

Hindutva and the Muslim Question in Assam: Underlying Tensions and Emerging Dynamics

Nayan Moni Kumar¹ and Akhil Ranjan Dutta²

Abstract

This paper attempts to understand how BJP has dealt with the Muslim question in Assam. It argues that while Muslims have remained as Hindutva's primary political Other in Assam, the frames of religion and indigeneity have shaped BJP's overall politics according to which it has maintained a distinction between Indigenous and the Immigrant Muslims in the state. However, such a distinction has been characterized by much socio-political stress and tensions which reflects BJP's eventual otherization of Muslims in the state.

Introduction

The 'Muslim question' in Assam can be traced back to the colonial period when the region saw the large-scale migration of East Bengal origin Muslims. The colonial machinations aimed at increasing agricultural revenue, led to the promotion of migration from an overpopulated and land scarce East Bengal. Such large-scale migration significantly affected the demographic ratio of Hindus and Muslims in the state leading to much uncertainty about the unfolding landscape. Over the time the colonial period witnessed the multifarious expressions of Hindu and Muslim identity, influencing the broader Assamese identity. This process continued even in the post-colonial period. In this regard, a significant body of literature³ has thrown light on such developments and its political ramifications. However, rather than delving into these historical aspects the present paper focuses on the contemporary politics of Hindutva and how it has negotiated with the Muslim question in Assam. Such an academic exercise is necessary for two important reasons. The contemporary political scene in Assam is marked by two significant developments: the consolidation of Hindutva (more on this later), and the new forms of identity questions in the state. Politics of identity has been the characteristic feature of politics in Assam emanating

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University, E-mail: nayankumar083@gmail.com

²Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University, E-mail: akhilranjangu@gmail.com

³See, M. Kar, Muslims in Assam Politics, Delhi: Osmos publications, 1990; M.K Nath, The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India, Oxon: Routledge, 2021; Udayon Misra, Burden of History: Assam and the Partition: Unresolved Issues, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2018.

from awakening of the ethno-cultural consciousness. The diverse groups inhabiting this state have been pressing either for the creation of separate or autonomous state on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities or for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities (Phukan, 1996). Some of these demands have also been for recognition of their particular identities by the majoritarian society. Within this broader landscape of identity politics, the contemporary identity questions of the Muslims can be located. Recent times have witnessed the assertion of *Miya* identity led by a section from within the community. Such demands emanate from years of their struggle for recognition from the larger Assamese society. In this regard their struggle for identity has more been about seeking universal recognition that couches their demands in the vocabulary of the politics of universality. Simultaneously, Indigenous Muslims have also asserted their indigeneity and their particular ethnic identities by distancing themselves from the *Miya* Muslims (Kumar, 2024). In this regard, a sense of difference has come to characterize their identity talk, couched more in the vocabulary of the politics of difference. In this unfolding landscape, the present paper seeks to understand how the BJP has navigated the Muslim identity politics in the state.

We argue that, for Hindutva, while Muslims have consistently been the primary political other; in Assam, the frames of religion and indigeneity have shaped BJP's overall politics according to which it has maintained a nuanced distinction between indigenous and immigrant Muslims in the state. Nevertheless, this differentiation has not been without socio-political tensions, reflecting BJP's ultimate otherization of the broader Muslim identity.

Understanding Hindutva's Creative Consolidation

BJP for long dismissed as a cow-belt party, with which presumably the more civilized denizens of the country in the non-cow-belt areas would have nothing to do, has made much headway outside its turf (Prabhakara, 1994). In fact, BJP has managed to make significant gains in non-traditional areas. North East India in general and Assam in particular has long been viewed as one such non-traditional territory for BJP. Many scholars have earlier argued that Assam with its culture of plurality and diversity is a ground which is infertile for the growth of Hindutva ideology (Bhattacharjee 2016; Misra, 2016). Given the complexity of the demography of this region that consist of diverse races, ethnicities, faiths, customs, culture and multiplicity of issues it becomes extremely difficult for an ideology riding on Hindu religious nationalism to identify common ground that enables it to make a dent in this region (Bhattacharjee, 2016). Moreover, the spread of Vaishnavism, particularly in the valley areas, contributed significantly towards the softening and, in many cases, obliteration of many inegalitarian social practices, rituals, orthodoxies and dogmas of Hindu caste system in the state which in turn hindered the growth of the ideology of Hindutva (Goswami, 2020). Political factors were also important in this regard. The growth of BJP was halted to a considerable extent by the Assamese caste

Hindus who used to see BJP only as a *Marwari* party. The BJP's policy of being soft to Hindu immigrants and hard on the Muslim immigrants did not find many takers among the influential section of the Assamese society who were more obsessed with the fear of domination by the Bengalis— both Hindus and Muslims— in all public spheres (Srikanth, 1999). However, despite such odds, Hindutva in the last few years has managed to attain significant political grounds in Assam.

A careful look at the differentiated trajectories of the BJP in different states makes it abundantly clear that the continuing momentum of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics has become regionalised. Hence, any understanding of the trajectory as well as possible futures of Hindutva must take as its point of departure the local and regional dynamics that have provided the conditions for the current advances of Hindu nationalist forces (Hansen, 1996). Such developments, in turn, are part of the regionalization of politics in India that has led to the rise of discrete and distinctive political discourses, mobilization patterns and alliances in each state.

Accordingly, Hindutva's consolidation in this part of the country too has certain regional characters. An important dimension of Hindutva's rise has been its adaptability to a complex socio-political terrain and its creative accommodation of certain apparently contrasting aspects to its ideology, which highlights its pragmatism.⁴ Hindutva activists from the very beginning adopted novel strategies for navigating through complex realities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people.⁵ Further, it had to go through a significant ideological reorientation in the region. Instead of relying on an explicit nationalist agenda, it had to take into account regional concerns; it had to accept the diversity of identities in Assam which were plural, layered and multidimensional. Consequently, its largely majoritarian outlook gave way for the minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious) in the region which in turn, opened up possibilities for dream alliances at both social and political level (Sethi and Subhrastha, 2017).

Two important frames of 'othering' continue to characterize the politics in North-east Indian, where one frame is defined by ethnicity and indigeneity and another by religion. The presence of either of these frames maybe more or less salient during certain moments and in certain spaces. At times, there may also be significant overlaps between these two frames (Kolås, 2023). Recent studies have emphasized on how these two frames have had an overlapping influence in terms of BJP's electoral

⁴The political consolidation of Hindutva in this region involved different strategies that evolved over the time. See, Akhil Ranjan Dutta, *Hindutva Regime in Assam: Saffron in the Rainbow*, Delhi: Sage, 2021.

⁵Bhattacharjee argues that, the Sangh Parivar has, since the past 60 years or so, been working assiduously towards establishing a base in the social and the cultural realm in Assam. It has relied on the socio-cultural work, which often involved offering support by providing welfare services in the realm of education, health, cultural development, organizing conferences, festivals, establishing publication departments, schools, hospitals, vocational training centres etc for deepening the roots of Hindutva in Assam, See, Malini Bhattacharjee, "Tracing the emergence and consolidation and Hindutva in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51 (16), 80-87, 2016.

success in Assam (Sircar, 2022; Saikia, 2020; Tripathi et al., 2018). Saikia argues that the crystallization of Hindu votes in Assam and BJP's appropriation of nativist politics or the indigenous discourse of identity were crucial in its electoral success (2020). These two aspects need a bit of elaboration. Even though, Assam's socio-political terrain offered much complexities, certain historical and demographic prerequisites for the rise of Hindutva forces were already present in Assam (Srikanth, 1999). In this regard, the 'Muslim question' assumes considerable political importance. Whether Assam will remain a Hindu dominated state in the face of increasing numbers of Muslims has remained a persistent theme in the state's politics. The increasing number of Muslim population is often seen as a threat to the security and identity of the Hindu population of the state. This concern is closely tied to the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh, which politics has failed to resolve till now. Further, an important question in Assam today is not merely about illegal migration but about the population explosion of the *Miya* Muslims in the state that has received significant socio-political attention (Mahanta, 2021). This problem provides a fertile ground for BJP to consolidate its position in Assam.⁶ Along with this, BJP has made indigeneity as the core issue of political mobilization (Tripathi et al., 2018). BJP captured the identity narrative or the *Khilonjiya* (Indigeneity) discourse long present in the society and emphasized on preserving the identity and culture of the indigenous people in the face of swift demographic change in the state (Misra, 2016). BJP's rhetoric of protecting *Jati, Mati, Bheti* of the indigenous populace managed to capture the political imagination of the people.

Accordingly, the interplay of religion and indigeneity were crucial in BJP's electoral success. In the background of such developments, we must understand how BJP has navigated the Muslim question in Assam. Based on BJP's political trajectory in the state, we argue that both the frames of religion and indigeneity have come to shape BJP's politics towards the Muslims in Assam.

Muslims in Assam: The Underlying Faults

A presumed singularity of the 'Muslim' as an identity dominates the popular and political discourse. Muslim as an identity and a religious category is often taken for granted to be homogenous and a unified whole transcending regional, cultural-social-political boundaries. This straitjacketing of multiple Muslim identities erases the particularities within the Muslim identity and reduces it to a few stereotypical assumptions, for example- Talaq, Polygamy, High birth rate, conservative, communal

⁶ BJP has made the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh one of its main electoral planks, after hijacking the issue from the regional party AGP (Asom Gana Parishad). The Congress government, both at the Centre and in the state, showed apathy towards resolving the issues of deportation and detection of illegal foreigners. While other parties, both national and regional, have failed to address this issue concretely, the BJP took the opportunity to project itself as a party capable and credible enough to resolve this unaddressed issue. Consequently, the focus of the BJP has shifted towards the issue of Muslim population increase in the state, See, Sandhya Goswami, *Assam Politics in Post-Congress Era: 1985 and beyond*, Delhi: Sage, 2020.

and so on (Ibrahim, 2020). Much of the discourse on Muslims in India has sought to break the myth that the Muslims in India are a monolithic community; rather, contrary to popular assumption they are a heterogeneous lot. They represent both vertical and horizontal unevenness and also exhibit in-depth socio-economic, linguistic and cultural differences. This is true even in the context of the Muslims of Assam, as they form a highly heterogeneous community with a plethora of different dimensions. The Muslims of Assam although belong to the same religious faith, reflect significant sociological variations in terms of caste, class, language, occupation, education, geographical distribution, political ideology and culture (Sircar, 2017). Broadly speaking, Muslims in Assam are generally divided into two groups- Indigenous and Immigrant Muslims.⁷

Indigenous Muslims in Assam, also known as Assamese Muslims, are descendants of the captive prisoners and of the preachers and their disciples believed to have come from outside, as also of the converts from local tribes and communities in ancient and medieval Assam (Nofil, 2021). They were a significant component of the Medieval Assamese society and polity (Baruah, 1978) and over the centuries they have contributed immensely towards the development of the region and have been an integral part of the process of the formation of Assamese nationality. This category of the Muslims is deeply assimilated and relatively well accepted in the larger society and Assamese nationality (Hussain, 1993). By and large they see themselves as part of the larger Assamese speaking community together with Assamese Hindus and many of them are conscious about being distinct from *Miya* Muslims (Nofil, 2021).

On the other hand, *Miya* Muslims are still considered as immigrants at the popular level. The migration of this community started during the colonial period, starting from the late 19th and early 20th century, mainly from Bengal. This was an internal migration of an oppressed peasant community from one part of the same country to another part in search of a better life (Hussain, 1993). What basically started as an economic problem eventually got transformed into a matter of extremely complicated controversy with ramifications into social, political, cultural and linguistic aspects of Assam's life (Kar, 1990). Accordingly, to deal with the emerging concerns due to the ongoing migration, the Assamese middle-class leadership expressed their willingness to assimilate the '*Ana-Axamiyas*' (non-Assamese) into the Assamese nationality. For the Assamese middle class, Assamese language became the primary marker, the sole criteria, of identification as Assamese. Accordingly, over the time, the community came to be known as *Na-Axamiya* or Neo-Assamese. However, such attempts were never complete and in fact were destabilized by contemporary colonial and postcolonial developments. Initially many from within the *Miya* community

⁷Immigrant Muslim' is used to imply those Muslims that came to Assam after the advent of the British colonialism in the nineteenth century. See C.K Sharma, "The Immigration issue in Assam and Conflicts around it", *Asian Ethnicity*, 13(3), 2012, pp. 287-309. Previous academic analyses have often relied on such a distinction. See B.J Dev and D.K Lahiri, *Assam Muslims: Politics and Cohesion*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985; M.K Nath, *The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India*, Oxon: Routledge, 2021.

came to accept this designation. It was expected that with the passage of time they would become *Axamiya* (Assamese) from *Na-Axamiya*. But the turbulent anti-foreigner movement in Assam created hurdles on the way of the formation of greater *Axamiya* nationality. Instead of getting recognition as *Axamiya* they were belittled with names, such as *Miya*, Bangladeshi, *Bidexi* (Kumar, 2022). In this regard, Yasmin Saikia has argued that unlike the indigenous Muslims, *Miya* Muslims never got to experience the process of *Xanmiholi*⁸ due to colonial and the post-colonial socio-political developments. Emphasizing on this aspect, Udayon Misra argued that, it would be simplistic to conclude that the cordiality and warmth which has marked the relationship between the large majority of the Assamese-Hindus and the rather small minority of the indigenous Assamese-Muslim community would be continued in the case of Assamese Hindus and the *Miya* Muslims. He has particularly emphasized upon the political capital that the community enjoys today and how that creates a concern for the Assamese Hindus (2014), a concern that has equally been shared by the indigenous Muslims in the state.

An analysis of the identity concerns of the indigenous Muslims vis-à-vis *Miya* Muslims reveals its multidimensional character ranging from social, political, cultural, economic. Indigenous Muslims have long claimed that their unique identity as 'Assamese Muslims' have been threatened due to the increasing number of the *Miya* Muslims. They are afraid that due to their identical religious affiliations with the *Miya* Muslims their unique identity with its special feature *Assamese-ness* may be lost (Mumtaz, 2019). It is also argued that the homogenization of the Muslim identity also put indigenous Muslims in a vulnerable position as in the everyday discourse of illegality, the entire Muslim community is branded as illegal immigrants. Further, the growing dominance of the *Miya* Muslims in electoral politics of Assam has made the Assamese Muslims sceptical towards the community. Unlike the *Miya* Muslims, the Assamese Muslims don't live in contiguous areas. So, they do not have the dominance in any assembly constituency from upper and middle Assam and Barak Valley. In contrast to that due to their numerical strength, the *Miya* Muslims are decisive in at least 30 assembly constituencies from lower and middle Assam and Barak valley (Nath, 2007). Consequently, the loss of political capital has created a sense of concern among the indigenous Muslims as it has significant consequences in terms of the sharing of material benefits from the state. Further, the economic and educational advancement of the *Miya* Muslim community have further challenged the hegemony of the Assamese Muslims. In such a socio-political context, marked by difference, BJP's politics assumes importance.

⁸ A blend/mix/fusion of histories and identities which helped in the emergence of Assamese as dynamic identity that had Assamese Muslims (and other communities) as its constituting element. For more discussion on this concept, see Yasmin Saikia, "The Muslims of Assam: Present/Absent History" in, *Northeast India: A Place of Relations*, ed. Yasmin Saikia and Amit R. Baishya, 2017.

Good Muslim/Bad Muslim: Understanding Hindutva Politics

A violent rhetoric has characterized the last two legislative assembly elections in Assam. While the 2016 legislative assembly election was touted to be a 'battle', the last battle of *Saraighat* (Sethi and Subhrastha, 2017) to be precise, the 2021 election was a 'clash/conflict of two civilizations' (Express News Service, 2020). The election/battle/clash/conflict was to take place against the illegal (Bangladeshi) immigrants and their culture. Such conflation of election and a battle/clash is based on the otherization of and making an enemy out of the illegal immigrant who have come to 'reside within' and whose numbers have grown exponentially, posing an existential threat- (perceived or real?)- to the indigenous populace of the state. In BJP's imagination the illegal immigrant is none other than a Muslim. Here it must be pointed out that the narrative of illegal immigration has a long history in BJP's notebook. In this regard, Ramchandran argues that, as Hindu nationalist organisations came to the forefront of Indian society and politics, their discourse drew attention to the seemingly unfamiliar, largely unregulated, and surreptitious population flows from neighbouring Bangladesh. A substantial body of propaganda texts drafted by the Sangh Parivar's ideologues or supporters outside the fold chillingly, solidly, and in great detail outlined the supposed manifold dangers of 'infiltration'. Their xenophobic discourses characterized the undocumented immigrants, not commonly as aliens or illegal immigrants but rather as infiltrators representing a visible threat to the long-term existence of an enfeebled Hindu-Indian nation (Ramachandran, 2003). However, in BJP's narrative Hindu Bangladeshis emerge as refugees, and they advocate for their citizenship status while demanding deportation of Muslim Bangladeshis (Shamshad, 2019).

Accordingly, while Muslims have consistently been positioned as an 'Other' in the broader conversations on migration by Hindutva forces, there are certain nuances in the way BJP has dealt with the Muslim question in Assam. BJP's rhetoric has not been linear as it seems to have maintained a 'strategic distinction', at least at a surface level, between the indigenous and the immigrant *Miya* Muslims. As the current chief minister of Assam argued:

When we speak of Muslims in Assam, there are two types - one is the indigenous Assamese Muslims, who usually vote for the BJP and, even if they don't vote for us, they are associated with our culture and heritage. Whereas the other category is of those who do not even have their names properly in the NRC as of now (Sabrang India, 2021).

The BJP has constantly maintained that they have no conflict with the indigenous Assamese Muslims and that they are an important part of Assamese society. Accordingly, they seem to have been promoting the cause of the indigenous Muslims. They have argued that:

Assamese Muslims are being exploited. They do not have any representative in the Assembly or any parliamentary constituency. Nobody talks about them or their plight. So, the BJP is strongly on the side of the Assamese Muslim community (Express News Service, 2020).

However, this outreach to indigenous Muslims is not unusual or exceptional if we see it in the larger context of its attempts to reach out to social groups who are usually not its traditional supporters. In a significant study, Badri Narayan has shown how organizations based on the Hindutva ideology, such as the RSS and its affiliates, work at the grassroots to ensure their expansion socially, culturally and politically. As a part of its strategy to bring more and more sections of the population under its wing, the RSS is constantly trying to reach social communities who are not yet under its influence. Dalits, tribals and Muslims are the groups on which the RSS is working hard. He argues that RSS and its various wings use tactics of appropriation and accommodation to co-opt social groups like Dalits, tribals and minorities within its framework (2021). Through such analyses, Bardi Narayan questions the stereotypes and myths about Hindutva politics, organizations and their socio-political actions, which exist due to certain biases resulting from our distance from grassroots realities (2021). Even though, Badi Narayan's work has faced certain criticisms, his analyses do provide the ever-evolving picture of how politics gets manifested beyond the cliches of critic's accounts (Reddy, 2020).

In this regard, BJP's recent attempts to woo *Pasmanda*⁹ Muslims is a case in point. The BJP's recent overtures to *Pasmanda* Muslims have sparked heated debates in Indian politics as this outreach unfolds against a backdrop of escalating communal tensions and contentious politics, further complicating the matter (Nehal, 2023). Hilal Ahmed argues that BJP's strategy to reach out to *Pasmanda* communities must not be seen through the prism of politically outdated metaphors like 'social justice', 'minority appeasement', and/or desire for 'inclusiveness'. Further, by cautioning against reducing the party's mobilizational strategies and electoral tactics to Hindutva rhetoric, he argues that BJP's *Pasmanda* policy actually stems from party's professional attitude and managerial approach (2023). He writes:

It is true that BJP has been committedly adhering to the ideology of Hindutva since its inception. However, it does not mean that the party leaders do not pay attention to those practical considerations that do not fit well in the Hindutva-driven framework of politics. In fact, many a time the party does not hesitate to deviate from its ideological premises to deal with emerging political realities. BJP, in fact, has produced a workable equilibrium that maintains a balance between party's ideology and the context-specific moves. BJP's Pasmanda outreach is an excellent example of this politics of professionalism (2023).

⁹Pasmanda, a word of Persian origin literally means those who have fallen behind, broken or oppressed.

Such context specific move is also witnessed in BJP's outreach to indigenous Muslims. While BJP has not fundamentally moved away from its Hindutva ideals, it has engaged with the indigenous Muslims in an effort to put them within its broader 'construct' of Assamese identity (however this development remains contentious). Most importantly it has sought to reap political mileage out of the identity concerns of the indigenous Muslims that has remained unacknowledged for years. Accordingly, the government formed a committee to identify the 'indigenous' within the 'Muslim' in Assam. The objective has been to carve out a distinct identity that separates them from the *Miya* Muslims who are considered as non-indigenous/immigrant. The committee was formed following a long demand by indigenous Muslims to protect their identity against the possible identity threat from a large population of *Miya* Muslims. Accordingly, following the committee's report the government has recognized *Goriya, Moriya, Deshi, Syeds* and *Julhas*¹⁰ as 'indigenous' Muslim communities (Singh, 2022). Further, the government has also given the approval for the socio-economic survey of the state's indigenous Muslims population. These moves are aimed at protecting their distinct socio-cultural identity as distinct from *Miya* Muslims.

As against these developments, *Miya* Muslims have emerged as the archetypal 'Bad Muslims'. In the current political landscape, the otherization of the community has manifested across various dimensions including social, political and cultural spheres. However, it is crucial to note that this otherization is not a recent-phenomena. It was during Assam movement, the otherization of *Miya* Muslims peaked when the entire community came to be branded as illegal immigrants. A sense of identity threat to the 'in-group' (the Assamese in this case) characterized the movement which in turn led to infliction of violence on the community. BJP's contemporary politics builds on and exacerbates such existing tensions between the Assamese and the *Miya* Muslims.

As argued earlier, the question of increasing population of *Miya* Muslims has become a focal point in the contemporary political discourse in Assam so much so that in the last few years the government has taken various political measures to address what it sees to be a potential threat to the indigenous population in the state. For example, the Assam government's proposed two child policy recommends cutting benefits in state government funded schemes to those who flout the norms. Interestingly, this proposed two child policy won't be affecting the Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe and tea garden communities. Further, the government also proposed to form a 'population army' to help curb birth rate in Muslim majority areas. In this regard, Dutta argues that a form of 'population populism' has come to characterize BJP's approach which is marked by both welfarism and a strong underlying sectarianism (Dutta, 2021). In fact, the BJP government at the centre and in Assam has not concealed its fears of a rapid increase in the Muslim population in the state (Dutta, 2017). Accordingly, BJP has been making efforts to consolidate the Hindu bloc, comprising Assamese

¹⁰ For more discussion about these identities, see, Report of the subcommittee on cultural identity of indigenous Assamese Muslims, 2021.

Hindus, Bengali Hindus, and various other tribal groups in the state. In this regard, BJP's population policies, despite its welfare tinge, cannot be delinked from their political discourse of Muslim otherization. A more aggressive development in this regard is the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, which despite its humanitarian tone, is rooted in Hindutva's political imagination. In Assam's context the act assumes significance as it seeks to (counter)balance the Muslim population in the state by providing citizenship to non-Muslims minorities from certain countries. In fact, that act has been touted as the biggest arsenal to stop Assam from becoming another Kashmir or a Muslim majority state.

BJP's anti-*Miya* politics has further materialized in a bout of state driven eviction drives. '*Mati* and *Bheti*' (land and home) have remained the two core political pillars of BJP's politics in the state. As one of BJP's stated political aim is to remove and recover encroached lands, it has carried out rounds of eviction drives in the state to that end. The popular discourse on these evictions sees them as being undertaken to clear government lands that have been encroached by 'doubtful citizens'- often translating to Bangladeshi illegal immigrants/*Miya* Muslims. The constant effort through popular media campaigns to establish the evicted masses as illegal Bangladeshis and encroachers further creates suspicion and hostility. In a recent incident of state driven eviction drive in *Jamugurihat*, in the *Sonitpur* district, a local news channel praised the administration for its 'courage' to evict the 'Mini Bangladesh'. Later on, it was taken off the air (DY365, 2021) due to outrage among the people. Such media representation reinforces and legitimizes state's action without scrutiny. However, a careful observation of these state-evictions reveals a pattern of targeting the Muslims in general and *Miya* Muslims in particular (Siddique, 2023; Azad, 2019) who have always remained at the margins in the state. According to Azad, these evictions serve a dual purpose- it reinforces BJP's politics of exclusion by identifying the state's Muslims as 'encroachers' and it polarizes the state on communal lines (2019). Further, it also helps BJP to consolidate its image as the protector of the indigenous interests. An empirical study done by Muktiar et al. too has found that the eviction policy of the government is not only communally divisive but also an attempt to gain political mileage in the name of evicting Bangladeshis (2018). Such political developments further put the *Miya* community in a vulnerable position in the society.

A lot of 'cultural talk' (Mamdani, 2004) has characterized BJP's *Miya*-centric politics. Even during the colonial period that witnessed the large-scale migration of Bengal origin Muslims, Middle class Assamese stalwarts like Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Nilamani Phukan saw the possibility of assimilating these people within the broader Assamese nationality (Hossain, 2021; Hossain, 2018). Such efforts further continued in the postcolonial period. A newly emerged middle class from the *Miya* community led by people like M. Illimuddin Dewan, Ataur Rahman, Ismail Hussain (Sr.) played an important role in bringing the community closer to the Assamese identity (Islam & Kalita, 2007). However, BJP's politics removes the

possibility of such integration. In fact, its politics is based on an anti-thesis between two competing cultures or civilizations- Assamese (read Hindu) and *Miya* (read Muslim), the latter being a threat to the former. The clash of these two civilizations is the new political narrative in today's Assam steered by Hindutva forces which fixes the *Miya* Muslims as the target whose civilization has allegedly posed a serious threat to the identities and age-old civilization of the local and indigenous people. In such cultural talk Badruddin Ajmal, a member of parliament from AIUDF, emerge as the sole representative, protector and a symbol of the *Miya* community. In fact, the community becomes 'Ajmal's people' and their language, culture and ethos emerge as alien to the Assamese community (The Quint, 2023). Such systematic and consistent campaign has gradually manufactured a mass hysteria against the community (Dutta, 2022).

Further, political talk assumes equal or probably more importance in BJP's narrative, as 'our culture' can only be protected if there is a political consolidation of 65% of Assam's population- that includes the caste Hindu Assamese, tribal population, *Bengalis*, *Marwaris* and other Hindi speakers in the state- as against the 35% of the Muslims. Interestingly, the rationale behind promoting such a consolidation is cultural, as it is argued that the roots of 65% of Assam's population is the Indian civilization which stands in contrast to the foreign-ness of the *Miya* Muslims (Sarma, 2019). Accordingly, Assam has witnessed the formation of a 'rainbow coalition', bringing together diverse tribal and non-tribal communities in the region. While this coalition may have limitations beyond electoral arena, there is an expectation that it will extend its influence into the socio-cultural spheres (Sarma, 2019). This experimentation of BJP seems to be in line with its attempt towards constructing a 'non-Brahminical Hindutva' that it has tried in Uttar Pradesh by including OBC's Dalits and others within its fold (Pai and Kumar, 2019). Here too in Assam it has attempted to form a '*Mahajati*' by incorporating every (non-*Miya*) communities in the region so that both cultural and political identity of the Assamese/Indigenous/Hindus can be protected.

Interrogating the Strategic Distinction: Tension within BJP's Politics

An important question that can be raised here is that, in co-opting the concerns of the indigenous Muslims has BJP moved away from its hardcore Hindutva stance? Not necessarily. In Assam, while a soft Hindutva stance of BJP could be witnessed during its initial years (Dutta, 2021), it has not strayed from its fundamental principles of Hindutva. In fact, over the time it has reverted to its original hard-line Hindutva agenda. According to Gohain, during the 2016 legislative assembly election, BJP was uncertain about its hold over the masses and therefore had chosen to stress the indigenous and the Assamese identity. However, during the 2019 general election their stress was on Hindu identity (Gohain in Ameen, 2021) and this trend continued afterwards. In other words, BJP's Hindu supremacist politics, which thrive on hate campaign against Muslims, seem to have overtaken ethnic Assamese nationalism,

prevalent for decades in Assam (Ameen, 2021). Recent studies (Donthi, 2021; Bijukumar, 2019) too have pointed towards the political transition in Assam from ethnonationalism to Hindutva¹¹ which in turn has made the Muslim question a much relevant political issue. In this regard, Nath argues that Muslims constitute more than one-third of the total population in Assam. BJP realises that, in such a demographic equation, only Muslim communalism can help it in the future to return to power through the consolidation of the Hindu votes against the Muslims (2021). Accordingly, in the last few years BJP has brought in its usual political tropes of love jihad, mandir-masjid-madrassa, beef politics, Islamic fundamentalism, flood jihad and all the other issues where religion- Hindu and Muslim- becomes the overt categories of political mobilization.

Drawing parallels with Kashmir the incumbent chief minister has asserted that Muslim in Assam are not a minority, igniting apprehensions about Assamese people sharing the same fate as Kashmiri pandits. He held that Muslims must behave like majority and they must assure that the Kashmir situation is not repeated here (Singh, 2022). Such rhetoric obliterates the internal distinctions within the Muslim category and the extant socio-cultural and political power relations. However, such fading away of the internal boundaries is not new. While the government would like to maintain a distinction between the two categories of the Muslim population at the policy level, how it actually maintains such a distinction at the ground is not very clear. In fact, in some of its actions it has failed to do so. Indigenous Muslims too had to face the government's eviction drive that was ostensibly aimed at *Miya* Muslims who are often portrayed as illegal settlers (Karmakar, 2021). It is for the purpose of ensuring such a distinction that many indigenous Muslim groups have demanded identity cards and a census to identify the indigenous within the Muslims in Assam. In recent times there have also been targeted attacks on historical figures like Bagh Hazarika, a revered personality for the indigenous Muslims who fought for Ahoms against the Mughals. Hindu Jagaran Mancha has termed it as a fictional character. They also alleged that Hazarika's character was created to 'tarnish' the image of Lachit Borphukan, the commander leading the Ahom army (India Today NE, 2021). Another such incident was when a BJP MLA termed noted poet-writer Syed Abdul Malik as 'intellectual Jihadi' creating sharp reaction across the state (The Wire, 2020). Such incidents elicited strong resentment among the indigenous Muslim community bringing out the underlying tensions within BJP's policy of maintaining a distinction between the two groups of Muslims.

BJP often maintains that the indigenous minority communities are sons of the soil and there is no need for them to be afraid of any political discourse. Any discourse may take place in the political arena but the indigenous minority people being the sons of the soil should not be swayed away or be afraid of any such discussion (India Blooms News Service, 2016). However, what is not acknowledged here is

¹¹ This is not however to argue that this process is complete. But it does point towards the political dominance of Hindutva in Assam

that political discourses have the power to construct social realities by positioning the subjects within certain socially othered categories.¹² In the common imaginations, Muslims are seen as a politically conscious community, which is supposed to be fully aware of its communal interests and that they participate in politics to bargain with the state for the protection of their collective, communal, and eventually separatist interests (Ahmed, 2022). This political understanding of the Muslim identity often obliterates specificities within the universal Muslim identity. In this regard, BJP's political discourse assumes significance, as it raises the question of whether the distinction they maintain between indigenous and *Miya* Muslims at the political level gets equally translated into distinction at the social level. In the recent GMC election, BJP held that they do not need the votes from people living in areas like Garigaon, Hatigon. The underlying logic was that, those areas were inhabited by Muslims. The parties winning those two seats were branded as exclusively catering to the needs of the Muslims. Such political discourse, normalizes the otherization of the Muslims in the state. Accordingly, even though the BJP seeks to maintain a distinction between the two groups, everyday political rhetoric often blurs these categories, causing existing social division within the Muslim community to become obscured, with the result that 'Muslim' Identity as a whole emerges as the Other.

Emerging Dynamics

While the recognition ensured by the government as indigenous Muslims might assuage their existing concerns regarding its identity vis-à-vis the *Miya* Muslims, however, concerns and ambiguity still remain. A society that has witnessed significant social assimilation and continuous intermingling between the communities, the move has been seen as divisive. Such labels given to Muslims as indigenous and non-indigenous/immigrants are seen as a strategy to divide the Muslim community and strengthen the Hindutva project (Saikia, 2021). It is also seen as an attempt to further alienate *Miya* Muslims from the mainstream society by creating friendly and enemy Muslims. It has also been argued that in the guise of championing the cause of indigenous Muslims, the BJP and its cohorts are demonising *Miya* Muslims (Hazarika, 2020). Even within the indigenous Muslim community though the decision has been welcomed there remains lot of uneasiness. What has created further concern is the very question of indigeneity itself. While, politics of indigeneity has been a characteristic feature of Assam's politics, yet no such definition of indigenous exists, which keeps it open for legal contestation. Accordingly, many have seen BJP's recognition to the Assamese Muslims as a political gimmick.

Further, BJP's attempt at reconstructing Assamese identity as a Hindu identity, raises significant question regarding the identity of the indigenous Assamese Muslims. In the context of changed demography, as BJP seeks to protect Assamese identity

¹² For more discussion on positioning and discourse, see, Michael Peters and Stephen Appel, Positioning Theory: Discourse, the subject and the problem of desire, *Social Analysis*, No.40, 1996, pp. 120-141; Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

by including within its fold, communities who have been living here for centuries, like tribals, tea community and the Hindi speakers (Sarma in Press trust of India, 2024); the Muslims seldom find a space within such constructions, at least in popular imaginations. While BJP can still claim that indigenous Muslims are a part of such construction of Assamese identity, how it gets translated and received at the societal level remains ambiguous. This tilt of Assamese identity to its religious Hindu credentials creates an uneasy situation, raising question about what position indigenous Muslims occupy within such an identity that they have long been sharing as equals. Accordingly, is the demand for recognition of particular ethnic identity, as *Goriya*, *Moriya*, *Deshi*, *Julaha* etc., by various groups of indigenous Muslims a response to such socio-political developments? The unsettled nature of these questions calls for a more in-depth examination of the implications and consequences surrounding the recognition of indigenous Muslims and the broader construction of the Assamese identity.

Contemporary Hindutva politics also has significant implication for the *Miya* Muslim identity as the community finds itself marginalized on multiple fronts. *Firstly*, the community has been portrayed as an enemy of the Assamese people and their culture. *Secondly*, the community has been portrayed as a perceived threat to the Indigenous Muslims. The ongoing evictions have further trapped them in a cycle of poverty and hardship (Siddique, 2021). The cultural politics propagated by BJP intensifies the social estrangement experienced by the *Miya* community. Further, their citizenship status has become more tangled, leading to a blurring of the distinction between the citizen and the non-citizen. While such developments intensify marginalization of the community, it also give rise to a counter politics of assertion of the much-detested *Miya* Identity. The realization that they are alone in this battle against a Hindu-right wing behemoth holding forth both at the centre and the state has triggered massive mobilization among the *Miya* Muslim community mainly through its young educated and right conscious generation to articulate their issues as much as possible both at the national and international platforms. Lack of voices rising from within the Assamese community reclaiming the *Miya* Muslims as part of the wider Assamese society, also has aggravated the matter (Pisharoty, 2019). Consequently, as part of this counter politics of assertion, attempts are being made to identify certain contents of that identity representative of the *Miya* culture-*Lungi*(sarong), *Miya* dialect being the most prominent. In fact, There has been emerging articulations about *Miya* culture,¹³even though it has been marred by political controversy. Most importantly there have been attempts at re-appropriation of the *Miya* identity by challenging

¹³ Recently, a private centre showcasing the culture and heritage of Bengali-speaking Muslims was inaugurated primarily by members of the All-Assam *Miya* Parishad at Dapkarbhita in the Lakhipur circle of Goalpara district. They named it [the Miya Museum](#). The Parishad had intimated the district head about the opening of the museum. Some legislators and former MLAs of the BJP interpreted the museum as a cultural aggression and asked the government to pull it down. See, Rahul Karmakar, "Why was the *Miya* museum in Assam sealed?", The Hindu, October 30, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/explained-why-was-the-miya-museum-in-assam-sealed/article66074947.ece>

the prevailing stereotypes against the identity.¹⁴ While such an emergent identity discourse has been empowering for the community in the face of virulent attacks by the regime, many have come to see such assertion as providing a ground for BJP to further its divisive politics. Such assertion has been portrayed as separatism which has allowed further subjugation of the *Miya* Muslims in the state (Gohain, 2019). It has provided BJP the means to cast the community as an enemy of the Assamese society. The following narrative substantiates this development:

here is a community which has distorted Assamese language and created a language called Miya... It is not an independent culture, they distorted Assamese poetry and started Miya poetry... So, it is aggression. They tell people that they want to assert their identity. What is the need to assert identity? That means you want to aggressively counter Assamese culture by encroaching on land of our monasteries... We will not accept this type of assertion. This is not acceptable to us... (Sarma in Express News Service, 2022)

The current political conjecture creates a significant dilemma for *Miya* Muslims as they remain unacknowledged as Assamese while simultaneously facing backlash for asserting their particular identity. Accordingly, these developments offer a complex political situation in front of the *Miya* Muslims as they are getting cornered from all the sides.

Conclusion

As the cultural politics promoted by BJP takes the 'popular form', the consequent mix of politics and identity among indigenous and *Miya* Muslims gives rise to new complexities, having significant implications for the socio-political relations between the two communities. In fact, a careful look at the present politics indicates towards the deepening of the faults between the two communities as revealed in the assertion of their respective identities. Such attempt towards the construction and the reconstruction of identities, in turn, has consequences for how certain identities like Indigenous Muslim, *Miya* Muslim, Muslim and the Assamese identity evolve from here. The claim for and the acknowledgement of indigeneity of the indigenous Muslims also reveals the regional character of the Muslim identity. Interestingly, while in the popular imagination, the quintessential indigenous is usually a tribal community, while Muslim being the other, the present politics widens the discourse of indigeneity in the state (while simultaneously remaining exclusive).

The assertion of *Miya* identity has also led to much tension between the majoritarian Assamese community and the *Miya* community. Critiques argue that the attempt to assert the *Miya* identity is a move towards further fragmentation of Assamese identity

¹⁴ See, Urmitapa Dutta, The Politics and Poetics of Fieldnotes: Decolonising Ethnographic Knowing, *Qualitative Enquiry*, 27(5), 2020; *Miya* Poetry: Poetics, Politics and Polemics, Abdul Kalam Azad and Gorky Chakraborty, in *Citizenship in Contemporary Times*, ed. Gorky Chakraborty, Oxon: Routledge, 2023.

by halting the assimilation process of this community into Assamese nationality. While it must be admitted that many from this community have been well accepted today, whether such acceptance reaches to all the members of the community is a question and how we reduce this gap remains the biggest challenge. In fact, the contemporary developments significantly hinder the possibility of assimilation of the community into the larger Assamese nationality. This unfolding landscape presents many questions that remains unanswered, highlighting the complex intercourse of identity and politics in the state.

References

- Ahmed, Hilal (2022). New India, Hindutva constitutionalism, and Muslim political attitudes. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 10 (1), 62-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230221082833>
- Ahmed, Hilal (2023). Pasmanda Muslims and BJP's politics of professionalism. *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/pasmanda-muslims-and-bjps-politics-of-professionalism-2358069-2023-04-10>
- Ameen, Furquan (2021). Stress on Hindu identity: BJP hate campaign in poll-bound Assam. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/stress-on-hindu-identity-bjp-hate-campaign-in-poll-bound-assam>
- Azad, A. K (2019). How the BJP weaponised evictions as a tool against Assam's Bengali Muslim residents. *The Caravan*. <https://caravanmagazine.in/religion/bjp-weaponised-evictions-tool-assam-muslim-residents>
- Baruah, S.L (1978). The Muslim population in Pre-British Assam: Their Social Status and Role in Cultural History. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39(1), 570-580. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44139398>
- Bhattacharjee, Malini (2016): Tracing the emergence and consolidation and Hindutva in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51 (16), 80-87. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44003801>
- Bijukumar, V (2019). *Parties and Electoral Politics in Northeast India*, Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.
- Donthi, Praveen (2021). India: Assam's Easy Transition from Ethnonationalism to Hindutva, *Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres*. <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article59725>
- Dutta, A.R (2017). Assam's population policy, 2017: Overstated Numbers and Underlying Agendas. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52 (48), 19-21.
- Dutta, A.R (2021). Population populism: Assam's population control policy: A misguided approach. *Down to Earth*. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/population-populism-assam-s-population-control-policy-a-misguided-approach--78089>
- Dutta, A.R (2021). *Hindutva Regime in Assam: Saffron in the Rainbow*, New Delhi: SAGE.
- Dutta, A. R (2022). Muslims and Hindutva in Assam. *Seminar*. <https://www.india-seminar.com/2022/758/758-09%20AKHIL%20RANJAN%20DUTTA.htm>
- DY365. "Clarification." (In Assamese). Facebook. 2021. <https://m.facebook.com/DY365/photos/a.133054626722182/4720058021355130/?type=3&source=57>

- Express News Service (2020). *Himanta Biswa Sarma: NRC, CAA no longer the discourse... Issue now is conflict of cultures, this claim of Miya identity*. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/himanta-biswa-sarma-nrc-caa-no-longer-the-discourse-issue-now-is-conflict-of-cultures-this-claim-of-miya-identity-7061653/>
- Gohain, Hiren (2019). *Debate: Miyah Poetry in the Assam context*. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/culture/debate-miyah-poetry-in-the-assam-context>
- Goswami, Sandhya (2020). *Assam Politics in Post-Congress Era: 1985 and beyond*. New Delhi: Sage, 2020.
- Hansen, T.B. (1996). The vernacularisation of Hindutva: The BJP and Shiv Sena in rural Maharashtra. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 30(2), 174-214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996679603000201>
- Hazarika, Myithili (2020, February 17): *BJP wants to segregate Assamese Muslims from Bangladeshi Muslims, but Some Ask How*. The Print. <https://theprint.in/india/bjp-wants-to-segregate-assamese-muslims-from-bangladeshi-muslims-but-some-ask-how/363736/>
- Hussain, Monirul (1993): *The Assam Movement: Class Ideology and Identity*, Delhi: Manak Publications.
- Ibrahim, Farhana (2020): Representing the 'Minority'. In Rowena Robinson (Edited), *Minority Studies* (pp. 118-137). Oxford University Press.
- India Today NE (2021, November 25): *Hindu Jagaran Manch claims Bagh Hazarika to be Fiction: India Today NE*. <https://www.indiatodayne.in/assam/story/hindu-jagaran-manch-claims-bagh-hazarika-be-fiction-411379-2021-11-25>
- India Blooms News Service. (2010). Indigenous Minority should not be afraid of any political discourse. *India Blooms*. <https://www.indiablooms.com/news-details/N/25650/indigenous-minority-should-not-be-afraid-of-any-political-discourse-assam-cm.html>
- Islam, Sahidul& Kalita, Kamal (2007): *Ajan*. Jorhat: Assam Sahitya Sabha.
- Kar, M (1990). *Muslim in Assam Politics*. Delhi: Om Sons Publications.
- Karmakar, Rahul (2021, October 24): *Indigenous Muslims feel the heat of eviction drive in Assam*. The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indigenous-muslims-feel-heat-of-eviction-drive-in-assam/article37151983.ece>
- Kolås, Åshild. (2023). This World and the "Other": Muslim Identity and Politics on the Indo-Bangladesh Border, *Alternatives*, 48 (4), 223-241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754231196587>
- Kumar, Nayan Moni (2022). *Miya Poetry: Identity Contestations and Reappropriation*. Economic and Political Weekly, 57(17) 62-68. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/17/special-articles/miya-poetry.html>
- Kumar, Nayan Moni (2024). Beyond Common consciousness: Understanding the rise of separate identity consciousness among indigenous Muslims of Assam. *Asian Ethnicity*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2023.2301340>
- Mamdani, Mahmood (2004). *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*. Doubleday.
- Misra, Udayon (2014). *India's North-East: Identity Movements. State and Civil Society*.

Oxford University Press.

Misra, Udayon (2016, May 28). Victory for identity politics, Not Hindutva in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(22), 20-23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44004317>

Muktiair, Pinku., Nath, P., Dekka, M. (2018). The communal Politics of eviction drives in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(8). <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/communal-politics-eviction-drives-assam>

Narayan, Badri. (2021). *Republic of Hindutva: How the Sangh is reshaping Indian Democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Nath, M.K (2007). Future of Muslim Community in Electoral Politics of Assam. *Social Change and Development*, 5, 143-156.

Nath, M.K (2021). *The Muslim question in Assam and Northeast India*. Oxon: Routledge.

Nehal, Ashraf (2023). The complex game of BJP's Pasmanda Policy. *The wire*. <https://thewire.in/politics/pasmanda-muslim-bjp-caste-survey>

Nofil, Z.M (2021). *The Identity Quotient: The Story of Assamese Muslims*. Har-Anand Publications Pvt Ltd.

Pai, Sudha & Sajjan Kumar. (2019). *Everyday Communalism: Riots in contemporary Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Phukan, Girin. (1996). *Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India*. Spectrum publications.

Press Trust of India. (2024). Definition of Assamese must include those living here for years: Himanta Sarma. *Indian Today*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/himanta-biswa-sarma-says-definition-of-assamese-has-changed-it-must-include-those-living-here-for-years-2509634-2024-03-02>

Pisharoty, S.B (2019). *Assam: The Accord The Discord*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India.

Prabhakara, M.S. (1994). BJP and the North-East. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 14(1), 66–71. <https://doi.org/10.1215/07323867-14-1-66>

Ramachandran, Sujata. (2003). Operation Pushback: Sangh Parivar, State, Slums and Surreptitious Bangladeshis in New Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(7), 637-647. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00133>

Reddy, D.S (2020). What is Neo about Neo-Hindutva. In Edward Anderson and ArkotongLongkumer (eds.), *Neo Hindutva: Evolving Forms, Spaces and Expressions of Hindu Nationalism*. Oxon: Routledge.

SabrangIndia (2021). Don't need Miya Muslim vote: Himanta Biswa Sarma. *Sabrang*. <https://sabrangindia.in/article/dont-need-miya-muslim-vote-himanta-biswa-sarma>

Saikia, Saikia (2020). Saffronizing the periphery: Explaining the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party in contemporary Assam. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 8(1), 69-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023020918064>

Saikia, Yasmin (2021). Muslim Belongingness in Assam: History, Politics and the Future. *South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies*, 44(5), 868- 887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1962061>

Sarma, H.B (2019). *Bhinna Samay Abhinna Mat*. Guwahati: Saraswati printers and publishers Ltd.

Sethi, Rajat & Shubhrastha (2017). *The Last Battle of Saraighat: The story of the BJP's rise in the North-East*. Penguin Books.

Shamshad, Rizwana (2019). Are Bangladeshi Migrants in India foreigners, refugees or infiltrators, asks this new book. *Scroll.in*. <https://scroll.in/article/947343/are-bangladeshi-migrants-in-india-foreigners-refugees-or-infiltrators-asks-this-new-book>

Singh, Bikash (2022). Muslims constitute 35% of Assam's population, they cannot be a minority, says CM Sarma. *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/muslims-constitute-35-of-assams-population-they-cannot-be-a-minority-says-cm-sarma/articleshow/90245598.cms>

Sircar, S.I (2017). *The Muslim Family in an Emerging Urban Space: A study of Axomiya Muslims* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Gauhati University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/222334>

Nilanjan Sircar (2022). Religion as Ethnicity and the Emerging Hindu Vote in India. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 10(1), 79-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230221082824>

Swabana, Mumtaz (2019). *The Assamese Muslims: A Socio-political study with special reference to Darrang district* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Gauhati University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/301518>

Siddique, Nazimuddin (2021). Assam's Miya community is now threatened with eviction. *Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/miya-community-muslims-nrc-eviction-7554387/>

Siddique, Nazimuddin (2023). Evictions as the latest tool of citizenship exclusion in Assam, *The wire*. <https://thewire.in/rights/evictions-as-the-latest-tool-of-citizenship-exclusion-in-assam>

Singh, Bikash (2022). Assam cabinet approves identification of five indigenous Assamese Muslims communities. *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/assam-cabinet-approves-identification-of-five-indigenous-assamese-muslim-communities/articleshow/92685132.cms?from=mdr>

Srikanth, H (1999). Communalising Assam: AGP's loss is BJP's Gain. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(49), 3412-3414.

The Wire (2020): Complaints Filed Against Assam BJP MLA Over Communal Comments on Syed Abdul Malik. *The Wire*. <https://thewire.in/communalism/complaints-assam-bjp-mla-shiladitya-dev-syed-abdul-malik>

Tripathi, V., Das, T., & Goswami, S. (2018). National Narrative and regional Subtext: Understanding the Rise of BJP in Assam. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 6(1), 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023018762676>

The Quint, (2024). Prioritise education or Ajmal's people will take all seats, says Himanta Biswa. <https://www.thequint.com/news/himanta-biswa-sarma-assam-cm-ajmals-people-education-remark#read-more>