# VISUAL CULTURES OF ASSAM: LOCATING THE MEMORY OF THE ASSAMESE–MUSLIM WOMAN IN POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS

—

SHAHEEN SALMA AHMED

zubaan

Zubaan is an independent feminist publishing house based in New Delhi with a strong academic and general list. It was set up as an imprint of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali for Women, and carries forward Kali's tradition of publishing world quality books to high editorial and production standards. *Zubaan* means tongue, voice, language, speech in Hindustani. Zubaan publishes in the areas of the humanities, social sciences, as well as in fiction, general non-fiction, and books for children and young adults under its Young Zubaan imprint.

Typeset in Arno Pro 11/13

# VISUAL CULTURES OF ASSAM: LOCATING THE MEMORY OF THE ASSAMESE–MUSLIM WOMAN IN POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS

—

When I started work on this proposal, I was overwhelmed by the scope of the research. It seemed vast and was not limited to any historical time frame. The research in itself seemed to encompass a wide repository of cultural and historical artefacts. Over four months of studying, visiting archives, perusing family albums, examining and viewing Assamese cinema and conducting interviews; the research became focused. Starting from scratch and figuring out the dialectics in which to address the issues this paper wants to acknowledge has been quite a journey.

The best way to engage with the objectives of this research is to start with my lived experience as an Assamese–Muslim woman from Guwahati. Ina Blom (2017) makes a compelling argument regarding social identity and memory. She argues, 'Society is memory, and memory is recognition, identity.' This search for memory and visual representation in popular culture and media for the women from

the community I belong to, led me to ask questions about Assam, citizenship, gender and, importantly, the location of the Assamese–Muslim woman in the political, social and cultural discourse of Assam. The political discourse in Assam since mid-2018 has been focused on the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and on the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), which has led to multiple contestations over the idea and the body of the citizen.[1] This has further conflated the cultural, social and political idea of who or what makes the body of the Assamese–Muslim citizen, whereas many now make the assumption that Muslims in Assam are a homogeneous category.[2] It is thereby imperative to start the paper by dismantling this assumed homogeneity of Muslim identities in Assam. In his paper titled, 'The Muslims of Assam: A Critical Study', Rabindra Das identifies the Muslims in Assam through four categories viz; the Assamese–Muslims, the Neo–Assamese Muslims, the Muslims of Cachar or the Barak Valley and the Bihari or the North Indian Muslims living in Assam. This paper is concerned with the first category, and Das's definition is indeed helpful to us. Das (2014) defines the Assamese–Muslims as:

> Asamiya Musalman (Assamese Muslims), Asami or Thalua Musalman (native or indigenous Muslims), Goriya are the first category of Muslims of Assam. Their mother tongue is Assamese. This category of Muslims are scattered in all the districts of the Brahmaputra Valley and they were the first settlers of Muslims [sic] in Assam.

This distinction is crucial for discussing Muslims in Assam because Assamese Muslims both identify with and are identified as *Tholua* or *Khilonjia* (indigenous to Assam). The colloquial Assamese term for Assamese Muslims is *Khilonjia,* and is also what I grew up hearing and understanding as my identity.

But there has been a glitch somewhere. The glitch is in the non-representation of the native and the local in popular culture, media and even literature. This is quite a unique case of the visible being rendered invisible. This 'absent-presence', to borrow from Derrida, is something

of an essentialization of the visual representations when we speak about Assamese Muslims. Derrida famously said, 'There is nothing outside the text' in his important work, *Of Grammatology* (1997) while engaging with the dialectics of the present and the absent. If the visual is the text, then where is the Assamese Muslim in our everyday discourse? Just as visibility and the voice of the subaltern groups have become the focus of postcolonial studies since the emergence of the subaltern studies group, the visibility, memory and social identity of the Assamese Muslim is a pressing question in our contemporary times.

## OF MEMORY AND THE ELUSIVE ARCHIVE

This research is located in the quotidian and the everyday, because the questions of the absent-present arise within these areas. Sandria B. Freitag, in her essay, 'Consumption and Identity: Imagining "Everyday Life" Through Popular Visual Culture', points to the close connection of the everyday with visual histories as well as why it is crucial for us to consider it. Freitag (2015:239) argues that 'As both analytical concept and sphere of activity, "the everyday" has enabled historians to move away from elite sources and concerns that involve much larger sweeps of a society.' She further argues that, 'The visual turn in history, has enticed analysts to turn to visual evidence, especially materials produced for popular consumption, and thus enabled us to ask new questions and establish new focal points for understanding larger patterns (ibid.).' So, even if Ben Highmore (2002:1) describes the everyday as being characterized by 'Those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day', he questions the disjuncture that the everyday may possess if '[t]hat which is most familiar and most recognizable, then what happens when that world is disturbed and disrupted by the unfamiliar? (ibid.:2).' In this context, it does appear

that the body of the Assamese Muslim is the most familiar, and yet the presence of the body disrupts the familiarity of the Assamese social and cultural discourse.

There are compelling reasons why this paper investigates these questions through photography and visual representations. Historian Anirudh Deshpande (2018) deliberates on whether the visual archive should be taken as seriously as the textual archive. He raises an important question: Since the visual archive is as old as the human narration of the past, can or should the historians take it seriously in the writing of integral history?' Pachuau and Schendel (2016) debate the reasons for investigation through visual anthropology (which does hold ground with the research methods for this paper). They argue that visual anthropology '…focus[es] on the subjective, emotional meanings that photographs have for us, the ways in which photographs are socially placed, their role as triggers of memory and the different social uses to which they were put.' There are multiple trajectories working here simultaneously. Not only are images important for the consideration of a cultural community through the colonial period, they are also the repositories of memories by being the archives of a community. It is also important to note that any engagement with the question of identity in Assam should also be located in its colonial history and demarcation of a borderland region by the colonialists.

Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the construction of a social memory of women from the Assamese Muslim community in the absence of a public archive. Is it possible to remember in the absence of a public archive? Or is it possible that even the memory of a community is code[3] and our gaze should rather focus on the multiple private archives rather than building dependence on a public archive? Is it time now to transcend normative historiographical narratives and re-think artefacts as repositories of memory, if the narrative of this community is to remain public and relevant? These are some of the questions that this paper shall try to interrogate.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE BORDERLANDS

The archive that this paper is examining is the visual archive. Photography, as demonstrated by many scholars, was an important instrument of colonialism in matters of surveillance as well as ethnography. Deshpande explains that the production and circulation of images as 'visual documentation and the consumption of images were crucial to the development of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. Visual imagery via paintings, lithographs and photographs played an important role in the development of orientalism' (2018). Photography, as Christopher Pinney suggests, was initially embraced by the colonial state as a superior documentary and classificatory form (1997). Discussing the relationship between anthropology and photography, Pinney argues that many nineteenth-century anthropologists were uninterested in culture, and for many 'anthropology was little more than a form of comparative anatomy'. (2011)

Thus, within the colonial ambit of photography in the frontier regions, not only is there a focus on the documentation of the 'uncivilized tribal', but also that of the topographical and the 'picturesque'. Gadihoke argues that 'ethnographies and other accounts about early analogue photography are used to explore the continuing ambivalence involved in capturing the real as photographs veered between truth and falsity or original and fake' (2014). By the time the British entered Assam in 1826, they 'found spacious areas, formerly densely desolate and overgrown with jungles, sweeping embankments fallen into ruins, the various handicrafts in utter decay, decimated to less than two million' (Gohain 1973). The region was documented heavily by the colonial administrations while setting up tea plantations, or later when oil was discovered. Bora posits that the 'Aspect of colonial governmentality, coupled with the tea plantation economy, created the racialized and gendered category of the ungovernable tribal, as distinct from the proper governable subject, the spectres of

which continue to haunt the functioning of postcolonial citizenship' (2014). This spectre can be read as the spectre of invisibility that continues to mark the region and its subjects. It is this invisibility that has persisted even in the contemporary times regarding the Assamese Muslim woman in popular memory and in popular representation even after the mass movement for redefining who or what constitutes an 'Assamese' in the early 1980s.

Historian Maheswar Neog, writing in the 1970s, tried to articulate this identity and argued that,

> The concept of Assamese culture is mostly based on people's affiliation to, and knowledge of, the Assamese tongue and their belonging to the geographical entity called Assam ... after the political fragmentation of the old Assam, there are left many Assamese speakers beyond her borders (2004).

This argument is, in a way, asserted by historian Madhumita Sengupta when she examined the colonial history of the region and wrote that 'the emergence of an Assamese identity, initially as a bond of affect towards language and, later, as a sense of entitlement to shared and often contested cultural symbols, was a unique feature of nineteenth-century Assam' (2016). Bobbeeta Sharma adds more nuance to this understanding by expanding on Assam's composite culture which she attributes to its folk heritage. She observes that, 'Ethno-linguistic communities of Assam such as Mishings, Bodo-Kacharis, Rabhas, Deuris and other ethnic tribes may have, in the past, existed as separate folk entities, but, over the years, a close intermingling and social interaction between them has given birth to a composite Assamese folk culture' (2014).

This culture and identity become the zone of various contestations with the coming of colonialism which manifests even through Independence up to contemporary times. If, as Ravinder Kaur and Thomas Blom-Hansen argue, 'India's familiarity with the world was profoundly shaped by colonialism and later decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century' (2015), then Assam's history and destiny have also

been profoundly affected by the colonial and later the independent nation-state's demarcation of the region as a borderland.

Sengupta writes on this issue and argues that, 'Assam…was deemed to be a cultural backwater of India long before specific policies were put in place to reinforce this status… Colonisation ripped apart the delicate fabric of social and cultural life in the region apart from inflicting a terrible blow to the province's economy' (2016). Thus, it is also important to understand and locate identity and invisibility vis-a-vis the lens of the borderland region. This is important as a discourse because they enable us to look beyond colonial and national interpretations and imaginations of a space and its people. As Sengupta further writes, 'Borderlands have emerged as the most viable units of analysis on account of their ability to generate data about the prehistory of political boundaries and the impact of the latter on the inhabitants as well as the ways in which these boundaries are routinely circumvented and subverted to establish the essential inanity of enforcing rigid political demarcations.' Schendel and Pachuau trace the genesis of the term 'north-east' to the partition of the country and argue that, 'Partition created the region we now call north-east India. Its new international borders disrupted long-established connections, both physical and man-made, and created new scales of association. The result was a configuration of contrary developments of homogenization and divergence within the region, making regional generalizations hazardous' (2016). This disruption in the physical geography of the land has also affected how the independent nation–state viewed its citizens from the frontier zones. But it also, perhaps, affected how citizens from within the region also looked at fellow citizens.

Thus, it becomes important to engage with the concepts and definitions of citizenship and identity within the Assamese context. Amelia Jones argues that identity '[i]s not only *self-definition* but also intersubjectively constituted in relation to *someone else* (1998).' Whereas, Charu Gupta defines identity formation as '[t]he very process by which the multiplicity, contradiction and instability of

the subjectivity is signified as having coherence, continuity, stability: as having a core – a continually changing core but the sense of a core nonetheless' (2001). When it comes to the case of the Assamese Muslims, this core is the sense and identity of being an 'Assamese', an indigenous, a native of the land. The intersubjectivity is built up in relation with both the Hindu Assamese and other Muslims residing in Assam who may ascribe to the same religion, but whose language and cultural mores are different from those of the Assamese. This will come to the fore when we examine photographs in the paper as we proceed. Toby Miller's proposition on the multiple kinds of citizenship is useful in this context to understand how and where we can place the Assamese Muslim citizen. Miller (2012) states,

> ...the last two hundred years of modernity have produced three zones of citizenship with partially overlapping but also distinct historicities… and these are:
>
> a. The political (conferring the right to reside and vote);
> b. The economic (the right to work and prosper); and
> c. The cultural (the right to know and speak).

It is within the praxis of the third category that we must examine the case of the community in question, as the right to speak is also intricately connected with the question of visibility.

The history of Muslims in Assam has been written about in various books, treatises, articles, monographs and research (Ahmed 2015 and 2016; Barbhuiya 2010; Bhuyan 1947; Gait 1906). This paper, will thus, not engage with the historiography of Muslims in Assam in detail. Assam's first encounter with Muslims happened in the early thirteenth century when Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded the Kamrupa kingdom on his route to conquer Tibet. Since then, the growth of Assamese Muslims and them being an inherent part of the Assamese society has been documented since the time of Shihabuddin Talish, the Mughal scribe who accompanied the attempts by Mir Jumla to

conquer Assam in the seventeenth century. Talish documents the indigenous Muslims of the region in his tome *Fatiyah-i-ibriyah* and observes how integrated the Muslims were into the Assamese society and also in the Ahom administration. This sense of identity continues in contemporary times where the identity of this community is still marked by a sense of ethnic belonging rather than a religious affiliation. Examining the colonial archive and documentation also gives insight into this construction of identity and belonging.

See Figure 1 for a pensioner's document for Shaikh Karim Baksh, which was signed by the deputy commissioner of Kamrup. What is interesting to note is the column for 'Sect' or 'Caste'. The pensioner is identified by the colonial administration as a 'Mohammedan Assamese' or, in other words, a Muslim Assamese. Where can we then place this document within the erasure of popular memory and representation? Saurabh Dube (2016) raises some pertinent points



**Figure 1:** A pensioner's document issued by the comptroller's office. Kamrup 1887
**Photo courtesy:** The Latief family, Guwahati

regarding the social dimensions of space and time and argues that they both are intimately enmeshed with the other and that,

> '…social space and social time are far from being merely passive contexts, readily given backdrops, and already received conduits for human action. Rather, under consideration is the incessant interplay between routine cultural understandings, dominant ideological representations, and fraught everyday productions of space and time as constitutive of … social conventions and historical practices' (2016).

Dube's essay is interesting because he juxtaposes his personal narrative with the research about subaltern groups in India that he has been working on, with regards to time, space and modernity. He compels the reader to understand how the personal dimensions of the researcher too, shape research through questions of power in traditions and communities. This paper proposes to locate the question of memory and erasure within a process of social time and space where historiographies are constructed and archives become sites for anxiety.

Cultural memory, as Blom argues, '…is a portrait: it allows us to see who we are and who we have been' (2017). But for us to access this memory, we need access to the archive which, as noted by this paper, has been elusive. Derrida (1996) notes that the anxiety about memory has always had an element of 'death' and 'of loss' at work in it. Blom frames the anxiety over the archive in much more specific terms by saying that the 'archival anxiety and the preoccupation with memory loss on a grand scale is not a universal condition but premised on a very specific image of sociality' (2017). This issue of anxiety over the archive is important as it manifests in our 'collective memory' of society and cultures (Bate 2010; Blom 2017). Our work here is to understand and emphasize how visual representations and photographs engage with the question of collective memory and the anxiety over the archive. David Bate (2010) asks two crucial questions pertaining to this issue in photography and collective memory:

> What did photography do for memory and what contribution has photography made to the practice of memory in human culture? Has photography affected or changed the constitution of individual collective memory, in what way, what are its effects, on whose memories, how and why?.

However, what needs to be kept in mind is that 'photography does not transcend the social context in which it is produced, circulated and read' (Anderson, 2009). How can we then reconcile the images or the representation of the Assamese–Muslim especially women, no matter how limited it has been so far, that we have noticed in popular media with those in private family albums? This question arises as we notice marked difference in these representations of the Assamese Muslim body. To explore this difference in meaning making, I will look at some of the very few Assamese films that have been produced in the history of Assamese cinema that with this community. I posited the question on the presence of Assamese Muslim female actors to well-known film-critic, filmmaker and historian of Assamese cinema, Utpal Borpujari who remarked that 'this is a significant question since there is no known presence that I can think of. It is significant precisely because the Assamese Muslim community is an intrinsic part of the Assamese culture and identity.'[4]

Assamese cinema was pioneered by the polymath Jyotiprasad Agarwala with his film *Joymoti* which was released in 1935. Bobbeeta Sharma, while discussing Agarwala's work, writes that 'cultural reflection was obviously the overriding principle that guided Agarwala when he made the first Assamese film *Joymoti…*' (2014). Thus, the subject for the film is not too surprising indeed as the film is centred around the Ahom princess Joymoti who sacrificed her life for her husband and the kingdom. The film was based on Assamese literary legend Lakshminath Bezbaruah's play *Joymoti Kunwori* written in 1915. Sharma cites another well-known Assamese director Phani Talukdar's observations about *Joymoti* published in 1981. He aimed 'to make a film that displayed Assamese culture… the shots of the *japi* dance, the palanquins of noblemen, *sarai, bota,* canal-digging thieves,

*bhaona*, weaving looms, depicting rural Assamese life… ' While Agarwala tried to get some of the best technicians in the film industries of Bombay and Calcutta at that time, what is relevant to this paper is the cast for the film. Aideu Handique was the main lead for the film and played the eponymous role of Joymoti. Handique has received iconic status in Assam, and rightfully so, but only after a lifetime of marginalization, because she chose to act in a film, an unthinkable act for those from the Assamese middle and upper middle classes at that time. Most of the cast associated with this film went on to make their mark in the cultural and cinematic traditions of Assam. Though, there is no copy of the whole film available[5], and I am unsure if any Muslim character from the Ahom administration or court was represented in the film. However, it is interesting to note that the cast includes an actor who is listed on multiple sites as 'Shamshul Haque'.[6] There is no further reference for this actor or what role he enacted in the film. I spent hours trying to figure out details about this 'actor' as it appeared that an Assamese Muslim person was associated with the very first film ever produced from Assam. It was only after an interview with film historian and documentary filmmaker, Parthajit Baruah, that more details emerged,[7] and this erasure of 'Haque' is rather telling.

The actor who is listed as Shamshul Haque is actually named Samsul Huda. He acted in quite a few early Assamese films produced from 1935 to the late 1950s. He enacted the role of a spy in *Joymoti* and was also part of Jyotiprasad's second film *Indramalati* (1939) and other films such as *Biplobi* (1950), *Smritir Poroxh* (1956) and *Dhumuha* (1957).[8] According to Baruah, Huda was an Assamese Muslim from Nagaon district of Assam. No further information was available to me at the time of writing this essay. Of course, there have been notable Assamese Muslim actors such as Syed Abdul Mazid and Mirael Kuddus, but the representations of the body of the Assamese Muslim woman, as well as the man, remain few and far between even today. Bobbeeta Sharma writes, 'In the fifteen years after the release of *Joymoti,* only six Assamese films were released (2014).' Among them one was *Siraj* by Phani Sharma in 1948 which was one of the first films

to have had an Assamese Muslim character as the protagonist and was about Hindu–Muslim unity. Based on a story by Lakshidhar Sharma, the film's script was written by cultural and political activist Bishnu Rabha and the film's music was by its music director Rabha, assisted by Bhupen Hazarika. There remains no known copy of this film, and I could only locate its poster.

Interestingly, out of the seven films that Bhupen Hazarika directed, he re-made *Siraj* as a period drama in 1988 with noted Assamese actor Nipon Goswami playing the title role. Mridula Baruah plays the role of Siraj's sister, Fatema. Their representation in the film is what concerns this paper.



**Figure 2:** Poster of the film Siraj (1948).
Source: http://bhupenhazarika-news.blogspot.com/2010/06/movie-poster-siraj-1948.html.

**Figure. 3:** A *Youtube* grab of the film Siraj (1988). Seen here is Siraj (extreme right) and his sister. A Muslim villager is in the foreground. Source: https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=_14fVaGRlBw.

*Siraj* (1988) is not only about communal harmony but is also about class and caste differences. What is important to observe in the film is that the class of elites represented in the film, that is, the tea-planters, are shown as Hindu upper-castes. This is a point to remember as it also reinforces certain representations that do seem palatable to the sensibilities and taste of the cinema-going public.

Siraj is shown here as a devout Muslim man who always has his skull cap on. The other villagers are also marked by their Muslim identity through markers such as the *lungi* and the black *tabeez* around their necks. Fatema is shown wearing a white or light-coloured *mekhela chador* throughout the film.

The next film that this paper looks at is a short one by Monjul Baruah, titled *Liakat* (2016). Based on a short story by Monikuntala Bhattacharjya, this film is about two cousins, Liakat and Hanif. It is a poignant humanist story set in a rural area in Assam.

Another film based on the Assamese Muslim community is *Momtaaj* (2013) by artist and director, Pulok Gogoi.

**Figure 4:** A screen grab of *Liakat* (2016). Seen here is the main character, Liakat. Source: https://vimeo.com/185965500



**Figure 5:** A screen grab of Liakat (2016). Seen here are the main character Liakat and Hanif's mother. Source: https://vimeo.com/185965500 The Liakat in figures 5 and 4 look different. Please confirm.

Apart from the Assamese Muslim community that is 'represented' in the film, the rural setting is what connects all three films. The other element of symbolism that binds these three films that span over three decades is the *tabeez* of the male protagonists. Apart from *Siraj*, the

**Figure 6:** A poster of *Momtaaj* as seen on Youtube. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMwiks8J4Xk&t=724s

representation of the women through their clothing is disjointed in these 'realist' portrayals of the community in cinema. This is where the question of cultural memory and social space becomes jarring and crucial as Bate writes, 'remembering also institutes a kind of forgetting' (2010). So, what is it that we are attempting to remember, and what exactly is it that we are trying to forget?

We encounter this question again when we look into advertising in Assam. I spoke with Ghulam Kibriya, the managing director of Exclusive Advertising Private Limited. Set up in 1986 in Guwahati, it is one of the first few private advertising firms in Assam and calls itself, 'one of the pioneers in northeast India's advertising agency'.[9] I asked Kibriya about the representation of the Assamese Muslim women in advertising in Assam, and Kibriya said there is no such representation that he has come across such so far.[10] He emphasized that the only 'representation' when it comes to the Assamese Muslim community (or any other Muslim community) may happen only during times such as Ramzan or Eid to target the Muslim audience. Kibriya says,

'Such ads are definitely there during religious festivals, but it is not just limited to Muslims. For instance, there are ads during Diwali or Durga Puja too targeted at a particular audience.' But the absence of minority bodies in advertisements is not limited to Assam, as I had demonstrated in my previous research work where I examined toiletries, contraceptives and detergent products from the 1970s and 1980s in India.[11]

Blom refers to Wolfgang Ernst's works on social memory and archives and understands his social framework as '…like the archive, social memory is first of all a set of technical procedures of connectivity and distribution'[12] (2017). Blom also argues that 'social frameworks only persist as living practices to the extent that they are continuously animated by the temporalizing technicity of memory – or, more precisely the *events* of new associations.' What this simply means is that our social memory is connected to how we produce and circulate it. As a community, the memory is generated through associations intersubjectively with other communities, as has been discussed in this paper earlier. Through the films that have been discussed here, we notice that a particular spatial and temporal memory of the Assamese Muslim is being generated and re-generated. What, Ben Singer in his book, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts,* posits as the 'history of perception' and a link between the 'sensorium and the environment of modernity' (2001). We are then faced with a community that is struggling with modernity (as has been represented so far). This is where the question of the archive arises for me as a researcher, and I propose here that the archive we are looking at has to change if social and collective memory and memory making is to not be representative of a move away from modernity, but an embrace of modernity and its technological aspects that affect us in the everyday.

Annette Kuhn defines memory work as 'an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory' (2000).

To engage in this memory work for the collective memory of the community, I turn to the humble family album.

Returning to Saurabh Dube's articulation on the social aspects of time and space, I make an ontological turn in the understanding of the archive, that is, the family photo albums of Assamese Muslim families. The two below are from the 1940s, from when photography in the northeast had already developed as a '…local vernacular practice that concentrated on documenting social life as well as private lives (Pachuau and Schendel, 2016:12)'. Writing about the family album, Pierre Bourdieu in his book, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, comments that, '… the family album expresses the truth of social remembrance. Nothing is less like the artistic search for lost time than the showing of these family pictures, accompanied by commentaries - an initiation rite that families impose on all their new members' (Bourdieu:53–53; Bate:247). I remain sceptical of the 'truth' element as Bourdieu has articulated, but it is indeed 'true' that the family album offers us a 'whole new reservoir for memories' (Bate). The family albums as Mette Sandbye argues, '… are objects at the same time related to personal, affective, social, and cultural communication and that all these aspects must be included in [its] analysis' (2014). What is also important to note here is Sandbye's assertion that the '...family photo album is a globally circulating form that not only takes locally specific forms but also produces localities that creates and negotiate individual stories'.

Figures 7 and 8 not only demonstrate to us to us a performativity of the family in action, but they also reveal much more in terms of the cultural and sociological positioning of the Assamese Muslim woman and the community within the larger Assamese identity and middle-class discourse. In Figure 7, we see the entire family posing in front of the lawn with the two women seated at the centre. Three children are seated in front of the chairs on a mat on the lawn. The apparent father or patriarch of the family is seated on the extreme left of the photograph while his eldest son is seated on the extreme right of the photograph. Both the men are dressed in 'colonial fashion'. The father

**Figure 7:** Family photograph of Shaikh Karim Baksh's children and grandchildren posing in their family home in Guwahati. The photograph is not clearly dated but was taken around the early 1940s.
Photo Courtesy: The Latief Family, Guwahati



**Figure 8:** Family photograph of noted Assamese poet Mafizuddin Ahmed Hazarika taken at their family home in Dibrugarh. The poet is in a black suit and seated on the extreme left. The photo is not clearly dated but was taken around the early 1940s.
Photo courtesy: Asad Ahmed, Guwahati

wears khaki shorts and black rubber boots. He is also resting a pith helmet on his left thigh. The eldest son is in a safari suit, most probably khaki. The young girls are dressed in pinafores with ribbons on their heads and Mary Jane shoes on their feet. The young boys who frame the whole tableau on either side and in the background are dressed in western outfits which include khaki shorts, trousers and coats. The daughter-in-law is dressed fashionably in a sari and blouse which reflects the fashion sense prevalent in the Bombay film industry of that time. Her hair is tied up in a neat and fashionable hairdo, and she wears bangles on her right wrist. It is not very clear what is on her left wrist, but it is most probably either a watch or a bracelet. The mother-in-law or the matriarch of the family, who is seated to the left of her husband, is dressed in a *mekhela chador* and has the *chador* lightly pulled over her head. She is not wearing any jewellery, except for some bangles on both her wrists.

Figure 8 is staged in a way that is not too different from the other photograph. The family is posing in front of their home. The patriarch is seated on the extreme left of the photograph. He is wearing a *sherwani*[13] instead of a western-style coat with drawstring pajamas and a hat, most likely the Karakul hat, which was fashionable among the elite Muslim men in colonial India. Hazarika's daughter, Sofia Khatun, is standing on the extreme right. She is wearing a fashionable sari as was seen on the young woman in the previous image. Her blouse is also fashioned in the latest style, and her hair is tied in a neat bun, as was the practice among many heroines in several films in Bombay cinema of the period. She is also wearing a long chain around her neck. The other two women are seated to the front and are wearing *mekhela chador*s with the chador covering their heads. Hazarika's sons are standing at the back, both wearing western-style coats. His grandsons are seated in front of him, wearing khaki shorts and coats. They are also wearing leather shoes, and their hair is neatly parted. The boy standing on the extreme left of the photograph, who is staring out of the frame, remains an ambiguous figure.

What strikes me most the moment I look at the photographs is the contact with modernity that occurred in these two families in the 1940s itself. As Richard Chalfen argues in his important book, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, '…family photography must be seen as at the same time a process and a *doing*, an act of communication and a symbolic activity.'[14] When we look at these photographs, we do realize that these carefully shot tableaus are an enactment of the Assamese Muslim family in the colonial period. They reveal to us the sociological and cultural conditions in which this community lived in that particular period. The encounter with modernity is also evident. Photographs and, especially, the family album are often understood to be a part of 'oral' histories (Edwards 2005; Bate 2010). Bate posits that there has been the emergence of counter-histories in the twentieth century, and they have emerged in oral history as a form of '…bottom-up history… the stories of ordinary lives that are often accompanied by photographic images that were made for family albums…' (2010).

It is precisely this counter history that we must take recourse to if we need not just a memory, but a haptic memory, as such, of the community in question.

The last two images are from my own family archive. My father was a keen amateur photographer from the late 1970s to the 1980s. He had a Nikon camera and would shoot many such 'candid' images of family members within and outside the domestic settings of the home. Edwards writes that 'photographs become a form of interlocutors because they literally unlock memories and emerge in multiple soundscapes, allowing the sounds to be heard and thus enabling knowledge to be passed down, validated, absorbed and refigured in the present' (2005). Through these images, even as a young person, I was able to bridge the social time and social space to understand what being born into this identity meant. Figure 9 has my grandfather sitting on his bed. He is wearing his usual cotton kurta and pyjama with his horn-rimmed spectacles perched on his nose. Next to him on the bed

**Figure 9:** Author's grandfather, Abdus Samad, sitting on his bed, 1982.
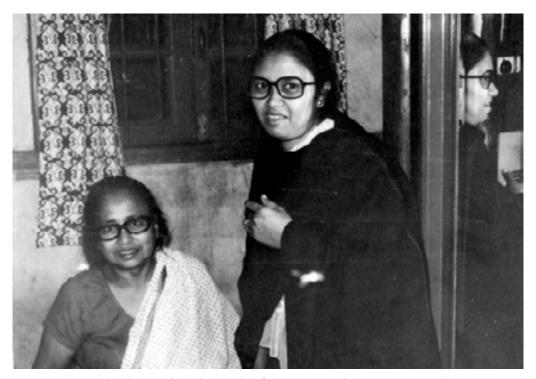Photo courtesy: Author's family archive



**Figure 10:** Author's grandmother, Ashrafan Nessa, and aunt, Jyotsna Khanam, 1982.
Photo courtesy - Author's family archive

is a transistor radio. Figure 10 has my grandmother and aunt smiling into the camera. From the appearance of it, it does not seem staged, but rather that they were caught unaware by the photographer, my father, and asked to smile. My grandmother is in a sari and is wearing horn-rimmed spectacles while my aunt has a shawl/stole wrapped around her and is also wearing spectacles. The two images here differ in many ways from the previous images. In figures 7 and 8, the people were dressed in their best clothes and posed in a tableau outside their domestic spaces in their lawns. It proves that the performativity of the family photograph was for a special occasion. These photographs provide insight into the social and familial structures at work. The lawn also signifies leisure which comes associated with upper classes. There is yet some scholarship to be done on material histories, especially with respect to modern technology and the middle-class in Assam unlike the work done by Arnold (2013) or McGowan (2015), and it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a full analysis of the encounter of modern technology, colonialism and the Assamese middle-class. So, it is not very clear how ubiquitous the camera was in the 1940s in upper- and middle-class households among the Assamese Muslims, although as we have seen Pachuau and Schendel say that photography developed into a vernacular practice. The next set of photos is premised on 'candid' performativity, where the people in the photographs are seen in clothes that they would wear on a usual day within their domestic spaces.

From the representations that we notice in the films and in the family albums, we can premise that the idea of cultural memory is quite distorted and problematic. This is perhaps because of what Blom writes on modernity, where she says that it is characterized by 'a crisis of memory' and a 'problematization of tradition' (2017). For the social structures that have been represented in popular culture, which also form popular tools of memory and archive, the Assamese Muslim body is imagined in only one social space and time, a rather pre-modern one, one may say. Whereas, an analysis of family albums shows a community that has been well entrenched in modernity and modernism. What is

also to be noted is that many families, including the future generations of the Mafizuddin Hazarika family, have been associated with tea estates as planters and owners. This is in continuation with part of the historiography of this community in Assam where they were associated with the Ahom nobility and administration. Madhumita Sengupta explains that the colonialists established tea planters as the new elite in Assam after '…eliminating the erstwhile aristocracy' (2016). This class status was also an important reason which put members of this community well within the paradigms of colonial modernity. This is established when Asad Ahmed, the grandson of Hazarika, belonging to the family who owned the Hirajan Tea Estate, one of the largest in Assam at one point, refers to their family history through commodity culture. Ahmed remarked to me that their family bought the first Chevrolet car in Assam in 1950 from Calcutta.[15]

Reverting to Assamese cinema, the role of Assamese Muslim women in its history is quite vague as there hasn't been any record of women actors or technicians. Following the narrative of Samsul Huda, it becomes difficult for me to say with certainty that there were no Assamese Muslim women actors. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, one of the most popular heroines in Assamese cinema was Zerifa Wahid,[16] who still continues to act in lead roles in various films. There are other Assamese Muslim actresses who have acted in theatre and cinema as well but have perhaps not reached the popularity of Wahid. Dr Jahanara Begum is an actress who has been associated with theatre since the 1980s and has been acting in films since the early 2000s. A qualified medical doctor, she also has a regular medical practice apart from acting in various plays and films.

Figure 11 shows an interesting portrait to consider. Dr Begum is posing for a studio portrait. Like the other images under consideration here, this photograph, too, is in black and white. The young actress is wearing a *mekhela chador*, with her hair tied in a plait and hanging to one side. She is smiling coyly into the camera. What is interesting to note is also the bindi on her forehead. This is a staged image quite like the family tableau photographs we have discussed so far.

**Figure 11:** Studio portrait of Dr Jahanara Begum, 1980.
Picture courtesy: Facebook account of Dr Begum

What I want to discuss here from these photos are the women as they appear in them. The young women are present in all the images as wearing the fashion of the time along with accessorizing themselves with the right kind of jewellery. Apart from Figure 10, the elderly women in figures 7 and 8 seem to have draped the *chador* over their heads. This, I would argue, is not related to their religious identity but mostly to the Assamese middle-class gender identity. We can surmise this through the personal interviews conducted by Bobbeeta Sharma with some of the former actresses in the Assamese film industry. In her interview with the first woman actor of Assamese cinema, Aideu Handique, it is revealed that Handique was not allowed to see any films by her father, not even the local theatrical performances, such as the *bhaona* (2014). Another well-known actress, Gyanada Kakati tells Sharma that her mother was very strict and would not approve of her singing or dancing. Thus, gender mores and norms in an Assamese household were not too different for either Muslim or Hindu women and girls.

## THE NEW ARCHIVE AND CONCLUSION

Through the different forms of memory and representations that we have considered so far, it does appear that the 'visual economies', which have been circulating over the Assamese Muslim body, have been those of convenience rather than being representative of the community so far (Mookherjee 2016). This is where I bring in the question about the archive, as it is through the archive that we commit the act of remembrance and forgetting. Charles Mereweather writes that the archive has become one of the 'defining characteristics of the modern era' because of its significance 'as the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored and recovered (2006)'.

It is precisely this aspect of the archive that makes personal family albums the response to the challenge of building a 'new' archive.

David Bate argues that photographs are 'sites of memory' and as such, '…photographic images offer not a view on history, but as mnemic devices, are perceptual phenomena upon which a historical representation is constructed' (2010). Sandbye explains the process of examining family albums and why it is crucial. She describes it as a primer for understanding how to read the family album. She explains:

> In order to write about a given family album, I need to manoeuvre between the global and the local, the general and the particular, the macro- and the micro-level ideology and emotion, and to be inclusive in my methodology rather than reductive. Albums are objects that are produced, used, circulated, talked about, laughed at, cried at, cared for, forgotten and even discarded … while every family photograph adheres in some way to the rituals and conventions of a particular group of people in history, we must also consider the materiality of each album and its individual images … In so doing, we can see the album as a highly social device actively constructing not only memories but also personal cosmologies and human relations in the presence of its making. (2014).

Which is what also makes family photographs and albums so 'affective' and also produce subjects rather than producing feelings within subjects (Sandbye 2014). The affective nature of the family album and photographs provides us with a new archive and way of seeing the cultural and social memory of the Assamese Muslim woman. No wonder that Bate argues that social memory as produced by photographs is something that '…is interfered with by photography precisely because of its affective and subjective status' (2010). To understand this affective nature of the archive, I look at the last example in this paper as being instructive of a new construction of social memory over social time and space.

Writer and translator Syeda Jebeen Sabira Shah, who is in her late fifties, has been based in the US for the last thirty-odd years. She is from Guwahati and is an Assamese Muslim woman. I found her social media profile interesting because she has been uploading photographs

of her family and distant relatives over the last few years. Figure 12 shows a photograph of her mother-in-law with her cousin. Shah does not simply upload photographs, but also provides personal narratives and histories in these digital albums. The photograph (Figure 12) is staged, but it is not very clear if it was shot inside a studio like in Figure 11 Over an email interview, I asked Shah her reason for sharing these images on social media, and she said:

> I have a large number of family members and even distant relatives on FB [Facebook], also from my husband's side … [I share these images] especially for the younger generations, I feel should know about their relatives, ancestors and family histories.



**Figure 12:** Two young Assamese Muslim women, dated late 1950s. Photo courtesy - Facebook timeline of Syeda Jebeen Sabira Shah

> So many, of them thank me for giving information about their grandparents or great-grandparents … then, there are my other FB friends, especially Assamese non-Muslim friends who I think, should know about the histories of Assamese Muslim families, especially since the last few years there has been a conscious effort by some section of the Assamese people to ignore the existence of Assamese Muslims and their various contribution to the society[17].

The loss of social memory and erasure is important to note in her response. Both Shah and Begum agree that there has been a lack of representation in popular media. Shah says that, while there are Assamese Muslim characters in the media, they 'should get more representation so that Assamese Muslims of all backgrounds can identify more easily.' Dr Begum explains that 'there is not just lack of Assamese Muslim representation in popular forms of media, but also in other walks of life. For instance, I am a doctor at a civil hospital in Assam and, here, there is just another woman doctor with me and one Assamese Muslim doctor.'[18]

As cultural citizens, this very palpable fear of erasure is what this paper tried to address, taking a visual studies and cultural studies perspective. I have argued that this is the moment for an ontological turn in what we consider the archive. Anirudh Deshpande advises his fellow historians on the importance of visual materials and evidence in furthering and enriching the discipline. He believes that, ' … [to] keep it [history], socially relevant historians would do well to engage with the importance of visual materials produced by the state and society and integrate them in writing histories which overcome the divorce between professional and public histories' (2018). In this context we need to engage with the question of what are the 'social frameworks of memory' and how the digital circulation of the archive may influence it. As Blom writes, when these frameworks 'include time producing or time critical media, i.e., media constructed around technologies that modulate, compress, distribute and differentiate time – the abstract sense of time subtending collective memory refracts into a myriad of different timescapes (2017:17)'. This is one way to not just subvert

popular memory or erasure, but through these very networked timescapes, it is possible to build up possibilities of new memories through the personal photograph. Photography has the 'power to speak one's own history, while underlining that photography is both a material and a social practice' (Sandbye 2014).

This new archive allows us the possibilities to construct new personal and social meanings pertaining to a community and gender precisely because of photography's interpretative ability and ambiguity (Bate 2010; Sandbye 2014). Through the networked and digital archive, the images, as is memory, are in constant circulation; and this alters our pre-conceived social memories as 'radical changes in the material frameworks of memory are intimately woven with changes in the conceptualization of memory (Blom:14)'. Thus, through our memories being codes,[19] it is entirely possible to discursively imagine new social memories of the cultural citizen, that is the Assamese Muslim woman beyond that of the pre-modern or the vernacular.

## REFERENCES

1. Anderson, Clare. 2009. 'Oscar Mallitte's Andaman Photographs, 1857–58', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 67 (SPRING 2009); 152–172.

2. Arnold, David. 2013. *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India's Modernity*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

3. Barbhuiya, Shahin Ahmed. 2010. 'Influence of Sufism on Assamese Culture and Society', Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Department of Persian Studies, Gauhati University.

4. Bate, David. 2010. 'The Memory of Photography', *Photographies*, vol. 3, no. 2, September: 243–257.2

5. Bhuyan, S.K. 1947. 'Annals of the Delhi Badshahate: Being a Translation of the Old Assamese Chronicle Padshah-Buranji, with Introduction and Notes', Gauhati: Government of Assam in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies. Not too sure what the author is trying to say about the source. What will be the style for this reference?

6. Bora, Papori. 2014. 'Speech of the Nation and Conversations and the Margins of the Nation-State', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*: 1–17.

7. Blom, Ina. 2017. 'Introduction: Rethinking Social Memory: Archives, Technology, and the Social', I. Blom et al. (ed.), *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology, and the Social*: 11–38. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

8. Das, Rabindra. 2014. 'The Muslims of Assam: A Critical Study,' *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 19, no. 1, version XI, February: 96–100.

9. Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz (trans.), London: The University of Chicago Press.

10. Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

11. Deshpande, Anirudh. 2018. 'Histories, Academic and Public: Issues in Treating the Visuals as an Archive', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 53, no. 50, 22 December 22: 16–20.

12. Dube, Saurabh. 2016. 'Mirrors of Modernity: Time-Space, the Subaltern and the Decolonial', *Postcolonial Studies*, 19:1: 1–21.

13. Edwards, Elizabeth. 2005. 'Photographs and the Sound of History', *Visual Anthropology,* vol. 21, no. 1 and 2, Spring/Fall 2005: 27–46.

14. Gadihoke, Sabeena. 2014. 'The Many Lives of Photography: Visual Sensation and the Urban Everyday 1945–1970', Unpublished PhD Dissertation submitted to the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

15. Gait, Edward. 1906. *A History of Assam*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and C.

16. Gohain, Hiren. 1973. 'Origins of the Assamese Middle Class', *Social Scientist*, vol. 2, no. 1. August: 11–26.

17. Gupta, Charu. 2008. *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black.

18. Freitag, Sandria B. 2015. 'Consumption and Identity: Imagining "Everyday Life" through Popular Visual Culture', *Visual Homes, Image Worlds: Essays from Tasveer Ghar, the House of Pictures*: 239–56. Delhi: Yoda Press.

19. Highmore, Ben. 2002. *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge.

20. Jones, Amelia. 1982. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

21. Kaur, Ravinder and Blom Hansen, Thomas. 2015. 'Aesthetics of Arrival: Spectacle, Capital, Novelty in Post-Reform India', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*: 1–11.

22. Kuhn, Annette. 2000, 'A Journey through Memory', *Memory and Methodology*: 179–196. Oxford: Berg.

23. McGowan, Abigail. 2015. 'Modernity at Home: Leisure, Autonomy and the New Woman in India', *Visual Homes, Image Worlds: Essays from Tasveer Ghar, The House of Pictures*: 277–290. Delhi: Yoda Press.

24. Merewether, Charles. 2006. 'Introduction – Art and the Archive', *Charles Merewether: The Archive*, London: Whitechapel Gallery, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

25. Miller, Toby. 2011. 'Cultural Citizenship', in *Matrizes*, vol. 4, no. 2: 57–74.

26. Mookherjee, Nayanika. 2016. *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*, New Delhi: Zubaan Publishers.

27. Neog, Maheswar. 2004. *Cultural Heritage of Assam*, New Delhi: Omsons Publications.

28. Pachuau, Joy L.K. and van Schendel, Willem. 2016. *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

29. Pinney, Christopher. 1997. *Camera Indica: A Social History of India's Photography*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

30. Pinney, Christopher. 2011. *Photography and Anthropology*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

31. Sandbye, Mette. 2014. 'Looking at the Family Photo Album: A Resumed Theoretical Discussion of Why and How', *Journal of AESTHETICS & CULTURE*, vol. 6.

32. Schendel, Willem Van and Pachuau, Joy L.K. 2016. 'Borderland Histories, Northeastern India: An Introduction', *Studies in History* 32 (1): 1–4.

33. Sengupta, Madhumita. 2016. *Becoming Assamese: Colonialism and new subjectivities in Northeast India*, Oxon and New York: Routledge.

34. Sharma, Bobbeta, 2014. *The Moving Image and Assamese Culture: Joymoti, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, and Assamese Cinema*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

35. Singer, Ben, 2001. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, New York: Columbia University Press.

# WEB REFERENCES:

1. 'Absence/Presence', The Chicago School of Media Theory, at https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/ (last accessed on 22 December 2018).

2. 'About: Exclusive Advertising Private Limited', at http://exclusiveadvertising.in/about/ (last accessed on 19 December 2018).

3. Ahmed, Shaheen, 'Before Sanjukta Parashar, there was another gritty female cop from Assam', at https://scroll.in/article/734814/before-sanjukta-parashar-there-was-another-gritty-female-cop-from-assam (last accessed on 2 January 2019).

4. Ahmed, Shaheen, 'Forgotten Histories: A Library in a Guwahati Mosque Shares the Fate of an Old Assamese Community', at https://scroll.in/article/804773/forgotten-histories-a-library-in-a-guwahati-mosque-shares-the-fate-of-an-old-assamese-community (last accessed on 3 January 2019).

5. Ahmed, Shaheen, 'The Fading Memory of Assam's Syncretic History', at https://thewire.in/history/the-fading-memory-of-assams-syncretic-history (last accessed on 2 January 2019).

6. Ahmed, Shaheen, 'Altaf Mazid: A Tribute', at http://raiot.in/altaf-mazid-a-tribute/ (last accessed on 9 January 2019).

7. 'Assamese Cinema', at http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Assamese_cinema#Siraj (last accessed on 2 January 2019).

8. 'Bhupen Hazarika: Collection of News & Articles on Our Beloved Bhupen Hazarika', at http://bhupenhazarika-news.blogspot.com/2010/06/movie-poster-siraj-1948.html (last accessed on 5 January 2019).

9. 'Box Office Assam', at http://www.boxofficeassam.com/?s=samsul+huda (last accessed on 5 January 2019).

10. Deka, Prantik, 'Altaf Mazid: The Life and Work behind the Legend', at http://www.assamportal.com/altaf-mazid-life-work-behind-legend/ (last accessed on 9 January 2019).

11. 'French Masters are Coming To a Screen Near You – Cine Art Society Organises Festival to Promote World Cinema, with Special Screening of Joymoti', at https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/french-masters-are-coming-to-a-screen-near-you-cine-art-society-organises-festival-to-promote-world-cinema-with-special-screening-of-joymoti/cid/698297 (last accessed on 23 December 2018).

12. *Joymoti* (1935 film), at https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b8d1e0416 (last accessed on 30 December 2018).

13. '*Joymoti* (1935): Full Cast and Crew', at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0151153/fullcredits/?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm (last accessed on 30 December 2018).

14. '*Joymoti* (1935 film)', at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joymoti_(1935_film) (last accessed on 30 December 2018).

15. Khalid, Saif, 'As Assam Counts its Citizens, Muslims Fear They May Be Left Out', at https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/assam-counts-citizens-muslims-fear-left-180530080633948.html (last accessed on 15 December 2018).

16. Lutz, Hazel, 'India: Clothing and Adornment', at https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/clothing-around-world/india-clothing-adornment (last accessed on 5 January 2019).

# NOTES

1. There has been much commentary across various mainstream and alternative media outlets nationally as well as globally over the two issues. Most arguments favour the migrants while some favour the indigenous inhabitants of Assam. However, no such argument in either the Assamese or English press has so far been published from an Assamese–Muslim perspective.

2. For instance, an article in *Al Jazeera* that was published in May 2018, titled, 'As Assam counts its citizens, Muslims fear they may be left out': https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/assam-counts-citizens-muslims-fear-left-180530080633948.html

3. I take this argument from Ina Blom, where she argues that digital technologies make memories into code. I shall return to this argument again in the course of this paper.

4. Utpal Borpujari shared this concern over a telephonic interview conducted in New Delhi on 9 January 2018.

5. In the early 2000s, Assamese filmmaker and critic, Altaf Mazid released a restored version of the film. Since all the original copies were lost, he culled out material from a documentary on Jyotiprasad Agarwala by Bhupen Hazarika in 1976 titled *Roop Konwar Jyoti Prasad aru Joymoti* (for reference, check here). However, there is a confusion on the year of release of the

digitally restored version of the film. Some websites refer to the year as 2001, some as 2004 and some as 2006.

6. The websites that list this actor as part of the crew include Wikipedia, IMDB and Indapaedia.

7. Telephonic interviews conducted on 5 January, 2019. Location: Nagaon (Assam) and Melbourne (Australia).

8. Some of his filmography is listed in the website BoxofficeAssam.com; however, the actor's biography and images are missing. So are other details regarding the roles the actor has played in various films.

9. From the 'About Us' page as listed on their website.

10. Telephonic interviews conducted on 13 December 2018. Location: Guwahati (Assam) and Melbourne (Australia).

11. I had observed the absence of bodies (is this how it should be written: bodies? We are talking about M T and D women in advertisements, right? Then what does bodies here mean?)) such as those of Muslim, Tribal and Dalit women from the advertisements published by both the Government of India and private companies in the period mentioned in my previous MPhil research, 'Decoding The Fetish: A Dialectical Understanding of the Notions of the Fetish in Advertisements in India from 1970 to 1993', submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2016.

12. Footnote number 44.

13. For some detail on the evolving fashion sense in India among men and women, this article by Hazel Lutz is useful. The article can be found here.

14. As cited in Sandbye (2014).

15. In a personal interview conducted at his residence in Guwahati on 15 August 2018.

16. I kept trying to get an interview with Wahid for many months but without any success. A conversation with her may have been useful to the purpose of the paper.

17. Email interview with Syeda Jebeen Sabira Shah conducted on 11 January 2019.

18. Telephonic interview was conducted on 13 December 2018 and location is Guwahati (Assam) and Melbourne (Australia).

19. I referred to this at the start of the paper.