CHAPTER VI
Nagabandha: Narratives of the Sufferers and the Alleged Attackers

“The dead, it is said, do not live to tell the tale, but this is not true in ethnic riots. The dead do tell a tale; it is the living who are reluctant to speak”

(Horowitz2001:224)

6.1 Introduction:

Communal violence can be called as collective violence. A systematic frustration is always associated with collective violence. When a group of individuals feel that their identity is in danger or they are being deprived of opportunities, they develop a frustration that ultimately leads to violence. Violence and its socio-political causes are the most alarming issues today. The character of hostility, the memories that exterior was starting from an allegedly particular event, the urge to count come again. There are some fundamental problems, while segregating the truth from overwhelming informational sources in the study of communal violence. Approaches, theories, methods have been used by social scientist to find out the forbidding realities. But it is often difficult to find out the real causes of communal violence (massacres) as both the attackers and the victims of a communal riot are reluctant to speak out on these sensitive issues. In the present study the narratives has been used to understand the socio-political causes of communal riots that occurred in the Nagabandha area of Assam.

Narratives provide an insight to understand how people think of an event and how they perceive their role in that event. “Narratives are the most powerful instrument for
ordering human experience. Indeed, narrative starts with the every history of mankind…” (cited in Macionis and Plummer 2014:84-85). Through narratives we can appraise the past happenings from the present perspective. It is an important way of apprehending the world with a coherent meaning and consequently, social life can be best understood through the narratives.

Urvashi Butalia argues,

“…how and why certain kinds of historical explorations become important at certain times, that particular kinds of exploration of the past are rooted in particular kind of experiences of the present. It is the present, our involvement in it, our wish to shape it to lead to the kind of future we desire, that leads to revisit and re-examine the past” (Butalia 2014:348).

Narratives constitute a significant component in the construction of identities of a community or even a nation through the history of a ‘common past’. The atmosphere, in which we live, influences our behaviour and attitudes and constitutes an important part in the process of collective identity formation (Kimura 2004:225). It helps to understand the collective consciousness which remains as the most compelling aspect of narrative formulation.

6.2 The Main Objectives of the Chapter:

1) The present chapter tries to comprehend on how the collective memory of a past event (communal violence/massacre) is formed and transformed through generations. The chapter focuses on the untold part of the massacre at Nagabandha revealed through the memories and thereby tries to identify the socio-political roots of the happening.
We can cite the observation of Surabhi Chopra as,

“... A massacre is when a group of people ….lacking in self-defense, at least at that moment, are killed, usually by another group…. who have the physical means, the power with which to undertake the killing without physical danger to themselves” (quoted in Chopra and Jha 2014:3-4).

In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the episode of communal riots occurred in Assam during 1983, and particularly in the Nagabandha area, where by and large the victims were threatened, harassed and killed. They lacked the opportunity to get-rid of violence.

2) The present chapter also focuses on how the collective memory determines the process of collective identities. From the narratives an attempt has been made to identify how the survivors and the alleged attackers perceive their role in the Nagabandha massacre and how it is essential to understand the process of collective identity formation.

3) An attempt has been made in the present chapter to analyse the group behaviour behind the violent killings. The chapter also discusses how the Nagabandha massacre broke up the long standing relationship between the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. Besides, it deals with question of the end of conflict. It appears that conflict is an intermittent process not a permanent process. Nagabandha also represents this ------ it was peaceful space which was severely affected by massive violence and brutality but ultimately returned to normalcy. It seems troubled period of high velocity has been slowly replaced by gradual return to peace and harmony. Moreover, both the parties to conflict understood the loss
they incurred materially, physically and emotionally. They do not want to go back to past, they look forward to peace and harmony in the present and future.

**Objective 1: The Analysis**

It is very important to understand how memories of violence draw the line for the narratives. It is an effort to understand the present through the narratives of the past. There are so many instances to show how the conditions and contradictions shape the memories of people. Memory is a construction of the narratives that people tell about themselves and others and become an active progression of generous connotation to the past. The memories of an incident particularly violent one is kept alive more in social memory than an individual memory. Maurice Halbwachs (1950:46-47) had mentioned memory as a social construction. He said that the past of an individual comprised of two kinds of element. The first belongs to the common domain which can be easily visible or accessible to other people. The second kind belongs to the individual’s passion which one is not easily accessible to others. Between the times he highlights the common domain through which social memory can be framed. Therefore to understand the narration of past violence we have to depend on social framework of memory which makes the memories alive. Through a live memory we can find out the social reality of communal riots. His perspective on memory can be understood as ‘social framework of memory’ which helps in understanding the present narration of past events through societal domain (Halbwachs 1992:38). Hence, the present study highlights the Halbwachs approach and perspective to grasp the real narrative both from the people who directly participated in the incident and from those we gained the memory through communication. Memory is very crucial part of human life which plays a very important role in the formation of both personal as well as collective
identity (Perera 2016:14). It can give life a new equation. Therefore while analyzing the narratives; the study of memory particularly collective memory takes the prominent position.

In this connection we may refer to Gyanendra Pandey who wrote,

“It is my argument that in the history of any society, narratives of particular experiences of violence go towards making the “community” and the subject of history. The discipline of history still proceeds on the assumption of a fixed subject – society, nation, state, community, locality, whatever it might be – and a largely pre-determined course of human development or transformation” (Pandey 2001:4).

Though in case of Assam we cannot see that violence, conflict are historically contained, yet there are some instances of outbreaks of communal riots particularly in 1980’s which underscores the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Gynendra Pandey further argues,

“Violence too becomes a language that constitutes – and reconstitutes – the subject. It is a language shaved by Pakistanis and Indians (as by other nations and communities) : one that cuts right across those two legal entities – and that in so doing, cuts across not only the ‘historical’ but also ‘the non-historical’ subject” (ibid).

The social and political structure of Assam in that period was very conducive to increase the propensity for group involvement to instigate people to involve in violent activities in the name of protecting of their group identity. Under such circumstances group clashes, conflicts, riots occurred among different communities particularly between the Asamiyas and the Muslim of East-Bengal origin.
“Collective memory is a collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the action and statement of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it also fulfills the interest of contemporary time. It is as much a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated” (Kansteiner 2002: 180)

When the interviews were conducted with the alleged attackers of the Nagabandha massacre, a sense of all encompassing insecurity propelled the violent and conflicting human behaviour. “The issue of identity and insecurity when localized in the narrative formation, it definitely continued to reside in the collective memories of the respondents while discussing certain crucial, “Politically Volatile moment” (Kirmani 2008: 64).

In narrating the incidents, the people have developed their collective memory and while developing the collective memory, they emphasized, the construction of ‘we’ and ‘other’. In India when we talk about religious identity, the common perception is the construction of the ‘us’ over ‘them’ categorization. “Such a fictitious and highly perilous binary of ‘us-them’, undoubtedly thrives on propagating the mythical population out-growth of one group in contrast to another” (Khan and Shahid 2017:34). In this perception another myth is the ‘Muslim outnumbering Hindus’ (Khan and Shahid 2017:36). These two propositions together created the situation for occurrence of communal riots in India and especially in Assam during the period of the Assam Movement. The field survey of the present study is to understand how the sense of ‘we’ and ‘other’ developed in the minds of the people became an important part of narrative, how the common people may do major crime like killing and torturing the people of the same society.
**Objective 2: The Analysis**

In narrating the experiences of mass communal violence, massacres and riots, people always use the categorization between ‘us’ and ‘them’ which is closely connected with the development of collective identity. Construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ can direct individuals to turn out to be more or less politically engaged. Politics is an essential part of society. It arises out of disagreements, conflicting interests, diversity that arises from different sources as such religion, culture, language, human migration and economic and social inequalities etc. which develops the sense identity amongst the members of different communities. Hence, the present study tries to analyse how the group identity and its fear of eroding develops animosity amongst the members of different communities.

In the view of Robertson and Holzner “identity is conscious commitment to a particular manner of both comprehending and managing one’s own self” (Robertson and Holzner 1980:41). Identity of one’s self is directed by tradition, socio-cultural values. Politics plays an important part in the process of formation and assertion of identities. The colonial ruler of British India used the policy of reservation to strengthen the division of Indian society on the basis of religious and caste identities. As Dipanker Gupta argues, “Independent India inherited a great many things from its colonial past. Among them was the fear, a persistent undertow that the cultural diversity of the subcontinent would soon see to the fragmentation of the Indian State” (Gupta 1997:232). The communal forces further sharpened the fragmentation and communalism remains omnipresent in the socio-political structure of India.

Collective memory cannot be understood without contextualizing it with the prevailing social structure. Joel Best (2016:86) argue that everything we learn and know is the
product of the society. All concepts and ideas are developed, created and passed through the process of socialization which helps the continuity of society. In this background we have to study how the constructivist thinkers have analysed the outbreak of violence, conflict and riots etc.

Best argued, “Constructionists are likely to focus on exactly what other analysts take for granted, and ask how and why particular conception of violence arose and gained acceptance; they examine the subjective process by which the idea of violence is created and transformed” (Best 2004: 86).

The violent environment of Nagabandha cannot be understood without isolating it from the social sphere. Before the incident the people of Nagabandha and its nearby villages witnessed the existence of social and communal harmony. Suddenly a social categorization emerged which had shattered the age-old cordial relationship.

The narratives show that, in the description of the experience about communal riots, people always emphasize more on the construction of ‘we’ and ‘other’. It is always very challenging to understand how social categorization as ‘us’ vs ‘them’ was developed among the people at a particular moment who were living together for decades. Therefore, their collective memory is more inclined towards the construction of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ and also the concept of communal identity. The narrative of a particular incident, events and riots etc are deeply rooted in the development of collective identity. Therefore, the formation of collective identity need to be studied while analyzing the cause of communal riots at Nagabandha in 1983.

The people, who participated in the Nagabandha massacre, strongly felt the sense of identity crisis. Hence perceived identity crisis pushed them to be involved in riots. This identity crisis in due course transformed to hatred among the attackers which directed
and articulated their action. Therefore it is very crucial to identify how common people without any criminal records could take part in violent killings.

The Muslims of Assam are an integral part of the Assamese society. The Muslims of East-Bengal origin also have merged themselves in the greater Assamese society and have been able to create a niche for themselves in the realm of Assamese language, culture and literature. Though they substantially assimilate with the Assamese society, yet they develop separate political consciousness to protect their interest. The frequent outbreak of communal riots against the community during that period (late 1980’s) further enhanced the consciousness. The identity politics among the Muslims has gradually rooted in Assam.

Here we can cite the views of Ahmed and Yasin,

“The long Assam Movement halted, undoubtedly, for the first time, the process of Muslims’ assimilation and their identity with the greater Assamese society….not only Bengali-speaking immigrant Muslims were the soft targets of assaults, intimidation and harassment, the indigenous Muslims and even well-known personalities were not spared humiliation…” (as quoted in Misra2014:197).

While doing research on Nellie Massacre, Kimura focused the relationship between minority group’s collective identity and memory of violence. She argued that, “the group recognized as attackers was active in developing its own version of narration on the violence, while the victims’ group was not” (Kimura 2003:226). In case of Nagabandha, the victims are also not active in the formulation of their narratives as they assimilate with the greater Assamese society and are not claiming a separate social identity apart from Asamiya identity. However, political mobilization among the community is matter of significance. The groups those who indirectly took part in the Nagabandha incident, they are very active and particularly, the Tiwas Bhurbhandha
areas were more active in their narrative formulation as well as identity assertion. Though, they are an integral part of the Assamese society, yet they developed strong assertion for autonomy for the development of the community within the greater Assamese society. Kimura argues, “Narratives on an incident and particularly regarding who the enemies are deeply related to the collective identity that develops after the incident” (Kimura 2013: 34-35).

Therefore, it is very important to understand the perception of collective identity while understanding the narratives of violence.

**Objective 3: The Analysis**

When we talk about communal violence from the perspective of identity crisis, the construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ plays a significant role. Two questions arise, how ‘common’ people could take part in violent killings? And how they developed hatred against a community simply because these ordinary people belonged to a different religious group? In case of Nagabandha, it seemed that, the alleged attackers had developed the sense of hatred against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin, and clearly nurtured the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and ultimately targeted them. Guttan (2007:23-25) raises the question as how the people who appears to led normal life suddenly transformed to the point of killing, torturing and enjoying infliction of pain on other humans. Guttan emphasized the idea of group mind as the main cause behind such transformed behaviour. Highlighting the perspective of Gustane Le Bon (1895), Guttan also emphasized the view that group behaviour always guides the individual behaviour. If the group behaviour generates hatred towards other group, then the individual behaviour is also likely to be directed towards such feelings. “Isolated, he may be a ‘cultivated individual’, in a crowd, he is a barbarian. That is creature acting
by instinct” (Quoted in Guttan 2007:24). In this backdrop there is the need to understand the collective memory as well as collective behaviour to analyse the development of hatred among the people of the same society.

Collective memory is an important area of psychological study. Through analyzing the collective memory we will be able to understand the psychological reasons that shape the collective memory. “Collective memory is the outcome of what society does as what the mind does” (Coman., et al 2009:126). We can find the real facts from the collective memory as it is the consequences of group behaviour i.e. the collective behaviour. Group identity directs the collective behaviour as the group actions would be produced by a generalized belief in the existence of extraordinary forces like threats, conspiracies, crisis etc. Neil Smelser (1962) identified the following as the major types of collective behaviour as panic, hostile outburst, non oriented movement value oriented behavior (cited in Morgan 2004:53). During the period of the Assam Movement, the identity crisis strongly embedded in the minds of a large section of the Asamiyas and their group behaviour (as the group actions) were influenced by the perceived threats, crisis and the sense of being outnumbered by migrant communities that generated a conducive atmosphere of hostile group behaviour. Their group behaviour, were influenced by the issues that developed within the social structure of that period.

Smelser provided six fundamental determinants of collective behaviour (cited in Morgan 2004:53). Among all, the most fundamental determinant is the structural conduciveness (physical situation) which increases the propensity for group to involve in collective behaviour and resulted violent outburst.
The situations that developed during the Assam Movement propelled a large section of ordinary people to become hostile and sometimes they took the violent path like killing, torturing of the people of the same society.

6.3 Area of Field Survey:

For field survey, Nagabandha, Hatibat and Bhurbandha three areas were selected from the present Morigaon district wherein Nagabandha area represents the victim. Two villages were selected from each of the above mentioned areas. Location, population, schools and hospitals have been assessed in the survey. The field survey was conducted in two phases during the month of November 2014 to April, 2015, while interview was conducted from September 2016 to January 2017. A total of 120 respondents were selected for the field survey and 20 respondents were selected from each village of the respective areas. The respondents that were selected for interview were above the age of 45 years. It has been done consciously as they could have the memory of the massacre. The present research endeavours to collect the memories and opinions of those people from areas comprised of Nagabandha, Hatibat and Bhurbandha, that experienced the horrible incident of communal clashes which took place on 16th February 1983. From 20 respondent of each village, 10 males and 10 females are selected for interview. Social condition i.e. economic conditions, literary rate etc. were not considered for selecting the respondents. It was because, the field survey only wanted to know the opinion of those people who were the eye-witness to that communal riot.

For collecting the opinion of the respondents, interview method was followed. Only three questions were asked to the respondents. They were---

1) What factors contributed to the Nagabandha massacre?
2) Was it a communal violence?

3) Do you think that the 1983 Assembly elections created the situation conducive for communal violence?

The respondents did not have sufficient understanding of English language. The interviews were conducted in Assamese language. The opinions of the respondents are analyzed here in narratives. Narratives can provide people’s interpretation of past according to their understanding of the present. Moreover, the present study mainly tries to understand the opinions rather than collecting the facts of the communal riots. The present study tries to find out how the victims and the alleged attackers have been living with the memories of violence.

**TABLE 6.1: The Areas with the Communities Selected for the Field Survey can be presented as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village selected for field survey</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Village code</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Position in the Massacre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nagabandha and Kalikajari</td>
<td>Nagabandha</td>
<td>M and MI</td>
<td>Na-Asamiya Muslims</td>
<td>Victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatibat Simaluguri and Tarabori</td>
<td>Hatibat</td>
<td>H and HI</td>
<td>(Local Assamese/Asamya)</td>
<td>Not, having involvement in the attack but majority of the people supported some of the ideologies of the Assam Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Auguri) Konwar Gaon and Auguri Gaon</td>
<td>Bhurbandha</td>
<td>A and AI</td>
<td>Tribal (Tiwas)/and other Assamese communities</td>
<td>Alleged attackers/direct involvement is in doubt(?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the analysis of the study, we are using the ‘village code’ instead of the names of the villages.

The village ‘M’ is 20 kilometers away from Morigaon town. At present the population of village ‘M’ is 6290. There is one L.P school, one M.E. school each for girls and boys. There is one high school, one college (under graduate), one Senior Madrassa and one mini Public Health Centre. Economically the village is better off than village ‘MI’.

It is found that, most of the victims of Nagabandha massacre belonged to village ‘MI’.

The Village ‘MI’ has the population of 7,266. There are three sub-section of the village as south, north and centre. In the southern part there are two L.P. schools; in the north there are three L.P. schools; and in the central part there are three L.P. schools and one M.E. school. There is one public health centre. The main occupation of the people is cultivation. The most affected part was the southern part of the village. This village is one and a half kilometer away from village ‘M’. During the time of violence, Na-Asamiya Muslims of the ‘MI’ village fled away towards village ‘M’ and took shelter in a high school situated in the village ‘M’. However, the high school where the fleeing people took shelter to save themselves from the assailants was set on fire by the attackers. Thus, all the efforts of the victims failed and none could survive. The next day one hundred and nine dead bodies were recovered from the school premises.

Villages ‘H’ and ‘HI’ from Hatibat area were selected for survey to understand the view of the local Asamiya people regarding the massacre. The number of population of village is 1311. There are two L.P. schools, one M.E. school, and one High school in the village. This village ‘H’ is about five kilometers away from Village ‘M’. We collected the views of some local movement leaders to understand the situation of
outbreak of the riot in context of the Assam Movement. They were very vocal in comparison to respondents from village ‘M’ and ‘MI’.

The village ‘HI’ is four kilometers away from the place of the incident. The population here is about 2365. There are two schools in the village, one is government High School and other is government Senior Basic School (S.b). The main occupation of the villagers is cultivation. The economic condition of village ‘HI’ is not as good as village ‘H’.

Village ‘A’ and ‘AI’ are also selected to understand the views from the alleged attacker’s angle. Both these villages are situated in the Bhurbhandha area. Bhurbhandha is five kilometers away from Nagabandha. The people of ‘A’ village are mostly the Tiwas. They held agricultural land in the Belorboripam (where the first attack occurred and one Tribal man was killed). Agriculture has been the sole source of livelihood in this tribal village. At present the population in the village is 939. There is one of L. P. School, one High School, one M. E. school and one model Hospital within that village.

The population in the ‘AI’ is 3,006. There are three L.P. Schools, two High Schools each for both the boys and the girls, and two M. E Schools. Both the villages fall under the Morigaon revenue circle. The economic condition of the village is also sound.

For analyzing the incident of Nagabandha area, the present research primarily depend on the method of ‘Interview’. Though we went through various reports like Inquiry Commissions (Tewary Commission Report 1984 and Mehta Commission Report 1985) but the incidents did not find any place in their reports. Moreover, these incidents did not find any place in Assam press. In some Assamese books, like ‘Assam’ edited by Talukdar and Kalita 2015, only the date of the incident was mentioned but detail discussion was conspicuously missing. Therefore present research is primarily
based on ‘interviews’, divided into three areas as mentioned earlier. After discussing with the people and cross evaluating their interactions, we can safely assumed that, ‘this incident had truly occurred’ and more than hundreds people were burnt alive inside a High school situated at Nagabandha on 16th February, 1983. It was not an imaginary ‘incident’. However, till now the Nagabandha massacre has not been extensively discussed in academic area and nor properly published. But the people who lost their near and dear ones still bear the agony of the incident. The incident still affects the minds of the people of entire Nagabandha who faced the gory incident. To understand the present affects through the prism of past incidents reveal more about the present state of things. The present research tries to understand the past incident through the perspective of narratives which includes both the alleged attackers and the victims. Therefore the present research tries to understand the past incident through the collective memory perspective.

People from villages ‘H’ and ‘HI’ did not have involvement in the attack on Nagabandha area but very much influenced by the Assam Movement during that period. They actively participated in the ‘Bideshi Khedaw’ movement and the issue of illegal ‘Bangladeshi nationals’. In the interaction with the respondent from these villages, they expressed without hesitation that the incident was very pathetic and should not have happened. The inhabitant of village ‘A’ belongs to an indigenous tribe and more active in the narrative formulation. They narrated their stories as

‘First attack came from the Bengali- Muslims side and to defend ourselves we decided to retaliate against those Bengali speaking people surrounding the area. At that time the movement had created the platform for distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims’ (group interview in village ‘A’ on 11.11.2014 to 15.11.2014).
They were very vocal and they blamed the ‘land grabbing attitude’ of those Bengali Muslims and asserted it as the main reason behind the attack in Nagabandha area. When we conducted interview in village ‘AI’ (Hindu Assamese communities) it is found that, the villagers supported the perspective of Village ‘A’, but located the occurrence of the massacre in the context of Assembly elections of 1983. They criticized some section of government leaders for pushing the elections to the state legislature and condemned them for creating ethnic-division within the Assamese society. Though the people of the two villages were very alert regarding the issue of illegal immigrants, however, there is a difference between them in narrating their collective memory. The villagers of ‘A’ have a clear narrative against the incident. The respondents of village ‘AI’ blamed the Assembly polls for everything and hesitate to explain their role. In this regard we may refer the views of Kimura (2013) “cause of the massacre differed: in many ways from ‘person to person’; we find common characteristics in each group” (Kimura 2013: 120)

6.4 Narratives on the Factors that Created the Incident

The narratives of the Na-Asamiya Muslims:

Regarding the factors that led to the Nagabandha massacre which took 109 lives of innocent people, we got two different kinds of narratives. The prevailing narratives among the respondents from Na-Asamiya Muslim community are that: - The incident was planned and designed. The victims were sheltered in Government-run school, and then they were burnt alive. The villagers of Nagabandha area did not have any idea of such kind of attack and they never dreamt of such violence from a section of agitating masses.
“We were lucky enough on that day. I was appointed as a polling officer in that assembly election of 1983. I went to the polling station but returned back without doing my duty feeling some sort of danger beforehand. On that day morning, I accompanied my family to some homes of neighbouring relatives for security reason via a paddy field. Suddenly I saw a huge mob attacking the villages. We were fortunate enough to escape with my family. Next day morning I came back to my village. I have no word to explain the horrible depiction, the heights of brutality. I could find only ashes everywhere. I saw the dead bodies were falling here and there. Except the sound of flies and bark of dogs, nothing can be heard” (interview with Mr. M one of the resident of village Nagabandha on 14.04. 2015).

They put forwarded two reasons for calling the incident pre-planned and pre-designed.

- First they said that, the attackers had guns along with sword, lathi etc. with them. At that period of time, acquisition and possession of a large number of guns was not very easy. This means, the alleged attackers were purposefully provided guns by some others or those were supplied to them from other places.

- Secondly, they convincingly said that the personnel belonging to the Haryana Armed Police Battalion, who were responsible for maintaining law and order in that area, openly helped and instigated the attackers, against the locals of Nagabandha area.

All the respondents from the Na–Asamiya Muslims, however, frankly accepted that the attackers were from distant villages and the local Asamiyas debarred themselves from participate in the killings.
Narratives of the Local Asamiyas:

As regards the factors that led to the incident, the Local Asamiya respondents have the same opinions. They said that the people from neighbouring Hindu villages of Nagabandha did not play any role in the attack. The attackers were from distant villages from Morigaon and Jagiroad constituencies. They further said that the attack on the Na-Asamiya Muslims of Nagabandha area was neither pre-designed nor pre-planned.

“It was a spontaneous response of the people against the supporters of the illegal elections. On 15.02.1983 a group clash occurred in Lalaiborigaon (there are two parts of Lalaibori, the Pub-Lalaibori and Pachim-Lalaiboi. The inhabitants of Pub-Lalaibori are Na –Asamiya Muslims and the inhabitants of Pachim-Lalaibori are the Asamiya Hindus) between the Na-Asamiya Muslims and the Asamiya Hindus. On that day firings from both sides took place. The dead body of a Hindu person was recovered from that village. This incident was one of the factors responsible for the violent mass killings. People from different villages came together to retaliate the attack on the Hindu person”(A school teacher of Hatibat area on 14.04. 2015).

Narratives of the Alleged Attackers:

If we go into the depth of Nagabandha massacre we will find some interesting experience. Just a few days before the Nagabandha massacre in 1983, one tribal of Bhurbhandha area was brutally killed in the “Belboripam” near to Nagabandha area. That ghastly incident was one of the foremost causes for the beginning of Nagabandha
Massacre as stated by the stakeholders. When we interacted with the family members of the deceased, we came to know that;

“… the root cause of the incident was ‘land centric’. The Bengali speaking Muslims wanted to gain the land of the natives. As a matter of fact the people from Tiwa community became more ferocious and the murder of a person, ‘Konwar’, from their community substantiates their anger. Thousands of people from Hill area came forward to Bhurbhandha area and they joined the attacking mob. The Bengali speaking Muslims residing within Nagabandha and nearby villages were attacked by thousands of people” (From an interview with Mr X of village ‘A’ on 14.11.2015).

6.5 Whether it was a Communal Riot?

The Nagabandha massacre by and large was a communal clash between the Asamiyas and the Na-Asamiyas. The following narratives will substantiate it. However, there are differences in the views of attackers and the victims regarding communal character of the incident, yet all have admitted that it was clash between two communities. Roshni Sengupta wrote “Communal riots as inevitable eruptions of anger and violence between communities divided by deep, incommensurable and often historical differences”(Sengupta 2005:2046). Historical and deep rooted differences along with perceived ‘Bangladeshi infiltrators’ developed the gap between the Asamiyas and Na-Asamiya which propelled an atmosphere for communal violence.
Narratives of the Na-Asamiya Muslims:
The leading narrative of the Na-Asamiya Muslims was that the Nagabandha massacre was the outcome of communal hatred between the Asamiyas and the Na-Asamiya Muslims. The 1983 elections generated communal polarization in society and politics in Assam. Some supporters of the Assam movement became more violent with the announcement of 1983 Assembly Elections by the central government. In this backdrop, they believed, the Nagabandha massacre was an attack of the Asamiya Hindus on the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The Na-Asamiya Muslims were labelled as ‘illegal Bangladeshi’ by the supporters of the Assam movement. When in the wake of Assembly elections the law and order broke down abysmally in the state, a section of movement supporter attacked the Na-Asamiya Muslims in different places of Assam.

“The first victims of the riot were the habitants of Thanasaruwa village situated to the South-West of Nagabandha. Around ten to fifteen thousand people were in the attacking mob. This was the starting point of setting fire to the houses of the Na-Asamiya Muslims. The mob became more aggressive and attacked the Dakhin (South) Kalikajari village. Then they moved towards Lahoripam, Pub-lalaibori village. Gradually the attackers became more and more violent and set fire on the school building of Nagabandha where more than hundred people were taking shelter to escape from the violent mob” (Interview with college teacher of Nagabandha area on 12.11.2016).

Narratives of the Local Asamiyas:
The Hindu respondents were reluctant to believe that it was a communal clash between the Hindus and the Muslims. They believe it was an accident, not a pre-planned
communal clash wherein a religious community attacks another. For them, the Nagabandha massacre was a clash between the supporters and the opponents of the Assembly elections. They believed that it was a clash between the people struggling for survival and the people who have brought about the threat to the survival of the indigenous people.

The murder of two Hindus i.e one at Belboripam and other at Lalaibori by the Muslims propelled an environment that everyone became restive to take revenge. After the incidents, the attack on the Na-Asamiya Muslims became more rampant and aggressive. All the assets of the villages were destroyed by a violent mob” (group interview on 12.09.2016 to 13.09.2016 at village ‘HI’).

Narratives of the alleged attackers:

When we interviewed the alleged attackers, their perception was that the Muslims were outnumbering the Hindus in that area. When one tribal man was killed by alleged Bengali speaking Muslims, it contributed to strengthening that common perception. They claimed that it was an attack against aberrant encroachment on land and identity of indigenous community by a migrant community

“The Bengali Muslims were very land greedy .They wanted to usurp the land of the Asamiyas by hook or crook. They did not bother to kill a person for land” (group interview 14.12.2016 in Village ‘A’)

6.6 1983 Elections as the Background of the Incident:

Assembly elections of 1983 were considered as the most propelling factor behind the occurrence of a series of communal riots in Assam along with the Nagabandha riot. The following narratives will substantiate it.
**Narratives of the Na-Asamiya Muslims:**

The leading narrative from the Na-Asamiya Muslim was that the 1983 elections propelled a situation for the massacre in Nagabandha area. They openly said that they did not seriously take the election boycott calls by the movement leaders. They could not imagine that their participation in the elections would lead to such a situation.

“I think the main cause of the violence during 1983 at Nagabandha and nearby villages was the participation of the Muslims in the election process. We cannot understand the seriousness of the appeal to boycott the election. We took the matter lightly. I also want to affirm here that when the slogan of the AASU changed from ‘bahiragata khedaw’ to ‘bideshi khedaw’ it really affected our sentiment. The agitators branded us as the Bangladeshi Bideshi. With a hope for security we took part in the elections. Till then we did not witness any sort of communal conflict among the communities. There were also lack of proper inter community communication network like what we have now a days (Group interview at village ‘M’ on 04.01.2017 to 06.01.2017)

“We had a very cordial relationship with the Hindus of the neighbouring villages. But the 1983 elections changed the entire situation. The Hindus began to alienate from us from the beginning of the electioneering. Support of the Na-Asamiya Muslim to the holding of elections made the neighbouring Hindu Asamiyas to assume that the Na-Asamiya Muslims are against the interest of the Hindu Asamiyas. This belief led to the occurrence of the incident” (Group interview at village ‘MI’ on 04.01.2017 to 06.01.2017)

The respondents of Na-Asamiya Muslims clearly acknowledged that they made a big blander by believing the assurance of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The P.M. appealed all to participate in the elections and assured security of life and property. The
Na-Asamiya Muslims of Nagabandha areas were convinced with that assurance of the Prime Minister of the country and they came forward to participate in the elections. However, the government machinery was not at all sincere to provide adequate security to those who supported the elections. Here, emerges the question of state complicity.

**Narratives of the Local Asamiyas:**

The dominant narrative of the Hindu Asamiyas was that the Na-Asamiyas should not have participated in the elections while they were fully aware of the fact that their neighbours were opposed to the elections.

“The Hindus and the Muslims of that area had a very close relationship till the elections of 1983. But the participation of the Na-Asamiya Muslim in the election process changed the whole situation. They strongly believed that the Na Asamiya Muslims of the area did a great betrayal by deciding to participate in the elections. Because by this, they clearly showed they are not with the Hindu Asamiyas who strongly supported the Assam Movement. They said that the Na Asamiya people of Nagabandha and it’s neighbouring villages showed more faith on the advice of Indira Gandhi than their relationship and faith on the Hindu people of neighbouring villages” (Group interview at village ‘H’ and ‘HI’ on 05.01.2017)

**The Narratives of the alleged attackers:**

Although, they put more emphasis on the land grabbing attitude of the Na-Asamiya Muslims behind the attack of thousands of people on Nagabandha area yet, they
considered the holding of Assembly election as the main cause behind the Nagabandha massacre,

“A large section of Assamese society decided to boycott the assembly elections. But the inhabitants of Nagabandha area decided and casted their vote and consequently they had to bear the brunt of neighbours

(Group interview in village ‘AI’.05.01.2017 to 06.01.2017)

6.7 Summing Up:

The Nagabandha massacre that took place on February 16, 1983 was an instance of communal violence. It is evident from its nature. A section of local people, who strongly supported the Assam movement, engaged in violence against the Na-Asamiyas of Nagabandha area as a retaliatory response for their participation in the elections which they wanted to resist any cost. The Nagabandha massacre was a cumulative consequence of the communal polarization that occurred in the wake of Assembly elections of 1983. Five broad conclusions can be drawn from the narratives of the people from field survey in the areas of Nagabandha, Hatibat and Bhurbhandha.

1. Apodictically it was a communal riot in true sense of term. It was a one-sided perpetrated violence between the Asamiyas and the Na-Asamiyas. Basically it was a conflict between the supporters and the opponents of the Assembly elections which ultimately transformed into a communal violence. Rage for revenge was the igniting point of this communal attack. The Nagabandha attack reflects the quest for revenge for two causes.

➤ First--- The murder of two Local Asamiyas in Beloboripam near Bhurbandha area, and other in Lalaibori village near Nagabandha area and
consequently, it was believed that these murders were committed by the Na-Asamiya Muslims of the Nagabandha area.

- Second--The participation of the Na-Asamiya Muslims in the Assembly elections which was boycotted by their neighbouring Asamiyas.

2. It was an organized violence. When the violence is organized, the participants are basically from distant places far away from where the incident takes place. The statement can be applied in case of Nagabandha massacre too. The Na-Asamiyas of Nagabandha area were living harmoniously with the local Asamiyas for many years. There was an untold cordial tie between them which debarred the local Asamiyas from killing their Muslim neighbours, though it was fought on communal lines. The movement sharpened the polarization between the Hindus and the Muslims. And, 1983 Assembly elections substantiate it unmistakably. After the incident the Na-Asamiya Muslims did not retaliate and became dependent on the state and government for their security. A deep sense of despondency engulfed them.

3. State complicity is a matter of great concern in the whole episode of Nagabandha. The Na-Asamiya Muslims of Nagabandha area openly opined that the Central government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi virtually misled them by promising to provide them security if they participate in the elections. Again, they boldly said that the Haryana Armed Police Battalion openly connived the attackers and did not protect the sufferers/victims at all. On the other hand, the local Asamiyas of Hatiba terea believed that the Na-Asamiya Muslims of that area dared to participate in the elections, despite the stiff resistance of movement leaders and a section of political
leaders instigated them to do that. The narrative of both sides clearly shows a series of conflict role of the Central government as well as the state government.

4. From the field survey, we do not get any concrete idea about who are the attackers. When we conducted interview in the Bhurbandha area, they said that thousands of people coming from nearby hills on the southern-side of the village, may be including Nellie, Tetelia Tribal Block etc. They joined the mob and marched forward to attack on the Na-Asamiya Muslims of Nagabandha and nearby villages. The victims also claimed that the attackers came from places far away from Nagabandha including Bhurbandha and its nearby areas.

5. An in-depth analysis of the Nagabandha massacre reveals some interesting facts. When the Na-Asamiya Muslims of the Nagabandha area came to know about the murder of two Hindu Asamiyas, they expected some form of retaliatory violence against them from the Hindu Asamiyas. They also noticed that the Asamiyas of the northern part of the village Nagabandha were vacating their houses. As expected the violence occurred at Nagabandha and nearby villages, most of the villagers were able to flee away from attacks. However, the anger of the attackers did not come down with the attack on Muslims of East-Bengal origin in the Nagabandha area. Two days after the Nagabandha massacre, thousands of people attacked in Nellie inhabited by Muslims of East-Bengal origin resulting in the infamous Nellie Massacre with much more brutality and casualty.