

Quest for Scheduled Tribe (Plain) Status: An Ethno-Sociological Study on the Moran Community of Tinsukia District of Assam

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Abstract— The Morans are one of the primitive tribes found in the lap of Assam. They reside in the Eastern most part of Assam especially in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. They have their enriched culture and language. But in the process assimilation, their culture and language are on the verge extinction. But it is found that with the passage of time, the Morans have attempted to revive their identity as a tribe and they are able to maintain their unique identity even today. Although enriched with all the characteristics of a tribe, the Morans have been struggling hard to achieve Scheduled Tribe status till date. It was due to the lack of leaders way back in 1935 when Simon Commission was set up for the purpose of including backward communities to the ST list, there were no educated persons among the Morans to represent them and they were even left out by Kaka Kalelkar Commission in 1953. Therefore, they were deprived of their rights and are still lagging behind in different spheres of life. Posted on 28th December, 2017 at 4:12PM by PIB Delhi, certain changes in criteria for inclusion in ST have been described by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. According to the new guidelines, specification of a community as a scheduled tribe are- indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse their claim to be included as ST in the light of the above characteristics. This will be done with the help of interview schedule and case study.

Index Terms— The Morans, Tribal Identity, Characteristics of Schedule Tribes, ST Status

I. INTRODUCTION

The Morans are one of the primitive tribes of Assam. Though scattered in various parts of Assam, majority of the population reside in the Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts. However, their distribution can also be found in a few areas of Lohit and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Little has been explored about the Moran Community of Assam. It is known that prior to the coming of Sukapha – the founder of the Ahom dynasty, the Morans has their own independent kingdom at Bengmara which is presently known as Tinsukia. Having arrived in this affluent land, Sukapha tried to establish matrimonial relationship with the indigenous tribes like Moran Barahi etc. In due course of time though assimilation took place, yet, the Morans are able to maintain their unique identity even today. A reason for that could be seen as the areas around the Dibru river which were covered by forest, were inhabited by the Morans and they were appointed by the king of the Ahom dynasty to supply resources from the forest like wood, elephant etc. The Morans were experts in catching elephant and in providing training to them. Therefore elephant department was endowed to them. They also served in the cavalry department. Thus, they had been assigned prominent positions in the Ahom kingdom.

Scholars have different opinion regarding the legacy of the Morans. According to Endle the original home of the Morans

was in Hukang Valley. Again historians like Dambarudhar Nath interprets them, “a remnant of the Ancient Austric Moria clan intermixed with the Bodos” [Nath, 1978:60] Some other scholars put forwarded the argument that the Moran is one of the twelve clans of the ‘Kirata Kacharis’ which is known as Intu – Minkhaya. The physical features of the Morans resemble the Mongoloid fold. They are sturdy medium structured people with light brown complexion. They have flat nose, bulging eyes, thick lips, wavy hair with coarse or medium texture. Though in due course of assimilation, the Morans have started intermingling with the mainstream culture. Yet the trait of their culture has still been preserved. In case of language also, the tribe has a dialect which according to many linguist was derived from the Bodo group of Tibeto Burman linguistic family. The people of this tribe use their own dialect in their day-to-day life.

The Morans are the followers of Moamaria Vaishnavism fabricated by Sri Aniruddha Deva, disciple of Sri Sri Sankar Dev the founder of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam. They are disciples of Moamaria Tipuk Satra and its twelve affiliated Satras. The terms Moran and Matak are often used synonymously. The basic difference between the two communities is Moran is a tribe but Matak is a creed (Mat = Opinion and Ek = One). The disciples of Moamaria sect who re- tied with one religious belief. Famous historian of Assam and a representative of the Moran Community Sri Sri Kumar Dohutia in his book “Mayamora Buranji” (History of

Mayamora) writes, "Matak is a community comprising all the Moamarias meaning for their religious one – ness i.e. having single faith in the religion and consequent action." There are many tribes within the Matak Community. They were basically Morans, Barahis, Kacharis and Chutias. The Morans want to assert their unique identity instead of establishing their composite identity. Though followers of the same sect, the Morans refer themselves as 'Habitolia (inhabitants of the forest) and other Matak as 'Mukalian' (inhabitant of the open area).

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Dutta, Arun Chandra(2012) a research scholar of Sighania University conducted a study on "The Socio-Economic problems of the Morans of Assam". In this study, his aim was to study the role of social organizations like Assam Moran Sabha to erase the socio-economic problems of the community. The findings of the study revealed that the activities of Assam Moran Sabha are concentrated in the Tinsukia district only and they don't have any influence on national and regional issues. The paper described the problems of the organisation very well but suggestions for improvement on the part of the researcher could not be found.

Dohutia, Srikumar (2013) wrote in his book "A Dossier on The Morans of Assam" about the ethnography and history of the Moran community. The book highlights the long-standing saga of ignorance and struggle for their assertion of identity. The unique feature of the book is that the author had documented all the memorandum and proceedings by the organisations to the government for the welfare of the community. The book supports the view that a positive response to the matter of inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list would definitely encourage development of the community.

Dutta, S (2014) conducted a study at North Eastern Hill University Shillong on "Moran state formation in Assam". In this study he recognized some factors responsible for the growth and development of tribal states before independence such as growth of private property, exploitation of religious sentiments of the masses for political purposes etc. The findings of the study revealed the origin of the community and the way they had remained peacefully with the Ahoms and their small kingdom comprised roughly the present day Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam. The article is a good analytical piece of the tribe's attempt to form a state amidst foreign invasion but it lacks analysis of the backwardness of the community which exists even today compared to the other communities of Assam.

Deka, Juri (2015) conducted a study on the Moran Community of Tinsukia district in her paper named "The Moran Tribe of Tinsukia District of Assam: A Study of their Ethno-History." She studied the historical origin, religious belief, food, shyness, language and about the distinctive art and culture of the community. The findings of the paper revealed that though the tribe has gone through a long process

of assimilation with other communities yet the unique traits of their culture have still been preserved. However the paper was more of a document of the rich cultural heritage of the Morans and it lacks critical analysis of the socio-cultural changes that might stand as a threat to the originality of the tribe.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

1. To study the ethnicity of the community.
2. To study the socio-economic scenario of the community.
3. To study the cultural traits of the community.
4. To study the tribal identity of the community.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study covers the Tinsukia district of Assam where major concentration of the Moran population is found. The research method used for the present study is descriptive in nature. There are four taliks in Tinsukia district – Tinsukia, Doomdoo, Margherita and Sadiya. In order to carry forward the study 40 samples are collected using quota sampling. Interview schedule is taken as the tool for data collection and case study method is used.

IV. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Man has a genuine desire to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity as a group. The Moran community of Assam has been struggling hard to preserve their own identity and rights. To identify the key elements for the holistic development of the community, the society should take some short term and long term planning.
2. The prime reasons for the problems faced by the Moran community are historical conflicts, social strife and interstate migration etc. The community has got continuous threats from those elements in socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and land related issues. Being shy and tolerant the Morans surrendered their land to the migrates British and they escaped to geographically isolated areas.
3. Education is still a fundamental problem in the Moran society. The Moran society is basically an agrarian society. It depends primarily on agriculture, fishery poultry farm etc. But due to the lack of scientific knowledge, production is less Therefore, economically the society is not very sound. And the economy leads to obstacles in the path of receiving education. Again there are many interior villages where adequate infrastructure is still a problem. There is no electricity, no communication, no economic development project and no medical health care facilities. Lower primary, upper primary, high schools and higher secondary schools are less in numbers.
4. To struggle with extreme poverty, the Moran community should play a vital role in bringing economic reformation. The new generation should

adopt scientific knowledge to cope us with the problem of unemployment. Attention on the part of the government is required in this regard. Government should adopt adequate plans so that the poor, unemployed youths of the community can get benefits from those schemes.

5. The Moran community has been claiming the status of scheduled tribe plain for many decades. At present if we compare the socio-economic status of the community with other backward classes, then it is found that the community is lagging behind in all parameters to be called as developed community. In that context, if we analyse article 342 of Indian constitution, it is found that the honourable president of India can declare the status of S.T. to a particular tribe or community depending on the governor's appeal. The process should be discussed in the parliament of India and it should be accepted in both the houses.

V. CONCLUSION

Posted on 28th December, 2017 at 4:12PM by PIB Delhi, certain changes in criteria for inclusion in ST have been described by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. According to the new guidelines specification of a community as a scheduled tribe are (i) Indication of primitive traits (ii) Distinctive culture, (iii) geographical isolation, (iv) Shyness of contact with the community at large and (v) Backwardness. An attempt has been made to justify their claim to be included as ST in the light of the above characteristics.

- (i) Indication of primitive traits: It is seen that the Morans have not much influenced by the process called acculturation. They still depend on natural resources like agriculture, fishery etc. They live clan wise i.e. all the members of a certain clan live in a certain village. A custom is still present among the Morans that if a migrated member of a village dies, the children of the deceased have to keep a coin in his grave.
- (ii) Distinctive Culture: The Morans are culturally very rich. They preserve their own distinctive culture marked with social significance. The Moran people were different dresses on different occasions. They have a separate dialect and they perform Bihu in a different way. One of the typical procedures of the Morans is to hold "Sharddhas" (cremation ceremony) of the deceased is that it can be performed even after 5/10 years at a suitable place jointly with some other hosts who have also kept the "Sharddhas" pending.
- (iii) Geographical Isolation: From time immemorial the Moran people are inhabiting in villages isolated from other communities. They are now spreading around the towns of Kakopathar, Doomdooma, Makum, Margherita, Digboi, Panitola of Tinsukia District. Lack of facilities of the modern age such as all whether roads, proper electricity can still be seen in the villages.

- (iv) Shyness of the contact with the community at large: The people of this community are shy by nature and they hardly want to mix with other communities. For example – once upon a time Bengmora was their capital but when it developed into a modern town with diverse population, they shifted to interior places.
- (v) Backwardness: Long standing exploitation has kept the Morans as backward class. They had a glorious past but their tendency to remain in a peaceful atmosphere and ignorance of modern education system still stand as a barrier in the path of upliftment of Moran society.

The renaissance brought by globalisation has touched only a section of the Moran society. But the quest to assert the unique identity of the tribe in the face of globalisation is still present. Social organisations like Assam Moran Sabha and All Moran Students Union have been constantly claiming inclusion of the community in the Scheduled Tribe list. Since development is the key issue and the tribe is to go miles away to experience worldwide identity, a positive response from the part of the government to the issue of scheduled tribe would definitely encourage upliftment of the community.

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