

INTERGROUP RELATIONS AMONG  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ASSAM: A STUDY  
OF COGNITION AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*for the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Date: 7/12/21

**DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis entitled “**INTERGROUP RELATIONS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ASSAM: A STUDY OF COGNITION AND SOCIAL RELATIONS**”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

  
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**CERTIFICATE**

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*Dedicated  
to the people of Assam,  
who have and are still struggling  
to attain their due.*

## Abstract

Cognitive science since the 1960s and 1970s has been commanded by the information processing analogy of the individual. This ruling point of view is recognized as “social cognition”. Some contended that ‘social’ is an inaccurate designation and that the sole thing social about social cognition is that it revolves around social objects. This information processing model investigates cognitive activities at the cost of context and content. The western perspective of cognition is unreservedly controlled by this cognitive individualism.

Cognitive sociology dismisses this radical individualistic view of cognition, suggesting that we not just comprehend the world through our senses but also, are socially influenced by the world around us. Our cognition is determined by our membership in numerous thought communities. Psychologists are now progressively recognizing the limitations of individual cognition and assert that phenomena such as intergroup conflict and aggression, protests, and collective action cannot be understood by the investigation that is purely based on cognitive individualism. The long-established conventional European social psychology worries that cognitive processes and structure have outright abandoned the social context, therefore being reductionistic, computational, and prescriptive in nature. Individualistic cognition barely provides insight into the individual condition in an intergroup context. European social psychology however, faces its own problems too.

For example, even though Social Representation theory claims to come under the banner of European social psychology, Parker (1987) challenges it to be individualistic in nature. Another tradition under European social psychology is discursive approach. Few discursive psychologists themselves reject cognitivism (Billig, 2009). Discursive psychologists have responded against the suppositions of the cognitive approach and

certainly cognitive linguistics. They have contended against the very notion of considering language- behavior as if it were an indication for the genuine, significant psychological reality (Billig, 2009). Finally, the third and the most significant tradition is the Social Identity theory that has obtained an enormous reputation in the European social psychology literature, but suffers from certain issues. Even though it explains sufficiently well the various triggers to participation in collective action, it is found deficient in explaining the numerous cognitive artifacts that assists in perpetuation of collective action.

Owing to certain limitations of both North American and European social psychology's view on social cognition, the current research was propelled to glance outside of the discipline of social psychology and adopt a sociological concept i.e., Cognitive Praxis (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) to examine the meaning of social cognition in the context of collective action. Cognitive praxis focuses on the interaction between individual, collective, and macro societal practices.

Activities in protests entail cognitive practices which is the fundamental pursuit of a social movement. There exists a particular cognitive element in various activities of the movements, nevertheless, it has never been theorized, and that it largely remains negligible. They are disregarded suppositions of examination as opposed to being the subject matter of inquiry. The present thesis attempts to fill this gap by investigating the Assam movement through the lens of cognitive praxis. Cognitive praxis takes place at numerous points. They transpire in the way the campaign is put into operation, the manner in which the protest can be best utilized to send the message over. The passionate debates over meeting agendas, protests slogans, particular organizational events, contact between campaign groups and their oppositions, the innumerable forums of conflict and discussions are some of the instances of cognitive practices that ensue within the social movement. The present thesis seeks to investigate the numerous cognitive practices that surfaced in the Assam movement (1979-85). The Assam movement was so eminent that several Assamese scholars have attempted to study it. However, most of the scholars have merely stated historical facts and statistics,

there has been no effort for explanation and providing theoretical formulation for it (Baruah, 2002). In this context of the poor state of social scientific research, it becomes important to investigate it from a well-developed perspective.

It is crucial to note that the idea of social movement is governed by the culture in which it develops. There are considerable differences in how social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out and later conceptualized. It is important to remember that the cognitive practices of that campaign must be connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture. Even social psychologists are now beginning to realize the importance of cultural meanings in collective action; however, scant research has been carried out so far. According to van Zomeren and Louis (2017) culture is the “elephant in the room” that nearly not a single social psychologist in the area of collective action speaks about. The state of Assam which documented two crucial movements was enormously connected to the hallmark constituents of their local culture.

The current thesis strives to precisely examine the several cognitive practices that emerged in the course of Assam Movement.

In study 1, sixteen former participants were interviewed about the movement and execution of culture in it. Thematic analysis was employed on the interview data. The analysis revealed six major themes. Role of leaders, contribution by the local media in educating and informing the masses, role of music in uplifting the masses, and the emotions displayed were among the six themes. The final theme was the humungous participation of women in the agitation. This insinuated us to inquire whether both the male and female actors (participants) of the Assam Movement were treated and merited identically for their endeavors? To examine this, in Study 2 eleven former participants of the movement were asked gender-specific questions related to the dispersal of responsibilities, appointment in high-ranking positions and roles, leadership, number of women in the executive of AASU, women’s standing in the

aftermath of the movement and so on. The interview data was studied through thematic analysis, which revealed three broad themes- the patriarchal face of the Assam movement, lack of development of feminist consciousness, gender skewness in the student organization. These findings suggested that the movement was indeed gendered.

For both Study 1 and 2, I had employed the concept of cognitive praxis to better understand the meaning of social cognition in the context of collective action. Cognitive Praxis is a useful concept when one aspires to enquire about the various cognitive artifacts that operate while collective action is in progress and sustains it for a prolonged time. In short, cognitive praxis is functional once the collective action has begun, it however falls short to explain the various factors that drive the emergence of collective action. After an extensive review of literature, it was discovered that in order to examine the factors that result in the outset of collective action, the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) was suitable. As I have observed that culture helps individual to make sense of themselves, their social world, and their roles in the society. In view of the centrality of culture in individual's lives, study 3 was conducted to examine the responses of individuals (Assamese student population in various colleges and universities of Assam) when their valued culture comes under threat. Study 3, employed and extended the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) to establish quantitatively that threat to culture indirectly predicts collective action intentions among the in the backdrop of the recent anti-CAA protests in the state. A sample of 188 students (N=188) was collected who responded to measures on injustice, efficacy, ingroup identification, collective action intentions, and cultural threat. The results showed that cultural threat successfully explained the relationship with injustice, efficacy, and ingroup identification, which further predicted collective action intentions. Therefore, the findings corroborate the hypothesis that cultural threats would indirectly predict collective action intentions.

Keywords- Cognitive praxis, Collective action, Culture, Gender, Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), Assam Movement, Anti-CAA protests in Assam

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that learning never stops, no matter what stage you reach in life there is always scope to keep learning from others. I have learned immensely watching you, that one's dignity and seriousness about his/her work remains in one's own hands. You have encouraged me when I needed it the most, and at times rebuked me when it was necessary. You furnished huge support while I was teaching at the University of Delhi, but you also recommended I quit when it was needed to be done. Because sometimes taking the right call at the right time is lifesaving. You also have been ears to the developments in my personal life, whether it was my marriage or my shifting out of Delhi. Your support and cooperation were never debilitated. I have been truly blessed to have received your supervision all these years.

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### **Declaration by author**

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contain no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used

or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND THESIS OVERVIEW

Social psychology throughout the 1960s and 1970s became more and more drawn to the information processing analogy of the individual which gradually began to command cognitive science (Augustinos and Walker,1995). At present in North American social psychology, this ruling point of view is recognized as ‘social cognition’. Few have contended that the ‘social’ is an inaccurate designation and that the sole thing social about social cognition is that it revolves around social objects. In recent times, new and progressive understanding in numerous domains of psychology and neuroscience, highlighted by impressive photos of brain scans, is seen by several professionals that bit by bit we are on the road to decode cognition entirely with regard to activity inside an individual’s head (Zerubavel & Smith, 2010).

Theory and research in social cognition are guided by inordinate individualistic emplacement which fails to acknowledge that the subject matter of cognition emerges from social life, in individual communication and interchange. This information processing model which is principal to social cognition investigates cognitive activities at the cost of context and content. Hence, collective and symbolic attributes of individual thought are frequently disregarded and neglected. This cognitive individualism (Downes 1993) still controls the widespread Western outlook of cognition (Zerubavel & Smith, 2010).

It is important to note that, mental actions such as perceiving, remembering, attending, framing, generalizing, classifying, interpreting, time estimating are consistently carried out by particular individuals with some distinctive cognitive peculiarities. Still, they are also social beings, who are subscribers of a particular thought fraternity (Mannheim 1929, 1936; Fleck 1935, 1979). That is to say, what ensues within our heads is further influenced by the specific thought communities (country, occupation, religion, political movements) with which we are associated. We not only think as a person but also think as social beings (a teacher, a feminist, an

Indian, a vegan), we are a by-product of the environment that equally influences and restrain how we communicate with the world.

Cognitive sociology (Zerubavel 1997) dismisses this radical individualistic view of “mental Robinson Crusoe”, refreshing our memory that we understand the world not just through our senses but also through our subscription to numerous thought fraternities. As Rogoff (1990) writes “Rather than a solitary individual developing in a vacuum, the child is a cognitive apprentice, socially influenced by others.” By opposing cognitive individualism, it has called our attention to the noticeable similarity in the way different individuals shape their experience, allocate meaning to things, compute time, have collective memories, and possess astonishingly similar cognitive maps of the world.

Psychologists are also progressively recognizing the limitations of individual cognition and assert that phenomena such as intergroup conflict and aggression, protests, collective action, cannot be understood by the investigation that is purely based on cognitive individualism. The long-established conventional European social psychology worries that social cognition is far too gripped by individual cognition which is not much of help in comprehending the behavior of individuals in a collective. Many scholars contend that “the focus on cognitive processes and structure has distracted attention from the study of human interaction to produce a markedly reductionist and asocial account of human behavior” (e.g. Augustinos & Walker, 1995; Kraut and Higgins, 1984; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Mosconici, 1982; Zajonc, 1998). It is further asserted by critics that this “reductionistic, computational and prescriptive” emphasis on social cognition has outright abandoned the social context. Individual behavior is explained in the experimental laboratory manner rather than demonstrating the behavior the way it exists in a real complex world (Fiske & Leyens, 1997). Hence, this individualistic cognition barely provides insight into the individual condition in an intergroup context.

Although it is well-known that both prior to and following the disruptions brought about by the second world war, European social psychologists have constantly been inclined to give more prominence to contextual factors to explain human behavior (Smith 2011), it also is subjected to issues. For example, even though Social Representation theory claims to come under the banner of European social psychology, Parker (1987) challenges it to be individualistic in nature. According to Parker, it is understood as a cognitive arrangement that resides inside the minds of the person, thereby creating the personalized meaning of greater importance than the shared and figurative character of the subject. Another tradition under European social psychology is discursive approach. Few discursive psychologists themselves reject cognitivism (Billig, 2009). Discursive psychologists have responded against the suppositions of the cognitive approach and certainly cognitive linguistics. They have contended against the very notion of considering language- behavior as if it were an indication for the genuine, significant psychological reality (Billig, 2009). Finally, the third and the most significant tradition is the Social Identity theory that has obtained an enormous reputation in the European social psychology literature. Tajfel and Turner in 1979 developed the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to comprehend the social-psychological activities that support intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT explicitly focuses on the significance of social identities in intergroup activities. SIT emerged as a social psychological identity approach to protest (Klandermans & van Stekelenburg, 2013). The importance of social identity as a constituent, encouraging involvement in protest has been highlighted. Numerous empirical investigations reveal unflinchingly that the more people identify with the group the more they are willing to protest on behalf of the group (de Weerd and Klandermans, 1999; Kelly and Breinlinger, 1995, Klandermans et al., 2002; Mummendey et al., 1999; Reicher, 1984; Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Simon et al., 1998; Stryker et al., 2000). Meta-analytically also this association has been corroborated (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Shared fate, shared emotions, effectual efficacy, identification with one another are some of the powerful stimulants for individuals to participate in protest activities (van

Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2013). However, SIT undergoes certain problems as well. Even though it explains sufficiently well the various triggers to participation in collective action, it is found deficient in explaining the numerous cognitive artifacts (countless communication between participants and the opposition, the manner in which message to be put across effectively, the role of media, slogans raised, the numerous strategies adopted, folk music that aids movement actors to remain stimulated, cultural space where various movement activities are conducted, etc.) that assists in perpetuation of collective action.

Owing to certain limitations of both North American and European social psychology's view on social cognition, the current research was propelled to glance outside of the discipline of social psychology and adopt a sociological concept to examine social cognition in the context of collective action.

No participation in collective action can come about till individuals are willing to get involved and convert their personal issues into a common public issue and eventually move into the process of collective identity formation (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). The viewpoint is that social change is achievable when individuals participate on a massive scale, altering themselves in the process. This belief is grounded in cognitive praxis (practice). Eyerman and Jamison (2007) understood cognitive praxis as – “seeking to reconnect psychological level of analysis to a collective or sociological level of analysis. We, aim at providing a social theory which focusses on the interaction between individual, collective and macro societal practices.” Activities in protests entail cognitive practices which is the fundamental pursuit of a social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). As Eyerman and Jamison (2007) write- “A social movement is like a cognitive territory, a conceptual space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations.” For example, in the American Civil Rights movement, cognitive praxis could be observed in phases. It began with bus boycotts to becoming more direct, resulting in sit ins. Gradually the movement turned more revolutionary leading to development of new ideas, and joining of other organizations. Cognitive praxis of the civil rights movement comprised of particular means of resistance such as Gandhian method of nonviolence and more essentially the strategies (e.g., mass

meetings in the church, black studies, Afro-American history which first reflected in study groups and later became contents of pamphlets of the movement), and the manner of protest (e.g., sit-ins, boycotts, freedom rides, mass demonstrations) by which the opposition was resisted.

There exists a particular cognitive element in various pursuits of the movements, nevertheless, it has not yet been theorized, and that it largely remains negligible. The cognitive affairs and ventures of the movement are to a great extent assumed. They are the disregarded suppositions of examination as opposed to being the subject matter of inquiry. The present thesis attempts to fill this gap by investigating the social movement (Assam Movement) in Assam through the lens of cognitive praxis.

Cognitive practice takes place at numerous points. They occur in the unforeseeable and frequently unplanned contact between movement campaigners in organizing upcoming actions and reviewing previous actions. They also transpire in the way the campaign is put into operation, the manner in which the protest can be best utilized to send the message over. The passionate debates over meeting agendas, protests slogans, particular organizational events, contact between campaign groups and their opposition, the innumerable forums of conflict and discussion are some of the instances of cognitive practices that ensue within the social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). The present thesis seeks to investigate the numerous cognitive practices that surfaced in one of the extremely popular movements in Assam, i.e., the Assam Movement (1979-85). The Assam movement was so eminent that several Assamese scholars have attempted to study it. However, most of the scholars have merely stated historical facts and statistics, there has been no effort for explanation and providing theoretical formulation for it (Baruah, 2002). In this context of the poor state of social scientific research, it becomes important to investigate it from a well-developed perspective. Additionally, limited attention has been placed on the empirical work that connects culture and collective action in Eastern countries.



It is crucial to note that the idea of cognitive practices any social movement is governed by the culture in which it develops. There are considerable differences in how cognitive practices of social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out and later conceptualized. It is important to remember that the cognitive practices of that campaign must be connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture. In short, as Eyerman and Jamison (2017) postulate that- “Social movement draws on intellectual traditions and the types of knowledge that are specific to the societies in which they emerge.” Even social psychologists are now beginning to realize the importance of cultural meanings in collective action; however, scant research has been carried out so far. According to van Zomeren and Louis (2017) culture is the “elephant in the room” that nearly not a single social psychologist in the area of collective action speaks about. The state of Assam which documented two crucial movements was enormously connected to the hallmark constituents of their local culture.

Assam is among the seven North-East states of India, home to luxuriant green tea fields, cabalistic hills, virgin forest, and the glistening Brahmaputra. It is the land of “Lahe Lahe” which means, slowly slowly, a way of life in Assam (Das, 2016). The state of Assam shares international borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan, making it an extremely significant region geo-politically. Assam has had a particularly very convoluted relationship with Bangladesh for decades now. The intergroup relations between the two are embittered and continuously revolves around the subject matter of illegal migration of Bangladeshis into Assam. This unabated inundation of Bangladeshis entering the border illegally has cost the people of Assam a considerable amount of affliction. The local population of the state feels threatened by their presence as these migrators have thrown the regional demography for a toss, causing an immense threat to their employment, land, language, and culture. The people of Assam are tremendously sentimental about their language and culture, more so when the threat of Bangladeshis overshadowing their way of life lingers. This threat signaled the All Assam Students’ Union to spearhead the iconic Assam Movement, also called

the anti-Foreigner's Movement in the year 1979. The demand was simple, complete detection, deletion (their names from electoral rolls), and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants from the state. The movement carried on for six years, which observed tremendous participation of masses all across gender, class, caste, and region. The campaign of this magnitude witnessed numerous cultural activities to help the participants remain motivated and engaged to the cause.

The current thesis strives to precisely examine the several cognitive practices that emerged in the course of the movement in Assam. The thesis also seeks to investigate collective action in a specific context and culture (Assamese youth's struggle against the threat from illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in their state) bearing in mind that the phenomenon of collective action is truly connected to the characteristic attributes of the culture in which it emerges. Individuals who actively participate in the action, utilize an enormous proportion of perception, remembering, attending, framing, generalizing, classifying, interpreting, estimation, etc. which is not by surprise, is heavily influenced by and embedded in the context and culture they are situated in. In fact, I would further suggest that it is this cognition that is situated in a particular setting that provides individuals engaging in collective action more strength, vigor, and intensity to continue to challenge the existing state of affairs.

## 1.1 Thesis Overview

The present thesis attempted to expand the understanding of social cognition by investigating the area of collective action. The North American understanding of social cognition is largely driven by the information processing analogy. This information processing model which is principal to social cognition investigates cognitive activities at the cost of context and content. The collective and symbolic attributes of individual thought are frequently disregarded and neglected. This cognitive individualism (Downes 1993) still controls the widespread Western outlook of cognition (Zerubavel & Smith, 2010). Scholars on the other side of the globe, that is, European social

psychology assert that this “reductionistic, computational and prescriptive” emphasis on social cognition has outright abandoned the social context. Individual behavior is explained in the experimental laboratory manner rather than demonstrating the behavior the way it exists in a real complex world (Fiske & Leyens, 1997). Hence, this individualistic cognition barely provides insight into the individual condition in an intergroup context. They dismiss this radical individualistic view of “mental Robinson Crusoe”, refreshing our memory that we understand the world not just through our senses but also through our subscription to numerous thought fraternities. As Rogoff (1990) writes “Rather than a solitary individual developing in a vacuum, the child is a cognitive apprentice, socially influenced by others.” European social psychology continues to be fervently interested in the traditional concerns of social psychology, while it investigates individuals, it is highly interested in the social and cultural determinants of cognition and behavior (Scherer 1993). In such a situation, it is suggested by established scholars (e.g., Augustinos and Walker) that the way forward is the integration of the two traditions i.e., North American social psychology with European social psychology. To fulfill this requirement the concept of ‘cognitive praxis’ that emerges from the discipline of sociology was employed in the thesis. Even though it comes from Sociology, it, however, delivers the need of merging the two traditions. Eyerman and Jamison (2007) understood cognitive praxis as – “seeking to reconnect psychological level of analysis to a collective or sociological level of analysis. We, aim at providing a social theory which focusses on the interaction between individual, collective and macro societal practices.” This conception of cognitive praxis successfully yokes together both the American and European traditions by addressing and binding the foundational idea i.e., individualistic understanding (American) with the wider social context-specific (European) practices with respect to the social movement.

Prior to introducing the studies, I begin with the literature review of the concepts employed in the current thesis. Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical perspectives in social cognition, where I have divided the chapter into two sections. The first section

comprises the social cognition concepts that come under the North American tradition and the second section deals with the social cognition of European social psychology. Chapter 3 focuses on the various fundamental concepts of collective action in social psychology namely principles of movement participation, the steps towards participation, the motivation to participate, sustained participation and disengagement, etc. Chapters 4 and 5 present the background of the context in which this thesis is based. It comprises the socio-political affairs of the state of Assam including the issue of immigration and the protest against it, and the Assam movement. Chapter 5 sketches out the formation, growth, and numerous activities of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) which lead the Assam movement. Chapter 6 outlines the theoretical framework that is employed in the thesis, including the qualitative and quantitative methods. The studies begin with Chapter 7. The aim of the study was to understand the various cognitive practices which are highly influenced by culture such as music, leadership, emotions, strategies, etc. that were undertaken by AASU during the movement. Chapter 8 comprises another study that attempts to answer the question posed by analysis in chapter 7, that is, were male and female participants in the movement treated equally and merited in the same manner, and is AASU a gender-neutral student organization. Chapter 9 lays out the third and final study in which cultural threat was measured using the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) in the context of recent anti-CAA (citizenship amendment act, 2019) in Assam. In the final chapter, the key findings of the thesis were reviewed and the implications of the findings, limitations, and future direction to research were discussed.

## **CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL COGNITION**

I will now discuss the prime conceptual bodywork within social cognition which has influenced the discipline of social psychology majorly. The current chapter will present both descriptive as well as empirical growth in the respective area. The chapter will be

divided into two sections, the first dealing with the North American understanding of social cognition, and the second half will cover the European tradition of social cognition.

## **2.1 North American Social Cognition**

This section will examine the major concepts that have influenced the American understanding of social cognition such as attitudes, social schemas, and attributions. I will now discuss each of them one by one.

### **2.1.1 Attitudes**

It is suggested by the pioneers in the field that the employment of attitude in the everyday life is “loose”. This stands true in social psychology as well. Even though it is the single most investigated subject in the field of social psychology, the meaning of the term is frequently unclear, erratic, and implied. This chapter, therefore, attempts to theorize it, and then in the latter part, I will in short consider its functions, its relationship with behavior, and cognitive organization.

Zana and Rempel (1988) defined attitude as “We regard an attitude as the categorization of a stimulus object along an evaluative dimension based upon or generated from, three general classes of information: 1) cognitive information, 2) affective/emotional information, and/or 3) information concerning past behaviors or behavioral intentions.” Mc Guire (1985) defined it as “...attitudes are defined at least implicitly as responses that locate objects of thought on the dimension of judgment.” Augoustinos and Walker (1996) agree with both the definitions. According to them, “attitudes are evaluations.” They signify an individual’s positioning to something. Attitudes are communicated in the bhasha of ‘like/dislike’, ‘approach/avoid’, and ‘good/bad’, they are thus evaluative in nature. In cases where the object of attitude is significant for the individual, the assessment of the object creates an emotional

response in that individual. The above two definitions mentioned incorporate two important features. The first is that “attitudes are categorizations.” According to Zana and Rempel (1988)- “categorizations refer to a process with at least some minimal cognitive activity”. Even though attitudes carry some effort however there is confirmation that that effort is only minimum, so much so that attitudes can be triggered and can operate instinctively. The second main characteristic is that “attitudes are responses that locate.” This denotes that attitude are expressive, they are social, they can transport details and knowledge from one individual to another. Jointly the above two points propose that attitudes are indeed a component of cognitive existence and a constituent of social conversation. The understanding of attitude as assessment is turning out to be progressively common in the field of social psychology, however, it is yet not widespread.

#### *2.1.1.1 Functions of Attitudes*

Attitudes carry out certain functions. They are helpful to the individual who possesses an attitude. Katz (1960) pronounced four different functions of attitudes. “The knowledge function is similar to the common understanding of what an attitude does. Attitude helps us explain and understand the world around us. In the Pratkanis and Greenwald (1989) definition, an attitude is a memorial representation of an object, and associated with that representation are rules about the labeling of the object, an evaluative summary of the object, and a knowledge that helps us know the world. The knowledge function of attitudes helps us know the world. Second, for Katz, attitudes serve a utilitarian function, which is meant that they help us gain rewards and avoid punishments. To be politically correct or ideologically sound is to hold and display attitudes for utilitarian reasons. The third function is the value-expressive one. The expression of an attitude can sometimes be no more than a public statement of what a person believes or identifies with. Finally, and less obviously, attitudes can serve an ego-defensive function. Such attitudes are usually deep-seated, difficult to change, and hostile to the attitude object. The classic examples are homophobia and

xenophobia. According to Katz, at least some people who hold such attitudes do so because they are unconsciously denying some aspect of their own self.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) Smith et al., also developed a typology which resembles closely to that of Katz, however, he discusses three functions: the object appraisal function is one and the same as the knowledge function by Katz, and the externalization function is a replica of the ego-defensive function of Katz. Katz’s value-expressive and utilitarian functions are combined by Smith et al., into one i.e., social adjustment function. Shavitt also gives her own typology on the functions of attitude, she combines Katz and Smith et.al., in a tight-fisted manner. Therefore, she explains attitudes as possessing utilitarian function, which incorporates knowledge and utilitarian function of Katz and object-appraisal function of Smith et.al., social identity function, which merges value-expressive function of Katz and social adjustment function by Smith et.al., and a self-esteem maintenance function which comprises of the ego-defensive function of Katz and externalization function by Smith et.al. Herek, on the other hand, pronounces two distinct types of attitudes: evaluative and expressive. The earlier ones “are attitudes in which the attitude object is an end itself and the attitude functions to allow the individual access to the object itself. In contrast, an expressive (or symbolic) attitude object is a means to an end, by providing social support, increasing self-esteem, or reducing anxiety. Evaluative attitudes may be experiential and specific, experiential and schematic, or anticipatory. Expressive attitudes may be social-expressive, value expressive, or defensive.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) It should be noted that all the above-mentioned functions of attitude are much the on the individual holder. However, many of the functions also possess a social characteristic. Attitudes perform social functions as well. Some of the social functions of attitude are described by Augoustinos and Walker (1996). First, attitude lends a hand to locate the individual inside the social setting. Secondly, attitudes are an apparatus for the transference of social views and viewpoints, social representation, and ideals to the person. Finally, attitudes act as illustrative and therefore providing a justification in aligning the person to the collective world.

### *2.1.1.2 Attitudes and Behaviors*

One of the most lasting mysteries in the field of social psychology has revolved around the relationship between attitudes and behaviors. Sound judgment may lead us to believe that attitudes straight away give rise to an individual to behave in a specific manner. However, social psychologists have for long now known that the relationship between attitude and behavior is not as straightforward as it seems, as many times behaviors seem to be rather unconnected to the attitudes. In this section, I will look into the two comprehensive categories of response, when the connection between attitude and behavior is powerful and when it is not.

Many elements that influence the intensity of the attitude-behavior connection have been recognized. Some of the significant ones will be discussed. “First, attitudes about an object have been formed through direct experience of that object appear to be more strongly associated with behavior related to that object than are attitudes which do not rely on any direct experience. It has been suggested that the link between behaviors and attitudes formed through direct experience is stronger because such attitudes are held with more clarity, confidence, and certainty (Fazio, Zanna, 1978, 1981), because such attitudes are more accessible and stronger (Fazio, 1989) and because such attitudes are automatically activated upon presentation of the attitude subject (Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell and Kardes, 1986). Second, it has been suggested that attitudes that are more stable will show greater attitude-behavior consistency than attitudes that are unstable (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Finally, several individual differences have been found which affect the strength of the attitude-behavior link. People who have been made self-aware (usually by placing a mirror next to them while they complete attitude scales) typically display much greater attitude-behavior consistency than do people not made self-aware (Gibbons, 1978). People who are described as high self-monitors (that is, who monitor and regulate their own reactions through the reaction of others) typically show lower attitude-behavior consistency than those people who are described as low self-monitors (who monitor internal



reactions rather than others' reactions) (Zanna, Olson and Fazio, 1980)" (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996).

#### *2.1.1.2.1 Cognitive Dissonance Theory*

Cognitive dissonance theory by Festinger (1957) is straightforward however assists in describing the manner in which individuals alter their attitudes corresponding to their behavior, as opposed to the other way. This supposition merely declares that if an individual maintains two perceptions that are psychologically inconsistent, then that inconsistency is uneasy. This inconsistency or dissonance can be decreased by altering either or both the perceptions or by initiating a fresh perception. This concept according to its advocates is applied to any occasion where an individual participates in behavior that does not match with the relevant attitude maintained prior to that behavior. Cognitive dissonance is chiefly activated when one of the perceptions "in the syllogisms is about self." (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) Cognitive dissonance theory comes under the class of consistency theories: it presumes that discrepancy is irksome and that individuals are prompted to attain uniformity and equilibrium. However, this presumption has been questioned by many scholars and they state that individuals are more forbearing of perceptions and interpersonal discrepancies than what cognitive dissonance supposes.

#### *2.1.1.2.2 Self-Perception theory*

Daryl Bem (1967, 1972) developed self-perception theory to describe exactly the identical occurrences as that of cognitive dissonance theory professes to claim however without resorting to detail the psychological procedures. "Bem argued that we deduce our own attitudes to objects in the same way we deduce others' attitudes- by the processes of attribution. Attribution theory suggests that observers attribute attitude to an actor which corresponds with the actor's behavior and that this tendency is stronger when the action is chosen freely by the actor. The major hypothesis of self-perception theory is that in identifying his/her own internal states, an individual

partially relies on the same external cues that others use when they infer his/her internal states.” (Bem, 1970) Fazio, Zanna, and Cooper (1977) maintained that self-perception theory operates when behavior comes under the region of acceptance, however, when the behavior falls outside that region, cognitive discrepancy procedures seem to function.

Attitudes do not prevail in seclusion but rather there exist in a structure. They exist in a cognitive arrangement; they are generally organized through schemas which will be discussed in the next section. Two characteristics of attitude as schemas have significant organizational effects- the activation of attitudes and the accessibility of attitudes. It is important to note that not every attitude is operative at the same time. Attitudes ought to be switched on. They are perceived as “nodes in memory connected in an associative network. Nodes become connected through experience and the more any connection is experienced the stronger the connection becomes. Some connection becomes so well-rehearsed that when one node is activated, the other is automatically activated also.” (Augoustinos and Waker, 1996) whether instinctive or not, attitudes are switched on by stimulus in the surroundings. Once it is turned on, attitudes impact what we bestow our focus to, how and what is focused on (Friedrich, Kierniesky and Cardon, 1989), and the manner in which recollect certain occurrences (Echabe and Rovira, 1989). Attitudes also differ in accessibility or how effortlessly they are recovered from memory (Fazio, 1989). Powerful and significant attitudes are more reachable than frail attitudes (Krosnick, 1989) and reachable attitudes rule behavior with more strength than do less reachable attitudes (Fazio and Williams, 1986).

### **2.1.2 Social Schemas**

Social schemas are cognitive arrangements that comprise of knowledge of the social community. Augoustinos and Walker (1996) writes- “Schema theory is an information processing model of perception and cognition which attempts to isolate the

mechanisms by which people come to understand the complex social world in which they live. The emphasis within social schema theory and research has been on the perception and processing of social information, that is, information about people, groups and events.”

#### *2.1.2.1 Schema*

A schema is understood as an intellectual arrangement that comprises of usual suppositions and knowledge of the social community. This might incorporate common assumptions regarding people, occurrences, roles, and the manner in which to act in a specific circumstance. Schemas are absorbed by means of experience or by interacting with others. Otherwise, it would be strenuous to go about our day-to-day life in the absence of any previous knowledge or assumptions regarding people and occurrences, and hence schema furnishes a certain sense of prophecy and guidance of the social community. They assist in comprehending the complications of the world around us. The concept of schema, hence, highlights our dynamic building of social actuality. Schemas assist in guiding to what we pay attention to, what is discerned, what is recollected, and what is deduced. They are a sort of mental shortcut that is employed by people to make reality simple. Research on schema directs to comprehend the manner in which individuals depict social details in memory and the manner in which fresh information is incorporated with the prevailing knowledge, in other words, the manner in which individuals organize, explain, and comprehend complicated social details. Schemas as mental arrangements comprise theoretical and common knowledge regarding a specific domain. There have been numerous writings that have appeared in psychological works however the most authoritative practice of research that progressed the writings on social schema theory was that of Bartlett’s investigation on non-social memory (1932). Bartlett’s work on social schema theory showed that individuals are superior at remembering details when they are structured around a subject than when they are not.

#### *2.1.2.2. Categorization*

Prior to applying the schema to a social object, it first needs to be categorized. According to Eleanor Rosch, “the process of categorization refers to how we identify stimuli and group them as members of one category, similar to others in that category and different from members of other categories.” Categorization is viewed to be rudimentary to discernment, thought, language and action. Much of the time categories are employed instinctively with very less effort. They put an order on the complications of the social world and when doing it, it permits us to make communication with and regarding the social world effectually and systematically. Augoustinos and Walker write- “Rosch’s (1975) experimental work found that some members of a category act as cognitive reference points in that people consider them to be more representative of a category than other members. Rosch referred to these as prototypes. The most typical or prototypical instance would best represent the category.” Those objects that share certain common characteristics with other categorization members, they become connected by ‘family resemblance’. It is suggested that social categorization is a more complicated activity than object categorization because social objects like people and events are changeable, dynamic, interrelated, and hence can be of little predictive value. Just like the non-social class, subscribers of a social class tend to share common characteristics, although certain subscribers tend more prototypical than others. In the same vein, social situations are also classified with regard to characteristic attributes in order that specific behavior can be expected and predicted in specific settings. Classifying individuals and occurrences permits us to make things simpler and organize the social community and therefore help predict upcoming behavior and occurrences. It has been suggested by scholars that “more recently the categories may not only be represented by some averaged abstraction but by a number of specific and concrete instances or ‘exemplars’ of the category which have been encountered.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) This exemplar approach seems to have more advantages than the prototypes in the sense that it is capable for accounting for the changes and variety of occasions

inside a common classification. Therefore, exemplars function as more particular and definite reference points.

### *2.1.2.3. Schema Types*

The schema types that I will discuss now and which had been put into application empirically are person schemas, self schemas, role schemas, and event schemas (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Taylor and Crocker, 1981). All the above schemas have similar purposes- all four of them affect the manner in which new details are encoded, the memory of old information, and conclusions regarding lost information.

#### *2.1.2.3.1 Person schemas*

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write, “Person schema deals with abstracted conceptual structures of personality traits or person prototypes that enable a person to categorize and make inferences from the experience of interactions with other people (Cantor and Mischel, 1977). Trait or person schemas enable us to answer the question: ‘what kind of person is he or she?’ (Cantor and Mischel, 1979), and thus help us anticipate the nature of our interactions with specific individuals, giving us a sense of control and predictability in social interactions.”

#### *2.1.2.3.2 Self schemas*

Investigation on self schema has examined the conceptual arrangement that individuals have for themselves and the level to which such arrangements influence the rate and orderliness of processing details which is either pertinent or immaterial to oneself (Higgins and Bargh, 1987; Markus, 1977; Markus and Wurf, 1987). Markus has defined self schema as “cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual’s social experiences” (1977). Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write- “Self schemas are conceptualized as well-elaborated structures which are linked to salient and largely stable individual traits and behavior. They are components

of the self-concept which are central to identity and self-definition. The self schema concept is consistent with various psychological conceptions of the self which emphasize the static, enduring, and self-protecting nature of the self-concept (Greenwald and Pratkanis, 1984; Swann and Read, 1981). Alternatively, the self-concept has been conceptualized as multiple, dynamic and flexible, changing with the affective and situational needs of the individual (Gergen, 1967).”

#### *2.1.2.3.3 Role schemas*

Role schemas are defined as the knowledge arrangements individuals have of the standard and supposed behaviors of particular role placements in the community. They can be described as achieved and ascribed roles. The achieved roles comprise of roles which are obtained through hard work and schooling, for example, engineer role, police role, on the other hand, ascribed roles are the ones which are out of our control for example caste, gender, age.

#### *2.1.2.3.4 Event schemas*

Event schemas can be defined as cognitive scripts that explain the successional arrangement of happenings in day-to-day pursuits (Schank and Abelson, 1977). Therefore, event schemas furnish the foundation for expecting the coming times, laying down goals, and formulating plans. They equip the people to lay down a plan of action to attain the desired objective, by stating the suitable behavioral chains by means of which the individual must proceed to achieve the wanted outcome. Scripts as backdrop knowledge and causal sequence furnish connectivity. “However, scripts and plans are not simply stereotyped sequences of events. To accurately predict the world around us we need also to know something about people’s intentions and goals. Predicting other people’s and our own behavior depends on knowing what goals motivate behavior.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) Schank and Abelson proposed that goal-aligned information makes the backdrop from which inference is made and behavior is comprehended.

#### *2.1.2.4 How do Schemas Function?*

Now that I have discussed the four major types of schemas that are fundamental to the social cognition literature, I will at present examine the function of schemas, that is, how it impacts the encoding, saving, and recollection of complicated social details.

##### *2.1.2.4.1 Schemas as theory-driven structures*

The chief purpose of schemas is to provide a certain structure to experience. Augoustinos and Walker write “A schema is matched against an incoming stimulus configuration so that the relationship between the elements of the schema is compared to the incoming information. If the information is a good match to the schema, then the constitutive elements of the schema are imposed upon the information. Thus, a schema guides identification of the elements of the incoming stimulus, thereby providing a context for its meaning, organization, and internal representation. Information processing is therefore conceptualized as theory-driven rather than data-driven, that is, it relies on people’s prior expectations, preconceptions, and knowledge about the social world in order to make sense of new situations and encounters. An inherent feature of theory-driven or schematic processing is that often it can lead to biased judgments. As existing cognitive structures, schemas can fill in data that are missing from incoming social information. Schemas can also provide shortcuts when processing information by the use of heuristics.” In the case of schema, individuals are seen as ‘cognitive misers’ who attempt to make their life simple by explaining particular occurrences considering the usual case. (Fiske and Taylor, 1984).

##### *2.1.2.4.2 Schemas as memory traces*

Schema effects and leads to what kind of social details would be encoded and recovered from memory. Investigation on memory within the schema writings during early times discovered that schema assists recollection of details so that a good stimulus copy of a schema assists general recollection and that schema constant information is better recollected than schema inconstant information. Studies show

that we are more probable to pay attention, encode, and eventually recollect details that are consistent with early suppositions (Hastie, 1981; Rothbart, Evans, and Fulero, 1979). Additionally, few pieces of research have revealed that people can have contorted recollection of details when it is schema inconstant.

Generally, schema-rooted discernment does not summon comprehensive cognitive processing. Individual's previous suppositions and knowledge would decide for what arriving social details they will require to undertake greater cognitive pursuits.

#### *2.1.2.4.3 Theory-driven vs data-driven strategies*

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write- "While schema theory conceptualizes social cognition as predominantly theory-driven, this view of human information processing has been challenged (Higgins and Bargh, 1987). Hastie and Kumar (1979) found that subjects were significantly more likely to recall information about the person which was incongruent with the character's personality description. These findings are largely inconsistent with schema models. According to Hastie and Kumar (1979), information which is inconsistent with expectations because of its novelty and distinctiveness is potentially more informative to the individual. The person is, therefore, more likely to attend to this information and perhaps process it more thoroughly. In turn, information which is processed more thoroughly is more likely to be recalled ( Craik and Lockhart, 1972). Forgas's (1985) research found that the more culturally salient and consensual stimulus, the more likely schematic processing was to be activated, whereas information with low cultural salience because of its distinctiveness, is more likely to be data-driven. This suggests that people use either of two strategies depending on the nature of the information to be processed." Research by Forgas was successful in demonstrating that cognitive factors are not sufficient and do not solely impact information processing rather cultural factors also have a huge influence on it.

One of the major critiques of schema theory is that it has been challenged to be very general and fails to conceptually take an account of the various contradictory and discrepant findings. This theory has been criticized for being completely immersed in the cognitive framework of information processing. Scholars have repeatedly questioned-



‘what is social about social schema theory?’. It is challenged to be excessively cognitive in character and that it lacks a spirited social and situational viewpoint.

### 2.1.3 Attributions

In order for life to be well-ordered and foreseeable, individuals tend to assign reasons to occurrences. The manner in which people carry out it, the causes behind why they attribute, by what means they attribute, the state under which they do or don’t attribute, every one of them accounts for the theme of attribution theory.

#### *2.1.3.1 Theories of Attribution*

In this section, I will look into the contributions of three central theories of attribution. These are that of Heider, Jones and Davis, and Kelley.

##### *2.1.3.1.1 Heider’s naive scientist*

Heider (1944) proclaims a ‘common sense psychology’ or a ‘naïve psychology of action’ in his book *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. His common-sense psychology sees individuals as innocent researchers. Individuals instinctively conclude the reasons for occurrences around them. Augustinos and Walker write “the arrangement of objects and events into cause-and-effect relations constitute a causal system in our cognitive architecture (Krech, Krutchfield and Ballachey, 1962). The question of which of the many available objects and events shall be taken as cause and which as the effect is crucial; almost defines the attributional process. Some objects and events combine more easily than others to form a causal unit, especially when the object or cause is a human actor and the event or effect is a social behavior. Two prime determinants of ‘unit perception’ are similarity and proximity. Two events are more likely to be seen as causally related if they are proximal rather than distal.

Likewise, the greater similarity between two events makes them more likely to be perceived as a causal unit than is the case for dissimilar events.

Two further principles of causal inference are important. First, people tend to attribute behavior to a single cause rather than to multiple coterminous causes; and the second, cause of behavior can be thought of residing either within the actor or outside the actor somewhere in the situation. Causes within the actor are said to be dispositional causes, and those outside the actor are situational.” Haider additionally observed that individuals are more inclined to view their own actions as powered by situational factors, however, onlookers are more inclined to assign the action of others to internal factors.

#### *2.1.3.1.2 Correspondent inferences*

The correspondent inference theory of Jones and Davis is the first systematic arrangement of some of the early ideas of Heider’s. The fundamental proposition of this theory is under a specific state, individuals exhibit a powerful inclination to deduce that an individual’s intent and propensity correspond to their behavior. Like Heider, Jones and Davis see the observer as an instinctive researcher, methodically drawing out theoretical details from perceived behavioral information, examining and removing different theoretical clarifications for the information prior to fixing on single theoretical clarification most maintained by the information.

Three central factors were outlined by Jones and Davis (1965) that affect the procedure of building correspondent inferences: the desirability of outcomes, the principle of non-common effects, and the motivational variables of hedonic relevance and personalism. Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write “Behaviorism judged to be socially desirable are less informative than behaviors to be socially undesirable. Undesirable behaviors are more informative than desirable behavior, and allow the receiver to make dispositional attribution about the actor with confidence. The attribution about the actor’s disposition is likely to be as negative as the observed behavior. A second

important determinant of correspondent inference is the principle of non-common effects. The principle applies particularly when an actor has or at least is perceived to have free choice in action between several behavioral alternatives. Again, this principle works because under these conditions the behavior is informative; it reduces uncertainty by implicitly favoring one explanation for the behavior over other, competing explanations. The final factor in the Jones and Davis theory of correspondent inference is motivational and includes two related constructs-hedonic relevance and personalism. An action is said to be hedonically relevant for a perceiver if the consequences of the action affect the perceiver; the welfare of the perceiver is either harmed or benefited by the action. Personalistic actions are a subset of hedonically relevant actions, and are characterized by the intention of an actor for the action to have hedonic relevance for the perceiver.”

#### *2.1.3.1.3. The principle of covariation*

Kelley’s covariation model of attribution stands on the proposition of covariation, which contends that prior to accepting two occurrences as causally connected they must covary with each other. In the case where the two occurrences do not covary, they cannot be connected causally. “Kelly (1967) suggested that three factors are crucial in assessing covariation and that different constellations of positions on these three factors lead to different types of causal conclusions regarding the specific behavior in question. The three factors are consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus. Consistency refers to whether that person responds in the same way to the same stimulus or similar stimuli at different times. Distinctiveness concerns whether the actor acts in the same way to other, different stimuli or whether the actor’s response distinguishes between different stimuli. Consensus is not a feature of the actor’s behavior, but the behavior of others; is there consensus across actors in response to the same stimulus, or do people vary in response? Different constellations of positions on the three dimensions lead to different attributions about the causes of behavior.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) Five years later after his original formulation, Kelly

(1972) added two more important elements to the covariation model- discounting and augmentation.

### *2.1.3.2 Attributional biases*

Cases where allocation digresses from the stipulated framework, it is considered as a biased attribution. Few attribution scholars refer to these biases as errors. I will now examine the biases that occur during the course of attribution.

#### *2.1.3.2.1 Fundamental attribution error and the actor-observer effect*

“The fundamental attribution error is the tendency for attributers to underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors in controlling behavior.” (Ross, 1977)

“There is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions.” (Jones and Nisbett, 1972) It was observed by Heider that individuals and onlookers have varied perspectives of the actions, of the circumstance, and of the reasons for actions in that particular condition. Heider (1958) writes, “the person tends to attribute his own reactions to the object world, and those of another, when they differ from his own, to personal characteristics in the other.” The fundamental attribution error defined above is fundamentally an extension of one-half of the actor-observer effect. The fundamental attribution error proclaims that individuals underestimate the power of circumstantial factors and overestimate the power of internal factors in commanding other’s actions. In accordance with Heider, Jones and Nisbett, and Ross, circumstantial and internal factors are ipsatively linked. Therefore, the fundamental attribution error states again the second half of the actor-observer effect- individuals are more inclined to assign the behavior of others to well-balanced personal character.

#### *2.1.3.2.2 Self-serving biases*

Individuals involve themselves, fervently or not in the happenings surrounding them. They and their allocations, influence and are influenced by other people and by happenings. Frequently individuals make allocations that are self-serving, devised deliberately or not to amplify their respect in eyes of their own and those of the others. Self-serving biases occupy various forms, some of which I will discuss in the next section.

*a. The false consensus effects*

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write “The tendency of people to overestimate the commonality of their beliefs, opinions, and attitudes is known as the false consensus effect. Allport (1924) meant that people often assume that the way they react to a particular situation is the same way others would react. Marks and Miller (1987) describe four mechanisms that might account for the false consensus effect. The first two mechanisms are similar to one another and are both heavily cognitive. An argument based on the availability of information from memory suggests that memories of interactions with others who are similar to ourselves or who agree with us are more readily accessible from memory than are instances of interactions with dissimilar others or disagreeing others. The second one is that of salience. Salience refers to the extent to which a stimulus or referent object in the surrounding situation stands out from other stimuli or from other aspects of the situation. The third explanation is a rational, not a biased outcome of information processing. Finally, the fourth explanation focuses on motivation and self-esteem. According to this, it is psychologically valuable to believe that one’s opinions are common.”

*b. The false uniqueness effect*

When there is an overestimation of the frequency of appearance of our thinking in public, there is also an underestimation of the sharing of our potentialities. This is what is referred to as the false uniqueness effect. Seemingly, we prefer to be of the opinion that our potentialities are unique and that our beliefs are common (Marks, 1984).

## 2.2 European Social Cognition

This branch of social cognition is the opposite of the North American understanding of social cognition. The European tradition of social cognition focuses on social existence, in individual communication and interaction. It is rooted in context and content. The societal, collective, and symbolic characteristics of individual reasoning are studied and investigated. European social psychology is largely represented by three perspectives, that is, social identity theory, social representation theory, and discourse analysis, which I will examine in the coming section one by one.

### 2.2.1 Social Identity

Tajfel (1981) defines social identity as “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership.” Usually, social identity situates a person in the context of social classification, social status, or social standing. Social identities are generally assigned to and obtain from the grouping to which we are a member. However, we can still associate with groupings to which we do not associate with and with specific people.

#### *2.2.1.1 Social Identity theory*

The most comprehensive perspective to studying social identity is called social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In European social psychology, this theory constitutes a movement away from the individualistic remainder of North American social psychology. Clearly, Social identity theory is a theory of intergroup relations. Tajfel et.al. (1971) performed many experiments that are still today classic and reflect the real dynamics of intergroup behavior. His minimal group experiment exhibited an authentic intergroup occurrence. The minimal group experiment showed that there was an absence of any real rivalry between the two groups. The minimal groups were deficient of all features that is

usually linked to a group. The groups had no history or way of life among their members, there was no communication among them, there was not a thing, groups were really minimal, yet the group members favored their own ingroup members over the outgroup members. The explanation for such an occurrence can be made through three reasons- categorization, identity, and comparison.

*a. Categorization*

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write “the simple fact of categorization has important consequences. The accentuation effect asserts that when stimulus objects are categorized, similarities among members of one category are perceived as greater than they actually are and differences between members of different categories are perceived as greater than they actually are—in other words, inter-category differences, and intra-category similarities are accentuated. The accentuation effect is only to be expected when the categorization is salient to the person judging the stimuli and when the categorization is useful to the person in the judgment task. To sum up, then, the most elemental part of Social identity theory is the simple and obvious proposition that the social world is perceived in categories that are socially constructed.” Few confirmations prevail that the most fundamental social categorization into us and them instinctively yields ingroup favoritism. But social identity theory contends for an alternative origin of ingroup favoritism very frequently viewed in minimal group investigation. That origin is identity.

*b. Identity*

Identity can be described as our self-image or self-concept. Identity is principal to social identity theory. Social identity theory presumes that an individual’s social identity is made up of a large number of social identifications that an individual has with numerous social classifications. At any single time, social identity constitutes a few identifications picked out to suit the specific social condition. Assessment of

classification membership can only be constructed through procedures of social comparison.

### *c. Comparison*

When assessing self on any aspect, an implied social comparison is made necessary with others. “Any particular social category membership can inform a positive social identity only through social comparison between the ingroup and some relevant outgroup.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996). The value of being anything can only be assessed by making comparisons with other social classifications. The social comparison theory which forms the backbone of social identity theory was developed by Festinger (1954) and it was majorly a theory of in what manner people assess their personal qualities. The theory proposed that people are inclined to assess self and its attributes in opposition to some “neutral” standard. And in times when such standards are absent, individuals usually go back to social comparison-comparing themselves with others for assessment purposes. In accordance with Festinger, the rationale following all comparisons is the aspiration for a precise self-assessment. However, since then many pieces of evidence have shown that such is not the case. On the contrary, individuals seem to take part in social comparisons mainly due to self-enhancement. Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write, “regardless of how people engage in social comparisons between ingroups and outgroups, it is the consequences, rather than the mechanisms, of such comparisons that are most important to social identity theory.”

#### *2.2.1.2 Results of threats to social identity*

It is important to understand theoretically what ensues when people discover themselves in groupings that cannot be assessed positively with respect to other groupings. In such circumstances, the comparative position inferiority of the ingroup accounts for a threat to the social identity of the person. “Social identity theory specifies two broad classes of behavioral response- exiting from the group and remaining within the group but attempting to alter the status of the group. Whether



an individual selects one or the other depends in large part on his or her beliefs regarding social mobility and social change (Ellemers 1993). Social mobility refers to the belief that group boundaries are open rather than closed, that it is possible to leave one group and join another. Social change refers to the belief that the relative status of groups can be altered, that it is possible to change a negative valuation of an ingroup to a positive one. The third kind of response exists but has received little research attention within the framework of social identity theory, namely to accept the validity of membership in the group and to accept the negative evaluation of that group.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996)

#### *2.2.1.3 Results of a positive social identity*

The negative consequences of threat to social identity have been well researched and documented, however, there has been no attempt to understand if positive social identity could also cause some kind of deleterious effects or not. This section will attempt to delve into this question. Augoustinos and Walker (1996) in their book *Social Cognition: An integrated introduction* suggest that there might be two types of the price that is paid by the individual in attempting to maintain a positive social identity—one is personal and the other is social. The personal penalty that is paid by the individual to maintain a positive social identity might appear in the shape of greater requirements put down on the person by the group members to uphold the ingroup unitedness and consistency. At the social level, the main price paid by the person is that of intergroup stress and antagonism. Social identity theory acknowledges that intergroup stress is a probable cause of aspiring for favorable intergroup differentiation. The third social price is plain outgroup disparagement.

#### *2.2.1.4 Self-categorization theory*

Turner (1985; Turner and Oakes, 1989; Turner et.al., 1987) formulated the self-categorization theory. Social identity and personal identity are not very different types of identity, on the contrary, they represent varied kinds of self-categorization. Self-

categorization can take place at three general levels: the superordinate level (explaining oneself as an element of greater humanity), the intermediate level (explaining oneself by a specific group associateship), and the subordinate level (explaining oneself at the individual level). Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write, “the ordered structure of categories used by self-categorization theory from influential work on the categories used by people in the cognitive representation of the physical world (Rosch, 1978). Categorization always occurs within a social context; it can never be acontextual. Within any one context there always exists several classificatory possibilities. Self-categorization theorists insist that self-categorization is not intended to supersede social identity theory. It is an extension of it, developing the construct of identity and the process of categorization, reconceptualizing the distinction between personal and social identity, and providing a mechanism for predicting when and how people will self-categorize in one way or another. Whereas social identity theory is primarily a motivational theory, the self-categorization theory is primarily cognitive.”

Even though social identity theory has attained an overwhelming stature in the European social psychology literature, however, it has its own problems and difficulty. Social identity theory does not consider individual differences. The other problem with social identity theory is that it assumes that individuals would acquire any social identity and that group associateship is more physical than psychological. Another main issue with social identity theory is that it centers its claim on intergroup differentiation betwixt ingroup and outgroup should escalate self-respect. This is a basic premise of the social identity theory. However, there exist very few studies that could corroborate this finding.

### **2.2.2 Social Representations**

Social representation theory by Moscovici (1972) developed in the midst to call for a more *social*/social psychology. Social representation theory has made it an urgent need

to relaunch social attention to the investigation of social psychology by restoring the precedence of collective ideas like culture and beliefs. It attempts to comprehend a person's psychological working by locating the person in his/her social, cultural, and collective environment. Social representation theory starts with the proposition that the person is essentially a social creature whose own way of life and individuality is embedded in a collectivity. Therefore, it strives to comprehend in what manner social procedures influence and impact the social-psychological working of people and groupings.

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) write, "For Moscovici, social representations are the ideas, thoughts, images, and knowledge which members of a collectivity share: consensual universes of thought which are socially created and socially communicated to form part of common consciousness. Social representations refer to the stock of common knowledge and information which people share in the form of common-sense theories about the social world. Through these, members of a society are able to construct social reality. Moscovici's concept of social representation is differentiated from Durkheim's collective representations in that the former emphasizes the dynamic and changing nature of representations and also takes into account the array of differentiated knowledge shared by subgroups within contemporary western societies (Moscovici, 1988). It is through shared representations that social groups establish their identities and come to differentiate themselves from other groups within society."

Representations have a role, it is to normalize things, individuals, and occurrences to situate them in a well-known classification setting. Representations are also authoritarian in character, directed by customs and practices, they foist themselves on the cognitive pursuits. Additionally, what makes them social, is that their formation and construction is done by means of social communication and interchange with people and groupings. Principal to Moscovici's theory of social representation is two procedures that create the representations- anchoring and objectification. Through these processes, unknown things, occurrences, etc. are made known. According to

Moscovici, it is of prime significance for people to find meaning and comprehend the character of unknown things since anything that is unfamiliar and unknown seems intimidating and terrifying.

#### *2.2.2.1 Anchoring*

Augoustinos and Walker (1996) define anchoring as “the classification and naming of unfamiliar objects or social stimuli by comparing them with the existing stock of familiar and culturally accessible categories. When we compare, we either decide that something is similar to a prototype, that is, we generalize certain salient features of the prototype to the unfamiliar stimulus, or we decide that something is different, that is, we particularize and differentiate between the object and the prototype. If we decide in favor of similarity, the unfamiliar acquires the characteristics of the model. In some cases when a discrepancy exists, the object is readjusted so as to fit the defining features of the prototype.” Moscovici mentions that the allocation of titles and designation in culture is called a ‘nominalistic tendency’. When we classify and name a thing, we not only identify and comprehend it, however, we also assess it, either in a positive or negative manner or see it as usual or unusual. Thus, as Moscovici (1984) contends “naming is not a purely intellectual operation aiming at a clarity or logical coherences. It is an operation related to a social attitude.”

#### *2.2.2.2 Objectification*

Objectification refers to the procedure by means of which unknown and theoretical beliefs, concepts, and depictions are modified into definite and neutral common-sense actualities. Moscovici’s (1961) research on the dispersal of Freud’s psychoanalytic concept is fundamentally an investigation of objectification procedure. “Moscovici was able to show how laypeople adopted Freudian notions such as complexes and neuroses and used them to explain their own behavior and the behavior of others. In the process of this usage, these conceptual and analytic properties rendering them with an independent existence. So, abstract constructs such as mind or ego are

perceived as physical entities and complexes, and neuroses are construed as objective conditions that afflict people.” (Augoustinos and Walker, 1996) The procedure of objectification essentially means the person's propensity to make things simple or refine complicated details into a central or ‘figurative nucleus’ of illustrated and cognitive components that are reserved in memory and retrieved when needed.

Moreover, Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) discuss three exterior procedures through which information is altered into good sense or social representation- the personification of knowledge, figuration, and ontologizing. The first is the personification of knowledge which connects the thought, notion, or supposition to an individual or grouping. The connection of a notion to an individual furnishes a thought of a definite reality. Secondly, figuration is the procedure through which a theoretical idea is manifested or controlled by an allegorical form in order for conceptual is made reachable. Thirdly, ontologizing is the procedure through which oral construct is permeated with corporeal personality. The above three processes combined furnish highly expert and scientific information more reachable to the common society so that transmission of information can transpire.

### *2.2.2.3 Consensual and reified universes*

Moscovici defines the meta-theory by asserting that there exist two different and definite kinds of reality-the reified and the consensual universes; the sphere of science and the sphere of common sense. The conversion of specialist information into common sense signals the difference betwixt the consensual and reified universes. The consensual universe incorporates social representations that are generated, utilized, and reconstituted by individuals to find meaning in day-to-day life. The reified universe on the other hand is one where the specialist researcher put through reality to meticulous inspection and examination. Moscovici further contends that social psychologists should be involved in investigating the consensual universe- the manner in which common individuals generate and utilize meaning to find coherence in their life.

Social representation theory suffers from its own problems. The fundamental problem with this theory is that though it claims to come under European social psychology, Parker (1987) challenges it to be individualistic in nature. According to Parker, it is understood as a cognitive arrangement that resides inside the minds of the person, thereby creating the personalized meaning of greater importance than the shared and figurative character of the subject. Allansdottir, Jovchelovitch, and Stathopoulou (1993) along the same lines asserted that the innate adaptability and accessibility in the conception of this theory causes it to be unguarded to embezzlement by individualistic perspectives. Harré (1984) also communicates related problems that the theory suggests a cognitive subject matter as opposed to seeing representations as cultural outcomes emerging from collective pursuits.

### **2.2.3. Discourse analysis**

Zellig Harris (1952) was the first to introduce the term discourse analysis which meant analyzing associated speech and writing. There were two chief concerns of Harris- one was the inspection of language further on than the level of sentence and second was the relation betwixt linguistic and non-linguistic way of behaving. He inspected the two concerns with great description and furnished means for explaining the manner in which language characteristics are dispensed inside the text and the manner in which they are merged in specific types and kinds of texts. Therefore, there exists a distinctive manner of employing language in specific situations. He contended that these discourses not only allot specific meanings, they also possess typical linguistic attributes connected to them. What are their meanings and the manner in which they are understood in language, is the primary concern of discourse analysis.

#### *2.2.3.1 Relationship between language and context*

Harris interprets “the relation betwixt linguistic and non-linguistic way of behaving” as the manner in which people realize from the circumstances that they are currently in and the manner in which to explain what someone speaks. Van Dijk (2011) asserted that the very same discourse can be comprehended distinctly by varied language users in addition to it being comprehended distinctly in varied contexts. Van Dijk (2008, 2009) writes – “context is a subjective construct that accounts not only for the uniqueness of each text but also for the common ground and shared representations that language users draw on to communicate with each other. Further, that the link between society and discourse is often indirect and depends on how language users themselves define the genre or communicative event in which they engaged.”

The interconnection of language and context was rudimentary to the research of J. R. Firth (1935, 1957a, 1957b), Michael Halliday (1971, 1989a), and John Sinclair (2004) who have made a significant contribution to the domain of discourse analysis. Firth’s work revolved around the idea of the *context of the situation* and *context of the culture* in order to examine the relationship between language and context. He argued that in order to comprehend the sense of what an individual speaks or writes, it is imperative to know the situational and cultural context in which it is based. Halliday (1971) takes the argument farther by connecting the context of the situation with real texts and the *context of culture* with possible text and the gamut of probabilities that are unlocked to language users for the formation of texts. The real act of choosing an individual makes from the possibilities that are accessible to them within the specific *context of culture*, therefore ensues in a specific *context of the situation*, both of which impacts the employment of language in the text (Hasan 2009, Halliday 2009a, van Dijk 2011). It is also asserted by Sinclair that language should be examined in a non-artificial context and the chief emphasis should be on the analysis of meaning (Carter, 2004).

#### 2.2.3.2 Cultural ways of speaking and writing

Divergent cultures frequently have varied manners of carrying out things by means of language. Hymes (1964) explored this and contended that language was little and sometimes completely neglected from the social and cultural contexts in which it occurred. He writes- “aspects of speech events such as who is speaking to whom, about what, for what purpose, where and when, and how these impact on how we say and do things in culture-specific settings” should be considered.

The discourse is viewed as the *social construction of reality* that sees texts as expressive components that are submerged in social and cultural applications. The words that are spoken or written are molded by these applications. That being so, discourses are both determined by the community as well as form the community. Discourse is molded by the language also molding the language. It is molded by the individuals who employ the language, together with molding the language that individuals employ. As Paltridge (2012) writes – “Discourse is shaped, as well, by the discourse that has preceded it and that which might follow it. Discourse is also shaped by the medium in which it occurs as well as it shapes the possibilities for that medium. The purpose of the text also influences the discourse. Discourse also shapes the range of possible purposes of texts (Johnstone, 2007).”

### *2.2.3.3 Discourse and socially situated identities*

What is spoken or written, more than just language is used to exhibit “who we are and how we want people to see us.” (Paltridge, 2012) The manner in which we clothe, the gesticulation we employ, and the manner in which we take action and interconnect also impact the manner in which our social identities are displayed. Other aspects that determine this comprises the manner in which we contemplate, the viewpoints we reveal, and objects that are valued, felt, and believed. As Gee (2011) argues, “the ways we make visible and recognizable who we are and what we are doing always involves more than just language. It involves acting, interacting, and thinking in certain ways. It



also involves valuing and talking (or reading and writing) inappropriate ways with appropriate ‘props’, at appropriate times and inappropriate places.” Discourses, therefore include the ‘socially situated identities’ that are performed and identified in the varied situations in which we communicate. They comprise of culture specified manner of behaving and culture specified manner of identifying identities and pursuits. Discourses also comprise the varied types of language that are employed to act out and identify these identities, i.e., varied social languages (Gee, 1996). Discourse also comprises of typical manners of displaying emotions, gesticulations, clothing, and posing. They comprise specific manners of respecting, contemplating, trusting, realizing, conversing and attending, perusal, and composing (Gee, 2011).

Now that we have understood what discourse analysis fundamentally deals with, it becomes important to know how discourse analysis is used in European social psychology.

#### *2.2.3.4 Discursive social psychology*

Discursive social psychology is the implementation of concepts of discourse analysis to problems in social psychology. Discursive social psychology predominantly is a constructionist approach that is frequently connected with a relativist meta-theory as opposed to the realist, positivist meta-theory that is even now mainstream in experimental social psychology (Edwards et al., 1995; Gergen, 1994). Discursive social psychology is constructionist in two ways. Individuals construct their surroundings by means of their description and explanation on one hand. That is, actuality penetrates human applications by means of categories and explanations that are components of those applications. The community is not previously classified by deity or nature in a manner that it has to be accepted submissively, on the contrary, it is composed of the way individuals speak, write, dispute, and impair it. Discursive social psychology, on the other hand, emphasizes that these explanations and descriptions that individuals

employ to establish their community are themselves created, i.e., manufactured in the opportunity of conversations, or in particular writings, from allegory, words, and a gamut of discursive assets. This theme of discursive social psychology investigates the practices that are continued by specific fabrication of the community and it examines the manner in which these accounts are created, the manner in which they are relevant to the context of employment, and the supplies they pull out (Potter, 1996).

Social psychologists for many years have fallen back on social cognition for illustrative occurrence; equipment of schemas, prototypes, heuristics, scripts, beliefs, attitudes, social representation, categories, memory stores, etc., (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). They turn into participants in a more common narrative that emit individuals as an information processing unit that sieve and calculate data and create a gamut of data. On the contrary, the primary theoretical gist of discursive social psychology is ‘anti-cognitivist’. However, it does not signify that nothing is presumed to be going on inside an individual’s head. Discursive social psychology on the contrary is transferring both the analytic and illustrative emphasis from cognitive procedures and institutions to discursive applications and the assets they pull out (Edwards, 1997). That is, it examines the action itself- as opposed to the results of the action or assessment of the action, which is more usual in conventional social psychology.

There is a gamut of published reports of varied methodological and analytic features of discursive social psychology (Billig, 1997; Coyle, 1995; Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996c, 1997, forthcoming b; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1994, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Wooffitt, 1990, 1993; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). It is imperative to take into consideration that discursive social psychology is a fresh perspective with a gamut of varied elements to it. Conventional social psychologist has been unwilling to manage genuine interchange, favoring to imitate it experimentally or rebuild it through scales and questionnaires. However, there are problems in this approach too. Few discursive psychologists themselves reject cognitivism (Billig, 2009). Discursive psychologists have responded against the suppositions of the cognitive approach and certainly

cognitive linguistics. They have contended against the very notion of considering language- behavior as if it were an indication for the genuine, significant psychological reality (Billig, 2009). Billig argues- “One problem with cognitivism is that in seeking to find the supposed mental entities that stand behind social behavior, cognitive scientists have neglected to study the intricacies of such behavior.” This accusation has been important in the discursive reaction against cognitive approaches to the study of language. As per discursive psychologists, cognitivist not only possess a deficient outlook on language but their approach diverts them from investigating the manner in which individuals really employ language in their social life.

Now that I have discussed the major theories of European social psychology, I would like to introduce a concept that has been employed in the present thesis. It emerges from the discipline of Sociology however just like the requirements of European social psychology, it is too rooted in context and content. This concept is called ‘cognitive praxis’ founded by Eyerman and Jamison (1991). Apart from the Social Identity theory, cognitive praxis (practice) was employed in this thesis because the North American tradition of social cognition as has been discussed in the review above is declared as individualistic in nature, outrightly abandoning to take into account context and content. Social representation theory which comes under the umbrella of European social psychology also has been challenged with similar criticisms by scholars, that this theory pays no attention to cultural outcomes, dismisses the shared and collective character of the society thereby defeating the purpose of European social psychology. On the other hand, cognitive praxis (practice) is capable of fusing both the traditions, that is, American and European social psychology in studying collective action for an improved understanding of social cognition.

#### **2.2.4 Cognitive Praxis**

Eyerman and Jamison (2007) understood cognitive praxis as – “seeking to reconnect psychological level of analysis to a collective or sociological level of analysis. We, aim at providing a social theory which focusses on the interaction between individual, collective and macro societal practices.”

Activities in protests entail cognitive practices which is the fundamental pursuit of a social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). As Eyerman and Jamison (2007) write- “A social movement is like a cognitive territory, a conceptual space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations.” There exists a particular cognitive element in various pursuits of the movements, nevertheless, it has not yet been theorized, and that it largely remains negligible. The cognitive affairs and ventures of the movement are to a great extent assumed. They are the disregarded suppositions of examination as opposed to being the subject matter of inquiry.

Cognitive practice takes place at numerous points. They occur in the unforeseeable and frequently unplanned contact between movement campaigners in organizing upcoming actions and reviewing previous actions. They also transpire in the way the campaign is put into operation, the manner in which the protest can be best utilized to send the message over. The passionate debates over meeting agendas, protests slogans, particular organizational events, contact between campaign groups and their opposition, the innumerable forums of conflict and discussion are some of the instances of cognitive practices that ensue within the social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007).

Studies on cognitive praxis (Holford, 1995; Parker and Camicia, 2009; Hendrick and Volbrecht, 2003; Morris and Kirwan, 2006; Leung, 2010; Carroll, 2014, 2015, 2016; Bridger and Graham, 2015) has been conducted majorly in the field of sociology, education and then some in economics. All the studies have employed Eyerman and Jamison’s (1991) definition of cognitive praxis. Cognitive praxis is a framework developed especially for examining social movements, and hence without any surprise then, all the above studies were done on social movements. However, till now there

has been no social psychological study that has exercised cognitive praxis in studying collective action.

It is crucial to note that the idea of social movement is governed by the culture in which it develops. There are considerable differences in how social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out and later conceptualized. It is important to remember that the cognitive practices of that campaign must be connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture. In short, as Eyerman and Jamison (2017) postulate that- “Social movement draws on intellectual traditions and the types of knowledge that are specific to the societies in which they emerge.”

#### *2.2.4.1 Dimensions of Cognitive Praxis*

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) conceptualized three dimensions of cognitive praxis namely; cosmological, technological, and organizational. The cosmological dimension is referred to as a worldview, where a social movement vocalizes its historical explanation. Eyerman and Jamison (2007) in their book- *Social movements: a cognitive approach* writes, “the cosmological dimension represents the common worldview assumptions that give a social movement its utopian mission or, to speak with Habermas, that represent its emancipatory aims. It can be found in movement documents, programs, books, articles, etc.” In other words, it is something that can be studied, a recreation from available information. Second, which is the technological dimension is actually the identification of particular technological problems that certain movements grow. Questions like- what type of technology is disseminated and created? What type of condemnation is directed against accepted systems of technological evolution? In short, this dimension attempts to answer the particular concerns, particular problems that are vocalized in the movement pursuits. Thirdly and finally, the organizational dimension attempts to understand the manner in which messages are sent across in movements and the various organizational structures that exist within the cognitive praxis. Eyerman and Jamison (2007) suggest that the three

dimensions of cognitive praxis together can be productive analytic apparatus to examine a social movement.

### **CHAPTER III. COLLECTIVE ACTION AND ITS CONCEPTUALISATION**

The objective of this chapter is to review the available literature on the social psychology of collective action in terms of its conceptualization and the principles of movement participation. We will begin with a small introduction to intergroup relations first, followed by the definition of collective action. Next, we will look into the various dynamics of movement participation. We will conclude this chapter by discussing the many reasons why individuals resolve to withdraw from the movement.

Humans as social beings aspire to form close-knit ties with each other. Nevertheless, when it comes to accosting members of a different group, the very same social beings that pursue alliance and union with others dispense hostility. It is argued that intergroup relations are frequently more disputable than congenial (Forsyth, 2010). Various forms are undertaken when interactions ensue between groups and between

members of several groups. Some groups may decide to pass over and exist what seem to be dissociated and disconnected worlds. While some groups and their members may participate in interactions that are amicable and cordial or still exist in cooperation. It is not uncommon to spot various groups to combine efforts and work in collaboration to improve the state of affairs that are deleterious to all (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2009). Lastly, on the other side of the spectrum are groups that mischief-makers, disagreement, friction, quarrel, and war. When a group feels that injustice or unfairness has occurred to them posed by another group (authority, government), and when their grievances are not heard, they may take to collective action.

### **3.1 What is collective action?**

Collective action encloses any behavior where an individual act on a group's behalf to improve the status, social power, or conditions of a group as a whole (Wright, 2009; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Tarrow (1994) defines a social movement as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities". Individuals occupy social movements that share collective objectives and collective identity and participate in unrestrained collective action. Huge social movements assemble a comparatively small portion of the community. This does not mean that fewer people commiserate with these movements, however, getting involved in a movement is not equivalent to commiserating with it (Klandermans, 1997). Taking action as per one's principles is not all the time simple. Individuals make social movements, even though a social movement is a lot more than just a gathering of persons. Social movements are an assemblage of individuals taking action jointly and these very real demands to be described and not to be assumed. When we place individuals at the center, we notice that inside a movement, individuals frequently fail to agree about a plan of action, that every individual might have very varied reasons to participate, that each member may contribute to the movement in a divergent manner, and this collaborative spirit "may

be more than the sum of its parts”. (Klandermans, 1997) Furthermore, questions that why some people participate while others do not; seemingly in identical circumstances, do not; what makes people engage in one kind of action but not in another, why does individual show support for a particular cause and not in others, or why do some individuals discontinue a movement while others choose to continue, can be understood only at the individual level of study. This individual level of inspection positions social psychology at the “center stage”. For the development of our understanding of social movements, social psychology indeed has a lot to proffer.

### *3.1.1 Individual and collective beliefs*

The mainstream political science and political psychology are challenged by the members of social movement since these areas state that an ordinary resident is unconcerned and disinterested in politics (Barnes and Kasse 1979 and Popkin 1991). At the end of the day, individuals who participate in movements are vigorous, well-informed, committed to obtaining a social change, and devoted to the collective objectives of the movement. Investigation on social movement engagement has repeatedly demonstrated that to become an active member in a movement, one doesn't require these exceptional character qualities (Keniston 1968; Klandermans 1983, 1989; Mc Adam et al. 1988). So how does an individual change to become a member of a movement? How does an individual come to think and recognize that his/her contribution to a campaign would lead to a change in the unfortunate circumstances or resolve a social issue? The association between individual beliefs and collective beliefs is where the answer lies to the above-mentioned questions. Every individual is born or welcomed in a brotherhood that consists of a firmly established collection of beliefs. These beliefs which are shared consequently obtain an objective reality separate from the individual. Because the experience of no two people in terms of socialization and public discourse is identical, it is usually found that even within the same community, beliefs differ from one individual to another, even though the fundamental beliefs continuously stay.



How the collective beliefs are created and changed relies a lot on the actuality that they are shared. Clearly, the creation of collective beliefs does not happen by individuals in seclusion, rather it takes place in interpersonal interaction. In these conversations, discussion, interpretation, and comments are made on occurrences and fresh details. Even though collective beliefs are steady and long-lasting, alterations in collective beliefs do come about. Unavoidably, in that case, there will be repeatedly some divergence from collective beliefs by few members of society. Therefore, beliefs inside as well as betwixt groups are debated, disapproved, formulated differently, and justified. The procedure of contending and counter-contending may be influence by external occurrences but not in a straightforward manner. Occurrences may set off discussions or emphasis a point of view, however, its effect is hard to forecast (Klandermans, 1997). What is pivotal in building and rebuilding collective beliefs is interpersonal interaction. This type of dialogue relies on the presence of social identity- the manner in which a person explains himself/herself as an adherent of a grouping (Hewstone et al. 1982). Since they recognize a specific category, they are more ready to embrace the beliefs and standards that outline the group (Turner 1982). Therefore, the study of the building and rebuilding of collective beliefs unavoidably entails the inquiry of collective identity.

### **3.2. Principles of Movement Participation**

There is a mobilization potential in each social movement, meaning every one of the residents could be summoned by that movement (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Mobilization potential could be explained as comprising of individuals who share specific morals and ideologies, that is to say, people who are commiserating to a stated collective action frame. The first step is about movement engagement is the commitment to a collective action frame.

As defined by Gamson (1992), a collective action frame “is a set of oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns”. That

is to say, collective action frames are a group of collective ideologies that is employed to generate a condition of mind in which the engagement in collective action seems to be significant. Three elements of collective action frames are recognized by Gamson: (1) a feeling of injustice, (2) a component of identity, and (3) a facet of the agency. Moral resentment in connection to unfairness may lead to a feeling of injustice. Frequently moral resentment has to do with unlawful inequality- individuals and groups who are treated unequally are discerned as unjust (Folger 1986; Major 1994). However, it is to be noted that inequality is not always a requirement to set off anger and virtuous indignation that precipitates social movements. There are many movements that had nothing to do with inequality rather it was the manner the authorities behaved was an issue (Klandermans 1997). Researches have shown that anger is the most common emotion communicated by individuals who believe an external delegate accountable for an undesirable circumstance (Major 1994; Parkinson and Manstead 1993; Abelson, Ewing and Roseman 1986). Anger must be shared to prompt a collective action. This examination leads to the second element of collective action frames, identity. Klandermans (1997) writes- “The identification of a ‘they’ (authorities, elites) who are held responsible for a negative situation implies an opposing ‘we’. And in defining a ‘we’ the identity component of collective action frames highlight the fact that these frames are sets of collective beliefs, that is, beliefs shared by groups of people. Thus, the frames are also shared”. Since social movements cover unfairness shared by category of individuals, it is assumed by social psychologists that fraternalistic deprivation is more pertinent to the occurrence of social movement engagement (Major 1994). The identity element as observed not only emphasize sharing of injustice, it additionally demonstrates the resistance of the group to the performer held accountable for the injustice. Therefore, a significant constituent in the identity element of collective action frames is the causal attributions. Agency can be defined as the confidence that an individual has in oneself that he/she can change the circumstances by employing collective action. An element of identity and feeling of injustice could be a requisite stipulation for engagement in a movement,

however, solely sharing injustice and locating a jurisdiction to criticize is not sufficient to propel individuals to participate in collective action. People must be persuaded that they possess the ability to alter their situation. An extensive review of literature attests that an organized public demonstration happens when there exists a faith that collective action can accomplish in eradicating the injustice (McAdam 1982; McAdam et al. 1988; Schwartz and Paul 1992).

### *3.2.1 How are collective action frames generated?*

To understand how collective action frames are caused, we will look into two independent processes: the social construction of collective action frames in a community and the acquiring of some portion of those ideas and principles by a person of that community.

#### *3.2.1.1 The social construction of collective action frames*

As researchers of social issues have maintained repeatedly (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) that numerous circumstances could be reckoned as a social issue but it never grows into a complication, although they may be very irksome than a set of circumstances that do in fact turn into a point of rallying. What seems significant is that identical circumstances have been explained in an entirely contrasting manner by the same category at varied points. Klandermans (1997) writes- “Before a collective action frame can be generated, evaluations of existing circumstances must be cast as shared grievances, which in turn must be transformed into demands to be presented to the authorities held responsible for the negative circumstances. Finally, people must trust that collective action would be an effective means to produce change.” Injustice, identity, and agency are all socially constructed explanations of a circumstance.

#### *3.2.1.2 The appropriation of collective beliefs*

In the appropriation of collective beliefs, the interpersonal dialogue assumes a predominant position. Such conversations may incorporate friends or co-workers, or

it may happen in the course of meeting individuals in buses, trains, metro, at getting together, at bars, and as Oliver (1989) and Walsh (1988) have noticed – over a phone call, by email, by fax. Whatever that goes on in these conversations covers the creation of agreement (Klandermans 1988) Research in social psychology has frequently shown that individuals have a preference for comparing their viewpoints with those who are similar to them (Hewstone, Stroebe and Stephenson 1996). However, it is to be noted that interpersonal conversations are not the only context where the appropriation of collective action frames takes place. Collective ideologies could be included and communicated in convincing transmission or discussion in media and can be integrated separately of interpersonal conversation. In his studies, Gamson (1992) found that individuals employ any form of available source of information, be it newspapers, feature films, advertisements, books, gossip, experiences of their own as well as of others, etc. He differentiated three kinds of information sources: media, experiential knowledge (of one's own and those of the others), and popular wisdom (shared information that everybody is aware of). The media helps in providing details principally about who is to be held accountable for the present circumstance, and the remaining two are critical for the explanation and “emotional loading” of that detail. Gamson deduces that media is a dominant asset that people can avail when attempting to find the meaning of the problems in their interactions.

### **3.3 Four steps towards Participation**

According to Klandermans (1997), mobilization of participants can be viewed from two standpoints, one is of the organizer and the other are the people whom the organizer is trying to arrive at. The four steps concerning mobilization from the standpoint of the organizer to gain support for the movement are – generating mobilization possibility, developing and initiating a recruitment system, invigorating the incentive to engage, and eliminating the obstacles to engagement. From the standpoint of the person wanting to engage in the movement includes the subsequent (connected)

steps- first coming to be a component of the mobilization possibility, next, an objective of mobilization endeavors, then becoming stimulated to engage and lastly succeed in dealing with the obstacles to engagement. Let's now examine each of the steps.

### *3.3.1 Mobilization possibility*

A movement should be able to acquire commiseration from few sections of the community to generate mobilization possibility. "The term mobilization potential refers to those members of a society, who in one way or another, may potentially be mobilized by a social movement" (Klandermans 1997). It incorporates everybody who possesses a favorable frame of mind regarding the movement. Even those individuals who do not advantage straight from the pursuits of a movement may grow commiserated to the arrangement (McCarthy and Zald 1973) and hence a probable prospect for mobilization. There are limitations, however. Only those individuals who have grown a collective action frame concerning the cause of the movement make it to the mobilization possibility. Some person who has not cultivated such a frame would not contemplate engaging in the movement, even if they are requested.

### *3.3.2 Recruitment networks and attempts at mobilization*

No matter how wide-reaching the movement's mobilization possibility be, if the network of recruitment is weak then naturally it would not be able to set in motion its possibility. "To form and activate recruitment networks, a movement must join forces with other organizations and establish ties with already existing formal and informal networks, and it must develop its organizations at both the national and local levels" (Wilson and Orum 1976; Feree and Miller 1985). A social movement's recruitment nexus governs the stretch of its mobilization endeavors (Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson 1980). The wider the nexus, and the close-knit bonds to different institutions and nexus, the considerable sum of individuals would pitch inside the purview of mobilization endeavor (McAdam and Paulsen 1993).

Positions held by individuals inside the recruitment nexus are both the object and subject of mobilization: object in the sense that they do not need to be mobilized to undertake duties in the mobilization crusade; subject since after being mobilized, they turn functional in mobilizing other peoples (Klandermans 1997).

### *3.3.3 Motivation to participate*

To activate the stimulation to engage, a movement should determine the supposed costs and benefits of engagement. The drive to engage in a movement thus can be defined “as a function of these perceived costs and benefits” (Oberschall 1980). Engagement in a movement necessitates participation in a definite and specified pursuit like being present at rallies or marches, make a donation, or providing crew to the workplace. It is to be noted however that there is no reason to assume that an individual who participates in one activity would participate in all types of activities considering the costs and benefits of engagement. Not just the particular activity in the inquiry but also the individual’s situation, disposition, and preference dictate what type of activity he/she would participate in. So, what may seem comparatively damaging to one individual, may seem completely risk-free for the other.

### *3.3.4 Barriers to participation*

Drive designates a readiness to engage, however, this readiness is not an adequate state for engagement in the movement. It would cause engagement only to the degree when the intent is put into action. People can overcome obstacles if they are thoroughly stimulated. Finally, it comes down to the fact that if an individual who is motivated would engage, it relies on how he/she make a response to the obstacles. Therefore, a social movement in its final stage should seek one or both the plan of action- continuing or strengthening the drive and removing barriers. In addition to these two, people who are important to an individual also play a significant part in continuing the drive to engage in the movement (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1986).

### 3.4 The Motivation to Participate

To actuate individuals to engage, appealing and achievable objectives and type of action that are recognized to be effectual should be suggested by the organizers (Klandermans 1997).

#### *3.4.1 Values and expectations in collective action*

Engagement in a social movement requires participation in a particular activity by an individual placed in a lengthy incident of collective action directed at attaining a collective objective. Klandermans (1984) suggested a model wherein it covers the decision of an individual whether to engage or abstain from taking part in a pursuit. The model merges both value-expectancy theory (Feather and Norman 1982) and collective action theory (Olson 1968; Oberschall 1973). “According to value-expectancy theory, an individual’s behavior is a function of the value of the expected outcomes of behavior. The more likely it is that a specific behavior will produce a specific set of outcomes, and the more highly an individual values these outcomes, the more likely it is that he or she will engage in that behavior.” (Klandermans 1997) However, when it comes to engagement in collective action, the dynamic of motivation is further complicated. Because of which Klandermans in his model included collective action theory.

From the standpoint of motivation, the crux of the collective action theory is the difference between selective and collective incentives (Olson 1968; Oberschall 1973, 1994; Oliver 1980). “Collective incentives are related to the achievement of the collective goal. They are all-inclusive, that is, once the goal has been realized, everyone profits, even people who never contributed to its realization. Selective incentives, in contrast, affect only those people who participate in collective action. Distinctively, the objectives of collective action are collective incentives. These incentives fall into two categories, social or nonsocial. Social incentives involve the reaction of significant

others- partners, friends, coworkers- to individual participation; nonsocial incentives concern such matters as the amount of money and the time one will spend, how participants will affect one's job, and physical risks." (Klandermans 1997) Selective incentives are then dependent straight on a person's behavior. Collective incentives on the other hand are connected to a person's behavior indirectly. The intermediary betwixt both collective and selective incentives in another people's behavior. This reliance on the decisions of other people makes the functioning and the understanding of motivation complex when it comes to collective action. An issue would not be created if each individual was aware of what everyone else would perform. However, such is not the case, people do not know what others would do. One thing is certain though, people would have expectations regarding the behavior of other people. Due to the unavailability of authentic details, people can only rely on expectations assuming that others would take action. The expectation that one's action would contribute immensely to the movement, helping it attain its objectives and that the objectives would also be attained faster if others contribute as well, affects the decision of the individual whether to engage in the movement or not. In different words, social movement organizers cannot just presume the expectation would appear so automatically, rather these expectations have to be manufactured socially, in conversations between possible members. These expectations are in a way "self-fulfilling"- the more the number of people feel that their collective action can be victorious, the more probable it is that widespread action would transpire and eventually force the authorities to pay attention and acknowledge it. However, there is another side of the fence too, which is widespread inactivity. If nobody believes that collective action would be victorious, such extensive activity is not possible.

Therefore, the organizers of the protest movements that direct themselves at convincing individuals to engage should not only focus on the worth of the movement objectives and selective incentives whenever possible but it should also persuade the person that other individuals would also engage to make the movement a success, to attain the desired objectives. Converting the expectations of others into action requires



a delicate balance on the part of the organizers. Excessive optimism decreases the drive to participate so does excessive pessimism. Excessive optimism may lead to free-riders whereas pessimism would lead people to think that since not many people are participating, how would individual participation make any difference to achieving the movement objective.

### **3.5 Sustained Participation and Disengagement**

A characteristic that is principal to any social movement is its prolonged survival for an extended time. However, not all movements regardless of strong it has been, they move through a pattern; they sprout and deteriorate. Even dedicated members may resolve to leave sooner or later. It is also true that the pattern of the movement designates that not all members resolve to leave at the same time. In different words, situations that might cause one member to back out of the movement may not influence the durability of the other members.

The fact the social movements must not only captivate the members but also maintain them, sometimes even, release them has been appreciated by a small number of students examining social movements. Surprisingly, noteworthy structured attention has not been extended to both the occurrence of disengagement nor to the continued engagement in the social movement writings. To understand both disengagement and continued participation, Klandermans (1997) first explains the notion of movement commitment as “a psychological state that impels people to remain within a movement.” Commitment is both a precursor as well as a resultant to a progressing engagement. The more dedicated someone is towards a movement, the more probable it becomes that he/she would carry on to engage in it, and the longer one engages in the protests the more dedicated he/she grows. Therefore, in the procedure of continued engagement and also in disengagement, commitment plays a critical

role. In the earlier one, dedication to a protest extends engagement and in the latter instance deficiency of dedication may lead to desertion (Hirschman 1970).

### *3.5.1 Commitment to a social movement*

The notion of commitment has been constructed earlier (Barling et al. 1992; Allen and Meyer 1995) but in the backdrop of social movement, it has been seldomly administered. According to Klandermans (1997), the sole cause because of which this notion has not been frequently administered in protests is the limited curiosity in continued engagement and desertion amidst the protest movements academicians. The notion of commitment introduced by Klandermans (1997) has its origins in organizational psychology and social psychology of union engagement. Allen and Meyer (1990, 1991, 1995) the authors of organizational commitment recognized three separate topics in the explanation of commitment: ‘commitment as an affective attachment to the organization, commitment as a perceived cost associated with leaving the organization, and commitment as an obligation to remain in the organization’ (Meyer et al. 1993). The authors mention the above three kinds of commitment as affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Emulating Meyer and Allen, Klandermans also differentiated three types of commitment between members of the movement: an affective closeness to a movement felt by the individuals, the individuals may fright of leaving the movement or the individual may feel an obligation to stay.

### 3.5.2 The antecedents of movement commitment

#### 3.5.2.1 Affective commitment

The more gratifying it is to engage in a protest, the greater is the emotional dedication to that protest. Emotional dedication grows out of a favorable interchange association betwixt a protest and a member. As it already observed that protests engagement involves both the price and profits for every member, if the profits exceed the price the more the member turns emotionally dedicated to the protest. Many studies have

demonstrated that individuals decide to join a protest presuming that the advantages would exceed the price (van Rij 1994 and van Rijn 1995, van de Putte 1995). Once the expectations are fulfilled and communication and conversation with the union also demonstrate as gratifying, emotional dedication grows towards the union. Hence, emotional dedication and engagement strengthen each other, the more robust the dedication, it gives way to widespread engagement, as long as engagement goes on to be fulfilling. However, they can also go against each other and in due course lead to erosion: disheartening engagement incidents could diminish dedication, frail dedication could give way to smaller vigorous engagement, and smaller vigorous engagement could additionally decrease emotional dedication (van Teeffelen and Klandermans 1989).

### *3.5.2.2 Continuance commitment*

The more considerable the investment of an individual in a protest and the more penurious the standard of options the individual discern, the more forceful the individual's continuation to the movement will be. Sometimes remarkable investments are made by people in the protest pursuits, giving up employment, materialistic ease and security, friends and attachments to others; undertaking danger, possibly spending substantial costs to merely join the institution, predominantly if it is an "exclusive movement organization". (Klandermans 1997). The length to which individuals renounce themselves to a protest turns evident in their answers when the individuals are intimidated of dismissal- sometimes this measure is employed by the organizers to keep the members under control. Options discerned by individuals could be both challenging protest institutions devoted to the identical cause and protest institutions committed to different causes, and it could be both appealing to the person more or less. Even though the deficiency of attractive options could be one of the reasons why a person stays with the protest. It should also be noted that except if individuals have excessively invested in the protest, remaining involved in the protests should be of no necessity. If engagement suffers the loss of its appeal, individuals can

resolve to leave; the accessibility of an option need not have any relevance on their resolution to quit. However, if the commitment of an individual is flickering, the existence of an appealing option may make a critical difference in support of leaving (Klandermans 1997).

### *3.5.2.3 Normative commitment*

“Normative commitment is the result of long-term socialization processes that generate values and beliefs congruent with those of the organization. The importance of the alignment of an individual’s ideological frame with that of a social movement has been demonstrated time and again in the literature. The more commensurate the two ideological frames, the stronger the individual’s attachment to the movement.” (Klandermans 1997) Therefore in the backdrop of the protest engagement, it is hypothesized that normative commitment plays an important role. Ideology, values, and beliefs ultimately are crucial components to any protest, additionally, the feeling of accountability or moral duty does act as a pivotal part in regulating protest engagement, chiefly when it comes down to continued kind of engagement.

### *3.5.3 The consequence of movement commitment*

Research in other fields has shown that movement commitment is a forceful and dominant intermediary betwixt discontentment with the protest and the resulting ways of behaving. Caryl Rusbult and her colleagues (1991) differentiated reaction to discontentment across two dimensions: active-passive and destructive-constructive. The above-mentioned dimensions merge to generate four kinds of responses; “exit, actively destroying the relationship or the link with the organization; neglect, passively allowing one’s relationship or the link with the organization to deteriorate; voice, actively and constructively attempting to improve conditions; and loyalty, passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve.” (Klandermans 1997) Therefore, an inflated degree of commitment encourages sustained engagement and an inferior degree of commitment accelerates the end of a connection.

### 3.6. Conversion of Discontent into Action

For the individuals to become a member of the protest pursuits, the requirement calls for being more than existing as a sympathizer. Protest engagement as mentioned before is the result of series of four steps: turning into a sympathizer, selected by mobilization efforts, being inspired to engage, and ultimately in reality engaging in it. These course of action regarding engagement not just come off in varied ways betwixt protests, inside protests too they deviate, it is contingent upon the pursuits under deliberation. Encouraging people to participate in a protest pursuit is not all the time simple and straightforward, not even when they exhibit sympathy towards the cause. Turning into a protesting member is not only contingent on the individual's commiseration towards the protest but also the crusade and the pursuits arranged by the protest. There is a provision of a selection of opportunities to engage in a protest movement, however, not all individuals who commiserate are informed and enticed to some forms of pursuits. In other words, conversion of dissatisfaction into taking action is a complex procedure where there are organizational and social psychological elements that communicate to generate engagement as a result. This section deals with the transformation of sympathizers into participants.

#### 3.6.1 Targeting Sympathizers

The presence and genuine operation of social nexus are required in focusing sympathizers and consequently consist of three facets: constructing or adopting nexus, initializing present nexus, and employing social nexus in enrolling plans. Marwell and Oliver (1993) have successfully demonstrated through their mathematical simulations that networks and organizers are critically important for participants to become mobilized. An emphasis was laid by these authors on "selectivity in mobilizing"- in other words being aware which person to arouse- a crusade can be hugely benefited if the organizers make use of it. "Social movements-it is often said- are networks of

networks and organizations. Commonly, such networks do not originate automatically, but often as a result of long-term endeavors of organizers and activists. Most mobilization processes imply coalition-formation and the mobilization of networks first before mass support can be mobilized.” (Klandermans 1997) Arranging huge mobilization and enrolling protest participants are indeed varied but both are required for successful campaigning.

#### 3.6.1.1 Recruiting volunteers

As protest organizations are unable to continue the connection with individual members who show sympathy towards the cause, they, therefore, depend on the time and hard work of the volunteers. Performing in the protest or crusade as a volunteer is a kind of engagement that entails escalated degree of dedication both concerning hard work and durability. Once turned into a protest volunteer generally signifies devoting oneself to deplete a substantial quantity of vitality and time for an extended spell. According to Oliver (1984) “volunteering is a form of movement participation with diminishing marginal returns, that is to say, that with every new volunteer the contribution to the collective good decreases.” Essentially there is a requirement of only a restricted quantity of volunteers for the crusade or protest to keep continuing. In a protest, as a result, volunteers are fundamentally providing a free ride to the remaining sympathizers of that crusade (Marwell and Oliver 1993).

An apparent answer to the query as to how individuals turn into volunteers in a protest is that they are solicited to volunteer. The recruitment process is broken down into two varied procedures, one where the protest activists advance towards the recruits and the other where the decision to engage lies on the recruits. Hence, individuals should be first aimed and inspired then to engage. As mentioned before activists do not arbitrarily approach individuals, neither everyone in the nexus is approached, however, their selection is rooted in the information about the individuals inside the nexus and on the idea of certain attributes required for them to engage. Activists are more likely to approach individuals who they believe would give a favorable response. This way of

working also has its disadvantages, as it neglects all those who are previously unfamiliar to the activists. This pitfall could be fixed by making use of unbiased media for example an advertisement on a notice board or in newspapers. This way fresh candidates could be attracted. The decision to become a volunteer rest on the perceived costs and benefits of engagement. Some of the advantages include putting efforts for a good cause, associating with individuals having similar tastes, exercising authority, time being spent in a relevant manner. The costs include the amount of time lost and fright of social penalty.

### *3.6.1.2 The utilization of networks in targeting sympathizers*

Snow et al. (1980) categorize the channels a protest could employ to recruit. Four varied channels have been recognized: “face-to-face, private (door to door leafleting or petitioning, social networks; private, mediated (mail, telephone); face-to-face, public (face-to-face leafleting or petitioning on sidewalks, participation in public events, staging events for public consumption); and public mediated (radio, television, newspapers).” (Klandermans 1997) A crusade’s ability to be selective is contingent upon the activist’s information of where to locate sympathizers and the more carefully a crusade chose its participants the higher the success rate it would have (Marwell and Oliver 1993). The four channels outlined by Snow et al are not efficacious equally. Mass media and mails could look appealing but they have their disadvantages too. There is no conviction ever to what degree is the target attended. Media could be costly if the crusade has to make the payment themselves for it, and difficult to restrain once the protest employs independent promotions. Employing the protest’s media could be one of the strategies to avoid the downfall. But this too has a severe setback, it would reach very fewer people. Sometimes, protest activists have no choice left but to employ face-to-face communication, because they either have a dearth of other methods to employ or the influence they are hoping to reach via other methods is feeble. The principal snag to face-to-face communication is that it takes a lot of time. (Klandermans 1997)

### 3.7 Motivating to Participate

It is important to aim at sympathizers as targeting sympathizers successfully is frequently a mobilization attempt on its own. Such an attempt places the conditions for the real crusade to take place. Triggering individuals to engage in a protest signifies encouraging them to participate in certain protest pursuits, for example, marches, rallies, strikes, or blockades. However, there are social predicaments that the individuals go through in protest engagement that should be conquered, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### *3.7.1 The social predicament of movement participation*

Olson's (1968) explanation that participants who are logical do not engage in collective action however they make use of free ride except if selective inducement stopped them from carrying out, but there are countless such instances where individuals have engaged in collective action. Still, individuals may encounter social predicaments whether to engage or not generated by the protest engagement. "Free riding according to Marwell and Oliver (1993) is an option only when the individual contributions to the production of a collective good follow a decelerating production function, that is to say, 'each contribution makes other's subsequent contributions less worthwhile, and thus likely. Mass mobilization, on the other hand, follows an accelerating production function, that is to say, 'each contribution makes the next one more worthwhile, and thus, more likely.'" (Klandermans 1997) There is no free-riding in this backdrop evidently, as the engagement turns more appealing with each following member.

#### *3.7.2 Free Riding*

Klandermans (1997) notes that "in terms of the motivational dynamics of movement participation this means that nonparticipation can be defined as free-rider behavior



when three conditions have been satisfied: (a) the collective action must be effective; (b) there must be a sufficient number of participants, and (c) the nonparticipation of a single individual must not endanger the effectiveness of the collective action.”

### *3.7.3 Overcoming the social dilemmas of movement participation*

Exactly for the reason that there is a realization among the individuals concerning predicaments of collective action, and the continuous threat that if excessive people make use of free ride there would no production of collective benefit, they may resolve to engage in a protest and attempt to guarantee that other people engage in the protest as well. There is an emphasis put forward by Feree (1992) and Gamson (1992) on the significance of collective identity for defeating the social predicaments arising out of protest engagement. To conquer these conundrums, social factors assist to a great extent. An activist to arouse the inspiration to engage could employ the following paths- insistence on the significance of action objectives, creating a connection more observable betwixt a person’s engagement and objective attainment, and supplying the members selective inducements to engage. The most potent mobilization crusade merges all three.

#### *3.7.3.1 Emphasis on the importance of the objective*

There are definitive objectives in the pursuits of a protest and it can never be assumed that possible candidates would deem these objectives to be connected with their interest. Gaining sympathy for the protest does not happen spontaneously and does not signify that the individuals are convinced by the objectives of a particular pursuit. Action objectives have to be done legally. “The process of consensus mobilization thus continues in the context of action mobilization and the challenge a movement organization faces, is to demonstrate that the goals chosen for a specific drive are instrumental for eliminating the dissatisfaction or fulfilling the aspirations that are at the root of a movement’s mobilization potential.” (Klandermans 1997) Emphasis on the importance of an action objective narrows down to attempting to affect an

individual's resolution of the state of affairs and consequently needs a transmission plan. However, before an individual builds a point of view towards the engagement, the individual should be well known for the action objectives and their most significant ramifications. It must be noted that action objectives are not changeless, they can and do alter. No matter how significant sufficient distribution of information could be, it comes down to how to generate an extensive favorable frame of mind regarding the action objectives. All specified objectives may not be equally attractive and at times it is strenuous to persuade individuals that their cause is worth struggling for. However, just persuading individuals that the action objectives are significant is not sufficient, the predicaments of collective action have to be defeated with other methods which will be discussed now.

### *3.7.3.2 Individual participation and objective attainment*

Building a connection between a person's engagement and objective attainment more observable signifies influencing beliefs regarding the efficacy of a person's engagement. "An individual's belief that participation is related to goal achievement can be conceived of as consisting of three separate beliefs: (a) the expectation that one's participation will contribute to the probability of success; (b) the expectation that the action will succeed if enough other people will participate; and (c) the expectation that enough others will participate." (Klandermans 1997). Growing the detectability of the connection between a person's engagement and objective attainment indicates persuading individuals that engagement plays an instrumental part to victory and on the other hand, non-engagement threatens victory; that the protest's action plan would affect the specified organization. In conjunction, the above three ideologies constitute a person's victory suppositions. A requisite stipulation for engagement is the "expectation of success". (Klandermans 1997) As mentioned before self-fulfilling prophecy is operating when it comes to suppositions regarding the behaviors of other people. If an individual thinks that no one is engaging in the collective action, he/she themselves would not be inspired to engage. On the same

lines, crusades that are victorious in persuading people that other individuals are engaging as well could earn their engagement. The activists therefore must be able to steer a balance betwixt excessive hopefulness and hopelessness regarding the behavior of other individuals, as they both could lead to a diminishing drive to engage. It also must be noted that our suppositions regarding the behavior of people have their roots in previous experiences and perceptions.

### *3.7.3.3 Strategies to link participation and goal achievement*

The connection betwixt a person's engagement and objective attainment could be made observable in numerous manners. Some of which will be examined below.

#### *3.7.3.3.1. Social networks*

There are numerous methods through which the activist could employ social nexus to make observable the association betwixt a person's engagement and objective attainment. One such method is contract. As stated by Marwell and Oliver (1993) contracts "specify conditions for participation in such a way that would-be-participants can withdraw if not enough other people participate. Usually, such contracts specify a goal in terms of the number of people to be recruited or the amount of money to be collected." The splitting of the objective into sub-objectives makes the contribution of a person noteworthy. If a crusade structures its objectives concerning some magnificent outcome, it could lead the contributions made by the individual to appear worthless, resulting in the individual suspecting the crusade's capability to attain its goals. By setting up sub-objectives, a crusade could remove the above-mentioned obstacles to engagement. Additionally, in crusades that are smaller in size the decision of an individual to engage influences the attendance more in a straightforward manner than in the large-sized crusades.

#### *3.7.3.3.2. Experience*

An activist could pinpoint previous victories while building on previous experiences. This plan does the trick if the crusade has gained some previous victories to refer to. On the other hand, previous fiascos could be disastrous as they subvert the capability of the crusade to convince possible candidates who could contribute. If the responsibility of nonsuccess however could be placed on the competitors, it could rather expedite mobilization (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Schwartz and Paul 1992). In cases where previous experiences are unavailable, small-sized experimentation could be conducted by the activists to establish that victory is attainable. However, in doing so there is a huge danger that the experiment could be unsuccessful leading to a more difficult time for the activists to persuade individuals to engage. (Klandermans 1997)

#### *3.7.3.3.3 Persuasive communication*

If there are no previous experiences available for a crusade to pull out to foresee its efficacy, it could attempt to convince individuals to think that people are engaging and the crusade would achieve its victory. Communication that is convincing classically involves the subsequent reasonings: “more and more people are becoming concerned; something should be done soon; a substantial proportion of those who are concerned already contribute; the campaign can successfully attack the problem if enough people contribute, and each individual can make a significant contribution.” (Godwin 1984) Communication that is persuasive is employed as a plan however would work only once. (Klandermans 1997).

#### *3.7.3.3.4 Changing the cost/benefit structure of participation*

Supply of selective inducement to individuals is an additional plan that could balance out the social predicament of protest engagement; by creating engagement more appealing than nonengagement. Even though selective inducements are a significant element of each mobilization plan, but they are not enough. Klandermans’s numerous works (Briët, Klandermans and Kroon 1987; Klandermans 1984; Klandermans 1993; Klandermans and Oegma 1987 and Klandermans 1994) have shown that selective

inducements by itself are not an adequate incentive to engage. On the other hand, it is the discerned price and profits of engagement that play a significant part in an individual's decision-making to engage in a protest. This plan of getting over the predicament of protest engagement boils down to providing rewards for engagement and penalizing nonengagement.

### 3.8 Participation

The final step course of action in the transformation procedure is the most strenuous task for an activist to regulate. Supporters are selected, their incitement is triggered, the only remaining step left is eliminating the obstacles and maintenance of their motivation. It is suggested by Klandermans (1997) that maintaining motivation so that individuals are inspired abundantly to deal with unpredicted obstacles in all likelihood is more fitting than attempting to eliminate the remaining hurdles. Klandermans (1997) explained "that people with a high motivation more likely end up participating and that motivation easily fades away in the course of a campaign, especially among people in unsupportive social environments. On the other hand, even, slight barriers may restrain a person from participating if their social environment fails to keep them to their promises." The question that why does protest supporters don't engage has been explained by Klandermans. He provided three causes for nonengagement: absence of commiseration (not ready), when commiseration is missing (erosion), and nonsuccess to transform commiseration into taking action (non-conversion). Protest engagement can take numerous varied kinds. Knoke and Wood (1981) cataloged twenty varied pursuits a protest's constituency would participate in "inter alia, soliciting of donations, sitting on a committee, writing, phoning or contacting government officials, taking part in a picket or demonstration, representing the organization to other groups, helping with office work, recruiting new members,

attending a meeting, and it would not be difficult to add twenty ones.” A significant feature of “mobilization technology” is to design repeatedly fresh chances to engage that could fulfill the objective in an exhilarating manner and makes the candidates desiring to discharge more. Klandermans (1997) proposed classification which merges the hard work and time features. “Participation can be limited in time or once-only and involve little effort or risk (a) for example, giving money, signing a petition, or taking part in a peaceful demonstration. Alternatively, it may require considerable effort or risk, (b), for example joining a sit-in, an unauthorized demonstration, or a strike. Participation can also be indefinite but a little demanding (c) for example playing a membership fee to an organization or being on call for two nights a month, or on the other hand, more taxing (d) like being on a committee or a voluntary worker in an organization.”

### **3.9 Maintaining Movement Commitment**

Whereas some individuals in protests withdraw from it, others resolve to remain even their entire lifespan (Andrew 1991; Teske 1995). Klandermans (1997) espoused a difference betwixt affective, normative, and continuance commitment as three varied features of dedication having their unique precursors and outcomes. The two-devastating manner of answering to discontentment with a protest are neglect and exit, on the other hand, the two manners to act constructively includes loyalty and voice.

Protest dedication does not survive on its own. It is continued through conversation with the protest and any course of action that creates the particular conversation satisfying assists to preserve dedication. Five mechanisms of social ties are discussed by Downton and Wehr (1991) which protests exercise to preserve dedication. “Leadership, ideology, organization, rituals and social relations which make up a friendship network each contribute to sustaining the commitment and the most effective is, of course, a combination of all five. These authors refer to the ‘common devotion’ that results from shared leadership; to group pressure as the primary means

of maintaining a social movement's ideology; to taking on a role within the organization itself as a way of increasing people's investment in the organization; to rituals as patterns of behavior that are repeated over time to strengthen core beliefs of the movement; and to circles of friends that strengthen and maintain individual commitment by putting an individual's beliefs and behavior under greater scrutiny and social control." (Klandermans 1997) Literature has shown that the above-mentioned five mechanisms promote an individual's bond to the protest. Selective inducements rarely are adequate for engagement in a protest, but it does escalate dedication.

### **3.10 Disengagement**

Withdrawal from involvement in protest can acquire varied shapes and each type of engagement is not aborted in an identical manner. At times, it is sufficient to merely remain distant, at times disconnection demands certain activity and at times a person selects to merge departure and voice and quit the institution in an exceedingly vocalized manner. The answer to the question as to what makes individuals divert has been given by Klandermans (1997) suggesting that inadequate satisfaction in amalgamation with the absence of dedication leads them to change directions.

#### *3.10.1 Neglect: erosion of support*

It is hard to notice neglect. As mentioned by Klandermans (1997) all sorts of causes exist as to why individuals who sympathize with the cause ultimately cancel it, and this has not a single thing to do with diverting. Still, at times individuals who originally buttress the protest alter their way of thinking and turn reluctant to buttress the protest anymore. In such instances, the issue is the disappearance of sympathy. Oegma and Klandermans (1994) define erosion of support as "the nonparticipation of individuals who, though once prepared to participate, have changed their minds and lost their readiness to take action." It was hypothesized by them that erosion happens

when people discern the proportion of price to profit as turning less approving over some time and the complaints posed by them appear less urgent and there is a disappearance of their sympathy towards the protest. The occurrence of erosion of support takes place in the backdrop of protest deterioration, alteration in the opinion of the public, and problems in the cycles of attention. In the milieu of action mobilization crusades, erosion of support could also take place. In such an instance, erosion of support is more in terms of well-contemplated denial to engage anymore.

### *3.10.2 Exit: Resigning as a participant*

Resignation in protests could account for the following reasons- despondency, demanding experiences, appealing options, burnout, altered life phase, or merely missing inspiration. In union membership, the chief rationale provided for resignation included uncertainty regarding the agency of the membership of the union, discouraging experiences with the association, and alteration in the occupation. (Klandermans 1997) In totality, when the organization disappoints and there exist shallow dedication levels, individuals ready themselves to resign. However, pessimistically encountered communication or absence of optimistically encountered communication leads them to withdraw from the protest. These shallow communication levels among other factors are brought about by the absence of optimistic communication with the institution. As soon as the levels of dedication are degrading, seeds of uncertainty are sowed, and ultimately when the communication remains unsatisfied, furnishing resignation turns easy.

A requirement of a union activist is commitment levels higher than others (Barling et al. 1992), more recurrent communication with the union, faith in the policies and practices of union, feelings of accountability, and exceedingly understanding social surroundings (Nandram 1995; Hoekstra 1994). It is not only time-consuming but also very stressful for a union activist. Some experiences could be so stressful for an activist that it could lead to burnout, and this burnout could be a possible reason for them to withdraw particularly when the surroundings are unsupportive. "Burnout is a stress



reaction typical of people who work with people. It is an overarching concept which covers loss of motivation, cynicism, and depersonalization (Maslach 1982). Burnout is typically observed among idealistically motivated volunteers, who start their job with unrealistically high expectations.” (Klandermans 1997) Studies conducted by Gomes, Maslach, and Struik (1991) showed that it is the combination of the inflated price or inflated degree of psychological strain with inflated degrees of dedication that could create burnout. Damage is done when the activist is unable to produce pliability in their work and finds no time to unwind. It is to be noted that not all activists withdraw from the protest due to burnout. Some also leave when the momentum of the movement turns dull. (Oberschall 1978; Duffhues and Felling 1989; Silverman 1991) Klandermans (1997) studied desertion of movement by individuals, who quit at varied times and selected to remain at varied points. They termed them as persisters, shifters, and terminators. “Persisters are those who stay behind as prophetic minorities to maintain the abeyance structure (Taylor 1989). Shifters are those who leave to become active in another movement and terminators are those who give up political activism altogether.”

We will now examine in detail the social political context of the location in which in this research is situated in.

#### **CHAPTER IV: SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF ASSAM FROM 1662-1998**

Commonly, the general public, policy planners, and social scientists have the tendency to club all the seven states of the northeastern region as *North-east*. While it is true that these states suffer from common problems of drug trafficking, insurgency to illegal infiltration, however, it will be grossly unjustified to put them under a single

umbrella. For, these states not only possess apparent culture-historical traditions but economically too, they are at different stages of advancement (Misra, 2013). This universal allocation of the seven states as *North-east* has not only led to the unfairness of the distribution of financial resources to big states like Assam but also more importantly to serious administrative mishandling by the Centre of the complexities of the region. Hence, it makes it all the more crucial to study the states of the northeastern region independently and give each of them its due share of attention to understand the gravity of the situation. Journalist Kalpana Sharma (1990) writes “Assam today is troubled and divided”. Not only is Assam isolated from the rest of the country, but the men who run Assam are also equally isolated from the people they govern, especially the ‘tribals’ (Baruah, 2001).

As history unfolds itself, it is known that Assam was the first region among all of the northeast to open communication links with the rest of India. It also would not be an exaggeration to say that Assam has one of the best-documented histories in the whole of India dating from tribalism to feudalism (Misra, 2013). So, let’s begin with some of the most historical events of Assam in order to appreciate and recognize the issues this rich and resourceful state faces.

#### **4.1 Assam as a province of British India**

The Ahom kingdom ruled Assam for a span of six centuries within which it defeated the mighty Mughals. There was a serious conflict between the Ahom kingdom and the Mughals in the seventeenth century, and in 1662 the Mughal General Mirjumla attacked Assam and ransacked the capital city of Gargaon (Brauah, 2001). However, the war ended with Ahoms overthrowing the Mughals in 1682. This major victory by a small kingdom over the mighty empire provided significant political capital to the Ahom kingdom, enabling it further to consolidate its rule in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Baruah, 2001).

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Burmese empire began to expand itself and had begun to hinder the affairs of the Ahom, Manipuri, and other small kingdoms in northeast India. 1817 witnessed many Burmese military invasions of Assam and by 1822; the Ahom kingdom came under the rule of Burmese commander. This was the time when the Ahom approached the British for aid against the Burmese invaders. The British agreed to offer help but with the condition that once it defeats the Burmese empire, the Ahoms will surrender itself under the East India Company. In 1826, Yandabo Treaty was finally signed between Assam and Burma wherein it was concluded that the king of Ava (Burma) renounced “all claims upon” and agreed to “abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea” (Jaintia), (Baruah, 2001).

Once it came under the rule of the East India Company, Assam’s boundaries went through considerable changes. The changes were not accidental but well thought of and based on considerations of administrative convenience and some on the whims of colonial administrators. For instance, there were arguments for the expansion of Assam and it was said that a larger Assam would make it attractive for senior and accomplished British civil servants to come and work in Assam (Guha, 1977). 1905 saw the creation of a new Assam combined with all of the eastern Bengal- currently Bangladesh. Following this was also a consideration to remove the word Assam due to the addition of the new province and to be named as North Eastern Province. However, later the name changing proposition was dropped and Eastern Bengal and Assam were finally chosen not because of any Assamese sentiments but due to pressure from the tea industry, since Assam had developed to become a big name in the production of tea, and there were high stakes in the name of Assam. The harshest response to the new name came from the British tea industry as they believed that the reputation of tea in the international market comes from the name “Assam”, hence it must be retained. The province of East Bengal and Assam lived for a brief time and in 1912 Assam reverted to its former status and to its former boundaries that included Sylhet.

It must be noted however that, politically, culturally, and economically, the territories of Assam under the British were not the same as pre-colonial Assam. Colonial Assam was not only larger than pre-colonial Assam; it also excluded some areas that were culturally part of pre-colonial Assam (Baruah, 2001).

### *3.1.1 Assam as an Extension of Bengal*

The cultural politics of Assam went through significant long-term implications when Assam was viewed as an extension of Bengal. This assumption led to major decision-making and ramifications such as (a) Assam was ruled by the British as part of Bengal until 1874. After Assam became a separate province, colonial authorities once more experimented with a composite province of East Bengal and Assam from 1905 to 1912. Even as a separate province, Assam, until the very end of British rule, included the Bengali-speaking district of Sylhet. (Baruah, 2001). (b) Right through the complete British rule, the colonialist treated Assam as a land frontier of Bengal. They justified this move to integrate Assam and East Bengal by saying that since Bengal is very densely populated and Eastern Bengal its most crowded area, it requires space for enlargement and this can only be done eastward. An official said, “Far from hindering national development, we are really giving it greater scope and enabling Bengal to absorb Assam” (Guha, 1977). (c) Bengali was announced as the official language in courts and government schools in Assam from 1837 to 1873. Though it was changed in 1873, the welcoming act of large-scale immigration from Bengal to Assam, and the way the boundaries of Assam were drawn sadly kept Assam’s language question under controversy throughout the period of the colonial period and beyond. (d) Setting up of educational institutions was important for Assamese intellectuals as they saw it as a ‘progress’ of Assam, however, the colonial authorities were unwilling to expend resources on the establishment of educational institutions in Assam and they saw it as a sign of narrow-mindedness or Assamese “provincialism”.

As mentioned earlier, the Assamese language remained an issue then and even later because the colonialist regarded Assamese as a byproduct of Bengali. A major political

controversy was stirred in the 1860s due to the demand that Assamese should be made the language of education and courts in India. Assamese intellectuals justified this move by expressing that Assam is home to distinctive people with a distinctive language and culture. While the battle to ascertain Assamese was on, they found an unexpected ally in American Baptist Missionaries who for their own reasons were writing grammar and dictionaries of Assamese. Finally, Assamese came to be recognized as the official language of Assam with the help of American Baptist Missionaries who succeeded in convincing the colonial administrators of their case.

#### *4.1.2 Sylhet and Assam's Demographic Imbalance*

Considering Assam as an extension of Bengal led to two important repercussions (a) the incorporation of Sylhet in Assam, and (b) the program of sponsored immigration of Bengali into Assam became quite significant in the second decade of the twentieth century. Shillong was chosen as the capital of Assam as a result of the inclusion of Sylhet in Assam. It was argued that on the rationality of geographical contiguity, where two valleys connected together by the intervening hills, Shillong as headquarter seemed fit.

The colonial rule created a new world where English education unlocked the road to fresh opportunities and possibilities. Sylhet being the oldest under the colonial rule of Bengal was British India's most dynamic province- due to exposure to English education, the educated class would immediately take advantage of the opportunities opened up in the new frontier. Gradually, they came to occupy the bulk of the positions in Assam's colonial bureaucracy and their dominance was widely resented by the locals, especially after the Assamese western-educated class began to emerge (Baruah, 2001). Bengali-Assamese disputes over cultural, immigration, and other policies emerged and were marked as an everlasting characteristic of the political life of Assam during the colonial period and beyond.

When the population of Sylhet (where a large number of Bengali immigrants migrated) was annexed to the population of Assam, the number of Bengalis escalated than the Assamese. Bengalis constituted 45.8 percent of the population of Assam in 1911. As the Congress legislator from Sylhet, Abalakanta Gupta writes “Assam was a province of several distinct tribes and communities of which Bengalis form the single largest community”. The minority position of the Assamese in colonial Assam was also apparent in the legislative bodies, with limited powers and electoral representations which were established during colonial rule (Baruah, 2001)

Once the Assam’s boundaries went through a change in the colonial period, concerns crawled in for Assamese public intellectuals and politicians. In 1933 one such concern was expressed by the president of Assam Association saying “Assam could not have her own university, High Court, trade and commerce, nor could she develop her language and literature” as long as Sylhet remains a part of Assam. However, even if these politicians and public intellectuals wished to see the separation of Sylhet from Assam, it would still not make any difference given the demographic imbalance they could hardly expect to carry the majority in any legislative body. Also, many groups began to develop vested interests in the continuation of those boundaries. For example, when in 1926 the separation of Sylhet was being discussed in the Assam Council, one of the representatives from Sylhet, Dewan Wasil Choudhury, challenged the proposal saying that they reap benefits (they were making rapid march in all fields) that amalgamation with Assam has brought to “Sylhetis” vis-à-vis Bengalis.

The controversy surrounding Sylhet culminated with the end of colonial rule. A referendum was held in 1947 to decide whether Sylhet should become a part of India or Pakistan. The results reflected the Hindu-Muslim divide of the district: 36.6 percent voted for joining Pakistan and 43.3 percent voted for remaining in India (Baruah, 2001). The referendum brought “a feeling of relief in the Brahmaputra Valley” writes historian Amalendu Guha. He goes on to say that for Assamese political leadership it was a “lifetime opportunity...to get rid of Sylhet” (Guha, 1977). However, it must be noted

that the separation of Sylhet from Assam in 1947, did not bring the tension and turbulence between Bengalis and Assamese to a finish.

#### **4.2 Assam and its Immigrants**

Major John Butler of the 55<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry arrived between 1837 and 1851 and traveled extensively through Assam. His arrival was not long after the British occupied Assam. Naturally, he was assigned the job to consolidate British colonial rule and establish a framework of colonial administration. His is the earliest European accounts of Assam (Butler, 1978). One of the striking themes in his travel account is the absence of human settlements in large parts of Assam (Baruah, 2001). Butler in 1978 writes that in the thirty miles between Mohung Dehooa (Mohendijuwa) and Dhemapoor (Dimapur) “not a vestige of any habitation or a human being could be found”. He narrates a “dreary and desolate wilderness that seemed totally devoid of man, beasts or birds; a deathlike stillness everywhere prevailed, broken only by the occasional barking or halloo of the ooluck or ape”. The British conquest resulted in attracting large-scale immigration, which continued well into the twentieth century, becoming one of the hardest to reconcile topics in the chapters of Assam’s history.

Butler saw noteworthy changes by the end of his fourteen-year stay in the Assamese topography- he saw “progress” and “civilization” that the colonial rule brought to the Assamese land. Nonetheless, he was displeased as “immense tracks of forests still remained untilled” and he saw no hope of “a dense population for ages to come” (Butler, 1978).

Butler misjudged and believed that Assam would not be great trading people, but his fears proved to be premature as later it had become observable that there could be large-scale commercial production of tea in Assam. All the earlier prophecies about Assam’s economic future were transformed by this fact alone. The stock exchange of

London was shaken by this discovery: “a madness comparable in intensity with that of the South Sea Bubble seized men’s minds, and normally level-headed financiers and speculators began to scramble wildly for tea shares and tea lands” in Assam (Griffiths, 1967).

Tea was not the only item that lured investors to Assam; oil too was uncovered in upper Assam in the late 1830s and 1840s. In the following decades, there was also the development of coal fields, and Assam’s forest was cut down for timber, as well as to make space for tea plantations. In the nineteenth century, Assam saw nothing short of economic revolution followed by enormous ecological destruction. Historian Amalendu Guha calls Assam’s late-nineteenth-century economic reformation “a big push without takeoff” (Guha, 1991).

This economic transformation of Assam caused an enormous demographic move. Due to the considerable amount of labor needed in the tea plantations, colonial officials actively engaged and encouraged immigration into Assam, hence making it the first major reason for migration. The local peasants showed very little interest in the wage-labor also they had a difficult time convincing themselves of the value of permitting “their women to come into tea gardens”. Therefore, the Assam tea planters in the nineteenth century turned to immigrants for the bulk of labor needs. The expectation is that after few years of vigorous recruitment others would come on their own and “the redundant population of Bengal will pour into Assam” (Griffiths, 1967).

As stated earlier, tea was not only a commodity that enticed immigrants into Assam, it was also oil, timber, and with the economic revolution in the nineteenth century, other enterprises too developed such as coal, and construction of railways, roads, and buildings. In addition, they came to occupy many new middle-class positions in Assam that required new skills, such as the knowledge of English by the immigrants and who also took advantage of growing opportunities for trading. Despite the importance of these economic factors, however, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the primary factor that transformed Assam into a land frontier was political conquest



(Baruah, 2001). When Assam was on its own, assisted further by the unreachable forests and dearth of roads – Assam was nobody’s land frontier. It was only after it came under colonial rule that Assam turned into what came to be seen as a “natural” land frontier—a scantily populated area situated next to a thickly populated region of the Indian subcontinent.

Tea plantations had surrounded “some one-fourth of the total settled area (five percent of the total area) of Assam proper, under their exclusive property rights” by 1901 (Guha, 1991). This widespread enclosure of land by tea plantations constituted the foundation of what historian Amalendu Guha calls Assam’s “Planter’s Raj” (Guha, 1977). Conservative agriculturalists, shifting cultivators and the hunting and gathering peoples, who came to be referred to as “tribals” were terribly affected by these enclosures (Guha, 1991). Numerous weekly markets where the villagers brought their farm products for sale also came under the bounds of tea plantations. Villagers were denied entrance to public roads and communication between villages was obstructed as barriers stood on them. The right of way became a major issue in Assam’s anti-colonial politics in the twentieth century.

#### *4.2.1 Immigration in the Twentieth century*

Between much of the twentieth century, large-scale immigration attracted Assam. Myron Weiner in 1978 wrote, “Assam has been the fastest growing area in the subcontinent for the past seventy years”. Since the Assam movement of 1979-85, statistics on immigrants in Assam have been a matter of severe political contestation. To make their case, both the supporters and opponents of the Assam Movement relied on census data to decipher the population growth. Weiner alerts, “the controversies between migrants have been so intense” that census figures on language and migration should only be taken as “crude approximations that really underestimate the numbers of migrants and of non-Assamese speakers” (Weiner, 1978).

Weiner offers two estimates of Assam's twentieth-century immigrants. Projecting from Assam's 1901 population and making the assumption that its natural rate of population growth was the same as in the rest of India, he estimates that of Assam's 1971 population of 15 million, 51 percent may have been descendants of those counted in 1901 and 49 percent post-1901 immigrants and their descendants (Baruah, 2001). Susanta K. Das maintains that even though Assam's population growth rate has been exceptionally high all through this country since 1951 immigration rates have not been this high as in earlier decades. He believes the rate of population increase in Assam from 1901 to 1951 "has been the second-highest in the world, exceeded only by Brazil" (Das, 1989). Das asserts that Assam's natural rate of population growth is higher than that of the rest of India. Immigration, he argues nevertheless, remains one of the factors that contribute to Assam's above-average growth rates.

A large number of immigrants – notably Muslims of Bengali descent, but other communities as well- identify themselves as Assamese speakers, irrespective of whether they speak the language.

#### *4.2.2 Assam's Immigrant Communities*

Major "immigrant" communities of Assam will be briefly discussed now. Baruah (2001) maintains that the term "immigrant community" itself is troublesome – even unfavorable- as only the first generation can be correctly designated as immigrants. He goes on to say that the vast majority of those who compose the "immigrant" community are referred by him as Muslims of Bengali descent who has acquired Assamese manners, and those who speak and write Assamese, are referred to as neo-Assamese (No-Axomiya) and/or Muslims of the chars (flood plains) (Chaura Musalman). The same is applied to other "immigrant" communities as well. However, there are some ironies to this term of "immigrant communities" for example; Nepalis residing in different regions of India are not viewed as immigrants and have rights as

indigenous people (in Darjeeling or Sikkim). But when it comes to northeast India and Bhutan, Nepalis are considered as outsiders at least occasionally (Rose, 1994).

Among the major “immigrant” communities of Assam that will be discussed in the following pages are Muslims of Bengali descent, Hindu Bengalis, Marwaris or Nepalis, and the “tea-labor community”.

#### *4.2.2.1 The “Tea Labour Community”*

The oldest of Assam’s large present-day “immigrant” groups comprises the workers in the tea plantations. From the nineteenth century until 1960 workers for the tea plantations from outside Assam continued to be recruited. The recruitment took place among the “tribal groups” such as Sanhals, Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Gonds, Khonds, Kisang, and Nagesias- many of them from the regions in contemporary Bihar and Orissa (Phukan, 1984). This recruitment of laborers from outside Assam was opposed but even after the abolition, it continued. In 1960, the practice finally stopped when the “position of labor supply in the tea gardens in Assam had reversed from shortage to surplus and unemployment in tea gardens appeared in the scene” (Phukan, 1984).

Over the years, the labor recruited to work in tea plantations put down roots in Assam at the end of the contract period. Some vacated the tea plantations and tried making a livelihood by settling in the neighboring agricultural lands before the termination of their labor contracts. The 1921 census approximated that migrants to tea plantations and their descendants numbered over 1.3 million, which is one-sixth of the total province (Weiner, 1978). Some scholars have been able to differentiate innumerable “ethnic groups” within the tea labor community of Assam which illustrates the fact that they have a various genesis. Another scholar observes that there are three independent linguistic elements in Assam’s tea garden labor community: (a) Kolarian-speaking groups, e.g., Munda, Santhal, and Kharia; (b) Dravidian-speaking groups, Oraon, Kondh, Gond, and Malpahariya; and (c) groups speaking Oriya, Bengali and Hindi (Kar & Sharma, 1990). Nonetheless, very few of them belonging to the tea worker

community speak any of these languages and dialects. The majority of them speak a patois that is called *Sadani* or “Garden baat”- regularly documented in the census as Assamese. Their children attend Assamese schools and some also do intermarriage. Historically, their proclivity to speak Assamese and embrace Assamese ways has made them ideal immigrants in the eyes of the ethnic Assamese. But the ethnic Assamese upper class has accorded them low status, and that has not always made it easy for them to become part of Assamese society. There also has been a demand on the part of the tea labor community that further highlights the differentiation from the Assamese is recognition as a “scheduled tribe” status.

#### *4.2.2.2 Muslims of Bengali Descent*

It was the landless or land-poor peasants from East Bengal that the colonial officials expected to come to Assam given its geographical location. Colonial officials saw land-abundant Assam as a solution to East Bengal’s problem of land scarcity (Brauah, 2001). It also must be noted that the other motivation to attract them was partly political in nature- balancing the Hindu and Muslim population of Assam as a tool of colonial political control.

Edward Gait stated with regret, in the Census Report of 1891, that economic factors alone were not sufficient enough incentives for settlers from Bengal to come to Assam. Similar regret was also expressed in the 1901 census, where it was mentioned that Assam had not yet enticed “spontaneous” immigration. Of the 596,856 persons who had been brought to Assam since 1891 under the provision of the labor laws, “not a single one of these individuals would have entered Assam, had it not been for the tea industry” (Allen, 1984). However, by 1911, a beam of positivity was sighted, when G.T. Lloyd reported in the census, “that men from Mymensingh (a district in East Bengal) began to advance in Assam, driven apparently by pressure on land at home, they were also joined by people of other East Bengal districts in fewer numbers” (Cited in Census of India, 1991). The subsequent decade saw staggeringly increased rates of migration. The movement of the population by census 1931 had become even more dramatic.

The superintendent of the 1931 census, C.S. Mullan wrote “Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years likely to alter permanently the whole structure of the Assamese culture and civilization, has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims from the districts of eastern Bengal and in particular from Mymensingh”. He goes on to predict that in another thirty years “Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home”. In the writings of anti-immigration politicians of the 1980s, this quote became their favorite. However, Mullan’s argument was critiqued by other scholars like Monirul Hussain writes “Contrary to Mullan’s mischievous prediction, the entire East Bengal Muslim peasant community adopted the Asomiya (Axomiya or Assamese) language as their mother tongue” (Hussain, 1993).

What started as a requirement to develop the province, later turned into a major plight and struggle for the locals (for employment, identity, language, land) as there was a period of large-scale immigration which continues even today.

#### *4.2.2.3 Hindu Bengalis*

Historically speaking, the Hindu Bengalis owing to their hold on important posts and positions in government jobs and their less inclination on adopting Assamese ways had been a more persistent source of conflict in Assam than the Muslim peasant migration from East Bengal. The migration of Hindu Bengalis to Assam began in the earliest days of colonial rule. New positions in the colonial period necessitated fundamentally fresh norms, contemporary forms of knowledge, people with novel skills, and most importantly command over the English language. It was a usual pattern in much of the colonial world, regions were colonized first, where they were educated in the English schools, and these later benefited from the opportunities brought about by colonial dispensation. The people who came to Assam to staff new positions were mostly Bengali Hindus. Hence, for three decades from 1837 to 1873, Bengali was the language of courts and the language of the new government schools of Assam. Bengali Hindus gradually began to hold a monopoly over major professions in Assam

including positions in the colonial bureaucracy, medical, legal, teaching as well as other middle-class positions in the railways and in the post office (Weiner, 1978).

The earliest issues Assamese sub-nationalism took was when there was opposition and protestation of Bengali migrants' dominance in government offices and in middle-class occupations. This issue however arrived in the late nineteenth century, even before the starting of Assamese sub-nationalism. Petitions and complaints were presented but the earliest one was by an Assamese to A. J. Moffat Mills and then by Maniram Dewan who on behalf of the members of Ahom royalty and aristocracy complained and then it was Anandaram Dhekyal Phukan who opposed that even though a number of vernacular schools had been established, instructions in these schools was "imparted in a foreign language, viz., the Bengalee, which is but imperfectly understood by the teachers themselves, not to speak of the pupils" (Mills, 1853).

Colonial authorities finally had to give in and attend to the demands and opened up employment for the "natives of Assam" as soon as the turn of the century. In 1903 "appointment to public services in Assam was restricted to residents and natives of Assam". The government defined a native as a person who, irrespective of ethnic origins, had his or her permanent residence in Assam or would stay in Assam after retirement (Baruah, 2001). Advertisements and notices for government jobs began to roll stating that there would be a preference for "bonafide natives of Assam and domiciles" (Datta-Ray, 1978). It must be noted that in the post-colonial period, the claims for the preference for "locals" have been an even more controversial issue than before.

#### *4.2.2.4 The Marwaris*

Commercial caste from Rajasthan called the "Marwaris", are another most sighted immigrant community in Assam. This term is however is used by Assamese a little loosely to include members of other ethnic groups, such as Sindhis as well along with

the Marwaris who for long have been affiliated with trade and commerce in the area. Since it is important for the Marwaris to get along with the locals for better trade, they are more likely to speak Assamese than the two communities discussed earlier.

In the nineteenth century, it was the Marwaris who played a dominant role in transforming Assam from a non-monetized economy to a market economy. The Marwaris came the first time to Assam along with the British and soon became to control and dominate the region's trade and commerce as there was non-existence of competition from a local trading class. During the initial phase of tea, they functioned as bankers and commercial representatives to tea plantations. Marwaris exchanged rubber, wax, hand-woven clothes, elephant tusks, rhino horns, and medicinal plants for rice, salt, opium, cloth, cotton garments, and so forth with the "tribes" of present-day Arunachal Pradesh (Baruah, 2001). It will not be an overstatement to say that the "Assamese peasant economy was completely in the grip" of the Marwari traders (Nag, 1983).

Until the 1960s, by and large, there has been no major anti-Marwari violence; there have been only mild expressions of animosity and resentment ever since the nineteenth century. However, occasionally Marwari businesses have come under the target in the 1970s. Also, since the Assam Movement, the development of ULFA, and Bodo insurgents, Marwari businesses have been highly vulnerable to extortion demands by insurgents as well as other political organizations.

#### *4.2.2.5 The Nepalis*

Just like the Bangladeshis, Nepalis too are treated as "foreigners". However, the paradox being Nepali origin people who lived in Assam for a long time, and even those Nepalis who have come recently have almost all legal rights in India (Baruah, 2001). 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship permits for unhindered travel of citizens between the two countries along with rights to get involved in economic occupations, to settle, and to possess a property. Leo Rose (1994) narrates the entry

of Nepali immigrants into Assam – “The first major Nepali migration was into the virtually unpopulated areas in Darjeeling district in Bengal, and from there, into the southwest section of Sikkim in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This input of Nepalis was sponsored and indirectly at least, organized by the British who were then in the process of establishing tea plantations in Darjeeling that required a labor force capital of working in steep hill areas. The Nepalis became the critical factor in the tremendous expansion of both the Darjeeling and Sikkimese economies from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. By 1900, Nepalis had become the majority community in both Darjeeling and Sikkim, although not the dominant force politically”. Rose also goes on to report that in the 1960s, when he traveled through what is now Meghalaya, he found “virtually every village below 4000 ft. to be Nepali-inhabited and Nepali-speaking, with little evidence of tribal authority being exerted in these supposedly tribal areas”.

One of the prime reasons for Nepali migration was the popular “Gorkha” soldiers of the Indian Army; some of them choose to take up residence in Assam after retirement. What also interested Rose in his travels in the 1960s was that he observed the Assam Rifles was almost entirely composed of Gorkhas questioning how Assamese was the Assam Rifles? Another attraction for Nepali immigrants in Assam was the availability of grazing land and the emerging business of milk supply in the booming urban economies. Many of the people of Nepali origin now speak Assamese. There was a decrease in the percentage of Nepali speakers between 1971 and 1991. Except for the Assam Movement, anti-Nepali feelings have been sparse.

The Assamese people once welcomed the British government as their rulers, but in doing so they did not anticipate that the new rulers would invite foreigners to come in such a large number so as to swamp the indigenous population. It may be not wrong to compare Assam briefly with Malaysia and Fiji, two other places where large-scale migration took place as a result of political and economic transformation of colonial rule has led to a stubborn pattern of immigrant-indigenous conflicts. But while Malaysia and Fiji have developed institutions-although rather fragile ones- that have



tried to respond to indigenous demands, in Assam, at least in post-colonial times there has been very little direct acknowledgment of this central problem as requiring a robust policy response. The fact that Malaysia and Fiji are independent sovereign countries and the arena for national policymaking on immigration, while Assam is not, has made all the difference in the capacities of these three places to respond to the immigration crisis.

### 4.3 Language

The assertion of independence and distinctiveness of Assamese language and culture is as old as the British invasion of Assam. In 1836, the language of rule in Assam was decided to be Bengali by the British colonial officials. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan in 1852 appealed to Moffat Mills against instructions in the “Vernacular schools” being “imparted in foreign language” that is Bengali (Mills, 1853). With this, the very first generation of modern Assamese public intellectuals made a point that they were distinct people with a unique language and culture. Phukan fighting for a distinct position for the Assamese language found a supporter in American Baptist Missionaries and together their efforts culminated in pronouncing Assamese once again as the language of schools and of judicial proceedings in 1873. When Bengali was Assam’s official language, Assam’s historical narratives in the nineteenth century referred to it as the “dark” period for Assamese language, literature, and culture.

In 1888, an organization called Axomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha (Association for the Development of the Assamese Language) was founded by Assamese students studying in Calcutta what was then the capital city of colonial India. The establishment of this organization is said to be “a landmark in the history of Assamese language and literature” (Barpujari & Sharma, 1993). Standardization of the Assamese language was one of the primary projects of this organization. Lakhinath Bezbarua who is generally considered as the founding father of modern Assamese literature was one of the

significant personalities of this period in the history of Assamese cultural nationalism. The goal of Xabha he wrote was to help the “tender mother-tongue grow up to maturity” to enable the mother tongue to “reach the heights of other rich and prosperous languages of the world and illuminate with its glorious rays the face of ....poor and backward Assam” (Neog, 1976). The other major projects of the Axomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha were to remove all grammatical and orthographic anomalies, to introduce appropriate new words, to remove defective ones, and to create a standard language all through Assam (Barpujari & Sharma, 1993). Upper Assam which was the center of the old Ahom Kingdom, Assamese was spoken there by the late nineteenth century and was being accepted as standard modern Assamese.

There were a number of factors that depended on the form language standardization takes place in an area. However, the case of Assam was different, and it was not possible for Assamese to emerge as a standard language of the whole of colonial Assam. First, Bengali identity around the Bengali language predated language standardization in Assam, and many of the literate sections of the Bengali population of Assam, especially Hindus had begun identifying with the Bengali language and culture. It is not unexpected that the separation of Bengali speaking district of Sylhet was the major item on the agenda of the political agenda of Assamese sub-nationalism. Second, it was doubtful the extent to which Assamese might be accepted in the hill areas that were historically unconnected to the plains, to say the least. Even the hill peoples who were historically close to the Assamese and some of the “plains tribals” who had historically acquired the Assamese language and culture eventually dismissed Assamese (Baruah, 2001).

#### **4.4 Assamese Sub-nationalism and Pan-Indianism**

The Assam Association formed in 1903 was the most prominent public organization in Assam during that period. The organization was created in order to “give its loyal

support to the British government, to ameliorate the conditions generally of the people of Assam by taking up social, commercial and economic questions and to ventilate grievances or to take such measures as may lead to their removal” (Sharma, 1989). Prior to forming the Assam Association, its founder and prime mover Manik Chandra Barua’s major public accomplishment was to convince the colonial government to form in 1901 the first college in the Brahmaputra Valley. Soon after its formation one of the major issues the Assam Association took up in 1905 was to actively resist Assam’s integration into a single province called East Bengal and Assam. After this single province idea became a fait accompli, in 1907 the Association submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of the State for India asking for Assam’s separation from East Bengal (Baruah, 2001). The formation of a university in Assam was the Assam Association’s demand in 1920.

Also, in the 1920 annual meeting of the Assam Association voting happened that led to the amendment of its constitution to replace loyalty to the British crown with the “attainment of swaraj (independence) by non-cooperation” as a goal, and the Association soon after that became a de facto organ of the Indian National Congress (Sharma, 1983). In the period following the establishment of the Congress in Assam, the different priorities on a number of issues of Assamese and pan-Indian politicians became discernible. Among them was the issue of control of immigration and the separation of Sylhet from Assam. A divide occurred between the Assamese congressmen and pan-Indian Politicians in the Cabinet Mission on the issue of grouping Assam and Bengal into a single unit which received stiff disapproval in Assam.

The stress between the Assamese congressmen and the pan-Indian counterparts was also found in the journey of the controversial Ambikagiri Raychaudhury an Assamese literary and cultural figure, also a militant anti-colonial activist, a poet, and lyricist were a major player in the Indian National Congress organization in Assam. Raychaudhury expressed a notion of the Assamese as a Jati (sub-nation or nationality) within the

great Indian nation Mahajati (Nation). He recognized the need to assert collective self-assertion by the Assamese in order to resist their economic and cultural marginalization in their own land (Raychaudhury, 1986). In 1926, he founded the Axom Xonrokhwini Xobha (Assam Preservation Society) to further advance Assamese sub-national interests. A goal of the society was “to form the Assamese nation by bringing together the high and the low, the rich and the poor and people across the religious and caste divide”. The society was committed to supporting government policies that “protect the national interests of the Assamese” and to oppose policies that were inimical to “Assamese national interests”. Its goal was also to “ensure the full control of the Assamese over Assam’s land and natural resources, agriculture, commerce and industry, trade, employment, language, and literature, culture and ethos” (Neog, 1968).

Two major concerns taken up by the Xonrokhwini Xobha and a numeral of other Assamese public organizations in the 1990s were the segregation of Sylhet from Assam and the command over immigration from East Bengal. During his tour of Assam in 1937, a deputation representing these organizations met Jawaharlal Nehru. He said “the question of Sylhet’s separation and immigration may be very important to you but in comparison with other big problems that are facing us today, they are very small” (Bhuyan et.al., 1978). Yet these two themes were probably the most paramount issues discussed in the Assamese public domain.

Raychaudhuri himself outlined a constitution for an independent India that would be a federation of linguistic nationalities, one that would recognize dual citizenship (Guha, 1974). However, Raychaudhuri’s ideas can firmly be described as sub-nationalist, for he never “dreamt of Assam as an independent country ....He thought of Assam as an integral part of India. He only wanted that the Assamese should enjoy equal status in the community of Indian nationalities (Baruah, 1991).

#### *4.4.1 Immigration Policy*

Gyananath Borah in his booklet *Foreigners in Assam* elaborated upon the subject of immigration in Assam. He argued that in Assam's very particular situation as an area with extraordinarily high immigration and where "foreigners" dominated the economy, the topic of "foreigners" becomes very pressing. In Assam's particular condition "freeing Assam from the grip of foreigners" is "the only road to Assam's autonomy and progress". Cultural policy and the legal status of immigrants were the focus in the postcolonial period; however, Borah's principal interest was the control of trade and industry by "foreigners". Assam is a province where "foreigners" then numbered about 2.1 million and Assamese only 1.7 million. It is a region where "foreigners" possessed thousands of shops, businesses, and big and small factories. The Assamese even backed on "foreigners" for their food and clothing and were indebted and subservient to them. Millions of rupees went out of Assam in exchange for the imported items and commodities. The only concern, the only responsibility that the Assamese have, he believed, was "to save themselves from the grip of foreigners" (Borah, 1996).

Foreigners would have been less of a threat, he argued, if the Assamese had control over Assam's trade and commerce. Borah was hinting at the realistic threat faced by the Assamese from the foreigners. In the 1930s and 1940s, the immigration issue shuddered Assam's politics. The focal point of controversy was the Line System- an administrative measure adopted in 1920 that sought, largely unsuccessfully, to curb immigrant settlement to certain parts of a district. While many Assamese were in the favor of a strict Line System but one of the major figures in the politics of Bangladesh, Maulana Bhasini advocated for unrestricted immigration. Ambikagiri Raychaudhury called for organizing a volunteer corps called Axom Atmarokhwini Bahini (Assam self-defense force) to resist further immigration (Baruah, 2001). The immigration issue took a central position and became a divisive issue in Assamese politics during the decade instantly anteceding independence. Between 1937 and 1947, Assam saw a major political instability the cause being the issue of immigration, during this phase, Assam also faced a period of Governor's rule (Guha, 1974). Line and colonization scheme by

the Muslim League Prime Minister Saadullah was more successful in curbing and regulating the flow and settlement of immigrants even though this policy was much criticized at that time.

#### *4.4.2. Cabinet Mission Plan and the Settlement of Partition Refugees*

In 1946, the Cabinet Mission's proposition for an independent India that would be an alliance of two groups or regions, one Hindu and the other Muslim, left the Assamese public agitated. This proposal was termed as a "death sentence" for Assam by the president of the Assam Congress. The idea was that Assam would be a part of Bengal which was a Muslim dominating province; hence it implied to the Assamese being incorporated into Bengal- the perennial Assamese fear (Tayebulla, 1962). A delegation that included Ambikagiri Raychaudhury visited Delhi to express their opposition to the plan with Mahatma Gandhi backing them (Raychaudhury, 1989). It was also decided that if the Cabinet Mission accepts the deal on grouping, the Assam delegation would walk out of the Constituent Assembly. So significant was Assam's opposition that it has been argued that, with the rejection by the Congress on the plan of grouping provinces, India's last chance for a united India was lost. Thus, it has been argued that Pakistan was created because of Assam's Congress leader Bordoloi (Barooah, 1990). Based on their own understanding and interpretation of it the Congress and the League had each accepted the Cabinet Mission's plan (Baruah, 1990).

The tensity between Assamese sub-nationalism and pan-Indianism nearly arrived at a critical point on the question of settlement of Hindu refugees from East Bengal after the partition of India in 1947. Assam Premier Bordoloi argued that Assam could not make room for many refugees. Relying on an exchange of letters between the Jawaharlal Nehru and Gopinath Bordoloi, historian Nirode Barooah writes that "Nehru treated many of Bordoloi's judgments on the events of his own state with little respect" and a number of times he displayed "importance and condescension" (Barooah, 1990).

Given the history of the Assamese desire to maintain an Assamese public identity for Assam, it was rumored that a number of Assam's cabinet ministers preferred Muslim economic immigrants to Hindu refugees since Muslim immigrants had in the past appeared more likely to adopt Assamese as their language. Nehru wrote to Bordoloi that Assam was "getting a bad name for its narrow-minded policy" and that the Assam government's position that Assam did not have enough land to accommodate refugees was not acceptable. "It is patent", wrote Nehru, "that if the land is not available in Assam, it is still less available in the rest of India." Nehru directly threatened that "if Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help solve the refugee problem, then the claims of Assam, for financial help will obviously suffer" (Barooah, 1991).

To his reply, Bordoloi explained by providing figures on the amount of wasteland available in Assam, leaving aside grazing reserves, saying there were about 20,000 acres of the wasteland of which not more than 25,000 acres are fit for reclamation. Besides, he said, Assam had its own problem of landlessness: Assam had to settle many thousands of its own landless families. Since Assam was an agricultural economy that remained industrially backward, he said, a popular government could not ignore Assam's own need for land (Baruah, 2001).

#### **4.5 Contested Identity of Colonial Assam**

After India's independence in 1947, the colonial Assam was split into five states in the following three decades. The breakup of Assam was seen as a sign of Assam's lack of supremacy over its own fate. There were many set of factors leading to the breakup of Assam, however, the prime reason was a powerful central government that decided that by creating new states it would be able to suppress and even prevent insurgencies in the northeast (Baruah, 2001). It is now evident that this approach was a non-success.

The colonial Statutory Commission considered making India a federation. The Commission noted that “federation schemes usually start with a number of clearly defined states each already possessed of individuality and consciousness, whereas in India there only a number of administrative areas which have grown up almost haphazard as a result of conquest, the supersession of former rulers or administrative convenience. No one of them has been deliberately formed with a view to its suitability as a self-governing unit within a federated whole” (Indian Statutory Commission, 1930). The Indian National Congress in 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, had restructured the party into sections based on language boundaries. It was evident that Indian languages and not English should be the system of organization of provinces and also not in accordance with the colonial administrative convenience. In 1948 the Linguistic Provinces Commission listened to many petitions to rearrange India’s provinces but it advocated against linguistic states. It concluded by saying that “linguistic homogeneity in the formation of new provinces is certainly attainable within certain limits but only at the cost of creating a fresh minority problem”. If the provinces were organized on a linguistic basis, there would be more than 70 to 80 percent of the people speaking one language and leaving the minority of at least 20 percent of people speaking other languages (Schwartzberg, 1985). But it was a time when the excitement for “nation-building” was at its peak, the Linguistic Provinces Commission was resistant to make any institutional accommodation to sub-nationalism.

Assam was also no different from the general feeling of independence- there was a supposition promoted by many years of anti-colonial political change that at the climax of colonial dominion would launch an India that was more attuned with its cultural self. For the Assamese, it meant that this would transliterate into a desire that Assam now has an Assamese public identity. From the example of other states (e.g. Andhra Pradesh was declared as a Telugu-speaking state), it was unquestionable to most ethnic Assamese that Assam should have Assamese as its formal language. However, the situation was different in Assam as compared to the other majority of regions. Even when Sylhet was separated from Assam, it still remained a multilingual



place. The first post-independence census in 1951 revealed 56.7 percent of the population of Assam as Assamese speakers. But the major trial to the theory of Assamese as the formal language came from Bengali speakers which made up to 16.5 percent of Assam's population and the staggering majority of the Cachar district. Moreover, the figures of Bengali speakers as stipulated by the census concealed a well-known reality: that most Muslims of Bengali descent in the Brahmaputra Valley were calculated as Assamese speakers. Whether they associated themselves that way was as an act of convenience or to demonstrate a real inclination to acquire Assamese, to many skeptics, the soaring number of Assamese speakers from 31.4 percent in 1931 to 56.7 percent was not reliable. The number of Bengali speakers declined from 45.7 percent in 1911 to 26.8 percent in 1931 to 16.5 percent in 1951 (Das, 1989).

Assam's boundaries were reorganized which led to the formation of new states, Nagaland was separated from Assam in 1970. Followed in 1972, Mizoram too was parted from Assam and made first into a Union Territory and then into a completely developed state. The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) which acquired much significance became a subject of dispute between India and China, was originally brought under the control of the External Affairs Ministry, and then relocated to the Home Ministry. NEFA too was made into a Union Territory in 1972 and it received a fresh name, Arunachal Pradesh. It became a separate state in 1987 (Baruah, 2001). "Following the thesaurus of general ideas about nation-provinces, Indian states all expect to have distinct public identities, often expressed through the symbol of an official state language. Thus, to the Assamese, it seems axiomatic that Assam should have an Assamese public identity, just as, say Tamil Nadu has a Tamil and West Bengal a Bengali public identity. Thus, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Assam following the language riots of 1960, at a public meeting he asked a rhetorical question: "Where else but in Assam can Assamese be the official language?" After a pause, to the thunderous applause of his mostly ethnic Assamese audience, he answered: "In Bombay?" (Prabhakara, 1962) However, the answer to this magniloquent question still remains so disputed that even Nehru could not have envisaged.

#### *4.5.1 Assam's culture wars*

Straightaway after independence, with the segregation of the Bengali-speaking Sylhet district from Assam, the call for giving a formal status to an Assamese public identity for Assam became vociferous and the movement to have Assamese pronounced as the state language obtained strength. The inundation of a massive number of Hindu Bengali refugees made the subject of Assam's public individuality more desperate than ever to the ethnic Assamese. The conservative Assam Tribune in an editorial asked "Has Assam no right to exist as the land of the Assamese people? Is it the intention of the government to turn the Assamese people into a minority community in their own province and jeopardize their language, culture, and their very existence?" (Goswami, 1990)

Ambikagiri Raychaudhury leading the Axom Jatiyo Mohaxobha presented in 1947 a memorandum to Assam's fresh government pleading the state government to safeguard Assam's affairs. The demands incorporated (a) ending the inflow of "outsiders"; (b) full representation of Assamese interests; (c) widening acknowledgment of the Assamese language "in every sphere of governmental activities"; (d) creating Assamese the channel of all educational institutions of Assam (Goswami, 1990). The biggest opposition to this demand came from Bengali organizations mainly those based in Cachar. Edward Gait noted that Cachar got its name from Kacharis, a subgroup of the Bodo people (Baruah, 2001). As stated by another hypothesis, the name Cachar was assigned to the district by the Bengalis bordering Sylhet. Cachar's name is said to acquire from the Sanskrit "Kaccha," which implies a "place near water". According to this theory, the same derivation goes to the Kutch region of Gujarat. In the colonial era, Cachar was considered along with Sylhet as a component of the mostly Bengali-speaking Surma Valley in contradiction to the mostly Assamese speaking Brahmaputra Valley. It is a region where Bengalis are in a dominant majority. It is sometimes advocated given the language divide, that Cachar should be parted from Assam. However, Cachar's situation is not as black and white

as the status of Sylhet in the colonial period. Whatever the historical dissension, the reality remains that in contemporary times, in terms of cultural, intellectual, and political currents, Cachar has been more bounded to Bengal than to the rest of Assam.

While protesting the enforcement of Assamese on Cachar, many of these organizations asserted for Bengali being granted the stature of a formal language of Assam along with Assamese. The Xobha gave an ultimatum to the state government to pronounce Assamese as the state's language. Amidst acute disagreement, the Assam Assembly sanctioned the Official Language bill in 1960. This resulted in widespread brutality, and in 1972 "Language riots" took place on a smaller scale when Gauhati University made its mind to launch Assamese as the language of education in all colleges.

#### *4.5.2 Assam's Language Riots*

In 1960 and 1961, the most scandalous "language riots" took place in Assam after the sanctioning of the Official Language bill by the state Assembly. Riots on a smaller scale took place in 1972 when Gauhati University decided to inaugurate Assamese as the medium of instruction in all colleges. In both occurrences, there was violent strife between ethnic Assamese and Hindu Bengalis, and as a result of it, many deaths occurred. Those who died became martyrs and the demise added to emotions on both sides on the language question.

The turbulence of 1960-61 came to a close with a settlement initiated by the pan-Indian Congress leader Lal Bahadur Shastri. He put forward that the Assam Official Language be modified (a) to give regional bodies the jurisdiction to change the official language of their area by a two-thirds majority; (b) to permit interaction between the state capital and Cachar and the hill districts to carry on to be in English; (c) at the state level to persist with the use of English along with Assamese; (d) to incorporate powerful provisions for the preservation of linguistic minorities (Chakrabarty, 1981).

The other upsurge of language riots in 1972 was when it was decided by Gauhati University to launch Assamese as the language of education in the colleges under its authority. M. S. Prabhakara wrote mockingly in reporting this episode, “the politically interesting issue is exceptions”. There was predictable opposition to this decision, especially from Bengali organizations. They desired Bengali to be the language of a college education not only in Cachar but in the rest of Assam as well. The disturbance came to a finish with the intercession of D.K. Barooah (then a member of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s cabinet), who proposed a settlement formula that entitled for the continuation of English and discarded any obligation on the matter of colleges switching to Assamese (Chakrabarty, 1984).

#### *4.5.3 The Politics of Creating New States*

The “rigid stand on the question of Assamese being recognized as the sole official language of the state” as observed, has contributed immensely to the inclination of Assam’s “tribal” community to choose for separation. While it is true that Assam’s language policies did play a role, but holding it responsible entirely for the breakup of Assam is often exaggerated and magnified.

As observed by Shibankinkar Chaube, the chief mover in the process of constructing new states in the northeast has almost always been the central government. “Unlike the reorganization of states in many parts of India that responded to sustained political mobilization, redrawing boundaries in the northeast was more a top-down process. This applies even when new states were formed in response to actual- and what policymakers thought of as potential- separatist insurgencies, for it was New Delhi that originated with the idea that creating separate states would somehow make insurgencies go away.” (Baruah, 2001) Once New Delhi decided to carve states out of Assam, it enormously affected the state’s politics. It triggered movements for separation and dissuaded a politics of acculturation. Some of the most unfavorable consequences of this strategy have become apparent in the case of the movement of Bodo homeland.

The central government's supremacy to erect new states and to alter state boundaries has been of massive ramification to the politics of Assam. The Indian Constitution grants the central Parliament the authority to create a new state, modify state boundaries, alter the name of the state- and all this can be done with simple majorities. Granville Austin makes an estimation that two dozen or so modifications made by straightforward majorities have altered state boundaries or constructed new states in India (Austin, 1993). Assam's new states were also created with simple majorities in Parliament. The initial step in making adjustments to the boundaries of Assam was the segregation of the Naga area and the eventual formation of Nagaland. In December 1963 the foundation of the state of Nagaland was laid. Mizo National Front set in motion an insurgency in the Mizo Hills district of Assam in 1966. In 1972 the district was made into Union Territory and later into a state. Just as in creating Nagaland and Mizoram, Assam Assembly was not consulted, for the creation of today's Arunachal Pradesh (then the North-East Frontier Agency) there was no consultation extended to the Assam Legislative Assembly too. Detaching the area from Assam, and then creating it into a different state was completely a byproduct of New Delhi's strategic deliberations – in response to India's border dispute with China. In 1969 an Agency Council was formed with legislative functions. In 1972 NEFA was made into a Union Territory and it was granted a new Sanskritic label, Arunachal Pradesh. In 1987, it became a separate state. The creation of Meghalaya was rather uncomplicated. "The campaign for a hill state, sponsored by the All-Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), was nothing like the campaigns for statehood in other parts of India. This campaign was quite a low-key and achieved its goal relatively easily" (Baruah, 2001). The success of APHCL was ascribed by Chaube to New Delhi's fresh viewpoint to such commands. However, it is far from comprehensible that spitting up Assam was the supreme possible way of establishing a balanced order in the northeast. If the new states were constructed to prevent or curb separatist insurgencies, examining the situation today, this approach cannot be called an absolute success.

#### 4.6 Protest Against Immigration

Between 1979 and 1985 were the six years of the “Assam Movement”- a crusade opposing what was professed to be a de facto Indian government policy of acknowledging and enfranchising “foreigners”. The leaders of the movement asserted that immigrants from foreign countries –mostly from erstwhile East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 and then became the sovereign state of Bangladesh, and some from Nepal- unless they were given citizenship status in India without any restraints or reservations, were “foreigners” or illegal aliens. This insinuation came from that many noncitizens were enfranchised through infelicitous means and were registered in voting lists, hence holding elections in Assam became a highly disputable phenomenon.

During 1983, the government of India involved the heads of the opposition movement in the settlement, and ultimately in August 1985 the government and the campaigners agreed on a middle ground. Apart from making a deal on the “foreigners” question, the Assam Accord was a broad agreement that encompassed other noteworthy commitments on crucial cultural and economic developmental concerns that had spirited Assamese subnational policies with great zeal. Among them were a clause in the accord that pledged “constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards ...to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.” (Government of Assam, 1988) On the debate of “foreigners” in Assam it was decided that they would be grouped into a number of categories on the basis of which they have made an entrance in India. Some of them were to receive citizenship rights, some of them were to be disenfranchised for the short term, and more latest ones were to be deported. However, these measures were arduous to execute because of the hurdles of legally verifying who was a foreigner.

As a result of the partition of India in 1947, this matter now obtained a constitutional and legal dimension. The arrival and the enfranchisement of the latest immigrants from the region, the activists claimed, was illegal. “The citizenship status of many of the newer immigrants was ambiguous for three reasons. (a) While the laws on Indian citizenship did not take account of the possibility of a continuous flow of Hindu refugees from what was East Pakistan and subsequently became Bangladesh, informally an obligation toward refugees of partition was widely accepted in the rest of India. (b) The difficulties of monitoring the Indo-Bangladesh border against both Hindu political immigrants and Muslim economic immigrants. (c) Since in India having documents of identification was the exception, it was difficult to determine who was a legitimate resident and who had entered the country illegally.” (Baruah, 2001) It also must be noted that Assam Movement also left few undesirable effects on the state as well. The collapse of the Assam Movement on finding a solution to Assam’s immigration catastrophe led to the radicalization of Assamese sub-nationalism, giving it a separatist twist. An additional effect of the prolonged struggle was the fracturing of association between a number of ethnic groups. The crusade also generated discord between the ethnic Assamese and some of Assam’s plain tribal groups- the Bodo movement of the present day is in some ways an eruption of the Assam movement.

#### *4.6.1 The Constitution, Laws and “Foreigners”*

The establishment backing Assam Movement evaluated that the amount of “foreigners” in Assam in 1971 to be as giant as 4.5 to 5 million or 31 to 34 percent of the gross population of the state (Barooah, 1984). As it has been mentioned that the task of calculating the numbers was extremely strenuous and Assam’s position was not like of a “modern legal regime” where documentation of citizens was expected to have some form of written identification.

After the exhaustive population movements that followed the partition of 1947, the Constitution of India had confirmed July 19, 1948, as the time limit for migrants from what became Pakistan to profess citizenship in India. However, the technique for

securing Indian citizenship for those who transferred after that was reasonably simple. When post-partition disturbances created more migration of minorities from East Pakistan to India and from India to East Pakistan, a concordat between the two countries, widely called the Nehru-Liaquat pact was signed, which advocated that refugees returning home by December 31, 1950, would be authorized to get back their patrimony, essentially “pushing back the date beyond the Constitution’s July 19, 1948, to the end of 1950.” The Nehru-Liaquat deal created a fabrication that “once calm was restored the refugees would return to their homes across the border, unlike the western region where the exchange of population was treated as final.” (Verghese, 1996)

From a legal viewpoint since the 1950s, there is thus some ambivalence about the position of Hindu immigrants who have traversed over to India. In the case of Muslim immigrants, while there may not be any unofficial liability stemming from the partition, many Indian laws were not susceptible to differentiating between Hindu and Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. It is not astonishing that during the dialogue between the Assam movement leaders and the government there were formulations such as exposing “foreigners” based on the Constitution, National Register of Citizens of 1951, and other pertinent documents and paperwork.

In 1965, journalist Shekhar Gupta adduces a confidential memorandum of the Indian Intelligence Bureau, which suggested methods for “preventing infiltration from Pakistan to Assam.” The memorandum “conservatively estimated” the number of illegal immigrants from East Pakistan into Assam over the preceding twelve years at about 250,000, apparently comprising only Muslim immigrants. Since “it is always difficult to remove an immigrant after he has entered the territory and he has settled down for some time,” the memorandum examines ways to “stop this infiltration at the border, and make it unattractive for the Pakistanis to come to Assam by denying them benefits which lure them into this State.” (Government of India, 1984)

#### *4.6.2 State, Civil Society, and Assam Movement*



In 1978, there was fresh public attention on Assam's issue of illegal immigration in the by-elections to a parliamentary constituency in Assam. The Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency has a substantial congregation of Muslim voters of Bengali descent; the statement was given by India's Chief Election Officer, Shakhder. During that time there were a number of accounts of the latest immigration from Bangladesh to Assam. Following available procedures, thousands of grievances were registered during the reworking of electoral rolls challenging the citizenship of voters on the list. "In the face of complaints that a large number of Indian citizens- Muslims of Bengalis descent, Bengali Hindus and some ethnic Assamese Muslims –were harassed and the exercise had to be stopped." (Baruah, 2001)

On June 8, 1979, the All Assam Student's Union (AASU) financed a twelve-hour widespread strike (in the state of bandh) to demand the "detection, disenfranchisement and the deportation" of foreigners. A few political and cultural organizations on August 26, 1979, comprising the Asom Xahitya Xobha came together to form an alliance called Axom Gono Xongram Porixod (Committee for the Assam People's Struggle) to synchronize a statewide movement to pull awareness to Assam's problem of illegal migration. That was the origin of the six-year Assam Movement. The campaign was dedicated to the objective of resolving the issue of the precision of the electoral rolls before any future election would take place in Assam.

Two organizations that occupied a dominant position in the Assam Movement were the Axom Xahitya Xobha and the All Assam Student's Union. Both organizations call themselves "nonpolitical"; they both depict themselves as unwilling entrants to the political realm. The Xobha has consistently sought to support and encourage the Assamese language in Assam. The most important body behind the Assam Movement, however, was the All Assam Student's Union (AASU). The AASU began as a voluntary confederation of the student unions of schools and colleges in 1967, comprising of appointed secretaries of student unions (Borah, 1985). Only Assamese-speaking schools and colleges seem to have become part of this confederation-

Assam's various Bengali or Hindi schools are not part of the All Assam Students Union. Like the Xobha, the All Assam Students Union declares to be non-political- an interesting assertion for a body that caused regular politics to come to a standstill for five years and whose leaders in 1985, then advanced to succeed elections and form the government of the state. Both the Axom Xahitya Xobha and AASU, therefore, are establishments that give the Assamese civil society its organizational potential, and in the Assam movement, one viewed it as the most electrifying demonstration of this capacity.

#### **4.7 The Assam Movement, State Response and Ethnic Rifts**

During the span of six years of the Assam Movement, the bonds between the Assam's many ethnic groups were considerably fractured. In spite of legal couching of the argument, nicknames such as "Bangladeshis" and "foreigners" were habitually made use of throughout the movement. There were discord and disharmony between "immigrant" and the "indigenous" communities. However, a somewhat astonishing effect of the phase was the aggravating of relations between the "indigenous" peoples- the ethnic Assamese and the "tribal" groups, predominantly the Bodos. The term that became common in discussions of Assam politics since the Assam Movement is "ethnic Assamese". The term was either hypothetical or in extremely infrequent use before the Assam Movement. As Baruah (2001) writes "the emergence of the term ethnic Assamese suggests a process that Abner Cohen and other anthropologists have described a shift from an "elite group" being culturally invisible to becoming culturally visible- as a result of a loss of hegemony." The Assam Movement ethnicized the Assamese, as the state's "immigrant" organizations and "plain tribal" organizations began opposing their dominance to speak for Assam and its people. Baruah (2001) in his book *India against Itself* classified the movement into five phases: (1) June 1979 to November 1980, (2) December 1980 to January 1983, (3)

the Election of February 1983, (4) March 1983 to May 1984, and (5) June 1984 to December 1985.

#### *4.7.1 June 1979 to November 1980*

Widespread participation by ethnic Assamese in demonstrations and rallies marked the first phase of the Assam Movement. The movement unfolded with a spirit of hopefulness about an agreed settlement and terminated with significant negativity and hopelessness about the likelihood of a resolution and signs of growing crevices in the Assamese subnational development. The movement started in the end days of the Janata Party government. The first phase of the Assam Movement commenced with festive and mostly conflict-free protest actions, but with some records of ethnic violence. The next phase marked a considerable heightening of these trends.

Satyagraha or an act of symbolic disobedience to the law was observed in November 1979 where nearly 70,000 people in the state as a whole courted arrest. People's Union of Civil Liberties (1980) reported that "the Government of Assam is running the movement and the AASU is running the Government." In December 1979, Assam witnessed an economic shut-off. The civil disobedience campaign was expanded to the economic blockade, and campaign supporters ceased the movement of crude oil and plywood from Assam to the rest of the country. "With the enthusiastic support for the demands of the movement by major sectors of Assamese intellectual and cultural life, apart from the leadership role of the All Assam Student Union and the Axom Xahitya Xobha, the Assam movement managed to mobilize extremely broad support among the ethnic Assamese." (Baruah, 2001) Sections of plain tribals whose cultivable land had been taken away by the East Bengali immigrants over time and the tea plantation workers too encouraged the movement. There were, however, some distinctive ethnic Assamese intellectuals and political figures, majorly of the political left who resisted the movement and there were complaints of physical attacks on them.

Among the ethnic groups explicitly threatened by the demands of the movement were “immigrant” communities –particularly Hindu Bengalis and Muslims of Bengali descent. There was a heightened propensity to group all the Bengalis as Bangladeshis, which added more to their fears. The heads of the movement called for a punitive ban of the parliamentary elections of December 1979 unless the government concurred to withdraw names of the foreigners from the rolls. Holders of the printing presses in Assam declined to print the electoral rolls for the election. Elections had to be quashed in twelve of Assam’s fourteen parliamentary constituencies.

Some ethnic groups explicitly intimidated by the demands of the movement started to formulate organizations to resist the demands of the Assam Movement. In May 1980 a fresh organization, the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), which strived to incorporate both Hindu Bengalis and Muslims of Bengali descent, emerged on the scene to challenge AASU. While it did not dispute the severity of the issue of illegal immigration, AAMSU demanded that all immigrants who came before 1971, be officially given citizenship and the badgering of the minorities be discontinued. AASU took a stand against the new organization, and in certain strongholds of “immigrant” communities, strike calls on days AAMSU had called for protest demonstration led to aggressive disputes between AASU and AAMSU supporters. The state also observed a growing number of terrorist attacks on State officials and State property. “By September 1980, the organization representing “immigrant” communities became a third-party force in the settlement on the demands of the Assam Movement. As the negotiations appeared less likely to produce an agreement, the movement leaders intensified their protest actions and the government used more and more coercion in dealing with protesters. The Assamese press came under censorship and the Indian Army was recruited in 1980 to break the eleven-month-old oil blockade.” (Baruah, 2001)

#### *4.7.2 December 1980 to January 1983*

A new phase of the Assam Movement was marked by the inauguration of a Congress (I) government in December 1980 led by the Anwara Taimur. The Taimur government was established due to a shortcoming to the Congress (I) from other parties but sustained only for six months as President's Rule was inflicted once again in June 1981. In January 1982 a new Congress (I) government headed by Keshab Gogoi came to authority but it too survived two months. In March 1982 President's Rule was pressed once again and the State Assembly, elected under very unusual political circumstances in 1978 was dismissed. The decision to culminate central rule and form a state government in December 1980 connoted the center's decision to stand against the power potential of the campaign and to back electoral institutions that displayed the demographic actualities of the state.

The Taimur government attempted to regulate ethnic Assamese government employees, especially senior officials who were known advocates of the movement. In order to utilize more force in opposition to the movement, Taimur practically had to change the state bureaucracy. In the months following the foundation of the Taimur ministry, there was a growth in the occurrence of violence. State oppression was a double-edged tool. While it was anticipated to increase the value of involvement in the movement, it also strengthened a sense of fairness of the cause, while the abrasion of influence of ethnic officials intensified the fright of Assamese minoritization. The selection of Gogoi as Chief Minister in January 1982 was an effort to restrict the impairment. While his government sustained only for two months, the phase was characterized by less use of force. But after the breakdown of the Gogoi government in March 1982, the administration, under President's Rule, once again went about the job of sanitizing the administration of officials viewed as sympathetic to the campaign. There was the increasing use of coercion.

The twenty-third round of settlements between the government and movement leaders took place in December 1982 amid reports that the government was adamant to hold elections in Assam by March 1983.

#### *4.7.3 The Election of February 1983*

The Congress Party was planning a comeback in December 1982 after the defeat of Indira Gandhi in 1977. The intense emotion of the disturbance was barely the most auspicious time to hold an election since Assamese society was being divided on the very debate of who was qualified to vote. The organizers of the movement called for a prohibition of the election, calling it Assam's "last struggle for survival." On the other hand, the intimidated immigrant fraternity perceived the election as a suitable time to elect an "immigrant" cordial government. The contrasting set of beliefs generated a moment of unmatched stress.

The election was to be held on the basis of the electoral rolls formulated in 1979, which had triggered the Assam movement. In that sense, the election was meant as an explicit provocation to the organizers of the Assam movement. There was nil effort even to redraft the rolls to assimilate the keynotes of the understanding between the movement leaders and the government: to discard the names of post-1971 immigrants from the rolls. Thus, the argument was not who would succeed, but whether there would be an election at all. It was the holding of the election that became the focal point of a clash between the Assam movement and the Indian state. Voter involvement mostly followed a sequence foreseeable from the ethnic settlement patterns. In constituencies where Bengalis were prevalent in more numbers, the attendance was high and in ethnic Assamese predominance, it was low. Moreover, apart from Congress (I), some parties who resisted the movement also competed in the elections. In regions where there were considerable figures of both in favor- and against elections ethnic groups, vicious encounters took place.

More than three thousand people- chiefly Muslims of Bengali descent – were executed during the savage surrounding the election. The extermination –especially some horrifying killings in Nellie- captured worldwide media awareness. The majority of the violence took place as promoters of the election came at loggerheads with the dissidents. The orientation toward the election- whether one cast vote in the election

or condemned it- appeared to determine who the “allies” and the “enemy” were in this so-called “last struggle for survival.” (Baruah, 2001) All intelligence warned the local police that “one thousand Assamese villagers were getting ready to attack” East Bengali “immigrant” villages “with deadly weapons.” That report prophesied the bloodbath in Nellie and was filed three days before the killings. According to the authorized figures, 1383 men, women, and children were murdered in the massacre. (Shourie, 1983) Indian newspapers accounted for the participation of “tribal” peoples in the Nellie killings.

Contradictory to the government’s assumptions, the election of 1983 did not bring the anti-immigrant turbulence to a close. The rough elections brought to authority a Congress (I) government. But the fresh government was handicapped by the inadequate nature of the official order- restricted by the extremely victorious call for an election ban in ethnic Assamese strongholds and by the internationally broadcasted bloodshed.

#### *4.7.4 March 1983 to May 1984*

The election brought about a new Congress (I) government lead by Hiteswar Saikia, an ethnic Assamese, Ahom by caste. The decision to choose an Ahom as chief minister for the second successive occasion is relevant since there was a predominant cognizance that the Assam movement had its vigorous encouragement among the ethnic Assamese “upper” castes- not the Assamese Muslim, “tribal”, and “immigrant” groups.

The new government’s plan of action of tackling the movement combined political manipulation with the employment of enforcement. It sought to influence support away from the Assam movement by assigning governmental sponsorship to groups that comprised of feeble connections in the Assamese subnational development. The election bloodshed had already exerted the formation. There was a signal of a breakup in the AASU by May 1983. At a confidential convention, various Muslim members of

the AASU leadership issued an ultimatum to the AASU leadership calling for rectification of a “pro-Hindu communal tilt”. Their memorandum demanded a “firm definition” of a “foreigner.” (India Today, 1983) The leadership of the movement had to shield against the mushrooming interior divisions. The election savagery pushed the leadership to suspend the movement and to direct attentiveness to cure the ethnic fissures. In January 1984 AASU held a National Convention which was attended by a number of eminent Assamese intellectuals as well as activists of the movement, in order to explore ways and means for “regeneration of the Assamese nationality and to provide a united socio-cultural as well as a political platform.” (Misra, 1988)

The Saikia government attempted to contend for legitimacy with the Assam movement. It sought to bring to the spotlight that the government headed by an ethnic Assamese was serious about putting an end to future immigration and about discarding the names of post-1971 illegal aliens from the electoral rolls, on which there was a settlement between the movement leaders and the central government. Other methods directed at sculpting out new administrative districts and sub-divisions and figurative allowances to Assamese ethnic dignity such as the alteration of the English spelling of the Assamese city from the Anglicized “Gauhati” to the more Assamese “Guwahati”. The measures, however, were unsuccessful to slit into the popular support of the movement. During its 33 months of rule, members of the Saikia cabinet were welcomed by strikes and boycotts in their visits to ethnic Assamese regions.

#### *4.7.5 June 1984 to December 1985*

This phase was called the phase of accommodation. An atmosphere of hopefulness about the possibility of a negotiated settlement was brought about by several factors. The state government was kept away from the negotiations as the government acknowledged the movement’s potential capability. Second, administrative actions of reassessment of electoral rolls, built on previous points of accordance such as the disenfranchisement of post-1971 aliens, could secure the faith of the movement



leadership. Third, even though the inhibitions were relieved before the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the alteration of leadership in New Delhi later was a determinant in the revived benignity between the center and the leaders of the movement.

After 18 months of intense negotiations, an accord was signed between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and leaders of the movement on August 15, 1985. “According to accord, illegal aliens who had entered the state between January 1966 and March 1971 would be disenfranchised for ten years and those who came after March 1971 would be deported. It was agreed that the state government formed after the election of 1983 would resign, the state assembly would be dissolved and fresh elections-based revised electoral rolls would take place in December 1985. An amendment to India’s citizenship law was enacted by the parliament in November 1985 providing that non-citizens who were found to have entered Assam between 1961 and 1971 would enjoy all rights of citizens except the right to vote for ten years” (Baruah, 2001)

Once the accord was signed, two fresh parties appeared: the Aom Gana Porixod (AGP), founded by the student leaders of the Assam movement, and the United Minorities Front, which constituted of the nonconformists Congress (I) politicians who were either Bengali Hindu or Muslim of Bengali descent. While the execution of the Assam accord was the primary subject for the AGP, the UMF demanded that the accord be eliminated. The AGP came to power on a wave of popular support that included plains tribals, tea plantation workers mostly from Bihar, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh, certain sections of Bengali Hindus, Muslims of Bengali descent. However, in subsequent years there has been very little movement on the immigrant controversy. The Indian parliament in 1983- at a time when Assam was largely unrepresented as a result of the election boycott-passed the Illegal Migrants (Determination of Tribunal) Act, making it difficult if not impossible, to prove that someone was an illegal alien in Assam. Indeed, after the signing of the Assam Accord not more than a thousand illegal aliens had been detected- fewer than the numbers routinely detected in earlier years- even though the campaigners had claimed that their numbers were in the hundreds

of thousands. As Baruah (2001) understands, “in retrospect, it would appear that the clauses of the accord were never intended to be implemented. To cynics, the accord may even appear as a maneuver to break the power of the protest movement at the heights of its popularity.” Gradually, the AGP’s inefficacy on the immigration question adversely affected the appeal and legitimacy of its government. As the appeal of the AGP declined, a fresh force came to occupy center stage in Assam’s politics: the separatist militant organization, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). ULFA claimed that “the mass movements of the past and especially the illegal elections of 1983 prove beyond dispute that there is no so-called moderate road available to the people of Assam.” (Xonjukto Mukti Bahini Axom, 1979)

## CHAPTER V. ALL ASSAM STUDENTS' UNION (AASU)

The Assam movement which was set in motion by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) had its genesis in the past. It is a heartbreaking sight for any Assamese who has observed quietly the whooping infiltration by a pack of foreigners and outsiders that have been going on in the state readily post-Independence. The Governments led by Gopinath Bardoloi and Bishnurava Medhi kept it under surveillance to some degree in this regard. However, the following Governments slackened the vigilance to favor their myopic selfish motives.

Assamese students' initial step towards activism can be allocated to the submission of a memorandum (a report on the administration of the province) in 1853 by some students headed by Anandaram Dekhial Phookan to A. J. Moffat Mills on his visit to Assam. Although it was unsuccessful in generating any reaction, yet its importance lies in the viewing of it as the birth of Assamese students' activism.

Students like Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Hem Chandra Goswami were significant in organizing numerous literary and cultural bodies. A fresh shift in journalism was also observed along with the political consciousness and establishment of these organizations. All these created an ambiance of unusual spirit and flair for Assamese literature which led to the emergence of the renowned 'Asomiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha' (ABUSS) at the initiative of

the indivisible trinity of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Hem Chandra Goswami, and Chandra Kumar Agarwala.

The goals and objectives of the ABUSS were:

- i) To gather the puthis (manuscripts) dispersed all over Assam, conserve them from unavoidable ruination, and print them
- ii) To establish Assamese as the means of instruction in schools of Assam
- iii) To campaign for launching of proper and accurate Assamese grammar for communicating correct Assamese language in educational institutions of Assam
- iv) To collate analytical studies and explanation of writings of honored writers like Sridhar Kandali, Sri Srimanta Sankardev, and others.
- v) To transliterate Sanskrit books and books in other languages into Assamese
- vi) To collate socio-political and religious histories of Assam
- vii) To evoke literary consciousness in the minds of the common Assamese people and
- viii) To produce journals and newspapers in Assamese. Later, the ABUSS was assigned a new name as “Assamese Students Literature Club.”

In 1903, the Assamese Students’ Literary Club (ASL Club) came to be inaugurated in Calcutta and Gauhati respectively. In 1905 at Uzan Bazar in Gauhati, ‘Ekata Sabha’ was founded by the students. Stirred by the conferences of the Uttar Bangiya Sahitya Sanmilian in 1912 and the Bangiya Sahim a Sanmilian in 1915, Assamese students many of whom were subscribers of the ASL Clubs of Calcutta and Gauhati spearheaded in bringing into shape the ‘Asom Chattra Sanmilian’.

Asom Chattra Sanmilian was truly given its form under the leadership of Lakshminath Bezbaruah in 1916. Chandra Nath Sarma put forward the aims of the Sanmilian by saying, “Besides developing literary skills, brotherhood and patriotism, the students must also revive the ancient heritage of Assam.” (Bora, 1996) Politics was however

kept outside the realm of the Sanmilan. In 1917, it was made clear by the Secretary of the Reception Committee K.K. Handique that Sanmilan was not detached from the national life of Assam. The immediate attention of the Sanmilan was the spread of national literature, publication of books, and it called for an expansion and extension of education that would lead to the growth of Assamese literature.

The feeling of nationalism acquired momentum in the sessions beginning from 1921 to 1928. In 1923, there was an obvious expression of the ideas of Assamese identity. Gradually but certainly, the Sanmilan, extremely motivated by the political ideology of the Indian National Congress, got drawn into the mainstream politics of the country. The constitution of the Sanmilan in 1939 was modified again to make possible the coalition of the Sanmilan to the All India Students' Federation (AISF). The Sanmilan was able to kindle the ideology of nationalism in general and Assamese nationalism in particular with a request for action for the revitalization of Assamese identity and language and preservation and growth of Assamese literature. The substantial contribution of the Sanmilan however lies in the fact that it built an inextricable alliance between the students' fraternity and the people of the State at large for generations. Starting from the 1960s this legacy of the Sanmilan was rightly carried forward by the AASU (All Assam Student Union) and it is not for nothing that the Sanmilan was rightly labeled as the justified forerunner of the AASU.

The unification of AASU with AISF was a crucial point, because in 1939 for the first time in the history of the student movement in Assam, the students of tribal areas cast off their age-long seclusion and teamed up with students of the rest of the region.

### **5.1 Formation of AASU**

The language problem came into notice soon after Independence in Assam which led the students to enter into politics. From time to time student organizations beseeched

to Bengali students to welcome and adopt Assamese as the State language. These requests however had no effect on them and they carried on to actively resist the Assamese language. The language problem was the antecedent of the issue of the socio-political identity of Assam and its people which had dogged State politics in innumerable ways to date.

With the refinery issue, students' activism took a fresh shape. In 1956, representatives of various institutions of Gauhati assembled and reached a conclusion to carry on a powerful campaign for the placement of an oil refinery in Assam instead of in Calcutta. On August 2, 1956, a gathering of about 800 students came together and condemned the Centre's intentions towards the industrial development of Assam. The meeting came to a solution appealing to the State Government to implore the Centre to situate the suggested refinery in Assam as an industrial enterprise in the private sector, and determined to mark August 11, 1956, as "All Assam Students' Protest Day". On that particular day, students refrained from attending classes and took out a procession shouting slogan asking for the position of the oil refinery in Assam. A general strike was successfully observed on August 28, 1956, in various regions of the State. On July 13, 1957, a delegation on behalf of the Gauhati Students' Oil Refinery Action Committee came face to face with the Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi to deliberate about the issue and even demanded his resignation if their needs were not met. Enormous series of movements including *hartals*, protest marches, etc., coerced the Government of Assam to confiscate the assistance of a French expert as a consultant regarding the technical and economic suitability of an oil refinery. The French expert's report was favorable from all directions. He showed approval for establishing an oil refinery in Gauhati. Finally, the Centre concluded to set up a refinery, that too a small one, in Gauhati, which was unsuccessful in meeting with the expectations of the student fraternity. On August 31, 1958, the All Assam Students' Association (AASA) was founded with the declared objective of a coalition without any political favoritism.

A delegation on behalf of the newly-founded AASA and student representatives in 1960 arranged a meeting with the Chief Minister and submitted a memorandum insisting on proclaiming Assamese as the State language. One of the massive controversies in Assam politics—the language controversy was instigated by this memorandum. The call to make Assamese the official language was not without opposition and objection. The State was explicitly divided by clamor for and against Assamese as the official language. Stress was unmistakably perceptible. Police shot at student boarders of Cotton College on July 4 1960 causing the death of Ranjit Barpujari and wounding many others. This episode marked the pinnacle of the language movement. There were public demonstrations all over the State against the execution of Ranjit Barpujari. Protests began to ascend in Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi districts against the demand of Assamese as the official language.

Lal Bahadur Shastri took a tour of Assam to understand the situation better and came out with an acceptable solution to the language problem called the Shastri formula. It suggested the following measures-

- a) Communication between the State headquarters and Cachar and the autonomous hill districts to continue in English until replaced by Hindi.
- b) At the state level, English would continue to be used along with Assamese
- c) Linguistic minorities in the State would be accorded safeguard as provided in the Government of India's memorandum of September 19, 1956.

Various students' organizations were formed in the meantime owing to faithfulness to several political parties. Many students felt that a student body without party allegiance would be the best gamble in acquiring the economic, social, and educational expansion of the State. The outcome of the meeting was the development of a students' union independent of any political partiality for the answer to the diverse worries of the students. (Deka, 1958) Speakers in the gathering emphasized that the body would also put in efforts for the cultural development and moral elevation of the

student fraternity. (Assam Tribune, 1958) A students' meeting was held in 1958 which was attended by students of the school, colleges, and university unions to discuss the constitution of the Students' Association, and a resolution was passed. The meeting also formed a board of conveners with Harekrishna Duara, Bhuban Barua, Abani Kliand, Chandrika Saha, and Prafulla Saikia to organize the All Assam Students' Association (AASA). Thus, the All Guwahati Students' Union was formed in 1958 and was taken over in 1959 by the formation of the AASA. The AASA in 1960 headed the students of Assam in the language movement and was victorious in bestowing Assamese the legal status of a State language amid massive objections and resistance from vested quarters. On July 1, 1966, in Gauhati, the All Gauhati Inter-College Students' Union devised the proposition for the formation of the All Assam Students' Union. A committee of the All Assam Students' Union was soon formed and Lakshnti Kanta Saikia, became its president, and Dilip Kumar Bhattacharjya became its general secretary. The AASU held its First session at Tezpur in the first week of August and decided to chalk out a general scheme of the plan for the student community of Assam on the suggested reorganization of Assam, police excesses, unemployment problem, and other problems faced by the State.

## **5.2 Growth of AASU**

Under the presidentship of Tilak Gogoi and the general secretaryship of Bharat Lohar on August 8, 1967, the AASU constitution was adopted. The AASU took an oath, "We, the students of Assam, solemnly pledge to form an organization to establish social, economic and political justice, freedom of thought, equal status, respect for individual and national unity and dedication towards the establishment of brotherhood and unite the entire student community irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. We hereby adopt this constitution in this Tezpur general session today at 5 a.m. on August 8, 1967



and are determined to implement it.” (Shodganga) It also reached a conclusion to fight against the reorganization of Assam’s physical boundaries.

However, ASSU was unsuccessful in maintaining the spirit and faith it had generated earlier. It almost went into obscurity. It was the volunteers of All Jorhat Students’ Union that brought AASU back to life. On February 19 and 20, 1971 Pradip Dewan, who was the vice president of the All Jorhat Students’ Union and general secretary of Jorhat Engineering College Students’ Union was voted as the president of the AASU while Atul Bora, general secretary of the Cotton College Union Society, as well as the man who came forward to reinvigorate the ‘moribund’ AASU was elected as the general secretary (Bora, Sadou Asom Chhatra Santhar Adhibeshnar Samipesu). In the Jorhat convention, the AASU flag was also approved. The convention agreed on 21 proposals among which were the expansion of broad gauge line to Dibrugarh, operation of the Brahmaputra Flood Control Board and allotment of requisite financial grant to it, free education to students up to Class V, and 90 percent reservation for indigenous Assamese in educational institutions in Assam, compulsory teaching of Assamese as a subject in all schools of Assam up to the Xth standard, etc. (Bora, Sadou Asom Chhatra Santhar Adhibeshnar Samipesu)

AASU units began to expand to various regions such as Dimoria, South Kamrup Puraniguadam, Mangaldoi, and Goalpara. In many other places, existing student bodies changed their names and unified with AASU. In the next convention, the medium movement of 1972 was headed by the AASU under the leadership of Pulakesh Barua (president) and Prassana Narayan Choudhury (general secretary). Between 1972 and 1979 many presidents and the general secretary came and lead the AASU in their ways. However, it was in 1979, in the Sibsagar convention of the AASU that illegal immigration as an issue was taken gravely. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (Nowgong) took charge as the president and Bhriгу Kumar Phukan (Sibsagar) as the secretary of the organization. The convention decided to set in motion a statewide campaign against

the incessant flow of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to Assam. From 1979 till 1985, the AASU committed itself wholeheartedly to the Assam Movement.

In the four-day convention of the AASU starting on February 21 special attention was paid to the issues concerning the tribals of Assam, including those of their language under the presidentship of Keshab Mahanta. Another notable accomplishment of the AASU during the period was the withdrawal of 12 Cabinet Ministers by Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, on corruption charges. From January 8, 1989, a new set of leaders took charge of the organization at the 11th convention of the AASU at Bongaigaon. During their term of office (Atul Bora as the president and Sammujjal Bhattacharya as the general secretary), the long-awaited tripartite dialogue incorporating the Centre and the State Government started in New Delhi. It was during this phase that the controversy concerning electoral rolls came to light. The push against the secessionist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) by the Centre also started during their tenure. The initiative was also taken in establishing a number of conferences in Guwahati and New Delhi on the IM (DT) Act, 1983, flood problem, voters' list, and execution of the Assam Accord.

In the 12th AASU conference at Kamrup from January 21-22 1992, the two Central Universities were launched during this period while the IIT Bill was approved by Parliament and Numaligarh Refinery was installed. The 13th annual convention of the AASU at Tezpur held from April 8-10 1994 was marked by a series of tripartite and bipartite dialogues concerning the Assam Accord. Numerous rounds of discussion also took place with the All Bodo Students' Union, the Naga Students' Federation, and the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union on areas of collective concerns. It was in the Barpeta convention in February 1999, that the revocation of the IM (DT) Act, 1983, predicament reached Parliament as well as the Supreme Court. Apart from this, there were several rounds of bipartite and tripartite discussions regarding the Assam Accord happened.

### 5.3 Aims and Objectives of AASU

The distinctive attribute of the AASU constitution is its aims and objectives which explicitly lay down the trail, the establishment needs to march.

“Clause 1 of the AASU constitution adopted the name “All Assam Students' Union” for English usage and “Sadau Asom Chatra Santha” for Assamese usage for the organization. Clause 2 limits the AASU jurisdiction to the State of Assam. Clause 3 adopted the symbol representing a red circle with Assam of pre-1950 in green with a left-hand fist in white right at the center of the map and the river in white. The motto is ‘Jai Aai Asom’ in a crescent. The name of the organization in tandem with the motto covers the inner layer of the circle written in white. Clause 4 of the constitution specifies the proportion of the AASU flag at 3:2. The color of the flag shall be white and the symbol would be lodged at the Centre. The diameter of the symbol is three-fourth of the breadth of the flag.” (Shodganga)

Clause 5 of the AASU constitution enlists the aims and objectives of the organization. They are:

Article A: To form a student organization free from an alliance with any political party.

Article B: To invigorate and intensify patriotism and esteem and regard for the masses

Article C: To devote the struggle of students to emancipate the masses from exploitation.

Article D: To motivate students to establish socialism and work toward the uplift of the State and that of the country.

Clause 6 of the AASU lists its duties. They are:

“Article A: To make the students united and engaged in a continuous struggle for creating and producing a conducive educational atmosphere

Article B: To publish posters, magazines, and newsletters for propagating the aims and objectives of the organization

Article C: To organize symposia, debates, public meetings, and various get-together.

Article D: Publication of a house journal.

Article E: To organize seminars amongst different strata of students and people for finding out ways and means to achieve the aims and objectives of the organization". (AASU Constitution)

Since its foundation, AASU has not been very firm on criteria regarding membership. However, to be a member of the AASU, a student has to fulfill the following-

- 1) a) One must be a regular student of an educational institution in the true sense.  
b) One must have allegiance to the aims and objectives of the organization  
c) One should not be a member of any political party.
- 2) A student will be a member of any local unit (primary unit) at the first instance.
- 3) Payment of (prescribed) a fixed amount of fee to the union is compulsory.

## **5.4 Activities of AASU**

Remaining true to its aims and objectives AASU carried out numerous activities. Among the chief activities in the period from 1967 to 1979 was the medium movement of 1972, the 21-point charter of demands in 1974, and the 18-point of demands in 1974.

### *5.4.1 The Medium Movement*

The rational extension of the language movement of 1960 was the medium movement of 1972. In this context too, the Assamese community, students in specific perceived

that Bengalis constituted a threat to their socio-cultural existence as since 1960 most of them had refused to adopt and welcome Assamese as the State language and also as the channel of instruction.

June 6, 1972, saw the beginning of the medium movement effectively; when the Academic Council of Gauhati University (GU) in compliance with the language policy of the Union Government, reached a conclusion to launch Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its command along with English with effect from July 1972. Nevertheless, the students were open to writing answers in Assamese, English, or Bengali.

After becoming aware of this development, people in Cachar were disappointed. They called for Bengali as the medium of instruction. There was no opposition to the decision of the GU Academic Council by the Assamese students, but they disapproved of the decision of permitting students to write in Bengali. That is why the Council's verdict of June 6, 1972, was received with a series of protests.

The AASU along with the students of GU started a movement. A memorandum was presented to the Vice-Chancellor and demanded that (i) medium of instruction and examination should be Assamese (ii) in the pre-university classes, it should be functional from 1972-73 and for degree classes from 1974-75, (iii) English should be the substitute medium up to 1978, (iv) question papers should be in Assamese and English, (v) no district should be considered separately (Assam Tribune, 1972).

Many establishments like the Assam College Teachers' Association, the Gauhati University Teachers' Association very soon joined the protest. The Academic Council revoked its earlier decision and resolved to retain Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under GU control after a meeting on June 12, 1972. It, however, made a relaxation by permitting English as a substitute medium for ten years. For the time being, the Cachar students pursued legal remedies to the revised Academic Council decision. The Silchar-based Gurucharan College filed a writ petition

in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the Council's decision. The AASU, on the other hand, appealed to all non-Assamese communities of Assam to accept the GU decision. It observed 'Demand Day' on September 15, 1972, to press GU for immediate implementation of its decision. (Assam Tribune, 1972) It blamed the government action for the prevailing tension, and the movement turned violent.

Keeping in mind the capacity of the movement in the Brahmaputra as well as the Barak Valleys, the Assam Legislative Assembly resolved, "the medium of instruction at the university stage for Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities should be Assamese, English also, however, be continued as the medium of instruction. In the spirit of the Official Language Act, this Assembly does further resolve that a separate university be set up with territorial jurisdiction over the district of Cachar and that the Government of India be moved in the matter." (Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, 1972) The AASU was unhappy with this settlement and called for the pulling out of the resolution unsuccessful which threatened a vehement movement. With no indication of Dispur backing down of the resolution, the AASU set in motion its agitation. The Government launched curfews and violence struck in many towns of Brahmaputra Valley. AASU denied the offer placed forth by the Government of Assam to hold negotiations in New Delhi. The AASU was able to cultivate a powerful sense of Assamese nationalism, at least in the Brahmaputra Valley by that time. For it, the issue incorporated the argument of the existence of Assam and the Assamese. It perceived that the policy resolution of the Assam Assembly mirrored a collapse on the part of the Government to give due acknowledgment to Assamese as the single authorized regional language of the State. In the meantime, the Assam Government made a decision not to execute the resolution of September 23, 1972. Despite Dispur's declaration, the AASU carried on the movement.

From November 6-16, 1972 the AASU began a gana satyagraha, in the fourth stage of its movement. The state of affairs was growing tense. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paid a visit to Assam and appealed to the AASU to withdraw the movement.

On the assurance of the Chief Minister that the implementation of the resolution will not happen, AASU called off the movement. However, the students of Cachar continued their agitation. In such a situation, the Central Government developed a formula according to which Assamese was to be the medium of instruction in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bengali in Cachar, and English for an unlimited period. AASU rejected this three-language formula and the Assam Assembly adopted a new resolution keeping the prevailing circumstances in mind, which said: “the Assam Assembly does now revoke the resolution unanimously adopted by the House relating to the medium of instruction in universities in Assam and also for the establishment of a separate university in Cachar during the September session of the Assembly.” (ALAD, 1973) “The movement in the Brahmaputra Valley subsided and the Cachar leaders finally relented after Chief Minister S. C. Sinha and K. C. Pant met them at Shillong and arrived at a decision that the universities allow continuation of English for a long term.” (Assam Tribune, 1973)

#### *5.4.2 Educational Activities*

AASU, the largest student body of India since its inception in 1967 showed involvement in major problems of Assamese society be it social, economic, cultural, political, or educational spaces. Hence AASU was never an organization that kept itself only to educational matters of the state. Beginning with the language problem, food crisis, the opposition of Federal Plan of the Centre, the refinery movement, the medium movement, and the 21 point Charter of demands leading ultimately to the agitation against the foreign nationals, AASU was aware of the fact that true upliftment of society can take place when genuine attention is given to the economic and social spheres.

The AASU was victorious in laying the foundations of the Gauhati University campus at Kokrajhar and the launching of Bodo language in postgraduate courses at Gauhati University. On January 7, 1989, the AASU succeeded in setting up a Central Library at the University site. There was an adoption of enormous protests by AASU against the

perpetual financial setback faced by the three universities of the State in March 1989. An Assam bandh was called for on January 21, 1994, in opposition to the Centre's effort to limit the power of GU and DU. The regional office of the University Grant Commission was also opened in Gauhati after the successful agitation by the AASU.

An Education Advisory Board was constituted by the AASU to look after the educational affairs of the State and to propose measures for a solution to the problems in the field. An AASU Centre of Academic Information Guidance and Development had been functioning fully since December 1995 to guide students on choice of career and opportunities in education. A computer center in all district headquarters of Assam built at the initiative of the AASU and with a donation from Kuldeep Nalar MP's Local Area Development fund is actively engaged in imparting computer education to students. More than 5,000 students have benefited from the computer centers so far.

The AASU believes that educationists should be entrusted with the job of administering the education system. It has been very vocal on arbitrary transfers of teachers and the anomalies in checking examination answer sheets. At the same time, the AASU has kept close scrutiny on students adopting unfair means in the examination, as well as ragging and eve-teasing. AASU activists are also engaged in the distribution of free textbooks to underprivileged students.

AASU has also made sure to maintain a cordial affinity with teacher's bodies in the state specifically the Assam College Teachers' Association (ACTA). It went on to ask the timely issue of salaries from the government, at the same time is determined to work for a healthier educational atmosphere. AASU prepared an all-inclusive academic calendar for the first time and presented it to the state government and demanded its instant execution. The rationale for having an academic calendar was not to waste a single day. The academic calendar came into implementation in 2005.

## **5.5 Beginning of the Foreign Movement**



On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1978, AASU began a spur demanding the deportation of foreigners followed by picketing in all district headquarter offices also including hunger strikes, rallies, marches, *satyagrahas*, *Assam bandhs*, etc. The origin of this movement began when the death of the sitting member of Parliament of the Mangaldoi constituency resulted in the by-election, whereupon the electoral rolls had to be reviewed and updated revealing a massive number of foreign names in the electoral rolls. This revelation caused huge controversy, resentment among the local people, and widespread dismay. A forceful demand was placed by the journalists, intelligentsia, and AASU for a rigorous emendation of the electoral rolls in all the parliamentary constituencies of the state. The Chief Election commissioner however instructed the concerned authorities to end the removal of foreign names from the roll, saying- “A person whose name has been included.... shall be presumed to be a citizen of India”, contradicting his earlier statement. AASU forcefully opposed this, demanding identifying, removal, and expulsion of infiltrators and also the urgent sealing of the Indo-Bangladesh border. However, both the Centre and the state remained indifferent to the pleas. The student's body then decided to execute its course of action. AASU in the fresh committee in the Sivasagar conference appointed Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as the President, Brighu Kumar Phukan General Secretary, and Nagen Sharma, their advisers in March 1979.

AASU soon issued a press release demanding the same. AASU executive called for a meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1979 where it was decided to head start the anti-foreigner's movement in the state. A 12-hour bandh was decided in the meeting marking the launching of the six-year-long Assam Movement. The motto of the movement was to cease the entry of infiltrators, keep a check on the price rise of essential items and create for the local people more employment opportunities. In an open letter, AASU president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta wrote to Chief Minister Golap Barbor to criticize the state government for its utter failure in handling the most serious problem of the state i.e. infiltration. He went on to accuse the government of its passivity and inaction and claimed that both old and new inhabitants are gradually constructing their own

pockets of land, slowly taking over the employment too. He warned the government that the infiltrators were attempting to build their linguistic hold in the state and nurturing political aspirations.

To encourage the engagement of people from all sections of the society in the massive struggle both at the mental and physical platforms, AASU resolved to organize the participation of non-students in the crusade. Thus, at the meeting in Dibrugarh convention on August 27th and 28th 1979, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) came into existence. The AAGSP incorporated AASU, the Asom Sahitya Sabha, the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad, Jatiyatabadi Dal, the Asom Yubak Samaj, and the Young Lawyers' Forum also joined the wagon in the fight against the infiltrators.

AASU declared a mass two-day strike, followed by picketing of all government and semi-government offices. The rationale behind picketing was the government's neglect and passivity in recognizing and expelling foreign nationals from the state. Very soon the crusade attained impetus. Office work in Sivasagar, Golaghat, Rangia, Jorhat, Kamrup, Nowgong, Barpeta was immobilized. Students in various districts refrained from attending classes, engaged in sit-in-strike in front of the sub-divisional office, and chanted slogans. A great many people were arrested due to a breach of prohibitory orders. Mass rallies were held all across the state by AASU against the Chief Election Commission's directives who remarked earlier that no names will be eliminated from the list as proving citizenship was time-consuming. All over the state boycott of classes, demonstrations and hunger strikes took place. The AASU, the AAGSP, the Asom Jatiyabadi Dal, the Assam College Teachers' Association, and other organizations also joined the mass rally. At the iconic Judge's field, a torch rally was carried out by the runners from Sadiya holding the portrait of the great commander of Ahom Kingdom Lachit Borphukan. A decision was made at the rally impelling all national and state political parties to not select any candidates for polls and refrain from participating in elections, otherwise, the election campaign would be dismissed.

Deputy Prime Minister Y.B Chavan visited Assam for a brief period. The discussion between him and the leaders of the movement did not reach any solution. A statewide general strike was announced by the AASU-AAGSP to drive away illegal migrants. At numerous places violent clashes took place. A warning was made by the Assam Chief Minister of serious consequences if the violence was sustained. AASU remaining unmoved declared all across the state a fresh week-long public satyagraha insisting detection, deletion, and deportation of foreigners from the electoral rolls and the state at large. Lakhs of people came out on the call of AASU, and thousands were court arrested. The movement saw the participation of people irrespective of caste, class, gender, age, language, or religion. The Centre was however steadfast on holding elections as scheduled and requested the students to shun away from the route of campaigning for the greater interest of the state. As a manner of retaliation, AASU called for a 36-hour bandh all across the state, followed by mass picketing in front of polling offices where nominations are placed. More specifically, the AAGSP instructed the participants to house arrest the candidates refraining them to participate in the elections till the last date of filing nominations. A statewide bandh was announced on the last day of placing nominations. All routes of communications were blocked. The government pronounced curfew in central Gauhati, Nalbari, and Barpeta on December 9 and 10, 1979.

On December 18, 1979, the people of Assam pledged “to sacrifice our lives for the national cause of Assam and promise that we will remain active participants of the national movement launched by the All Assam Students' Union and we will save our motherland from the clutches of the foreigners and from any danger that may come” (*Save Assam Today to Save India Tomorrow*. An appeal from the people of Assam). The constitutional machinery in the state broke down completely as a result of the Union Cabinet after the emergency meeting placed Article 356, thus President's Rule enforced in Assam. On one hand, Indira Gandhi of the Congress won with an enormous majority in 1980 and on the other hand, the increasing indifference of the Centre towards the struggle of Assam pushed AASU to adopt fresh methods to create

pressure on the Centre. Picketing on crucial and key points of oil organizations started at Duliajan and Narangi. The volunteers picketed peacefully for as long as 21 days at the two vital refineries thereby totally stopping the flow of crude oil disabling the refineries. However, the very next day the police announced it as unlawful and began a lathi charge followed by tear gas. Despite such atrocities, the participants remained unmoved and non-violent. Several participants were injured and some died too. The oil picketing was rationalized by AASU saying “without it, you in Delhi or Bombay would never have realized the magnitude of the problem here.” AASU president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta wrote to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi informing her about the infiltration problem of the state, warning her that the very existence of the Bangladeshi and Nepali population is threatening the indigenous people. He also went on to suggest some constructive solutions to the issue and successfully submitted a detailed memorandum. The letter to the Prime Minister revealed the great determination of the AASU of not remaining silent to the complications of the state and especially when the Constitution of India was at stake. The letter demanded the immediate attention of the Centre, and urged for a strong and powerful action to detect and deport the foreign nationals from Assam, and appealed for a deep discussion on the issue.

Indira Gandhi in her speeches claimed that the problem of Assam was not of infiltration but unemployment among the educated sections. This created enormous disappointment among the people of Assam disclosing the double standards of the Centre, AASU went on to criticize that the Constitution through which the entire country is administered is not being used for addressing the issue of infiltration in Assam. AASU in its press release mentioned that the 1951 National Register of Citizens and the 1952 voter’s list should be used as the criterion to recognize the foreign nationals. Indira Gandhi finally agreed on meeting the opposition leaders to examine the situation in Assam, at the same time urged the student leaders to accept 1971 as the cutoff year. An Eight-member team headed by Nibaran Bora arrived in Delhi, numerous meetings took place between the Centre and AASU-AAGSP but attained no

headway. The Assam Governor L.P Singh on 1 April 1980 summoned AASU leaders to Shillong and advised them to welcome 1967 as the cutoff year for detection and expulsion of illegal migrants. However, AASU declined the proposal. The picketing of oil refineries had created a huge ruckus in the state, with the State government appealing to withdraw the oil blockade. Soon the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, 1958 was enforced in the state.

### **5.6 Violence in the State**

The Prime Minister visited Gauhati and urged the AASU to welcome 1971 as the cutoff year, but the dialogues were unsuccessful and AASU declared to continue the oil blockade. In a press release in 1980, AASU cautioned that if the influx of infiltrators was not put to an end, India would suffer the loss of the northeast for good. The release also attacked the Centre's agenda of attempting to generate communal division in the State and crushing the democratic rights of the volunteers. In the release AASU also condemned the Centre for what it called the disguised emergency in Assam. It went on to say that the Centre was attempting to the fullest to stop the seven-month-old democratic movement. The AASU also resolved to dispatch some representatives to major cities to enlighten and gather support for the movement carried out by the student union. The movement indeed began to gain acceptance from all sections, validating that the AASU was fighting for the larger interest of Assam. Prohibition on exports of jute, timber, plywood, and bamboo was also declared by the AASU-AAGSP.

Soon, communal violence engulfed Assam. Nine major towns of Brahmaputra valley came under curfew and many were arrested. Assam witnessed the worst communal violence in its history where hundreds of people got massacred. For the very first time, AASU stated that former tea garden laborers would be given identity cards, also appealing for their cooperation and maintain unity and integrity among the several communities. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi once again summoned an all-party meeting in Delhi, but it failed too. The AASU was clear on the stand that detection of

illegal migrants must be on the foundation of constitutional provisions and pertinent laws. It also added that those who entered before 1961 would be asked to vacate. AASU maintained that identification and deportation of foreigners should be based on the 1951 NRC and 1952 voter's lists.

Meanwhile, in Bengal, a counter-student movement started due to the atrocities carried out on Bengalis in Assam. The West Bengal Chief Minister stigmatized the campaign as communal and derogatory remarks were made about the Assamese women. AASU published a press release wherein it cautioned the people to beware of the communal forces at work attempting to gain the opportunity of the situation. Picketing was carried out successfully outside the state and central government offices in which government employees themselves participated as well. The campaign was suspended temporarily for fourteen days to provide some time for the Government to ponder over and resume communication. Talks resumed once again in 1980 between the movement leaders and the Centre in Shillong. However, nothing was achieved this time around too. AASU declared a three-day campaign program that paralyzed air and train services to and from the state. Rigorous measures were taken by the Government and provided freehand to CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force).

To encourage dialogue between the Centre and the movement leaders, frenzied political activity was advancing both in New Delhi and Dispur in 1981. Through a press release, AASU exerted pressure on the need to develop a long-term economic scheme alongside the movement as the Centre was detaining to find a resolution to the infiltration issue, also attempting to exhaust AASU. The AASU stated for the first time that economic and political power must be passed on to the indigenous people of the state as a measure to solve the influx problem. In the meantime, the Centre proclaimed that dialogue with the movement leaders would restart once again in May 1981. This time, the Centre formulated a fresh formula that those who entered between the period of 1961-1971 could be retained in the state. The AASU, however, was adamant on the proposal of 1961 as the cutoff year which the Centre rejected. The AASU-

AAGSP on the pleas of the Centre concurred to withdraw the agitation and pursue negotiations in the next round which was to be held in June. In the meetings which were the longest of all the negotiations between the Centre and the movement leaders, an agreement was arrived to fence the Indo-Bangladesh border. However, the subject of disagreement remained as to distinguish between refugees and illegal migrants. The Centre's position was to incorporate as refugees all minority community members from East Pakistan but the movement leaders opposed this proposal. Another impasse in the talks was that the movement leaders wished to decision of the appellate tribunal to be final. They also opposed the use of ration cards, driving licenses, etc. as verification proof. The movement leaders nearly turned down the proposal of 1961-1971 as the cut-off year for entrants and grant them citizenship in Assam.

### **5.7 Towards an Agreement**

The constant failure of dialogues caused frustration among the AASU, resulting in ten oppositional parties demanding the Government to address suitable measures for resolving the issue of infiltration on the foundation of the Constitution of India, pertinent laws, and on the national and international agreements. AASU also claimed that it was ready for a continued movement if necessary. The AASU-AAGSP developed an amended draft, according to which all illegal migrants were to be identified on the premise of the Constitution and pertinent laws- Citizenship Act, 1955; the Foreigners Act, 1946 and Passport Act, 1952. In October 1981, a new round of talks began in New Delhi, where it consented in theory that a road would be constructed running parallel to the Assam-Bangladesh border, as a measure to inspect further infiltration. Also constructing a wasteland between the boundaries. However, a certain impasse still existed on the issue of the endowment of citizenship to migrants from Pakistan on a reciprocal basis under Section 5 (1) of the Citizenship Act. Dialogues, therefore, got suspended. The AASU-AAGSP after they arrived from Delhi to Gauhati, announced no

interest in further talks with the Centre. Soon a 36-hour *bandh* was declared. Numerous participants were arrested. An announcement was made by AAGSP for a month-long campaign which culminated with a 12-hour *Janata curfew* on the Republic day of 1982. Posters were carried by the volunteers, slogans were chanted- “deport foreigners”, “no elections”, “do not usurp democratic rights of Assamese people”.

Tripartite talks once again began between the national political parties, Centre and AASU-AAGSP. It was declared by AASU that it would participate in the dialogue but this time would not withdraw the campaign. These were the lengthiest talks, which included the oppositional parties. An agreement was reached that safety measures would be strengthened at the Assam and Bangladesh border to avert any more infiltration. It was agreed both by the Government and Opposition that foreigners would be identified on the premise of the Constitution and the current pertinent laws. To carry out this, relevant documents like NRC, 1951; Electoral rolls of 1952, and land documentation upheld under Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act- would be utilized. However, the talks did not progress further due to the conflict over the definition of foreigners and the desire of the Centre to stick to Policy Instruction published in 1965, which AASU wanted to be abolished. A temporary adjournment of the campaign was declared by the AASU so that the students could prepare for the upcoming exams. In 1982, the Keshab Gogoi Ministry resigned due to which for the third time in four years Assam found itself under President’s Rule again.

Dialogues began once again in 1982 but met with the same providence as the earlier ones. It was declared by the AASU-AAGSP that the Government was not serious and sincere to find solutions to the problem of infiltration in the state. The Centre’s demand for enforcing the 1965 Policy Instruction generated issues in the dialogue. A fresh suggestion was posed by Ravinder Verma that stated that all those who entered illegally between 1961 and 1971 into the state, their names could be identified and removed from the electoral rolls and expelled according to the administrative suitability, except for those who have been permitted citizenship under 1965 Policy



Instruction and related laws. Some reluctance was shown by the Centre towards the Verma formula but consented to safeguard the social, cultural, and political identity of the Assamese people. The demand to make the tribunal final of the movement leaders was however turned down by the Centre. The cruxes of the issue were the status of 1961-71 migrants. AASU in a press release condemned the Congress and Left parties from producing sincere efforts to arriving at a solution as they suspected that expulsion of foreigners would damage their political aspirations. Tripartite talks started once again, with the Centre still asserting to accept March 1971 as the cutoff year. The AASU-AAGSP displayed objection to the reference to 1971 as the cutoff year, stating that the meeting was summoned to discuss the status of infiltrators between 1961-71. Soon after which, Verma solution was presented which AASU-AAGSP rebuffed resulting in talks to end.

Election Commission declared by-elections in 1983 to twelve parliamentary constituencies and general elections to the Assam Assembly on the premise of 1979 electoral rolls. The movement leaders took this announcement no more than as an offense and declined to adhere to the directives of the Election Commission. The very moment the AASU-AAGSP arrived back to Gauhati, they were apprehended resulting in violent clashes all across the state. the violence became more and more intense as the election came closer. The media reported violence every single day. March and processions in major cities and towns of Assam were out against the elections on the call of AASU-AAGSP. A complete non-cooperation in administrative work was requested by AASU-AAGSP from the state government employees. At the call of AASU-AAGSP, teachers too joined the wagon protesting against the elections. To maintain law and order in Assam, the Centre arranged for another regiment. Anti-poll demonstrations followed by *bandh* and *janata* curfew were organized. The Centre sent additional 5000 men to facilitate in polls. Violence continued to grow. A 12-hour bandh was announced against the Prime Minister's visit. The violence began to take communal color. On being questioned by the Chief Election Commissioner as to proceed with the elections, the Centre remained unaffected. More than 1200 people,

majorly Muslims were massacred on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1983 at Nellie in Nowgong. The killings went on for 24 hours. Violent confrontations continued so did the polling. Blood spilled in Assam. Once the polling was over, the leaders of the movement were released. The people of Assam were praised by AASU for opposing the elections coerced on the state by the allegedly democratic government at the Centre. The movement leaders attacked the Centre for the flagrant breach of the Constitution and were censured for their cowardly act of arresting the movement leaders after their arrival to Gauhati.

Counting of votes concluded, resulting in triumph victory of Congress. A thirteen-member Ministry lead by Hiteswar Saikia sworn in. In the meantime, fissures started to emerge within the AASU. A separate meeting headed by Nurul Hussain was attended by some Muslim members, therefore, marking the first sign of rift. Hussain stated that there was the presence of communal elements, signaling the association of BJP and RSS within the student body, to which AASU denied completely. Hiteswar Saikia the new Chief Minister declared the development of 20 tribunals to identify foreign nationals who entered after 1970, additionally the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 was passed to decide whether a person was an illegal migrant. This Act made Assam a distinctive and the only state in the world where two different laws existed to identify foreigners in the state. In a press release, AASU criticized the IMDT Act, 1983 claiming that it would destroy the political freedom of the local people.

October 1984 witnessed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. An announcement of the Lok Sabha elections was made except in Assam and Punjab. Rajiv Gandhi won with massive votes. Formal talks once again resumed between the AASU-AAGSP and the Centre in 1985. A fresh cutoff year of 1966 was pressed by the movement leaders for the identification and expulsion of foreigners, disenfranchisement for ten years as against their early demand for twenty years. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi arrived in Gauhati on August 12, 1985, for Congress Centenary Celebration, announced “good news” for Assam. Negotiations continued for long

hours between the concerned parties and it nearly reached a deadlock, but the intervention and persuasion of the Prime Minister to exhibit some level of pliability resulted in the historic signing of the Assam Accord marking the termination of six long years of Assam Movement where numerous lives were lost for the larger interest of the state.

## CHAPTER VI. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE THESIS

This chapter lays out the theoretical and methodological standpoint of this thesis. The chapter first examines the significance of cognitive praxis in social movements and then discusses the manner in which culture (a crucial component of cognitive practice) governs social movements and finally studies the methodological approach employed which included both qualitative and quantitative methods.

### 6.1 Theoretical Perspective

#### *6.1.1. Cognitive Praxis and Social Movement*

From the sociology of social movements, something elementary is absent, something that is overlooked from its numerous conceptualities. That something is what Eyerman and Jamison (2007) mean by cognitive praxis. It is not the case that sociologists of social movements are ignorant of the cognitive side in the many pursuits of a campaign however they have been unsuccessful in proposing a theory and it largely remains neglected. As such, the various cognitive affairs and pursuits that take place within a movement are assumed and underappreciated by the sociologists who study them. As Eyerman and Jamison write- “They are the unreflected assumptions of analysis rather than the objects of investigation.”

According to Eyerman and Jamison, the issue starts with the manner in which social movements are defined. Many resource mobilization sociologists define social movements empirically. As per them, “a movement is defined in operational terms: organizations are distinguished from sectors or industries, and the movement dissolves into the particular mechanisms of mobilization and recruitment that are being analyzed.” For the majority of American sociologists, knowledge, and identity

are viewed as nonempirical things, and hence cognitive praxis becomes inconspicuous for them and they are more focused somewhere else or see-through incorrect paradigmatic eyeglasses. It is the other elements of movement practices such as the tactical, strategic, organizational, and emotional activities that become the theme of inspection. European scholars of social movements on the other hand give more importance to sociohistorical identity, which is brought out from theories of social change and history. Ideological writers such as Gorz (1982) from France and Bahro (1984) from Germany have failed to contribute to our comprehension of the authentic cognitive importance in social movements. Possibly the closest point of view is that of Alberto Melucci (1988) who view movements no longer operating “as characters but as signs;”. He notes, “They do this in the sense that they translate their action into symbolic challenges that upset the dominant cultural codes and reveal their irrationality and partiality by acting at the levels (of information and communication) at which the new forms of technocratic power also operate” (Melucci, 1988). Eyerman and Jamison’s concept of social movement as cognitive praxis also attempts to capture the symbolic or expressive importance of social movements. They strive to re-establish a bond between an individual or psychological level of analysis to a collective level of analysis. That is to say, they emphasize the interplay “between individual, collective and macro societal practices.” (Eyerman & Jamison, 2007) This interchange, with respect to social movement is discerned as cognitive praxis.

Postulated by Eyerman and Jamison (2007), a social movement is similar to a cognitive terrain, a fresh conceptual region that is loaded by the vigorous interchange between distinct groups and organizations. It is by means of this tensivity betwixt distinct groups and organizations concerning explaining and taking action within the conceptual area that the identity of the movement crystallizes. The specific character of a campaign, what makes it different from other campaigns, and what triggers it, is its cognitive praxis. Despite what has been said, it is evident that cognitive praxis does not happen off the peg to a movement. It is in the formation, communication, framing of fresh ideas and beliefs that a movement occupies a place in society.

Cognitive praxis is the fundamental pursuit of a movement. In studying it, it is practical to deliberate it in terms of stages or periods of advancement. It is commonly acknowledged that movements undergo a sort of lifecycle, from origination to emergence and integration. Rarely do social movements appear in an impromptu manner, rather they need a lengthy span of groundwork at the individual, collective and societal level. Without appropriate political circumstances, the background of the problem, conditions of communication, availability of the possibility of resolutions, and knowledge promulgation, no social movements make an appearance. It is important to note that, not every issue turns into a social movement, only those that are successful in striking the principal chord, that is victorious in touching the primary stress in a society have the capability of giving rise to a social movement. Simultaneously, no participation in collective action can come about till individuals are willing to get involved and convert their personal issues into a common public issue and eventually move into the process of collective identity formation (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). The viewpoint is that social change is achievable when individuals participate on a massive scale, altering themselves in the process. The crux of the matter is no matter what the social movement may be, it is real people that put it together. Each of one these motivational levels are relevant even at the later phases of the movement lifecycle. Eyerman and Jamison write, “ the longevity of a social movement is largely the result of how long a society takes it seriously as a political force, and this, in turn, depends on the commitment of individual actors, their creative use of strategy and tactics, the response of the established political institutions, and the willingness and capacity of the entire social movement to absorb, incorporate, or reject the message of the movement.”

Cognitive praxis takes place at numerous points. They occur in the unforeseeable and frequently unplanned contact between movement campaigners in organizing upcoming actions and reviewing previous actions. They also transpire in the way the campaign is put into operation, the manner in which the protest can be best utilized to send the message over. The passionate debates over meeting agendas, protests

slogans, particular organizational events, contact between campaign groups and their opposition, the innumerable forums of conflict and discussion are some of the instances of cognitive practices that ensue within the social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007).

Cognitive praxis is not only an operational term but also an empirical term. It is a certain kind of empirical occurrence. Cognitive praxis happens and can be investigated factually, but one need not search for it inside the heads of the participants engaged in the movement. It has to be sieved out of movement records, participants' memory and their appearance and evolution have to be recreated. Cognitive praxis can be spotted in the context and space, betwixt participants and organizations. In a nutshell, cognitive praxis is always present, its dimensions, however, can be discovered only by those who are seeking it. They direct the participants, and more significantly, cognitive praxis cannot prevail without the participants being led by them. They are a sort of adhesive that keeps the movement together and makes the movement what it is.

It is crucial to note that the idea of social movement is governed by the culture in which it develops. The concept of social movements is determined by the political culture in which they are constructed. There are considerable differences in how social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out and later conceptualized. It is important to remember that the cognitive practices of that campaign must be connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture. In short, as Eyerman and Jamison (2017) postulate that- “Social movement draws on intellectual traditions and the types of knowledge that are specific to the societies in which they emerge.” Even social psychologists are now beginning to realize the importance of cultural meanings in collective action; however, scant research has been carried out so far. According to van Zomeren and Louis (2017) culture is the “elephant in the room” that nearly not a single social psychologist in the area of collective action speaks about. We

will now discuss the emergence and significance of culture in social movements in the next section.

### *6.1.2. Culture and Social Movement*

It was in the 1980s when culture made its arrival in the social movement scholarship. The study of culture in sociology is primarily extracted from two fundamental heritage, one from Marx Weber and the second from Emile Durkheim. For Weber, the focus always remained on ‘meaningful action’ and the individual performer was always the primary component of the examination. Social action was were affected independently by ideas, advanced, and endorsed by ‘self-interested actors.’ (Johnston and Klandermans 1995) Analysis of culture was done by Weber by attempting to comprehend classical ‘worldview’, which has molded the reasoning of significant groups. The second primary understanding of culture in sociology came from Durkheim. Culture according to Durkheim composed of ‘collective representations.’ (Johnston and Klandermans 1995) “Collective representations are not ideas developed by individuals or groups pursuing their interests. Rather, they are the vehicles of a fundamental process in which publicly shared symbols constitute social groups while they constrain and give form to individual consciousness” (Durkheim 1965; Bellah 1973) Durkheim penned down about rituals, symbols, and representations. Alain Touraine (1978) and his colleagues in a sequence of sociological interposition exhibited the way the collective identities were worked out by the demonstrators for movements of their own and those of the rivals, proceeding past materialist and Marxist movement theories. William Gamson and David Snow employed the notion of frames and framing procedure to exhibit the cultural tasks which protests should achieve so that it could pull volunteers, assets, and appreciation (Benford & Snow 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford 1986)

Even though hesitantly in the beginning but soon with escalated impetus, cultural standpoint extended to each conceptual and empirical nook and corner of protest studies (Jasper 2017). In the course of its arrival, it unlocked many conceptual



entrances to numerous subject matters like emotions, leaders, collective identities, strategic decisions, and gender roles which initially were not cultural.

Before heading to the significance of culture in social movements, it is imperative that we first provide a working definition of culture that is employed in the thesis. There exists tremendous argumentation as to what constitutes culture and how to theorize it. As Snow and colleagues (2014) express the issue fittingly when they explain culture as “a kind of kitchen-sink soup that is difficult to configure because it contains almost everything.” However, we adopt the definition put forward by van Zomeren and Louis (2017) specifically for the students of social psychology of collective action as “any system of shared meaning that embeds individuals in social structure through their experience and enactment of their relationships and group identities.” The definition supplied above is more psychological in nature than geographical, proffers an apparent connection betwixt social structure and human agency (van Zomeren & Iyer 2009). Now that the definition of culture is addressed, we progress to understanding the prominence of culture and the several ways in which culture demonstrates itself in a social movement.

Numerous shapes can be taken by cultural meanings. Few are internal and some are external. The ones which are internal takes place in our bodies and brains comprising of languages, memories, motivation, muscular tension; the external ones are personified in the outer sphere of posters, books, speeches, music, dancing, and buildings. Culture began to appear occasionally also in the structural age of protests scholarship. We would now examine the various conveyors of cultural denotation.

#### *6.1.2.1. Narratives and Collective Memory*

Narratives at the closing of the 1990s sprung as a way for comprehending in what manner explanations and feelings were encased and communicated. “Narratives often provide the dynamic thrust of frames through a sense of inevitable or urgent movement toward a better future, and they usually offer a succinct moral lesson.”

(Polletta 2006) Narratives spin on every side on one principal constituent that is the way the actor carries out activities, a model is supplied by them in what manner to perform skillfully or abysmally, incorporating models for potential volunteers as well. (Jasper 2017) The establishment of actors principally the “triad of victim-villain-hero” has been examined lately. To be more specific, demonstrators should locate victims to set off commiseration, anger is stimulated through villains and at times heroes who can sort out the problems by providing solutions. (Jasper, Young & Zuern 2017) We become aware of not only what to contemplate but also in what manner to perceive regarding every actor. Although these conventional actors from saga and folk tales have vanished from intellectual fabrication, however, they are still very much existent in political oratory. We believe no longer in mythical heroes but there exist “everyman” heroes who intercede to sort out the issues. Another aspect that goes around the victim-villain-hero triad is the politics of blame which is pivotal for proposing political answers to social issues. In the absence of a victim there exist no issues, and in the absence of a villain, there is nothing to rectify. Villains induce negative emotions that are a critical stimulation to take action, possibly even powerful than positive emotions like compassion. (Olesen 2013)

Studies on collective memory traveled a parallel course as a constituent of the cultural spin. Collective memory is frequently more concentrated on different types of buildings, monuments, and other constructions that the forceful actors build. However, Jasper’s understanding of history “is embodied in many artifacts and figures, from founding heroes and suffering victims to landscape paintings and visual caricatures, to conversion stories and other references, to songs, lyrics, and poems. Movements try to control broad historical metanarratives, but also their own stories and especially stories about past conflicts and their outcomes.” (Doerr 2014, Jasper 2017) The notion of “political generations” characterized by chronicled episodes of their youthfulness carries on to motivate investigation. (Corning & Schuman 2015; Giugni & Grasso 2016; Pagis 2014) Collective memory is significant as an asset for upcoming politics (Fine 2001).

### *6.1.2.2 Collective Identities*

Social movement scholars in the 1990s started to exhibit approval for the notion of collective identity as a means to comprehend the various dimensions of culture in protests. (Taylor & Whittier 1992) It is now understood that collective identities are formulated around strategies, institutions, and different discretionary connections as well. It is argued that as long as there is the politicization of collective identities, they furnish a critical connection betwixt inspiration and taking action (Klandermans 2014; Simon & Klandermans 2001; van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears 2008). Collective identities as observed by Melucci (1996) is a project that is in progress for all protests and frequently the principal objective of the protests, however, at the same time, they also have been responsible for ethnic clashes (Coleman & Lowe 2007), labor market tactics (Wimmer 2013) and electoral spheres (Beltrán 2010).

Emotions are shared by members of a group regarding the outer sphere (shared emotions) and as well as emotions regarding one another (reciprocal emotions) (Jasper 1998). Collective identities are reinforced by both of them, whether shared anger is expressed at the adversary or whether expressing affection for fellow workers. Both shared and reciprocal emotions communicate with one another since the earlier one has a briefer range than the second one. “Reciprocal emotions are normally background emotions to the shared emotions, as when we trust the opinions and interpretations of leaders about new events. Even negative shared emotions can increase positive feelings for fellow group members, as when they share an unpleasant experience such as intimidation, arrest, or jail time. Positive feelings toward opponents and targets would seem to be a powerful “moral battery” (Jasper 2011). But negative feeling-thinking processes may focus attention better than positive ones.” (Jasper 1997) As a matter of fact, it was demonstrated by Becker, Tausch, and Wagner (2011) that the most forceful predicting power of readiness to engage in collective action are negative emotions with regard to outgroups than the positive emotions with regard to the ingroup. Members of a group begin to perceive an intense attachment towards

the group when the group creates tactics that are applauded by others. A good strategy was defined by Bongiorno, McGarty, Kurtz, Haslam, and Sibley (2016) “as those that are expected to be efficacious and which are worthy of public expression - presumably tapping pride in the group’s moral position.” Collective identities mold people’s objectives, what is deemed as benefits and drawbacks. Injustice posed to the group as a whole may be felt concerned more than the unfairness posed to the individual members. A large number of studies have demonstrated that negative emotions like anger leads to mobilization in the shape of an assessment that the drawbacks in which the group is situated are unfair. (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer & Leach 2004)

### *6.1.2.3 Emotions and Cognition*

A critical constituent of culture are emotions which are molded by our life stories and suppositions, communication, and encounters with another, each part of cognition is equally molded as well. (Jasper 2017) Emotions are sculpted by culture, it triggers what emotion to display, how it is communicated, how it is tagged and comprehend. (Jasper 2017) It is be noted that there is no instantaneous emergence of emotions like anger from within. They become a constituent of the way engagement with the environment is carried out, and they further notify in what manner things are turning out in that specific environment. The outcome, therefore, is that typically performing individuals are aware of what ways to generate emotions, and which emotions are socially fitting.

Emotions in the social movement scholarship have been disregarded for far too long precisely because it was believed that emotions make demonstrators irrational (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2012). However, emotions came back to studies of a social movement with the return of culture in the 1980s. The research mainly centered on framing (Snow et al. 1986), narratives (Polletta 2006), collective identity (Taylor and Whittier 1991), and codes (Melucci 1996). There exist several emotions that play out during recruitment, activation, and commitment in a social movement. It is argued by Jasper and Owens (2014) that “the emotional valence

of social ties” creates nexus effective for activation and mobilization. Anger as mentioned previously is a powerful emotion that determined civil rights electoral engagement. (Beyerlein & Andrews 2008) It was demonstrated by Beyerlein and Sikkink (2008) that the engagement in 9/11 paying tribute events was motivated by emotion like sorrow. Moral shocks argued by Jasper and Poulsen (1995) triggers engagement considering that an unpredictable episode of knowledge creates a feeling of indignation. When people are exposed to grotesque visual images, Halfman and Young (2010) found that it could generate powerful emotions which could either trigger or hinder mobilization.

There also has been researching on emotions that played a role in maintaining participation during social movements. As argued by Jasper and Poulsen (1995) motivation to remain involved arrives from moral shocks which escalates dedication by reviving interest for an objective, expanding association with a group, and creating discerned danger feel real. Supplying a focus to hold someone accountable could unite awareness and furnish a productive channel for expressing negative emotions like anger, outrage, and hate. (Ness and Summers-Effler 2019) Generation of emotional prize for sustained engagement can be derived from an emotional relationship which unites the volunteers with one another and it could also turn into a probable price for withdrawing. Gupta (2009) demonstrated that a slight increase in success could produce emotions of hope which help volunteers remain aligned to the coming times with expectations for greater success.

Research on emotional procedures during the demobilization period has also been covered. One of the sources of withdrawing from a movement could occur due to the creation of competing allegiances when emotional dedication to spouses, family, kindred, or sometimes even the self, clashes with the movement’s agreement leading to withdrawal. (Goodwin 1997) Jasper (2004) explains “Band of Brother's dilemma, where affective ties that draw one into participation, or develop during participation, can lead to fractured sources of solidarity.” The enjoyment of demonstration can soon

grow into exhaustion and burnout. Encountering continued tiredness in the absence of any emotional potency of stimulation, danger or aspiration could ultimately cause exasperation towards the movement (Summers-Effler 2010). Disagreement around strategies could also develop powerful negative emotions that could endanger unity and emotional bonds (Owens 2009). Failure could also be caused by leaders due to their lack of ability to pull, create the correct feelings, or lead them in a productive orientation. (Ganz and McKenna) In the absence of charisma of a leader, a protest could be deficient of emotional inducements that maintain dedication and they may additionally find it troublesome to draw fresh volunteers.

Our thinking much of the time is instinctive, and a great share of it comes through emotions (Barrett & Salovey 2002). Appeal, revulsion, exhilaration is felt in others and ourselves, comprehension of knowledge is carried out distinctly when in positive moods or negative moods (Schwartz & Clore), and a perception of what is correct or incorrect is made before we communicate a proposition to lead us (Haidt 2007). Therefore, there exists a tremendous overlap between emotion and cognition in the manner they function (Jasper 2017).

#### *6.1.2.4 Leadership*

Leaders these days have become out of date, both in the protests and those who investigate them. (Jasper 2017) Alberto Melucci (1996), a cultural theorist saw leadership as an interchange betwixt leaders and followers, however, according to him a restricted number of prices and benefits was being interchanged (Ahlquist & Levi 2013). At the center of two predicaments are leaders- the pyramid dilemma which means how precipitous a pecking order to build, and the second is an organizational dilemma which means how stiffly to follow formal regulations alternative of being pliable. The communication betwixt leaders and followers comprises numerous “emotional dynamics” (Jasper 2017). “Leaders thrill us because they embody our moral aspirations, express our affective loyalties, display our reflex emotions such as anger or pride; they are our ideal selves. They are useful symbols of our ideologies, and hence

they are good to think with. They are useful to outside audiences as well, representing a movement and what it stands for. Leaders make good symbols, but they are also influential decision-makers.” (Jasper 2017) As argued by Taylor (1989) due to personal allegiance to the leader who is generally the originator, numerous groups are clutched to one another. This fondness, faith, and admiration are all very strong adhesive holding groups in conjunction for a long time, even at times of difficulty. However, the group evaporates if the leader expires, deserts or disapproved (Leondar-Wright 2014). As demonstrated by Lalich (2004), observing such passionate allegiance, leaders could take advantage of it. Therefore, these emotional dynamics consist of both advantages and disadvantages.

#### *6.1.2.5 Players and Arenas*

Jasper (2017) defines arenas as “physical places that contain objects such as oil paintings and wise quotes, areas to sit or stand, amplification and lighting, recording devices, and more. People in those places arrive at decisions in which something is at stake, following formal rules and informal traditions.” Arenas are spaces where individuals chase their objectives in communication with different people (Duyvendak & Jasper 2015; Jasper & Duyvendak 2015) Players are defined as people or collections who share objectives and certain perceptions of identification and where action are synchronized by players in these arenas. Players and arenas both should be deciphered through the lens of culture. Since players are humans they are molded by connotations and actions are taken through them. However, it must be noted that arenas are regulated too by official regulations and unofficial anticipations that should be explained regularly. “Meanings are built into the chambers, the furnishings, and the decorations, all of which guide the action and the understandings of the action that occurs in arenas. Most arenas contain small or medium-sized groups, and are subject to the many dynamics of face-to-face groups.” (Jasper 2017) The players-arenas structure draws special attention to the manner in which players devise decisions and the way it is carried out in arenas or backstage. Player’s instrumentality could be

understood if we pay heed to culture, additionally assisting us to comprehend arenas, different players, and the restrictions they enforce in conjunction.

Therefore, it can be safely concluded that culture has assisted in illustrating the manner in which the demonstrators connect with the society at large, starting with understanding the way they comprehend and perceive it. Demonstrators explain themselves by recognizing other people, through cognitive and affective closeness to grouping tag and identifications. They communicate with other individuals to strengthen commitments they have for the cause and to create an emotional spirit to stimulate additional measures. They narrate and hear tales that describe what is significant in their way of life. Culture links us to society at large, incorporating molding our psychology.

## **6.2 Methodological Perspective**

To investigate the research problems brought up in the Introduction chapter earlier, there is a requirement to examine the lacuna by adopting both qualitative and quantitative methodological perspectives in the thesis. To understand the experiences of how protesters of the Assam Movement employed culture to strengthen the movement itself, as well as to investigate particular predictions concerning the relationship of culture with other variables, engagement of both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches appeared relevant.

### *6.2.1 Qualitative Methods*

For us to understand and capture the role culture played in the Assam Movement which assisted in strengthening and intensify participation from all sections of society of Assam, it required us to approach the former protestors of the movement and interview them regarding their experiences on how culture was employed in the maintaining of six years-long movements. Such an examination was expedited with



the utilization of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2012). Thematic analysis is an adaptable technique in a way that it permits for a precise portrayal of the experiences of participants in the absence of enforcing any preliminary classifications on their accounts and simultaneously it also permits the researcher to proceed towards the interview information concerning specified research questions. Therefore, thematic analysis can assist us in exploring the various cultural carriers that played out in the movement and also aid us in developing certain predictions that could be tested employing a quantitative approach.

### *6.2.2 Quantitative Methods*

Apart from employing qualitative methods to our interview data, we were also interested in establishing the findings we gathered using the quantitative method. We were interested in investigating particular predictions concerning the relationship of culture with other variables. These predictions could be better tested using the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) proposed by van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008). SIMCA is an integrative socio-psychological perspective that places injustice, efficacy, and very importantly social identity as its fundamental constituents for comprehending and forecasting collective action. As per SIMCA, social identity aids comparatively helpless people to discern and who encounter emotionally accidental and structural impediment as unfair and at the same time feel emancipated with the purpose of challenging those in authority. SIMCA suggests that social identity connects the injustice and efficacy descriptions of collective action in the meantime permitting for a straight impact of identity on collective action (van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears 2008). These three subjective variables i.e. injustice, efficacy, and social identity that could impact collective action have received considerable academic attention (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997, 2004). However, they have studied separately and no study has considered researching the relationships betwixt these three subjective variables and their predictive impact on collective action. This is where SIMCA contributes to the discipline by adding a fresh and integrative perspective on

collective action. We will now examine each of these variables individually and its impact on collective action.

#### *4.2.2.1 Elucidating Collective Action through Injustice*

The conventional supposition that objective deprivation prompts collective action slowly changed to the notion that it is the subjective experiences that predict collective action particularly well. To elucidate as to why objective deprivation does not continuously forecast discontentment of people, the conceptualization of relative deprivation was developed by Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Star, and Williams (1949). Their research demonstrated that the military police were more contented even when given slow-moving promotions than the air corpsmen who on the other hand were given swift promotions. Scholarly work like these guided the evolution of relative deprivation theory (RDT; e.g., Crosby 1976, 1982; Folger 1986, 1987; Merton & Kitt 1950; Pettigrew 1967; Runciman 1966; Stouffer et al., 1949; Walker & Smith 2002) whose center of attention was the subjective learning of unfair treatment. Deriving from social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), the Relative Deprivation Theory postulated that sentiments of deprivation grow on the foundation of social juxtaposition with distinct others. “According to Relative Deprivation Theory, it is only when social comparisons result in a subjective sense of injustice that collective action to redress the injustice is likely to occur.” (van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears 2008)

In the last few decades, the Relative Deprivation Theory grew in two significant manners. The initial advancement was to shed light on what social juxtapositions promote collective action. Meta-analytic confirmation for Runciman’s (1996) suggestion was established by Smith and Ortiz (2002) that collective action is probable when individuals encounter fraternal or group situated deprivation (Cook, Crosby, & Hennigan 1977; Dion 1986; Dube ´Simard & Guimond 1986; Guimond & Dube ´Simard 1983). Betwixt the intergroup juxtaposition which is mostly based on group deprivation and the intergroup character of collective action, they seem to fit conceptually (Postmes et al., 1999). On the other hand, egoistic deprivation which is

individual-based deprivation is less probable to be upshot in collective action (Koomen & Fränkel, 1992; Walker & Mann, 1987; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). The second significant advancement in Relative Deprivation Theory was to investigate what creates deprivation such as a compelling stimulator. Smith and Ortiz (2002) found in a meta-analytic assessment of the conventional suppositions of Relative Deprivation Theory that in contrast to the discernment of group situated deprivation forecasted collective action, sentiments of deprivation were ultimately more forceful predictor. These findings find resonance with intergroup emotions (Mackie & Smith, 2002; E. R. Smith, 1993), which is in accordance with appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991, 2001; Roseman, 2001; Scherer, 1984, 2001; C. A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; for an overview, see Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001), postulating that group situated emotions like anger set up a conceptual connection betwixt group situated appraisal and particular action propensities (e.g., Mackie & Smith, 2002; E. R. Smith, 1993; Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003).

#### *6.2.2.2 Elucidating Collective Action through Efficacy*

In the seventies, Relative Deprivation Theory was criticized by scholars contending that a subjective feeling of unfairness is not adequate to prompt collective action (Finkel & Rule 1987; Gurney & Tierney 1982; McPhail 1971; for reviews, see Ferree & Miller 1985; Klandermans 1989; Walker & Smith 2002). Based on this reasoning that social inequity and unjust treatment is prevalent in nearly every community and therefore is ubiquitous and usual to forecast collective action, theorists of resource mobilization suggested that the key to propelling individuals to take action is the mobilization of assets by allegedly political organizations (e.g., McCarthy & Zald 1977; see also Gamson 1975; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978). The fundamental assumption with which resource mobilization theory works is that protests comprise of a pack of logical collective actions by groups to promote their objectives and claims, by putting pressure on those with authority to give in to the requirements of the deprived.

Klandermans's (1984) unification of components of sociological and social-psychological theories of collective action brought back the importance of subjective socio-cultural predictors of collective action. Based on theories of attitude-behavior connection and theory of collective action by Olson (1968) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) Klandermans (1984) suggested that a person's rationale for collective action can be estimated through subjective value-expectancy outcomes. The expectancy constituent was specifically significant as it comprised of an individual's subjective expectation if collective action would be effectual in attaining its objectives. Since then, efficacy has turned into one of the crucial descriptions of collective action- the notion being that individuals participate in collective action on the condition that individuals have faith that they would make it further probable that pertinent objectives are attained. Mummendey et al., (1999) suggested that group efficacy is a powerful predictor of collective action and they defined it "as the shared belief that one's group can resolve its grievances through unified effort" (see also Bandura 1995, 1997; Folger 1986, 1987). The concept of efficacy exhibits specific characteristics of a sociological concept of agency which also means faith that a person's actions have the capacity to mold and ultimately alter the social structure (Gergen 1999). That is to say, group efficacy supplies individuals a feeling of collective authority or vigor on the foundation of which they are of the opinion that they possess the ability to change the condition and fate of their collectivity (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Reicher, 1996, 2001). This implies that the more powerful the subjective feeling of group efficacy, the more probable individuals are to participate in collective action (Hornsey et al., 2006; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Mummendey et al., 1999).

#### *6.2.2.3 Elucidating Collective Action through Social Identity*

A fresh socio-psychological outlook on collective action appeared in the seventies in the shape of social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Social identity suggested that individuals commonly aspire for and profit from the favorable social identities connected with their group's membership. Certain questions like why

individuals would recognize groupings that represent them negatively were raised. Social identity theory answered this by indicating three socio-structural variables that influence in what manner individuals handle their identity worries: “the permeability of group boundaries, the legitimacy of intergroup relations and their stability. Permeable group boundaries allow disadvantaged group members to leave their group for a higher status group, whereas impermeable group boundaries offer no such “exit” (Hirschmann, 1970). If an exit is impossible, people have to make the most of their situations. They can do so in multiple ways—and one of them is to engage in social competition, of which collective action is the clearest expression.” (van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears 2008) In accordance with social identity theory, when individuals belonging to a subordinate ranking group discern the between-group ranking differences to be unlawful and unsteady, they are more probable to recognize their grouping and participate in collective action to alter the between-group ranking differences (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel, 1978; Turner & Brown, 1978). Consequently, social identity theory forecasts that recognition with the deprived collection is a good predictor of collective action (Ellemers 1993; Kelly & Breinlinger 1996; Mummendey et al., 1999; Tajfel 1978).

These notions of collective action in specific were administered by Reicher and colleagues (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000, 2005; Reicher, 1996, 2001), they reason that social identity fulfills as a function to muster individuals for social modification. Simon, Stürmer, and colleagues (Simon et al., 1998; Stürmer & Simon 2004) carried this reasoning one pace farther in the backdrop of social movement organizations by suggesting that recognition with a social movement organization is still more predictive of collective action in comparison to recognition with the deprived grouping as the first one is a politicized identity. As Simon and Klandermans (2001) defined the concept, people “evinced politicized collective identity to the extent that they engage as self-conscious group members in a power struggle on behalf of their group knowing that it is the more inclusive societal context in which this struggle has to be

fought out.” Politicised identity more particularly links individuals to the organizational difficulties of the deprived grouping, ensuing in an “inner obligation” to engage in a social movement pursuits (Stürmer 2000; Stürmer & Simon 2004). It is confirmed, even though indirectly that the politicization of social identity permits the political to grow into a personal identity assignment (Klein et al., 2007), changing a person’s identification from one that is explained by social situations into a more agentic one (Drury & Reicher 1999).

The Social Identity Model of Collective Action, therefore, is highly incorporating, yet parsimonious and particular. It permits for the distinctive impact of identity as it recognizes the probability that “social identities can politicize” and thus have distinctive impacts on collective action. In addition, it permits for a distinctive impact of injustice as it appreciates the probability that the apparent group situated affective encounters of injustice stimulates collective action. Ultimately, it also forecasts that social identity enables the subjective encounters of both injustice and efficacy. Hence, SIMCA unifies varied proposals that make distinct particular prophecies about these associations by amalgamating them into a logical specimen with a fundamental part for social identity.

## **CHAPTER VII. COGNITIVE PRAXIS IN THE ASSAM MOVEMENT**

I will now start with the empirical section of the thesis by looking into the experiences on the utilization of cognitive practices. The current chapter will present a qualitative study that examines the experiences of the former participants on the effective use of cognitive practices that further enhanced and intensified the Assam Movement.

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the introduction, it was noted that cognitive praxis (which seeks to connect individual, collective, and macro societal practices) is governed by the culture in which it develops. There are considerable differences in how social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out. Cognitive practices of that campaign are connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture.

The study of culture, however, was not so pronounced and appreciated as it is done in the current times in the field of social movement. It was connected to conservative traditions and fraternities to the 19th-century liberals (Jasper, 2017). For the Marxists, it meant misrepresentation of beliefs and ideas in opposition to the assumed veracity of science. For a generation of political analysts, culture was largely disapproved after 1945 (Jasper, 2005). For Neil Smelser (1962), culture compressed coherent thinking, causing social movements to make incorrect targets a whipping boy. Smelser (1968) also noted that theorists often depended on psychoanalysis to elucidate meaning due to the unavailability of a strong cultural lexicon. For Charles Tilly (Mc Adam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001) cultural concepts were “untestable, unmeasurable and unscientific” or culture comprised of complaints and injustices but of little expository engagement

(Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). More commiserating structuralists viewed culture as an asset (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004) yet barely promoting considerable observation to cultural meanings. Since the protestors were viewed as limitedly logical, motivation to protest was considered to be uncomplicated. When these researchers finally decided to incorporate cultural meanings, the preference was popular, observable types such as “discourse, frames, and rhetoric over anything that occurred in the minds of individuals” (Pinard, 2011). As promoted by David Snow, culture in the United States emerged in academic study on social movements in the form of frames and framing processes. Snow et al. (1986) presented numerous processes in which frames could be employed by activists to recruit people in face-to-face settings. Many scholars in the mid-1990s began to collaborate cultural understanding into a fresh class of social movements. Collective identity was placed at the crux of the movements by Melucci (1996). Attention was paid to motivation and interpersonal dynamics by Klandermans (1997) fundamentally operating parallel to cultural perspective without depending on the word culture. On the other hand, a multifaceted approach was adopted by Jasper (1997, 2007) deriving insights into cultural processes and outcomes from anywhere he could. He viewed cognition, emotion, and morality as equivalent constituents of culture. (Jasper 1997, 2007) No scholar of a social movement from then on could disregard cultural meanings, structuralists too joined the bandwagon (Kurzman, 2004).

The intellectual pendulum has swung and culture is now being viewed as significant in the study of social movement framework. Protestors’ engagement with the world, starting with how they comprehend and perceive it, is aided by culture. “Culture connects us to the world, including shaping our psychology” (Jasper, 2017). How cultures disclose themselves in identities and emotions, how they are explained and demonstrated in frames, narratives, and leadership, and how they describe and form the dynamics of collective action across gender, ethnic, religious, or political groups are examined by Jasper. It is argued by Zomeren and Louis (2017) that “inclusion of culture in the field of social psychology of collective action is almost a necessity.” It is



suggested by them that globalization combined with internationalization is being observed both in the field of collective action as well as in its demonstration across various cultures. They believe that in the near future, more and more researches on collective action would emerge from different cultures, and presently the field of collective action is not provisioned to handle it both at theoretical and empirical levels (Zomerren & Louis, 2017). Additionally, they believe that culture is the “gorilla in the room” that nearly no social psychologist in the field of collective action speaks about. Hence the present study attempts to fill this gap by examining the role played by culture and its magnitude in the Assam Movement (1979-1985). The Assam Movement was spearheaded by the All Assam Student’s Union (AASU), the largest student union in the country. The movement carried on for six long years against the Government’s negligence and inaction in detecting, deleting, and deporting Bangladeshi migrants staying illegally in Assam. The movement was widespread and massive, attracting the participation of people from all walks of life, but regrettably has received scant theoretical attention. As argued by Baruah (2002), that the student movements of North-East India have not received sufficient theoretical attention, efforts have been made to state historical facts and gather official information but the theoretical explanation is inexistent. Thus, the present study in addition seeks to furnish a robust and sound theoretical framework to understand the Assam Movement and the manner in which cognitive practices influenced by the culture in which it developed were carried out by the All Assam Students’ Union in sustaining and amplifying the movement.

## **7.2 The Present Study**

The present study wanted to explore and understand the various cognitive practices (influenced by the culture of the location where collective action takes place) that emerged during the course of Assam movement, that also helped in the perpetuation of the movement. Cognitive practices take place at numerous points. They occur in the unforeseeable and frequently unplanned contact between movement campaigners in

organizing upcoming actions and reviewing previous actions. They also transpire in the way the campaign is put into operation, the manner in which the protest can be best utilized to send the message over. The passionate debates over meeting agendas, protests slogans, particular organizational events, contact between campaign groups and their opposition, the innumerable forums of conflict and discussion are some of the instances of cognitive practices that ensue within the social movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 2007). The Assam movement (1979-85) which went on for six long years is the most iconic and powerful among the various student protests across the country. The study was designed to be exploratory in nature. I was interested in developing a theoretically meaningful social psychological understanding of collective action especially in the context of the Assam movement lead by the All Assam Students' Union. The aim, therefore, was to explore and understand the numerous and varied cognitive practices that AASU utilized in the Assam Movement. I was also interested to study how a culture of a specific location provides a unique identity, a distinctive purpose, and fierce solidarity and unity among members of a movement. I wanted to explore what exactly were the features and carriers of the culture that reflected in the Assam movement. I wanted to study how the participants of the movement were able to carry the movement forward successfully for six long years ending with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. The Assam movement which was spearheaded by students for the perseveration of Assamese identity from the continued infiltration of illegal migration from Bangladesh especially had many components to it. The cultural component, however, was the most forceful. The folk music and dance, its language, its traditional attire, its cuisine is very dear to the state of Assam. It seemed crucial then to recognize the significance of these elements in assistance to the movement.

## **7.3 Method**

### *7.3.1 Sample*

Sixteen individuals (57-90 years) who were active participants of the Assam movement took part in a semi-structured interview which lasted for 50-100 minutes. The interviews were recorded with their consent. They were recruited using a snowball or referral chain technique (Browne, 2005). To begin collecting the potential names and references who were active during the Assam movement, I went to the AASU page on Facebook and dropped a message asking for assistance. Very soon they sent across the contact number of the executive member of AASU. I immediately phoned him and discussed the purpose of my research and asked for the possible references I could interview. He suggested names and forwarded their contact details. I started interviewing the first female participant in New Delhi, a former professor in Cotton University (Guwahati) also a poet, novelist, and Sahitya Academic Award winner. After finishing interviewing her, she provided me other potential references (people belonging to media, and other organizations) who were very active during the agitation period. I interviewed all the other participants in Guwahati itself, visiting their respective offices and residences. I did not seek a representative sample but wanted as much diversity as possible among participants. Employing the snowball or referral chain technique aided me to reach out to participants belonging to different age groups, occupations, etc. The participants ranged from newspaper and magazine editors, former professors, housewives, ex-government servants, and some presently working in the public sector unit (PSU), the current All Assam Students' Union advisor, ex MLA, and Assam Sahitya Sabha awardee.

The sample comprised eight male participants and eight female participants. Since gender was an important aspect here, it was made sure that as many female participants are recruited as possible. Among all, only one belonged from the Bodo (tribal) community, and the others belonged to the upper caste. The interviews were held mostly in English, and sometimes Hindi was used as per the comfort of the participant. As this topic was very close to their heart, as it dealt with the cause of the state, participants had no problems in narrating and describing the incidents with great

depth and knowledge. Questions were answered satisfactorily, some probing was required at some instances, overall a profound and extensive interview was carried out.

### *7.3.2 Interviews*

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured schedule. The interviewer asked questions in English and sometimes in Hindi depending on the comfort of the participants. The questions dealt with various cognitive practices executed and numerous cultural carriers that could have influenced the movement and had given it a distinctive color. The word “culture” specifically was not used while interviewing, but rather its carriers like music, strategies employed during the agitation, the decision-making processes, the emotions held and how it was channelized, the role of gender during the agitation, the leadership, and others were enquired. If anything at all apart from this appeared, it was noted and if felt important, were probed further.

Participants were generally very elaborate in their narration about the movement days, one could sense the emotions through the tone of their voice. Although they were asked specific questions, however at times, they diverted to the issue of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (now an Act) that would affect the state and that the entire purpose of the Assam Accord remains defeated. On bringing them back to the movement days, they remembered it very fondly and proudly as to how the people of Assam coming from all sections of the society, from all age groups fought hard and strong against the government for its inaction on the situation of infiltration of illegal foreigners in Assam.

### *7.3.3 Analytic Strategy*

The aim of the analysis was to explore and capture theoretically significant cognitive practices and numerous aspects of culture that guided and impacted the movement.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke; 2006, 2012) was found suitable for the current study. “Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.57). One of the main advantages of using Thematic analysis is that it is very flexible and can be carried out in various ways. I primarily used the inductive form which is a bottom-up approach, where the codes and themes are taken out from the content of the interview. Additionally, I also ran the six-phase approach to thematic analysis traced by Braun and Clarke (2006,2012). Phase 1) the audio interviews were transcribed in English and Hindi, aiding further to *familiarize* with the data. Phase 2) once the interviews were transcribed, they were then read intently numerous times to generate *initial codes* keeping in mind the probable pertinent research questions. The codes were scribbled on the paper itself ranging from one word to one-line sentences. Phase 3) codes that clustered around a particular issue were collated which assisted the *searching of themes*. A preliminary thematic map was outlined at this stage giving more clarity. Phase 4) once the thematic map was outlined, the *themes were reviewed* once again to explore if anything was left behind or has the themes been made correctly. Some codes were discarded at this point. Some themes were clubbed into one. Phase 5) once it was clear what themes to be present, they were *named*. The naming and defining stage of themes had to be done numerous times, as it was not capturing the essence of the codes. And more importantly the research questions. Phase 6) eventually, the right extracts were identified that fit each theme well so that it is reflected when *producing the report*. The last and final phase of the thematic analysis is presented in the next section.

*Table 7.1*

Transcripts	Codes	Themes
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<p>Mahanta and Phukan were next to God. When they used to fall ill, people used to worship for their recovery. They were the leaders, the saviors. They were the protectors, symbols of the movement.</p> <p>The media supported the movement. They published the views and news of the meetings and statesmanship of the leaders. To speak the truth. The media ran the agitation.</p> <p>Anyone who was there was an Assamese. Anyone who joined the satyagrahas at that time, that difference was not there.</p> <p>Music was very much important. Prithviraj Rabha, unka is andolan mein bahut bahut participation tha. Bahut saare gaane bhi gaaye hai. Bhupen Hazarika and Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala ka jitna bhi music tha, Bishnu Rabha jo Prithviraj Rabha ka father hai unka jo gaana hai, jitna bhi tha sab laga diya slogan main. Nikaal nikaal ke unlogo ka gaane main, pura.</p> <p>The main emotion is to protect our motherland. Love for our motherland. Anger was there towards the government because they had failed miserably to solve the problem of illegal migrants. Have irritation towards the infiltrators, because of you we are facing this problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Worshipped</li> <li>-as saviors, hero, protectors</li> <li>-symbol of the movement</li> <li>-pro-Assam movement</li> <li>-mobilized masses</li> <li>-lead the movement</li> <li>-no background differences</li> <li>-unity from most parts of North-east India</li> <li>-mass participation from all sections</li> <li>-active participation from local music artists</li> <li>- indigenous music used creatively in slogan making</li> <li>-indigenous music valued by the masses</li> <li>-anger (towards the govt.) and fear (of being minority) predominant emotions</li> <li>-love for the state especially</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 1. <i>“Mahanta and Phukan were called Ram and Lakshman”</i>: Leaders as idols</p> <p>Theme 2. <i>“Movement ko momentum tak pahuchane mein media ka bada role tha”</i>: An active contribution by the local press</p> <p>Theme 3. <i>“Anyone who joined the satyagrahas was an Assamese”</i>: All-inclusive Assamese identity</p> <p>Theme 4. Music brought vitality to the movement</p> <p>Theme 5. Fervent expression of emotions</p>
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<p>There was huge participation of women, women were emotionally was also very surcharged at that moment, it was something like the national movement. Women came out in large numbers, they really thought that something was going to change, there was a lot of faith in these young boys that they are going to do something.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-emotions brought people together</li> <li>-mass participation of women</li> <li>-women had hope in AASU</li> <li>-women from both humble and well to do families participated</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 6. <i>“It was the women who gave color and spirit to the Assam movement”</i>: <i>Mass participation by women</i></p>
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#### 7.4 Analysis

The thematic analysis disclosed six comprehensive themes which illustrate the numerous cognitive practices employed and the significance of culture in a social movement, and specifically in the context of the Assam movement led by the All Assam Students’ Union. The themes are: *“Mahanta and Phukan were called Ram and Lakshman”*: *Leaders as idols*, *“Movement ko momentum tak pahuchane mein media ka bada role tha”*: *An active contribution by the local press*, *“Anyone who joined the satyagrahas was an Assamese”*: *All-inclusive Assamese identity*, *Music brought vitality to the movement*, *Fervent expression of emotions*, *“It was the women who gave color and spirit to the Assam movement”*: *Mass participation by women*. Each theme will be examined now.

*Theme 1. “Mahanta and Phukan were called Ram and Lakshman”*: *Leaders as idols*

It has been a long-lived understanding that leadership affects the effectiveness of a campaign. Much prominence has been placed on the role of charismatic leadership in the maturation of movements. I too wanted to understand how were the leaders of the Assam movement (President and General Secretary of All Assam Students' Union) viewed and what did they signify to the general population of the state. Examining the following three extracts by individuals from three different occupations.

Extract 1. (M, 50, Advisor of AASU):

Mahanta and Phukan were next to God. When they used to fall ill, people used to worship for their recovery. They were the leaders, the saviors. They were the protectors, symbols of the movement.

Extract 2. (F, 57, Editor of Nandini magazine):

When Mahanta became sick, people in rural areas, they used to pray for his recovery. Phukan and Mahanta were called Ram and Lakshman. Their photographs were hung on the wall. Diya jalata tha. They were worshipped as God.

Extract 3. (F, 64, ex MLA)

He was worshipped like a God. He was a savior. He might change the future for the better for Assam.

It is well highlighted in all the three extracts consistently that the leaders of the Assam movement were revered as God. They were nothing less than a hero. They were admired, respected, and glorified. They became a symbol of unity and power for the people of Assam. They were recognized and valued by the common population for taking up the matter of detection and deportation of illegal migrants from Assam which the past governments had failed to act upon. They were considered as saviors, who would liberate them from the jaws of illegal foreigners harnessing on their land,



employment, causing a danger for the people of the state to become the minority in their own homeland. As Jasper (2017) suggests that leaders personify peoples' dreams and goals, they demonstrate our affective allegiances, exhibit emotions like anger (against the perpetrator) or pride (in one's tradition). The speeches of the leaders of the Assam Movement instilled in the masses hope, optimism, and the belief that they could change their present for a better tomorrow. Mentioned by many interviewees that Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (President of AASU) was very soft-spoken and his speeches resonated with the masses. Brighu Kumar Phukan (General Secretary) on the other hand was a very powerful orator who spoke logic and reason. Together, they were the functional symbols of ideals. The movement was represented by them and what it really stands for to the external spectators as well. They were symbolic influences that have localized evocation and impact.

In extract 2, we can see the creation of characters, *Ram* and *Lakshman* assigned to Mahanta and Phukan, the pivotal leading lights of the Assam movement. Ram and Lakshman are the central characters of the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana, a mythical story written by Rishi Valmiki. Ram is a major deity of Hinduism and his younger brother Lakshman is especially attached to Ram. Lakshman is epitomized as a man with unswerving fealty, love, and dedication to his elder brother through times of jubilation and hardship as well. Both of these characters are worshipped among the Hindus. The metaphor of Ram and Lakshman is employed to denote the feeling of brotherhood and approbation for Mahanta and Phukan in the hearts of the people. Though these conventional personas from saga and folk tales have departed from intellectual invention (Jasper 2017), we can observe that their usage is still very much existent and active in political rhetoric. The erection of characters particularly the victim-villain-hero has lately been examined. Specifically, protestors must find victims to arouse sympathy, villains to stimulate outrage, and sometimes heroes who can set things right again (Jasper, Young, & Zuern, 2017). In the current context too, it is quite evident that there has been an attempt to elevate how to feel about each character. The role of the victim has been played by the common people of the state, who have

been struggling with the issue of illegal foreigners in Assam since the times of the British. The role of villain has clearly been assigned to the government, both central and the state for their incompetent and negligible attitude towards the people of Assam. And finally, the role of hero is allocated to Mahanta and Phukan, the student leaders for taking up the enormous responsibility on their shoulders to communicate and mobilize the general population against the long-lived violation of their rights.

*Theme 2. “Movement ko momentum tak pahuchane mein media ka bada role tha”:  
An active contribution by the local press*

“Leader’s speech and its reception illustrate the power access to the media afford when all goes well. It is a particular kind of power, one that can afford access to the highest circles of government and at the same time, contact with previously unreachable masses. It is a power that presupposes limited and carefully chosen targets, as well as the great risk of irreparable failure. It requires careful selection of audiences, skillfully projected images, and the “luck” of the right time and place. It requires, in other words, professional planning and movement intellectuals with particular training and skills, forms of knowledge... that would direct a social movement in particular directions.”

- Eyerman and Jamison (2007)

As mentioned in the above excerpt, the media has an immense capacity to turn the movement around. It can bring the masses together, reach remote places and make way to the upper echelons of administration or cause irreversible damage. Hence, the main motive here was to study the role of mass media, and in what manner it promoted or suppressed the movement. It was considered important to investigate because during those times (1979-85) only local newspapers and radio were prevalent, and they were the only means through which one could access and be informed about the relevant issues and topics pertaining to the movement. Also, mass media like newspapers and radio can have an enormous impact on the local population as to what to make out of

the movement, hence it seemed a significant aspect to be studied. We will now examine three extracts.

Extract 1. (M, 90, editor of Agradoot):

The media supported the movement. They published the views and news of the meetings and statesmanship of the leaders to speak the truth. The media ran the agitation because the media supported as because it is a life and death problem for all the indigenous people.

Extract 2. (M, 89, editor of Ajir Baturi):

Media at that time in Assam these televisions were not there, newspapers were also not many. Only Assam Tribune and Dainik Asom, Janambhumi was also there. Janambhumi was from Jorhat was pro-movement they supported the movement they played rather not a moderate but aggressive role. Dainik Asom also played an aggressive role in the movement. Assam tribune played a moderate role. That is how. Agradoot also supported the movement and played an aggressive role in support of the movement. Facing government threats means the withdrawal of advertisements. And most of the journalists, they were in support of the movement, morally and personally.

Extract 3. (F, 60, Former Professor of North-eastern Hill University):

Agradoot was published from here but it had a very pro-Assamese kind of sentiment. Assam tribune has always been a more often a government voice kind of thing. But it was the vernacular papers that had more information, the local like Notun Akhomiya in upper Assam. So vernacular media definitely carried forward the movement. Asom janambhumi and others were very popular at that time. The government was trying to clamp down on the media. Obviously, the Histeshwar Saikia government tried to divide the movement tried to see that press was at least suppressed.

From the above three extracts, it's fairly transpicuous that mass media like the regional newspapers and the radio were active contributors in the Assam movement and were completely involved in advocating and endorsing the movement. They understood that the cause was genuine and believed it needed to be supported since it dealt with the future of the Assamese community. Like it is mentioned in extract 1, the media lead the agitation in its own way, they contributed heavily and made sure that the information and details of the movement reached as many people both in rural and urban settings. Todd Gitlin was among the first intellectuals to display the significance of mass media in the social movement. Gitlin reported how the mass media assisted and the manner in which they sketched out the social movement lead to extensive support from the people (Vleigenthart & Walgrave, 2012). Gitlin's investigation documented that social movements require mass media to muster probable supporters, obtain people's support for their demands, ultimately leading to political alteration. On the same lines, Gamson (2004) mentioned that it is through the mass media that the movement leaders can reach out to a maximum number of probable supporters and people at large.

Among the most popular newspapers of those times were the Assam Tribune (English newspaper), Dainik Asom (Assamese), Agradoot (Assamese), Janambhumi (Assamese). The regional newspapers were more widespread and popular since the population could read Assamese more fluently than English noting here that during the 1979-85 period there were not many eloquent speakers or readers in English, hence the popularity for regional papers was somewhat more than the English.

Also expressed in extract 2 and 3, that the Government of Assam attempted to suppress the movement by banning the newspaper companies from advertisements. They were harassed and their journalists were beaten up, in fact, some of them were put behind bars. Vleigenthart & Walgrave (2012) noted that the concerns of movement actors and journalists usually do not concur. Movements are absorbed in making sure that messages are getting delivered in the right manner, their goal is to guide the

media's and the people's attention to the matter at hand. But the journalists do not have any such concerns, they are more eager and focused on reporting the aggressive side of the movement, the inside disputes, or private and sensitive information about the leaders. However, such was the not case with the journalists in the Assam movement. Since the journalists themselves recognized the significance and seriousness of the issue of illegal foreigners in Assam, they participated not so much as a journalist but more as an Assamese. They contributed to the movement by covering the rallies, the marches, the public gatherings, the *satyagrahas*, the hunger strikes, etc. Some journalists went a little too far in their patriotic sentiment that they turned their back on covering the other side of the story, that is the negative elements of the movement (a few sections of the Assamese population in remote districts began targeting Indian Bengalis). Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that they were successful in bringing forth the issue of Assam to the nation's attention, provided the national importance it deserved. Since north-east India has always been considered peripheral states, they are never accepted as part of mainstream India, it was the journalists who took it upon them to make the entire nation cognizant of the struggle the state of Assam was going through.

It is evident from these extracts that the mass media had a huge influence on the local population and precisely because of this humongous impact on people, the Government of Assam was very keen on clamping down on the activities of the media. The AASU- AAGSP (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad) would announce in newspapers, the schedules to meet, days allocated for rallies, days assigned for bandhs, etc. in advance so that the maximum number of people could participate. Eyerman and Jamison (2007) refer to the above innovative tactics and strategies as cognitive practices. It is a cognitive practice the manner in which the movement strives to communicate its message to the audience by using various means. It was also mentioned at many points during the interview sessions with the media persons that the Government of Assam imposed censorship on the announcements made by AASU-

AAGSP, editorials, and other such pieces of writings. The right of expression was confiscated.

Radio then acted as a crucial medium. The regional news on the radio was broadcasted twice in the day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Since there were not many television sets in many households and the regional newspapers reached people in rural areas sometimes after a delay of two days, the radio became an extremely important source of information. As mentioned below in extract 4, people would gather around with their transistors to listen to the current happenings, it gradually became a ritual for people to assemble and tune in.

Extract 4. (F, 60, Former Professor of North-eastern Hill University):

Radio was very important because everyone would listen to the regional news. At least the regional news would have the highlights of what was going to happen, what is the AASU's program. This was All India Radio (AIR) mostly because there were no private channels then. At least that they informed, that this has happened, that rallies happened, and this was the crowd and that spreads, that so many people went we should also go next. So definitely whatever news it gave because that was one way, everybody had those transistors in remote areas and all that. At least they listened, they tuned in to listen to what was going to happen, and then sometimes they would also tell you that AASU has this plan if they got the news.

One therefore can observe that the mass media through its own course of action was, in fact, mobilizing the public. This phenomenon has been explained by Gamson (1995) through the use of framing theory. The theoretical argument states that three 'collective action frames'- a collection of views that stimulate and nourish collective action- are highly influenced by media reportage. Media reportage nourishes the sentiment of injustice and incites the readiness for carrying out action by exaggerating and individualizing accountability for the unfairness. Media can induce the sentiment of agency by portraying locals that they can improve the circumstances of their everyday existence. Media can also furnish to the sentiments of collective identity by explaining the resentful bunch as one unit and by determining obvious opponents.

*Theme 3. “Anyone who joined the satyagrahas was an Assamese”:* All-inclusive Assamese identity

The chief rationale here was to comprehend who really was an ‘Assamese’ when the movement was at its peak. Since the complete struggle of the Assam movement was to preserve the Assamese identity, its culture, its language, it seemed only natural to investigate what this identity meant to the people who were on the streets marching, raising slogans, taking the police batons, getting arrested, getting injured, some lost their lives too. Let’s examine the following four extracts.

Extract 1. (F, 60, Former professor of North-east Hill University):

Anyone who was there was an Assamese. Anyone who joined the *satyagrahas* at that time, that difference was not there.

Extract 2. (M, 50, PSU employee):

*Sab logo ko lekar Assamese. Jo Assam main permanently rehte hai beyond other languages, linguistics groups, wo Karbi ho ya, Rabha ho, jo sab the, wo log bhi maante the. Tab sab log saath mein tha. Tea garden labors bhi Assamese maante the.*

Extract 3. (F, 62, Housewife):

*Koi bhi Bodo, koi bhi Rabha, koi bhi Tiwa, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa, Arunachali, Manipuri, all are Assamese. Wo time pe kisiko doubt nahin tha, koi question nahin tha. Hum sab ek saath mein aagaya tha.*

Extract 4. (M,50, Advisor of AASU):

Assamese meant sab ko *leke*. We didn’t think of who is who. Who is Hindu, who is Muslim, who is tribal, non-tribal? We didn’t think of it.

Beginning in 1963, the Central Government made headway towards breaking Assam into several states primarily to restrain, prevent insurgencies in the northeast (Baruah, 2001). However, it is fairly evident that this approach was a fiasco. It began with the segregation of Naga regions from Assam ultimately leading to the creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963. Meghalaya was partitioned from Assam in 1970 and created into a new sub-state. In 1972, the separation of Mizoram from Assam was done and made into a Union Territory. It was later turned into a completely developed state. The same year the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) which obtained a critical significance as a contested region betwixt India and China, was created into a Union Territory in 1972 and was later assigned a fresh name, Arunachal Pradesh. In 1987 it was given a separate state status (Baruah, 2001).

Originally Assam was one big state that incorporated all the above regions which were later partitioned by the Central Government by a simple majority in the Parliament. When the Assam movement started in 1979, people from all the other states joined in as well. They too participated in the rallies, marches, *satyagrahas*, hunger strikes, blockades. The feeling was simple and uncomplicated that we all are 'one'. One big family. One big unit, and that we all must come together to fight for a common cause that is, the detection and deportation of illegal foreigners (specifically Bangladeshis) from Assam. Movement intellectuals from the 1980s have progressively highlighted the importance of collective identity as an element that invigorates protest involvement (van Stekelenburg 2013). Sociologists were the first among all who argued for the prominence of collective identity in the protests. It was argued by them that the creation of collective identity is rather pivotal for a movement to unfold (Taylor & Whittier 1992). On similar lines, social psychologists too recognized and investigated repeatedly that the more the people associate with the group the more they are predisposed to protest in support of the group (e.g., Reicher 1996; Simon et al. 1998). Identifying with the group is allegedly a powerful cause as to why people participate



in protests on account of that group. Collective identity is therefore explained as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (Taylor & Whittier 1992). Similar solidarity and unanimity were observed in the Assam movement when participants from almost the whole of Northeast India came together under one single banner.

It might also be true that after seeing the fate of Tripura (another Northeast state) which had been turned into a Bengali dominated region due to endless infiltration of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, the very same fate was feared by the other remaining states of reducing into a minority in their own homeland, so it seemed logical for people belonging to various communities, tribes, castes, states to lend a hand in the movement showing solidarity and support for the rightful cause. It is quite evident from the above extracts that during the movement days, there was no uncertainty in the minds of people as to who was an Assamese. Even while interviewing, people from different backgrounds, they all mentioned and defined Assamese on the same lines, that anybody who participated in the movement was an Assamese for them. Religion, tribe, caste, gender did not matter. What mattered was the unity of people for the cause. As Eyerman and Jamison (2007) mention in their book – *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*, no participation in collective action can come about till individuals are willing to get involved and convert their personal issues into a common public issue and eventually move into the process of collective identity formation. The viewpoint is that social change is achievable when individuals participate on a massive scale, altering themselves in the process. Assam Movement is an exemplar of this metamorphosis.

In addition to this, they also went on to acknowledge that the debate on who really is an Assamese came to the forefront when in 1985 the Assam Accord was signed between the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the AASU leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, General secretary Brighu Kumar Phukan and the AAGSP (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad) convener Biraj Sharma, marking an end to a six-year-long movement. Clause 6 of the Accord said: “Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote

the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.” (Government of Assam, Implementation of Assam Accord) This generated problem among the tribal communities as the state of Assam also inhabits tribes. There was no mention of guarding the tribal identity and its culture. Very soon the tribal communities began to show resentment against this unfair treatment. It was stated by many interviewees that since then, whoever Government was in power has been taking advantage of this and have created rifts between the Assamese people and the tribals (for example the demand for a separate Bodoland). Hence, they revealed that the debate on who is an Assamese is mere a political construction by the political parties in power to keep the people of Assam divided.

#### *Theme 4. Music brought vitality to the movement*

Among many, the most treasured feature of any social movement is the cultural component i.e. music and its optimum utilization in mobilizing public support. Rosenthal & Flacks (2012) report that music being such a principal component of many social movements, it has become a favorite among many cultural scholars for investigation. In the current context too, it is noted that Assam is especially rich in its indigenous music which includes Bihu songs, and other tribal songs like the Karbi, Mising, Boro songs, etc. Bihu songs especially communicate the spirit of Assamese culture and reflect its social framework. The songs are seen as repertoires of cultural sentiments (Scroll, 2021). In Assam music has always acted as a very significant facet in bringing people together for a celebration or showing solidarity during hardships. Let us now examine the following extracts.

Extract 1. (F, 62, Housewife):

Music artists *ka pura* support *tha*. *Bahut gaan banaya tha*. *Mor bhaiti nahoi* by Bhupen Hazarika on 1983 election martyrs *bahut chala tha*.

Extract 2. (M, 50, Advisor of AASU):

Music was very much important. During the movement, we had cultural gurus, Roop Kumar, Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala, though he is Aggarwal but he is our cultural hero. Kala Guru- Vishnu Prasad Rabha, he is our cultural hero, then Bhupen Hazarika, he too was a participant in the Assam movement.

The lyrics of Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala, Vishnu Prasad Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika, and our other great poets played a major role.

Extract 3. (F, 59, ex MLA):

Prithviraj Rabha, *unka is andolan mein bahut bahut participation tha. Bahut saare gaane bhi gaaye hai.* Bhupen Hazarika and Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala *ka jitna bhi music tha, Bishnu Rabha jo Prithviraj Rabha ka father hai unka jo gaana hai, jitna bhi tha sab laga diya slogan main. Nikaal nikaal ke unlogo ka gaane main, pura.*

From the above three extracts, it is apparent that music played a huge role and contributed immensely to the Assam movement. Legendary artists like Bhupen Hazarika, Bishnuprasad Rabha, and Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala among many are called the cultural gurus of Assam who gave their voice to the Assam movement.

Bhupen Hazarika popularly known as *Sudhakantha* is a recipient of the highest civilian honor Bharat Ratna (along with other accolades such as Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Dada Saheb Phalke Award, and Padma Vibhushan), his work as a lyricist, poet, composer, writer, film-maker, and singer is well celebrated in Assam. He is recognized to bring culture and folk music to Assam and the entire Northeast of India. Even though he is anything but non-political, his considerable body of work had a political flavor. Sanjib Baruah (2001) in his book *India against Itself* analyzed Hazarika's songs and he writes "One finds in his music the constant reflection of the political moods of the Assamese. Using his lyrics, one can construct an unofficial history of the Assamese nationality its hopes, aspirations, and disappointments. Even the most recent radical

and militant turn that Assamese sub-nationalism took in the 1980s... found more than a pale reflection in Hazarika's music...[His] music, and indeed his entire career, are texts that underscore the compatibility and dialogical relationship between Assamese sub-nationalism and pan-Indianism.”

Hazarika created a piece in 1968 in which he writes that Assam Movement was expected to take place against illegal foreigners. The very same song mentions another very famous cultural icon of Assam, a poet and a nationalist Ambikagiri Roychaudhury (1885-1967) who was imprisoned during the freedom movement. In the song, Hazarika bemoans that ‘we no longer have an Ambikagiri to remind us day and night that our land has gone’ (Hindustan Times, 2019).

During the peak of the Assam movement, an additional version of the song was taped to commemorate the lacs who acknowledged Ambikagiri's summon. In 1983, when the infamous elections were imposed on Assam, Nellie massacre took place where many lost their lives, boycotts happened, Hazarika penned down a canzone- *1983 – the year of the devastating fire – the year of the election* that enunciates about a “little brother” who was put to death. The song questions: “My little brother disappeared that year. Do you have any news of him? He wanted to build his country and secure a happy future for those who live in Assam. He did not want to become a stranger in his own land.” An attempt to invoke emotional association with family is made, and it recites: “Mother does not eat her food, the village youth all wait for you each day, your sister lights an earthen lamp in your room every day and poor old dad goes to the railway station every day, hoping to find you in one of the trains.” (Hindustan Times, 2019) One of his later songs was analyzed and translated by Baruah that praises and acclaims valor, gallantry, and sacrifice of the military personnel: “I salute mother Assam and I dress up to go to war. I salute the river Luit (another name for the Brahmaputra) and pray to Goddess Kamakhya; with your blessings and an oath, I am off to war...It is not the time to teach history lessons, it is not the time to take it easy; the enemy taunts us at our gates, leave aside your daily tasks, get ready for war and be prepared to lay

down your lives.” (Hindustan Times, 2019) Hazarika’s Jai Aai Axom (Glory to Mother Assam) is also another very high-powered song that became a rallying cry of the Assam movement. In several thousand households, these songs were played repeatedly on tape recorders and they triggered a heightened public sentiment around the agitation. McNeil (1995) documented that music becomes a means for groups to unite and bond along with collective locomotion, dancing, and singing.

Earlier songs like ‘Aami Axomiya nohou dukhiya (We Assamese will never be impoverished)’ and ‘Biswa Bijoye Naba Juwan (The youth are the champions of the world)’ composed by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (famously called the Rupkonwar of Assamese literature) and sung by Hazarika kept reminding and prompting people of the rich culture and tradition of Assam (Pisharoty, 2020). The lyrics resonated with each Assamese of the times the state of Assam was going through. People got immediately titillated and pulled to it. As also mentioned by Eyerman & Jamison (1998) that ideas and ideals conveyed in the lyrics of music are often conserved for later generations. It appears quite accurate because during the protest in 2019 against Citizenship Amendment Act (it strives to make illegal migrants from six religious groups, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, and Buddhists from three countries Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan entitled to citizenship who arrived in India on or before 31 December 2014; PRS Legislative Research) the streets of Assam was thrumming with these songs which once generated the same stream of emotions. Music thus, became a forceful device of protest, it triggered emotions, it stimulated the youths and the elderly alike.

#### *Theme 5. Fervent expression of emotions*

Any social movement cannot be deprived of emotions. In fact, in absence of emotions, a movement cannot be successful. Emotions bring people together, unites them, bond with them resonates with the aggrieved, it activates the distressed into action. Social movement scholars have begun to emphasize the study of emotions and now the

literature on emotions is reasonably developed in a significant manner. Earlier scholars conceived of emotions as a sign of irrationality however the return of emotions in the area of collective behavior and social movement is credited to the 1980's cultural bend which displayed curiosity to the micro-level. (Van Ness & Summers-Effler 2019) In the context of the Assam movement as well, emotions were exhibited in creative ways. Let us now study the following three extracts.

Extract 1. (M, 50, Advisor of AASU)

The main emotion is to protect our motherland. Love for our motherland. Anger was there towards the government because they had failed miserably to solve the problem of illegal migrants. Have irritation towards the infiltrators, because of you we are facing this problem.

Extract 2. (M, 90, Editor of Agradoot)

Everybody was aware of the illegal infiltration in Assam and everybody was *afraid* of the situation. Everybody was *afraid* that the number of foreigners will cross the indigenous people, that's why most of the people supported the movement.

Extract 3. (F, 59, ex MLA)

*Humara jo gussa* (anger) *tha* was against both state and central government. Because state government was elected by whom? Elected by us, we are their people, we are her people, we are correlated. *Bahut gussa* (anger) *tha* at the illegal migrants also. *Kyun aayega aur kaise aaya? Aur kisne aane diya?* No fear from the police. Nothing. *Kitna baar arrest kiya. Kitna baar police maara hai. Kitna baar danda maara hai. Kitna baar bhaga diya.* Even then, we courageously came out for a genuine cause.

From the above three extracts, the noticeable emotions are love, anger, and fear. Love is expressed for the motherland, for the state of Assam in particular. Assam has a rich

culture and is abundant with natural resources such as oil, tea, timber, silk among many others. With the growing globalization and sprouting influence of other cultures, the people of Assam endeavor to maintain and uphold their folk music and dance, Assamese cuisine, their clothing, their unhurried and laidback culture providing Assam with a distinctive label called the *land of lahe lahe* (Phukan, 2014). Berezin (2014) reported in his current writings on collective identity that affective allegiances entail love for the group and abhorrence for the non-members. The love for their state is immense and especially when the threat of reducing into a minority in their own homeland lingers, they sometimes overdo the cultural pride and love principle. For instance, extremist groups like ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) and others announced a prohibition on airing Hindi films, stating that the cultural invasion by mainstream India is subverting the robustness of the regional socio-cultural foundations (Vinayak 2003). Though the ban has been withdrawn such elements indicating the love for one's state and the threat of being overtaken by others are observable.

Anger was another dominant emotion expressed fairly clearly in the interview sessions by many participants. Most of the participants voiced that Assam has been neglected by the Central Government continually. The state had been struggling with the issue of illegal migration even before the independence. Gopinath Bordoloi the first Chief Minister of Assam repeatedly wrote in his letters to Jawaharlal Nehru also the first Prime Minister of the country to do something about the influx problem, that Assam did not have the land to accommodate the surge of Hindu and Muslim 'refugees' from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). But Nehru remained indifferent and unmoved. He knew little about the condition of Assam. He remained ignorant of how the constant influx of refugees was altering the demography of the state each day. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel the then Home Minister joined the wagon too with Nehru thereby supporting the settling of refugees in Assam. Nehru and Patel disappointed the people of the state with their attitude, which got further intensified when in 1962 the Chinese army entered India through the Assam frontline and killed numerous soldiers of the

Indian Army. While the war was still on, Nehru bade adieu to Assam in his speech. That farewell speech is still not obliterated from the hearts of the Assamese, the anger like fire began to ablaze. This fire which started as a spark was given a nudge by the Central government in power. For Indira Gandhi too who later became the Prime Minister did not see the issue of illegal migration as a grave problem. It was like a ticking time bomb. When in 1971 secular and democratic Bangladesh was formed, a massive number of Hindu refugees entered Assam. The many years of injustice lead to an explosion resulting in Assam Movement. The anger among the Assamese knew no limits. The state and central government had failed miserably in mending the problem of illegal migration, after being failed by those whose primary responsibility was to take measures, the students took it upon themselves to make a change. The anger did not just suddenly erupt one fine day rather it was budding and sprouting among the people of Assam over the years of neglect and abandonment by the preceding governments. As Jasper (2017) pens down aptly, “emotions like anger do not suddenly erupt from inside us. They are part of how we engage our environment, and they inform us about how things are going for us in that environment. As a result, normally functioning adults know how to create emotions, and we know what the socially appropriate emotions are.”

Apart from anger, the other most presiding emotion that governed the Assam movement was fear, fear of being reduced to a minority in one’s own homeland. People from all sections of society were afraid of their identity being lost. As mentioned in extract 2, the primary fear was that the illegal foreigners will take over the indigenous population and occupy their land and employment. There was a cultural threat that the Assamese language would be replaced by Bengali again as the official language of Assam just like it happened within the time frame of 1836-1873. The fear was real. It happened before; it could happen again. The fear of what would happen to the future generation of Assam haunted them. That fear ushered peoples, young, old, men, women, children all to come out and participate in one of the iconic movements of India that had been seen, led by students. It is reported that the shared reflex emotions



seem to strengthen groups in response to incidents and affective allegiances are shared with one another, each contributing to the other (Jasper, 2011). Negative emotions too can reinforce positive emotions. “Even the experience of fear and anxiety, not uncommon in the midst of protest, can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity and be an attractive force in collective actions” (Eyerman 2005, p. 43). Therefore, a negative emotion like fear or anger actually brought people together for a movement that continued for six long years.

Emotions in the Assam movement were channelized very creatively through slogans. Slogans that were raised in the movement were not only catchy but they triggered emotions too. Some of the slogans that were shared by the participants during interview sessions were - *Jai Ai Asom* (Hail my mother Assam), *Desh bulile nalage aadesh* (when it comes to the motherland, no need for any command), *Torile desh morile swarg* (Success proffers Nation, Failure proffers Heaven), *Morim kimba torim* (will do or die), *Aah oi aah, ulaai aah, khed oi khed bideshik khed* (Let’s come out to the streets. Let’s make these foreigners leave), *Teg deem, tel nidiu* (will give blood but not oil), *Ai jui jolisa jolise jolibo* (this fire is burning, and will keep on burning), Save Assam today, save India tomorrow. These slogans were hugely popular during those days. They were fitting to the situation in Assam then. The slogans were original and some were taken from the songs by Bhupen Hazarika and Jyotiprasad Aggarwala and poems by Ambikagiri Roychaudhuri. The Assam movement provided the masses a platform to vent out their outburst, to channelize their anger and fear, it gave them an outlet to express themselves. The speeches of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the president of AASU then, and the leader of the Assam movement mobilized people by invoking emotions, by pinching the nerve of the masses, by invigorating them to come out on to the streets and challenge the government, as they could be the change-makers of Assam. Emotions thus are a principal component of culture, they are molded by our life stories and expectations, experiences, and interchanges with others. Culture molds what activates an emotion, how we convey them, how we tag them, and comprehend it (Jasper, 2017).

*Theme 6. “It was the women who gave color and spirit to the Assam movement”: Mass participation by women*

Any movement is successful when both the sexes understand and perceive the cause as worth fighting for. The Assam movement which went on for six long years received support from almost all sections of the society, and the characteristic feature was the humongous participation of women. The very evident fraction of the movement was the women agitators. Women agitators become a part of cognitive practice in the sense that, women represent the society and culture in which they live. They also represent the numerous perceptions and understanding of the collective and macro societal practices. If women are free and liberated from the conventional duties and are treated as equals, it reflects on the society at large and its fundamental cognition, on other hand, if they are bound to the traditional ways of living, that too demonstrates the cognition and thinking of that specific community. Eyerman and Jamison (2007) refer to this social group that had no former experience of intellectual work but got involved in intellectual jobs and gradually became in the process as “movement intellectuals”. Let us now study the following extracts.

Extract 1. (M, 89, ex. Govt servant):

*bahhh...it was the women who gave color and spirit, it is the women of Assam who came in lacs, Assamese women from villages and well-to-do families both.*

Extract 2. (F,60, Former professor of North-eastern Hill University):

There was huge participation of women, women were emotionally also very surcharged at that moment, it was something like the national movement. Women came out in large numbers, they really thought that something was going to change, there was a lot of faith in these young boys that they are going to do something.

Extract 3. (F, 59, ex MLA):

*Aur* movement *main* especially women's participation was really high. We have to say and we have to admit. AASU always says this thing that women's participation was really high. They have recognized it.

Extract 4. (F, 57, Editor of Nandini magazine):

A large number of women came out and very tough works were assigned to them such as blockade of oil, blockade of rail, these are very risky things they did you know. In front of that line, you know women only stood.

From the above four extracts, it is very apparent that the masses acknowledged the participation of women as movement intellectuals. In the Assam movement, women's participation was as widespread as men's. Women left behind their own feminine issues and participated with full zeal and vigor for the state. They became the face of the movement. The women of Assam had faith; they trusted the AASU 'boys' that something was going to come out of this, that their state will be liberated from illegal migrants. Their children will have a better future. This motivated them, pushed them to action each day for six long years. However, it is to be noted that AASU and AAGSP organized these women's associations for various programs and publicity. There was no self-governing women organization, all women participation was under their purview. While interviewing one of the participants, she mentioned that women (housewives) organizations like Sodow Assam Moola Gabhoru Santha went door to door speaking to the housewives about the movement and its relevance. Many times, doors were shut on them, people refused to listen to them, but they continued to try patiently. Finally, people did begin to attend them and they were successful in persuading them after many years of hard work. Their role in the mobilization of other fellow women is definitely noteworthy. One such organization was the Assam Jagrata Mahila Parishad which acted as a pivotal medium in galvanizing women into action. They invoked the feeling of 'mother' among women and this stimulated them by

providing a sense of power to sustain the movement even in times of adversities. As mentioned by Sharma (2017) in one of her writings, “My interview with several women agitators reveals that they did not make a conscious choice of joining the agitation against foreigners with clear agenda. As the events progressed, women in general and middle-class and upper-caste women, in particular, took part in the agitation. They had full faith in AASU members who went from door to door seeking support. In the course of time, tribal women too became a part of the agitation.”

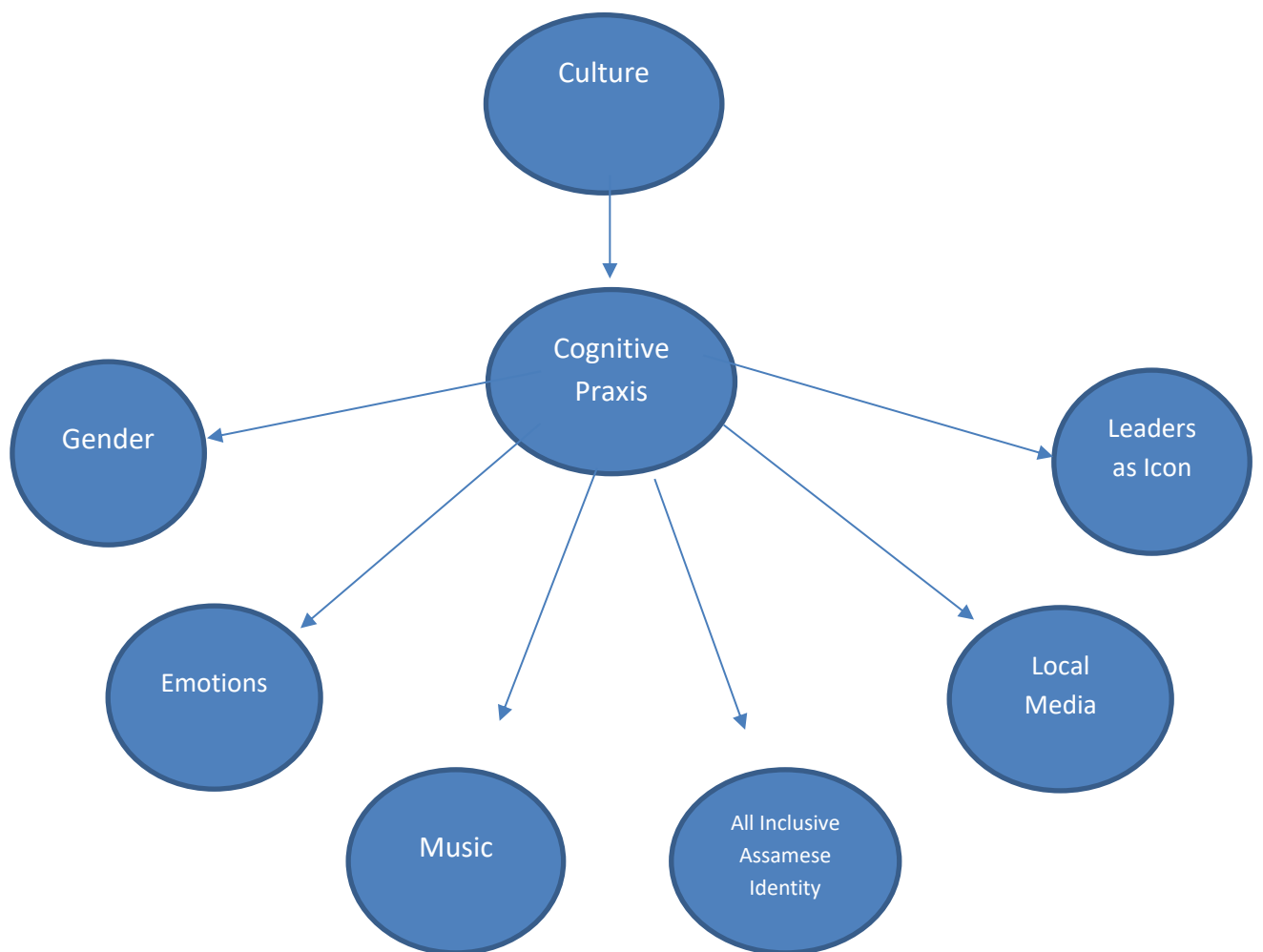
In any political movement, women in Assam for the first time became conspicuous in the early twentieth century. The participation of the largest number of women in any social movement was seen in the period from 1930-1934. The Quit India Movement then followed, which again saw huge involvement of Assamese women as the Congressmen were seized at the beginning itself (Sharma, 2017). However, it was the agitation of 1979-1985 that identified the large-scale engagement of women. Women from various backgrounds, caste, class, tribe came together and raised voice in a single timbre i.e. the deletion and deportation of illegal migrants from Assam. Women participated spontaneously in rallies, processions, marches, picketing, blockades. They did not fear the police batons or getting arrested. One of the very active female participants of the movement shared with me that there was no fear of being beaten up or being jailed. She remembers very fondly while narrating that there were numerous times when police tried to expel them from the streets by employing many means. Horses with police riding them were run over the non-violent agitators, tear gas was released, women and men were flogged equally, so many got injured, so many lost their lives but nothing quivered their determination. The agitation got more intensified and escalated. Women especially were at the forefront of every rally or march or picketing. They stood as a shield as an escutcheon, guarding the leaders of the movement as mentioned in extract 4. Women began to take up new and different roles in the decision-making arena during the movement period but all under the guidance of AASU. A sense of liberation swept in. The same women who would restrict themselves to household chores and activities were gradually assigned relevant

positions in organizations, began mobilizing the masses through their awareness of the situation. They no longer were confined to domestic spaces rather they were out on the streets with their families raising slogans vociferously, marching head-on with everybody thereby leading the movement.

During the movement, women also began to provide financial support to AASU. Great many Mahila Samiti (Women's Association) appeared who chipped in cash to AASU's treasury so that the agitation could be carried out smoothly and this practice continued till the culmination of the movement (Sharma, 2017). Apart from this the educated section of the women too contributed in their own ways. For instance, the support for the movement was given by the Assam women Writers Association who went on writing to the Government of Assam to withdraw the election of 1983 till the electoral voter's list was revised. Another organization that looked into the medical aid of the victims of the agitation was the Purbanchaliya Mahila Sanstha (North-eastern Women's Association). This particular organization incorporated women who went from door to door proffering medical and material assistance to the agitators who were wounded in the agitation (Sharma, 2017). Samajsewi Matribahini (Social Worker Mother Force) was another organization that proffered material assistance to those "women who were either molested by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans or lost family members, by granting them handlooms to become self-dependent financially" (Sharma, 2017). Many such women organizations were active and fully involved with the agitation. Thus, women's participation as movement intellectuals in the Assam movement was monumental and epic.

Below is the Thematic Map with all the six themes arriving from the central element i.e. cognitive praxis which is regulated by culture.

Figure 7.1



## 7.5 Discussion

The objective of the study was to explore the numerous cognitive practices and different cultural meanings of these practices that came into emergence during the Assam Movement. Cognitive praxis (which seeks to connect individual, collective, and macro societal practices) is governed by the culture in which it develops. There are considerable differences in how social movements emerge in varied regions and that these differences have a powerful impact on how social movements are carried out. Cognitive practices of that campaign are connected to the characteristic features of that specific culture. Culture is defined “as the (often hidden or implicit) background of shared meanings against which individuals can be understood best (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013), including their many and different motivations to engage in collective action to achieve social change”. (Zomeran & Louis, 2017) Culture in collective action appears to be an important subject to investigate as they disclose themselves in identities and emotions, how they are explained and exhibited in narratives and leadership, how the dynamics of collective action are given meaning to and molded across gender, ethnic, religious, or political groups.

The constituent that makes the incorporation of culture in the field of social psychology of collective action even more urgent is the expanding globalization along with the internationalization of this area. It is conjectured by Zomeran & Louis (2017) that more and more such studies of collective action will appear from diverse cultures, and there is a need to equip ourselves to be able to manage them theoretically and empirically. Therefore, an attempt is made to investigate the role and impact of culture in the Assam Movement lead by the All Assam Students’ Union in 1979-85.

The present analysis revealed six cognitive practices that carried a specific (Assamese) cultural meaning appurtenant to the movement- iconic leaders, contribution by the local media, an inclusive Assamese identity, music, emotions, and mass women participation. Each practice nurtured and promoted the movement in its own distinct

manner. The principal heads of the movement, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta at the age of 26 and Brighu Kumar Phukan at the age of 23 respectively lead the Assam movement against the Government both at the state and the Centre, appealing for detection, deletion, and deportation of illegal migrants from the state. The appeal and imploring made by them won humongous participation from almost all sections of society. They were esteemed and applauded by the public because when the government failed to act, these students with avid and ardent fervor and love for their motherland started a movement that supplied hope and optimism to the common masses that things will now change for the better. They were worshipped. In today's time, if one speaks about Mahanta and Phukan, their contribution to the Assam movement is repeatedly referred to. The next practice was the local media who were instrumental in advocating and boosting the movement. The local mass media is credited for aiding the movement to reach its impetus. The media (the regional newspaper and radio) took an active part in disseminating the details of the movement as much as possible to the masses even during difficult times when censorship and other bans were imposed on them by the government. Journalists were beaten up and prevented from covering or reporting the news. In spite of these hurdles and obstacles, they continued to carry on their duty of informing the masses of the events, as they too supported the cause.

The chief motive of the Assam movement was to preserve their identity, culture, and language. The threat to their identity was not a new situation. Assamese since the time of the British had been grappling with this issue because the infiltration of migrants (now illegal) prevailed. Appeal after appeals was made to the central government to rectify this problem but nil happened. So, in 1979 when in the Mangaldoi constituency the death of a sitting member of Parliament ensued, a by-election was announced. When the electoral voter's list came into the public's eye, it was noticed that there were far too many names of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. This was the turning point and soon after the movement was launched. People from different backgrounds came onto the streets on the call of AASU. There were people from other north-eastern states as well who had joined in. Hence, it's said that anybody who fought for the



cause of Assam was an Assamese. This makes our next element i.e. an all-inclusive Assamese identity. In any social movement, music adds a significant dimension, and the indigenous music of Assam is highly rich and popular among the masses. This cognitive practice had a strong and in-depth cultural meaning. The music legends like Bhupen Hazarika, Jyotiprasad Aggarwala, and Bishnuprasad Rabha gave their voice to the movement. Their music was played on speakers during rallies and processions. Music had an invigorating and vitalizing effect on the masses. It aided people to come together under one banner, raising one voice in a rhythm, that is, the liberation of Assam from illegal foreigners. The lyrics of songs and poems instilled among the masses great spirit and energy. Music also triggered emotions. Emotions like anger and fear were quite prevalent during the movement. Anger towards the government both the state and the Centre for their passivity and negligence towards their own citizens. Fear of being reduced to a minority in their own land tormented the masses. There was no fear of being whipped, or arrested, or even losing their lives. They wanted to accomplish their agenda to live as Indian citizens who are protected and safeguarded from all threats (realistic or symbolic) across the border. Emotions were channelized through slogans which were inspired from the music by Hazarika, Aggarwala, Rabha, and others. Their slogans were catchy and captivating. Slogans were scribbled on the walls, on the pamphlets and leaflets, on the posters during rallies, processions, and marches. This was the most creative aspect of the movement. These tactics and strategies are referred to by Eyerman and Jamison (2007) as the technical dimension of cognitive practice. The technical dimension comprises the definite objects of resistance and, “even more importantly, the tactics, the techniques of protest, by which those objects are opposed.” And finally arriving at the last component was the part played by the women in the Assam movement. The movement saw by far the largest participation of women as movement intellectuals ever. Women belonging to both humble and well-to-do families came out on the streets to join the cause. Women were mobilized by AASU-AAGSP and formed various associations and organizations through which further mobilization was carried out. Women became a part of every activity be it rally

or *satyagraha* or picketing. They always stood at the forefront. They provided a shield to the masses as the police would be reluctant on raising batons on them. But this worked only initially, later the police considering no difference carried on with the lathi charge on them too. Women became the spirit of the movement as they never shied away from any task. They suffered injuries, they were raped by the police forces, still, they marched on hoping that their efforts will assist the ‘boys’ of AASU to win against the government. And they did win, Assam Accord was signed in 1985 indicating the end to the movement with not even a single woman on the board. The AASU ‘boys’ went on to form the regional government, Assam Gana Parishad, and came to power. These ‘boys’ went on to hold important positions and roles. But what about the women? Were they given any recognition for their efforts or was it just expected out of them? Was the AASU organization cognizant of this? Is AASU a gender-neutral organization? Was the Assam movement a gender-neutral movement? Did the movement acknowledge the achievements of both the male and female participants equally? The next study will attempt to investigate these questions, the gendering of the Assam movement.

## **CHAPTER VIII. ARE MALES AND FEMALES IDENTICAL ACTORS?: GENDERING OF THE ASSAM MOVEMENT**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The cognitive structures of the people are immensely influenced by the culture in which they exist, thereby also reflecting themselves in many societal pursuits. Gender is also one such socially and psychologically constructed phenomenon. A cognitive position on gender is based on the foundational idea that gender is an elementary

category employed to comprehend and interact in one's surroundings (Cross & Markus, 1993). It is asserted by Eagly and Wood (1991) that norms do not subsist for communicating with other people who are gender-neutral, however, it is present when communicating with males and females. As argued by Unger (1990), research within social-cognitive theory has indicated that sex and gender furnish information that performs as a foundation for assessment, expression of expectations, directions of behaving in a social setting irrespective of whether the social setting seems to be gender-related. He defined gender as "the cognitive and perceptual mechanisms by which biological differentiation is translated into social differentiation" (Unger, 1990). Gender belief system was founded by Deaux and Kite (1987) outlines a number of viewpoints and opinions that people have about men and women and the attributes that are assumed to display masculinity and femininity. Incorporated in this belief system are stereotypes around men and women, attitudes towards women and men regarding suitable roles and behavior and attitudes towards individuals who vary from the norm. This belief system includes various stereotypes around men and women and outlook with respect to men and women to suitable roles and ways of behaving. Findings of numerous studies reveal that gender-stereotypic categorization influence conclusions about men and women (Deaux & Lewis, 1984, Noseworthy and Lott, 1984). Previous researches on the subject matter of gender stereotypes disclosed that men are commonly viewed as "agentic, aggressive and instrumental" whereas women were conventionally seen as "passive, relational and emotional" (Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; Ashmore, Del Boca, & Wohlers, 1986; Eagly, 1987; Lippa, 1990; Martin, 1987; Spence, Deaux, & Helmreich, 1985). However, at the same time there exists sizable empirical confirmation that behavioral resemblances between men and women are considerably prominent than are the dissimilarities. Still, a universal belief in such gender dissimilarities continues to exist and is indicated by the inclination of both male and female perceivers to ascribe characteristics, behavioral traits and even source for similar functioning to the gender of the individual (Hoffman and Pasley, 1998). If these societal gender stereotyping exists in various aspects of social life, do they also exhibit in collective action?

Why are names like Niru Mahanta and Kumudini Gogoi unknown to the common public, despite their notable work in the Assam Movement? It is argued by Kuumba (2001) who introduced the topic of the “gendered terrain of social movements”, that this undetectability of the labor of women comrades in social movements is not an accident but rather it is indicative of the numerous ways in which gender biasness acts out internally within major social movements. After the politicization of a social movement happens, men tend to take over the political leadership no matter what degree of prominence role of women have been or continue to be in the movement (Bechtold, 2004). This inconsistency in the assignment of duties on the basis of gender reflects enormously on the society in which it exists. It displays the wider societal practices, thinking, and cognition of the members of the specific community. Gender is not merely a biological term but rather is a cultural aspect, that influences cognitive practices.

Numerous social movement scholars in the 1970s who engaged in the gendered studies of social movement began with the motive to diminish the indiscernibility of women’s roles in the movement; the more current academic studies of social movements believe that each and every social movement are gendered (Bechtold, 2004). Depending on their ascribed gender roles, men and women have unequal levels of structural availability, giving way to the gendered division of labor within social movements. In general, social movements display gender structure and hierarchy that already is prevalent in society. Hence, women’s participation in social movements is effortlessly transitioned to activities pertaining to caretaking, or provisioning. Feminist scholars interested in the social movement studies have also called notice and recognition to the gendering of social movement processes and theory. Feminists writers (Blee, 1996, 1998; Marx Ferree and Yancy Martin, 1995; Naples, 1992, 1998; Ray, 1999; G. West and Blumberg, 1990) reveal that gender, as a matter of fact, is a predominate characteristic of social movements. Empirical research of feminists social scientists proposes that “gender hierarchy is so persistent that, even in a movement that purports to be gender-inclusive, the mobilization, leadership patterns, strategies,

ideologies, and even the outcomes of social movements are gendered” (McNair Barnett 1993; Beckwith 1996; Blee 1991, 1996; P. Brown and Ferguson 1995; Marx Ferree 1994; Fonow 1998; Nagel 1998; Robett 1996, 1997; Staggenborg 1998; Taylor 1996; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995). However, in current times the field of social movement has surprisingly failed to attend to the gender processes in the social sciences. Relatively scant attention has been paid by the mainstream scholars of social movement and especially the field of social psychology of collective action. The current study attempts to fill this gap by examining the “gendered terrain” in the context of the Assam Movement (1979-1985).

The previous Chapter revealed numerous cognitive practices that were executed in the Assam Movement. One such theme was the humungous and impressive participation of women coming from various backgrounds. AASU mobilized women's comrades by activating inside of them the feeling of “motherhood”, that “mother Assam” required their engagement to free herself from the clutches of foreign nationals threatening their existence, and the future generation of Assam (Sharma, 2017). Women were charged with emotions and never shied away from the numerous activities planned and strategized by the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU). They bravely participated in rallies, marches, blockades, *bandhs*, *satyagraha*, hunger strikes. They in fact spearheaded many of the activities. They stood in front as a shield to block the police personnel from attacking the masses, in the course of which they endured police batons, tear gas, water cannons, etc. bravely. To mobilize other women comrades, they went door to door seeking support and participation to the cause on the call of AASU (Sharma, 2017). During the Movement, they left behind their own feminine issues and struggles, ventured into the battle for the larger interest of their state (Sultana, 2013). Despite all the efforts, they laid down, Assamese women never became a part of any central body or member of an important decision-making committee. When the time came to recognize and merit their efforts, no attempts were made by the AASU to thank them by entrusting upon them significant roles in the formal spaces. When the movement was in operation, they were used as women force, as a citizen,

but soon after the movement concluded, they were termed as “women” (Sharma, 2017). When the historical Assam Accord was signed, no woman was present on the board. No woman made her presence to the peace-making committee, or even in the iconic Assam Accord. There was no mention of any welfare schemes or plan especially dedicated to women in the Accord. The present study, therefore, attempts to understand whether a movement as widespread and enormous as Assam Movement was gendered, whether the division of labor was skewed on gender lines. Were Assamese men and women who gave tremendous sacrifice merited equally? Were Assamese women marginalized and unrepresented from powerful and dominant positions and roles during and after the movement? Was Assam Movement like all other social movements gendered? Were the cognitive practices employed in the movement gendered?

## **8.2 The Present Study**

Cognition of an individual and the larger society reflects itself in personal life, occupational paths and in various other domains. One such domain is the social movement. A social movement is a progressive space where people inclusive of both males and females, come together to accomplish the overarching purpose of bringing certain social change in the society, whether at the individual level or the institutional level. Assam movement (1979-1985) led by the All Assam Student’s Union (AASU) was one such arena that witnessed huge participation of masses from all sections of the society and its distinct feature was the enormous assemblage of women of all age groups and background. Participation of women agitators was observed in all major activities- rallies, marches, boycotts, sit-ins, blockades. They stood in front of the lines as a buckler to defend the masses from the various atrocities (water cannons, tear gas, batons, imprisonment, etc.) of police personnel. They were an important constituent of many women associations and organizations whose primary objective was to mobilize more and more women comrades, to aid the ones injured, or collect donations for AASU. Women agitators were no less than men in terms of endurance and strength. Still, once the movement terminated, women did not see the light of the day. They were not present

in any relevant formal spaces. The present study, therefore, wishes to investigate if and in what manner gender differences played out internally within and after the culmination of the Assam movement. The study also wanted to examine whether AASU is a gender-neutral student organization.

## **8.3 Method**

### *8.3.1 Sample*

Eleven participants became a part of semi-structured interviews which continued for 30-50 minutes. The interviews were recorded with their consent. They were contacted using the snowball or referral chain technique (Browne, 2005). There were seven women participants and four male participants. To begin with, collecting the potential names and references who were active during the Assam movement, I went to the AASU page on Facebook and dropped a message asking for assistance. Very soon they sent across the contact number of the executive member of AASU. I immediately phoned him and discussed the purpose of my research and asked for the possible references I could interview. He suggested names and forwarded their contact details. I started interviewing the first female participant in New Delhi, a former professor in Cotton University (Guwahati) also a poet, novelist, and Sahitya Academic Award winner. She further furnished me with details of other participants I could meet and interview for my research. All the other interviews were held in Guwahati, at their respective offices and residences.

I was not looking for a representative sample but rather sought as much diversity as possible in the sample. The sample consisted of participants coming from various backgrounds- former professor of universities, housewife, advisor of AASU, think tank of AASU, editors of vernacular newspapers and magazines, ex MLAs, and PSU (public sector unit) employee. The age group ranged from 57-90 years. Only one belonged from the tribal (Bodo) community, the others came from upper castes. The use of the

snowball technique aided me as I contacted the next participant through the reference provided by the previous one, which made the building of rapport quicker and smooth. Most participants knew each other through a common background. Also, identifying myself as a Ph.D. scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, further helped the participants to trust and open up to me without much difficulty.

### *8.3.2 Interviews*

The interviews were carried out using a semi-structured schedule. The interviewer asked questions in English and occasionally in Hindi depending on the participants' comfort. Questions were asked by first making a statement:

The Assam movement lead by the AASU was a struggle for the preservation of Assamese identity, its culture, and its language, which was supported and recognized by an enormous number of people of the state. Among them, the most iconic was the participation of women. None of the movements in India before had seen such humungous participation of women, also documented by many researchers. Do you think women and men were treated equally during the movement period? Do you think women were given equal responsibilities and duties in the formal spaces? How many women members made it to the upper echelons of the administration once the movement terminated and AASU led government, Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) formed? What are your thoughts about AASU when it comes to providing equal opportunities to girls in their organization?

These questions provided the participants the ample space and needed framework to answer. It helped the participants to respond, keeping in mind to be specific to the power imbalance among the males and females in the Assam movement. The motive



here was to understand if there at all was any gender skewness in the movement and if there was then what made it so. AASU being a student union, the largest in the country comprises both male and female students, then why is AASU called the ‘boys’ organization? I also wanted to unravel if AASU was a biased organization.

Participants were able to elaborate on this fairly well. Since all of them had been active participants in the Assam movement, they could reflect on the topic and narrated instances in detail. Most of the women participants while narrating was emotionally charged and one could sense the disappointment in their voice. However, the male participants in their narration kept themselves quite impersonal and neutral in their tone. In some instances, probing was required to further capture their understanding of the issue. Overall, the interview sessions went well, furnishing me with insights that were not previously available in the literature.

### *8.3.3 Analytic Strategy*

The objective of the analysis was to explore and capture if gender differences persisted in the Assam movement. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke; 2006, 2012) was found suitable for the current study. “Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.57). One of the main advantages of using Thematic analysis is that it is very flexible and can be carried out in various ways. I primarily used the inductive form which is a bottom-up approach, where the codes and themes are taken out from the content of the interview. Additionally, I also ran the six-phase approach to thematic analysis traced by Braun and Clarke (2006,2012). Phase 1) the audio interviews were transcribed in English and Hindi, aiding further to *familiarize* with the data. Phase 2) once the interviews were transcribed, they were then read intently numerous times to generate *initial codes* keeping in mind the probable pertinent research questions. The codes were scribbled on the paper itself ranging

from one word to one-line sentences. Phase 3) codes that clustered around a particular issue were collated which assisted the *searching of themes*. A preliminary thematic map was outlined at this stage giving more clarity. Phase 4) once the thematic map was outlined, the *themes were reviewed* once again to explore if anything was left behind or has the themes been made correctly. Some codes were discarded at this point. Some themes were clubbed into one. Phase 5) once it was clear what themes to be present, they were *named*. The naming and defining stage of themes had to be done numerous times, as it was not really capturing the essence of the codes. And more importantly the research questions. Phase 6) eventually, the right extracts were identified that fit each theme well so that it is reflected when *producing the report*. The last and final phase of the thematic analysis is presented in the next section.

#### 8.4 Analysis

Three themes were revealed using thematic analysis that shed light on the gendering of the Assam movement and the existence of gender bias within the AASU. The three themes arrived at were the *Patriarchal face of the Assam movement*, *Lack of feminist consciousness*, and *“AASU is very male”: Gendered roles in the student organization*. The first two themes specifically revolve around the participation and discreditation of the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the society, i.e. women agitators in the Assam movement, the third theme deals with the unbalanced representation (ratio of boys and girls) and duties assigned to women/girls in the AASU organization. We will now expound on each theme in detail.

*Table 8.1*

Transcripts	Codes	Themes
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<p>Women were always at the forefront during the movement and they kind of carry the cultural baggage. They were made to wear traditional attire, they make a nice appearance in their traditional clothes, they are always in the forefront but when it came to leadership, when it came to decision-making, when it came to the aftermath of the movement, when they were forming the governments then women were nowhere. They were all the time just companions, or messengers, things like that, and quite exploited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-women at the forefront of every activity</li> <li>-they are forced to wear the traditional attire</li> <li>-no leadership to women</li> <li>-not a member of the decision-making body</li> <li>-given menial jobs</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 1. The patriarchal face of the Assam movement</p>
<p>Like I was in Dibrugarh university for 35 years I used to go on telling the girls, the smarter girls in the class why don't you contest, they don't because AASU don't encourage women to do that and they don't feel and they always worship their dadaas thinking they will be their leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-girls do no contest elections at the college/university level</li> <li>-AASU does not encourage</li> <li>-girls also don't feel like</li> <li>- believe that men belong to the domain of leadership</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 2. Lack of development of feminist consciousness</p>
<p>AASU is very male. AASU till today. I keep telling AASU that you are so male and where are the women? They are not visible at all. I have not seen any women at least in the last 30-40 years. Like the Dibrugarh university students' union, we were there all the time to participate in all these events. Women are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-AASU male-dominated</li> <li>-no women representation</li> <li>-girls present for superficial jobs like</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 3. "AASU is very male": Gender skewness in the student organization</p>

<p>just brought in to dance or sing or serve tea or receive people, they are always at the reception committee. So, I kept thinking- for how long will you be phool rani? Your role is only phool rani? Serving tea?</p>	<p>serving tea or sing or garland people  -serious roles only for males in AASU</p>	
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*Theme 1. The patriarchal face of the Assam movement*

I wanted to understand from the participants if there was gender disparity in the dispersal of important roles and positions in the decision-making bodies or any other manner of observation of male domination prevalent in the Assam movement. Examining the following extracts from female participants coming from different occupations.

Extract 1. (F, 64, Former Professor of Dibrugarh University):

Women were always at the forefront during the movement and they kind of carried the cultural baggage. They were made to wear traditional attire, they make a nice appearance in their traditional clothes, they are always in the forefront but when it came to leadership when it came to decision-making when it came to the aftermath of the movement when they were forming the governments then women were nowhere. They were all the time just companions, or messengers, things like that, and quite exploited.

Extract 2. (F, 60, Former professor of North-eastern Hill University):

So, we had opposed this when they (AASU) tried to put a dress code for women, that all women should come in Mekhela chador. We said no. Our point is how

can you put a dress code? They were very upset about it that you know how can you say that? this is our tradition. I said, then you have it for men also, men should also wear the ethnic traditional wear, you cannot just have it for women only. We had a big fight actually on that with the boys. It's not that we are against it but we are not going to submit to this.

From the above extracts, one can gauge that the Assamese women had become the casualty of patriarchy in the Assam movement. The movement went on for six long years and it became successful by the participation of the common public from all segments but the one which drew the most attention by intellectuals across the country was the engagement of women and girls from both modest and noble families. Women came out in large numbers as already mentioned in study 1. The AASU, however, had imposed on the women participants a dress code i.e. Mekhela chador, the traditional attire of an Assamese woman, justifying that it is a tradition of Assam and women should comply, as mentioned in extract 2. This foisting of dress code was done on the garb of patriarchy where the responsibility was always laid on women to “be a good human being, a good mother, and a good citizen” (Barthakur, 1980). She is continually expected to carry the cultural baggage, while the men on the other hand persisted at their own convenience. The Assamese men were never placed on that pedestal of proving themselves as “a good human being” or “an ideal Assamese person”, that room was only left for the local women to demonstrate. However, despite such involvement at various activities like picketing, *satyagraha*, rallies or blockades, and members of different organizations, they were never taken into consideration while going for talks and negotiations with the Prime Minister in New Delhi, or when the movement culminated with the signing of Assam Accord in 1985 none of women representatives was present in the board meeting summoned by Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister. Previous researchers in Gender studies had recognized two chief features: wellbeing and welfare activities being the domain of women and regulation and assertion being the domain of the men (Denmark and

Paludi, 2008). In the Assam Movement too, the numerous women associations and organizations that were formed by AASU-AAGSP dealt with the medical and material assistance provided to the victims of agitation, and some provided financial aid to the treasury of AASU, but arenas like leadership and positions of authority were occupied by the Assamese men only. As mentioned in extract 1 that women were nowhere, they were never invited or deemed noteworthy to be a part of these meetings or talks which decided the fate of Assam. But when the AASU needed their support, they were called upon as ‘mothers’ who needed to come out and fight for the cause of the state. “It is the duty of ‘mothers’ to support them wholeheartedly. Women were speaking what they were expected to speak” (Sharma, 2017).

During the movement, numerous women's associations and organizations were formed by AASU-AAGSP to educate the masses about the cause and to mobilize supporters. In every activity called by AASU, women, and girls spearheaded it. They formed the strongest agitators among the others (employees, peasants). They continually stood at the front of every rally or procession turning themselves into a shield as a protection for the men. They faced police batons, tear gas, water cannons and many were assaulted and raped by the military personnel. As Sharma (2017) raised in her writings too that “Whenever any violent incident took place women were the first and worst sufferer of it - be it the violence and rape in north Kamrup district or the Nellie and Gohpur massacre. While the leaders of AASU or AAGSP used to address the masses for carrying on the agitation they themselves rarely joined the crowd. Whenever tear gas or water cannon or lathi charge happened the ordinary agitators had to bear the brunt. Women agitators could not run fast in the face of such action, and they used to end up being thrashed and humiliated.” In the very same lines, it was mentioned by many female participants in my interviews that they were taken advantage of and used as protectors rather than as women's force. They were expected to be of service, by triggering inside of them the sentiment that “motherland” is in danger who was to be freed from the grip of illegal foreigners. Treacherous and unsafe

tasks like blockades, or sending across a message secretly were designated to women comrades as mentioned in the following extracts.

Extract 3. (F, 60, ex MLA):

Women were always in the forefront because when the police come to beat, if women are there on the forefront, so they are used as a shield but not as a women force, not per se the women interests are involved. They were mainly used as protection and they were the homemakers, they were the caregivers, they could give selfless service.

Extract 4. (F, 57, editor of Nandini magazine):

Very tough works were assigned to women such as blockade of oil, blockade of rail, these are very risky and dangerous things they did you know. They were used to send messages secretly as the newspapers would arrive 2-3 days later. But when the time came for part-sharing women are really deprived. so ultimately, we are from a patriarchal society.

When the movement finally culminated with the signing of the Assam Accord between the central government and leaders of AASU and AAGSP in 1985, as indicated before there was no women representation there, apart from this inadequacy, the accord itself had no mention about the welfare or protection of her rights. All those numerous women's associations and organizations were dissolved, and most women went back to their kitchen and household chores. Researches on gender roles show that women are better viewed as caregivers who do the marketing, look after the house, and provide emotional support (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Women having given their heart and soul to the movement had endangered their lives for their state, for their “motherland” leaving behind their own issues, none of the leaders of that time deliberated about the women force. Once the Accord was signed, the leaders of the Assam Movement formed their own regional party *Assam Gana Parishad (AGP)* which came to power immediately, only three women (Rekha Rani Das Bodo, Saraswati

Sinha, and Jyotsana Sonowal) were given the authorization to contest elections. Sharma (2017) in the book *Rethinking Gender History: Essays on Northeast India and Beyond* writes, “So engrossed were the office bearers with patriarchal notions that even after assuming the reins of the government women were never made inclusive, rather a separate organ of *Mahila Parishad* was formed.” The leaders of the Assam Movement as also mentioned in extract 5 were gender-insensitive men. Coming from a patriarchal society itself, they wanted to take all the credit.

Extract 5. (F, 60, Former professor of North-eastern Hill University):

But if you look at the Assam Accord there is not a single thing about women, that what are women going to get. You see that gender sensitivity is nil. It was nil in the whole movement. They only wanted women to be out in that thing at the forefront so that the CRPF cannot attack the men. You know just to have a symbolic presence is not the thing. It has to come out to what they have signed. In what they have signed there is nothing, that even if they had said that they will protect the land women should get equal share in the land, *pattas* should be in the name of the woman something you know where women find a place. It is very difficult for women, the fact that they came out on the streets they took note of that. and I think these boys were also young and obviously, they come from a society that is patriarchal so obviously, you can't expect them to have any other kind of sensitivity. I know some of their advisors absolutely patriarchal. Those were also totally gender-insensitive men.

In my interviews with male participants on the prevalence of patriarchal structure in the movement, apart from two participants who acknowledged it, the others outright denied it. They mentioned that it is not the culture of Assam, where males dominate females, that Assam is a state where people are open also to inter-caste or inter-religion marriages. One of the interviewees mentioned- “it's not true. It is 100% wrong. In Assam, we don't have a culture like that. In Assam, we don't even think of keeping women behind or suppress them, and on other hand encourage men to progress.



There is one thing though, we don't inspire housewives to go out and work in the office, but it also doesn't mean that we will keep her locked in the house, be it my wife or my daughter." This is a classic case where endorsement of the patriarchal system is possible where one disparages women and concurrently appears to be one that merits and values women. It is the gender version of the often-heard proverb: "I am not prejudiced, but..." (Shields & Diccico, 2011)

### *Theme 2. Lack of development of feminist consciousness among women*

Once it was clear to me that there was the presence of patriarchy that played out in the Assam movement, I became even more intrigued to understand how the women participants dealt with it. Did they come out and confront the leaders of the Assam Movement? Did they voice out the unfair treatment meted out on them? Did they speak against the biased representation of men in the pecking order? Or did they choose to remain silent and quietly carry on with their lives. Let's now examine the following extracts.

Extract 1. (F, 64, Former professor of Dibrugarh University):

Like I was in Dibrugarh university for 35 years I used to go on telling the girls, the smarter girls in the class why don't you contest, they don't because AASU don't encourage women to do that and they don't feel and they always worship their *dadaas* thinking they will be their leaders.

Extract 2. (F, 62, ex MLA):

*Toh us time mein kya sochta tha mahila log ne, yahi sochta tha ki humara jo leaders hai unhe banne do. Government banana hai. karne do unlogo ko. Karne do. Toh us time pe ye feelings tha nahin, bilkul nahin tha. Wo sirf campaign kiya, support kiya ki government banana hai.*

Extract 3. (M, 50, Advisor of AASU):

See the feeling is there, that they are “our boys”, and we (women) are guiding them. so, when the police approach to lathi charge, women came first to protect the boys.

Extract 4. (F, 60, Former Professor of North-eastern Hill University):

..that I agree that there really wasn't any very deep feminist consciousness even amongst women so that was 1979-85, so that was a period when in all Indian contexts also the feminist movement were not very strong.

The deployment of women agitators in the Assam movement was not out of worry or concern for women issues or for addressing any feminine agenda. Rather a sexist attitude of the leaders of the Assam movement was discernible when they foisted dress code for college-going girls and woman professors. They made it a mandatory act to wear traditional Assamese attire, that is, Mekhela Chador (Kolas, 2017). Many women organizations and associations that were set up by the leaders of the Assam Movement, aided further in the mobilization of potential supporters in rural settings too. These organizations were not devoid of gender bias, as they provided little or nil autonomy to voice out problems on women's matters. The contribution made by the girl students in the agitation by AASU was depreciated and sidelined. They were attacked by comments like ‘women who agitated were manipulated by the male agitators’ and ‘women agitators in Narengi oil field were having pastry and tea as if they were on a picnic’ (Sharma, 2017). When the movement ended, women were pushed back to conventional duties and the four walls of the house. Their involvement in the movement went unrecognized and so did the room they created for themselves in the Assam politics. “The contribution made by the women went unreported and their space in the movement was limited to that of mere victims (of rape and assault) in reports on the conflict situation.” (Phukon, 2008)

It only seemed natural to understand then, in what manner did the women participants try to break this glass ceiling of patriarchy. Questions were asked keeping the background of women's immense contribution to the Assam Movement in mind. However, the response received was surprising. Only very few women became a mouthpiece for the prevalent gender bias and the need to break through it. The other interviewees, one who was a housewife (belong to the middle class) completely rebuffed the idea that patriarchy existed in the movement. She even went on to justify the AASU leaders stating that, since those people were well informed and more cognizant of the situation, it was reasonable for them to lead the organizations and associations. It was never a problem for the housewives' association to have the men to lead or even to take the credit for it. She went on to say that they were "our boys" fighting for the cause of the state, so we did whatever we could to help them achieve their objectives. Mary Becker (1999) explains this case very aptly- "Women assure men that they are real men by deferring to them, by allowing them to set the agenda and do most of the talking, and by stroking their egos in countless other ways. In women's eyes, men see themselves as they should be: independent, autonomous, strong, and successful." Another interviewee who also outrightly denied the existence of patriarchy was an ex-MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly). Even though she mentioned numerous times during the interview session that she had to fight for her position extremely hard within the AASU organization and that many a time she was denied the role by the AASU. Her justification for this was that members of AASU are elected through a democratic process, it is all about votes. She never received enough votes to gain a position. In extract 2, she states that women during that period did not think for themselves, they thought about the cause, their only concern was to make their own government who could expel the infiltrators out of the state and so if the leaders of the movement were going ahead with important positions and roles, let them. Her denial of the pervasiveness of patriarchy in the Assamese society and yet admitting to the struggle she had undergone within the AASU cries out the lack of development of feminist consciousness among the Assamese middle-class women. As Becker (1999)

writes, “In a patriarchal culture, there is a strong tendency to deny conflicts of interest between women and men despite obvious inequalities in the allocation of responsibilities and scarce resources. Because women and men live together in intimate relationships as parents and children or husbands and wives, we are reluctant to admit conflicts of interest. And it is easy to deny conflicts of interest because patriarchy justifies inequalities and injustices, violence, in terms of women's choices and defects: if women get what they choose or deserve, we need not worry about conflicts of interest nor that mostly male decision-makers divide the pie.”

There were, however, other women belonging to the intellectual class who did vocalize their issues and concerns. In extract 1, it is stated by one of the female interviewees that despite continuous imploring to the girls of her class to make headway in the university elections, they chose to remain unengaged and uninvolved in the politics justifying that those positions and roles are reserved for their *dadaas* (older brothers) and that they are satisfied being led by them. This section of women acknowledged and recognized the absence of feminist consciousness among a large number of women during that period, who continuously consented for the men to lead and were comfortable in their shells. Even today, many girl students at the college or university level either do not contest elections because they still perceive that it is not a domain for girls to be in and even if they do, they are barred from reaching the pinnacle in the hierarchy within AASU.

In short, the imbalance and inconsistencies connected to sex, religion, class, ethnicity, etc. are generated and reconstructed in the social structures and the individuals who reside in them. In the current context of the Assam Movement, where the Assamese society is arranged around the needs of the men, the state of things are seen from their bird's eye view, their traits and characteristics are perceived as most treasured and worthwhile and they as it goes without saying have a command and influence over politics and culture. This demonstrates the cognitive practice that persists in the Assamese society. This inconsistency in the assignment of duties on the basis of gender

and the manner in which women are viewed reflects enormously on the society in which it exists. It displays the wider societal practices, thinking, and cognition of the members of the specific community.

*Theme 3. “AASU is very male”: Gendered roles in the student organization*

From the movement days, till the present time, I had only heard about AASU being called “our boys”. AASU is a student organization, where students are both boys and girls. So why is it that AASU is known more in terms of a “boys” organization? What about the girls? AASU is the largest student union in the entire country, but little attention has been paid to the internal narrative of the representation of girls and boys and the unbalanced dispersal of duties within AASU. Below are some extracts that hope to throw some light on this.

Extract 1. (F, 57, Editor of Nandini magazine):

AASU it’s a boys’ organization, almost a boys’ organization because girls are only there to garland people, to give bouquet and to sing AASU’s theme song. Only for that girls are there.

Extract 2. (F, 64, Former professor of Dibrugarh University):

AASU is very male. AASU till today. I keep telling AASU that you are so male and where are the women? They are not visible at all. I have not seen any women at least in the last 30-40 years. Like the Dibrugarh university students’ union, we were there all the time to participate in all these events. Women are just brought in to dance or sing or serve tea or receive people, they are always at the reception committee. So, I kept thinking- for how long will you be phool rani? Your role is only phool rani? Serving tea?

Extract 3. (F, 60, Former professor of North-eastern Hill University):

AASU is absolutely patriarchal let me tell you. In fact, that's what I told them publicly also that you may look at your executive there are no women there. When you say All Assam Students' Union, so students are both boys and girls, so where are your girls? Why aren't they there? They may come out to support your movement but that doesn't mean.. why they not in decision-making bodies?

Extract 4. (F, 60, ex MLA):

You know the whole structure of AASU, there are no women in the whole structure. There is not even a single lady in an important position, can you imagine even in a district. In AASU, there are no women.

On two occasions I had visited the Swahid Nyas Bhawan in Guwahati which is the informal headquarter of AASU, where all the crucial decisions are taken, signatures on important documents are done, press meetings are held and critical announcements are issued and declared in the name of AASU. On both occasions, I never spotted any girl student visiting or even a name being mentioned in the executive member. When enquired further on the same to my interviewees, it became very evident that AASU is dominated by boys even today.

One must understand and put to notice that student leadership roles in organizations like student unions especially when it is the most popular and the largest union in the country is significant as they comprise of, as Loader et al. (2014) have pointed out, the 'first significant rung on the ladder for professional recognition and future advancement' for those who strive to be in the profession of political activity. Many of them who were part of AASU later went on to become MLAs or cabinet ministers, and two of the former AASU Presidents (Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Sarbananda Sonowal) were also elected as the Chief Minister of the state. Therefore, making sure that all social groups acquire a just and objective opportunity of standing for such roles and positions is critical (Brooks, 2015). Moreover, research from various countries has

advanced that “smaller student societies, often facilitated by the students’ union, are important loci for young people to develop their political habitus, providing space for the development and performance of the political self” (Loader et al., 2014). However, in the context of AASU, girls and women are kept out not just from reaching the top in the hierarchy but there is also a skewed representation in the executive member of AASU as mentioned in extract 3. It is consistently stated by all the female interviewees that the presence of women in AASU is not less than a laughing stock. Girls are underrepresented, and those who are present are designated menial and domestic jobs like serving tea, or garlanding people, or singing songs in well draped Mekhela Chador, thereby reinforcing the gender stereotype that the girls belong in that domain and remain an eye candy to the audience, while the boys take up the leadership positions and other serious roles. No skilled and serious engagements are entrusted to girls. Researches reveal that women’s skills and aptitudes are often ‘misrecognized’ (usually unintentional) through gender bias (Morley, 2013). Studies have also shown that within student’s union, men are more likely than women to assume leadership roles (Brooks, 2009), while Roker and Eden’s (2002) research on youth participation more generally indicated that although more females than males took part in ‘social action’ projects, young men were more heavily involved in leadership roles in youth councils which, they argue, had a more ‘masculine’ image. AASU, therefore, is a social structure that is male-centered, male-identified, male-dominated, and which valorizes qualities narrowly defined as masculine.

When I probed further about the biased representation of women to the advisor and the think tank of AASU, both of whom are males, they placed the entire onus on the women stating that women only do not come forward to contest, so if they really had an urge to do something for the Assamese society they would automatically advance. He (unofficial advisor) reasoned that most girls come from modest families and their only priority is to complete studies and acquire employment to support their families. Therefore, most of the girls are not interested in joining the student politics, so

naturally, the numbers are bend toward the boys. On other hand, the advisor of AASU justified the skewed numbers of girls ratio to boys communicating that girls only come to district level but not to the state level because of “practical reasons” such as they can’t be out late at night for work because of safety purpose, or one has to move around the place continuously, so it is a very demanding and challenging task for a girl. All the above-mentioned explanations directly hint at benevolent sexism present in the functioning of AASU. Both these men had applauded and praised the participation of women in the Assam Movement but when the question came to providing women serious and critical roles, they furnished such petty clarifications. Benevolent sexists have a positive attitude towards women but that ultimately characterize women as wonderful, yet weak (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997). Past research has found positive effects of benevolent sexism such as its association with positive stereotypes and evaluation of women (e.g. Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al ., 2000). Benevolent sexism is more prevalent and socially accepted in today’s society, and women are just as likely as men to hold benevolent sexist attitudes. (Becker, 2010; Glick & Fiske, 2011); both men and women oftentimes do not perceive benevolent sexism as gender discrimination (e.g. Barreto & Ellermers, 2005; Beckers, 2010). At the same time, this subjective positivity of benevolent sexism masks how it reinforces gender inequality. For example, past research has found that treating women in a benevolent sexist manner undermines women’s cognitive performance (Dardenne, Dumont, Bollier, 2007), that benevolent sexist managers are more likely to assign women to a less challenging role in the workplace (King et al., 2012) and the endorsement of benevolent sexism related to support status quo (Becker & Wright, 2011; Jost & Kay, 2005). The same can be witnessed with respect to AASU, where girls’ cognitive performance is enormously underestimated, and are assigned less demanding roles whereas the “boys” enjoy dominant positions and responsibilities, thereby strengthening gender inequality and discrimination.

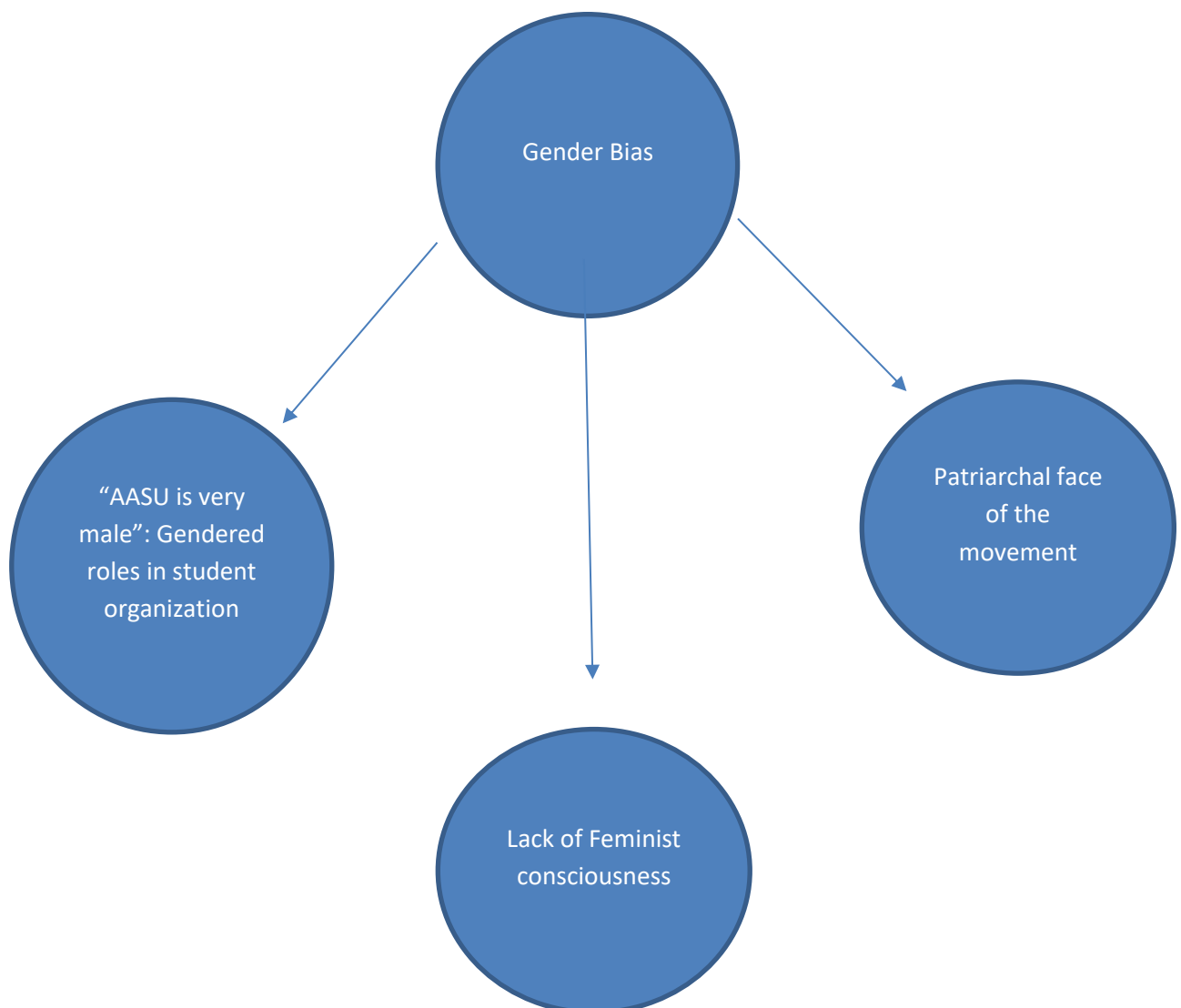
Hence, it can be stated very safely that AASU is a male-centered, male-identified, and male-dominated student union where girls do not find a place for themselves in the



apex bodies and their presence is only to entertain and delight. The AASU is a patriarchal body whose men come from a patriarchal society. Even though they admire and applaud women for the involvement and sacrifices they made and continue to make for the state however directly or indirectly these men have pushed women back to their traditional roles as homemakers and caretakers and offer such excuses that women cannot takeover such substantial and massive duty thereby strengthening the gender stereotypes further and maintaining the status quo.

Below is the thematic map, where three themes are arrived at from one central component, that is, gender bias.

Figure 8.1



## 8.5 Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore and understand the women's position and status in the Assam Movement and within the All Assam Students' Union that spearheaded the Assam Movement in 1979-85. The present analysis revealed three themes that arrived from a central theme, that is, gender bias. The first theme was the patriarchal face of the Assam Movement, the second was the lack of development of feminist consciousness among women and finally, the last theme dealt with AASU being a male-dominated organization- "AASU is very male": Gendered roles in the student organization. Women's participation in the iconic Assam Movement had been immense and widespread. Women from all backgrounds, caste, class, age, the community came out on the streets for a cause that had been causing distress and threat to the state of Assam for the longest time. Women were organized in numerous associations and organizations by the AASU to enlighten the masses about the cause and to mobilize potential supporters from both rural and urban settings. Women walked many kilometers, went door to door seeking support. They attended numerous meetings and public gatherings summoned by AASU-AAGSP. At the call of AASU, they came out from their homes, quickly concluding the household chores like cooking, cleaning, etc., and marched out strong and determined. They participated in activities like rallies, marches, *satyagrahas*, picketing, oil or rail blockades and continually stood at the forefront, frequently acted as a shield, as a defense between the agitators and the police force. They faced police batons, water cannons, tear gasses, they were thrashed and whipped and even at times assaulted and raped by the military personnel. A tremendous amount of sacrifice and hardships went through, but they never paused, they came out even stronger and forceful. They raised slogans harder,

marched ahead more fiercely to bring this agitation to its final heights. They excellently balanced both home and the activities of agitation. They cooked for the injured, provided medical assistance, converted their homes into shelter and sanctuary for the agitators, and at times even as a hideout.

Despite all that they undertook and went through, they were never presented with significant and serious positions within AASU or after the culmination of the agitation in the regional party, except for two women (who fought immensely for a position in the party). All they received was oral acknowledgment and respect, more like a consolation for the absence of true recognition and accreditation. There was an existence of patriarchy in how the movement was led. It was led by males who needed support from the women's section to give the movement the required force. For important talks and negotiations, no woman accompanied these men to New Delhi, at the signing of the Assam Accord that determined the fate of Assam, for which the women force gave up their lives and dropped their own issues, no women representative lay her hand in the final documents. The famously infamous Assam Accord had no reference to the protection and safeguarding of women's rights. The AASU even today has no women in its executive. The girls who did go on to contest and won were limited to zonal or district level only, no woman reached the state level neither did the AASU ever attempt to propel the young women to contest and advance in the organization, encourage and induce in them the potential they carry, that they are the reservoir of vigor and power to change the state of affairs. On no occasion, such an endeavor was made by the “boys” of AASU.

AASU, who was the trailblazer of the Assam Movement is male-centered, male-identified, and male-dominated, that is why AASU was called and is still called a “boy’s” organization. AASU’s patriarchal structure is natural because the people who formed it belong to a patriarchal system themselves. And they repudiate this claim categorically on the ground that they do appreciate and admire women’s efforts and hardships, implying at benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) is prevalent. Glick and

Fiske define benevolent sexism as “a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that is subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure) (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Benevolent sexism is a subjectively positive orientation of protection, idealization, and affection directed toward women that, like hostile sexism, serves to justify women’s subordinate status to men” (Glick et al., 2000, p. 763). The AASU “boys” are benevolent sexist men who associate the traditional and conventional roles like caregivers and homemakers to women and challenging and serious roles such as leading a group or managing the organization are not entrusted upon them because they are fragile and weak, that the girls cannot be out late at night and the tasks and jobs of the student union are too demanding for a girl, therefore, such positions should be reserved for men only. They grossly undermine their cognitive capabilities. The fuel to this fire is added by the women themselves especially from the middle class, who continue to perceive that arenas like leadership are the domain for men. So, they make way for men, they do not contest, they do not fight, they do not challenge such actions of men. There is the exclusion of feminist consciousness among these women. Feminists presume that women and men are equal (Gager, 1974) and they are committed to the goals, beliefs, and values of the women’s movement (Freeman, 1975; Cassell, 1977). There is an absolute denial of patriarchy among these women too, and they live their lives quietly performing what they are expected to perform (household chores). There is a complete absence of feminist consciousness among the Assamese middle-class women, who are equal perpetrators to the existing gender bias and unequal status quo. Women become feminists either through a change in consciousness similar to a religious conversion (Micossi, 1970) or as a result of particular socialization patterns (Acker & Howard, 1972). Learning about gender is formed from the experience of having one’s behavior, beliefs, and attitudes being molded in terms of culturally defined gender-specific roles (Shields & Dicicco, 2011). Therefore, gender roles are substantially embedded in the

larger social structure. Apparently, only the intellectual class of Assamese women are exposed to such socialization or they have actually altered their consciousness to become more feminists in their attitudes as compared to the Assamese middle-class women who still choose to stay otherwise.

## **CHAPTER XI. EXAMINING CULTURAL THREAT BY EMPLOYING SOCIAL IDENTITY MODEL OF COLLECTIVE ACTION (SIMCA)**

In the previous two studies, I had employed the concept of Cognitive Praxis to better understand the meaning of social cognition in the context of the Assam Movement. Cognitive praxis as a concept is useful to investigate the numerous cognitive elements that surface during the movement. It is, however, inadequate to explain the various factors that set the movement in motion. Therefore, in order to throw light on the several components that aid the movement to commence, and demonstrate the importance of culture in cognition that could further help in elucidating the several triggers of the movement, I in the present study made use of the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) in the context of the recent anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (2019).

### **9.1 Introduction: Socio-Political Context of the Study**

On 11 December 2019, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) who is currently leading the Indian Government introduced the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in the parliament, and the same bill was passed by both the houses of the Parliament, turning the Bill into an Act. The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 proposes "that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> day of December 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made thereunder, shall not be treated as an illegal migrant for the purposes of this Act;" (Government of India, 2019). In short, the Act grants Indian citizenship to non-Muslims who made an entrance into the borders of India on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2014. The government further went on to justify this unfair treatment by furnishing with an explanation that Muslims can acquire shelter in other Islamic countries however the six religious groups who face persecution in Muslim majority nations have nowhere else to go, hence it becomes a duty for India to provide them sanctuary (The Economic Times, 2019). However, it is argued by many that the logic extended by the Centre is irrational and unreasonable because the Act does not extend protection to all religious minorities nor does it apply to all the neighboring countries (e.g. Sri Lanka, Myanmar). "The act also reduces the aggregate period of residential qualification for citizenship for those eligible from eleven years to six years of residency in India in the case of the aforementioned non-Muslim migrants from these three countries" (Henrich Böll Stiftung, 2019).

On the night of 10th January 2020, the Union Home Ministry released a notice that the Act will be effectuated with immediate effect (The Wire, 2020). Even before the announcement was made, protests began all across the country against the draconian Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). It must be noted, however, that protests in different parts of the country against CAA were for varied reasons. For example, most states went on massive protests claiming that the CAA was unconstitutional and reflects

discrimination against a particular community i.e. Muslim community. The Act does not open the country's doorway to Muslims which is against the secular ideology of the country. On the flip side, in other parts of the country, especially North-East India, the rationale for their protests was absolutely different. The Act maintains that "it would not apply to areas under the sixth schedule of the Constitution – which deals with the autonomous tribal-dominated regions in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. The bill will also not apply to states that have the inner-line permit regime (Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram)". (The Economic Times, 2020) This implies that only limited areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram are protected and secured, the other regions are still open for migrants to enter. Assam which shares its border with Bangladesh has been fighting the issue of illegal infiltration of Bangladeshi immigrants for over 50 years and this Act brings a major blow to them. If only limited regions are secured, then naturally the Act permits for Hindu Bangladeshi to pour in other parts of Assam, thereby stirring up the already existing threat and fear among the indigenous people of Assam of their culture, language, and identity. The fears of infiltration of illegal migrants are real, to many Assamese populations. Further, they allege that the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants through fake documents like voter ID, Aadhar Card, and other similar documents have now taken up the major share in employments and jobs. Consequently, a shared feeling of threat can be perceived among the local people of Assam, the panic is that they (Bangladeshi immigrants) over the years have gradually taken over the tribal lands and now the demography of the state is showing enormous change (Outlook, 2019). The people of Assam suspect that they will soon turn into a minority in their homeland and the CAA is the nightmare turning their fears into reality (India Today, 2020). After a period of 35 years, the people of Assam took to the streets once again headed by AASU (All Assam Students' Union) to oppose the Act and categorically stated that Assam would no longer endure the burden of Bangladeshi immigrants, as it already had tolerated the Bangladeshi immigrants (Hindu or Muslim) from 1951-1971, while the decree for the rest of the country pronounces that anybody who entered the country after 1951 without proper

documents was an illegal migrant. It was like a déjà vu for the older generation who revisited the trauma of the past. On the very same issue in 1979 Assam Movement was headed by AASU against the illegal settlement of Bangladeshi immigrants. The Movement went on for six long years, ending in 1985 with an accord signed by the AASU, AAGSP, and the Central Government. In spite of the unfairness on the part of the Centre, the AASU leaders agreed to consider 1971 as the cut-off year to ascertain the legal status of Bangladeshi immigrants. Perhaps, Assam is the only state in the entire nation wherein such a cut-off year is applied to determine the status of the immigrants. Now the CAA which has declared 2014 as the new cut-off year for the six religious groups from three Islamic nations is a violation of the Assam Accord. A large number of people of Assam outrightly rejected the Act stating that Assam will no longer welcome Bangladeshis anymore irrespective of their religious affiliations.

The protests against the CAA in the country first began in Assam where thousands of students took to the streets under the banner of AASU, and very soon the general public, artists (musicians, poets, actors), women, and academicians joined the wagon. “The protestors said the people of Assam won't accept the Citizenship (Amendment) Act as, they said, the new law would be a threat to the indigenous people of the state, the Assamese language, culture, heritage and civilization” (India Today, 2020). Once again the streets of Assam echoed with slogans like ‘we will give blood, but not our soil’, ‘*Joi Aai Asom*’ (Glory to Mother Assam,) and ‘*Aah Oi Aah, Ulai Aah*’ (Come Out, Come Out All) and the eternal tunes of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika resonated (The Wire and The Hindustan Times, 2020). The state is now witnessing new songs and poems with anti-CAA lyrics. Songs by famous singer and composer Bipin Chawdhary like ‘*Nagorikotwo Songsudhoni Bidheyok khon nelage*’ (We don't want CAA) and ‘*Jatir maatir gaan*’ (Song of my people and land) are in vogue during the anti-CAA protests (The Hindustan Times, 2020). “When something touches the heart of creative people it leads them to express it in their own way through their medium. Right now, due to Centre imposing CAA despite people's protests, Assam is seeing such creative outburst,” said eminent writer and Padma Shri winner Eli Ahmed (The Hindustan Times,



2020). Once again people from different walks of life came together and raised voice in one single rhythm. Once again, the cultural spirit of Assam was observed.

The Assam Movement which continued for six long years kept its momentum going through involvement in numerous cognitive practices enormously influenced by culture (Deka, 2010). During the Assam Movement, many cognitive practices colored with cultural meanings (music, fervent expression of emotions, leadership, language, strategies, and tactics adopted, etc.) were observed which aided students and the general public to intensify their collective action against the Government both at the Centre and the State. Culture for Assam as previously mentioned is hugely important and linked to their identity. In a similar vein, the threat to culture seems to be playing a tremendous role in the current anti-CAA protests in Assam as well.

## **9.2 Theoretical Model underlying the Study**

For both Study 1 and 2, I had employed the concept of cognitive praxis to better understand the meaning of social cognition in the context of collective action. Cognitive Praxis is a useful concept when one aspires to enquire about the various cognitive artifacts that operate while collective action is in progress and sustains it for a prolonged time. In short, cognitive praxis is functional once the collective action has begun, it however falls short to explain the various factors that drive the emergence of collective action. After an extensive review of literature, it was discovered that in order to examine the factors that result in the outset of collective action, the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) was suitable. As we have observed that culture helps individual to make sense of themselves, their social world, and their roles in the society. In view of the centrality of culture in individual's lives, study 3 attempts to examine the responses of individuals when their valued culture comes under threat. The study attempts to theorize the relation between a significant element of cognitive practice i.e., culture and collective action in the context of anti-CAA protests in Assam

headed by AASU by applying the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA). SIMCA posits that the social identity of an individual is the central element to account for individuals' group-based perceptions (perceived injustice) and group-based beliefs with respect to the capability of their group to produce the desired results or experiences (group efficacy) (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Although SIMCA has mostly been employed in western countries, a successful investigation in Asian contexts has recently been demonstrated (Li, Xu, Yang, & Guo, 2019). There are well-grounded reasons for the application of the SIMCA in the context of anti-CAA protests in Assam. First, there is long-established importance of Assamese identity for the people of Assam, which can be illustrated through the fact that previously Assam Movement demanding the detection and deportation of illegal migration of foreigners and currently the anti-CAA campaign launched by AASU where lakhs of people participated for the protection and to safeguard the Assamese identity. The preservation of Assamese identity is tremendously important to the local population. Second, perceived injustice has often been a pivotal reason to protest against the government. Previously in the Assam Movement people came out on streets in massive numbers in opposition to the government for its negligence and passivity in the deliverance of duty of protecting their citizens from external threat and in the current times students and the common masses once again took to the streets against the Government proposal on CAA. Third, "Collective efficacy is defined as members' shared belief of being able to achieve desired results through collective efforts" (Bandura, 2002), in the context of anti-CAA protests, the collective efficacy was observed among the masses who participated and got completely engaged in the rallies, picketing, *satyagrahas*, marches, hunger strikes, and similar activities. Slogans in Assamese were raised, writings on the walls were inscribed as a constant reminder to the masses of the undertaking, music by the legendary folk artists and current musicians were continuously played and numerous such cultural activities were organized by AASU to keep the momentum of the anti-CAA protests going. These instances signify an immense belief among the Assamese population in bringing change

in the current state of affairs. The more they participated in these cultural activities, the more their mission and execution became fierce and forceful in the backdrop of several adversities and hardships.

There is satisfactory evidence that culture is an important area of study within the collective action framework. Protests and demonstrations are not limited to western countries only, and it is being observed all across the globe, across cultural boundaries. Jasper (2017) furnishes with the description as to how emotions and identities are uncloaked in cultures, how through frames, narratives and leadership they are described and exhibited, and how across gender, ethnic, religious, or political groups, cultures state and mold the dynamics of collective action (p 279). The significance of language for collective action aimed at withstanding assimilation pressures was emphasized by Droogendyk and Wright (2017). It was suggested by them that because it personifies the past and present of a cultural group, language becomes an important component of culture. They went on to claim that language can be the central feature of cultural identity and can provide additional motivations to participate in collective action. Empirical works on the seriousness of culture in collective action have also been demonstrated in both within-culture and across-culture comparisons. Osborne et al. (2017) studied the colonial history of New Zealand and its consequences for the indigenous and non-indigenous population in regard to collective action. The results showed that the measures on two culture-specific ideologies, that is, historical negation and symbolic exclusion over time weakens collective action for both samples. Travaglino et al. (2017) emphasized on inspecting the Southern Italian culture and the occurrence of Italian criminal organizations using intracultural appropriation theory. The findings suggest that while studying collective action it is important to take into account culture-specific ideologies. In another study, Chayinska et al. (2017) investigated the reaction of a sample of 1,000 Ukrainian adults to the annexing of Crimea by Russia in 2014. The study made a connection between the social identity approach which is an important aspect in the social psychology of collective action to

the cultural construction of conflict frames. Fischer et al. (2017) employed samples from Germany, Turkey, and Japan to study collective action against sexism cross-culturally. Drawing upon the results of the study, he argued that the field of social psychology of collective action will profit hugely by using concepts from cultural psychology. Finally, in the Ukrainian context, support for more normative forms of collective action in relation to internal efficacy and external efficacy was carried out by Gulevich et al. (2017). The merging of external efficacy into the study of collective action was the contribution of this study.

These studies demonstrate that both the phenomenon and study of collective action are international. However, the problem as Zomeran & Louis put it, “is that we need to make sure that our measures are equivalent across the cultures we derive our samples from, preferably in a structural fashion (i.e., that the same measures have the same meanings in each culture) or at least in a functional fashion (i.e., different measures tapping into the same construct for different cultures).” By at least defining the concept of culture is a step forward in this direction. A working definition of culture in the social psychological study of collective action is proposed by Zomeran & Louis (2017) as, “any system of shared meanings that embeds individuals in social structure through their experience and enactment of their relationships and group identities.”

From the above researches, it is discernible that culture appears to be playing a vital role in setting off collective action. Assamese people who are immensely attached and sentimental about their culture, any threat to its continued survival is intolerable to them. The danger to their culture leads them to advance to the streets and oppose with great fervour. Consequently, the study of culture in the current setting appeared significant. We, therefore, sought to investigate how far threat to culture triggers the three key predictors of collective action i.e. social identity, injustice, and efficacy in the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA; van Zomeran et al., 2008).

### 9.3 The Present Research

I investigated in what capacity cognitive practices influenced by specific culture were utilized and contributed to collective action in Study 1. The study employed a qualitative method of data analysis, Thematic Analysis, to understand the interview data. The results displayed six themes that clearly showcased the gravity and seriousness with which culture (an important factor in cognitive practices) was employed to drive people of Assam out of their comfortable lives to the streets for a struggle that lasted for six long years. The current research, set in the backdrop of anti-CAA protests really, therefore, is an extension of Study 1, where the objective is to examine the role of threat to culture within the robust Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008). It was hypothesized that threat to culture would successfully activate the three central predictors of collective action i.e. social identity, collective self-efficacy, and group-based perception of injustice in the model.

### 9.4 Method

#### *9.4.1 Participants*

I recruited 188 Assamese students in the age group ranging from 17-28 years and studying at under graduation or post-graduation level in various colleges and universities of Assam. The sample comprised 123 males ( 65.42%) and 65 females ( 34.57%), 114 were Hindus (60.63%) and 74 were Muslims (39.36%). The participants were contacted using the snowball technique.

#### *9.4.2 Measures*

All responses were provided on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

***Injustice.*** The one-item Injustice scale (Zomeran, V.M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R., 2008) was used to assess participants' feelings of injustice. The item included was- "I think the way we are treated by the Government is unfair".

***Efficacy.*** For inclusion in the present study, five items (Fox and Schofield, 1989 and Mummendey et al. 1999) were selected. Items included were- "To what extent do you think this (collective action) will increase chances of the government changing their plans?", "I think that students can successfully protect the interests of Assam", "I think that students can really influence these decisions". The five items were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher levels of efficacy ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

***Social Identity.*** For determining social identity, the Five Dimension strength of the Ingroup Identification scale (Leach, van Zomeran, Ouwerkerk, Vliek, 2008) was used. The scale incorporated five sub-scales, Solidarity, Satisfaction, Centrality, Ingroup Homogeneity, and Individual Self-stereotyping. As Lovakov, Agadullina, and Osin (2015, p. 3) state: "Individual self-stereotyping is the degree to which an individual perceives herself as similar to an in-group prototype. In-group homogeneity is the degree to which an individual perceives her in-group as relatively homogeneous and distinct from relevant out-groups". Individual self-stereotyping and in-group homogeneity are, in turn, two dimensions of the group-level self-definition factor. The group-level self-investment factor organizes the remaining three components. Solidarity refers to "a sense of belonging, a psychological attachment to the in-group, and coordination with other group members. Satisfaction refers to the positive evaluation of the in-group. Centrality is the salience and importance of in-group membership" (Lovakov et al., 2015, p. 3). Under Solidarity, there were three items ("I feel a bond with the Assamese identity", "I feel solidarity with Assam") for Satisfaction there were four items ("I am glad to be an Assamese", "I think Assamese have a lot to be proud of"), for Centrality three ("I often think about the fact that I am Assamese",

“The fact that I am Assamese is an important part of my identity”), Ingroup Homogeneity two (“Assamese people have a lot in common with each other”) and Individual self-stereotyping, three items (“I am similar to the average Assamese person”).

***Collective Action Intentions.*** Five items (van Zomeren, Leach, et al, 2010; van Zomeren, 2004) assessed the collection action intentions of the participants in the present study. The five items were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher levels of collective action intention ( $\alpha = .93$ ). The items included were “I would like to vote against the decision of CAA”, “I would like to do something with fellow Assamese to voice up against CAA”.

***Cultural Threat.*** Twelve items were self-constructed by referring to the many news reports, articles, and blogs that indicated cultural threat expressed by the local people of Assam if the CAA was put into effect. The items included were “I feel there is a fear that application of CAA in Assam would lead to the extinction of our culture”, “I feel that the proposed Bangladeshi settlers are threatening to destroy the distinctiveness of Assam”, “CAA is an assault to our culture”. The twelve items were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher levels of cultural threat ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

#### *9.4.3 Procedure for Data Collection*

The data was collected during the COVID-19 lockdown period (March-June, 2020). An online questionnaire was created using the Google Form. Initially, it was planned that we would measure if “Assamese culture” ushers the local population to collective action (because people of Assam utilized and displayed their culture enormously aiding its population to come out in lakhs during the Assam Movement as demonstrated in Study 1). Items for social identity, efficacy, injustice, and collective action intention were taken from developed scales. However, there was no developed scale for measuring culture leading to collective action. Therefore, few culturally inclined items were constructed and inserted within already developed items. For

example, to measure In Group Identification, we used the Five Dimensions strength of In-Group Identification scale (Leach, van Zomeren, Ouwerkerk, and Vliek; 2008) which consisted of five dimensions- Solidarity, Centrality, Satisfaction, In Group Homogeneity and Individual Self-Stereotyping. Seven culturally inclined items like- ‘I feel like our folk music and dance makes us unique’, ‘I feel our language needs to be protected and preserved’ etc. were included in the Solidarity sub-scale. In the Centrality sub-scale, only one culturally inclined item- ‘I often think Assamese culture is an important part of my identity was incorporated. For the collective action intention scale, one such item –‘I would like to participate in raising our collective voice towards protecting the culture, language, and heritage of Assam’ was inserted. These items were constructed in line with the content of other items in the various sub-scales. Once the questionnaire was prepared, it consisted of 34 items. After the data collection, Cronbach Alpha was run on the self-constructed items. Four items were removed with extremely low reliability, five items were retained ( $\alpha=.85$ ). SmartPLS (is a software for structural equation modelling that uses the partial least squares path modelling method) was employed to run the path modelling. It was decided at an initial stage that a comparison would be made between two models, one which had cultural items inserted with previously developed scales and one which had cultural items removed from the developed scales in order to establish if “culture” was really contributing to SIMCA. Once the path model was run, the results showed no significant difference between the two models. The results only asserted that such alterations with already developed scales were erroneous. These results were discussed with peer research scholars in a group meeting to gather a perspective. It was suggested by many of them that the concept of ‘culture’ being so complex in nature it is problematic to narrow down what ‘culture’ connotes, and because one derives one’s identity from culture to a great extent, both the two concepts- ‘culture’ and ‘social identity are dependent on each other to a great extent and have largely merged with each other with no salience. Hence, these two concepts must be measured separately for significant results.



Keeping the recommendations in mind, a new set of items were developed, this time to measure ‘cultural threat’. The replacement of “culture” to “cultural threat” came from the above the learning that since culture as a concept is so composite, it may mean different things to different people (of Assam, as there is no one common culture they follow, the state consists of many tribes who have their own values and beliefs). Recognizing these layers of complications, it was finally decided to measure “cultural threat”, as the primary rationale for the anti-CAA protests in Assam was precisely to protect and preserve their cultural existence from the Bangladeshi migrants. The items were constructed by referring to various news reports, articles, and blogs online, which specifically dealt with the issue of fear of cultural threat by the people of Assam if CAA was put in force. 12 items were constructed using a seven-point Likert scale and sent to Assamese friends, ex-classmates, colleagues via Google Form. The form stated that we are interested in knowing their views about the enforcement of CAA in Assam, which makes a special case for the whole of the country. People across the country are protesting against CAA due to its religious inequality, Assam however, had very different grounds to oppose it. A sample of 188 Assamese students age ranging from 18-24 years studying in various colleges and universities was collected. The males constituted 56.91% (N=107) and females constituted 43.08% (N=81). 66.48 % (N=125) were Hindus and Muslim formed 33.51% (N=63) of the sample. Cronbach’s Alpha was run which came out to be high,  $\alpha = .97$ . The data collected before (which included all the scales including culturally inclined items) was scrapped. It was felt that participants’ responses to the developed scales i.e. injustice, efficacy, social identity, and collective action intention would have been adulterated due to the presence of the culturally inclined items. Hence, a fresh data collection was carried out which contained only the developed scales. Once again a sample of 188 Assamese student participants age ranging from 18-29 years studying in various colleges and universities were contacted through referral sampling. An online questionnaire was once more developed in Google Form and sent across contacts, which further shared it with their network of friends, classmates, etc. The questionnaire stated that the students have always been

active stakeholders in the protests in Assam and asked what did they think about the present situation in their state with respect to CAA. The sample constituted 64.36% (N=121) males and 45.74% (N=67) females. 88.29% (N=166) were Hindus, 10.63% (N=20) were Muslims, 1 (0.53%) was a Jain, and 1 (0.53) was declared to be atheist. When finally all the data was available from both the questionnaires, path modelling was run on SmartPLS software.

## 9.5 Results

*9.5.1 Preliminary Analyses.* Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlations for all variables are presented in Table 7.1. Participants’ mean scores and S.D. have been indicated within parenthesis for each variable: Efficacy ( $M=33.29$ ,  $SD=7.72$ ), Injustice ( $M=5.28$ ,  $SD=1.94$ ), Social Identity ( $M=92.32$ ,  $SD=14.11$ ), Collective Action ( $M=30.63$ ,  $SD=7.95$ ) and Cultural Threat ( $M=77.47$ ,  $SD=18.89$ ). Upon examining Pearson’s correlation coefficient matrix, it was found that the predictor variables injustice, efficacy, and social identification tended to covary with collective action. In addition, the cultural threat also covaried with efficacy, social identity, and injustice.

Table 9.1

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Correlations for Study 3

Correlations							
	M	SD	Efficacy	Social Identity	Collective Action	Cultural Threat	Injustice
Efficacy	33.29	7.72	1				
Social Identity	92.32	14.11	.435**	1			
Collective Action	30.63	7.95	.608**	.635**	1		

Cultural Threat	77.47	18.89	.194**	.161**	.233	1	
Injustice	5.28	1.94	.360**	.481**	.674**	.159**	1

*Note.* All variables are measured on a 1-7 scale.  $p < .01$  \*\*

### 9.5.2 Path Analysis

To investigate the hypothesized relationship between cultural threat, efficacy, injustice, social identity, and collective action intentions, we conducted a path analysis to predict collective action using the software SmartPLS 3.3.2 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2020). We chose to test the structural model in path analysis with Structural Equation Modelling software rather than multiple regression for three reasons. First, path analysis allows for simultaneous parameter estimation in a model that contains multiple intercorrelated predictors. Second, path analysis in SEM allows us to compare the fit of the hypothesized model to the plausible alternative. Third, Structural equation modeling allows to test complex models for their compatibility with the data in their entirety and allows to test specific assumptions about parameters (e. g., that they equal zero, or that they are identical to each other) for their compatibility with the data.

The hypothesized model specified cultural threat as the exogenous predictor of identification with the target group (i.e. protestors), the efficacy of the target group, and injustice felt by the target group. Group identification, efficacy, and injustice were specified as predictors of collective action intentions to support the target group. Current theoretical frameworks of collective action suggest that three variables i.e. social identity, injustice, and efficacy predict collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Thus, group identification was allowed to covary with injustice, as were group identification and efficacy. The exogenous predictor i.e. cultural threat was allowed to

covary but was not expected to predict the outcome variable i.e. collective action intention directly. Thus, the relationships between cultural threat and collective action intentions were considered to be zero.

The analyses that were carried out are presented in two parts: the first section will discuss the Measurement Model, which will be further sub-divided into Reflective and Formative, and the second section will explore the Structural Model.

**Measurement Model.** The relationship between constructs and their corresponding indicator variables is represented through the measurement model. When analyzing the measurement model, we examine two broader types of measurement specifications- reflective and formative measurement models.

**Reflective Measurement Model. a)** In a reflective measurement model, measures represent the effects of an underlying construct. Thus, causality is from the construct to its measures. While examining the Reflective measurement model we inspect the following criteria-

- a. Indicator loadings
- b. Internal consistency using composite Reliability
- c. Convergent validity
- d. Discriminant validity

Assessment of the indicator loadings of the exogenous latent variable i.e. collective action intentions displayed that each of the loadings is above 0.708 indicating that the construct explains more than 50 percent of the indicator's variance, hence providing acceptable item reliability.

*Table 9.2*

Indicator Loadings of Collective Action Intentions for Study 3.

Collective Action_1	0.92
Collective Action_2	0.86
Collective Action_3	0.88
Collective Action_4	0.95

Next, we examined the internal consistency reliability by employing Joreskog’s (1971) composite reliability. It is suggested that higher values commonly designate higher levels of reliability. As it is clear from Table 7.3 that the reliability values range from 0.80-0.94 indicating high reliability of items. Values of social identity and cultural threat are close to 0.95 which could have been problematic indicating that the items are unnecessary, thereby decreasing the construct validity (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Drolet and Morrison, 2001). Values higher than 0.95 may also indicate the “possibility of undesirable response patterns, thereby triggering inflated correlations among the indicators’ error terms” (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle; 2018). The two values here, however, are below 0.95, hence it is safe to consider them. The value of injustice is higher than 0.95, it is due to the fact it was a single item construct, so it can be taken into account as well.

*Table 9.3*

Composite Reliability

	Composite Reliability
Injustice	1.00
Efficacy	0.89
Social Identity	0.94
Collective Action	0.92
Cultural Threat	0.94

Assessment of Convergent Validity of each construct measure followed. Convergent validity is the extent to which the construct converges to explain the variance of its items. To measure convergent validity we evaluate the average variance extracted (AVE) for all items on each construct. An acceptable AVE 0.50 or higher specifies that the constructs explain at least 50 percent of the variance of its items. From Table 7.4, it is easily perceived that all the constructs i.e. injustice, efficacy, social identity, collective action intention, and cultural threat are above 0.50 thereby accounting for the above rule of thumb.

Table 9.4

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Injustice	1.00
Efficacy	0.64
Social Identity	0.63
Collective Action	0.76
Cultural Threat	0.69

Discriminant Validity was assessed next in the reflective measurement model. Discriminant validity refers to “the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model” (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle; 2018). To examine the discriminant validity we used the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations proposed by Henseler et.al (2015). The HTMT is defined as “the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct” (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle; 2018). An HTMT value above 0.90 would suggest that discriminant validity is not present. But when constructs are conceptually more distinct, a lower, more conservative, the threshold value is suggested, such as 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). In addition to these guidelines, bootstrapping can be applied to test whether the HTMT value is significantly different from 1.00 (Henseler et al., 2015) or a lower threshold value such as 0.85 or 0.90, which should be defined based on the study context (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019). More specifically, the researcher can examine if the upper bound of the 95 percent confidence interval of HTMT is lower than 0.90 or 0.85.

In our case, the results exhibit that the construct-collective action intentions are empirically different from other constructs in the structural model, as the confidence

interval at the upper bound is below 0.85 and is significantly different from 1.00. Hence, it is safe to state that the discriminant validity has been established.

*Table 9.5*

Discriminant Validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) HTMT

		Confidence Interval Low	Confidence Interval Up
Collective	Action	0.54	0.75
Intentions			

**Formative Measurement Model. b)** When indicators cause the construct, it is referred to as the formative measurement model. “An important characteristic of formative indicators is that they are not interchangeable, as is true with reflective indicators. Thus, each indicator for a formative construct captures a specific aspect of the construct’s domain. Taken jointly, the items ultimately determine the meaning of the construct, which implies that omitting an indicator potentially alters the nature of the construct. As a consequence, breadth of coverage of the construct domain is extremely important to ensure that the domain of content of the focal construct is adequately captured” (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). To examine the formative measurement model, we look into the following criteria-

- a. indicator collinearity
- b. statistical significance
- c. relevance of the indicator weights

For assessment of indicator collinearity, we employ the variance inflation factor (VIF). “VIF values of 5 or above indicate critical collinearity issues among the indicators of formatively measured constructs. Ideally, the VIF values should be close to 3 and lower”



(Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle; 2018). Table 7.6 displays the variance inflation factor for each indicator. The VIF for indicators ranges from 1.00-4.99. Initially, there were in total 36 indicators for five constructs, but only 24 indicators were retained because as per the rule, a value above 5 designates collinearity problems. Therefore, in order to avoid the collinearity issue, twelve indicators above the value 5 were withdrawn.

*Table 9.6*

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	<b>VIF</b>
Injustice	1.00
Efficacy	1.75
Efficacy_2	3.82
Efficacy_3	2.41
Efficacy_4	2.21
Efficacy_5	3.05
Centrality	2.24
Centrality_2	3.62
Solidarity	3.31
Solidarity_2	2.45
Solidarity_3	2.42
Satisfaction	4.69
Ingroup Homogeneity_2	3.73
Individual Self-Stereotyping	4.99
Collective Action	3.90
Collective Action_2	2.68
Collective Action_3	3.85
Cultural Threat_2	2.26
Cultural Threat_3	4.38
Cultural Threat_4	4.14
Cultural Threat_5	2.94
Cultural Threat_6	2.31
Cultural Threat_8	4.80
Cultural Threat_12	3.61

In the final step, an assessment of indicator weight's statistical significance was carried out. Table 7.7 displays three columns, one with the relationship between indicators, the second column shows the T statistics and the third column displays the significance level. As is evident from the table that all indicators' outer weights are significant as they are above the 1.96 t value. According to Hair et al. (2017a), indicators with a significant weight should definitely be eliminated if the loading is also not significant. The outer loadings of the following indicators were significant too.

*Table 9.7*

Outer weight significance results

	T Statistics	Significant Level
Injustice		
Efficacy <- Efficacy	10.596	Significant
E2 <- Efficacy	19.717	Significant
E3 <- Efficacy	19.190	Significant
E4 <- Efficacy	18.681	Significant
E5 <- Efficacy	20.302	Significant
Centrality <- Social Identity	10.400	Significant
C2 <- Social Identity	9.956	Significant
Solidarity <- Social Identity	7.538	Significant
S2 <- Social Identity	5.573	Significant
S3 <- Social Identity	10.716	Significant
Satisfaction <- Social Identity	13.410	Significant
InGroupHomogeniety2 <- Social Identity	10.946	Significant
Individual Self-Stereotyping <- Social Identity	8.565	Significant
Collective Action <- Collective Action	30.130	Significant
CA2 <- Collective Action	25.013	Significant
CA3 <- Collective Action	21.866	Significant
Cultural Threat2 <- cultural threat	2.482	Significant
CUL3 <- cultural threat	2.817	Significant
CUL4 <- cultural threat	2.277	Significant
CUL5 <- cultural threat	1.962	Significant
CUL6 <- cultural threat	1.963	Significant

CUL8 <- cultural threat	3.335	Significant
CUL12 < - cultural threat	2.491	Significant

**Structural Model.** Once the Measurement model is satisfactory, which in our case is, we move on to assessing the structural model. The criteria that must be considered to measure the structural model include-

- a. coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ )
- b. the blindfolding-based cross-validated redundancy measure ( $Q^2$ )
- c. the statistical relevance
- d. relevance of the path coefficients

Before we began analyzing the coefficient of determination, it is suggested to measure collinearity just the way we executed in the formative measurement model to ensure that it does not bias the regression analysis. A similar procedure is carried out. Values above 5 imply a collinearity problem among the predictor constructs. Ideally, VIF values should be close to 3 and lower. But in our case, we will look for indicators that are below the 5, rule of thumb. As it is apparent from Table 7.8 that the values of the indicators are all below the value of 5, meaning there is no collinearity issue among the predictor constructs. Once it was established that there is no collinearity problem, we then moved on to measure the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of the endogenous constructs. According to Shmueli and Koppius (2011), the coefficient of determination basically determines the model's explanatory power. "As a guideline,  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 can be considered substantial, moderate and weak" (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2011). Table 7.9 shows the values of the coefficient of determination. The value for injustice is 0.26 which according to the rule of thumb is barely above the 0.25 limit implying a weak explanatory power. The value for efficacy is 0.59 which falls between the 0.50 and 0.75 range, indicating a moderate explanatory power. Value for social identity is 0.76 which falls above the 0.75 limits displaying a substantial explanatory power. For collective action, the value is 0.84 which again falls above the

0.75 limits exhibiting a substantial explanatory power. In totality, social identity and collective action have a considerable role in explaining the model, efficacy has an

	Injustice	Efficacy	Social Identity	Collective Action	Cultural Threat
Injustice			1.43	1.52	
Efficacy			1.56	3.75	
Social Identity				3.94	
Collective Action					
Cultural Threat	1.00	1.00	1.21		

average contribution, whereas the contribution of injustice perhaps because it's a single item is frail in justifying the model.

*Table 9.8*

Inner VIF Values

*Table 9.9*

Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )

	R square
Injustice	0.26
Efficacy	0.59
Social Identity	0.76
Collective Action	0.84

Most researchers also calculate effect size ( $f^2$ ) which assesses how strongly one exogenous construct contributes to explaining a certain endogenous construct in terms of  $R^2$ . According to Cohen (1988), the value of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 respectively represents small, medium and large effect sizes as a rule of thumb. Table 7.10 below mention the effect sizes. The values in the table mention that the exogenous construct i.e. the collective action intentions explains injustice moderately as the value ranges between 0.15 and 0.35. Collective action intentions explain efficacy by a large amount as the effect size of 0.58 falls above the value of 0.35 indicating a large contribution to describing the efficacy construct. Finally, collective action explains social identity also by a large proportion as the value of effect size is 0.56 which also takes place above the value of 0.35 as a rule of thumb.

*Table 9.10*

Effect Size ( $f^2$ )

	Injustice	Efficacy	Social Identity	Collective Action	Cultural Threat
Injustice				0.33	
Efficacy			1.52	0.58	
Social Identity	0.30			0.56	
Collective Action					
Cultural Threat	0.09	0.20	0.08		

$Q^2$  is another method through which to assess the PLS path model's predictive precision (Geisser,1974; Stone,1974). "This metric is based on the blindfolding procedure that removes single points in the data matrix, imputes the removed points with the mean, and estimates the model parameters" (Rigdon, 2014b; Sarstedt et al., 2014). "Small differences between the predicted and the original values translate into a higher  $Q^2$  value, thereby indicating a higher predictive accuracy. As a guideline,  $Q^2$

values should be larger than zero for a specific endogenous construct to indicate the predictive accuracy of the structural model for that construct. As a rule of thumb,  $Q^2$  values higher than 0, 0.25, and 0.50 depict the small, medium, and large predictive relevance of the PLS-path model. Similar to the  $f^2$  effect sizes, it is possible to compute and interpret the  $Q^2$  effect sizes” (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle; 2018). Table 7.11 below mentions the  $Q^2$  values for the four constructs. The  $Q^2$  value for injustice is 0.07 falls at 0 implying a small predictive relevance of the path model. It may be owing to the reason that injustice was a single item construct, perhaps its predictive relevance is minor. The  $Q^2$  value for efficacy came out to be 0.27, which falls just above the 0.25 depicting a medium predictive relevance of the path model. The  $Q^2$  value for social identity is 0.36 which falls between the range of 0.25 and 0.50, indicating a slightly higher on the medium side of the predictive relevance to the path model. And finally, the  $Q^2$  value for collective action intentions came out to be 0.62 which falls above 0.50 representing a large predictive relevance of the model.

*Table 9.11*

Cross validated Redundancy

	$Q^2$
Injustice	0.07
Efficacy	0.26
Social Identity	0.36
Collective Action	0.62

The final step in structural model is to assess the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients. As evident from Table 7.12 below, the path coefficients are all significant. The path from injustice to social identity was significant ( $t [188] = 4.99, p < .01$ ). Path from injustice to collective action was significant ( $t [187] = 2.82, p < .001$ ).

Path from efficacy to social identity was significant ( $t [187] = 14.25, p < .001$ ), while the path from efficacy to collective action was significant ( $t [187] = 2.90, p < .01$ ) Path from cultural threat to injustice was significant ( $t [187] = 3.37, p < .001$ ), for cultural threat to efficacy, it came out to be significant ( $t [187] = 3.94, p < .001$ ) and finally for cultural threat to social identity, the path was significant ( $t [187] = 2.51, p < .01$ ).

*Table 9.12*

Path coefficient significance

	Significance level
Injustice -> Social Identity	Significant
Injustice -> Collective Action	Significant
Efficacy -> Social Identity	Significant
Efficacy -> Collective Action	Significant
Social identity -> Collective Action	Significant
Cultural threat -> injustice	Significant
Cultural threat -> Efficacy	Significant
Cultural threat -> social identity	Significant



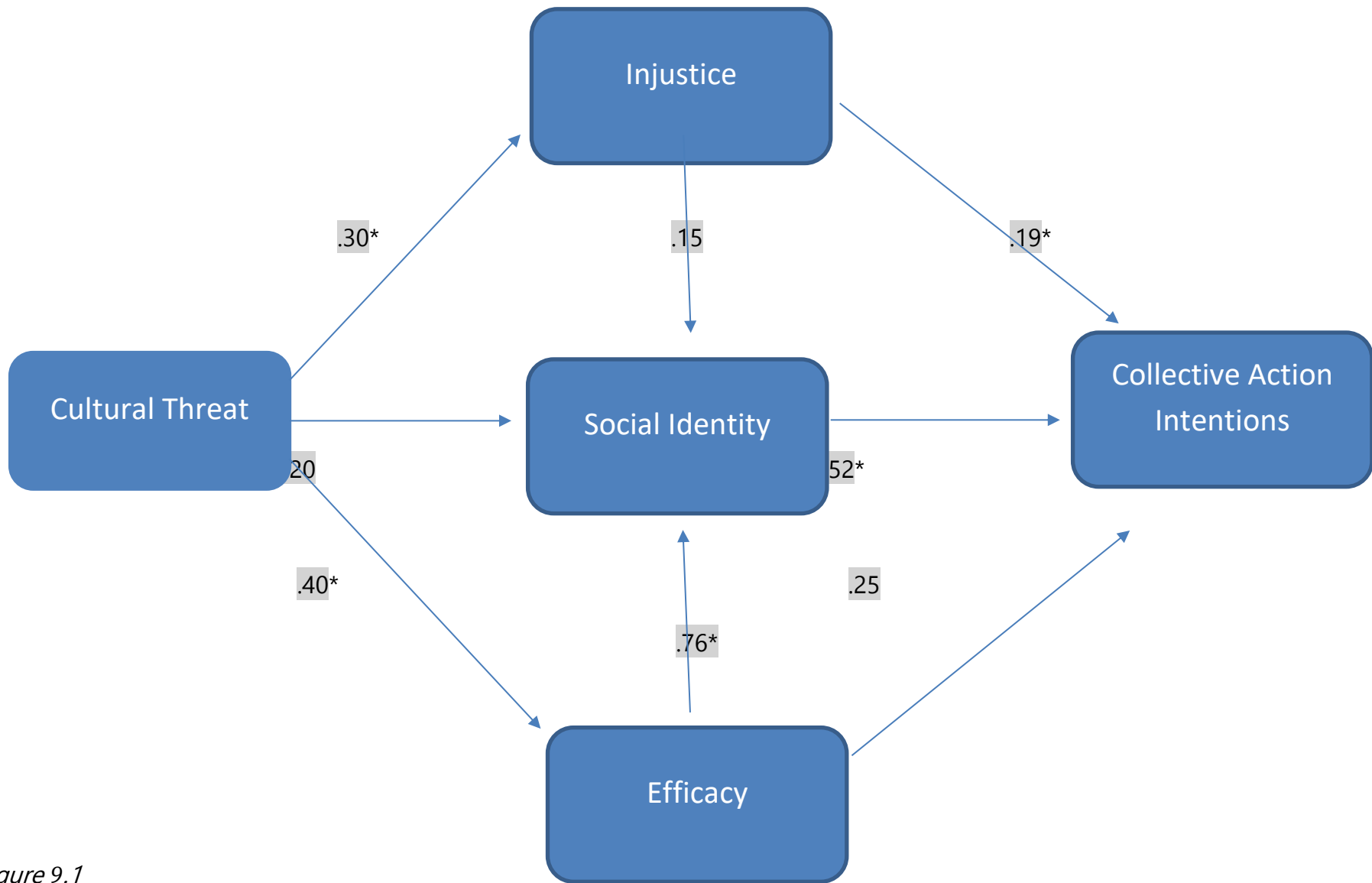


Figure 9.1

Study 3 hypothesized a path model with standardized regression weights.

$p < .01$ .  $p < .001$ . \*

## 9.6 Discussion

I investigated the role of cultural threat to collective action intentions through the three fundamental predictors i.e. perceived injustice, efficacy, and social identity of the SIMCA model. In the present study, I found that cultural threat does positively associate with the three key predictors which further predicts collective action intentions. In study 1 I demonstrated that cognitive practices colored by the Assamese culture did contribute enormously to collective action stimulating the people of Assam to come together as one big family to fight against the government, which ultimately led to the iconic Assam Movement (1979-1985) lasting for six long years. Study 1 was a qualitative inquiry that employed thematic analysis to explore the numerous cognitive practices impacted by ‘culture’ during the movement. The current study is an extension of study 1 as here I attempted to establish quantitatively the role of culture in collective action intentions by employing structural equation modeling (SEM). I sought to examine if the same ‘culture’ which was once utilized by AASU (All Assam Students’ Union) leaders to implant a feeling of togetherness and invigorated lakhs of the indigenous population especially the youth to protest against the government (for its passivity to take action against the illegal Bangladeshi migrants, thereby endangering their demography, economy, and culture) comes under threat due to the implementation of CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019), would it usher the youth of Assam once again to collective action?

The finding revealed that cultural threat triggered perceived injustice, efficacy, and social identity which then further predicted collective action intentions positively. I did highlight in the Method section that cultural threat may not directly lead to collective action intentions and hence I measured cultural threat’s relationship with collective action intentions via perceived injustice, efficacy, and social identity. As clear from the finding that the connection between the cultural threat and perceived injustice is strong owing to

the fact that the people of Assam have endured and tolerated injustice by the government on numerous occasions in the past. But this time, it was different. It meant something of grave seriousness to its people. Implementation of CAA in Assam means providing a legal license of citizenship to all the Hindu Bangladeshis who had entered India on or before 31 December 2014. So, the current government instead of deporting back the existing illegal Bangladeshis which Assam have almost 50 years been demanding and urging, the government decided to furnish them with Indian citizenship. In addition, the CAA is an absolute contravention of the Assam Accord which was a by-product of the Assam Movement (precisely ensued because of the presence of numerous illegal Bangladeshi names on the electoral roll in the Mangaldoi constituency election) signed between the leaders of AASU, All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1985. The Accord categorically states that the illegal migrants especially the Bangladeshi migrants who entered Assam before 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971 will be identified as Indians while the others who entered after the cut-off year will be detected and deported. Clause 6 of the Accord which is the most crucial component of the agreement states that the constitutional, legislative, and administrative shield will be furnished to protect, preserve and promote the culture, linguistic, and heritage of the Assamese people. The people of Assam had already made a compromise by accepting the illegal migrants till 1971, while for the rest of the country the cut-off year for identification of any foreigner is 1951, the announcement of CAA came as a big blow to them. What CAA also states is that areas that come under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya Tripura, and Mizoram) will be exempted from CAA. North-east of India has a 40% tribal area (Kumaran, 2012). Since certain areas are protected from CAA, the load and burden of Hindu Bangladeshi migrants will automatically turn to the shoulders of the remaining parts of Assam, considering that Assam and Bangladesh share the same border. It was unfair then; it is unfair now. People of Assam as mentioned previously have undertaken the burden till 1971, they no longer

desire to take any more foreigners no matter what religion they belong to, and as one of the placards during the anti-CAA protests said- “Mr. Modi, Assam is not your dumping ground” (guwahatiplus, 2019). The Assamese people fear that their fate too might turn into like Tripura if nothing was done. Another placard during the protests said- “Dear PM, Dear President, you can’t use the constitution as your private property. Democracy is killed. Secularism is murdered. What you have done to the indigenous people of Tripura? We will not let you do the same thing with Assam. We reject CAA” (guwahatiplus, 2019). This injustice of turning Assam into a breeding ground for Bangladeshi migrants successively caused the Assamese people to fear becoming a cultural minority saw its expression in their collective action against the government.

The findings of the study also displayed a positive relationship between the cultural threat to efficacy ultimately leading to collective action. People of Assam especially the youth belonging to various students’ unions have never shied away from participating in rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, hunger strikes, etc. for the larger interest of Assam, be it the Refinery Movement of the 1950s, Language Problem of 1960, Food crisis of 1966, Medium Movement of 1972, Economic development of 1974 or the very prominent Assam movement (1979-1985). Anti-CAA protests that commenced in December 2019 was no different, in fact, it was more intense and vigorous. In Assam, the protests broke out even before it was announced into an Act. The violent protests began soon as the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB, it was termed then) was cleared by the Union Cabinet for its introduction in Parliament. Soon other states joined the wagon. Once the Bill was passed by both houses of the Parliament, Lok Sabha and then in Rajya Sabha, and finally after obtaining approval from the President, the Bill went on to become an Act. This announcement created a huge uproar in all of the country and especially Assam. People in various parts of Assam (Dispur, Tezpur, Golaghat, Dibrugarh) on the call of AASU and other student organizations sought all means of protest- *bandhs*, torchlight marches,

800km *padayatra* from Sadiya to Dhubri, *hartal*, gherao, stone-pelting, and vandalism was also observed in few areas of the state (The Times of India, 2019). As defined by Mummendey et.al. (1999) group efficacy “is the shared belief that one’s group can resolve its grievances through unified effort. In other words, group efficacy gives people a sense of collective power or strength on the basis of which they believe themselves capable of transforming the situation and destiny of their group (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Reicher, 1996, 2001). This means that the stronger the subjective sense of the group’s efficacy, the more likely people are to engage in collective action (e.g., Hornsey et al., 2006; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Mummendey et al., 1999).” This was exactly the character and atmosphere of the anti-CAA protests in Assam. Its people and its youth in the past have encountered such struggles multiple times before. The belief of transforming the situation and changing their destiny among the masses had resulted in victories in the past and therefore the very same belief was carried forward in the anti-CAA protests as well. Additionally, in one of my interviews in Study 1 when it was asked for how long will they continue to fight (referring to the campaign against CAB, it was a Bill then), the advisor of AASU replied that their only hope is to fight and win, sitting passively and accepting the state of affairs would anyway lead to nothing. The other respondent (former participant of Assam Movement) answered the same question mentioning that they are fighting this battle for the future generation of Assam, to secure our culture and language, to ensure that they live as an Indian citizen and not as a second citizen of India. The above narrations and the various pursuits undertaken by them adduce that there was an ample sense of efficacy among the Assamese people to guard their cultural, linguistic, and heritage by partaking in collective action in opposition to CAA.

The next and final finding of the study also showed a positive relationship between cultural threat triggering social identity propelling to collective action intentions. According to Reicher *et.al.* (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000, 2005; Reicher, 1996, 2001) “social

identity serves to mobilize people for social change.” Social identity theory suggests that people try to gain benefits from positive social identities from their membership groups. People who belong to a low-status group or disadvantaged group attempt to change their group membership to an advantaged group. But sometimes, it is not possible, and in those cases, people strive to engage in collective action to change the intergroup status differentials. (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel, 1978; Turner & Brown, 1978). It would not be wrong to postulate that one’s social identity is tremendously governed by the culture one thrives in. Assam and its people are no different. Assamese people draw enormously their identity from the culture, language, and heritage they reside in. They take huge pride in it. They are sentimental people who attach significant value to their culture. One possible rationale for such a saccharine bond is that the people of Assam as previously mentioned have struggled hard to protect and preserve their identity. They have fought to retain their soil (for instance, as the Freedom Movement progressed, the British government proposed a Cabinet Mission, according to which Assam was to be grouped with Bengal having a Muslim majority. Hence the destiny of Assam was left on Muslim League which supported the mission. If it was not due to the support of Mahatma Gandhi approached by Gopinath Bordoloi, Assam would have lost its identity. The Cabinet Mission was finally dropped) (Deka, 2015). In another instance, during the Sino-Indian war in 1962, when the Chinese had taken over Bomdila, a small town in NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) and were closing to Assam, Jawaharlal Nehru’s speech on All India Radio (AIR) had broken the hearts of lacs of Assamese people when he said “my heart goes out for the people of Assam”, which was interpreted as Nehru giving up on Assam and that they were on their own, Nehru bade farewell to Assam creating huge chaos at such a sensitive time. The situation later was however controlled by the army personnel. (Deka, 2015; Times of India, 2019) United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) which started off as a group with extremist values turned militant later have grappled for a prolonged time to keep illegal migrants at bay and continue to do so. They have fought forcefully to preserve their culture and

language from adulteration demanding a sovereign Assam. They once even demanded a ban on Hindi films claiming that Hindi is gradually invading Assam's unique cultural identity gathering support from All Guwahati Students' Union (AGSU) and other Assamese film personalities. (Times of India, 2002) When one has to go for a campaign or a protest for almost every basic right, which other parts of the country are provided effortlessly, one tends to grow and cultivate more strong and powerful identity and any threat or danger to it would involuntarily result in collective action. During the anti-CAA protests, collective action was carried out by employing diverse cognitive practices with specific cultural meanings. The streets of Assam once again filled with immortal tunes of Bhupen Hazarika and Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala (The Wire, 2020). The mass was once again reminded of the Assam Movement of 1979-85. The protests also witnessed many new songs and poems with anti-CAA lyrics (Hindustan Times, 2020) Slogans like- *Jai Ai Asom, Aah aah olai aah* echoed the streets. People came out wearing their traditional attires (women wearing *Mekhela Chador*, *Dhokna* of Bodo tribe, *Koum Kontong* of Rabha tribe, both men and women draped *Gamosa* around the neck and sometimes wrapped around head with a knot). *Gamosa* which is a symbol of an Assamese identity was used as a placard in many sit-ins. The sounds of Assamese folk musical instruments like *Ransinga*, *Dhol*, *Pepa*, *Gogona Taal*, *Toka*, *Xutuli*, and many others resonated, protesting against CAA. On the call of AASU, cultural protests called *RanaSinga* were launched supported by Assamese artists (NorthEastNow, 2020). Protests against CAA was observed in the celebration of *Bhogali Bihu*, one of the most popular festival of the state, where people before the feast burned down dummy copies of the Act as a mark of protest (thecitizen, 2020). The utilization of social media unlike other movements in Assam was extremely high during this protest so much so that mobile internet services were banned by the government for ten days (Economic Times, 2019). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp were made use of to announce meetings, sit-ins marches, or to discharge any such information. In fact according to Scroll (2020), "a government



department cautioned employees against taking political stands on social media. In the order, issued by the state's elementary education department, employees were warned there would be disciplinary action against those indulging and participating in political activities on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram". Assamese identity, therefore, as is evident reflected exceptionally well through the cultural activities during the anti-CAA protests.

In conclusion, we can safely assert that our model befits the context appropriately suggesting that cultural threat does drive the three key predictors i.e. injustice, efficacy, and social identity probing to collective action intentions.

## **CHAPTER X. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The primary objective of conducting the research was to expand our understanding of social cognition by examining collective action. As argued in chapter 1, the dominant understanding of social cognition is synonymous with information processing, something that takes place inside the heads of individuals. This dominant (North American) view on

social cognition is devoid of social context and content. This perspective of cognition is unreservedly controlled by cognitive individualism (Downes, 1993) furnishing barely any insight into the individual condition in an intergroup context. On the other side of the spectrum is European social psychology, which addresses the limitations of the North American approach to social cognition by emphasizing the social and cultural determinants of cognition and behavior. It is embedded in the shared, collective and cultural character of a community. It is argued that mental actions are carried out by individuals who possess some distinctive cognitive peculiarities are also members of specific thought communities (Mannheim 1929, 1936; Fleck 1935, 1979). In other words, what transpires inside our heads is also impacted by the surroundings and particular thought communities of which we are a member. We are a consequence of our environment that not only expands but also limits our interaction with the community equally. Chapter 2 discussed the various social cognition concepts that fall under North American and European traditions separately. As mentioned earlier that the main criticism of North American understanding of social cognition is the accentuated focus on individualism resulting in a “reductionistic, computational and prescriptive” (e.g., Augustinos & Walker, 1995; Kraut and Higgins, 1984; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Mosconici, 1982; Zajonc, 1998) emphasis. Some conceptions of social cognition under European social psychology are also affected by their own problems. Social identity theory has attained an overwhelming stature in the European social psychology literature; it, therefore, serves some purpose. It is able to illustrate the emergence of collective action and in fact said to be the key predictor of collective action (van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears, 2008). It is argued by many scholars that identification with the disadvantaged group is the closest predictor of collective action (Ellemers, 1993; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Mummendey et al., 1999; Tajfel, 1978). However, despite its significance, it has its own problems and difficulties. Even though social identity theory throws light on the outset of collective action, it remains insufficient to explain the numerous factors such as

the various unforeseeable and unplanned communication between movement participants in organizing upcoming and reviewing former activities, the manner in which the campaign is to be put into operation, the manner in which a specific crusade could be best utilized to place the message forward, the numerous spirited debates over meeting programs, protest slogans, particular organizational pursuits, the numerous communication between movement participants and the opposition, and the multitude of domains of encounter and discussion that sustain the collective action for an extended time. Social representation theory suffers from its own problems too. The fundamental problem with this theory is that though it claims to come under the banner of European social psychology, Parker (1987) challenges it to be individualistic in nature. According to Parker, it is understood as a cognitive arrangement that resides inside the minds of the person, thereby creating the personalized meaning of greater importance than the shared and figurative character of the subject. Allansdottir, Jovchelovitch, and Stathopoulou (1993) along the same lines asserted that the innate adaptability and accessibility in the conception of this theory causes it to be vulnerable to misappropriation by individualistic perspectives. Harré (1984) also communicates related problems that the theory suggests a cognitive subject matter as opposed to seeing representations as cultural outcomes emerging from collective pursuits. The third and final European tradition is the discursive approach. Few discursive psychologists themselves reject cognitivism (Billig, 2009). Discursive psychologists have responded against the suppositions of the cognitive approach and certainly cognitive linguistics. They have contended against the very notion of considering language- behavior as if it were an indication for the genuine, significant psychological reality (Billig, 2009). Billig argues- “One problem with cognitivism is that in seeking to find the supposed mental entities that stand behind social behavior, cognitive scientists have neglected to study the intricacies of such behavior.” This accusation has been important in the discursive reaction against cognitive approaches to the study of language. As per discursive psychologists, cognitivist not only possess a deficient outlook

on language but their approach diverts them from investigating the manner in which individuals really employ language in their social life.

Within cognitive science appears a relatively new driving force that pays attention to the interplay of body, brain, and world to reorient the scientific study of the mind and replace the old computational and representational understanding (Clark, 2017). These approaches are namely- Embodied cognition (Husserl, 1938; Heidegger, 1976; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) Distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1996), and Situated cognition (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989). Embodied cognition invariably rebuffs the computational loyalty to cognitive science and on the contrary stresses the significance of an individual's physical body in cognitive capabilities (Shapiro and Spaulding, 2021). Examiners of embodied cognition emphasize the idea that the body or the body's interplay with the surroundings accounts for or contributes to cognition in numerous ways (Shapiro and Spaulding, 2021). Critics of embodied cognition, however, claim that this approach furnishes a depleted understanding of cognition or is unable to present an authentic substitution to computational cognitive science or with declaring that bodies play a constitutive role in cognition when in actuality their role is purely causal (Shapiro and Spaulding, 2021). Goldinger, Papesh, Barnhart, Hansen, and Hout (2016) asserted that the fundamental issue with embodied cognition is that "it claims all cognition is profoundly rooted in bodily experience." The second approach is Distributed cognition which is also opposed to the notion "that thinking goes on inside the heads of the individual." (Hutchins, 1996) Their criticism emerges in their recognition that amid other things, people take part in activities with others, they exist and operate in a culture and that they collaborate with each other. Considering these realities about the social tendency of individual existence, they have grown to be worried with cognitive science's fixation on the inner functioning of the mind as the foundation for the interpretation of individual actions. The originator of Distributed cognition, Hutchins (1996) writes, "the emphasis on finding and describing knowledge structures that are somewhere inside the individual's

head encourages us to overlook the fact that human cognition is always situated in the complex socio-cultural world and cannot be unaffected by it.” Distributed cognition considers the socio-cultural sphere as a cognitive system in which the processing that is happening in one individual’s head is harmonized with processing that is happening in another individual’s head via cognitive artifacts frequently technological ones such as logs, charts, dividers, etc. Critics of Distributed cognition, however, claim that this approach does not bring anything new to the table (Button, 2008). While the observational data (behavior) can be noticed but there is certainly no way in which the processing of data inside the head can be measured. They assert that it is nearly impossible to connect the observational data in a context to the data that is supposedly processed in the brain. All that is left is to infer (Button, 2008). The third approach is Situated cognition which principally concentrates on the interplay betwixt people and the conditions (Clark, 1997; Clancey, 2009; Robbins and Aydede, 2009). The advocates of Situated cognition emphasize the social as opposed to the physical setting. They maintain that cognition is basically social- social conditions, motives, and identities that restrict and compose of thoughts and behavior whether or not individuals are physically in attendance of others (Smith and Semin, 2004). The central proposition of Situated cognition is that individual judgments, decisiveness, and adapted behavior are predominantly built from locally obtainable resources and situational hints. Opposers of Situated cognition claim that there are cognitive activities that take place outside of the situation as well, for example- daydreaming, thinking about the future, or remembering the past. In a nutshell, our capability to formulate mental representations regarding things that are distant in time and space which is possibly an essential condition of individual thoughts, in essence, cannot surrender to situated cognition understanding.

The above discussed various approaches to cognition have either seen cognition as existing in the heads of an individual or those that still approach cognition as something that is influenced by culture and the surroundings, have shied away from investigating

the various cognitive artifacts (not technological ones) that are situated in culture (such as songs, slogans, the various strategies adopted, etc.) of the specific community in which collective action takes place and the manner in which the participants of the movement manifest these cognitive artifacts during the course of the movement.

Owing to the shortcomings of various approaches discussed above, the present thesis made use of a sociological concept that acknowledges the existence of certain cognitive features in the various undertakings of a movement. The concept is called cognitive praxis (practice) which is developed to fundamentally investigate social movements. It is defined by Eyerman and Jamison (1991) as “seeking to reconnect psychological level of analysis to a collective or sociological level of analysis. We, aim at providing a social theory which focusses on the interaction between individual, collective and macro societal practices.” According to Eyerman and Jamison, a social movement is like a cognitive territory that is loaded with active interaction between various movement participants and their opposition. It is through these frictions that a social movement develops an identity. A chief characteristic of cognitive practice is that it investigates social movement as an activity in which persons generate brand new social identities. The action is controlled by the participant’s own frame of reference which is in continuous interplay with the context. Action, therefore, derives its meaning from the context in which it takes place and the understanding which actors carry or acquire from it. Another major feature of the cognitive practice is that it situates social movements in a specific political-historical context. Cognitive practice comprehends social movements with respect to their specific time and place. Hence, being context-specific.

Cognitive practices in social movements uncover themselves in multiple ways such as in the various unforeseeable and unplanned communication between movement participants in organizing upcoming and reviewing former activities, the manner in which

the campaign is to be put into operation, the manner in which a specific crusade could be best utilized to place the message forward, the numerous spirited debates over meeting programs, protest slogans, particular organizational pursuits, the numerous communication between movement participants and the opposition, and in the multitude of domains of encounter and discussion. For example, the Civil rights movement's cognitive praxis included the non-violent method of resistance (followed Gandhi's manner of resistance) such as bus boycotts, sit-ins, mass demonstration leading to extended time in jails, freedom rides, black studies, and Afro-American history first emerged in study groups and pamphlets of the campaign were later dispersed into universities, group solidarity and emotional display by the black church, Martin Luther King, Jr's charismatic speeches, etc., all of which were peculiar to that culture.

Numerous researches have been conducted that emphasize collective action and the role of cognition in it (Gross, 1994; Brunsting and Postmes, 2002; Pretty, 2002; Gintis, 2006; Heffernan, Nielson, Thomson and Gunn, 2008; Hargave, 2009; Stokolo, Misra, Runnerstrom and Hipp, 2009; Wright and Tropp, 2009; Ostrom, 2010; Giguère and Lalonde, 2010; Leonard, Moons, Mackie and Smith, 2011; Gavrilets, 2015; Freeman, Baggio and Coyle, 2020; Comfort, Kapucu, Ko, Menoni and Siciliano, 2020; Baddan, Jost, Fernando, Kashima, 2020; Wright, 2021). However, barring a few (Brunsting and Postmes, 2002; Wright and Tropp, 2009; Giguère and Lalonde, 2010; Johnston, 2019; Wright, 2021) most studies have understood cognition as something that exists inside the head. A study done by Gavrilets (2015) while examining the role of cognition in collective action, placed emphasis on studying brain activities. Ostrom (2010) in his study focused on evolutionary theory, providing genetic underpinnings to explain collective action. Stokolo, Misra, Runnerstrom, and Hipp (2009) investigated whether the influence of the new age ecological crisis led to collective action. Cognition here was viewed as an information processing mechanism. Freeman, Baggio, and Loyle (2020) viewed cognition as general

and social intelligence, employing IQ scales to measure if it improves collective action. In her study, Pretty (2002) examined collective action in biodiversity management, where cognition was viewed as the action of knowing and perceiving. Hence an information processing mechanism was employed. A study done by Leonard, Moons, Mackie, and Smith (2011) examined self-stereotyping and collective action, where cognition was understood in terms of appraisal and judgment. The study adopted the North American conceptualization of social cognition. Bowles and Gintis (2006) studied voting behavior in collective action by means of genetic transmission/natural selection. In their study of collective action under threat of covid-19, Comfort, Kapucu, Menoni, and Siciliano (2020) understood cognition as mere awareness. Badaan, Jost, Fernando, and Kashima (2020) in their study employed a cognitive-motivational route to examine the potential for collective action. Cognition here was also viewed in terms of having an individualistic character.

On other hand, to my knowledge, the studies that had employed European understanding of social cognition (such as social identity theory, collective identification, or social cognitive theory) in collective action frameworks (Postmes, 2002; Gibson and Earley, 2007; Giguère and Lalonde, 2010; Wright and Tropp, 2009, Wright, 2016), have held back from investigating cognition in terms of the various cognitive artifacts (that are heavily influenced by culture) that demonstrate themselves during the course of the movement. The studies limited themselves to concerns like the cost and benefit and the strategic consequences of participation, rational-decision making processes during collective action, the cognitive component of relative deprivation theory which is restricted to individual's perception of deprivation, individual beliefs in his/her capability to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments, etc. Although these studies employed cognition in an intergroup context of collective action, they were unsuccessful in acknowledging the numerous ways cognition (affected by the local culture



of the place) reveals itself during the collective action. The studies viewed cognition from an individual's perspective who is (or a potential) participant in the collective action. These studies overlook the gravity of culture that impacts the cognition of not just one individual but the community at numerous levels, resulting in collective action that is not only unique but has a character and content of its own. As a result of these limitations and my readings, I was prompted to glance outside of the conventional social psychological understanding of social cognition for an effective examination of collective action.

While there have been studies in the West that have attempted to understand the significance of culture in collective action (Jasper, 2017; Droogendyk and Wright, 2017; Osborne et al., 2017; Travaglino et al., 2017; Baysu and Phalet, 2017; Górska et al., 2017; Chayinska et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2017; Gulevich et al., 2017), limited attention has been placed on the empirical work that establishes the importance of culture in collective action in Eastern countries. In view of the limitations of literature pertaining to the role of social cognition in social movement, the first study was planned.

Study 1 was designed to be exploratory in nature wherein the chief aim was to explore and understand the employment of cognitive practices in the Assam movement by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). The analysis revealed six broad themes- the role of leaders, contribution by the local media in educating and informing the masses, the role of music in uplifting the masses, the formation of an all-inclusive Assamese identity, and display of fervent emotions. These findings imply the various cognitive practices carrying cultural meanings that were put to use during the course of the agitation, which further intensified and strengthened the movement. As noted by Jasper (2017) culture is seen in every part of the social sciences and hence in the research of social movements too. William Gamson and David Snow illustrated that social movements must execute cultural activity so that recruits, resources, and recognition could be drawn in (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). The initiators of the Assam Movement

executed precisely this. They engaged the protestors in numerous cognitive practices which were high on cultural meanings to keep the momentum of the movement and motivation of the masses high (Deka, 2015). The technical dimension of the Assam Movement's cognitive praxis comprised of the peculiar objects of resistance and more significantly, the strategies and methods of objection. The leaders of the movement took the assistance of numerous "traditional regional, micro-regional performances to spread their messages" (Bora, 2020). Since performances like Bihu (folk dance), Ojapali (folk dance), Gayana-Bayana (traditional operatic drama) are connected so intricately to the culture of the people of Assam, it aided in strengthening the appeal of the movement (Bora, 2020). Bihu was strategically used by AASU to mobilize the masses during the agitation. Bihu has undergone many transformations, one such publicization was the "Stage Bihu" where Bihu was not just performed on stage but this celebration meant inviting popular leaders of the movement to address the masses through cogent speeches at the iconic Latashil grounds in Guwahati (Bora, 2020). Latashil playground in Guwahati since the 1950s (Bora, 2020) has developed into a major Centre for numerous activities for example - it is a permanent venue for Bihu and other cultural celebrations, it has been continuously used as a site for gatherings of protestors, where public meetings are held, where demonstrators launch their processions and so on. This explains that "culture can render a particular site a fruitful base for collective action" (Fuist, 2013). Other theorists have understood this culture within sites encouraging collective action through the notion of "free space" (Evans and Boyte 1986; Kellogg 2009; Polletta 1999). These sites are "an intermediate sphere" "between the private and public spheres" where "oppositional frames and collective identities are constructed" (Leach and Haunss 2009: 255-256). Social movement scholars have consistently maintained that the culture within sites suffices to construct a particular place or space as a productive center for mobilization in the creation of meanings and identities. One of the cognitive practices that are enormously influenced by the culture of the specific community, which further nourishes identity is music.

Music, a vital element in cognitive practice has been utilized by the people of Assam vigorously during Assam Movement. Classic tunes of Bhupen Hazarika, Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala, Bishnuprasad Rabha, and other such legendary artists echoed the streets of the state. As documented by Rosenthal & Flacks, (2012) music has played a central part in numerous social movements and is among the favorite subject of cultural scholars. The ideas and ideals that the music carries in its lyrics frequently saved for future generations (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998) become a mode for groups to bond (McNeil, 1995). The recent anti-CAA protests saw the local population coming together and playing folk musical instruments such as Dhol, Pepa, Gogona, Taal, Xutuli, Toka among others. Music can be seen as a resource. According to Fuist (2013), when the focus is on specific cultural elements that are actively employed by the social movement participants to attain their objectives, it qualifies as culture being used as a resource. Past researchers have found that culture furnishes resources that can sustain movement in times of abeyance (Nepstad 2008; Rupp and Taylor 1987), assist movements to connect with potential supporters (Braunstein 2012; Wood 2002), and helps in the selection of strategic options (Polletta 2004; Smithey 2009; Tilly 2002; 2008). Very recently, the emotional effects of music have emerged in recruitment, retention, the socialization of fresh recruits, especially the young people, challenges to censorship, the propagation of moral values, the depiction of opponents and authorities (Traïni, 2008). During the movement in Assam, music not just energized the masses but also brought the masses together, instilled in them, feelings of hope and optimism. Emotions displayed during crusades have now come to be acknowledged as a resource as well. Throughout the Assam movement, the dominant emotions were anger, fear, and love. Anger against the government for its passivity, fear of turning into a cultural minority in their own land, and love for the “Mother Assam”. Jasper and Owens (2014) argued that expressing emotions are effective for the mobilization of masses. Emotions like anger, sorrow, moral shocks, indignation, exposure to grotesque imagery, pessimism, and frustration are potential mobilizers (Chong, 1991;

Gould, 1993, Beyerlin & Andrews, 2008, Beyerlin & Sikkink, 2008; Jasper & Poulsen, 1995; Nepstad & Smith, 2001; Halfmann & Young, 2001; Luker, 1984, Oliver, 1984). Research on emotions in social movements has also disclosed methods of maintaining commitment. Jasper and Poulsen (1995) suggest that moral shocks can activate engagement, it can boost involvement by reviving enthusiasm for a cause, escalating identification with a community, and making perceived threats feel “physiologically real” (Halfmann & Young, 2010). The origin of the Assam Movement began with the discovery of a massive number of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the electoral rolls of the Mangaldoi constituency, which created a moral shock among the Assamese people, driving them to the streets to demand the detection, disfranchisement, and deportation of the illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Furnishing a target to blame can unify attention and provide a constructive outlet for negative emotions such as contempt, anger, and hate (Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019). The emotional connection that binds activists together creates emotional rewards for continued engagement. In the Assam Movement, the target to blame was clear and explicit i.e., the government, which unified and supplied the Assamese people a healthy channel to communicate their emotions. Protestors also grow emotional connect with the location which supplies continuity in participation (Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019), clearly visible in the Assam Movement where there is a deep sentimental attachment to the place. It must be noted that emotions are shaped by culture, molded by life stories and expectations, interactions and experiences with others. Culture also outlines what stimulates an emotion, how we communicate it, how we tag it and comprehend it (Jasper, 2017).

Leadership is one of the vital cognitive practices that are pivotal to social movements: they induce devotion, mobilize resources, generate and identify opportunities, design plan of action, structure demands, and impact the end result (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002). They inspire and motivate others to engage in social movements. They not only function as a

mobilizer but also serve as an articulator connecting the movement to a larger society. The two main faces of the Assam Movement, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (President, AASU) worked as a mobilizer, traveling place to place, bonding with people, whereas Brighu Kumar Phukan (General Secretary, AASU) performed as an excellent articulator and orator instilling not just emotions but also explaining the rationale of the cause to the masses and further course of action to be taken. It is the responsibility of the leader to specify grievances and formulate a social reality to encourage collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). As Snow and Benford (1992) have argued, “collective action frames punctuate the seriousness, injustice, and immorality of social conditions while attributing blame to concrete actors and specifying the collective action needed to generate social change”. The masses become grateful to leaders for addressing the cause and taking measures on their behalf (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002). Leaders of the Assam Movement were revered and soon became a symbol of the agitation. They were termed Ram and Laxman (two brothers in the Hindu saga, Ramayana). Their photographs hung on the walls of Assamese households. As suggested by Jasper (2017) that leaders are valuable symbols of our beliefs, “and hence they are good to think with.” At the same time, they are beneficial to the external spectators as well, depicting the movement and what it signifies. Leaders are crucial decision-makers too (Jasper, 2017) and are responsible for the division of labor (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002). The numerous cognitive practices such as marches, rallies, strikes, bandhs, picketing, blockades, *satyagrahas* during Assam Movement were decided by the leaders in consultation with heads of AAGSP (All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad). Efficacious leaders appeal to diverse adherents and increase the agency of their supporters as well as their own (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002). Assam movement did not just receive support from the local population of Assam alone, but people from other states of North-East such as Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura also joined the wagon. The engagement of adherents from different states generated an all-inclusive Assamese identity. Movement intellectuals from the 1980s have progressively highlighted

the importance of collective identity as an element that invigorates protest involvement (van Stekelenburg 2013). Employment of tools of collective effervescence proposed by Durkheim- dancing, chanting, shared focus of attention strengthens group identities of all kinds (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Wlodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015). The same could be witnessed during the Assam Movement.

Media influenced protest participation to a large extent. The support of local media and press during the Assam Movement was phenomenal. Every local newspaper (both Assamese and English) and radio channel rendered full support in favor of the cause which AASU had taken up. Gitlin's (1980) investigation documented that social movements require mass media to muster probable supporters, obtain people's support for their demands, ultimately leading to political alteration. The regional media of Assam informed the masses about the various activities held across the state, broadcasted headlines, and frequently published the upcoming events and calendar of AASU's undertakings. Sociologists term them as "movement communicator", those specific movement intellectuals (actors in the movement) who depicts the campaign to and before the audience via mass media. It was the local media of Assam that changed the course and image of the Assam Movement to how it is known presently. They constructed an appearance of agitation with the aid of cautiously creating and performing media events. As noted by Lemart (1984) that news coverage can provide important "mobilizing information" on the practicalities and logistics of how and where individuals can participate if they wanted to join the social movement or protest. The more the public of Assam read and heard about the events and activities the more they developed a fervor to join the campaign. Gitlin reported how the mass media assisted and the manner in which they sketched out the social movement led to extensive support from the people (Vleigenthart & Walgrave, 2012). Media coverage of protests can create what Kielbowicz and Scherer (1986) call a "collective awareness," in that audiences can identify with and relate to the grievances expressed by the protesters to their own lives. The local media left no stone unturned to educate and enlighten the

public during the Assam Movement. It came as no astonishment when censorship was imposed on newspapers by the government, and in extreme cases but routinely journalists were beaten up and put behind bars. The regional media of Assam became accountable to gather the attention of mainstream India to take notice and address the demands of the Assamese people. Even though there is contrasting evidence that media coverage tends to be biased and negative, emphasizing sensational and violent elements rather than covering the underlying issues and grievances of the protests (McCurdy, 2012), it was however not the case in the context of the Assam Movement. Since the journalists who were covering the movement were equally Assamese and equally angry and anxious about the future of their state, their stories covered the problems and injustice relevant to the agitation.

Study 1 divulged six broad themes-the sixth and the final theme was the humungous participation of women in the agitation. As discussed above, the cognitive structures of the people are immensely influenced by the culture in which they exist, thereby also reflecting themselves in many societal pursuits. Gender is also one such socially and psychologically constructed phenomenon. A cognitive position on gender is based on the foundational idea that gender is an elementary category employed to comprehend and interact in one's surroundings (Cross & Markus, 1993). It is asserted by Eagly and Wood (1991) that norms do not subsist for communicating with other people who are gender-neutral, however, it is present when communicating with males and females. As argued by Unger (1990), research within social-cognitive theory has indicated that sex and gender furnish information that performs as a foundation for assessment, expression of expectations, directions of behaving in a social setting irrespective of whether the social setting seems to be gender-related. Gender belief system was founded by Deaux and Kite (1987) outlines a number of viewpoints and opinions that people have about men and women and the attributes that are assumed to display masculinity and femineity. This

belief system includes various stereotypes around men and women and outlook with respect to men and women to suitable roles and ways of behaving. Findings of numerous studies reveal that gender-stereotypic categorization influence conclusions about men and women (Deaux & Lewis, 1984, Noseworthy and Lott, 1984). Previous researches on the subject matter of gender stereotypes disclosed that men are commonly viewed as “agentic, aggressive and instrumental” whereas women were conventionally seen as “passive, relational and emotional” (Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975; Ashmore, Del Boca, & Wohlers, 1986; Eagly, 1987; Lippa, 1990; Martin, 1987; Spence, Deaux, & Helmreich, 1985). If these societal gender stereotyping exists in various aspects of social life, do they also exhibit in collective action? This hinted me to inquire whether both the male and female actors (participants) of the Assam Movement were treated and merited identically for their endeavors? The findings of study 2 disclosed three broad themes- the patriarchal face of the Assam movement, lack of development of feminist consciousness among women, and gendered roles in the student organization. These findings revealed that the movement was indeed gendered, where the men went on to take important positions and roles during and after the agitation, whereas the women comrades were unrepresented at the upper echelons and marginalized when the time came to reap benefits. They were pushed back to traditional ways of life. The fact that women comrades during and after the Assam movement were not entrusted with leadership positions and were largely marginalized and unrepresented is consistent with previous studies. As noted by Morris & Staggenborg, (2002) that gender inequality that exists in a community would result in the reflection of gender inequality in social movements as well. As an outcome, the upper echelons of social movement leadership have seen male faces, while very few women gain access to high status through their relationship with men as wives or lovers (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002; Rosen, 2000). During the Assam Movement, women served with great fervor and vigor but were unrepresented at the high-ranking positions within AASU. They



were no woman at the peace-making board or the historical signing of Assam Accord. They were employed as “shields” during rallies, used as women's force, but forgotten when the time came to reap benefits. They acted as “bridge leaders” defined by Robnett (1997) as “an intermediate layer of leadership, whose task includes bridging potential constituents and adherents, as well as potential formal leaders to the movement”. The bulk of emotional work is drawn out of them and they perform a strong role during periods of crisis and challenges, but powerful and top formal ranking positions are acquired by men only (Robnet and Jones, 1997, 1993). Women during the Assam Movement carried out tasks such as organizing activities, creating strategies, developing frames, going door to door mobilizing more women, fundraising, etc., but were excluded from formal high positions, from accountable leadership. When women are excluded from top ranks, they are naturally separated from a considerable amount of power exercised by social movement leaders (Morris & Staggenborg, 2002). The inconsistency in the assignment of duties on the basis of gender reflects enormously on the society in which it exists. It displays the wider societal practices, thinking, and cognition of the members of the specific community. Gender is not merely a biological term but rather is a cultural aspect, that influences cognitive practices. The gender inequality that is prevalent in the state of Assam demonstrated itself within the movement too, hence gendering it.

For both Study 1 and 2, I had employed the concept of cognitive praxis to better understand the meaning of social cognition in the context of collective action. Cognitive Praxis is a useful concept when one aspires to enquire about the various cognitive artifacts that operate while collective action is in progress and sustains it for a prolonged time. In short, cognitive praxis is functional once the collective action has begun, it however falls short to explain the various factors that drive the emergence of collective action. After an extensive review of literature, it was discovered that in order to examine the factors that

result in the outset of collective action, the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) was suitable. The model states that perceived injustice, group efficacy, and social identity are crucial to predicting collective action. "A particular feature of the model is that it accords a key role to social identity and suggests that identity influences collective action both directly and indirectly through perceived injustice and group efficacy" (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwar and, Heath, 2011). As we have observed that culture helps individual to make sense of themselves, their social world, and their roles in the society. In view of the centrality of culture in individual's lives, study 3 was conducted to examine the responses of individuals when their valued culture comes under threat. By employing and extending Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) was established quantitatively that threat to culture indirectly predicts collective action intentions among the Assamese student population in various colleges and universities of Assam in the backdrop of the recent anti-CAA protests in the state. The results showed that cultural threat successfully explained the relationship with perceived injustice, group efficacy, and ingroup identification, which further predicted collective action intentions. The findings were consistent with the previous studies. Lu, Wan, Hui, and Tong (2019) examined whether cultural self-awareness in the context of cultural threat would increase collective pride and identity prompting participation in collective action. Their investigation successfully demonstrated that threat to culture was positively associated with engagement in collective action. Threat to culture presents a danger to the group that participates in that culture. Since associateness in a group fulfills diverse identity incentives namely self-esteem, self-continuity, and distinctiveness (Vignoles, 2011), any danger to the group could endanger the attainment of these incentives. In reaction to such danger, people have exhibited engagement in identity reactions that assert collective identity (Fischer et.al., 2010; Smeekes and Verkuyten, 2013). When North Koreans encountered threats to culture from immigration, they demonstrated a more complete definition of Korean identity (Ha and Jang, 2015). Once people declare their collective identity, they grow more

receptive to participating in collective action to protect the group from the threat (Ufkes et al., 2015). It has been demonstrated that protests are frequently triggered by the perceived threat to culture and the growing requirement to guard the continued survival of the local culture (Chen and Szeto, 2015; Suner, 2017). Therefore, the findings corroborate with the previous studies that threat to culture is viewed as a threat to one's identity thereby resulting in collective action intentions. The thesis makes various contributions which will be discussed in the next section.

### **10.1 Theoretical Contributions**

The findings that emerge from the current body of work make several important contributions to social cognition. The first contribution of the thesis was that it shed light on why cognitive praxis is a more appropriate concept to examine collective action than the other traditions of social cognition. Some (European Social Psychology, Situated Cognition, Distributed Cognition), although acknowledges and understands social cognition as something that is influenced and is in continuous interaction with the culture and the social context in which the individual is situated, however methodologically its demonstration of the significance of cognition in collective action is limited to identifying certain cultural components of that community and assessing them on a sample (Jasper, 2017; Droogendyk and Wright, 2017; Osborne et al., 2017; Travaglino et al., 2017; Baysu and Phalet, 2017; Górska et al., 2017; Chayinska et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2017; Gulevich et al., 2017). Cognitive practice on the other hand investigates collective action by delving into peculiar culturally loaded cognitive artifacts of that specific community which reflects itself in the collective action such as movement documents, programs, books, articles, it studies how the movement puts its message across, the creative ways of using tactics and

strategies, and how they are to be developed and propagated, speeches by leaders, the best method of communication, the specific organizational pursuits, etc. Cognitive praxis, therefore, is not only culturally and contextually rooted but also methodologically a suitable concept to examine the role of social cognition in collective action.

The second contribution of this research is that it was successful in demonstrating that the gender component is a sensible addition to the cognitive praxis literature. As illustrated before, the cognition of an individual is greatly impacted by the culture and environment one is brought up in, and if the culture advocates specific roles and responsibilities for ‘male’ and ‘female’ separately, it instinctively creates gender stereotyping. This gender stereotyping reflects in nearly all domains of society such as personal life and various occupational paths. A social movement is also one such undertaking where both male and female participants come together from all walks of life to bring about a change and create a better future for themselves and subsequent generations. In such progressive space too, such gender inequality is observable, where males lead and occupy important positions and roles whereas the female remain largely marginalized and underrepresented. This equation is a direct result of the cognition of the individuals living in a culture that promotes such gender inequalities.

The third contribution of the present research is to integrate the concept of ‘culture threat’ to the literature of social cognition. Although, the role of affective processes has been acknowledged in the literature, the specific role of perceived threat to ingroup’s culture in giving rise to particular kind of social cognition that underlies collective action is noteworthy.

## **10.2 Practical Concerns**

The present thesis attempted to understand and expand the role of social cognition in the context of collective action wherein students are involved. Participation of university students in social movements has been an age-old practice in India. Jawaharlal Nehru once in a debate with respect to whether students should be “politically active in the national movement”, cheerfully professed that participating in the national movement was not politics but rather “a sacred duty” (Chopra, 1978). Students who comprise both males and females represent a crucial component in the economic and political development of numerous nations. In many countries, they have overthrown governments and, in several others, they have constituted a consequential role in national movements. As demonstrated in the present thesis the cognition of an individual is heavily influenced by the culture and environment in which the individual is situated. In the very same manner, collectives such as student unions are also equally impacted by the cultural and social context. Student unions of numerous universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Aligarh Muslim University, University of Hyderabad, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, etc., have been highly active in several social issues. This concern and interest to participate in societal issues are also reflected in the proportionate representation of both boys and girls in the student bodies. Girls can be observed in upper echelons and positions within the student union, they hold strong opinions, they are fearless to stand for the cause, they are supported by peers and teachers and more importantly, they themselves are confident to confront the opposition. However, on the other side, there are university student unions (ex, All Assam Student’s Union), where girls’ representation in the union is not only far-fetched, girl students themselves feel that they do not belong in higher positions, it is something reserved for boys. The question then arises, what is happening in those educational institutions where only boys are encouraged to stand for positions and go on winning, whereas girls are either not inspired or don’t have any motivation to do so? Is our education system genuinely empowering girls to get out of their shells and fight, and if that is so then why is that some educational institutions still hold the age-old patriarchal practices? Are our educational institutions impacted by the cultural

and social context, which in turn reflects in the way students think, function and act? And if that is so, how can we make sure that the culture of the educational institutions demonstrates equality, tolerance, and liberalness? Is education in these higher educational institutions really training them to be tolerant and unbiased towards the opposite gender? Is our education system making us liberal and objective to the several social realities?

### **10.3 Limitations and directions for Future Research**

Even though the following section marks the end of this thesis, it should be rather seen as the beginning of studying social cognition in ‘true’ social sense especially with respect to collective action literature. The current body of work has not only strived and ventured but also provided some very important insights and understanding of social cognition and collective action and the importance of its interplay. However, it has been difficult to examine all the questions but, this thesis opens up interesting avenues for future work.

First, I want to address that the present thesis has been undertaken by taking into consideration the Assamese (ingroup) point of view on the issue of illegal immigration, and how it threatens their culture and way of life at large. It was done by examining the Assam movement and its inside dynamic. However, I believe that the account remains incomplete without paying regard to the other side of the spectrum, that is, the Bangladeshi (outgroup) point of view on the issue of illegal migration. As it is known that no one likes to leave their country and move to an unknown territory without a rationale. Bangladeshi migrate to India especially the bordering states due to unfavorable economic circumstances, belligerent conditions, intolerance, etc. in their native country. As a result, it becomes important to examine their position in this complex yet significant phenomenon.

Although it is immensely important to consider the narratives of the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the country, I propose the equal regard must be paid to the accounts of the native students who share their classroom or campus with the illegal

immigrants. Numerous researches have been done in the past where they have studied the challenges and opposition an immigrant student experiences in the educational institutions such as labeling them with various names, discrimination, etc. To address these issues there exist proper monitoring and assessment tools to aid the immigrant students to cope and adjust however it is equally imperative to examine what the presence of immigrant students has on the local students. Jensen (2015) conducted a study in Denmark, where he examined that having a large share of students for whom the host country language is not their first language may have detrimental effects on the educational outcomes of native children. His results illustrated that a high number of immigrant students in school lead to lower grades of native students, there was a higher dropout rate from high school, lower probability of getting through exams, the native students experienced more incidents of bullying, and the tendency of parents to move their children out to a school with fewer immigrant students. I believe that similar if not more problems might be experienced by the native students in higher educational institutions due to the presence of a large number of immigrant students especially when the perceived threat to their culture and fear of turning into a minority already exists. More such studies must be conducted that could examine the social-psychological effects of immigrant students on the local students.

The other limitation of the thesis is that while it demonstrated the presence of gender inequality in the functioning of the Assam movement as well as within the student organization, it failed to enquire whether and what steps have been taken to sensitize both the girl and boy students about the prevalent gender bias in the student organization and perhaps in the higher educational institution at large. It must be noted that the statements like- “it’s not safe for girls to venture out at night and so it is suitable for boys to take over the duties that are entrusted upon them by the student organization” or “the responsibilities and duties of AASU are strenuous, so boys are better

fitted for it” not just display gender inequality within the student organization but is also a reflection of the society at large. As one of my male interviewees said - “I don’t keep my wife or daughter locked up in the house but I don’t favor my wife to go out and work”, is a reflection of prevalent gender biasness that exists in the larger Assamese society. When such biases reach the educational institutions, it automatically begins to reveal itself in the classrooms and campuses as well. In such a scenario, it is important to investigate whether any interventions are being taken up by the educational institutions to sensitize their students on gender bias.

Another limitation that can be outlined is that for study 1, only sixteen individuals were interviewed who were active participants of the Assam Movement to understand how the numerous cognitive practices influenced by culture strengthened the campaign. For a finer and stronger analysis, the sample size could have been increased. The former Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta also the President of AASU, could have been approached since he was in the midst of all the happenings. His interview could have added richness to the analysis and perhaps provided a clearer understanding of the movement. He could have furnished answers to all the whys and hows of AASU in the movement. He along with other important former members like Atul Bora, Nibaran Bora who worked arduously backstage should be interviewed as they were some who had put together the movement, organized it, and directed it. Though it is important to interview the familiar and popular names of the movement, at the same time it is consequential to pay attention to the narratives of the common people who were involved too. Their accounts and descriptions could shed light on the various domains that have gone unnoticed and could have added immense quality and depth to the analysis. The same rationale can be adopted for study 2 as well where eight prominent and renowned females were interviewed. While their accounts proved to be in sync with the literature on gender bias within the movement, more female participants from ordinary backgrounds



should have been contacted as they perhaps could have presented a different picture. Study 2 was a qualitative inquiry because it was felt that if a questionnaire or survey or any such explicit measures was administered, respondents would have not provided honest answers due to social desirability or the fact that nobody wishes to speak against AASU. However, to measure the existence of gender bias, implicit measures could be employed like Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), to tap if respondents associate AASU faster with boys than girls. In the final and third study where SIMCA was employed to understand the relationships between constructs, injustice was only one item variable, which could be increased to multiple items variable for better validity, also for estimating social identity we employed the Five-dimensional strength of the Ingroup Identification scale (Leach, van Zomeren, Ouwerkerk, Vliek, 2008), where some items had to be removed while running the Structural Equation Modelling due to high collinearity issue. So instead, the Three-dimensional strength of the Group Identification scale proposed by Cameron (2004) could be used to avoid the collinearity problem.

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## APPENDIX

All items measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

**Injustice** (Zomeran, V.M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R., 2008)

1. I think the way we are treated by the Government is unfair.

## **Efficacy**

Items 1 and 2 taken from Fox and Schofield, 1989 and Mummendey et al. (1999)

1. To what extent do you think this (collective action) will increase chances of the government changing their plans?
2. I think that together we can change the present situation of CAA in Assam.

Items 3-5 taken from van Zomeran, Leach et al. (2010)

3. I think together we are able to stop the proposal of CAA.
4. I think that students can successfully protect the interests of Assam.
5. I think that students can really influence these decisions.

### **In-Group Identification** (Leach, van Zomeren, Ouwerkerk, Vliek, 2008)

#### *Solidarity (3)*

1. I feel a bond with the Assamese identity.
2. I feel solidarity with Assam.
3. I feel committed to Assam's struggle against the CAA.

#### *Satisfaction (4)*

4. I am glad to be an Assamese
5. I think Assamese have a lot to be proud of.
6. It is pleasant to be an Assamese.
7. Being Assamese gives me a good feeling.

#### *Centrality (3)*

8. I often think about the fact that I am Assamese.
9. The fact that I am Assamese is an important part of my identity.
10. Being Assamese is an important part of how I see myself.

#### *Individual Self-stereotyping (2)*

11. I have a lot in common with the average Assamese person.
12. I am similar to the average Assamese person.

#### *Ingroup Homogeneity (2)*

13. Assamese people have a lot in common with each other.
14. Assamese people are very similar to each other.

### **Collective Action Intentions** (van Zomeren, Leach et al, 2010; van Zomeren, 2004)

1. I would like to vote against the decision of CAA.
2. I am willing to sign a petition in support of maintaining and protecting Assam's sovereignty.
3. I would like to participate in anti-CAA organized activity, meeting leaders face-to-face to protest against the proposal.
4. I would like to do something with fellow Assamese to voice up against CAA.

### **Cultural Threat**

1. I feel there is a fear that implementation of CAA in Assam would lead to extinction of our culture.
2. I feel that necessary steps must be taken to protect and preserve the cultural, linguistic and social identity of the indigenous people of Assam.
3. I feel that the future Bangladeshi settlers will threaten and destroy the distinctiveness of Assam.
4. I feel that the old fear of Bengali (language) dominance over the Assamese during the British colonial period is once again intensified.
5. I feel that the Assamese people's fear and anger stems from a history of cultural oppression.
6. I feel that there is worry among the masses that CAA would bring in Bengalis from Bangladesh to threaten the existence of the Assamese language and culture.
7. CAA is an assault to our culture.
8. Destruction of our culture and language is the reason why we oppose the Act.

9. Damage to the culture and language is hurtful to the Assamese, no matter what religion they belong to.
10. I feel this Act is a threat to the integrity and a complete disregard of the Assamese identity.
11. The Act breaks the continuity of language, culture, demographics and economic wellbeing of the indigenous people of Assam.
12. CAA reverses everything that Assam Accord had sought to protect.