

The Morans of Assam, India: Struggle for Survival

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The Moran is a lesser known community of Assam, scattered over the Brahmaputra valley of the State. Their main concentration is found in the Tinsukia district of Assam. However, there are a few areas in Lohit and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh where their distribution can be found. It is said that prior to the advent of the Ahoms, the Morans had their own independent kingdom at Bengmara, which is the present day Tinsukia (the eastern most district of Assam).

In the Assam *Buranjis* (literary history of Assam) the term Moran was used synonymously with Matak and Moamarias. It is pertinent to note that Matak is a composite community while Moamaria is a religious fraternity. Thus Nath [1978 : 60] postulated, “Morans were really Mei-Morias (*Mei-mi* = men, people) and were latter on known as the Maya Morias or the Moa Morias. It has been endeavoured to interpret the term as having reference to *Maya*, the occult art or to *Moa*, a kind of fish, but it really a corruption of the Austric *Mie-Moria*”. He also stated, “according to the conception of the Austriacs the country under the occupation of the Moran was considered to be the apex of the head of the mother country. The Sanskrit word for head is ‘*Mastaka*’ and the word was pronounced locally as ‘*Mahtaka*’ – hence the country was known as Mahtaka or Matak country.

The Morans had a prominent place in Ahom history. There are different views regarding the inclusion of Morans in the Ahom kingdom. Nath (1978 : 60) reported – “After the Bhauma Pala dynasty collapsed the Morans became independent and they were totally concentrated in a small kingdom comprising more or less the present Dibrugarh sub-division which he latter on confirmed to be identified as Matak country”.

Baruah (1985 : 222) stated – “Sukapha (the founder of Ahom Kingdom) won over the Morans by diplomatic means. He organized feasts and invited the leading members of the tribe to participate with him and sought their co-operation and friendship with them”. Endle (1990 : 88) reported – “The Morans were employed by their Ahom conquerors in various manual capacities, as hewers of wood and drawers of water and were sometimes known as Habungiyas (*Ha/bungiya*’, perhaps from *ha*’ for earth, *bung* for su-bung men; hence ha-

bungiya, autochthons, adscripti glebae, sometimes like the serfs of the old feudal system in Europe”.

According to Goswami (1977 : 38) “Sukapha impressed by a Moran known as Lanmakhru, who supplied him brinjals. Sukapha addressed this Moran as such because in Ahom language brinjal is called makhru”. He further stated, “Sukapha had also adopted a Moran family from Tipam. The name of the head man of this family was Maimat Khairat, who was a weaver by profession. Maimat was made incharge of pators (weavers of pat silk) by Sukapha”.

When the political aggrandizement of the Ahom kingdom extended towards the west, many Moran people were appointed to different administrative posts in the military departments. The elephantry was practically monopolized by the Morans because they were expert in catching elephants and training them for war. The section of the Morans who supplied elephants were called Hatichungi and the officer-in-charge of elephantry was called Hati Baruah. These titles still exist among the Morans. In a like way the Moran served in the cavalry department also and the officer who was in charge of it was called Ghora Baruah. Thus they contributed greatly to the building up of the Ahom Army and hence to the establishment and expansion of the Ahom power in Assam.

The empirical data suggest that the Morans are a branch of great Bodo group. Some authorities like Nath interprets them as “a remnant of the ancient Austric Moria clan intermixed with the Bodos” [Nath, 1978 : 60]. Again some scholars want to say that Moran is one of the twelve original clans of the ‘Kirata Kacharis’. The names of those clans are Damsaya = Dimasa, Barhaya = Bodo, Juhala Luiya = Lalung, Intu Hajaya = Hajai, Badu Sonolaya = Sonwal, Intu Minkhaya = Moran, Dounaya = Deori, Intu Mechaya = Mech, Kuchubaya = Koch, Intu Garoya = Garo, Rabha Kirataya = Rabha, Badu Hajaya = Hajong.

As far as the physical features of the Morans are concerned, they are sturdy people with medium stature. Their complexion is light brown and look almost like other plains tribal of Assam. They have wavy hair with coarse or medium texture. Face is more or less round with scanty beard and moustache. Nose is little bit flat. Complete mongoloid fold is present in their eyes. The eyes are little bit oblique in nature. Lips are medium in thickness.

Many linguists believe that Morans had a common dialect of their own which was derived from the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Gradually they started

using Assamese as lingua franca to communicate with other Assamese people and in due course of time Assamese became their primary language. But they still use some words in their day to day life which corresponds to their original dialect.

Morans are Vaishnava by religion and belong to the *Moamoria* Sect. It is believed that this community was the first to embrace Moamaria Vaishnavism. They were introduced to this religion by Sri Aniruddha Deva, disciple of Sri Sankara Deva, who was the founder of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam. As Vaishnavas, they believe in one God and propitiating through prayers only.

In Neo- Vaishnavism of Assam, *satras* (monasteries) and namghars (village level prayer houses) are the pillars of this religion. These two institutions play an important role in the socio-religious life of its followers. Every village should have at least one namghar. Most of the Morans affiliated to the Moamoria Tiphuk Satra and its twelve affiliated satras and a lesser number to other Moamoria satras like Dinjoy, Puranimati, Bogoritolia etc. It is important to mention here that, those who are affiliated to other Moamoria satras apart from Tiphuk affiliated satras are considered as Matakas. It should be noted here that as a general term of reference, the people belonging to the *Moamoria* sect are referred to as Matakas irrespective of their satra affiliation.

Morans, prior to their conversion to Vaishnavism were the followers of Shakta faith affiliated to the *Kechaikhati Than*, a shrine where mother goddess is worshipped. The shrine is situated in the Sadiya region of Assam, where in the remote past human sacrifices were carried out. At the time of conversion of Morans there might have been some understanding with the people under whom they were converted, that they should be allowed to continue their devotion to *Kechaikhati*. Probably that could be the reason why some of the rituals performed by the Morans are totally antagonistic to vaishnava principle.

Morans continue to perform sacrifices in the name of *Kechaikhati*, which are carried out in the satra campus and instead of buffaloes and pumpkins, now-a-days ducks and goats are sacrificed. The meat of the sacrificed creature is cooked in a house called *jagnya ghar* situated inside the satra. Morans carry out sacrifices of animals and birds on various occasions such as *sharddha* and *kaj* (death rituals), while going for community fishing in big rivers, before setting out on expeditions to catch wild elephants etc. Among the Morans, sacrifices are carried out not in the usual way of cutting the throat but by drowning in water.

The Moran community of Assam are struggling to establish their identity for a very long time. They have been continuously trying to gain recognition as a scheduled tribe (plains) status of Assam. The Morans claim that they have never received their due share in the social, political and economic development of the country and particularly of the region. Opinion of the Morans suggest that relative socio-economic backwardness and with regard to their need of having some constitutional facilities are the driving forces behind their sustained effort to assert their unique existence and in the process carve out a niche for themselves. They realized that, if they continue to identify themselves with the Matak community, which is a conglomeration of various tribes and caste groups, their issues pertaining to socio-political and economic upliftment would not get the due emphasis from the policy makers. Therefore, they needed to establish an identity of their own as an indigenous tribal community of the region.

(ii)

There are various opinions regarding the origin of the Morans. Endle [1990:88] in his book, *The Kacharis* reported that “the original home of the Morans is said to have been at Mongkong (Maingkhwang) in the Hukong valley at the upper reaches of the Chindwin river, where a few centuries ago resided three brothers, Moylang, Moran and Moyran. Moylang, the eldest of the three remained there, the youngest Moyran migrated Nepal, while the second brother Moran crossed the Patkai range, entered Assam and settled near Tiphuk river. And the descendants of Moran came to be known by his name. According to Kedar Brahmachari, the people known as Murrang, Muurang or Morang migrated to Saumar area (eastern most part of ancient Assam) from Nepal and course of time came to be known as Morans (cited in Dutta, 1985:9). The Moran community has a prominent place in Ahom history. There are different views regarding the inclusion of Morans in the Ahom kingdom. Nath (1978:60), reported, “after the Bhauma Pala dynasty collapsed, the Morans became independent and they were totally concentrated in a small kingdom comprising more or less the present Dibrugarh sub division”, which he later on confirmed to be identified as *Matak country*.

No systematic record of their rules and nature of government is available, but it appears that Morans were a warrior race with strong determination and spirit of vengeance remained integrated in their blood for generations. Whether the whole area was ruled by one chief or by different chiefs in different areas is not easy to ascertain. But it is a fact that when

the Ahoms came to this country, their first target of attack were the Morans, whom they crushed easily by making the womenfolk partners of their bed and the menfolk hewers of wood and drawers of water. Gogoi (1968) cited the political boundary of the Morans from the authentic transcript copy of an old Assamese manuscript, titled 'Borgohain Vamsavali', i.e., genealogical records of the Borgohains (a higher official of Ahom Kingdom). There it showed that the Moran state was surrounded by natural boundaries or more precisely rivers on all sides. Towards north was the Buri Dihing river, on the south, the Disang river and towards east and west were the Sufry and the mighty Brahmaputra rivers respectively.

According to the Morans, when Sukafa came to Assam (1228 AD) he had not brought along any women except for a few hundred horsemen. He married Moran king Bodosha's daughter and ultimately took control over the Moran state, which is popularly known in history as the Matak country. Morans candidly say that, Sukafa and his soldiers married mostly Moran women and, therefore, they are in a way the maternal uncles of the Ahoms. Though Morans loosely claim blood relation with the Ahoms, but throughout history their relation had never been cordial. There is a popular view among the Morans that when Ahom king Lakshmi Singha ordered to kill the entire Moran population, many identified themselves as Ahom. Those who had hidden their Moran identity stayed as Ahom for the fear of execution and in the process reaped the benefits of being a part of the dominant population. This factor had contributed to a great extent for the lower number of Morans in many places of upper Assam.

As mentioned earlier, Matak community includes many tribes and caste groups of which Moran is also a part. But in order to assert their Moran identity, they started referring themselves as Moran rather than their composite identity, i.e., Matak. Here it is pertinent to note that the basic difference between Moran and Matak, besides Moran being a totally distinct community is their affiliation to different satras. Morans are basically affiliated to the Tiphuk Satra whereas Mataks are affiliated to the Dinjoy satra. However, there are exceptions, where Morans are found to be affiliated to the Dinjoy Satra and Matak to the Tiphuk Satra. In such cases, those Morans who are members of the Dinjoy Satra are never considered as Moran but Mataks. And for the non Morans who are with the Tiphuk Satra, there is a general consensus among the Morans that persons, who are affiliated to Moamaria Tiphuk Satra and are actively involved in Moran socio-religious activities, can be considered as Moran. The terms *Moran* and *Matak* generally rise confusion as these terms are used very casually by others due to the fact that both the communities by religion are Moamaria

Vaishnavite and hence are Matak. Therefore, to give a clear picture, the Moran refer themselves as *Habitolia* (people of the jungle) and other Matak as *Mukalian* (people from the open areas). Further, to give people a better idea about their community, the Morans put forwarded a slogan which says **“all Morans are Matak but all Matak are not Moran”**.

It is evident from the historical records that Morans have been living in Assam from the time immemorial, but throughout history whenever they came in contact with alien populations, their community underwent tremendous changes, be it political, social, religious and even geographical. When Ahom came, they took over their territories and brought the Moran under their rule. The Morans lost their independence which they had enjoyed in the form of an independent state with Bengmara (present Tinsukia district) as its capital. Then the Morans came in contact with the Vaishnavite movement and the entire population accepted Moamaria Vaishnavism. In the 19th century the British came and acquired their land for setting up tea gardens. It compelled them to leave their original habitat for the interiors, isolating themselves even more from other populations. Even though, they left their original habitat, places like present day Rupai Siding, Dahotia village, Dariabheti village, Sookerating Tea Estate, still remind the fact that these places were once belonged to the Moran people, as the name of these places correspond to the various Moran clans. It has been found that the Morans in the past used to live clan-wise in separate villages and they named their villages according to their clan names. Hence, many Morans are of the view that places like Rupai near Doomdooma town once belonged to the Rupaigonya clan, Dahotia village to the Dahotia clan, Sookerating tea estate to the Chakarigonya clan, and likewise many other places in Tinsukia district.

(iii)

There was a time, not too long ago, when some Morans preferred to identify themselves as Matak. By identifying themselves as Matak, they try to achieve a sense of superiority over their fellow Morans. It also helps to identify themselves with other caste hindu people within the Mattak fraternity of the Dinjoy Satra. Another reason for some people to move away from their Moran identity is the stigma attached with the Moran community of being backward. Now the trend is changing; people are seeking back their Moran identity. In doing so, people who have once identified themselves as Matak have started using the surname Moran. This eagerness among the people to get back their Moran identity is due to the anticipation that sooner or later, Moran tribe is going to be included as

one of the scheduled tribe (plains) of Assam and therefore it is wiser for them to get back to their Moran roots and reap the benefits. In order to prevent non Moran elements from gaining Moran identity, organizations like *All Assam Moran Student Union* and *Asam Moran Sabha* had carried out their own census and genuine Morans were identified and enlisted.

The All Assam Moran Student Union and Asam Moran Sabha have been putting their efforts for an all round development of their community. Their immediate focus is to get the Moran community in the list of scheduled tribe (plains) of Assam. These two organizations have submitted thirteen memoranda to various authorities since 1974. Out of these memoranda, five were submitted to the Prime Minister of India (1974, 1979, 1980, 2000, 2002), one to the President of India (2000), two to the Tribal Affairs Minister (2000, 2002) and one each to the Chief Minister of Assam (2003), Cabinet Welfare Minister (1996), Surajvan Commission (1979), Assam Cabinet Sub-committee (1988) and to Parliamentary Affairs Minister (1995). Despite the efforts made by these organizations, inclusion of the Moran in the list of scheduled tribe is yet to materialize. According to the members of the community, Assam Government's recommendation to the Union Government in this regard has fallen in deaf ears. Further, it is not clear to the people that on what ground, the authorities have been rejecting their plea over the years. However, the government has taken certain initiatives to enhance their socio-economic condition. In addition to their MOBC status, which provides them with certain but limited opportunities in education and jobs, the government has given some additional consolations such as, by making a provision under which a seat has been reserved exclusively for the Moran community in the combined entrance test for Medical and Engineering colleges of the state.

The Morans still regret the fact that their community would have been included in the scheduled tribe list way back in 1935, when Simon Commission was appointed for the purpose. But as there was no educated persons among them to represent the Moran case, as such they were left unincluded. Now this community is determined to prove their tribal identity which is distinct but plagued by awful backwardness.

In order to justify their claim they have tried to highlight some major facts integral to their community, in the memoranda submitted to the various authorities. They believe that these facts would enable the decision makers to understand that the Moran community fulfils all the criteria to have the much needed tribal status and their present socio-economic

backwardness as well as lack of political representation would be recognized by the authorities and give them their due share.

The major facts which were highlighted in the memoranda are as follows.

(i) **Origin of the Morans** : Morans originally belong to the Austric Moria clan and later on intermixed with the Bodos to form a separate tribe. According to some anthropologists Morans belong to the bigger Bodo group. Moran is one of the twelve original clans of the 'Kirat Kocharis'. The names of those clans are – Damsaya (Dimasa), Barhaya (Bodo), Juhala Luiya (Lalung), Intu Hajaya (Hojai), Badu Sonolaya (Sonwal), Intu Minkhaya (Moran), Dounaya (Deori), Intu Meghaya (Mech), Duchubaya (Koch), Intu Garoya (Garo), Rabha Kirataya (Rabha) and Badu Hajaya (Hajong).

(ii) **Political History** : Unanimous opinion regarding the political history of Morans has not been found yet, but historians agree that, from time immemorial Morans lived in Saumerpith of Kamrup, the ancient Assam. Saumerpith (the present districts of Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of Assam). Morans had their own kings and kingdoms but all of its chronologies of that period have remained as myths. There is no historical record on the Morans, of the period prior to 13th century. In Ahom history mention of the Morans came up for the first time with regard to Sukapha's matrimonial relation with Moran king, Badausa's daughter.

During 18th century Morans revolted against the misrule of the Ahoms and Raghob Moran took over the Ahom throne. However, Moran revolutionaries were suppressed by the Ahoms with the help of British under Captain Wells. Since then, Morans could not come to the forefront of Assam's political arena.

(iii) **Geographical Isolation** : Morans are concentrated in a compact region in Saikhowa, Buridihing, Doomdooma, Hapjan, Tingrai, Makum, Tipling and Rongagora Mouzas in Tinsukia district. These Moran inhabited areas have neither approach roads nor linking roads between villages, let alone, other facilities of the modern age. As such these places are practically isolated.

(iv) **Primitive Means of Livelihood** : In Assam, most of the communities including various tribes have come through many stages of acculturation, but the Morans have not been influenced much. It still retains its traditional way of life. Morans to a great extent depend on forest and other natural resources for their livelihood. They collect fire wood and edibles from the forest. At the time of preparation of

the list of scheduled tribe in 1935, almost all the Morans were jhum cultivators. They still use locally made traditional agricultural and household implements in day to day activities.

(v) **Self Sufficient within the Tribe** :Moran were self sufficient up to the early twentieth century, when British opened tea gardens in the areas. Different clans of the Morans were specialized in different trades. As for example *Rupai Gonya* clan were expert in making silver ornaments, *Telepia* for manufacturing mustard oil, *Kari Gonya* for preparing bow and arrows, *Naoholia* for boats, *Tekela* for errand from one village to another in case of exchange business, *Shilikhaghatia* for medicine, *Hatimoria* for catching and training elephants, *Daini Gonya* for magical treatment of ailments. With the trades cited above, they fulfilled the needs of the entire tribe. Thus for food, cloths to all other daily requirements; are met through exchange within the tribe. The self sufficiency of the Morans ended with the handing over of large Moran inhabited land by the Sattradhikars of the Tiphuk Satras to the British for establishing tea gardens. The British took over the land in exchange for fifty mounds of opium, twelve guns and fifteen hundred rupees. As a result, the Morans left their original abode and moved to the interior of the neighbouring forest. Thus, with the establishment of the tea gardens, influx of people of different castes, creed and religion began to flow and the Morans went on shifting and retreating into the forest. They sold their land and other belongings to the comparatively clever and enlightened new-comers because of acute poverty. This trend is still continuing and as a result this Moran community could be said to be on the verge of extinction.

(vi) **Art and Culture** : Moran people perform *Kola-Burhi Nach* (a dance form of the Morans) in marriage ceremonies along with *Satriya Nritya*. They perform a peculiar Bihu dance with slow melodious songs accompanied by slow rhythmic drum beats. The drums played by the Morans are bit bigger than those of the other Assamese people. The art of adorning a bride without blouse and only on a two fold shawl or *Panch Kathia* on the upper part of the body is a distinguishing feature of Moran bridal wear. A *Kekhela* or long gown with *Kalia Riha* or black sharee-like cloth embroidered thoroughly are wrapped artistically on the lower half of the body. The bride is adorned with different ornaments on her neck, ear and hands along with *Murial* or a crown-like prepared out of bamboo, *kuhila* or

spongy wood and of coloured leaves and bark of trees, which are made by the village artisans; certainly highlights tribal characteristic.

- (vii) **Housing Pattern** : Morans have their own style of constructing dwelling houses, which are erected in a long and two roofed style in Assam type pattern, with the main front door, *Mudhe Dowar*, right in the middle portion of the house. *Dighali pati* or a long corridor runs on one side of the house to the other until it reaches the last room, which is used as kitchen.
- (viii) **Festivals** : Unlike other Assamese people, Moran do not celebrate all the three Bihus, namely Magh Bihu, Bohag Bihu and Kati Bihu. They celebrate only Bohag Bihu with great festivities. Morans celebrate Bohag Bihu on the first Wednesday of Assamese new-year. On that day, Goru Bihu is celebrated, which coincides with the Bihu celebration pioneered from the *Keshai-khati* mandir of Sadiya. Among the other festivities, the Morans organize *Garakhia Bhoj* (a kind of feast) for the cow-boys of the village, annually, after the harvest is over, almost simultaneously with *Ali-Ai-Ligang* of the Mishing and *Baithou-Puja* of the Sonowal Kacharis.
- (ix) **Religion** : Morans are Hindu by religion and were originally *Shaktas* as they worshipped *Keshai-khati* or raw flesh eater of Sadiya, prior to their conversion to *Mahapurushia Vaishnava* religion under Sri Sri Anuruddhadeva in the 16th century. But, Morans continued their devotion to the *Keshai-khati*, dedicating ducks, pigeons, goats etc. holding *Jagya* in the *Satra* campus. The Mohapurushia Satradhikars in their turn perhaps could not hut make relaxation for their tribal devotion *Keshai-khati* along with their devotion to Mahapurushia Vaishnavism.
- (x) **Socio-Religious Functions** : Socio-religious functions of the Morans are almost the same with that of the other tribes of Assam. Unlike other Assamese people who perform *Doha* and *Kaj* (death rituals) on the 13th and 33rd day, Morans hold these functions together after 5 to 6 years from the day of death. As it is an expensive affair, more than one family whose some one had died few years back get together to jointly organize these functions at a suitable venue and according to the convenience of the participating parties.
- (xi) **Family relations and Terminologies** : Morans have some peculiar kinships terminologies. The most prevalent terminologies are *Jijia* (grandmother), *Abu-Dau* (father-in-law) etc. which merit exception among the Assamese identical for a separate tribe.

- (xii) **Common Dialect** : Morans had a common dialect of their own which according to the linguistic was derived from the Bodo group of languages. Morans started using Assamese as lingua-fronea in order to interact with other Assamese people, perhaps after the advent of the Ahoms in the 13th century, and in due course of time their own dialect became extinct. At present, only a few word of Moran origin are found to be in use among the people. Some of the words are *Apitey* (always), *Hedung* (boundary), *Heram* (vacant space, after Jhoom crops have been harvested), *Kharmau* (sweet gourd), *Grahangia* (not to adjust under any weight), *Dakalia* (a kind of bamboo mat with the edge bound tight, kept above the fire place for drying paddy).
- (xiii) **Political Organization** : Morans were politically organized in the past as they are now. They had their own village panchayats. Even today, all the social and other decisions come from the village headman, known as the *Bar Burha*. In case of any government orders, the villagers approach the *Bar Burha* for his recommendation, and only after that, a decision or order come into effect. For any complicated problems the villagers led by the *Bar Burha* approach the *Sattradhikar* (administrative and religious head of a Satra) for solution.
- (xiv) **Customary Laws** : Morans have their own customary laws. For instance, traditionally the offence of a murderer is excused only after he is fined *Shon Taka*; i.e., rupees twenty only, the exchange value of 1 *tola* (10 gm) gold. It was fixed when the value of one *tola* gold was twenty rupees. The fine is given to the religious teacher, after which the offender has to reform himself in a function known as *Tel-Puri-Samaj*, in presence of the village panchayat. Only after that, the offender is accepted in the society. Even, if a murderer has gone through life imprisonment, given by a law court, he has to under go the customary punishment as the society doesn't recognize punishment by court of law.
- (xv) **Least subjected to Acculturation** : Out of uncompromising psychology to adjust with the alien forces and to merge with the modern civilization and for their acute conservative attitude, they have been least subjected to acculturation. The only change that has occurred in their society is that, they have transformed from barter system to a monetary economy and even that to a certain extent, while their neighbouring tribes and the world around them have been experiencing rapid acculturation. Their socio-economic, socio-religious

thoughts and beliefs, anthropological peculiarities have remained almost stagnant till today.

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The identity assertion by the Moran community has been based on several key markers, such as their history, culture, religion, territory, etc. The people endorse the view that they are a branch of the Great Bodo Group and once inhabited the Hukong Valley at the upper reaches of the Chindwin river. Some also believe that their original home was in Nepal. Where ever their place of origin might be, these people migrated to the plains of Assam and more precisely to the *Saumar* area, i.e. the eastern most part of ancient Assam; and later on spread over the whole Brahmaputra Valley, in Upper Assam. While settling down in this part of the region, the people shared their space with other ethnic groups and in the process developed a culture which is unique; and at the same time is having a semblance of commonness with that of the other communities belonging to the Assamese sub-nationality. Many rituals and performing arts of the Morans are very unique to their community but along with that there are many examples where the difference in culture with other Assamese population is not apparently observable.

The Morans since their acceptance of the *Moamaria Vaishnavism* lived peacefully with the other groups of the Matak community. But during the early 1960^s there was a feeling among the people that they need to establish their own independent identity for overall development of their community. They realized that being a part of the Matak community would not help their cause as it includes many tribes as well as caste groups and therefore, the Moran community would not get the desired attention from the policy makers. This view gradually gained popularity and ultimately they detached themselves from the *Matak Sanmilan* (a premier Matak organization) and formed the *Assam Moran Sabha* in 1962 followed by the formation of *All Assam Moran Student Union* in 1965. Since the formation of these two premier organizations, the Morans have been demanding constitutional facilities for the upliftment of the community. They have been emphasizing that their tribal life accompanied by severe poverty and backwardness in almost all spheres is good enough to justify their demands. Although their grievances are yet to be properly addressed, the government has taken certain initiatives for the betterment of their present state of Affairs. In addition to the MOBC status, the government has given some additional 'consolations', such

as, by making a provision under which a seat has been reserved exclusively for the Moran community in the combined entrance test for medical and engineering colleges of the state.

The Morans, in order to justify their claim for the scheduled tribe status, have provided a list containing various statistics regarding their total population and other relevant data in the memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam in 2003, demanding their inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes. According to the list, there are 4 lakh Morans in Assam; of which 20% are landless labourers. Cultivators having cultivable land upto 10 bighas is 20% while those having 20 bighas and between 20-50 bighas are 8% and 5% respectively. The list also highlights that, there are only 4 college teachers, 2 gazetted officers, 6 University students, 3 medical students and 30 college students. There is not a single MLA and MP from the community.

It is quite evident that whenever people refer to the Moran community, they generally express it as Moran Matak rather than Moran. There is no denying the fact that at certain level, especially in respect of religion, differences between Moran and Matak are not very conspicuous. Being a major constituent of the Moamaria Vaishnavism sect they are an integral part of the Matak community, but apart from that Morans are no doubt a distinct community with a unique culture. Despite the fact that organizations like Assam Moran Sabha and All Assam Moran Student Union are putting their best efforts to portray the Moran community as one of the tribal groups of the state, the government is yet to be convinced on the subject. In bird's view there are no conspicuous differences among the Morans and other Hindu communities, however, in close observation one can locate some special traits in Moran culture in respect of kinship terminology, dress and ornament, fairs and festivals and religious way of life. The claim of the Moran community that they have not been influenced much by other cultures, except for transforming from barter system to a monetary economy due to their conservative stance does not hold much weight. The community has already lost its dialect and also given up their pristine religion for Vaishnavism. However, their Vaishnavism is a conglomeration of their traditional religion and Assam's Vaishnavism. It should be noted here that in Assam's Vaishnavism, idolatry, sacrifice, etc. are strictly tabooed but in Vaishnavism prevalent among the Morans shows many traits which are not sanctioned in that religion. Sacrifice of animals and birds are integral part of their propitiation. The structure of the worshipping house and the way of

appeasement of the this community also exhibit some differences with those of the other local Vaishnavites. Most of the differences found in Moran's Vaishnavism have been percolated from their pristine animistic religion.

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