CHAPTER VII
Summary and Conclusion

Every massacre is associated with different realities and myths. Every communal riot has multiplicity of explanations and interpretations. It is difficult to rationalize the narratives regarding the cause of a particular communal riot or massacre. People always feel comfortable to choose the interpretation that suits them. Many a times people choose such an interpretation that is least destructive to their interest. The main intend of the present study is to find out and analyze the gradual growth of communal feelings, bitter hatred and associated causes between the local communities and migrant communities living side by side in Assam during the time of the Assam Movement through narratives of the victims and the alleged attackers of communal riots which occurred at Nagabandha on 16\textsuperscript{th} February 1983 of undivided Nagaon district. Different theories of communal riots have taken in to consideration while attempting to comprehend the nature and causes of communal riots that occurred in Assam during the period of the Assam Movement and particularly in the Nagabandha area on 16\textsuperscript{th} February 1983. Series of communal riots occurred during the Assam Movement and particularly during the time Assembly elections in 1983, but the one that occurred, in Nagabandha area unmistakably reflects the deepened rift between the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. The social-constructivist theory argued that the colonial administrators created certain simplified social categories such as class, religion and generated additional consciousness within them. With the passage of time this consciousness turned into aggressiveness and became one of the main reasons of communal riots in India. When we talk about communal riots especially in India, our
minds automatically move towards the Hindu-Muslim communal division and its eruption as a riot. This perspective helps us to understand the realities of communal riots within the social structure of the Indian society.

Migration of population from one place to another is a natural and historical phenomenon. In fact, broadly speaking human history is rooted deeply in migration. Sometimes this natural process leads to astonishing consequences. The alleged increase in the numbers of the Muslims of East-Bengal origin over the years in the undivided Nagaon district pushed some of the local Asamiyas to feel insecure demographically and politically. They did not find any solution to get out of such insecurity not only at societal level but also at governmental level. It paved the door for group conflicts between the Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and left a far-reaching impact on the society and politics of Assam.

The Line System was introduced as early as in 1920 in the district by the colonial administrators to minimize the native-migrant conflict. Though there were latent conflicts, yet it did not take the shape of an open ultimate communal violence in the district. In 1950, Assam experienced communal riots which reflected the beginning of communal hatred and political polarization. Wide spread communal incidents took place in 1950 in Goalpara and Kamrup districts as well as in some other areas of Assam. The victims were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. These communal riots forced thousands East-Bengal origin Muslims to flee Assam. However, most of them returned to their places after the end of communal riots. The government of India through Nehru-Liaquat Ali pact (1950) facilitated the way for their return. The local Asamiyas of that area also accepted them whole-heartedly. Once again they gradually merged with Assamese society and culture. They even participated actively in the
‘Language Movement’ during 1960s. Again they participated actively in the 1972 Language Movement that fought for making Assamese language as the medium of instruction at the college level under the Gauhati University. Their acceptance of Assamese language as their mother tongue, gave a majority status to the Assamese language.

The British brought these Muslims peasants into Assam wherein the Assamese gentry and the *Mahajans* too collaborated. They settled down gradually in the lower Assam with the help of the administration and became an important part of the Assamese society. How can now one alienate them from the history of Assam? Will the Bangladesh (they came to Assam much before the independence of India) government take them back? At the same time we have to admit that both the central government and the state government did not pay attention to the clashes emerged out of the issue of immigration in Assam.

The issue of immigration (foreign nationals) became much heightened during the Assam Movement. Initially the movement was against all the foreign nationals staying in Assam. But later, the focus shifted against the religious and the linguistic minorities living in Assam. Such communal turn of the movement came in September 1979 with the revision of electoral rolls and alleged entry of 4500 names of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls. That happened during the preparation of the by-election to the Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency. The alleged detection of foreigners’ names in the electoral rolls made the local Asamiyas more apprehensive and subsequent politicization of the issue of losing their identity and gradually transformed the movement from non-violent to violent one. The violent turn was more visible during the Assembly Elections of 1983. Instead of detecting foreign nationals in the absence of
a clear-cut mechanism; violence was allowed a free flow taking a huge toll of life and property. Countless people lost their lives and valuable properties during the period of the Assam Movement. The Movement generated a new political awareness among the Muslims in general and Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular.

Atrocities on the minorities are not a new phenomenon. It is prevalent in various forms almost in all the nations of the world. Sometimes it may be in the religious form, sometimes in linguistic or in ethnic form. The six year long Assam Movement developed such an emotionally charged situation where in both the religious and the linguistic minorities had to bear the brunt. The environment that developed during the course of the Assam movement deepened the communal polarization in the society and politics of Assam. The leadership of the movement mainly confined to the Upper Caste Hindus. Some section of these leaders used the issue of foreign nationals as a political strategy and with this; they entered into the electoral politics of Assam. Later, the Assam Accord which was signed between the movement leaders and the Central government finally put to an end the Assam Movement. The AGP was formed by a section of movement leaders after signing the Assam Accord in 1985. This party won the Assembly Elections of 1985 and formed the state government in Assam. Through the Assam movement, the leadership of the movement entered to the electoral politics of Assam and captured the state power by forming the government at the state level.

The Assembly elections of 1985 demonstrated a new trend in the electoral politics of Assam. Till 1983 the Muslims of East-Bengal origin largely remained as a Congress vote-bank. As soon as the UMF was formed in the aftermath of the Assam movement, greater fragmentation was seen in the Congress vote-bank politics. The UMF participated in the Assembly elections of 1985. That shows how the Assam Movement
had created unintentionally a new platform for religious and linguistic minorities of Assam in the form the AAMSU and the UMF. Gradually, mutual harmony and prosperity turned into mutual suspect and antagonism. Many scholars argue that the Assam Movement has ended the ‘ethnic accommodation’ and developed ‘intra and inter ethnic conflict and tension’ in Assam.

The leadership of the AASU was leading the movement with a demand to detect and deport foreign nationals and to fully protect the borders of India, etc. But 1983 assembly polls made a section of movement supporters violent and they did not hesitate to take the path of violence against those who did not support the movement. During the electioneering, communal riots broke-out in different places like Silapathar, Gohpur, Nellie, Nagabandha, Chaowlkhowa Chapor, Khairabari and Chamaria etc. but the state failed to deal with the incidents of communal riots wherein thousands of people were killed, mimed and injured, thousands of villages were burnt down. Respondents of the Nagabandha massacre considered the Assembly polls of 1983 as a propelling factor behind its outbreak.

The Assam Movement, the Assembly Elections of 1983 and the participation of the Muslims in the elections which was boycotted by the leaders of the movement, land alienation by the local people, etc. combined together to make it a matter of contestation. But if some common people decide to take part in such collective violence in spite of being ethically hesitant, there must be some reasonable grounds. During the heydays of the Assam Movement some natives tried to grab the chance to get back the land occupied by the Muslims of East Bengal origin or to obtain some political advantage. Such types of situations are created by some politicians, religious leaders or power seeking organizations. With the passage of time, people slowly tried to wipe out
the ghastly memories of the Nagabandha massacre. Consequently, they became conscious about the dreadful politics which can demolish everything for the fulfillment of personal gains by some leadership. The victims of Nagabandha massacre blamed the government more than their Assamese neighbours. After the Nagabandha incident both the communities have been living in their respective space in mutual understanding, empathy, harmony and peace. The Nagabandha massacre was the first and the last instance of communal riot that they experienced in their life-time.

In the whole incident of Nagabandha, the role of the Central government is shrouded in mystery. Inspite of stiff resistance from a large section of the people, the Congress government at the centre arranged all possible ways to hold the Assembly elections at any cost as if it was a war! The huge presence of paramilitary forces converted Assam virtually into a battle-ground. Most of the government officials of Assam refused to cooperate with the government in holding the elections. So, the Election Commission of India brought officials from outside Assam. The whole process reflected the inflexible character of the Central Government. The Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi came to Assam and visited areas inhabited by the Muslim minorities. The main purpose was to somehow conduct the elections and to win the elections at any cost. But the government failed to protect both minorities as well as indigenous communities from political violence. Therefore many people criticized the government and emphasized its absolutely unimaginative negative role during the heydays of the movement particularly during the days of polling. A responsible government with effective bureaucracy, and active police force combined with vigilant media can create a situation which can restrain the occurrence of such communal riots.
It is true that the memories of massacres or riots remain as a black spot in psyche of
the people--- both the victims and the attackers. Although normalcy was restored in
Assam after the signing of the Assam Accord, yet communal polarization entered into
the society and politics of Assam. It negatively affected the process of assimilation of
different communities. In the aftermath the Accord, different ethnic communities of
Assam began to demand more autonomy, more power and more economic benefits.
Communalism was used as an instrument by certain vested groups to achieve power.
Once it was applied, it grew quickly and entered every sphere of the society. It
developed a solid ground for animosity and resentment among communities in Assam.

The most important fact is that, though the Muslims in Assam in general and Muslims
of East- Bengal origin in particular developed a sense of distinct political consciousness
aftermath of the Assam Movement, yet they never entered into any movement based on
their religion or new identity consciousness. No doubt they became politically aware
after the Assam Movement. This political awareness found expression in the electoral
politics of Assam. A good number of Muslims of East-Bengal origin joined public
politics that subsequently increased the number of Muslims MLA’s in Assam. The
UMF and the AIUDF were formed to ostensibly protect the interest of the minorities in
Assam in the post-Assam Movement period. In 2011 Assembly Elections, the AIUDF
became the major opposition party in Assam. All these political equations reflect the
development of a new political consciousness and resultant electoral behavior among
the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in particular.

Frequent outbreaks of communal riots and atrocities against the Muslims (East-Bengal
origin) during the Assam Movement sharpened a separate identity consciousness
among them. After the movement they became politically more united than ever before.
All these perceivable changes among the Muslim community of Assam have resulted in widening the social gap between the Hindus and the Muslims all the more. That is the compatibility between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam has weakened during the period of Assam movement and more particularly during the Assembly elections of 1983. Subsequently, deepened the political polarization between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

The riots were over, but the memories still haunt the survivors deeply. The narratives of the Nagabandha massacre reveal that the memories of riots still remain a scar in the society. These narratives assert that even after thirty-four years of that inhuman incident at Nagabandha, the victims of the massacre and their lineages, still nurse the wound of their losses. The pain of that gory incident till now haunts the residents of Nagabandha. The neighbouring Asamiyas of Nagabandha area have the opinion that the massacre should not occur again. The massacre inflicted a black-spot in the decades old relationship between the local Asamiyas and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin. Now by and large a deep sense of empathy and sympathy has grown in the society, which has been preventing further outbreak of communal riots in the Nagabandha area.