



‘Miya’ Centric Politics in Assam: Facts and Truth

Dr. Abdus Sobur

Asstt. Professor, Deptt. of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi Memorial College, Lengtisinga

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ABSTRACT

‘Miya’ is a term that denotes to respected person in Bengali speaking Muslim Community of Assam. This community of people in Assam has been facing identity crises in post independence Assam as they given different name by different personalities of Assam. For instance, this Bengali-speaking Muslim community is often self-identifying as "Na-Asamiya" (Neo-Assamese), who are descendants of migrants from the Bengal region (mostly modern-day Bangladesh) who settled in the Brahmaputra Valley during British rule in the 20th century. The term is often used pejoratively. Sometimes they are called “Luitpuria’ and ‘Noiporia’ too. They are distinct from "indigenous Assamese Muslims" like Gorias, Morias, Sayeds, Jolhas, etc. Originally, there is no any community like ‘Miyan’ in Assam. They are the victims of their destiny, as they lack economic prosperity and proper education. They have been facing a lots of problems and difficulties to survive not only from natural disaster but also from so called extreme nationalists backed by Government and media by misleading propaganda and facts. It is true that they have migrated within undivided Indian regions from Mymensingh, Rangpur, and Bengal to Assam during British colonial rule. The waves of such migration took place between 1757 and 1947. After the migration, they have adopted the Assamese language as their mother tongue in government institutions although they have been practicing Bengali language at their home. This has made them different from Hindu Bengali community people who have not gave up their

identity and culture. The term 'Miya' is considered derogatory by many, and the community often faces issues related to citizenship and ethnic identity in Assam. They have been sitting in examinations decade after decades, passing and still facing suspicion and hence again compelled to appear in the same examination to prove citizenship and the process is going on. Nobody knows the end of this examination to prove citizenship.

Historical Background of Bengali Speaking Muslims in Assam

Assam is an integral part of the union of India. There are 28 states and 8 Union Territories in India comprising about 143 Crores of population. **As per the report of the Technical Group by the National Commission, the population of Assam is projected to be 3.68 crore, as of July 1, 2026.**¹This is not a small number of population. It exceeds the number of population of countries like *Australia (2.7 crore)*, *Cameroon (2.8–2.9 crore)*, *Nepal (2.9–3.0 crore)*, *North Korea (2.5–2.6 crore)*, *Syria (2.3–2.5 crore)*, *Venezuela (2.8 crore)*, *Switzerland (0.90 Crore)*.²The state of Assam has a pride place in so far as the population is concerned. Again, *Assam is the 14th most populous state in India.*³The Ahoms, the Bodos, Koch-Kasaries, Tiwa, Karbi, Missing, Dimasa, Goria, Moria, Deshi, Rabha, Hajong, Garo, Nepali, Bengali Hindus, Beangali Speaking Muslims, Kalita, Nath, Jogi, Motok, Moran, etc. community people have been living in the state since long past. There is th socio-political harmony along with an ideal example of multiculturalism in Assam. But the issues of power politics have destroyed these ideal multicultural practices by targeting one particular community people in the name of Miya'.

Now the question arises here that who is 'Miya' people in Assam. *The Miya people, alternatively identified as 'Na-Asamiya' by themselves (literally meaning 'Neo-Assamese), denote the progeny of Bengali Muslim migrants originating from the contemporary Mymensingh, Tangail, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Cumilla regions.*⁴ These individuals established residence in the Brahmaputra Valley during the 20th century, coinciding with the period of British colonial rule in Assam. *The migration of the Miya people was actively promoted by the Colonial British Government from the Bengal Province, spanning the years 1757 to 1942. This migratory trend persisted until the year 1947.*⁵ This migrated Bengali speaking people constitute a large number of populations of Assam. They are provided nickname by different dignitaries of Assam in different times to mean them specifically and particularly. Sometime, they are called "Na-Asamiya" (Neo-Assamese), 'Luitpuria' (People residing in Luitpar, the alternative name of Brahmaputra), 'Pamua'(it refers to an immigrant), and 'Noiporia'(who settles or resides on the



bank of river). Presently, the term "Miya" is using by the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues to mean this Bengali Speaking Muslims of Assam who are mostly settled down in the 'Char-chapori' area of Brahmaputra valley in Assam. In the last January, 2026, Assam Chief Minister Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma had outburst against a section of the state's Muslim population, derogatorily described 'Miya's, as illegal Bangladeshi whose roots are alleged to be in Bangladesh. The chief minister Mr. Sarma said that his *'job is to make the Miya people suffer'*.⁶ But the question is that whether these Miya People are the citizens of the country or not? If not, then deport them lawfully without delay. The government is yours and all agencies of the land belong to your mighty government. Then why bother to take action? Alternately it is said that, if those people are the legal citizens of India, then why you discriminate with them? Why the chief of the state government offers such speech against a particular community of people? These are the questions to answer in proper way. Interestingly, the chief Minister and his Cabinet Colleagues use this derogatory word against the Bengali Speaking Muslims to take political advantage. It is a definition that provides huge political milestone to the saffron party to unite the indigenous Assamese People by creating extreme nationalist sentiments among them. That is why the issue has been unsolved and is used synonymously as suspected Bangladeshi, Illegal migrants, Encroacher, Immigrants, etc. to woo the sentiment of Assamese people. Practically speaking, *the term 'Miya' is considered a pejorative word.*⁷ By this definition, this community of people is intended to be sent to utmost back foot in all sphere of livelihood. This is a negative term and used to demolish the status of a targeted section of people.

Why Migration to Assam?

The discovery of coal and petroleum in upper Assam in the later part of the 19th century carried out a new economic opportunity and a commercial prosperity to Assam. To achieve this opportunity, the colonial rulers needed a skilled and cheap rate labour force to perform difficult works and to construct road and railways. At first, they tried to engage local labour to this field. But soon they found the local source unable to provide such skill labour force at cheap rate. Hence they made policies to induct professionals for making industry, tradesmen, police and security personnel's from outside the province. By this way, a new trend of migration was encouraged by the colonial administration in Assam to meet their required professionals.

In this context, we can cite the example of two types of migration into Assam. One is internal migration and other is external migration. The internal migration was took place during the British colonial rule



while the other form of migration took place in post independence era. Let us discuss both forms of migration in Assam.

Assam has witnessed a long history of migration since the British colonial rule in India. Initially, this trend of migration did not make any annoyance in the socio-economic and political environment of Assam. This migration was internal one that happened within the Indian Territory. Therefore those people who migrated to Assam from different parts of undivided India are not illegal migrants. They are the son of the soil of the mainland and hence they have all rights like other caste community people of Assam.

Let us discuss the trends of migration in Assam. The following data and information will provide us the causes of migration to Assam from other parts of undivided India. *In 1847, the introduction of ship or stream encouraged a large number of influxes from East Bengal to Assam.*⁸ Most of them or almost all of them were landless peasants who were facing Zamindar's (land lords) torture and exploitation. In 1863-1864, the first large scale influx of tea garden labourers occurred under the *the 'Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act.'*⁹ This was the beginning of internal migration to Assam and it was a type of coercive migration to mitigate labour force shortage in the tea gardens in Assam. This trend of migration was continued into *Cachar (1877)*¹⁰ and *Sibsagar (1878-79) tea estates.*¹¹ During this period, only labourers were encouraged to come to Assam. **In 1892, Bengal-Assam train line was introduced and huge influx took place into Assam from different parts of East Bengal.**¹² This was the beginning of the Bengali speaking Muslim peasant classes arrival to Assam. During *1901-1911, the first major, mass immigration of farm labourers from Bengal specially from Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rongpur District to Goalpara, increasing the district's population by 30%.*¹³

*In 1921 one/fifth of Goalpara district population and one/seventh of Nagaon district's population were recorded as Bengal born and a large majority of them were from the district of Mymensing.*¹⁴ This causes great concern among the indigenous Assamese people. They demanded safeguard of their land and interest. As a result, the colonial government introduced *"Line System" in 1920 in Nagaon District of Assam*¹⁵ and then it was extended to Barpeta and other parts of the state to restrict migrants. But the system was not successful one to control the migration in Assam. The migration was continued and demographic changes in the state was going on rapidly causing challenges to local indigenous people.

(The Line System in colonial Assam (implemented from 1920) was an administrative measure that drew geographical lines to segregate land, restricting immigrant peasants from East Bengal to specific areas



while protecting land for indigenous inhabitants. It aimed to manage rapid demographic changes and rising communal tensions over land in districts like Nagaon and Kamrup.)

In one hand, the migration of large scale Bengali Speaking People was tried to restrict by introducing 'Line System' and on the other hand, the same was encouraged by the government by adopting ***"wasteland development" policies (later termed "colonization schemes") in 1931-1941.***¹⁶

Interestingly, during the interim governments tenure in Assam under Sir Syed Mohammad Sadullah, migration was extremely encouraged from East Bengal under the ***"Grow More Food" scheme on 24th August, 1943.***¹⁷ Under this policy, all immigrant Muslims were provided land allocation for cultivation. In such a way, the number of ***immigrant population in Assam increased to 138% by 1951 compared to 1901, which was the highest recorded increase of any province in India during that period.***¹⁸

After the partition of India, Hindu People of Pakistan and Muslims of India fled to safe places for life and livelihood. Communal riots took place in many parts of both the newly independent countries. Interestingly, 1971, East Bengal province of Pakistan fought war for independence from Pakistan and succeeded to its mission. During the course of 'Mukti Yuddha', a large number of Bengali Hindu people along with a small quantity of Muslim fled to India for security. ***The influx was primarily due to the military crackdown by West Pakistan that began on March 26, 1971.***¹⁹ The Government of India provided shelter and treated them as 'Refugee'. Many of them took shelter in Assam causing huge migration. This has also led to the change of demography in the province and a kind of threat and challenges was felt by indigenous people of Assam. ***The total influx in the whole state including Meghalaya both in and outside camps is 4,98,440 as on 02.07.1971.***²⁰

Consequences of Migration in Assam

Migration into Assam from both inside and outside has profoundly altered the state's demographics, creating significant socio-economic and political outcomes. The utmost impact of migration includes an identity crisis among indigenous communities. An adverse affect is seen in the form of land pressure leading to deforestation and ethnic conflicts, competition for jobs, and intense political debates regarding citizenship. It has been creating fear among indigenous communities to become minority in their own state.

Secondly, an increase in population has escalated land pressure, leading to the rapid deforestation, encroachment on protected land and a significant drop in the agricultural sector.



Thirdly, high levels of immigration have resulted in increased competition for limited resources, causing ethnic tensions and frequent communal disharmony. Political parties have been taking chances of this situation and wooing electorates to protect their identity, culture, tradition and land at any cost.

Fourthly, the influx has shaped regional politics, with migrants often becoming a focus of vote bank concerns, leading to anxiety and movements like *six years Assam Agitation held during 1979-1985*.²¹ The movement had unprecedented consequences in the state. The Assam Accord was signed on 15th August, 1985 which determined 24th March, 1971 as the deadline to detect and deport illegal migrants from the state. Accordingly, *National Register of Citizens (NRC) was updated on 31st August 2019, which contained 31 million names out of 33 million populations. It left out about 1.9 million applicants, who seem to be divided roughly equally between Bengali Hindus, Bengali Muslims and other Hindus from various parts of India*.²² After the update of NRC, the people of Assam were confident that the issue of illegal migration as well as the Bangladeshi issue is ending. But that is not happened. Even the issue has got more fuel in the name of suspected Nationals alias 'Miya People' in Assam. Under Chief Minister Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has actively countered the influence of this community in local politics, often framing it as a threat to indigenous people and demographic pattern of the state.

Comments on "Miya politics" are heavily polarized in Assam. While some political leaders accentuate the need to address the socio-economic marginalization of this group of people, others, particularly the BJP leaders use the rhetoric of "illegal immigrants" and "demographic invasion" to consolidate their support base among indigenous people as well as among other 'Sanatan' people irrespective of their previous residence. This has been dividing the society into communal line, although they claimed to be secular and impartial while distributing Government Schemes and performing welfare activities.

Some of the recent development over 'Miya centric politics in Assam is need to be highlighted. *On January 31, 2026, Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said the term "Miya" referred to Bangladeshi infiltrators and vowed to drive them out of Assam. "Miya means Bangladeshi infiltrators, and we have decided to go as far as it takes to send every one of them back from Assam," he had said while addressing a public gathering*.²³ By offering this type of derogatory speeches, a dignified and constitutional person like Dr. Sarma has not only violated the constitutional obligations but also the breach of right to equality of the Indian Constitution under Article 14. However, the opposition parties in the state have criticised Government policy, alleging that genuine Indian citizens are being harassed in the name of Miya Politics. The Bengali Speaking Muslims have become scapegoat in the



state in the name of suspected Bangladeshi alias Miya. *Recently, the Gauhati High Court issued a notice to Sarma in connection with a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) accusing him of making alleged “hate speeches” against the community.*²³

Politics around ‘Miya’ Muslim people in Assam has taken a new turn after Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma set out ten conditions for the community ahead of the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections. All political parties in the state are very much cautious about the use of this community in their election campaign. Some of the parties are using opposition card while others are using pro-Miya card to get election benefits. But the issue is continue since post independence era with different definition of the community.

Conclusion with ‘Miya’ narratives in Assam

One of the defining but an exclusive familiar narrative likely to design the upcoming election is the BJP’s political messaging around the ‘Miya’, a pejorative associated with Bengali origin Muslim communities in Assam, often vilified as illegal Bangladeshis. The BJP has framed allegation against this community is that the issues of land encroachment, demographic change, and identity around this narrative, seeking to secure indigenous and Assamese speaking Hindu voters in their favour and support.

BJP claims that it is the only party which is serious about securing the future of Assam by launching an eviction drive to free 1.51 lakh bighas of government land from illegal Miya Bangladeshi and vowing to throw out all such Miya infiltrators if given another chance. The anti-Miya rhetoric has become shriller than before, with Congress and other Opposition parties being projected as Muslim appeasers as alleged by BJP and their allies. All Assam Students Union (AASU) has remained silent spectator on the recent development in Assam’s politics.

The ‘Miya Narratives’ in Assam has arisen from Bengali-origin Muslims, largely descendants of migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) reclaiming a derogatory term to combat systemic discrimination, socio-economic marginalization, and questions over their Indian citizenship, although they have come out successful to prove their citizenship several times. Centered on the ‘Miya Poetry’ movement, these narratives highlight experiences of living on riverine char- chapori areas, facing eviction, erosion and fighting xenophobia, asserting belonging through art and counter story telling. The Miya Poetry Movement is a powerful artistic resistance that utilizes local, colloquial dialects to express pain, identity, and protest against environmental discrimination and state led marginalization in all fronts.



They are the sufferers in their own motherland. None is there to understand their pain, except the judiciary and legal humanitarian activists.

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