

Traditional Belief of Moran Tribe

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Abstract

Moran is a very important community along with many other communities living in Assam since the ancient time. The evidence of Moran people can be traced back to the time when Ahom came to Assam. Moran society which is endowed with rich culture is seen preserving their culture through numerous traditional beliefs and are very conscious of preserving it. They are trying to protect it by preserving it as it is. But with the rapid change of time flexibility can be witness in the safeguard of their tradition. Through this research paper the traditional belief of the Moran tribe will be discussed. This research paper Traditional Belief of Moran Tribe has been prepared with a hope that it will add a new dimension in the field of research about the great Moran tribe and for this purpose descriptive method has been adopted.

0.0 Introduction:

Culture is diversified. It has a very wide scope. Culture is an integral part of human society. Social rules and regulations, oral form of literature, beliefs, manners, religious, non-religious faith etc. can be considered as folklore. Folklore can be classified in many parts. Generally folklore can be classified in four parts, these are *folk-literature, social folk custom, material culture and folk performing arts*. Social folk custom can be considered as one of the most important among all these.

Moran society has been following numerous folk beliefs since the ancient time. These are traditionally acquired belief. Different types of manners, rules and regulations etc. are followed by the people in Moran society. They are influenced by these beliefs, manners, traditional rules and regulations, festivals, recreation, folk medicine, folk religion which represents their society.

1.00 The Aim, Scope and Methodology of the research paper:

We can witness many tribal belief in the society of Moran tribe who are

living in Assam since the ancient time .Through this paper we can point their traditional living system, living in the backward areas, agricultural based society, own language, socio- economic and political backwardness .With the rapid change of time these social structures are of course taking a new shape. They are seen preserving their traditional beliefs through rules and regulations and through numerous norms followed by them and they are very conscious of it. Through this research paper the traditional belief of the Moran tribe will be discussed. This paper has been prepared with a hope that it will add a new dimension in the field of research about the great Moran tribe and for this purpose descriptive method has been adopted.

2.00

Among many others tribes of Assam, Moran is regarded as one of the noted tribe who have been living in Assam since ancient times. Moran's are living in Assam Since the arrival of Ahom in the Brahmaputra valley. They are called the 'Habungiya' or 'son of the soil' and were

living in ancient *Saumarpeetha* region of Assam. They belongs to the second largest community in the world known as Chino-Tibetan language family. Anthropological study it is showed that the colour of Moran people was yellow, face was huge, height of five to six feet, black hair and a very few number of beard. According to the study of researchers and many other scholars it has come to the light that they were living in the bank of river Yang che Kiang and Huang Ho and migrated to Assam from that region and started living in the upper part of the Assam. Especially, a large number of their community is seen living in Tinsukia district. A good number of them also lives in the districts of Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Sivsagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur and a very few of them are living in Arunachal Pradesh also. Since very ancient time they are seen living together. Though they live in a patriarchal society they also advocated for the women empowerment. In many tradition based on agriculture, woman based rituals, social festivals, women enjoys very high position. But Moran people prefer to give importance to men in socio, political and economic causes. They prefers to solve social problems through patriarchal norms. Moran people prefer joint family system because of its usefulness in agri-cultural work. But with the changing of time single family has taken the place of joint family in their society.

From cultural and social point of view Moran society is seen endowing with a unique identity. Their attire, ornaments, agricultural tradition, weaving tradition, festivals, food culture all seen representing uniqueness of their social structure. Numerous faith, religious norms, festivals, ceremonies, various tradition related to death and birth, traditional medicine are using by numerous tribes living in Assam since ancient times and Moran tribe is not exceptional of it. A detail account of Moran society and community through their traditional and social norms are trying

to be put forward though the following discussion.

2.00.01 Religious Folk belief

The religious belief of every society is seen interlinked with its tradition. Numerous customs, rituals and beliefs are seen so much attached with the religion and Moran's are not exceptional of it. They were the believer of Saktism since pre-historic times who later adopted Vaishnavism. Goddess Tamreswari or Kesaikhati is being worshiped by the Moran's who beliefs in the Saktism. Moran's were used to sacrifice human as a part of Sakti worshipping which was later replaced by duck sacrifice to symbolically represent human sacrifice. Moran people were fond of hunting and sacrificial ceremonies were often celebrated before going out for hunting to bring good luck. After converting to Vashnavism the evidence of both Vaishnavism and Saktism can be clearly seen in the Moran culture. The vividness in their tradition can be witnessed due to the duality of their culture. Moran's were also influenced by the Moamoria cult of Vaishnavism promulgated by Sri Sri Anirudha Deva and they started converting to it since the beginning of 16th century. Now a days the impact of Moamoria Sattras can be seen in the society of Moran tribe along with Saktism. While we can see that in some festivals they sacrifice duck, pigeon, goat, fish in the Yajna. They also distribute Prasada after the prayer. The tradition of offering duck and pigeon to gurus in order to take his blessings to protect them from bad luck is evident among them. **Borkokai Bhar** (responsibility of elder brother) is another rituals of Moran people. According to this tradition newly married men need to take Sarana for three days from the chief of a Sattras by shaving their head. After the Sarana is over Satradhikara choose someone among them and made him Borkokai which conclude with a feast of duck.

Praying and singing devotional song in the Sattrā during the Assamese month of Faguna is another tradition of the Moran people. Celebration of monthly Tithis (birth or death ceremony of saints) and the annual prayer for the well being of the village is also evident in Moran society.

2.00.02 Folk beliefs Related to birth

Various traditional beliefs can be witnessed in Moran society related to child birth. After the birth of a child numerous rituals can be seen observing in their society. These ceremonies began since the time of cutting the umbilical cord of a child's with the help of a blade made from bamboo. After this the baby and the mother is given a warm water bath and new clothes to wear. In some cases the new born is also seen giving warm heat of the fire. After all these the mother and the child is not permitted to come out of the room till the falls of the babies umbilical cord. After the separation of the umbilical cord purification ceremony for the mother and the child is organised. The purification began with the cleaning of the household and washing of the clothes. After that child and the mother is given a bath and the newborn baby along with his parents were taken before the people to take their blessings. The very night of that ceremony there are rituals of sleeping too, the new born child must sleep between the parents and prayers are offered with incense sticks and by keeping a pair of betel nut and leaf, an egg, a pen, a book, and a notebook in the tip of a banana leaf on the side of the head rest. In the Moran society *Uruli* (a sound made by women by rolling their tongue) is given with the birth of a boy which is not done with the birth a girl child.

After the birth of the child the mother is given *Jhal* to eat (a spicy food preparation). *Jhal* is prepared with duck meat, *kolkasia* and black pepper and generally given on the third days of the child birth. For the preparation of the *Jhaal*

if the child is a boy then the duck must be male and for girl child it must be a female duck. For the purification ceremony which is often celebrated after the separation of the umbilical cord five guests are invited. The ceremony is accompanied the cleaning of the house and washing of the clothes and by providing bath to both mother and the child. The woman who helped the mother during child birth is also honoured in this ceremony. Later Helps are taken from astrologer for the naming of the child.

2.00.03 Folk belief related to marriage:

Moran tribe follows many rituals related to marriage. Moran society has different rituals for *Tuloni biya* (performed after a girl has her first menstruations) and *borbiya* (real wedding). As soon as a girl started her menstruation, she has been permitted to enter the house along with three *Jeura* stick (bamboo stick used to construct boundary wall of a household). The girl must keep a knife and a betel nut with her during these days. Ladies are invited to bless her besides a big curtain.

For *borbiya* after the culmination of the wedding when the bride came to the home of the groom for the first time she need to stand on a banana leaf in front of the grooms house and her feet's are washed by the sister of the groom. After these they were given new clothes to wear and taken before the parents to take their blessings.

2.00.04 Social folk beliefs:

The social bond of the Moran people is so strong. For them everything is acceptable under the purview of society and they do not accept anything against social norms. They must follow the traditional set up of the society. There is evidence of punishment given to the people who didn't follow social norms. Punishment can be delivered by someone well reputed in the society. Generally

Barbuha or the Purohita of the Namghar(temple) is responsible for delivering punishment to the guilty one. For serious crime punishment can be delivered only by the Moran Goshain. There are also evidence of reparation in Moran society, for example if someone is found guilty for adultery convicted can be declare crime free by praying before the people with a price for his crime in a Sarai(An Assamese tool). Different rituals of reparation are there for serious crime. There is many other traditions related to the killing of animals. Killing of the cow is regarded as a serious sin by the Moran people as they worship cow as a holy animal. They even celebrate a feast in the name of cow after the finishing of yearly agricultural activities. If a cow dies in the cowshed there are rituals of purification for the people of that household. A feast must be offered to the villagers in order to be free from serious sin like killing of cow.

Marriage within blood relation like marrying a girl from the side of maternal aunty, paternal aunty, from the family of mother's side or father's side, among daughters or sons of the friends from same gurus are prohibited in Moran society. But they accept the marriage among distant relatives.

Moran society also follows some rituals related to death .Except natural death a Sarania man cannot touch the dead body of someone who committed suicide. A person from every household of the village must attend the cremation of a person who died a natural death. If someone failed to attend, it is regarded as a crime and for this one must pray before the people offering betel nut.

Apart from these, there is purification method for breaking other social norms like eating forbidden foods, doing bad works or permitting people from different caste or tribe to enter the kitchen area. Having sexual relationship apart from

wife and committing adultery is also regarded as punishable crime by the Moran people. Moran society has a special place for the big brother in law. The sister-in-law must respect him and she must keep put her headscarf before him. Giving betel nut or tea in his hand, touching, arguing and walking over is shadow is regarded as a bad sign. If she broke these norms she must apologise before the society by offering betel nut to them. Like these numerous social norms can be witnessed in Moran society.

2.00.05 Folk beliefs related to festivals:

Festivals are generally celebrated by the common masses with the culmination their annual agricultural work. While celebrating these festivals people are seen following some traditional rules. Moran tribe also celebrates many rituals. Many rituals followed by the Moran people in this regard are either religious or non religious.

Since ancient times Moran people were the believer of Shiva -Shaktism, who gave importance to goddess Kesaikhati Gosani. At the end of 17th century Krishnabhuj Deva, son of Astrabhuj Deva tried to convert them to Vaishnavism. After him Narabhuj Deva became the chief. Though these two Satradhikar tried to convert them to Vaishnavism they failed to completely convert them from their traditional belief of Saktism.It is during the time of Sri Sri Sankar Bhuja Deva, son of Narabhujadeva who permitted them for sacrificing animal inside the Sattra and created a new religious faith with the mixture of both Saktism and Vaishnavism. But the tradition of celebrating Bohag Bihu in the first Tuesday and Wednesday of the Assamese month of Bohag in the Kesaikhati Gosani Shal of Sadiya and sacrificing duck in their home continued even after that.

Among the irreligious festival of Moran people sacrifice a duck which is also known as 'hah mora'(killing of duck) in any one day of the three bihu along with a feast is remarkable. They believe that if they failed to celebrate any traditional festival it will bring bad luck to the family.

Moran people celebrates different rituals on the day of Goru bihu(festival of the cattle). In the morning of the Goru bihu there are rituals of praying by offering Betel leaves and areca nuts in a *Dola*(a plate made out of bamboo) before giving bath to the cattle. Separate *chak* (a bamboo stick to tie vegetables) are made for each cow which needs to be either of three, five or seven branches. Vegetables used in the *chaak* for throwing to the cattle are picking up and taken to the home to make paste for bathing purpose and mixed with one hundred and one types of vegetables in the night which is believed to have medicinal qualities. In the evening when the cattle returns to the home they are offered *Ghilapitha*(traditional sweets) in a banana leaf and only after this elderly people can have their food. Apart from this Nangal(plough) juoli(plough hook)joboka(forkhoe) kur(hoe) kotari (knife) are also kept in a banana leaf after washing it. It is believed that if they do that it will bring good luck. Moran people also celebrates egg fight in the very beginning of the new year and they believed that if someone won in the egg fight it will bring good luck for the rest of the year. On the day of the Manuhor bihu(festival of the human)new clothes were worn by everyone. On that day younger one takes blessings from the elder one by offering betel nut and clothes to them. Hence on the day of bihu elderly people stays in the home itself and never stays in the home of other people for the night.

Moran people often seen celebrating bihu in a specific place called *bihu khola* and follows some rituals for

this, like the bihu khola house must be of two rooms without any walls. The room in the right side is reserved for the young boys and in the left side room is especially for the girls. No one can enter each other's room during the time of bihu celebration.

Moran people also celebrate some rituals for bihu Uruwa ceremony(ending of the bihu). People from many villages gathered in the Satra for this purpose. While celebrating it one side of the Satra is used for the performing of Gayan Bayan(traditional performing art) and on the other side bihu dance is performed. The ceremony ends with taking blessings from the Gosain by the villagers. On the other side young boys and girls finished their bihu by throwing toka(abihu instrument),Gamusa into the sky. Playing of any instrument and dancing is prohibited after the bihu uruwa ritual. Married women of the Moran community are not permitted to dance and if someone breaks this norm it is regarded as a punishable crime. If a married women is caught dancing she must apologise by praying before the people.

2.00.06 Any other Rituals:

Moran society is seen observing various rituals in their day to day life. As their life is based on agriculture, hence the evidence of agricultural based festival is common. Before sowing seeds for paddy farming they plant *Tora* tree (alpine tree)and *kosu*(taro plant) plant as they believe that by doing so their paddy will be taller like alpina and it will grow like taro plant. They believed that if they starts their cultivation in the Krishna pakshya(waning moon) insects will not notice it and if they starts it in Suklapkshya(waxing moon) they cover their head with headscarf or with a headgear or *Japi* (Assamese traditional umbrella) for symbolical representation. If insects attacks the sowing field they use a Jakoi(a traditional equipment to catch fish)

by cowherd boys to keep the insects away. They kept their produced goods in *khorahi, pasi and dun* (baskets made out of either bamboo or cane) as they believed that it will increase the production.

They did not hand out produced goods on the day of their parent's death and on the Thursday (Gurubar). It is prohibited to give rice to a beggar or anyone on the very day of starting cultivation. Offering rice and grain together is prohibited. Talking to anyone on the way to start cultivation is regarded as inauspicious. Similar rituals were followed on the day of bringing agricultural produce to the home for the first. They didn't sit on *dheki* (a tool used for grinding and separating rice grains) while the rice started heading. While planting betel and pepper plant they didn't chew betel nut and planting these types of plant by women during their menstruation time is regarded as inauspicious.

Moran people follows some rituals regarding hunting too. If they set out for hunting animals then they pray before their devoted *buha-buhi* (traditional god goddess) and before the hunting of fishes and tortoise they pray before goddess Masandari, it is believed that if they failed to satisfy them then they will not be able to hunt properly. Before going for the hunting for religious purposes of Namghar and Sattra they took blessing from Gosain. Moran people also believes in the tales of *Bak* (a fish eating demon). Hence, they bring ripen chilli, garlic, knife, mustard seeds, machete with them to save them from *bak* before going for fishing. They do not eat sour food before going to catch fish as they believe that catfish will sting them if they do that. They also believes that if they drag fishing instrument like *Jakoi, Polo and Khaloi* (traditional fishing instrument) they will get snakes instead of fish.

There are many beliefs related to storm and thunder. Men are prohibited to go out during rain and thunder storm, They believe that by showing *dola and saloni* (Assamese tools) towards rain or thunder by women will stop the rain. If a tree fails to give fruit they put women clothes in it so that it can give fruits. If someone climbs tree in the midday then it is believed that he will be caught by the demon. They also believe that if beetles came inside the home in the night, itching of the hand palm, twitching of the right eye, dreaming of the fish will bring money. Touching of the day to day used tools by the foot is regarded as bad manners. Plucking fruits in the night, pooping by the birds in the head is regarded as a sign of bad luck. Calling elderly people by their name is also regarded as a bad habit. It is also believed that if a boy attends *a tulonibia* he will never grow beard. If someone dies in their home they put a white curtain in the door of the granary and cattle shed and believes that goddess Lakshmi will stay inside if they do that.

If someone fall sick a prayer must be organised before taking him to the *Bej* (traditional doctor). If someone gets a stomach bloating he is believed to be caught by someone's evil eye and is given sacred water. If crow starts cawing in front of home it is considered as a sign of upcoming bad luck. Keeping a knife upside, cock fight in the front yard, seeing empty vessel, women with open hair, abnormal activities of the dog etc are regarded as a foretell that bad things are going to happen. If many animals shout together it is regarded as sign of upcoming natural calamity. If someone dreaming of losing front teeth or last teeth it is believed that they will lose someone very dear to them.

Moran people generally use natural remedies for treating small disease. For example they use castor gum to treat

toothache, juice of air plant to treat kidney stone, *Paederia foetida* to treat skin disease. They are also seen using herbal product for various purposes.

Conclusion:

Moran tribe is successful in establishing its unique identity with the blend of numerous popular beliefs. Moran society can be well portrait with the vividness in their culture. Direct or indirect traditional beliefs of their society is fuelling to hold their unique culture since ancient times and it can be believed they will be able to hold it till the time immemorial. These popular beliefs are instrumental in showing their traditional life. Moran's society beliefs in preserving their rich culture and they are trying to preserve it as it is for the coming generation. Apart from the popular beliefs mentioned above there are many other beliefs related to medicinal use, crops, games and sports in their society. Without the consent of elders of the society rejecting something in the society is near impossible. Their self identity is so clear with the traditional beliefs seen in their society which represent the vividness of culture presents in the society of Moran tribe.

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