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## Media Discourses on the Charaideo Maidams' UNESCO World Heritage Nomination and the Proposal for The Sukafa University: A Print Media Analysis (May–December 2019)

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### Abstract

This study examines the role of print media in shaping public discourse and policy action regarding the UNESCO World Heritage nomination of the group of Maidams at Charaideo in Assam, India. Using a mixed-method content analysis of 30 news items published across 10 prominent Assamese and English newspapers between May and December 2019, the study evaluates the prominence, framing, and frequency of coverage. The findings reveal that print media significantly contributed to awareness generation and indirectly influenced governmental action, particularly in initiating cadastral surveys essential for UNESCO nomination and to established the Sukafa University. The study highlights the agenda-setting role of regional and national newspapers in heritage conservation.

**Keywords:** Charaideo Maidams, Sukafa University, print media, UNESCO, content analysis, Assam, heritage communication

### 1.1. Introduction:

The group of Maidams, at Charaideo, the royal burial mounds of the Ahom dynasty, represent a vital component of Assam's cultural and archaeological heritage. Despite being recognized as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, the nomination process remained stagnant for several years due to administrative and technical constraints, particularly the absence of a proper government land map (cadastral map). The Charaideo Maidams are the royal burial sites of the Ahom kings, reflecting over 600 years of Assam's rich history. They showcase unique architectural and cultural traditions of the Ahom dynasty. The groups of Maidams are often compared to pyramids because of their structure and historical importance. They help historians understand the social, political, and religious practices of the Ahom period.

In this situation, the media played an important role. Newspapers helped bring attention to key issues like land encroachment, lack of proper records, the absence of detailed surveys of the Maidams' area and establishment of a university in the name of Sukafa, the first king of Ahom, in the maidams' area. By continuously highlighting these problems, the media helped push the authorities to take action.

The Media Management & Research Association, Assam, raised this issue with another important demand—to establish a university in the name of Sukafa in the Charaideo maidams area, the first capital of the Ahom kingdom. The aim was to promote research on the 600-year-old history of the Ahom dynasty and to make proper use of the neglected Maidam areas. Under the leadership of Dr. Zakirul Alam, the association became more active in late 2018, especially after land disputes with the Charaideo Tea Company and the imposition of Section 144 in April 2018. (Section-144, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 is a **preventive legal order, India**, that restricts assembly and certain activities in a particular area.)

The MMR Association worked closely with local people from different communities, religions, and language groups to spread awareness about the importance of getting World Heritage status. They explained that this recognition would not only protect history but also bring benefits like tourism, job opportunities, economic growth, and overall development of the region. Gradually, people understood the importance and started supporting the movement to protect the Maidams.

The association, through Dr. Alam, regularly communicated with government offices such as the district administrations of Charaideo and Sivasagar, the Directorate of Land Records and Survey (DLRS) the State Archaeology Department, the Archaeological Survey of India, revenue department of Assam State, Chief minister office of Assam, archeology department of Assam state, prime minister office of India, local organizations, historians, media persons, academicians and local public etc. This was especially necessary because there was confusion about land boundaries after Charaideo became a separate district in 2016. From October 2018 to December 2019, the association also organized regular press meetings, which were widely covered by the media.

This study is based on those news reports published after the press meetings by the said Association. Earlier, media coverage of the Maidams was very limited because there was not enough reliable information about the nearly 500 Maidams in the area. Some journalists tried to raise awareness, but they often faced pressure from people who had illegally occupied Maidam land for tea gardens and houses.

Due to continuous media coverage, the government finally took action. On 3rd September 2019, a seven-member committee was formed to properly identify and demarcate the Maidams for World Heritage consideration. This meeting took place at the Charaideo District Commissioner's office in the presence of historians, teachers, public representatives, officials, and local people. The committee gave the responsibility to Dr. Zakirul Alam to help identify and verify the

Maidams and monuments to be included in the official land records map and also handed over the responsibility to Dr. Alam to prepare the model map of the proposed World Heritage site, Groups of Maidam at Charaideo. After about two months, the government formed a survey team through the Directorate of Land Records and Survey. Another press meeting held on 12th October 2019 helped keep public attention on the issue. Finally, the survey team was officially assigned on 28th October 2019, and field survey work started from 1st November 2019. This marked an important step from raising awareness to taking real action for the protection of the Maidams.

## 1.2. Objectives:

- i. To examine the role of newspapers in raising public awareness about the Maidams situated in Charaideo, the first capital of the Ahom kingdom and in advocating their preservation and systematic survey for inclusion in the proposed dossier to UNESCO for World Heritage recognition and to set up the Sukafa University.
- ii. To evaluate the contribution of newspapers in facilitating awareness and support for the initial survey of the Maidam landscape, covering approximately 4,756 bighas of land and encompassing around 500 Maidams, along with associated heritage features such as ponds, Deohals, Langkuri Dol, Bailungbari Deohal, Rajabari, Langibor Pond, Baba Tila, Khundana Tila, the residence site of King Sukapha, other related monuments, and the land for Sukafa University.

## 1.3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a **content analysis approach**, combining both **quantitative and qualitative methods** to systematically examine media coverage.

## 1.4. Sample Selection

The study analyzes **30 news items** published between May and December 2019 in **10 widely circulated newspapers**, including both Assamese and English dailies such as:

- Asomiya Pratidin
- The Times of India
- The Sentinel
- The Telegraph
- Amar Asom
- Niyamiya Barta
- Dainik Janambhumi
- Dainik Gana Adhikar
- Dainik Agradoot
- Dainik Batori Kakot

## 1.5. Units of Analysis

Each news item was analyzed based on the following variables:

- Column space (1–7 columns)
- Page placement (front page, inside pages)
- Use of photographs (color/black & white)
- Headline structure (headline, sub-headline, supporting details)
- Total space (in column centimeters)

## 1.6. Data Collection and Coding

Data were collected through archival newspaper analysis. Each item was coded into structured tables to quantify:

- Frequency of coverage
- Prominence (space and placement)
- Presentation style

2.1 Name of the Paper: Asomiya Pratidin, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 July 2019	HeadLine: Ahom Heritage Encroached by Charaideo Tea Company. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Chaolung Sukapha's Maidam Struggles to Preserve Its Existence. <b>Supporting Line / Detail:</b> Media Management & Research Association Alleges Compromise Between Owners, Mandal, and Revenue Department	2 (Box)	Photo (Black & White)	Front page	Guwahati	53

2.	16 September 2019	<b>Headline:</b> First Capital of the Ahom Kingdom Set for Inclusion in World Heritage Map. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Administration Begins Survey to Preserve Hundreds of Bighas of Maidam Land Encroached by Tea Gardens	4 (Box)	No	5 no page	Dibrugarh	73
3.	8 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Detail Survey Conducted at Ahom Capital. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Maidams' Grounds Face Encroachment	3	Pic (Black & White)	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Dibrugarh	61

## 2.2. Name of the Paper: The Times of India, A popular national English Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Missing Map hits efforts to preserve Ahom royals' graves lying in a shambles	7	Picture of Sukafa Maidam in Black & white	6	Guwahati	49
2.	6 <sup>th</sup> Aug, 2019	<b>Head Line:</b> Charaideo's Missing Map Comes in way of UNESCO tag. <b>Sub Headline:</b> Creating Hurdles in Conservation Efforts of Govt.	4	Picture of Maidam in color	6	Guwahati	82
3.	7 <sup>th</sup> , Nov. 2019	<b>Headline:</b> 'Ahom Capital' gets a fresh survey <b>Sub Headline:</b> Burial Grounds are Facing Encroachment	5	Picture of Maidam in color	6	Guwahati	80

## 2.3. Name of the Paper: The Sentinel, A popular English Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	<b>Headline:</b> The Media Management & Research Association(MMRA) comes forward to save the Historical Land of Sivasagar after completing a research <b>Sub-headline:</b> Demand to establish Sukafa University in the Charaideo Maidams Area.	7	Picture of Press meet at Guwahati press Club in Color	3	Guwahati	34
2.	6 <sup>th</sup> Aug, 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Missing Map of Charaideo Hampers UNESCO Tag Bid. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Lack of Documentation Creates Hurdles in Government Conservation Efforts	4	Picture of Maidam in color	6	Guwahati	25

3.	7 <sup>th</sup> , Nov. 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Fresh Survey Conducted at Ahom Capital. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Historic Burial Grounds Face Encroachment	3	Picture of Maidam in color	6	Guwahati	27
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2.4. Name of the Paper: The Telegraph, A popular National English Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	<b>Head-line:</b> Ahom Kingdom's first capital remains deprived. <b>Sub-Headline:</b> Demand to raised to set up Sukafa University in the Charaideo Maidams Area.	2	Color Pic	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	22
2.	5 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2019	Historic First detailed survey Conducted on maidam Sites.	2	Nil	6 <sup>th</sup> Page	Guwahati	18
3.	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019	Group of maidams at Charaideo inscribed as world heritage site.	3	Nil	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	24

2.5. Name of the Paper: Amar Asom, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Headline: Encroachment on Sukapha Maidam	1	No picture	Front page	Guwahati	25
2.	5 <sup>th</sup> Aug, 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Charaideo Maidams Unlikely to Gain World Heritage Status. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Archaeology Department Lacks Accurate Land Map	3 Box	No Picture	Front page	Guwahati	36
3.	12 <sup>th</sup> Oct., 2019	<b>Headline:</b> World Heritage Dream for Charaideo Faces Doubts. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Media Management & Research Association Questions Survey of Maidams	6 Box	Picture of Maidam in color	3	Jorhat	72

2.6. Name of the Paper: Niyamiya Barta, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Demand for Probe into Land Corruption at Charaideo Maidams.	4	No picture	Front page	Guwahati	22
2.	5 <sup>th</sup> Aug, 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Demand Raised for Delimitation of Maidam Areas in Charaideo. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Cluster of Maidams Remains Deprived of World Heritage Recognition	2 Box	No Picture	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	22
3.	6 <sup>th</sup> Nov.	<b>Headline:</b> First-Ever Survey in Charaideo Maidams Boosts World Heritage Efforts <b>Sub-headline:</b> MMRA President Dr. Zakirul Alam	5 (Box with pic, headline, subheadline & supporting line)	Picture of the survey at Maidam in Black & white.	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Dibrugarh	50

Contributes to Historic Initiative							
4.	14 Nov. 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Push to Establish Charaideo Maidams as World Heritage Site <b>Sub-headline:</b> Dr. Dayananda Borgohain to Raise Issue in Assam Assembly Winter Session	3	No picture	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Dibrugarh	21

## 2.7. Name of the Paper: Dainik JanamBhumi, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Still first capital of ahom deprived.	1	Nil	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	18
2.	5 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2019	First ever Started the detail survey on the group of Maidams.	2	Nil	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Jorhat	12
3.	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019	Establishment of the groups of maidams at Charaideo as world heritage site.	2	Nil	8 <sup>th</sup> page	Jorhat	24

## 2.8. Name of the Paper: Dainik Gana Adhikar, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Headline: Demand Raised for Inquiry into Land Corruption Sub headline: Maidam Preservation, and Sukapha University Establishment	3	Color picture of the press meet	Front page	Guwahati	81
2.	6 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Government Conducts Survey of Charaideo Maidams for World Heritage Inclusion. <b>Sub-headline:</b> Mapping of Ahom Ancestral Burial Sites Underway	2	Color Picture of Maidam	Front page	Guwahati	35
3.	12 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019	Move to Establish Charaideo Maidams as World Heritage Site	2	No picture	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	65

## 2.9. Name of the Paper: Dainik Agradoot, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Head line: Government Lacks Map of Charaideo Maidams Sub-headline: No Survey Conducted Yet	4	Black & white picture of the press meet	3 <sup>rd</sup> page	Guwahati	48
2.	6 <sup>th</sup> Aug. 2019	Headline: Doubts Over Charaideo Maidams Survey; Sub-headline: World Heritage Recognition Remains a Dream (article)	4	Photo of the maidam	Editorial page	Jorhat	One and half page
3.	5 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2019	Historic First Survey Launched in Charaideo Maidams	2	Color Picture	Front page	Jorhat	50
4.	11 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 2019	<b>Headline:</b> Demand for Sukapha University at Charaideo Maidams area. <b>Sub-headline:</b>	4	2 pictures of maidams & King Sukafa	4 <sup>th</sup> page	Guwahati	60

		Lack of Preservation Efforts Raises Concern Over Heritage Sites					
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2.10. Name of the Paper: Dainik Batori Kakot, A popular Assamese Daily, Guwahati Edition, Kamrup, Assam.

S.L. No.	Date	Headlines(News/article/Letter to the Editor/Editorial)	No. of Column	Photo(Color Or Black & White)	Page No.	Edition	Total Space Col.cm
1.	20 <sup>th</sup> July, 2019	Headline: Government Lacks Map of Charaideo Maidams; Sub-headline: No Survey Conducted Yet: Demand by Dr. Zakirul Alam, President, Media Management & Reseach Association.	3	Black & white picture of the press meet	Front page	Guwahati	30

3. Data Presentation and Analysis:

3.1. Distribution of News by Column Space

Sl.No.	Name of News Paper	1 column news	2 column News	3 column News	4 column News	5 column News	6 column News	7 column News
1.	The Times of India				1	1		1
2.	The Sentinel			1	1			1
3.	Asomiya Pratidin		1	1	1			
4.	Amar Asom	1		1			1	
5.	Dainik Janambhumi	1	2					
6.	Dainik Agradoot		1		3			
7.	Dainik Gana Adhikar		2	1				
8.	Niyamiya Barta		1	1	1	1		
9.	Dainik Batori Kakot			1				
10.	The Telegraph		2	1				
11.	Total Published News in Column	2	9	7	7	2	1	2

The analysis of 30 news items shows varying degrees of prominence:

- 2 news items in 1 column
- 9 news items in 2 columns
- 7 news items in 3 columns
- 7 news items in 4 columns
- 2 news items in 5 columns
- 1 news item in 6 columns
- 2 news items in 7 columns

This distribution indicates that **most news items were given moderate to high prominence**, with a significant number occupying 2–4 columns. High-column coverage (5–7 columns) suggests strong editorial importance.

## 3.2. Presentation Style of News:

Sl.No.	Name of News Paper	Only Headline	Headline with sub-headline	Headline with Sub headline and supporting/Detail	Only Photo with caption	Headline with sub-headline and photo	Only Headline with photo	Total published news
1.	The Times of India					3		3
2.	The Sentinel					2	1	3
3.	Asomiya Pratidin		1	1		1		3
4.	Amar Asom	1	1			1		3
5.	Dainik Janambhumi	3						3
6.	Dainik Agradoot					2	1	3
7.	Dainik Gana Adhikar	1	2			1		4
8.	Niyamiya Barta	1	2			1		4
9.	Dainik Batori Kakot				1			1
10.	The Telegraph	2					1	3
11.	Total Published News with headline, sub-headline and supporting/	8	6	1	1	11	3	30

The structure of news presentation further reveals editorial emphasis:

- 8 news items had only headlines
- 6 included sub-headlines
- 1 included detailed supporting lines
- 11 included headline + sub-headline + photograph
- 3 included headline + photograph

Notably, **14 out of 30 news items included photographs**, indicating visual emphasis and enhanced reader engagement.

## 3.3. Newspaper-wise Coverage:

Sl.No.	Name of News Paper	Total News	Total Space Col. Cm.	Total published news
1.	The Times of India		211	3
2.	The Sentinel		86	3
3.	Asomiya Pratidin		187	3
4.	Amar Asom		172	3
5.	Dainik Janambhumi		54	3
6.	Dainik Agradoot		158	3
7.	Dainik Gana Adhikar		181	4
8.	Niyamiya Barta		115	4

9.	Dainik Batori Kakot		30	1
10.	The Telegraph		64	3
11.	Total space of Published News in col.cm		1258	30

The total coverage across newspapers shows that:

- A total of **30 news items** were published
- Total space covered: **1258 column centimeters**

Major contributors included:

- The Times of India (211 col. cm.)
- Asomiya Pratidin (187 col. cm.)
- Dainik Gana Adhikar (181 col. cm.)
- Amar Asom (172 col. cm.)

This indicates that both **regional and national newspapers actively covered the issue**, reflecting its broad relevance.

Thematic Analysis

The dominant themes identified in coverage include:

- Lack of cadastral mapping.
- Encroachment of heritage land .
- Administrative delays.
- Demand for preservation.
- UNESCO nomination challenges.
- Demand to set up Sukafa University.
- Role of civil society organizations.

Media narratives consistently emphasized **government inaction and urgency for preservation**, thereby shaping public discourse.

Findings

The study reveals several key findings:

1. **High Media Engagement:**  
Print media provided substantial coverage, with 30 news items across major newspapers, indicating strong journalistic interest.
2. **Prominence of Coverage:**  
Most news items appeared in 2–4 column formats, with some front-page placements, demonstrating editorial prioritization.
3. **Visual Emphasis:**  
Nearly half of the reports included photographs, enhancing the visibility and seriousness of the issue.
4. **Agenda-Setting Role:**  
Media coverage played a critical role in highlighting the absence of cadastral mapping, a major barrier to UNESCO nomination and to set up a university at Charaideo maidams area in the name of Sukafa.
5. **Policy Influence:**  
The consistent reporting and public pressure contributed to the **initiation of surveys by the government**, suggesting media influence on policy action.
6. **Regional Media Leadership:**  
Assamese newspapers were particularly active in sustaining the discourse, showing the importance of regional media in cultural preservation.

Limitations

- The study is limited to **print media only**, excluding electronic and digital platforms.
- The sample size is restricted to **30 news items**, which may not capture the entire media landscape.
- The sample size is collected from the booth edition of each news paper published from Guwahati, Jorhat and Dibrugarh.
- The study focuses on a **specific time frame (May–December 2019)**.
- Content analysis does not measure **audience reception or impact directly**.

**Conclusion:**

The study concludes that print media played a **significant and proactive role** in shaping discourse around the Charaideo Maidams' UNESCO nomination and to set up a university in the name of first Ahom King, "Chaolung Sukafa", at his first capital, Charaideo. Through consistent reporting, strategic framing, and prominent placement, newspapers brought critical issues to public attention and directly influenced government action on the based on regular press meet by MMRA .

The findings reinforce the idea that media functions not only as an information provider but also as a **catalyst for cultural preservation and policy intervention**. In the case of Charaideo Maidams and Sukafa University, print media served as a crucial link between heritage advocacy and administrative response.

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