“Assam movement is a very complex social movement. It would be interesting as well as challenging for the students of social movements to study the Assam Movement objectively in its totality” (Hussain 1993:10)

3.1 Introduction:

The Assam Movement is the most popular mass movement that Assam experienced during the post-colonial period. A large section of the Asamiya people supported the movement because it was embedded in the question of identity. The movement, in its inception, was a protest movement against the government policy of giving political rights to alleged foreigners. But gradually some transformations took place in it with the emphasis being shifted to the issue of identity construction by drawing upon various ethnic stands and ultimately leading to ethnic disorder. In Assam, the movement brought a distinct political awareness amongst the Muslim community in general and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular. Though the movement at its initial phase was against all the illegal foreign nationals residing in Assam, gradually it seemed to be stood against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Hindu Bengalis living in Assam. It propelled a deep polarization between the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The Assembly elections of 1983 further deepened the apprehension.

The movement drastically changed the socio-political environment of Assam. The middle class Assamese played the leading role and the Assamese Hindu upper caste actively participated in the movement. The fear of identity crisis due to influx of
foreign nationals to Assam pushed a large section of Assamese to join the movement to stop the influx of the alleged foreign nationals and to protect their identity from those alleged illegal foreigners. In Assam, the struggle for protection of the Asamiya identity had a long history but it got its boost along the Assam Movement.

Hussain argued,

“The leadership popularized the idea very strongly that the Asamiyas were losing their identity. The fear of losing their identity in their own homeland propelled the mass movement and many participants made immense sacrifice in order to fulfill the demands…” (Hussain 1993: 166-167).

The Asamiya bourgeoisie also strongly supported the movement. The Assamese middle class, along with vernacular press popularized the idea that the Assamese were losing their identity as well as their control over the state politics in the face of unabated influx from Bangladesh.

Susanta Krishna Das is of the opinion that

“There was an advanced Calcutta oriented Hindu upper middle class among the indigenous Assamese, which though not large in number, dominated the Assamese society. This class developed a strong instinct of consciousness about its linguistic and ethnic identity. ....This apprehension was further fuelled by the continuous inflow of immigrants from East Bengal (Das 1980: 857).

Though the movement was a common platform for the all Assamese to safeguard their interests, yet the actions and courses that the movement produced in due course helped the Assamese middle class to establish their domination over the society and politics of Assam.
The movement was not only an important movement of Assam, but also became a point of reference for other immigrant/anti-migrant oriented conflicts in the North-Eastern States.

Myron Weiner Argued,

"The anti-foreigner movement spilled across the borders of Assam into the nearby states of Tripura and Manipur. In Tripura indigenous tribal groups launched violent attacks against Bengali settlers, who, by now, outnumbered the locals and controlled the state government. And in neighbouring Manipur, Manipuri students attacked Bengalis, Biharis, Punjabis, and the numerous and increasingly prosperous Nepali dairy and cattle farmers. India's entire northeast has been fragmented by the migrant-ethnic issue (Weiner 1983: 287).

After six years, the Assam Accord was signed in 1985 marking an end to the movement which still takes the centre stage of controversy. But the entire movement affected the age-old relationship between the Hindus and Muslims in Assam in general and Assamese/Asamiya and Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular.

There are always some sensitive issues in a mass mobilization which may transform into a harmful explosion in the society. Tilly (2004:3-4) argues that, social movements are sophisticated forms of ‘collective behaviour’. The collective behaviour guides group actions which play a vital role in a movement. Tilly recognized social movements as a major vehicle for ordinary people’s participation in public politics. By participating in a movement, ordinary people are able to attain direct power through collective effort. Collective participation of a large group of people can bring about changes in such a manner that can bypass established procedures and lead to dramatic changes. The Assam Movement in post-independent Assam brought about such
changes in society and politics of Assam. After the Assam Accord, the leadership of the movement formed a regional party and that entered to the electoral politics of Assam. Later, that party formed government in Assam.

Is the Assam movement a mere political movement? According to Monirul Hussain,

“The Assam movement seems more political than a social one. The issue of immigration of foreign nationals from across the border to Assam, raised by the leaders of movement apparently looks more of a political and constitutional issue than a social problem. The Assam movement had all the fundamental elements of a social movement rather than simply a political one…. all historically significant political movements are in fact essentially, social movements because of their deep roots in society and their impact on it. The Assam movement too, had its root in the society and its impact was felt deeply by the people” (Hussain 1993:6).

The Assamese privileged class feels insecurity and considers the growing number of alleged foreign nationals in Assam as a considerable ‘threat’ to their economic, socio-cultural and political existence. They develop the anxiety that if foreign nationals in Assam remain unrestrained the native people would lose their identity. Phukan argued that “The Assam movement on the issue of foreign nationals has been the manifestation of this anxiety” (Phukan: 1996: 49).

The ‘Bangladeshi go back’ slogans rent the sky and many people were forced to face the misdirected anger. A situation was, thus, created to impress the citizens that they would be overpowered by the foreign nationals. The leaders popularized the idea that the Asamiyas were becoming a minority due to continuous influx of foreign nationals to Assam. All these issues brought the Assam Movement to the fore in the socio-political history of Assam which worked as platform to demand detection and
deportation the foreign nationals from Assam. The Muslims of East-Bengal origin were labelled as Bangladeshi foreigners and targeted the indiscriminately to the level of genocide.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to discuss the reasons behind making the Muslims of East-Bengal origin the main target of attack during the movement period. The chapter also deals with the communal polarization in the society and politics of Assam during the Movement. The chapter argues that the Assam Movement brought a new political consciousness among the Muslims of Assam in general and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular in the society and politics of Assam.

3.2 Historical Background:

What ignited the movement to surface so strongly was the initiation of by-poll process in Mangaldoi parliamentary seat which fell vacant following the death of a Janata Party MP of Lok Sabha, Hiralal Patwari on March 28, 1979. The declaration by India’s the then Chief Election Commissioner S.L. Shakdhar on the issue of inclusion of foreign nationals names in the electoral rolls in the states of north-east India added to apprehension. Alleged sudden increase in the number of voters in the electoral rolls was taken up by the AASU to launch the movement. All the leaders of the AASU demanded the postponement of the by-elections in Mangaldoi till the names of the alleged illegal foreigners were deleted from the electoral rolls.

Subsequently, a number of complaints were filed from members of the civil society demanding a correction of the electoral rolls. The foremost planned protest was with the call of a twelve hour general strike (Assam Bandh) by the AASU on 8th June 1979. They demanded “Deletion, Disenfranchisement and Deportation” of the foreign
nationals (Baruah 2001:121). They also demanded that all who had entered the state after 1961 should be excluded from the state’s electoral rolls. The demand was wholeheartedly supported by a large number of people of Assam and there was positive response to the bandh calls. That was said to be the beginning of the Assam Movement.

August 25th and 26th of 1979 were memorable days in the social history of Assam when many organizations namely All Assam students’ Union, *Asom Sahitya Sabha*, *Asom Yuva Samaj*, *Asom Jatiyata badi Dal* (Girin Barua), *Jatiyatabadi Dal* (Khagen Hazarika), *Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad*, *Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad*, Plains Tribal Council, *Karbi Parishad* and All Assam Tribal Union united under the banner of the *All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad* (henceforth AAGSP) demanded for detection and deportation all foreign nationals living in Assam. The formation the AAGSP gave an impetus to the movement. As a platform for *Asamiya* masses to fight the issue of illegal foreigners, the AAGSP was able to draw the avid support of lakhs of people of Assam. The main objective of AAGSP was to detect and deport the foreign nationals from Assam along with the economic development of Assam. On 6th and 7th September 1979 both the AASU and the AAGSP called for a mass protest throughout Assam to stop the influx of foreign nationals. This mass protest received overwhelming support from a large section of the Asamiyas. The leadership of the Assam Movement continued their protest by staging demonstration, *satyagraha*, and other non-violent methods of protest to detect and deport the foreign nationals from Assam.

**3.2.1 Elections to Lok-Sabha:**

After the fall of the Charan Singh government at the centre in 1979, the Lok-Sabha was dissolved and a mid-term poll was ordered to be held in the early part of 1980 (Hussain 1993:109). The leadership of the Assam Movement started protesting the order of
Election Commission of India and demanded the revision of electoral rolls before holding any elections in Assam and thus deteriorated the law and order situation in Assam. The then Assam government led by Jogen Hazarika collapsed on 12th December 1979 and consequently Presidential rule was imposed in Assam. The leadership of the Assam Movement demanded the postponing of the Lok-Sabha elections in Assam and physically restricted all probable candidates from filing their nomination. A remarkable day during the movement period was December 10th in 1979 when Assam *bandh* disrupted normal life across the state. A section of leadership of the AASU and supporters of the movement in large number barred Late Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed’s wife, Begum Abida Ahmed from filing her nomination in Barpeta constituency where Khargeswar Talukdar, a movement supporter died and several others sustained injury in the blockade. The death of Khargeswar Talukdar became a turning point for the movement supporters and he was declared as the first martyr of the Assam Movement. “The election to the Lok-Sabha from the Brahmaputra valley was stopped at the eleventh hour” (Hussain 1993:113).

On 2nd February 1980, AASU submitted a memorandum of seven demands to the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, which emerged as the reference point of the Assam Movement. The demands were…

1. Foreign nationals must be detected and deported from our country.

2a. Names of foreign nationals must be removed from the concerned electoral rolls before holding any election in Assam.

2b. Inclusion of names of foreign nationals in electoral rolls in future must be made impossible with the help of adequate and strong election machinery.
3. Borders of India with the neighboring countries must be fully protected to effectively check infiltration.

4. Indian voters residing in Assam should be issued identity cards with photograph affixed.

5. Necessary constitutional safeguard should be provided to the people of North-Eastern region for the next 15/20 years by making necessary constitutional provisions for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people in the region.

6. The government of Assam should be free to reject any (citizenship) certificate issued by the district authorities of West Bengal and Tripura.

7. We demand that, the authority to grant citizenship certificate delegated to the State Government, should be withdrawn by Central Government immediately from all the State Government, so that those foreigners who were detected and deported from Assam do not come back armed with citizenship certificates issued by other States (Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India by AASU on 2nd February 1980:2).

Through these demands, the leadership of the AASU drew the attention of lakhs of Indian people on the issue of illegal foreign nationals. The problem of foreign nationals has been recognized as a serious problem both by the Central and the state government. Rounds of talks were held between the Central government and the AASU leadership on the issue of foreign nationals. The first four demands were accepted by the Central government. “The acceptance of all these four demands represents the success of the movement” (Hussain 1993:119).
3.2.2 The Issue of PIP (Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan):

After the end of Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the then Congress took up the issue to detect and deport the illegal foreigners from Assam. The government of Assam under the leadership of Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, adopted the scheme of PIP which was enacted by the Government of India in 1962 after the Indo-China war to prevent infiltration from Pakistan. “The operation of the PIP scheme terrorised the virtually unorganized and defenseless rural Muslim peasantry - particularly the Na-Asamiya Muslims throughout the Brahmaputra Valley” (Hussain 2000:4519). The Assam police de-ported 56,917 'infiltrators' from Nagaon district alone between 1961-67 (Government of Assam 1978).

Hussain pointed out that “The Assam government had already deported nearly 2 lakhs of Muslim immigrants/ infiltrators from Assam, and later, the Government of India stated that the number of Muslim immigrants was 27,000 out of 9,67,000 immigrants” (Hussain 1993:219).

Table 3.1 : Number of immigrant’s to Assam during 1961-71

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Displaced person</th>
<th>2,14,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Illegal Immigrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>6,31,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9,67,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1980, (cited in Hussain 1993:219)
The above data of table 3.1 reveals that, among those immigrant communities, the Muslims of East-Bengal origins are lesser in number. On the basis of the data Hussain argued that, “the fear generated by the leadership of the movement about the Muslim immigration/ infiltration was not based on sound evidence. They were guided by extra-rational commitments” (Hussain 1993:219).

3.2.3 Growth of Population in Assam and the Asamiya Consciousness:

Table 3.2: Assam 1901-1971: Percentage Increase in Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Growth rate Assam</th>
<th>Growth Rate All-India</th>
<th>Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-11</td>
<td>16.99</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>11.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-21</td>
<td>20.48</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>20.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-31</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-41</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-51</td>
<td>19.93</td>
<td>13.31</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-61</td>
<td>34.98</td>
<td>21.51</td>
<td>13.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-71</td>
<td>34.95</td>
<td>24.80</td>
<td>10.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 1971.

Table 3.2 reflects a steep and high growth of population in Assam which was far above the national population growth rate. During the period from 1971 to 1991 the percentage of the Hindu and the Muslim population fell respectively by 41.89% and 77.42% while in all India the percentage fell respectively 48.38% and 55.04% (Census Reports 1971, 1991). The growth trend set a record during this period which is said to be the result of the massive exodus of the Bangladeshi people during the war of 1971. The emergence of Bangladesh out of East Pakistan seemed to have changed the
socio-political and cultural landscape of the north eastern region of India. Caught in heat of the escalating war, many people fled to Assam from Bangladesh across the international border in view of the fact that the border was totally porous. Since the war and the resulting fear were similar across all people irrespective of religion, the Bangladeshi nationals who migrated into Assam were both the Hindus and the Muslims.

Chandan Kr. Sharma argued,

“The freedom movement in East-Pakistan during 1970-71 and the Pakistani administration’s violent repression of the movement also compelled lakhs of East Pakistani citizens to enter Assam as refugees, many of whom did not return to their homeland even after the formation of Bangladesh. All these contributed to the rising anti-immigration temperature in the Assamese public discourse” (Sharma 2016:96).

The realization of the fact that the growth of population in Assam was much higher than the all India growth-rate makes the people apprehensive of the situation. Thus, the growing population propelled apprehension in the minds of the Asamiyas and they raised voice against all those non-Asamiya groups residing in Assam. When it was noticed that the growth of population in Assam was much higher than the all India growth rate, it immediately caused the apprehension.

Such apprehension was one of the reasons behind the attack on both religious and linguistic minority in Assam during the Assam Movement. The most important factor which has not been highlighted those writers regarding the growth of Muslims of East-Bengal origin in Assam is their marginalized socio-economic condition. Their poor
economic conditions, high rate illiteracy, absence of the middle class within their community are the propelling factors behind their growth of population which needs to be taken into scrutiny.

**Table 3.3: Variation of religion-wise demographic pattern in Assam 1901-2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hindus (%)</th>
<th>Muslims (%)</th>
<th>Others (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>71.03</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>16.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>67.95</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>15.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>67.33</td>
<td>19.41</td>
<td>13.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>70.09</td>
<td>23.41</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>46.84</td>
<td>25.72</td>
<td>27.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>72.01</td>
<td>24.68</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>71.33</td>
<td>25.26</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>72.51</td>
<td>24.56</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.4 reveals that growth of Muslims population from 1951 to 1971 remained stable at around 24%. The growth rate was lesser than the prospect. “Therefore, it would be factually wrong and ahistorical to say that the Muslims are demographically threatening the Hindu dominance in Assam” (Hussain 1993:221).

It is true that majority of Muslims in Assam are of a migrant descent. A large section of Muslims of East-Bengal origin came to Assam during the colonial period. During the early phase, the numerical strength of the East-Bengal Muslims were not so high. But the repeated migration of people belonging to same social group, speaking the same
language and following the same religion made them an issue in the society and politics of Assam.

3.3 The Assam Movement and Communal Polarization:

The entry of the Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangh (henceforth RSS) and Jana Sangh have marked the beginning of politics on religious polarisation amid the drive to deport the illegal migrants. Moreover, political leaders mainly from Bhartiya Janata Party (henceforth BJP) maintained closed contact with the leadership of the Assam Movement. All these happenings compelled a section of Muslims to withdraw from the movement which they supported earlier. Hussain argued, “From the very beginning of the movement, the RSS played a very active role in poisoning the minds of the Hindus” (Hussain 1993:132). These schemes of things have sown the seeds of communal politics and clashes in many pockets of the state where the Hindus and the Muslims developed distrust amongst each other. “The movement itself is by no means secessionist, but it holds in its womb teeming secessionist ideas and attitudes” (cited in Phukan2007:214).

The veneer of non-violence and secularism peeled off as soon as big and small incidents of group clashes rocked the movement where a section of the people belonging to a particular religion was targeted. These incidents finally resulted in a yawning gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Quoting Isfaqul Rahman, Nandana Dutta writes

“In the movement to push back foreigners one of the primary directions was that of Hindu fundamentalism. At the one point a BJP-RSS sentiment entered the movement and an anti-Muslim feeling emerged.
Muslim was equated with foreigners. As a result, the people of Assam were divided into a majority and minorities” (Dutta 2012: 86).

Aggressive nationalism dominated the state’s socio cultural and political spheres during the movement, wherein thousands died, many sustained injuries and communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims started falling apart at an incredible speed.

Quoting Hiren Gohain, Nandana Dutta writes, “for five years the Assamese people have had their lives laid waste. A catastrophic cyclone came and spoilt hundreds of lives, destroyed age-old inter-community relationship sowed the seeds of poisonous barbs and thorns for the future” (Dutta 2007: 91).

The leadership of the Assam Movement institutionalized the mindset of youths of Assam against the alleged foreign nationals. Assam Bandh, hunger-strike, demonstration etc. against the outsiders, deteriorated the socio-political environment of Assam. They demanded that all ‘Bahiragata’ (outsiders) should be deported from Assam.

Ahmed argued,

“The interpretation of the word ‘Bahiragata’ came from different persons that non-Assamese or who came from other states or out–side India might be known as Bahiragata. In fact, Muslims, Marwaris, Bengalis, Biharis, Madrasis, Sikhs, and Punjabis- all these were Bahiragata. So this meaning became very complicated as well as dangerous for the integrity of the whole of India. With quick interference of V.H.P., RSS and other Jatiyatabadi groups, the meaning was diverted to “Bangladeshi foreigners’. Thus, the agitation turned into a new communal line” (Ahmed 1999:143).
But it was a game of political power if Kuldip Nayar is to be believed whom Samiruddin Ahmed quotes, “If the Assam situation is to get analyzed without emotion, it seems apparent that the real issue is to get political power not foreigners” (Ahmed 1999:146).

Subir Bhaumik wrote,

“The ferocity of the violence split the groups leading Assam agitation along religious lines and a number of Assamese Muslims leaders broke away from the AASU and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) immediately after the 1983 riots, alleging that the agitating groups had been ‘infiltrated by the RSS’(Bhaumik 2009:53).

3.4 Towards a New Political Consciousness:

The Assam Movement brought a new political consciousness to the Muslims in general and Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular in Assam. Lots of events contributed towards the growth this new political consciousness.

3.4.1 Birth of All Assam Minority Students’ Union:

The leadership of the Assam Movement failed to distinguish between East-Pakistani refugee and foreign nationals in Assam (Hussain 1993:131). The Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Hindu Bengalis residing in Assam bear their origin from East-Pakistan. Therefore they were easily labeled as Bangladeshi foreigners during the movement. After the North Kamrup incident of 1980 against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Hindu Bengalis, they became aware of the real motive of the leadership of the Assam Movement on the issue of foreign nationals. It seems that, the labelling of foreign national was done consciously. All these phenomena compelled them to organize themselves against the move to detect and deport the foreign
nationals. The All Assam Minority Students’ Union (henceforth AAMSU) came into existence as a counter organization to the AASU. Both the AASU and the AAMSU were dead opposed to each other and their activists clashed with each other’s in many places.

“As an antithesis to the AASU, the All Assam Minority Student Union came into existence, and similarly as an anti-thesis to the AAGSP; the Citizens’ Right Preservation Committee (CRPC) of Assam came into existence” (Hussain 1993:131). The centre did not miss the advantage and invited the AAMSU leadership for talks in New Delhi along with the AASU leadership. The minority students further demanded citizenship to those who came to settle in Assam before 1971. But the AASU leadership was against the idea and remained firm on 1951 as the base year. The simmering difference finally resulted in an orgy of clash which later took the communal turn. “The Assam Movement and its resultant countermovement behaved in such a way that it sharply divided the masses of Assam” (Hussain 1993:132). It led to a total collapse of the communal fraternity and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Udayan Misra argued that,

“Though in earlier populist agitations like the one for making Assamese the state language, the Assamese Muslims had played a significant supportive role, yet it was during the anti-foreigners stir of 1979-85 that they felt somewhat alienated and insecure for the first time in the state's post-independence history” (Misra 1999:1269).

The attack and counter-attack between the AASU and the AAMSU further intensified the communal polarization.
3.4.2 Confused Regime:

Assam’s sphere of politics kept taking new trend since Mrs. Syeda Anwara Taimur took oath as Assam’s Chief Minister in 1980. At the outset she got tougher with the leadership of the Assam Movement and did not allow the Government employees to participate in the movement. She patronized some bureaucrats to nip the agitation in the bud. “The process appeared to be one of the de-Assamesization of state bureaucracy and it reinforced the fear of Assamese minoritization and of immigrant power”(Baruah 2001:129). Her course of action created doubt among the native Assamese against the Muslim politicians and it enhanced the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam. Though Asamiya Muslims estranged from the movement after Mrs. Taimur became Chief Minister, yet a large number of Asamiya Muslims stood with the Assam Movement. Infact, there are examples of Muslims leaders such as, Nurul Hussain became the vice president of the AASU, Nekibur Zaman became the president of Kamrup district of the AASU, and Safiqul Hussain became the president of Jorhat district of the AASU and helped in the continuity of the Assam Movement.

3.4.3 Violence against the Muslims of East-Bengal Origin during the State Legislative Elections in 1983:

The sixth Assam Legislative Assembly failed to complete its stipulated term and was dissolved on 19th March in 1982. The dissolution of the state legislature indicated that according to the constitutional provision Assam would have to go in for election before 18th March 1983 (Hussain 1993:147). The Centre was keen to hold the Assembly elections to safeguard their political interest and announced the polling dates as 14th, 17th and 20th February of 1983. The AASU and the AAGSP opposed the move to hold the Assembly polls without deleting the names of the suspected immigrants. Let us
follow Sanjib Baruah who divided the Assam movement into five phases. The first phase took place from June 1979 to November 1980 which he calls ‘festival of protest’ while the second phase lasted from December 1980 till January 1983 to be named as ‘Confrontation’. This included the assassination of E.S. Parthasarathy, a civil servant and an entry of paramilitary forces to the politics of Assam. The third phase that includes the Assembly elections in February 1983 was marked as period of increasing violence. Baruah names it as ‘total breakdown of order’. More than 3000 people were killed, divisions in Assamese ethnic society emerged (Dutta 2012: 84). The fourth phase that existed from March 1983 to May 1984 was marked by the ‘contest between the state and the movement’. The final and fifth phase which began in June 1984 and ended in December 1985 was the phase of ‘accommodation’ (Baruah 2001: 115-126).

Each of these phases reflected the happenings of the time. The deadly incidents of violence erupted as soon as the Election Commission announced the Assam assembly poll schedule from February 14, 1983. The socio-political scene was dominated by incidents of police firing, attack on polling booths, setting vital bridges on fire.

“Clashes, which were essentially of political nature to begin with, thus ended up largely as communal massacres-even genocide at Nellie for instance-as it had happened on a smaller scale even before in North Kamrup in the early part of January 1980. The outbursts of violence both then and later were apparently preplanned” (Dasgupta and Guha 1985:844)

Police lathi-charge on the agitators, incidents of group clashes, explosions, setting buildings and bridges on fire became burning issues of the media every passing day. Voters stayed away from exercising their franchise, willing voters were forced to confine themselves in their homes. The elections were marred by many incidents of
violence where the turnout was very poor. The victims of violence mostly were the Muslims of East Bengal origin. More than three thousand people, mostly Muslims of East Bengal origin, were killed during this period of skirmish before the elections (Baruah 2001:131-132).

Nandana Dutta quotes B.G. Verghese who has clearly depicted the picture of the outcome of the Assam Movement. “The state was racked with bomb blasts … over 1600 bridges and culverts were damaged or destroyed. The climax came with the ghastly Nellie Massacre ...” (Dutta 2012:63).

The Nellie massacre was followed by series of massacres at Chaowlkhowa Chapori in Darrang district and Silapathar in Lakhimpur district. In Chaowlkhowa Chapori, the victims were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and in Silapathar the victims were the Hindu Bengalis. At Gohpur in Darrang district, many people died because of the conflict between the Asamiyas and the Bodos. More than 109 people were burnt alive at Nagabandha village of undivided Nagaon district. The ordinary people became the direct victims of those massacres occurred in different places of Assam. Among those victims, the majority were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

“The large number of Muslims who were victimized in violence during elections and the national and international press coverage of it as a case of Muslims being killed, strained the ethnic Assamese Muslims’ attitude towards the movement. Several Muslim members within the AASU issued an ultimatum to the AASU leadership demanding a correction of a “pro-Hindu communal tilt”. Their memorandum demanded a “firm definition” of a foreigner” (Baruah 2001:136).

Thus, the movement which was launched peacefully came to be marred by murder and mayhem. One of the factors responsible for these murders, mayhem, communal riots
was the Assembly elections of 1983. The repeated occurrence of communal riots widened the gap between the Assamese and the Muslim community and particularly Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Assam.

3.4.4 Illegal Migrant (Determination by Tribunal) Act:

To find out a way to reduce the occurrence of communal riots and to protect the genuine citizens from harassment, Indian authority introduced the IM(DT) Act and imposed this Act on Assam in 1983. The act was imposed to protect the interest of genuine citizens of India, from atrocities and harassment. The Act set the qualifying date for identification of foreigners as 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1971 under its section 3c(i) of the Act. Surprisingly the act was deliberately framed specifically for Assam while the rest of India is operated under Foreigners Act of 1946. Assam followed the IM(DT) Act 1983, till 2005 (Nath 2009:96).

All these have put the popularity of the movement at stake. The assassination of Mr. Indira Gandhi had marked a change in the course of the Assam Movement. Rajiv Gandhi took oath as Prime Minister and renewed talks with the AASU leaders to find a solution to the long pending impasse. Then the AASU leadership agreed 1971 as the cut-off year and Gandhi promised of measures to detect and deport the illegal settlers who came after 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1971. The agitation ended on August 15, 1985 after the AASU and the AAGSP leadership signed the ‘Assam Accord’ with the Centre.

3.5 The Assam Movement and The Assam Accord:

The ‘Assam Accord’, a memorandum of settlement was signed between the Central Government of India and the leadership of the movement in New Delhi on 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1985. Various political parties and organizations stood against the Accord.
*Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad* rejected the Accord and condemned it, saying that it was “made only for political power” (Ahmed 1999:167). The leadership of the AAMSU supported the Accord. The Accord fixed 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971 as the cut-off date for identification and deportation of illegal foreigners from Assam, as demanded by the AAMSU and accepted by the Central government.

The Assam Accord was drafted by the government side after due consultation with the leadership in New Delhi to be cleared by the AASU and the AAGSP. Then it was formally signed by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Assam Chief Secretary of the government of Assam and the AASU-AAGSP leadership on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1985. Thousands of people welcomed the pact and a section of leadership was elected as their representatives a couple of months later.

Phani Bora argued,

> “The mass movement in Assam covering more than 6 years on the issue of detection and deportation of the foreign nationals by the Assamese people was an unprecedented event. All the peace loving people of our country felt a great relief that the grave holocaust, taking the toll of thousands of human lives and rendering about 3.10 lakhs of immigrant---Muslims, Hindus, Bengalis, Assamese and tribals homeless, Assam has returned to normalcy as a result of an accord signed between the government of India and the leaders of the 6 year long agitation followed by a general election. It is essentially the problem of Assamese nationality; many of its associated problems still await to be attended more seriously and carefully” (Bora 1987:35)

### 3.5.1 Birth of *Asom Gana Parishad* (AGP):

The end of the Movement marked the beginning of the regionalism in the field of politics. “The AASU part of the leadership took initiative to form a regional party in
Assam with the help of the supporters of the Assam Movement” (Hussain 1993:155). Accordingly the Asom Gana Parishad (henceforth AGP) came into existence as a regional party on 10th October 1985. The formation of AGP inspired leaders of the AAMSU to form another state party in Assam.

3.5.2 United Minority Front (UMF):

After the formation of AGP, the leaders and supporters of counter movement against the Assam Movement formed the United Minority Front (henceforth UMF). While the AAMSU and the CRPC (Citizen Right Preservation Committee) were the organizational counter to the AASU and the Assam Movement, the UMF remained as a counter political group to AGP formed by the leadership of the Assam Movement. Ahmed argued, UMF “a political party for the minorities, by the minorities and of the minorities” (Ahmed 1999:174). The main support bases of the UMF were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Hindu Bengalis. The formation of the UMF added a new chapter in the development of new political dynamics among the Muslims of Assam.

3.5.3 Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF):

A new political party was formed in Assam in the late 2005. The formation of Assam United Democratic Front (henceforth AUDF) gave a new direction to Muslim politics of Assam. Later, AUDF was renamed as All India United Democratic Front (henceforth AIUDF). Assam Jamiat played an important role behind the formation of the AIUDF. For the first time in independent India, Jamiat (Jamiat-Ul-Ulema-E-Hind) came to play a direct role in the electoral politics of the country (Nath 2011:157).
3.6 Summing Up:

The whole atmosphere of Assam was covered by slogans like *Mare Asom, Jiye Kon, Jiye Asom Maare Kon, Jai Aai Asom*, (if Assam dies, who will live? If Assam lives, none will die: Long live mother Assam:), *Jodi Nuhua Asomiya, Asom eri gusijua* (if you are not an Assamese, leave Assam) during Assam movement. These slogans encouraged large section of Assamese to join in the demands of detecting and deporting illegal foreigners from Assam. The AASU spearheaded the movement with several objectives to protect the interest of the Asamiya people. But in due course, acrimonious differences, fratricidal clashes took a huge toll which converted the movement to a violent and communal one. The issue of detection and deportation of foreign nationals, the participation from RSS and the leaders of BJP to the Assam Movement, occurrence of communal riots during 1983, birth of the AGP, AAMSU, CRPC etc. and the introduction of IM(DT) Act, all these led to unprecedented communal polarization and developed a new political consciousness among the Muslims in Assam in general and Muslims of East-Bengal origin of Assam in particular. The Assembly polls of 1983 aggravated the situation. The elections to the state’s legislative assembly became a turning point for the Assam Movement which deepened the polarization between the Hindu Assamese and the Muslims in Assam. The next chapter will discuss how the Assembly polls of 1983 divided the society of Assam and developed the situation for communal flare-ups.