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Identifying 'Immigrants' through Violence: Memory, Press, and Archive in the making of 'Bangladeshi Migrants' in Assam

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Identifying ‘Immigrants’ through Violence: Memory, Press, and Archive in the making of ‘Bangladeshi Migrants’ in Assam

Musab Iqbal

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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in the fond memory of my

late father,

who left his thesis unfinished, but inspired

me to never stop learning and exploring

ABSTRACT

This research studies the violent conflict between Bengali Muslims, who mostly migrated from the former East Bengal during colonial times, and the Bodo Tribe, who mostly follow the Bathou religion in the Bodoland region of Assam. This conflict is often seen through the pre-existing lens of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India. Here, conflict between a religious minority and an ethnic one is investigated in its locality and this investigation highlights the complex history of the region and its part in shaping this antagonism. It does so by looking into the colonial archive which introduced the category of 'immigrant' to the region, together with Urdu and English press coverage of four violent events that essentialize the categories 'Muslim' and 'immigrant', respectively. Defying simple categorization, the Bengali Muslims in the Kokrajhar district have devised their own strategy for narrating time. Through archival and ethnographic research this study shows the shifting meaning of the concept of an 'immigrant' and its implication for social and political realities. This research addresses some less studied dynamics of the clash between two minorities and its representation in both the English and Urdu Media.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Musab Iqbal, hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASU - All Assam Students Union

ABSU - All Bodo Students Union

BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party

BTAD - Bodoland Territorial Area Districts

BTC - Bodoland Territorial Council

NRC - National Register of Citizens

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time when screens large and small flash scenes of horror at us and terrorize us, but now, additionally, our hands feel the tremors as the news relentlessly breaks in our palms. Amidst the flow of the news of suffering we may perhaps be moved, or our attention caught by one subject which draws empathy. Sights of children being separated from parents at the Mexican-U.S. border, boats capsizing in the Mediterranean, Rohingya refugees running from the terror of the state with their fearful faces, refugees at the gates of borders waiting hopelessly to enter a new territory, and the lesser known sight of people locked in detention centres because their Indian citizenship is doubted in Assam, waiting to be deported to an unknown country. These are headlines that make the 21st century look grim. We certainly know these stories because the media have communicated them to us, but similar pictures perhaps disguise many different circumstances.

Painful news address certain sensibilities and feelings, it arouses emotions and connections but often tears generated by these images "inevitably turn attention away from the causes of the tears", and do not reflect on the particular history of the pain, as Jean Seaton notes: "more political realities are transformed into emotional narratives" (Seaton, 2005: p.133). The pertinent question she asks "Is 'news' blood influenced by changing mores around 'entertainment' blood - the gore that features in fiction? The blood effect must be calculated as it should "fit an aesthetic" and is not there "to mimic reality" (Seaton, 2005, p.21). This featuring of fiction and the need for news to grab attention and entertain mask the history, and the making of rational judgments by contextualizing the news within its particular history becomes difficult.

The debate around migration has become a major policy and political issue that is re-shaping political cultures, policy and countries' future direction, causing anxiety to people worldwide. Of course, there are differences, different responses in different places with varying degrees of state efficiency. In a place like India, which has failed to serve its people adequately, raising feelings against minorities is an effective strategy with which to distract attention from fundamental injustices. More widely, there is the discontent of those people who are left in communities from which industries have left (either because they have been superseded or, indeed, because the work and the industries have been exported to nations offering cheaper

labour). They may be encouraged to turn against those who are more marginalized and deprived in the world of development. Our history of the present is perhaps as an age of anger, since Pankaj Mishra concludes that “in general, there has been an exponential rise in tribalist hatred of minorities, the main pathology of scapegoating released by political and economic shocks, even as the world is knit more closely by globalization” (Mishra, 2017, p.328). On the contrary, David Goodhart has tried to understand this anti-immigrant sentiment in the wake of Trump’s election and Brexit as a great divide between ‘Anywhere’ and ‘Somewhere’. Goodhart writes:

> The anywhere world of the geographical, and often social, mobility of higher education and professional careers was once the preserve of a small elite; it has now become general, though not universal. For Somewheres, meanwhile, post-industrialism has largely abolished manual labour, reduced the status of lower income males and weakened the national social contract - neither the affluent nor employers feel the same obligation towards ‘their’ working class that they once did” (Goodhart, 2017, p.6).

These Somewheres, whom Mishra may consider tribalist, with their own grievances and particular history, have begun to speak, as Goodhart points out, through new and established parties. It is insufficient to blame a political or business class, or the media, for stoking the hatred. Indeed, in some societies, like the UK, all of these three institutions have worked, imperfectly, inadequately, but nevertheless to some effect to diminish such inequalities and to integrate groups into education and achievement. Mishra argues that every individual has to take responsibility and a moment of introspection to reflect “on our complicity in everyday forms of violence and dispossession, and our callousness before the spectacle of suffering” (Mishra, 2017, p.329).

Are we living in a more violent age? Domestic violence has in many western countries and some Asian ones been reduced remarkably over the last 50 years. People are less frequently murdered, casual violence has been diminished, famines are less common because there are responses to them. Yet, in other places and times, there is what may be described as a new violence that breaks ‘normal’ codes. Extreme violence against groups, genocide and ethnic cleansing do not happen without the normalization of hatred. Violence everywhere is made possible through certain acts of communication and the reinvention of a history. Everywhere, there is anxiety that the breaking of the formal and informal restraints that govern political and communal action may be being weakened. In his reading of Herbert Kelman (1989), Zygmunt Bauman found three conditions that, once they are met singly or together, weaken moral restraints on violence and cruelty:

> …the violence is authorized (by official orders coming from the legally entitled quarters), actions are routinized (by rule-governed practices and exact specification of roles), and the victims of the violence are dehumanized (by ideological definitions and indoctrinations)" (Bauman, 1989, p.21).

Ethnic cleansing starts from the ordinary, slow, and possibly hard to discern or fight, erosion of values, norms, behaviour, rules, and something vulnerable is exploited in the 'ordinary', which then subtly routinizes violence in a society. Without the dehumanization of the victim community the psychological numbing that makes the action of violence and its acceptance is impossible. The routinization of a certain language against a set of people to dehumanize them is the key to making hatred and violence ordinary acts. As Ashis Nandy notes:

> Such dehumanization is usually brought about through hate propaganda, manipulation of history to set up the victims as intrinsically dangerous or contaminating, and the use of scientific or pseudo-scientific categories, such as eugenics, demography and social evolutionism." (Nandy, 2013, p.68)

The Holocaust was a discrete, distinct event that occurred in a particular place over a particular period of time with an absolutely particular machinery of destruction, but that was also, as Bauman reminds us, an event that should be "traced back to the only-too-familiar record of the hundreds of years of ghettos, legal discrimination, pogroms and persecutions of Jews in Christian Europe – and so revealed as a uniquely horrifying, yet fully logical consequence of ethnic and religious hatred" (Bauman, 1989, p.2). 'Ethnic' conflict has erupted more recently in Bosnia, Rwanda and Burma, and can quickly change from being small scale to being huge and genocidal.

A rapidly growing economy, like India's. has nevertheless failed to address the anxieties of smaller groups, as the urgent train of development has trampled over (as it had done everywhere that industrialisation took place) local issues and traditions. The salaried masses need to be kept busy in offices, as the GDP should keep climbing and the idea of India needs to be recast to paint a picture of economic growth and the success of the 'majority'. This needs an ideological adjustment and a new project for writing history. On his deathbed, the revered Kannada writer and critic, U.R. Ananthamurthy, wrote a book with a spirit of compassion and a tone of urgency. He argued that there were two ideas of India which started

to clash at the beginning of the twentieth century, and these ideas were entering into a final battle. The result of this contest will determine the country's fate. In *Hindutva or Hind Swaraj* (2016) he saw two visions of India - that of Gandhi, inspired by religion and non-violence, which is of an inclusive India driven by self-governing villages, the other that of Savarkar, whose ideology inspired Godse to kill Gandhi, and whose vision of India for Hindus has inspired generations. In this ideological battle, good and evil, citizen and alien, future and past were opened up for debate and a 'final' definition.

The idea of exclusive citizenship is now at the core of the Hindu nationalist vision of India which Savarkar and his compatriots envisaged. A new citizenship (amendment) bill was introduced to the parliament (in 2016, and it has yet to become law) by the existing government, which is run by Bharatiya Janata Party, and this categorically removes any potential citizenship for a Muslim from neighbouring countries. The bill makes it clear that "illegal" migrants "who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan" are eligible for citizenship (India, n.d.). In the light of the proposed amendment, the category of 'illegal immigrant' is reserved for a Muslim from the region. The citizenship of millions of people is already in doubt due to the new draft of the National Register of Citizens in July, 2018, which excluded four million people in Assam.

Assam, the largest north-eastern state of India, is the site of many conflicts and conversations and this perhaps constitutes a defining feature of the post-colonial condition. The modern project of nation building and the underlying conflict it brings and exposes is very evident in the state of Assam. It is the site of the contestation of the meaning of history and belonging. This is where arguments about the definition of 'foreign' and 'native', 'national' and 'anti-national', 'ethnic' and 'non-ethnic' are in a perpetual struggle to define and claim many boundaries which they can legitimize and own. It is a fuzzy space where the broad distinction between majority and minority is confused. Assam is an exemplary case study through which to examine the making and unmaking of citizenship: people find themselves arbitrarily assigned to the wrong side of a binary – and it exposes the limits of the project of contemporary nationhood construction in India.

For decades, the history of this region has been written by protest and agitation, violence and riots, and debates about belonging and alienation. The region has seen many militant groups demanding self-determination, some asking for a separate state and others

demanding the expulsion of 'foreigners' from their state. The question of 'illegal immigration' has long shaped the public debate and polity of the state. The 'migration' question is deeply entwined with the South Asian history of partition, dis-possession, movement and injustice. The debate about migration in the region cannot just be understood in terms of law and border, but it demands a broader understanding of the narratives that shape the history of community and nation.

This thesis not a history of Assam, of which there are many, neither is this a history of migration, of which there are few. Rather, this is a study of those who are trapped between these two histories (the histories of migration and Assam). This is story of the 'one' who is a 'Muslim' and an 'Immigrant'. The 'one' who is wedged between the politics of exclusion and the politics of victimization. The idea of this research is to locate the everyday violence in its microcosm. It attempts to circumvent the clamour of an ahistorical reading that is shaped by the 'Power – Knowledge' discourse and that attempts to show history in its own distinct time and with its own peculiarity, as well as seeing the micro-history of local people. This work has been an attempt to see the changing concept of 'immigrant' and to historically analyse the context that is produced by the media that make news intelligible to audiences.

I have looked at four episodes of violence in the Bodoland region of Assam. So this research is an attempt to understand and explain the mechanisms of repetitive violence: how each episode resonates with the next and needs to be looked at through the problem of time. This demonstrates how our Now-Time, or Historical Time, shapes the world around us, builds conceptual and imaginary borders, delineates one from the other, alien from citizen, and helps make new and possibly escalating violence possible. People's memories and official memories, official and informal narratives, interact to produce legitimations and fear. In turn they stoke (or conceivably, if handled in different ways, may de-escalate fear) new action.

Chapter One engages with some of the writing on violence that was produced around the Second World War period, which showed the tyranny of a totalitarian regime but also its ingredients and signs. The shock of the Holocaust that produced debates around violence and the processes that led to it have enduring value. Despite being decades away from the period, the research of Benjamin and Arendt that considers the insightful conceptualizations of violence remains chillingly apposite in our times, and to India in particular, where the law is now being instrumentalized for violence. This chapter also explores the representation of

minorities in Indian media and its implication for Indian politics. Here, I also deal with the methodological aspects of this research. In this thesis, I have triangulated three methods to look into the question of time and memory and their effect on the present. Through work in the historical archive, using Colonial and contemporary papers, I looked into the deep time. Later I looked into English and Urdu Press coverage of violence and this revealed how the categories of 'Muslim' and 'Immigrant' are produced by these newspapers.

In *Chapters Two* and *Three* I have located the violence in history and archive. I have explored the context in which a different nationalism started to emerge and different ethnicities started to evolve their politics of difference. In *Chapter Three,* I have opened a small window into the past by offering a glimpse into the colonial archive which made the 'immigrant' a sociological and epistemological category. Through the information collected and produced about the immigrants, their social formation was made possible. This is in no way an exhaustive archival work on the term 'immigrant', but it provides enough insight to make the understanding of the definitional history of migration in the region, and the 'original' usage of the term, richer. Of course, much more could be said and explored about this archive, but it adds a different dimension of time and an explanation of the problem that the research was attempting to unravel.

Chapter Four considers the coverage of violence in the English language regional newspaper of Assam, *The Assam Tribune.* I have looked into the category of 'immigrant' that is discussed in the newspaper and how it locates the immigrant community in the regional history. This chapter explores the way the news reports violence and the editorials interpret it. This has also explored the anxieties of the Assamese community and the politics of fear.

In *Chapter Five* I have examined two Urdu newspapers, published from Kolkata, and their coverage of four episodes of violence in the region. Just finding the papers and constructing an 'archive' of their coverage was itself an example of creating an archive: I had to work to find what they no longer held or knew, but which I presumed had an effect. The newspapers' reporting demonstrates how Muslim identity is essentialized and a homogenous time of Muslim *ummah* was produced. I have introduced the term 'Bare moment' to denote the time in which the event (of violence) is used to speak of victimization as the only reality.

The last chapter of this thesis discusses the fieldwork which was conducted in the villages of the Kokarjhar district of Assam. *Chapter Six* shows how vivid and real the memory of violence is, and how routine violence, and the attempt to negotiate and limit it, shapes people's subjectivity. This chapter explores how people defy the historical categories and define themselves through their own space of experience. This also shows the relationship people have with time as an immigrant and reveals how violence has become a system of social organization and demarcation in that area. This chapter focuses on the present, lived experience of the categories that were produced by the earlier research.

The different components used in this work have all contributed to an attempt to understand the anxiety of a particular place, Assam, among a particular group of people who share the space, but who are in conflict over resources and definitions of rights. It is a particular history with specific interactions between memory, law, changing political circumstances, media narratives, local gossip and fears, and the instrumentalization of discrimination and the use of the raised sentiments of groups against each other. However, it may also raise wider, more general questions about how these complex interactions work and play out in real, everyday life. Is modern India, in this place and in this set of practices that are dangerously teetering on the edge of a more authoritarian future? If the routinization of misunderstanding (present and past) is not challenged, then the routinization of violence will never be questioned either.

CHAPTER ONE

Violence, Identity and Issues of Representation in Modern India

Introduction

Understanding endemic, communal, repetitive violence and the sudden and unexpected fracturing of civilised behaviour, not war but the continued threat of violence, has puzzled thinkers in all ages. Violence has not only been inscribed in States' political and social structures and institutions, but also in everyday communication. Although the symbolic aspects of violence: ideology, myth, rumour, victimization and visual images are present in the modern age, contemporary media technologies have made violence an everyday news event. These new technologies have made violence ever present in individuals' daily life; often as information that is embedded in sensationalised presentations. The identity-based politics of modern times and the emergence of 'population' as a quantifiable category, have opened up a series of violent confrontations between ethnic categories, and these have written the history of most of the modern world's nations. The last century has, in fact, seen many horrific episodes of violence that has been based on identity; whether in post-colonial nations or in the socialist states of Russia and China.

Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, has dedicated much of his scholarship at understanding modern society, multiculturalism and the tension created by the formation of modern identities. Taylor (2011) makes a distinction between categorical violence, a violence directed towards a particular category of people, from every other form. He further distinguishes between biological and metabiological factors of violence. As he continues to explore the theme of categorical violence, he finds that metabiological factors play a very crucial role in the emergence of this type of violence. Taylor sees the notion of categorical violence as a "throwback" phenomenon which, according to him, is the condition in which the past returns into the present. To understand the violence unfolding in modernity, through new institutions and the modern project of identity, I explore some key literature on the understanding of violence in general and, later, the cause and history of ethnic and communal violence in modern India.

The Violence of the law

In his insightful essay, 'On the Critique of Violence', written in 1921, the German critic Walter Benjamin opened up a new front in understanding the nature of violence. Benjamin's essay is at times penetrating and at times elusive; lurching from the domain of the political to that of the theological, as informed by 'today' as it is by a 'religious past'. Benjamin, hence, introduces religious or Judaic conceptual semantics, making the problem of violence much more complicated. What lies at the heart of Benjamin's writing, however, is the question of violence as it relates to the questions of law and justice; and not only law and justice, but a "tension between natural law and positive law - violence as natural or the product of history" (Benjamin, 2009, p.3).

Benjamin inaugurates the argument by looking into the problem of natural law, and any discourse on violence remains incomplete without tackling the question of means and end. Natural law, for Benjamin, "seeks through the legitimacy of ends to 'justify' means; positive law seeks through justified means to 'guarantee' the legitimacy of ends" (2009, p.3). Such an analysis causes ut to look also into the historically recognized categories of sanctioned and non-sanctioned violence. The essay does not go more deeply into exploring these categories, but it definitely leaves a trace which allows us to read it through the lens of the means-end debate. Violence is legitimized through the claim of a legitimate end, the means to attain such an end must be found in a legitimate means which is, in fact, contrary to positivist law that concerns itself with the legitimacy or question of justification in order to obtain a particular means. Benjamin declares that "it has been suggested already that positive law demands that any violence produce proof of its historical origins, which in certain conditions will constitute its legitimacy, its sanction in law" (Ibid., p.4)

It is at this point that Benjamin draws one's attention to the problem of legal violence; the kind of violence that had taken grip of Germany, leading to fascism through establishing legal ends. This emergence of law, or legal violence, forces one to consider the question of justice separately from law, at the same time annihilating the force of this violence of law, "one may have to consider the surprising possibility that the interest of law in monopolising violence so far as the individual is concerned may be accounted for not so much by any intention of

safeguarding legal ends, far more by the intention of safeguarding law itself" (Benjamin, 2009, p.5).

The interest of law is, then, in protecting itself, which necessitates that only law has the power to do violence. This monopolization of violence suggests that law alone carries the duty of violence, stripping everyone else of such power, or making them so weak that the use of violence becomes impossible for anyone but the law. This method, in legitimate systems, constitutes the protection of the individual citizen from arbitrary violence, but if states are taken over and legitimate law is subverted, then the state becomes the enemy of the very individual citizen it is meant to protect. In his reading of the class struggle in Europe, and particularly in Germany, Benjamin makes a link between the right to strike, including workers' use violence in order to attain certain ends and the law resorting to violence in order to counter such a strike. This, in turn, potentially establishes the modification of the legal relations by which a class struggle, or any possibility of violence by the working class, is destroyed by law. Even in a very general sense, a strike can be termed illegal, making the use of force against strikers legitimate.

Benjamin then explores the similarity between martial and strike law, presenting the argument that "the legal subjects sanction instances of violence whose ends, for those doing the sanctioning, remain natural ends and as such may, in an emergency, clash with their own legal or natural ends" (Ibid., p.8). By removing all kinds of violence from anyone but the State or, more specifically, all possibilities for violence, modern law establishes itself. Benjamin underscores this by calling it 'laying down the law', by which he indicates that within violence there always lies a potential or character to establish law. He then draws attention to two functions of violence which, in Benjamin's thinking, appear as a theoretical foundation or zone of operation. The first function of violence, in his work, is 'law establishing' and the second is 'law upholding'(Benjamin, 2009).

Derrida, in his deconstructive reading of Benjamin's critique of violence, maintains that when we speak of *Gewalt,* it is not natural physical violence about which we speak, rather, in Derrida's meditation, a calamity or natural disaster does not qualify as *Gewalt*, but instead what comes to determine justice and law can only be seen in another sense, one which "gives rise to a judgment, before some instrument of justice.

> Hence, for Derrida, the "concept of violence belongs to the symbolic order of law, politics and morals - of all forms of authority and of authorization, of claim to authority, at least. And it is only to this extent that it can give rise to a critique. Up to this point this critique was always inscribed in the space of the distinction between means and end" (Derrida, 2002, p.265).

Benjamin notices the twofold function of violence in establishing law, in the context of which he claims that:

> … while this operation seeks to achieve what is established as law as its end, using violence as its means, in the moment of establishing what it is aiming at as law it does not repudiate violence but only now, strictly speaking, turns it (directly, this time) into a law-establishing agency (Benjamin,2009, p.22).

which, for Benjamin, results in the establishment of law that is neither independent nor free of violence but for which violence is necessary. Law, in other words, "intimately bound with violence, calling it power". Benjamin does not reflect, then, on what power is, or why it is calling itself power.

Benjamin makes it clear that, "Establishing law equates to establishing power, and to that extent it is an act of the direct manifestation of violence" (Benjamin,2009, p.22). Hence "Justice is the principle of all divine end-establishment, power the principle of all mythic law-establishment" (Ibid., p.22). Here, Benjamin enters into the field of theology or Judaic law, at the same time invoking the question of the ethics of law. The introduction of the mythic and the divine is derived from the reading of religious and mythological texts, however, Benjamin distinguishes between the mythic and the divine and proposes that mythic violence establishes law, whilst divine violence destroys law. Mythic law is myopic, it is very lowly or earthly, in the sense that the job of the Messiah, or any messianic intervention, is to liberate people from the tyranny of law, a law which assumes power for itself through commanding violence.

Now, the law, through which violence operates, makes itself a force which embroils those whose blood it is seeking or, in a manner of speaking, claims those lives which have been left to be decided by this mythic violence, by this force of law. Only this force of law, by maintaining an un-decidability, decides the very subject of law. A bare life is, then, imagined through a mythic violence that is left bare by the law. In the case of an 'illegal immigrant', who is termed an 'infiltrator' or (given) other names, it carries and then encounters this very violence of law which makes his/her life a non-life. This is then what makes the problem of

law, in the face of violence, very paradoxical or contradictory in its existence or emergence "all law-upholding violence itself eventually weakens the law-establishing aspect represented in it by suppressing all inimical counter-violences." (Benjamin, 2009, p.27)

What kind of belief is vested in that authority, which is neither ontological nor rational, (it is rational if created rationally)? One which only demands pure belief or trust or, in fact, a belief which can offer obedience. If this authority, which can enforce law, is mythic through its very presence, what will emerge, what is suspended, is it divine authority or one which is too obscure and hence divine? This is what emerges from a western tradition of law and rationality. If we relocate to the East, for example, we may find that law is then only moral law, and authority too is only moral, but this reading of history is a history of singularity. The Divine is, in the East, is encapsulated in moral laws, and a moral authority cannot enforce a law, thus the authority disintegrates.

At this point, when mythic violence is clearly separated from the 'divine' kind, Benjamin descends into a religious or elusive plane, which then urges him to expect that only the intervention of divine violence will save people, perhaps by destabilizing authority or shaking its very foundations. The general strike, revolution, or an unseen intervention, the teleological presence of a messiah, might then be calling for divine violence, hence a "pure divine violence is free once again to adopt any of the everlasting forms that myth has bastardised with law" (Benjamin 2009, p.28).

It is important to note that Walter Benjamin wrote at a time of crisis, although it may be argued that there is no time without crisis, but Benjamin wrote this critique when Germany had lost the First World War and the class struggle, or the workers' movement, was becoming intense and the country was on the verge of another war. The authority , was enforcing itself through law and what was emerging was the violence of power producing industrial killing that was unmatched in the history of mankind to that time.

The critique of law should not be taken for lawlessness, but a critique of law should be located in a context where laws are not just and the enforcement of law is arbitrary. Benjamin is not proposing a lawless state, rather, he is critiquing the law which is bordering on lawlessness. The importance of this critique has not faded over time, as may be witnessed in India, where arbitrary law enforcement produces violence and the law itself is being

weaponized by the state to marginalize people. In one of the most globally known incidents of violence recorded in India, widely covered by the media and publicized, the anti- Muslim riots of Gujarat (often referred to as the Gujarat pogrom), the Supreme Court of India expressed its lack of confidence in the legal system of the state of Gujarat and asked that cases relating to the riot be transferred out of the state. Justice V. N. Khare, of the Supreme Court of India, was quoted as saying: 'I have no faith left in the prosecution and the Gujarat government.' Evidence showed a clear case of the subversion of the justice system, as the state government manipulated the machinery of law to suit its own ends. Banaji writes: "The spinelessness of the judiciary and its overt or covert sympathies with the extreme Right was a major part of the story of success of German fascism. We (Indians) have not reached that state of judicial disintegration yet" (Banaji, 2013, p.227). The presence of laws relating to illegal immigration and their implementation, in Assam, show the arbitrariness of the law and its weaponization, which has lead to violence.

Distinguishing Power from Violence: Arendt 'On Violence'

In her work on violence, Hannah Arendt explicates the theory of violence, to separate violence from power, not just from power but also from force, strength and authority. In doing so, she critically looks into the ideas presented by Fanon (1963) and Sartre which, in a sense, justify violent means for a just end. Sartre rationalizes the same in introducing the theory expounded in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963). Arendt raises the question of violence in the realm of the political, and she tries to propose a new conceptual definition of power and violence, maintaining its difference or opposition. Reading through Bertrand De Jouvenel's book *On Power,* Arendt concludes that power, "is an instrument of rule, while rule, we are told, owes its existence to "the instinct of domination" (Arendt, 2014, p.36).

Arendt founds her argument on the very distinction between power and violence. Alexander Passerine d'Entreves, in her opinion, is the only author aware of this distinction, as evidenced, she suggests, in *The Notion of the State,* in which she claims, "We have to decide whether and in what sense 'power' can be distinguished from 'force', to ascertain how the fact of using force according to law changes the quality of force itself and presents us with an entirely different picture of human relations," (Arendt, 2014, p.37). Arendt then asserts,

however, that not even Passerine d'Entreves reaches the heart of the matter and tends to define violence, "as the most flagrant manifestation of power" and, in her view, "as a kind of mitigated violence", leading her to believe, to her disappointment, that he reaches almost the same conclusion as everybody from right to left who agrees on the basic crux of the nature of power. I will return in the end to Foucault, who also moves away from the traditional understanding of power, but whose conclusion is not that of Arendt..

In modern day democracy, control manifests itself through bureaucracy; it is the "rule by nobody". It is what Arendt calls an intricate system of ruling, in which nobody is responsible for ruling and, in that sense, the "rule by nobody" is the most tyrannical of all. The Eichmann Trial, further, re-constructed the problem of the 'banality of evil', in which the crime is committed by nobody, or nobody is responsible for the most heinous of crimes.

In an attempt to fix the definition of basic terms to furnish 'authentic diversity,' Arendt defines power as the "human ability not just to act but to act in concert" which is not the property of the individual but, rather, belongs to a group and remains intact so long as the group stands together, unlike the case of strength, which is singular and a mere individual entity. "It is in the nature of a group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength." (Arendt, 2014, p.44) And force, "which we often use in daily speech as a synonym for violence, especially if violence serves as a means of coercion, should be reserved, in terminological language, for the "forces of nature" or the "force of circumstances" *(la force des choses),* that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements (Arendt, 2014, p.45).

Ricoeur (2010) argues that Arendt seems to be associating the idea of domination with authority more than power. He notes that, "the qualifiers of recognition and respect, to the exclusion of constraint and persuasion, shift authority to the side of power" (Ricoeur, 2010, p.30) which not only opens up a paradoxical tension for a concept of power, but also the correct place for authority. If, in a very political sense, contempt threatens authority, then does it logically mean that it makes the increase in the enforcing capacity of authority weaken power? Reading through the theoretical discussions on power, Ricoeur notes that, "the concept of authority is badly founded from the start, since it transcends the terrestrial sphere of power" (Ricoeur, 2010, p.30). If this proposition is considered then, in a modern power, where authority is not entirely vested in the sovereign but is dispersed, as may be witnessed in the

case of the police, which Benjamin was trying to highlight, since a police force is less a representation of power and more an authority, an authority which is protected by law and has the right to exercise violence. The other problem worth noting is when power, in its territorial sense, cannot exert authority and authority emerges from outside power. The case of violence becomes more complicated when modern power and its agencies are present, but communities are primordial and share those ties, authority is present outside the realm of the established political sphere. A further complication is created when the modern press starts representing, in modern language, this primordial tension, further opening up a space for violence.

Arendt highlights an important point in that the disintegration of power does make revolution possible or successful naturally. It may, in fact, lead to something more gruesome. It is not possible to run a government only through violence, as "no government exclusively based on the means of violence has ever existed. Even the totalitarian ruler, whose chief instrument of rule is torture, needs a power basis - the secret police and its net of informers" (Arendt, 2014, p.50). It is also important to note that what Arendt is doing is not denying all possibility of violence, or of absolute non-violence, as non- violence is not the exact or only opposite to violence, rather, she is trying to prioritize power over violence by making the two different, if not exactly opposite. She postulates that even many despotic regimes rely on the superior organization of power and not on superior means of coercion. For Arendt, even in very conceptual language, "Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues" (ibid., p.51). This is fundamental to Arendt's thought this distinction between power and violence; violence is a mere means, but it cannot stand on its own, nor can it sustain itself forever. Power can only sustain itself on legitimacy, which it derives through ruling, and in the absence of which it is not possible to rule. Here, Arendt introduces one more philosophical or conceptual distinction between legitimacy and justification, and how violence and power diverge based on legitimacy and justification. She asserts that, "Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future. Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate" (Ibid., p.52). It is, at this point, that all violent forces to enact power need legitimacy and if these forces fail to achieve this legitimacy they will "always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power" (Ibid., p,53). So, an instant obedience is possible at gun point which might be perfect, because one can do what is

commanded without even involving his opinion or will, but power cannot find itself in such circumstance; it may, even, end itself at this point. Power resorts to violence when opinion in its favour starts to dwindle; a shrinking power always gives rise to violence.

In conclusion, and strong assertion of difference, “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance” (Ibid., p.56). Arendt, however, seems to assume that the State’s exercise of power is always legitimate, and:

> … the all-powerful author of violence and indeed holds the monopoly on it. So, while Arendt rightly puts massacre and decolonization together, she fundamentally mistakes it is as a historical choice and that too for one actor alone, namely, the weakened imperial state. As such, the choice of killing and violence is seen to be the prerogative of the state either for action or for restraint. (Kapila, 2013, p.178)

Communal Violence in Modern India

Communal violence, or communalism, has become such a significant aspect of modern India that we cannot write a history of the Indian sub-continent without reflecting upon it, nor can we understand the state of affairs within India without studying it, as Paul Brass asserts, “Hindu-Muslim communal riots have been an integral part of the political process in modern India since the 1920s” (Brass, 2003, p.366). The history of colonial India and its post-colonial politics is riddled, not just with the communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims, but also with other forms of conflict, however, the conflicts between the two major religious communities “have a special status” in the Indian subcontinent because “of the degree to which they go to the root of the identities of the two largest categories of the population” (Brass, 2003, p.356). The identities, of these religious groups are shaped on such communal conflicts and inform the politics of each group.

Historians have argued that the period of the late 1930s until the end of the Second World War in 1945, saw a period, in colonial India, of the rapid growth of communalism in the country. Bipin Chandra (1990) notes that this period saw the rise of communalism, not just, among Muslims and Hindus, but also among the Sikhs and Muslims He also argues that the partition of India did not end the communalism in the Punjab, rather, Hindu and Sikh communalism grew “very fast from 1947 onwards” (Chandra, 1990, p.39). Jon Wilson points

out that this period, which saw the rapid growth of communalism, results from a number of factors, which include the "fragile and quickly collapsing imperial power", and also economic depression combined with the "collapse of agriculture and the expansion of Indian industry", which forced people to migrate to cities. Wilson notes that "Calcutta grew from 1.2 to 2.1 million between the census of 1931 to 1941 and Ahmedabad from 270,000 to 590,000" (Wilson, 2016, p.434). Along with other factors, the victory of the Congress Party in the "entirely Indian-run provincial ministries", in January and February, 1937, did not improve the situation among different communities, as the "all inclusive" Congress became a greater threat to Muslim identity. Wilson quotes a critic of the Congress Party's attempt to include (or assimilate) "rivals and annihilate the different religion and identity of Muslims", as claiming that the Congress aim is "that the Muslims should walk into the parlour of Hinduism and be swallowed up" (Wilson, 2016, p.445).

Communal riots which spread throughout most of northern, western and eastern India, scripted the fate of partition of India. Chandra (1990) argues that one needs to maintain a difference between communalism (an ideology) and communal riots (a form of violence) and that communal ideology can grow for a long period before taking the form of violence. One might argue that communalism, as an ideology and a political weapon, grew in the colonial period and continued to have an impact upon identity formation, social relations and polity in post-partition India, but that incidents of communal violence were just not recorded in the colonial period. Omar Khalidi notes that the first reported incident of Hindu-Muslim communal rioting took place in 1714 in Ahmedabad, and this was followed by similar incidents of violence in Kashmir in 1719, in Delhi in 1729, in Bombay Province in 1786 and in different parts of Uttar Pradesh in the first half of the nineteenth century (Khalidi, 1995). In what he calls the 'Pre-history of Communalism', the historian Christopher Bayly presents the cases of religious conflict between 1700 and 1860 and he underlines the distinction between 'religious conflict', which constitutes "disputes over symbols, rites and precedents", and 'communal conflict' in which " the broader aspects of a group's social, economic and political life were perceived as being unified and marked off from others by religious affiliation." (Bayly, 1985, p.179) Bayly highlights that the importance of pre-conditions which can lead to such forms of violence as being that "religious differences were more likely to become communal conflicts when they coincided with shifts in political and economic power" (Bayly, 1985, p.203). Maintaining the distinction between 'precondition' and 'causes', Bayly argues that the severe political crisis, whether in the context of disintegrating the Mughal rule of eighteenth and

nineteenth century India, or the depression of the 1930s in Colonial India, might have exposed the social fractures which could trigger the violent events.

Bayly's historical case studies of religious conflicts in pre-colonial India may be read as being in contrast to the work of historians or social scientists, who see the emergence of communalism as a modern phenomenon rather than as a mere 'pre condition' which leads to such an event. For Ashish Nandy (1990) , communalism emerges from modernity. In questioning the importation of the idea of secularism to India, he maintains that "secularism has little to say about cultures; it is definitionally ethnophobic and frequently ethnocidal" (Nandy, 1990, p.71). Problematizing the idea of secularism and its politics in India, Nandy emphasizes the relationship between modernity and communalism. Gyanendra Pandey, in his extensive work on the construction of communalism in colonial India, also asserts that "communalism in India is another characteristic and paradoxical product of the age of reason (and of capital) which also gave us colonialism and nationalism" (Pandey, 1990, p.5). Richard Fox, critiquing this position, argues that communalism is not a pathology of modernity, but is rather a local instance, in the case of India, of the "hyperenchantment of religion", just as "racism is the hyperenchantment of biology" and by 'hyperenchantment' he means the disenchantment with the pre-modern world which gives rise to new identities. He asserts that these emergent enchanted identities, with new means of communication and transportation, became much more powerful, "much more extensive (or "massive") and therefore potentially much more destructive and violent" (Fox, 2005, p.239)

Nandy, however, looks for tolerance outside modernity in tradition and invokes Gandhi by arguing that he is "an arch anti-secularist" who is not just looking for tolerance of religions "but also a tolerance that is religious" (Nandy, 1990, p.91). It is important to note that Gandhi saw truth as something which should constantly be realsised and endlessly pursued, for which reason the taking of certain action is absolutely imperative. Gandhi's political struggle, hence, in his own terms, is a *satyagarah* and those who follow him in this struggle are non-violent activists called *satyagarahis* - seekers of truth. Gandhi's concept of non-violence, which, was central to his mobilisation of the masses against British rule in India, was essentially situated in religious temperament, however, as Akeel Bilgrami notes, this concept was also located in a "thoroughgoing critique of ideas and ideologies of the Enlightenment and of an intellectual paradigm of perhaps a century earlier than the Enlightenment." (Bilgrami, 2015, p.103) Gandhi's non-violence is not just a philosophical idea, but also a strategy in his opposition to

revolutionary action. There was a realisation that "violent revolutionary action could not possibly carry the mass of people with it" and, in Gandhi "there was not a trace of this vanguard mentality of Lenin." (Bilgrami, 2015, p.104)

For Ghandi, the question of non-violence was not just limited to the anti-colonial struggle but extended to the co-existence of two major communities in his nation -Hindus and Muslims – this was a challenge to his political action and philosophy. Since the history of modern India was transformed by violence and created deep division between the two communities as a result, Kapila (2013) argues that, often, this dichotomy between Hindu/Muslim is understood as being a self/other distinction, owing to liberal, colonial and Hindutva tradition. For Gandhi, the relationship between Hindu and Muslim was not founded on otherness but was, rather, a fraternal relationship. According to him, it was not otherness but sameness which made them one, and "Significantly and precisely, the fact that Hindus and Muslims were not merely relational, but were essentially the same, posed the most potent conceptual and political problem regarding violence and sacrifice. Gandhi transformed this fraternal relationship into one of "neighbourliness", in which Hindus and Muslims could coexist with their differences held intact" (Kapila, 2013, p.180). Tilak, who was widely accepted as being the mass leader of the Self-Rule movement (Lokmanaya), before Gandhi entered onto the scene, also denies this otherness. Tilak, too, posited that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims was a fraternal one but, unlike Gandhi, did not equate this relationship as one of neighbourliness, and went further to describe it as one of the presence of a brother in the same house. As Kapila notes, "Tilak, on the other hand, focused on the fraternal itself and therefore the nature of the political for him was premised in terms of brothers within a house. Thus, the spectre of fratricide that the Gita addressed was central, since it overtly posed the problem of the conversion of kinsmen into enemies." (Kapila, 2013, p.180)

For Nandy, the source of Gandhi's tolerance was traditional Hinduism whilst, in the case of his killer, a Hindu nationalist, the murder was committed in the name of secular statcraft. In whatever manner one diagnoses the reasons for the emergence of communal violence in Modern India, the impact of such violence on India remains extremely significant. The partition of India in 1947 not only divided the country into two along religious lines, but also had a bearing on the "formulation of the polity's posturing on individual rights, citizenship concerns and, most evidently, on the contentious issue of group rights for cultural minorities" (Fazal, 2015, p.28). Partition made the Delhi-based power structure ever ready and willing to

crush, “not only secessional movements but also any demands for concrete institutional recognition of ethnic-religious identities” (Maiello, 1996, p.101). The Hindu-Muslim conflict not only influenced the individual groups’ civil and citizenship rights but also provided a template from which to understand other forms of conflict in the region.

Media, Communal violence and minority status in India

The debate around communal violence and modernity is not only about emerging identities and contestations between different groups and amongst themselves, but also about how the emergence of the press helped communities to come closer. Benedict Andersen’s frequently cited and extensively discussed text on the emergence of Nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, demonstrates the importance of the press in forging a national identity. The case of modern India may not be differentiated from this phenomenon of modernity. As different groups within India started to assert themselves politically, the press helped them in their respective identity formation. The historian, Gyanendra Pandey, notes that:

> From the last decades of the nineteenth century, improved communications, the growth of the vernacular press and, not least, the colonial government’s drive to record ‘custom’ quickened the pace of these attempts to recapture history, as more and more local groups sought to establish their identity and status by obtaining a public recognition of their genealogies, their ‘traditions’ and their rights in given territories . (Pandey, 1990, p.113).

Contemporary scholarship regarding the partition of India, and its pre-conditions, also demonstrate the extent to which the press played a key role in constituting and mobilizing a certain identity. It is through the communicative process that one group asserts its claim over a certain history or territory. Each group tries to create its own meaning, and to create one that is conscious of its group identity through interpreting events of violence. As Paul Brass, highlights:

> In modern times, local acts of violence have also been commonly placed in political contexts depending upon the ethnic identities of the persons involved in them. Indeed, inter-ethnic relations have become such a pervasive concern in contemporary societies that the interpretation of virtually any act of violence between persons identified as belonging to different ethnic groups itself becomes a political act. But the interpretive process is not only political, it also generates competing systems of knowledge concerning inter-ethnic relations, the sources of tension between members of ethnic

> groups, the causes of discrimination and prejudice, their social and economic bases, and the like. (Brass, 1996, p.1)

Historians and social scientists of colonial and post-colonial India have shown how the press represented different ethno-religious groups in their journalistic output, and also played a key role in framing the narratives of the various conflicts taking place between these groups. The news produced as a result of such conflict was routinely exploited by Indian political parties to further their own aims during colonial times. News of communal violence in that period of the 1940s was reported in such a way that "people only heard about atrocities carried out against their own community" (Chattha, 2013, p.612). The violence in the United Provinces and Bihar was kindled by deliberate false reporting; Francis Tuker writes, in *While Memory Serves,* that:

> Terrible and deliberately false stories were blown all over the world by a hysterical Hindu Press, and these stories did infinite harm in India by kindling in Bihar and the United Provinces the Hindu desire for revenge. This, in turn, after the Bihar and United Provinces outbreak, kindled the indignant and violent emotion which flung the Muslims of the Punjab into their civil war of reprisal. (Tuker, 1950, p.142)

All of the parties involved in politics were actively using the press to get their message out and to maintain unity within their own constituencies. The press, in singularly supporting one community over the other to achieving political ends was charged with partisan reporting, and during partition "Each Indian newspaper presented Partition violence almost exclusively from the perspective of its co-religionists, holding the 'other side' more responsible for the disturbances in 1947" (Chattha, 2013, p.612). Regardless of actual incidents or facts, newspapers continually presented their own, biased position (in support of their chosen political group) and engaged in contradicting charges brought forward by newspapers supporting the rival political groups. In providing examples from amongst pro-Muslim newspapers like *Ihsan,* Chattha writes:

> the Urdu-language daily *Ihsan* ran a series of articles blaming the disturbances on the Sikhs who, it said, had been preparing for communal warfare for months. These were dismissed as 'baseless pieces' by the Punjabi authorities. In its issue of 18 March, the paper published casualty statistics which alleged that more Muslims had been killed than non-Muslims. (Chattha, 2013, p. 614)

Chattha's work demonstrates, or rather confirms, what had been chronicled by Tuker (1950) or evidenced in Raghuvendra Tanwar's work, on the reporting on the partition of the

Punjab (2006): that partisan reporting in this period was commonplace. This kind of reporting was not merely an attempt to characterize the other community in a bad light, but also to assure the minimization of retaliatory action (Chattha, 2013). As mentioned earlier, communalism did not, in fact, end with partition, rather, it became further institutionalized and the role of the press in reporting communal violence in post-colonial India, cannot be emphasized enough.

Before conducting an overview of violence reportage and minority representation in India, post partition, it is important to introduce a crucial element without which we cannot understand the politics of the Indian media. *Hindu Nationalism,* according to the Anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen, who states that the "agendas, discourses, and institutions have gradually penetrated everyday life" and one of the most remarkable feature "is the relative ease with which it has fitted into most of the authorized discourses on India and more generally on politics and culture in the postcolonial world" (Hansen, 1999, p.5). For Christophe Jaffrelot the

> Hindu nationalism, like Muslim separatism (a movement which in India was formed around the same time), rejected both versions of the universalist view of nationalism articulated by Congress. This ideology assumed that India's national identity was summarized by Hinduism, the dominant creed … Indian culture was to be defined as Hindu culture, and the minorities were to be assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation. (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.5)

For Jaffrelot, Hindu nationalism fulfills the criteria of the definition of 'ethnic nationalism' (Jaffrelot, 2007), however, John Zavos (2000), in his work on Hindu nationalism, considers Jaffrelot's position problematic. For Zavos, Jaffrelot draws his definition of ethnic nationalism from the conception of ideology that was theorized by Clifford Geertz, which is "a restricted notion of ideology", since Geertz's notion of ideology does not clearly explore its relationship with class or colonialism. Without dwelling too much on the conceptual categorization of this phenomenon, we may safely point out that the penetration of the ideas of Hindu nationalism[1] in every day national discourse, and the influence of its politics, cannot be emphasized enough. There are two key areas of ideology in Hindu Nationalism which, in the contemporary sense, are at the core of the Hindu Nationalist agenda and politics – firstly, the

[1] Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which was founded in 1925, is the main exponent of the idea of Hindu Nationalism, and Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) is it's political wing, which was founded in 1980

cultural dominance of Hinduism over other groups, and, secondly, redefining the concept of citizenship based on religious affiliation.

Paul Brass's work on Hindu-Muslim violence talks about an 'institutionalized riot system network' and he demonstrates the role of "news" and reporting in deliberately provoking violence. This relationship between the press and the network is exhibited, for example, in the form of the spreading of false information or presenting news out of context by not providing reliable, adequate background information, thus resulting in the press becoming complicit "in the enactment phase of riot production by the attention it gives to the statements of the riot's producers" (Brass, 2003, p.346). The bias in reporting, in Brass's work, expounds upon two concerns: how it Started and who started it. He shows, using the riots in Aligarh as an example, how these two biases emerged in press coverage coupled with the often baseless rumors that were propelled by the media, which prolonged the violence. Brass's work seeks to demonstrate the common prejudice about Muslims that prevails in the press, and how the press have made them responsible for starting riots. The role of the vernacular press has been much more negative, and their reporting less objective in regard to violence, if compared to the English Press, as shown in Brass's work, and this is consistent with what has been shown in other research on various occasions of communal violence.

It is important to mention at this juncture two major events of violence that took place in India, events which influenced the course of Indian politics and that have generated plenty of scholarship due to their impact and significance. These events are: the nation-wide eruption of violence following the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu Nationalists, and the Gujarat Riot of 2002, which many believed to have been a pogrom, in response to which the state government showed complacency in ending the violence (Vardarajan: 2002, Ghassem-Fachandi: 2012). These two violent events boosted the agenda of the Hindu Nationalists in India, and this had a wide-ranging effect. This also shows the way politics is enacted through media and how a context for certain politics is created through the communicative process, as evidenced in the intensive work of Arvind Rajagopal's *Politics After Television* (2004), in which he notes:

> Hindu symbolism had not been absent from public life by any means, but its presence now took on a different, and to many a sinister meaning, signifying a claim to rule public space and brooking no challenges to its dominion. (Rajagopal, 2004, p.3)

Hindu Nationalism used the symbol of Hinduism to give itself new meaning and this captured the imagination in the case, for example, of the *Ram Janambhoomi* Movement, which culminated in the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* in 1992. The movement utilized the image of the chariot of Ram as an icon with which to create and bestow historical meaning upon its endeavor. This movement, however, was not merely satisfied with promoting a positive Hindu narrative, but also aimed, through its iconography and mobilization, to "frame[ing] Muslim identity around a history of medieval conquest and iconoclasm embodied in the persons of Mughal rulers, rather than the social state of contemporary Muslims, rendering the Indian Muslim community much more of a threat." (Davis, 2005, p.49)

The rise of media output in India in the 1980s and 1990s led to a vast increase in programming, unfolding a certain vision of the nation in the mainstream media in which the "middle class family forms the core of a community and a nation-space of plenty, and consumption provides the primary mode of enfranchisement." and "a Hindu Indianness, often defined against Muslims, provides the cultural coding of the nation and its dominant identify" (Chakravarty & Gooptu, 2013, p.104). This attempt to define a nation by excluding what was seen as being 'other' to the nation, has influenced the news reporting on violence, especially in the vernacular press, to this day. The role played by the Hindi press in inflaming the violence during the 1990s has often been the subject of scholarly discussion (Farmer, 2005; Charu & Sharma, 1991; Brass, 2003). In their work on the reporting of violence after the demolition of the *Babri Masjid*, Gupta and Sharma, conclude that the stereotyping and manufacturing of consent in the light of the Hindu right wing has reached a new stage, in which Muslims are not just responsible for the riots and violence, but violence against them has become legitimate, as " a certain degree of consent has been built for the Hindu recourse to violence and riots: teaching Muslims a lesson has acquired a certain legitimacy among a substantial section of the Hindu intelligentsia" (Gupta & Sharma, 1996, p. 10).

Whilst the press reporting on the events of violence, sparked by the *Ram Janambhoomi* movement, have largely been problematic and have played a negative role through producing animosity, the coverage and reporting of violence in Gujarat in 2002 (which was the first instance of a riot that was covered in real time by television channels) has demonstrably been "a sea change in the attitude of the press" (Narayana & Kapur, 2011). Some of the national English press in India took a strong stand against communal forces and a difference was noted in their reporting between the 1990s and 2002 in the framing of the narrative around Muslims

and communal riots (Narayana & Kapur, 2011). The vernacular Gujarati Press's role, however, was one of inflaming violence, and this was aptly observed by Manoj Mitta in his work on *Modi & Godhra* ,which aims to show how Gujarati newspapers, including *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar,* intensified the situation by publishing sensational headlines and baseless news, thus acting as "one of the key contributory factors" in inflaming passions during the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat (Mitta, 2014, p.238).

Other scholarly work further confirms that the framing of Muslims in the Indian media, in general, is problematic, and the public discourse relating to Muslims as a group, quite exclusionary (Muralidharan, 2012), as is the representation of true narratives of other minority and marginalized groups in India. There lies the further issue of the representation of minority voices within mainstream Indian media, which is, for the most part, non-existent. This kind of under-representation has especially been observed with regards to the Dalit community[2], which constitutes almost a fifth of the nation's population but is barely visible in terms of employment in the Press. Robin Jeffrey's work on Dalits and the Indian newspapers reflects upon this under-representation and aims to understand the causes for the community's absence from the newsroom, which he compares with the rapid development of black newspapers and journalism, and he concludes that the contrast is striking (Jeffrey, 2001). The exclusion of Dalits from the majority of Indian newspapers and television broadcasting is indicative of the community's marginalization and speaks of their deprivation and the prejudice they face at the hands of Upper caste Hindus (Jeffrey, 2001). In the words of a Dalit journalist, the "Indian media wants Dalit news, but not Dalit reporters" (Mondal, 2017). In a 2019 report, released by Oxfam India, on the representation of marginalized caste groups in the Indian newsroom, it was found that of 121 newsroom leadership positions, 106 were occupied by journalists from upper castes. Similarly, three of four anchors in flagship debates were found to be of the upper casts and not Dalit or Adivasi (Oxfam, 2019). Jeffrey argued that the inclusion of Dalit employees within television and major print ventures would not be a possibility until they became "a valuable category of potential customers in the eyes of advertisers" (Jeffrey, 2001, p.237). The Oxfam report suggests that although problematic coverage and the under-representation of marginalized groups mostly affects Muslims and Dalits, it also extends to various other minorities, including those tribal groups that are scattered across India. The

[2] Lower caste Hindus who have historically remained backward and marginalized in India

North-Eastern part of India, similarly, remain largely neglected in the news media unless something explosive needs reporting (Arya & Sharma, 2008; Dutta, 2012)

Routine Violence and Media Events

Susan Sontag (2003) writes that "being a spectator of calamities" taking place at a distance from us is a "quintessential modern experience." Everyday news of suffering and violence is fed to people in their living rooms. Bad news constitutes the everyday of news, but news also shapes our understanding of violence. The reporting or misreporting, naming and un-naming of violence, affects our perception, not only of our surroundings, but of others/neighbours. Violence routinely appears on the television screens and printed pages of broadsheets, serving amongst others the function of rationalization.

The questions under the theme of the rationalization of violence must begin with what domesticates violence today. It is the media which now perform this function: it is the modern function of the media to archive events of violence (apart from other events) and to rationalize them and give them meaning. By 'headlining' the reason for violence, the news creates a moral world for the receiver in which the 'immoral' is identified as a source of violence.

Jean Seaton, in exploring the theme of carnage in the media, by looking at the history of suffering, particularly in Europe, asks the question, "How do you communicate pain? Why are we willing and eager to observe suffering at certain times, while at others we are more resistant to it?" (Seaton, 2005, p.103). She adds that "attitudes towards pain mutate - and must surely determine the audience's experience of it. Whilst news covers many other aspects of life, nevertheless it trades in pain the whole time - one of the defining features of news has come to be that somebody, somewhere, is suffering" (Seaton, 2005, p.103).

Now, if we presume that the elementary function of the media was to produce news, disseminate news, or to inform, its ultimate function, or ideal function, is to rationalize everyday life, the everyday world. As suggested above, "news is not just about external events, it is about placing ourselves in the world - understanding ourselves in the context of the fate of the other" (Seaton, 2005, p.xvii). By informing us of the everyday, by archiving the now, the news, consequently, is archiving the rationale of now or the rationale of everyday life, and even

everyday violence is archived.

It is not that certain deaths are mourned and others are not, based only on the discourse of preference, rather, there is a quality to everyday rationalization which makes it possible to pay attention to the news of certain violence and not to consider another episode. The meaning of a place or a person is discursively formed by this every day production of news language and media.

The media scholar, Neil Postman, in critically looking at the impact of television, particularly in American society, makes an effort to analyse the agenda of social change that is embedded in technology. He dismisses the argument of the neutrality of technology as plain stupidity. Postman then argues,

> …that technological changes in our modes of communication are even more ideology-laden than changes in our modes of transportation. Introduce the alphabet to a culture and you change its cognitive habits, its social relations, its notions of community, history and religion, introduce the printing press with movable type, and you do the same (Postman, 1987, p.162).

Postman, combining pun and critical insight in his further argument, sees the belief in the 'inevitability of progress' as being central to the problem but, here, if we simplify this ideological aspect of communication, we can argue for two things: a) the impact of communication technology is very different from other technological development, as it creates communicative space, which then impacts upon the way subjects and objects are rationalized, and; b) communicative technology affects the social relationship and cognitive and perspective fields of any societal members. Here, I would argue that this is not merely a problem of the 'ideological' but, rather, it encompasses the reign of the rationale. From myth to news media (produced by sophisticated communication technology), the rationalization process continues, what changes is the speed, communicative space and transitions from the metaphysical to the physical, as in myth or the sacred, the object of myth was metaphysical (absent) from where the morality or politics was derived, whilst in the process of creating news stories the objects are physical (present), yet myth retains itself.

In explaining the complex historical and sociological conditions which have made violence a norm in India, Gyanendra Pandey, argues that 'routine violence' in India, which is

a social fact, is “involved in the construction of naturalized nations, of natural communities and histories, majorities and minorities” (Pandey, 2006, p.8). Through the violence on a quotidian level, different categories are made possible and violence starts to work as a system and a demarcation. Violence is a condition of life and we must recognise that. It is not always present in its

> …spectacular, explosive, visible moments, but also in its more disguised forms – in our day-to-day behaviour, the way we construct and respond to neighbours as well as strangers, in the books and magazines we read, the film we see, and the conversations and silences in which we participate (Pandey, 2006, p.8).

Routine violence is, then, always at work within different layers of our everyday life, the everyday politics which constructs the enemy and justifies this violence is inscribed in daily newspapers, films, various cultural forms and even in school textbooks. The prejudice and discrimination which a nation nurtures within itself “is daily reinforced by school textbook and media stories, by box office hits and the no longer noticed vocabulary of everyday national politics, shared by left and the right alike” (Pandey, 2006, p.8). It is the continuous saga of routine violence which constitutes certain groups as majorities and others as minorities. A certain routinization of violence creates a special category of a targeted minority whose loyalty and citizenship are always in question. In the case of Assam, as we will see in the following chapters, it relates to how routine violence operates in everyday news, and questions the existence and legitimacy of a minority group.

An episode of violence may also be understood as a ‘Media Event’. In their celebrated work *Media Events*, published in 1994, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz theorized the idea of ‘Media Events’ in the context of public ceremonies, which are broadcast live on television. Since the publication of their work, this has remained an important concept in Media Studies which has gathered sustained commentary and interest. The theory was initially inspired by the event of the Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, travelling to Israel in 1977, generating a lot of expectation of peace and reconciliation. The phenomenon of media events is a way to look at the live broadcast of ceremonies and how televised events shapes reality. Dayan and Katz (1994) provide over a dozen reasons for the study of media events, some of which may be questioned 25 years after the book’s publication, whilst others remain as relevant as they were at publication. Although the concept owes its emergence to television events, it may be equally applied to other forms of communication, like print media. In her historical work on imperial

experiences, Chandrika Kaul demonstrates how the idea of media events developed in the late twentieth century, but may be used to interpret imperial events in the early twentieth century. In exploring the Coronation Durbar event during the colonial period, she insists on the significance of media events in understanding media coverage in an imperial context. She highlights the similarity between the two periods, and writes that, "Modern media events are preplanned and advertised in advance, giving

> …time for anticipation and preparation' for both broadcasters and audiences, 'abetted by the promotional activity of the broadcasters.' Likewise, in 1911, the media built up anticipation for the Durbar in the weeks and months preceding the ceremonies (Kaul, 2014).

Of thirteen points noted by Dayan and Katz (1994) for the exploration of the phenomenon of media events, I would like to highlight four which may be useful in understanding events reported by newspapers and not only broadcast live. One, they note that, "media events may create their own constituencies" (p.15) and it is the power of the media that it not only inserts messages into a social network, but is also able to create networks that design or re-design social structures. Second, media events not only capture but conquer time, not only in the sense of declaring a holiday, but also, in the midst of an event, narrating the time, in such a way that an alternative history, or the time of an event, is re-created. Third, they note that, "Reality is uprooted by media events" (p.17), in the sense that the event is taking place elsewhere and is immediately reported to the audience. The audience remains detached from the origin of the event and the event remains inaccessible to the audience/reader. In other words, reality may be relocated, displaced from its original location and transplanted somewhere else. Fourthly, "The process of producing these events and telling their story relates to the arts of television, journalism, and narration," (p.17) and the power of narrative scripts the politics of difference and the politics of fear. These four characteristics of media events may be utilized to understand the reportage of events of violence in print media, despite the fact that this theory has conventionally been applied to the understanding of ceremonial events.

There have been several critiques (Sonnevend, 2018; Hepp and Couldry, 2010) of the concept of Media Events which urge that this concept needs to be updated in the context of globalization, and should take into account the emergence of events like terror, disaster and war, which should also be included within this broader concept. Katz and Liebes (2007) have tried to address some of this criticism, maintaining that there is a key difference between Media

Events then and now. The importance and significance of Media Events, however, cannot be emphasized enough within media scholarship.

The migrant and historical time: The case of violence in Assam

In terms of Hindu-Muslim communal violence, Ashutosh Varshney's research demonstrates that this violence remains a largely urban phenomenon, and within urban India he identifies eight cities where it is highly concentrated (Varshney, 2002). Consequently, scholarship pertaining to communal violence is also more concentrated on urban phenomena. For example, a large body of scholarship has been dedicated to the study of the violence that was sparked by the *Ram Janambhoomi* Movement in India and the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002, as they were seen as national phenomena, and the impact of Hindu nationalism on Indian politics generated that focus. The violence perpetuated in the North Eastern states of India, on the other hand, has not received the same kind of attention or generated the same volume of scholarly examination. The ethnic violence between Bengali Muslims and Bodos, which is the focus of this work, exemplifies the ways in which Assam is distinct. Here, the occurrence of violence has been more rural, unlike the majority of the violent outbursts in the rest of India, and it is multi layered, as different tribal and ethnic groups are in tension with each other for control over resources and for recognition from the government. Bengali Muslims, who are largely considered immigrants, have been continually subjected to these cycles of violence and the arbitrary use of laws against them. Regional media, in general, have not been very hospitable to their plight and, on the contrary, have been found to be using a right wing, xenophobic narrative, against them (Crush & Ramachandaran, 2010), largely framing their existence in terms of a security threat as, "the security argument is used in the discourse to frame the relationship between Bangladeshi migration and Assamese identity" (Glebova, 2011, p.20). Whilst communal violence between Hindus and Muslims is the general framework within which ethnic violence in India is usually understood, so the violence in Assam may not be studied in such straightforward terms and is, in fact, much more complicated. A simplistic 'majority' versus 'minority' framework would not suffice in understanding the complexity of the situation, since various minorities, not just Hindus and Muslims, are in conflict with each other. Anther distinction, in the case of Assam, is the question of time, which excludes or includes the immigrant and plays a key role in the making of a narrative of violence. The

historical time which determines the legitimacy of an immigrant as a citizen makes the question of time very central to the discourse of immigration in Assam.

Since the question of time, and narrating time, is central to the question of immigration and the (inclusion/exclusion) of citizenship, it is therefore important to observe how the time of the immigrant is narrated and how they have themselves narrated their own time. This implies that the concept of the 'immigrant' is entangled with temporality and that the change in context has a bearing upon the usage of the term itself. I will be using two theoretical concepts: "Narrative Time" and "Historical time", not entirely in their philosophical understanding but, more as an analytical tool by use of which to reflect upon the question of time and to explore how narrative shapes our time. Paul Ricoeur, in his philosophical work, explores the relationship between Narrative and Time and proposes

> …temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate reference. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal" (Riceour, 1980, p.169).

The core of Ricoeur's idea suggests that the "narrative is the guardian of time" (Wood, 2007, p.31) and the temporality in Ricoeur's narrative produces a sense of "narrated world as moral or ethical whole" (Dowling, 2011, p.12). Ricoeur uses the example of novels and the fictional plots to reflect on the relationship between time and narrative, however, I would like to displace this relationship from its location in fiction and explore this relationship through the telling of any kind of story – in our case, a news story – which has a moral and ethical bearing. The plot, which for Ricoeur is the "intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story" (Ricoeur, 1980, p.169), may, easily be imagined as one of migration, within the larger narrative or story of a nation. 'Narrative time', for Ricoeur, is a 'public time' and a "story's public is its audience", and through the reading or recitation of the story it is "incorporated into a community which it gathers together" (Ricoeur, 1980, p.176). Whilst maintaining the difference between narrative time and chronological time, Ricoeur outlines two dimensions of every narrative – chronological and nonchronological – one is made up of events which characterize the story and is the episodic dimension of a narrative, whilst the other offers a configurational dimension through "which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events" (Ricoeur, 1980, p.176). Ricoeur's characterization of narrative may be instrumental in understanding how it shapes time by connecting different scattered events.

Reinhart Koselleck, a major exponent of conceptual history, also insists on the vital relationship between language and historical events, asserting that any experience gained from historical experience, "cannot be communicated except through language", which does not, however, mean that he does not acknowledge that there are "levels of experience that escape linguistic determination" (Koselleck, 2004, p.222). Koselleck's work is also an attempt to explore the relationship between language and temporality, between history and language, and in so doing he theorizes the notion of historical time which, for him, was explicitly defined or identified in a post-enlightenment world. In modernity, he locates historical time as being distinct from "mythical, theological, or natural chronological origins" and the distinction of this modern time is its conception of an open future without boundaries (Koselleck, 2002, p.119). Modern, historical time, for Koselleck, is in the interplay of 'expectation' and experience' as "through the medium of certain experiences and certain expectations concrete history is produced" (Koselleck, 2002, p.119). Koselleck draws his notion of historical time from two anthropological categories: the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation', since historical time lives against a spatial background. These two categories remain metahistorical categories with anthropological meaning. (Koselleck, 2002; 2004)

Koselleck's attempt to situate historical time between the future and the past, or between experience and expectation, demands closer examination of the historical concepts realized through anthropological experiences. I will be exploring the construction of the term 'immigrant' from Koselleck's approach to the history of concepts, as his method oscillates between linguistic and non-linguistic approaches (Ifversen, 2011). He sees conceptual history as being very much tied to social history (Koselleck, 2012), and to trace a linguistic concept one needs not only to contextualize it, but also to have true anthropological insight into the context. The experience of the individual may not be dissociated from its linguistic expression. For Koselleck,

> The concept is connected to a word, but is at the same time more than a word: a word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a sociopolitical context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word (Koselleck, 2004, p.85).

So, "the existence of concepts does not depend on words only. Concepts appear in particular contexts in which they perform a key role" (Ifversen, 2011.) It is, then, not only important to look at the historical growth of a concept semantically, but also at the historical condition in

which the concept is located. Concepts define context and through that context they reinvent themselves. The contextual aspect of meaning is, then, very determining in defining the concept. It is only through the "condensation of a wide range of social and political meanings" that a word becomes concept and this condensation necessitates an abundance of meaning and the experience of making that concept an ambiguous territory opens up a space that is a semantic battlefield (Andersen, 2003). It is argued that, "Concepts, as their historical analyses have shown over and again, do not depend on definitions alone but carry with them the heritage of their past use" (Pernau and Sachsenmaier, 2016). The relationship of experience and language in a certain time is also scripted in the concept, as Koselleck explicates, "It is precisely the internal temporal structure of some concepts that generates temporal differences in the consciousness of speakers" (Fernández, Fuentes & Koselleck, 2006, p.109). The concept which captures or explains the event always remains distant from that event and has a different time structure to such events.

Aim of the Research

Like a jigsaw puzzle, I attempt to piece different components together to make sense of a specific history and to examine the ongoing nature of its impact on the present. Consequently, in this research I apply different methods to the same problem, thus attempting to capture the creation and agency of memory in the accumulative experience of different protagonists in an ongoing situation. The different methods employed reveal different aspects of a complex picture. The focus of this study is to understand episodes of violence, not through the isolation of such events as ruptures and discrete moments but, rather, to locate them within a larger historical and political plot, constructing a method with which to consider a longer, repetitive, folding in of events into the mis-constructions and into the new violent possibilities in the present and the future. This research looks into the violence in the Bodoland region of Assam through its coverage in newspapers published in two different languages and through the memory of those people who endured it, attempted to deflect it, tried to understand it, and, at times, participated in it. The violence, as an event, is deeply connected to the construction of the identity of immigrants. Identity-based violence in the region is an everyday reality which is often triggered, not by an eruption of injustice but which, rather, may be provoked by an organized militant attack. If the conventional story is one of erupting sporadic clashes, then

such a phenomenon must be questioned, and the purpose of the spectacle of violence be methodologically assessed.

This research aims to explore, analyse and determine the role played by the press in archiving events of violence, over time, in Assam. The aim is to consider the role that newspapers published in different languages may have played in reinforcing, eliciting or diffusing emotion in the communities concerned, and the way in which this has contributed to a repetitive cycle of violence. The local press is where the history of such events is archived and then rehearsed. These accounts will be compared with oral evidence collected from four particular incidents of conflict in the Bodoland region of Assam in 1993, 1994, 2012 and 2014. The aim is to explain the role of the press in representing and indeed misrepresenting events, and the identity of different groups within the region. Although this will be a detailed case study of the press in a particular period, in a particular region, based on detailed textual, historical and linguistic research, it will nevertheless explore wider and more general problems about the media's representation of violence and the way in which the history of violent episodes becomes part of identity.

The main research questions at hand are :

- How is violence, as an event, represented in two newspapers published in different languages?
- How do violent events, in a particular context, play an instrumental role in constructing the identity and the time of the 'immigrant'?

The question of migrants and their time, and their belonging, takes center stage when the event, i.e., violence, unleashes itself. There is an intricate relationship between the construction of the identity of the immigrant and the violent event in the media and in people's lives. The relationships between cyclical violence, competing narratives and memory in the politics of identity are explored through the main question in this research.

The complexity of the questions above has led me to utilise multiple methods and to bring them into conversation with each other. To explore the link between present day violence and the migration of decades ago, I needed to research both times – that saved in the archive as the history of migration and living time – and the time in which people live every day**.** I

have thus used triangulation to reflect on the history of violence in the Assam region in India, bringing together the colonial archive, the press coverage of episodes of violence, and the memories of people who endured the violence, gathered through use of the ethnographic method. This triangulation gives both horizontal and vertical understanding of the events of violence that are studied. It helps to see the complexity as a whole, and not just any incident or its coverage in isolation.

How is the identity of a Bengali Muslim in Assam imagined by two different language newspaper operating in two different kinds of media spheres? How do they locate violence in the context of their own political imagination? Earlier, we studied how violence is being understood in general scholarship, and this present study seeks to answer the question relating to the ethnic violence and discourse of migration in the Indian context.

Further, I wish to ask the question: How does the narrative of the experience of violence act as an interpretation of the meaning of their space and narrative of time? I aim to look into the perception of time from a migrant's position and to explore it with the modern understanding of historical time which Koselleck (2004) puts into the historical categories of the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. Utilizing the narrative in the archive and reporting on direct conversations from within the oral narrative or direct experience are key to this research.

Archive: This Deep Time

Working with the colonial archive was not part of the original research plan, but during my field work in Assam, I found colonial records in the oldest college (now a university) in Assam. Guwahati's Cotton College was founded in 1905 by Sir Henry Cotton, and it is a centre of higher learning for the people of the North Eastern state of India. The library's archive section has a lot of records from colonial times and there I found various reports related to migration in Assam, written by previous Commissioners of Assam. Engagement with the material in the archive, soon led me to realize that the violence in the state, in the name of anti-migration, may not be understood without studying the category 'immigrant' itself, and how this term was originally used.

Cotton College's library included holdings of copies of the 'Report on Labour Immigration into Assam' for several years, starting from 1897, and the archive section also held copies of the annual 'Resolution on Immigrant labour in Assam'. The colonial archive reveals the constitutive elements of the category of 'immigrant'. The archive demonstrates the colonial care taken with labour – care in the sense of attentiveness to how they were governed and observed. Their bodies and movement were carefully monitored and meticulously recorded in these archives. The concept of 'immigrant', as a population, their mortality and nationality, are very minutely recorded. These reports show how the immigrant formed a category of labour for colonial administration and gives a glimpse into the formation of colonial knowledge.

Whilst not every year's report was available in the Cotton College Library, I found more such reports in the India Office Section of the British Library. Along with these annual reports on immigration in Assam, I also examined old Bills and laws about emigration and immigration for the region.

During the research, I was intrigued to explore more about such reporting, since colonial power mobilized/imported-exported labour from different parts of the world. However, I did not manage to look into the similarity and dissimilarity of the reporting systems in the different colonies governed by British Empire. In the context of Assam, however, I would like to note that during colonial times there were overlapping reports, about immigrant labourers. I found an annual report on the health of tea gardens in Assam which also talked about the labour employed on these gardens. Assam constituted a unique economic geography for the British colonial administration with a special focus on tea gardening. It was tea and its economy that made the administration populate the region with migrant labour, but the immigration of the labour was carefully administered. I have used the archival material to supplement my historical reading of Assamese migration, and have used as a method through which to better understand the region and its historical development.

I would also like to mention another limitation that I came up against whilst working in the archive: These archives contain a lot of technical terms and categories and also terms whose meanings have changed over time. Some terms, like 'nationalities', in the archive cannot be clearly explained. A proper exploration would have needed more time and perhaps more focused research in order to delve into each and every aspect of the archive and understand its

richness. However, I used the archival method to better inform my work, to observe how the category 'immigrant' was archived in colonial times and, indeed, how these reports recorded incidents of violence in those times. Since these reports are focused on immigrant labour which was imported for tea gardening, and does not mention labourers who were not coolies (under no contract and who could move freely), we cannot get a complete sense of the category and its management. The archival method can, then, be a bit limiting, but it still provides us with a good grounding from which to understand the time that is trapped deep inside the archive. I have, further, not used all the reports in the archive, but have selected a few reports from which to provide a glimpse into the past and to illuminate the period in terms of the origins of immigrants in the region. It is my limitation, in terms of the time and scope of study, that I was not able to fully explore all the material I uncovered.

Press: Background Time

The second method I utilised was to look into newspapers to understand how the 'immigrant' is constructed in post-colonial India, and how stories about violence against immigrants were constructed. Since anti-immigrant violence has largely been anti-Bengali Muslim, I have endeavoured to explore how the Muslim question became prominent in the clash of ethnicities. I have chosen one regional newspaper from Assam, *The Assam Tribune,* to see how the Assamese press views the migrant and how it reports on violence; how the migrant is constructed as the 'other', and how regional sentiment / Assamese nationalism plays a role in framing the news. To contrast with the English newspaper, I selected two Urdu newspapers through which to explore the same themes, but in print media with contrasting language and politics. In India, the local press is still popular, and people gather around to read newspapers in small cities, villages and ghettos. Urdu newspapers are very common amongst the Muslim minority, and most of the newspaper reading takes place in groups, and people borrow newspapers from each other. In fact, an analyst of Urdu media argued that the Urdu language newspapers' economy is weak due to its readers' habit of sharing and borrowing newspapers rather than not buying them for themselves (Lakdwala, 2005).

One of the reasons for studying newspapers in two languages (English and Urdu) is to look at how contrasting politics of memory and semantic differences reflect on the matter of violence. The majority/minority politics, the politics of victimization and suppressed memory,

play differently in both newspapers. All three newspapers were published in black and white in 1993 and 1994, whilst, in 2012 and 2014, they were appearing in colour and with a larger number of pages.

The Assam Tribune, which was first founded as an English weekly on 4th August, 1939, was transformed into a daily in 1946 by the Barooah Press, and it has been an important media outlet for the region. The newspaper

> …was jointly owned by Someswar Baruah, a tea planter of Dibrugarh, and Radha Govinda Barooah. It was edited by Lakshminath Phukan" and "it was R. G. Loyal, the superintendent of Maijan Tea Estate and Vice-Chairman of the Assam branch Indian Tea Association, who suggested the name of the paper" (Barua, 1994, p.128).

From the beginning, the newspaper was more centrist and its first editor, Phukan, claimed it was "an independent paper with congress leanings" (Barua, 1994, p.128) but, nevertheless, it went through some troubled times with Congress. *The Assam Tribune* is considered the leading newspaper of the North-Eastern region and is also considered to be of national importance. The study of *The Assam Tribune* shapes our understanding of how the regional/local politics of migration are understood and projected into a larger framework, since the English readership has a broader range of interests than a local language readership would have. The concerns for national security, borders and migration are not regional but national/international issues, and this regional newspaper contextualises these issues from a regional-leaning point of view.

The other language newspaper I have chosen is an Urdu, one since it is widely considered to be the language of Muslims, and even more so of poor Muslims (Jeffrey, 1997). Urdu newspapers are largely consumed by Indian Muslims who, despite their poor quality of reporting and content (Jeffrey, 1997), still enjoy a consistent growth in readership in the country. The 58th Annual Report, of the registrar of newspapers for India suggests that, in 2013-14, Urdu language dailies were the third largest in publication after Hindi and English ones. There are 929 dailies published in India in Urdu (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2017).

The Urdu newspaper is more concerned with the Muslim minority in India than with the objective reporting of any event. Its emphasis is largely on minority politics, international news (mostly focused on the Muslim world or the implications of events for Muslims' lives world-wide) and some religious information. Against this backdrop, the research will focus on

Urdu newspapers published from Kolkata, West Bengal, to explore whether these papers are looking into the identity of Bengali Muslims in Assam through a religious lens, rather than through an ethnic one. The aim was to see how Urdu newspapers cover the violence against the 'Bengali Muslim' in the Assam region. How is the narrative of victimization articulated and (re)produced? How is the Muslim identity communicated? Is there any consideration of the ambivalence of Muslim identities?

I selected *Akhbar e Mashriq* and *Azad Hind* to investigate their coverage of violence in the Bodoland region of Assam. *Azad Hind,* which started publication a year after the Indian Independence, in 1948, has now ceased to exist. Mired by controversy and poor management, it has not been able to publish since 2016[3]. For decades it was the most important newspaper published from Kolkata, and it was under the editorship of Ahmad Saeed. Maleehabadi. *Akhbar e Mashriq* started in the 1980s and now circulates seven editions from different Indian cities. Both newspapers are published in Kolkata, which makes them, essentially, Bengali Urdu newspapers, and thus the identity question of the 'Bengali Muslim' in an Urdu newspaper is an intriguing one. *Akhbar e Mashriq* also have a digital presence and their e-paper was available daily, whilst the archive was not.

Both these newspapers dedicate a daily page toUrdu speaking regions of India (like Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh), but they do not include any regular reporting from Assam (where Muslims make up over 30% of the population, but speak either Bengali or Assamese). Locating the archives of these two newspapers was the most difficult aspect of the archival part of this research.

Difficult Archive

I found the archive for the coverage of *The Assam Tribune*, from 1993 and 1994. In the National Library, Kolkata, and for 2012 and 2014 I accessed the archive in the newspaper's office at Guwahati. *The Assam Tribune* has a digital presence and the e-paper is available daily, however, the archive section does not offer much. The section's 'back issues' were not very

[3] Kunal Ghosh, a politician from the ruling party of West Bengal, and who acquired many media groups, also took control of *Azad Hind*. He was enlisted in the Saradha group, which came under the scanner as a chit fund scam was exposed, *Azad Hind* had to suffer due to his proprietor. The newspaper since didn't publish very regularly and changed many offices since 2013. Saradha chit fund was a Ponzi scheme which lured investment from 1.7 million depositors. Saradha group collapsed in April 2013 and an investigation was launched into this scandal.

helpful when I started my research, since these were mostly missing, although now it does provide headlines from older issues, but not the entire paper. In the National Library of Kolkata, gaining access to archives is a tedious job. One has to first fill out a form every day for access to those newspapers that are needed, and then has to further fill out two different forms in order to take pictures and make photocopies. After going through the newspapers, one is able to select ten news items for the day of which to make either a copy or a photograph. To make a copy, one has to visit another building, pay the amount due for photocopying, get a receipt for payment before 2 p.m. and then access the copies by the end of the day or the next day. Most of the time, the cashier is not to be found and one has to come back the next day. This entire process makes the acquiring of material very time consuming and slow. The English section of the archive is functional enough to offer this service, whilst the Urdu section is almost defunct, and a lot of the archive is left to rot. One must find Urdu newspapers from amongst a pile of papers covered in dust.

My initial idea was to work on one English and one Urdu newspaper, but tracing the archive of the newspaper turned out to be so difficult that I had to switch from working on *Azad Hind* to *Akhbar e Mashriq,* and eventually decided to work on both. The archive of *Azad Hind* is not very well preserved in the newspaper's offices in Kolkata, and due to some constant issue at *Azad Hind,* the office could not offer any archive material except for 2014, and claimed that even the back-up of the newspaper files had been destroyed. I could not find newspapers from 2012, which were intermittently published, and no local library in Kolkata had them. I found newspapers from 1993 and 1994 in the National Library, Kolkata, with great difficulty, and newspapers for several days during that period were missing. Most of the community libraries don't hold old Urdu newspapers; one librarian reported that they sell all newspapers older than six months as scrap, and, hence, they had nothing to offer.

Akhbar e Mashriq does not have a very good archiving system either. The office could not offer their 2012 archive since it could not be found. I located different months' issues at different local libraries in Kolkata. The scattered archive certainly reflects on the carelessness of the newspaper's management, but also shows how the Urdu newspaper business is run in India. The editor at the newspaper was not much concerned by the missing archive, as was the case with most editors at the Urdu language newspapers. This carelessness is related to the newspapers' poor economy and their lack of professional functioning. To obtain copies of the 2012 archive of *Azad Hind* and *Akhbar e Mashriq,* I visited several libraries, which included

the Press Information Bureau (PIB), and found no record, United News of India (UNI), which had no record, the National Library, which holds the archive of the newspapers but was shut due to strike action, the National Library (another branch), had some copies, but *no Azad Hind* from 2012, the Urdu Academy Library, had some records from 2012, but nothing before 1996 and no *Azad Hind,* Mohammad Ali Library sells the newspapers for scrap every six months, the Muslim Institute Library had no newspapers, the Humayun Kabeer Institute Library held newspapers only for a year. The *Azad Hind* 2012 record could not be found anywhere.

. Reading these two language newspapers shows how insecure communities look at each other, report on each other, understand and repel each other. Two different politics of identity that emerge from events of violence may be traced back through the reading of Urdu and English newspapers. This method also shows how the semantics of 'immigrant' are used in contemporary times by *The Assam Tribune*. I performed a historical analysis of both language newspapers to locate their reporting in the larger history and politics of the nation, and to understand the cycle of violence in a more contextual sense

Time Period

I have considered four violent events against Bengali Muslims in the Bodoland region of Assam which took place in 1993, 1994, 2012 and 2014.The violence that erupted, in 1993 and 1994, was part of a 'project ethnic-cleansing', as reported in *The Assam Tribune*. 1993 was when the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord was signed. The years 1993 and 1994 constitute a crucial period in the history of the Bodo struggle and their confrontation with other ethnic groups. This period gave rise to a series of violent events that resulted in a change in the demography of the region. This shifting demography may hold some insight and provides us with an historical understanding of the emergence of the struggle for Bodo statehood through these episodes of violence. Whilst the violence in 2012 and 2014 took place after a renewed Accord, which lead to the formation of Bodoland Territorial Districts (BTAD), and it was signed in 2003, the violence of 2012 was one of the most significant in the history of communal clashes in India and captured the attention of the entire country, the repercussions of which, were felt across the nation. I have considered the actual month of violence and the months preceding and following it, to analyse how the events in these areas were covered, and the larger context within which the newspapers reported these events. I have looked into the

newspapers' coverage of: September 1993- November 1993, June 1994-August 1994, July 2012–September 2012 and April 2014–June 2014. These time periods open up various layers of conflict and politics of identity. These periods show the cleavage between identities and the conflict in the ambitions of different ethnicities. The violence of these periods helps us understand the larger question of communal history in the region and also how insecure minorities clash with each other in order to find a place in a majoritarian driven country. The research seeks to understand only four events of violence in the selected region, and although we may not generalize, we are able to observe a pattern in reporting. A longer period might give us a more general view, but this study is limited in terms of the time period selected and the number of events it seeks to study.

Ethnography: The Lived Now Time

Since the memory of violence is a key theme in my research, I wanted to explore it through the oral narratives of those people who witnessed the violence and who have lost family to these episodes. I am particularly interested in how people narrate themselves and wish to be identified. What constitutes their own sense of time in relation to resisting the category of immigrant? I wanted to see how, in oral history, a competing narrative emerges, as opposed to that in the press and archives, and what we achieve when we bring together both narratives. I used the ethnographic method to address this aspect of my research.

During November 2015, I stayed in the Kokrajhar District of Assam in order to conduct my fieldwork. This district is the headquarters of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) and has been the epicentre of many episodes of ethnic and militant violence. My stay in Guwahati in October 2015 helped me to contact people working in that region, amongst them were lawyers and civil rights activists who were aiding the people of the region in fighting the state (for citizenship and rehabilitation) and arbitrary violence. I joined them in a fact-finding mission during my stay, hoping also to build trust and confidence in them concerning my research and, in due course, I was invited to the office of a local NGO to present a lecture on media theories. My stay in Guwhaati prepared me for further research and brought me in contact with community leaders and activists in the Kokrajhar district. For the first half of my visit I moved to Salakti village and operated from there. I visited different villages and various people, and I observed everyday life by staying in this village, where I was hosted by a local minority leader and his family. This young local leader was later (in 2017) assassinated in broad daylight. A

high-level enquiry has been demanded from the authorities and the investigation is still on-going. Even when first I met him, he told me that his life was at risk due to his political activism. Since the research is focused on the category of 'immigrant' and people who are targeted because they are 'immigrants', I placed myself in Bengali-Muslim villages. Most of the villages are clearly demarcated between Bodos and Muslims, and some of this delineation has taken place through episodes of violence. I was not allowed to conduct my research without administration and Police permission. Since the region is an active conflict zone, both Bodo militants and the Indian military are quite active in the region. Further, abductions carried out by NDFB (the Bodo Militant Organization) are quite common there. I was told, during my fieldwork, that the organization abducts people and takes them to the forest along the border of India and Bhutan (which is not far from where I was located). Local administration and police, both separately conducted meetings with me and asked that I would not conduct any research without police clearance. After a 'background check', I was allowed to move freely in the district and to conduct interviews. The second location of my stay was Bhumrabil village, where I was offered lodgings and meals at the house of a local school teacher. I visited several villages, and two camps for people who had been displaced in the aftermath of the 2012 violence.

During my stay in Bhumrabil, I did not encounter any unpleasantness, partly because, I shared the religious identity of the residents, as I come from a Muslim background myself. This led them to talk to me more freely about their victimization. As I was immersed in their daily lives for a period of time, this also normalised my presence with them and helped locals, especially those guiding me around the area, to forge a bond with me (and I still stay in touch with some of them). Whilst staying in Bengali Muslim villages, primarily conducting my research with their aid, I encountered the limitation of not being able to cross the line and conduct similar research with Bodo villagers. Unfortunately, in a conflict zone, one is not easily able to win the trust of both sides of a conflict as a scholar and to engage equally on both sides of the divided line. In one village, where I briefly wanted to talk to Bodo women sitting outside their houses, I was not welcomed. I then entirely relied on the account I gathered from Bengali Muslim villages and their perspectives. Here again, the lack of time played an important role in limiting my research, since an anthropologist must spend long periods of time in an area to build relationships with both sides in a conflict. I also believe that, in a conflict zone, spending long periods of time is quite daunting for a researcher, since there exists the constant reminder of the risk involved, which is not psychologically conducive to encouraging a researcher to

stay in the field for too long. Perhaps returning to the field regularly may be a better idea. In this research, I did not get the opportunity to go back to the villages I visited, which is a shame. The renowned anthropologist, Veena Das, reminds us of the importance of returning to the field and keeping in touch with the informants, for which reason I have tried to remain in contact with the people I visited, especially those who guided me around the area and took the risks with me.

I have not spent enough time in the field to call my research a proper ethnography, but since I stayed with the people who were the subjects of my research, observed their behavior and recorded their memories, I would call my approach an ethnographic oral history. Ethnography and oral history are not mutually exclusive and, rather, share certain features and perhaps certain challenges of the field too. Micaela di Leonardo (1987) identifies six areas where these two methods diverge: firstly, she notes that oral history relies on interviews, which are generally dyadic encounters, while an anthropologist takes individual life histories in the context of ethnographic encounters which involve a large number of people. The ethnographer comes out as a heroic individual who interprets the lives of the other, whilst the oral historians create extensive archives, working anonymously. Secondly, anthropologists define themselves by being in the field, and working in the field becomes a constitutive act, whilst oral historian rely on interviews and this means that gathering information is suspect. The third difference, Leonardo notes, is that the focus of oral historians is on the narrative and artifactual modes of data collection, whilst most modern ethnographers tend to de-emphasize artifacts and focus more on "narrative and behavioral evidence", hence, the key difference between these two fields becomes the "lack of documentation and analysis of behavior in oral history". The other important distinction is protecting the identity of people in ethnography and not so much in oral history, as oral historical work intends to use the narrative for public record and so does not use pseudonyms to protect informants. she notes,

> …anthropologists tend to seek private data from informants, information that might be harmful or embarrassing if revealed; they also document behaviour patterns of which informants themselves may be unaware (Leonardo, 1987, p.5).

All of the male informants interviewed for this research could speak Hindi, but most of the female informants did not know the language, and this posed a challenge to the research. With my rudimentary Bangla, I was not able to make conversation with those women who spoke in a distinct local dialect. The reliance on translators often limited the scope of

conversation and did not deliver a clear sense of the difference in language between the narratives of men and women.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting research in such a conflict zone, it was clear that I had a duty of care to my informants. It was not just me undertaking a risk in performing this research, but this risk was automatically transferred to the participants in the research. The participants gave me oral consent to use their names and photos, urged by what they believed, was their duty to tell me the truth. They co-operated openly in interviews, and a clear sense was conveyed that, being a researcher from a foreign university, they believed, I could give their voice some weight and that their problems would be discussed seriously internationally.

The anonymization and protection of identity is of particular interest to me in my research as I initially thought of recording an oral history and using these recorded narratives in an exhibition, or to contribute to an oral history repository at some library. I decided, however, to use the ethnographer's hat and protect the identity of my informants, with one exception, where I have used the informant's real name and documents, and she provided me with permission to do so. They will be explored more thoroughly in the chapter on the field work. I have been careful to follow the ethical guidelines of protecting the "confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents" (Crang & Cook, 2007 ,p.29). I have anonymized all the respondents and taken care to protect their identities, so that "the potential benefits of the project do not outweigh the invasion of privacy that is entailed." (Murchison, 2010, p.32) which is an important consideration for any ethnographer. I have used some random photos of the villagers and villages I visited to provide a glimpse into the site where I conducted my work but have at no point produced photos of my respondents.

Why ethnographic oral history?

Since my focus is on people who have been marginalized and lack resources to make their voices heard, the attempt in this research is not only meant to analyse them and their living conditions, but to also present their voice as it is. The earliest objective of oral history has been to bring out the narrated life experiences of the people who lack resources and do not have

political power. This also means that this group of people lack documentation and memoirs, which would have been able to shape their narrative or influence the historian, or, in my case, even legitimize them as citizens. Possessing documents is a privilege of citizenship and, in the case of Assam, where citizenship demands a large number of documents, failing to produce such documents means that one, risks imprisonment and deportation[4]. In this research, hen, I attempt to bring a local oral narrative to challenge the narrative of the press.

One of the pioneers of oral history, Paul Thompson, introduces oral history as

> …a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes, not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people. It encourages teachers and students to become fellow workers. It brings history into, and out of, the community. It helps the less privileged, and especially the old, towards dignity and self-confidence. It makes for contact - and thence understanding - between social classes, and between generations (Thompson, 2000, p.23).

Oral history, Thompson insists, is as old as history itself and it is the first kind of history. It is only the usage of the tape recorder which made it more possible to access and to have implications for the future. Oral history brings forward the narrative of the most marginalized people and shifts the focus of history from the political to the lives of ordinary people. It may not, be the only instrument of change, but it may certainly be a means "for transforming both the content and the purpose of history". Since its focus is on the lives of people, the scope of oral history is wide and is definitely able to offer a challenge to "the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgment inherent in its tradition" (Thompson, 2000, p.24). This is perhaps the reason that some argue that oral history is partial, and it is not possible to capture it without taking a side. Portelli suggests that

> 'Partiality' here stands for both 'unfinishedness' and for 'taking sides': oral history can never be told without taking sides, since the 'sides' exist inside the telling. And, no matter what their personal histories and beliefs may be, historians and 'sources' are hardly ever on the same 'side'. The confrontation of their different partialities—confrontation as 'conflict', and confrontation as 'search for unity'—is one of the things which makes oral history interesting. (Portelli, 2003, p.73)

[4] As I write, the citizenship of four million people in Assam is already in doubt, as per the new updated National Register of Citizens. The registration, or update, has demanded a lot of documentary evidence, which many poor and illiterate people do not possess.

McDowell (2002) underlines the importance of oral evidence in any historical research and notes that it can reveal a new line of enquiry and open up a totally new perspective for a historian. It can recreate the past more vividly, if compared to other methods. Since oral historians rely on recording the voice of the narrator, he notes that the meaning of the words are often not in the narrative itself, but are conveyed by “tone, volume and rhythm of speech and these cannot be reproduced precisely on the printed pages”(McDowell, 2002, p.61). Arguing along the same lines, Portelli writes that,

> Scholars are willing to admit that the actual document is the recorded tape; but almost all go on to work on the transcripts, and it is only transcripts that are published. Occasionally, tapes are actually destroyed: a symbolic case of the destruction of the spoken word. (Portelli, 2003, p.64).

Nonetheless, what is at the centre or core of oral history is memory, from which a historian or scholar extracts meaning and tries to preserve that very memory (Ritchie, 2015).

Conclusion

By using a variety of methods, I have confronted a more varied series of obstacles and problems. Triangulating research methods to concentrate the different insights means facing different evaluation problems. If ‘archives’ are partial, contextualising that limitation is part of why they are so invaluable, as are the newspaper reports. These are constrained, not only by politics, ideology and political bias, but also by economic conditions. They are made, as bad or good as they are, by a lack of proper journalistic standards and the ways in which they are financed. Informants, too, have their own set of limitations. This research thus faced complex issues in assessing material across time and across varied methods. Yet such ‘triangulation’ also added a richness to the research.

From the question of approaching people and protecting them, to getting to the archive, working with four different kinds of material was a very challenging endeavour. It was never easy to bring out a coherent whole and there existed a constant risk of repetition. To observe the entire timeline through a different clock system, through different periods and parallel narratives, made this task very tedious, as one method would drag me in one direction, whilst another took me to another world. In this thesis, each chapter is its own world, independent of the others but, at the same time, functions within the same cosmological system. Despite all

the challenges the triangulation method has posed it was enriching to work with such dense material and to bring out a 'complete' piece, with grand narratives that were interspersed with small and micro narratives. History was evinced, not only in archives and language, but also in moving and living human bodies, and this made this work and method very fascinating and intriguing for me as a researcher. Bringing together the various components has given me a better insight into the systemic time, causes and consequences of the repetitive nature of violence. Working with these methods helps us to understand how people live the category and time which is archived by a past power and narrated by the press every day. Bringing memory, archive and press together gives us a glimpse into our modern life, and into the events which shape and re-shape it incessantly and almost violently.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualizing the Violence in Assam

Introduction

The history of the modern Indian sub-continent is partially made from a long, complex and shifting series of violent eruptions, some national, some local, and with an interconnected rhythm. One effect of these has been to continually re-enforce and separate one identity from another, one group from another. For Brass "communal riots have been an integral part of the political process in modern India" (Brass, 2003, p.366). The tension between Hindu and Muslim, the evolution and solidification of the 'majority' and the 'minority', as essential categories, largely determined the future of British-ruled India, and continue to dominate the socio-political landscape of the country.

Within this general problem, however, the local causes and responses to ethnic/communal violence vary. Assam, the largest North-Eastern state in India, exemplifies how this can take on a particularly dense complexity. That rumour, information and the news media have played a part in this is evident. To gain a deeper sense of the events of violence in the Kokrajhar region of Assam, it is important to glean an understanding of the particular context in which the events become news. The history of the region is a complex subject, having multiple layers and an intricate entanglement with the colonial and post-colonial projects of the nation. The region was colonized by the British in the mid nineteenth century and from then onwards tea plantation and oil refineries became a significant part of the colonial government's profitable enterprise. Consequently, labourers for plantations and rail work were deliberately imported from all over India, with the majority of 'migrant labour' brought in from East Bengal (Guha, 2006).

Yet, this complex patchwork of labourers, both imported and local, with different economic and political rights, became the basis for conflict. Soon after independence in 1947, the entire North-Eastern region entered into a phase of militancy and multi-ethnic conflicts as different ethnic and tribal groups demanded autonomy. Protests against the migrant population also escalated in the region of Assam, as the state felt the maximum pressure of the influx of 'labour immigration'.

The modern history of Assam is not merely a history of colonization, but also one of intensive migration that is associated with the development of numerous competing strands of nationalisms. When we look at the question of migration and the issue of violence, in the largest North-Eastern state of Assam, we find the interaction of successive waves of arrival in Assam, settling in Assam, and the interaction of economic and political causes and responses to these movements of people which complicate the figure of an 'immigrant', but without which there is no comprehension of this figure. The story of migration in Assam is interwoven with four—often competing—nationalisms, hence, these four overlapping histories of nationalism must be examined.

The history of migration in the state is linked with Indian nationalism which has its own competing narrative, and whose story took a new turn with the struggle for Indian independence and, later, the partition of India. 'Indian' nationalism is a shaping force with its own dynamic. Then there has been the occurrence of Bengali nationalism, which gave rise to strong regional sentiment in Eastern India, eventually threatening, Assamese identity in the region. In response, this brand of regional nationalism has provoked and re-shaped a strong kind of Assamese nationalism. Finally, the sub-regional or local nationalism of the Bodo tribe has witnessed an emergence which, it would seem, feels threatened and is made insecure by these other forms of nationalisms and the presence of 'the immigrant' in their territory. All these four nationalisms have played a role in shaping the region, and the identity of the people in the region. Each of these nationalisms form ideological, physical, economic, social and political forces. They have emerged and have been shaped in relation to, and in conflict with, each other; each possessing its own dynamic.

In this chapter, we will locate the events of violence, which are emergent as a result of these nationalisms, and which form the core focus of this study through different assertions of nationalism and, hence, in different periods of history. These nationalisms not only provide, a stable and necessary source of identity for groups in difficult circumstances, – but also provide each group with a framework narrative to look at the 'other'. We are not going to trace the trajectory of each of these nationalisms, however, the narrative of the events of violence in the region would remain incomplete without referring to them. This chapter attempts to understand the origin of migration in the region and the emergence of regional and sub-regional nationalisms, which owes much to the project of modernity, but also to Indian nationalism and

the Indian state. The region of the North East is often neglected by the Indian state, and the development of these states has never received enough focus. The North East has been seen through the lens of cycles of violence and the fear of militancy which has gripped the region for a long time.

Assam: From Colonial Times to Partition

Assam was never seen as part of any mainland Indian kingdom or state before the British colonial period. Mughals, during the Ahom kingdom in the seventeenth century, tried to invade the region, but never succeeded in bringing it into the fold of the Mughal Empire. The Ahom conquered Assam in 1228 by defeating the local kings of Chutias, Kacharis and Jaintias, and they became the undisputed rulers of the Brahmaputra valley (The Brahmaputra is the river which runs through the state and divides it into two parts). Saikia (2004) highlights that this migrant community, which won the battle over the locals,

> …under the rule of a Swargadeo (from heaven (*swarg*), hence a god (*deo*)), brought the various groups of the hills and plains together into, one body politic. This polity is what we know as the Ahom Kingdom of Assam" (Saikia, 2004, p.8).

The region was ruled by the Ahom kings, despite the serious threat posed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, until the border attack from Burma became a major source of turbulence. The British were fearful that the Burmese might attack and overrun the region as soon as they lost their grip over it in 1813, a fear which came to pass when the "king of Burma moved in and brought Assam under Burmese political control" (Saikia, 2004, p.9). The British occupation of Assam began after the defeat of the Burmese King in the first Anglo-Burmese war, by means of signing the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. On condition of paying a revenue of fifty thousand rupees, after the treaty the administration of the region was left to the Ahom king, Swargedo Purandar Singha. The area came under direct British control after the second Anglo-Burmese war in 1838, under the pretext of bad administration (Saikia, 2004).

The colonial geography and the colonial administration following this war have had a lasting impact on the fate of the region. When the British took control of Assam, they treated it as an extension of the Bengal province and not as independent entity. Until 1874 it remained part of Bengal and was treated as a Bengal land frontier. Saikia (2004) argues that this psyche

of imagining it as a 'mere' frontier shapes the polity of Independent India. From 1837 to 1873 the Bengali language was used in the courts and in the government schools of Assam, and the colonial administrators of the early period treated the Assamese language as being a mere extension of the Bengali language. However, during the 1860s, protest from amongst the Assamese against the Bengali language, grew. Two American Baptist missionaries, Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson, who performed the classic work of formalizing and fixing the language as they researched it, wrote about it, and so 'fixed' the grammar and dictionary of Assamese. In 1874, Assam became a colonial province with its own Chief Commissionership, and included the regions of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, parts of the Naga Hills, the District of Cachar and the Garo Hills. The Eastern Bengal district of Sylhet was added to the province on September 12th of the same year, and this would have a significant impact on the region, as Sylhet was a part of Bengal with a majority Muslim population. Colonial Assam expanded in geographical area as compared to its precolonial extent, and in 1921 it was upgraded into a Governor's Province (According to the GOI Act of December, 1919). The British Administration maintained a strict policy of separating the people of the hills and plains, maintaining a strict policy of restricting contact between them in the belief that they were two different entities and segregation was better for governance. Even Assam's elected Chief Minister could not visit the hills without the British Governor's permission. (Guha, 2006; Baruah, 2001)

The province that was controlled by the British Administration was seen as a resource with abundant land and a sparse population. Eventually, the Administration started to encourage a policy of immigration into the region. The discovery of indigenous tea plants in 1823 led the British to use the area for vast cultivation, and East Bengali labour and labour from other parts of India were encouraged to contribute to this new economy. Other than tea, oil was another resource that the British wished to exploit. Moreover, the British also used the English speaking, Bengali middle class to run the bureaucracy of the state, and this was another source of antagonism for the local Assamese population and the immigrant peasants.

Baruah (2001) classifies the immigrants moving to Assam during colonial times into five categories: 1) The "Tea Labour Community", 2) Those Muslims of Bengali descent, 3) Hindu Bengalis, 4) The Marwaris (the commercial caste from Rajasthan), and 5) The Nepalis. Another source of classification, devised by Ghosh (2006), divides them into six groups: 1) Adivasis, who came or were imported (labour importation is a colonial terminology) from

present day Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and who worked as tea garden labourers, 2) Muslim peasants from East Bengal, 3) The Nepalese, 4) Hindu refugees from Pakistan (this is the category which emerged from the end of the British Raj in India), 5) The Marwaris, and 6) Muslim economic immigrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). This is also a post-colonial category of immigrants.

Tea plantation (or what Guha calls the 'planter Raj') was, in the main, the concern of the British colonial administration in the region which, as a by-product, resulted in defining the category of the 'immigrant' itself which we will look into in greater detail in the next chapter. Adivasis were brought in as a labour force to work in the tea gardens, and East Bengali Muslim peasants, who were brought in to use the land for cultivation and to meet food requirements. All these categories of immigrants slowly made Assam their home, causing fear and unrest within the communities that had previously lived in the region.

In 1911, the Census Commissioner took note of "ongoing immigration as a peaceful invasion of Assam", despite the fact that immigrants were welcomed from an economic point of view to fill the labour gap, as they were needed to cultivate the abundant land . Studying the genesis of the clash between immigrants and locals, Guha (2006) writes,

> landless immigrants from overpopulated East Bengal of whom some 85 percent were Muslims – found land in Assam's water-logged, jungle-infested, riverine belt. Used to an amphibious mode of living and industrious, they came by rail, steamers and boats up the Brahmaputra to reclaim these malarial areas. All they wanted was land. From their riverine base, they further pressed forward in all directions in search of more living space, to areas held by the autochthones. It was then that an open clash of interests began to take place (p.166).

Rampant immigration prompted the administration to introduce the 'Line System', which was adopted in 1920 and under which a line was drawn in the districts to delineate the area for immigrants and to segregate them from locals. However, this system could not succeed, as Bengali peasants were better cultivators. They started to buy land from the Assamese and the Marwaris started to fund them. A further, rigid policy, was demanded by the Assamese to limit not only the immigrants from other provinces, but the British planters too. Bengali Muslims were opposed to the Line System, wanting it to be removed, an opposition that was supported by Assamese Muslim politicians. Guha notes that a politician from the Nowgong area opposed the Line System using the logic that it was encouraging separation, rather than

the assimilation of groups, however, the local Assamese Muslim population remained sceptical, since they found themselves closer to Assamese culture (irrespective of religion) than to the Bengali (Muslim) one.

In the context of migration in Assam, the Line System has had a hugely adverse impact, leading to a large extent to the communalization of migration. Muslim League leaders, like Bhasani[5], took up the issue of the peasant and fought for the abolition of this system, whilst Congress introduced an eviction policy which gained popular support from Assamese Hindus. Chakrabarty notes that,

> Apprehending the adverse economic and demographic effects of unchecked immigration from East Bengal to Assam, the Congress ministry (headed by Gopinath Bardoloi) that came to power in February 1946 decided to evict 'the illegal immigrants' from Assam following the Line system – introduced in 1920 – whereby all settlers beyond 1 April 1937 were to be evicted. The Assamese Hindus welcomed the step, as 'the influx of Muslims from [east Bengal] was upsetting the population ratio and the Assamese wanted to retain a majority in the Brahmaputra valley'. It was also suggested that the influx 'could be countered only by Bihar Hindus to settle down' in Assam." (Chakrabarty, 2004, pp.184-185).

The Line System divided the villages of Assam into four categories; 1) exclusively for immigrants, 2) exclusively for Assamese, 3) mixed villages, and 4) the Assamese side, in which no immigrant was allowed to settle (Kar, 2013). Some have argued that this was more of a communal line dividing Muslim Bengalis from the Mymensingh District of East Bengal from the local Assamese population, however, it also led to the official definition and limitation of the category of immigrant. As Dasgupta (2014) notes, even after the introduction of the Line System, migrants could not be effectively contained, and this led the Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division, S.N. Mackenzie, to define the term. This word would then be applied to anyone coming from any district of Bengal and the Surma Valley, but would exclude tea garden coolies and former coolies. Anindita Dasgupta highlights that,

> In his standing order, it was clearly stipulated that the term *Mymensinghia* would henceforth be dropped and the word *immigrant* substituted in all official papers. It further states that, 'immigrants' could not acquire the same rights as the Assamese *ryots* (peasants) (Dasgupta, 2014, p.152).

[5] Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was Assamese peasants before Independence, and was part of the Muslim League as well. In East Pakistan, in the 1950s, he ran a movement for the self determination of Bengali people and demanded that it distance itself from Islam. Peter Custers (2010) argues about how this religious preacher led the transition into secular politics in East Pakistan.

The Line System created more differences between these two communities and more clashes were reported. The restriction was initially created for the *Mymensinghias* (hence making them the prominent immigrant), but was eventually extended to everyone coming from East Bengal by the government order of 22nd August, 1924. This was further extended to other communities, like the Sikhs and Marwaris (or *keyas* and declared immigrants) on 3rd December, 1935, by a government order, and later tea garden labourers, who were brought in from Bihar. The lines drawn not only separated the Assamese and Non-Assamese, but this form of boundary was extended within the immigrant community also.

In the 1931 census, the Census Commissioner warned people of migration, calling it invasion, and writing, "wheresoever the carcase, there will the vultures be gathered together – where there is waste land thither flick the Mymensighias." Reflecting on Mullan's quotation, which warned locals about becoming outnumbered by Muslims from the Mymensingh District, in the census report, Guha highlights that Mullan's prediction was irresponsible, and noted his "false prophecy of 1931, that provided a rationale the chauvinism which was to plague Assam for many years to come" (Guha, 2006, p.172). Mullan prophesied that the Assamese race would ultimately merely be limited to one district (Sibsagar). Even though such sentiments may have activated the beginning of a long tension between the communities of the region, anti-Bengali sentiments were always latently present, especially among the Assamese middle classes, who saw Bengali domination as tough competition (Hussain, 1994). The immigration into Assam was engineered by the colonial administration, which led to demographic change in the state. Dasgupta claims that, "colonial rulers wanted to patronize the social conflict between the Assamese and the migrants" (Dasgupta, 2014, p.158) and thus Mullan "aimed at creating a fear psychosis among the Assamese so as to generate conflict between them and the East Bengal migrants" (Dasgupta, 2014, p.158).

In this way, competing linguistic identities, migration and its entanglement with religious divisive politics, has shaped Assam since colonial times. The migration question is, then, entwined with the communal history of the modern Indian subcontinent. The Muslim League assumed that Assam would be part of a new nation, as it would go with the Muslim majority East Bengal, but only Sylhet, a Muslim majority region, was able, through a direct referendum, to become a part of Pakistan. This loss was welcomed by the Assamese, who "perceived the partition as a 'God-sent' opportunity to have a homogenous province for

themselves without any Muslim domination" (Shamshad, 2010, p.5). As Chakrabarty points out, "Partition was not forced upon the subcontinent, but it emerged as the best possible alternative at a particular historical conjuncture" (Chakrabarty, 2004, p.10). During the Sylhet referendum, the voting rights of these immigrants were also fiercely debated and the Referendum Commissioner denied them such rights citing that tea plantation labourers did not fulfil the qualifying right of working as a permanent employee and hence designated them a floating population and like other labourers— agricultural and industrial— they do not have the right to vote. These labourers were, hence, excluded from voting (Chakrabarty, 2004)

The partition of India led to the movement of refugees across the newly created border and allowed them to settle in their chosen country under the Nehru-Liaqat pact of 1952. However, to discourage Muslim immigration from Eastern Pakistan, the Immigrants Act (Expulsion from Assam) was passed by the parliament in 1950. Guha writes that

> … the act provided for the removal of immigrant persons (except the *bona fide* refugees), whose stay in Assam was politically undesirable. Empowered by the new law, the government of Assam ordered a sizeable number of Muslim immigrants to quit the province. This created a general panic among them (Guha, 2006, p.271).

Guha notes that thereafter the immigration of East Bengali Muslims stopped, but Bengali Hindus, Christians and Buddhist refugees, "from the same area created new problems that defied any immediate solution" (p.271). In 1950, a major riot broke out in lower Assam, forcing over a hundred thousand Muslims to leave the country and take shelter in the newly born East Pakistan. Most of them returned after the Nehru-Liaqat Pact of 1952, however, the number of returnees was not included in the 1951 census but were included in the 1961 census, which certainly seemed to over-inflate their numbers and "this apparent increase made the Assamese feel threatened about Muslim migration from East Pakistan. At that time, it was described by the Assamese nationalists as Pakistani infiltration" (Shamshad, 2010, p.5). Guha notes that the riot of 1950 was the first big riot against a religious minority and, since then, "it was the language question that was to increasingly become the rallying point of anti-social, divisive forces and vested interests, to organize riots" (Guha, 2006, p.271).

Figure 2.1 Political map of Assam today

Source: Indian Map Service, Jodhpur

The Assamese Nationalism and Assam Agitation Movement in Independent India

The boundaries of Assam have altered repeatedly since the colonial period. States like Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh (1948), Mizoram (1987) and Nagaland (1963), have been carved out of the historic Assam of the colonial period. Today, Assam has an area of 78550 sq.kms. with a population of 3,1,169,272 (according to the 2011 census), with Assamese as the main language of the state. Saikia, tracing the history of the Assamese language, notes that,

> Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, four styles of Assamese writing developed in the Brahmaputra valley: Gargaya (particularly practiced in Eastern Assam for writing buranjis), Bamunia (for religious texts), Lakhari, and Kaithali (practiced in Western Assam) All of these scripts merged into one when the printing press was developed in the nineteenth century, and the American Baptist Mission created standardized Assamese letters (Saikia, 2004, p.6).

However, despite the emergence of one script, the boundaries of the speech community were maintained, and hence the difference in culture and politics between Lower and Upper Assam continued. Adding to this, Saikia writes:

> While the internal divisions between Assamese speakers are considerable, they dislike and share a general sense of mistrust of the Bengali speakers of Barak Valley. This anti-Barak/anti-Bengali feeling of the Assamese has in recent years taken a new shape. As a result, Bengali speakers in Assam have been reduced to the status of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, and local political demagogues in Assam, supported by the national Bharatiya Janata Party, are demanding their expulsion. A clear division, however, is made on religious grounds, and thus only Bengali Muslims are targeted as illegal. This targeting of Muslims reflects national religious divisions more than any clear history of religious conflict internal to Assam, where language has been a more divisive issue (Saikia, 2004, p.7),

The assertion of Assamese identity and the fear of being outnumbered by Bengali Muslims and Hindus continued in post-independence Assam. Assamese was made the official language of the state and Assamese speakers were given clear preference in government jobs and positions. The "Sons of the soil" policy was pushed in the state so that the native Assamese got the upper hand, and Weiner notes that:

> In this campaign to assert their culture and improve the employment opportunities of the Assamese middle classes, the Assamese won the support of two migrant communities, the tea plantation laborers from Bihar, and the Bengali Muslims. Both declared to census enumerators that Assamese was their native tongue, and both voted for the Assamese-dominated Congress party. (Weiner, 1983, p.284).

Nandana Dutta (2012), has particularly noted the contribution of diasporic community of *Char-Chapori* in helping the Assamese language to become a majority language. The *Char-Chapori* were the Bengali Muslim peasants who migrated from East Bengal in the late 19th and early 20th century and settled in the low-lying riverine areas. They used this land for cultivation and made an important contribution to the economy of the region. The census of 1931 showed that the Assamese language had become a minority language and it was at this point that the Bengali

speaking Muslim community, who had adopted Assamese as their own language, played a key role. Nanda writes:

> This is the point at which the tea garden tribes, the Assamese tribal groups, and the non-indigenous Muslims stepped in as defenders of the language. As a result of the concerted efforts of the Char-Chapori Muslim between 1931 and 1951, the census of 1951 revealed that Assamese had regained its majority status. The community participated in the efforts to make Assamese the language of use in government offices and courts and in schools and college. They were also involved in the 1972 movement to make Assamese the medium of instruction up to the undergraduate level. (Dutta, 2012, p.234).

Bengali Muslims chose to side with the Assamese since they had a fraught relationship with Bengali Hindus and believed their alliance with the Assamese would strengthen rather than weaken their positions. This alliance continued until the 1970s, and it remained strong, as Weiner notes:

> In the mid-1960s the Assamese turned against Marwari businessmen for not providing employment to local Assamese; bands of young Assamese smashed and burned Marwari-owned shops in Gauhati. There was a major anti-Bengali movement in 1972 with large-scale riots throughout the Brahmaputra valley, but the clash was entirely between Assamese and Bengali Hindus. Though the central issue was whether Bengali could be used in the examinations at Gauhati University, the Bengali Muslims continued to side with the Assamese. (Weiner, 1983, p.286).

Weiner highlights that, after the 1977 election, the Assamese turned against Bengali Muslims for political and demographic reasons. The 1971 Census showed a significant growth in the Muslim population, which caused fear amongst the Assamese in the Bengali population, and soon outgrowing the Assamese one. They believed this would threaten both their identity and language. In Weiner's arguments, the fear of the Assamese society of being outnumbered is not totally illogical, as they are a small population. He writes:

> One should not underestimate the extent to which the peoples of the northeast, and especially the Assamese, have a sense that they are a small people living next to a vast Bengali population eager to burst out of a densely populated region. Bangladesh (in 1980) had a population of 88.5 million, West Bengal (in 1981) had 54.4 million, and Tripura 2 million, for a total of 145 million Bengalis, making them numerically second only to Hindi speakers in South Asia, and the third largest linguistic group in Asia. Assamese also tend to view Bengalis as "cultural imperialists" who, if given the opportunity, would attempt to assimilate the Assamese, especially since the Bengali language is seen as more "advanced," its literary traditions stronger, and its cultural institutions dominating. (Weiner, 1983, p.287)

In the 1960s, and most of the 1970s, anger existed, not just against Bengali immigrants but against all 'outsiders'. Monirul Hussain notes that it was the *Bohiragatos* (outsiders) who were targeted, as a whole, and the threat to Assamese identity was linked to their larger presence in the state. During these times, the walls of towns were plastered with Anti-*Bohiragatos* slogans and "the Asamia bourgeois press too, started a vigorous propaganda against the danger posed by the outsiders in Assam" (Hussain, 1993, p.101). In Hussain's historical analysis, the parties mobilizing the anti-outsider campaign, AJD (Assam Jatiyabadi Dal) and PLP (Purbachaliya Lok-Parishad), could not sufficiently mobilize the masses against the outsider. First, the concept of 'outsider' was itself very vague and not well defined, and, second, during the anti-Marwari protest/riots in the 1960s, the Marwaris did not vanish and, indeed, they became more powerful and established themselves further in the state. The leaders running the campaign did not possess enough credibility and, despite their persistent anti-outsider campaign, the popular response was never satisfactory. The Asamiya ruling class needed to have better leadership and an alternative issue with which to mobilize people, and hence to "increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the Indian ruling class to enable them to exert their hegemony over the people of all nationalities and national minorities like tribals in Assam"(Hussain, 1993, p.102).

They got this opportunity when, in 1978, the Chief Election Commissioner, S .L.Shakdhar, in a meeting with electoral officers, raised the issue of the influx of migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh, leading to an increase in voters, who might be illegal. Although Shakdhar did not explicitly mention Assam in his statement, this was enough to create a huge political issue which led the leadership of the Assam Movement to misinform the local masses effectively that their distinct identity was being threatened since illegal immigrants were being enrolled as voters. The issue, which then became decisive and historic in Assam, transformed from being the 'outsider' to being the 'foreigner'. The protests in Assam between 1979 up to 1985 were named the 'Assam Movement', which self-defined as an anti-foreigner movement. Axom Xahitya Xobha and the All Assam Students Union (AASU) played a critical role in shaping the movement, which later played a major role in defining the political mood of the region. The by-election of 1979, in the Mangolodoi constituency of Assam, triggered a long political movement which opened up a new front of violence and political contestation. During the election, the right- wing Janata Party (the predecessor of today's BJP) saw its electoral base shifting the use of the issue of the electoral roll. Hussain writes that:,

> As the revision of electoral rolls started, some 70,000 complaints were lodged hurriedly challenging the authenticity of citizenship of a large number of people, most of whom had already received or exercised their constitutional rights to franchise. Later, it was found that the services of the state police force were utilized to inflate the number of alleged foreign nationals in Assam. The Asamiya bourgeois press played it up as a major issue bellicosely terming a large number of Indians and Bangladeshis (Hussain, 1993, p.104).

The magnification of the Mangoldoi issue instilled fear in the Assamese middle class, and the leadership movement persuaded people to support the movement in the cause of saving Assamese identity. This persuasion of the masses, as Hussain notes, was conducted by the AASU leadership in collaboration with the regional press.

Baruah (1999) divides the six years of the Assam Movement from 1979 to 1985 into five phases. The first phase took place from June, 1979, to November, 1980, which he calls the 'festival of protest'. He notes that this phase saw mass demonstrations, rallies, and gathered the support of the ethnic Assamese population, and also threatened the immigrant community of the region, which started to feel insecure. This phase started with high optimism and ended with considerable pessimism. The second phase was the phase of 'confrontation', which took place between December, 1980, to January, 1983. In this phase there was direct confrontation with the government, as the movement started opposing local elections which the central government was keen to hold. Twenty-three or more rounds of discussions took place between the movement's leaders and the government. The third phase started from the election of 1983, in February, which Baruah calls the 'breakdown of order'. There was widespread violence and "more than three thousand people – mostly Muslims from Bengali descent – were killed during the violence surrounding the election"(Baruah, 1999, p.132). The fourth phase took place between March,1983, and May, 1984, and is the phase of the 'contest between the state and the movement'(Baruah, 1999, p.135). This phase, followed by the violence during the election, saw a rift in the movement as there were instances of conflict between opponents of the election (ethnic Assamese) and tribal supporters of it—mainly Bodos. Bodos asserted their own distinctness during this period, and we will explore this more closely in the following section. The last phase is the phase of 'Accommodation', which took place from June, 1984, to December, 1985 (Baruah, 1999, pp.123-143).

The Assam agitation ended in the Assam Accord; however, all the years of agitation saw major ethnic polarization and widescale ethnic violence. This also resulted in making violence a routine event in the state, and militancy or "revolutionary violence" also grew post-the Assam agitation. In the North, Kamrup District of Assam more than 200-300 people died as a result of mob violence, during the movement. Most of those who were killed were non-Asamiyas and thousands were rendered homeless. The worst, and most historic, episode of violence took place during the election in 1983, in Nelli, where "1,600 people were killed in a one-day attack" (Kimura, 2008, p.151) and it was noted that despite being an anti-foreigner movement "the victims were mainly Muslim immigrants of Bengali origin" (Kimura, 2008, p.151). The number of victims is still disputed, and for some it ranges from 1,800 (officially) to 3,000 (unofficially) (Chopra, 2014). Nellie, a small village (then in the Morigaon District and now part of the Nagaon District) of Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants, was surrounded by neighbouring villagers of the Tiwa tribe and ethnic Assamese on 18th February, 1983, who systematically burnt down houses and attacked the residents of Nellie village, leaving thousands dead (Chopra, 2014). Nelli then became a metaphor and memory for all future reporting and discussion of the violence in the region. References to Nellie continue to arise in the reporting, and is discussed in both English and Urdu newspapers in this study. Sanjoy Hazarika (2000) recalls, from his visit soon after the massacre, how "the issues raised by the killing fields of Nellie continue to haunt Assam and to a larger extent the North East and India". He also highlights that:

> "Land or *maati* is critical to identity-formation, especially among agrarian societies. Their own short-sightedness is reflected every day when they contemplate their former tenants as owners of this ancestral land. The rage becomes deeper, blinding those in its grip to their own follies" (Hazarika, 2000, p.53).

The questions of land and language have both remained central to the episodes of violence in the region for a long time, and certainly the taking over of land by Bengali peasants, and perhaps their better cultivation techniques, became a source of conflict. This is quite evident in the field study undertaken for this thesis in terms of how Bengali Peasants are employed by Bodos, and how they lose control over land through events of violence. Violence then becomes a means to gain control over land, and this was evident during the violent episodes in the Assam agitation period, perhaps significant to the fact that the violence was very rural. Generally, communal violence has been very urban in India, and rural India has not been much affected by it. The violence in the region and the Nellie Massacre, in particular,

proved, as Hussain notes, that "communal violence in India is no longer confined to urban India alone but has very forcefully penetrated into rural India" (Hussain, 1993, p.142). Weiner also notes that:

> the central government mistakenly assumed that the agitation was predominantly urban and that its paramilitary forces in and around the cities and larger towns would be sufficient to maintain order. The desire of Assamese and tribals to take over lands now cultivated by Bengali Muslims—some of whom, incidentally, came before independence— appears to have been a significant element in the violence. (Weiner, 1983, p.287).

The Assam Accord, which marked the end of a long period of agitation, protest and violence, was signed between the AASU leadership, the Central government and the State government. The Accord stipulates that anyone entering Indian territory after 1971 would be considered illegal, and would be deported, and whoever had entered before must be considered an Indian citizen, however, those who entered between January, 1966, and March, 1971, would be disenfranchised for ten years, consequently losing voting rights for that period. The initial demand of the AASU was to make 1961 and not 1971 the cut-off year for citizenship, but central government did not accept this demand, which some view as a defeat for the AASU. Navine Murshid questions the reasons for this choice of 1961 (when Bangladesh was not an independent country) by the AASU as the cut-off for citizenship, rather than 1971 (when it gained its independence). He argued that:

> …the logical cut-off would have been 1971, at Bangladeshi independence, rather than 10 years prior, before the 1962 China–India War. In effect, the identity construct was directed toward Bengali Muslims from East Bengal—regardless of whether they came from ''East Pakistan'' before 1971, or from ''Bangladesh'' following independence. (Murshid, 2016, p. 596)

The construction of the identity of the "foreigner" which was central to the Assam agitation was carried out through this demand, as this "allowed the broadening of the understanding of outsiders from ''foreign Bengali Muslim'' to ''Bengali Muslim,'' encompassing even those who had been in the region since the early 20th century" (Murshid, 2016, p. 597). The result was different, as 1971 became the cut-off year, but in the public consciousness "six years of mobilization against the ''illegal Bangladeshis'' was the conflation of the identities ''foreigner,'' ''Bangladeshi,'' and ''Bengali Muslim''" (ibid).

The end of the agitation was in no way the end of violence, rather, new forces of violence emerged in the state during the agitation years of which, ULFA (the United Liberation Front of Assam) was the most menacing. Other ethnicities too started to demand more rights, and new militant groups started to shape the movements of statehood. The violence and militancy of ULFA gripped Assam by the mid-eighties, as the post-Assam Accord government was not effective enough in protecting the identity of the Assamese and meeting the demands of the people. It should be noted that in only one decade, between 1992 -2002, "as many as 4,888 people have been killed across the state in insurgency-related violence. These included 643 personnel of the security forces and 2597 civilians. Besides, the number of people killed in ethnic flare ups is estimated to run into several hundred" (Hussain, 2006, p.6).

Bodo Nationalism and the cycle of violence in Bodoland

Bodos are one of the early inhabitants of the North-Eastern region of India. The Bodo indigenous tribe is one of the major ethnic minority groups of the region and has been demanding rights and recognition for a long time. They are said to have migrated from central Asia, and the earliest known inhabitant settled in the Brahmaputra valley (Gait, 1926, p.247). There is a difference of opinion about the term 'Bodo', however, but most scholars agree that this is a generic term for the tribal people of the region. Today, Bodo Kacharis, Dimacha Kacharis and Mech-Kacharis, are all broadly termed Bodo. Today, in representational politics, the broad terms 'Bodo' or 'Boro' are used to include all these people (Basumatary, 2012). With the arrival of Ahoms in Assam, the Bodos engaged in a long struggle with them and fought numerous battles to dethrone the kingdom. Despite this political rivalry, many Bodos were taken into the fold of the Ahom Kingdom and received administrative positions (Swargiary, 1997). A lot of new Indian nationalistic historiography is re-writing the evidence about the 'origins' of the Indian people, and the Bodos are, like other groups, being written out of contemporary, ideologically nationalistic, historical writing.

We observed earlier that in Assam there existed hill tribes and plain tribes, which the British administration's policy preferred to keep separate. After the Independence of India, the situation of the plain tribes did not improve much, whilst the hill tribes received a lot of attention and protection through the autonomy that was provided by the central government. The tribals of the North-East also received protection that was enshrined within the sixth

schedule of the Constitution of India, which safeguarded the interest of tribal populations. However, as Swargiary notes,

> …the Bodos and other plains tribes were fobbed off with the so called "tribal belts and blocks" where the Assam Land Revenue Rules and Regulations in theory imposed restrictions on possession and transfer of tribal lands. In practice, the restrictions on ownership and transfer of land in the tribal belts and blocks have been observed more in breach resulting in large scale alienation of land owned by Bodos and other plains tribes (1997, p.80).

The Bodos, comparatively, also felt that they were more alienated than the other tribes of India, who were protected by the fifth schedule of the Constitution. However, the feeling of alienation and insecurity in identity goes back to colonial times, when on 12th August, 1927, a resolution was adopted by tribal representatives of the Bodo family to safeguard their identity, and they refused to be identified with the Assamese community, since they felt threatened by Hinduisation (Swargiary, 1997; Kumar, 2016). In his famous work on the history of Assam, the colonial administrator and historian, E.A. Gait, raised his concern about the future of Bodo identity, and writes, "the Bodo dialects, though still spoken in Assam by more than half a million persons, are in their turn giving way to Aryan languages (Assamese and Bengali), and their complete disappearance is only a matter of time" (Gait, 1926, p.7).

In 1928, under the leadership of Gurudev Kalicharan, two organizations, the Assam Kochari Youth Association (AKYA) and the Golpara District of Boro Association (GDBA), met the well-known Simon Commission in Shillong and put forward some key demands for; 1) the creation of a separate category in the census report, 2) separate representatives in the provincial council, 3) reserved seats for the Boros in the central legislature, 4) the reservation of executive posts for Boro educated youth, and 5) the creation of separate seats for the Boropeople on the Dhubri local Boards (Kumar, 2016).

The Bodos continued to struggle after Indianndependence, asking for more rights and the recognition of their language. When, in the 1960s, Assamese was made the sole official language of Assam and, in 1972, the sole medium of instruction, and then as a third compulsory language in non-Assamese schools during the AGP government, tribals vehemently opposed these moves by the government. Since the 1950s, Bodos have been pushing to achieve recognition of their language by the state. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) demanded that the Bodo language be authorized as a medium of instruction in Bodo dominated areas, and

submitted a memorandum in 1953 to the then Chief Minister of Assam. The language movement of Bodos continued in the 1950s and 1960s and, as a result of the movement, in 1963 the Bodo language could be taught in school, but only until the fifth standard, and the state government maintained that Bodo was not a recognized official language and could not be taught in medium and high school. Bodos continued to fight for the recognition of their language and script. Bodos wanted to use the Roman script for their language, which the government did not accept. During colonial times, the Bodo language had been written in Roman script, and between 1904 and 1936, Roman script was used to prepare Bodo text books. However, the Devanagari script was eventually adopted to be used to transcribe the Bodo language in schools, after a series of pressures were exerted by the government (Swargiary, 1997, p.87)

Alongside the struggles for the change in script and the recognition of language, a new struggle of a more political nature has started to grow since the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the project of nation state building advanced, a sense of alienation and deprivation grew within the Bodo community (Behera, 2018). Bodos started to realize more deeply the negligence by the state and the demand for "an autonomous region for plains tribals to be called Udyanchal" started to grow. The movement, the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), could not progress much due to ideological differences within the movement, and this gave rise to the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) which, in 1984, for the first time, demanded a separate homeland from Assam and was actively supported by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). Both the ABSU and the PTCA presented the Bodo tribe's urge to possess political power and the right to self-determination. The ABSU led the movement for self-determination when the PTCA failed to fulfil the dream of a separate state. During the 1980s, until the leadership was taken over by Upendranath Brahma, the peaceful struggle for splitting Assam into half gained momentum. The slogan "divide Assam fifty-fifty" echoed strongly in the state and the vague demand for a tribal homeland then turned into a fully -ledged demand for a new state of Bodoland; a new political reality.

Here, it is important to note that the Bodo movement's emergence is owed to the feeling of being dominated by the "majoritarian Assamese Discourse" and different Bodo groups "expressed their unwillingness to be identified as Assamese" (Behera, 2018, p.5). However, when the Assam agitation movement against foreigners, a movement, in basic terms, that was aimed against those Bangladeshis living in the region illegally, gained momentum towards the

end of the 1970s, and almost took a violent turn in the 1980s, overshadowing everything else, the Bodo groups supported this movement instead. However, the movement against "foreigners" was also an assertion of Assamese nationalism and an attempt to bring all ethnic groups under the umbrella of Assamese identity. The signing of the Accord shocked the Bodo leadership, and they realised that their dreams and interests were not protected. This was when the Bodo Movement, in the mid-1980s, turned to violence and a new geography of violence opened up. The Bodo leadership saw that the supremacy of Assamese culture and language was being imposed upon them as a result of the anti-foreigner movement.

The struggle for a separate state then took militant form in 1986, as the Boro security forces (BrSF) turned to armed resistance to liberate the "Boro nation from Indian expansionism and occupation" (Kumar, 2016, p.597). BrSF, which later became the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) wanted a separate country. The Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC), which was formed in 1988 to mobilise Bodo people towards the demand for statehood, is considered a historic moment in the history of the movement, which later, however, adopted violent methods and came to be considered the armed wing of the ABSU. In 1993, the Bodo Accord was signed to give some autonomy to Bodo people in the districts of their domination, but the Accord was not a solution to the problem and it eventually collapsed. At the time of the Accord, violence gripped Bodo dominated districts as Bodo militant groups aimed to cleanse the villages of non-Bodos in order to bring more areas under the newly formed Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC). The BAC could not function for long, as Kumar notes that it, "could not exercise whatsoever limited autonomy was provided by the Act mainly because of insufficient financial powers and overwhelming domination of the state government over most of the transferred subjects" (Kumar, 2016, p.61). The line demarcated by the government for the BAC was rejected by both the ABSU and the BPAC and caused large scale violence in 1993 and a brutal massacre in 1994.

The failure of the Accord saw the emergence of the NDFB and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), both different in ideology but sharing the common "revolutionary" zeal of liberating the region through violence. BLT, however, through stronger organization and armed struggle, became "the *de facto* guardian organization of the Bodo movement" (Kumar, 2016). The militants carried out a number of ethnic cleansing operations to clear the districts of non-Bodos and make way for a pure Bodoland. As a result, hundreds died and thousands were rendered homeless. The major targets of these attacks were Bengali Muslims and Advisais

(Santhalis), both of whom had originally started to settle in the region during colonial rule. The violence was not, however, limited to targeted attacks on non-Bodos, and it also extended to clashes between these two militant groups (the BSF/NDFB and the BLT). Basumatary (2014) has observed that the areas of these two groups were virtually demarcated, and

> … a person belonging to a particular area believed to be patronising one group would be murdered with no questions asked if that person ventured into the areas which patronised the other group. Such a situation eventually resulted in fratricidal killings among the Bodos. Bodo militant groups killed 260 people in 1996 alone. (Basumatary, 2014, p.12)

He also noted that the divisions between these two groups were sharp because, "BLT being perceived as adherents of the Bathou[6] faith and the NDFB being perceived as neo-convert Christians" (Basumatary, 2014, p.12).

The rise of Bodo militant groups, and the ensuing killing, created a sense of insecurity in all non-Bodo groups living in the Bodo dominated district of Western Assam. K och Rajbongshis, especially, who had their own political aspirations to form a state (Kamtapur,) for themselves, were discontented with their villages being made part of the BAC. Consequently, most of the non-Bodo ethnic groups started to form their own militant groups to counter the Bodo militant groups, and Basumatary notes that the

> Santhals formed the Bisa Commando forces (BCF) and Adivasi Cobra Militant force (ACMF), the Koch Rajbongshis formed the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and the ethnic Bengalis formed the Bengali Tiger Force (BTF) (Basumatary, 2014, p.14).

The above may be viewed in the light of the way that Arendt (2014) differentiates between violence and power, and how the weaker power enables violence. The violence becomes the alternative to the political solution, which power is not ready to address. The situation throughout the 1990s, in Western Assam, remained tense and ethnic clashes, along with targeted killing, continued. However, a decade later, after the BAC had wrapped up its operations in 2003, the state government entered into negotiations with the BLT leadership,

[6] This was the traditional faith of the Bodo people before Hinduisation, it is a kind of animistic faith in which a certain variety of cactus is worshipped.

eventually signing a peace accord. The second Bodo Accord, signed in that year, was a modified version of the first one, which had been proposed in 1993. The Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) was formed in accordance with the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Four districts: Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri, were carved out to make Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (popularly known as BTAD). This formation was not without resistance, since the NDFB, aiming for a sovereign Bodoland, was against this, as was the non-Bodo community. However, with the surrender of 2,641 BLT militants, with their sophisticated arms on December 6th, 2003, a new chapter in the history of Bodoland began. The government also opened talks in 2004 and 2005 with the NDFB militants. The NDFB split into three groups after the formation of the BTC: the Dhiren Boro group, which was known as the NDFB -P, the Ranjan Diamary group, which was known as NDFB R, and the Songbijit group, which was known as NDFB -S and which carries out militant activity to this day, whilst the former two have engaged in peace talks with the government (Behera, 2018; Basumatary, 2014).

The formation of the BTAD has not seen the end of violence and ethnic conflict in the area. Bodos, who make up roughly 30% of the region, are running an autonomous council within the state of Assam, but still remain a minority. The contradiction of being both a minority (numerically) and a majority (politically) complicates the situation, and the violence against non-Bodos continues. In essence, then, the narrative of 'native' and 'foreigner' takes a complex form, as the struggle for the supremacy and dominance of the Bodo group becomes part of the narrative of 'illegal immigration' too. Bodo leadership sees it as being politically more relevant to assert their political demand by making 'illegal immigration' a route to attaining it. The story of the tussle over land becomes the story of the "foreigner" as well; as Naveen Murshid articulates it,

> … while the tensions between tribal population and Bengalis are not predicated on ethnicity *per se* but on economic transactions over land use, political actors, particularly Bodo leaders in this area, have figured out that relabeling land encroachment issues as foreign encroachment is politically more rewarding. This is how the story of land grabs became one of Bangladeshi infiltration as well (Murshid, 2006, p.587).

During 1992 and 2014, many incidents of violence, extortion, kidnapping and targeted killings by the NDFB were reported. In the episodes of violence, Adivasis and Bengali Muslims remain the main target. As the table below shows, in major incidents of violence in the BTAD region, the majority of those killed in these incidents are Muslims and Adivasis.

Table 2.1 Ethnic Clashes in Assam in the BTAD Region (1992-2014)

Year	Communities involved	Districts Involved	Persons Killed	Persons in relief camp
1993	Bodo - Muslim	Undivided Kokrajhar & Bongaigain (K&B)	61	-
1994	Bodo - Muslim	Undivided K&B	113	-
1996	Bodo - Adivasi	Undivided K&B	198	-
1998	Bodo- Adivasi	Undivided K&B	186	-
2008	Bodo - Muslim	Darrang & Udalguri	64	1,93,000
2012	Bodo - Muslim	Kokrajhar, Chirang & Dhubri	109	4,85,000
2014	Bodo - Muslim	Kokrajhar & Baksa	46	498

Source: Department of Home Affairs, Government of Assam, Guwahati (Saikia,, 2015)

Saikia (2015) draws a parallel between the civil war in Sri Lanka and the violence in the Bodoland region of Assam. In the case of Sri Lanka, the majority Sinhalese community

> …used outbidding as a means to attain power" and this led to a systemic marginalization of the Tamil minority population in the country. What led to the reactive nationalism of the Tamils and a cycle of violence in Sri Lanka was the process of outbidding, which was "embedded in the institutional structure of a polity (Saikia, 2015, p.214).

Bodos were disenchanted with the Assamese ruling class and felt outclassed by Assamese nationalism. so the Bodo movement then, "spiralled into violence" as the youth of the tribal

population used violence as a means to 'outbid' the moderate Bodo leadership in order to influence politics.

The violence of 2012 received international coverage and attention and populated national and regional news, not only due to the intensity and scale of violent episodes, but for two other reasons: firstly, the conflation of the riots as a result of the Rohingya issue in the Arakan state of Burma, and, secondly, the usage of social media to mobilize and create an atmosphere of fear; eventually leading to the 'exodus' of North-Easterners from the major metropolitan cities of India. The 2012 violence started with the killing of two activists from a minority (Muslim) organization in the Bodoland area, which was called the All Bodo Muslim Student Union (ABMSU). Both were shot dead by unidentified bikers in Magurmari village on 19th July, 2012, in response to which four ex-BLT militants were killed by a mob the next day. These events led to a cycle of violence and killing on both sides (Bodos and Bengali Muslim) which continued for over two months. Thousands of houses were burnt down and half a million people were displaced. The issue of violence soon became synonymous with the issue of illegal immigration. As an academic from Assam writes,

> … to make matters worse, leaders of the Bodo community, large sections of mainstream Assamese society, and a section of the media and political class took it upon themselves to allege and prove that the responsibility for this human tragedy lies squarely on illegal Bangladeshi migrants (Goyary, 2015, p.16).

The violence then became a means to identify migrants and necessitated a construction of identity, which ultimately served as the face of the enemy.

In 2014, violence followed the May general election, when the militants of the NDFB-S gunned down Bengali Muslims in the Kokrajhar and Baksa districts of Assam. The actual reason, for scholars like Saikia, is that the "provocation of Bodo leaders that non-Bodos have not voted for the BPF (ruling party of BTC) candidate" (Saikia, 2015). The killing of 46 people, including 22 children, and the burning of over one hundred houses, again raised the question of the legitimacy of Bengali Muslims and their legitimacy as citizens of the country. Some scholars, like Dutta (2016), have argued that Muslims eventually become the soft target of nationalistic sentiment, as they are frequently labelled as Bangladeshi. This categorization, or naming, in a sense legitimizes violence, or the act of violence, as the actual issue becomes one

of hindering infiltration by the enemy. Dutta highlights that the fear of land alienation has gripped the Bodo population, and

> … the Bodos feel that Muslim immigrants are swamping the area and alerting its demographics. The immigration issue assumes further importance because Bodos believe that Muslim settlers lend support to illegal immigrants from Bangladesh by helping them cross the border into India and settling them on their lands (Dutta, 2016, p.488).

There is no doubt that there is a deep sense of alienation in the Bodo community, not only because national and regional governments do not give the community their due share in resources, but also because Assamese nationalism marginalizes their identity, coupled with the uniting of non-Bodo ethnic groups against them. These factors, combined, prompt the emergence of violence, which creates deeper divisions between Bodos and non-Bodos. The ethnic solidarity between non-Bodo ethnicities creates more tension between communities, as these ethnicities share a certain memory of loss, have the same grievances, and fear the violence of the same common enemy, resulting in Bodo groups being put in a vulnerable position. A clear example of this may be found in a memorandum that was submitted to the Home Minister of India on 6th August, 2014, by non-Bodo groups. It alled into question Bodo hegemony over the region. I accessed a copy of the memorandum during my field visit to Bodoland. It was presented to me by a leader of the ABMSU. The memorandum was submitted to the Home Minister by a united forum of twenty-one organizations, which mainly represented Bengali Muslims, Adivasis and Koch Rajbongshis. One can clearly see the ethnic solidarity of non-Bodos and the demands made in the memorandum, which has certainly challenged the existence of the autonomous entity of Bodoland. Some key demands included:

- Reviewing the BTC Accord and the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act -2003, to preserve the constitutional rights of non-Bodo people, and to exclude the non-Bodo majority villages from the BTAD.
- White paper on the situation created by the Bodo movement
- Scheduling of Koch Rajbongshis and Adivasis
- To find a permanent solution, the foreigner issue in Assam, Bangladesh, and India .
- The Bhutan border must be sealed within one year and all river routes patrolled to stop all kinds of infiltration.

I do not want to list all the demands made in the memorandum, most of which concern action against the militants, the perpetrators of violence and the rehabilitation of victims of violence. However, two issues are quite prominent here, one is the issue of villages in BTAD with a non-Bodo population and, two, the sealing of the Border. The White Paper on the Bodo Movement and the exclusion of non-Bodo villages from BTAD, certainly raises the question of the legitimacy of Bodo leadership over non-Bodo peoples. Such insecurity, in turn, triggers violence from Bodo groups, who aim to cleanse villages of the non-Bodos, rather than allowing for the collapse of the administrative council by letting non-Bodos remove villages from the BTAD. The violence of 1993 clearly demonstrates how Bodo militant groups strategized their violence to create a geography exclusively for themselves. As the issue of infiltration and border crossing from Bangladesh is made central to all the violence in the region, the memorandum clearly wants a strict border which will eventually protect them, along with an insistence on preparing a national register of citizens with a cut-off date of 25th March, 1971.

Conclusion

We may argue that in the specific context of Bodoland and the larger context of Assam, the usual frame for communal violence to grasp the tension between two communities would be inadequate. Since the Bodos are also competing with other communities and trying to assert a distinct identity from that of the Assamese, the conflict in the region becomes a multi-dimensional one. The violence in the region also highlights the failure of the State to address the demands of different groups of people and to include them within the idea of a 'nation'. The violence between the Bodos and the Bengali Muslims in Bodoland is about land and identity, and this becomes 'ideological' when instrumentalized by the right wing politics of Hindu Nationalism, or the victim politics of the Muslim minority. We will see how the narrative of violence in the English and Urdu press undermines the multi-layered context of the region and uses the events to essentialize the identity of these groups in the chapters on the English and Urdu Press.

The events of violence we are going to encounter, with respect to their coverage in the press, in the following chapters, cannot be understood without engaging with the complex history and context of the competing nationalisms and identities of the Assamese region. The four events of violence (1993, 1994, 2012, 2014) which we are going to explore need to be

situated within this broad context, in which many insecure identities are struggling to find space for themselves. The struggle is not just over physical space, but over the conceptual space wherein the definitions of the self and the other take place. Violence often operates as a system which distinguishes the self from the other.

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CHAPTER THREE

The 'Immigrant' in the Colonial Archive

Introduction

Assam has had a history of immigration from different parts of the region. People of different faiths and language groups have settled in the region for centuries. With the defeat of the Burmese Army and the signing of the Yandabo Treaty, Assam, once a frontier for the British Administration, came under its direct control. The inclusion of Assam in the colonial administration made immigration a whole new phenomenon. It was done on an industrial level as the demand for labour soared, people from over all the region were brought into the state as never before. This was a modern-day migration which was not just a movement of people but a very careful management of them, which was based on information, and this information contributed to the social formation of the immigrant in the region. The British Administration devised polices, created laws and showed great care in archiving this category. A new cartography emerged from this importation of labour in the region, as the administration started to map/demarcate the territory as per the labour movement.

Nirod K. Barooah, in his book on David Scott[7], mentions an incident when an Assam hill king asked David Scott why he recorded every judicial transaction in writing as, for him. it was an unnecessary process to put everything down. To his enquiry, David Scott replied "Swurgo Deo, you are of celestial origin, and can recollect everything. We are earth-born, and when we go to dinner forget what we have heard in the course of the day; therefore, we write down what we hear." (Barooah, 1970, p.134). The answer may have satisfied the king but, retrospectively, when we look at history we find an immense network of knowledge produced

[7] David Scott, Jr. (1786-1831) was a very influential local administrator of British India. He played a key role in administration of not just internal affairs but complicated matters of frontier administration as well. He was appointed as commissioner of lower Assam after being a judge and magistrate in north-eastern district of Bengal in 1812 (Barooah, 1970)

by the Empire through a varied range of information systems, Christopher Bayly, in *Empire and Information,* has shown how social communication was shaped in India during colonial rule. Bayly used the concept of the 'Information order' to reflect on the broad framework of the state's intelligence and social communication.

Assam's modern history is tied to the history of tea, but even before tea plantations formally began in the state, Francis Jenkins advocated the settlement of Englishmen on the wastelands in Assam. Amalendu Guha (2006) has noted that Jenkins' colonization scheme finally materialized as the Wasteland Rules of 6th March, 1838, and this allowed forty-five years of leasing for the applicants, with just one condition: land clearing at leastevery five years. However, it was not a very attractive offer for the Europeans, and the growth of the tea industry was very slow. This prompted a new intervention in the form of the Wasteland Settlement Policy, which was adopted by the government in the 1850s and '60s. The idea of the "fee-simple rules" of Lord Canning, under which there was no land clearing condition and "instead of giving a lease the land was put up for sale at auction. This encouraged large-scale land grabbing." (Behal, 2006). A large area of land was taken up for tea plantation and the industry continued to grow from the late nineteenth century to the end of colonial rule. Behal has noted that "at the end of colonial rule in the Assam Valley, tea plantations employed nearly half a million labourers out of a labour population of more than three quarters of a million, and more than 300,000 acres were under tea cultivation out of a total area of a million acres controlled by the tea companies" (Behal, 2006, p.143).

The Indian Tea Association (ITA) was founded in 1881, and it became one of the most powerful pressure group in India and Europe. It lobbied to devise friendly policies and laws for itself, and it even used state machinery to suppress labour protest and strikes against low monthly wages. When the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Henry Cotton, advocated for an increase in the monthly wage after his inspection report, the ITA campaigned and lobbied against it, which lead to "trouble for Cotton from his superiors and marred his future prospects in the Indian Civil Services." (Behal, 2006, p.148) Cotton earned a warm reception from coolies after this, as he was passing "from Fenchgunj to Silchar, the roads for a distance of fifteen miles were reportedly lined with coolies holding lanterns and crying out '*Cotton sahib ki jai'* (Glory to Cotton)" (Guha, 2006, p.38). The tea business contributed immensely to the economy and tea lobbies became powerful groups globally, as Erika Rapport has noted.

> They formed powerful and long-lasting trade associations that lobbied governments and raised taxes that paid for massive, and often repetitive, global advertising campaigns. Planters, their allies, and associations thus cultivated many of the technologies and ideologies we associate with the history of modern consumer society (Rapport, 2017, p.8).

When, in 1864, Oscar Flex came to Assam as the manager of a tea estate, he wrote that:

> …if this region has suddenly become the centre of attraction, it is due only to the fact that hordes of Europeans have descended on it to produce just one thing Tea – and make a business out of it. But no attempt has yet been made to put to better use the mineral resources available in the region and harness the potentials of its innumerable rivers. Only the tea planters are scouting around its dark and fearsome jungles and the grasslands to find suitable site for tea plantation." (Flex, 2013, p.13).

Flex's account is a glimpse of the reality of the situation prevailing at that time in Assam. Vast amounts of land were needed for tea plantations, and for that tea estates needed a large number of labourers. In its early days, during the 1840s, The Assam Company had imported Chinese staff who were better paid than the Assamese labour (Guha, 2006). However, the situation with the arrival of the indentured labour changed everything in the state.

The category of Indentured Labour, or contract labour (*coolie,* which is now considered a derogatory term), was introduced by the British Empire when this slavery was abolished as 'a new system of slavery'[8]. Indentured labour filled the labour demand of the Empire's colonies globally, and India provided the largest share. Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine wrote that:

> In total, 1, 47,740 indentured workers were recruited and sent overseas to other British Empire destinations between 1834 and 1920. India provided the largest share. Indeed, with the exception of those leaving the British Isles, Indians were the empire's most numerous and persistent migrants. Indentured workers from India travelling to British colonies numbered 1,258,861, or 85 percent of the total. (Harper and Constantine, 2010, p.50)

Not only the labourers sent to the colonies worldwide, but the indentured labour's importation into Assam changed the entire dynamics of the region and shaped its history and future. The British administration took great care in managing the labour force and recording

[8] As argued by Hugh Tinker in his work *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920.* In *Migration and Empire*, Harper and Constantine try to look into this position critically and to contextualize it in its actual location.

minute details about them. Annual labour immigration reports were written for all the colonies and one can see a commonality in these reports, with their particular dealings in the region. Labour immigration reports were not only written for the labour traveling to places like Jamaica or Mauritius, but to Assam as well. In this chapter, we will look some examples from these reports which will give us a glimpse into the past and the archive which recorded their lives and movements as it was. This is not an extensive chapter on the colonial archive, but it should be read as a supplement to the previous chapter. These examples I have used should be read as fragments to look into how the category of a migrant was constructed and preserved during the colonial time. The purpose of this chapter is to help us to locate the migration debate and the violence around it, which we will encounter in the further chapters. This gives us an historical understanding of how a semantic category, like migrant, holds different meanings in different periods of history.

The Labour Districts Emigration Act (Act No VII of 1873)

This Act was introduced in 1873 to amend the law relating to the emigration of labourers to districts of Assam and to regulate contract labour and service. The Bengal Act II of 1870 was repealed after the introduction of this Act. The Act was divided into twelve chapters with one hundred and sixteen articles. It ensures that accommodation, support and medical treatment is available for all emigrants. The power to prevent the emigration of a labourer was invested in the hands of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and the Garden Sardar (the head coolie, who recruited coolies) could only make someone an emigrant by getting a signed certificate from the magistrate. The emigrant is a labourer who is a native of India, the native Indian is imagined as being outside the boundary of Assam and, hence, their arrival is regulated. The emigrant is the term used for indentured labour and through these Acts they are regulated and protected. The Act clearly outlined the limits of recruiters, contractors, and garden sardars. These Acts were also guaranteeing some protection to those recruiting under the contract. The major aspect of an emigrant/immigrant in the archive is his mortality and health. His health was given utmost importance in the Act and a number of articles talk about it, since unhealthy labourers were not good for the Tea gardens and there was also the fear of epidemics. Every migrant needed to be certified by the medical officer before proceeding to the labour district where s/he would work.

Article 53 shows how the migrant had to go through a medical check-up at the arrival depot, and the Act defines how:

> …the medical inspector shall examine any emigrant in regard to whom a medical certificate is not forthcoming, and shall certify whether such an emigrant is in his opinion in a fit state of health and able in point of physical condition to journey and work for hire in a labour district.

In the case that someone is deemed unfit, then s/he should be sent back. The provision for compensation was also in the Act if, at the depot, the Superintendent of Emigration finds any emigrant being ill-treated by a recruiter or a garden-sardar. Chapter ten of the Act was dedicated to the regulation of labour, which also included the article about not using the labour more than six days a week, nor for more than six hours consecutively. The employer could be punished by a fine if he forced the labourer to work when he might have been unfit to do so. Chapter twelve of the Act talked about the necessary provisions for labourers, which included sufficient and proper house accommodation, a water-supply, sanitary arrangements and rice.

Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for the Year 1879

Generally, the labour immigration reports were compiled in the light of the existing Act relating to emigration or immigration. The labour report for the year 1879 talked about the decrease in the number of unsuitable coolies, but still there were complaints about coolies who were found to be sick or weak. Different reports discussed the implications of the arrival of coolies by steamer and the need to improve the steamer services. The tension between the administration and the planters could also be found in the reports. On the issue of making a depot at Disangmukh in the Sibsagar District, the report said:

> …it was under consideration during the year, but, as the planters, for whom alone the depot would have been of use, would not undertake to share any of the expense which it would have entailed, the Chief Commissioner did not feel justified in recommending that the necessary expenditure should be incurred entirely by the Labour Transport Fund (p.3).

On the legal status of an emigrant who had arrived without written agreement, the report suggested that a circular be issued “explaining that a coolie who, even without giving a written agreement, has been imported at a planter’s risk and expense, and on the understanding that he

is to labour for that planter, is an emigrant." (p.3) The report, in light of the Act of 1873, determines the meaning of an emigrant. The need for labour shaped the definition of a migrant in the region. The emigrant is one who is imported for labour and who has the will to labour. The report, separately, would talk about mortality among coolies from different regions. Madrasi[9] coolies' mortality was a concern in the previous year, and the death rate had not been that high that year, but still the health and mortality of Madarasis has been an issue, and "a stricter examination of immigrants before they leave the recruiting districts in years of scarcity" is recommended in the report. The Act of 1873 was informed by labour reports like these and amendments were made. and the report reflects on those changes that had been made. Regular inspections were carried out to check the implementation of the Act, and they would also be part of the report. Statistical data on the inspection of each tea garden in all districts, along with general statistics in relation to numbers were important features of the report. The report enlists coolies who were working on contracts made under Act VII and also non-Act ones. In 1879, fewer labourers were imported if compared to 1878, and this was due to the decrease in the good harvest, another reason being the high number imported in the previous year. The report also had a comparative statement on the localities of the coolies. The report named this section 'Localities from which coolies were imported'. For the year 1879, coolies were imported from Bengal, North West Province, Chota Nagpur, Nepal, Madras, and Bombay. The largest number of importations came from Chota Nagpur. The issue of free immigration is also discussed in the report, and the need to obtain more statistical data on that is asserted. The report mentioned:

> The extent to which free immigration has been going on during the year cannot be ascertained. But looking to the diminution of non-Act imported labourers, it is not probable that it has materially increased. An attempt will be made during the year 1880 to register the free immigrants at Dhubri for the Assam Valley, and at Bhairab Bazar for the Surma Valley, and, if these attempts prove at all successful, the Chief Commissioner hopes to be able to give some interesting details on this point in the next year's report. (p.8).

The report discussed the issue of the free immigrant as cheap labour and that they were desired by the employers, if compared to contractual labour who were emigrants. In the report, the free immigrant is distinguished from the emigrant. One who is free and not part of reporting system, and the other is the emigrant who is part of the contracted labour scheme, and thus of

[9] Coolies from Madras, Tamil Nadu. Now renamed Chennai

the reporting system. The report uses both the terms 'locality' and 'nationality' to talk about the imported labour. The idea of nationality is just of locality -- from the region of origin – the region as demarcated by the administration. So, the nationality is not even an ethnic or 'national' category. The report comprehensively talks about the average wage, the offences of labourers statistically, settlement within provinces, and rice cultivation for the benefit of the local population. It also reflects on the limitations of the Act and concludes with recommendations to improve communications for the development of the region.

Rules, forms and Schedules under the Assam Labour and Emigration Act, VI of 1901

With six parts and two hundred and twenty-three articles, a new emigration act was passed in 1901. The changing Acts are one of the features of the administration in those times. The regular updating of Acts is owed to the information system that wa at work through different kinds of reporting and information gathering. The emigration related Acts were aiming to achieve a lower mortality rate, better regulation and the protection of labour from exploitation in recruitment, and the better administration of the entire area. Along with some general rules, the Assam Labour and Emigration Act had sections on the management of depots and places of accommodation, procedures to be followed in relation to the occurrence of cholera, transport, embarkation agents, medical offices, etc. This was a very comprehensive Act with lot of specific guidelines, but the first section started with the definition of an 'Emigrant' "which means a labourer and includes his dependents", and a category of "Intending emigrant" was also defined. The issues of health and a healthy place to live for the labourers, are discussed in every detail. Separate articles on 'ventilation of depot sleeping sheds', 'depot water-supply', 'Depot latrines' 'Depot hospital', 'Depot dispensary' and 'penalty' were discussed with clear directives. For example, Article 24 said

> A hospital for ordinary cases, with separate wards for male and female patients, shall be provided. The ward shall be dry, well-raised, thoroughly ventilated, well-lighted and furnished with a separate platform or *machan* for each patient, which, when not boarded, shall be covered with matting. (p.3).

A Superintendent or Medical Officer's words were binding for the contractors until he successfully appeals against the Officer. The figure of a migrant is one that has been dealt with with great care in the archive. The body of an emigrant also shaped the category of an emigrant – hygiene and health is very key to this Act, and not even the smallest directive is missed.

Article Fifty Seven is about the 'personal cleanliness of the emigrant', in which the Act said "Emigrants and intending emigrants shall wash their clothes at least twice a week when possible, and shall bathe daily. A liberal supply of soap shall be provided for the purpose" (p.6) The mortality of the labourer was a great concern, and one can see in these Acts how that care has been shown or archived. Communicable disease, and the procedure to deal with it, are detailed in the Act as there is special chapter outlining the 'procedure to be followed on the occurrence of cholera'. The contractor is made responsible for paying for the treatment of each emigrant in such a situation. There are different rules for migrants taking different routes to Assam. Most of the articles in the Act are concerned with the transportation of the emigrant and the care needed to take them to the actual ground where they labour. The instructions included in the Act said:

> …the person in charge must take every care of the emigrants on the journey. He must give them a cooked meal before they start, and if the journey is likely to occupy more than six hours, he must distribute biscuits and sugar in the proportion of two biscuits and one ounce of sugar to each emigrant of and above ten years of age (p.50).

Figure 3.1 Map of Assam to illustrate the immigration report

Source: Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for the year 1901

Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for the year 1901

The map above was presented with the report and, unlike previous years, draws lines on the map of Assam according to the Immigration Report. It shows the coolie routes, the ports of inspection, river and railway disembarcation depots, and also coolie rest houses. The 1901 Report was released after the new (aforementioned) Act was passed, following the repeal of

Act I of 1882. Samita Sen has noted that the Act of 1882 was a major watershed, in the sense that it

> "married unsupervised recruitment with contractual employment, resulting in a system of 'free emigration'. The planters benefitted enormously from this system, as did the brokers. The share of 'non-Act' recruitment increased by leaps and bounds until the system was discontinued in 1901" (Sen, 2012, p.194).

In eight chapters, the 1901 Report discussed general statistics in relation to the labour force, immigration, contracts and wages, vital statistics, unhealthy ground, offences, relations between employers and the employed, and miscellaneous other things. Reflecting on the new Act, the report noted that it was:

> …designed to cheapen the cost of importing tea garden labour, and to safeguard coolies against fraudulent or oppressive recruitment by bringing under some control the operations of all recruiters whether working under the special labour Law or not, and by encouraging the employment of garden sardars as the recruiting agency, instead of contractors (Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for the year 1901).
> .

There is a fair amount of discussion on recruitment and different meetings and memoranda show us that the administration preferred the Sardari system over Contractors or sub-contractors. It clearly mentions *Arkati* in the report, as the number of coolies dropped in 1901 from *Arkati* recruitment. Without going into a detailed discussion of *Sardari* and *Arkati* we should note that these were two recruiting methods. The Sardari system was organized by a law in which the Garden Sardar was given a license to recruit 20 workers. *Arkati* was part of a network of sub-agents that was being used by the contractors. Sumita Sen has pointed out that the "*arkati* [was] already a notorious figure, [and] came to symbolize immoral profiteering, invoking memories of slave traffic, increasingly associated with crime and violence" (ibid). For employers, the *Arkatis* were not a viable option, and the *Sardari* was trusted. In a memorandum submitted to the Secretary of the Chief Commissioner of Assam from the Chairman of the Assam Tea Association, J. Buckingham, in 1892, he pointed out that:

> At present free emigration is actually checked by *arkati* competition. A good coolie is not allowed, so to say, to emigrate at his own discretion. A strong proof of this is the number of old coolies coming up to Assam under five years agreement on Rs.5 and Rs.6 pay, when, as free agents, they could have earned Rs.7; the *arkati* knows their

value too well to let them off cheap (Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for the year 1901).

The Memorandum also makes a clear point about how tea companies have to bear the cost of these four stages of recruitment: *First*, the village *Arkati*; *Second,* the recruiter; *Third*, the sub-contractor, and *Fourth*, the contractor. There is a discussion between Sen (2012) and Ghosh (1999) on whether there is a logic in thinking that the Sardar were considered insiders and the *Arkati* outsiders, in the colonial understanding, or was it that by promoting *Sardari* the administration managed the criticism against the labour system in Assam.

The Arkati's exploitation is also found in the oral narrative of indentured labour. It is part of folk songs and the collective memory of those who left their homes as an immigrant to go to various parts of the world during the colonial era. A folk poem is mentioned in the project book on Bhojpuri migration, edited by Mousumi Majumder (2007), *Pravasi Yadgar* (Immigrant's Memory), Amarshingh Raman wrote:

vahi dinva jab yad avela, ankhiya me bharela pani re.
Hindustan se bhagkar aili, yahi hai apni kahani re,
bhai chuta, bap chuta, aur chuti mahatari re
Arkatiya khub bharamavlis, kahai paisa kamaibu bhar-bhar thali re,

[When that day comes to mind, the eyes are filled with tears,
Fleeing India, I've come here - this is my personal story
Brother got separated, father got separated, and my wife got separated too.
The recruiter (*Arkati)* deceived me badly, saying that I would make much money[10]]

The 1901 Report dealt with the labour imported for employment on tea gardens, in the oil refinery at Margherita, in coal mines, and in a few saw-mills in Upper Assam. The report categorically said that this did not include all those immigrant labourers who worked on railways or were seasonally employed. The report gives a comprehensive figure on the classes of labourers for five years, which included Act and non-Act adults and children. The report notes a striking decrease in immigration due to famine in the recruiting districts. The title of the section on the locality of immigrants from 1879 was changed to Nationality of Immigrant. The number of deaths and their causes were also an important aspect of the report. Most of the

[10] I have changed a few words in the translation to make it more accurate to the exact poem. The actual poem can be found in Amarsingh Raman's collection *Phulon ke Panchi* (Bird of Flowers), which was printed in 1984.

labourers died from cholera. The report also talked about the wages and contracts in detail, and there was verification of the contracts in every district with numbers. The relationship between employers and the employed is briefly discussed in the Report, and an improvement was noted in the relationship, however, incidents of rioting and assault were also noted. Incidents like allegations made by the wife of a coolie that the manager had abused and assaulted her, lead five coolies to attack the manager, leading to severe injuries. In another case, the manager of a tea estate allowed coolies to fight amongst themselves, and this became known as the "Lyall Case". The statements at the end of the Report gives the comprehensive statistics about a range of things, including the nationality and sex of the immigrant and information about their recruiting agency. The nationalities of immigrants listed in the table were: Bengal (Chota Nagpur and Sonthal Pargana, Behar, Bengal proper and Orissa) United provinces of Agra and Oudh, Central Provinces, Madras, Nepal, Assam. The immigrant term is used for Assamese labour as well, as s/he is recruited for labouring work in the tea gardens, both on Act and non-Act contracts.

The Report on Immigrant Labour in the Assam Valley Division for the year ending the 30th June, 1930

In the 1930 Report we no longer find any Act and non-Act coolies, there are coolies recruited to the tea gardens and there is no Act to classify them. The Report addresses the labour force employed on tea gardens, on the oil fields, in the Digboi refinery, and in the coal mines, but it does not talk about the labourers and their conditions in these mines and oil refinery. The focuses of the Report are the tea gardens and tea districts and tea labourers (who will later call themselves tea tribes) and one can easily get a sense of a coolie's life working on these gardens, but it hardly reports on the condition of coolies elsewhere. The 1930 Report noted that the condition of the tea industry was "not prosperous during the year under review" and this was one of the reasons for there being fewer immigrant labourers compared to the previous year. The "depressed condition of the (tea) industry" was the factor given for less labour recruitment. The mortality rate and birth rate are reported on in the Report, as three deaths in transit are also mentioned. The Report also mentioned a fraudulent recruitment complaint made against C.K. Bezbarua for obtaining labour from *Arkatis* in Calcutta, which could not be proven, and no charges were made against him.

In 1930, the Report is more focussed on the status of tea gardens, the land under cultivation and the situation of those lands. There is less discussion on health and mortality, if compared to previous reports, although in discussing the welfare of the coolies their birth rates, death rates and epidemics are discussed. The issues of wages and concessions are also under discussion and the report noted that the "Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur reports that there has been a marked improvement in the standard of living amenities of life of the labour force due to the higher wages." One can see a shift in 1930, as earlier reports were more focussed oin the health of tea labourers, what they had been eating and how they were dying, but here the report lists the properties owned by coolies. The report produced districts/subdivision statistics relating to a number of gardens with a totally adult labour force, and then labour is classified under two categories, those who own buffaloes and those who have any other cattle. The report also mentioned the savings and remittances of these coolies. The report said, "The information as to the amount of money saved by coolies is not available except in the case of the Kellyden Tea Estate in the District of Nowgong, where the coolies have remitted a sum of Rs 3,200 to their native districts". It also provides information about land held by ex-tea garden coolies immediately under the government as subtenants. The statistical data also provides information about the average earnings of different categories of labourers: Men, Women, Children (in book) and their average daily working strength, monthly cash earnings, and average monthly cash earnings.

The major aspect of the 1930 Report is the vivid and descriptive account of incidents that had occurred in that period. The relationships between managers and labour forces were discussed in detail, as a few incidents were reported about tensions between manager and labour, as they refused to work. More serious was a garden disturbance in Darrang District, which caused a riot in which the manager, assistant manager and an engineer were assaulted by coolies as a result of a "head hunting" scare.[11] There are a number of incidents of labour striking for more pay, which were also reported. This is very specifically explained through the reporting of cases in individual districts. Along with incidents between managers and coolies, riots, protests and strikes, 'separate cases of disturbances' were also reported. As one incident of that nature is reported:

[11] For more on headhunting in Assam, please read J. H. Hutton's *The Significance of Head-Hunting in Assam.*

> Mr.Lamb, the manager of Bhumbrighat Tea estate in the Karimganj subdivision, fired a gun at a mad dog and accidentally shot a coolie woman of his garden, causing her death; two other men were also injured slightly. A case under Section 304 (A), Indian penal code, was taken up but was finally reported as mistake of fact. (Report on Immigrant Labour in the Assam valley division for the year ending the 30th June, 1930.)

Another incident of 'disturbance' reported:

> In Clevedon Tea Estate in the South Sylhet subdivision, the manager, while inspecting the work of the coolies, took a Sardar to task for bad outturn of work from the women in his charge. The Sardar resented this and showed an insolent attitude. The manager therefore placed him off work for six days as a punishment. On the evening of the same day when the manager was getting the leaf weighed the women folk surrounded and insulted him. This was the version of the manager. Coolies, on the other hand, alleged that the manager slapped a coolie woman and hence the trouble. The matter was settled by the sub divisional office and the coolies resumed work. (Report on Immigrant Labour in the Assam valley division for the year ending the 30th June, 1930.)

This year's report also mentioned an incident that was related to Hindu-Muslim tension:

> About 200 coolies of Kumbhigram Tea Estate suspended work from the 25th June, 1929, to the 3rd July, 1929. Their demands were for the dismissal of Mussalman clerks because certain Bengali servants (Mussalmans) had killed a cow or ox. As the coolies had no fault to find with the clerks and the offending servants had been dismissed, the strike had no substance and fizzled out. The coolies returned to work peacefully. (Report on Immigrant Labour in the Assam valley division for the year ending the 30th June, 1930.)

The Report carries a lot of everyday incidents around tea gardens, along with extensive statistical data on different aspects of tea gardens and immigration, together with the 'nationality and sex of the adult labour', which included labourers from the United Provinces, Bengal and Bihar; Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas; Central Provinces; Madras; Assam, etc.

Conclusion

The Reports and Acts discussed above represent different periods during colonial rule. This does not give us a complete or comprehensive picture of immigration, or of how these

documents were configuring the power, but such fragmented glimpses from these reports show us how the figure of the 'immigrant' was defined, understood, regulated, protected and archived. These reports reveal how the semantic meaning of 'migrant' was built up and connected to other semantics in that field. The labour that is defined and determined within the category of the 'immigrant'; the mortality of labourers, which was a defining feature of the category, and that also shows what the colonial care of the labourer was at that time. Along with health and mortality, the exploitation of the labourer was a serious concern for the administration. Different laws and policies were devised to address this, and the concerns of labour also found a place in the archive. The vividness and descriptive nature of the archive is quite telling, since it outlines the category of 'immigrant' with great care and particularity. There are not just numbers, statistics and bureaucratic and administrative issues, but there are stories and narratives which tell us about the time. In one way, these archives reveal the lives of coolies from that time, their journeys, their struggles with diseases and weather, their troubles with employers, and their economic achievements. We do not know what the document excluded, but what it included is quite telling about the labour force, employers, administrators and that historic time. In the archive, the 'nationality' is also very geographical, and the location of origin is considered to be the nationality, and not an ethnic or political category. Labour working on tea gardens were recorded as 'immigrants', whether they were Nepalese or Assamese.

It is true that the archive cannot be understood without the power, Foucault would argue, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* that it is a "system of statements" and the "rule of practices" (Foucault, 1972) which shape the particular regularities, and Derrida talked about how an archive cannot be understood without the power to archive. Derrida, in his essay 'Archive Fever' (1995), shows the tradition of archiving and its concept in the Greek language. The archive has a relationship to command. The archive, or archival knowledge, is also the work of a certain form of command. Someone has to command the archiving of the other and, hence, to archive the knowledge about someone. Derrida demonstrated that the archive has a deep relation with the idea of the future, and it cannot be understood as a mere event in the past. The question of the archive is not a mere question of physical space, in which the information is stored, but it also holds an "historical, or ontological principle" (Derrida, 1995, p.9).

Despite the way that Derrida, Foucault, or others, question the archive and its inherent authority, an archive still reveals to us what historiography might conceal, it can reveal to us the condition of knowledge and, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued about the status of colonial archive,

> It diverts our attention from how much colonial history-writing has been shaped by nationalist historiographies and the nation-bound project. It leaves unquestioned the notion that colonial states were first and foremost information-hungry machines in which power accrued from the massive accumulation of ever-more knowledge rather than from the quality of it. (Stoler, 2002, p.100)

The archives were not only documents of reason and official repositories of policy, but are also records of fear, intimacy, emotion and cultural sensibilities. The information system shaped the social formations of the time and, as Bayly has noted in one of the footnotes to *Empire and Information*,

> Following Foucault and Said it is often taken as axiomatic that the influence of a knowledge or a discourse both reflects and substantializes the political 'weight' of its authors. Yet we shall suggest that in pre-colonial and colonial times the emergence of systems of knowledge could equally well reflect the weaknesses of power and legitimacy, or situations of intense social competition. Assertive 'knowledges' might grow up on the troubled margins of power. (Bayly, 1996, p.25).

The significance of the colonial archive in understanding not just the colonial knowledge formation, but also the link between the categories of colonial and post-colonial is quite critical. The way colonial archives show the formation of categories and different system of knowledge has its bearing on the postcolonial formation of categories. The way labour and immigrant are archived underlines the categorical formation of the immigrant class and its impact on the social and economic aspects of the region. This cannot be overlooked in any contemporary debate about immigrants in the region of Assam today. In Javed Majeed's latest work on Grieson's *Linguistic Survey of India,* one notices the profound significance of this survey, not just in understanding the formation of colonial knowledge, but also in how India emerged as a linguistic region (Majeed, 2019). In looking at these archives, the development of the intertwined categories of 'immigrant' and 'labour' enriches our understanding of history and informs our contemporary debates.

We saw how the ‘immigrant’ emerged in the colonial archive, now, in the next chapter, we will see how the change in context has created a new semantic field for the ‘immigrant’ and the figure, immigrant, moves from ‘care’ to an existential threat. The chapter has shown the emergence of the phenomenon of migration and the usage of the term in its very context. The following chapter, on the English newspaper coverage, will show how a new context displaces the semantic from its original meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Assam Tribune

Reporting violence and Identifying Immigrants in Bodoland

Introduction

The Assam Tribune, one of the most prominent English newspaper of North-Eastern India, covers regional politics and events extensively. In this chapter we will look into the coverage of four events of violence in the Bodoland region of Assam and the newspaper's interpretation of them for the Assamese public. Here, we will look at the politics implied in the reporting of events of violence and how certain themes are embedded in the discourse around ethnic violence. Two interconnected issues: 'Border' and 'Immigration' are integral to the newspaper's framing of the violence and its rationale. In this chapter we will explore how events of violence become an avenue along which to define immigrants, as against natives.

Press and Politics: An historical entanglement

On December 4th, 1999, the then Prime Minister of India, and the prominent leader of Hindu Nationalism, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, addressed the diamond jubilee celebration of *The Assam Tribune* newspaper in New Delhi. He praised the newspaper and remarked that people, the heart of the nation, might not know of a regional newspaper, from a remote part of the country, but, "India's national media would be incomplete without what is described as the regional press." He praised the newspaper for not being an imperial enterprise and maintained that, "*The Assam Tribune* was in the forefront of arousing the latent nationalism of India's Northeast, thus making a major contribution to the national freedom movement, and to the subsequent consolidation of the country," and added that, "Whenever India has faced a challenge to her sovereignty and territorial integrity, this newspaper has played a frontline role in mobilizing opinion and boosting public morale" (*The Assam Tribune*, 2018, 17Aug). Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, in November, 2014, addressed the platinum jubilee celebrations of *The Assam Tribune* and said "The Assam Tribune has remained indispensable for the people of the region. They can spare the morning cup of tea, but not *The Assam Tribune*" (*The Assam Tribune*, 2014, 30Nov). These two instances of Indian Prime Ministers (from the same political party) speaking at prominent events that were held by the same newspaper, is symptomatic of the symbiotic relationship that the press and politics may have. The government's vision of a country, and its narrative of the nation, are channelized through the processes of communication. Since the growth of the press in the modern world, its relationships with politics and the politician have been significant.

In his work on the press and propaganda in the Indian nationalist struggle, Milton Israel highlights the distinction between the Anglo-Indian press and the Indian-owned press, and its meaning for politics during the colonial era. He underlines that whilst the Anglo-Indian press, was able to be critical of the Raj, there was consensus about its legitimacy, whilst the Indian owned newspaper, on the other hand, acted as its opposition. He argues that,

> Among Indian newspapers, their shared nationalism was no constraint on a spacious range of views regarding means and ends. In its daily editorial comment and reporting of events, competing images of India present and India future reflected loyalties to a particular leader and the significance of ethnicity, language, local historical experience, and religion in any response to calls for unity of action and identity (Israel, 1994, p.5).

Milton Israel draws from Stephen Koss's reflections on the emergence of the Press in the mid-nineteenth century, and particularly on the intimate relationship between the press, politicians and the political process, including the partnership between individual parties and politicians which, according to Koss, in Victorian England, dominated newspapers. In Israel's view, this essential characteristic, if not the whole context, was replicated in India. He underlines how Indian papers were attacked for their allegiance to the Indian National Congress and were described as "unprofessional propagandists writing for political rags with no legitimate claim on freedom-of- the-press protection" (Israel, 1994, p.7). The late nineteenth century Indian Press, focused a lot on social reform and the defence of traditional values, and in so doing often made use of the past, which could prove to be emotional and combative between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Israel notes, about that period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century press, that, "urban-based English-language papers tended to be more restrained than the vernacular press in this regard" (Israel, 1994, p.8).

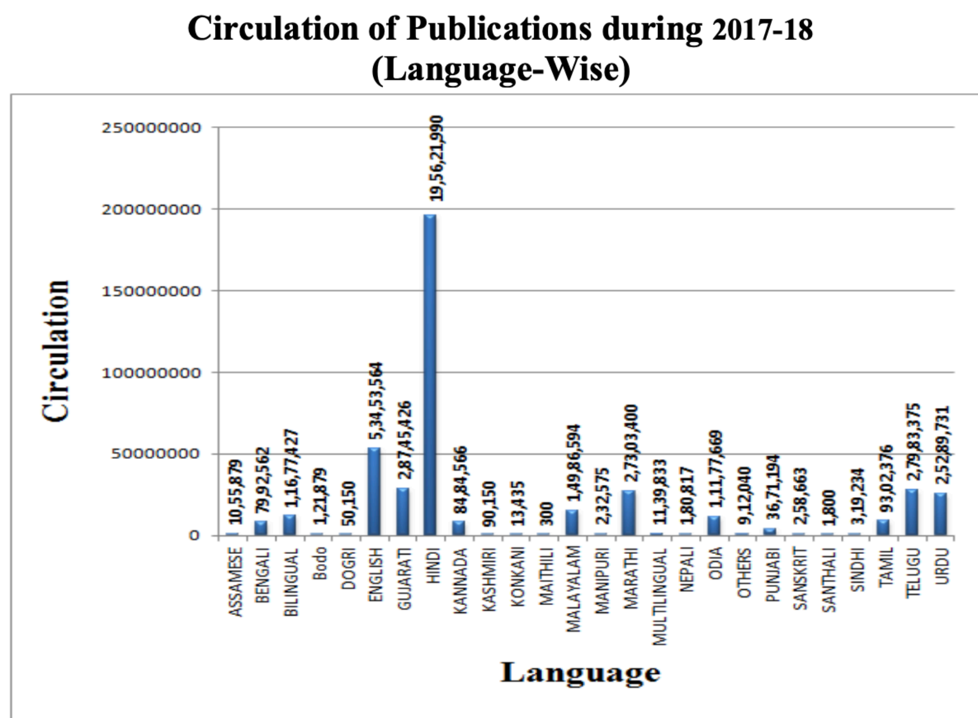
Chandrika Kaul, in her work on the relationship between the British press and colonial India, explores this relationship quite extensively, and demonstrates how reporting on India shaped the imperial experience. She underlines the fact that the Empire was very much interwoven with, "social conditions and British cultural institutions". It is not just that imperial policies and political events are covered and analysed by the press, but also that the government attempts to influence the reporting. To gather public support for its India Policy, the Empire developed a systemic approach to news management. In one instance, the royal tour of Edward VII was used as a public relations event and, as Kaul mentions, "The chairman of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association was invited to assist the India Office to ensure that the arrangements would be 'helpful' to the press" (Kaul, 2003, p.233). Where they failed to control the information, they influenced its interpretation, as is shown in the case of *hartal* and the protest against the government that was called by Gandhi in this period. Influencing both the news and its interpretation was vital to the Empire. Another important aspect of *Reporting Raj* which can be extended to the study of newspapers in different contexts, is that a free press in Fleet Street was, "at the heart of an imperial system of coercion, and to that extent it was inevitable that the press both reflected and reinforced prevailing images of order and power" (Kaul, 2003, p.9). A free press may operate within a coercive system and legitimize the policies of government, even those of an extreme kind. In reading the newspapers of a particular era, one is enabled to reconstruct "contemporary perspectives on events" and newspapers, as Kaul notes, allow us to capture the reaction of contemporaries in history, yet the coverage of each paper is determined by various factors, like the costs of information, the relationship between the paper and its reader, and the journalists (Kaul, 2003). In modern society the press plays an important role in shaping public opinion and the nexus of politics - the press is also used to legitimize or normalize certain views or positions. The press's views and public opinion are connected to each other and, often, such views are regarded as "a proxy for a wider public opinion" in a society where there is limited opportunity for the public to showcase its opinion, or an "absence of alternative insights into public attitudes" (Kaul, 2003, p.20).

The History of the English language Press in India

Soon after Indian Independence, in 1954, a Report of the First Press Commission was released, which showed that the country had 330 newspapers in publication, the circulation of

which was 25.255 lakhs, with a daily circulation of 6.97 lakhs[12]. The 62nd Annual Report for 2017-18 by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, shows that there are 3,838 Hindi language news dailies, claiming a circulation of 10,34,78,860, whilst there are 815 English Dailies, claiming a circulation of 2,97,25,905. Hindi language newspapers, over a period of seventy years, have seen immense growth owing to various factors. However, the significance of the English Press in shaping public opinion and policy debate, remains influential.

Figure 4.1 Circulation of Publications during 2017-18 (language-wise)



Source: The 62nd Annual Report for 2017-18 by the Registrar of Newspapers for India

With regard to the Hindi and English Press, during colonial India it was noted that the Hindi Press was overtly politicized and “Hindi journalists were deeply patriotic and adopted journalism as a mission …Hindi newspapers were largely used for propaganda and opinion, rather than news (Neyazi, 2018, p.44). Hindi newspapers were associated with the politicization of the public sphere in the colonial period, and the language was the most significant vernacular language used amongst the people of India, if compared to any of the

[12] 1lakh = 100,000

other Indian languages "because of the support provided to Hindi by Gandhi and other national leaders" (Neyazi, 2018, p.48). Nationalist English newspapers were also in publication at the time, like the *Hindu* in Madras, the *Indian Mirror* in Kolkata, etc., the popularity of which grew in the first half of the twentieth century. The division between the Hindi and English language presses, however, is an interesting one as it demonstrates the influential power of the English press in India, even in post-colonial times. At one level, it is the colonial history of India which has granted the English language a special status in national discourse, and it has traditionally also been viewed as the language of modernity. However, the dominance of the English language media on political power structures and other aspects of life also owes itself to other factors. Neyazi's work on the Hindi press in India shows that, in contrast to the English Press, the Hindi language was not able to establish its authority in the market, and its influence did not expand beyond Northern India. The dominance of English in the public sphere is also due to the failure of Hindi "to widen its social base constituency and emerge as a vehicle of communication" (Neyazi, 2018, p.50). A few important factors are owed to the dominance of the English language in public discourse, as noted, and these are: English, in contrast to Hindi, became the language of the elite, the ideological dominance of English was greater than any of the other Indian languages in national discourse, and it also became the language of social mobility, since English newspapers were viewed as being more credible, and Hindi newspapers borrowed news from them, emulating English newspapers. The Hindi newspapers tendency to imitate is described by Arvind Rajagopal as their acting as ''satellites'' of the national English language newspapers, rather than as ''independents", utilizing the distinction, which was originally made by Rahul Sankrityayan (Rajagopal, 2004, p.158). The Hindi language press started to triumph over the English press by the end of the twentieth century, as is well reflected in the Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India but, as Neyazi concludes, it "still does not occupy the status that is commanded by English, the language of a growing Indian middle class" (Neyazi, 2018, p.76).

While we see in Kaul's work (2003) the influence of the Empire over news reporting and management, Rajagopal highlights the way in which the post-independence period in India curbed the press and devised ways to control it. The attitude towards the press varied in this period and the provincial press saw less control by the government if compared to the metropolitan press, as the government feared its "potential political power" (Rajagopal, 2004). It was through limiting their growth and the "rationing of essential supplies such as newsprint" (Rajagopal, 2004, p.157) that the government exercised control over the press and intimidated

it "through numerous complaints to the Press Council, and the threat of withdrawal of government advertising" (ibid).While it exercised control on the metropolitan press, it showed generosity to small newspapers in remote states, and acted as a benefactor by "providing advertisements and subsidies of newsprint to encourage their growth" (Rajagopal, 2004, p.157). The distinction between provincial and metropolitan papers is in their quality and, as is the case in Hindi, the provincial press imitated their English counterparts.

In the context of India, the other significance of the English language, in contrast to other language presses, is that its audience is considered to be relatively more coherent and a "well networked national elite, with a sense of being bearers of the agenda of modernization." This granted the English press the privilege, and in some sense the right, of defining the nation and narrating its limits of inclusion and exclusion. This implied, as Rajagopal has noted, that the English press be secular, if not in fact then in intention. The limit and unevenness of the meaning of secularism presented a dilemma for the English press, and it could not solve the contradictions of secularism in India (Rajagopal, 2004, p.158). The cultural disparity between the English and Hindi presses is also being effectively used by the Hindu Right, as noted:

> If the English media treated issues of religion as for one reason or another peripheral to their concerns, and the Hindi media treated it as a relatively familiar, living presence and as a sociological fact within their purview, the latter could become an organizing ground for the Hindu right. (Rajagopal, 2004, p.160).

The History of the Press in Assam

In 1999, the Department of Post, issued a commemorative postage stamp celebrating 150 years of Newspapers in Assam, with an image of the first newspaper in Assam, *Orunodoi*, which published in Sibsagar in 1846 (Istampgallery.com, 2016). This was a missionary paper, but played a role in shaping the Assamese literary scene. Since then, several newspapers and periodicals have emerged and grown in the region and not just in the Assamese and English languages, but in many other regional and tribal languages.

A "confidential" report published during the colonial period with the *Statement of Newspapers and Periodicals Published in the Province of Assam from 1924 to 1944*, shows a changing number of publications during this period. Many newspapers and magazines appeared and disappeared; in 1924, there were 28 newspapers and periodicals published in

Assam, and in 1928 51. In 1929, there were 45. Nonetheless, there has been a significant growth in the press media, and various language newspapers were trying to publish. The Report mentions newspapers and periodicals in languages like Mikir, Lushai, Khasi, Gurkhali, Lakher, Bodo, etc. *Deka Assam,* published in Assamese in Gauhati since 1935, needs a special mention, as the 'General remark' by the colonial administration characterizes it in 1935 as being "A pro-Assamese publication, prone to attack the Bengali community by whom it is very much disliked", and in 1936 a report remarks that it was " inclined to foster class hatred between the Assamese and non-Assamese", and each year the report carried the same remark, with one addition in 1938, that "it supports the congress coalition ministry". This is the only periodical which is categorized as being anti-Assamese by the colonial administration reports. Since 1939, *The Assam Tribune* has also appeared on the list of publications, with the remark column carrying only one word, "moderate", with a note that it had an approximate circulation of 2000 during that period.

As *Deka Assam* was characterized for its dislike of the Bengali Community, the Bengali Press, in the Bengali language, raised the issue of the exploitation of plantation labour in Assam. Prem Narain (1970) has noted that, "… the Indian press of the period, especially that of Bengal, is replete with instances of fraud as well as of atrocities that the planter and his agent committed on the helpless people" (Narain, 1970, p.176). He maintains that Anglo-Indian newspapers, in general, represented the views of the colonial administration, but there have been instances where newspapers, like *The Pioneer,* took note of the oppression, and this was taken by the vernacular press as evidence of what they had been reporting (Narain, 1970). The question of the Bengali immigrant would later dominate the *news-scape* of Assam in post-colonial India.

As per the 62nd Annual Report for 2017-18, by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, there are 131 registered dailies and periodicals published in Assam, in various languages. The English Press is particularly strong, as English papers have the highest circulations amongst the dailies in the state. *The Assam Tribune* and *The Sentinel* have a claimed circulation of 84,215 and 90,435, respectively, which is much higher than any other Assamese or Bengali newspaper. This is one indicator of the importance of the English press and the role it plays in shaping public opinion of and about the region.

The Context and Background of the Bodo- Bengali Muslim conflict

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the struggle of the Bodos to be uniquely identified as a cultural group has gone through many stages in the last few decades, starting in 1993, when the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord[13] was signed. The Accord, however, did not address the anxieties of the Bodo groups. In February, 2003, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was created, but since it has not been successful in solving the issue of Bodo recognition, ethnic violence has continued. The Bodo struggle and the resulting violence are not just indicative of their constant tension with the other groups in the region, but also of the strains that different ethnic groups cause on resources. It is as much a battle for state attention and resources as it is a cultural battle. Appadurai points out that as

> "these culturalisms compete for a piece of the nation (and of the resources of the state), they inevitably enter into the space of potential violence". He proposes a new understanding of the relationship between "history and agency, affect and politics, large-scale and local factors" in order to effectively study contemporary ethnic movements (Appadurai, 1996, p.157).

According to Appadurai, the crisis of the modern nation-state is very much tied to modern ethnic movements through "a series of interesting links": how natural affinities are assumed to be holding the national self-rule, the link between specific projects of modern nations state (e.g,, the census) and large scale group identities, and the inextricable link between "language of rights and entitlements" with "large-scale identities" (Appadurai, 1996, p.157). The Bodo struggle can, then, be best explained through these links, as they strive to establish themselves by using the logic of the nation to establish a state, or to get maximum entitlement from the state. The crisis is not just theirs, but is that of the nation state too. However, the question of Bodo identity and their struggle for recognition is also mired with the "immigration" question in the state.

The framing of migration or illegal immigration differs in the regional Assamese narrative when compared to the national Indian one (Baruah, 2001). The creation of India and

[13] On 20th February, 1993, a memorandum of settlement was signed between the State =Government of Assam, the Bodo groups and Central Government to end the problems of the Bodos and other Plains Tribals living on the north bank of the River Brahmaputra within Assam. More can be seen at: https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/sites/default/files/accords/Bodo_Accord_-_1993.pdf

Pakistan in 1947, and of Bangladesh in 1971, brought legal/illegal, native/foreign, and citizen/alien binaries into place which were absent in pre-independence India, despite anxiety among the locals about migration and demographic change. These binaries are not merely a product of post-Independence India, but also of the politics of more than seven decades of Independence. Within the national framework, and in the context of the violent history of partition, the migration question is entangled with highly sensitive questions of religious identity: firstly, the way that the Muslim minority in India is treated, and, secondly, the obligation the Indian government feels about the Hindu refugees/migrants from Pakistan/Bangladesh. (Baruah, 2001). The question of Muslim immigrants in the region, then, takes on a special significance as, in general, the Muslims who chose to remain in India after partition are generally viewed with suspicion, and, as Pandey (2006) notes, despite choosing India as their homeland, the question remains "can a Muslim really be an Indian?" Perhaps "this is one of the enduring legacies of the partition in India"(Pandey, 2006, p.136). The Muslim peasants who migrated, from the, then, East Bengal, are at the triple disadvantage of being peasants (underprivileged class), Muslims (oppressed minority) and migrants (the outsider).

The question of framing or reporting violence in Assam is far more complex. Being part of the North Eastern state, it is virtually detached from mainland India. It is marginalized in the national discourse, and the national media gives it attention only in cases of big crises and covers it using pre-existing stereotypes. The disappearance of these regions in Indian media coverage is a wider problem. It is not merely that India is 'large' and 'federal', but it has also had to do, more recently, with shifts in media ownership and control: the extent to which the media in India is owned as part of political strategies and, increasingly, by businesses, as part of media strategies, intended to harvest political preferences. In her critique of the national media's coverage of Assam, Nandana Dutta (2012) argues that only during a violent clash does the issue of immigration receive some visibility, and while reporting on an event of violence the "media's representation is more about the media itself than about an event. An event indeed becomes the occasion for showcasing the media's particular style honed on just such occasions." She is particularly critical of the national TV channels' reporting on the violence in Assam. In a way, Assam, as a region, gets national attention only "in the aftermath of insurgent/ethnic violence"(Dutta, 2012, p.12) and the frame repeats itself. The exception, however, was the ethnic violence of 2012, from which there was a potential threat of a backlash from Muslims in major cities in India, and the "exodus" of North Eastern people from mainland

India. Nandana Dutta (2012) notes that because of the situation created due to fear-mongering through social media, and the resultant “exodus”, the media paid more attention to the issue and provided more detail on the event. The national media, argues Nandana (Dutta, 2012), covered the violence in Assam, through a historical frame of communalism and reported it mostly as communal violence, which is not how these events are understood in Assam, thus

> It shows how the media understands the region and its problems within a pre-existing framework of communalism—a big theme in post-independence India ever since partition—that rarely explains the particular kinds of land and territorial focus of NE problems. (Dutta, 2012, p.13).

In Dutta’s argument, the depiction of violence, for Assam, is not just about the violence but also about the relationship the state has with the centre. The deep sense of alienation in the state, from the central government, is also a consistent theme, while debating the violence. This is very evident in the reportage of *The Assam Tribune*, which is being studied here, in which editorials and stories are openly critical of both central and state government, lambasting them as being negligent about the situation in the state. The narrative of defining the self has, for Assam, been mired in the “feeling of abandonment and of being out in the cold” (Dutta, 2012, p.14). The context, Nanda proposes, that is essential to understand any reporting or event in Assam, is one of historical injustice starting from “tortures and cruelties by the Burmese invader before the British came in as saviour” (ibid) and the sense of being betrayed by the British in the nineteenth century through

> …their policy of systematically settling Bengalis on its land and forcibly establishing the Bengali language in schools and courts. And it develops a strong sense of being injured regularly by the perceived threat to its culture and language by the presence on its land of a powerful Bengali elite. (Dutta, 2012, p.14).

Reporting Violence: October, 1993.

In 1993, The Bodo Movement, reached a stage where it could have some territorial autonomy through the signing of an Accord with both the state and central governments. However, the Accord clearly states that villages with 50 percent or more population of Bodos would be carved out to make a new territory, hence giving rise to the question of boundaries and delineation, which then became a contentious issue in Bodo majority districts of Assam. Despite getting presidential assent for the Bodoland Autonomous Council Act in May, the

questions of demarcating the lines and including or excluding a "contentious villages" remain a major trigger for violence in the region. The villages with a slightly smaller Bodo population became a bone of contention, and a demographic change was needed to include them in a new Bodo territory. Poor implementation of the Accord and the claims over these villages caused large-scale violence in the region (George, 1994). These villages had pre-dominantly Bengali Muslim and *Adviasi* ethnic populations. Bodo militant groups tried to cleanse the area of these ethnic groups so that such villages could be included in the Bodoland region. Consequently, Bengali Muslims and indigenous *Santhali* people (*Adviasi*), particularly, became the targets of Bodo militant groups. It was an attempt at ethnic cleansing, and it is noted that

> …his ethnic cleansing operation has its genesis in the manner in which the movement for fulfilment of genuine aspirations of the Bodos is conducted and also in the manner in which successive governments tried to solve the issue" (Chakarbarty, 2008, p.166).

In the violence that ensued in October, 1993, in the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts, "Bodo militia managed to kill and displace thousands of people… 20,000 Muslims ended up living in 18 relief camps in the two districts by that year" (Goswami, 2008, p.182).

News Reports:

The Assam Tribune, whilst discussing the issue of the exclusion of the Non-Bodo villages from the new Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) area and the eruption of the ensuing violence, presented its main headline on 8th October, 1993, as *"100 non-Bodo houses torched: Army deployed"* and the report was:

> Over 100 houses belonging to non-Bodos were torched in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts today by Bodo extremists in a bid to drive away the non-Bodo population from these two Bodo dominated districts of the state, even as a tense situation is developing … Bodo extremists started their anti-Harsha (non Bodo) operation from early morning today in Milan Bazar. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1993, p.1, 8Oct)

The news report has the by-line of a staff reporter, and the violence is reported by the newspaper's own journalist rather than by the news agencies. The first report called this violence an operation by Bodo extremists to cleanse the area of Non-Bodos. The violence continued, and the headline of 9th October read *"10 killed in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon violence"*. The report noted that:

> …torching the villages of non Bodos by armed Bodo militants yesterday … armed Bodo militants attacked the minority-dominated villages … Bodo militants also attacked shops belonging to minority communities at Balangaon." (*The Assam Tribune,* 1993, p.1, 9Oct)

This news report does not directly frame the incident as a clash or as violence, but as an attack by Bodo extremists, in the first report, and by Bodo militants, in the second. The term "minority dominated village" is used in reports following the violence against the Bengali Muslim community. With reference to the statements of the Chief Minister, the news reports maintain that it was a planned attack to evacuate the minority community from their villages. Later, the report also framed it as "ethnic clashes between Bodos and non-Bodos", and the newspaper gives its front page to the BJP's demand that doubtful nationals should not be rehabilitated. The report is entitled "BJP wants no resettlement of doubtful nationality", and it was published on 26th October, it says:

> BJP has demanded that no resettlement and re-sheltering of the persons of doubtful nationality should be made in the riot-hit areas of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts without verifying their nationality …The BJP has also demanded immediate deportation of Bangladeshi infiltrators after proper verification" (*The Assam Tribune*, 1993, p.1, 26Oct)

Editorials:

The editorial of 9th October 1993 focused on the updated electoral rolls but, on the 10th, it interpreted the events of violence with the title *"Bodos on rampage"* and started by calling it

> …disturbing and distressing that the Bodo marauders have set ablaze over a dozen non-tribal villages in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts, rendering over 10,000 people homeless and killing at least 13 persons … these villages were inhabited predominantly by Muslims, Bengali Hindus, and Koch Rajbangshis, who have been opposing inclusion of their villages in the Bodoland Autonomous Council… the fact that the attacks on minority-dominated villages in two districts occurred almost simultaneously shows that they were carried out mercilessly. .. Assam has been traditionally known as a land of peace where people of different ethnic groups and speaking different languages and following different religions have been living in harmony and with brotherly feeling for centuries." (*The Assam Tribune,* 1993, p.4,10Oct)

The editorial singles out a Bodo militant group for this attack, but does not opine that it is an attempt at 'ethnic cleansing'. Another editorial, published on 30th October, entitled *"Demarcation of BAC"* was critical of Bodo militants and urged the different groups to live in peace and harmony.

Reporting Violence: July,1994

In July, 1994, violence broke out between Bodos and Bengali Muslims in Barpeta, and this reached its height when Boro Security Force (BrSF) militants attacked the relief camps where Bengali Muslims were staying during the clashes, killing over a hundred and leaving many more injured. The issue of BAC continues to complicate the situation in the region and is one of the reasons for the violence.

News Reports:

The news, like that of the violence in 1993, was on the front page of the 21st July, 1994, newspaper, with the headline *"Group clashes in Barpeta: two dead"* and the first report of the incident says:

> …Thousands of people being rendered homeless and unspecified number of houses torched in a series of clashes between Bodos and Immigrants in the last 24 hours. At least two persons were reported to have lost their lives in the clashes while thousands of people flocked to Barpeta road ... reports of attack on Bodos by immigrants and razing of several Bodo villages … around 2 am a mob of immigrants attacked Katajhar, a Bodo village, and razed to the ground at least 20 houses… An official source here said that prior to the attack on the Bodo village, a mob of Bodo miscreants attacked Bokuwamari, Metenga, Dhekiajanix, Pathar, Bormuza and Narsinghbari, villages inhabited by the immigrant community … an irate mob of Bodo people attacked a few immigrant villages about 20 kms. from Barpeta Road, and … officials here suspect that the main cause of the current phase of violence lies in the death of two persons belonging to the immigrant community on May 12 at Chouraguri. Both the persons were allegedly killed by the Bodo miscreants at Chouraguri area and buried … It was from that time on that palpable tension prevailed in the area with a section of the immigrant community looking for retaliation. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.1, 21Jul)

The first report gives some detail about the incident and while identifying the 'immigrant' responsible for this violence, provides some background for their deed. Unlike 1993, the first report frames it as violence between 'Bodo and immigrant' and does not specify the identity of

the ‘immigrant’. On the next day, 22nd July, the front page of the newspaper was, again, dedicated to follow up news on the violence, with the headline *“Curfew in Several Barpeta Towns: Death Toll 7*” and the report outlines:

> … death toll rising to seven and about 20,000 people being rendered homeless … miscreants burnt down five more villages taking the toll of affected villages in the riots to 30 villages ... six arsonists belonging to the minority community who were picked up yesterday from the custody of the police forcefully. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.1, 22Jul)

In this report, there is a change in terminology and, unlike the previous report, the ‘immigrant’ here is exchanged for the term ‘minority community’, which gives a sense that the immigrant community is a minority community; essentially the Bengali Muslim one. The report uses the standard term ‘miscreants’ for the rioters or attackers. The report does not specify the number of casualties or of homeless people in relation to the Bodos and the Minority, separately. While the ‘arsonists’ of the minority community are identified, the identity of the miscreants is not revealed, in this context, it must be members of the Bodo community, however, the newspaper does not specify this.

On July 23rd, the front page was again dedicated to the reporting was of violence, starvation and death in the relief camp On the second page of the paper, a report, with a statement from the Chief Minister, is published, accusing the Bodo militant group, the BSF, of being responsible for the attack. The news report frames the incident as a clash between the ‘Bodo and [the] minority’ and does not mention ‘immigrant’. On 25th July, the front page again carried a big news story about a violent attack by BrSF militants, with the headline *“BrSF attacks relief camp: over 100 dead, 300 injured”,* and the report by the newspaper correspondent continued:

> Over 100 people were killed and about 300 others injured in Barpeta district last night when in a daring attack the militants of the outlawed Boro security forces (BrSF) swooped down at a relief camp in the Basbari area about 20 km from here and massacred the inmates... death toll could be much higher and has been placed at 120 in last night’s violence. Three truck loads injured people brought over to Barpeta road … about 40 militants belong to the BrSF armed with sophisticated and automatic weapons swooped at the Manas ME school which was being used as a relief camp after the riots. Though about 5000 people were taking shelter at the camp only about 400 refugees were actually present inside the school … According to an eye witness report, over 120 people, including about 20 to 25 babies, 10 to 12 children and about 30 to 40 women, were killed inside the school…A victim of the attack Nur Mohammed told the

> correspondent that seven members of his family died. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.1, 25Jul)

The news report does not specify to which community the hundred people belonged, although by identifying the attackers as Bodo militants, it is implied that members of the minority community were killed. The report, for the first time, directly quotes one of the victims, giving his name. The newspaper followed up on the episode of violence very regularly. It also gave prominent space to any statement or news that was related to the AASU (All Assam Student Union). One of the reports, published with reference to the AASU on 26th July, links the violence with the 'foreigner issue' and maintains that:

> …govt faulty decision to allot land pattas to the immigrant people, rehabilitation of riot affected people of Kokrajhar district in Goalpara and the CM's repeated declaration that there are no foreigners in the state, have created tension resulting in the ethnic riots. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.1, 26Jul)

In another front-page report, published on 26th July, with the headline *"Minority communities were warned beforehand"* the report reads:

> A section of the Bodos had warned the people of the minority communities to move out of the Bodoland Autonomous Council areas about a few months back, said several victims of the ethnic riots in Barpeta who are now undergoing treatment in the Guwahati Medical College Hospital… their houses were burnt down on July 20 in broad daylight and all the people of the village escaped to the Basbari Camp … Ali revealed that the people of the nearby Bodo villages had assured them that they would protect them, but when they were attacked no one came forward. He said that all his property, including the cattle, were gone, and they have decided not to return to their villages after losing several of their family members. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.1, 26Jul)

This corresponds to my own interviews with people who were affected by this violence, which is discussed in the last chapter of this thesis. Some voice has been given to the victim in the report, unlike the reports in 1993, where there is an absence of victim voices. The 'immigrant' is dropped after the first report of violence, and it is replaced with 'minority community' in follow-up reports.

Editorial:

On 23rd July, an editorial entitled *"Stop this madness"* was published, looking into the reasons for the violence and interpreting the chain of incidents. The editorial maintains that:

> The ethnic violence rocking the district is clearly the result of the simmering discontent and frustration of the Bodos who find that their demand for inclusion of 3085 villages in the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) has not yet been fulfilled and they may have to be reconciled to accepting the 2570 villages already constituting the BAC . Not only that, they also find that their lands have been grabbed by non-tribals, mostly immigrants, and that has been a score point leading to ethnic violence, as happened in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts a few months ago … The situation is aggravated by the immigrants retaliating by torching Bodo villages and the Bodos counter-retaliating by increased violence … At the moment the riot is confined to two groups only because they are in direct confrontation, but it has all the potentials of developing into a wider scale. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.4, 23Jul)

Here, the editorial identifies land grabbing by non-tribals as the primary cause of violence, and, unlike the case of the 1993 violence, the editorial takes a position on this violence as being caused by immigration. The editorial does not specify different, non-tribal groups, but categorizes the immigrant as the principal land grabber and, once again, does not mention the identity of the immigrant, nor the nature of the land grabbing. It does not provide any data or facts about the claims in its report. Since the violence took place between Bodos and Bengali Muslims, the title 'immigrant' is naturally conferred upon the Bengali Muslim. On 26th July, another editorial, addressing the BrSF attack on the relief camp, is published with the title *'Massacre and after',* and it continues:

> These victims, all religious minorities, originally immigrants, came to the relief camp at the Manas ME School either driven away by the militants or out of fear of attack ...The massacre has sent shock waves throughout the country reminding one of the Nellie massacre of 1983. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1994, p.4,26Jul)

Here, the identity of the immigrant is linked to a religious minority and no distinction is made in categorizing the immigrant. However, the usage of the term connotes that the victims are Bengali Muslim, specifying that they are originally immigrants to assert their non-nativeness. At the end, the editorial questions the timing of the Bandh called by the AASU, but agrees with its demands and position which, as I mentioned above, stating the relationship between violence and the allotment of land to the Bengali Muslim community.

Reporting Violence: July/August, 2012

In July, ethnic violence broke out in the Kokrajhar District and rapidly spread to the BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts). The impact of the violence went beyond Assam this time, and it captured the eyes of both the national and international media. The violence spiralled to different zones and life did not return to normal for months. The violence in 2012 was perceived to be a national event. Social media and fake news played a vital role in this event, perhaps it would be safe to say that this was the first event of violence in which the social media were widely used to create and stir psychosis among people across the country (in all of the major metropolises of India, North-eastern people were threatened through social media messages creating a nation-wide panic). Local incidents of violence and inter-ethnic rivalry became a national issue.

News Reports:

The newspaper first published a small news report on 8th July, 2012, with the title *"Kokrajhar tense after killings"* and it reported:

> Brutal killing of two innocent persons by unidentified gunman last night in Kokrajhar turned the situation tense today as suddenly all shops were closed, plying of vehicles came to halt and the normal life of people was disrupted. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.1, 8Jul).

This news is reported more as a local criminal incident, with no ethnic or political implications. The usage of words like "innocent persons" and "unidentified gunman" makes it a banal incident of violence which has no bearing on the multi-ethnic fabric of the region. There was no follow-up news after this report until 22nd July, when the violence took hold of the Kokrajhar District. The headline on the 22nd was *"9 Killed, Curfew Clamped in Kokrajhar"* and it continues:

> Tension prevailed here as indefinite curfew was imposed in Kokrajhar town following sporadic group violence since last night left at least nine persons dead in Kokrajhar district…It may be mentioned here that, according to police sources, last night around 8.30 pm four Bodo youths were coming from Bhatipara in two motor bikes on the way at Joypur under Kokrajhar Police station when unidentified miscreants attacked them with sharp weapons killing all the four youths on the spot. The dead have been identified as Pradip Boro (32), Jwangshar Boro (36), Nip Goyari (25) and Jamin Goyari

> (24) … In the retaliatory attack, this morning, some unknown miscreants opened fire indiscriminately at Duramari village under Kokrajhar Police Station, killing one, Sahadad Ali (60), on the spot and injuring Hafijuddin Sk (10), Ahad Ali (13), Kadija Bibi (36), Monjira Begum (20) and Fulija Begam (12). In another incident, armed miscreants shot at Abdul Rezzak (35) at Kodaldoha village under Fakiragram Police Station. Miscreants also killed a menial labourer, Jakir Hussain (22), at Narabari under Kokrajhar Police Station today morning at about 6.30 am, police sources said. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.1, 22Jul)

The attacker's identity remains as 'unidentified miscreants' and 'armed miscreants', while the miscreant remains a consistent signifier, the victims of violence have been named in the first report as well, unlike the reporting in 1993 and 1994. Various pieces of news that are related to violence on the other pages of the newspaper can be found. On July 24th,the front page carried the headline *"shoot-at-sight order in Kokrajhar"* and reported:

> An alert has been sounded in ten districts of Assam following communal violence in the Bodoland area … Miscreants exchanged fire with security forces and torched two villages near Ouguri" (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.1, 24Jul)

The long report provided an update from each district and continued to use the term 'miscreants', while not giving much information about the targets of the miscreants. The report, unlike reports on the other two events, framed the violence as 'communal violence', while other news stories called it 'ethnic violence'. The violence continued to capture the headlines of the newspaper in the last week of July, and reports of dead bodies being found, without much information about the identity of the dead, continued. On July 27th,BJP's statement was printed on the front page of the newspaper, with the title *"BJP blames illegal migrants for violence".* The visits of the Prime Minister, Chief Minister and the Union Home Minister, found the headline too. On 1st August, front page space was given to L.K. Advani's (the prominent leader of the BJP) statement that "*Influx root cause of violence".* On 3rd August, front page news with the title "Demographic aggression" was published, stating the BJP's view that "illegal Muslim infiltrators" were responsible for the violence, and the people of Assam would be united in fighting them. While some news of normalcy was reported on 6th August, the headline *"Fresh incidents in Chirang, 4 killed"* and reports that dead bodies were found, naming the dead, showed a different picture. On 8th August, the front-page headline said, *"Fresh clashes rock Kokrajhar, curfew clamped".* The newspaper dedicated a lot of space to reports relating to violence, be it the event of violence, events of protest or statements about

the violence. The 10th August front page carried the statement of the Home Secretary, G.K. Pillai, as its headline, and reported:

> The Government should expedite the process of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and photo identity cards should be given on the basis of it to remove suspicion and apprehension from the minds of the indigenous people so that ethnic clashes like the recent one in BTAD can be prevented. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.1,10Aug).

Here, while referring to the Home Secretary, links were created between immigration and violence and advocacy for a quick update of the NRC[14], and this was consistent throughout the newspaper. It also gave prominent space to the AASU and its views. Front page news, on 13th August, with reference to the AASU, made a connection between illegal immigration and violence. On August 17th,the news of the exodus appeared as the headline, *'Exodus of NE people from Bangalore on'* and it reports:

> Fear struck people from the North East continued to flee the city for the second day today as the Karnataka government assured them safety and launched confidence building measures … (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.1,17Aug)

Several pieces of news in the newspaper on that same day talked about the exodus and the spread of rumours; as another news report says, on 13th August:

> The fear factor following the backlash in many parts of the country has triggered this exodus. With rumour mills running strong, panic has struck the people based outside the state. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.1,13Aug)

The exodus became a standard term with which to define the situation, and it entered the semantic field of violence with other standard terms, like 'miscreant'. The usage of the term 'exodus' is selective for North Eastern people fleeing different parts of India, rumour and a climate of fear driving them, however, the flight of people from violence in Bodoland to different states, was not labelled as an 'exodus. Navine Murshid notes that these "reports did not discuss about exodus from Assam but an exodus to the northeast" (Murshid, 2016, p.582).

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[14] This electoral roll, which includes the names of 'legitimate' citizens, is a battleground for citizenship. The inclusion of names in the electoral roll and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has caused anxiety and despair in an individual's life and protest and backlash in social life. To date, the updating of the register of citizens is the most critical political issue of the region, causing a great sense of anxiety for those that are not included. As per the updated list published in August, 2019, almost 2 million people have been left out. They have to apply to foreign tribunals and prove that they are Indian citizens.

According to government reports, there were 270 relief camps for over a half million displaced people in 2012. Many in the Kokrajhar region ran *en masse* to West Bengal to escape the violence; their departure in fear and panic escaped the particular qualification required for an exodus.

The link between infiltration and violence speaks to the audience of the newspaper. On August 17th, the "Letter to the Editor" section of the newspaper was entitled *"Assam: A future district of B'desh",* and one of the letters read:

> The greater Assamese race today is in danger of being wiped out totally in our own homeland, in this context we can see BTAD as the first round, if we allow influx to continue Assam is soon going to appear as one of the districts in the map of Bangladesh. We, the general citizens of Assam, cannot let this happen." (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.4, 17Aug)

The fear was well channelled in the reporting and framing of the problem. Exodus news captured the front pages of the newspaper, and the follow up reports about violence and violence-ridden districts slid into the corner and the inner pages of the newspaper. The hate messages and rumours which led to the exodus were then attributed to "Pak elements". The Pakistan angle then makes the phenomenon of the exodus a twisted entanglement of North-Eastern people, being a target of the revenge of Pakistan. The news about tracking IP addresses and blocking websites found a lot of news space in subsequent days.

Editorials:

Several editorials were dedicated, during the period of violence, to issues that were inter-connected with this event of violence. The first editorial on this matter, published on 23rd July, was entitled *"BTAD violence"* and blamed the gun culture in the region for the violence. It found fault in the administration's inadequacy in maintaining law and order and curbing the culture of kidnapping and extortion, and it also characterized the BTAD region as one with a culture of violence. The editorial asserted that:

> The overall situation in BTAD areas is characterized by a growing cult of violence and fratricidal killings. The progress in that the creation of the BTC was supposed to usher in will remain a mirage unless there is an end to the prevailing gun culture. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.6, 23Jul)

The violence, in the editorial's view, was seen as being a local event, prompted by the incapable administration of the Bodoland region. The editorial on 26th July, entitled *"Bodoland burns",* urged the government to be swift in controlling the situation, and while reflecting on the reason for the "communal clashes" concluded that:

> … the burgeoning immigrant Muslim population – a fallout of large-scale cross-border infiltration from Bangladesh over the decades – and the resultant demographic changes are also creating a complex situation with adverse socio-political implications for the indigenous populace. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.6, 26Jul)

The immigrant and indigenous binary shaping the conflict and the demographic future became the interpretation of the event of violence, it moved from the local to the question of borders and citizenship. In the subsequent editorial on the 27th July, was entitled "BTAD lessons" the cynicism towards the Bodoland administration and the Bodos returned. The editorial maintained:

> The BTAD area has a history of violence beginning from the Bodoland movement, and all-pervasive cult of the gun in the area is having a disturbing impact on the peace and stability of the region. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.6, 27Jul)

The editorial maintained a tone of criticism towards Bodo autonomy and the Bodo Movement. Both groups involved in the conflict throw different challenges at the polity of the state and the dominant Assamese society, one challenges the limited autonomy, while the other is seen as a demographic threat. The Editorial on July 29th again criticized the BTAD administration for being incompetent, and it blamed the discriminatory practices of Bodo authorities towards non-Bodos as reasons for the conflict, but concluded by saying:

> Tension between the Bodos and the non-Bodos in BTAD stemming from discriminatory practices of the authorities, and the burgeoning immigrant Muslim population and the resultant demographic changes and pressure on scarce resources" (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.6, 29Jul)

Editorials, along with many of the news reports, repeated and asserted that the growing number of Muslim immigrants was the primary reason for conflict in the region. 'Muslim Immigrant' become that anomaly which exposes the limits and weaknesses of administration and politics. The August 8th editorial, entitled *"BTAD violence",* repeated its position that

infiltration from Bangladesh was causing demographic changes, leading to violence. Similarly, the August 10th editorial, "BTAD crisis", raised the similar issues of fencing the Bangladesh border and the rising number of infiltrators in the region. When fall out violence reached the stage of rumour and exodus, then the editorial *"End this strife",* on 18th August, maintained that:

> By terming it as a war between illegal Bangladeshi settlers and the indigenous people – a generalization too simplistic to be convincing – many are actually adding fuel to the fire. (The Assam Tribune, 2012, p.6, 18Aug).

While subsequent editorials took notice of rumours and the exodus, with the issue subsiding, an editorial appeared on 24th August, entitled *"BTAD probe",* and it stated:

> Another area of concern relates to the possibilities of illegal migrants getting settled during the rehabilitation process. It has been alleged that an abnormally high number of immigrants are staying in the relief camps, and the presence of illegal migrants cannot be ruled out. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.6, 24Aug)

Reporting Violence: May, 2014

The violence or massacre by the NDFB(S) Bodo militants took place during the national election of May, 2014. During the election campaign, the then prime ministerial candidate of the Hindu BJP, Modi, warned immigrants living in Assam that their time to leave had come, as the BJP was coming to power. Urdu newspapers see an obvious link between the killing of Bengali Muslims and Modi's speech, but AT does not talk of an obvious link. There is a history of violence which takes place during elections in the Kokrajhar region. During election periods in 2005, 2006 and 2009, violence erupted in the region. In 2014, the reason for violence, discussed in the newspapers, was the instigation, by the local Bodo political party, the BPF, which polarized Bodos and non-Bodos, on speculation that non-Bodos would not vote for the Bodo parties during the election.

News Reports:

The front page on May 3rd, 2014, carried the headline *"Violence erupts in BTAD, 20 killed"* and reported:

> The orgy of violence has reared its ugly head once again in the Bodoland territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) with unidentified miscreants gunning down over 20 persons, including children and women, … heavily armed miscreants attacked two villages near the Manas National Park and opened indiscriminate firing … BTC chief Hagrama Mohilary has strongly condemned the killings … he held the NDFB(S)faction responsible for the violence. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2014, p.1, 3May).

The news report identified the 'unidentified miscreants', in the first report of violence, while, in the same news report, with reference to the BTC Chief, the NDFB(S), militants were the alleged attackers. Another news report, appearing below this one, and filed by the staff, reported in its headline *"Gogoi calls for firm handling of situation"* whilst quoting the Chief Minister of Assam, and continued:

> Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi today instructed the Assam Police to deal firmly with the situation in the wake of the gunning down of innocent people by the suspected NDFB(S) militants at Narsingbari and Balapara Tulsibil under BTAD last night. (*The Assam Tribune,* 2014, p.1, 3May)

While the government believed NDFB(S) militants were behind the attack, the newspaper proceeded with the standard term 'unidentified miscreants', instead of naming the group, and did not reveal the ethnicity of the village or of the villagers attacked. The May 4th front page was also dedicated to the violence, and the newspaper revealed the names of some of the victims, along with a report of 'no fresh violence'. A front page follow-up piece of news, was published on May 5th and it talks about the situation and reported the "exodus from minority-dominated areas" which, according to the paper, was denied by the newspaper. So, the 'exodus' did not become either a headline or a media event. On May 6th, the front page carried news entitled "*No Fresh Violence in Kokrajhar, Baksa"* and reported that:

> The law- and – order situation continued to improve in the two trouble-torn districts … where 31 people lost their lives in a terror attack by the cadre of NDFB(s)" (*The Assam Tribune,* 2014, p.1, 6May)

This piece of news carried a rare term, if compared to the reportage of the last three events of violence, in which the reporter called the incident a *'terror attack',* as the news about violence generally framed attacks as 'BTAD violence' and not as terrorist incidents.

Editorials:

The editorial following the incident called this a repeat of the 2012 ‘communal clashes’ and viewed speeches by Narendra Modi as “a simplest accusation at best” and returned to the theme of immigration. The editorial, entitled ‘Blame game’ on 6th May, stated:

> It is a repeat of the communal clashes of 2012 when over 100 people were killed and lakhs disappeared, some of whom even today live in the refugee camps. …. The congress in turn is castigating the BPF-run administration even as it blames speeches made by Narendra Modi to be a catalyst to renewed violence, a simplistic accusation at best … More important long-term measures centred round the core issue, that of pressure upon the available resources including agricultural land due to excessive increase in population. The issue of migrants, mostly illegal ones from Bangladesh, has been a bone of contention for a long time, with ruling entities like the Congress doing nothing to tackle the problem. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2014, p.1, 6May).

The Editorial claimed that the better implementation of law and order was the short-term solution to the violence, however, the long-term issue which needed to be resolved remained immigration. The region exploded due to illegal migration from Bangladesh, but this editorial’s position did not detail the conflict that the Bodos harboured with other communities, i.e., the non-immigrant communities. Several other editorials around this period of violence maintained similar positions, wanting to be tough on militant groups, but demanding tougher action on immigration.

Analysis: Reporting violence from 1993/1994 to 2012/2014

Paul Brass (2003) underlines the significance of labelling or naming a communal/ethnic incident to have control over its interpretation. He notes that:

> …the post hoc labelling of incidents of collective violence is an important aspect of the political struggle to gain control of their interpretation. The planners, organizers, and perpetrators of collective violence want all such events to be labelled riots, expressions of the spontaneous and justified feelings of people outraged by the actions of victims who allegedly precipitated the violence. (Brass, 2003, p.387).

In the case of the *Assam Tribune*, the interpretation of violence is not performed from the perspective of the aggressor as a planner or organizer but, rather, from a higher Assamese cultural location, placing the violence in a certain context and giving the aggressor meaning for their own politics. By not using the terms ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘terrorist attack’, and preferring miscreants over militants in framing the narrative of violence, the newspaper also

controls the interpretation of the event. Since it ultimately holds immigration responsible for the violence, it cannot then interpret such targeted attacks as well-organized attempts to wipe out the population. By calling the attacks ‘communal clashes’ and attacks by ‘unidentified’ miscreants, the newspaper, locates the violence as a law and order lapse and as spontaneous violence. The narrative of violence then creates a hierarchy of pain in which the immigrant is both involved in violence and is the ultimate reason of it. The militant act of aggression is not justified, but it is understood as a natural reaction to the growing number of immigrants in the region, thus the pain and suffering of the two groups cannot be likened. The abundant reporting of violence (less in 1993 and much more in 1994, 2012, 2014) is also an opportunity to remind society that immigrant numbers are growing and are causing the violence suffered.

Since these events of violence did not take place between Assamese (Hindus) and Bengali (Muslims) but, rather, between Bodo tribes and Bengali Muslims, the reporting of the violence was less emotional. One of the early works on the role of the press in conflict in Assam, by Surendra and Indira Gupta (1990), through the study of ‘The Assam agitation movement’ shows that the regional press, like the *Assam Tribune,* “tried to evoke the emotional feelings of two linguistic groups, i.e., the Assamese and the Bengalis. … By biased reporting the regional newspapers gave more importance to regional identity than to national identity.”(Gupta and Gupta, 1990, p.166). In her work, comparing *The Assam Tribune’s* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika’s* coverage, of three incidents of violence involving Assamese and Bengalis in Assam (in 1980), Makiko Kimura, portrays the regional and linguistic bias of the newspapers. She notes that the newspapers are selective in using ‘facts’, as such ‘facts’ are defined by their agenda. She notes, with regard to the choice of words in characterizing the ‘victims’ and ‘offenders’ by the *Assam Tribune,* that it describes:

> …the victims of the incidents as: indigenous people, students, youth, peaceful picketers and local Indian citizens. As for the offenders, it mentions miscreants, police, army, foreigners, Bangladeshis, immigrants, linguistic and religious minorities and foreign elements. (Kimura, 2001, p.155)

She confirms Gupta and Gupta’s findings about the role of the press, and she emphasizes that the “reporting of the newspapers is concerned with defining the boundaries between ethnic groups and nations – the Assamese and the Bengalis, and the Indian nation and the foreigners” (Kimura, 2001, p.157). In slight contrast to both these findings, the *AT’s* reporting of conflict between Bodo and Bengali Muslim does not try to inflame the emotions of any side, and uses

miscreants for attackers from both the communities. It is critical of the Bodoland administration's handling of law and order and there is an undertone of cynicism towards Bodoland and its autonomy. The newspaper frames this demanded autonomy as a problem for regional stability, and since this demand involves a tribal group which does not necessarily identify with Assamese cultural nationalism, the newspaper does not use the 'offenders' characterization solely for one group. It should be noted that not enough Bodo voices are given space in press reporting. However, the method of reporting on the violence is used to draw boundaries between the immigrant and the non-immigrant. Reporting on Bodoland violence is used to question the 'illegal immigration' and to frame the immigrant as the root cause, if not the immediate cause, of the violence, without necessarily siding with the Bodos. The newspaper does not contribute to the tension between the two communities, however, it categorizes the immigrant as a threat for all.

In narrating the violence, the newspaper's reference to the immigrant, and its substitution for minority, creates ambiguity but, in an unambiguous manner, connects the two. It does not refer to the group as Bengali Muslim, rather, it calls the group 'immigrant' or 'minority'. In referring to the group of people as immigrant, and then only rarely adding 'illegal', this denies the distinction between the immigrants from different time periods. Since the cut-off date for the recognition of immigrants as citizens is 1971 in the region, and 1951 in the country, the constant reference to the immigrant, conflating it with illegal, and then with minority, underlines the entanglement of immigrant with time in the narrative. In the larger plot of violence, the narrative about the immigrant delineates their time from the time of the 'indigenous' people. This is a particular feature of cultural nationalism which fixates the identity of one group in time and history and thus makes it permanent, Identities in narratives, like 'indigenous' or 'immigrant', are made timeless and unchanging (Thapar, 2014). Referring to people as 'immigrants' without making a distinction between those who migrated during the various decades of colonial rule and those who came during partition, and yet others during the 1970s, makes the identity of the 'immigrant' unchangeable, and it is always teetering on the outer limit of (Indian) citizenship. One of the problems of modernity is that "time is no longer a simple classificatory principle, but rather an agent, the operator of a historical process – the other name, or rather the true name, for progress" (Hartog, 2013, p.124). The sense of time is constructed through narrativizing the past and interpreting the present in a particular way.

Udayon Misra (2017) argues that Assam is "caught in a time warp"(Misra, 2017, p.146), as the sequence of events seem to repeat themselves, He finds that there is striking similarity between the 1940s and the 21st century. He notes that the issue of the 'Hindu refugee' was discussed in the press in the 1940s and it is being debated again today with very similar observations and statements. With reference to the *Assam Tribune* and *Dainik Asom,* he notes that on the issue of the 'Hindu refugee' the press, both then and now, emphasizes Assam's plight, in that it has alimited capacity to accommodate more refugees (Misra, 2017). In various editorials about infiltration and immigration, the *Assam Tribune* insists that immigration must not be encouraged on religious grounds, and it is critical of both Congress and the BJP on the question of the 'Hindu refugee'. However, the 'Hindu refugee', in contrast to the 'Muslim immigrant', is to be accepted, and should then be taken in, not just by Assam. One of the editorials, entitled 'Bangladeshi infiltration', was published on 8th September, 2012, and noted that:

> And if at all the Hindu refugees are to be accepted, the burden should be shared by other states and not Assam, which has already borne the brunt of cross-border influx. (*The Assam Tribune*, 2012, p.6, 8Sep).

The events of violence and their interpretation is intricately linked with the questiond of immigration, infiltration and borders. In a newspaper there is no possibility of understanding and controlling the violence without dealing with immigration. In the kaleidoscopic space of the newspaper, events of violence share the border with news and views on infiltration. In that small space of a newspaper, each event neighbours another and each fragment, in relation to another, creates a whole. Since editorials identify the root cause of violence as immigration and infiltration, the discussion about borders and the infiltrator gets prominent coverage in the print media. The violence in the newspaper's narrative is tied to demographic change caused by immigration and, in particular, the Muslim component of it. In its diagnosis, the newspaper suggests that it is not only cross border infiltration from Bangladesh which is responsible for the high number of Muslims, but the higher birth rate among them also creates a demographic crisis. Consequently, violence is entangled with cross-border infiltration and the Muslim immigrant. Editorials regularly discuss the urgency of this situation and the need to control the birth rate at a systematic level. So, a tougher border at territorial level and organized family planning for Muslims are two solutions that are regularly advised by newspapers' columnists and editorials.

The Demographic Fear: Border and the Muslim Infiltrator

The events of violence and its interpretation are intricately linked with the question of immigration, infiltration and the border. In the newspaper, there is no possibility of understanding and controlling violence without dealing with immigration. In the kaleidoscopic space of the newspaper the events of violence share the border with news and views about infiltration In that little space of a newspaper each event neighbours another and each fragment in relation to the other creates a whole. Since the editorials identify the root cause of violence as being immigration and infiltration, the discussion about the border and the infiltrator gets prominent coverage in the newspaper.

In the 1990s, when the border with Bangladesh was mostly unfenced, the debate about immigration was largely about infiltration through the unprotected border. The Indo-Bangladesh border is one of the most dangerous borders in the world, where all kinds of human rights abuses are practiced. The highest number of deaths at the hands of India's border security forces (BSF) were reported at different crossing points. It is noted that between "2000 and 2015, the BSF killed more than a thousand Bangladeshi civilians along the border" (Jones, 2016, p.56), while the most inhumane case of brutality was witnessed in 2011 when Felani Khatoon was shot dead by border police and her body "dangled on the barbed-wire fence for several hours after she was shot" (Ibid.. p.61). There is no doubt about the significance of the border for a nation state and of it being an integral project for nation building, but the danger of it being weaponized by public discourse poses a serious threat to lives. As David Ludden notes "Communities imagine nationality in maps. All of the external margins of national territory fall inside national geography in order to confirm national coherence." (Ludden, 2003, p.1064) A border is not only protected by security apparatus but also by the public opinion that is regulated and controlled by media which, in its anti-immigrant narrative, attempts to make a nation more coherent and more clearly demarcated from the other. Territoriality and mobility, are in constant contention with each other, in an attempt to narrate the nation through boundaries. While border cruelty is not much of a discussion in the newspaper, there is another aspect of border discussion which instils the feeling in readers (and citizens of the region) of being at the frontier of the nation and being perpetually vulnerable, with not enough policing and fencing of the border.[15]

[15] There is lot of discussion about borders and its significance. Some may argue that legitimizing the border can prevent conflicts. However, in the case of India, even after more than seven decades, the border lines are not

The demand for a stronger border continued even in 2012 and 2014, and in all of the events of violence the newspaper brings the question of the border to the fore. An editorial in 2012 accuses the government of making the situation worse and concludes that the violence may even lead to a proper civil war, however, towards the end it raises the question of migration "Be that as it may the porous Indo-Bangla border warrants immediate sealing with adequate floating outposts and manpower on the riverine stretches. Along with infiltrators, there is every chance of fundamentalist elements entering Assam to foment trouble in a sensitive situation." It ends with the note that "Infiltration induced demographic changes are a grim reality in Assam" (*The Assam Tribune,* 2012, p.6). Two years later, in 2014, while discussing the violence, the newspaper editorial discusses the porous border and demographic change as being key to the problems of the region (*The Assam Tribune*, 2014, p.6).

The structural and systemic violence perpetrated through border patrolling or policing is not a cause of concern for *AT*. The border is where the question of rights splits into two: rights as a citizen and rights as a human being, and then mobility becomes the most suspicious activity taken up by any individual. This is where "mobility is violently restricted through laws that prioritize citizens' rights over human rights, walls that funnel migrants to dangerous crossing points, and a border security infrastructure that results in thousands of deaths every year. The direct and structural violence of borders forecloses the opportunity for many people to move" (Jones, 2016, p.163).

Editorials and news reports in the 1990s consistently called for an even tougher border. A 15th November, 1993, editorial, for example, suggested:

> We feel that the immediate and most urgent task before us is the sealing of the border by human barricade as suggested by a noted economist from Assam…or by erecting barbed fencing, etc. The border with Bangladesh is still open and the influx of Bangladeshis is continuing unabated. (*The Assam Tribune*, 1993, p.4, 15Nov)

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finalized thus causing several problems. The issue of an enclave between India and Bangladesh was resolved only in August, 2015. For more than six decades after partition the demarcation could not happen. One territory of a sovereign nation was found in another, showing the complexity of borders in the region and the inefficiency or unwillingness of the state to resolve the issue. Shewly (2016) notes that "By the time of the exchange, there were an estimated 53,000 enclave residents in total, about 38,000 Indians in Bangladesh and 15,000 Bangladeshis in India. Over time, each country occasionally demanded full access to its enclaves on the other's territory, but was unwilling to allow reciprocal access in turn." After the deal between both countries they allowed the people to choose their country of citizenship.

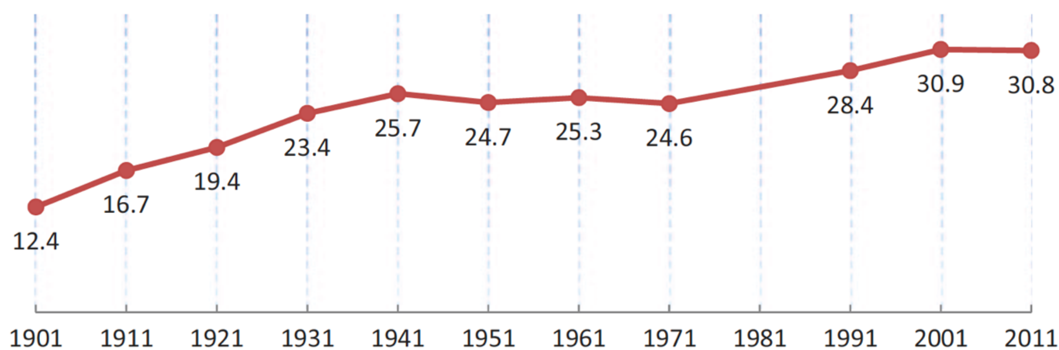
Everyday news reporting about border breaching and uncontrolled infiltration lacks objectivity and journalistic investigation. The newspaper largely relies on anonymous sources to discuss the border issue, but it is quite consistent in advocating a tougher border. It not only suggests that it should be barricaded by barbed wire, but also, where possible, through human barricades. People (or legitimate citizens), acting both as border and border patrol, are frequently discussed. The newspaper's position is clear regarding migration, as it repeatedly demands or discusses the need for tougher action against those who are undocumented citizens. Jones argues that most of the theory related to migration and borders focuses on the practice of the state and not on the role of boundaries: "Walls, borders, maps, properties, identity documents, and enclosure laws are technologies of governance that are fundamentally about controlling and excluding" (Jones, 2016, p.65).

The newspaper, while reporting on violence and migration, also draws an ethnic boundary through mediated communication. By constantly identifying the other, it draws the border of distinction to delineate the infiltrating other from the native self. Roberto Esposito (2013) talks about the emergence of 'immunity' in opposition to 'community' in a modern political world. For him, *communitas* is affirmative, while *immunitas* is negative, despite being derived from the same term *munus.* Immunity, for Esposito, implies the exemption from the law of caring for the other. The idea to be protected has been central to all society but, at the end of the modern period, Esposito argues that this "need become the linchpin around which both the real and imaginary practices of an entire civilization have been constructed" (Esposito, 2013, p.59). In debates on migration and protecting one's society from it, the idea of immunity seems to be at work. The immunity question becomes central, as "everywhere we look, new walls, new blockades, and new dividing lines are erected against something that threatens, or at least seems to, our biological, social, and environmental identity" (Esposito, 2013, p.59). Looking into the news reports and opinions, or the conceptual landscape of the *AT,* we can see how the fear of contamination is at work and a great urgency exists to be protected from it. The newspaper's question of borders not only demands the fencing of the physical area across two nations, but it also asks for a tougher imaginary border which cannot be infiltrated. Central to the newspaper's question of migration is the infiltration of Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh, and the demographic change caused, not only by the infiltrators but by the population growth of those who have been there for some time. Limiting their numbers, fencing their growth and

containing them are also positions which the newspaper pushes forward. Only by controlling the growth of infiltrators can the society (or *immunitas*) be protected.

The growing number of Muslim immigrants is the subject which repeats itself and, with it, the fear of demographic change repeats itself. The demographic change caused by immigrants and 'high fertility' among Muslims are the two factors that are seen to be responsible for the violent situation in BTAD, along with the government's incapacity to address these problems. The editorial 'Influx: myth and reality' discusses the high birth rate of Muslim immigrants, widespread poverty and illiteracy, and urges the government to popularize birth control among immigrant Muslims. Similarly, the editorial 'Mumbai violence' talks about the growing immigrant Muslim population having serious implications for violence and unrest. The newspaper also carried news items referring to the Chief Minister, stating that birth control needs to be popularized and that illiteracy is the reason for the growing Muslim population. In 2015, the government proposed a two-child policy (not enacted as of now) to control the population among Muslims. The proposal is the debarring of anyone with more than two children from being elected as head of a village council or of any local body, and not being entitled to any government job: a policy which might further marginalize a community which is already extremely marginalised.

Figure 4.2: Variation in the percentage of the Muslim population in Assam, 1901-2001. No census was conducted in 1981.



Source: Murshid 2016

The narrative of migration also carries the conflict-ridden history of the region. The "immigrant" question is mired with the question of the border and is also entangled with the violent history of the partition of India. The migration question is also a result of the relative

success and failure of economies since partition, forcing people to migrate. The violence and displacement are also a manifestation of economic insecurity, since SAARC countries do not allow free movement in the region, unlike ASEAN[16], migrants looking for livelihood become a security threat. Meanwhile, the other context is undermined in the newspaper and the history of religious conflict in South Asia determines the contextualization of the immigrant debate. In this context, the immigrant is produced and linked with other characterizations which produce certain meanings of the term. One opinion, in the newspaper, talks about rising immigration and, Bezboruah highlights different categories of immigrants having different objectives for migration and argues about the category of "Muslim infiltrators", who are:

> …the land hungry hordes, silent insidious invaders from the neighbouring country. They are not refugees. They find easy sanctuary in the districts of Assam already infiltrated in earlier decades by their compatriots... Islamic fundamentalism is a resurgent cascading force. It gathers momentum and mass support as it progresses… Today the population pattern of Assam is such that it will require only a small effort on the part of Bangladesh to initiate demand for self-determination for large tracts of Assam… Large scale demographic changes in a border state like Assam will nourish political ambition in neighbouring Bangladesh. (Bezboruah 1993, p.4, 6Oct).

Another characterization, in an opinion piece, suggests:

> For Assam it is Muslim immigrants – peasants, wage earners and petty traders posing a host of socio- political problems to the demographic pattern of Assam … to convert Assam into a Muslim majority area by pushing hordes of Muslim land grabbers to this region. (Kakati, 1994, p.4, 23Aug).

He blames anti-Indian leaders who are trying to push the Bangladeshi population into India, as migrants, to take over India. In other news, *AT* reports that "16,334 fresh Bangladeshis including 908 re-infiltrants and fresh infiltrants have been deported. Besides, 68,189 Nepali nationals have been deported", making a clear distinction between Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants. This difference needs a historical understanding, as the Nepalese have historically been allowed to visit and work in India without a visa (and vice versa), even after the

[16] SAARC stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. It includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Except for Nepal, citizens of all the other countries need a Visa to enter India, which is very tedious and often draconian (especially for a Pakistani citizen and vice versa) to obtain., while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has ten member countries whose citizens can travel without a visa. Countries of South Asia suffer from "cartographic anxiety" and some call them "fearful states".

independence of India. However, under a 'Restricted Area Permit' of 1976 they were not allowed to work in Assam without permission. The Nepalese, despite being living in the area since colonial times, were also targeted as foreigners by the Assamese bourgeois press (Hussain, 1993) but, in Hussain's class analysis of the distinction between a Bangladeshi and a Nepalese, a Nepalese migrant was not seen to be a threat to the dominant middle class of Assam, despite the anti-foreigner movement seeing them as outsiders (Hussain, 1993). This is where the word 'infiltrator' becomes an exclusive term for a 'Bangladeshi' in the news usage by *AT*. Infiltration is quite often linked to the religious fundamentalism of Muslims and the stereotypical images of a polygamous Muslim man. Editorial page opinions regularly make logical connections between infiltration and radicalism. In an opinion published in November, 1993, the writer insists that:

> … the unholy alliance between the petro-dollar and the fundamentalists freely operating in Assam has since assumed a serious proportion, particularly in view of the fact that such fundamentalism, expansionism has, of late, become a world-wide phenomenon … the process of detection and deportation must be continued, however, slow a process may be… the twelve crores of Bangladeshi people will multiply into more than twenty crores by 2001" [talking about Bangladeshis that might migrate to India] " … the demographic pattern of the entire eastern sector of the country will per force undergo a sea-change let alone Assam … The practice of polygamy prevalent among these infiltrators must be curbed. With this end in view alone, a uniform civil code must be introduced ...the bullet being ineffective against the ballot, these infiltrators are about to accomplish the conquest of a part of our country which Jinnah had failed to do" (Bhattacharya, 1993, p.4, 16Nov).

Opinion columns like these not only attempt to characterize an immigrant but also attempt to define a Muslim and the threat the 'other' poses to the nation in general, and to the region in particular. The article is talking about threats from the Muslims of Bangladesh, who can network globally to bring a drastic change in India. It is not only Assam, but the entire country which is at risk from these migrants, and hence they should be stopped with all necessary force. The article does not hide its cynicism towards the Muslim (Bengali speaking or Bangladeshi). It clearly invokes the history of the partition of India and tends to suggest explicitly that what Jinnah[17] failed to achieve, these infiltrators can achieve by turning the country into Pakistan or breaking it once again. This rhetoric is very much a part of a Hindu

[17] Founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who proposed the idea of the two nation theory and who fought for a separate Muslim state of Pakistan as a leader of the Muslim League

right-wing politics of fear as it constantly suggests that "Muslims' loyalty is elsewhere, namely Pakistan and the Arab world. (Anand, 2011, p.40).

The politics of fear about migrants in the newspaper corresponds with the politics of fear of the Hindu-Right wing in India, whose essential argument lies in the demographic threat caused by religious minorities. Demography has been linked to communal violence (Bhagat, 2018) and Hindu nationalists have effectively used the topic of Muslim population growth for its politics of fear and hate. (Devotta, 2002) As has been noted:

> …population growth rates, when desegregated along religious lines, provide fodder for religious extremists, who may use the figures to fan communalism. This, however, is to be expected in polyethnic societies where each group's growth rate is scrutinised for how it may affect politics. (Devotta, 2002, p.54)

The politics of fear was amplified in 2012 as the violence became nationalized, and in 2014 with the emergence of a right-wing narrative. NRC, influx, Assam Accord, demographic change remain the keywords used to make meaning of the context and identity of an immigrant in the region. Everyday stories about the various problems of the state are used as an opportunity to discuss migration and the urgent nature of this phenomenon. The population growth causes discomfort among each ethnic group and, as Esposito underlines,

> … the more ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups come into contact with each other, invading each other's respective spaces, the more we find a movement toward a kind of exclusive attachment to one's own nation, party, or ethnic identity – in other words, toward a closing- off of identity. (Esposito, 2013, p.132).

Rodney Benson talks about the humanitarian frame in reporting immigration news, whose discursive indicator, he notes is that "immigrants are victims of unjust government policies (violations human rights, fair legal process) or business practices; they suffer from poverty , lack of access to health care, dangers related to border crossing, etc., or they have difficulties in adapting to their host society" (Benson, 2013, p.18), in contrast to this frame, the newspaper positions the immigrant as one causing the strain on the resources of the region, and the very reason for that violence.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the coverage of four events of violence and the underlying social and political issues relating to *The Assam Tribune*. The research does not explore the impact of this framing of violence on the viewership of the newspaper, but we can perhaps reason that it shaped public opinion about both the Bodos and 'immigrants'. The Assamese middle class consuming the English press might see their identity being constituted through this discourse about the 'native' and the 'foreigner'. Since the immigrant and the topic of the foreigner dominate the reporting and interpretation of events of violence, the reader of the newspaper may find the immigration to be an imminent threat, not just to the territory but to their native Assamese identity.

In this chapter, we have explored the concept of the 'immigrant' and the politics of migration in the newspaper, *The Assam Tribune*. The chapter has attempted to analyse how an event of violence and the news around it (and the failures of reporting to engage in the circumstances of the region more fully), come to define the meaning of a key term. I have demonstrated how a particular system of name-calling runs through the newspaper that lends itself to formulating the meaning of an alien or infiltrator. Here, the 'immigrant' is not just a simple signifier, but is a product of a very complicated history and context. The newspaper, while discussing violence and migration, produces a fear of migrants which is located in the history of the partition of India. This politics of fear of the migrant is very consistent with the Hindu right-wing politics of the fear of Muslims in India. The immigrant debate is also complicated in the presence of the competing ambitions of different identities which the newspaper tends to overlook. The key semantic of 'immigrant' is tied to other terms, producing a specific meaning which is also tied to the very context in which meaning is played out. Overall, the coverage and discussion in the newspaper remains very anti-immigrant, and the idea of the immigrant is entangled not only with the category of Bangladeshi, but with the category of Muslim.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bare Moment: The Historical Victimization Narrative of the 'Muslim Minority'

Introduction

This chapter examines the coverage of violent events in two Urdu newspapers – *Azad Hind* and *Akhbar e Mashriq,* which are published in Kolkata. It explores two intertwined aspects of Urdu newspaper coverage, of violence, in the Kokrajhar region of Assam. Firstly, the self-perpetuation of victimized Muslim identity by those who have symbolic power in the Muslim community in the press. It is a feature of Urdu language reporting in these papers that the events of violence experienced by the community are always explained within the pre-existing framework of the 'Muslim victim'. These stories are constructed without any journalistic investigation or editorial responsibility or any obligation to be objective. They constitute a 'bare moment', in which any particular event is fitted into the pre-existing narrative of victimization. This chapter aims to problematize the reporting of violence in the Urdu press by historically locating it in the conflict-ridden history of South Asia.

In reporting the violence in Assam, the Urdu newspapers take a very contrasting position to that of the English language press. Coverage in the Urdu press has a different trajectory, which originates from a different understanding of history. While the English press, in general, creates a discourse of the alien and alienation by making the Bengali Muslim, in Assam, a dangerous other, violence, in *The Assam Tribune* newspaper, is discussed more as a regional issue. On the other hand, the Urdu press, contextualizes violence in national and international frameworks. The Urdu press alters the discourse of otherness that is produced by the English press.

The alterity of the Urdu press produces a different identity for victims of violence, locating it in a different history and politics. It is argued that "'alterity' itself unfolds as a

projection screen for imaginations, fantasies, wishes, national anxieties and self-exaggerations — visions of the unknown, as well as projections onto the alienized, exoticized, or stereotyped Other" (Medick, 2017). In this very sense, the Urdu press, as opposed to the English one, unfolds the anxiety of those subjects who are seen as outsiders, and as the sole reason for violence in the case of Assam. The alterity lies in the interruption of the dominant discourse which routinely constructs the other, the foreign, and the alien.

It is not an 'alternative' position (or semantic) which Urdu newspapers produce every day in reporting violence, but it is a parallel position, a parallel history and a parallel frame, one which *The Assam Tribune* does not consider or use. Hence, there are two histories operating over the same set of events, giving rise to discourses of 'alien' and 'alterity'.

The role played by different language media in constituting their own public is worth noting. In the case of Urdu, the Urdu newspapers constitute an Urdu public sphere, the identity of which is also hopelessly linked with Indian Muslims. During independence/partition, the idea of Pakistan, or the future of the 'Muslim minority', was fiercely debated amongst the Urdu newspapers of Undivided India. Advocates for the creation of Pakistan used the Urdu press for their own ends and were countered by other 'Muslim nationalists' in different newspapers (Dhulipala, 2015). As elsewhere in India, the Urdu language became a site for defining or determining the meaning of the Indian Muslim. Subsequent violent episodes were discussed differently in the Assamese local press, if compared to the national media. The larger identity category, of a Muslim, overshadows the other subtleties and complexities of the region in the Urdu language dailies. Heidegger (1982) theorizes about the 'essencing' ability of language, in that the true essence of a thing is in the language. Words or language shape our thinking, and perhaps make thinking possible. For Zizek (2009), a fundamental violence is actually inscribed in this very essentializing ability, but thinking necessitates words or language. Zizek sees an unconditional violence in this very non-violent medium of communication. There is no doubt that language can simplify things and reduce them into a single feature, as depicted by Zizek, drawing on Hegel, however, at the same time, language alone has the capacity to civilize and humanize. It alone can heal and hold the complexity, which no other thing can. Nonetheless, language is crucial in articulating any identity and in communicating it. The essence of something may easily be preserved and communicated in different languages, but differently. This is particularly true about the idea of the (Indian) 'Muslim' or 'minority' in relation to the Urdu language. Urdu language newspapers, under discussion here, give a certain

essence to the meaning of these events of violence, and they subsequently assign a particular meaning to the identity of a 'victimized minority'.

The History of the Urdu Press in Colonial and Post-Colonial India

The history of the Urdu press is entwined with the politics of identity formation and the rise of the public sphere in colonial Northern India. This multifaceted history has been the subject of scholarly research in both the Urdu and English languages[18]. Scholarship, on the Urdu press and in the Urdu language, no matter how comprehensive, often misses its crucial link between discourses of identity formation and public sphere politics. However, this crucial connection has been dealt with by several works of scholarship in the English language[19].

With the introduction of the press, a new world was introduced to the public life of the nineteenth century. This would prove vital in shaping the future of the country and the community. The divide between Hindi and Urdu also became more evident with the advancement of the press in the region, and shaped public discourse about language politics and communitarian identity formation. In this regard, Ayesha Jalal, in her seminal work *Self and Sovereignty,* unpacks the mutually constitutive relationship between the role of the press and identity formation. She argues that religion became a common social denominator which was mobilized in the service of the collective discourses of the community (Jalal, 2000, p.41). The public sphere was primarily comprised of newspapers, and it became the site where these collective discourses were debated by the self-fashioned public intellectuals of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Jalal highlights that, "It was the dialectic between colonialism and the self-perceptions of Indians seeking to project their religious identity for political purposes through print technology which injected a potent layer of ideological differentiations into subcontinental psyches" (Jalal, 2000, p.46). The rise of the Urdu press in Northern India is also

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[18] For scholarship on the history of the Urdu press, please see: Imdad Sabri, *Tareekh e Sahafat e Urdu* (Delhi:Jamal Press,1983); Nadir Ali Khan, *Hindustani Press* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1990); Masoom Muradabadi, *Urdu Sahafat aur Jang e azadi 1857* (New Delhi: Khabardar Publications, 2008); Dr.Shearullah Khan Wajeehi, *Uneesveen sadi ke urdu Akhbarat* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2005); Anwar Ali Dehlavi,.ed.,*Urdu Sahafat* (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 2013); Muhammad Siddiqi, *Hindustani Akhbar Navisi: Kampani ke ahad mein*(Karachi: Indus, 1980); Muhammad Siddiqi, *Suba e Shimali o Maghrib ke Akhbarat o Matbooat (1848-1853)* (Aligarh: Anjuman e Taraqqi Urdu, 1962); Irteza Karim,.ed.*Urdu Sahafat ke do so saal* (New Delhi: National Council for the promotion of the Urdu language, 2017)

[19] See: Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008); For the pre-colonial link of Urdu newspapers with Persian *Akhabarat* see: *Information and the Public Sphere: Persian Newsletters from Mughal Delhi* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009)

concomitant with the rise of the “middle class” of colonial Northern India. This process has been studied by scholars like Sanjay Joshi, who have seen how, in colonial Northern India especially, respectability was redefined in terms of cultural capital, and how a group of men drawn from “service communities” could act as the new standard bearers of social and religious conduct which, in turn, empowered them *vis à vis* the lower classes and the traditional elites (Joshi, 2001).

Warsi (2003) argues that the history of the Urdu press can be divided into three stages: The first stage lasted between 1822- 1900 and was dominated by a reformist tone, newspapers like *Jam e Jahan Numa, Delhi Urdu Akhbar or Sadiq ul Akhbar* emerged and played a key role, during this period; The second stage took place between 1901 to 1947 in which Urdu newspapers actively engaged in the anti-colonial struggle. The press at that time was poorly printed and poorly organized, partly due to different colonial laws curbing the freedom of expression (against the rulers) and partly from the lack of resources as, pioneers of the time, Hasrat Mohani and Abul kalam Azad, were carrying the journalistic burden alone; The third phase, according to Warsi, started after the independence of India, in 1947, and continues today. This phase brought about the suffering of the Urdu press, since non-Muslim readers switched from Urdu to Hindi papers, owing to the legacy of partition. For Warsi, Urdu newspapers today are of two kinds: one advocating Islamic thought, and the other offering a secular tone.

Since Urdu Journalism started in Kolkata (Bengal), it remained an important centre for Urdu newspapers and journalism. Shanti Ranjan Bhattacharya (2003) suggests that the history of Urdu journalism in Bengal must be divided into two eras: One is the era of revolution, which started with the journalism of Abul Kalam Azad in 1912, and saw ferocious battles against colonial administration. New newspapers kept surfacing and changing their names, due to colonial laws which banned them, and this motivated people to fight for the struggle of the country; The second era, from 1940 to 1948, was an ‘era of chaos’, a time when Bengal was hit by the Second World War, causing regional chaos and the Bengal famine, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths. This era was also an era of intense communal violence, due to the partition of India. This period, further, saw a crisis in regard to paper for newspapers, making it extremely tough to carry on reporting in such conditions.

Despite the challenges, the Urdu press played a key role, in pre-independence India, in creating an 'Urdu public', and it helped to forge a sense of *'Qaum'* and community. It became a space in which to contest different versions of nationalisms and to anchor certain ideologies of the nation. For David Gilmartin (1991), it is critical to understand the commercial Urdu press in order to have any understanding "of an emerging Muslim 'public' that transcended the particularistic structure of the colonial state"(Gilmartin, 1991, p.130). As explained above, the Urdu press produced idioms of community, not merely to control the community and direct them, but also to draw them to these newspapers. There is not only a reformist logic, but a commercial logic that is inherently present in the Urdu newspapers of that time. Gilmartin notes that

> …the rhetoric of 'community' was increasingly deployed in the press not primarily in the interest of education or rational self-control of the individual, but in the interest of drawing as many readers as possible into the public discourse on which their publications, and the dissemination of their own ideas, depended" (Gilmartin, 1991, p.130).

Gilmartin sees a commercial logic in the press which went beyond the political, and this commercial logic enables a reader or a citizen to make a choice. The autonomy of the individual was operating from the perspective of commercial logic, as he highlights that

> … central to the 'imagined community' of the new press was not a community bounded by a discourse of rational control over individuals, but a new realm of public community rooted in a discourse of individual autonomy. (Gilmartin, 1991, p.130).

The policy of the British administration, to have a separate electorate for both Hindus and Muslims and to define through them a 'fixed and controlled space', also empowered urban leaders to create a new kind of 'public',

> … defined at the intersection of an emerging commercial press, with its appeals to symbols as a focus for Muslim community identity, and an appeal to popular action (including voting) as an expression simultaneously of community and individual autonomy. (Gilmartin, 1991, p.136).

This became particularly vital in the conceptualizing of 'Muslim nationalism' in British India. It was, for Gilmartin, a public in a Habermasian sense, which was not encapsulated by the State. He underlines that there was less of an immediate benefit to this but, in the long term, the emergence of this 'public' played a key role in shaping the demand for Pakistan. A new

nation was imagined through this new public, which "'imagined' both in the world and in the individual heart" (Gilmartin, 1991, p.137). This new imagination shaped Muslim identity and politics for the long term, giving them the sense of a transcendental community whose location was in India, but that belonged to the horizon of the entire Muslim world. Ansari rightly notes that it was:

> … the remarkable growth of the Urdu vernacular press that brought Indian Muslims into contact as never before with the wider Muslim world. There developed an increasing awareness of how the expansion of European power was increasingly subjecting Muslims to Christian rule. (Ansari, 1986, p.510).

The emergence of Muslim '*Qawm*', an important term in the definition of the Muslim community, which we will look at in more detail later, owes itself to the emergence of the Urdu press. The term, however, is also associated with the emergence of a certain Muslim elite which critically shaped the identity of the community, and that was captured insightfully by Ayesha Jalal's work *Self and Sovereignty,* which notes that:

> …examining the role of the vernacular press and poetry in the forging of communitarian identity shows how epistemological certainties can lead to the erasure of distinctions between an elite discourse and the complex, and often ambiguous, existential dynamics at the social base. (Jalal, 2000, p.86).

The category of Muslim, as an epistemological category, that is produced by the Urdu press, has undermined all the complexity and heterogeneity of the community. In forging the identity of the Muslim, in twentieth century India, the vernacular press exploited the idea of nationalism and communalism. As Jalal notes, the "natural site of competing discourses on the language of communitarian identity" (Jalal, 2000, p.124) was print media, and the attempt was made by different vernacular newspapers through undermining all contradictions, to "invent a language of identity for religious communities." (ibid).

Urdu-Hindi Press

The growth of the Urdu and Hindi presses bear significance for the modern politics of India and the shaping of identities. In his work, *Press, Politics and Society*, Kirti Narain demonstrates the role that the Hindi and Urdu presses played during the period 1885 to 1914. His historical work highlights the oppositional role that was played by the non- English press in the region in this period through standing against various laws that were passed to curb or

censor them, like the famous ‘Gagging Act’ or Vernacular Press Act of Lytton in 1878. His work underlines the impact of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s reformist writing and journalistic venture on the development of the Urdu press, post 1857, in Northern India. He also notes that “Urdu journalists objected to the growing Hindi journalism” (Narain, 1998, p.22). Chandrika Kaul notes that the colonial administration also published newspapers in Urdu and Hindi for its ‘native’ Indian employees, like the *Akhbar -i-Jung*, a weekly Urdu paper for the ‘native’ “troops of Indian expeditionary forces on the subcontinent” (Kaul, 2003, p.127).

So, the emergence of the Urdu press, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and its instrumental role in shaping identities and constituting the public sphere, cannot be accounted for in isolation . The rise of the Hindi press and the antagonism it felt towards Urdu was born out of the Hindi or Nagri script, which emerged as a counterpart to Urdu in claiming the Hindustani language. Jalal notes that,

> What gave extra flight to resentments against Urdu was the sense of anticipation with which a segment of educated Hindus looked upon the new political dispensation. Now that Muslim colonialism was a thing of the past, they could revitalize Sanskrit, refine Hindi and reassert their distinctive religious identity. (Jalal, 2000, p.126).

The Urdu-Hindi divide, despite claims that they share a common origin, remained an important and determining aspect of Hindu-Muslim politics in colonial India. As Akshaya Mukul (2015) notes, in his work on the Gita Press which not only played a key role in popularizing the Hindu world view, but also in shaping a Hindu Idea. The founder of the press, Hanuman Prasad Poddar, asserted that “The effort is to turn Hindi into Urdu, Urdu into Persian so that Hindi is killed forever. This should not be allowed to happen” (Mukul, 2015, p.283). He notes the staunch resistance to Urdu by the new, emerging Hindu educated class, and its insistence on making Hindi a language for Hindus. Finding a language for a distinct community or religious group communalized the language and created the politics of the Hindi-Urdu divide.

Urdu and the Muslim Minority

The Independence of India, and its partition, did not make the situation better, as the question of language was already entangled with the question of religious identity. A considerable amount of scholarship shows scepticism towards the simplistic assumption of

Urdu as the language of Muslims, and explores the common genealogy of Urdu and Hindi[20], but not all agree. Omar Khalidi (1986) argues that there is an inextricable link between Urdu and Muslims in modern India. He sees it as a common language which ensured the solidification of Muslim identity and the strengthening of unity amongst them. For him, "Preventing Urdu speakers from learning the *lingua franca* of Muslims" is, then, a strategy to divide Indian Muslims into different linguistic groups and to break its 'all-India' personality, and thus the solution begins with ensuring that every Muslim child learns Urdu. Syed Shahabuddin puts forth a similar view about Urdu and Muslim identity, so intertwined (especially in North India) that, "it is impossible to separate them" (Shahabuddin, 2006, p.169). Linking Urdu with Muslims has been a key political aspect of the Muslim *Ashraf* and has been criticized by *Pasmanda* Politics. The *Pasmanda* criticism holds that this linking is detrimental to Urdu and is an instrument of *Ashraf* Politics in India[21]. (Alam, 2009).

So, this view of the 'inextricable link' is not uncontested, as it is largely shared by *Ashraf* Muslims and has also been seen as the main propeller of *Ashraf* Politics in Northern India, even before partition. Rafiuddin Ahmed (1988) has shown how the Ashraf, in Bengal, rejected Bengali as a Hindu language, not proper for Muslims, he reflects on the Bengali-Urdu divide of the early 20th century, which shapes the character of Muslim politics in the region. The constitution of 'community', by the *Ashraf,* whose *lingua franca* was Urdu, included those who were part of the Bengali 'speech community' and have not acquired enough knowledge of the language to be included in that community (Ahmed, 1988). A similar argument has been put forward by Papia Sengupta in his work, *Language as Identity in Colonial India,* which highlights the *Ashraf's* (who migrated from the Western region of India to Bengal) attitude to the local Muslims of Bengal as being very discriminatory. The *Ashraf* class spoke Persian or Urdu, and did not consider Bengali Muslims to be their equal (Sengupta, 2018, p.19).

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[20] Please see: Alok Rai and Shahid Amin, *A debate between Alok Rai and Shahid Amin regarding Hindi* (The Annual of Urdu Studies, 2005)

[21] *Pasmanda* is a term used by the Muslim lower caste to define themselves, and their politics has been critical of the *Ashraf* class of Indian Muslim. For more on *Pasmanda's* critique of *Ashraf* politics and the assertion of the Urdu language as a question of the Muslim minority, see Arshad Alam, *Challenging the Ashrafs: The Politics of Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz* (Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 2009)

The dilemma and tension of 'minoritization' goes deep into history and society and so does the reciprocal relation between 'Urdu' and 'Muslims' in India[22]. The condition that creates a minority lies in its victimization and oppression (Tripathy and Padmanabhan, 2014). The ontological being solidified by 'repeated acts of minority performance' (Tripathy and Padmanabhan, 2014) can be traced back to the narrative of 'minoritisation', which speaks of its own oppression. Arguably, the question of a 'Muslim Minority' in India is tied up with the question of Urdu, and the marginalization of Urdu is an indicator of the minoritisation of Indian Muslims. At the same time, the Urdu language was also used as a tool by Ashraf[23] leaders for minority politics. As most of the mainstream Urdu newspapers were run by this class, they exercised power over shaping opinion and constructing the identity of Muslims. In this way, Sikand notes, the Muslim upper caste, "like their Hindu counterparts, they control Muslim opinion, head most Muslim religious and community organisations, and thus claim to be natural leaders of the community as a whole" (Sikand, 2004, p.13).

The two Urdu newspapers' coverage of violence in the Bodoland region of Assam and of the conflict between the Bodos and Bengali Muslims there, produces the narrative of a "real minority". The violence is the event which brings the narrative of victimization as a single definer of Muslim identity in India. The newspapers do not acknowledge the ambivalence of Muslim identity, nor articulate what defines these subjects and the violence, apart from their 'minority' statuses. It objectifies the subjects to represent the minority in an unequivocal fashion as a product of injustice that is cast in hopelessness.

Reporting Violence in the Bodoland Region of Assam

The coverage of violence in 1993 is almost negligible; there are few news reports in *Azad Hind* and *Akhbar e Mashriq* on the subject. News of violence in both Urdu newspapers are translated from the news agency PTI (Press Trust of India Ltd.). The most extensive discussion of violence was during 2012, as that event spiralled into a national Event and it coincided with the Rohingya crisis in Burma. Since *Azad Hind*'s 2012 files could not be found,

22 During my schooldays, for instance, Muslims were allowed to have a break for Friday prayers, in every class a teacher, before the prayer time, would announce 'Urdu students can take a leave' which effectively meant that Muslims could go for prayer.

23 Ashraf is referred to as the Muslim elite belonging to the upper castes of Muslims in India and holding key community positions as political leaders, religious scholars, community leaders, etc. The medieval Ashraf scholars defined themselves as those from a noble/respected class or background or lineage

we discuss 2012 in light of the *Akhbar e Mashriq* coverage of the Event. During the violence in October, 1993, little news space was given to the coverage, and *Azad Hind* called it 'Racial violence' ("*Nasali Fasad"* in Urdu), the most likely translation of ethnic violence from the news agency. There is no editorial interpretation of the events of violence.

However, in 1994, more coverage of the topic may be found in both newspapers. The editorial in *Azad Hind* on 23rd July, 1994, interpreting the event of violence says

> *Assam mein chahe jis qism ki tehreek aur shorish uthe aakhir uska rukh musalman ki taraf mud jata hai. Khoonkhar darindon ko khoon chahyie aur jab koi unhen koi doosra shikar aasani se nahin milta to kamzor aur laachar musalmanon par bhooke bhedyon ki tarah toot padte hain.*
>
> Whatever movement and crisis erupts in Assam, eventually, they are directed against Muslims. Blood thirsty monsters need blood and when they can't find anyone else then weak and helpless Muslims are attacked by them like a pack of hungry wolves] (*Azad Hind*, 1994, p.3, 23Jul).

Akhbar e Mashriq also reported and opined about the events of violence in October, 1994, and in one editorial, entitled '*Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims in Barpeta',* it argues that "so much hatred against Muslims has been propagated in the region that every wall and door is bloodthirsty… and since the government of Assam itself hates and calls them Bangladeshi, then no wonder there is a genocide" (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 1994, p.4, 25Jul)

Both Urdu newspapers use the words '*Muslim'* and *'Minority'* interchangeably'*,* Muslims are framed as a helpless minority who have no agency and who survive on the memory of violence and oppression. The Bodos are largely represented as murderous and as being instrumentalized by Hindu right-wing forces to eliminate Muslims.

In 2012, the episode of violence in Assam was internationalized by the newspaper, as it coincided with the ethnic violence against Rohingya Muslims in the Arakan region of Burma. *Akhbar e Mashriq* abundantly elaborated on the plight of these communities, drawing a parallel between them. The conjecture is that their miserable life is essentially due to their identity as Muslims. In both cases, the hope of help from the State is minimal in the newspapers' interpretation of the situation.

An article by the Magazine Desk of the newspaper in the supplementary edition of *Akhbar e Mashriq* on 2nd September, entitled, *"Mass killing of 20,000 innocent Muslims in Burma"* starts off by talking about the dismal situation of Muslims in Palestine and Syria, then moves onto the state of the Rohingyas in Burma, and claims that between 3rd June and 12th June, 2012, 50,000 Muslims were killed by Buddhist terrorists. The contradiction in the headline and the first few lines of the article is obvious. It lacks objectivity and moves to the glorious history of the Muslim arrival in Burma during the time of Caliph Haroon Rasheed. The article concludes by comparing these stateless citizens of Burma with the Muslim citizens of India, it says:

> *Hindustan mein azadi ke baad se ab tak sainkdon muslim kush fasadat mein hazaron begunahon ki jaanen talf ho chuki hain. Lakhon lut put ke barbad ho chuke hain. Lekin aaj tak na mutassereen ki baaz aabad kaari ka koi mansooba banaya gya aur na qasoorwaron ko saza mili.*
>
> [In India, since independence, hundreds of anti-Muslim riots have taken place, in which thousands got killed and lakhs displaced, but no plan has been carried out to rehabilitate them or to punish the guilty]. (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 2012, p.5, 2Sep)

The article suggests that victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riot obtained justice, but Muslims cannot expect justice in this country [i.e., India] and have to live at the mercy of the majority community. It is not the unique suffering of the Assamese or the Indian Muslims that is focussed upon, but the universal suffering of Muslims in the world, as the world has turned against them. The victimization is perpetuated, not only in the local or regional sense, but in the international sense of seeking a kind of solidarity with persecuted Muslims, globally.

Another opinion writer draws similarities from around the globe of Muslim persecution. It starts with Palestine and goes on to Iraq and Afghanistan, then comes back to reflect on the Muslim situation in India, reading it through 'global Muslim history'. In a nostalgic tone it boasts and bemoans:

> *Jis hindustan mein babri masjid shaheed ki gaye, usi Hindustan par aath sao baras tak muslim hukmuranon ne hukumat ki hai..kabhi musakman is haisiat mein the ke europe,asia, aur afirca mein jo chahte the karte the, lekin aaj muslim qaom sari dunya mein qatl o gharatgiri aur har qism ke mazalim ka shikar hai"*
>
> [In this India where Babri Masjid was demolished, in this very India, Muslims once ruled for 800 years. Once Muslims were so powerful that they could do whatever they

> wanted in Europe, Asia and Africa, but today the Muslim nation is a target of all kinds of killing and injustice, it is a victim of all kinds of tyranny] (Agha, 2012, p.14, 2Aug)

Ummah Politics: From Local to Global

The framing of violence in the Kokrajhar region shifts from regional to national and then global. The reference to a glorious past, and a nostalgic overtone is characteristic of this newspaper. The only solace for the oppressed community is the memory of a wonderful past; the question of Muslim identity is tied to this idea. The international or trans-national outlook of Muslims makes them distinct as an *'Ummah'* or global nation. Their plight in India is not independent of their suffering in the Middle-East, or elsewhere. Editorials in *Akhbar e Mashriq* during this period of 2012, assert this point relentlessly. Beyond caste, class and ethnicity, the category of Muslim is monolithic, as it were, and their fate and misery are unique and universal. By connecting two different local issues, it tries to connect two out of joint, times and create a sense of a common time of the community it is imagining.

This is perhaps the most consistent feature of Urdu newspapers for a long time: Overwhelming coverage of international news, conflating it with the local situation and thereby rendering a sense of a unified global Muslim community. In 2012, while reporting the situation in Burma and the violence in the Bodoland region of Assam, the newspaper links the two events together and presents it as one, creating a strong sense of '*ummah'* and connectedness. In his work, *'The Politics of Self-Expression,'* Daeschel notes this feature, even in news coverage, in Urdu newspapers before partition. He highlights that "The Urdu media world of late colonial North India was segregated along religious lines. Muslim papers like *Inqilab* or *Zamindar* constructed their imagination of world space with the help of locations that did not feature as prominently in their Hindu equivalents", and the most unsurprising feature was the paramount importance given to the "events affecting Muslims worldwide" (Daeschel, 2006, p.135). He notes that the "Events affecting the Muslim *ummat* inside India were often reported with the same sense of closeness as Muslim affairs in other countries". Daeschel's work shows how the politics of self-expression created its conceptual space through the Urdu newspapers which shaped the politics of middle-class Muslims before and during colonial times. Linking the news from Burma and Assam together by a press which was situated in Kolkata, which has no correspondent in the actual field where the event was happening, creates a space where the world looks like a singular entity, with events connected to each other, giving a sense of a homogenous *ummah,* whose suffering is shared and connected. Daeschel notes that "this

juxtaposition of news on a single page establishes a certain form of temporal-spatial grid" and the "events in India and events in the world are all located on one and the same". The headline on 12th August in *Akhbar e Mashriq* proclaims: "*The Blood of Muslims in Mumbai boils over the Violence in Assam".* This, and many other headlines like it, bring 'Muslim', a heterogeneous and abstract category, together with different locations and delivers a sense of a coherent whole which stabilizes and essentializes the identity 'Muslim'.

It is worth noting that the two recurring terms invoked in these Urdu newspapers are '*Ummah'* and '*Qawm'.* These terms owe their meaning to the Quran and emergence of Islam and their usage was meant to create an 'imagined community' by the Muslims of South Asia during the colonial times. Faisal Devji sees the genealogy of this term in the emergence of the Muslim community as a "new kind of social category", which is "derived at least in part from the new forms of enumeration and classification put in place by the British in India" (Devji, 2015). The word 'Qawm' has been used in religious terms for a community, but its usage here in a very historical sense, is for a nation as well. The usage of 'Qawm' is meant to create a sense of a Muslim community, with no difference. Devji notes that the term was used and made intelligible by the Muslim Ashraf who tried "to overcome the ravages of colonialism by exploiting that space opened up by the destruction of the Mughal empire to emerge as a separate nation; a group which could only have meaning in terms of Islam" and hence this new Muslim nation, or *Qawm,* he notes, is "dominated by the shurafa as a unified, pan ethnic entity for the first time". The 'Qawm' was seen as being ethnically exclusive and distinct from the religious term 'ummah', which implies a Muslim community worldwide to which a Muslim feel associated. In Jalal's words, it is the "spiritual bond with the ummah or the worldwide community of Islam meshes with associations to family and the larger kinship group. A Muslim's identification with a non-territorial community of Islam, and the sense of belonging to a territorially located community means that space is both infinite and finite at the same time. It is this dialectic, inherent in their religiously informed cultural identity that has lent historical complexity and depth to the Muslims' relationship with the *watan* or homeland." (Jalal, 2000, p.10). The role of the Urdu press and Urdu language can hardly be overemphasized. Qasmi and Robb opine that,

> …the cultural shaping of the Muslim qaum owed much to figures like Iqbal who, through the powerful medium of Urdu and Persian poetry, helped enrich the concept of the Muslim Qaum with cultural and ideological content drawn from multiple intellectual traditions. (Qasmi & Robb, 2017, p.19).

In these newspapers' discussion of the Muslim minority, the idea of a *Qawm* and the Ummah, is always present. The Indian Muslim, or the victim minority, is an exclusive *Qawm* and part of the global *Ummah* as well. Minority, *Qawm*, and *Ummah* belong to one semantic field which determines the identity of the Indian Muslim. The 2014 general election in India, and the victory of the, right-wing, Hindu Nationalist Party, the BJP, has further deepened the fear within the 'minority' community or the '*Qawm*'. The coverage of violence in 2014 makes direct reference to Narendra Modi and the coming oppression of Muslims in titles like '*Assam: Anti-Muslim violence a new glance at Modism'* (*Azad Hind*, 2014, p.5) and '*Is anti-Muslim violence in Assam the beginning of the Modi mission'* (*Azad Hind*, 2014, p.5)

The fear of Majoritarian Nationalism

The violence in Kokrajhar, in 2014, took place during the national election. The coverage of violence in both newspapers is contextualized within the 'Modi Phenomenon', which is seen as a threat to the Indian Muslim. *Akhbar e Mashriq's* 4th May front page headline was *"In Assam: Mass Killing of Muslims, 33 Dead"* and *Azad Hind* on 4th May gave its front page, but not the main headline, to an article entitled: *"In Assam Once Again: Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims, Dozens Killed"*. On May 5th, it carried the news of violence as main headline with very emotive photos. An editorial in *Azad Hind* on 8th May, 2014, interpreting the event of violence suggests:

> *Musalmanon ke qatl e aam ke peeche ek munazaam sazish kaam kar rahi hai. Musalmanon par hamla narendra modi ki us taqreer ke baad hua jis mein narendra modi ne Bengali musalmanon ko warning dete hue kaha ke woh 16 may se qabl assam se nika jayen ... narendra modi ko poori ummeed hai ke mulk ke aaenda wazeer aazam wahi ho rahe hain aur 16 may ke baad hi unki taaj poshi jo jayegi. .. Narendra modi ke dil mein musalmanon ke khilaf zabardast nafrat bhara hua hai. Is ka andaza is se lagaya ja sakta hai ke unhone parlemani intekhab mein sewae char panch musalmanon ke kisi aur ko ticket nahi dia. ... Gujarat ke assembly intekhabat mein bhi modi ne kahin kisi musalman ko ticket nahi dia. Woh musalmanon ko Hindustan ka shahri nahi samajhte . narendra modi maujooda daur ka firaun hai jo ek allah ka naam lene walon ka khula dushman hai.*
>
> [There is a well-planned conspiracy behind the killing of Muslims. The attack on Muslims in Assam happened after that speech of Modi in which he warned Bengali Muslims and asked them to leave before the 16th May. Narendra Modi is certain about his victory and he will be crowned as the Prime Minister of India. His heart is filled with hatred for Muslims. One can figure this out through the fact that he only fielded five Muslim candidates in this national parliamentary election. Even in Gujarat, he

never gave a ticket to any Muslim in the assembly election. He does not consider Muslims citizens of India. He is a pharaoh of our time who is openly against the worshipper of one god] (*Azad Hind*, 2014, p.5, 8May)

Narendra Modi, the Hindu nationalists' choice for Prime Minister, is seen as a democratic threat and his brand of nationalism is characterized, by the Urdu press as non-democratic. It is also seen as a threat to the religious identity of Muslims in India. The violence is not only ideologically read but also theologically framed by using the Quranic (and Biblical) tale of Moses and Pharaoh. The Gujarat pogrom of 2002, in which thousands of Muslims were killed during the Chief Ministership of Narendra Modi, was one of the predominant reasons for the Muslim community to be frightened of his candidacy.

The fear of Hindu majoritarianism dominates the coverage (and opinion) of violence. The fear and insecurity are intrinsic elements of the language which communicates the events of violence and the future which grows under the shadow of violence. The reminder to the 'Urdu public' is of their doubtful citizenship and sheer worthlessness. The reference to Pharaoh, a Qur'anic tale about a tyrant and his subjects, is overtly religious, and constitutes the imagination of Muslims as essentially being a religious community. The religious references to explain every day politics suggest that the identity of a religious minority escapes the secular –political imagination and it can build or represent itself in the language of its religious experience.

"The worthless blood of Muslims", an article (without an author) in *Akhbar e Mashriq* on the same episode of violence in Assam, concludes in utter helplessness that:

Assam ho ya phir koi doosra ilaqa aakhir musalmanon ko hi kyun eejad e sitam ke liye apni tajurbagah tasawwur kia jata hai? ... kya yeh nihatte musalmanon ki takhleeq isi wajah se hue hai ke unko karb pahunchaya jaaye aur surat e haal is qadr alam angez ho ke koi dilasa dene wala bhi na ho.

[Whether it be Assam or some other region, why are Muslims, alone, considered the only subject to be tormented with new experiments of violence? Were innocent and unarmed Muslims created only to be tortured and the situation be reduced to such that there is no one to console us.] (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 2014, p.6, 9May)

The bare narrative of victimization and helplessness that is produced in these two Urdu newspapers unveils the complex history of the concept of a minority, entangled with the paradox of modernity in India. Aamir Mufti's argument needs a close reading to locate this

narrative in the fractured history of South Asia. He draws a parallel between the "German Jew" and the "Indian Muslim", seeing them not simply as social groups, but as ones carrying the "entire cultural and political problematics and trajectories" which emerge to represent the "torments of European and Indian modernity" (Mufti, 1995). The formation of the identity of a 'minority', of a Muslim or a Jewish one, is of a paradoxical nature. Just as a Jew in a liberal European state is both a Jew and not one, the Muslim in a liberal-secular universe has to be a Muslim and not to be one. The identity of the 'Muslim' within an Indian nation is very much constituted in its otherness; as Mufti says, "the representation burden that falls upon the figure of the Muslim is precisely that of being the other within the modern nation, the continually repeated, negative reminder of the national(ist) self's modernity" (Mufti, 1995, p.84). This is. then, not the problem of 'minority' to begin with, but of the 'majority' which defines Indian nationhood and "seeks to place "the Muslims" in the place of the national minority" (Mufti, 1995, p.85). The dilemma perpetuated by the project of nationhood incessantly asks Muslims to explain themselves, to declare their identity, what they are "out rightly": Muslim or Indian? For Mufti, the partition of India is, then, not just the culmination of a 'separatist impulse' but is a "necessary development for the discourse of nationhood itself" and turning the one–third Muslims left in the country into a "national minority" (p.86). Urdu newspapers, also a site of Ashraf symbolic power and a conceptual space, own this responsibility of speaking for this "national minority". By undermining the complex history of immigration and tribal struggle for self-determination in Assam, Urdu newspapers self-perpetuate the monolithic identity of a victimised Muslim minority in India. The absent voices of actual victims of violence and the dominant voices of those seizing the moment to speak for the entire minority, characterise the meaning-making project of the 'victimised minority', in these two newspapers. If history is not the product of 'ancestral memory' and it is made by educated people (Seaton, 1999), then by narrating and articulating the reasons for violence, the Muslim Ashraf take total control over the question of the identity and meaning of history. Faisal Devji refers to this as a "siege mentality", which has emerged in modern India due to the lack of autonomous Muslim politics, in the country. While reflecting on the coverage of the Gulf War in the Urdu press during the 1990s, Devji notes that,

> …when pro-Saddam feeling was high, a Delhi Urdu newspaper, *Nai Duniya* (New World), carried on its front page a portrait of the Iraqi president at prayer surrounded by daggers representing the allied forces - including other Muslim countries but excluding Pakistan. The lack of an autonomous Muslim politics leads to the second

aspect of their victimhood: widespread paranoia - or a "siege mentality," as the Indian press would have it. (Devji, 1992, p.15).

Fear of a majority, a majority which is not only arithmetically superior, but that dominates the power structure, defines the idea of a 'minority,' not only today, but even before partition when Jinnah was leading his cause for a country separate from India and only for the Muslims of India. Jinnah championed the cause of 'Minority Muslims' in British India which formed the core mission of Muslim League (Jaffrelot, 2015). The 'majority Muslim' and the 'minority Muslim' were both present at the time of colonial rule, and Jinnah tried to address both and later gave way to the 'majority Muslim' in the leadership. The ambivalence of Muslim identity did not evade Jinnah, but he turned the 'minority' question into an existential question in order to advance the aim of a new nation that was carved out of India.

The fear of numerically powerful Hindus constituted the idea of the 'Majority' which would not let the 'Minority', comprised primarily of Muslims, live in peace and equality. Jinnah, in his speeches and writings, transformed the 'fear' into the concepts of minority and the two nation theory[24]. One may underline the following points, as key definers of Jinnah's idea of minority, gathered from his speeches and writing (Ahmad, 1960) :

Security: The most prominent aspect defining the 'minority' is the presence of a threatening and hegemonizing majority. In the case of India, the Hindu majority represents a permanent danger to the Muslim minority.

Muslims as a distinct minority: Although numerically a minority, Muslims are a distinct minority, they are a nation and should not be reduced to a minority. This nation is distinct as an *Ummah or Millat*[25]

The Muslim minority as indivisible: the Muslim minority is one and caste, class and region disappear behind this unity. This elitist position denies privileges (such as the privilege to define 'minority') and trans-communitarian hierarchies (such as caste) within the minority and delegitimizes the diversity of thought and action (determines this minority and diversity of any kind or any other agency cannot be thought within this concept).

[24] According to two nation theory, Hindus and Muslim are two distinct nations which cannot live together. This theory serves as the basis for the movement of Pakistan

[25] Not bounded by territoriality but by religion, law and greater ambition. For more on this nation in the Indian context, please see Ayesha Jalal's book *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*

Bare Life or Bare Moment?

The Urdu newspaper, thus, is a site of becoming: becoming a minority, becoming a site of minoritisation. The original condition of the emergence has changed, but the 'minority' continues to live in fear. The very tension of the meaning of Indian Muslim (or of a national minority) transforms and reinvents (or repeats) itself in the Urdu newspapers. Despite the claim and promise of Urdu newspapers' editors and journalists that this is a language for all, a language of the nation, a language of national integration, and that the festival of Holi should be covered as much as Eid (Farooqi and Kazim, 2000), the reality remains contrary in the face of the lack of both resources and skills. The Urdu press thus remains a site of the "bare victim narrative" as it is the process that is unfolding the minoritisation.

The emergence of modern-day nationalism and the rise of the press are intricately linked. These are key features of Western modernity, which has generated the idea of an "imagined community", as shown by Anderson (1991), who argues that the homogenous empty time of the nation holds the 'simultaneity' of the past and the future in an instantaneous present. The simultaneous experience of reading newspapers helped to imagine individuals as a community, united and bonded in one single narrative through narrating the nation as 'homogenous'; what is excluded, and how the exclusion creates its own time in order to assert equal citizenship and to threaten the 'homogenous time' of the nation. The minority, which is frightened and insecure, is also imagined by the majority as frightening and threatening to security. Appadurai (2006) discusses the case of Muslims, in general (and Indian Muslims in particular), to demonstrate how this modern category of 'majority' and 'minority' produces the *'anxiety of incompleteness'*. The presence of a minority is a constant reminder for the majority that there lies a gap "between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos" (Appadurai, 2006, p.8) prompting the eruption of violence against minorities by the majority. The narrative of a global war on terror was effectively used by the BJP government at the beginning of this century to reduce "Muslims to a humiliated and ghettoized minority" (Appadurai, 2006, p.95).

The increased coverage of violence, in 2012 and 2014, in *Akhbar e Mashriq*[26], bears

[26] *Azad Hind's* archive for 2012 could not be found. The newspaper management was going through a turbulent time due to the Saradha chit fund scam. They were changing offices constantly and were publishing intermittently in that period and not keeping the records. The paper has now ceased to exist.

this very anxiety, which is multiplied by the post-9/11 narrative of global war on terror. The violence is not only placed in a global context, but it is also framed as anti-Muslim rather than as ethnic or communal. The headlines carried by the newspaper on their front pages were, *"Fresh wave of anti-Muslim violence in Assam"* (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 2012, p.1) or *"The Blood of Muslims of Mumbai boils over riots in Assam – 2 killed in violent protest"* (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 2012, p.1) or *"Nation-wide prayers for the Muslims of Assam and Burma*" (*Akhbar e Mashriq,* 2012, p.1), which does not report anything objective about the violence, but quotes from a Friday sermon about the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad in such situations and about how to defeat the enemies of Islam by following Islam more strictly. The press does not talk about the suffering of the Bodos, or their lives in relief camps, or the lives they have lost. It emphasizes, instead, that Muslims as the only sufferers in these cycles of violence. If the original question of modernity is "are you an Indian or a Muslim?" then, at the site of Urdu, at the determining site of minoritisation, one is 'outrightly' Muslim. The possibility to be 'something else' ceases firstly in experience and then in language, opening the space for a certain kind of communication in which existence lies unadorned.

The bare narrative of victimization that is produced in these newspapers is made possible by the events of violence and the very communication of this bare narrative is conceivable in the bare moment. In those bare moments, made possible by a rupture in normal time that is caused by violence, history, fact and fear, all collapse into one single narrative of victimization. In this bare moment, the life of Muslims in India is presented as a 'bare life', a life which is not a "simple natural life, but life exposed to death" (Agamben, 1998, p.88). The newspaper editorials, reports and columns constitute this bare moment by projecting this 'bare life', which is characterized by certain exceptions. If in a camp, as a state of exception, underlined by Agamben, "fact and law are completely confused" (Agamben, 1998, p.170), in the 'bare moment', the Urdu press constitutes the situational site of minority as a camp, where journalistic objective and fact is completely confused with fear and angst. While a 'bare life' has no identity except that it is facing death, and in this bare exposure to death it is freed of all identities, its identity is one that is counter-posed to the sovereign power (Samaddar, 2010, p.xxii). Urdu newspapers' 'bare life', captured in this 'bare moment', is just reduced to its Muslim identity and is exposed to sovereign power and protected by nothing in facing death. One Urdu commentator, Suhail Vahid, deliberates upon the charge against Urdu newspapers, that they fanned communal fire, and asks whether the language they use is divisive. He then questions whether Hindi newspapers are communal or not, and challenges the notion of

absolute objectivity, defending the language of Urdu newspapers and its perceived lack of journalistic ethics by retorting that " if the community they represent, if the minority they speak on behalf of are victim of communal politics, which is oppressed by communalism then how can its language not reflect this?" (Vahid, 1996, p.50). The sensational language in each headline amplifies the fear of the community which these newspapers claim to represent, or— by articulating this fear— the *Ashraf* politics is enacted through the Urdu press.

In narrating the violence from a remote site (and not from the site of violence), newspapers try to underline the exception in which this community lives and dies. On the question of arming the minority community in Assam, a 1994 editorial criticized the police/security forces, for attacking the oppressed instead of the perpetrators, arguing that, "if innocents are armed and they can hit back then perpetrators might restrain from the violence. Since the government cannot protect its weak and minorities it should arm them at least" (*Azad Hind*, 1994, p.3, 11Jul). The newspaper's editorial position reflects an understanding of the Muslim minority in India as an exceptional state, where law cannot protect them and justice can never be served. In 2012, *Akhbar e Mashriq,* in its editorial, does not directly ask for the arming of Muslims but instead suggests:

> *Hindustan mein ab tak jitne bhi firqa warana fasadat hue hain ya hindu muslim tasadum ki naubat aaye hai un mein humesha musalmanon ka ektarfa nuqasan hua hai. Uska sabab yeh hai ke woh ghair munazzam aur ghair musallah hote hain. Unke haath mein lathi danda bhi nahi hota jab ke doosri taraf fasadyon ke paas hand grenade aur bomb hota hai hai. Wahshat mein baaz awqat musalman police aur intezamia se bhi takra jate hain jo bandooq aur rifles se musallah hoti hai aur inhen thikane lagane mein koi kasat nahi chorti.*
>
> Whenever there is communal violence, in India, only Muslims have suffered it. It is a one-sided loss because Muslims are not well organized and well-armed. They do not even have sticks, while the other side has hand grenades and bombs. Sometimes, in desperation, Muslims confront the police and they (the police) are well armed with guns and rifles and do not hesitate to kill them. (*Akhbar e Mashriq*, 2012, p.7, 17Aug)

This is one of the key features of the 'bare moment' in which the life of Muslims is narrated outside normality, perpetually exposed to death. Law is enforced, to ensure not their protection but their destruction.

Here, it is important to note that cynicism or mistrust in the Police, discussed in Urdu newspapers, is not unfounded. The Muslim minority, in general, does not have a very high

opinion of the police, especially during riots. Various reports by civil society, scholars, government and non-government committee reports have highlighted the communalism of the police. Their controversial role, during the riots, is perhaps a constant feature of most of the reports on communal violence. Asghar Ali Engineer points out that the

> …local police, SRP and the PAC in Uttar Pradesh and the BMP in Bihar have acquired notoriety in the eyes of minorities. In riot situations, the PAC and BMP behave very violently and even kill innocent people. (Engineer, 1994, p.18).

He highlights the case of the 1987 Meerut riots during which:

> …the PAC constables under the command of Tripathi, pulled out 3+ young boys from Hashimpura and shot them dead by the side of a canal. Also, on May 23, they shot dead 67 Muslims coming out of the mosque after Friday prayer in the village of Malyana six kilometers from Meerut city. No one was punished for this heinous crime. (Engineer, 1994, p.19).

A commission appointed by the Gujarat government to investigate the causes of communal violence, a committee headed by Justice Jagmohan Reddy, in 1969, found that:

> We have already mentioned in another Chapter suggestions made in cross-examinations against Hindu officers that because they were Hindus, they showed anti-Muslim attitude; to officers other than Hindus or Muslims, the suggestions were that because they wanted to please the government, they showed anti-Muslim attitude. It is, in our view, not unnatural for the Muslim community which has suffered a great loss of life and property in the riots and felt helpless in most cases in not obtaining relief and protection in time, to view the matter, with a sense of suspicion, grievance and frustration and feel that everything that could have been done had not been done because the officers and men, a majority of whom were Hindus were partial. (Engineer, 1994, p.18-19)

This was also noted in the case of the Nelli massacre in Assam, where thousands of Bengali Muslims were killed in a single day, and this remains an important reference point in talking about violence in Assam, in both the English and Urdu newspapers. The police remained indifferent to Muslims and provided protection to the group of Hindus who filed a complaint to the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) on 15th February, Chopra notes that "There is thus, a strong contrast between how the police in Morigaon responded to Assamese Hindu residents expressing fears about being attacked, and Bengali Muslim residents who expressed the same, ultimately well founded, fear " (Chopra, 2014, p.61).

This very space, outside normality, makes an exclusive language of victimization, plausible. In this very moment, the experience of marginalisation speaks without any pretence, or promise. Only in this space, defined by the narrative of marginalisation, does one feel disassociated from the world outside and held within a narrative that is packed with the distant memory of glory and the proximity of total destruction. A disassociation which is based on disgust, fear and insecurity. A narrative of historical victimization thus unfolds itself in this space, constituting that 'bare moment', and claiming that, "The oppressed Muslims of Assam can get the monetary compensation but not justice" (Afroz, 2012, p.3).

On the one hand, in this 'bare moment', there is only one historical victim, one sufferer, one oppressed, by this repetitive violence laying 'bare' and, on the other hand, the perpetrator has only one identity, which is marked by an irrational hatred of Muslims, of a barbaric other. In this 'bare moment', the attackers can be named in the crudest form possible. There is no distinction between Bodo militants and Bodos as a community, it is argued that:

> *Bodo qabayel jo aam par aslahon se lais rahte hain, nihatte musalmanon par bhooke gidh ki tarah pil pade aur khoon aasham darindon ki tarah unhen bhambhodna shuru kar dia...lag bhag 500 gaon se musalmanon ka wujood is tarah mita dia gaya jaise kabhi unka wujood hi na tha…tamam wasail ke bawajood markaz aur ryasat dono ne musalmanon ka safaya karne ke liye poore saat din bodo darindon ko mohlat de di aur assam ka kokrajhar mukammal taur pe in darindon ke hawale kar dia tak ke woh jo chahen karen ...Hindustani musalmanon par charon taraf se yalghar hai, Israel ki khufya agency 'mossad' ne apne bal o par phail liye hain aur markazi wizat e dakhila isi ka homework kar rahi.*
>
> [The Bodo tribe, which is generally armed, has attacked defenceless Muslims like a horde of hungry vultures, they have destroyed them like ferocious barbaric animals … from almost 500 villages, Muslims have been wiped out as if they never existed in those places… Despite having all the resources, both central and state governments gave seven days to these Bodo barbarians to finish Muslims off completely, and left the region in the hands of these barbarians so that they could do whatever they wanted. …Indian Muslims are under attack from all sides. Israel's intelligence service, 'Mossad', has also expanded its network in the country, and now the Home Ministry is doing their homework.] (Anjum, 2012, p.5, 6Aug)

The article ends by invoking the concept of '*ummat e wahida*', a singular *ummah* which should come together and help the victims in Assam. This is a typical example where the writer freely expresses his anger without caring much for fact, and thus instils fear in the mind of the reader. The writer simply dismisses the idea of the Bodo as a community, and he does not mention any distinction between Bodo militants and the Bodo tribal group. He refers to the

entire community as "Barbarian Bodos" and then sees it not just as an ethnic conflict, but as a state lead pogrom which instrumentalizes these "barbarians" for killing Muslims. The article then certainly imagines the Muslim community living outside a 'juridical boundary' which the state protects, their condition is then of exception and their lives areexposed to death with nothing to protect them. Typical of Urdu newspaper's reporting, the writer makes an Israeli connection to give it an international twist, but thus also making it a plight of the '*ummah',* as it were, with India and Israel both working to destroy the Muslim *Qawm* or *Ummah.*

Urdu newspapers' narrative about victimization repeats itself in each of these events and brings it together with the memory of a distant glorious past. If "narrative is the guardian of time" (Wood, 2007, p.31) then in the narrative of violence and victimization, a certain presence is made possible by language, a presence which represents the identity and history in a particular way. The narrative of victimisation makes an ethical point by counter-positioning the Indian Muslim *vis à vis* an unjust and immoral enemy. In its evocative narrative of victimization and violence, feelings of anger and disgust are the underlying feature of this journalism in which violence is debated outside the actual site of contestation.

Conclusion

The same language and explanations for events repeat themselves in the reporting patterns of the Urdu newspapers studied, which were printed from 1993 to 2014. This owes a lot to the history of Urdu and the figure of the Indian Muslim. It has been seen that Urdu (the language) came to represent Muslims and thus became a minority subject. Scholarship has shown the relationship between the emergence of the Urdu press and Muslim politics but, as Datla notes, in her work on Urdu nationalism, during colonial times in the Deccan region of India: the "Urdu language in the early twentieth century became a means not only of asserting difference but also of imagining a common secular future" (Datla, 2013, p.9). However, the politics of Hindu/ Muslim and, later, the partition of India, made the question of Urdu complex. The Urdu newspapers, discussed in this chapter, show in their reporting how they remain tied, almost solely, to the question of Muslim identity. They do not report or investigate, but rather they evoke and repeat. The Urdu newspapers act as the sole voice of Indian Muslims and propel the worldview of a religious–elite class of Muslims. *Ashraf* values are projected in the meaning-making enterprise of Indian Muslims through these newspapers. One religious cleric,

praising Urdu newspapers, claims that "the voice of Urdu journalism represents the inner voice of millions of Muslims and it truly reflects the emotion and thoughts of the community" (Ahmad, 2011, p.172).

In a recent work on Urdu newspapers in India, Khan and Vats note that the liberal space is shrinking in the country, and

> A review of Urdu language dailies on triple *talaq*, polygamy and *halala* prove this point. Urdu dailies are, directly or indirectly, influenced by Muslim clerics. As a result, most of the dailies do not give even an iota of space to contrary opinions when it comes to Muslim personal laws. They do not publish anything critical on the violation of Muslim women's rights. (Khan and Vats, 2018, p.109).

The research also highlights that major media houses are now investing in the Urdu newspapers, a point about which Farouqui (1995) remained hopeful two decades ago. He argues against the overtly emotional tone of Urdu newspapers 'arousing the Muslim sentiments' (Farouqui, 1995) and hoped that prominent newspapers would one day take over the business of Urdu newspapers and change their character, but the fate of the Urdu newspaper is entangled with the fate of the community in the country. Being taken over by mainstream media houses might not change the language and journalistic ethics of these newspapers very much.

The victimization discourse in Urdu newspapers is strongly entwined with the idea of the minority, of an endangered community. The language of this discourse carries certain experiences of history and whoever identifies with such an experience constitutes the potential 'Urdu public'. It is perhaps not only a matter of the lack of resources, which is argued by commentators like Farouqui (1995) and others (Ashraf, 2006), which makes Urdu media "non-serious' (Amanullah, 2009), but it also shows how a language that is hopelessly tied to a frightened minority constructs the character of the Urdu press in India.

Only deconstruction of the category of 'minority' would enable the press to escape such a discourse and become both professional and objective. Perhaps this is not possible without the deconstruction of the dichotomy of the 'secular' and the 'religious', which empowers this category. The victimization discourse in Urdu newspapers speaks through the events of violence and, in a 'bare moment', it addresses victimized subjects without any commitment to

journalistic ethics or balanced language. In this moment, it can only speak of its eternal victimization and repeat itself endlessly.

CHAPTER SIX

A Long Time:

Memory of Violence and Production of Presence

Introduction

My journey started with a small town named Salakati, in the Kokrajhar district. Kokrajhar district, with an area of 3,169.22 square kilometres, is the administrative area for the Secretariat of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC). The district has three subdivisions: 1) Kokrajhar Sadar Sub-Division; 2) Gossaigaon Sub-Division; 3) Parbatjhora Sub-Division. Salakati is a small town with a police outpost, a population of around 5000 people, and a majority population of non-Bodos. The main commercial market is dominated by non-Bodos (Bengali Muslims and Hindus), and the Bodos have their small market at the edge of the town, but they also shop at the main market. With a majority non-Bodo population, the violence in 2012 did not affect the population much and all the houses seemed to be standing and unharmed.

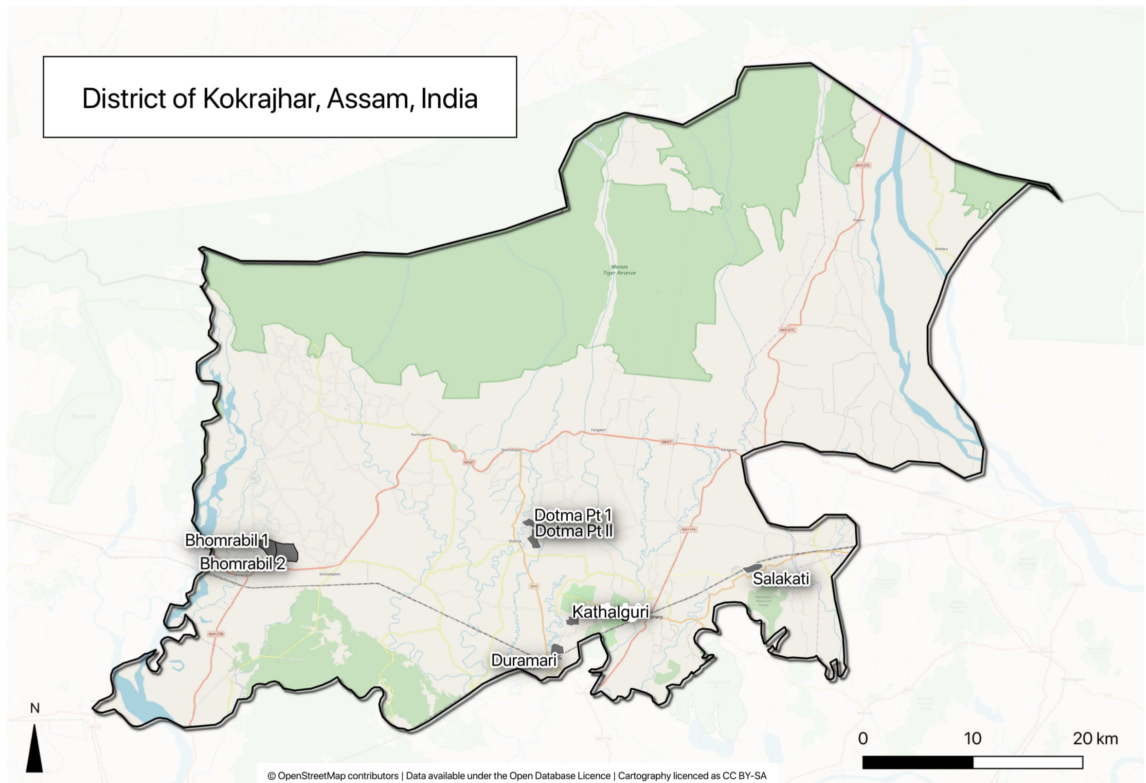
Since most of the villages affected by the violence in 2012 were still recovering from the carnage and people were slowly moving back to their native villages, most of the villages I visited had new or makeshift houses, which were donated in some cases by Muslim organizations. These houses did not have room for a guest to stay and men also tended to spend more time outside their homes in these villages. Houses were small and farms big. I travelled to these villages from Salakati town or Bhumrabil village, which was predominantly Bengali, and as one informant told to me that Bodos avoided visiting these villages. A small militant organization had popped up in this village after the violence in 2012, and it was called the Muslim Tiger Force (MFT).

The line between different ethnic groups was very clear. It was in people's imagination; it was not often physical, but everyone who lived there knew where the lines were. The memory of violence also reminded the people where the lines existed, and their presence and acceptance

are a perpetual reminder of the past. In order to live and negotiate this everyday reality, as a Muslim or a Bengali Muslim, people devised their own narrative strategy. In memory and in stories, they told themselves and others of their present and past. There existed a strong will to shape a future that was free of those shadows of violence. The memory also served as an alternative to the history which the regional press preferred, to contributing to a wider arc of the story of the nation, and to delineating the 'legitimate' citizen from 'illegal' aliens. Memory is the counter-narrative to the winding story which dominates the *Assam Tribune's* idea of the immigrant. It also often works as a counter-narrative (and seldom as a complimentary narrative) to the Urdu press's re-iteration of the victimization theme.

In looking at their quotidian life and their memory of loss, I examine how victims constitute their sense of time to negotiate the everyday politics of categorization. The Urdu press uses event of violence to construct an identity politics that refers beyond the nation and that feeds a wider international set of common themes, yet in this abstract politics of identity the lives of the people – the local Muslim population – are excluded. Such a framing does not give local problems, local issues or local people a voice. Indeed, comparing what people on the ground said and how the press that is apparently reporting on them narrates events there is a startling difference: in the comparative distance between the two one can trace the distinction between the narrative of victimization and the victim's narrative.

Figure 6.1 Locations of my field work in the Kokrajhar district



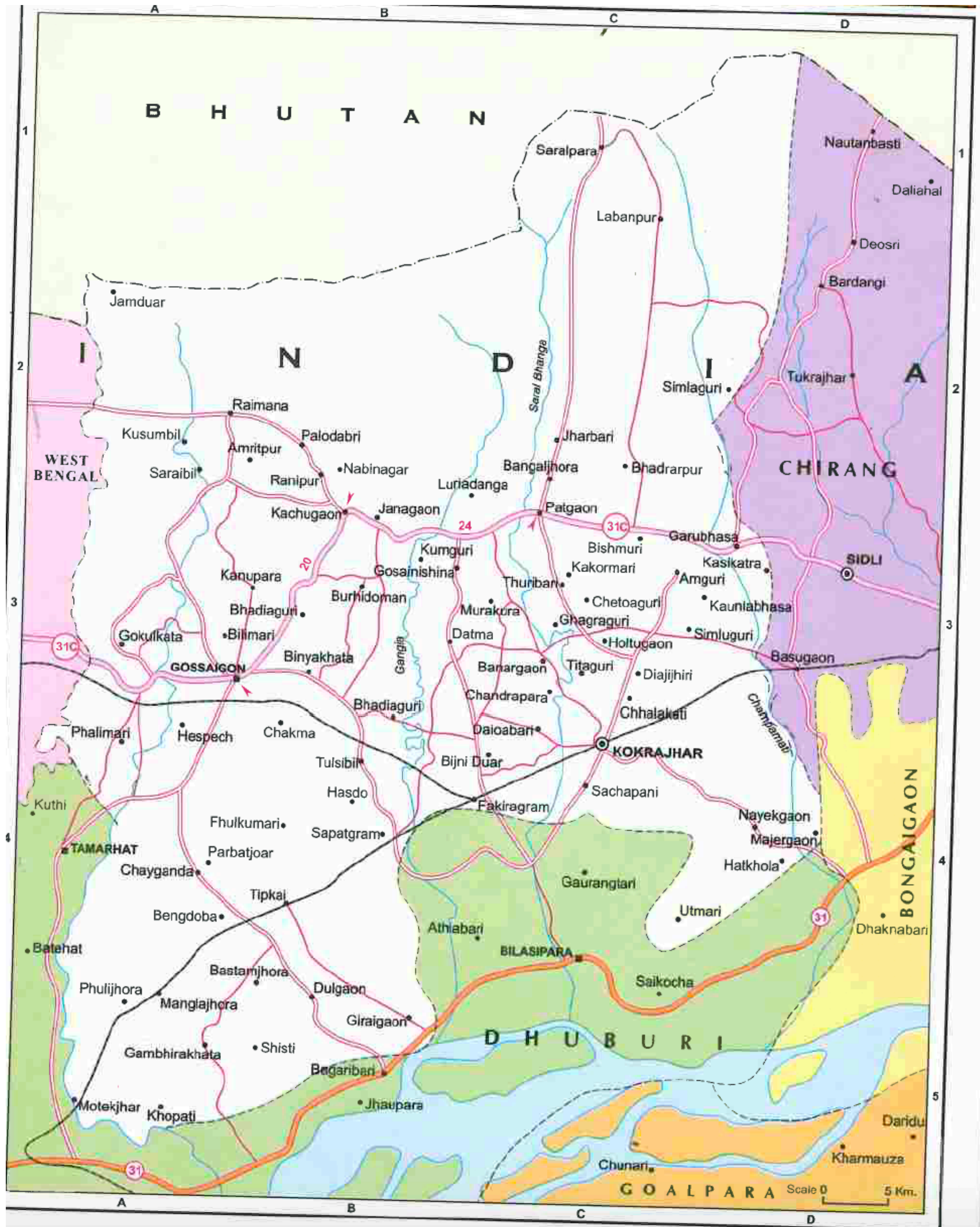
The Tale of Violence of Duramari Village

Location One:

Duramari Village is South of the Kokrajhar District Headquarters, the village falls under Kokrajhar District and Subdivision. Like most of the district, Duramari is an agricultural village. The village has two divisions, with two roads at the village's entrance that lead to the two divisions. At the entrance of the village there are some Bodo inhabitants, but the village is predominantly home to Bengali Muslims. The village has a school and a *Madrasah* (a religious school for Muslims to learn/memorize holy texts). Most of the people are involved in farming, including the women, while some have local businesses. The road to the village is well built, as is the case with most Kokrajhar roads leading to villages since the Prime Minister launched a special scheme to make concrete roads in villages nationwide (i.e,. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna), in2000. The village has a population of roughly 1,800 people. Most of the women from earlier generations are illiterate, but nearly all of the younger generation attend

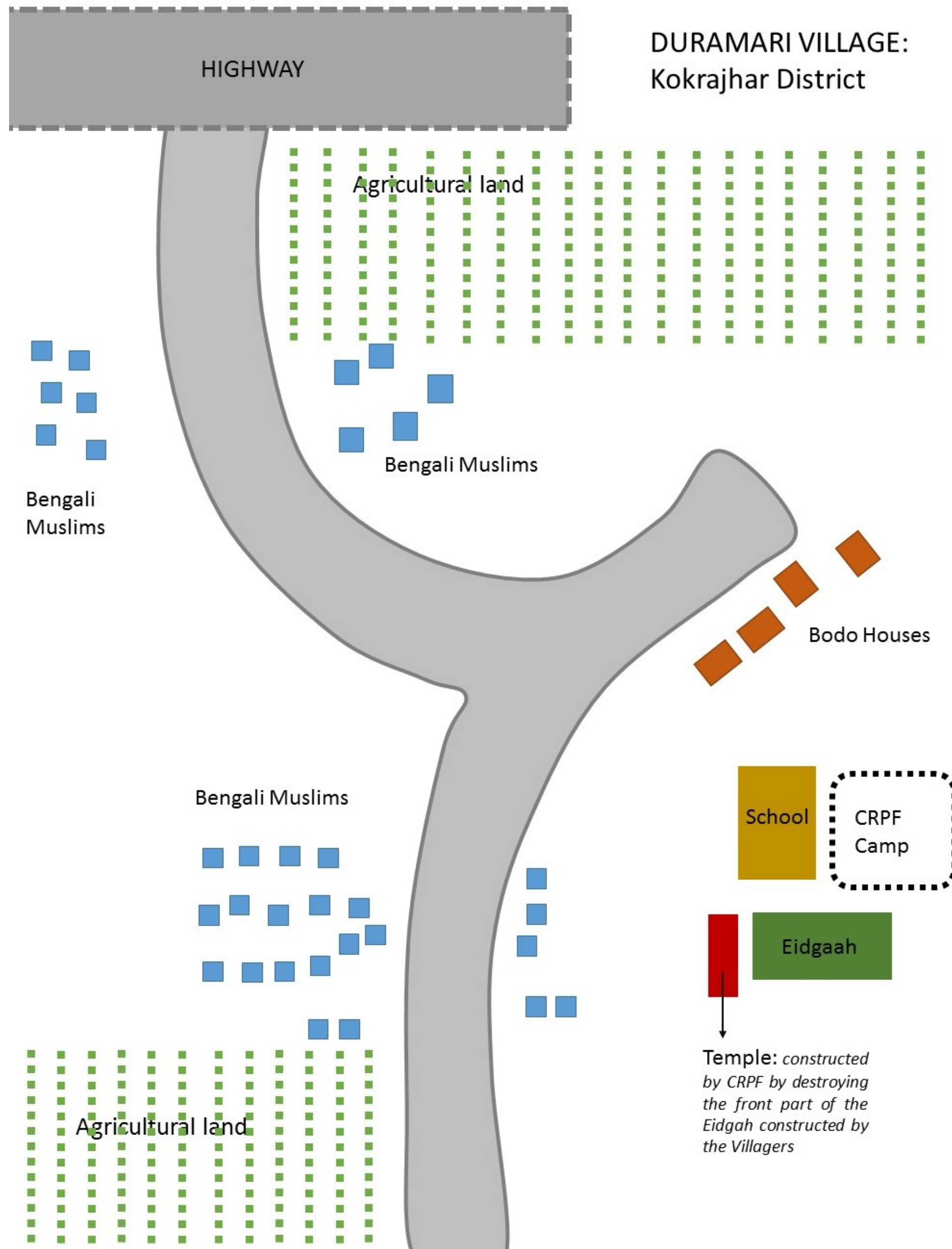
school. These people are culturally Bengali, and the distinction between them and the Bodo tribe is apparent. Even the housing structures and decorations are different, and this was noted in other villages.

Duramari village saw violence in 1994 and 2012. In both episodes of violence, people left their homes and lost family members. In 2012, it was one of the worst hit villages of the region and nine people were killed in this episode. People had left the village to stay in relief camps in other districts for a few months and, once they returned, they found everything razed to the ground or turned to ashes. All the houses are newly built. Only the school was left standing and an *Eidgah* (a special mosque where Muslims go for Eid prayers, i.e., twice a year). The front part of the *Eidgah* was captured by the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force), who built a temple over it. However, the villagers could not do much about this, except complain. CRPF is still camping in the village, although their interaction with the villagers seems to be minimal. The villagers are caught between the law and outlaws, and without the CRPF post many feel insecure, but the presence of the CRPF on their sacred site is perceived by them to be double victimization. Many see this camp on their site as a betrayal – a cost they have paid for the security of their lives. They have now built a new temporary mosque made of tin sheets. I felt the fear in the quietness of the village, and in conversation one could sense that the memory of violence had gripped the people tightly. They see the 2012 violence as exceptional since, in 1994 the fear of violence was not as strong or prolonged. Three years after the 2012 violence the fear has not been allayed in the people's hearts.



Source: Indian Map Service, Jodhpur

Figure 6.3 A rough sketch of Duramari village



"This is not because I speak Bangla, therefore, I am Bangladeshi; this is political not linguistic."

I met Faizal, who was 24 years old, in his small, tin garment shop, but we were not rendered any privacy, as a few villagers soon gathered to take part in the conversation. Faizal owns this shop and this was his business even before the violence. He also teaches at the local *Madrasah,* where forty students are registered. He has a sewing machine in his shop to do minor tailoring. He is married and has one child. Faizal could speak in Hindi with a Bangla accent, and he seldom paused to find the proper word in Hindi.

While going back a few years in his memory, he portrayed the feeling that everything was still too fresh for him. Even his facial expression and tone appeared to dip into the memory when he was narrating the events he witnessed. He reminisced:

> In 2012, Bodo people burnt our village. I don't know what exactly happened outside, I do not have much clue, but what I remember is that they fired one night in a house on the first day of Ramadan at the time before dawn (the time of Sehri, he said, which Muslims use to eat before they start fasting), and an old man died and a kid was injured. Police came to get the dead body, but we argued with them that they had not provided us with security: give us some security, provide some army for our protection, otherwise we will not give you the dead body. So, we blocked the road. But a few army men came and took the dead body for autopsy. A few army men stayed here, and in the night there was cross fire between the Bodo and the army. It continued for a few nights but one night the firing got intense and the army left us. Consequently, even we left the village in the early morning, at 4a.m., and while we were leaving an old woman was killed by the Bodos.

Faizal remembered the names of the villages and camps he went to after leaving the village with fellow villagers:

> In the morning, the Assam police came and stopped us at Dibli village (a neighbouring village to Duramari) police station. Firing was going everywhere. The police asked us to go back. No one gave us any army or protection. We called everyone, from the District Collector to the army camp. The army said they didn't have many men, they made excuses like the road is not good, and all. We were all so frightened. We moved from village to village, and finally camped in Bilasipara. We stayed there for 6 months. But the camp life was painful, we hardly got any relief but somehow we survived.

Faizal went on narrating his memories of that day through raising the issue of Bangladeshi and illegal immigration:

> After burning our houses, everyone published that we are Bangladeshi. Hagrama[27] and other MPs, MLAs, they all said we are Bangladeshis, but some of his legislators themselves were with the militants/terrorists. He was arrested too. Everyone says we are Bangladeshis, but we have all the proofs that we are not. We have NRC for our grandfathers and father, and we have registry of our lands.

All of the villagers are aware that they are referred to as Bangladeshi, and they consider this naming a politicization, a way to usurp their land. They understand that at the core there lies the question of citizenship and land. Most of the people, while talking about violence, also talked about the compensation which the government promised. Faizal had not received the compensation he was promised, like many others, while some had received it and had used it to rebuild their houses. The Bangladeshi tag is what they want to resist, both politically and legally. There was no trace of any newspaper, but people kept themselves updated with the information and rumours through mobile phones and TV. People rely on TV and word of mouth for news. Faizal said:

> No newspaper arrives here; we watch news on TV. At the time of the violence everyone said we were Bangladeshi, but we showed everyone the proof we have. Even Sonia and Rahul Gandhi came when we were in the camp. We showed it to the journalists.

The politics of identity, which determines the migration debate in the state, is well identified by the people. In their narrative the question of identity, the question of belonging, goes back to the land. The question of entitlement to land remains central to the battle over resources among the different ethnic groups of the region. Faizal makes the point:

> The local administration cancelled a lot of our land registry when we were at the Bilasipara Camp ... other men also joined in this complaint… for the last few years, the government has not been registering the land under our names… even when we buy the land from someone, it does not get registered in our names … and this is only for us, although when a Bodo buys land from us they get the registry done.

The question of identity is linked to the question of land, the loss of entitlement to land makes it difficult to prove your identity. Landlessness makes matters even more precarious. During his stay in the camp, during the 2012 violence, land registry was cancelled and as was made clear by him, a few others had also found themselves in a similar situation of landlessness. The land is not registered in their names when they buy it from someone, which

[27] He is the elected head of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Kokrajhar is headquarter of BTC and one of the four districts called as Bodoland territorial area districts (BTAD)

may also be due to new land laws, which define certain land as being only for Bodos. Whether the land registration dilemma is caused by the law, which protects certain land for scheduled tribes, or in the general attitude of the Bodo administration towards Bengali farmers was a point that was not made very clear by Faizal. Violence drives people from their homes, and repetitive violence does not make it easy to retain control over the land.

He first witnessed the violence in 1994. Although he was confused about how old he was then, he remembered the violence quite well. The memory of violence was fresh, or every episode of violence made the marks of the previous one deeper.

> I first saw the violence in 1994. Houses were burnt then as well, and it was all very bloody… 30-40 people died during the attack and shooting… Not all of them are now in this village... Compared to 2012 it was many more, as 9 people died in the recent episode here. Not all the houses were burnt in 1994, like this time in 2012, but there was a lot of firing. We camped in Kashipara then for a week.

Most of the informants consider the term 'Bangladeshi' to be mere name-calling, a signifier of a kind of politics which tends to alienate them, and that aims to exclude them socially and politically. Being trapped in the cycle of violence and being a member of a religious minority in India, they articulate their resistance to the 'Bangladeshi' identity tag by pointing to the politics who demonized them and consistently referred to the identity documents as proof of their citizenship. While the politics might question their citizenship, their narrative tends to question the politics with the legal (documents they hold). Their explanation of violence underlines two combined factors – land and identity. Wali, who was sitting behind me on a bench interrupted us to make his point:

> We have everything but still they call us Bangladeshi. I really feel sad about it. We have inherited 40 bighas of land from my father … agricultural land was also captured by them during the violence, but after the District Collector's intervention it was partially resolved. Initially, Bodos warned us against carrying on any farming activity, but now it seems to be fine.

Faizal continued to narrate the violence of 2012, whose memory was fresh and the marks of the destruction of the psyche, quite evident. He explained how everything from home to school, from *Madrasah* to *Masjid,* was destroyed and thrown out of the village and what was left was taken away, even bamboos. He remembers the attackers were a Bodo mob, but does not remember any singular face or person. He spoke with confidence and was ready to

answer any question, but without detail; either due to an avoidance of detail or to its insignificance. What happened, what it did and what one went through after such an event was what gripped his mind and dominated the communication. The government rebuilt the school, but the villagers recreated everything else. The fear of tomorrow dominated every conversation on violence, and they continued to anticipate a similar event. *"I really feel frightened here. This is my old land here. This is my village… where will I go from here?"* Faizal said:

> The question of violence is then the question of reconciliation. The clearly demarcated village finds it difficult to cross borders in order to avert violence and create conversation. There is some conversation now with the Bodo, but the administration told us at that time not to go into Bodo villages, we didn't go then, but now we are developing some conversation with them. Faizal added, with some degree of doubt..

The conversation might have begun but there is a deep distrust and disenchantment. There is no apparent cultural exchange between these two ethnic groups at the rural level. There is no sustained conversation or dialogue. Is it possible to have it when the violence is more predictable than peace when distrust defines the distinction of identities, *"When we came from the camp things were quite tense and volatile… they used to tease or frighten us… someone was killed when we came back but don't clearly remember".*

Figure 6.4 School building, old (burnt and dismantled) and new on the same campus in Duramari

> "There is no clue when it will happen again… when we will have to run when it will burn again. No one knows."

Duramari has a concrete road and a mobile phone network but it has the sociological characteristics of a village in which most of the conversation and interaction happens outside. Every stranger is given a curious look, partly because of the history of violence, and partly because one does not expect a stranger in such a place. Wali started talking about himself, saying he had 9 bigha[28] of land, which he inherited from his father, who was registered in the NRC[29] in 1951[30], and about having all the records with him. Wali talked about the violence in 1994, the reason for which was not clear to him, but he remembered staying in the camp at Bilasipara, like everyone else.

> On Friday, people went to Tinali Bazaar… everyone went for land registry as administration has said that they will do all registrations for land for everyone that day, only women were left in the village… then they came through Hikaipara and attacked the village. 30 people were killed then only, and houses were burnt. As we heard this news, we all ran from the village. We had no clue about their plans and actions, we didn't know what they were going to do. The army intervened later and with them we went to Kokrajhar. Some stayed at a school in Kokrajhar, and some in Kashipara,

Wali's house was not destroyed in that episode of violence, however, in 2012, there was no sign of his house left, as the entire village was burnt down. He clearly remembered the event and the names of places from 1994 and 2012, but he too avoided going into detail. Destruction, actual event and expectations capture the imagination more than the vivid details. It may also be that extracting details was akin to re-living the detail, while daily life has to move on. The question, or the experience, of daily life pushes out the experience of the extraordinary, and the ordinary appears to dominate, despite the fact that this ordinary is the

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[28] 1 Bigha = 1,340 m^2 in Assam

[29] "National Register of Citizens (NRC) means the register containing the names of Indian citizens. NRC updating basically means the process of listing the names of citizens, based on Electoral Rolls until 1971, and the 1951 NRC." Source: http://nrcassam.nic.in/what-nrc.html

[30] "National Register of Citizens, 1951 is a register prepared after the conducting of the 1951 Census, in respect of each village, showing the houses or holdings in a serial order and indicating against each house or holding the number and names of the persons staying therein. These registers covered each and every person enumerated during the 1951 Census and they were kept in the offices of Deputy Commissioners and Sub Divisional Officers, according to instructions issued by the Government of India in 1951. Later, these registers were transferred to the Police in the early 1960s." (ibid.)

result of the extraordinary that constitutes the experience of daily life.

The question of citizenship is very much at the centre of the violence, and to this point Wali asserts the fact that his father was born here and so was he. He was forty- eight years old, at the time of the interview, and had lived here his whole life, not being new to this place, yet he was still gripped with fear, "I feel very frightened here," he said, while his eyes looked somewhere else. He then continued to say that he and the villagers have asked for permanent police camps. *"Without the army we really feel frightened here… there is no clue when it will happen again… when we will have to run and when it will burn again. No one knows."*

Living in a state of perpetual fear and insecurity, they expected the state to protect them by providing adequate forces. Despite the distrust of the state, most of the villagers felt safe with the presence of the army and felt that the violence would return when these military posts disappeared. The trust in the army seemed stronger than that in the police force. This seemed to be a nation-wide feature: the Muslim minority, and other minorities, seemed to trust military and paramilitary forces. Asghar Ali Engineer has noted that:

> ..the role of paramilitary forces like the BSF, CRPF etc., and the army is often such that the minorities plead for retention of these forces in order to better protect their lives. During my investigation of the Bhivandi riots in 1984 many Muslim ladies desperately pleaded with me to use my influence with the authorities to retain the army for at least a month. They said that, but for the army, they would have suffered much greater loss of life and property. Many people told us that in the Ahmedabad riots of 1985, too, the role of the army was commendable. This clearly indicates that the victims and their relatives and friends do not approve of the role of the local police and the armed constabulary like the SRP, PAC and MBP. (Engineer, 1994, p.21)

Reflecting on the difference between the Army and the Police, and the reason that Muslims have more trust the in military, Engineer writes:

> A police source maintained that the local police are often influenced by the local factors whereas the paramilitary forces are not involved in day-to-day affairs of the local society. Moreover, the local police are also subject to various local pressures as it is in day-to-day touch with the people of the concerned city or town. They develop intimate contacts with one section of the society or the other. The police are also often in league with criminal elements and especially those who have been politicized. These criminal elements are often involved in communal riots. (Engineer, 1994, p.21)

Figure 6.5 The CRPF camp and the temple built on the *Eidgah*

It is very painful. My heart aches every time I think about it.

While we were sitting in Faizal's shop having the conversation about the violence in 2012, Nasir Sheikh appeared and expressed his displeasure with such conversations about the past that raked up painful memories. When everything was destroyed and nothing much was left, why would anyone come here to make conversation? In his language and expressions rage and anger were apparent, as he could not see any reason for such discussions and the opening up of old wounds. Nonetheless, when he was convinced that I was not a reporter or a Government officer, he opened up. He did not want his life to be a news story, nor the pain to be sensationalized. Nasir Sheikh, 56 years old, referred to fate which would defeat all of us and which we could never change. Being a religious Muslim, faith and practice were his refuge from the memory of violence. It is in the everyday practice of religion that the people found their daily refuge from the extraordinary violence and its memory, which determines their social and political life.

Nasir Sheikh's father was shot dead in the violence which gripped the area in 1994. He was overpowered with emotion and his voice was trembling as he started to narrate the incident, which was over twenty years old. "I buried him with my hands." He said, and paused. The trauma was evident. He was not only carrying those memories, but was also well aware that he or his son could meet the same fate. He, like others, could not talk about violence without talking about the promised compensation in the same breath. "I was compensated partially by the government, but in 2012 it was even worse: everything was burnt. And due to some brokers, I couldn't get the right compensation."

There was not much description of who those brokers were, and of how they had mediated the compensation process. Memory of violence was not only constituted by the memory of the loss of lives, but also by the memory of loss in general. This was perhaps why the deficiency in compensation also became embedded in the narrative of loss. The reference to compensation is an important feature of the sense of loss. The sense of loss and the question of compensation are entangled together in shaping a narrative that makes life possible in the present and the future. Donald E. Polkinghorne explicates how life experience is given meaning through narrative plot. He writes:

> … narrative knowledge is not a simple recall of past. Narrative comprehension is a retrospective, interpretive composition that displays past events in the light of current understanding and evaluation of their significance. While referring to the original past life events, narrative transforms them by ordering them into a coherent part-whole plot structure. (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.10)

Narrative is an interpretation of life and it helps to shape the past in the light of the everyday experience. Nasir Sheikh remembered 1994 as everyone else did and, like everyone else, he was unsure of the reason for such an event. He remembered that day:

> They came suddenly and started to burn, and everyone left the village. It was May 27 of 1994. We stayed in the Adivasi[31] village. We found dead bodies of 34 people and we buried them all, but a lot of dead bodies were washed away by river.

He remembered the incident or, as he carried with him the memory of it, he further

[31] A generic term for the aboriginal people of South Asia, it comprises many tribes. In Assam, Adivasis were brought by the British to work on tea gardens. They are mostly from present day Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha states.

narrated that most of them were shot with guns. His father was first shot in the hand and he tried to find cover in the Bamboo forest, but it was not good enough, as the Bodo militants found him and shot him as he attempted to escape, in vain. His body was found there in the bamboo jungle. There was a silence. His pitch was high, and eyes filled with emotion with the sense of loss and anger. Violence erupted in 1955 too, as narrated to him by his father, and everyone cramped themselves into a room to hide and to find company. They were asked to leave the house and the village. There was looting and many died during that episode also.. He said he did not have much memory of that incident. Obviously, as he must not have been born then. The sense of time is more of an experience than a linear record. There was a lack of accuracy in dates, not only with him but also with many others. He quite clearly remembered the other incidents, which happened in the vicinity, like in 1998. He had 34 *bigha* land, which he disposed of, and he bought a house in a neighbouring district as he found this village insecure.

The labelling of all of them as Bangladeshi was not quite comprehensible to him. He argued, *"When the British left they gave us the patta, the entitlement to the land. The record is still with me. My grandfather has it, my father had it and now I own that."* He was interrupted by a young man, "All this is to harass us as we are Muslims." Nasir responded by saying, *"I will not say just like that, but I have all the documents and I have shown them."*

Their narrative carries constant reference to the communal politics and communal history of India. The tension is multi-layered and not just religious, as it is the most evocative of all, and the history since partition has made it an easy category of identification and of violence: a convenient rationale for defining many problems. Nasir did not conform nor disapprove of the young man's interjection, but he referred to the documents he has to prove his citizenship as, through documents, the narrative of migration can be contested. It was mentioned by everyone that even the state of violence could not be used as an excuse to leave documents behind.

The story drifted into 2012 as, like his fellow villagers, he too was one of the eye witnesses and victims of this episode of violence. With a bit of authority, he started with the exact date,

(It started) on 30th July, Friday, 2012. For 3 days we stayed here in the village. Bodos

> live not very far from here. They started to fire before dawn that day when were up for sehri[32]. This was a sudden attack for which we were not prepared. A guy called Sadaqat[33] was killed then. This frightened everyone around and we stayed with the dead body.

He confirmed or, rather, narrated, a story similar to that of Faizal, of staying in the school and then walking on foot, leaving the village behind, to find himself in the camp for almost eight months. Return was possible by showing papers, and by proving the legitimacy of their existence. Nasir confirmed that:

> Everyone took some paper of identification with them... some school certificate, some patta, some registry... it had happened earlier as well... my father and grandfather told me if you want to live in Assam keep your papers intact: leave wealth behind but not the papers.

This is the most remarkable aspect of this repetitive violence: it revolves so much around citizenship, unlike any other form of communal violence in India. Here you carry the religious identity of a Muslim/minority as well as of a foreigner or illegal immigrant/infiltrator. The paper becomes the defining aspect of their being. The documents of identity and land are not only used as proof of citizenship but also as a historical reference to their long past.

Since 2012, nothing of the sort of violence that was witnessed then has taken place, but fear follows as the very shadow of those afflicted; and everyone said, “It can come back at any time.”

Nasir steered the conversation in the direction of deprivation and the failure of the State, “The government promised a lot but we have got nothing. There is no tax on promises, so they promise.” He continued to add that no one was addressing the fear,

> We gave application to government saying that Bodo militants destroyed our houses and the office responded by asking, ‘Have you seen it? Don’t you Muslims have militants/terrorists? Maybe there are terrorists within Muslim community, but question here is very different.

Nasir expressed himself in a helplessness way while sharing this anecdote, and he then decided

[32] A time before dawn when Muslims wake up to eat and start fasting.
[33] Name changed

to leave for home. He came to this village only for his job, as he has sold his property here; he had to go back to the neighbouring village.

On the other side of Duramari village lies Jauliapara. Once you enter the village, you turn right and the road takes you to the end of the village, which touches the main road, the other side of which is inhabited by the Bodo community. In July, 2012, when the violence started, Jauliapara was the first to face the firing, as the attackers came from the other side of the village. The first casualty was taken in this village, after which people first camped in the school at Duramari, and then moved to another district. The Bodo village borders the farm land of these Bengali Muslim villagers, where we had gathered to talk about the memories of violence

A Long Time …

Mohammad was a 38 years old farmer with five children. He owned 10 *bigha* of land. He could not speak Hindi/Urdu and was a proper Bangla speaking farmer. It was with the help of a translator that communication with him, was made possible. He had lived his whole life in this village, on his farmland. On the question of origin, like everyone else, he was obliged to say that he was from here, and his ancestors belonged here. "*Since a long time we are here. My father and grandfather died here.*" And from where did they come? "*Here, only here,*" he replied with force and conviction. This force and conviction ended the discussion on the past and any history of movement to this region. How far does this 'long time' stretch? The question of origin, not of them, but of the origin that is more accurate or original, was what he was trying to answer by the gesture of being forceful and by finding the language of 'long time'. The long time was his time, the time of his origin; its longevity is the beginning of him, who he knows, and is what will ensure the future. This 'long time' which legitimized his presence, was a time that kept his space-time fabric intact, making it liveable for him. This fabric of time-space was then altered by violence.

He narrated the violence of 2012 with clarity, as it was fresh in the memory, but what escaped his memory was the date, when exactly did it happen – which month? What formed the memory, however, was not the calendar month of July, but the holy month of *Ramadan*. As *Ramadan* breaks the norm and alters routine, it is divine and holy. This is what emerges to

anchor the memory and the detail. Mohammed said that it happened on one late night of *Ramadan,* but he did not remember the date from the English calendar.

> It was at 1 a.m. in the night when the firing first started in this region. One man immediately died in firing and two were injured. We all gathered and left the village and camped in the school of Duramari for three days. Bodos had surrounded us from all sides. We did not get much help from the police or administration. By firing and burning they forced us to leave.

Like everyone else, he moved to the relief camp in Dhubri for eight months and he came back to find that nothing was left in the village; everything had turned to ash. He, in his lifetime had witnessed three episodes of violence, including that in 2012, but he did not remember dates for any of the episodes. He remembered the events quite clearly, but there was no memory-archive to bring him the exact date or year. He kept referring to violence in 1983, when the Assam agitation reached its peak, and when, in Nelli, thousands of Bengali Muslims were killed in the anti-migrant violence. That period, and the event, were integral to his memory of violence and the region, but not as much of the details. He recalled the violence of the early 1990s, "I remember one in 1991— it was then to remove Muslims from this land — the Andolan (agitation/protest) was to force Muslims out. Lot of burning happened but not much death." The repetitive nature of this violence, in their narratives, was owed to the fact that they were Muslims, not that they were Bengali. The linguistic or ethnic distinction was not creating the subject of violence, but the religious distinction, which is also a meta-category with which to determine who are the majority and the minority. A few others added to Mohammad's narrative that, between 1991 and 1994, many violent incidents took place, and these were viewed as one single episode or stream by the villagers. However, people who suffered in 1994, as was demonstrated by the inhabitants of another part of this village, quite clearly remembered the depth of the violence, and talked about 1994 in detail. In the case of Mohammad, the reason for violence was not comprehensible to him as a 'Bangladeshi issue' which, he believed, was created to justify the violence that was based on religious identity. It was, for him, a senseless violence, not only, to eliminate them, but to categorize them as 'foreigner' or 'external'. Violence then serves two purposes; one of categorizing them, and the other of displacing them from their place.

Earlier, Faizal, in his conversation, also explicated that the violence was not of a linguistic nature but a religious one, "This is not because I speak Bangla, and therefore I am

Bangladeshi; this is political not linguistic. Bodos do not speak Assamese (if language is the logic)." For him, like others, it was not a historical question (but it may be a historical problem), it was a question of present, it was the question of his presence. The response to the question of being Bangladeshi, and the fact that the region is made up of migrants, is a strong denial, in itself, of that version of history: "No one has any connection with Bangladesh… No relationship whatsoever... We all are very old here... We have absolutely no relationship... it is not about Bangladesh."

For most of the people I met during my fieldwork, the history of migration was a past that they did not want to preserve in their memory. It was a narrative of identity. Their presence constitutes the past and a narrative of 'long time' is the guardian of 'past time', but it is not in contrast with the other Muslims, who had not originated from the erstwhile East Bengal region.

Athiabadi Relief Camp
Location Two

In Athiabadi Relief Camp, run by *Jamiat e Ulema i Hind*[34] following the 2012 violence, there were 187 houses with more than four hundred people living in them. The relief camp had Muslims of Bengali and Hindi descent; 56 years old, Ghani Khan was one of them, and he lived with his two children in the camp. He articulated his displacement as the result of an incident between the Muslim minority and all the others, who constituted the majority:

> What was happening before 2012 is not known to me, what I know is that those people used to attack our people and we couldn't do anything about it. We could not hit back because we are a minority and they are a majority. Suddenly some clashes happened, and we saw fire all around and we could hear lot of firing as well. There are good and bad in their side as well. So, we got a call from them giving us advance warning and asking us to leave and save ourselves. I don't know the exact and deep reason for this violence in 2012, but I believe the main reason for this violence is Bodoland, and this is not new, it is since '83, and the government is not giving them -- prompting them to resort to violence.

The narrative of the victimization as Muslims and as a subjugated minority is made possible by the other belonging to a majority, which is powerful, despite the fact that the other

[34] This is a century old organization of Muslim scholars who took upon themselves to bring social, educational and religious reform. Founded in 1919, it also actively participated in the anti-colonial struggle. It is one of the most active religious organization of Muslims in the Assam region.

is a minority too. However, Ghani Khan's narrative would tell us that the other is the one that has power to act against this minority. It is an ethnic construction as well as a structural reality. The majority, which is operating against this very minority, is not only a majority in terms of numbers, but one that has access to vast resources. Returning to the question of history and time, which is in contrast with the narrative of *'long time'*, Ghani Khan owns his past with a very clear memory:

> I was born here. My father was born in Jharkhand. He came here before his marriage. He must have come before 1947, I think he moved here in 1942. He came here in search of some kind of labour job. Some old people came from Jharkhand here and started some business. There was peace and harmony in those days. So, they decided to stay here, and then we spread and our number grew. My father is very old, maybe 100, but he is not here. In our village, people with land are very few. We are mostly workers, but we don't do any labour work on agricultural land. We haven't heard about the Bangladeshi issue here. No one has called us Bangladeshi. I know that Bengali-speaking Muslims are often dubbed as Bangladeshis, but they don't call us that as they know that we are from Jharkhand.

Before analysing Ghani Khan's account, which tells us about the politics of time and the variation in the formation of subject position, let us look into a similar account from Momin Ali, aged 30, who was also a small businessman living with his four children in the camp:

> I have never met any Bangladeshis in my life, not even one. In our village, some read newspapers and they do say in newspaper reports that there are Bangladeshis. We know when they call out 'Bangladeshis' or talk about it, it's referring to us, a shorthand for Muslims, and it hurt us. Bodos sometime call us Bangladeshis too, and we can't respond to them fearing that they might harm us. I am also from Jharkhand, but we speak Bangla here because in the market where I do business everyone speaks Bangla but here amongst family, we speak Hindi and our children go to school and study in Assamese.

There were a few important issues underlying these narratives. One of time, the second of subjectivity and the third of victimization; but let us begin with the question of time. There was a clear contrast between people who speak Bangla narrating their time, and those who spoke in Hindi. Any relationship to the past, to a history, is based on the experience of time, as Agamben argues,

> …every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. (Agamben, 1993, p.91).

The migrant's experience of time is directed towards the future, it is the anxiety of the future which shapes the experience of time and formulates his/her narrative of the past. If we take into account Ricoeur's philosophical work on narrative and time, which tends to suggest that "there can be no final theoretical answer to the meaning of time, only practical ones like those that make use of narrative to tell the story of human action, and of the world in which it occurs" (Pellauer, 2007, p.71), then we might see that in the narrative of long and old time lies the anxiety of the future and the experience of the past. It also becomes the narrative strategy for dealing with certain politics of time and citizenship. The very narrative of 'long time' acts as a narrative strategy with which to fend off any questions about belonging.

Ranajit Guha wonders about the temporal dilemma of the first migrant who arrives in a foreign or strange land, one in which he wants to participate in the now, the everyday life of the host community, yet that very participation in their life can make the first migrant an alien. It is s/he, then, who has to live with this dilemma and wait for the next generation to arrive "on the scene with its own time, over determining and thereby re-evaluating his temporality in a new round of conflicts and convergences" (Guha, 1998, pp.160). In the narrative of Faizal and Mohammad, we saw this re-evaluation that is based on the politics around them, and the repetitive cycle of violence which tended to subjugate them so that their experience with the past becomes a discontinuous one. Most of the people I met, in the different villages, shared this very narrative of 'a long time', or of being very old here, a reference to their fathers and grandfathers, without talking about their point of origin or East Bengali/ Bangladeshi roots. The narrative of 'long time', which determined their relationship with time, is a discontinuous time. This long time began in their narrative to disrupt their origin or the genesis of their migration. This very time disconnects them from a period, and it gives them a new sense of period. If we take this proposition that a "modern time regime does not need compensation but rather correction and complementation." and "in the frame of memory, the future is directed by the past, but the past is also re-evaluated in the light of future" (Assmann, 2013, p.55) then we can clearly see how the historical time - a time of their existence and experience - of the migrant community, is shaped by this discontinuity or rupture. It is the 'now time' which is 'long' and 'old', and which operates as a mode through which history is made possible as a livable experience. If the papers, as evidence of citizenship, legally make their existence and presence possible, then this narrative of a 'long time' becomes adequate enough to morally strengthen their presence and direct their *chronopolitcs* – the politics of time.

This dilemma of time was not faced by Ghani Khan and Momin Ali, as their forefathers' point of origin still lies within the territory of India, and they could legitimize their presence by pointing to the past, which corresponded to the continuity of modern India. They did not have to legitimize their presence by a narrative which is discontinuous, however, sharing the same religious identity as the migrant community might make them equally foreign, which they intended to dissociate themselves from by pointing to their own historical origin. It is not that these people were unaware of their past, once their relationship with me, as a researcher, changed to one of friendship, there were references made to Bangladesh, but their 'long time' did not tend to disappear. It stayed as a reminder of presence, even if they have belonged to this region by living here since birth, by dwelling in their villages from the beginning of their time, they did not want to be associated with the term 'immigrant' or 'Bangladesh'. The 'long time' produces its own presence, and in the shadow of that time a distant past was rendered irrelevant. This 'long time' serves as a counter narrative to the popular narrative which may delineate these people as being alien, infiltrators, intruders, immigrants and foreigners. This can be seen as a counter-narrative of resistance, it is a resistance of memory against history, and it is a resistance of presence against the past, and it is a resistance of self-definition against categorization.

In the narratives of Ghani Khan and Momin Ali there also lies a counter narrative to those of the English and Urdu presses' framing of the problem of violence. While the English press focuses on the native and the non-native and reports the violence as a clash between Bodos and Immigrants, or Bangladeshi or Bengali immigrants, it does not consider the identity of people like Ghani Khan and Momin Ali, who belong to a different ethnic and linguistic identity. If the clash is predominantly between Bodos and Immigrants, then Ghani and Momin also become part of that immigrant community since they share the Immigrants' religious identity. *The Assam Tribune,* in this case, does not see the ambivalence in the identity of the victims, it is in this condition that my informants would tend to claim that Bangladeshi becomes a shorthand for Muslims. Meanwhile the Urdu press that we have studied essentializes their religious identity and frames the other (group) as irrational and violent. In the narratives of Ghani Khan and Momin Ali, we come upon the claim of their own subjectivity, their distinction from the Bengali Muslim, and also the rational or functional relationship that they have with the Bodo community, which helped to save their lives. The Muslim subjectivity that is formed by the press, or by the political leadership, remote from the ground, is not always congruent

with the subjectivity that is produced by people on the ground. The discourse of victimization is not a mirror image of the victims' narrative, and we will return to these problems later.

Jauliapara, Duramari
Location Three

In Duramari's Jauliapara, I met nine-year-old schoolgirl, Manjulika, who was with her grandparents in July, 2012, when they were attacked, and her grandfather died on the spot and in front of her eyes, from a bullet injury. She did not say much, she was a bit frightened and preferred silence, but she showed me her arm, which bore the mark of a bullet wound. Her mother, Safoora Bibi, came to narrate the incident on her behalf.

Safoora Bibi, like many others, did not remember her exact age, and with the help of others she could tell us that she was twenty-eight years old. "It was during the time of sehri (the time before dawn for fasting), there was sound of gunshot, my father in law went out to see and he was shot directly. He died. They then started shooting at our houses: my daughter and mother in law got injured in that shooting. Then we left this place." She was quick and accurate in narrating the events of that day, as she had witnessed events of violence before. She did not remember the dates of any of these episodes, though. What she remembered was the loss, the suffering, and the event, which defined who she was. In her narrative, violence is not just present in everyday life, but it is to be expected at any moment and this had also become normal; as she insisted, "We now have a habit of living with violence. We just wait for another episode."

The mother-in-law of Safoora Bibi joined us near the paddy field, where we were trying to recollect the details of that day, and the conversation was punctuated by many silences. Like many others, Safoora Bibi, too, questioned the rationality of cyclical violence, "We don't know the reason for the violence. We just face the consequences. Someone else might get benefit from the violence." Not much detail followed the statement about the reasons for violence. Their judgment was that the violence is not rationally justified, and when Safoora Bibi claimed that the reason for the violence was unknown to her, she also meant that the true politics of it, was not clear to her. In everyday life, when things might be normal, the reason for the violence was perplexing. Safoora's mother in law was shot that night too, but she restrained herself from

talking about the night that her husband died; she did not divulge her name. After a long silence, she just said she remembered everything, and that her memory was full of other episodes of violence as well. A few men, returning from the paddy field, joined us, and everyone started to talk about the events of violence they remembered best. One could notice the change in tone of the men when they were talking about the violence. A man, with passion and rag,e interrupted the way Safoora reminisced in a mild tone, "It enrages us whenever we are dumped as Bangladeshi. During the stay in relief camp in 2012 we protested against this labelling and representation. These Bodos want to dump us as Bangladeshi." The young man's voice, full of rage, continued, "We know that it will happen more." A few others joined in, divulging their own anxieties and their expectations of violence, which they believed to be on the horizon. Women stopped talking about it, and men started to express their apprehensions.

Everyday life is memorialized by the violence and the mark it has left on the people, as does the expectation of those future episodes which keep these people in perpetual anxiety. The function of violence, for such a society, is then not only something which pulls them to the past, but it is news, always in the making. Its arrival should always be expected. In their articulation, violence is without any definite reason, it lacks rationality. It only has the force to unleash suffering.

Ricoeur talks about three functions of mind: expectation, attention and memory, which results in a state where the future, "which it expects passes through *[transeat*] the present, to which it attends, into the past, which it remembers" (Ricoeur, 1984, p.19). For Ricoeur, the mind expects and remembers, and this expectation and remembrance is what appears in the present, showing the contrast between past and future. The remembrance of the past also shapes the expectation of the future, and as long as the mind remembers it also tends to expect. While Ricoeur make this relationship of the present with the past and the future through his philosophical reading of Augustine, Reinhert Koselleck, on the other hand, takes a historical approach in reading the modern condition of viewing the past and the future together. Koselleck argued that "there is no history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents" (Koselleck, 2004, p.256). For him, the '*space of experience'* and *'horizon of expectation'* are the two historical categories of our time and "these two categories are indicative of a general human condition; one could say that they indicate an anthropological condition without which history is neither possible nor conceivable" (Koselleck, 2004, p.257). If we look into the accounts of the expectation of

Safoora Bibi and other informants, we see that the space of experience that is shaped by imminent violence, has also framed their expectation from the future. There is so much to remember and experience, but not much to expect. In their present, their future is merely an extension of the past, of the memory of loss and displacement.

There is no social relationship between the women of this village with the Bodos or their women; they do go out to farm sometimes, but much less often than before the 2012 violence. Before 2012, some of the men had some contact with Bodos, but this had ended too. *"During farming, sometimes, we talk, but it's not friendship,"* a man clarified. This dynamic differed from village to village, but in all the villages one could see that the relationship, even that which existed pre-2012, was not very deep. There did not exist much of a cultural or social exchange, if there was an exchange at all, it was through the medium of the economy. The clear demarcation between villages and within a village also made it difficult to have exchanges on a daily basis. In Duramari, there was hardly any conversation between Bodos and Bengali Muslims after 2012. Since most of the people have their own land now, they no longer go to Bodo land for farming. Earlier, they used to work on their farm on a 50-50 basis (the *Bataidari* system), but, as I was informed, they refused to do so anymore.

"It is to throw us away from our land"

In her fluent Bangla, she started to narrate her experience of violence, most of which had already been narrated by fellow villagers. Qaisar Bibi, like many others, was not sure of her own age. The 34-year-old was perplexed on the question of age, the only time her confidence seemed rattled. The explanation provided by one of the villagers was that most of them were illiterate, and they did not exactly remember their age (the one according to the paper), and when ever there was a need, they would run to some educated person to cross check factual details. Women in the village were largely illiterate, however, girls had started to receive an education in the last 10-15 years. A high school had recently been inaugurated in the village, which mobilized families to send girls to school. Factors barring girls from pursuing education were child marriage or early marriage.

Qaisar Bibi remembered three episodes of violence, which she witnessed in 1983, 1994 and 2012:

> I remember from 1994 that houses were burnt and 34 people died in the attack, while many were injured. We had camped in Kashipara, which was in the Kokrajhar police station; we stayed there for ten days. We returned back to see that all the good houses were destroyed and cattle were stolen.

The violence in 2012 was very fresh in her memory, and she narrated it in great detail. A few women, sitting at the fence near her house, interrupted once or twice to add details to her narrative. She was quite vivid and elaborate in the detail she gave, unlike a few men who had narrated their stories. The details were very much part of the uniqueness of her narration, but the translator merely translated the narrative (it seemed) regarding the periods in which she stayed in different places. She narrated her tale of displacement:

> In 2012, when it all started, we went to the school, made it as a camp, the MLA[35] from the ruling party of BODOLAND came and said to us not to worry at all about the violence, and that he would help us, but eventually relief camp, i.e., the school, was attacked too. So, we were frightened, as after leaving home we thought we were safe in school, but it was insecure too. Women and children were separated. In the relief camp at school two people died during the shooting. The police that were meant to protect us were there too and were attacked. Both sides then indulged in the firing during the night. Eighteen people died in this village, including children and women. I lived in relief camp for months like everyone else.

The number of casualties, in her account, differed from the account of others, however, she detailed the facts about the local MLA and was more expressive about it than anyone else. Although she was not making much eye contact, her fluency was impeccable. As a woman she had, perhaps, more to say on suffering. She found this occasion apt to reflect on the event and her life. Like everyone else, she asserted her belonging to the village and repeated, "We are from here ... Our father and grandfather all from this place." The experience of time and its narration does not change with gender, as both genders experienced similar kinds of violence and their perception of the past has been shaped by these events and the politics around that violence. The understanding of local politics and the sense of conflict are common among men and women.

[35] Member of the legislative assembly, the legislator elected every five years for the state assembly.

Most of the people had the presence of mind to flee with essential papers, proof of their legitimacy as citizens. In 2012, the violence started from this side of the village (where I was located at the time) and so most of the people did not get much time to collect all their papers. Forty-eight-year-old Mujeeb was one of those who had to flee without getting a chance to collect the necessary documents. He said that all his documents were burnt in the fire which swallowed the village. He managed to get his documents for land, but was yet to be registered on the electoral roll. He further said, *"*No one says now that we are Bangladeshi but during the violence, they used to say we are not from here. We have each and every document, Bangladeshi issue is just an excuse to do violence and throw us away from our land."

Figure 6.6 A representational image from one of the villages

For the villagers, these episodes of violence do not start with anything specific. In raising the issue of the Bangladeshi tag, villagers asked why it was never explained who the infiltrator, against whom voices are being raised, is. As one man, sitting with Mujeeb, said: "They never say it clearly pointing to an individual that he/she is a Bangladeshi. They always say it very vaguely. They will burn the village and will say that there were Bangladeshis there and hence the violence was justified."

They all came together to say that they had never seen a Bangladeshi, in their life. "We

have never found any in our village from Bangladesh. We only hear from others or read in news that in x village Bangladeshis have infiltrated," said another man, sitting on the floor. This is another method with which the villagers questioned the reasons for the violence, and pointed to the violence being strategized. They even linked the logic of violence with the electoral politics of the State. The fear of its coming back is evident, and so is the anticipation that, "The election is around the corner, it will start again after the election." Despite being critical of the State, their commitment to voting and to making the election a success, is very dutiful, as through elections they assert their citizenship and do not want to be labelled 'doubtful' people, by missing out on the vote. Hence, everyone goes to vote, as a man from another village put it "the voting percentage among Muslims here was higher than 90%, because if you did not vote you might become a doubtful citizen (i.e., a D voter)."

Eighty years old, Aleemuddeen, the father of Mujeeb, also joined us, reminiscing about his days in this village. Living in this village for many decades, he was the oldest man among them. He is a farmer with a meagre land holding of half a *bigha*. His farmland was where the firing first started in 2012, after which the violence spread throughout the village. He had not had the courage to return to his field since 2012 to conduct his usual farm work. "I feel very frightened as it is very close to the Bodo village, it's just the other side of the road." Aleemuddeen had migrated to this village from the neighbouring district of Goalpara, seven decades ago. He migrated soon after his marriage, when he lost everything in a flood and came to this village, escaping natural disaster and settled. For him, the Bangladeshi tag issue is a recent one, at least in his memory, as he had never heard of such an issue while living in Goalpara. As to how he reached Goalpara, he clarified the position and belonging by referring to the 'long time':

> I lost land in flood and moved here, and I was never harassed in the name of Bangladeshi before; but now after each act of violence, they call the event a Bangladeshi issue. It was only during 1983 that I heard it for the first time.

Internal displacement due to flooding is very common in Assam, and often the movement of people from one district to another is linked to illegal immigration. Goalpara District is located on the bank of the Brahmaputra, and has a history of flooding and displacement. During my fieldwork, I happened to visit the village of Mayong (also famous for black magic) in the Morigaon District, near Guwahati. A few regional newspapers published a story about Bangladeshis having captured land in Mayong overnight, building

bamboo houses upon it. Taking part in a fact-finding group to investigate this issue, I discovered that these people possessed permits, issued by the local administration, to stay on the land, since they had been displaced by flooding and soil erosion. Since the issue of migration mobilizes many sentiments in the region, displacement from neighbouring areas and any new forms of settlement creates panic. In Kokrajhar District, I came across many people who had migrated from either Dhubri or Goalpara. Both these districts had a common history of flooding and consequent displacement. The only difference between Dhubri and Goalpara is that Dhuburi has an important entry point used by migrant labour during colonial times. Aleemuddeen's story of migration is one of internal displacement caused by flooding, however, his internal migration, combined with the history and politics of migration, generated an anti-immigrant sentiment against him. It was noted that:

> With the flooding of the Brahmaputra over the years, and the subsequent slow-onset event of erosion of riverbanks, there has been large displacement of people every year. Whole villages have been erased or washed away due to the force of the river. Unfortunately, official statistical databases for the number of villages displaced and details regarding the relocation of the population - where they move to and how they survive - remain vague. (Coelho, 2013)

Table: 6.1 Number of erased villages in Assam

District	Number of erased villages	
Dhubri	71	
Jorhat	2	
Kamrup	14	
Goalpara	75	
Chars (Riverine area)	181	

Source: Coelho, 2013

The table above portrays the number of erased villages, prompting people to migrate and find a new home. It should also be noted that most of these Char areas are historically populated by Bengali immigrants. The narrative of Bangladeshi migration in the state is entangled with many factors, which the regional and national press do not tend to consider.

Kathalgudi
Location Four

Fakir lived with his four children and wife in a relief camp in Kathalgudi village in the Gossaigaon Subdivision. He moved here after the 2012 violence gripped his village, Ramphalbil, which is surrounded by Bodo villages:

> In 2012, no Bodo came to protect us, in fact, our neighbours said kindly leave because we will not be able to protect you. 1200 to1300 people came to attack our village. They were armed with gun, knives, sticks, and fire and petrol bombs. There were only four policemen who took us to the police station. Bodos were all around us, and we were the only Muslim village in that locality. That day, we just ran madly, we took our naked children and ran, but there was no escape, we thought we would never survive. The attackers were from our neighbouring villages. My mother had a heart attack, seeing all of this, and eventually died in the hospital at Bongaigaon, where we took her soon after escaping the village. Children said during the violence that "Father, our house is burning", and I asked them not to look back, just keep running. Now when we talk about going back to our village, they say we survived somehow, but we cannot survive next time. We will starve here, but will not go back.

Fakir talked at length about his experience of being in the relief camp and as a witness of the violence. His memory was shaped not by one big event of violence, but by a series of violent episodes, which are an everyday reality for his village. The routine violence he spoke of ranged from smaller conflicts between his fellow villagers and the Bodos, to the portrayal of him and his neighbours as a Bangladeshi and foreigner. His village had a history of trouble with neighbouring villages, which is not being reported or investigated by the media or the administration. These small and regular conflicts make the ground for a bigger event more fertile. Fakir, and others accompanying him, articulated India as a majoritarian state with a Hindu Identity, one where the media serves the majoritarian sentiment. For him, Bangladeshi is a name for Muslims in the state, and anything can be turned into a Bangladeshi issue, in order to marginalize them. The media does not represent them fairly and citing an instance of such misrepresentation, Fakir referred to a time, after the 2012 violence, when during their stay in government camps, a few people were reported by officials as being missing, and then further reported in the media as being missing illegal immigrants:

> When there is nothing to eat, one will go out to find work. If your name is registered with the relief camp and you are out to work when the officers come for enquiry, then they go back and make a report that there were Bangladeshis in the camp, and now they are missing. They would never ask others about them and give this as news item to the media channels, and the media never come to confirm or cross check the facts.

According to Fakir's narrative, it is the distrust of the state, arising from the belief that the state does not contribute to their well-being, and that leads people in relief camps to leave for different cities or states, to find work, which, to their detriment, allows officials to report them as infiltrators. The issue of illegal immigrants, missing from camps, have been turned into a political issue by the BJP and are consistently reported on, by *The Assam Tribune,* which synonymises this issue with the violence. Fakir, too, returned to the question of land towards the end of his narrative, relaying that the Bodos had attempted to seize his land whilst he was resident in his village, which he had reported to the police. He explained, however, that such encroachment was now hard to battle, since he no longer lived in the village.

D Voters: The Doubtful Citizens

One of the outcomes of the Assam agitation was The Illegal Migrant (determination by tribunal) Act[36] (the IMDT act), which was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1983, as a mechanism with which to identify foreigners in the country by tribunal, which was especially constituted for this purpose. The burden, according to the Act, was upon the local authority to prove whether a subject was a citizen or not. With the enactment of this special tribunal, a peculiar phenomenon started to emerge in the state, during the 1990s. During the revision of the electoral roll in 1998, the letter 'D'[37] was marked against people whose citizenship was doubted by the state. These voters were called D Voters, a short form for Doubtful Voters. Such individuals were referred to the tribunal and the authority would investigate their case, during which period they would remain doubtful. A white paper, published by the government of Assam, in 2012, on the foreigners' issue in the state, introduced the genesis of D voters, in Chapter 2.6, as follows:

> In pursuance of instructions of Election Commission of India dated January 5, 1998 during intensive revision of electoral roll in Assam in 1997, the letter 'D' was marked against the names of those electors who could not prove their Indian citizenship status at the time of verification through officers, especially appointed for the purpose. 'D' meant that the citizenship status of the elector was doubtful/disputed. Verification was done through local verification officers (LVOs). Based upon the report of the Local Verification Officers (LVOs), the Electoral Registration Officers took a decision on

[36] See more: https://indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/1766/1/198339.pdf

[37] This might be considered a bizarre comparison, but in the Imperial War Museum in London I came across the collection from the Holocaust, where I saw the passport of a German Jew being stamped 'J' by the Nazi authority. While 'D' makes them doubtful, and a subject who is to be detected and deported, in the case of 'J', extermination was the end devised.

whether a reference to the concerned Tribunal was necessary to ascertain the Indian citizenship status of such elector. Once the Electoral Registration Officers confirmed in the affirmative, such cases were forwarded to the competent authority (SP of the concerned district) for reference to the concerned Tribunal. Such electors marked with 'D' were neither permitted to cast their votes nor contest in Elections. In issuing such instructions, the Commission took into consideration various orders of the Gauhati High Court, Supreme Court. and provisions of Article 326 of the constitution read conjointly with section 16 of the Representation of People's Act, 1950 and section 62 of the Representation of the People's Act, 1951. The cases of such 'D' voters were forwarded by the Electoral Registration Officers concerned to the competent authority (Police Department) for further reference to the relevant Tribunals for determination of their citizenship. Based on the judgment /orders of the Tribunals, the letter 'D' was either removed from against the names of those electors whose Indian citizenship status was confirmed or the name of the elector deleted from the Electoral Rolls in the case of those whose citizenship status as Indian could not be established in Court (Assam, 2012).

Table : 6.2 Number of D voters (1998 -July 2012)

Cases referred	Cases disposed	Cases Pending	Persons Declared as foreigners	Persons Declared as Indian	Cases where no opinion could be expressed
231657	88192	143465	**6590**	44220	37382

Source*:* White paper on Foreigners' Issue, Government of Assam

In 2005, the Supreme Court repealed the IMDT Act and declared it unconstitutional. In the popular case of Sonowal vs Union of India, Sarbananda Sonowal filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court of India, to repeal this Act on the grounds that it was unconstitutional and made it difficult to detect and deport foreigners. Sonowal, who was the President of the AASU in the 1990s, later joined the right -wing Hindu Nationalist BJP, and became Chief Minister of Assam in 2016. The judgment in the Sonowal case is of great significance in the debate of citizenship, in India. The judgment of the Supreme Court in repealing the IMDT Act brought these migrants within the scope of the Foreigners' Act of 1946, according to which the burden of proof to prove citizenship, rests upon the person accused of being illegal. The Supreme Court, in its judgment, also equated illegal immigration with aggression, detailing in several paragraphs the wide-reaching implications of illegal immigration, referring to this form of migration as an aggression not dissimilar to war, providing an international precedent of judgments held against illegal migrants, and spoke to the economic aggression of migration. This judgment is of significance since the migrant was not only declared an alien and an infiltrator, through this

ratio, but also became an aggressor; his act of aggression an act against the state of India. Ratna Kapur (2007) stresses that the “Sonowal decision needs to be read within the context of the re-emergence of the Hindu right”, and that this “case demonstrates how Indian citizenship is deeply anchored in assumptions about cultural and religious identity and not confined to formal legal status”. She also notes an important aspect in the judgment, for which the Supreme Court heavily relied on an army report alleging that “Muslim militant organizations had mushroomed across Assam and that the large-scale illegal migration was tantamount to external aggression and causing internal disturbance”. This reliance is very telling of the Supreme Court’s “approach to the issue of citizenship” (Kapur, 2007, p.557). The emergence of the Hindu right since the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in 1992, aims to complete its central project of constructing Indian citizens as Hindu citizens.

Anupama Roy, in her work on citizenship in India, has discussed this judgment in great detail. She notes that:

> It is significant that while declaring the IMDT Act unconstitutional, the court described immigration not merely as 'illegal' entry into foreign territory, *but as an act of aggression*, arguing within a discursive framework that makes for a bounded notion of citizenship, with the policing of boundaries and the determination of citizenship construed as a significant manifestation of state sovereignty. Moreover, the arguments that the judges made before identifying migration as an act of aggression placed their articulation of citizenship squarely within the framework of an ethnically determined membership of the nation-state. In this exposition, the constituent outsider was marked out not only on account of being a foreigner, but also on account of being a Muslim, the latter inevitably associated with Islamic fundamentalism, as well as a threat to the nation (read Hindu) and its security.
>
> Significantly, the judgment's discussion of demographic shifts in Assam, and hence the undesirability of the IMDT Act, switches from an examination of the population break-up in terms of linguistic profile to a religious profile of the state. The examination focuses, thus, on the increase in the Muslim population, occluding in the process the linguistic specificity and cultural preservation that had formed the basis of differentiated citizenship articulated in the initial stages of the Assam movement, followed by developmental concern. (Roy, 2010, pp.116-117)

In another observation made by Anupama Roy and Ujjwal Kumar Singh, they write:

> While Bengali-speaking Muslims have come to constitute a “suspect community” not just in Assam, but in the rest of India, subjected to frequent dislocation, expulsion, or excision of their names from the voters list, here has been an ongoing shift in the philosophical and ideological basis of citizenship, from civic and associational forms

> to a predominantly exclusivist ethnic definition of citizenship. While the Supreme Court judgment, in particular the justification it gave for scrapping the IMDT Act, was one manifestation of the shift, a more enduring change has been taking place, almost imperceptibly, in the legal framework of citizenship in India. (Roy and Singh, 2009, pp.58-59)

As a result of this judgment, one who is doubted or stamped 'D', or Doubtful, has to prove his citizenship at a tribunal and, very often, due to lack of paperwork and resources one member of a family is separated and detained. Many, who are legitimate Indian citizens, find themselves in detention centers for long periods, since Bangladesh is not their home country and they have nowhere to go. Most of the citizens living in poverty find this burden of proof an unbearable one. In a very well-known case, reported in the national media, a daily wage laborer committed suicide, since he was not able to generate resources to free his mother from the 'D' category.[38] This is a form of structural violence, and as Kamil Sadiq has observed, it is biased against the poor (Sadiq, 2009). Siddique (2019), in recent work, note that:

> Many of the legal battles to prove citizenship turn into a failure owing to the inexperienced handling of the lawyers, for good lawyers are a distant dream for most of them. There are instances where the victims of "doubt" are forced to sell even the small plots of lands or other properties they ever possessed while pursuing the state-imposed legal battles.
>
> This has resulted in the landlessness and homelessness of thousands of families. (Siddique, 2019, p.27).

Sapkata Village
Location Five

As most of the people I met, in Kokrajhar, denied meeting any D voters, and some even expressed their ignorance about the issue altogether, I encountered very few Doubtful voters, and I recorded the narratives of these few. Sapkata (literally meaning 'snake bite'), is a village in the Gossaigaon Sub-division of Kokrajhar, a village named for incidents of snake bites by flying snakes which, it, is claimed, once lived there. The main road in this post office village,is not very well built towards the end of the village. In Matiapara, in this village, I met sixty years old Jan Bibi, who did not speak any Hindi, and who was a 'Doubtful voter', living with her son and his family in a hut made of bamboos with a tin shed. Jan Bibi never learnt to read or write,

[38] See more: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/assam-man-commits-suicide-after-failing-to-free-his-mother-from-d-voter-tag/articleshow/65744093.cms

and she did not watch Television or follow the news through any other medium. She remembered living in this village for over 45 years, while her family was from the Dhubri District. Before being profiled as ‘doubtful’ she had not heard about ‘D voters’ or what it meant to be named one. She had no clear understanding of the issue or of its implications. She recalled:

> I did not know about D voters. I have always voted, but since 2005 my name has appeared in D voters and I could not vote. I remembered to be ill and was visiting a doctor. They summoned us for verification of voters list in the local police station, which I missed. My husband could not appear as well (he did not take it very seriously) and after that my name was included in D voters list. I was not notified that I am a D voter by any direct correspondence. It was during the election in 2005 I went to cast my vote and I learnt that I am a D voter at the election booth. I am the only one in that list. No one in my house has got the D voter notice, no one is in the list, and everyone goes for voting from my family. Since then I get notices and then we have to appear (in Kokrajhar) before the court and talk to lawyers and come back. This is what is happening since then. After 2012 violence we didn’t appear for two years in the court and then we got another notice.

Jan Bibi did not know why her name had appeared on the list. Her son clarified that, between 2005 and 2015, he had appeared ten times before the court on his mother’s behalf, and he took her to the court once. Jan Bibi remembered the violence of 2012 against Muslims, and in 1996 against the Adivasis:

> I was here in 2012 when the violence happened. For almost a week since the beginning of violence we patrolled our village and guarded it in night, even women, but late,r when we saw a village burnt in East, then we left our village for refugee camp. We stayed for three months in Kachari Gaon, Dhubri District relief camp. During the violence they were shouting at us ‘Bangladeshi hatao’ ‘Bangladeshi hatao’ [Expel Bangladeshis]. They were calling us Bangladeshis, I know it. Every one of my forefathers is from this country, I know they are calling us Bangladeshis, but my father is still alive, and he is in Dhubri, and his family is from there. We have all the documents including the NRC of 1951. I have witnessed the violence against Santhal (Adivasis) in 1996. I saw their houses being burnt and when they ran away they took refuge in our village first, and then moved to different camps. We helped them in moving to camps as well.

Jan Bibi’s son, Zahoor, wondered out loud why his mother was included in the list whilst no one else in the family was. Zahoor, too, did not seem aware of the politics surrounding the D voter list, like his mother, and the implication of being included on the list. In Matiapara, Bengali Muslims do not have a good relationship with the Bodos and the Adivasis of the village but Zahoor had a clear memory of the1996 violence against the Adivasis. The systematic

violence in which one community is targeted, in one episode, is a typical feature of violence in the region. This almost operates as an independent system of ‘detecting’ and ‘killing’ in each unique episode. Zahoor’s narrative showed an empathy and care for the Adivasis, despite having no cultural exchange or regular communication.

> I saw violence in 1996, Adivasis came in night running for life, and they told us that Bodos killed our people and burnt our houses, they were targeted in 2014 as well. I gave them my house as shelter in 2014 when they ran for life. They lived here for almost three years. A lot of people were killed then.

Figure 6.7 A barber’s shop in Bhumrabil village with multi-religious calendars

Jan Bibi, has been aided, by local volunteers from the *Jamiat e Ulema i Hind*, to fight her case. The *Jamiat* actively helps any D voters who ask for their aid and ask for a meagre compensation of one thousand rupees to help them get through the case. *Jamiat’s* activity, on the ground, helps this Muslim organization to strengthen their ideological base and reap the dividends politically by getting support for its political party, AIUDF. The All India United

Democratic Front (AIUDF)[39] was founded by the State President of *Jamiat e Ulema i Hind,* Badruddin Ajmal. Recurrent violence and the Bangladeshi tag issue have made *Jamiat* an important political actor within the state, and by involving itself in everyday issues of the people it has been able to garner popular support. The issues surrounding the Muslim minority of the region have strengthened the power of this old Muslim organization, which has traditionally only had symbolic control over the Muslims of India, providing it with a platform for its narrative of finding prominence in national politics. Athiabadi Camp, mentioned earlier, is also run by *Jamiat*, however, the organisation has made sure not to decree the land to the people, rather, allowing them to stay there whilst retaining control of the resource. By involving itself in issues of the D-voter list and rehabilitation, such organizations with a pan- India and pan-Islamic narrative influence the sense of *Muslimness* of the people they help. People who volunteer on such initiatives articulate victimization differently than those who are remote from it. Violence and the question of citizenship opened up new cracks from which religious power started to operate in the everyday life of the people. Such charitable initiatives certainly help the poor and marginalized to access resources (in, however, a limited way), which may lead to ensuring citizenship, however, it also takes away from them the agency to articulate their struggle and have a voice – socially and politically. Social actors, like this one, have the power to act on behalf of individuals or the community, and in acting this agency can transform their (individuals' or community's) sense of belonging and identity, from which they become dispossessed. If we take into account the narrative of Jan Bibi, who has carried the tag of the 'D voter' for ten years, but remains unaware of its meaning, her illiteracy and the *Jamiat'*s intervention may create a detachment from emerging trends, dilemmas and crises, which make human agency evolve, limiting her agency and capacity to act.

Khadeeja Bibi, of Ballamguri, managed to rid herself of the doubtful tag after appearing in court for over six years. She was first barred from voting in 2007, when she appeared in the booth with her serial number and learnt that she could not vote, but she got an official letter in 2009 notifying her of being enlisted as a D voter.

> I took all the papers of mine, of my father and my husband, and appeared five times in the court since then. Eventually I was cleared of the tag in 2014. The magistrate used to ask me about my father and forefathers and whether they were Bangladeshis or Indian. Magistrate checked my papers and documents many times before clearing my name from the D voter list.

[39] Founded first as the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) in 2005, and later changing its name to All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)

She witnessed the violence in 2012, and that earlier against Santhalis (Adivasis), like many others, and remembered helping them. She made clear her agitation at being called Bangladeshi:

> In 2012 only 36 houses were left, and rest were all burnt. My house wasn't burnt. I have seen the violence against Santhalis earlier. I saw them running away from their villages and we tried to help them then. This is our land and I am not afraid living here. I have never seen any Bangladeshi in my life. This is just an issue they have created. No one has called me a Bangladeshi, but they call all of us Bangladeshi in general.

Sixty-year-old Sakeena Bewa had a different tale of helplessness to tell as she waited for the cloud of doubt to pass so she could resume a life of normalcy. She had been listed on the D voters' list in 2005, and had not been able to free herself of it for ten years. Sakeena, a widow, had a thirty-year-old son who now worked in the South of India, and who had also been added to the list. Sakeena's story is one of many which demonstrate the nature of this law and its execution. In her own words:

> This village is my birthplace. My father was also born here. My father's name was in the 1951 NRC. I have always been exercising my rights as a citizen to vote, but in 2005, when I went to cast my vote. they gave me a receipt, I took that receipt to the booth, then two policemen saw my receipt and said that you are no longer allowed to vote. I was termed a 'D voter'. Ten years have gone by, but I have not received any notice or any letter from the authorities. I have no reason to go to the magistrate or the court as the notice is yet to come. I was told that day that my name has got a 'D' against it. My son and I both were marked as D voters. We don't have any voter ID card (issued by the Election Commission of India) and without an identity it is very difficult to find a job in this state, this is why my son migrated to the South of India.

Before 2012, she used to live in a different village, on her nephew's land.

> I moved here after the violence in 2012, which destroyed two of our houses. It was all burnt, and our storage of food was burnt too. They shot at us too, that fateful morning. I made this house myself with the compensation we got from the government. The paper of the earlier house was in my nephew's name, so he got the compensation and gave me my share. But the registration of my land is not done yet officially. I am illiterate. I didn't know about D voters, but since then I went to police station, election officer, village authorities, but no one has helped me. They all said 'everything will be solved, don't worry' but they haven't told me how to solve it, or how it will be solved. I have all the documents of my father and husband. I have the NRC documents of 1951 and 1966. I went to the authorities in the last election too, and they repeated the same that I am on the 'Doubtful' list/

Sakeena Bewa did not want to talk much about her memory of violence and the history of her presence in the village, she was looking more desperately at the horizon for a future. Anxiety driven Sakeena, also submitted her documents to the NRC, and thought being registered would resolve her 'D voter' problem, but the officials told her the two were different. NRC's first draft of their citizens' list, released in July, 2018, has cast doubt on the citizenship of four million people (and the second draft released in August, 2019, has excluded roughly two million from the citizenship list). Sakeena faced multiple challenges in this situation, which include her illiteracy, poverty, gender, her inability to deal with the bureaucracy, and waiting for an official notice which might begin her actual legal battle for citizenship. While Sakeena waited for the notice, the absurdity and arbitrariness of the Kafkaesque bureaucracy comes to mind, which is a prominent element of the immigration story of Assam. Siddique also highlights the arbitrariness of the law, and notes:

> …the method of marking individuals as D-voters is utterly arbitrary and unsystematic. To one's surprise, the tag of D-voter thus imposed on an individual's name can only be removed through an order by the FTs. In case any FT finds an individual to be doubtful, it immediately throws them into jail, officially termed as a "detention camp." At present there are about 900 D-voters, and about 2,000 declared foreigners languishing in the jails. (Siddique, 2019, p.26)

I recently acquired a copy of a judgment through a lawyer in Assam. This judgment deals with a similar case. In the judgment order, delivered by a Foreigners; Tribunal in the case of Amina Khatun and others, the judge noted the absurdity of delivering notices which can destroy people's lives and families. In this case, the notice was hung upon a tree in the market place. The judge remarked:

> The said case was proceeded ex-parte because the Applicants /Ops were not found in the given address at the time of serving a summons, as reported by the PS, and accordingly the said notice was hung upon a tree in the market place in the presence of Gaonburha[40] and the VDP[41] President. It would be pertinent to mention herein that the process server and the Gaonburha and VDP President are summoned before this

[40] The village Headman

[41] The Village Defence Party (VDP) is the primary unit of the organisation called the Village Defence Organisation (VDO). A VDP comprises of 20-25 volunteers from a village who are responsible for safeguarding the area of that particular village jurisdiction. This concept is unique to Assam and was introduced in 1949. See more: http://assampolice.gov.in/departments/vdo/vdo.php

> Tribunal innumerable times in various Foreigners' cases, directing all these persons not to hang the Notice in any ordinary place like the waiting shade/trees or upon electric pole, but to hang the Notices in some conspicuous place, but in most of the cases it is repeatedly found that process serves usually hang the notices upon some trees or electric pole.

The judge also made a remarkable statement that:

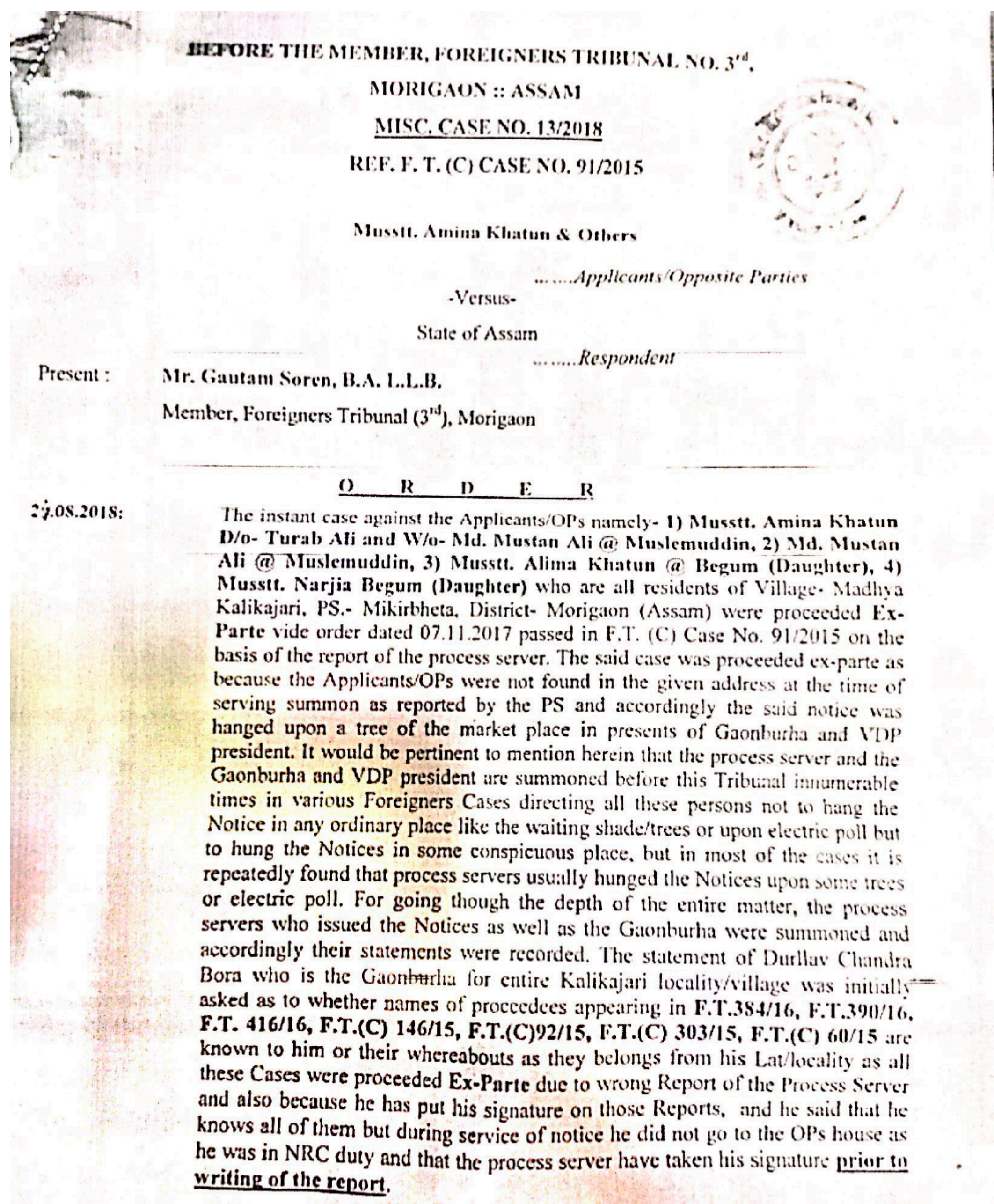
> …it is also observed by this Tribunal at the grassroots level, through Tribunal's own reliable source, that Foreigners' case, at this juncture, have assumed the form of an industry, as each and every person involved with Foreigners' cases has been trying to mint money by any means.

The court, dismissing the charges against the applicants, advised them to file an appropriate damage suit against the village authorities. Most people complained that the law was unfair, and so was its execution. as this whole process of labelling voters D voters was very arbitrary. Walter Benjamin, in his critique of violence, does not take a position against the law or lawfulness, but saw the law as being instrumentalized to enact violence, and law enforcement being emboldened by authoritarian or totalitarian regimes which can become a source of violence. The law, which wants to delineate the 'doubtful' from the 'faithful' and its process, which detects the person living a doubted life, has an element of arbitrariness and violence. As most of the people who have to go through this whole process are poor and lack resources, the law, then, is not on their side by placing upon them the burden of proving their citizenship. The actions of law enforcement agencies, with their arbitrariness, hanging notices on trees and dragging cases before a court for over a decade, is not conducive either, leaving people in a vulnerable position to be exploited by corrupt authorities.

The fieldwork also threw up a perplexing question by bringing female D voters to the fore. There are no clear government statistics separating the number of D voters by gender, however, Muslim women seem more prone to appear on D voter lists for two normative social reasons: one, changing their surname after marriage, bringing about a change in status; the single girl or woman generally has 'Begum' (use for a lady) as the last name, replaced with 'Bibi' (one of its meanings is wife) after marriage, and 'Bewa' (literally meaning Widow) upon widowhood, which causes confusion and ambiguity, in many cases. The normative practice then becomes a challenge to modern name keeping, and it subsequently makes the person appear to be doubtful. The other social practice causing 'doubt' was revealed by a social worker from the village who was working on a few 'D voter' cases. Second marriage in men,

after being widowed, is quite common, and they often then give their first wife's identity card to the newly-wed second one. The second wife, possessing the documents of the deceased first wife, often gets caught and listed as a doubtful citizen. I am unsure of the numbers of such cases, but this narrative is suggestive of citizenship dynamics at a very low level. The concept of citizenship and doubt conceptually operates from the top, on one level, and on another level, this is contested, created and lived upon at the ground level. In a way, the concepts of citizenship and identity become fluid, it is not only for the state to 'doubt', 'detect' or 'confirm', but it also rests with the 'men' who have the power to grant it to their 'women'. It is on a legal and bureaucratic level that the 'Doubtful citizen' is arbitrarily picked, but it is also on a very social level, through certain practices, that the 'doubt' is cultivated.

Figure 6.8 Copy of the Judgment on Amina Khatun & others by the Foreigners' Tribunal



BEFORE THE MEMBER, FOREIGNERS TRIBUNAL NO. 3rd,
MORIGAON :: ASSAM
MISC. CASE NO. 13/2018
REF. F. T. (C) CASE NO. 91/2015

Musstt. Amina Khatun & Others

.......Applicants/Opposite Parties

-Versus-

State of Assam

.......Respondent

Present : Mr. Gautam Soren, B.A. L.L.B.
Member, Foreigners Tribunal (3rd), Morigaon

O R D E R

2?.08.2018: The instant case against the Applicants/OPs namely- **1) Musstt. Amina Khatun D/o- Turab Ali and W/o- Md. Mustan Ali @ Muslemuddin, 2) Md. Mustan Ali @ Muslemuddin, 3) Musstt. Alima Khatun @ Begum (Daughter), 4) Musstt. Narjia Begum (Daughter)** who are all residents of Village- Madhya Kalikajari, PS.- Mikirbheta, District- Morigaon (Assam) were proceeded **Ex-Parte** vide order dated 07.11.2017 passed in F.T. (C) Case No. 91/2015 on the basis of the report of the process server. The said case was proceeded ex-parte as because the Applicants/OPs were not found in the given address at the time of serving summon as reported by the PS and accordingly the said notice was hanged upon a tree of the market place in presents of Gaonburha and VDP president. It would be pertinent to mention herein that the process server and the Gaonburha and VDP president are summoned before this Tribunal innumerable times in various Foreigners Cases directing all these persons not to hang the Notice in any ordinary place like the waiting shade/trees or upon electric poll but to hung the Notices in some conspicuous place, but in most of the cases it is repeatedly found that process servers usually hunged the Notices upon some trees or electric poll. For going though the depth of the entire matter, the process servers who issued the Notices as well as the Gaonburha were summoned and accordingly their statements were recorded. The statement of Durllav Chandra Bora who is the Gaonburha for entire Kalikajari locality/village was initially asked as to whether names of proceedees appearing in **F.T.384/16, F.T.390/16, F.T. 416/16, F.T.(C) 146/15, F.T.(C)92/15, F.T.(C) 303/15, F.T.(C) 60/15** are known to him or their whereabouts as they belongs from his Lat/locality as all these Cases were proceeded **Ex-Parte** due to wrong Report of the Process Server and also because he has put his signature on those Reports, and he said that he knows all of them but during service of notice he did not go to the OPs house as he was in NRC duty and that the process server have taken his signature **prior to writing of the report.**

The Road to Balapara
Location Six

In the first week of May, 2014, Bodo militants, carried out a spree of violence in the villages of the Kokrajhar and Baksa districts. Khagrabari was one of the worst hit by this militant attack, as 41 people were killed and a fact-finding report by a Guwahati based NGO even noted that this militant attack had only been made possible with the "direct assistance of BTC administration" (Azad, 2015). Balapara was another village which came under heavy attack, leading to the loss of lives. Balapara was CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) guarded after the massacre in 2014, with a post outside the village. The road to Balapara from Gossaigaon was filled with fear and threatening silence as and my guide and I decided to ride a bike to the village. Most of the forests on the either side of road are inhabited by NDFB militants and no one takes this road, even in broad day light. All this was reported to me when I returned safely to Salakati, one student leader claiming that even they do not visit that place alone. Not only the villagers, but the entire area, seemed to have a fresh memory of violence. The village of 500 houses is predominantly Bengali Muslim and also witnessed violence in 2012, like all of the others where I did interviews.

Twenty-six-year-old Noor used to work in Kolkata and came to vote in the general election of 2014, like many harbouring the same fear -- that skipping the vote might bring citizenship into doubt. He remembered living in the camp across the river with his family after the violence in 2012:

> We used to shuttle between camp and the house, and this is how we entered in 2014 from 2012. I came back from work just to vote in 2014, but during the election there was some rumour about rigging. There was some issue about that election, and voting machines were destroyed at the booth and the voting was postponed. However, I voted very swiftly, between 3 and 4 p.m., and there was no issue, but when my father went later to vote he learnt from security personnel that after 5 p.m. there might be some trouble so better go somewhere safe and hide. My father came back and asked all of us to leave. All of my siblings left the village and went to different villages, to our relatives. My parents went across the river and one brother stayed back in our home, while two other brothers left the village for work. I visited my father from the other village, but I felt that situation is deteriorating. My brother called me at night saying he had been shot in his hand. I got worried about my father, so I started calling him frantically. I also called a friend and he said my mom, sister in law and children are killed, please come soon. I was in Dhubri District and it was far for me and impossible to come at midnight. I called my cousin, and he said that your sister in law and her child is killed. So, I asked him to check on my father and mother, he went out, but security

> forces stopped him from going anywhere. I was relentlessly calling my father, and eventually my mother picked the phone said: "I am shot, and your father is shot too". I could hear my mother's voice sinking. I called my cousins and a brother to immediately check home, but by the time they reached my parents were dead."

Noor had not witnessed episodes of violence before 2012 in his village. He remembered in 1996,, when Adivasis were killed, some dead bodies floated in the river next to the village. No one was targeted from his village at that time, as the violence was directed towards Adivasis, and no Muslim left their home. Noor showed me his father's and grandfather's documents while narrating the story of living in this village for a long time. His father and grandfather were born there, and he showed a great sense of belonging to this land. In his small house, he asked me to sit on the bed while he did not. He kept his distance from the bed, as it held the painful memory of being his parents' deathbed. The bed was as part of his memory as his narrative. His reluctance to come closer to the blood-stained bed portrayed how memory is also the powerhouse of the sacred and profane. Memory is not what one remembers, but how one makes sense of remembrance. Memory of his parents' death had shaped the sense of sacredness in his small world.

Noor shared his memory of his father and the day he left, but he was also excited to ask whether I saw the news of his father's death on news channels. He was excited to inform me that he news was shared and acknowledged. He could not find that TV report on his mobile phone, so he called over a fellow villager to show me the news clip on his smart phone, which Noor did not watch. He wanted me to witness the clip and keep a copy of the video. For Noor, there existed an anxiety about the future, since the CRPF continued to maintain its post outside the village:

> CRPF camp is perhaps good for our security but what purpose has it served when we needed it the most. The violence happened and we lost our loved ones -- now they have to come to protect us and show us they care. BSF (Border Security Force) was here when the Bodos attacked, and some of us called them for help, but they never came. They ignored our desperate requests and made trivial excuses.
>
> In the day, we come here and work, as my father was a farmer and we have land, but at night we leave the village and go across the river. We all live together at night in a common place. I know that the media portray us as Bangladeshis, and when we were in the camp, they reported that there were Bangladeshis, but the Bodos around us never called us Bangladeshis, but they (Bodo Leadership) exploit this issue quite well. They (Bodo) want us to leave so that they can capture our land. They want Bodoland exclusively for Bodos, and they would like everyone else to leave.

> For me, it started with 2012, before that we used to work on each other's land (Bodos) and we also used to go to each other's homes. However, their militant organization asked them not to mingle with us, and after 2012 we stopped talking. Bodos are no longer allowed to come to our village (CRPF would not let them in, anyway). This is all patta land and we have all the documentary evidence for that. We earn our livelihood from this land, if we leave this land, where else would we go? This is my Janambhoomi.[42]People talked about Modi in the 2014 massacre, but this has nothing to do with Modi. However, Modi is not good for Muslims, he will be harsh on us and will cause more trouble.

Noor's story is indicative of how his narrative of being a religious minority is shaped by his own experience of violence and suffering. In working on the memory of violence at the partition of India, Butalia notes that,

> The suffering and grief of partition are not memorialised at the border, nor publicly, anywhere else in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A million may have died, but they have no monuments. Stories are all that people have, stories that rarely breach the frontiers of family and religious community: people talking to their own blood. (Butalia, 1998, p.52).

Noor's story, too, hardly breached any borders, since his narrative was one that had a sense of sharing the memory with a member of the same community. Are you a Muslim? This is the question one encounters before they open the doors of their memory and let you share in it, since the one asking the question feels that his pain cannot penetrate the borders of identity.

Conclusion

This is definitely one side of the story; at the same time there is another side to the story reported by newspapers. Due to time and security constraints, I could not stay with Bodos and record their narrative. One might wonder how they articulate their pain and narrate their memory and identity. With the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) they might feel that their struggle and autonomy are respected. With the tension among neighbouring communities, and in a quest to deal with Assamese and Indian nationalism, Bodos are also

[42] My birth place, an expression to show deep emotional connection to a place.

trying to re-invent their clock to strengthen their language and culture through this opportunity for an autonomous Bodoland. Burdened with apprehension about control over land and being turned into a minority among minorities, their narrative may perhaps be dominated by a different kind of fear. Reported in the stories of violence and militancy they may, perhaps, be searching for better representation and prospects of peace, in a situation in which their identity is distinctly acknowledged

However, in these small voices of the people, and in the granular local lived experience, there is a defiance of both historical categories – immigrant and Muslim. The first, articulated and re-enforced by the English language newspaper, and the second is proposed and used to fit any event by the Urdu language newspaper. The value in ethnography was that it undermined any easy assumptions of either the press representing local experience or, and to some extent more surprisingly, in undermining any easy explanations by the press of defining and shaping local experience. This was not because these press narratives were unavailable, or were not present – they were - but they floated above how the people lived. How the people on the ground define themselves and find a historical category within which to locate themselves, which, is shaped by their own space of experience. Their language and imaginations are the product of their own distinct relation with their Now-time. There is a disparity between the homogenous Muslim time, or *Ummah* time, which is conceptualized and projected through Urdu newspapers and the experience of *Muslimness* in these villages. The oral narratives they put forward permit one to conclude that, despite the puzzlement of the rationale of violence, they are well aware of its reasons. The 'suffering of the Muslim world', or the 'travails of the Indian Muslim', do not enter their own accounts, which is in sharp contrast to the victimization narrative of the Urdu newspapers. On the ground, people do not refer to Rohingyas or to communal violence elsewhere. They do not fit their experience of 2012, or of violence in general, into such larger narratives. Unlike the accounts in the Urdu newspapers, they do not place their own pain into a competing hierarchy with other subjugated people. There is, of course, an opportunity in this: their concerns for justice, legitimate legal processes and everyday fairness are not, yet, linked to abstract demands. However, they do need attention.

This is not to suggest that these people are unaware of their religious identity and the majoritarian Hindu politics shaping India. Their experience of violence and proximity to the Bodos have shaped their own subjectivity as Muslims. They are aware of the stress surrounding land, and they understand that, locally, the central issue is land, since Bodos want more land to

cultivate and to control. Bodoland is for Bodos when they possess more land and grow in numbers so that they dominate the demography. While local Muslims recognize the land issue on a local level, they identify with Muslim oppression nationally as a reason for violence. This sense of Muslim oppression is not constituted by their sense of *Ummah*, *Qawm,* or Muslim victimization, everywhere, but by their own unique experience with the law and law enforcement. This is not hierarchical or imaginative but, rather, a dialectical way of coming to this realization of being a minority.

It is their experience of Foreigners' Tribunals, being classified as doubtful citizens, dealing with the arbitrariness of the law and with an unfair bureaucracy that determines their idea of belonging to a Muslim minority. Of course, such pressures on this 'minority' can be shared nation-wide by other members of the group, yet their idea of minority is not shaped by the experience of others, or the victimization as imagined by the leaders or communicated by the Urdu press. The sense of an unfair law and unfair treatment by someone enforcing the law, along with the repetitive cycle of violence, is what makes their sense of 'Muslim minority'.

These narratives also contest their categorization as being an immigrant or a Bangladeshi. For them, Paper (proof of citizenship) and Presence (having lived there for a long time) are the legitimate bases for rejecting the category that is used to identify them. These two associations (with time and with law) for them make them as 'Indian' as anyone else. Self-identity is shaped by a discontinuous time which has shaped the borders and nationalities of South Asia.

Lastly, in the people's stories, and through the observation of their behaviour, one can see a lack of cultural exchange between the two groups, but, also, the complete absence of any long-term initiatives, interventions, processes or institutions that might assist conflict resolution. The history of interaction between the two communities differs in different villages, but the total breakdown of conversation has been a common trend since 2012. Yet the injustices they suffer are, in fact, held in common. The Bengali Muslims share a common history of suffering with the Adivasis, without having much cultural exchange with them either. Despite the lack of that everyday exchange and sharing, there is a sense of solidarity and, through the memory of violence, they connect with the Adivasi community. Yet, the violence in the region operates as a system. It has a norm of its own, in that alliances shift, and, first, violence is targeted at one group, and then opposing forces unite. It then shifts and re-combines against

another group. The cycle goes on. In May, 2014, it was Muslim villages that were targeted, and in December, 2014, it was Adivasis who were killed and displaced. The story of suffering goes on and so does the struggle to strive for tomorrow

CONCLUSION

If you listen and write about stories of violence, not stories of abstract or distant violence, but stories from people who have lived through violent events and fear – quite realistically – one also becomes a witness of such an act. In writing this thesis, I have oddly felt a proximity to these episodes of violence that I rarely had when I was closer physically to the conflict zone, but was less engaged with it. This was a story where a complex shifting view of 'the minority' was shared among groups, all of which also believed themselves to be minorities. A story in which all the groups involved felt insecure, felt themselves to be victims of politics and history, felt misrepresented. I chose to focus on one side of the story to see it unravel in different zones. I have not located the 'Muslim' question in the politics of Assam, I have, instead, tried to locate the politics of Assam and migration in the 'Muslim question'. Much of the scholarship concerned with Assam has focused on the question of Assamese identity, its history and location, and has tried to see other events from that position. I have tried to look at it from the other side. I have looked into the narratives which shape the experience and expectation of these peoples.

The story, at a very local level, in villages and hamlets, is of conflict between Bodos and everyone else who is, at that point, a non-Bodo, for control over land resources. At the regional level, it is a conflict between 'indigenous' and legal/illegal immigrants. At a national level. the conflict becomes a story of who has access to being a citizen, of bewildering but powerful changes in the definitions of rights, handed down from the government, and with alarmingly arbitrary, but rigorously enforced, shifts in the political ideologies and practical politics that shape legal definitions. It is at this level that a narrative of ideas and ideologies start to define inclusivity and exclusivity within the Nation's imagination. All these layers add to its complexity and make an understanding of the situation difficult. Nevertheless, they should not obscure the genuine particularities of history.

Bodos are particular, the villages are particular, the trajectory of lived experience is specific. If we dislocate it from there, then it becomes easy to mobilize emotion and downplay rational decisions. The research has shown how the concept of 'migrant' resides in the

historical archive, meticulously collected and created by colonial administrators, but also how it resides in newspapers – abandoned, not archived, nearly lost newspapers, discarded as insignificant, yet holding within them the trace of the political definitions that formed the present, and also how the term survives to shape the contemporary lives of people. How has the concept gone through transformation, as each period is marked by its own politics and historical change and has contributed to the meaning of this category called 'immigrant'? In the colonial archive one can see the figure of the 'immigrant' as labour and a cared for category. The archive showed the humanizing aspect of the category of immigrants, which is not without its own shortcomings, while the usage of the term by the newspaper in contemporary times displaced the concept from its actual historical position and dehumanized it, by connecting it to other semantics which make the figure of the immigrant an ahistorical one.

Victims' narratives and the narratives of victimization are different. The former is based on real experience of violence and is shaped by the memory of it, while the narrative of violence is shaped by a politics of victimhood and is an imagined experience of the Muslim subject. In the victim's narrative, the proximity to the aggressor, and an expectation and calculation of the 'reasons' for the acts, are present. Meanwhile, the ongoing narrative of victimization does not recognize the other and shows no sense of the particularity of history. In the victim's narrative one can trace compassion, a solidarity for the other victim groups and a commitment to living everyday life, while the story of 'victimisation' evokes, and is detached, untethered from the local group solidarity. This victim's narrative is shaped by its local and quotidian experience. It is rooted in the complex, empirical world of topography, experience and physicality. By contrast, the narrative of victimization brings the local and the global together to create a homogenous time.

The expectation of people trapped in such a cycle of violence is shaped by their experiences of the past. They live in the fear and expectation that it may return at any time. In their narrative of time there is a politics of time. They want and need to be included in the common time of the nation. yet they are excluded. Yet this means that they stay in the present, and they orient themselves from the Now-time and not the time of past, which is of migration, and this is, hence, contagious. They live in a constant present, trying to evade and ignore the past that traps them.

The Urdu and English newspapers show two forms of reporting on the same kind of problem, they both have different histories to tell, and they reveal two different trajectories. While the migration issue is clearly absent in Urdu newspapers, as for them it is a Muslim issue, for *The Assam Tribune* it is an issue of immigration, but their stories and editorials play out a certain politics of fear which can be identified with the Hindu nationalists, who exploit the fear of rising Muslim numbers in the region, and weaponize various political and social issues in order to marginalize the community.

This thesis has used three different methods to investigate a historical problem. This method has given a very vivid picture of the present, interspersed with the category of the past and the narrative of the present shaping the future. In using conceptual history as a method, the semantic change in each period has been revealed, giving us a sense of the conceptual making of a category in the course of time. The triangulation of methods gives a very wide frame and helps to locate the media narrative into its own genealogies. The thesis has attempted to underline the conceptual history of migration by bringing micro-history together with archival material. The theories about force and power, subject and subjugation, need to be rethought, as each power relation is produced in its particularity of history, forming its own subjectivity. Although managing three different methods has its own advantages and deficits, as managing the demands of each method was different, this has still provided richness to the understanding of the issue, and I would not have seen it the way I do without this multiplicity of methods.

Although my work draws theoretically from the work of Derrida on Walter Benjamin's critique of violence, which shows that authority legitimizes through law. In reading Benjamin, Derrida makes the point about law not being just or justice. People obey law because of the authority contained in law, not because it delivers justice. Derrida is thinking through the experience of Roman law, and he does not see the importance of law in protecting justice in the most remote corners of the world. We might see through the problem of law and its arbitrariness, but looking into the empirical material from Assam, we see the desire in the victim to be protected by law, and justice delivered through law. In asking for law, they are not obeying authority, but expecting justice through lawful authority. Their experience of preserving identity papers as their lawful right to stay, and in adhering to these papers and being ever willing to share their documents, is the way they see justice being served by the law. which needs to be respected. The authority is not only invested in law enforcement, but in one who is ready to abide by it and seeks justice. The arbitrariness of the law undermines justice

and not the law (just one) *per se*. The theories of violence help us understand a few broader themes and issues. but it is not sufficient to understand the unique situation of Muslims in Bodoland districts. Gandhi's idea, or Kapila's discussion of Tilak about Hindu-Muslim politics, are also not enough to understand the conflict, as the conflict is not of identity first, but of resources. This is also a peculiar case where the violence is between two minorities, and anthropological work like that of Veena Das in the context of Partition, or Ashis Nandy's critique in the context of Hindu-Muslim riots, is insufficient, as the violence in Indian sociological and political study generally focuses on majority-minority categories and their construction, as we have seen in Gyanendra Pandey's work on routine violence.

The empirical work in the villages has shown how violence is also very locally managed, in a certain sense. It is organized and systematic in choosing the victim group, and targets it. People understand it. and they form a group solidarity to defy that. They could survive the locally managed violence, as they have an everyday understanding of its working dynamics, but what they find difficult is dealing with the neglect and bias of the state. The discrimination that is instrumentalized through certain laws, and violence legitimized by a certain ideology, are what they find it hard to negotiate with.

To conclude, I would like to recall the spirit of the people I met, who carry on with their lives, despite all the threats. There is, in their everyday lives, a compassion and a wise willingness to understand why things happen. They understand well enough what motivates the people around them. If this compassion and understanding were to be channelized, it would help with the reconciliation and bring peace and happiness.

APPENDIX

Profiles of Newspapers

The Assam Tribune:

The Assam Tribune is an English daily newspaper published in Guwahati and Dibrugarh, Assam. Since its inception in 1939, it has risen from a weekly newspaper to become the most popular English daily in North-Eastern India.

The late Naren Deka was the editor from 1993, and was succeeded in 1997 by Prafulla Govinda Baruah, who still presides over the daily. It is owned by Assam Tribune Pvt. Ltd., which is dominated by the Baruah family who founded it, and members of this family are the editor as well as the executive editor. The politics of the paper is inclined towards the BJP, the ruling party as of 2019.

It was priced at ₹3 during 1993-94, ₹4 in 2012 and ₹6 in 2014.

Akhbar e Mashriq:

Akhbar e Mashriq is an Urdu daily printed in Kolkata, with its first issue dating back to 25th April, 1980.

The founding Editor, Mohammad Wasimul Haq, and his family members, worked diligently enough for its circulation to prevail beyond Kolkata in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, UP and Delhi.

Since 1996, it began to put out simultaneous editions from Kolkata, Delhi and Ranchi,

making it the only Urdu newspaper to have done so.

In a controversial order that was passed in 2012, the Trinamool Congress, a centre-left party in West Bengal, banned English and mass-circulation Bengali dailies at state-sponsored and aided libraries. They restricted the purchase of newspapers/dailies by public libraries to a few, including *Akhbar-e-Mashriq*. The current Editor, Nadeem ul Haq, is a Member of Parliament of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament (Rajya Sabha) on the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) ticket.

It was priced at ₹1.50 during 1993-94, ₹2.50 in 2012. and ₹5 in 2014.

Azad Hind:

Azad Hind, an Urdu daily, was founded in 1948 by Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi, a close associate of Indian freedom fighters, who wrote a biographical book on Maulana Abul Kalm Azad.

His son, Ahmad Saeed Malihabadi, a Rajya Sabha member, edited and owned the newspaper until August. 2010. following his father's death in 1959. An independent paper until 2010 (with some congress leaning), contracting revenues forced him to sell it to the Saradha Group. When the Saradha Group closed its media operations in 2013, The Trinamool Congress was alleged to have seized control of it, albeit indirectly. A newly floated *Azad Hind* and the Kalam Staff Welfare Association runs the paper, whose CEO is Asif Khan Ashrafi, a close associate of the All India Trinamool Congress's (TMC) all-India general secretary, Mukul Roy. *Azad Hind* is now out of print.

It was priced at ₹1.50 during 1993-94, and ₹3 in 2014.

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