

**Religion in Electoral Politics: A Study on the Shifting Trends  
of Voting Behaviour Towards BJP in Assam**

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## CHAPTER 6

### Summary and Conclusion

#### 6.1 Summary of the Chapters:

(1)

In the democratic process, election constitutes an important element. Election enables citizens to intervene directly in the political process, select their rulers and express their policy preferences. Elections thus, legitimize the power exercised by the governments and make governments representative (Joseph & Mahajan, 1991). On the other hand, voting is the means through which citizens participate in the election process. The voting pattern focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. In order to understand the voting pattern, we have to understand the voting behaviour of the electorates.

The phrase 'voting behaviour' connotes more than just an examination of voting records. It is a compilation of voting statistics and a computation of electoral shifts. It indicates the analysis of individual psychological processes like perception, emotion, and motivation and their relation to the vote decision of group structures and functions and their relation to political action. It also indicates the institutional pattern such as the communication process, and their impact on elections (Eldersveld, 1951).

The voting behaviour has different connotations for different academic disciplines and the factors/variables that they probe and compute are also different from each other. The sociological approach for measuring voting behaviour uses socio-economic variables like class, occupation, ethnicity, sex and age for determining the support of electorates for political parties and candidates and finding co-relations. The focus of this approach is on the co-relations between the voters and social settings, voting intentions in the social context and to examine the effects on the voting behaviour of variables such as caste, communities, socio-economic class, language, religion and rural-urban divides (Kumar & Rai, 2013). This study has purposely taken religion as the entry point to explore the various dimensions of voting behaviour and the state electoral politics.

In India, religion has been a motivating factor behind many major political developments. Religion plays an important role in influencing the voting preference of the electorates. In India, communal consciousness is a strong element in all religious communities, be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian in certain circumstances and is clearly reflected in electoral statistics.

In this context, it is interesting to observe that the politics in Assam was not distinctly centered on religion till the last two decades unlike the other parts of India. Electoral politics of the state in the last two decades has witnessed a rise in the number of political parties and the polarization of electorates in the name of religion (Kalita, 2016).

Various significant phenomena had taken place in the state which draws the attention of the researcher to study the political atmosphere of the state in religious terms. In the politics of Assam, Jamiat actively involved itself in the formation of a political party for the very first time. In response to the upsurge of Muslim communal politics, the expansion of a counter narrative based on Hindutva ideology can also be witnessed in the sphere of the Assam state electoral politics. The winning of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in April 2016 made the counter narrative stronger. The results of the 2014 Lok Sabha and 2016 Vidhan Sabha elections showed clear religious polarization in the state. The results of the elections revealed that the BJP nevertheless managed to localize the contest by exploiting the already polarized debate on immigration (Saikia, 2020).

A constant effort from the part of BJP to polarize the voters by capturing the regional sentiments of Assamese society can be seen in the state. Thus, it becomes all the more important to know how these agendas get manifested at the grass-root level and how the common people have taken (accepted and internalized) these agendas. It is also important to study whether these agendas bring any change into the lives of the people or not. The consequences of these agendas can only be examined through primarily focusing on the voting behaviour of the electorates and the political sphere of the state as polarization in terms of religion, only serve the ultimate political goal of the political parties and organizations. Thus, along with the voting behaviour, the researcher has explored and analyzed sociological manifestations of BJP's political and religious agendas in selected politically significant sites.

The study has been conducted with the following objectives-

1. To look at the organizational structure, functioning and ideological principles of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Assam.
2. To account the historical trend of elections in Assam from 2006 Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly Election) and the role of religion in it.
3. To comprehend the role of religion in understanding the voting behaviour of the electorates and how it differs vis-à-vis caste, ethnic and religious groups.
4. To understand how the political and religious ideologies of BJP disseminate at the grass root level.

A number of approaches can be distinguished in literature which explains the voting behaviour. All these approaches contribute significantly to the overall explanation of voting behaviour (Cited in Kumar & Rai, 2013).

The sociological model connects the voting behaviour to group membership. It suggests that the voters aim to accept a pattern of voting which reflects the social and economic position of the group to which they belong. This model focuses the importance of a social alignment reflecting the various divisions in a society rather than development of psychological attachment to a party. Class, gender, ethnicity, religion are the most important dimensions. The impact of socialization is relevant to sociological model. In so far as the interests of group may help to shape party allegiances, the social base explanations allow for rationality. The sociological model links the voting behaviour to group membership, suggesting that electors tend to adopt a voting pattern that reflects the economic and social position of the group to which they belong. In focusing on social groups, the sociological model ignores the individual and the role of personal self-interest (ibid.). The present study has adopted the sociological model which focuses on the significance of social alignment reflecting the various divisions in a society. This model considers class, gender, ethnicity, religion as the most important dimensions of voting behaviour. As the present research work intends to study the religious aspects of voting behaviour thus, it is considered as more suitable to give a broad framework in looking at the empirical reality of the selected research sites.

Three Vidhan Sabha constituencies have been selected as the universe of the study from the Brahmaputra valley of Assam based on their geographical representations. Therefore,

Nalbari (Sadar) from lower Assam, Tezpur from middle Assam and Jorhat Vidhan Sabha constituency from upper Assam have been selected as the representative sample sites. The main target groups of the study were general voters belonging to different political parties and different religious communities, political leaders of different political parties, leaders and workers of different organizations. Key informants are drawn from the above-mentioned categories through purposive random sampling. About 75 respondents each from the three selected constituencies have been interviewed constituting a total of 225 respondents. In the study, interview has been used as the key method for collecting the primary data. It has been supplemented by case studies and some select FGDs. About 5 FGDs from each constituency with a total of 15 FGDs had been conducted. Interviews have been conducted with the help of semi-structured interview schedule tool.

(2)

The second chapter is an attempt to understand the organizational structure of Bharatiya Janata Party and how the different organizational bodies of the party contribute to the functioning of Bharatiya Janata Party. This chapter also tries to understand the affiliate organizations of Bharatiya Janata Party. In addition, the chapter also intends to understand the ideological principles of Bharatiya Janata Party and how over the period of time, the ideologies of the party evolved with the contribution of different prominent figures of the party. The first part of the chapter deals with the organizational structure of the party and the supportive organizations and the second part of the chapter deals with the ideological principles of Bharatiya Janata Party and the journey of BJP and its affiliate organizations in Assam and the Northeast. To understand the organizational structure of the party, the constitution of the Bharatiya Janata party has been studied and analysed with the help of reflections from the field. The different members and leaders of the party were interviewed in order to understand the actual organizational structure of the party at the ground level and their functions within the party. In addition, in order to understand the ideological principles of Bharatiya Janata Party and its journey in Assam and Northeast, different secondary literatures on BJP and Sangh Parivar have been reviewed and analyzed. The chapter addresses the first objective of the study. This chapter helps in understanding the organizational structure, functioning and ideological principles of Bharatiya Janata Party and also the journey of BJP and its affiliate organizations in Assam and Northeast which in turn helps to have a comprehensive

understanding of BJP and various dynamics related to it in the state politics as well as in the research sites.

By stating about the organizational structures of different levels like National Level, State Level, Regional Committees, District Committees, Mandal Committees, Gram/Shahari Kendra, Local Committees as mentioned in the article VII of its constitution, the chapter tries to give a detailed understanding of the Bharatiya Janata Party's organizational structure.

The chapter argues that the ideological principle of the party is rooted in its history, so it makes an effort to understand the historical background under which BJP has emerged as a separate political party and also tries to understand different opinions and thoughts of different pioneering figures associated with the party. The chapter also tries to unveil the relationship between BJP and RSS. It discusses the main affiliate bodies of the Sangh Parivar like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), etc., to understand their roles and how the presence of these organizations has been supporting the journey of BJP.

The chapter states the role of the affiliate organizations of the Sangh Parivar such as, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Seva Bharti, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), etc., in the strengthening of the organizational base of RSS and BJP in the Northeast region (Singh, 2021). The chapter tries to highlight the challenges faced by the RSS to expand its presence in this region which was relatively unaffected by the mainland issues like Hindu-Muslim binaries.

While trying to put light on the history of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in Northeast India the chapter went back to the year 1946, in October when the three full time RSS workers first set foot in Northeastern region and established the region's first *shakhas* or branches in Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Shillong (Awungashi, 2019). The chapter states how RSS deployed ABVP during the Assam Movement to prevent the demand for an independent state which became a turning point in the journey of RSS in Assam (Sarma, 2016).

The chapter demonstrates how, the RSS has been focusing its energy primarily on propagating its ideology through education since its inception (Siddiqui, 2014). The

chapter also put light on the many initiatives of the RSS which have been taken to integrate youth of the region into the mainstream nationalist narrative (Rashid, 2023).

In tune with Malini Bhattacharjee, the chapter argues that the ‘Seva’ activities are being used to propagate the organizational base of RSS and its affiliate bodies in Northeastern region and in the country. The rehabilitation and relief works have helped in creating a compassionate image for the RSS. It also generates opportunities to recruit new cadres, strengthen its organizational base and network, and even reach those regions where it didn’t have any support base (Bhattacharjee, 2021). It is interesting to observe that the political construction of Seva as served by the RSS and its affiliate organizations have been playing an instrumental role in the growth of Sangh Parivar in the northeast, which further helped the BJP to expand its wings in this region.

Malini Bhattacharjee argued that the people who get benefited by ‘Seva’ activities spontaneously offer their thankfulness. It has been observed that a moral indebtedness is reflected in the behavior of people which is often manifested in the appropriation of certain kinds of cultural behavior (ibid.).

Malini Bhattacharjee’s understanding of ‘Seva’ is aptly reflected in the context of Northeast, as it helps both RSS and BJP to construct a common cultural identity despite of having multiple religious, ethnic or linguistic identities. The beneficiaries of these ‘Seva’ activities are those who may have struggled to get public goods from the state and hence remain eternally grateful to Sangh for its help and support. Thus, they intend to give it back to *Sangh Parivar* either by becoming members themselves and also help in mobilising others to join the organization or by supporting and voting for the political affiliation of the RSS during elections (ibid.).

The success of this ‘Seva’ activities also signifies the failure of the welfare state which fails to provide basic rights like education or health facilities to its citizens as a result of which people take shelter in the ‘Seva’ of RSS, which in turn encourage them or morally obliged them to join their organizations or follow their ideology. It can also be argued that the ‘Seva’ activities have been used in a very subtle way to navigate through this region, which was supposedly a challenging place to get entry for the RSS and its affiliate organizations. The expansion and growth of RSS and its affiliate organizations have been helping BJP to expand its political dominance in Assam and the Northeast.

The chapter also gives a brief account on the political journey of BJP in Assam and how it managed to capture the votes in consecutive elections starting from the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The gradual growth of both the RSS and the BJP in Assam can be attributed to their ability to adapt to various regional dynamics, address local concerns, and capitalize on issues that resonated with the people of the state (Karmakar, 2021). The chapter argues that various infrastructural developments, grass root level strategic politics, fear of illegal immigrants, pandemic and its aftermath, strong leadership of Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma, consolidation of Hindu votes in favour of BJP, the alliance of Congress with AIUDF and weak leadership of Congress paved the way for BJP's victory in Assam for the second term (Deka, 2021). BJP had declared the 2016 to be the last battle of Saraighat where protection of Jati (community), maati (land) and bheti was the main slogan. In 2021 election, BJP urged all Hindu people to consolidate and fight the civilizational war against the Congress-AIUDF alliance. The chapter argues that BJP's electoral campaign got translated into votes in their favour as reflected in the voting results of the elections (Karmakar, 2021).

### (3)

The third chapter intends to highlight the communal angle in the electoral politics of Assam. In this chapter, efforts have been made to understand the electoral politics of Assam from the pre-Independence Period to 2021 election and the role of religion in it. In addition, the chapter tries to analyze the electoral trends of Assam in general from 2006 Vidhan Sabha election to 2021 Vidhan Sabha election and how religion played its role over the years. The chapter also tries to highlight the electoral trends of the three selected research sites from 2006 Vidhan Sabha election onwards and try to understand the role of religion in those trends. In order to get the historical perspectives on Assam state electoral politics starting from pre-Independence period, different secondary literatures have been reviewed and analyzed. In addition to that, electoral data available in the website of election commission and different secondary literatures have been studied, and attempted to integrate with the empirical data. Based on the records of the past election, the researcher has been trying to highlight and decipher the meaning, tune, and the line of communal politics in Assam. An attempt is thus made, to understand its genesis, evolution and the changing trends.



The chapter tries to understand communal politics of Assam from the historical perspective. While trying to understand the electoral politics of the state and the role of religion in it during pre-independence period, the chapter discusses the pre-independence period by focusing on few landmark events. In the pre-independence period, the chapter observed a significant rise in Muslim League politics and a clear division between Hindus and Muslims (Nath, 2021).

The chapter states that after independence, Muslim League had lost its significance. The percentage of the Muslim MLAs shows a decline in the Muslim representation in the electoral politics of the state after Independence. The chapter pointed out that the politics of Muslim people shows a linguistic alliance with Assamese people and a political alliance with the Congress (ibid.). The chapter also highlighted that although the Assam agitation was against immigrants regardless of any religion but the movement also took a communal turn because allegedly most of the immigrants were Muslims. Various Muslim leaders of Assam Movement and AASU either restricted themselves from agitating or separated themselves from AASU (Nath, 2015).

The chapter argues that various significant events like the involvement of Students' organizations such as, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyathi Parishad (ABVP) in the Assam Movement and joining of personalities who started to rise consciousness of Assamese people against illegal immigration into BJP indicates a Hindu upraise against the political activities of Muslims (Nath, 2021). Jamiat in Assam openly opposed the core issues of Assam Movement and other organizations like AAMSU and Tablique Jamat were also formed to uphold the minority issues. Therefore, the chapter argues that the Assam movement entirely communalized the politics of Assam (Talukdar, 2019).

The chapter mentioned about how the Assamese media's projection of 1980's Anuwara Taimur government as the minority government, cleared the path of RSS and BJP to mobilize people against Muslim appeasement. The chapter also states that the tendency of appeasing Muslims by the Congress (I) high command also led to communal politics in Assam (Nath, 2014). As a result, religious conflict has taken place which led to the killing of both Assamese and immigrants. After the Assam movement, for the first time in Assam politics election was held between two communally divided fronts. Therefore, the chapter argues that Assam Movement had much influence on communal politics in Assam (Nath, 2021). To counter Jamiat's political activism, a trend of majoritarian

politics was seen in Assam. This helped BJP to gain ground in Assam politics. BJP as an alternative to Congress was emerged for the Hindus of Barrak Valley mainly due to the Ram Temple movement and as a reaction to Jamiat's communal politics.

The chapter states that Jamiat supported AGP alliance despite its opposite stand on the Assam Accord where AASU was the key signatory because the minority front had a tendency of supporting the party who formed the government. The chapter pointed out that AGP had a very good connection with Jamiat and thus because of AGP's support to 'D' voter concept, the AGP- BJP alliance could not go for long (Phukan, 2019). The chapter states that in 2001 election, as Jamiat supported Congress, AGP stood for Assamese nationalism and it supported BJP led NDA. As a result, Hindu Bengalis did not support AGP. This helped the Congress to form the government (Nath, 2015).

The chapter pointed out how the presence of political parties with the Hindutva ideology has been growing over time. The chapter also highlighted the fact that in 1991, 1996 and 2001 elections, no party could form the government without the support of Jamiat, be it congress or AGP. As according to 2001 census, the Muslim population of Assam was 30.92%, therefore this percentage of the total population played a crucial role in Assam Politics (Bhaishya, 2014; Nath, 2021).

The chapter argues that the nullification of the IMDT Act in 2005 by the Supreme Court of India started a new phase of communal politics in Assam and to enhance the political consciousness of Muslims, Badruddin Ajmal formed AIUDF. The chapter argues that this growth of communal environment in Assam made assembly elections communal from 2006 onwards (Nath, 2016).

The chapter states that veteran Congress leader, Tarun Gogoi initiated the politics of soft Hindutwa of Congress by trying to cater the votes of ethnic Assamese tribes and Hindus by asking publicly 'who is Badruddin'? The chapter argues that prior to the 2006 election, Tarun Gogoi's decision of clear separation of Congress from the Muslim Front made Assam politics more communal and the Muslim Front, which was always an ally with the government, gradually emerged as a strong opposition. The chapter argues that Assam Assembly was divided based on religion. The chapter held the view that in Assam, while Congress was doing soft Hindutva politics and BJP stood by their hard Hindutwa ideology (Talukdar, 2019).

The chapter highlighted the fact that despite of having one-third of total population in Assam, the consolidation of Muslim votes in one political party was never possible because Muslim population was defected in various political parties. The politics of Assam, compelled the political parties like congress to rely on majoritarian politics by playing soft Hindutva politics (Nath, 2016).

The chapter pointed out that the same Hindu Bengalis who opposed the AGP-BJP alliance led by the AGP had no objection to support the same AGP-BJP alliance led by BJP. The chapter argues that the Congress, under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi set an example of how government can be formed without the support of Muslim Front in Assam, which was better used by BJP while implementing the proper Hindutva ideology. BJP emerged as the best option than the Congress to form the government with a strong Hindutva force along with the national wave which helped BJP to win majority of the seats in Brahmaputra Valley. The chapter also believes that a successful 'rainbow coalition' of BJP with AGP & BPF and the declaration of Sarbananda Sonowal as CM candidate, the main person, behind declination of IMDT, helped BJP to gain ground in Assam (Nath, 2016; Dutta, 2021). Thus, the chapter argues that the consolidation of Hindus in favour of BJP's construction of hard Hindutva ideology and the division of Muslim votes can clearly be witnessed. The chapter pointed out that BJP with its allies could manage to win more seats than Congress and AIUDF despite of Congress having more percentage of votes than any other political party (Nath, 2016).

The chapter notes that a clear communal polarization could be seen from the voting records in Assam politics after 2014. The chapter pointed out that while 57% of Assamese Hindus supported BJP in 2016 Assembly election, 67% rallied behind NDA. In 2016, BJP mainly relied upon its rainbow alliance. The party workers proudly publicized most ethnic tribal politics outfits and added Bodos to its alliance mainly in the districts of lower Assam where Bodos had majority in numbers. This moves played a crucial role. The chapter argues that though the 'Last Battle of Saraighat' was to be fought against illegal migrants, the Hindutwa ideology posed it as anti-Muslim (Dutta, 2021).

The chapter states that after winning of 2016 election, BJP brought its core Hindutva ideology to mainstream by introduction of the famous Citizenship Amendment Bill, in response to which a state-wide agitation could be seen. The chapter argues that

underlying provisions of giving citizenship to all the major communities without Muslims clearly indicated BJP's political narrative of majoritarianism in Assam. The chapter also argues that the various eviction drives run by the state government also had some communal links. Evicted persons were mostly Muslim peasants of East Bengal Region (Mukhtiar et al., 2018).

The chapter gives an account of the political trajectory of Nalbari, Tezpur and Jorhat. Starting from 2006 election, the chapter tries to analyze the Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections of the three constituencies. The chapter observed some interesting trends in Nalbari Sadar assembly election starting from 2006 Vidhan Sabha election. Despite having 24.1% of the total voters, Muslims either didn't have any candidate to represent them or the Muslim candidate didn't receive more than 2.29% of the total votes. AIUDF mostly gave the candidature to Hindu candidates. Minority candidates only subtracted votes from the Congress vote share and whenever there is no minority candidates, the Congress vote share get increases which is reflected in the increase of 29.25% in 2016 to 31.43% in 2021 Congress voting percentage. In both 2016 and 2021 elections, a clear communal polarization is visible in Nalbari.

Despite having 32.8% Muslim votes, the winning of BJP candidate in Mangaldoi Lok Sabha signify that the Muslim votes got divided and the Hindus unanimously voted for BJP in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The chapter also argues that winning of the BJP candidate from Mangaldoi even before the Modi wave of 2014 signify clear polarization of Hindu votes and also division of Muslim votes between the Congress and AIUDF. The chapter notes that the political representation of Muslims is very weak in Mangaldoi. In 2014 general election, there was no Muslim candidate and even AIUDF gave its candidature to a Hindu. In 2019, as AIUDF did not give any candidate which increased Congress's vote share by 2% than in the previous general election.

The chapter notices that although as per 2011 census, Tezpur assembly has 31.7% Muslim votes but it is divided between INC, AGP, AIUDF and other independent candidates. As a result in 2011 and 2016 election, the AIUDF only managed to secure the fourth and third position with 10.35% and 16.46% votes. Although AIUDF increased its vote share by 6% but in both the elections, the AIUDF candidates were Hindus. The increased vote share of the AGP candidates in 2016 and 2021 assembly elections from

the previous assembly elections shows polarization of votes in favour of the AGP-BJP alliance in Tezpur.

The chapter notes that in Tezpur Lok Sabha constituency, despite having the largest vote share, the Muslim votes have been disintegrated among all the political parties and independent candidates. The consecutive win of the BJP candidates from Tezpur in 2014 and 2019 parliamentary election signify the shifting of community voting towards BJP from Congress. The disintegrated Muslim votes and shifting of loyalty of communities like tea tribe and Gorkha made it possible for the BJP candidates to win the Tezpur seat with huge margins which was earlier consecutively won by Mani Kumar Subba of the Congress.

The chapter observed that that a ten times hike in the vote share of Jorhat assembly election in favour of BJP in 2016 indicates consolidation of Hindu votes against the 'Muslim' immigration. The chapter argues that the emergence of AIUDF in a constituency like Jorhat of Upper Assam clearly indicates the communalization of 2016 Assembly Election. The consecutive win of the Brahmin candidates of Jorhat from BJP, AGP and Congress clearly denotes the caste hierarchy in political power.

The chapter pointed out that in 2014, despite having Congress MLAs in all the ten assembly constituencies of Jorhat parliamentary seat, BJP managed to win in the Jorhat seat with an approximate 49% total votes polled. In 2016 Assembly election, 6 of the 10 Assembly segments were won by AGP-BJP alliance which made 2019 parliament election easier for BJP. Although the communal factor is not very relevant in Jorhat due to the less share of the Muslim votes but community wise voting trends have been witnessed t in consecutive elections. The chapter states that the communal factor is so weak that the candidate of AIUDF contesting for the Jorhat Assembly segment was a Hindu. Though emergence of AIUDF in 2016 was termed as a minority political consciousness by many political commentators but it had no impact on the ground.

#### (4)

The fourth chapter intends to understand the voting behaviour of the electorates and the role of religion in it, in the three selected Vidhan Sabha constituencies viz., Nalbari, Tezpur and Jorhat. To understand the voting behaviour of the electorates of Nalbari

(Sadar), Tezpur and Jorhat Vidhan Sabha constituencies, the researcher conducted various interviews and focus group discussions among the respondents. Key respondents are selected randomly from the different communities and different caste groups. Interviews are also conducted among the leaders and members of different political parties and civil society organizations. Respondents have been asked about their opinions on different matters related to the voting behaviour. They were also interviewed to know their voting choices and voting behaviour during the Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections.

The chapter states that the rise of BJP in Nalbari, Tezpur and Jorhat is a recent phenomenon. The chapter argues that BJP was more benefited by the continuous failure of the regional party, AGP, than the failure of Congress (Srikanth, 1999). The chapter agrees with Nani Gopal Mahanta who states that the emergence of the BJP in the 2014 election has marked a new phase of polarized politics in Assam (Mahanta, 2014).

The chapter argues that the BJP has been successful in converting an anti-outsider sentiment into an anti-illegal migrant sentiment belonging to one religious category. BJP raised the issue of protection of *jati, mati, bheti* ('community, land and homestead') from 'illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants' and managed to draw support from diverse ethnic communities with its promise of freeing the land from the illegal settlers (Sharma, et al., 2019).

In this context, the chapter agrees with Udayan Mishra who argues that the BJP's image of a Hindi-speaking Hindu party had to accommodate the regional aspiration of the Axomiyas and the party did it with an effortless tweak (Mishra, 2016). Identity politics and elements of Hindutva crossed paths as BJP won a resounding victory (Dutta, 2021). The chapter holds the view that the insecurity of the caste Hindu Assamese society with regard to illegal infiltration and increasing population of one particular religious group was rightly captured by BJP in Assam. It has been argued that states in northeast India have high propensity of going with the party in power at the Centre (Saikia, 2020). Apart from Mangaldoi, the trend of Jorhat and Tezpur clearly support this argument. In the Lok Sabha election, the central politics has been playing the key role in the voting choices of the respondents. In the Vidhan Sabha election, the Hindu people irrespective of their caste identity voted for the AGP candidate of Tezpur because BJP and AGP were in alliance. Based on the current situation, the chapter argues that AGP could only manage

to win in Tezpur with the support of BJP. On the contrary, AGP gave a much-needed secular flavour to BJP (Mishra, 2016) which was necessary for BJP to win.

Polarization of votes in the name of religion is clearly visible in all the constituencies. Consolidation of the Hindu votes in favour of the BJP candidate irrespective of caste and community can be observed in all the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha constituencies. The Hindu voters supported BJP because they believe that it supports Hindus. Hindu-Muslim binary is created in the society and BJP targeted the Hindu votes by clearly excluding Muslim votes specially *Miyas*. The caste Hindu Assamese people have the fear of being outnumbered by the increasing Muslim population especially *miyas* which can snatch the political rights from the Hindu people and that's why they believe the essentiality to bring BJP into power because according to them only BJP is able to take firm action against *miyas*.

The chapter notes that in Mangaldoi Lok Sabha election, the threat of the Muslim 'other' has been a constant factor. People think that voting for a party, which has an image of sympathizer of Muslims will bring threat to their identity. The idea that Muslims are 'pampered' by 'pseudo-secularists' continues to prevail in the Hindutva discourse and the Congress has been projected as 'pseudo-secularists' (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). BJP rightly used this image of the Congress during electoral campaign through different narratives and rhetoric. BJP's pro-Hindu image attracts the Hindu voters to get rid of the threat of the Muslim 'other'.

The chapter argues that the Muslims did not seem to have voted for the Congress with the same intensity as the Hindus voted for the BJP in both Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections of all the research sites. Although Muslims has, a major chunk of vote share in Tezpur and Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency, but Muslim votes got divided between more than one or two political parties. A kind of united Hindu vote and a divided Muslim vote could be one of the key reasons for the BJP's victories in constituencies with substantial Muslim populations, like Mangaldoi and Tezpur (Sharma et al., 2019). The winning of the BJP candidate from Mangaldoi even during the bad times of BJP only denotes the consolidation of Hindu votes irrespective of caste and community identities. Omar argues that that the idea of the Muslim 'other' is necessary to maintain Hindu identity and therefore, the Muslim is, constructed as an object of fear, disloyalty, hatred and envy. The intention is to create a sense of insecurity among the Hindus and mobilise

them to protect their identity from the ‘other’ (Omar, 2021). Although the chapter is critical about Omar’s statement but in the context of Nalbari, the existence of ‘Muslim other’ has benefitted BJP in the Lok Sabha election even before 2014 and now in Vidhan Sabha also, the ‘Muslim other’ has been used to polarize people.

The chapter demonstrates that Sangh Parivar has succeeded in highlighting the Hindu versus Muslim cleavage as the line of cleavage at the expense of other identities. The difference between Bengali-speaking and Assamese-speaking Muslims got abolished by focusing on ‘they are Muslims first, and we are Hindus first’. Now it has been observed that a large number of Bengali-speaking Hindus, Assamese-speaking Hindus and Nepalese are thinking of voting together for the BJP (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018).

The chapter finds that many Muslims supported the Congress party because of their year-long association or loyalty and not because of the hope to win election. They strongly asserted that at any cost, they cannot vote for a party who are against the Muslims or Islam. According to majority of the Muslim respondents in all the constituencies, the developmental works are mostly concentrated on the Hindu dominated areas and they are alienated from the government’s developmental schemes. Feeling of ‘othering’ and marginalization is clearly visible in the comments of most of the Muslim respondents in all the constituencies.

The chapter revealed that some caste Hindu voters supported BJP because they have no other option than BJP and they believe that although the Congress earlier used to do politics of appeasement but now it turned into a Muslim party. According to them, Congress didn’t do anything to protect the interest of the Assamese people and they are responsible for demographic change in Assam.

The chapter also revealed the consolidation of Brahmin votes is in all the research sites which is most prominent in Jorhat, because of which the political parties are afraid of giving party tickets outside the Brahmin caste. On the contrary in the Lok Sabha election, more than caste, religion plays the most deciding role. Many respondents openly said that no matter who the candidate is, but it should not go into the hands of the Muslims.



The chapter reveals that the majority of the Hindu respondents of Nalbari and Jorhat are happy with the beneficiary schemes of the present BJP government. The BJP government has constructed many roads in their first tenure, which is clearly visible in all the constituencies which are more prominent in Jorhat and Nalbari. The chapter has been observed that in all the research sites, people are not much bothered about the MP fund. Whatever development has taken place, it has been done through the fund of the MLA and local panchayats. However, they still voted the BJP Lok Sabha candidate because they want Modi as the Prime Minister. The Modi wave is still relevant among the common people. More than the efficiency of the candidates, the party background of the candidate matters most in all the constituencies. It has been observed that although people have frustration about the inefficiency or indifferent nature of their MPs, but it plays negligible role in affecting the way individual vote (cited in Omar, 2021). However, in the context of the Vidhan Sabha election people are more serious and they discuss about the works of the local MLA and the government.

In all the research sites, the organization of Bhagawat path and other religious programmes have been increased considerably which are more prominent in Nalbari and Jorhat. It is also observed that as a counter to Hindu religious programmes and rituals, religious activities among the Muslims have also increased which are more prominent in the areas where Bengali-speaking Muslims are dominant. It is also observed that there is a tendency to revive their culture and keep intact the sanctity of religion among the Assamese Muslims as well. It can be argued that gradual decrease of the numbers of associational form of engagement across religion and instrumentally design policies to mobilize intra-religious activities to create a regular form of everyday engagement through harisabha, akhanda Harikirtan, istema, etc., are becoming a major cause of religious disharmony in the studied areas (Varshney, 2002).

The chapter pointed out about the recruitment of young members of 18-29 years age group in the right-wing organizations who have expertise in martial arts and also have the history of indulging in aggressive activities. The argument of Anderson and Jaffrelot that the frustrations of younger people – who could not get a job and any recognition in society pushed them towards a rewarding form of activism, because fighting in the name of Hinduism provides them with some identity and self-esteem has been observed as true in case of many members of the right-wing organizations (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018).

Although many join the organizations with clear thought, but in case of many members, it is observed that being associated with the Hindutva mobilisation give them a purpose to conduct their life and also give recognition in society which was not possible earlier.

Despite of having cordial relations with Assamese-speaking Muslims, Caste Hindu Assamese people are not ready to tolerate in case of love jihad and cow slaughter. Love jihad and cow slaughter are the two key issues, which have been instrumental in the mobilization of the people, especially youths by the right-wing organizations in all the constituencies against Muslims (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). In the electoral campaign also, appeals are being made to unite Hindu votes for the larger interest. It has also been claimed that if Hindus are not united, then Muslims will snatch the political rights and the Hindu women and they will slaughter *gau mata*. The chapter demonstrates that eating of beef meat clearly makes the Muslims ‘other’ to the common Hindu people because of which an anxiety already existed between Hindus and Muslims. By realizing the fear and anxiety of Caste Hindu Assamese people, the BJP and the Hindutva brigade use ‘Love Jihad’ and ‘cow protection’ rhetoric as a narrative to mobilize people against the supposed Muslim ‘threat’. The chapter argues that because of such mobilizations, people associate themselves with right wing politics and as a result BJP has been gaining politically.

In the Lok Sabha election, more than the candidate, people voted for BJP because of its pro-Hindu and nationalist image. It has been observed that the intensity to be concerned about the national issues is more among the non-Assamese communities in comparison to the caste Hindu Assamese communities. The chapter pointed out that the issue of national interest and the threats from Pakistan and other Islamic terrorist organizations become more important issues during Lok Sabha elections, which undermines other important issues like unemployment or price rise (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018).

The chapter states that Assamese-speaking Muslims in all the research sites become silent on political issues and rather prefer to focus on their work silently. They are irritated with the behaviour of some of the newly joined members of the right-wing organizations who are trying hard to portray themselves as radical Hindus than others. In this context Anderson and Jaffrelot argued that words and ideas which were used marginally, have received a new legitimacy, and at the expense of others (ibid.). The present situations in the research sites supplement the argument of Anderson and

Jaffrelot where the leaders of the political parties and organizations are not hesitant to have communal conversations in public. It has been observed that both Assamese and Bengali-speaking Muslims feel insecure whenever issues like beef ban, CAA, NRC, Love Jihad, etc., are being discussed in the public domain (Jha, 2003).

It can be said that a sense of being exploited by the BJP government is prominent in the opinions of most of the Muslim respondents. They believe that government interferes in their religious matters, be it triple talaq, cattle preservation bill or Madrasa ban, etc. Although they have a strong feeling of anger and frustration, but they have chosen silence over protests because they believe that it may create further problems for them. On the other hand, various attempts of radical mobilisation by the right-wing organizations through rallies, protests, etc., have created an environment of fear psychosis among the Muslims (Omar, 2021).

The chapter observed that some of the educated Assamese-speaking and Bengali-speaking Muslims started supporting AGP just to be part of the government from which both BJP and AGP gained politically. AGP gave the BJP a much-needed secular flavour from which it benefited (Mishra, 2016). It is interesting to observe that the same Muslim people who criticize BJP as a communal party supported and voted for the AGP candidate despite knowing that AGP-BJP are in pre-poll alliance. Thus, it can be argued that wherever Muslims feel themselves a distinct and vulnerable minority, they seek the protection of mainstream parties by voting as the general electorate does and they support the likely winner and governing party to be (Jha, 2003).

The chapter argues that BJP has been successful in creating a narrative in which Azmal become the poster boy of illegal migrants and as Congress share a pre-poll alliance with AIUDF, so Congress also becomes synonyms of AIUDF and the godfather of *miyas* for the caste Hindu Assamese voters. The insecurity for the *Miyas* of the caste Hindu Assamese voters made the last election a totally polarized one and out of that polarization, BJP gained the most in the electoral politics of the three constituencies as well the state. Many educated Assamese Muslims believe that AIUDF is the reason behind the communal politics in Assam.

The electoral campaigns of all the political parties clearly show that, they tried to mobilize people in the name of religion. BJP leadership clearly showed the threat of

Bengali-speaking Muslim population upon the indigenous Assamese people and the caste Hindu Assamese voters in all the constituencies brought this campaign which is reflected in the clear polarization of Hindu votes.

After BJP came to power, the Hindi-speaking communities and other non-Assamese communities have become radical supporters of BJP. Despite opposing CAA, people voted for BJP because they believe that the threat of the Muslims is more dangerous than the threat of the other non-Assamese Hindus and they didn't choose Congress because it had pre-poll alliance with AIUDF. People believe that Congress and other regional parties or organizations couldn't capitalize the anti-CAA sentiment which was against BJP. Although people have frustration and anger regarding the Citizenship Amendment Act, but that anger and frustration didn't translate into votes against BJP. Majority of the Caste Hindu Assamese people want a strong regional party but, they also believe that it is not possible with the help of existing regional parties like AGP, AJP or Raizor Dal. Many people believe that AGP compromised their ideologies for the political interest of its leaders. In Tezpur, AGP could only win the election because it is associated with BJP. It can be said that BJP has benefitted more from AGP's loss rather than any other political parties (Srikanth, 2009). AGP who was earlier the leading political party of Assam, had to rely on the BJP and become a 'B' team of BJP.

The chapter argues that for the caste Hindu Assamese people the insecurity of *Miyas* undermines the insecurity of Bengali-speaking Hindus. It is observed that people have practiced their voting rights based on their comparative understanding of the threats from the outsiders. It has been argued that the Hindutva movement has crystallized in reaction to the 'existential' threats from the Muslim 'other'. The Hindutva brigade need these others to flourish politically and that is why, they keep 'othering' Muslims (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that the pre-existed threat of the 'Muslim other' made it easy for BJP to flourish politically in the studied areas.

The chapter demonstrates that the Assamese-speaking Muslims of all the studied areas are not happy with their shared identity with the *Miyas* based on religion. They have been trying to segregate themselves from *Miyas*. They consciously use terms like 'Miyas' and 'we Asomiya' to separate themselves from Bengali-speaking Muslims. They believe that culturally they are superior to *Miya*. The Assamese-speaking Muslims of all the constituencies restrict themselves from marrying Bengali-speaking Muslims calling

them *miyas*. Because some of them believe that, it will break their racial purity. It is interesting to observe that Assamese-speaking Muslims point out Bengali-speaking Muslims as *Miyas*. On the other hand, most of the time, they are also being called as *Miyas* by caste Hindu Assamese people for any unwanted incident in society. Leaders of the BJP and right-wing organizations selectively and conveniently use the term '*Miya*' sometimes to separate the Assamese-speaking Muslims from Bengali-speaking Muslims and sometimes as rhetoric. This has been used as a strategy where the differences between Bengali-speaking and Assamese-speaking Muslims have been abolished by focusing on 'they are Muslims first, and we are Hindus first' (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). On the other hand, majority of the Assamese-speaking Muslims blamed non-Assamese people living in Assam for Hindu-Muslim divide and radicalization of the society. In this process, they try to create an identity of Assamese community only comprising Assamese-speaking Hindus and Assamese-speaking Muslims. In this newly created identity, common identity is created based on shared identity of language and not based on religion. In this identity, Bengali-speaking Muslims and non-Assamese people are restrained. As a counter to create a common identity based on religion, Assamese-speaking Muslims have been trying to create an identity based on language.

The chapter pointed out that Caste Hindu Assamese people are not ready to accept *miyas* as part of the same Assamese community. A fear psychosis is created in the name of *Miyas* even in the areas with negligible *miya* population like Nalbari and Jorhat. This fear is instrumental in the radicalization of society and also polarization of votes in these two constituencies. In the context of Tezpur, instead of using terms like *miya*, the whole Paanchmile area was projected as a derogatory place where *Miyas* are living. The Panchmile area has been used as an example of *Miya* aggression and how over the period of time, *Miyas* expand their settlements with their rapid population growth. In the context of Tezpur Vidhan Sabha constituency, instead of projecting Muslims as 'other', the whole Panchmile area was projected as the 'other' with many political connotations. It has been argued that the Hindutva movement need the 'others' which includes Muslims and Christians for flourishing politically (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). The chapter argues that in all the constituencies, efforts have been made to polarize the Hindu votes against the 'Muslim other'. In the context of Tezpur, the whole Panchmile area become the 'other' for the rest of caste Hindu Assamese voters and the leaders of BJP tried to capitalize it during electoral campaigns. After looking at the election result, it can be said

that the AGP-BJP alliance gained politically because of that narrative. The efforts to polarize votes in the name of 'Muslim other' were translated into polarized Hindu votes.

(5)

The fifth chapter intends to understand the politico-religious ideologies of Bharatiya Janata Party and how these ideologies disseminate at the grass roots. It significantly explores the importance to understand the nexus between BJP and its affiliate organizations. In this chapter, the focus has been given on the politico-religious ideologies of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the repercussion of these ideologies in the state, particularly at the research sites. The Bharatiya Janata Party came to power at the centre in 2014 and they are in their consecutive 2<sup>nd</sup> term of power. In Assam, BJP came to power in 2016. After coming to power, the BJP Government has taken some decisions as inspired by their political ideology, which have created many controversies in the civil society as well as in the state. So, it has all the more becomes necessary to understand how common people perceive those agendas and how it influences the everyday life of the common people. This chapter has also attempted to understand whether these agendas bring any changes into the interactions between different communities. In this chapter, the researcher also tries to understand the implications of these agendas and how people perceive these ideas or decisions of the BJP government and the Sangh Parivar. To put on the record, the present study was conducted between the years, 2019 to 2022. Moreover, as already mentioned, for representational purpose, Nalbari (Sadar), Tezpur and Jorhat constituencies have been selected. From these three constituencies, the key respondents were selected from different interest groups sorted out with purposive sampling method. The chapter puts light on the expansion of the Ganesh Puja with the initiative of the leaders of right-wing organizations in Nalbari after the year 2015, which was earlier only observed in Ganesh Mandir of Nalbari. The chapter notes that after the rise of BJP, people are coming out openly to show and celebrate their Hindu identity in the form of rituals and festivals. The rightwing organizations also admit to show their strength to the non-Hindu communities. The organization of religious programmes like Akhanda Bhagawat Path, different kirtans, Paal naam, Hanuman pujas have been increased considerably. The chapter establishes a connection in the rise of BJP and RSS with the organization of such programmes. One reason of the increase of such programmes can be attributed to the sponsors of such programmes by different BJP and right-wing leaders. Based on a case study in Hyderabad, Varshney (2002) argued that everyday form of association helps in

the mobilization of the masses. RSS has taken the everyday form of association to strengthen its organizational base. In the research sites, different kirtans, Paal naam, Hanuman puja, etc., were organized through which people are being mobilized. It has not only inserted one kind of oneness but also mobilized people to be united. It has been instrumental in making the sense of 'we' and 'others' (Varshney, 2002).

The chapter witnessed massive participation of people during Durga Puja or Chhath Puja. The chapter also mentioned about *Bharat Mata Pujon* where many BJP, RSS and right-wing leaders were present in that celebration. The chapter pointed out that the celebration of *Bharat Mata Pujon* has only started after the winning of the BJP in Assam. Inside the mandap premise, they kept a statue of *Bharat Mata* and behind that, they kept a map of Bharat or India. The chapter referred to Bhattacharjee (2016) who argues that the ideologues of Hindutva are intelligently making use of the opportunity to construct an identity for the Assamese, the mission being to define a connection between Assam and 'Bharat', since the ancient times. They selectively highlight references to Assam in a variety of Vedic, Puranic and epic texts to impart a strong Hindu identity to Assam. Hindutva activists have therefore, from the very beginning, adopted novel strategies for navigating through the complex particularities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people (Bhattacharjee, 2016). The chapter argues that the observation made by Bhattacharjee is aptly reflected in the research area. The Hindutva organizations are already successful in establishing Hindutva in the cultural and political imagination of the people.

The chapter also notes that as a counter to these Hindutva activities, there is also an increasing tendency to organize more religious programmes called 'Istema' and 'Jolsa' among the Muslims, where different religious leaders and maulanas are invited to give lectures on Islam and Islamic way of life. Although according to both Assamese and Bengali-speaking Muslim respondents, the nature of the lectures is not political but the leaders of the right-wing organizations alleged that in those lectures, political guidelines were also given. In this context, a mention can be made of another case study of Varshney (2002) based in Hyderabad, where as a counter to Hindutva activities, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul (MIM) of Hyderabad also engineered a new collective rite for Muslims, called the Pankha procession. Varshney argued that the festivals are often an important source of civic engagement in societies. Festivals and rituals can often bring otherwise separate

individuals into a common civic space. Because they are so central to public culture, festivals can also be the focal points for group assertion, communal disputes, and sectarian contestation. The rituals of participation are thus, a double-edged sword. Celebrations of high ideals or of the divine can go together with violence and bigotry (Varshney,2002). From Varshney's understanding of festivals and rituals, it can be argued that in the context of studied area, festivals and rituals become the reason of communal disputes between Hindus and Muslims, although it hasn't involved violence and bigotry till now.

The chapter pointed out that all the people who associate themselves with BJP, RSS and other Hindutva organizations now greet each other by saying 'Jay Shree Ram'. Interestingly, some of the Muslims who are in good relationship with the leaders and members of right-wing organizations now greet them by saying 'Jay Shree Ram'. The leaders also appeal the members of their organizations to wear saffron colour clothes in any rituals and cultural programmes and the members of their organizations happily follow that. The chapter critically look at different significant phenomenas like the celebration of Lachit Divas by the right-wing organizations such as Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc., collection of money for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya under the leadership of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the celebration of Hanuman Jayanti during Bihu by organizing big rallies under the leadership of the right-wing organizations. The chapter argues that although Hindutva organizations initially focused on adapting local cults and symbols (Bhattacharjee, 2016), but with the passing of time, they have aggressively been mobilizing people through the invocation of Hindu stereotypes like 'Ram' or 'Ayodhya', saffron tilak or Saffron clothes, etc. It is interesting to note how the local cultural icons like Sankardeva and Lachit Barphukans are being appropriated by right wing organizations. By doing that, they try to create a common identity or belongingness for people across different communities and ethnic groups to identify themselves as Hindus.

The chapter states that 'Love jihad' and 'Cow slaughter' are the two main issues, which have been creating huge controversy all over the state and the right-wing organizations are successful in mobilizing Hindu boys against these two issues. Many youths spontaneously joined that rally and sought slogans like, 'Jai Shree Ram', 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', etc. The main intention of the rally was to mobilize and sensitize people, especially the young boys and girls against love jihad. In fact, school-going kids also joined those



rallies and sought slogans like “Jai Shree Ram, while seeing the crowd in joy and excitement. They use saffron clothes in their rallies. The chapter critically looks at the narratives as stated by the right-wing organization members about love jihad and cow slaughter but agrees to the fact that the right-wing organizations have successfully managed to mobilize young Hindu boys and girls against love jihad with such narratives. The incidents related to love jihad and cow slaughter created strong repercussion amongst both the religious communities. In this context, the chapter referred to H. Srikanth where he identified Muslim fundamentalism as one of the major reasons for which BJP could firm their footing in the politics of Assam (Srikanth, 1999). Although it is difficult to find the truth behind love jihad, but because of the issues like love jihad or cow slaughter, Hindus, irrespective of their caste or community could be united by right wing organizations which in turn help BJP to gain politically.

The chapter critically looks at the mobilization of people on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan by right-wing organizations and also critically looks at its relation to love jihad where the lives of the Hindu girls are considered to be in threat and the responsibility to give protection to Hindu girls is bestowed upon Hindu males. The chapter also critically look at the recently introduced Bill of the Assam government, which penalizes polygamy and child marriage, where many link this decision of the government with the issue of love jihad. While trying to see the connection between Love jihad with polygamy and child marriage, the chapter pointed out that Love jihad is a pan-India concept but the prohibition of love jihad and its reaction after the prohibition is contextual to Assam. No other state government in India seems to have taken such aggressive stand against child marriage. After the arrest of many Muslim people in relation to child marriage; a strong anti-assertion can be seen among the Muslims.

The chapter highlighted the fact that whenever the members of the right-wing organizations face any troubles from the police, the leaders of the ruling party came into their rescue. After BJP came to power, they are getting freehand for doing Hindutva activities, as a result of which Hindutva has been spreading to every nook and corner of the country and according to them, as a result of Hindutva, BJP gains the most. In this context, Vijayan MJ alleged that in general, Hindutva groups are rarely punished for any act of vandalism or even outright violence (MJ, 2018). The claim of Vijayan MJ is reflected in the opinion of the right-wing organization leader.

While stating the incident of physical assault of ex-contestant of Nalbari Sadar from Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) by a mob, constituting members of the right-wing organizations, the chapter argued that the idea that Muslims are ‘pampered’ by ‘pseudo-secularists’ continues to prevail in the Hindutva discourse. The ‘pampering’ or even the presence of ‘such people’ is unbearable because it is not justifiable to the Hindus (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). This intolerance and unbearableness against anybody, who according to them pampers Muslims, can be clearly understood from this incident of Nalbari where the ex-AJP candidate was assaulted physically even though he is a Hindu. From the narratives of the field, it can be said that the elements of fear and anger is already present regarding love jihad and cow slaughter among the Hindu people which makes it easy for BJP and other right-wing organizations to mobilize people against the Muslims which has been seen in all the studied areas.

The chapter mentioned about an incident where some people from the Marwari community allegedly belonged to RSS started RSS Pada Sanchalana programme near Rajmao Pukhuri of Jorhat which was protested by all the civil society organizations of Jorhat. In this context, Udayan Mishra in his article, ‘Assam’s Growing Resistance to Saffronisation’ admired the secular beliefs and social harmony of Assamese society and therefore, he believed that it will be difficult for the right-wing organizations to distance Assamese people from their secular beliefs and religious tolerance by using Hindu versus Muslim or nation versus regional identities (Mishra, 2017). This belief of Mishra is relatable in the context but the chapter also questions the position of the educated middle class who want to maintain their secular and progressive image in public even though they might be radical Hindus or radical Muslims.

The chapter mentioned about a conflict between Eidgah Namaz Committee and Bihu Committee which eventually turned into a Hindu-Muslim conflict. The chapter also mentioned about the conflict between the Christians and the Bajrang Dal members which was centered on the conversion of 200 families of the Harijan colony of Tezpur to Christian religion. In this context, the chapter referred to Versney who in his book mentioned that when ethnic conflict is instrumental, it has been used by the elites for their own interest. On the other hand, when ethnic conflict is essential or primordial, then it means it is already inherent in society (Varhsney, 2002). From the field narratives, it can be said that some elements of conflict of interest have pre-existed in society, which

has been used by BJP, RSS and other right-wing organizations to mobilize people. In Assam, it is partly instrumental and partly primordial, because BJP, RSS and right-wing organizations instrumentally revive the primordially existed elements.

From the interviews of the respondents, the chapter mentioned that in the RSS camps, lectures were given on Muslim aggression and different examples were given to validate their lectures. Examples were given on the changing demography of Kalitakuchi of Hajo, Medhi Suburi of Dhekiajuli, Radhakuchi from lower Assam, which are presently occupied by the Muslims. The chapter states that in those camps, people are manipulated through the Hindu versus Muslim binaries to realize the insecurity of the Assamese people and the aggression of Muslims.

From the field narratives the chapter mentioned about while narrating a recent incident when the *Bhumi Sangroksan Samitee* got directly involved in land related matters and restrict the selling of land to a Muslim, the chapter demonstrate that prior to the upsurge of Hindutva forces, instance of exclusivist nature of buying and selling of land was not prominent in Assam unlike the other states of north India. The chapter argues that an increasingly exclusivist nature of buying and selling of lands can be observed in all the research sites where Hindus try to restrict the land ownership among the community members itself. The chapter has argued that even if some primordial elements of conflict was existed in the society, but mostly an instrumental type of ethnic conflict as advocated by Versney (2002) can be witnessed in the research sites, where the right-wing organizations are instrumental in restricting the buying and selling of lands to Muslims in the Hindu dominated areas. Although Bengali Muslim bashing element was already there in society but the right-wing organizations revive the primordially existed elements (Varhsney, 2002).

In the backdrop of the controversial law introduced by the Assam BJP government in 2020, which planned to convert all state-run Madrassas into 'regular schools' that impart general education, the chapter mentioned about a narrative based on Jorhat town where one government Madrasa namely, 'Jorhat Muktab School' converted to a normal school, because of the government's changing policy to withdraw all government madrasas. Because of this incident, some conflict of interest arises between the Hindu and Muslim faculty members. The chapter also addressed the allegation of many respondents that the BJP government has been taking a firm stand against the illegal settlers as they belong to

one particular community. In addition, the chapter also addresses the encounters of the drug mafias and drug peddlers which created huge repercussions in the state as people from one particular religion have been killed in those police encounters. After these activities, a strong anti-assertion from the Muslim community has been seen in many parts of the state.

From the activities of some of the members, the chapter argues that the functioning of the organizations of the Sangh Parivar has many contradictions. In this context, the chapter agrees that people may be simultaneously members of different groups with different overlapping interests and it is possible to have contradictions internal to an identity or clashes between identities (Joseph & Mahajan, 1991). The chapter pointed out that most of the members of BJP and other right-wing organizations are the ex-members of different organizations which had contradictory ideological positions. However, the sudden shift to RSS and BJP makes it confusing for them to adapt to new ideologies. In all the research sites, the already existed Assamese nationalism responded to newly emerging Hindu nationalism. Although BJP, RSS and its affiliate organizations have been working at the ground level, but sometimes it is difficult to demarcate their roles, whether it is coming from the BJP or it is coming from the RSS. It is alleged that most of the people who recently joined RSS have political interest. So contrasting behaviour of some of the members can be observed where political interest of the members and the interest of the organizations like RSS contradict each other. It has also been observed that to prove as radical Hindus or more loyal supporters, the newly joined members of BJP and other right-wing organizations who come from Congress or other political parties try to participate in more radical activities. The chapter notes that many of the old RSS and BJP members are not happy with the way the new members are functioning within the party or organization.

From the field experience the chapter notes that people are trying to create identities only based on religion. The chapter also highlighted that Nepali, Bengali and other Hindi speaking community strongly assert the necessity to vote as Hindus. On the contrary majority of the Muslim population see the decisions of the government regarding triple talaq, cattle preservation, Madrasa ban, child marriage, etc. as discriminatory and Sang Parivar's agenda to interfere in the religious affairs of the Muslims. They believe that the government has been using state machineries for their political interest and as a reaction

to these activities a strong counter assertion among the Muslim community can be observed. Thus, it can be said that the strategy of Sangh Parivar to abolish the difference between Bengali-speaking Muslims and Assamese-speaking Muslims and also between Bengali-speaking Hindus and Assamese-speaking Hindus by only focusing on their Hindu or Muslim identities has become successful (Anderson & Jaffrelot, 2018). Udayan Mishra in his article, 'Assam's Growing Resistance to Saffronisation', showed his trust in the yearlong social harmony and secular beliefs of Assamese society. He strongly believed that the very ethos of Assamese society is extremely difficult for the Hindutva organizations to wean the Assamese people away from their secular beliefs and religious tolerance by trying to impose simple equations of Hindu versus Muslim or nation versus regional identities (Mishra, 2017). Findings from the research sites, has revealed that the trust of Mishra on the Assamese society has somehow broken already. Assam has become a fertile ground for the rise of Hindutva activities in the line of north Indian Politics.

## **6.2 Conclusion:**

From the empirical data, discussion and analysis, the study concludes that a clear polarization based on religion has been manifested in all the research sites. Assam becomes a potential fertile ground for radical political mobilizations. The identity of religion undermines all other aspects in Assam (as seen in the research sites). People are increasingly voting as Hindus or Muslims. Despite opposing CAA, caste Hindu Assamese people voted for BJP, because for them the insecurity of *Miyas* undermines the insecurity of Bengali-speaking Hindus. It is observed that people have practiced their voting rights based on their comparative understanding of the threats from the outsiders.

The pro-Hindu image of BJP helps it to grab the Hindu votes irrespective of caste and communities. On the other hand, the image of Congress as the sympathizer of Muslims cost the Hindu votes. BJP has been successful in creating a narrative in which Congress become synonyms of AIUDF and the godfather of *miyas* for the caste Hindu Assamese voters.

It is also observed that the Muslims did not seem to have voted for the Congress with the same intensity as the Hindus voted for the BJP in both Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections of all the research sites. It is interesting to observe that some of the educated

Assamese-speaking and Bengali-speaking Muslims started supporting AGP just to be part of the government from which both BJP and AGP gained politically. It is interesting to observe that the same Muslim People who criticize BJP as a communal party supported and voted for the AGP candidate despite knowing that AGP-BJP are in pre-poll alliance.

The Assamese speaking Muslims are trying to create an identity based on language by segregating themselves from *Miyas*; while on the other hand, BJP and right-wing organizations along with the Hindi-speaking Hindus are trying to create an identity based on religion. In both the identity constructions, the Bengali speaking Muslims become the 'other'. Caste Hindu Assamese people are not ready to accept *miyas* as part of the same Assamese community. A fear psychosis is created in the name of *Miyas* even in the areas with negligible *miya* population like Nalbari and Jorhat. This fear is instrumental in the radicalization of society and also polarization of votes.

From the narratives of the field, it can be said that the elements of fear, anxiety and anger is already existed regarding love jihad and cow slaughter in the minds of Hindu people which makes it easy for BJP and other right-wing organizations to mobilize people against the Muslims. Because of such mobilisations, people associate themselves with right wing politics and as a result BJP has been gaining politically. It has been observed that to prove as radical Hindus or more loyal supporters, the newly joined members of BJP and other right-wing organizations who come from Congress or other political parties try to participate in more radical activities.

There has been a connection in the rise of BJP and RSS with the increase of organizing Hindu religious programmes and rituals such as, kirtans, Paal naam, Hanuman puja, etc., in the research sites. It is also observed that as a counter to Hindu religious programmes and rituals, religious activities among the Muslims have also increased.

An increasingly exclusivist nature of buying and selling of lands can be observed in all the research sites where Hindus try to restrict the land ownership among the community members itself by not allowing selling of lands to Muslims.

From the field experience it can be argued that the Hindutva organizations are already successful in establishing Hindutva in the cultural and political imagination of the people. The thesis argues that although Hindutva organizations initially focused on adapting local

cults and symbols (Bhattacharjee, 2016), but with the passing of time, they have been aggressively mobilizing people through the invocation of Hindu stereotypes like 'Ram' or 'Ayodhya', saffron tilak or Saffron clothes, etc. It is interesting to note how the local cultural icons like Sankardeva and Lachit Barphukans are being appropriated by right wing organizations. By doing that, they try to create a common identity or belongingness for people across different communities and ethnic groups to identify themselves as Hindus.

Finally, it can be argued that Assam has become a fertile ground for the rise of Hindutva activities in the line of north Indian Politics which has been reflected in the polarization of Hindu votes in all the research sites during both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. Because of this clear polarization, Assam has become prone to communal clashes or riots. The study further suggests that the government should sensitively deal with the polarization of Hindus and Muslims to maintain communal harmony in the state. The study argues that only by permanently ensuring political rights of the indigenous Assamese people, their insecurity of being outnumbered by *miyas* can be reduced. At the same time the government must take serious steps to improve the socio-economic positions of the *miyas* which will further reduce the increasing crime rates among them. On the other hand, implementation of a strong population policy is necessary to control the increasing population of the state.

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