

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COLONIAL IDENTITY OF THE GREATER 'MATAK' COMMUNITY OF ASSAM: RELIGION COMMUNITY, ETHNICITY AND STATE (1760'S-1900'S)

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ABSTRACT

The 'Matak' alias 'Mayamara' refers to a Sect or Community whose religious way of life is based on the ideology of Aniruddhadeva, a Vaishnava saint of the early 17th century Assam. It hardly denotes a specific Jati, Tribe or Race as mistakenly labeled by some of the British writers as well as by a section of Matak themselves. There have been people from several tribes and casts within the Matak community of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, such as Moran, Ahom, Kachari, Chutia, Brahmin, Kayastha, Kalita and Kaivarta. During the prolonged Matak Rebellion against the Ahom State (1769-1805), and after that within the Matak State (1805-1842) itself several internal contradictions emerged among various groups within the Matak community taking the shape of sub-sectarian as well as political rivalry. The Matak who are enlisted within the 'More Other Backward Classes (MOBC) of Assam, now are demanding for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status from the Indian Government along with five other OBC/MOBC communities- Ahoms, Koch-Rajbangshis, Morans, Chutiyas and Adivasis (Tea tribes). The political demands of Matak along with that of the other communities has recently become a crucial issue in the electoral politics of Assam. However, a little attempt has been made in this article to highlight various socio-economic determinants of Matak identity politics as well to assess the growth of modern political consciousness among the Matak community during early Colonial era.

KEY WORDS: MATAK, Assam, Community, Ethnicity,

The present political scenario, especially the electoral politics of Assam is largely influenced by the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by six communities, and frequent agitations launched by them to place the gravity of their demand in front of both the Assam Government and the Central Government. Matak community is one among these six communities. The others are Tai Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Koch Rajbongshi and Tea Tibes (Adivasi). The population of the Matak community at present is more than 20 lakhs, according to a memorandum submitted to the Narendra Modi Government in July, 2014, by the 'All Assam Matak Yuba-Chatra Sanmilan' in collaboration with the 'All Assam Matak Sanmilan' (Das 2015: 200). Most of the Matak live in present Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts which once formed their state between the Brahmaputra and the Burhidihing river during 1805-39 AD. The rest of the Matak lie scattered throughout the Brahmaputra valley. The Assam Government has enlisted the the Matak within the More Other Backward Classes (MOBC).

The prolonged Matak Rebellion (1769-1805) against the Ahom State led to considerable change in geo-political distribution of the Matak population, as many of them took shelter in the interior or frontier regions to escape persecution

or to establish military hubs to organize and train the rebels. Namrup and Chaulkhuwa in present Dibrugarh district during the first phase, and in the final phase Japoribheta of Lakhimpur (in the foothills of present Arunachal Pradesh) and Bengmara (present Tinsukia town) were the centres of Matak uprisings. Some Matak and Morans disguised themselves as Ahoms overnight to escape the unrest, and with the passage of time they merged with the Ahoms. After the Ahom-Matak Agreement, 1805 the Matak uprisings came to an end, and a semi-autonomous Matak State came into being within the Ahom State with Bengmara (present Tinsukia town) as its Capital. Consequently large number of Matak migrated to the Matak State, their new home land recognized by the Ahom Government.

According to several Tai-Ahom and Assamese chronicles, the Ahoms, a group of Tai-Shans in their prolonged journey to the Brahmaputra Valley (1215-28) named the groups of people they met, according to their physical traits or nature. In the Ahom language 'Ma' means powerful and 'Tak' means tested or examined. The name 'Matak' (Mat – principle or belief + Eak – one) was first offered by the Ahom King Susenpha alias Pratap Singha (1603-41) after "testing the unflinching obedience of the

Matak disciples to their Guru" (Dutta 1996: 5). According to a section of scholars, including R. K. Bordoloi the prevailing word 'Matak' is the corrupt form of the real word 'Matek'. Interpreting almost in the same way, S. Rajkumar too argues that the Moamarias are called 'Mataks' as they fought as 'one man' against the Ahom State (Dutta 1996: 7). (Note-1) However, today the respective community across Assam has recognized the word 'Matak' to identify themselves, and it is unanimously recognized by all groups of scholars that the word 'Matak' was coined by the Ahoms.

The Mataks experienced the British military might even before the formation of Matak State (1805). Captain Thomas Welsh of the British East India Company in early 1794, on behalf of the Ahom Government marched to upper Assam to crush the Matak rebellion. With a small detachment of 360 infantries equipped with firearms, Welsh easily overpowered the several times bigger Matak detachment. When three decades later in 1824, British again entered Assam to eliminate the Burmese menace with an objective to annex Assam permanently, Matak chief Matibar Barsenapati decided to establish amicable relations with the East India Company in 1825.

IDENTITY CONTRADICTIONS ON THE EVE OF FORMATION OF THE MATAK STATE:

Various identity discourses among the present Matak community are inevitably related to their historic roots that can be traced in the rebellion of Mataks against the Ahom State and its consequences. Hitherto there has never been an end to the controversy on the roots and nature of the historic Matak Rebellion that paved the way for the decline of Ahom State as well as for the entry of British Colonialism in the North-East India. After the Ahom-Matak Agreement (1805), the politics and administration of the newborn Matak State were gradually being concentrated in the hands of a few descendents of Sarbananda Singha, a Matak of Chutia origin. It greatly annoyed the Moran section of the Mataks who had in fact created the rebellion 36 years before under Ragha Moran in 1769.

Ahoms authority before the Matak Uprisings never interfered in the internal affairs of the Morans. Morans maintained a separate ethnic identity which can be distinguished from Ahoms as well as from rest of the Mataks. Referring to the Moran section of the Mataks, Edward Gait (1863-1950) writes, "At the end of Ahom rule, they occupied the country between the Dangari and Dibru rivers, they paid no revenue but supplied various products of jungles such as elephant, dye, honey, mats." (Dohutia 2016: 235) Although the Morans became a part of the Matak society after adopting Mayamara Vaishnavism in the late 18th century

it couldn't bring any revolutionary change into their socio-economic traditions that was centered around primitive way of cultivation and the products of jungles. Only after few years of their conversion Morans were destined to suffer catastrophic reverses during the prolonged Matak uprisings between 1769 and 1805. Like many other tribal groups of India, the Morans consider themselves as the "Son of the soil".

"They along with their brethren, the Borahis, had their own Chiefs and territories when Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam, came from Upper Burma in the early 13th century. Sukapha and his men took over the territories and Ahomised most members of the tribes, and appointed them to serve the newly founded state with the supply of resources from their jungles, such as the wood, elephants, honey, fuel wood and so forth.....the Borahis completely lost their identity as a separate tribe. There is no doubt that these tribes submitted to the foreign rule because of their lack of an organized force, being then under an inferior economy.....It was natural that they should unite, and at the extreme point of their exploitation, they would protest.....It is significant that the Tungkhungiya Buranji records how the Ahom forces used communal terms to heap contempt upon the Morans as an unsophisticated tribe (gandhikhowa Moran, i.e. eater of an insect having dirty smell called 'Gandhi')..... Thus, the Moamariya Revolt was a result of both ethnicity and religion; while the first precipitated the organization, the latter provided the ideology to create it." (Nath 2008) (Note-2)

Due to their close and inherent connection with the forest and its products, the Moran section of the Mataks are often called "*Habitolia*" (people from jungles), very often in a derogatory sense. Whereas the other Mataks are labelled as "*Mukolia*" (people from open areas). Even the Nadial Mataks were considered as 'Mukolia' Mataks. (Note-3) This practice of specification began during the later phase of Matak Uprisings, and such practices were largely political. Thus the Moran community was considered more or less unpolished or uncivilised not only by the Ahoms, but also by the other Mataks who were the inhabitants of plains or the open areas of the State: containing people from caste Hindu origin and other communities who were Hinduised and Sanskritised long before as compared to the Morans. Unlike the Morans and the Nadial Mataks, they were in higher positions of the state administration, and lived in close connection with the other non-Mata people of the valley. (Note-4)

BRITISH ANNEXATION OF THE MATAK STATE AND ITS EARLY CONSEQUENCES

Despite the internal contradictions, all sections of the Matak managed to fight together against their common arch rival- the Ahom Government. But with the formation of Matak State in 1805 and elimination of the common threat, again the internal contradictions emerged. Earlier due to inclusive policies and diplomatic efforts of Sarbananda and Matibar the internal rivalries remained passive.

While the Morans have been largely the disciples of Mayamara Tipuk *Satra* of Doomdooma and its branches in Tinsukia district, most of the non-Moran Matak including the Royal Family have become the disciples of Mayamara Dinjoy *Satra* of Chabua which was in fact the main *Satra* shifted by Bhaktanandadeva from Jorhat to the Matak Kingdom in 1837. However, till the death of Matak chief Matibar on 2nd January, 1839, the Morans remained silent as apart from the support of the main Mayamara *Satra*, Sarbananda and Matibar enjoyed the moral as well as political support of Moran dominated Mayamara Tipuk *satra* as well. But when Bhagirath, the grandson of Sarbananda became Matak chief in 1839, Bhaktanadeva of the main *Satra* of Chabua prevailed, whereas Nababhujdeva of the Tipuk *Satra* was not taken into consideration. Such a policy antagonized the Morans who were the disciples of the latter. Now each group being manipulated by their respective Spiritual heads were trying to overpower each other. Moreover, some political steps taken by Bhagirath being backed by his Spiritual mentor further enhanced the feeling alienation among the Morans. This situation can be better understood with the writings of some contemporary British officials who were in search of opportunities to create division between the Morans and the rest of the Matak.

"According to Captain Adam White, the discussions were occasioned by Sectarian differences between the Morans, the inhabitants of Upper Matak who were followers of the Mahanta of Tipuk *Satra*, a branch of the main Mayamara *Satra* and the Non-Morans, who inhabited the Lower Matak, and were disciples of Bhaktanandadeva, the head of the main *Satra*." (Dohutia 2016: 47-48)

In November, 1839, several Moran village Headmen (*Gaon Burha*) and common villagers under the guidance of Tipuk *Satradhikar*, Nababhjdeva met Captain Hamilton Vetch in Tipuk who was on his way to Matak Capital with an objective to make the new Matak chief to sign a new Agreement with the British Government. They informed him about their troubles. The Morans had already submitted a memorandum to the local British Authority with an appeal to liberate them from the Matak State and to introduce an a separate system of government for the Morans. Consequently Vetch advised the Moran leaders to send a delegation to the

Matak Capital with him. At the grand meeting Vetch introduced a proposal of separating the *Ojani Matak* alias Upper Matak region, inhabited by the Moran section of the Matak from the *Namoni Matak* alias Lower Matak region inhabited by the other Matak (who were not Morans) . (Note-5) At the meeting the Moran representatives cherished the proposal of British Government, whereas the Matak chief, his brothers and rest of the Matak of rank vehemently opposed the proposal (Dohutia 2016: 51). Such an open disagreement among the Matak offered the British Capitalists their desired opportunity to annex the Matak State as it's so called 'waste lands' were very suitable for tea plantation. (Note-6)

Finally by a proclamation Captain Vetch himself assumed the charge of the Matak State. Three years later in 1842 the British Government formally declared the annexation of Matak State in the British-Indian Empire. That same year Dibrugarh town was announced as the Head Quarter of erstwhile greater Lakhimpur District and the District Judicial Court was shifted to Dibrugarh from Lakhimpur. Similarly the British shifted their headquarter for Matak territory from Rangagarha to Dibrugarh. Thus the "Devide and Rule" policy of British further aggravated the internal sectarian as well as political rivalries among various segments of the Matak community, and paved the way for British annexation of the Matak territory.

After the annexation of the Matak State in 1839, the descendants of the Matak Royal Family were given pension which had been continued throughout the Colonial era, and after that by the Indian Government till 1973. (Note-7) Moreover, the Gohain brothers (the sons of Matibar) were offered rent- free grants individually on a fixed rate. Bhagirath, the grandson of Sarbananda Singha was appointed as a *Sadar Amin* on a salary under the jurisdiction of District Judicial Court, in addition to his pension. (Note-8) After his death another members of his family were appointed in his place. The ex-officials and men of rank were also granted remission in revenue to ensure their goodwill to the British Authority (Dutta 1996: 174). On the other hand, Morans due to their isolationist attitude and religious conservatism were lagging behind the rest of the Matak. Unlike the latter the Morans were reluctant to cooperate with the British. Morans even didn't allow a single piece of paper to enter their kitchens if it was printed in English. As a result the British authority imported outsiders to work in Government institutions. Within few years the Morans became alienated from the British authority in their own territory. Anti-English practices were common in several Moran villages even during the Second World War, when some frontier regions of

the Upper Assam came into contact with the Western army personnel of the Allied forces (Dohutia 2016: 293-294).

In early 1840's, British introduced opium among the Moran society of Doomdoooma, and the other regions in its proximity, and that too with the initiative of their own Satradhikar Nababhuj Mahanta who came to a personal agreement with the local British Government in 1842. It was a diplomatic endeavor on the part of the British authority to weaken the Morans, as they highly regards their Spiritual Head, and often identify themselves with their *Satradhikars* alias *Gosains*. However, the primary motive of the British was to snatch away lands from the indigenous people for tea cultivation. In 1838, already an Act namely 'Waste lands Grant Rules, 1838' was introduced by the British Government to serve the purpose of making the so called 'waste lands' a Government property. In 1841-42, Major Northbrook, signed an agreement with Mayamara *Satradhikar* Nababhuj Gosain. Under this agreement the British offered the *Satradhikar* a cash of 1,500 rupess, 12 guns and 50 maunds of opium. For exchange, he offered the British the entire Dibru-Dirak region which was under the jurisdiction of the Tipuk Satra of Doomdoooma (Das 2015: 151). As a result the Moran villagers were bound to leave the places namely Talap, Daisa, Chakariting and Hilikhaguri which were within the region given to the British. The *Satradhikar* declared that he had taken that large amount of opium for the wellbeing of the country, and he urged the Moran society to consume it for 'one month' (Das 2015: 153).

On the other hand, as a sign of gratitude the families of the *Satrdhikar* and his 90 Moran disciples were offered 500 acres (1500 *bighas*) of tax-free land by the British Government. (Note-9) Later again the Government imposed tax upon those lands in 1904. As a result the Morans were bound to leave those places and they shifted themselves to the interior places. "The Report on the Province of Assam" (1853), by A. J. Moffat Mills demonstrates that the Morans even in the second half of the 19th century were the inhabitants of interior high land villages surrounded by jungles. They are largely migratory and were mainly dependent on shifting cultivation. Whereas the rest of the Mataks in the southern part of the territory were habituated with permanent settlement in their villages, and the culture of productive wet-rice cultivation (Dutta 1996: 129).

The Agreement of 1842 was the juncture from where buying and consuming opium became a common tradition among the colonized Moran-Mataks and even 'opium' became an inherent element in various religious rituals among the 19th century Moran society. Opium was

easily available in the shops of the North-Indian traders who entered Assam on the walk of British imperialists. They very often worked as agents of the British tea planters. Both the tea planters and the Marwari traders encouraged the growing opium consumption among the Matak-Morans, as it facilitated their scheme to expand their business as well as to control the natives by making them addicted and physically weak. The Marwaries opened their *Gola* in Sadia and beside the tea estates in the proximity of Matak-Moran villages. (Note-10) When prior to tea plantation, opium was a major source of profit, Marwari's were involved in this trade. They even settled in the midst of jungles and on the paths leading to the jungles in order to trade with different tribes (Baruah 1999: 61).

In 1864, the erstwhile Matak Capital Bengmara, was renamed as 'Tinsukia' by the new alien Government. Most of the area of the erstwhile Matak Capital, in 1899, became a property of Senahiram Aagarwala. Notably the area of the erstwhile Capital was put under the jurisdiction of 'Waste lands Grant Rules, 1838'. He came to an agreement with the local British authority, and by paying minimum bribes to the *Laat mandal*, Agarwala took legal possession of the most of the area, by 1905. Very soon he was joined by his brother Chunnilal Agarwala. They erased most of the historical memories and constructions of the area (Mahanta 2013: 202). Notably by 1899, most of descendants of the erstwhile Matak Royal family and other elites moved to Dibrugarh town, and the other areas in its proximity to remain in touch with the British administration, and in search for employment and other means of livelihood.

Whereas in Tinsukia, taking advantage of the exploitative land laws of the Colonizers both the brothers grabbed land from the locals by any means. Moreover, the local Matak and Morans, who were traditionally peasants, suffered from financial hardship in the newborn monetized economy and heavy taxation imposed by the colonizers, like the rest of the peasants of Assam. They were often bound to sell their land to the British planters and the North-Indian traders in minimum price. Thus the 'Sons of the Soil' handed over their finest land holdings to the Capitalists and put themselves in relatively remote places to avoid the Colonial administration.

However, the Mataks and Morans were destined to suffer not only politically and economically. During 'Planter-Raj' they suffered psychologically as well. (Note-11) The memories of the atrocities committed by a section of the Matak rebels on the non-Matak masses of Assam during the second half of 18th century and early 19th century (1769-1805), were still alive. Hemchandra Baruah, a prominent

writer and social reformer of the 19th century Assam, in his famous Assamese dictionary '*Hemkosh*' (1900) used the words 'Moran', 'Matak' and 'Maomoriya' synonymously (p. 794). He, in the dictionary, labeled the Morans as a "very cruel" tribe, as they killed many people during the uprisings being the predominant group of the Matak community. It was published 58 years after the colonization of the territories of Matak by the British. Such interpretations naturally added to the growth of myopic visions among the local people as well as among the contemporary British officials and writers about the Moran community. R. K. Bordoloi, the *Upanyash Samrat* (king of novels) of Assam, in his novel *Manomoti* (1900) compared the Morans with the *Maans* (Burmese). He accused them of severely disrupting Assam that broke the backbone of Assamese society and paved the way for Burmese invasion and atrocities (1817-25). They were followed by renowned Assamese litterateurs across the Colonial and the post-Colonial era, like Lakhminath Bezbaruah, Atul Chandra Hazarika and Giridhar Sharma who expressed similar sorts of opinions in their writings about the Matak-Morans (Mahanta 2013: 207-208). Thus the Matak in general, and the Morans in particular were largely defamed in the Assamese literature. They remained alienated from the mainstream Colonial National politics of the Brahmaputra valley to a considerable extent.

CONCLUSION

The Matak-Morans have had a crucial role in framing the history of the 18th and early 19th century Assam. Being united, they relentlessly struggled against the Ahom state to carve out their own independent state. S. K. Bhuyan remarks that the transformation of the Matak into a military body has its parallel, though in a much larger scale, in that of the Sikhs who contributed to the subversion of Mughal authority in India. In both cases the fighting element in their sectorial organizations was introduced as a result of the clash of the *Gurus* with the Government of the land (Nath 2008). The ethnic Morans shaped this rebellion as a 'Freedom Struggle' by the 'son of the soil' to liberate their own territory. Whereas for the 'Nadial Matak' of Kaivarta origin, it became a socio-political struggle against the Upper Caste domination of Assamese society, and humiliation of the lower casts by them. For instance, they plundered and burnt down the Brahmanical Satras of Majuli. Earlier Ragha Moran compelled the Brahmin Satradhikars to recognize the superiority of Astabhuj, the Spiritual head of the Matak who was a Kayastha Hindu by caste, but recognized as a Shudra, and thus inferior by the Brahmin Satradhikars of Assam.

Growing internal contradictions among the Matak community centered around power politics and ethnocentrism

paved for the entry of British imperialism and their agents, the native Indian Capitalists. From the ruler the Matak became ruled. Due to their religious conservatism, and colonial policies of the British Government, a large section of the Matak community, particularly the Morans remained ignorant and alienated. The feelings of 'relative deprivation' can be traced in the Socio-political Movements organized by them in the post-Colonial Assam. Still the memories and flock tales about their 18th century struggle against the oppressive State keep on inspiring and energizing a huge section of the Matak and the Moran society.

Notes:

1. *Satras* are basically monasteries set up to propagate Vaishnavism. The chief of a *satra* is called *Satradhikar*. Sankaradev is said to have established his first *Sattra* at Bardowa, Nagaon. Most of the *satras* are named after their geographical location. Unlike the terms 'Matak' and 'Moamara', the term 'Mayamara' is found neither in Ahom chronicles nor in the biographies of Vaishnava saints of Assam. Only one official record, a letter written in July, 1802 by King Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) to the then Governor General Lord Wellesley, used the term 'Mayamara'. But in course of time, the term 'Mayamara' became more popular than that of 'Moamara'. Perhaps because the heads of the Mayamara *Satras* gave wide publicity to this term through their published biographies. (Dutta, 1996: pp. 11-12)

2. Matak is a politically organized greater community formed by several groups of tribal and folk communities who belonged to a 'Mayamara' sect of Vaishnavism. According to S. Dutta, Moran is a tribe, whereas Matak is a community which includes all the disciples of Mayamara *Satra* belonging to different castes, tribes and professional group including the Morans. The Morans constitute one of the very old ethnic groups of Assam. On the basis of their racial and linguistic affinities, they are ascribed Bodo origin, like many other tribes or linguistic groups of Assam. (<http://shakmachanongmaithem.blogspot.com/2010/09/morans-and-their-traditional-house-in->)

3. Kaivartas (traditionally known as *Dom* in Assam) are found to be one of the aboriginal communities in Orissa, Bengal and Assam from unknown past. They are largely considered as people from Dravidian origin. Matak of Kaivarta origin who generally lived in the proximity of rivers and became disciples of Mayamara *Satra* are called *Nadial* (*Nadi*: river) Matak. Fishing is traditionally considered to be the primary occupation of the Kaivartas. Today they are one of the sixteen Scheduled Castes of Assam.

4. Several Matak were high ranking officials in Ahom administration. Mainly they were from Ahom origin. Many Ahoms from the elite *Duwara* family of Ahom were the disciples of Mayamara *Satra* on the eve of the Matak rebellion. They supported the rebels against their own Ahom King. Moreover, the *Khargharia Phukon* (officer who looked after the Royal gunpowder store) was the disciple of Mayamara *Satra*. He helped the Matak rebels by secretly wetting the *Khar* (gunpowder) used by the Royal troops. (Gogoi 2007: 72, 83) (*translated from the Assamese original by the author*)
5. The Matak Kingdom, at the time of Matibar Barsenapati, was divided into two tracts. The first one situated between the Dangori and the Dibru rivers upto the Panee Chokey (near the junction of the Dangori and Dibru rivers) was predominantly inhabited by the Moran section of the Matak. The second one, lying between the Burhi Dihing and Brahmaputra, was inhabited by other Assamese people, most of whom were Matak. It was considerably covered with jungles. High ridges of ground ran across the country from south west to north-east, particularly towards the eastern boundary. But the general level of the country was low. The population of Upper Matak was estimated by Hunter as 10,060 and that of lower Matak as 31,133; the total thus coming to 41,193. At the time A. J. Moffat Mill visited Assam, its population increased to 70,000. (Dutta 1996: 128-129)
6. The waste lands settlement policy (known as the Wasteland Rules of 6 March 1838) tempted the tea planters to grab more land than they required or could manage. "This was because such waste lands provided them with far greater resources than what land as a factor of production ordinarily denotes. The waste lands contained necessarily housing materials including, in most cases, even valuable timber.....Above all, laborers could be settled as tenants on the surplus lands of the plantations, like so many serfs tied to the soil." (Guha 2014: 11)
7. *Rajkumar* Lankeswar Gohain was the last political pensioner of the descendants of Matak Royal family. After Independence he was offered political pension by the Indian Government till his death in 1973. On 3rd April, 1964, he submitted a memorandum to the President of India for restoration of the old Matak capital 'Bengmara Rajnagar' from some North Indian traders who had allegedly occupied the territory illegally by 1905. The respective territory had become a part of the Tinsukia Town hundreded years before in 1864, and lost its several historical and cultural heritages. (Dohutia 2016: 87)
8. The British officially declared the annexation of Matak territory in 1842, and it was made a part of the erstwhile greater Lakhimpur district. "The British arrived in Assam in the year 1826 as per Yandaboo Accord and since then they selected Dibrugarh as a center of administration as well as business purpose in Upper Assam. In the year 1842, Dibrugarh was announced as the Head Quarter of Lakhimpur District. The court was also shifted to Dibrugarh in the same year from Lakhimpur. (<http://dibrugarhjudiciary.gov.in/history.htm>)
9. *Bigha* is a traditional land measurement unit commonly used in Nepal, Bangladesh and in a number of states of India including Assam. There is no standard size of *bigha* and it varies considerably from place to place. In India, *bigha* ceased to be an official legal unit of land measurement in 1957, and it was replaced by the unites: square meter or hectare (10,000 square metre). However, in Assam, one *bigha* is equivalent to one-third of an acre. (Guha 2014: 299)

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