

Reflection of Historical and Social Evolution in the Oral Literature of the Moran Community

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Abstract:

There is evidence that the Marans, one of the oldest peoples of Assam, settled permanently in the Saumarkhand (a division of ancient Assam) region during the Ahom period. There is little mention of this in the chronicles of the Ahom era. As a very ancient community, the Morans are very fond of Folk culture. Extremely religious, obsessive-compulsive disorder, to some extent educational and social backwardness is one of the reasons for the cultural identity of the Moran people. This research paper seeks to discuss how the social and historical evolution of the population is preserved in oral hymns.

Keywords: Historical, Social, Oral songs, Moran community.

Introduction:

The Morans, a large Mongoloid ethnic group, are the ancient inhabitants of the Saumarkhand region of ancient Assam. Scholars have suggested that their former habitat was the Hwanghae and Yangtze River valleys in China. References of the Morans who lived in the state locally during the Ahom invasion of Assam can be found in various Ahom Chronicles. In the beginning, the Morans, who helped in the expansion of the Ahom kingdom, also established marital relations with the Ahoms. In the aftermath of these events, all of the Morans, for religious and other reasons, openly revolted against the Ahom monarchy and were able to temporarily overthrow the Ahom monarchy and take control of the royal privilege. Many fragments of the historical and social ups and downs of the community have been preserved in the oral hymns of the Moran people who are very fond of Folk culture.

Objective of the study:

The oral literature of the Moran people, have preserved in fragments, many of the material of the social and historical evolution of the Moran community. It is hoped that this

discussion will give us a better understanding of the historical and social identity of the community.

Method of Study:

This research paper has been prepared with the help of specific oral songs as the primary sources and field study as the secondary source. It has been supported by both analytical and descriptive methods.

Main Topic Analysis:

The agriculture based Moran people have been cultivating Jhum since time immemorial. When the Ahoms first came to Assam, they found people of Moran and Barahi communities cultivating in the forests on the vast banks of the Buridihing River. (Guha 1991) They cut down a part of the forest and practice Jhum cultivation in that area for 3-4 years and shifted to a different place after that. The land that remained after the Jhum cultivation is known as *Heramani* by the Morans. There are many references to it in the verses of Bihu.

Era Heramani Mechaki Mejenga

Burha Heramanit Kochu

Etaike Dekhilu Moinak Nedekhu

Kinu Henduluka Soku.. (Dangoriya 2012)

Mostly potatoes were cultivated in the Jhum field. In addition to that they also cultivated Yam, Sesame, Cotton, Pumpkin and other types of potatoes there. Evidences of the cut down forest could be seen in the midst of the cultivation.

Ahudhanor Maje Maje Kuroi Kathor Murha.

Amaar Aaideve Dora pale Bapekotkoi Burha.

(Roots of big trees in the midst of the rice fields

Our darling got a groom older than her father)

(Biyekheri, Informant-1)

In the aftermath of Jhum cultivation, the Maorans started to imitate the Ahoms and concentrated on *Shalikhethi* (cultivation of rice in low, moist land). The following verse carries the same meaning.

Moran Oi Hecholya Choi

Kotodin thak oi Tongi Ghorot roi.. (Mukuwa, 54)

This was like an invitation for the Moran people to start Shali cultivation.

In parallel with the Jhum cultivation, the Morans cultivated cotton, ginger, etc. in large quantities in the Brahmaputra valley of Upper Assam (Gohain, 1994). The partial effect of cotton cultivation is still present in the Moran community. During the birth of Mugura child, the protection shield that is woven for the child is made from cotton collected from 9 families. “Mugura Kheri” or “Shipini Kheri” recollects this ancient heritage even today.

Kopahor Gosote Shipini Jonmile

Laaj Nibaronor Babe

Laaj Nibarone Lage Kapur Kani

Manushye Pindhibor Babe.

(Moran, 2009)

(The weavers produce the fabric from the cotton trees

Fabrics that are used by human to cover the bodies)

There are many evidences of religious rites and customs in the oral literature of the Morans. The Morans were worshippers of Shakta, the devotees of Kesaikhati Gosaani. Even though the Morans abandoned the earlier Shakta religion and became the followers of Vaishnav Dharmacharya Sri Sri Aniruddhadev, they could not completely abandon the earlier traditions. There was an integration of both the religions in the religious practices of the Morans. Even during Bihu, they have been worshipping Kesaikhati Gosaani and celebrate the Bihu eve (Uruka) with a prayer-centric tradition on Tuesdays and main Bihu on Wednesdays.

Hachoti Oi Chot

Bichoti Oi Chot

Budhe Birochoti Mongole Uruka

Bihu Goi Asili Kot?

(Moran, 2009)

The mention of worshipping, Goddess Kamakhya, other name of Kesaikhati Gosaani is evident in some of the Bihu songs of the Morans.

Kamakhya Mandirot Kore Devi Puja

Hatoto Dhupe Dhuna Loi

Moiyu sun Ontorot Koru ture Puja

Ontorot Chobiti Thoi..

(Dangoriya, 2015)

(Devotees worship the Goddess in Kamakhya temple, with Agarbattis in their hand. I, too, worship you with your picture in my heart)

The earlier believers of Shaktism, the Morans transformed themselves into Vaishnavism in during the time of the 7th Satradhikar SriSri Chaturbhujdev of the Mayamariya Satra established by SriSri Anirudhadev.² However, the process of religious transformation had been taking place a lot earlier than this specific period. As a part of transforming from Shaktism to Vaishnavism, the Satradhikar SriSri Chaturbhujdev had advised the Morans to celebrate Bihu like everyone else on the *Sankranti* (the transition period of one month to another) of the Chat (December-January) month. This is mentioned in their Bihu songs:

Sri Chaturbhuje O'Hori Ram

Dumahi patile O'Hori Ram

Bhokote Furise Gai Ram Hori

Gopal Govinda Ram. (Moran, 2011)

The extremely religious Morans believe that Bihu is not just about fun and merry making. It is also a religious festival. The prevalence of the religious *Huchori* gives the hint of it:

Sankar Choti Madho Maroli

Logai Hori Namor Khuta O'

Gopal Govinda Ram. (Moran, 2009)

The Morans, who used to live in the forests, were experts in catching and taming wild elephants. *Hatichungi*, *Purani Maut* are some of the famed *Khel* (a division of people made by the Kings for a specific work) of the Marans. Their excellent qualities had impressed the Ahom kings and they appointed the Morans as the caretakers of their elephants. During the reign of Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha, elephant caretakers Nahorkhura Saikia and Raghav Moran were insulted by Kriti Chandra Baruah which became one of the key reasons of the Muwamoriya revolt. The mentions of the elephant friendly Morans are found in several Bihu songs:

Hati Sikaroloi Ulaisu Dehi O

Hatote Edali Phoni

Mota Hati Thakile Bore Ghor Shuwoni

Dotale Rakhibo Maan.. (Moran, 2011)

(Off to hunt for elephants, Oh dear, with a comb in my hand. A male elephant would brighten up the house, the tusks would bring respect)

Or in this way:

Hati Sikoroloi Najabi Dehi O

Nelage Sadagoror Dhon

Ghorote Thakibi Ramayan Porhibi

Xuni Thakibole Mon. (Moran, 2011)

(Dear, do not go hunting for elephants, don't want the rich man's money. Stay at home and read the Ramayan, love to hear that from you)

In the deep forest, the hunters use tame elephants to get hold of the wild elephants and they are brought to the stockade where the elephants are kept. This feeling of unexplainable joy is mentioned by the poets in the following way:

Sawul Sati Mari Parok Bondi Koru

Shalot Bondi Koru Hati

Digholi Potite Tuke Bondi Koru

Bhore Duporiya Rati. (Dangoriya, 2015)

(I trap the pigeons with rice and the elephants in their stockade. And you in my bed, at midnight)

The songs (*Kheri*) used to tame the wild elephants are prevalent amongst the Ahoms:

Oloi-lou Tolou lou Khagorike Khai

Porbotot Asili Kak Gaj Khai

Porbotot Asili Toi Fandi Sepa Khai. (Moran, 2009)

(You wander in around eating reeds and bamboo shoots in the hills and there you get trapped in the snare set up for you)

In this manner, the oral folk songs of the Morans have preserved the roles the Morans had played in the socio-economic and political situation of the nation.

The Muwamoriya revolt which took place in the last days of the Ahom reign had huge involvement by the chief Moran disciples of the Mayamariya Mahanta. Many songs and verses associated with the revolt are still prevalent amongst the Morans as Ronua Geet or war songs. The Morans had developed a dislike against the Ahom monarchy before the advent of the first revolt in the 1769 A.D. The fourth Mayamoriya Mahanta Nityanandadev had to lose his life because of the Ahom Monarchy in the year 1728 A.D.³ Since then the Moran and Matak had tolerated the continuous insult made by the Ahom monarch and developed hatred and feeling of revenge against them which gradually led to

the Muwamoriya revolt. Their song “*Mori Jau Mari Jau, Gurur Rin Guji Jau*” (Will die, will kill to pay back the debt of the Guru) became a revolutionary slogan of the Morans. The extremely devoted disciples of the Gurus stepped into a revolution against the Ahom monarchs with the blessings of their Gurus Astabhuj, Chaturbhuj and Saptabhuj. And even though for a short period of time, they were successful in taking down the Ahom monarch and enjoy a taste of royalty. Regions like Rangpur, Garhgaon were under the control of Naharkhuwa Saikia's son King Ramakanta and Raghav Neog (Borborua) for a period of 5 months from 21st November, 1770 to the following Bohag Bihu (April). The leadership of the Guru is still remembered in the song:

Astabhuje Saptabhuj Chaturbhuj Rakhe

Tare Dai Take Kate

Tare Hiloi Take Mare

Chaturbhuj Rakhe. (Dohutia, 2016)

The special role played by Astabhujdev's son Gagini Deka (later changed his name to Saptabhuj)

Ei Dhonu Ei Karh Dekadeu Dhenudhor

Mulung Maribole Jau

Bhalkoi Guri Dhor Matakori Dekadeu

Bhora Goyatire Nau. (Dohutia, 2016)

The advent of the ***Sekoni Kubuwa Ron*** was started by the revolutionary Morans under the Govinda Gaonburha (Village head) in the field of Shagunmuri. The following song bears evidence to this heritage:

Poroja Oi Jorouruwa

Sekoni Oi Sopai Dhora.

It is worth mentioning that the Ahoms officials adopted this same act of Sekoni Kubuwa Ron to murder the Moran Borborua Raghav by hiding a sword under a bamboo stick in the year 1770 A.D. in a conspiracy involved with a beautiful blue eyed maiden.

The Morans had to bear a lot of torture from the Ahom officials while the latter tried to stop the Muwamoriya revolt. The Morans bore the torture of the Ahoms that started from the reign of Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha through the reign of Swargadeo Gourinath Singha to the time of Swargadeo Kamaleswar Singha. Obviously, the normal life of the common people was also affected, and was unstable and fear stricken. The Morans who

were on the run, disguised themselves and tried to wipe off the evidence of the camps they built, which can be seen in the following Bihu verse:

Ujai Naworiya Balit Bhate Khale

Gosok Putile Tou.

(The upper valley bound boats-men ate their meal on the sand, buried by the vessel.)

Or

Bhate Khai Golou Topote Topote

Khuti Thoiye Goli Sukot. (Moran, 2009)

It is noteworthy there are various oral stories and idioms that bear witness to this heritage of the runaway Morans which are still prevalent in the Moran society. When a Moran man was on the run, during the time of his meal, he was served food on the other corner of the room and the floor from the doorway was mopped with muddy water to make it slippery. So that when the enemies arrived the one of the run could get enough time to run away. This is still prevalent in the form of folktales. The man preferably sat on a squat position, instead of sitting comfortably while he ate to make it easier to run. This sitting position is known as the 'Moran sitting' even today. The reflections of the misfortune faced by the Morans during those times are found in the following Bihu verse:

Bilou Din Ahile Deshot Jui Jolile

Ghai Soru Uthile Sangot

Shotorur Hatote Dekaru Kirili

Buwari Titile Gangot. (Moran, 2011)

(Sad days have arrived, the nations is burning. The main pots are stored up now, young boys are crying in the hands of the enemies and their wives are soaked in the river)
The condition of the society during the reign of the British is also preserved in this Bihu verse:

Ujaiye Ahile Bilati Sahabjon

Serap Khai Pelale Sisa.

Tar Pase Pase Memoni Ahile

Aathur Murot Mekhela Pindha. (Heramoni Hedangot, p. 27)

(The foreigner Sir has come upwards who throws away glasses after sipping the wine.

Behind him comes the Madam who wears her Mekhela (skirt) above her knee.)

During the British rule, the railways started to run through the places inhabited by the Morans. The simple hearted agricultural Moran people recorded this event in the following Bihu verse:

Ukiai Ukiai Rail Garhi Solile

Stationor Mukholoi Sai

Toi Jabi Jidina Moinu Kandim Xidina

Tumi Juwa Batoloi Sai. (Dangoria, P. 26)

(The trains run facing the stations blowing their loud horns,

The day you leave, I will cry too, seeing you leave)

The advent of tea cultivation started in the British rule. The Morans were placed in a special tea estate-centric situation. The echo of this can be heard in the following Bihu verse:

Tuke Sun Nepale Ani Lom Bongali

Siye Randhi Dibo Bhat

Somoyor Gotike Mini Buli Mati Jam

Siye Hobo Omator Maat. (Heramani Hedangot)

(If I don't get you, I will marry a Bongali, she will cook for me

I will call her Mini gradually like others do, giving a voice to the voiceless)

It is worth mentioning here that Morans referred the tea labourers as "Bongali" and this word is still prevalent today. During those times, (region specifically, in the present day too) opium was very common among the Morans. The Opium had entered the folk culture of the Morans and that is why situation like organizing "Kania Sokam" also arrived. Partial mentions of that can be found in the following Bihu verse:

Kaniyaloi Najabi Kani Dibo Lagibo

Taku Dibo Lagibo Moli. (Neog, 1994)

(Do not marry an opium smoker, you'll have to provide him with Opium, and crush it too.)

Or

Tuke Oi Napale Home Lang Kaniya

Khulate Tuponi Jaam. (Dangoriya, 2012)

(If I don't get you, I will be an opium smoker and fall asleep in a vessel)

During the days of or SriSri Navabhujdev as the religious head of the Tipuk Satra in the year 1792A.D. and during the time of SriSri Sankarbujdev as the religious head of

the Satra in the 1877A.D, the British used to frequently visit the Moran inhabited regions. The British were eyeing on the plain valleys of upper Assam that were suitable for tea cultivation. It is said that under the evil influence of the British, SriSri Navabhuj Satradhikar presented the British with a deserted land for tea cultivation in exchange of Nomun Kani, 12 Guns, and 18 silver coins. (Gohain, 2015, p. 150) On the other hand, a problem concerning the post of Satradhikar of the Tipuk Satra had reached the court. As a result the main Tipuk Satra was divided. The winner and the loser of the case parted ways and established their own Satras. This heritage is preserved in the following Kheri verse:

Ujaiye Ahile Sadagar Sahabti/ Aataikhon Murote Tupi

Henu Sankarbhuji Nohobo Lagile/ Tipukot Pelabo Dubori Jupi.

(Collected Informant-1)

In addition to all these there are several evidences of the heritage of independent India, safely preserved in the folk songs of the Morans and if those are studied properly, many aspects of the social and historical life of the Moran communities can be brought to light.

Conclusion:

So, this study of the Morans has shown that the oral songs and tales prevalent in the Moran community have drawn a map of the social and historical evolution of the society of that period. It reflects several events and incidents of the pre-Ahom period, Muwamariya revolt, British rule and the pre-independence period along with the social distribution of the Muwamariyas.

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References list:

1. When a child is conceived within the delivery of the first child, then the 2nd child is known as Jugura child.
2. The Tiphuk Satra, which was established during the time when Bhabananda or Krishnabhuj (SriSri Chaturbhuj was succeeded by SriSri Astabhuj dev as the Satradhikar of Mayamara Satra, and Bhabananda was born during the time of Astabhujdev to an unmarried Daivaki of the Witch clan of Moran) was the Satradhikar of Mayamara Satra, later became popular as the Mayamara Satra.
3. According to the book Moniram Dewan by Benudhar Sarma, Nityanandadev was killed during the death anniversary of Gadadhar Singa, during the reign of Rudra Singha in the 1701 A.D.
4. According to rumors, Raghav Moran and King Ramakanta were killed by Ahom plotters on the first day on Bohag Bihu in the year 1770 A.D. This is the reason why the Morans do not celebrate Bohag Bihu on the day the Ahom people does. But there are different opinions regarding this.

Informant :

1. Rupeswari Gohain Dangoria, (F. 72) Ujani Ubongaon, Kakopathar, Tinisukia.