



Identity Crisis And The Emergence Of Miya Literature As A Resistance Literature

Ajmol Hussain Laskar^{1*}, Mansur Ahmed Hazari²

^{1*}M.A. English, Aligarh Muslim University, Email- laskarajmol6@gmail.com

²B.A. Arabic, Jamia Millia Islamia, Email- mansurhazari449@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author: - Ajmol Hussain Laskar

*M.A. English, Aligarh Muslim University, Email- laskarajmol6@gmail.com

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Abstract

Miya community is a group of people who from several decades are living in the state of Assam. The term Miya is used as a slur to defame the community for their migration. This paper will attempt to analyse the core issues related to the problems of the Miya Community and their impact on Miya Literature. It will also explore the resistance of language that will portray how Miya communities were confined to a fixed language. Modern Miya poets are breaking the barriers of language by publishing their works in their own mother tongue. It also shows a cultural clash between the Ultra-nationalist Assamese groups supported by their biased views against the Miya community regarding the use of language in their works. This project will explore how the Miya community are reclaiming their lost identity with a new wave of poem and literary works. It will also enlighten the defence of local dialects against the majoritarian view to imposing certain languages in a particulate community irrespective of any borders. The biggest achievement of Neo-Mia poets is that they now write in their own dialects, denying the traditional majoritarian language. The poets of Mia literature are making their genre a parallel to Assamese literature. The oppression that Mia literature is facing is giving it a new aggressive tone that talks about the self-identification of the Mia community apart from the dominant Assamese culture and literature.

Keywords: Miya literature, Identity, Language, Crises and oppression

Historical Background

According to American philosopher Richard Rorty, there are two kinds of writers: those who strive for private perfection and those who work collectively to make our institutions more just and less cruel." (Gogoi, S "Miya poetry views a world of suffering and humiliation in contemporary Assam") Miya poets are the latter type of poets, who paint a picture of stigma and humiliation embedded in their identity through their poetry. They ask their readers, both from the mainstream Assamese society and beyond, to ensure that our institutions are more just and less cruel. The Urdu word "Miya," which means "gentleman," has been used against the very word itself by the "indigenous" people of Assam with various negative connotations to address the Bengali-origin Muslims who had migrated to Assam from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and their descendants who live in the state now. Various institutionalised programs, such as censuses and NRCs, have been grossly mismanaged by both state and federal governments in order to harass and torture people of Bengal origin. Despite their efforts to integrate with the meaning, both Hinds and Muslims (Miyas) migrated, which began to bear various negative connotations. In the context of Assam, Miyas are Bengali-originated Muslims who migrated to the state and their descendants who now live there.

"Miya poetry" was labeled with the epithet "Miya" when M. Riaz used the term in two circle net. Miya poetry began as Char Chapori poetry with more of a submissive tone, but it has mutated and gained an assertive tone with its rebirth in April 2016. This wave of Mia poetry began as a reaction to the flawed and torturous NRC process that was carried out in Assam. It developed spontaneously with the publication of the first poem, "Write down I am a Miya," by Dr. Haifz Ahmad on social media over the last four years. Miya poetry has taken

different directions. It has talked about the lived experience of the poets, their shared experience of living in the camps, and their struggles with constant demands to spread the message of the need for a more inclusive Assam. The body of Mia poetry consists of more than two hundred poems. There is no organisational structure to Miya poetry, and the poems are shared via electronic print and social media at the discretion of the poets. As such, it is impossible to estimate the exact number of Miya poems currently in existence.

Jose Saramago aptly delineates the Bengali-speaking people of Assam, whose ancestors had migrated from East Pakistan following the treaty of Yandabo (signed on February 24, 1826) and the acquisition of Assam by the British. Bengali cultivators migrated to what an English military officer, Major John Butler, described as the "dreary and desolate wilderness" of Assam that was "devoid of man, beasts, or birds." By the early 20th century, Bengali people had been settled in Assam as part of British policy. The migrants were initially welcomed, but the seeds of alternation were sown in 1837 when the British made Bengali the official language of Assam. Since then, Assamese have believed that their national existence is based on their language, and all non-Assamese migrants have been compared to "an invading and conquering army" and "a terrifying bird of prey."

In the artificial dichotomy of "indigenous" Assamese and Bengali-origin migrants, Assamese superiority became normative, while the migrants were established as inferior. Among the migrants, the Muslims who were considered outsiders or "bideshis," unlike the native Assamese Muslims, had brought with them the salutation word "Miya," which is popularly used by Muslims in parts of the subcontinent, while addressing them as "Bideshi miya" and the otherwise salutation word, with the passage of time and growing enmity, hostility between "natives" and non-natives is being used against the grain of its numerous poems written every day in various Miya dialects as well as Assamese. Its use of social media has enabled it to connect with readers beyond the national boundary and communicate their pain and anguish. However, the response it has elicited in the state from the ultra-nationalists has been unfavorable, to say the least.

This dissertation project will study all these aspects of contemporary Miya poetry, right from the horrific role of the NRC to the role of the media and its contents. The role of social media and the responses Miya poetry evoked both within the state and beyond are seen in the works of poets like Dr. Hafiz Ahmed, Kazi Neel, Rehna Sultan, and Abhishek Saha. It will also study the cultural memory of the Miya people, which is a depository of trauma that runs through generations: migration from East Pakistan and before that, East Bengal; displacement from the chars due to frequent flooding of the Brahmaputra as well as submersion of river islands, language politics surrounding Miya poetry.

"Miyah" is a matrix within which fall the descendants of people who migrated from Tangail, Pabna, Mymensing, Dhaka, and other districts of present-day Bangladesh. However, there is a clear angle to the equation too. An educated Bengali-origin Assamese Muslim who also speaks Assamese might be able to camouflage his "Miyahness." Since I am university educated and speak decent Assamese, I might not be called a Miyah, at least until I make it explicit. My cousin, on the other hand, who drives a rickshaw in Guwahati, will always be one. "My class privilege might immunise me from the feelings of disgust reserved for my cousin." Citation (Chaudhary, 2019) Miya poetry: Why is it creating noise in Assam now.

The oppression that Bengali-originated literature faces in Assam is due to the fact that it is written in the poets' native dialects rather than standard Assamese. Thus, creating a strong literary movement that deals with issues of Miya culture.

By forcefully proclaiming that he was a Miya, Ahmed allowed other Bengali-origin Muslims to come forward and describe their own experiences of being persecuted and discriminated against in Assam under a literary genre that has now come to be called "Miya poetry and literature."

The biggest achievement of Neo-Mia poets is that they now write in their own dialects, denying the traditional majoritarian language. The poets of Mia literature are making their genre a parallel to Assamese literature. The oppression that Mia literature is facing is giving it a new aggressive tone that talks about the self-identification of the Mia community apart from the dominant Assamese culture and literature.

Why Miya and not Assamese?

Seeing the transformation in language and turning to the native language to compare literature in Miya caused a backlash from Assamese intellectuals. Hiren Gohain, one of the giants of Assamese literature, asked why Miya are using their own "artificial" dialects rather than standard Assamese. Gohain argues that by using their native dialects to write, the Bengali-origin Muslims of Assam are ignoring the decision of earlier generations to use only Assamese formally. 'Miya' poetry has been written in a dialect prevalent in a region where immigrant Muslims have been residing for seven to ten decades now. "They" declared Assamese as their accepted language for literature up until 1991. They know Assamese well enough. The Assam Movement

having deeply scarred them, they were even persuaded by some leaders from Barak Valley to declare Bengali as their mother tongue, which reignited Assamese suspicions". Given the febrile link between language, identity, and politics in Assam, this switch from Assamese to Miya dialects in literature immediately produced a backlash.

In fact, the use of their native dialects has also led to some support. "It is curious that Miya poetry is provoking this extreme reaction." Said Samrat Chaudhary's co-edition of *Insider/Outsider*, a book on issues of identity in the North East and India, There are 55 linguistic communities in Assam, according to the people's linguistic survey of India. The Assamese language chauvinists have only been keen to wipe out poetry in this one dialect. Why the antipathy? What is the insecurity about? Mia literature is creating a big impact on the ground in Assam despite the opposition. It is facing. Mia poetry is trying to reclaim its glory by resisting pressure and creating its own legacy.

Reactions towards the Language of Mia Poetry:

However, various activists have reacted sharply to Miya's allegation that the poems in Bangladeshi dialects were aimed at "weakening" the Assamese language. They also expressed concern over the poet's writing in their own dialects, despite knowing Assamese well.

Hiren Gohain, a prominent Assamese poet and educator, stated that Miya poetry first invokes personal liberty to justify its creation and currency. But, given the sensitive and volatile times, the poets seem unaware of the dynamite they are sitting on. They come across as separatists heedless of the terrible recent toll that separation has taken, as said by Hiren Gohain.

In an interview, Sanjib pol Deka, the editor of the Assamese magazine *Aalaap* (Conversation), which was one of the first magazines in Assam to publish a series of Miya poetry, said that the timing of the controversy is concerning.

"We have always supported Miya poetry and will continue to do so as long as they write in standard Assamese format." This kind of statement proves the biased view towards the Mia dialects and creates a barrier for Miya poets. The crisis of Mia literature is much more complex if we compare it with the other regional dialects. Though some are on the side of ultra-nationalist Assamese intellectuals, it will only be solved with a healthy debate between the supporters and opponents of the Miya poetry genre. Despite action and reaction from both side i.e. Assamese nationalist and Miya poets. I think the essence of Miya poetry must not be compromised. This Literature should be given equal privilege be it in any region or in any dialect can't be tied regarding of any political situation or circumstances.

The Influence of social media in Miya Poetry

Despite so much oppression and its fight for survival, social media became a boon for Miya literature. Social media opened a warm door for Miya poetry, which was starving without proper support.

"Miya poetry" was labeled with the epithet "Miya" when M.Riaz used the term in two circles net. The collection of "Mia poetry" is not organised like the popular literatures of different cultures. Miya poetry is being organised on various social media sites as part of an initiative to bring it to a more systematic level.

There is no organisational structure to Miya poetry, and the poems are shared via electronic, print, and social media according to the discretion of the poets. As a result, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of Mia poets who currently exist. Few studies have looked at how social media helps people find and share Miya poetry, as well as how the poems reflect the cultural memory of the Miya people.

A study titled *Bengali Muslims in Assam*, written by Jabeen Yasmeen, and "Miyah" poetry: walking on the shifting terrains of 'Na-Asamiya' and "Infiltrator," which was published in the journal of migration affairs, discusses the historical context and shifting meaning of "Na-Asamiya" and touches upon the social media aspect of Miya poetry.

A podcast of Shalim M. Hussain's conversation with Marcia Lynx Qualey in London, which discussed the influence of Mahmoud Darwish on the Miya poetry movement in Assam, was published by *Arablit Quarterly*. It was titled, "How Mahmoud Sarwish Inspired a Poetry Movement in Assam, India Another article by Manash Firag Bhattacharjee, titled "Miya poets in a destitute time," discusses Miya poetry in the light of the difficult times we live in. An article published in the *caravan* by Samrat describes how poetry became a crime in Assam. It discusses the adverse reaction of Assamese ultra-nationalists. The "Char Chapori" diaspora who are living abroad are also watching and reading the poems that are composed by Mia poets. The diaspora also contributes literally and financially to support their native Mia literature, which talks about the hidden issues that Bengali Muslims face in Assam.

Aletta Andre and Abhay Kumar's protest poetry: Assam's Bengali Muslims take a stand, which was published on *aljazeera.com*, and elaborate on how the word "Miya," which is used as a slur, is being reclaimed by Bengali-origin Muslims of Assam. Only social media has helped popularise Neo-Miya poetry. The new generation of writers turned the tales, oral traditions, and generational suffering into vivid literature. Simply put, the Miya poetry genre paints a picture of stigma and humiliation embedded in different languages. The poem, written in various dialects, spoke about the alleged discrimination against Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam over the years and especially during the updating process of the NRC. All these poems of oppression are posted online on various social media sites.

In 1985, Khabir Ahmed, in his poem titled "*I Beg to State*," which included lines such as "I am a settler, a hated Miya," screamed of the discrimination meted out to Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. This poem was saved but became less accessible to readers due to the age of social media. Some prestigious gems of Miya's literature are going viral and getting the popularity they deserve. In 2016, a poem called "*I am Miya*," written by Kazi Sharowar Hussain and translated by Shalim M. Hussain, made a lot of people angry and got the attention of international media.

Miya poetry as a genre is multilingual and encompasses a world of suffering and humiliation for a group of people whose life has passed through numerous political claims and counterclaims. My first introduction to Miyah's poetry was through an article written by the poet and translator Shalim Hussain. I was deeply moved reading his account of the word "Miyah" and how this subaltern group of committed poets is trying to create something beautiful through protest and celebration of life. Hussain shared with us this beautiful poem of Maulana Bande Ali written in 1939.

"Neither Charvwa, nor pamua I am an Asomiya.

Of Assam's earth and air

I am an equal claimant."

(Maulana Bande Ali 1939)

This is considered the first wave of poems, which was followed by a series of poems mostly written in Assamese in the 1980s by people like Khabir Ahmed and Dr. Hafiz Ahmed. Hussain notes in a recent article that the new wave of poems has been more explorative and has moved beyond protest and resistance. This new generation is committed to writing the total history of their being.

Conclusion

For centuries, literature and culture have been inextricably linked. A culture of society is represented by its literature, poems, tales, and legends. Literature gives voice to every community and culture, and if a threat arises to literature, it is also a threat to the culture. The identity crisis that Mia literature has been facing for decades was also faced by African native tribes under colonialism. It is a grave source of discontent that in independent India, systematic oppression of Mia culture and literature is taking place.

The current dispensation, which is in power, is trying to cage Mia literature in the name of protecting the majoritarian views of Assamese ultra-nationalists. Literature can't be banned for any reason, because it includes the right to free speech, which is a basic right. The constitution of India provides protection for the growth of native dialects and its unique literature. The ruling power in Assam is targeting Mia literature by turning a blind eye on the constitutional rights given to the native people of India.

Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam continue to bear the brunt of being "migrants." In the latest move, the government has sealed a 'Miya' museum set up in a house allotted through PMAY at Goalpara and took the owner into its custody. The museum that was opened to the public displayed some agricultural implements and fishing equipment, as well as towels and checked lungs (sarongs worn by men) that are considered to be identity markers of the "Miya community by men) that are considered to be identity markers of the "Miya community." The situation in which Mia literature is standing today can be compared with the Harlem Renaissance that happened in America and was done by marginalised Afro-Americans by displaying their art, culture, and literature. The crisis in Mia literature and its struggle for survival can serve as a model for other marginalised societies suffering in their own countries.

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