

**EXPLORING THE THEMES OF VIOLENCE AND INSURGENCY  
IN MITRA PHUKAN'S "THE COLLECTOR'S WIFE"**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this Dissertation “Exploring the Themes of Violence and Insurgency in Mitra Phukan’s *The Collector’s Wife*” is my own original work conducted under the supervision of Dr. Chandrima Sen. Based on my understanding and capacity, this dissertation does not include any part of any previous work that has been presented for a degree at this university or institution. Proper credit has been given to the original authors.

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## PREFACE

The exploration of violence in North-East India was initially introduced to us during the second semester. This included studying the works of Mitra Phukan, an English writer and translator who delved into the subject of insurgency and violence. As someone who hails from the Northeast region, I found both the literature and the topic of violence to be of great interest. The relevance of North-East literature to my own background further heightened my curiosity. Consequently, my growing fascination with Mitra Phukan's ideas led me to choose this topic for my dissertation. During the third semester, when we were introduced to research methodology, it became clear that a research work should offer novel insights that contribute to the existing body of knowledge. With the limited time available, this dissertation represents a sincere effort to adhere to this principle. However, I must acknowledge that the guidance and support of my supervisor, Dr. Chandrima Sen, played a crucial role in making this endeavor possible. I am deeply grateful for her assistance and guidance throughout this process.

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## ABSTRACT

"The Collector's Wife" by Mitra Phukan explores the complexities of violence and insurgency in Assam, India. The novel follows Rukmini, a protagonist navigating personal turmoil amid socio-political unrest. It explores the physical manifestations of conflict and its psychological impact on individuals and communities. Insurgency is a central theme, intertwined with the characters' lives and shaping their experiences. The novel also explores moral ambiguity in conflict situations, challenging conventional notions of right and wrong. It portrays social instability, conflict both personal as well as political, political idealism, violence of outfits, pain, agony, trauma of insurgency, loss, fear of death, bloodshed, hypocrisy, bureaucratic functioning and customs, love and sacrifice in the fiction. The novel encourages readers to contemplate the complexities of human nature and the long-lasting effects of violence on society.

Keywords: North-East India, Violence, Insurgency, Extortion, Authoritarian Rule, Bureaucracy, Social Instability.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Insurgency in Assam is a major issue impacting the state's socio-political fabric, economy, and inter-ethnic relations. It threatens the state's authority, weakening governance and stability. Armed factions, such as the ULFA, have carried out violent acts like as bombings, killings, and attacks on security workers, resulting in the loss of lives and property. Insurgencies also hinder development and investment, slowing economic growth and increasing poverty and unemployment. Insurgent groups' destruction of infrastructure and interruption of transportation networks worsens the state's economic situation, resulting in an endless cycle of underdevelopment and violence.

Insurgencies and violence in Assam have broad and diverse effects. There is a significant human cost, with thousands of individuals killed and countless others affected by the act of violence. Fear and confusion have harmed people's mental and emotional well-being, particularly in combat zones. Economically, insurgency stifles growth and investment, hindering businesses and hindering progress. Insurgent organizations' destruction of infrastructure, interruption of transportation networks, and extortion activities worsen the state's economic challenges.

Insurgency is often seen as a means of drawing attention to real issues and gathering support for political change. However, its benefits are usually surpassed by its disadvantages, especially in terms of personal suffering and serious social effects. The use of violence and coercion to accomplish political objectives weakens the rule of law and democratic values, reinforcing a cycle of conflict and instability. Furthermore, insurgency promotes a culture of no punishment, destroys trust in institutions, and stifles efforts to build a peaceful and inclusive society based on justice and respect for human rights.

Mitra Phukan is a well-known literary personality from Assam, a northeastern Indian state whose contributions to writing, translation, and classical music have had a considerable impact on the region's cultural identity. Her writings, which include novels, short tales, essays, and editorials, are renowned for their in-depth depictions of Assamese life, addressing both its particular cultural richness and the socio-political challenges that affect it. Phukan's creative path has been distinguished by a deep engagement with the subtleties of Assamese society, making her a vital voice in modern Indian writing. Her writings have been translated into a variety of Indian and European languages, reflecting her exceptional versatility and eternal commitment to her profession.

Phukan is from Assam, India, and her early years were heavily affected by literature. Both of her parents were authors, with her mother excelling in Assamese literature. This early exposure to the literary world surely influenced Phukan's passion for storytelling. Her family's frequent talks about the newest books and writers promoted her interest for reading, making it an important part of her childhood and cultivating a strong connection to her cultural background. This connection shines through in her writing, which frequently goes into the intricate complexities of Assamese culture. Her debut novel, "The Collector's Wife" (2005), is a touching portrayal of life in a tiny village in Assam during political turmoil.

Following the success of her first novel, Phukan published "A Monsoon of Music" in 2011. This novel differs from the political issues of her previous work, focusing instead on the cultural and emotional lives of its protagonists. Set against the backdrop of the Sattriya culture of Assam, it tells the narrative of four artists whose lives are interwoven by their mutual passion for music. Phukan's story explores themes of love, ambition, tradition, and music's transformational power. "A Monsoon of Music" is praised not only for its rich cultural allusions and precise description of Assamese musical traditions, but also for its examination of human relationships and the universal quest for fulfillment and meaning.



In addition to her books, Mitra Phukan has contributed significantly to the short story genre. Her short tales, which have appeared in an array of national and international publications, frequently reflect the daily lives of Assamese people with tremendous compassion and understanding. Through her keen observation and nuanced storytelling, Phukan addresses a wide range of themes, from gender and identity to social justice and cultural transition. Her short stories are known for their ability to convey complex emotions and situations with brevity and clarity, making them impactful and thought-provoking.

Phukan's role as a translator has been instrumental in bringing Assamese literature to a wider audience. She has successfully translated numerous notable pieces from Assamese to English, such as the acclaimed novel "*Kobor aru Phool*" by Jyanpeeth Awardee Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, which was published as "*Blossoms in the Graveyard*." This translation serves as a testament to Phukan's ability to effectively convey intricate works from one language to another while upholding their fundamental essence and cultural context. Her translations of Assamese work into English have helped preserve and promote the literary heritage of Assam, making it accessible to readers beyond the region. This work is crucial in ensuring that the rich and diverse voices of Assamese literature are heard on a global platform. Phukan's translations are noted for their fidelity to the original texts as well as their ability to convey the cultural context and subtleties of the source material.

Beyond her literary achievements, Mitra Phukan is also a trained classical vocalist, a facet of her life that deeply influences her writing. Her background in music is evident in the lyrical quality of her prose and the musical themes that permeate her work. As a classical vocalist, Phukan has performed extensively, and her deep understanding of music adds a unique dimension to her literary creations. This intersection of music and literature enriches her storytelling, allowing her to explore the emotional and cultural significance of music in the

lives of her characters. Phukan's involvement in Aradhana, an organization committed to bringing music to underprivileged sectors of society, exemplifies her dedication to making a positive impact beyond her literary contributions. Through her active participation, she demonstrates a strong commitment to utilizing her abilities for the betterment of her community.

Phukan's essays and columns, which appear regularly in newspapers and magazines, cover a wide array of topics, including cultural issues, social dynamics, and political commentary. Her writings in these formats are characterized by their incisive analysis and thoughtful perspectives, often shedding light on underexplored aspects of Assamese society. Through her columns, Phukan engages with contemporary issues, providing her readers with a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Assam and its people.

Phukan's work frequently explores the convergence of tradition and modernity, which is a recurring theme. In her narratives, the characters face the challenge of preserving their cultural heritage while embracing contemporary influences. This theme holds significant relevance in the context of Assam, a region known for its vibrant cultural past and ongoing socio-economic transformations. Through her literary creations, Phukan delves into the intricate process of individuals and communities navigating this delicate equilibrium, shedding light on the conflicts and opportunities that emerge from it.

Phukan's depiction of female characters in her work is a remarkable feature. Her female leads are frequently intricate, multi-dimensional personalities who defy conventional gender norms and establish their autonomy through different means. Whether it be Rukmini Bezboruah in *"The Collector's Wife"* or the musicians in *"A Monsoon of Music,"* Phukan's characters are portrayed with profoundness and genuineness. They confront personal and career-related obstacles, showcasing resilience and fortitude in challenging circumstances. This emphasis on

powerful female characters brings a substantial layer to her narratives, enriching broader dialogues on gender and empowerment.

Mitra Phukan's contributions to literature and culture have not gone unrecognized. She has received several accolades for her work, both in India and internationally. Her novels and short stories have been widely reviewed and appreciated for their literary merit and cultural significance. Through her writings, Phukan has not only entertained her readers but also provided them with a deeper understanding of Assamese culture and the issues affecting the region.

Phukan has not only excelled in her own accomplishments but has also significantly contributed to the promotion of literary and cultural interchange. Through her active involvement in various literary events such as festivals, conferences, and workshops, both domestically and internationally, she has not only imparted her knowledge but has also engaged with fellow writers and intellectuals. These engagements had undoubtedly enhanced her creative output and broadened her impact within the literary sphere.

Mitra Phukan's impact extends beyond her published works. As a mentor and advocate for literature, she has inspired many aspiring writers in Assam and beyond. Her dedication to nurturing talent and promoting Assamese literature has contributed to the growth of a vibrant literary community. Through her mentorship, Phukan has helped shape the next generation of writers, ensuring the continued evolution and relevance of Assamese literature.

Phukan's multifaceted career as a writer, translator, columnist, and musician underscores her versatility and commitment to cultural preservation and promotion. Her ability to weave together the threads of literature and music, tradition and modernity, individuals and society, makes her a distinctive and influential voice in contemporary Indian literature. As she

continues to write and engage with cultural issues, Mitra Phukan remains a vital and dynamic figure whose work resonates with readers across different backgrounds and generations.

In conclusion, Mitra Phukan's literary and cultural contributions have had a profound impact on Assamese society and beyond. Through her novels, short stories, translations, essays, and musical performances, she has enriched the cultural landscape and provided valuable insights into the complexities of life in Assam. Her work not only preserves the region's rich heritage but also engages with contemporary issues, making her a key figure in the ongoing dialogue about identity, culture, and change. As an accomplished writer and cultural ambassador, Mitra Phukan continues to inspire and influence, leaving an indelible mark on the literary world.

Phukan's novel *"The Collector's Wife"* portrays a vivid description of social and political violence in the context of Assam and Northeast India. It stands out as a remarkable piece of literature, unfolding amidst the tumultuous Assam agitation of the 1970s and 1980s. This work holds great significance, not only for being among the pioneering English novels penned by an Assamese author to gain global recognition but also for delving into a crucial juncture in the history of Assam.

The author skillfully weaves together social violence, political violence, and their gendered impact in this novel. Her narrative delves deep into the complex realities of Assam and Northeast India, where political instability, insurgency, and violence have become a constant presence, profoundly shaping the lives of individuals, especially women. While Phukan's personal experiences undoubtedly influenced her writing, it is crucial to understand whether she drew directly from her own life in crafting the narrative.

Phukan's portrayal of social violence is rooted in the patriarchal structures that permeate society. She highlights the ways in which women are subjected to various forms of

discrimination and oppression, often based on their gender. In *"The Collector's Wife,"* the protagonist, Rukmini, faces constant comments and judgments about her childlessness, which serves as a reminder of her subordinate position in patriarchal society. Phukan's narrative underscores the ways in which women are valued primarily for their domestic roles and reproductive abilities rather than being recognized for their individual aspirations and capabilities.

The author's depiction of political violence is equally powerful and unsettling. Phukan's narrative is set against the backdrop of Parbatpuri, a town in Assam where kidnappings, extortion, and political instability are the norm. The character of Siddharth, Rukmini's husband, is killed by militants, leaving her to confront the harsh realities of violence and its devastating impact on personal lives. Phukan's portrayal of political violence emphasizes the ways in which it can disrupt personal relationships, lead to personal loss and trauma, and erode personal identities.

Crucially, Phukan's perspective on political violence is not gender-neutral. She highlights the ways in which women are disproportionately affected by political violence, often in the form of sexual abuse, exploitation, and other forms of violence. The author's portrayal of women's experiences underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of political violence and its impact on women, particularly in the context of Northeast India.

Phukan's narrative also emphasizes the interconnectedness of social and political violence, highlighting how these forms of violence are deeply intertwined and exacerbate each other. The political instability and violence in Parbatpuri create an environment in which social violence against women is more likely to occur. Similarly, the social violence faced by women in their daily lives can contribute to the perpetuation of political violence.

Phukan's perspective on violence is not limited to the public sphere; she also delves into the personal and emotional impact of violence on individuals. The author's portrayal of Rukmini's experiences highlights the ways in which political violence can lead to a sense of trauma, grief, and isolation. Rukmini's relationship with her husband is marked by a sense of disconnection and isolation, as the political turmoil surrounding them erodes their personal bond.

In conclusion, the insurgency and violence in Assam have had intricate and far-reaching impacts on both the state and its inhabitants. Despite insurgent groups purporting to advocate for marginalized communities, their methods often lead to extensive suffering and hinder the possibilities for peace, progress, and reconciliation. Resolving the underlying causes of insurgency, such as socio-economic inequalities, political exclusion, and inter-ethnic conflicts, will necessitate collaborative endeavors from various stakeholders, including the state authorities, civil society, and the global community, to foster discussions, fairness, and all-encompassing development. It is only through such holistic and inclusive strategies that Assam can aspire to eradicate the menace of insurgency and construct a harmonious and prosperous future for all its residents. Mitra Phukan's literary and cultural contributions have had a profound impact on Assamese society and beyond. Through her novels, short stories, translations, essays, and musical performances, she has enriched the cultural landscape and provided valuable insights into the complexities of life in Assam. Her work not only preserves the region's rich heritage but also engages with contemporary issues, making her a key figure in the ongoing dialogue about identity, culture, and change. As an accomplished writer and cultural ambassador, Mitra Phukan continues to inspire and influence, leaving an indelible mark on the literary world. Her perspective on social violence, political violence, and their gendered impact is a central theme in her works. Her narrative emphasizes the ways in which patriarchal structures and political instability intersect to create an environment in which women are disproportionately affected by various forms of violence. Phukan's portrayal of

violence underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of its impact on women, particularly in the context of Northeast India, where the interplay between social and political violence has had profound consequences for the lives of individuals.

## 1.2 Literature Review

Dr. Manirul Hussain discusses in his publication titled *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology, and Identity* the campaign that calls for the prevention of unauthorized immigration of foreign individuals into Assam, particularly from Bangladesh and Nepal. This movement also advocates against the involvement of these foreigners in the electoral activities of Assam, as well as the expulsion of all illegal foreign residents from the region.

Peter Barry, in his book *Beginning Theory*, discusses how postmodernists believe in revisiting the past with irony and experimenting with it. This trend of looking back at the past is evident in post-colonial literature, as highlighted by Frantz Fanon, who emphasizes the importance of 'colonized' people reclaiming their own past to find their voice and identity. Assam, known for its diverse culture, traditions, languages, ethnicities, and rich history, has also experienced conflicts, violence, and bloodshed, which continue to haunt its people. Despite being a part of colonized India, Assamese writers strive to assert their past to establish a strong presence in the realm of postcolonial Indian literature.

Sanjoy Hazarika's narratives, *Strangers of the Mist* and *Strangers No More*, explore the struggles, contemporary trends, and changes in the northeastern states of India. The books examine politics, policy, law, disorder, violent uprisings, offense and defense, conservation and oppression, history and contemporary reality, stereotyping, hope, and despair. Hazarika also addresses the issues of illegal immigration from Bangladesh, religious and communal

riots, and the aversion towards non-Northeasters. His works reflect the horror of terrorism, socio-political issues, and the scenic beauty of the uncontaminated land in northeast India.

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's *Love in the Time of Insurgency* provides readers with a deep understanding of the impact of the Second World War on Northeast India. The novel portrays the region as a battleground during the war, offering a ground-level view of the warfare and its terrifying effects on ordinary people. In this sense, it can be seen as a war narrative focusing on the northeast region, shedding light not only on World War II but also on the internal politics and insurgencies of the Indian freedom struggle. The novel also delves into the issue of sexual assault of women during wartime while highlighting the memories and traumas experienced by the common people. Love is a central theme in this novel, adding another layer of complexity to its narrative.

Sanjib Baruah's research delves into the complexities of *"Protective Discrimination and its Impact on Citizenship in North-East India."* The region grapples with challenging questions of justice, fairness, and the legitimacy of the system due to the politics surrounding scheduled tribes. Baruah suggests that it may be necessary to move away from the ethnic discourse embedded in the current protective discrimination framework, which essentially perpetuates the state's practice of categorizing individuals based on ethnicity and relegating descendants of immigrants to perpetual outsider status.

Jelle J.P. Wouters' publication, "In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency (Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India)," explores the Naga armed resistance and its consequences for the Indian state. The emergence of this resistance resulted in a significant escalation of violence, leading to the militarization of the Naga highlands and the implementation of a 'state of exception' (Agamben 2005). Consequently, the region witnessed numerous instances of indiscriminate killings, unprecedented levels of violence, torture, abductions, village



relocations, ambushes, and the destruction of granaries, portraying a distressing image of suffering. Despite these adversities, the NNC's Naga Army remained steadfast in their struggle. As per NNC veteran, for every Naga life lost, ten others joined the Naga Army, motivated by a profound sense of patriotism. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Naga Movement and the Indo-Naga conflict cannot be oversimplified into a singular narrative of Nagas uniting as a homogeneous and uniform group against the oppressive rule of the Indian state.

Namrata Goswami's research titled "*Applicability to Northeast India: Counter-Insurgency Best Practices*" highlights the inherent violent nature of insurgencies, which involve a struggle against the state to establish legitimacy and exert influence over the relevant populations. To effectively combat any insurgency, the foremost strategic understanding for counter-insurgency forces is the imperative need to secure the support of the population. Without this crucial support, conducting successful counter-insurgency operations becomes an arduous task, if not an insurmountable one. Additionally, the acquisition and utilization of efficient intelligence play a pivotal role in counter-insurgency efforts, further enhancing the effectiveness of the operations.

Leishipem Khamrang, in his work "*Geography of Insurgency—Contextualization of Ethno-Nationalism in Northeast India*," argues that insurgency activities in the region have stemmed from a variety of reasons and goals, each with its own unique agenda. However, a common theme among these movements is the desire to establish a homeland. Unlike other insurgent groups in the country, the insurgencies in Northeast India have laid the groundwork for sustained rebellion, focusing on territorial and community-based organizations. These groups are not only armed and politically organized, but they also have military structures in place. Some of these movements are aimed at toppling the existing government. The rise of such

"politico-territorial identities" advocating for separate territories within or outside India has heightened regional tensions.

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

This dissertation has employed the theoretical framework of reader response theory. This particular theory, situated within the realm of literature, highlights the reader's pivotal role in interpreting and constructing meaning within a specific context. It posits that meaning is not solely determined by the author's intentions or the text itself but is actively shaped by individual readers through their engagement with the text. Reader response theory asserts that readers bring their own distinct backgrounds, beliefs, and values to the reading process, thereby influencing their comprehension and interpretation of the text. This theory acknowledges the diverse range of readers' backgrounds and perspectives, resulting in varied interpretations and responses to a given text. Advocates of reader response theory contend that the meaning of a text is subjective and contingent upon the reader's personal and cultural context, rather than being fixed or objective. They emphasize the active involvement of readers in constructing meaning as well as the significance of their emotional and intellectual responses to the text. The emergence of reader response theory during the 1960s and 1970s marked a departure from formalist and structuralist approaches that primarily focused on the text itself or the author's intentions. Prominent figures in reader response theory include Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish. This theory has had a profound impact on literary criticism by deepening our understanding of how readers engage with texts. It recognizes that readers actively contribute to the interpretation and creation of meaning, thereby encouraging the exploration of diverse readings and perspectives through various methodologies. In order to support the arguments put forth in this dissertation, secondary sources, such as books and journals, have been incorporated.

#### 1.4 Aims and Objectives

1. To understand violence and insurgency as the backdrop of “*The Collector’s Wife*,”
2. To explore the historical context and socio-political landscape of Northeast India, emphasizing the key instances of political violence that have taken place in the region.
3. Assessing the impact of violence and insurgency on personal and communal lives in Assam.
4. The research seeks to examine how political violence influences diverse elements of society, encompassing governance, the economy, human rights, and social cohesion.
5. Analyzing the government's response, including military operations and economic initiatives to address the root causes, perpetuating the cycle of violence and instability.
6. To analyze the violent activities of militant groups and their effects on public concern.
7. Identifying the demographic changes due to the influx of immigrants who were perceived as a threat by the indigenous Assamese population.
8. Investigating the contributions of state actors, non-state actors, and external influences to the continuation of political violence in the region is essential for gaining insight into the underlying factors driving such conflicts.
9. Examining themes of isolation, identity, and resilience in the novel in relation to violence and insurgency.
10. To analyze the support and sympathy of the insurgent groups towards female individuals among the local populations in northeast India.

11. To understand the advantages and disadvantages of insurgency for marginalized communities, including human suffering and societal harm.

## **Chapter 2: Historical Background of Violence in Assam**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The history of north-eastern India is a patchwork of various different languages, cultures, and customs. The region is known for its isolated geography, rugged terrain, and unique wildlife, all of which have shaped its development throughout history. The history of the region spans back many thousands of years, and the classical Indian literature, *the Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, mention the region. North eastern India has been home to various indigenous tribes and ethnic groups for thousands of years; each group has its own unique culture and way of life. One of the most prominent historic figures in the region was the Ahom kingdom, which ruled over much of what is now Assam for over 600 years.

Coming originally from Southeast Asia, the Ahoms developed a robust monarchy that dramatically impacted and persisted in Assamese culture and society. Several other kingdoms and empires ruled over the region, including Tripura and Manipur, as well as the Koch kingdom. Regional kingdoms strongly endured the Mughals' attempts to acquire portions of north-eastern India. British colonial rule also had a remarkable effect on the Indian subcontinent. The British government joined the area into the larger Northeast Frontier Province as a single administrative unit. On plantations, the growing of tea began, resources were destroyed, and Christianity expanded.

Independence from the British Empire was followed by a wide range of socio-political actions. Many earlier oppressed peoples, including demands for independence and self-reliance from certain ethnic groups, have recurred throughout the years. Two successful ones were the insurgencies in Assam, Mizoram, and Naga. There have been efforts in recent years to address the issues of the people of the Northeast and grow and connect them with the national economy.

However, such issues as underdevelopment, insurgency, and ethnic violence continue to plague the region's violent and changing history.

The history of north-eastern India is diverse and complex, particularly in the state of Assam. It has been the natural habitat and center of multi-ethnic and native tribes for many millennia. The region had been the site of migration after migration, invasion after invasion, and cultural diffusion after diffusion. Its geographical importance was further reinforced when it became a battleground for many regional kingdoms and empires, such as the Ahoms, the Mughals, and later the British.

Following the split, Assamese immigration increased and persisted in the years that followed, especially during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The majority of the immigrants were Muslims and Hindus who spoke Bengali, and they came to Assam in search of safety and better economic opportunities. There were many different causes for their migration, from economic hardship in their home countries to political upheaval and persecution. Assam's close proximity to East Pakistan and its porous borders allowed for easy migration, which resulted in a notable rise in the immigrant population.

The state of Assam, as well as the native Assamese community, faced numerous difficulties as a result of the immigration wave. Demographic adjustments brought about by immigration were a significant issue, as Assam's ethnic and linguistic makeup was changed by the abrupt rise in population. In light of the expanding immigrant population, the native Assamese people voiced concerns about the erosion of their cultural identity and legacy. The demographic shift heightened tensions between the indigenous population and immigrants by bringing up issues with political representation and the distribution of resources.

Another major issue brought about by immigration is the demand for resources. There was competition for land, jobs, and public services as a result of the fast population expansion and scarce resources. The native Assamese people felt excluded because they thought the immigrants were taking advantage of their opportunities and resources. The struggle for resources widened the gap between rich and poor and stoked animosity between the indigenous and immigrant populations.

The difficulties brought forth by immigration were further exacerbated by conflicts between the native Assamese community and the newcomers. Social tensions and disputes were frequently caused by differences in language, customs, and religious practices. Cultural identity preservation became a divisive topic as both communities fought for their rights and customs. These cultural disparities increased mistrust and hostility, impeding Assamese efforts to achieve social harmony and togetherness.

The immigration problem became a divisive element in Assamese politics, leading to political instability. Political parties created division along racial and social lines by using the immigration issue to galvanize support among their various bases. Subsequent administrations' inability to resolve the native population's immigration-related worries exacerbated political unrest and instability in the area.

The difficulties brought about by immigration were also exacerbated by the differences in income between the native people and the newcomers. The native population and the immigrants battled for jobs and economic possibilities, with the latter frequently entering with fewer resources and experiencing socioeconomic problems. The economic disparity was widened, and the indigenous Assamese population's frustrations were exacerbated by what was believed to be preferential treatment of immigrants in terms of government welfare programs and resource access.

One of the main causes of the Assamese insurgency, which has been a major problem for the state since independence, was immigration. The indigenous Assamese community felt marginalized and alienated as a result of the immigration wave's danger to their cultural and ethnic identity. Many Assamese believed that immigration-related demographic shifts posed a threat to their way of life.

A sense of despair and disillusionment was fostered by the government's inability to address the concerns of the indigenous community regarding immigration, which made matters worse. The Assamese people felt neglected and marginalized in part because there were insufficient policies in place to control immigration and safeguard the rights of the native populace.

Certain groups in Assam, fed up with perceived injustice and the changing demographics of the state, have turned to armed resistance to protect their identity and interests. Numerous rebel groups emerged, demanding independence and autonomy from India, often using violence to achieve their goals. Assam's insurgency was further intensified by demands by various ethnic and tribal groups for autonomy and greater control over resources.

In summary, Assam's post-independence history has been characterized by a complex interplay of migration, demographic change, and insurgency. Tensions and conflicts between indigenous peoples and mass immigration from surrounding areas resulted in rebellions fueled by identity politics, economic inequality, and political grievances. Addressing the root causes of insurgency in Assam requires a comprehensive strategy that considers the interests of all stakeholders while ensuring the protection of rights and identities. It remains a serious threat to the state and the nation as a whole and requires continued efforts to promote inclusive development, peace, and reconciliation in the region.

## **2.2 Assam Agitation**



The Assam Movement, a six-year-long socio-political movement from 1979 to 1985, profoundly shaped the political, social, and economic landscape of Assam, a state in northeastern India. This movement was primarily driven by issues related to illegal immigration, cultural identity, and economic disparities. Understanding the causes and effects of the insurgency and violence in relation to the Assam Movement requires an in-depth exploration of these multifaceted elements.

The genesis of the Assam Movement can be traced back to the demographic changes caused by the influx of immigrants from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) before and after the partition of India in 1947. The indigenous Assamese population perceived this influx as a threat to their cultural identity, economic opportunities, and political representation. The fear of being outnumbered in their own land led to widespread resentment, which was further aggravated by the failure of the Indian government to address these concerns effectively. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) emerged as the primary leaders of the movement, demanding the detection, disenfranchisement, and deportation of illegal immigrants.

The initial phase of the Assam Movement was marked by non-violent protests, strikes, and civil disobedience. However, the situation quickly escalated into violence, with clashes between the indigenous Assamese and the immigrant communities. The infamous Nellie massacre of 1983, where over 2,000 Bengali Muslims were killed, stands as a stark example of the brutal violence that characterized this period. The massacre highlighted deep-seated animosities and the failure of state mechanisms to protect vulnerable communities, exacerbating the cycle of violence and retaliation.

Economic factors also played a significant role in fueling the insurgency and violence during the Assam Movement. Assam, rich in natural resources like oil and tea, saw little benefit from

these assets due to central government policies and the dominance of non-Assamese businesses. This economic disenfranchisement created fertile ground for discontent, particularly among the youth, who faced high unemployment rates and limited opportunities. The perception that illegal immigrants were taking away jobs and resources further inflamed these economic grievances, pushing the movement towards radicalization.

The Indian government's response to the Assam Movement was initially marked by attempts at negotiation, but as the situation deteriorated, it resorted to heavy-handed tactics. The imposition of President's Rule, the deployment of paramilitary forces, and widespread arrests of movement leaders contributed to the escalation of violence. The state's repressive measures not only failed to quell the insurgency but also alienated large sections of the Assamese population, who saw these actions as an attack on their legitimate aspirations and rights.

One of the most significant effects of the Assam Movement was the signing of the Assam Accord of 1985, which represents a critical turning point in the fight for regional peace, identity, and socio-political stability. The Accord, which was the result of years of political turmoil, ethnic conflict, and demographic pressures, attempted to address the complex network of problems afflicting Assam and its people and offered a framework for settlement and reconciliation. In order to comprehend the Assam Accord completely, one needs to study its historical background, the circumstances that led to its creation, the main clauses it contains, and how it has affected Assam's socio-political environment.

The Assam Accord has its origins in the colonial era, when Assam, a princely state at the time, was ruled by the British in the 19th century. The region saw several changes during the British occupation, including the establishment of tea plantations, the building of roads and railways, and the migration of laborers from other regions of India, especially Bengal, to work in these sectors. Assam's ethnic composition changed as a result of this demographic turmoil, laying

the groundwork for tensions and conflicts that would last for many years. Assam saw a number of socio-political upheavals after India gained independence in 1947, which were fueled by a variety of factors such as linguistic nationalism, identity politics, and economic inequality.

Concerns over the alleged threat posed to the state's cultural and linguistic fabric by immigrants from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and other regions of India gave rise to a movement in favor of the safeguarding of Assamese identity in the 1960s. Many political parties and ethnic groups used the call for the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants as a rallying cry, which sparked numerous demonstrations, strikes, and acts of violence. A number of insurgent groups, including the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which aimed to use armed conflict to redress the complaints of the indigenous Assamese community, emerged in Assam during the turbulent 1970s. Formed in 1979, ULFA capitalized on the widespread disillusionment with the government's handling of the Assam Movement and sought to establish an independent Assam through armed struggle. The group's activities included bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on security forces, leading to a protracted insurgency that has claimed thousands of lives. The presence of ULFA and other militant groups added a new dimension to the violence in Assam, transforming it from a mass movement into a complex insurgency involving state and non-state actors.

The insurgency, which was characterized by bombings, killings, and acts of terrorism, caused turmoil and insecurity throughout the region, escalating already-existing tensions and dividing communities along ethnic lines. The Assamese people's sense of alienation and animosity only grew as a result of successive state and federal governments' inability to successfully address the conflict's underlying causes. In this violent and turbulent environment, the Assam Accord has become a ray of hope for peace and harmony. The Assam Movement leaders and the Indian government negotiated the Accord, which was signed on August 15, 1985, in the presence of

then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and other figures who represented many interests. In order to address the complex issues of immigration, citizenship, and socio-political representation that had caused decades of violence and instability in Assam, the Accord constituted a historic agreement.

The Assam Accord's requirements regarding the identification and removal of undocumented immigrants, the defense of the language and cultural rights of native Assamese communities, and the establishment of peace and normalcy in the area were crucial. The Accord's main condition imposed a deadline of March 24, 1971, for the identification and removal of foreign nationals living in Assam without authorization. The start of the Bangladesh Liberation War and the subsequent large-scale refugee migration into Assam, which increased demographic problems, made this cutoff date significant.

The Assam Accord included a number of measures, such as the constitutional protection of indigenous Assamese communities' language, culture, and land rights, in addition to the due date, to preserve their interests. Along with funding for Assamese infrastructure, education, and healthcare development, the Accord also asked for the execution of steps to reduce the socioeconomic imbalances afflicting the region. But over time, a number of difficulties and disputes have hampered the Assam Accord's implementation. This cutoff date was crucial since it was the beginning of the Bangladesh Liberation War, which led to a large-scale refugee inflow into Assam and heightened demographic problems.

Apart from setting a deadline, the Assam Accord outlined certain strategies to preserve the rights of native Assamese communities, such as the constitutional conservation of their language, customs, and ancestral territories. The Accord additionally directed the execution of policies to reduce the socioeconomic inequality that afflicts the area, such as funding Assamese

infrastructure, healthcare, and education development. Nonetheless, there have been a lot of difficulties and disputes with the Assam Accord's implementation over time.

Human rights violations, accusations, and ineffective bureaucracy have resulted from the laborious and contentious process of identifying and expelling illegal immigrants. As governments struggle to identify real citizens among a sea of forged paperwork and bureaucratic red tape, the problem of citizenship verification continues to be challenging.

The underlying socioeconomic problems of the Assamese people, especially those from marginalized communities like tea garden workers, tribal populations, and ethnic minorities, have not been adequately addressed by the Assam Accord. Many areas of Assam remain impoverished and underdeveloped in spite of promises of development and fair resource distribution, which adds to the state of marginalization and alienation among the people.

The Assam Accord has gained attention in recent years due to the government's increased efforts to carry out its responsibilities and deal with the problem of illegal immigration. Established in 2013, the National Register of Residents (NRC) is an extensive record of residents living in Assam and is a significant step towards achieving the goals of the Accord. But the NRC process has been mired in legal disputes, political debates, and logistical difficulties that raise questions about how well it is working to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

To conclude, the Assam Accord of 1985 continues to be a significant turning point in the history of Assam, representing a group effort to address the complicated issues of immigration, identity, and socio-political representation that have hampered the area for many years. Even though the Accord was a historic accord meant to bring Assam's peace and stability back, there have been many difficulties and disagreements with its implementation. Achieving long-lasting peace and prosperity in the area will continue to depend on resolving the fundamental

complaints of the Assamese people, encouraging inclusive development, and encouraging communication and reconciliation among every individual involved.

### **2.3 Tea Plantation**

Tea plantations in Assam had a huge impact on the region's economy, lifestyle, and culture during the colonial administration. The British recognized Assam as a productive location for tea planting because of its ideal climate and soil conditions. As a result, they created large-scale tea plantations, which had serious consequences for the local inhabitants, the ecology, and the economy.

The introduction of tea plantations in Assam resulted in significant changes to the region's social and economic fabric. Initially, British landowners encountered difficulties in finding labor for their plantations. To overcome this issue, they established the system of hired labor, often known as the "coolie" system. Under this system, workers were hired to work on the plantations for a set amount of time in difficult conditions. The majority of the laborers come from poor areas of India, including the states of Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand.

The local population was impacted by the migrant labor influx in both positive and negative ways. On the other hand, it gave many poor people work opportunities who were having difficulty making ends meet in their local areas. However, it also resulted in the eviction of native populations from their ancestral lands and the British planters' exploitation of their labor. Long work hours, little pay, and subpar housing conditions were highlights of the coolie system, which caused a great deal of pain and unhappiness among the laborers.

A number of initiatives were also put in place by the colonial government to support the expansion of Assam's tea industry. The native people were frequently excluded from these practices, which favored the interests of the British planters. For example, the Waste Land Rules of 1838 allowed the British to claim large areas of land as "wastelands" even though

indigenous populations had previously utilized them for grazing or other uses. This allowed the British to purchase these lands for the purpose of growing tea. As a result, many indigenous people lost their livelihoods, and their land was taken over.

In addition, the British established a network of planter's clubs and associations, which provided the British upper class in Assam with private social and recreational areas. These clubs increased tensions between the colonizers and the colonized by reinforcing racial hierarchies and prejudice against the indigenous people.

During the colonial era, tea plantations had a major impact on the ecology. In order to make room for the growth of tea, extensive deforestation occurred, which resulted in the extinction of species and the disturbance of ecosystems. Furthermore, the region's environmental devastation was made worse by the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers on the plantations, which contaminated nearby water sources and degraded the soil.

In addition to bringing forth certain great improvements, the Assamese tea industry also presented several difficulties and injustices for the indigenous people. The establishment of tea plantations led to the development of infrastructure such as roads, railways, and ports, facilitating trade and transportation in the region. In addition, demand for tea in the international market created economic opportunities for Assam, although mainly benefiting British planters and colonial administrators.

In conclusion, tea plantations in Assam during the colonial period had a significant impact on the region and its people. While bringing about economic development and infrastructure improvements, they also perpetuate exploitation, displacement, and environmental degradation. The legacy of the colonial tea industry continues to shape the socio-economic dynamics of Assam to this day, highlighting the lasting legacy of colonialism in the region.

### **Chapter 3: Political Violence in *The Collector's Wife***

This chapter intends to study the political violence in the novel "*The Collector's Wife*" by Mitra Phukan. Before discussing the novel, let us briefly discuss what political violence is. Political violence is a complex and diverse phenomenon that involves various behaviors, such as riots, protests, terrorism, and armed combat. It is defined by the use of force, compulsion, or intimidation by people, organizations, or states to achieve political goals. It has various origins, including power struggles, territorial disputes, ideological radicalization, socioeconomic grievances, political marginalization, and tensions involving ethnicity or religion. Political violence can be triggered by poverty, marginalization, injustice, or political or spiritual extremism.

Authoritarian rule and state repression can also contribute to political violence. People or groups may use violence to oppose or topple repressive regimes when they feel marginalized, denied their rights, or excluded from democratic processes. This can lead to riots, protests, insurgencies, terrorism, civil wars, and state-sponsored violence.

Political violence has severe effects on societal unity, erodes faith in authorities, and hampers the advancement and stability of democracy. It results in deaths, dislocation, destruction of livelihoods, physical and psychological anguish, strained relationships, mistrust, social divisions, unemployment, poverty, and an economic downturn.

To prevent and lessen political violence, a comprehensive approach is needed, including addressing the root causes of political violence, such as socioeconomic grievances, political marginalization, and ideological radicalization. This understanding can help develop plans of action that advance social mobility, democratic governance, and human rights.



Mitra Phukan's *"The Collector's Wife"* portrays political violence by examining it from the perspectives of armed conflict, terrorism, and institutional and systematic violence. This analysis is done within the larger framework of political violence in literature and society. Phukan's research explores the complicated relationships between personal narratives and broader socio-political forces by examining the complex nature of violence, power dynamics, and the effects of political turmoil on individuals. This work sheds light on the ways that political violence affects people's daily lives and disrupts established power systems and social norms. Phukan provides a detailed picture of the effects of political unrest on people and communities by looking at the classification of political violence and its manifestations. In the context of larger socio-political situations, the novel highlights the pervasive influence of political violence on interpersonal relationships and identities, revealing the complex nature of this phenomenon.

"Every week, reports of fresh incidents of extortion or looting, or of gunning down unarmed citizenry, appeared in the papers." (Phukan, 81)

This line vividly portrays the grim reality faced by the characters and the community, where acts of extortion, looting, and violence against civilians are a regular occurrence. The mention of these incidents in the newspapers underscores the widespread nature of the conflict and the impact it has on the daily lives of the people, instilling fear and uncertainty in the region. The author uses this line to emphasize the brutal consequences of insurgency on society, painting a stark picture of the turmoil and chaos that characterize the environment in which the characters navigate their lives. Various terrorist groups in the district would quickly take credit for violent incidents. Rukmini, the protagonist, saw these groups as similar to each other, with their identities blending into one another. The most successful group, MOFEH, or the Movement for the Exclusive Homeland, influenced the others. Additionally, there were groups that

pretended to be terrorists for convenience, as well as fake terrorists who were essentially gangs of robbers pretending to be insurgents. These groups used a facade of patriotism to cover up their criminal activities.

Within the pages of this novel, Rukmini Bezboruah emerges as the central figure, assuming the role of the main protagonist. Her residence, a bungalow nestled amidst a hillside plagued by the constant threat of terrorist attacks, serves as the backdrop for her life. Accompanied by her husband, Siddharth, a district collector, Rukmini's existence is perpetually overshadowed by the looming fear of terrorism. Hailing from the esteemed nobility class in the provincial town of Parbatpuri, she finds solace in her role as an English teacher at a local college, where she dedicates her time alongside her pursuit of knowledge. However, the demands of her husband's professional life leave her feeling neglected and isolated. Additionally, her inability to conceive leaves her yearning for the joys of motherhood, despite the presence of a loving set of in-laws. Rukmini's quest for true happiness remains unfulfilled as she grapples with the complexities of her circumstances.

A pivotal moment arises within the novel when Rukmini crosses paths with Manoj Mahanta, a tyre salesman, resulting in the blossoming of an intimate friendship between them, giving light on the themes of isolation, rebellion, and self-realization in the main character's journey. Their friendship is complex, marked by a deep emotional affinity that goes beyond the surface exchanges of their first meeting. Rukmini and Manoj meet for the first time at a co-worker's wedding, and they share a brief but poignant moment of physical intimacy. This unforeseen friendship awakens Rukmini's desire for genuine human connection and emotional closeness, qualities lacking in her loveless union with Siddharth. Rukmini finds relief in their conversations as their connection grows, allowing her to express her emotions and goals openly. Manoj, an educated and handsome individual, stands in stark contrast to Siddharth, who is preoccupied with work and lacks emotional connection. Manoj's presence in Rukmini's

life serves as a catalyst for her release from her traditional role as a wife, allowing her to pursue her own interests and needs. Rukmini's interactions with Manoj help her assert her independence and defy the societal constraints that have held her back. Rukmini and Manoj share a deep understanding and regard for one another. Manoj, who has experienced his own marital issues, understands Rukmini's struggles and offers her emotional support. This support enables Rukmini to open up and confide in Manoj, building a strong bond of trust and intimacy between them. Nonetheless, their partnership is not without challenges.

Rukmini's marriage to Siddharth, the District Collector, and her social position as his wife prevent her from openly pursuing a connection with Manoj. The need for secrecy in their relationship complicates things, as they must navigate the risks and potential consequences of being discovered. Finally, Rukmini's relationship with Manoj becomes a symbol of her defiance of society's standards that have limited her options. Rukmini's companionship with Manoj fills her with a sense of fulfillment and joy that she had previously lacked. Their bond is a striking representation of the human longing for intimacy and connection, showcasing the transformational power of love and relationships in overcoming life's challenges. Their relationship is characterized by a strong emotional tie, mutual understanding, and respect, symbolizing the universal human need for connection and intimacy. Tragically, their bond is abruptly severed as both Siddharth and Manoj become embroiled in the perilous realm of terrorist violence prevalent in the region.

"It was a place of peace and beauty, startlingly at variance with the atmosphere just below." (Phukan, 68)

This line encapsulates the striking contrast between the tranquil environment of Rukmini's abode and the turbulent world that lies in close proximity. This quote effectively highlights the juxtaposition of serenity and chaos, symbolizing the inherent dichotomy between personal

tranquility and the surrounding violence and unrest. Despite the calmness that pervades the confines of her home, Rukmini is constantly reminded of the harsh realities of political violence and insurgency that afflict the region. The quote serves to underscore the arduous struggle to find solace and normalcy in a society plagued by fear and instability, thereby portraying the profound impact of external turmoil on individual lives.

Phukan's "*The Collector's Wife*" explores the complex fabric of Assamese culture. The novel's subtle examination of how political violence affects every part of life and shapes people's individual and collective fates is at its core. The complexity of Assam, a state constructed by insurgencies, is captured in Phukan's multilayered depiction of political violence. Amidst a backdrop of bombings, killings, and kidnappings, this novel vividly depicts the prevailing climate of fear and uncertainty.

One of the most significant incidents that best depicts the effects of political violence is the kidnapping of Rukmini's husband, Siddharth Bezboruah, the district collector. This crucial incident not only disrupts Rukmini's home life but also serves as an alarming reminder of how unstable life is in Assam, a region filled with chaos. A persistent reminder of the human cost of political turmoil, the collector's undetermined fate throws a lengthy shadow over the story. As the wife of a prominent government official, she becomes both a target and a witness to the political violence that ravages the land.

"Tears for two men. One who had died, not knowing that he was going to be a father. And another who had been prepared to be a father to an unborn child, not his."(Phukan, 348-49)

This passage is important as it discloses the major themes of the novel: loss, grief, and the complications of human connections. The first part of the quote, which reads "One who had died, not knowing that he was going to be a father," refers to the character of Manoj Mahanta,

who was shot by militants. It is an event of huge relevance, as it changes Rukmini's life and perception of it forever. The man did not realize that he was going to become a father, which emphasized the disaster of his premature death and the loss Rukmini had to experience. The second part of the quote, "And another who had been prepared to be a father to an unborn child, not his," reminds of Rukmini's husband, Siddharth Bezboruah. As already mentioned, Siddharth also gets killed by militants, and this event greatly depresses Rukmini. When the author discusses Siddharth's death, the fact that he was prepared to be a father to an unborn child but not his suggests that he had accepted the role of father and understood that it was a possibility, but it never happened. This makes the reader feel the tragedy and the sense of despair that surround the narrative. The reason this quote is important is that it conveys the full emotional richness of the novel's characters.

Rukmini's interactions with other characters in Phukan's narrative offer a detailed examination of the multifaceted nature of political violence. The insurgents, motivated by historical grievances and feelings of marginalization, turn to violence as a means of asserting their demands for autonomy and self-determination. Despite their initial intentions for justice, their actions inadvertently contribute to a cycle of violence that consumes the regions, perpetuating a destructive pattern of revenge and counterattack. In contrast, characters like Siddharth represent the state apparatus and its struggle to maintain law and order amidst insurgencies. Siddharth's dedication to upholding principles of justice and governance is put to the test in the midst of conflict as he navigates the complex realm of politics and power dynamics. As the District Collector, he occupies a pivotal position of authority and accountability, where his decisions hold significant implications for those impacted by the ongoing violence.

Phukan provides a detailed representation of her character's reactions to the threat of violence by skillfully navigating their emotional landscape. Rukmini's grief and desperation at her

husband's unexpected disappearance strike a strong chord, demonstrating the significant impact that political violence takes on individual lives. In a similar way, the community's post-abduction fear and suspicion are evident as neighbors observe one another thoroughly, unsure of whom to trust during such turbulent times.

“Several red and white cloth banners proclaimed, in Assamese as well as English, that the students were protesting against the illegal entry of foreigners from across the border into their state.” (Phukan, 88)

The above lines refer to the influx of foreign nationals, particularly from Bangladesh, which has become a significant issue in Assam, raising concerns among student groups and organizations. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) protests against the government's perceived inaction in addressing this issue, which has been a contentious political issue in Assam for several decades. The situation poses a threat to the state's demographics and the indigenous population. Rukmini questioned whether the issue was the underlying cause of the problems plaguing Parbatpuri. She questioned whether illegal immigrants should be blamed for various issues, such as inadequate education standards, floods, a lack of developmental projects, poor road conditions, corruption, and a lack of governance. The elimination of unauthorized migrants would not necessarily lead to an ideal society. Teachers who partially impacted these students displayed a lack of concern, and Rukmini hoped that if they could clarify the root cause of the chaos and understand that progress was a result of dedicated nation-building efforts, the destiny of these young boys and girls could have been altered.

Furthermore, Phukan skillfully examines how political violence affects community dynamics and relationships between families. An example of the deeper divisions that occur in families split apart by strife is Rukmini's tense bond with her mother-in-law, which is made worse by the kidnapping's anguish. Comparably, the doubts and mistrust that characterize social

interactions reflect the shattered social structure of a community dealing with the consequences of continuous acts of violence.

Political violence in *“The Collector’s Wife”* affects people directly, as well as their families and the larger sociopolitical environment of Assam. Phukan sheds light on the complex interaction of historical, ethnic, and socioeconomic causes that support the war and sheds light on the underlying grievances and desires that fuel the insurgency. She explores questions of identity, marginalization, and the need for autonomy while providing opinions on the underlying reasons for violence through the voices of a variety of characters.

“MG Road was more crowded than usual for this time of day. It seemed that the activities of MOFEH had drastically changed even the shopping habits of the people of Parbatpuri. Normally nobody would have moved out of their homes if it had been safe to shop after sundown. But now, even the afternoon siesta time was not sacrosanct.”  
(Phukan, 95)

Through the above lines, we can know how these groups affect the lives of the common people. The MG Road exhibited a higher concentration of individuals than is typical for this time of day. The impact of MOFEH activities seemed to have caused a noteworthy alteration in the shopping habits of Parbatpuri residents. Previously, individuals tended to refrain from shopping once night fell due to safety apprehensions. Nevertheless, the present situation suggests a departure from this custom, with even the customary midday respite no longer being considered inviolable. Despite the relentless pressure from MOFEH on shop owners and businessmen to contribute financially, business operations continued without much disruption. Interestingly, most of these individuals seemed to accept these demands with a sense of calmness. However, it was the customers who ultimately bore the financial burden of these so-called "donations." As a result, the prices of goods, including essential items, continued to rise

in Parbatpuri, while MOFEH claimed to be leading a "Peoples' Movement." Consequently, the middle-class residents of Parbatpuri had to make sacrifices by cutting back on items like meat, eggs, and fruit that were once part of their regular diet.

Phukan also explores how the government and its security forces contributed to the process of violence. The government's use of harsh measures to put an end to opposition simply serves to heighten tensions and alienate the community, which encourages more disillusioned youth to join violent organizations. She highlights the difficulties of governing in a conflict-ridden area by shedding light on moral dilemmas encountered by those entrusted with upholding law and order in the midst of insurgency through the character of the district collector. Amidst the prevailing political instability, the protagonists in this literary work navigate the intricacies of their lives, grappling with personal challenges and emotional anguish. Rukmini, the main character, confronts the hardships of infertility and her husband's indifference towards her, thereby highlighting broader societal issues and the lack of official support. Rukmini's spouse, consumed by his professional obligations, pays little attention to his wife's emotional well-being. Consequently, during her most challenging moments, she relies on her absent partner for assistance, only to be met with disappointment.

Within the shadows, Phukan delves into instances of resilience and optimism, showcasing the ability of individuals to seek comfort and connection even in the most challenging situations. Rukmini's bond with her loved ones acts as a stable point in a world of uncertainty, granting moments of relief amidst the chaos. Through these personal accounts, Phukan captures the core of human strength, emphasizing that even when faced with hardship, there remains space for affection, empathy, and unity.

*"The Collector's Wife"* is distinguished by Phukan's lyrical style and vivid imagery, which evoke the Assamese countryside and lend the novel depth beyond its thematic depth. Phukan



creates a striking picture of a country that has been damaged by conflict yet is tenacious in the face of hardship, from the lush countryside to the bustling markets of Guwahati. Her narrative allows readers to attain a profound comprehension of Assam and its inhabitants by enabling them to completely engage with the visual, auditory, and olfactory elements of the region through her detailed portrayals and intricately developed characters.

Ultimately, this novel delivers a perceptive examination of the enduring impacts of political unrest in Assam. Despite the darkness, Phukan also examines instances of resilience and hope, underscoring the human potential to discover comfort and solidarity even in the most severe circumstances. Rukmini's connections with her family and friends act as pillars in a sea of unpredictability, offering respites from the turmoil that envelops her. Through these personal moments, Phukan encapsulates the essence of human resilience, prompting readers to remember that even in times of adversity, there exists a place for love, kindness, and unity. Phukan's literary creation presents a compelling testimony to the human toll of conflict and the endurance of the human psyche amidst adversity through its vibrant imagery, well-crafted characters, and nuanced handling of pertinent themes.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Insurgency and violence have long been intricate and multifaceted occurrences throughout human history. Insurgency denotes a scenario where a collective of individuals or organizations, often driven by political or ideological motives, partake in armed conflict or other violent activities against a governing body or any other authoritative entity. Such activities can manifest in various ways, encompassing guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and civil war. In the context of insurgency, violence signifies the utilization of force or the imminent threat of force to attain a political or ideological objective. This encompasses acts of terrorism, like bombings or assassinations, as well as more conventional forms of warfare, such as confrontations between armed forces. Insurgency and violence possess the ability to deeply affect individuals, communities, and entire societies. These phenomena can result in extensive devastation, displacement, and casualties, along with enduring psychological and emotional distress. Furthermore, insurgency and violence can lead to significant economic and social consequences, such as the disruption of trade and commercial activities, the destruction of infrastructure, and the weakening of trust and social bonds.

In the context of Mitra Phukan's novel *"The Collector's Wife,"* the reader is immersed in the tumultuous social and political landscape of Assam, a region in north-eastern India marked by persistent violence and political unrest. Through the portrayal of insurgency and violence, the novel sheds light on the profound impact these forces have on ordinary citizens like Rukmini, who must navigate a dangerous world shaped by conflict and instability.

In this novel, the characters are deeply affected by the political violence that surrounds them, influencing their decisions, interactions, and mental states. Rukmini, the protagonist, becomes entangled in this violence due to her marriage to Siddharth, the district collector of Parbatpuri. Siddharth's position places him in the heart of the conflict, tasked with maintaining order in a

chaotic environment, which takes a toll on him emotionally and physically. He must navigate through the challenges of combating insurgents while also dealing with bureaucratic obstacles and corruption that hinder his efforts for positive change.

Rukmini's presence is consequently shaped by the external conflict that infiltrates her personal space, converting her residence into a miniature representation of the wider political tensions in the region. The strain of Siddharth's obligations and the constant looming danger of violence place a heavy burden on their relationship. The emotional detachment between them and Rukmini's increasing feeling of seclusion mirror the general sense of detachment experienced by individuals caught in the midst of political disputes. Rukmini's internal battle, as she seeks purpose and a sense of self in a world overwhelmed by disorder, reflects the existential anxiety prevalent in a society grappling with uncertainty and apprehension.

Phukan's account extensively explores the psychological consequences of political violence on individuals. The persistent fear of insurgent assaults, the imposition of curfews, and the uncertainty of daily life all contribute to a shared sense of anxiety and suspicion. This environment is vividly depicted through the stories of the local residents, who exist in a constant state of alertness, their existence shaped by the caprices of both insurgents and the military. The pervasive dread undermines social unity, weakens trust among community members, and places strain on familial and social relationships.

Characters like Hrishikesh Deuri, a law enforcement officer, symbolize the moral intricacies and ethical quandaries encountered by individuals at the forefront of this dispute. Deuri's inner struggle and eventual disenchantment with his position underscore the psychological burden on police officials. Balancing their obligation to uphold the law and the coercive methods frequently utilized for authority, these individuals are thrust into a morally uncertain realm, grappling to harmonize their professional duties with their own ethical beliefs.

The novel also examines how the media influences public perceptions of political violence. Rukmini's interactions with her co-worker, Animesh Dutta, who is a journalist, emphasize the challenges of reporting in a conflict-ridden region where the truth is frequently distorted by propaganda and sensationalism. The media's representation of events fluctuates between exaggeration and suppression, further complicating the public's grasp of the situation and contributing to an overall feeling of confusion and distrust. This dualism mirrors the broader difficulties of ascertaining truth in an environment where information is a battleground.

Phukan provides a nuanced portrayal of the insurgents, going beyond the depiction of faceless adversaries and instead presenting them as individuals motivated by a complex blend of factors. These include historical grievances, socio-economic marginalization, and the pursuit of autonomy. Through this empathetic portrayal, Phukan prompts readers to reflect on the underlying reasons behind the insurgency, fostering a deeper comprehension of its origins. By humanizing the insurgents, Phukan challenges simplistic dichotomies of right and wrong, shedding light on the intricate nature of political violence and the challenges of assigning responsibility.

The novel portrays the town of Parbatpuri as a distinct character, highlighting its evolution from a tranquil community to a symbol of the wider regional turmoil. The town's physical and emotional wounds serve as a reflection of the extensive socio-economic consequences resulting from prolonged political unrest. The disruption of traditional livelihoods, the erosion of cultural norms, and the disintegration of the community's unity are all consequences of the unyielding conflict. Phukan's evocative depictions of Parbatpuri emphasize the profound alterations caused by violence, underscoring the importance of resilience and adaptability in the midst of adversity.

In "The Collector's Wife," Phukan explores the cyclical aspect of violence, indicating that historical injustices and the state's insufficient response to these matters are the fundamental sources of conflict. The novel portrays the repetitive sequences of rebellion and suppression, underscoring the imperative need to confront the underlying factors of unrest in order to disrupt the cycle of violence. This viewpoint resonates with wider socio-political examinations that underscore the significance of justice, fairness, and inclusivity in attaining enduring peace.

Despite the desolate political setting, Phukan introduces a glimmer of hope through Rukmini's personal journey. Her search for purpose and connection amidst the turmoil serves as a symbol of the human spirit's resilience. Rukmini's eventual growth and her resolute determination to seek solace and meaning despite the chaos suggest the potential for renewal and healing. This narrative arc highlights the possibility of individual and collective resilience, advocating for empathy and understanding as vital components in the pursuit of peace.

Mitra Phukan's novel, "The Collector's Wife," delves deeply into the intricate theme of political violence and its profound impact on individuals and society as a whole. Through the exploration of Rukmini's personal experiences, Phukan brings to light the physical and psychological toll that conflict takes, as well as the moral dilemmas faced by those in positions of power. Additionally, the novel highlights the pervasive atmosphere of fear and mistrust that permeates the community. What sets this novel apart is its nuanced portrayal of insurgents and its examination of the media's role in shaping public perception. These elements add layers of complexity to the narrative, providing a multifaceted perspective on the conflict at hand. Phukan ultimately advocates for empathy and understanding, emphasizing the importance of addressing the underlying causes of unrest in order to pave the way for lasting peace and reconciliation. The story of Rukmini and Parbatpuri serves as a poignant reminder of humanity's enduring resilience and the significance of seeking solutions that go beyond

violence and division. It serves as a call to action, urging readers to consider alternative approaches to conflict resolution that prioritize empathy and understanding.

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