

**STATE ADMINISTRATION AND TRIBAL POLITICS:
ETHNIC ASSERTIONS AMONG THE MORAN
COMMUNITY OF ASSAM**

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ABSTRACT

The terms 'tribes,' 'indigenous communities,' and 'ethnic groups' are frequently used as inter-exchangeable expressions. In the context of India, it can be noticed that while some of the cultural groups have been officially recognized as 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST) by the state, some others have been left out due to various reasons. Over recent decades several ethnic communities in Northeast India have tended to invoke their tribal and indigenous roots by glorifying their traditional culture, beliefs and way of life, and rendering wider publicity to them via social media. The 'Moran' community which is mainly concentrated in Tinsukia district of Upper Assam is one among them. The Morans along with the Mataks are historically known as the author of the Moamoria Rebellion of the Eighteenth Century Assam which paved the way for decline and fall of the mighty Ahom monarchy. During the colonial era, the community remained marginalised both economically and politically. This paper will explore the genesis of growing politico-cultural

consciousness among the Morans in the post-colonial era. This consciousness is aimed at ensuring ST status for the community. In India, ST status remains a political marker of indigeneity and a grantor of some special political and economic privileges and concessions. Though from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, both the Morans and the Matak leaders were recognised as the same community by most of their leaders, but after the formation of 'Moran Sabha' in 1965, the majority of the Morans began to introduce themselves as a distinct ethnic group. On the other hand, a section of Matak leaders still upholds that the Morans constitute only a sub-group of the Matak community. This paper is an attempt to analyse the political dimensions of the assertion of indigeneity among the Morans.

Keywords : Assam, indigenous, ethnic, Moran, Matak, Scheduled Tribes.

Introduction :

The Moran is one of the ethnic groups of Assam. The Morans have their traditional belief system and social organizations which they have been maintaining to date in some transformed ways, even after the inclusion of Vaishnava belief in their socio-cultural sphere. Like many other tribes of India, jungles and their species and resources have had a crucial role in the socio-economic life of traditional Moran villages. They can unanimously claim themselves as the 'son of the soil'. During the Ahom era (1228-1826) which once included almost the entire Brahmaputra valley under their jurisdiction, the tribes of plains and hills were left to their own and the degree of their loyalty to the Ahom Government had always been fluctuating during the long six centuries. Among all the tribes of Assam, the

Morans were closer to the Ahom administration and they contributed a lot to the expansion and consolidation of the Ahom regime. E. Gait in his 'Report on the Census of India, Assam 1891' noted that the Morans had their language which was akin to that of the Kacharis. However, when the process of assimilation and then *Sanskritization* began during the days of Ahoms, the Morans gave it up in favour of Assamese. It was further confirmed by G. A. Grierson. Some scholars like Kedar Brahmachari, Benudhar Sarma and Biradhar Das tend to ascribe the Morans 'Aryan' origin. However, linguistic affinity as well as physical features and some other common characteristics of the Morans with the rest of the tribes of Bodo origin confirm that like the Kacharis they are a sub-branch of the greater Bodo ethnic group who speak Tibeto-Burmese language. S. K. Chatterjee places the probable period of migration of the Bodos from 2000 B. C. onwards. As regards the original home of the Bodos and thus the Morans as well, there appears to be a consensus among the scholars that the trans-Himalayan territory to the west of China and Tibet was the original place of these people. Important routes of migration followed by the different waves of these immigrants to India were through the courses of great rivers like the Brahmaputra, other routes between India and Tibet through Nepal and Bhutan; and later on through the passes of the 'Pat-kai' mountains in the North-eastern border.

The Morans and the Barahis were the first inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley with whom the Ahoms established close ties that were sanctified with matrimonial relations. The Morans often call themselves 'Moran-Matak' to distinguish themselves from the rest of the tribes and castes that belong to the Matak community. Although the Morans had been represented in the *All Assam Matak Sanmilan* (hereafter AAMS) during the period 1939-65, they were always conscious about their separate identity as a specific group among the Mataks. This ethnic consciousness finally led to the formation of *Asom Moran Sabha* (hereafter AMS) which became an exclusive ethnic civil society organization of the Morans. Though the Morans are still known as 'Moran-Matak' in general, it can be noticed that the ethnic and civil society organizations of the Moran community

are named only with the term 'Moran', thus specifying their own identity excluding the term 'Matak'. The Moran is one among the six communities of Assam which are demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) from the government.

Tribal Politics: Specific context of Northeast India

The terms like 'indigenous communities,' 'tribes' and 'ethnic groups' essentially belong to the domain of 'identity' which has political implications. These terms are frequently used interchangeably. Tribal communities are known to be the aboriginal or earliest settlers of their respective territories. These groups are largely known as *Adivasi* in the Indian subcontinent having their specific cultures and primordial lifestyle, and sometimes these groups also refer to themselves by this term. Apart from its literary portrayal, the term has a political underpinning as well. The term *Adivasi* is derived from the Hindi word *Adi*, 'beginning' and *Vasi*, 'resident', and is equivalent to the term 'aboriginal', referring to the original inhabitants of a particular place. The term 'indigenous' was first used in the late Nineteenth Century as an effort to distinguish the Europeans from the non-Europeans, and not to delineate the differences amongst the people in the colonies. However, the usage of the term took a significant turn in 1938 when the Pan-American Union declared that 'indigenous populations, as descendants of the first inhabitants of the lands which today form America, and to offset the deficiency in their physical and intellectual development, have a preferential right to the protection of the public authorities'.

However, the term *Adivasi* has not been accepted by several tribal groups of Northeast India to define themselves due to their specific historical context. These groups' early access to missionary education and the birth of articulate ethnic ideologues transformed 'colonial tribes' into larger ethnicities or ethnic-nations, such as Naga, Mizo, Khasi and Garo, during the late colonial and post-independence period (Zou, 2016, p. 119). In the Northeast, the tribal groups particularly from the hills have not endured the same exploitation as the tribal groups of central India did in terms of economic and political subordination. In

Northeast India, the term *Adivasi* is a symbolic one and is restricted to communities which were brought in as indentured labourers by the British tea companies to work in the tea states that had begun to be opened up in Assam from the middle of the Nineteenth century. These communities mostly belong to the groups referred to as *Adivasi* in their original habitats. This is, however, not to say that ethnic communities in Northeast India do not identify themselves as 'indigenous people'. In fact, in Assam, where most of the *Adivasis* live, some leaders of various tribal and other ethnic communities have questioned the 'indigenous' status of the *Adivasis*, because they were transported to Assam by the colonizers mainly for commercial purposes. These ethnic leaders have raised objections to the *Adivasis*' struggle in Assam to get recognition as a Scheduled Tribe, which may entitle the latter to certain constitutional privileges. It is obvious that the term *Adivasi*, which is equivalent to the nomenclature 'indigenous people', and has been in use in mainland India for a long period, has a different symbolic meaning in Northeast India where the term is equivalent to 'tea garden workers', and not to 'indigenous people'. Moreover, the term is considered a derogatory marker of being wild and unsophisticated by several members of other ethnic and tribal communities. It is worthmentioning that the leaders of some ethnic groups of Assam including the Morans, who are also seeking Scheduled Tribe status from the government, prefer to use the term *Khilonjiya*, an Assamese nomenclature, which is equivalent to the term 'indigenous' in the context of Assam.

It is worthmentioning that there are different lists of STs for different states in India. The STs of Assam are mainly divided into two categories, ST: Plains and ST: Hills. There are 15 Hills ST groups and 14 Plains ST groups in Assam as of February 2019. These groups account for around 13 percent of the total population of Assam. The six communities seeking ST status mostly belong to the plains. The Scheduled Tribes along with the Scheduled Castes are considered as backward communities of Indian society. In the aftermath of Independence, the Indian government recognized that it was facing considerable social problems

with respect to these two groups mainly due to the existing hierarchies in terms of caste-consciousness and economic status. The government had mainly three options to these problems: to change social attitudes; to generate economic development that would trickle down to the backward tribes and lower castes; and to institute an affirmative action policy (Bajpai, 2012, p. 38). The government finally decided to adopt the policy of 'reservations' as a form of affirmative action. The 'reservations' were relatively attractive because they could be implemented at once and they would also affect material deprivation and social attitudes simultaneously. The reservations for scheduled tribes and castes establish quotas in three domains; educational institutions including universities, public employment and political representation.

Thus, the term 'Scheduled tribe' is an officially defined category invented in post-colonial India and it is still in common use. The Indian Constitution has never promoted the term *Adiwasir* and instead, defines the STs as *Anusuchit Jana Jati*. Traditionally '*Jana*' was the predominant term to define the excluded groups in the Hindi heartland. The Sanskrit word *Jana* referred to the non-monarchical societies of ancient India, existing outside the hierarchical *Jati* (caste) system of the mainstream society (Radhakrishna, 2016, p.5). The British administration defined those people as 'tribes' who retained their distinct identity and culture, particularly in remote and isolated areas.

Electoral Politics: Defection of the Morans from the Mataks

There were several underlying causes which resulted in the defection of the majority of the Morans from the Mataks. After a long period of ethnic co-existence with the Mataks (1938-64), the Moran leaders finally decided to choose their separate path in the arena of ethnic mobilization. Those reasons were primarily associated with electoral politics and the issues of socio-economic development.

The Moran leaders' failure in the 1950s and 1960s, to send any representative from the community to the state legislature of Assam was one of

the major causes behind the defection of Morans. After Independence, the Matak-Moran leaders' joint struggle to get recognition as a 'backward tribe' remained relatively passive for around two decades because the ethnic elites of the group primarily emphasizing ensuring their political representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA). They also pressured the Congress leaders of Assam to offer candidacy to the members of the Matak-Moran community to contest elections in the districts where the Matak-Moran population was predominant. In the ALA election of 1952, Indreswar Khaund was the only person among the Matak-Morans who was offered a Congress candidacy (Deka Moran, 2018, p. 247). Khaund was elected to ALA from the erstwhile Constituency of 'Tinsukia North'. He subsequently served as the Transport Minister of Assam. Though the Matak-Moran leaders of AAMS urged the Congress leaders of Assam to offer candidacy to Ghanakanta Moran, the former general secretary of the organization, for the Constituency of Doom-Dooma, it was not taken into account by the party. Instead of giving opportunity to Moran who had been a worker of Assam Congress since its inception in 1921, Harihar Chowdhury, a stranger to the local Morans, was offered Congress candidacy for Doom-Dooma Constituency. Subsequently in the elections of 1957, 1962 and 1967, the Congress ticket for the Constituency was offered to Molia Tanti, a member of the community of Tea tribes. Doom Dooma is a region which has been traditionally and culturally associated with the Morans. Continuous political alienation of Morans in their homeland persuaded some ethnic elites of the community to strengthen their organizational base in the region. If the disadvantaged ethnic group is a minority and is concentrated in a geographical area, its elites would demand a legitimate share of political power in the political system. The electoral victory of Khaund in 1952 was perceived by some Matak leaders as an achievement of the first joint political move of the Matak-Morans. A section of ethnic Morans who were working under the banner of AAMS, however, did not recognize Khaund as a representative of the community because Khaund was not an ethnic Moran.

Deka Moran (2018) notes that the Morans cannot claim that Indreswar Khaund belonged to the Moran tribe; currently, the Mataks and the Morans introduce themselves separately and hence, Khaund represents only the Mataks excluding the Morans (p. 247). The Moran leaders had been bearing a grudge below the surface against this electoral deprivation from the very beginning. In the ALA Election of 1957, Indreswar Khaund, Devendra Nath Hazarika and Powaram Dutta from the Matak community were given Congress candidature in response to the demand of AAMS. Bhuban Chandra Chutia, on the other hand, was the only person belonging to the ethnic Morans who was given a Congress ticket for the Constituency of Tinsukia. Subsequently, Indreswar Khaund and Devendra Nath Hazarika were elected to the state legislature, but Chutia suffered a reverse. Devendra Nath Hazarika became a member of the Cabinet of Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the head of the newly elected Congress Government of the state. Among these four persons who were offered candidature of Indian National Congress in the Vidhan Sabha election of Assam, only Bhuban Chandra Chutia was an ethnic Moran, the other three persons represented only the Matak community, albeit in a parochial sense. It can be noticed that Ghanakanta Moran and Bhuban Chandra Chutia later became founding members of *Moran Sabha* in 1965. In the election of 1962, again from the 'non-Moran' section of the Mataks, Devendra Nath Hazarika and Indreswar Khaund were elected to the state legislature. On the other hand, two ethnic Morans Bhaba Barua and Rabin Moran failed to secure victory although they too had been offered Congress candidature. These continuous political failures persuaded the ethnic elites of Morans to consider the 'non-Moran' Mataks as a privileged group which had been occupying the entire political space of the greater community by overshadowing the former.

Subsequently, on the eve of the ALA election of 1972, the organizations of the two groups submitted separate memorandums to the Congress leaders seeking candidature for their respective groups. In the post-colonial history of Assam, it was the first separate political mobilization of the two groups in the field of electoral politics. Thereafter, Indreswar Khaund from the 'non-Moran' Mataks and Tarulata

Bora from the Morans were given Congress candidature. Both were elected to the state legislature. Tarulata Bora is regarded as the first person among the ethnic Morans who represented the community in ALA.

Thus, the criteria of ‘blood relations’ has been put forward quite consciously by Deka Moran to distinguish his kinsmen from the ‘non-Moran’ Mataks. In this connection, one can cite the view of Clifford Geertz who believes that people attribute primordial attachment to the ties of blood and kinship. Geertz in his renowned work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) argues as follows,

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’ – or more precisely, as a culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the given-ness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language... and following particular practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbour, one’s fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself” (Geertz, 1973, pp. 259-60).

Alienation and Socio-Economic Backwardness of the Morans

Most of the Morans are the inhabitants of Tinsukia district, the easternmost point of Assam. There are currently 114 Moran villages in the district (Dohutia, 2018, p. 176). Some Morans are also found in the districts of Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Jorhat and other regions of Upper Assam. Moreover, a handful of Moran villages are found in the Lohit and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Shrikumar Dohutia, a prominent writer and activist from the community argues that “currently the traditional culture and ethnic identity of the Morans is preserved only among the members of the group living in the relatively isolated places of

Tinsukia district". During their protracted Rebellion (1769-1805) against the Ahom State, several Moran people retreated to interior places of the frontier regions surrounded by dense forests to escape Royal wrath. Military campaigns of the Ahom Regime into the villages of Morans in the late Eighteenth Century were often followed by the deportation of a large number of Moran families to the areas which were under the strict surveillance of the Regime (Gogoi, 2007, p. 101). Such campaigns shattered the village-based agrarian economy of the community to a great extent. It was the beginning of their alienation from the 'mainstream Assamese' society.

Before the Morans could overcome those debacles, their territory was colonized in 1839. The British Government introduced several new land policies to facilitate the expansion of tea plantations in the areas inhabited by the Morans and subsequently a new phase of land alienation and displacement began among the Morans. As the Morans had not yet learned to use their landholdings as a commodity, the colonial masters and their agents could grab their land property with minimum effort and under different pretexts. Moreover, being entrapped by the money-lenders and due to the influx of aliens particularly the working and business communities of mainland India, the Morans, who liked isolation, further retreated towards isolated forests and rural areas. The incompatibility of the indigenous communities debarred those groups from entering into newly opened economic and educational opportunities, and therefore, their conditions deteriorated. The Morans sold their finest lands to the outsiders at throwaway prices, and ended up their money in no time, as they lacked entrepreneurial skills to invest money for profit making.

The worst effect of colonization on the Morans was the expansion of the habit of taking opium. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, a large number of Morans became opium addicted. Opium was patronized and made available in such a way that in the late 1960s there were around 10,000 habitual opium addicts and 20,000 occasional opium eaters among the Morans. With time, opium found

its place even in the religious rituals practised by the community. Under the initiative of AMS, several opium eradication programs were introduced in the Moran villagers in the late 1960s and 1970s. Educational backwardness emerged as another major issue among the Morans.

The educated section of the Moran leaders regarded those issues as some specific socio-economic problems among the Morans which could be solved only through special care and consideration. In the first session of AMS held in March 1966, the leaders of the ethnic group passed a resolution that sought ST recognition for the Morans exclusively. The session passed another resolution demanding the creation of a '*Moran Belt*' including 300 villages of the undivided Lakhimpur district predominantly inhabited by the Morans.

The Quest for ST Status

The Kaka Kalelkar Commission alias the First Backward Class Commission (1953) of India in its Report (1955) recognized both the Morans and the Mataks as a 'most backwards' group, but simultaneously the Commission identified both groups together as a 'Religious Sect'. Subsequently, they were not included in the official list of the STs which was revised in 1956 by the Indian Government in response to certain suggestions of the Kalelkar Commission. The 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' were the general criteria in government parlance for recognizing a group as an ST in the official lists of 1950 and 1956 (the revised version of the list of 1950), but the Morans were not considered eligible for this recognition mainly due to the erstwhile ethnic interchangeability of the Morans and the rest of the Mataks in official parlance. Though the Morans did fulfil those criteria to a considerable extent, they were perceived as a single ethnic group along with the rest of the Mataks. Thereafter, the Government of India constituted another committee under the chairmanship of B. N. Lokur in June 1965, the aim of which was to advise the Central Government on the revision of the existing lists of both the STs and Scheduled Castes (SCs). The committee in its Report remarked that the specification of certain groups as ST was a problematic affair. The Lokur

Committee reveals that “the difficulty in applying the criteria or characteristics in defining a tribe arose from the fact that the tribes in India were and had been for some decades ‘tribes in transition’” (Kulkarni, 1994, pp. 3073-74). For recognizing an ethnic group as ST, the committee put forward certain criteria such as (i) Indications of primitive traits, (ii) Geographical isolation, (iii) Distinctive culture, (iv) Shyness of contact with other communities at large; and (v) Backwardness. It mainly concentrated its focus on certain technical changes in the list which included minor inclusions and exclusions.

The Lokur Committee maintained that “tribes whose members have by and large mixed with the general population were not eligible to be in the Schedule”. This recommendation of the Committee was technically very crucial to the erstwhile official ethnic ties between the Mataks and the Morans, as the former includes certain relatively forward castes and communities. The Moran leaders consequently defected from the rest of the Mataks perceiving that if the Moran community identified itself with the Matak community, which included some non-tribal groups as well, the Moran’s demand for ST status would be weakened (Dutta, 1996: 9). A major break came in 1972 when the community was separately listed from the Mataks in the MOBC list of the Assam Government in response to the repeated demand of the Moran leaders. Hence, safeguarding tribal traits and acquiring tribal recognition from the state for political gain are the major underlying causes behind the bifurcation of the Morans from the rest of the Mataks.

The Morans culturally portray themselves as *Soumar Giri*, meaning the ‘owner of the Upper Assam’. However, the issue of seeking a separate Moran Land from the Central Government has not yet found its place in the official agenda of various organizations representing the community. The activities and demands of these organizations are generally aimed at ensuring justifiable political and official representation of the Morans in the state apparatus. According to the Moran leaders getting ST recognition will be the first step in their move towards economic development and political autonomy. But the existing ST groups of Assam

are not in favour of any step taken by the government to bestow official tribal status upon the six ethnic groups of the Brahmaputra Valley namely Ahom, Chutia, Koch Rajbangshi, Matak, Adivasi (Tea-tribes) and the Morans. In 2004, various organizations representing these ethnic groups established *Soi Janagosthiya Oikya Mancha* (a united forum of the six ethnic groups), to strengthen their movement for tribal status.

Political Challenges

On the opposing side, there is the Coordination Committee of the Tribal Organizations of Assam (CCTOA). It is a forum of several organizations representing the recognized 'tribal' ethnic groups (ST) of Assam which constitute 12.45 percent of the total population of Assam as per the Census Report of 2011. The ethnic groups that have already been enjoying ST status fear that the inclusion of more ethnic groups within the same constitutional category would slice away the benefits and concessions they currently avail. Thus, the entire issue of ethnic resurgence in Assam primarily revolves around the perception or fear of 'relative deprivation' in the sphere of material gain and resource sharing. Sometimes, fear of deprivation becomes politically more influential and effective than the actual degree of relative deprivation existing in the socio-political apparatus. The leaders of the state-recognized tribal groups assert that the quest of these six ethnic groups for ST status is against the rules of the Indian Constitution because these groups do not fulfil the criteria to become ST. The irony is that the Indian Constitution has not fixed any specific criteria for recognizing any group as a 'tribe' unlike the SCs, and left the matter to the consideration of the Executive. It gives opportunity to the political parties to make the matter of identifying and recognizing 'tribal' groups more politicized.

The concepts like 'indigenous' and 'tribal' can be defined only concerning the state. Material considerations of both the government and the aspiring communities play a vital role in the making and unmaking of identities which leads to the birth of new ethnic claims and demands based on 'indigeneity'. In September

2020, the Assam State Assembly passed three bills to create autonomous councils for the Morans, the Mataks and the Koch-Rajbongshis; instead of granting ST status to these communities. Subsequently, in July 2021, the Government of Assam announced the creation of a new Administrative Department named “Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Department” to preserve and promote the customs and rituals of different indigenous groups. This department will explore the scope for using indigenous tribal knowledge in fields like culture, healthcare, education and agriculture. The jurisdiction of this department includes not only the STs but also the other indigenous and tribal groups of the state like the Morans and the Mataks, which are currently not included in the list of STs.

Conclusion

The socio-economic and cultural traditions of the Morans have been marked by their inalienable relation with jungles and their species and products. During the first five hundred years of the Ahom regime, the Morans contributed a lot to the expansion and maintenance of the Ahom State. However, later on, due to growing sectarian rivalries and finally oppressive and authoritarian policies pursued by some Ahom officials, the Morans broke their age-old tradition of collaboration with the existing statesystem and raised the banner of a powerful rebellion which would turn the tide of political history of Assam. The military expedition carried out by the Ahom Government ruined the village-centric socio-economic structure of the Morans to a great extent and changed the demographic distribution of the community as well. Apart from the Morans who perished in the Rebellion, many other Morans reportedly disguised themselves as Ahoms to escape persecution and finally, they merged with the latter. The social and psychological alienation of the Morans from the mainstream Assamese society as well as from the British administration continued throughout the greater part of the colonial era after the annexation of the ‘Matak territory’ and the formation of the erstwhile greater Lakhimpur district, which included the territory of the present-day Tinsukia district. British tea planters’ greed for land to expand the territories of tea gardens and

colonial forest policy alienated the Morans to a great extent not only from their cultivable lands but also from their age-old right to use some of the most resourceful jungles of the area. Cultural conservatism among the Morans led to the further stagnation of the Moran society. Primarily a warrior race, being proud, resolute, simple, determined and sturdy people, the Morans were unable to retain their place in Assamese society and ended up being severely marginalized. Throughout history, every interaction of the Morans with outsiders has brought about several adverse changes to the community. While the advent of the Ahoms reduced their political space, the interaction with the British deprived them of their landholdings and socio-economic status, thereby drastically eroding their social, economic and educational profile. In post-colonial India, the civil society organizations among the Morans such as *Assam Moran Sabha*, *All Moran Students' Union*, *Moran Jatiya Mahia Parishad* and *Moran Sahitya Sabha* are working to preserve cultural heritages of the community and bringing about socio-economic development by placing their demands before the Government.

The connection between ethnicity, state and nationality is due to the requirement that the political space of a nation must be shared. If the voice of some social groups remains unheard, then they in certain ways cease to be a part of the greater socio-political apparatus called 'nation-state'. It leads to the politicisation of one's social identity which leads to ethnic resurgence. In Northeast India, ethnicity remains the pivot around which much of the local politics of the region revolves. Even the ruling BJP, the staunch nationalist political party, has become bound to take into consideration the demographic distribution of various ethnic groups in different pockets of Assam in the cases of both the State Assembly elections and the Parliamentary elections. In essence, the assertion of the 'tribal' identity by the Morans and some other ethnic groups of Assam is not essentially inclined towards seeking rejuvenation of a glorious past, nor they are necessarily secessionist. Ethnic resurgence among the Morans is aimed at ensuring a justifiable position for the community in terms of political representation and resource sharing.

The Morans' desire to get recognition as a 'Scheduled Tribe' is being backed by their quest for constitutional safeguard in the fields of land, jobs, political representation and overall resource sharing. It is evident that though the intra-group components like kinship, culture and tradition, have become the ideological and inspirational base for the Morans for defining ethnicity and triggering ethnic resurgence, one can easily notice that such ethnic mobilizations are originally triggered by material concerns. The official recognition as a 'tribe' in India is followed by the advantages of reservation, concession and constitutional safeguard in the fields of education, employment and legislature. The Moran leaders are resenting the fact that both the Congress Party and BJP are using the issue of conferring tribal status upon the community as a diplomatic means to secure Morans votes of Upper Assam, but these political parties have made it their habit to sideline this demand once they capture power after elections.

The moran leaders believe that the government's act of granting scheduled Tribe Status to the indigenous ethnic groups of Assam will ensure constitutional safeguard for the indigenous groups of Assam.

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