This chapter will deal with the presentation of ethnicity by analysing the definition of the category 'other' in the newspaper reporting of violent incidents. The urban-middle class provided material support to the movement, and it should be closely examined how the claims of the student leaders were expressed to this section of people. As noted in the Introduction, it has been pointed out that the movement was basically spearheaded by a section of the urban-middle class. Thus it is important to analyse the interpretation of the movement by the urban middle-class. We will examine the definition of the 'other' made by them and their interpretation of violent incidents during the movement.

To deal with this question, this chapter and the next will focus on two issues: the first one is the way the newspapers reported the incidents and the kind of messages that they sought to convey to the people, and another is the way the urban-middle class read the newspapers, and how they remember the violent incidents. The first issue will be discussed in this chapter, and the latter in the next chapter. Both parts will focus on the texts and narratives of the violent incidents that occurred in 1980 and 1983, which were introduced in Chapter 4.

As stated before, the most influential medium of communication at the time of the movement was the newspaper. Particularly in the urban areas, people came to know about the incidents mainly through newspapers. It is
also through newspapers that the claims made by the movement leaders and their opponents were carried to the people. Hence articles in newspapers are the most important text to be analysed here. By looking at newspaper reporting, we will try to examine the formation of ethnic boundaries and changes in the idea of ethnic identity in urban areas. We will also see how the claims of the movement leaders were interpreted by the people.

1. Theoretical Background: Framing Analysis

Existing literature on Assam's ethnic movements reveal that some scholars tend to see newspapers as playing a communal role to 'encourage communal flames'. Gupta and Gupta conducted an analysis of three newspapers including The Assam Tribune (an English newspaper published from Guwahati), Amrita Bazar Patrika (an English newspaper published from Kolkata), The Times of India (a national daily published from Delhi), and conclude that a bias in the reporting of the Assam movement attempted to evoke emotional feelings among two linguistic groups, i.e., the Assamese and the Bengalis (Gupta and Gupta 1990: 166). Similarly, Hussain argues that the Assamese newspapers were owned by high caste Asamiya bourgeoisie, and they served as the mouthpiece of the movement. He states:

The Asamiya bourgeois press played a very significant role in the build-up of the movement, defining its enemy within and outside, creating a positive image for the leaders and supporters, identifying with certain groups among the Asamiyas and showing antipathy towards certain other groups within the Asamiyas, Na-Asamiyas and non-Asamiyas. (Hussain 1993: 136)
The basic premise of these studies is that the mass media had a strong effect on people's actions. Although I agree that the newspapers played an important role in the movement, it is necessary to examine whether newspapers have such powerful influence or not. And for that purpose, we should carefully examine the processes and aspects of newspapers which are successful in persuading people.

In studies of the effect of media, there was a significant change of focus from attitude changes to cognitive effects in the 1970s. Before this period, scholars mainly focused on the aspect of attitude change caused by the media. The first stage of the media effects study was from the turn of the 20th century to the late 1930s. During this period, an image of direct and powerful mass media moulding of public opinion was very strong, especially between the world wars. The perspective of the study was largely influenced by the experience of strategic propaganda during WWI. This view, called the 'hypodermic model', was replaced by the 'minimal effects model' soon after WWII. In the second stage, it was believed that media does not have such a strong effect, and the influence of individuals was considered to be more powerful in bringing about a change in people's attitude. Klapper sums up the view as follows: Campaigns do not influence people; their major effect is the reinforcement of existing attitudes. Even for those who actually do change their mind, the effects are minimal (Klapper 1960). The minimal effects model corrected the image of the public as a passive object of media manipulation and restored the idea of active individual agency. People are believed to be selective in what they see and assimilate. (Gamson 1988:
In the third stage starting from the 1970s, the focus shifted to the media effect on cognitive aspect. The most famous model is agenda-setting function, which attempts to show how the mass media provides cues to people that they then use in deciding the importance of an issue. By choosing the issue or topic and ranking their importance, mass media can suggest 'what to think about', instead of 'what to think'. (Gamson 1988: 163; McCombs and Shaw 1972: 176-7; Takeshita 1998: 3-4)

More recently, there has been the rise of the 'social constructivism (constructionism)' model in this area (Gamson 1988: 162-3; Scheufele 1999: 103). The most prominent model is framing analysis, which supposes that journalists do not merely mirror the reality but rather – through their work ways, norms and rules of thumb – actively construct news out of the available raw materials. This active construction of reality may be more pervasive at certain points of an issue's evaluation than others (Kosicki 1993: 112).

Frame analysis shares some of its characteristics with other approaches such as agenda-setting or priming, and some argue that it is an extension of agenda setting. However, according to Kosicki, frame analysis is different from agenda-setting. Agenda-setting primarily focuses on the topic and its priority in the media, "it tells little about the content of issues". Kosicki argues, "the current dominant agenda-setting strips away almost everything worth knowing about how the media covers an issue and leaves only the shell of the topic". (Kosicki 1993: 112-5)

Frame Analysis is originally an idea proposed by Goffman that presupposes that we all actively classify, organise and interpret our life
experiences to make sense of them. The term ‘frame’ indicates ‘schemata of interpretation’, and “it enables people to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences or information (Goffman 1974: 21; Pan and Kosicki 1993: 56). Gamson, one of the leading scholars of frame analysis, developed the concept frame as the “central organising idea or story line that provides meaning.” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143)

Based on this approach, I would like to analyse newspaper content and people’s perception of the violent incidents during the anti-foreigners movement. Here we need to distinguish between two types of frame: one is that of the newspapers, the way they perceived the violence, and another is that of the individual urban middle-class. Here, I would like to call the former the ‘media frame’ and the latter the ‘audience frame’ according to Scheufele’s classification (Scheufele 1999:104-7). The latter fame will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In the analysis of the violent incident, the description of the victims and the offenders consists the most important part. And in case of the anti-foreigners movement in Assam, the distinction between the indigenous and immigrant, or ethnic difference such as the Assamese, tribals and Bengalis, are one of the important markers to defining victims and offenders, along with some other characteristics such as students, picketers, innocent villagers, minorities, etc.

The narratives and texts of the violent incidents that occurred during the anti-foreigners movement generally form part of the greater story of the movement: why it happens, who are the sufferers and who are the culprits, who gains or benefits from the movement, etc. In some periods, violence
dominated the reporting of the movement, particularly during the state legislative assembly election in 1983.

There are three types of media frames I will deal with here: the Assamese newspapers, Bengali newspapers, and the pan-Indian newspapers. As for audience frames, there are Assamese and Bengali-speaking urban middle-class in Assam. Based on these categories, I will examine each frame by content analysis and interviews, and compare their characteristics.

In India, newspaper circulation varies widely according to geographical region and language of the area, and the audience of the newspaper is divided according to this. For example, Rajagopal draws attention to a split between the 'English language print public' and the 'Hindi language print public' (Rajagopal 2001: 152-3). Sanjib Baruah, on the other hand, points out that there is a divide between the ways some issues are framed in the pan-Indian public sphere and in the subnational public spheres of the region. (Baruah 1999: 11-3)

However, as Rajagopal points out, "the public sphere is an ideal type rather than an historical artifact." The opinion formation of a linguistic community is affected by its members' political, economic and social status, and also by the historical background. While these linguistic communities are not perfectly divided (for example, many people in Assam read newspapers and journals published in Delhi or Kolkata and sometimes contribute articles to them), and are intertwined and influence each other, they definitely have their own circle of opinions.

2. Subjects, Method and Focus of Analysis
It needs to be stated that newspapers play different roles according to the region. Inside Assam, newspapers published in Guwahati played an important role in spreading the claims of the movement leaders and mobilised people to participate in the movement. In Bengali-speaking regions like West Bengal and the Cachar district in Assam, the dominant papers were published in Kolkata and opposed to the movement. Outside these regions, the national newspapers published in Delhi, Kolkata and other major cities in India mainly conveyed the news of what happened in Assam during the anti-foreigners movement.

With special reference to the anti-foreigners' movement in Assam, newspapers can be divided into three categories according to the place of their publication: (1) Guwahati, (2) Kolkata and (3) Delhi or other major cities in India. The papers published from Guwahati and Kolkata can be considered regional media of Assam and West Bengal, and papers published in Delhi or other major cities in India and circulated throughout India can be regarded as pan-India (national) media (though we should note that some English papers published in Kolkata can also be included in pan-Indian media). Moreover, among them, there is a difference between vernacular and English papers.

The Assamese media is made up of mainly two newspapers – Dainik Asam, an Assamese vernacular paper published in Guwahati and The Assam Tribune, an English paper from the same group. The two had major circulations in the Brahmaputra valley, and enthusiastically supported the movement. There were several papers from Kolkata, Ananda Bazar Patrika being the most famous among Bengali papers. There were several English
papers, and Amrita Bazar Patrika and Statesman were prominent among them. The Statesman particularly is published both in Kolkata and Delhi, and it has the character of pan-Indian media. People in the Barak valley also read the Statesman.

Apart from these, there were pan-Indian papers such as the Times of India, The Hindu and the Indian Express. There was also a bi-monthly journal called India Today, which together with the Indian Express, did detailed reporting on the issue. This was mainly due to the efforts of the Indian Express' correspondence, Shekar Gupta, who was posted in Assam right after the movement started. During his tenure in Assam, Gupta reported the sequence of the movement enthusiastically and meticulously. It was he who broke the news of the Nellie incident in the pan-Indian media. Later, he vividly described the movement in his book Assam: A Valley Divided.

There were other journalists such as Arun Shourie, the editor-in-chief of Indian Express at the time, who was known for his pro-movement stance in the earlier phase of the movement. Shourie conducted interviews of the movement leaders personally, and at the time of the Nellie incident, wrote a long article in India Today, criticising the central government for the forced election. The reports made by these two journalists made the Nellie incident famous throughout India.

I conduct three types of analyses in this part. The first focuses on the Assamese and the Bengali media and examines the first six months of the

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13 Interview with Mr. Shekar Gupta in Delhi, November 2002.
14 Arun Shourie later joined BJP, and was a Senior Minister in the BJP led NDA government until 2004.

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reporting of the movement by each media. By taking a thorough look at the reporting on the movement during the first phase, this analysis tries to unravel the basic frame – the storyline each media adopted on the anti-foreigners movement. The second analysis deals with the Duliajan incident, in which the difference between the Assamese and the Bengali press was most prominent. Here, the difference between the vernacular and the English language press will be also analysed. The third deals with the Nellie incident, and here, besides the Assamese and Bengali press, I will examine the pan-Indian media also. The background theory and method for each analysis are given below.

3. Framing Victims and the 'Other': Foreigners or Minorities?

3·1. Frame Analysis of the Assamese and Bengali Media

The subjects of the analysis are The Assam Tribune (hereafter referred to as AT) –a daily newspaper published in Guwahati, the centre of the movement; and Amrita Bazar Patrika (hereafter referred to as ABP) –a daily published in Kolkata, the centre of the state of West Bengal. Both newspapers are written in the English language, so we can assume that these newspapers are

15 It was difficult to survey all the articles in order to assess the difference between English and vernacular papers, for the lack of my fluency in Assamese and Bengali language. I picked up Duliajan incident as a case-study to analyse each regional papers' linguistic differences. This will be supplementary study to the first analysis on three violent incidents in section 3 of this chapter, where I surveyed only English paper articles in the first phase of the movement.
primarily read by educated people.

The analysis is of articles in both papers from December 1979 to May 1980, the first six months of the movement. The reason for choosing this period is that the basic frames of each paper were formed at this time, the first stage of the movement, and later, similar arguments were repeatedly asserted. Furthermore, an earlier study conducted by Surendra K. Gupta and Indira B. Gupta also focuses on the same period. Therefore, in order to compare this study with their analysis, the first seven months of the movement is the subject of this analysis.

As for the method, I will analyse the text of selected articles only, rather than surveying all of the published articles that relate to the anti-foreigners movement. In the former study, Gupta and Gupta conducted an analysis of three newspapers including *The Assam Tribune*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Times of India*. They mainly focus on the headlines of the newspapers and classify the headlines into five themes. By counting the headlines and analysing the content of articles in each of the newspapers, they analyse the tendency of the reporting. They conclude that a bias in the reporting of the Assam movement attempted to evoke emotional feelings among two linguistic groups, i.e., the Assamese and the Bengalis. (Gupta and Gupta 1990: 166)

Their research provides one of the first and the most precise arguments on the role of the newspapers in Assam's anti-foreigners movement, and is highly suggestive. However, as their analysis surveys all the articles published on the issue, the logic used by each newspaper for persuading readers is not explored in depth. To overcome this limitation and go for a
deeper analysis, I will focus on three violent incidents that erupted during this period. The three incidents are the North Kamrup incident (January 1980), the Duliajan incident (January 1980), and the counter-agitation by the AAMSU (May 1980). These three incidents were widely reported and there were mentions of them in the pamphlets issued by the movement leaders, as introduced in Chapter 4. By examining the content of the reports, I will look at the way in which the media emphasised the victims and the offenders in each violent incident. A close examination of descriptions in the articles will reveal not only the kind of problems that were constructed in the reports but also the orientation of each newspaper.

3-2. The Incidents in North Kamrup

In early January 1980, incidents of large-scale violence broke out in North Kamrup – north of Guwahati, the capital of Assam. It was reported that Bengali immigrants, both legal and illegal, old comers and new comers, were victims of the incident. Following this, the Government took severe action against Assamese villagers who became victims of rape and killing by the security forces.

On 6th January, The Assam Tribune gave a report of the death of a student leader along with his picture. It states “Madhyam Baska, a tribal populated Mauza came first under curfew since last mid-night after the murder of a student leader, Sri Dilip Huzuri at Barikadonga”. And under the picture was a brief description “Sri Dilip Huzuri, a Class X student of Baganpara High School who was killed on January 3 night by miscreants.” The next day, AT continued with the news, “Death of Sri Dilip Huzuri was
mourned today in Kamrup district by holding a number of condolence meetings and flying black flags by the students and people at large”.

In this way, the death of a student leader was widely published by AT giving the victim the attention generally reserved for prominent personalities.

On 10th January, after North Kamrup was declared a Disturbed Area, AT reported, “Indigenous people who are being attacked by Bangladeshi elements in Kaoimari Reserve and Matikhowa areas continue to evacuate to safer areas”. Moreover, on 12th January, “Organized Attack by Bangladeshis on Indigenous Peasants” was announced. Under the headline, it was alleged:

Over 3,000 indigenous peasants and their families fled their homes from Kaoimari reserve areas in Barpeta sub-division following organised attack by alleged Bangladeshi infiltrators, who have now taken [position] in a five to ten kilometres belt on both banks of the Brahmaputra extending upto Bangladesh border, according to information reaching here. (The Assam Tribune, January 12)

In this way, AT reported the whole incident as one caused by ‘organized attack by Bangladeshis’. Moreover, it also reported atrocities perpetrated by army personnel. According to their report of 12th January,

Untold atrocities are let loose on villagers in extensive areas of North Kamrup by the Army personnel, according to information received here today. The Army and CRP units are reported to have made indiscriminate arrests of the people from a number of villages in Nalbari sub-divisions. All atrocities are, however, alleged to have been perpetrated by
From these articles, it can be said that while emphasising the death of a student leader, AT regarded Bangladeshis and the army as threats to the local people.

On the other hand, Amrita Bazar Patrika did not state who the offenders and the victims of the incident were in the first stage of its reporting. On 8th January, it simply reports "3 die in Assam violence", and on the 9th, it states:

Death toll in North Kamrup violence mounted to 8 with two more killed in police firing in Mukalmua. Over 8000 people have been rendered homeless as nearly 2000 houses and huts have been burnt down in the large-scale arson, looting and rioting in wide-spread areas of North Kamrup. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 9)

Again, on the 10th, ABP wrote "At least 32 persons had been killed in the areas declared disturbed in lower and southern Assam since January 4th, official sources said tonight", and never reported the details of the victims or the offenders.

But on 11th January, ABP published the statement of the Government of West Bengal expressing concern for the life and property of the Bengali people in Assam.

The West Bengal Government is very much worried over large-scale reports from Assam that the life and property of Bengalee Hindus in upper Assam "have become unsafe as a result of the jingoistic activities of the Assamese people." (Amrita Bazar
Significantly, here 'Bengalee-Hindus' are described as victims and 'the Assamese people' are viewed as attackers. It should be noted that it was the West Bengal government that specified the identities of the victims and the attackers.

Looking at the reports of the incident shows that while AT stressed the death of a student leader killed by 'miscreants' it condemned both the attack on 'indigenous people' by 'Bangladeshis' and the 'army atrocities'. On the other hand, ABP was silent about the victims of the violence, but in the news of the statement by the West Bengal government, it depicted 'Bengalis' as victims and 'Assamese' as the offenders. Thus, these two reports of the same incidents gave readers entirely different impressions.

3·3. The Incident in Duliajan

On 18th January 1980, police fired at students picketing in front of Oil India Limited in Duliajan in the northern part of Assam. Several Assamese students and a Bengali technical manager of the company were killed.

In a front-page article on this incident, AT reported,

At least seven youths were reported to have been killed and more than 100 men and women of different ages seriously injured as a result of firing by the BSF [Border Security Forces] at about 8 a.m. while they were picketing along with thousands of persons in front of the industrial area of Oil India Limited at Duliajan. (The Assam Tribune, January 19)
It also stated that the AASU had condemned the police firing on peaceful picketers at Duliajan. And in the last page, AT wrote, "Dr. Robi Mitra, Technical Manager of Oil India Limited, was dragged out of his car by a violent crowd near the hospital at Duliajan and was killed, police said".

Moreover, in an editorial on 20th January, an AT editor wrote,

That ladies were among the victims heightens the ghastliness of the tragedy and wantonness and indiscriminate nature of the police action.... The unfortunate failure to save the life of the OIL official from mob fury, apparently sparked off by the killings, the police and the civil authorities must be held squarely responsible. (The Assam Tribune, January 20)

Thus, AT focused on the death of the picketers and condemned the police for using gunfire and attributed the death of the OIL manager to the violence caused by the firing.

Moreover, on 21st January, AT reported "At least 70 Picketers Killed At Duliajan". It stated, "The police firing at the Oil Town of Duliajan last Thursday is feared to have turned into an ugly massacre of non-violent and peaceful picketers, according to assessment of different organizations". Again on the 25th, AT reported "Over 1000 Dead Bodies were Hidden At Duliajan, Says PLP".

It is clear that AT focused on the death of the 'peaceful' picketers and reported the possibility of the larger number of killings. Furthermore, AT condemned the firing by the police and the security forces, and held the police
and civil authorities responsible for the death of the technical manager.

On the contrary, ABP underplayed the police firing and emphasised the death of Dr. Robi Mitra. On 19th January, it reported,

At least six persons were killed—five of them in police firing and another in mob violence—in front of Oil India Limited at Duliajan in Upper Assam this morning. Dr. Robi Mitra, Technical Manager of OIL was dragged out of his car by a violent crowd near the hospital at Duliajan and was killed, police said. *(Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 19)*

On 21st January, ABP reported the statement made by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mr. Jyoti Basu on the issue. It wrote,

Mr. Jyoti Basu... said that apparently *regional fanatics were now on a rampage and on a murder spree in Assam* and the alarming situation there had not only affected the normal life and possession of Bengalees alone, but had equally endangered the personal safety and security of all non-Assamese people alike including those [who] speak Hindi and Nepalese languages. *(emphasis added) (Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 21)*

From the article quoted above, it can be said that Basu interpreted the death of a Bengali in police triggered violence as a threat to all non-Assamese residing in Assam. Again, it was the chief minister of the West Bengal government who first stated that the security of the non-Assamese people was threatened in Assam.

Moreover, on 22nd January, an ABP editorial passionately stated,
A young Bengali scientist, Dr. Robi Mitra, who was serving as a Technical Manager ... was stoned to death. ...This was a case of premeditated murder, not a case of sudden attack on an individual by an angry mob.... Dr. Mitra was not a Bangladeshi, nor was he a Bengalee living permanently in Assam.... If the "anti-social elements" in Assam succeed in driving away all non-Assamese residents from that state, India will cease to be one country. (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, January 22)

It is interesting that ABP stressed the death of one Bengali and claimed that this was a premeditated crime by the organisers of the movement, thus concluding all non-Assamese lives were under threat. And it paid little attention to the death of student picketers.

Although there was no difference in the reporting of the facts, there was a clear divide in the emphasis given and in the tone and language used. Whereas AT clearly emphasised the police firing and death of the picketers, ABP's main concern was the death of one Bengali and it was alleged to be the conduct of the organisers of the movement.

3.4. Counter-Agitation by the All Assam Minority Students' Union

In May 1980, the newly formed All Assam Minority Students' Union (in which Bengali-Hindus and Bengali-Muslims were dominant) led processions and demonstrations against the detection and the deportation of foreign nationals. Police fired at the violent mob, resulting in the death of several people.

On 27th May, AT reported,
The newly formed Minority Students' Union, which took out processions in certain pockets dominated by Bangladeshis turned violent at some places when police had to open fire killing three persons and injuring one seriously at Bijni.... An official report says, a big procession of linguistic and religious minority people attacked police men on duty at Bijni when police had to open fire killing two on-the-spot and injuring one seriously. *(The Assam Tribune, May 27)*

It should be noted here that the AT's report emphasised that the AAMSU's procession took place in Bangladeshi dominated area, and thereby suggested that the AAMSU had support from them. Also, it stated that it was the minority people who attacked the police first.

Also on 29th May, it stated,

A serious communal violence rocked parts of Nowgong district dominated by Bangladeshis where armed hordes of immigrants from Bangladesh and East Pakistan made a number of attacks on indigenous villages and assembled at places with aggressive postures. *(The Assam Tribune, May 29)*

Here, the tendency to regard 'minority' or 'immigrants from Bangladeshi and East Pakistan' as the offenders is more explicit. The AT's report stated that the immigrants were 'armed' and made a number of attacks on 'indigenous' villages.

On the same day, AT reported the statement made by the AAGSP under the caption "Violent Activities by Foreigners". The statement went:
The Central Office of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad in a Press statement condemned the violent activities of the foreigners and their supporters for carrying out a mass carnage and devastation under the banner of a minority organization and expressed grave concern about the possible repercussions of these incidents. (The Assam Tribune, May 29)

Also, a statement issued by the PLP was reported. The statement read, 'It is a case of direct aggression by foreigners who have illegally stayed in Assam...' In this way, by reproducing the words of the AAGSP and PLP, AT insinuated that the AAMSU is a group of foreigners.

In this incident, despite the fact that several people had been shot dead by the police, AT did not focus on this, but rather sought to report it as a violent act carried out by the people from Bangladesh and East Pakistan. This is in sharp contrast to its reporting on the Duliajan incident, in which AT severely condemned the police for using gunfire on the 'peaceful' picketers. And by uncritically presenting the statements issued by the AAGSP and PLP, AT implicitly supports the view that the incident was 'caused by foreigners'.

On the other hand, on 27th May, ABP reported,

A police party and paramilitary forces opened fire at least in three places in Goalpara district today killing two persons and injuring another 10 persons when the peaceful demonstration and procession by the AAMSU was attacked by elements of AASU and Sangram Parishad in a bid to muffle the minorities from giving expression to their grievances. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 27)
Thus, although it was the police that actually fired and killed the processionists, ABP report layed the blame for the death on the alleged attack by the AASU and the AAGSP. On the same day, ABP presented a statement made by Chief Minister Jyoti Basu claiming that people who entered Assam after 1971 were not foreigners:

The Chief Minister reiterated that the first task of the Central Government to solve the Assam issue should be determination of the question who is a foreigner.... The cut-off date must certainly be 1971. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 27)

From the article, it may be noted that the Chief Minister of the West Bengal government was as vocal on the issue as he was in the North Kamrup incident and the Duliajan incident. By commenting on the cut-off year, he suggested that those people who led the procession were not foreigners but Indian citizens.

And on 29th May, in an editorial, ABP stated,

Moreover, the violence which has marked the agitation – despite the protestations of the AASU and the Gana Sangram Parishad – as also the harassment suffered by the linguistic minorities, the Bengali-speaking residents of the State in particular, has created a feeling of insecurity among them.... But the peaceful demonstrators [organized by AAMSU] were reportedly attacked by hostile elements leading to violence, accompanied with large-scale arson and loot, and police firing in which several persons were killed. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 29)
Thus, ABP stressed that the people suffering in Assam were Indian national minorities, and that the AAMSU represented their voice. In reports relating to this incident, AT described the AAMSU as 'foreigners' and as responsible for the violent incident. On the other hand, ABP described the AAMSU as a representative group of minorities and the organisers of the movement (AASU and AAGSP) as harassing those minorities. Thus, victims and offenders seemed to be reversed in its two papers even though AT and ABP reported on the same incidents.

Analysis - Construction of Different Frames
As stated above, the articles of AT and ABP differed from each other in the way they portrayed the victims and the offenders. The distinction between the AT and ABP reports becomes clear when we compare the typical victims and offenders in the articles.

AT described the victims of the incidents as: indigenous people, students, youth, peaceful picketers and local Indian citizens. As for the offenders, it defined them variously as: miscreants, police, army, foreigners, Bangladeshis, immigrants, linguistic and religious minorities and foreign elements. ABP, on the other hand, described the victims as: Bengali Hindus, Bengalis, non-Assamese and linguistic minorities. As for the offenders, they were: Assamese, regional fanatics, anti-social elements, the AASU and the AAGSP. Table 10. summarises the views of the two papers.

Table 10. Victims and Offenders described in *The Assam Tribune* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Assam Tribune</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous People, Students, Youth, Picketers, Local Indian Citizens</td>
<td>Miscreants, Police, Army, Foreigners, Bangladeshis, Immigrants, Linguistic and Religious Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amrita Bazar Patrika</strong></td>
<td>Bengali Hindus, Bengalis, non-Assamese, Linguistic Minorities</td>
<td>Assamese, Regional Fanatics, Anti-social Elements, AASU and AAGSP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, the structure of the problem described in each paper seems to be totally disparate. The main message of AT was that the police or military force oppressed the student organisation which was asserting a just cause, and the foreigners attacked indigenous people. In this message, the 'problem' was the social insecurity caused by foreign nationals, deletion of their names from the voters' lists, and their detection and deportation. This logic used in AT's articles was identical to that of the movement leaders' claims analysed in chapter 4, but the threat of the 'Bangladeshis' or 'immigrants' was more explicit in the newspaper reporting.

On the other hand, the focus of the articles published in ABP was mainly on the attacks on religious and linguistic minorities of Indian nationality by anti-social student organisations. Then, the 'problem' was the oppression of linguistic and religious minorities (especially the Bengalis) in Assam. This logic used by ABP is similar to that of the opponents of the movement introduced in Chapter 4: there was the oppression of 'minorities' and criticism of the organisers of the movement about their chauvinistic attitudes.

Therefore, it becomes clear that even if newspapers report the same
incidents, they select 'facts' and utilise them to support their own arguments, thus framing totally different stories. From this analysis, the effect of the reports on the public is unknown. But even if the reported 'facts' were the same, the interpretations, which include the structure of the problem, victims and offenders, were different. So it can be assumed that they influenced people's recognition and acknowledgment of the situation, although I cannot agree with the view that the newspapers had a direct effect on people's actions. However, I accept the argument made by Surendra K. Gupta and Indira B. Gupta to some extent, that the reporting of the newspapers accelerated the feeling of discord between the Assamese and the Bengalis in the state.

It should also be noted that the role played by the West Bengal government was significant. Each time an incident took place in Assam, there was a comment from the chief minister Jyoti Basu who stood against the movement. He pointedly criticised the movement stating that it was against all non-Assamese people, particularly the Bengalis. By such statements, Basu not only sought to label the movement as 'communal' and anti-Bengali but also undermine the constitutional legitimacy of the movement, which the AASU and the AAGSP were trying hard to project.

The above argument clearly demonstrates how the boundaries between ethnic groups are redefined through newspaper reporting through the way they identify the victims and the attackers of the movement. By setting their own agenda, AT and ABP established stereotypical images of the 'enemy', the 'other'.
To have a sharper understanding of the problem it would be prudent to look in more detail at the difference in the agenda of each incident. I will pick up the Duliajan incident and the Nellie incident, which are well remembered by people as symbolic of the movement.

4. Duliajan Incident: Frames of Vernacular and English Newspapers

4-1. Frames of Vernacular and English Press

The Duliajan incident is one of the three incidents focused on in the first analysis. In this incident, the difference between the Assamese and the Bengali media was most prominent. In the second analysis, I would like to examine the difference between vernacular and English papers both in Assam and Bengal. The subjects of the analysis are: *The Assam Tribune* (English) and *Dainik Asam* (Assamese), both from the same group in Guwahati, and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (English), *Statesman* (English), *Anand Bazar Patrika* (Bengali) and *Gonoshokti* (Bengali) from Kolkata.

It has been argued that in India, often the reporting and the opinions of the vernacular papers and English papers are different. By studying the Ram Janambhumi movement and Ayodhya incident, Rajagopal stated as follows.

What was critical was that English language news values were state-centric, following a colonial heritage, and reflecting the perspective of an elite business class that depended on the patronage of the developmentalist state. As such, English language news tended to require a certain distance from indigenous culture as a way of asserting its authority...

Hindi language news values, by contrast, tended to be more “society-centric”: more
diverse in the social composition of its audience, and thus more hybrid in the sources of authority it could appeal to. This reflected not only the more anti-colonial heritage of an indigenous language press but also the remove at which it existed from the center of state power. (Rajagopal 2001: 209)

However, in the context of the nationality movements in Assam, it has been pointed out that regardless of the language, newspapers published from Assam and Bengal took a unitary stand. This has also been corroborated by my interviewees, in the course of my fieldwork.

4.2. Media in Assam: Oppression toward the Movement by the State Government

In the Assamese papers, the prominent feature in the reporting of the Duliajan incident was the deep mistrust and criticisms of the state government. This tendency started in the North Kamrup incident which occurred just a week before the Duliajan incident. As noted in Chapter 3, the AASU and other leaders of the movement expressed deep concern over police and army atrocities in the area. This concern becomes more explicit in the case of Duliajan. For example, in The Assam Tribune, the matter was reported as follows.

The indiscriminate police firing by BSF personnel on non-violent and peaceful picketers at Duliajan is regarded here as a deep-rooted conspiracy hatched by a powerful caucus in the State administration to unleash a reign of terror to crush the peaceful movement on the foreigner's influx issue. (The Assam Tribune, January 20, 1980)
Thus, although the state government statement mentioned that only four persons had died in the incident, *The Assam Tribune* cast doubt on the figure by relaying the information from the Dibrugarh Gana Sangram Parishad which stated that more people were killed and a large number of people had got injured. I quote:

Our Dibrugarh Correspondent adds: Former General Secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Sri Nagen Saikia and Sri Ananta Kumar Handique and Sri Bhaskar Bora, of Dibrugarh Gana Sangram Parishad, who visited Duliajan today, said here that 15 picketers including women were killed in police firing and at least 150 were injured. (*The Assam Tribune, January 19, 1980*)

The tendency was more prominent in the vernacular newspaper, *Dainik Asam*. The paper was published from the same group as *The Assam Tribune*, but the vernacular version was more famous for its pro-movement stance. For example, the paper usually gave more weight to information delivered from private sources than those provided by the government on the incidents. In its front-page reporting, on the Duliajan incident it stated:

In Duliajan, yesterday morning, police fired on picketers and due to that 15 civilian including women died according to non-press report and about 150 people [got] injured. Government press notice, however, says only 4 people died and it did not mention that they died of police firing. (*Dainik Asam, January 19, 1980*: translation mine)
Further, the paper went on to criticise the government for emphasising the death of a manager of Oil India Limited.

On the other hand, the sequence of the incident in which one person of Oil India died was thoroughly described and ... the incident was commented as "such cruel and brutal murder". (*Dainik Asam*, January 19, 1980: translation mine)

Finally, the paper concluded the report by saying: “The present situation in Duliajan is very hot, though the government does not admit it” (*Dainik Asam*, January 19, 1980: translation mine). Through this report we can see that the paper did not see the government press release as credible but rather expressed faith in the information provided by the GSP. Here, the tendency was to project the government as being repressive towards the movement, especially the peaceful picketers, and soft on the foreigner’s influx.

4-3. Media in West Bengal: The Irrationality of the Movement

Contrary to the media in Assam, for the newspapers in West Bengal, the incident and especially the death of Dr Robi Mitra was regarded as proof of the irrationality of the movement. *The Statesman*, an English paper published both from New Delhi and Kolkata and thus having characteristics of both pan-Indian and regional media, stated in its editorial titled “Bad to Worse in Assam”:

It is ridiculous that the Assam Government should describe as “peaceful picketing” a
demonstration which, apart from causing immeasurable loss to oil production, resulted
in the death of ten people. Nor can violence be called spontaneous when even the official
version is forced to admit that Mr Rabi Mitra, the hapless Oil India technician, was the
victim of a well-planned murderous conspiracy. (*The Statesman, January 23, 1980*)

It was the same for *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, which put emphasis on the
death of Robi Mitra. In its editorial, after narrating how he was murdered by
a violent mob, it stated:

A State Government communique has attributed mob violence at Duliajan to
‘anti-social elements’, but it is too much to believe that Dr. Mitra was selected by
them as their special victim and duped by a telephone call. ... there is little doubt
that his tragic death was connected with the picketing of the oil pipeline which had
been going on for three weeks. (*Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 23, 1980*)

As shown in the two papers, the press in West Bengal largely read the
incident as premeditated violence by the movement organisers directed at
the non-Assamese in which the innocent Bengali officer became a victim. It
paid little attention to the police firing and the death of student picketers,
and by focusing on the death of one individual, they urged that firm steps
were necessary to put down the movement. Thus, the Duliajan incident was
reported as ‘death of an innocent Bengali’ not only by the West Bengal media
but also by its government, and used by them as proof of the illegitimacy of
the movement.

The same tendency is visible in the reporting of the Bengali language
press. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the largest selling Bengali paper reported the incident on 20th January under the title, "One Bengali scientist cruelly killed in Duliajan, five more dead" on the front page. Similar to *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, it narrated the sequence of Dr. Mitra's death first, and then referred to the police firing and death of the picketers.

In its editorial on 21st January, the paper referred to similar incidents of harassment and killing of outsiders (especially the Bengalis), and criticised the ongoing movement in Assam.

Also, *Gonoshokti*, a Bengali paper reported the incident on the front page. Here again, the death of Robi Mitra was reported first, and then the picketing and the firing was reported as a background explanation of the incident. (*Gonoshokti*, January 20, 1980)

**Analysis**

This comparison of the Assamese and Bengali vernacular and English press reveals that vernacular and English press in the region shared a common frame when interpreting the Duliajan incident. The Assamese papers focused on the death of picketers, and paid little attention to the death of Robi Mitra. At the same time, they showed their mistrust of the state government especially with respect to the firing on the picketers, and its announcement on the number of the dead and injured people. The vernacular press, in particular, was highly critical of the state government's version of news and treated the report from the GSP members as a more authentic news source.

Conversely, both the English and vernacular Bengali press emphasised the death of one individual, Dr. Robi Mitra. Almost all the papers reported
the incident under prominent headlines such as, 'Death of a Bengali' screaming on their front page. For the Bengali press, the firing on the picketers only served as background information necessary to explain the death of Robi Mitra. Rather, the reports openly suggested that the incident was a premeditated murder, not a mishap.

It is true that there were some differences in the reporting of the English and vernacular press but the differences were only in degree not in kind. A major difference pertains to the source of information. As Rajagopal rightly states, the vernacular press is less state-centric and more hybrid in its sources. This can be applied to the reporting of the number of dead and injured people by the Assamese press: the vernacular press relied on the civil sources rather than press statements from the state government. However, on the whole, the vernacular and English print media in Assam shared a common frame, and the same applied to those in West Bengal.

5. Nellie Incident: Different Perspectives by Media in Assam, West Bengal and India

5.1. The Nellie Incident: Role and Frame of Pan-Indian Media

The third analysis deals with the so-called 'largest massacre in Assam', the Nellie incident. Compared to the three violent incidents that took place in 1980, the nature of the incident and the style of the reporting by the newspapers were different. Thus, the analysis in this section will focus on some aspects which were not examined in the earlier analysis. First, the identity of the victims and the offenders of the incident was sometime not reported in the Assamese and the Bengali media. Thus, unlike the earlier
analysis, it is impossible to analyse the description of the victims and the offenders. Instead of the identity of the victims and the attackers, the difference between the two regional media was more explicit in the description on the character of the incidents itself. For example, the term 'group clash' were used by the Assamese media, while the Bengali media used the terms such as 'holocaust' and 'carnage'.

Second, in this analysis, the main focus is on the frame of the pan-Indian media and its role in making the Nellie famous at national level. At the time, the implementation of election in Assam caused controversy and confrontation among the political parties at the centre. The Congress (I) government was determined to hold the election in order to suppress the movement and to restore normalcy in the state. While the left parties, CPI and CPI (M), basically supported the implementation of the election in Assam, the Janata Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Lok Dal had decided to boycott the election. Thus, the implementation of the election itself attracted national attention. As the AASU decided to boycott the election, many journalists, politicians, and police officers warned about the possibility of large-scale violence beforehand.

As predicted by these people, during the 1983 election period, numerous large-scale violent incidents took place. Unlike the violence that occurred in the earlier phase of the movement, at this time the violence tended to be larger in scale, with incidents of group clashes that involved the local community both as victims and offenders. Thus, the attention of the pan-Indian media became prominent during the period as compared to the earlier phase of the movement, and the Nellie incident, in particular, was
reported widely.

This analysis brings out the reason why Nellie became famous, though it was just one of the many incidents that occurred at the time. Of course, Nellie was one of the deadliest incidents, and the number of those killed in the incident was the highest. However, compared to the coverage of the regional press such as the Assamese and Bengali press, that of the pan-Indian press had a tendency to highlight only select incidents such as Gohpur, Mangaldoi and Nellie, and not others. It was perhaps natural for the pan-Indian press, being far from the scene of the affairs, to see the Assam movement only as a regional occurrence. Although the situation in Assam drew considerable attention throughout India, pan-Indian media provided limited space in their news coverage compared to regional media where most of the articles were on the events and happenings in the region.

In case of the Nellie incident, a visit by Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister at the time, a few days after the incident, may also be another cause for the highlight by the media. It has been pointed out by Paul Brass that politicians and the press sometimes try to expose an incident for their own benefit. Commenting on the tactics used by Indira Gandhi, he states:

Mrs. Gandhi used demagogic tactics to appeal to the lower castes and the minorities, deliberately seeking out from newspaper reports and reports from political workers in the districts incidents of atrocities against lower castes and minorities for which her political rivals could somehow be blamed.

Where an incident was particularly atrocious and the political circumstances for its
manipulation were right, Mrs. Gandhi would personally proceed to the scene. The more remote the location and the more difficult the access, the more dramatic would be her entrance upon the spot, the most spectacular being her arrival by elephant at the notorious site of Belchi. (Brass 1997: 35)

It is not my argument here that only because of Indira Gandhi's visit to Nellie in the aftermath of the incident, it became famous throughout the state. The incident was reported by the Indian Express, which was critical of the Congress (I) Party at the time. The editor-in-chief of the paper, Arun Shourie, surveyed the same incident in order to criticise the forced election by the government. It was widely reported in a pan-Indian bi-monthly, India Today. Thus, it would be too simplistic to conclude that only Mrs Ganchi's visit made the Nellie incident famous. The pan-Indian newspapers and weeklies such as the Indian Express, The Times of India and India Today also highlighted Nellie in order to sensationalise the violence and attributed it to the central government's decision to hold the election in Assam. Thus, the political parties interpreted the Nellie incident in a way that best fit their own political end, and the pan-Indian media accepted or criticised them according to their stance. As a result, 'Nellie' became a symbolic term to refer to the violent incidents that occurred during the election period in 1983.

Therefore, compared to the Assamese media's reporting which covered numerous incidents that occurred everywhere in Assam, the pan-Indian media's select reporting of the Nellie incident had quite different meaning to the audience. In the discussion that follows, I will compare the Assamese, the Bengali and the pan-Indian media on the Nellie incident.
5-2. Media in Assam: One of Group Clashes

First, we have to note here that in February 1983, there were numerous violent incidents in Assam during the election period. The first phase of polling took place on 14th February, and from then on, there were daily reports of clashes between groups in the villages: one caption read “Clashes and Arson Spreads to More Villages”. Thus, when the first report of the violence in Nellie reached people on 19th February, it was projected as one of these group clashes. On the first page, the report narrated the sequence of the incident simply as a “clash between the opponents and the supporters of the elections”. It did not state whether the attackers were local inhabitants or the tribes, or whether the victims were immigrants or foreigners. The 19th February report of the incident that took place the previous day went as follows.

One attacking group from Nellie side armed with firearms, bows and arrows, daos and other conventional weapons chased the other group across the Damal heel after setting their villages consisting of about 40 houses including two pucca ones on fire. The fleeing group stood their ground on the northern bank of the Damalbeel, an oxbow-lake formed possibly by the Kopili to the north. (*The Assam Tribune*, February 19, 1983)

The next day, it became clear that the situation in Nellie was more serious than initially reported, but it was still treated as ‘one of group clashes.’ On the first page of *The Assam Tribune*, the news appeared under the title: “Over 100 More Killed In Different Places: Curfew at Nellie, Army
Deployed”. It continued as follows.

Guwahati, Feb 19- Group clashes in Assam have left more than a hundred dead in different places as the army and para-military forces moved into curfew-bound Nellie and nearby villages in Nowgong District, one of the worst trouble spots, to quell three-day orgy of violence, reports PTI. (*The Assam Tribune*, February 20, 1983)

On 21st February, three days after the incident, it was observed that the violence in Nellie was on a large scale. The report this time was titled, “Nelli (sic) and Morigaon wear Ghastly Look” and was described as follows.

Guwahati, Feb 20- Between 800 and one thousand are variously estimated to have been killed- about 500 in the Nelli (sic) area alone- in the week-long election-linked carnage, which engulfed a stretch of about 100km in Morigaon subdivision, Nowgong district last week, according to PTI correspondents who visited the area today. (*The Assam Tribune*, February 21, 1983)

The tendency to treat the incident as another group clash was also evident in the vernacular paper, *Dainik Asam*. On its report on 20th February, it stated:

In many places, the situation is very hot. Police firing, fighting, inhuman activities – because of these, night curfew has been enforced. To contain the situation, the army has been called. In Nellie area near Jagiroad, the situation is very dangerous. At this place, the army has been stationed since yesterday morning. (*Dainik Asam*, February 20, 1983)
Like *The Assam Tribune*, *Dainik Assam* report was silent on the identity of the attackers or victim whether they were locals or immigrants. They only treated it as a clash between groups.

Nellie is 50km away from Guwahati, and between Domol bil and Kopili river, group of 5000 people were fighting with another group of people. Between two groups the clash started. The group which firstly started attack was helped by another group which came from behind. The attacked people escaped from the place, leaving all the houses. (*Dainik Assam*, February 20, 1983)

It may be noted here that the incident was not treated as a premeditated ‘massacre’ but rather as one of the group clashes that were taking place all over Assam at the time. Many other places were reported as sites of large-scale violence, such as Mangaldoi and Gohpur. Also, almost each and every district's name was dragged into the papers in the reports of small-scale violence that erupted state-wide. However, none of the reports revealed the identity of the ‘groups’. It was therefore not possible for readers to know who the victims and who the offenders were. All that one could learn from the papers was that there were many group clashes taking place at the time, that the Nellie incident was but one of them, and could have been larger in terms of the number of the dead but otherwise was not different from other violence which occurred elsewhere in the state.

5-3. Media in West Bengal: Holocaust, Communal Clash and Mass-Killing
Compared to the media in Assam, newspapers in West Bengal adopted a different style in reporting on the incident. Although they also used the term 'group clash', at the same time, they described the incident as a 'holocaust' or 'carnage', which had a more striking impact on the reader's mind. For example, Amrita Bazar Patrika used the term 'group clash' at first and then started using 'carnage' or 'massacre' after the number of dead was uncovered. On 20th February 1983, it reported as follows:

The reports said tension had gripped the area since the polling for the Jagiroad Assembly seat in the first round of balloting on Feb. 14, with stray clashes between those for and against the elections in Nellie and adjoining villages, in which several were injured. The situation took a serious turn on Feb. 17, when many houses were set on fire at night, followed by group clashes. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 20, 1983)

Here, the incident was narrated as a group clash between those who supported and opposed the election. In the next day's report, Amrita Bazar Patrika used the term 'carnage' and 'holocaust' to describe the incident.

Meanwhile, the officials holding top posts in Assam placed the Nellie carnage toll at 600. Tonight another 40 persons had died in overnight violence elsewhere. The officials, who did not want to be identified, differed, though reluctantly, with eyewitness accounts of a four-figure tally in the day-time holocaust that visited Nellie on Friday. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 20, 1983)

In the case of the vernacular Bengali paper, Ananda Bazar Patrika, the
incident was described as 'cruel'. In its report on 20\textsuperscript{th} February, it stated:

> During the last 24 hours, the cruelest incident in Assam took place in Nowgong district's Belli (sic) and its neighbouring villages. Yesterday, unrestricted killing, firing and looting went on the whole night. The number of dead is seventy right now. But the news of more death is coming. Commenting on Belli's (sic) total number of death, chief secretary Rameshchandra said, "It is not possible to tell the exact number. However, many people died". At least 250 people died, the information reached. *(Ananda Bazar Patrika, February 21, 1983: translation mine)*

The next day, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* described the situation in Assam as a 'bloodbath' and the Nellie incident as a 'gonohota' (mass-killing).

Nellei (sic) mass-killing's death toll reached 1000. This takes the victims of vote battle in Brahmaputra for last seven days to more than 1500 people. And in this unexampled bloodbath, today the third phase of Assam's public election was finished.

According to the direct witness, Nellei (sic) mass-killing's victim reached 1000. Armed with guns, rifles and deadly weapons, a few thousands attackers took the chance of incaution at night and for 8 hours they continued the frenzied affair of killing to the villagers of 17 villages, and still after 48 hours, the witnesses are scattered in all directions. *(Ananda Bazar Patrika, February 22, 1983: translation mine)*

Moreover, after several days of the incident, the Bengali media criticised the movement leaders by stating that they are responsible for the violence. On 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 1983, the editorial in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* stated as follows.
In parliament also, leaders of the opposition parties boycotting the elections concentrated on criticising the Government of holding the elections, which was an indirect way of blaming the Government for the gruesome tragedy. The anti-foreigners agitation in Assam has never been free of violence. The peaceful interludes are explained by the fact that the agitation never ran a steady course; periods of lull and intense activity alternated. It would indeed be strange if the boycott leaders and their supporters had not realised that their call for a showdown would unleash passion which might provoke group clashes of the type now reported from Gohpur, Mangaldoi and Nellie. (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, February 23, 1983)

By this way, the paper put responsibility of the violence on the movement leaders by stating that they should have known that the boycott would lead to the violence. On the other hand, it did not mention much on the responsibility of the government, as some of the Assamese and the pan-Indian media did.

Thus, by using such emotive terms as 'holocaust', 'bloodbath' and 'cruel', the Bengali papers portrayed the incident in the blackest terms. The tendency becomes more explicit within a few days of the incident, when the number of deaths was clarified. Rather than describing the incident as a 'group clash', they used the term 'massacre' and indicated that the incident was not a clash but a designed killing of one group by another.

5-4. Pan-Indian Media: Tribal Massacre and Carnage

Among the three types of newspapers, the pan-Indian papers were most
prominent in identifying the victims and the offenders, and in specifying the cause of the incident. As well as the Bengali media, the terms 'carnage' and 'massacre' were generally used to refer to the incident, and the term 'group clash' was hardly seen at all. It was the Indian Express, the paper published from New Delhi, which has done an in-depth reporting on the Assam situation during the movement. On 19th February, the day after the incident, it gave a report on its first page.

In a series of bloody attacks in the trouble-torn Nowgong district on Friday, tribal villagers attacked a cluster of over 2000 immigrants and at least 30 dead had been accounted for by the end of the day. The attacks were scattered over wide areas around the Jagiroad town and many bodies are believed to be still lying around. CRPF patrols had partially controlled the situation late in the evening. The village of Nilli (sic) was burnt down rendering 5000 people homeless. (Indian Express, February 19, 1983)

This was the earliest report which specified the identity of the victims and the offenders – the immigrants and the tribals. On the next day, they used the term 'tribal massacre' in its headline and reported as follows.

In a ghastly replay of the Mandai [sic, Mangaldoi?] massacre, at least 500 persons were killed by frenzied tribal hordes in a cluster of villages spreading north to the foothills around Nelli (sic) village near Jagiroad in Nowgong district. The orgy of violence which began on Friday morning continued through the night and fresh incidents were reported from the interior on Saturday. (Indian Express, February 20, 1983)
Moreover, on 21st February, they reported that there were no adult males in immigrant villages at the time of the attack. It was stated that the men in the villages had crossed the Brahmaputra River in order to attack the villages on the other side. In a report titled “Massacre was in Men’s Absence”, it was stated:

Almost 80 percent of the dead bodies are women and children. There are bodies of mothers clutching babies. From what the survivors and police say it seems the villages were attacked when men were away on their own ravaging missions in the Mangaldoi region just across the Brahmaputra. Over 6,000 of them crossed the river southwards again late on Saturday night, on their way back to home. (Indian Express, February 21, 1983, emphasis added)

Thus, it was suggested that the immigrants were not totally innocent, but rather they were responsible for the attack in Mangaldoi region.

On the 22nd, it gave a report on Indira Gandhi’s visit to Nellie with her photo on the first page, under the heading of “PM blames agitators for carnage”.

In its issue of the 24th, it carried one report which gave an analysis on the violent incidents in Assam. The report accused the Congress (I) government of making the split wider by seeking only the non-Assamese votes. It stated:

The Prime Minister, the Union Railway Minister and other Congress (I) campaigners made the split wider by seeking only non-Assamese votes. They made totally election-oriented speeches which seemed to suggest to a beleaguered Assamese society
that the elections were meant to demolish the agitation. While this added to the mood of
desperation of the remnants of the agitation leadership outside the prison, the people
found themselves free to settle old scores under the cover of election violence. This led to
the bloody free-for-all in the villages. (*The Times of India*, February 24, 1983)

In the same article, the paper claimed that it was the tribals who were
responsible for the killings, and attributed the cause of the incident to 'land
alienation' suffered by the tribes at the hands of the immigrants.

*Tribal violence was responsible for the highest toll. Land alienation among the Assamese
plains tribals is highest in the country. More often than not the beneficiaries are
immigrant Muslims. Immigrant pockets now exist in the middle of almost all major
tribal belts. In the typical immigrant fashion these pockets expand pushing the tribals
farther away. (*Indian Express*, February 24, 1983)*

Thus, there are two important points on in the analysis of the cause of the
violence. One, the Congress (I) government added fuel to the tense situation
by seeking only non-Assamese votes. Two, however, it saw the tribal land
alienation as the root cause of the violence.

The *Indian Express* report gave a new twist to the Nellie incident,
shifting the blame away from the mainstream or Hindu Assamese who
spearheaded the movement against illegal immigrants (or foreigners) to the
tribals. It also saw the cause not as ethnic or as being politically motivated
but as an economic consequence of the tribals' loss of land to the immigrants.

This issue of 'alienation of tribal land by the immigrants' is not totally
new. It was identified by student leaders from the earlier period of the movement. However, it was the national paper which connected the Nellie incident to the process of land alienation and brought it to country-wide attention. Thus, in the report of the Indian Express, a different frame of the incident was set. It was a tribal attack on Muslim immigrants who had appropriated the traditional land of the tribes for a long time. This version of the incident spread more widely when India Today reported the incident as a cover story titled “The Nellie Nightmare” in its March 15th edition. During my fieldwork in Assam, many people referred to the report when they talked about the Nellie incident.

Following the reports by the Indian Express, other pan-Indian media also reported the Nellie incident. For example, The Times of India, published from Bombay, used the term ‘carnage’ most often. On its issue of 21st February, it used the term ‘communal carnage’ to refer to the incident:

The death toll in Friday’s communal carnage in the Nellie area in Assam was placed at 300 today amidst reports that 38 people had been killed in other parts of the state in the past 24 hours. Official sources said at least 50 more bodies were picked up today from the fields and ravaged huts in Nellie.

Eyewitnesses said at least 800 people were injured. The number of those killed would rise further, official sources said. (The Times of India, February 21, 1983)

Moreover, in the editorial titled “After the Carnage”, the paper compared the incident with the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’ in 1946 – the violence that erupted on the eve of partition. At the same time, they see the violence as an
outcome of the Congress (I) government's failure, which is a decision for holding the assembly election in Assam.

After the Great Calcutta Killing in 1946, the Nellie killings in 1983. Nothing so gruesome has disgraced India ever since the post-partition riots. ...But just as Calcutta is indelibly imprinted on their minds, so will Nellie be. Like the Calcutta massacre, the butchery in Nellie is a case apart. The Calcutta killings led to partition and the holocaust that followed. ... The Nellie tragedy is an outcome of the Union government's decision to impose elections on Assam. ... The results are there for all to see. Nellie floodlights the horror on Assam. (The Times of India, February 22, 1983)

Thus, by using the term 'communal' and referring to the Calcutta Killing in 1946, the report by The Times of India highlighted the Nellie incident as the most 'gruesome' incident that took place in the country since partition. It is clear from their statement that they criticised the government for holding the election, and suggested that the Nellie incident was the outcome of the government's decision.

On the 28th, it published a report on the front page referring to the land alienation suffered by the tribes in the hands of the Muslim migrants. Under the sub-title of 'Worst Pogrom' it stated,

The other remarkable feature of the [Nellie] area is the history of the acquisition of land by the immigrants, first in the low-lying water-logged areas and then in the better-quality swathes, usually at the expense of the less-efficient tribals and Assamese Hindu peasants who had until recently cultivated their land extensively.
This feature expectedly engendered some rivalry between the immigrants and earlier settlers, primarily the Mikir and Lalung tribals. *(The Times of India, February 28, 1983)*

The report showed that *The Times of India* also saw immigration and the tribes' loss of land as an important historical background to the incident. There may have been some influence by the report of the *Indian Express*.

Thus, by looking at the reports in the *Indian Express* and *The Times of India*, we can see two common character of the reporting by them. The first one is a criticism against the government for holding the election which led to the violence. This led to the emphasis on the damage caused by the violence, and the large-scale violence such as Nellie, Gohpur and Mangaldoi was highlighted. In the report of these incidents, sometimes the tribal involvement was highlighted as well as the number of the dead. In order to criticise the wrong decision taken by the government, some paper sensationalised the gravity of the Nellie incident and the barbarity of the tribal attack. It was particularly evident in the reporting made by *The Times of India*.

Another important aspect of the reporting by the national media is their focus on the cause of the attack. The *Indian Express* reported the identity of the victims and the attackers on the very next day of the incident, and specified the land alienation suffered by the tribes at the hands of the immigrants as the cause of the massacre. This was followed by the reporting by the other pan-Indian media such as *The Times of India* and *India Today*.

**Analysis**
From the analysis of the newspaper reports on the Nellie incident, it became clear that unlike the reporting of the violence in 1980, the Assamese media avoided identifying to which ethnic group the offenders and the victims belonged. Terms such as ‘group clashes’ were frequently used, but the identity of the groups were not mentioned.

As for the Bengali media, they repeatedly used the terms such as ‘bloodbath’, ‘carnage’ and ‘mass-killing’ in order to stress the graveness of the incident. Some of their reports described the incident as a ‘holocaust’ suggesting that there was a premeditated intention to annihilate the victims by the perpetrators. Moreover, by stating that they must have known that the boycott would lead to the violence, they put the full responsibility of the violence on the movement leaders. It is clear that they see the violence as an outcome of the movement. The Bengali media’s frame did not differ much from their frame on the violence which took place in 1980.

In the reporting of the pan-Indian media, they also clearly came out with the identity of the victims and the offenders. The pan-Indian media stated that it was mainly the tribals who attacked the immigrant Bengalis in the Nellie area. Furthermore, they specified that the land alienation suffered by the tribes was the cause of the massacre. This is in sharp contrast to the Assamese papers where the identity of the attacking and fleeing groups were not mentioned in their reports.

It should be noted here that the Indian Express had carried out in-depth reports on the violent incidents which took place during the election period. These reports were done mainly by Shekhar Gupta, a special correspondence of the paper. Immediately after the incident, the journalist identified the
victims, attackers, and the cause of the killing. In one way, the paper legitimised the movement by pointing out that tribal land alienation was the cause of the killing. It also drew the attention of the audience to the point that the immigrant Muslim men were away from the scene of the violence at Nellie when the killing took place and were engaged in similar acts of killing on the opposite side of the Brahmaputra valley. This implied that the Muslims were not innocent victims, but that were also involved in acts of violence against the local residents.

Moreover, the editor-in-chief of the same paper, Arun Shourie, who later joined BJP, had done a long report on the Nellie incident and stated that although there were warnings on the possibility of the large-scale attack in the area by the local police, the government did not take an appropriate action and thus criticised the government for not taking proper measures to prevent the incident. The report was published in another media, *India Today*, which gave a long report on the Nellie incident.

As for *The Times of India*, the tendency to criticise the government was more explicit than the *Indian Express*. As shown above, it equated the Nellie to the Calcutta killing in 1946 and impressed the readers that the Nellie incident was the most gruesome incident since partition.

In this way, the pan-Indian media interpreted the Nellie incident in the context of the Indian national politics. In this process, some new meanings were added to the incident, which were different from that of the regional context in Assam or West Bengal.
6. Conclusion

The newspaper analysis of the reporting of the anti-foreigners movement reveals two things. First, the reporting of the violence that occurred during the first seven months of the movement led to the creation of two different frames in the Assamese and Bengali media. Here, the difference in the definition of the 'foreigners' or 'Indian national minorities' is prominent. Second, in the case of the Nellie incident, the pan-Indian media also participated in the reporting and gave it a new dimension. While the Assamese media viewed the incident purely as an election-related issue thus refraining from specifying the ethnic identity of the victims or the offenders, the pan-Indian media not only widely highlighted the Nellie incident but also played up the ethnic background of the victims and the offenders.

From the analysis of the three violent incidents noted above, it could be said that a focus on the ethnic identity of the actions, for example Assamese and Bengali, is essential when constructing the storyline of reporting the anti-foreigners movement. Also, concepts such as 'Indian national linguistic minorities' or 'foreigners' are important when determining whether those people are eligible for protection under the Constitution of India. Looking at these concepts, it can be said that in framing the anti-foreigners movement, the definition of the 'foreigners' was crucial. And the reporting of the newspapers not only tend to whip up ethnic sentiments but also reinforced the boundaries between ethnic groups and nations – the Assamese and the Bengalis, and the Indian nation and the foreigners.

In the context of the incidents that occurred in 1980, The Assam Tribune reported that 'foreigners' and 'Bangladeshis' attacked local citizens, and
*Amrita Bazar Patrika* described them as the oppression of 'Indian national linguistic and religious minorities'. But it is difficult to distinguish 'foreigners' or 'Bangladeshis' from 'Bengali-speaking Indian nationals' or 'linguistic minorities' because there was a debate over the cut-off year. Congress, CPI, CPI (M) insist that the immigrants who entered India before 1971 should be treated as Indian citizens, but political parties like PLP and AJD that supported the Assam movement claim those who entered Assam after 1951 should be treated as foreigners and deleted from the voters' list.

Thus, it is not clear whether people who entered between 1951 and 1971 are foreigners or Indian national linguistic minorities, and these categories are highly fluid. But they were classified in distinct groups and labelled as each name in the newspaper reports, constructing different ethnicities. In case of the Assamese media, a group of people were labelled as 'foreigners' or 'Pakistanis/Bangladeshis' and described as a 'threat' to the Assamese. In the Bengali media, they were defined as 'Bengali-speaking Indian' or 'Indian national minorities' who became the victims of the attack by 'regional fanatics'. In the reporting of the violence during the first six months of the movement, the Assamese and Bengali media framed the different definitions of 'foreigners' or 'Indian national'.

In case of the reporting of the Nellie incident, the difference in the style of the reporting between the Assamese and the Bengali media still persisted. While the Assamese media described the incident as a 'group clash', the Bengali media termed it as 'holocaust', 'carnage' and 'mass-killing'. Moreover, the Bengali media was of the opinion that the violence was caused by the boycott called by the movement leaders, and they criticised the AASU for
being responsible for the situation.

On the other hand, the pan-Indian media played an important role in reporting the Nellie incident and attracted country-wide attention to it. At the time, the government was firm on going on with the election, and after the violence took place they criticised the movement leaders responsible for the tense situation. Also, Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, visited the refugee camps in Nellie, and attracted the attention of the people to the incident where the Bengali Muslims were mainly the victims. In contrast, the pan-Indian media such as the *Indian Express* and *The Times of India* criticised the government for holding the election in such a situation. In order to highlight the government's failure, the national media focused on a few large-scale incidents, and particularly the Nellie incident was reported intensively.

In one way, the reporting of the pan-Indian media on Nellie legitimised the movement and the attackers of the incident by pointing out that the tribal land alienation by the Muslims is the cause of the incident. On the other hand, by emphasising the graveness of the incident through stressing the 'tribal' involvement, it gave a sensational touch to the story.

Although the alienation of the tribal land by the immigrants was the important aspect of the violence that occurred during the election in 1983, it was not the one and only factor that led to the mass killing. It was not always the case that tribes were the attackers, and the victims were the Bengali Muslims. However, as a result of both the political parties' and national media's highlight of the Nellie incident, it simplified the structure of the violence by using the representation of the 'tribals' as the wild attackers and
the 'Bengali Muslims' as the helpless victims.

The representation of ethnicity analysed in this chapter revealed two findings. First, the reporting of the violent incidents in the first seven months of the movement framed the definition of 'enemy' and 'us', and thereby provided a basic scheme to interpret the movement in Assam and Bengal. Second, the reporting of the Nellie incident by the pan-Indian media played up Nellie as a symbol or representative of the violence that occurred during 1983 election period, and thus concealed the diversified character of the victims and attackers at the time. These are the results of the text analysis of the newspaper reporting. The next chapter will focus on the way the people remember these incidents.