CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

Memory is an inseparable part of human life. It is influenced by multiplicity of forces including political and cultural. Memory may be individual as well as collective. The role of politics in shaping collective memory needs to be analysed carefully because it carries multiplicity of consequences that differ from community to community. In a multi-ethnic society, collective memory sometimes reflects the deep-rooted reality of ethno-centrism, which develops the perception of looking at the world from the angle of one’s own culture. This perception first generates self-centric views within the community and also develops the sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness from the other communities. With the passage of time such thinking may generate restlessness and consequently aggressiveness. It has been observed that aggressive one-sided love towards own culture, religion, community, language, contributes towards occurrence of violence. Thus, violence becomes a part of social action of human beings. Social scientists uphold the view that man as an individual is barely ever aggressive. Alone he neither commits murder nor goes for violence but a man in social contact does both. It is only after men come together, leaving their personal interests, organizing into groups that collision and conflict follow out of perceived or imagined threats towards their group interests. Group identity as a community is a significant determinant in shaping the collective behaviour of a group. If the group is bound by common objectives, then the ethics of the group will determine the nature of action which may produce either
negative or positive results. Perceived group interests along with perceived threats
direct the group actions and increases “the feeling of locating one’s own group at the
centre of the universe, superior to other” (Talbot 2000:113-114). Accordingly, the
‘dominant group’ which locates itself as the centre of the universe tries to project the
‘other subordinate group ’as the threat to their identity and assume that they will be
outnumbered by their enemies. Many writers such as D. Horowitz (1985:41-54),
Ashutosh Varshney (2002:4), argue that ascribed group identities based on race,
religion, tribe, language or caste are the roots of all forms of conflict. Asghar Ali
Engineer (2004:3-4) opines that group identity plays a significant role in the process of
political mobilization resulting in group clashes. In intense inter-group conflicts, the
view of ‘Us’ versus ‘Them” comes into forefront, that further deepen the bitterness and
instigates one community against the other. It may lead to greater manifestation of
resentment in the form of movement or agitation. This situation can be best exploited
by the communal forces to organize communal riots that leave deep scars of pain and
distress, which is difficult to forget.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Indian society is a diverse society. Though these diversities have contributed towards
establishing a mosaic culture in India, in a number of times it generated bitterness
among the communities leading to communal riots. Communal riots between the
Hindus and the Muslims are one of the major problems in India. The frequent
occurrence of communal riots has undermined the relationships between these two
communities, which otherwise has a history of harmonic coexistence. It was the
political conflict between the leaders of the two communities during the British period
which later generated feelings of communalism in the minds of a large section of
people. Consequently this instigated them to participate in communal riots. When we talk about communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims in India, it is generally backed by a tendency of perceived threats that is “the threat of the Muslims” (Kimura 2013:9).

Assam is also not an exception to this trend of Indian politics. Existence of multiplicity of caste, race, religion, tribe and language in the Assamese society has led to identity consciousness among the people resulting in conflicts. From 1979 to 1985 the issue of foreign nationals shackled the social atmosphere of Assam and a movement with massive support emerged in Assam popularly known as the ‘Assam Movement’. The movement gained support from a large section of Assamese with the demand for the deletion of names of alleged foreigners from the electoral rolls and their subsequent deportation was the main demand of the movement. The leadership of the Assam movement apparently aimed at protecting the distinctive “cultural and linguistic identity” of the Assamese from the influx of foreign nationals (Goswami 2001:131-132).

In the politics of Assam, the issue of migration remains a dominant phenomenon. It is believed that, the migration of population from outside Assam has been posing serious challenges towards the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people. A large section of Assamese believed that the migrant communities particularly the Muslims of East-Bengal^1^ origin constituted an important vote bank in the state would have changed the politics of Assam. Girin Phukan argued that the Assam Movement was the manifestation of such apprehension (Phukan 1996:34).

According to Sanjib Baruah, “The leaders of the Assam movement argue that all immigrants from foreign countries, mostly from East
Bengal—that is, the province of East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 that became the sovereign state of Bangladesh and from Nepal, except those who were legally granted citizenship status in India, are illegal aliens” (Baruah 1986:1189).

The leaders of Assam movement demanded their detection and deportation from Assam. The leaders also demanded the deletion of their names from the electoral rolls because foreigners do not enjoy the right to vote.

Kimura depicted the picture how the migrant Muslims of East-Bengal became the illegal aliens when she stated,

“...before independence, the movement of people from the areas was regarded as interprovincial migration, as Sylhet was a part of same political unit as the rest of India. However, after, partition, the Muslim migrants became “illegal immigrants” or “foreigners”, whereas the Hindus were regarded as “refugees” (Kimura 2013:45).

Though the leaders adopted peaceful collective protest activities to achieve their demands right from the beginning, yet frequent outbreak of confrontations between the supporters and the opponents sometimes resulted in ethnic and communal violence. Such incidents stained the course of the movement from a non-violent to a violent one. Such confrontations became much more widespread especially during the time of Assembly Elections in 1983 as the leaders demanded the revision of the state’s electoral rolls before going in for the Assembly Elections. The attitude of the Central government was not very supportive towards the movement. There was conflict between the leadership of the movement and the Central government on the issue of the cut-off year for detecting and deporting the illegal foreigners. While the leaders demanded 1951 to be the cut-off year to deport the foreigners, the Government of India
proposed 1971 as the cut-off year. This sharpened the conflict between the leadership of the movement and the Central government.

In 1980 an incident of mass killing occurred in North-Kamrup in which, “it was estimated that 200 to 300 persons died as a result of mob violence” (Hussain 1993:116). This pogrom occurred during the mid-term poll to the Lok-Sabha in 1980. The leaders of the Assam Movement showed their strong determination and demanded the deletion of names of foreign nationals from the state electoral rolls before holding any elections in the state. They adopted all possible means to stop elections in Assam. Gradually, the Central government took tough stand towards the movement. In 1983, the Election Commission of India announced the dates of elections for the state legislature in Assam. The leaders of the movement again demanded the revision of the electoral rolls before going in for the Assembly elections. But the government went ahead with the election procedures without revising the electoral rolls. The leadership of the movement called for the boycott of elections in Assam which resulted in the occurrence of a number of violent incidents during that period. Armed forces were deployed to hold the elections successfully. All these deteriorated the law and order situation in Assam. The situation further led to unwanted and unexpected occurrences of communal riots. The victims of these communal riots were mostly of religious and linguistic minorities particularly the Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Assam for generation. The progression of the movement had brought a new wave in the political course of Assam. Several rounds of talks were held between the Government of India and the leadership of the movement that ultimately paved the way for ‘Assam Accord’. The ‘Assam Accord’, brought a new form of polarization for power between the leadership of the Assam Movement led by the All Assam Students’ Union
(henceforth AASU) and the leadership of the counter–movement led by the All Assam Minority Students’ Union (henceforth AAMSU). While the leadership of the Assam Movement accepted the ‘Accord’, the leadership of the AAMSU opposed and criticized it. Two new regional political parties came into existence in the politics of Assam. The formation of Asom Gana Parishad (henceforth AGP) a regional party formed by the movement leaders and the formation of the United Minority Front (henceforth UMF), a regional by the leadership of the AAMSU, changed the political equation of Assam in the post-Assam movement period.

From 1979 to 1983, series of communal riots erupted in different places of Assam such as North-Kamrup, Gohpur, Chaowlkhowa Chapor, Nellie, Chamaria Khairabari, Hatishal and Kampur etc. These riots became more frequent especially during the Assembly Elections of 1983. As Sanjib Baruah quoted,

“They testified not so much to "communalism" as to the total breakdown of governance: in Nellie Lalung tribals killed Bengali Muslims, in Kokrajhar sub-division Boro Kacharis fought Bengali Hindus and Muslims; in Goreswar and Khairabari Sarani and Boro Kacharis fought Bengali Hindus; in Gohpur Boros fought Assamese Hindu; in Dhemaji and Jonai Mishing tribes fought Bengali Hindus and Muslims; in Samaguri Muslims killed Hindus; in Dhula and Thekrabari again Muslims killed Hindus; in Chaowlkhowa Chapor Assamese Hindus and Muslims together killed Bengali Muslims. And each community that was a victim in one place was a predator in another” (Baruah 1986:1199).
Figure 1.1: The places that were severely affected by massive violence and killings during 1983

Map 1.1 shows the places that were affected by massive violence and killings in the wake of Assembly elections 1983. The map 1.1 was published in the popular Asamiya magazine of Assam named Prantik. However, conspicuously the map did not include Silapathar and Nagabandha. The press in Assam did not cover all the major incidence of violence and killings impartially. Memories of such violence still haunt the people. But conspicuously, these riots were not recognized despite their violent manifestation and traumatic experiences.
In this backdrop, the present study is an attempt to comprehend the nature and causes of the ‘communal riots’ that occurred in the Nagabandha area, a cluster of rural villages of the then Nagaon district of Assam resulting in a gruesome Nagabandha massacre. The Nagabandha Massacre took place on 16th February 1983 during the elections to the state legislature. Nearly all houses of Nagabandha and its neighboring villages like Sarubori Nigam, Kalikajari, Pub-Lalaibori, Garaimari, Lahoripam, Bagaribari, Buwalguri, Mohmara and Dewaguri were burnt down to ashes by an alleged section of movement supporters allegedly escorted by security personnel, as stated by the victims. Altogether one hundred and nine persons (collected from field survey and from interaction with the eyewitness) were burnt alive inside the Nagabandha High School situated at Nagabandha village wherein they sought refuge. (Hussain 2014:41-44). All the victims were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. They tried to resist the attack but did not succeed. The Nellie massacre which is recorded as the biggest pogrom of independent India is about 40 Kilometers away from Nagabandha. Both Nellie and Nagabandha were the part of Nagaon district at the time of violence. Nagaon District is located in the middle of Assam and is bounded by Sonitpur district and the river Brahmaputra on the North, West Karbi Anglong and North-Cacahar on the South, East Karbi Anglong and Golaghat district on the East, Morigaon and Karbi Anglong on the west. Nagaon was previously spelt as Nowgong till the mid-1980s. In the present study we are using ‘Nagaon’ which is widely used now. The district had witnessed heavy migration of Muslim population of East Bengal origin during 1921-1931 (for details see Guha 2006:165-169, Dev and Lahiri 1985:24-32). They settled in mouzas like Khatowal, Juria, Laokhuwa, Dhing, Bokoni, Moirabari and Lahorighat of the then Nagaon district. The area of the present study falls under Lahorighat legislative
assembly constituency of the present Morigaon district. Lahorighat is overwhelmingly a Muslim dominated constituency (92% as per Census Report 2011) of Morigaon district. However, Morigaon district was a part of Nagaon district till 29th September 1989 when it became a full-fledged district.

The Nagabandha incident is an extremely tragic episode in the history of communal riots that occurred during the Assam Movement. It took place on 16th February 1983, two days before the infamous massacre at Nellie, wherein as per official record, one thousand eight hundred ninety one people, mostly the Muslims of East-Bengal origins were killed (Nath 2015:203). But unofficially the Nellie massacre left more than two thousand people dead (Chopra and Jha 2014:58-59). The gory carnage at Nagabandha was purely communal in character wherein thousands of Muslims of East-Bengal origins were rendered homeless, hundreds lost their lives, besides the destruction of valuable properties and livestock. Thus, it was a total manifestation of human cruelty wherein people---men and women, old and young were burnt alive without any mercy. The incident turns out to be a forgotten history of time, since no extensive study on it has been conducted or published. Everyone wants to forget it. It is practically an arduous task to undertake a study of such communal riots of a distance past for a researcher, where officials are reluctant to disclose information, alleged attackers and even the victims are unwilling to be interviewed. It is also difficult to ask question to the affected people about such a pathetic and sensitive incident. Therefore, the present study focuses more on the narratives of the alleged attackers and the victims simultaneously in order to understand the causes of communal riots in the Nagabandha area.
1.3 The Context of the Study:

The present study proposes to analyse the communal riots in the Nagabandha area in the context of the Assam Movement and the Assembly Elections of 1983.

After the Nellie massacre, the Government of Assam appointed an enquiry commission under the Chairmanship of Tribhuvan Prasad Tewary (Retd. IAS), viz; ‘Enquiry Commission on Assam Disturbance, 1983’, popularly known as ‘Tewary Commission’. Nellie massacre of 18th February 1983 is included in chapter 13, of the report of the commission (Tewary Commission Report 1984: 253-312). However, conspicuously the Nagabandha massacre was not recorded in the Commission’s report.

According to the Report:

“The first incident of group clash in Nagaon District took place on 12.02.1983 when people from Kopahjuri belonging to Assamese Hindu community went to Gagalmari under Marigaon Police Station to burn a bridge. Local immigrant Muslims obstructed them and in the process a group clash took place with the result one Assamese Hindu sustained injuries. The rumour about the injured Assamese Hindu spread to neighbouring Assamese Hindu villages. On 12/13 February night thousands of Assamese Hindus from Bhuragaon under Lahoirghat Police Station attacked Sarubari Nigam and set fire to the houses belonging to the Muslim community. It was followed by group clashes between the Hindus and Muslims with the result that 5 Hindus and 4 Muslims died in the group clash. At about 17:00 hours Morigaon Police Station received information of the group clash at Gagalmari. Circle Inspector, Marigaon, along with 2 sections of Haryana Armed Police Battalion left for Gagalmari” (Tewary Commission 1984:265).

Nagabandha can be seen as a unique eruption of communal riots occurred during 1983 amid the Assam Movement, where people were burnt alive in the name of giving
security and shelter. The eyewitnesses of the incident informed that the Haryana Armed Police Battalion played a very partisan role behind its occurrence. There were rumours that, they helped the attacking mob to move *en-mass* towards Nagabandha area. Administrative machinery failed to protect and provide justice to those fleeing people who had taken shelter inside the Nagabandha High School. However, the incident was not given due weightage by the state administration. Due to negligence of that incident or inability to anticipate the occurrence of another such incident, the Nellie massacre erupted at such a massive scale. The outbreak of these communal riots became a turning point for the Assam Movement.

As Paul R. Brass argues, in India riots are “associated with movements by caste and communal groups to assert their rights or maintain their privileges against challengers” (Brass1998:13). The leadership of the Assam Movement considered the growing number of Muslims of East-Bengal origin as a threat towards their identity. This perceived fear of the Assamese of losing their identity and the uncertain future of Muslims of East-Bengal origin clubbed together and deepened animosity between these two groups which propelled a fertile environment for eruption of communal riots.

Paul R. Brass further states,

“Although most people everywhere are capable of committing acts of violence that are committed in “communal riots” are, I believe, undertaken mostly by “specialists,” who are ready to be called out on such occasions, who profit from it, and whose activities profit others who may or may not be actually paying for the violence carried out. Such regions have developed what I call “institutionalized riot system,” in which known actors specialize in the conversion of incidents between members of different communities into “communal riots” (Brass1998:9).”
Scholars like Harsh Mander, Akram Akhtar Choudhury, Zafar Eqbal and Rajanya (2016) argued that, people of diverse faiths who live together do not spontaneously turn upon each other; there must be some ground for such activities. The authors have pointed out three essential conditions for the occurrence of mass communal violence. These are ------

1) Deliberate manufacture of hatred.

2) Organization of physical execution for the riot.

3) A complicit state: no riot can continue beyond a few hours unless the state actively wishes that it does so (Mander., et al 2016: 39-45).

In the case of Nagabandha, these elements are found prevalent to a large extent. ‘Perceived threats’ on land, identity, surprisingly divided the communities (including Asamiya Hindus/ Tribal/ Asamiya Muslims/ Na-Asamiya Muslims) who had been living together peacefully through the decades. The perceived threats of the native Asamiyas resulted in the hatred towards the migrant communities. Their presence was considered as illegal. Among the migrant communities the Muslims of East-Bengal origin were labelled as ‘illegal Bangladeshis’. Before 1983, there was no incident of communal riots in Nagabandha area. In fact, communal harmony kept the communities together for decades. But a situation developed in such a manner in the entire area wherein the Asamiyas had lost their trust on the Na-Asamiyas in between 1979 to 1983 when the drive against the ‘illegal Bangladeshis’ struck a new turn in the form of murder and mayhem. The construction of ‘other’ and ‘we’ developed hatred between the Assamese and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in Nagabandha and its neighbouring areas. The steep nurturing of this communal hatred created fear psychosis
in the minds of the people and instigated them to physically execute this hatred wherein
a section of the local Asamiyas believed that their identity was at stake because of the
increasing population of the new settlers. What made the situation worse was the
administrative failure to deal with the eruption of violence. Local residents, narrated
without any fear or favour, that there was not simmering conflict between the local
Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in that area prior to the beginning of
the Assam Movement. Some of the local villagers stated that electioneering and voting
was one of the main reasons behind the gruesome murders and mayhem of the
Muslims. Some of those people, who had exercised their franchise defying the boycott
call by the movement leaders, narrated to us the circumstances under which they
decided to cast their votes. They believed that if they could bring to power a
government that would protect the rights and interest of the minorities, their lives
would be free of atrocities, harassments and communal conflicts.

The present study aims at outlining the gradual growth and consolidation of communal
feelings, bitter hatred and associated causes during the period of the Assam Movement.
Hatred is a strong negative emotion that gradually develops between communities
which makes one group apprehensive of the other. In our study area too, the
apprehension among the Asamiyas towards the Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in
Assam and the alleged inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls propelled the
conditions of conflict. The conflict took its destructive turn with aggressiveness
resulting in communal riots. Significantly the most interesting fact was that those who
participated in the communal riots were the ordinary people. Perceived threats towards
identity and its consequent politicization pushed thousands of people to participate in
communal riots. Another important fact was that most of the communal riots, violence,
group clashes during the Assam movement and especially during the Assembly Elections of 1983, occurred in the rural areas. As Monirul Hussain argued, “The movement received support from the educated, semi educated and unemployed youths from rural areas. They provided aggressiveness to the movement in rural areas” (Hussain 1993:282). Communal riots in Nagabandha were the outcome of such aggressiveness.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

Many acts of violence do not occur unexpectedly or all of a sudden from the blue. They are the cumulative consequences of long progression and events such as movements and their ideology, politicization of identities, greater mobilization of masses, socio-political crisis and so on and so forth. It is very important to understand the motives, interest, desires of involving groups in a communal riot along with other propelling factors behind its occurrence. The present study tries to focus on the relational mechanisms behind the violence that occurred at Nagabandha taking into account its historical and social roots. If we analyze the incidents of mass killing in Assam during 1983, it is found that, the issue of foreign nationals, the holding of the Assembly Elections as an imposition by government or its boycott by the leadership of the Assam movement, all contributed towards the occurrence of incidents of mass killing. In spite of appeal to boycott the elections, the inhabitants of Nagabandha and its nearby villages came out to cast their votes. As a result they had to face inhuman consequences.

Communal strains alone could not have helped the situation to blow out of proportion. Without considering the possibility of political patronage it would be an inconclusive exercise on our part to dig out the details of the chapter of murder and mayhem during
the movement against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The present study aims at understanding the formation of collective memory of violence that rooted in the minds of the people who witnessed it with horror, shock, anger and despair and how it led to the formation of collective identities. The local residents, whom we met, pitifully narrated the orgy of bloodbath on the Black Day of February 16, 1983. According to them, mostly the people belonging to religious minority group were butchered in broad day light. They remembered how the irate mob drove out people and set their huts and houses on fire. Those who could not come out or flee were stabbed on the spot. From crippling aged people to crawling kids, nobody was spared. And all this happened in broad day light!

Notwithstanding the tragic past, the victims of Nagabandha have been living harmoniously with the local people for many years without any fear of group clash. Most of the local people had hardly any idea of the Bangladeshi immigrants and the urgent need to detect and deport them when the All Assam Students’ Union launched the Assam Movement. Hence, question arises how the local people suddenly became angry with the so-called migrants and killed their neighbours. Moreover, it is also needed to be analysed what fueled the situation and under what circumstances a section of local people turned rabidly violent? Did somebody aid and abet them to get involved in the deadly attacks in Nagabandha? A convincing reply eludes us time and again wherein a dirty political propaganda mattered. We cannot straightaway deny the presence of a strong undercurrent of political interest behind these disquieting schemes of things which need to be analyzed to unearth the truth behind the incident. Communal hatred, anti-immigration assertion, polarization of political interest, assembly polls are all in a nutshell, to be blamed wherein the movement leaders and the Government
cannot escape their responsibility. The carnage was the direct fallout of the controversial assembly polls and violent electioneering. The movement leaders were strongly opposed to the polls with the controversial electoral rolls where many illegal migrants were believed to have registered their names. A section of political leaders urged those minority groups of people to participate in the polls for their safety and security. Most of the minority voters in Nagabandha area defied the diktat and exercised their franchise just before the carnage. Thus, the gory chapter is sandwiched in between the political scenario and a violent-turn of a section of movement supporters particularly during assembly polls, targeting the so-called illegal foreigners. The incident, beyond doubt, is the clear manifestation of an escalating communal riot wherein the religious minority community mostly in Nagabandha area had to bear the brunt. The result is a huge black spot on Assam’s social history where the tag ‘unity in diversity’ got severely stigmatized.

1.5 Objectives of the Study :

The fundamental objectives of this study may be stated as----

I. To find out how do the victims and the alleged attackers live in the same space with the memories of the Nagabandha Massacre?

II. To record the factors that led to the massacre: question of land, identity, political power and migration.

III. To find out the role of the state and the police administration as perceived by the victims.

IV. To understand the process of return to the normal lives after the massacre.
1.6 Hypotheses:

This study will proceed with these following hypotheses

1) Collective sentiment of ‘perceived threats’ leads to communal riots.

2) More concentration on political power, sometimes works as a catalyst of communal riots.

3) In a communal riot, more casualties come from the innocent and weaker section of the society.

4) Memories of riots remain as a dividing line in a society.

5) Memories still disturb the minds of the people-----both the victims and the alleged attackers simultaneously.

1.7 Methodology:

We made this study on the basis of data derived from both primary and secondary sources. We extracted the primary data mainly from field survey covering Nagabandha area (Na-Asamiya Muslims), Hatibat area (Local Asamiyas) and Bhurbandha area, (alleged attackers) of present Morigaon District. The field survey was conducted during the month of November 2014 and April 2015. Again, interviews were conducted over the months of September 2016 to January 2017. The data were also collected from government sources like Census of India, Election Commission of India, and other government documents. The methodology in detail is placed along with the findings of the field survey in the chapter VI of the present study.
Existing literature from books and journals, analysis and articles from newspapers, etc. both in English and Assamese languages, information from internet sources, etc. have been utilized as secondary sources of data for this research work.

1.8 The Limitation of the Study:

As a research method, the narrative method too has its own limitations along with its advantage of etic understanding of the phenomena. While many studies on the Assam movement and ethnic conflict have emerged, none have tried to understand the voices of the participants or victims of violence associated with the Assam Movement with the exception of Kimura (2013). Herein, we too are attempting to understand the Nagabandha massacre from the perspective of alleged participants and the victims. There is always a possibility of distorting the reality by the alleged participants and the victims. However, we would endeavour to minimize the effect of subjectivity as much as possible.

1.9 Rationale behind Selecting Nagabandha for Field Survey:

The present research is confined only to the communal riots in Assam where the state was caught within the double dilemma of the Assam Movement and the Assembly polls. The leadership of the movement claimed it to be a non-violent and democratic exercise to detect and deport the foreign nationals. But the veneer of non-violence peeled off when thousands of people labeled as Bangladeshi immigrants and were killed mercilessly. The state administrative machinery remained totally oblivious. Several communal clashes occurred in Assam as a consequence of the contestation between the movement leaders and the Central government on the issue of holding the Assembly elections. At Nellie and Nagabandha both in undivided Nagaon District, at
Chaowlkhowa Chapori in Darrang district, at Silapathar in Lakhimpur district, communal riots took place as a consequence of the Assembly elections. The Nellie Massacre has been studied extensively in several academic discourses like Kimura (2013), Hazarika (1994), Hussain (1993). However, the massacre that took place in Nagabandha has not been given significant importance by the researchers while studying communal riots in Assam. An attempt has been made here to bring to light the communal riots that took place at Nagabandha, a small village about 20 kilometres away from present Morigaon town on 16th February 1983. The study of Nagabandha communal riots shows the violent face of democratic electioneering as well as the nature of communal riots in Assam.

1.10 Research Strategy:

The present study is based on the fieldwork at Nagabandha and its adjacent affected villages. It is also based on the interaction with the local residents. During the field survey, three questions were posed before the eyewitnesses. Those were---

1) What factors contributed to the Nagabandha Massacre?

2) Was the incident of Nagabandha purely a communal riot?

3) Did the 1983 Assembly Poll during the Assam Movement make the situation conducive for communal riots?

1.11 Review of Literature:

A) The book, *Question of Identity in Assam: Location, Migration, Hybridity* (2012), by Nandana Dutta focuses on the issue of migration, Assam Movement and the prevailing culture of violence in Assam. Violence here does not mean physical violence alone. It incorporates the invisible forms of violence which
include corruption in public offices raising doubts over the probity in public life of many people. The author looks into the issue of Assamese identity with an in-depth, analysis of different narratives, modes and theories of migration.


C) The book, *Communal riots after independence- A Comprehensive Account* (2004) by Asghar Ali Engineer, provides a comprehensive account of communal riots of independent India. The book depicts a very clear picture of communal conflict based on religious affiliation throwing some lights on the deep-rooted social and political behaviour of the people. It gave an insight into the real face of communalism and communal violence in different time phases in India and each phase was characterized by some major political controversy.

D) The book, *Riot Politics: Hindu- Muslim Violence and the Indian State* (2011) by Ward Berenschot gives new ideas on the role of the political leaders in stinging communal riots. He called communalism a political act and not a state of mind revealing the role of the political leaders in the outburst of communal violence in Gujarat. Another feature of the book is the focus on the networks of local political leaders in the communal conflagration wherein many people were killed in the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi. The political mileage for a circle
of leaders from the riot has also come up for a comprehensive discussion in the book.

E) The Book *Plantar Raj to Swaraj, Freedom struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826 – 1947*, (2006), by Amalendu Guha is a minute analysis of the socio-political structure of the colonial period and the politics of anti-colonialism in Assam. The illuminating aspect is the discussion on the political and economic objectives of the freedom movement.

F) *The Assam Movement, Class, Caste and Ideology* (1993) by Monirul Hussain, provides a critical approach to the analysis of the Assam Movement in the light of the demographic background under the British era characterized by mass discontent that gripped the minds of the Assamese people which later developed into a socio-political movement. Further, the author has stressed on the class-perspective to understand the movement era keeping in mind the complexity of ideology and identity.


H) The paper---*State, Identity Movements and Internal Displacement in the North-east*, (2000), by Monirul Hussain is another illuminating discussion on the post-colonial identity movements that developed in 1960 – (the movement for making ‘Asamiya as the official language of the state/Assam). 1972 onwards,
the AASU spearheaded a movement to get Assamese language enforced as the medium of education up to the graduate level. This was followed by a prolonged movement starting from 1979 to 1985 to detect and deport the so-called Bangladeshi foreigners in order to protect the identity of the Assamese.

I) The paper – *The Political Demography of Anti-immigrant Movement* (1983) by Myron Weiner, is an analysis of the Nellie Massacre and the main factors behind its outbreak wherein the Bengali speaking Muslims had to face the wrath. Further, the scholar here traces down the demographic and political backgrounds behind the break-down of the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and harmony the followed.

J) *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (2003) is another thought-provoking book by Paul R. Brass. The book has a crucial explanation of the communal riots in the light of the Aligarh riots. Herein, the author comes up with the Institutionalized Riot System (IRS) for closely examining the communal riots in India. The IRS shows the clear picture of political involvement in the occurrence of communal riots.

K) *Stranger of The Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India’s Northeast* (1994) by Sanjay Hazarika is a detailed analysis of the government policies for north-eastern region and the outbreak of communal conflicts. He blamed the yawning gap of communication between the state and the centre. Hazarika, here throws new light on the Nellie massacre with many angles which took place during the controversial electioneering in 1983. He further closely observes the migration from the countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar to north-east India which resulted in ethnic tension apart from a battle for livelihood.
L) *The Other Side of the Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998) by Urvashi Butalia is an oral history of human tragedy wherein the author details the demographic and ethnic developments affecting partition. In her valuable book, the author recounts the traumas that women experienced where their families were not spared. Her acerbic recollection of the tragic memories makes her work extraordinary.

M) *Communalism in Modern India*, third edition (2008), by Bipan Chandra is a venture to define communalism and its social roots with ideological, cultural and social dimensions. Here, he calls communalism a modern phenomenon which stems from the British colonial impact (Chandra 2008: 9-10).

N) *Durable Disorder–Understanding the Politics of North-east India* (2005) by Sanjib Baruah is reach with new and old observations of a vexed rein which is not endorsed by many academics, people and the government. Here, the author aims at proving an understanding of Assam and the consequence of colonial power who consider insurgency as a major issue to be dealt with.


P) In the book *Asomor Musalman: Satya Aru Sanghat* (2007) (in Assamese), author Rezaul Karim discussed in details the communal riots during 1950, keeping in mind the narratives of the worst sufferers. The author also discusses
how the Assam Movement generates a new political consciousness among the Muslims in Assam in general and Na-Asamiya Muslims in particular.

Q) *The paper---Militancy and Identity Politics in Assam* (2000), by H. Srikanth is another detailed analysis of the material and ideological roots of militancy in Assam in the backdrop of the Assam Movement.

R) In the book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (2002), the author Ashutosh Varshney studied the ethnic violence in India through the prism of civil society. Varshney argues,

“Conflict is not necessarily violent. It can take an institutionalized form if ethnic demands for higher political representation, affirmative action, or personal laws are pursued in assemblies, elections, bureaucratic corridors, and non-violent movements and protests (Varshney 2002:38).

S) *Votes and Violence* (2004), by Steven Wilkinson, discusses the secrets of violence targeting the minorities in view of the relationship between electoral incentives at town and local levels with levels of party competition in the districts like Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, Andra Pradesh and Rajasthan.

1.12 Theoretical Framework:

In social science, the theories are primarily an explanation of the causes of human behaviour and they are based on reasoning. With the help of theories we can come to a logical conclusion. Riot is the manifestation of violence. A riot describes aggressive public disorder (Chopra and Jha 2014:3-4). The present study is more inclined towards understanding the aggressive behaviour behind violent attack involving a crowd. Therefore, the present study uses the term ‘communal riot’ to describe the nature of
aggressive behaviour behind violent attack, occurred during the period of the Assam movement. In India, the terminologies like communal riots, communal violence, communal conflicts, and incidents are interchangeably used to refer to the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims. Authors like Asghar Ali Engineer (2004) widely used the term communal riot along with communal violence. In the present study, the terms like communal riot, communal violence, communal conflict and communal incident are interchangeably used.

The social scientists have to depend more on approaches and concepts to find the root cause of the problems. In our study, it is essential to understand communalism or communal identity before going a step further. “Indeed, the concept of communalism/communal identity can better be understood by referring to another related concept, ethnicity and ethnic identity” (Singh 2016:95). The study of ethnic identity is very relevant to understand the background of communal riots as it helps us to understand the communal differences among people of different religious background. Though it helps to understand the differences, yet it always carries a negative dimension. Sometimes excessive concentration on ethnicity or ethnic identity leads to untold sufferings. The present study is more inclined towards the negative dimension of ethnic identity and how it leads to sufferings of human lives. An ethnic group always consider themselves to be different or distinct from other groups. Morgan argued, “An ethnic group is a group of people who consider themselves to be distinct from others because of a shared belief of common ancestry, ties with a specific territory, a perception of a shared culture, and belief in common destiny” (Morgan 2004:193). This sense of differences and distinctiveness creates the ground for hostility towards other groups. They do whatever is essential for preserving their distinctive
identity. Thus the ethnic identity increases the fanatical differences among the people of different communities. Under such circumstances, violence may easily erupt. Therefore in studying communal riots the study of ethnic identity plays a very crucial role.

Another important area is the development of communal ideologies which has a direct link with the eruption of communal riots. Many writers argue that communal riots are closely linked with communal ideologies. Writer Mohsin Iqbal Najar argues that communal violence is always linked to communal ideology comprising three elements, these are:

i. According to communal ideology, people who follow the same religion having common secular interest have common political, economic, social and cultural interest.

ii. In a multi-religious society, secular interest including economic, social, political and cultural beliefs among the followers of one religion is different from some of the interests of the followers of another religion.

iii. The interest of the followers of different communities cannot have common, economic, social, political interest. Their secular interests are bound to be opposed to each other (Najar 2014:5). These interests widen the religious differences among the followers of different religions. In this backdrop, people with religious differences may use religious identity to mobilize people to indulge in conflict. The present study tries to understand how the religious differences worked to instigate people towards communal riots.“When power
is sought on communal and caste lines, diversity becomes a source of conflict rather than a source of strength” (Engineer 2004:2).

During the Assam Movement, we witnessed a clear picture of communal and religious differences which was included in the communal politics of Assam. Therefore, it is very important to understand the link of communalism and communal ideologies, with the occurrence of communal riots. In this regard we may refer Najar and Asghar Ali Engineer who together put forwarded the link between communalism and communal riots.

“Communal violence is only a concrete conjectural manifestation of the communalization of society and politics. Communal ideology leads to political and psychological differentiation, distance and competition along religious lines. Sooner or later, it leads to mutual fear and hatred and ultimately to violence” (Najar 2014:5).

Communalism provides ground for easy eruption of communal violence.

Engineer said,

“If communal tendencies become stronger in the society it is much easier for communal forces to organize communal violence. Spread of communalism is a necessary condition for communal violence. To organize communal violence, communal atmosphere needs to be generated” (Engineer 2004:4).

Conflict is part of human society. Writers like. S. Cheldelin, D. Druckman D, Larissa Fast, Kvin Clements and R. Rubenstein (2003) argue that conflict and cooperation as the heart of all communities and both are very important for running the societies.
Sometimes conflict may be beneficial for society. However, it may not be so all the time. When we talk about conflict, hostility, war and crime, most of the time we see the destructive forces behind these phenomena. Communal riot is always destructive in its nature, as it destroys the age-old relationship among communities. It also destroys the values of cooperation, harmony, social values, and morals of social institutions. Communal riots generate aggressiveness which leads to transformation at the socio-economic, cultural and political levels. In this background we may refer to Richard Rubenstein who identified the followings sources as the destructive outbreak of a conflict.

i. Personal-aggressiveness: Aggressive behaviour gives birth to aggressive and destructive activities.

ii. Situational-aggressiveness: If the situation is totally against the conflicting groups, then it may generate frustration in the minds of the members of the group. This ultimately develops anti-social behaviour.

iii. Transformation: Changes in the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres may generate aggressiveness which may destroy communal harmony (Rubenstein 20003: 55-62).

Rubenstein argued that transformation in cultural sphere created most connected atmosphere for creating destructive conflict.

He said,

“The most profound of the changes connected with the transformation of the cultural norm—the ensemble of conscious and unconscious images, philosophical assumptions and ethnic ideas, habitual behavior and
emotional experiences that determines to a large extent, how people view themselves and each other” (Rubenstein 2003:62).

The present study also highlights the view of Rubenstein to understand the factors and forces of destructive outbreak of a conflict.

When people of a group feel that their economic benefits, political institutions, cultural norms are threatened by outsiders, their inherent fears take expression in violent activities and aggressiveness. Communal riots are aggressive outcome of a conflict which is the product of a long course of time. If we compare the situation of Assam during the movement period, we have to accept that aggressiveness was seen everywhere, wherein communal divisions and religious differences took the violent turn. The indigenous people of Assam had the belief that they would be outnumbered by the people of foreign origin. Since the number of the Muslims of East- Bengal origin was high in comparison to other migrated communities, they became the target of the popular resentment in Assam. Prior to the Assam Movement, a latent conflict was present between the local Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin as the local Asamiyas were not happy with the growing numbers of population of the later. With due course of time, the latent conflicts took the shape of visible conflicts though it was not so violent in nature. During the Assam Movement, it took more violent turn accompanied by aggressiveness, destruction of resources and loss of human lives.

According to Dennis J.D. Sandole, aggressiveness manifested conflicts are “violent in manner and they are not merely capable to be noticed and experienced, but are also destructive to parties, resources and others as well” (Sandole 2003:40). He called the latent conflicts a pre-manifest conflict process. He also views that the violent
expression of conflict does not erupt suddenly within a day but needs an atmosphere for its occurrence.

There are different theories to understand the nature and causes of communal riots. Basically there are two main approaches, one is primordial approach and other is instrumental approach. Primordial approach to understand communal riots argue that the consciousness towards identity works as a catalyst of communal riots. Theorists like F. Robinson (2005), S. Kakar (1990) show clearly how identity guides human actions and develops the ground for communal hostility. This approach is very important in analyzing the communal riots as it focuses on the perception of cultural identity which in due course may develop acrimonious atmosphere.

Berenschot said,

“Primordialist approaches to the study of violence focus on the capacity of ethnicity to shape one’s perception of the world and of one’s place in that world. Identity, primordial theorists argue, is an unconscious and important element of daily life that gives meaning to our action and guides us in our choices” (Berenschot 2012:22).

The Assam Movement brought the identity politics to the fore as the entire Assamese society was divided on ethnic grounds. This led to the occurrence of communal riots in different places of Assam. But the communal riots at Nagabandha cannot alone be studied through the primordial approach as it lacks the politics and other social institutions to shape the identity consciousness.

The instrumentalist approach is also very important while analyzing the very nature of communal riots. The main person highlighting the approach is the Paul R. Brass (1998, 2003). Along with Paul R. Brass, the other exponents of this approach such as Asghar
Ali Engineer (1984, 1989,) stresses that (Political) elite plays a strong role in the process of instigation and organization of communal violence. Brass has focused on how politicians or leaders of large-scale organizations manipulate the process of collective violence. His theory resolves round the idea that “riots have a ‘functional utility’ for many individuals and groups, which prevent them from effectively dealing with violence” (Brass 2003:32-34). But we cannot find out proper causes of communal riots in Assam through this perspective because in Assam we do not see the existence of ‘Institutionalized Riot System’ behind the outbreak of communal riots. Paul R. Brass (1998, 2003), Jogpal Singh (2016), Ward Berenschot (2012) used this perspective to understand the realities of communal riots in the states like Gujarat and towns like Muzaffarnagar and Aligarh etc. where political elites played a strong role behind generating communalism and instigating communal riots. This makes communal riots more widespread in nature almost in all times. But in Assam, we have a different situation. Communalism has been mainly a rural phenomenon which makes communal riots more rural centric in nature. Moreover, communal riots extensively occurred during the Assam Movement and particularly during the Assembly elections in 1983. But later on incidents of communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam reduced significantly.

Apart from this, Brass also analyses the connection between elections and occurrences of communal riots while developing the institutionalized perspective. Both Brass and Steven Wilkinson (2004) put forwarded a theory of strong relationship between elections and the outbreak of communal riots in India and gives the database to understand how electoral competition in India is shaped towards communal competition between the Hindus and the Muslims. To understand the background of
Assembly elections of 1983, and its relation with the outbreak of communal riots, the present study has to analyse the views of Steven Wilkinson who argued that “politicians use riots to divide their electorate on communal lines” (Berenschot 2012: 27). Steven Wilkinson (2004) and Ashutosh Varshney (2004) came out with a strong database which proved a strong relationship between election and communal riots.

Ashutosh Vershney’s (2002) analysis of Hindu-Muslim violence in India reveals yet another theory. Vershney argued that riots in India took place because of the absence of civic associations. Here, we find a clear picture of communal violence in India concentrated mainly in the urban areas which insist on the inter-ethnic link to prevent communal violence in the country. But there is a limitation as the electoral incentive perspective is not the only parameter to analyze communal violence in India, especially in Assam.

Makiku Kimura (2013) focused of the perspective of ‘ordinary people’s participation’ in a riot. In Assam, we do not have such ‘Institutionalized Riot System’ and do not claim that electoral incentive plays a crucial role in generating communal riots. As such, communal riots at Nagabandha cannot be studied through ‘institutionalized riot system’ or through the ‘framework of electoral incentive’. It reveals many issues. The present study is more inclined towards Kimura’s observation based on ‘Social Constructivist Theory’. This perspective helps us to understand the explosion of violent behaviour and its connection with the outbreak of communal riots. This perspective goes into the insight of social realities of communal riots which is very important in comprehending the causes and nature of communal riots. Therefore, the present study focuses more on social-constructivist theory to understand nature and causes of communal riots in the Nagabandha area.
1.12.1 Social Constructivist Theory:

The constructivist throws light on the sociological categories (caste, class, religion) created by the colonial administrator. The creation of these sociological categories became one of the main sources of communal conflict in India. Pandey argued that communalism “was a form of colonialist knowledge” ironically taken over and widely propagated by Indian nationalist (Pandey 2006: viii). He describes how the British rulers used these categories to increase consciousness and communal divide. The British rulers were successful in their mission of creating communal divide between the Hindus and the Muslims in colonial India. They developed the political barrier between these two communities by creating ‘separate electorate’ system for the Muslims and the Hindus. People thought that creation of Pakistan would minimize the barrier. But that did not happen.

Pandey observes,

“It needs to be stressed that the figure of the communal riot, of undying strife between Hindus and Muslims, was crucial to the argument about communalism: for the concept of communalism is derived from communal riot, not from community — even if it was community, identity, congenital tendencies that were said to be at the bottom of this history of perennial violence. Hence, the importance of the communal riot narrative that British colonial officials and observers elaborated over the course of the nineteenth century, taking the Banaras uprising of 1809-10 as their model example, and that lives on in media reports and state accounts of the Gujarat violence of 2002” (Pandey 2006: ix).

State intervention is an important agent in diminishing communal riots. Pandey said that not only the colonial state delayed intervention in those communal riots occurred
during that period between the Hindus and the Muslims, but the post-colonial state also delayed intervention.

Many contemporary writers like J.D. Fearon and D.D. Laitin (2000) argued that social constructivism lacks the empirical evidence to show the relation between the social construction of identities and the outbreak of communal violence. Though the theory has its shortcomings, yet it helps to understand the interpretations that emphasize the ‘us’ and ‘them’ categorization. The ‘us’ and ‘them’ categorization can be regarded as one of the major factors responsible for the outbreak of communal riots during Assam movement. Therefore, the present study focuses more on this perspective to understand causes of communal riots at Nagabandha.

This perspective laid stress on rational choice explanation of ethnicity, religiosity and cultural differences to understand the development of bitterness, animosity, hostility within the people of the same society who had never fought with each other earlier. The people of Nagabandha and its neighbouring areas had never witnessed any visible aggressive conflict prior to 1983. Suddenly they encountered a critical situation which was totally unexpected for them. The social environment was almost against the communal harmony between the local Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The constructivist theory discusses the outbreak of rebels, riots, and other types of conflicts with its connection with the social environment which is characterized by unfairness, disparity and oppression etc. (Morgan 2004: 20).

In order to analyse the communal riots at Nagabandha, we need to understand how the consciousness of ethnic identities divides the mindset of people and contributes towards communal conflict. This perspective helps us to contextualize riots, conflicts, cooperation with the structures and the norms of the society and then it becomes easier
to understand the resulting actions of such events. A violent event becomes meaningful if it is rationalized through the existing structures and norms of the society. In this regard we can refer to Morgan who argued:

“Constructivism as an approach acts like theoretical lens to understand the true nature of things such as class, gender and racial issues. When agents (individuals, groups or nations) and events are contextualized in a normative and material structure, it becomes easier to understand and even evaluate the resulting political action (cooperation or conflict)” (Morgan 2004: 20).

The level of cooperation by groups with conflicts, riots, clashes, disputes can best be explained through this perspective as it reflects the motivation of human behaviour towards conflict within the social environment. So, the present study focuses on this perspective along with the Kimura’s observation towards understanding the causes of communal riots in the Nagabandha area during 1983.

1.13 Organization of the Chapters:

Chapter I ‘Introduction’, precisely, is an introductory approach to the study with a clear cut objective to unearth the truth behind the outbreak of communal riots in Assam during 1983 amid the Assam Movement. The chapter lays the methodology of the approach to look into the whole episode of communal riots and its significance from an empirical point of view.

Chapter II is titled as, ‘Historical and Social background of Communal Riots: A Post-colonial Experience of Assam’. It is a modest venture to deal with the historical background of the communal conflicts in Assam in the post-colonial period. The communal mindset stems from the pain of partition which did not reach the north eastern states all of a sudden. This was because of a strong bond of brotherhood and
harmony among the people of various castes, creeds and religions. Religion did not matter for the Assamese Hindus and the Muslims who peacefully coexisted with each other for a long period. Amidst the simmering communal conflict in the post partition era, Assam took immense pride on maintaining peace and tranquility. Communalism struck Assam even much later after partition and it was confined to the areas bordering East-Pakistan which originated in the undivided Goalpara district and later on spread to Barpeta during 1950s. It sowed the seeds of trust deficit among the Hindus and Muslims to take a grim turn later on. A close scrutiny requires an in-depth study of the political scenario of Assam from 1937 to 1946.

Chapter III is on ‘The Assam Movement: the contextual understanding’. Here attempt has been made to understand the demographic and political events that deteriorated the Hindu-Muslim relationship in Assam during the Assam Movement. The chapter also deals with the issue of separate identity formation among the various communities of Assam and particularly among the Muslims of East-Bengal origin during the Assam Movement. The separate identity further developed the atmosphere of ethnic discontent and communal polarization in the society and politics of Assam.

The Chapter IV viz, ‘1983 Assam Assembly Elections and the communal consolidation’, is a critical analysis to the controversial Assembly elections of 1983 when the communal riots reached an all-time high. Both the Government of India and the leadership of the Assam Movement were posited diametrically opposite to one other on the issue of holding Assembly election in 1983. While the Government was in the favour of the holding of Assembly elections as a constitutional compulsion, on the contrary the leadership of the AASU, the AAGSP were against the elections and demanded the revision of state electoral rolls before going in for Assembly elections.
The Chapter V is titled as ‘Nagabandha: A case of Communal Riot’. It is a comprehensive study on the Nagabandha carnage in the present district of Morigaon with an attempt to compare it with that of the Nellie massacre of the same district. Both the incidents had some striking resemblance which we propose to discuss in details in this chapter.

Chapter VI is ‘Nagabandha: Narratives of the sufferers and the attackers’. This chapter examines the narratives of the alleged attackers on one hand and the victims on the other. This brings two different narratives to the fore. Here, the report of the field study is discussed in details with the help of a set of questionnaire.

Chapter VII ‘Conclusion and Summary of the Study’.
NOTES:

1) Muslims in Assam are a heterogeneous community with several recognizable distinctive groups. They can be broadly divided into ‘indigenous / Asamiya Muslims’ and ‘Muslims of East-Bengal origin’. The Asamiya Muslims migrated to Assam since the 13th century till the take-over of Assam by the British. On the other hand, the Muslims of East-Bengal origin migrated to Assam under British colonialism. A large section of this community lives in Brahmaputra valley and takes education in Assamese medium. This section living in Brahmaputra valley identifies Assamese as their mother tongue during census enumerations. This section of East-Bengal origin Muslims is known as the ‘Na-Asamiya’ (Neo-Assamese) Muslims’ in the society and politics of Assam. The Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Barak valley, whose mother tongue is Bengali, are known as ‘Bengali Muslims’ (for details see Hussain 1993:196-225).

In the present study all the above terms will be used according to the situation. The terms ‘Immigrant Muslims’, ‘Migrant Muslims’ ‘Bengali speaking Muslims’, ‘Na-Asamiya Muslims’, ‘New Settlers’ are used to refer to the Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Assam.

2) The Constitution of India has acknowledged only two kinds of minorities - religious minority and linguistic minority. In, India Muslims are the largest religious minority group. In Assam also Muslims are the largest religious minority group comprising 34.22% (Census report 2011). The Bengali –Hindus are the largest linguistic minority group in Assam.