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"I AM NOT A MIYA": STIGMATIZATION AND THE SENSE OF ALIENATION DURING THE EARLY PHASE OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Abstract

During the onset of the Lockdown owing to the COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent detection of COVI01D 19 cases in Assam, the Miyas, a Muslim migrant population, an already vulnerable community in Assam had to face the stigma as the 'carriers of the virus'. The Miya community in Assam for long has been reckoned as the 'illegal Bangladeshis'. The very term 'Miya' is a stigma in itself. This article is a humble attempt to understand the historical context of the process of stigmatization of the Miya community residing in Assam. The article would reflect on the attributes of ethnic identity that has given rise to the concept of in-group and out-group leading to the othering of the Miya community in Assam. The basic idea is to explore the construction of stigma that contours the social identity of the term Miya and Miyas living in Assam, that once again became vanguard during the early stages of the COVID Pandemic, notwithstanding the fact that those stigmatised as disease spreaders later became the saviours by donating their plasma.

Keywords: *COVID 19, Stigma, Miya, Axomiya Muslims, Migration, Illegal Immigration, Muslims of Assam.*

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The novel Corona virus that first emerged from the Wuhan district of China around early November, 2019, within a short span of time had engulfed the entire world. The virus brought about changes in our everyday lives and what was once normal became submerged in a 'new normal'. It was a first in history when the world was sharing a common culture- lockdown, wearing of mask, using sanitizers to name a few. We came across a gamut of words that became a part of everyday usage like facemask, gloves, sanitizers, lockdown, social distancing, quarantining, etc. (Srivastava 2020: April-June, Newsletter of Anthropological Survey of India). In the Indian scenario however, during the onset of the first phase of the lockdown a few more terminologies were

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added. Terms such as "corona jihad," "Islamic insurrection," and "corona terrorism" (Krishnan 2020: April 13 www.rfi.in) came into vogue in the social media platforms with hashtags# and even in many of the media reports COVID 19 was represented as coming from the Muslims and they were named as the "super spreader" (Ali 2020: June 14 www.the wire.in). The new terminologies owed it to the incident of not maintaining the sanctions of the first lockdown in the Tablighi Jamaat and the Markaz[1] in Delhi. The Tablighi Jamaat was blamed for violating lockdown rules and held responsible for the outbreak of the virus in India (Ahmed 2020: April 2 www.bbc.com). COVID 19 was rechristened was as "Muslim Coronavirus" by some, stigmatizing the already vulnerable community (Krishnan 2020: April 13 www.rfi.in).

Wills in his work had stated that blaming other people for getting sick has a long history, it has always been the 'others' comprising of the poor, the immigrants, the refugees who have been blamed for such incidents of plague etc., that have been reported in the past (2020: June 15 www.daily.jstor.org). In the context of Assam, during the onset of lockdown, the *Miyas*, a Muslim migrant population, (originally from East Bengal which after Independence became East Pakistan, and now Bangladesh) residing in Assam became the target of this backlash. The first COVID 19 patient in Assam detected with the virus was one of the persons who had returned from a visit to the Nizamuddin area, Delhi, followed by a few others who had been in the Markaz (Choudhury 2020: March 1 NDTV.com). Some of them were from the *Miya* community, however, all the Muslims living in Assam were being referred to as *Miyas* in the social media platforms during the early stages of the pandemic. This article is my humble attempt is to understand the concept of 'othering' and explore the construction of stigma that contours the social identity of the term *Miya* and *Miyas* living in Assam. Based on narratives, historical accounts, interactions, observations and my personal encounters and experiences as an *Axomiya*[2] Muslim of Assam the article explores the construction of a social identity that outlines stigma of belonging to a particular ethnic group. The concepts of in-group and out-group is also being looked at to understand the context of stigma and othering.

During the first lockdown phase two incidents involving *Axomiya* Muslims came into light that delineated the fear of stigma and also the opprobrium of being referred to as a *Miya*. The first case was narrated by my mother about an *Axomiya* Muslim, who refused to undergo swab test for COVID 19. The reason that the person cited was, "I don't want to keep explaining that I am not a *Miya*, if tested positive". The said person is responsible for the procurement of medicines in a hospital in Guwahati, Assam. Working in the health care segment he came under the category of high risk. Thus, to ascertain his safety, the hospital had suggested routine COVID 19 test as a precautionary measure. No one is more aware of the disease and the precautions that needs to be followed than him, owing to his job profile. Yet, he refused to go for a COVID test, fearing the stigma of being called a *Miya* and not the disease per say.

In another incident, Mr. Rahman also an *Axomiya* Muslim was walking in the veranda of his house during the time of the first lockdown, a policeman walked up to him and said, "Go inside, because of you '*Miyas*', we are not able to do our job peacefully". Rahman's son narrated this incident on his Facebook page[3]. In his post he had reflected on the agony of his ageing parents for whom it was a trauma, being mistakenly identified as a *Miya*.

In the first case it was not the fear of being tested positive for the COVID 19 virus but more to do with the stigma of being identified as a *Miya* Muslim. He was concerned about his social identity and the repercussions it would have on his family. In the second case Mr. Rahman was reprimanded as a *Miya* by the policeman. Rahman recounted that his forefather was a General with the army of Shuja al-Daula, Awadh, Bengal and had come to Assam on the invitation of the Ahom[4] King Chandra Kanta Sinha. Owing to the acumenship and artillery skills of the canon, the Ahom King had given their forefathers the title of Hilaidary (canon) Baruah (priest) (for more information on the history of migration of the *Axomiya* Muslims please refer to Zaman 2015). The Ahom rulers during their regime had encouraged migration of skilled personals from outside the state and promoted them to settle in the state. In order to strengthen the Ahom army, these migrants were given land grants and titles who had military knowledge and other warfare technique. They were given titles such as Phukan, Barbarua, Barua, Saikia, Bora, Hazarika as per their knowledge and skills (Saikia 2016: 22nd April www.outlookindia.com). This Ahom strategy had helped in assimilation and many of these early settlers comprising of both Hindus and Muslims today are a part of the dominant *Axomiya* identity. These people sharing a common language and culture, today recognize themselves as part of the *Axomiya* ethnic identity. Traditionally, the *Axomiya* speaking middle class with major control over economic and political powers since the colonial era has been identified as the 'mainstream' (Goswami 2011:5). Notwithstanding the fact that, Assam comprises of many local communities like the Bodos, Tiwas, Mishings, Karbis, Rabhas, to name a few whose primary language is not Assamese but comprise the indigenous populations (Baruah 1999:18). As Rahman's forefathers had served in the Ahom army, he took pride in recognizing himself as an *Axomiya* Muslim and a part of the mainstream. Thus, he felt that the honour was lost when the policeman had specified him as a *Miya*. Both, the incidents recounts trauma and stigma of being affiliated to the *Miya* ethnic community. In order to understand the construction of stigma related to the ethnic identity of being a *Miya* in Assam one needs to delve into the historical background and reflect on the root causes (if any).

Who are the Miyas?

In the historical context the origin of the word *Miya* was an address of respect. A term that is consistently used in many of the Islamic countries of South East Asia including India, particularly in Lucknow where '*Miya*' is a common

nomenclature meaning 'gentleman'. The term 'Allah Miya' is at times also used to refer to the Almighty. In the case of Assam, the terminology *Miya* was formerly used to refer to the migrant Muslim community of East Bengal origin as a whole. However, the connotation changed with the coming of the Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who speak the *Miya* dialect (basically an offshoot of the Bengali Language). They came into prominence during the Liberation War of 1969-1971 in erstwhile East Pakistan. During this time the *Miyas* or the *Mymensinghia* (as they originally were from the Mymensingh district) came in large numbers (mostly illegal immigrants) and settled in Assam. The infiltration of the *Miya* population around 1969-71 in uncontrollable numbers led to unrest in this part of the country triggering the Assam Agitation in 1979. "*It was after the Assam Agitation (1979-1985) that the term took on a derogatory connotation, suggesting illegal entry and usurpation of legitimate rights of the 'sons of the soil'*" (Goswami 2011: 4). Goswami, in her work had referred to 'sons of the soil' as those communities of both Hindus and Muslims living in Assam who claim their affinity to the *Axomiya* ethnic identity (as mentioned in the section above). At this juncture before we move on to understand the construction of a social identity, it is also pertinent to note here that there has been migration from Mymensingh, Pabna and Dhaka areas since the Colonial era.

During the Colonial era in Assam, which began after the signing of the Yandaboo Treaty[5] of 1826, the land saw a wave of migration from the Province of Bengal. The wasteland settlement policy[6] drawn during the colonial regime, brought many settler communities to Assam. In 1874, the inclusion of Sylhet district of Bengal, Goalpara and Cachar[7] into the newly constituted colonial province of Assam with a Chief Commissionership lead to inclusion of Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims as part of the province of Assam, without the question of migration. It was seen as an internal movement owing to the merger of districts in many cases. Encouraged by the colonial rulers and the wasteland settlement policy, during this time many Bengali speaking Muslim peasants moved from the province of Bengal and inhabited the riverine areas known as *char chapori* (char- river island, chapori- flood plains)[8], mostly in lower Assam particularly Dhubri, Goalpara, and slowly moved up to the Nagaon district. The major benefit was the knowledge of wet cultivation that these migrant peasants brought to Assam, as shifting cultivation was the mainstay for many of the indigenous communities of Assam during that time. The concept of wasteland that the colonial rule had described and the wasteland that was later given to the East Bengal migrants for cultivation needs to be revisited. Many of these settlement areas that were earmarked as wastelands and made into migrant settlement areas by the colonial rulers were in reality part of the land used for shifting cultivation by the local peasants. Shifting cultivation based on the slash and burn method required leaving the land barren for regeneration of the soil, after the soil has been tilted for a few years. The wasteland settlement policy for long has been a bone of discontentment among the *Axomiya* and the migrant populations.

Another wave of migration was seen, after the discovery of tea plants in Assam around 1831. The setting up of the tea plantations in 1834 was a major boon and became an important revenue generating source. The tea plantations brought in workers as indentured labourers to work in the tea gardens during this era (Saikia 2016: www.outlookindia.com) from other parts of the country. During the colonial regime the tea plantations were the major reckoning force for one of the oldest waves of migration of tribal groups like the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Gonds, Khonds, Kisang and Nagesias from present day areas of Bengal, Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand. Besides these tea garden workers many Muslim families came to Assam from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar when the railway lines were laid down. These Muslim communities primarily speak the Hindi language and are known as the *Julhas*. Traditionally, they were engaged in weaving, tent making, machine drilling etc. Today however, many of the *Julhas* are a part of the tea garden work force, primarily living in Golaghat and Jorhat districts.

These settlement policies of the Colonial era had long been a reason for discontentment and cause for resentment amongst the Assamese population. Protest was marked way back in the colonial era by Maniram Dewan, one of the first Assamese tea planters in 1852, who understanding the gravity of the migration situation in Assam had made a petition to the colonial rulers citing the loss of job opportunities for the Assamese youths (Sharma 2012:289-290). The dissatisfaction that had been brewing for long came into the limelight after the Liberation war in erstwhile East Pakistan now Bangladesh, that saw huge number of illegal immigrants coming to Assam. There was widespread unrest in Assam as it was an economic, political and social burden to provide for the large number of illegal immigrants. The resentment ultimately manifested in to the Assam Agitation (1979-1985) that demanded the deportation of the illegal immigrants, that ended with the signing of the Assam Accord. However, this was also the phase when a social identity of the immigrants was created with the classification of 'them' (the immigrants) and 'us' (the locals), thus leading to stigmatization and social alienation of the *Miyas*. The state was also struggling to come out of the social and economic burden that had left it scarred and marred.

Construction of a Social Identity: Char Chapori Mussalman

"*Mur baba eyate jonmo ar eyate mara gaise, moi eyate thakim, eih mur desh*" Haseena states in *Axomiya* with a tinge of *Miya* dialect[9] in her voice, that means; "my father was born here and he died here, I will stay here, this is my homeland". A poignant statement made by Haseena, a 50-year-old lady, whose family had migrated to Assam during the colonial era from East Bengal. Haseena living in Guwahati, works as a domestic help to earn her livelihood and had made this statement while seeking for a leave to go to her hometown. She needed to present testimonials to prove her identity as a bona fide resident

of Assam, in the wake of the publication of the first draft of the National Register of Citizens[10]. Her statement was made more in self-defense of her status as a migrant (*Miya*) Muslim in Assam. The question that arises here is why Haseena have to defend her ethnic identity? Her family had migrated from East Bengal way back during the Colonial era and even after generations of her family living in Assam, why is she still regarded as a migrant. The question of who we are, or who we are seen as? can be a matter of great concern, as identity is not based on how we look at ourselves but it depends on how others view us. As Jenkins had stated identification always involves individuals, something else – collectivity and history – may also be at stake (2004:3).

In the case of the *Miyas* of Assam, here again the distinction can be traced back to the colonial era when the line system was introduced in 1[9]20 to control the indiscriminate settlement. The line system divided the communities living in Assam with the division of villages into four distinct categories- (a) villages reserved for the original inhabitants of Assam, (b) villages reserved exclusively for the East Bengali immigrants, (c) mixed villages, and (d) villages where both the original inhabitants and the immigrants could settle, but there was a physical line dividing them (Goswami 2011:10). The colonial policy of first bringing in the Muslim settlers with their knowledge of wet cultivation from East Bengal under the wasteland settlement policy later created issues in terms of over population. To combat this the government introduced the line system wherein the population from East Bengal started settling in the *Char Chapori* areas or the flood plain of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. This was a major attribute in the construction of the 'other'. This population was almost segregated from the 'mainstream' and with a different language and culture they were almost alienated. One area and population that did not undergo the process of assimilation, as from the very beginning they were segregated. These areas were almost cut off from the 'mainstream' so much so that in 1983, the Assam government had to form the Assam State Char Areas Development Authority, as a special area programme. The aim was to work for the upliftment of these economically underdeveloped areas. In 1996, however, the authority was transformed into the Directorate of Char Areas Development (Goswami 2011:10). Thus, herein, we see the construction of the 'other' based on ethnic identity that was created mostly by the negligence of the colonial rule. The migrant peasant community was treated as an outsider when they were given special provisions of settlement, yet were neglected in terms of other social, economic, education and health benefits. The process of 'othering' was pronounced when the community was left to fend for itself and the colonial government reaped the benefits of their labour, as during that time Assam started producing surplus of rice and was in a position to export the same. Throughout the colonial rule Assam's tea and rice production were the key stake holders in revenue generation for the state.

In the last few years, owing to the creation of the National Register of Citizens and the identification of the bonafide residents of Assam the *Miyas* living in the *Char Chaopri* areas have been in the limelight. Every other day, there is one or the other news report in popular media like newspapers, TV channels etc., with the photographs of the population living in the *Char Chapori* areas, depicting their lives. The population of the *Miyas* living in the *char* areas belong basically to the peasant community engaged mostly as daily wage labourers, who belong to the economically weaker section of the society without education, access to proper health care facilities etc. This in itself created an image of the *Char Chapori Mussalmans* and for long has been the dominant symbol of the *Miyas* living in Assam.

The Creation of the Concept of In-Group and Out-Group

Ethnic boundaries are patterns of social interaction that give rise to, and subsequently reinforce, in-group members' self- identification and outsiders' leading to confirmation of group distinctions (Sanders 2002:327). The Muslims speaking *Axomiya* claim *Axomiya* ethnic identity and regard themselves as the 'in-group'. The question of in-group has found reflection in many historical writings, like in Muhammedan chronicler Shihabuddin's work, the author had noted that in Assam the Muslims settled had assimilated themselves to such an extent that except for the name nothing was left of Islam with them (Gait 1981; Neog 1985 cf. in Zaman 2015:94). Gait (1892) had also reflected on the Muslim *Satras* in the Census of Assam. *Satras* (monasteries) are a part of the Neo-Vaisnavism tradition in Assam. Popularly known as *ekasarana nama-dharma* the preaching's of Srimanta Sankardev reached out to the masses through the *kirtanghars* or *namghars* (prayer halls) and the *satras*. The creation of this Axomiya Muslims (in-group) lead to the construction of the out-group that comprised of the Bengali speaking Muslims.

To understand the concept of 'in-group' and 'out-group' from the many examples that can be cited here, one is of marriage to understand the claim of identity of the *Axomiya* speaking Muslims as in-group. Marriage alliances between the *Axomiya* speaking Muslims and the non-Assamese speaking Muslims has been vehemently opposed till the recent past. It is not only in terms of language, but they differ much in their social and cultural attributes like food habits, dress, and life cycle rituals to a large extent. Even among the *Miyas* they prefer to bring their brides from across the border or marry among their own (Saikia 2018: May 22 www.dailyo.in).

Language as a Medium of Othering

In recent discussions among family and friends, one of them related an incident while boarding a flight from Guwahati, who chanced upon three young college students fluently conversing in the *Miya* dialect. It was a moment of reflection for him when the thought registered that these young students

are educated *Miyas*. It made him curious, a rare entity as normally, the term *Miyas* is generally used to refer to the labour class population of Bengali origin who mostly comprises of domestic helps, daily wage labourers, rickshaw pullers etc. Goffman in his work had reflected on the creation of 'social identity' and how labels are structured based on occupation (1963:2). He had refrained from using the term 'social class'. In case of the social identity of the *Miyas* the social structuralization in terms of 'class' based on occupation and language is very pronounced. The students if they had been conversing in the *Axomiya* language, they would have not warranted any attention. The very fact that they were conversing in a language other than *Axomiya* was a moment to reckon, where the students social identity as *Miya* came into prominence and made them to be identified as the 'other'.

Language as a symbol of identification also needs to be understood in the local context as it underlines social identity that is based on the attributes like presentation of the self in terms of attire, cleanliness etc. How one is viewed by the 'others'? The valuation is made mostly based on appearances. "*I am University educated and speak decent Assamese, I might not be called a Miya, at least until I make it explicit. My cousin on the other hand, who drives a cycle rickshaw in Guwahati, will always be one. My class privilege might immunize me from the feelings of disgust reserved for my cousin*" (Hafiz Ahmed (president of the Char Sapori Sahitya Parishad) c.f. Daniyal: 2019: 14th July www.scroll.in). Social identity dwells on social class and is an important criterion in creation of the 'other'. Here, both language and occupation have a significant role to play. As stated by Eidheim "The language of symbols which bear on an identity cleavage is rich and finely shaded… and thus, must be understood in a local social context" (1969:40). Ahmed's summarization of why he would not be called a *Miya*, reflects on the fact that social identity bores on certain labels language and social class being one of them that constructs the 'other'.

Miya dialect spoken among the *Miya* population mostly living in the *Char Chapori* areas of Assam has led to their categorization and played a major role in the creation of ethnic identity that reckons them as the 'other' and the concept of in-group and out-group. In reference to the *Miyas* of Assam, this can be better understood in terms of social mediums through which association and ethnic identity is established: language, dress and occupation being some of the core components. The *Miyas* speaking the *Miya* dialect are considered as the out-group. The construction of a social identity based on language is also reflected in the statement below, "*Aita apuni centre aahibo nelage, aami kotha pati gom palu aapuni Axomiya*", "Grandma, you don't have to come to the centre again, we spoke with you and understand you are an Assamese". The statement implied that the lady has been identified as an *Axomiya* Muslim and not a *Miya* during the conversations with the officials (personal experience of the author when she had taken her 74 year old mother to one of the nodal offices) during the identification process for the National Register of Citizens

in Assam. The construction of a social identity vis-a-vis language is prominent. However, it would be a misnomer to state that all *Miyas* speak the *Miya* dialect. Many of the early settlers who had come during the Colonial rule speak *Axomiya*, as cited in the case of Ahmed. While there have been prominent Miya personalities well versed, who have been significantly in the forefront and worked for the country during the freedom movement and later in nation building. Thus, one has to be cautious like labelling a community that lead to stigmatization and alienation.

The incidents of stigma and social alienation that came to light during the COVID 19 pandemic in the context of Assam brought to the forefront the deep structures of the society, that had its roots in the Colonial rule. Borrowing from Durkheim's concept of 'collective representation' which also reflects on the history of a population, in Assam the creation of the 'in-group' (*Axomiya* speaking Muslims) and the 'others' i.e., the 'out-group' (the non-*Axomiya* speaking Muslims) is marked. Language as a symbol of identity has created social demarcations and given rise to question of ethnic affiliation leading to social discrimination and stigma.

Notes

1. The Tablighi Jamaat is a Sunni Muslim missionary with its roots in the Deobandi variant under the Hanafi school. The basic aim of the society is to reach out to the local people and bestow them with the knowledge of Islam, revive the rituals, dress and personal behaviour It was launched by Deoband cleric and prominent Islamic scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Khandhalaw in 1927 in Mewat. For more details read Tablighi Jamaat: What is Tablighi Jamaat, its purpose and how it runs? (indianexpress.com). Markaz are the physical spaces where the members of the Tablighi Jamaat congress. Markaz which serves as headquarters are found all over the world and any member belonging to the Tablighi Jamaat are free to visit and stay in these Markaz.

2. The Muslim population of Assam comprising of the Turks, Mughals, Pathans who settled in Assam at various points of time, before the Colonial regime, or had converted to Islam like the Syeds today share a common language '*Axomiya*'. Besides following the rites and rituals of the Muslims, they are a part of the Assamese culture in terms of dress, food habits, celebrating Bihu and other festivals, and thus, associates themselves with the Assamese ethnic identity. For more details on the *Axomiya* Muslims refer to Zaman 2015, 2016, Irshad Ali 1974.

3. The Facebook post was later deleted and the content was made unavailable by Facebook.

4. The Ahoms or the Tai-Ahoms are an ethnic group in Assam. They are an off-shoot of the Tai people (Shan, i.e., Sham, cf. Siam) of southeast Asia; they are called Shan in Burma, Thai in Thailand, Lao in Laos, Dai and Zhuang in China, and Tay- Thai in Vietnam. The Tai-Ahoms of Assam originally migrated from Mong Mao, a small kingdom, between Yunnan Province of Southwest China and Shan, Myanmar, along with their Prince Sukapha in the year 1228. The Ahoms ruled Assam for nearly six hundred years. See Baruah 1999: 217. In terms of religion, they traditionally believed in ancestor worship, but in course of time, many of the Hindu

rituals were incorporated. Some embraced Christianity and Islam (under Shah Miran and came to be known as the Syeds) during the later years. Since the Ahoms were from the Mongoloid stock, one of the distinctive physical features is the epicanthic fold over the eye. (Zaman 2015: 97)

5. Treaty of Yandaboo: Burmese troops had been raiding the Ahom state around the early 1800, fearing defeat the Ahom aristocracy had to seek help from the British company. The Britishers defeated the Burmese troop, they retreated leading to the signing of the Yandaboo Treaty. As part of the treaty Assam was annexed to the larger British company and Assam lost its sovereignty bringing an end to the six hundred-year-old Ahom rule. The Yandaboo Treaty marked the beginning of the colonial era in Assam

6. Permanently settled estates were created during the time of Lord Cornwallis in and around 1793 in Bengal, Bihar and Odissa (Orissa). Subsequently, the system was extended to Tamilnadu, Benaras districts of UP and middle part of Koch Kingdom (part of present Goalpara District), whole Sylhet districts (part of present Karimganj District). The holders of the Permanently settled Estates were Proprietors and were known as Zamindars and the Land Tenure System is otherwise known as Zamindari system. The Land Revenue (Kushiyara) System prevalent in the Surama and Barak Valley was somewhat different from that was in practice in Brahmaputra Valley. The permanently settled estate in the then Sylhet were classified under the following names (a) Permanently settled Waste Land Grants, (b) Dassana, (c) Illam Daimi, (d) Halabadi etc. In case of large estates, the owners were known as Zamindar or Talukdar and those whom the lands were sublet were known as Patni. Large temporary settled estates were Illam which could be sublet to actual cultivators or middle man. In case such middle man was known as Mirasdar. The temporary settled estates of Sylhet proper were known locally under the following names (a) Illam, (b) Nankar Patwarigeeri etc. The revenue survey in Sylhet was carried out in 1860-66. It was called "Thakbast" Survey in the sense that "thak" or demarcation marks of the estates were under taken. Illam Settlement Rules, 1876 were under taken for Resettlement and Reassessment of revenue Land Policies during British Rule | DIRECTORATE OF LAND REQUISITION ACQUISITION & REFORMS | Government Of Assam, India

7. The district of Goalpara in western Assam (now divided into four districts), which before the colonial era included Garo Hills region (now in Meghalaya), was part of the Mughal province of Bengal and came under the control of East India Company according to the Mughal Emperor's *Firman* of August 12, 1765 (Baruah 1999: 24). Thus, Goalpara was already under the British occupation before it was merged with the newly formed colonial province of Assam in 1874. Cachar was under the Bhutanese influence in the early nineteenth century and was annexed by the British in 1866 and transferred to Assam Province in 1874 (Baruah 1999:25)

8. Char Chaopri is also written as Sar Sapori

9. Miya dialect native to regions such as Mymensingh, Pabna, Tangail and Dhaka, now in Bangladesh which is largely spoken by the people who had migrated from East Bengal later Bangladesh. These communities mostly reside in the *Char Chapori* areas. The Miya dialect and the language politics came under the radar after the Miya poem "I am Miya", a part of the modern-day poetry in 2016, became one of the much trending news on Facebook. The language politics that began in 1950s with many of the migrant Muslims declaring their mother tongue as Assamese in the 1951 census, or the *Chalo Palti* (turn back) movement that later was started to regain their language, has not been discussed in this article, as it needs a separate

scholarship.

10. National Register of Citizens popularly known as NRC is the register of all genuine Indian citizens residing in Assam. The register was first prepared after the Census of India 1951. The need for a register was felt after Independence of India, owing to the illegal migration that had become uncontrollable in this part of the country bordering the newly formed East Pakistan a part of Pakistan. The purpose of NRC update is to identify illegal migrants residing in the North eastern states particularly in Assam who entered Indian territories after midnight on 24 March 1971 and to determine the citizenship of the applicants who have applied for inclusion of their names in the updated NRC. For more details please visit.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Citizens_of_India#Purpose_of_NRC.

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