

The Saga of Preservation of Ethnic Tribal Identity in the Society: An Analysis of the Matakas of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a key feature of human identity which is manifested differently in different societies. Ethnic identity is the nucleus of ethnicity. Ethnic identity has received much empirical and theoretical attention in the social sciences, given its wide- ranging implications for inter alia, intergroup relations, linguistic behavior and psychological well-being. But with the passage of time the ethnic identity of ethnic groups are on the verge of disappearing due to the process of homogenization of national identities and the tendency of assimilation rather than accommodation of various socio-cultural identities into the mainstream politics. One such case is the Matakas of Assam whose rich and unique ethnic identity is on the path of disappearing and as such numerous endeavours has been undertaken to revive and re-gain back their lost glorious history and ethnic identity.

Keywords

British, Ethnicity, History, Identity politics, Matakas

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Introduction

Ethnic identity implies an individual's socio-cultural identity within a larger society on the basis of his or her membership to a socio cultural group or ethnic group. Ethnic identity is the symbolic representation of people with the help of certain elements like cultures, traditions, languages etc which distinguishes them from the other people, groups and communities in the society. Furthermore it is a way in which persons on account of their ethnic origin locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems (Wsevolod, 1992). Infact, ethnic identity is one of the most widespread group identity as it serves individuals psycho social functions for group members by providing self esteem, bestowing social status, supplying existential security and knowledge along with granting social protection (Leach et al., 2008). It is rather an individual's self identification as a member of a particular ethnic group. The sense of 'we feeling' and belongingness to a particular ethnic group along with the preferences for ethnic behavior and practices of that particular group represents the vital elements of ethnic identity. The role of self esteem is very vital among the ethnic groups and they are very emotionally attached to it and often react quickly and rapidly when their ethnic identity and their dignity are challenged. Most often it is seen that issues relating to ethnic identity are very much sensitive and threats to ethnic identity are regarded as menace to one's self respect. Ethnic politics and ethnic identity are like two sides of the same coin. Indeed ethnic politics has its basis in ethnic identity consciousness which is formed among diverse ethnic groups, with the passage of time and with the objective to protect their separate identity and as an aftermath various demands are raised. The maintenance of distinct identities and development of the ethnic groups seems to be identical and complementary to one another (Chutia, 2006). The process of identity formation although started much before independence, however, the

materialization and political involvement can be seen only after India's inception as an independent country (Singha, 2016). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the politics of identity had become more pervasive and has eventually replaced the politics of ideas which had hitherto dominated political sphere (Singha, 2016). Ethnic movements and conflicts are found where ethnic groups are trying to consolidate their identity. This arises when the dominant group imposes restrictions on the smaller group or groups making the ethnic groups feel threatened, insecure and discriminated. India is a country with immense racial, cultural and linguistic diversity. It is not surprising that ethnic movements and conflicts are widespread in India between different ethnic groups. There are also conflicts between ethnic groups and larger society and nation-state and these ethnic movements and ethnic conflicts are mostly the minority groups who desire to preserve their unique culture, language etc. Infact, the search for identity is not merely a sub continental phenomenon but rather a global phenomenon with its present form having its inception in the post colonial period.

Ethnic groups and ethnic identity forms the nucleus of ethnicity. Often ethnic identity acts as a mechanism towards cooperation among the members of a particular ethnic group and even acts as an instrument of discord and social disparities among them. Ethnic groups inorder to preserve and maintain their distinctive ethnic identity and for their all round development makes various demands like demand for more constitutional powers, rights and reservations, demand for autonomous state, demand for recognition of their lost historical glory etc. The process of homogenization of national identities and the policy of assimilation rather than accommodation of various socio cultural identities into mainstream politics has further created threats to ethnic identity.

Northeastern region in general and Assam in particular is a mosaic of different ethnic groups whereby search for ethnic identities by diverse ethnic groups has been a living phenomenon in the politics of the region (Chutia, 2006).

Ethnic groups assert their ethnic identities through launching movements, agitations, protests, for the fulfillment of their numerous interests and demands. Various factors like marginalization of ethnic identities by the dominant section, biased policies of the ruling regime, big brother attitude of the dominant groups towards the marginalized groups, integration of social and cultural pluralities into one homogenous unit and negligence towards their needs has mainly paved the path towards the rise of ethnic identity politics and ethnic movements in pre colonial, colonial and post colonial era in this region. However, the nature of every ethnic movement is not same. While some ethnic movements lays emphasis upon the demand for separate political entity within the existing political system or outside the system to preserve ethnic groups distinct identity; some ethnic movements pertains to demands for all round development may it be social, cultural or educational; some relates to demands for reviving their lost ethnic identity while some others are concerned with acquiring greater political autonomy within the Indian union; for achieving separate administrative unit; demand for greater control over political power; demand for constitutional rights as well as demands for protecting their land and resources (Boro, 2016).

The ethnic identity politics of different ethnic groups of Assam has become a crucial issue in the politics of the state. The contemporary Assam is essentially the product of Colonial cartography even though from time to time it has been reformulated. The present article mainly focuses on Identity Politics of the Matak and their endeavours to protect and preserve their distinctive identity that has undergone changes over time. Ethnicity no doubt is a burning issue in contemporary times but research pertaining to this area and especially in regard to the Matak is very limited. The significance of the article is that it will help to know about one of the most aboriginal tribe of Assam, their ethnic identity which is on the verge of disappearing. Every ethnic group has a history of its own and their present situations is a reflection of their past. Likewise, the contemporary situations of the Matak is a reflection of their past and as such this study attempts to throw some light on the past history of the Matak.

Methodology

The method used in preparing this paper is descriptive and historical analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary sources of data are used. Secondary sources like books, journal articles, PhD and M.Phil thesis as well as the resources available on internet has been used judiciously alongwith primary sources such as ministries reports, memorandums, government reports etc.

Mataks and their Endeavours to Preserve their Ethnic Tribal Identity

The Matak are the 'Sons of Soil' of Assam who has been inhabiting independently in their own land, known as 'Saumar' region of Upper Assam possessing sovereignty, distinct tribal identity, cultures and traditions prior to the advent of Sukapha into Assam. They were one of the original inhabitants of Assam and this fact is validated by

historiography. As the practice of writing Buranjis started in Assam only after the advent of the Ahoms, so information and data regarding the numerous tribes residing in this part of the land prior to Ahoms is limited and similar is the case with the Matak. However, it has been recorded in the Buranjis that the first group of people whom Sukapha and his companions met in the eastern most part of ancient Assam (Tipam) were the Matak, whom they befriended and with whose support they fought a war against the Nagas and were even victorious. Indeed this tribal group was able to retain its sovereignty and independence even after the Yandaboo treaty. Infact, the Matak kingdom was the last kingdom to be annexed by the Britishers in this region.

With the passage of time and in the turbulence of historical events, the Matak gradually began to lose their sovereignty, independence, tribal identity and became subjects to alien governments. They suffered untold miseries during the Ahom and British rule in Assam. Nevertheless they struggled to maintain their identity under the alien ruling regime. The Matak although were able to establish their own kingdom and state after the Moamoriya rebellion but their self governance was short lived as the Britishers following the policy of divide and rule annexed their kingdom and state like the other kingdoms and regions of Assam.

Initially the relation between the Ahoms and the Matak were very cordial. But with the passage of time, due to the system of assimilation and integration the Matak began to lose their own identity. They got alienated from their independent rule in 'Saumar' and came under the Ahom rule either by diplomatic tactics of Sukapha or by their own will. Whatever may be the reason but the Matak played a very crucial and vital role in Ahom administration (Chetia, 2017). Later, following the policy of Friendship, Sukapha brought the Matak under his rule and brought political unity and cultural assimilation. However, with the passing time the Ahoms turned out to play the role of a hegemon over the autonomous tribes and its people of this land. As such in order to overthrow their hegemonic power a famous rebellion was initiated against the Ahoms under the leadership of Matak and Morans which is known as the historic Moamoriya Rebellion. Towards the end of the rebellion and as an outcome of it, the Matak Kingdom was established by Swargadeo Sarbananda Singha in Bengmara (present Tinsukia). At present Tinsukia is Assam's second most industrialized and commercial town and this very town was Ancient Bengmara state of Swargadeo Sarbananda Singha, the first ruler of the Matak state. The Matak Kingdom also known as Bengmora Kingdom was one of the most renowned kingdoms of the eastern part of India with its capital at Bengmora. During his reign, for the convenience of the masses and in administration he initiated a number of socio economic developmental works like he constructed numerous forts, roads, houses and dugged ponds and tanks and did all those things in every way possible which would help in beautifying the kingdom. Some of the notable ponds, tanks and roads which were dugged and constructed during his reign are still in existence in the contemporary era. The Matak State was very famous for rice cultivation and was known as 'Assam's storehouse of granary' (Dutta, 2017). Even goods were exported from this region to other places.

Directly or indirectly it was the Moamoriya Rebellion which paved the way for the Britishers in Assam as the Ahoms sought help from them during the rebellion. Britishers annexed Assam in 1826 as per the provisions of the Yandaboo treaty. By dint of Divide and Rule policy and the policy of annexation the Britishers gradually annexed one after another all the petty kingdoms of the tribal people inhabiting in this land. However, it is to be noted here that witnessing Matak's heroic zeal and capabilities as a powerful administering unit in Upper Assam, Matak Kingdom was the last among all the kingdoms to be annexed by the Britishers under their policy of divide and Rule. Aftermath the annexation of their kingdom by the Britishers, the glorious history and the kingdom began to deteriorate and their lands were diplomatically snatched away from them sometimes due to the purpose of trade and commerce and sometimes for the purpose of tea cultivation. As such they became minority in their own state due to increase number of migrants brought by the Britishers to serve their purposes in various spheres. Slowly, the then glorious capital of the Matak's became the hub of trade and commerce of the Britishers and even the capital transformed into a commercial town of the British government. With the passage of time, the very name Bengmora got changed and the place began to be known as Tinsukia- a name which is still in use today (Chetia & Rajkhowa, 2017). Gradually, those foreigners and migrants who came to Assam began to permanently settle down in those areas and due to which the population of that region increased rapidly and the Sons of Soil became minorities in their native place. For the protection and preservation of the historical symbols and territories of the Matak state although its residents raised their demands before the Britishers but all their efforts turned out to be futile. Finally being unable to find any solution they began to reside in the surrounding areas of the tea gardens established by the Britishers.

Losing their land and identity the Matak's became directionless and aliens in their own land and had to depend upon foreigners for their survival and existence. Due to antagonism of the Matak's towards the Britishers the foreign government did not provide any prominent portfolio to them in their administration and bureaucracy and even deprived them of their adequate economic, political and social rights and benefits. Recalling the sour days of British occupation of the Matak Tribal State through their prejudiced policies, the Matak's developed a deep sense of hatred towards them. Moreover, in the Matak dominated area their land, trade and commerce came to be gradually dominated by the non Matak people. Moreover, the practice of opium taking by the Matak's was indeed a diplomatic endeavor of the Britishers to snatch away their land and enthusiasm from them. As a result of all these slowly the Matak tribal group began to lose their glorious history and became an alien in their own land. The Matak's who were once able to shake the 100s of years of Ahom rule in Assam were on the verge of remaining only in the pages of history. The Britishers through the policy of discrimination and repression deprived them from their due rights and opportunities. All these culminated in a strong sense of hatred towards the Britishers and they suffered from inferiority complex. Economically they became very weak as their lands were snatched away from them for tea cultivation. As they were agrarian based

communities they found it very difficult to find an alternative source of livelihood. Not only economically but in all the spheres of life they became very weak and backward. As a consequence of Moamoriya Revolution 100s of years of Ahom Rule became weak. Kings quite frequently changed and their rule became more tough and complex and as such it became very difficult for the masses to sustain in the kingdom under such hard rule. However, for all the wrong doings and happenings the blame went upon the Matak's. In some of the one-sided Buranjis the Matak's were portrayed as rebellions (Baruah, 2017). With the passage of time this notion became far more rapid and strong and the Matak's were seen through the lens of derogation and discrimination. If one would give their identity as Matak's they were not given any jobs or any privileges under the British rule and as such the Matak people began to give their identity as Ahoms.

Later on an attempt has been made to find out the tribal groups of Assam and in this respect the Simon commission was entrusted with the responsibility of finding out the tribal groups with proper evidences and documents and those who were regarded as Tribal groups of Assam by the Simon Commission would be granted the ST Status (Borah & Gharphalia, 2019). But during that time educated people among the Matak's were almost negligible and as such they failed to provide evidences of their tribal identity before the Simon Commission and remained aloof from inclusion in the ST list. However, due to the expansion of education among the people during the colonial era and due to prolonged sufferings and atrocities in the hands of the alien government in their own land, some of the members of various ethnic groups became enlightened and conscious about increasing distortion of their ethnic identity. They began to feel that they were systematically exploited by the dominant section of the Assamese society as well as the Britishers at the same time and as a consequence of it, the tribal ethnic groups cultivated a sense of distinct identity on ethnic lines (Sonowal, 2003) and as such they became articulated and organized even in the pre independence period. As an aftermath it gave birth to the formation of numerous ethnic organisations and out of them, All Assam Matak Sanmilan (AAMS) (1939) is a notable voluntary organisation of the Matak's, formed with the aim to secure all round development of its people. This organisation provided a basis to work for reviving their lost ethnic identity and glorious history (Sonowal, 2003). The Matak's however had a ray of hope that although their ethnicity suffered under the grasp of the Britishers and Ahoms but once the country would attain independence their own people would help in revitalizing them. They thought that their land, culture, traditions, historical monuments and sites would be preserved along with protection of their rights and they will be able to get their due share in the society, which they have been deprived of from decades prior to independence. But all their aspirations in this regard turned out to be mere illusions in the post independence period.

In the post colonial era, the same scenario pertaining to the conditions of the ethnic groups and communities prevailed. Continued negligence and deprivation urged the Matak people along with the other ethnic groups to fight for preserving their distinct ethnic identity and their cultural heritage and with this objective in mind the All Assam

Matak Sanmilen with a renewed vision began to work. In order to help the All Assam Matak Sanmilen (AAMS) in its various agitations, demands and movements, two other organisations were formed within the parent organisation i.e. All Assam Matak Yuva Chatra Sanmilen (1940) and All Assam Matak Mahila Parishad (2005). At present all these three organisations have been collectively performing its role and functions for the all round development of the ethnic group and has been submitting numerous memorandums and has been raising their demands not only before the Assam Government but also before the Central Government. One of the significant demands of AAMS is to provide tribal status to the Mataks. It is noteworthy to mention in this respect that in all the census till 1911, the Mataks were identified as a tribal group of people but in the census reports of 1921 and 1931, the name of Matak tribe was completely left out which signifies the fact that during that period their distinct identity as a separate tribal group were rejected and nullified.

Even though there is no doubt that Matak is a distinct tribal group of people possessing their own history, culture and traditions but a debate often surfaces in regard to their ethnicity and allegations are raised that Matak is only a religious sect. Further, there are also allegations that all the people following Mayamora Vaishnavism are Mataks and the words Mayamora and Moamoria are used synonymously with the word Matak. There is also a notion that there is no word as Matak and that the word is derived from Mot-Ek and as such Motek is the word that should be used in dictionary to refer the Mataks. But in reality all these allegations are baseless, non historical, absurd and false. The history of the Mataks is much older than the history of Mayamora Vaishnavism because in Assam people started embracing Vaishnavism only in the Seventeenth century. Furthermore, among the followers of the Mayamora Vaishnava religion preached by Aniruddhadeva in Seventeenth century in Assam, the Mataks were the majority and as such naturally due to the numerical superiority the name of the community got attached to the religion and in due course of time all the disciples of Mayamora Religion came to be known as Mataks. As such the two words Matak and Mayamora began to be used as synonyms for one another but this should not be the case. Mataks are also a tribe like the Kacharis, Ahoms and Khamtis (A memorandum to the Chairman, North-East MPs Forum submitted jointly by All Assam Matak Sanmilen and Sadou Asom Mottock Yuva Chatra Sanmilen, Head Office-Sarbananda Singha Nagar, Borguri, Dist: Tinsukia, State: Assam, 2015). These allegations often stood as a hindrance in their way of acquiring the due rights and privileges from the constitution and government. The Mataks who were once very powerful and maintained their independent rule and helped the Ahoms in many ways in laying the foundation of their rule in Assam gradually lost their land, sovereignty and even their identity during the Ahom and British rule in Assam. The tribal group who possessed the ability to write the pages of history later had to become dependent on the alien governments for their survival.

The Matak tribal group who has been suffering from various problems, hindrances in their paths towards development has been carrying out agitations and struggles for self assertion and self establishment alongwith acquiring due

shares and rights in the society from pre independence era under the banner of All Assam Matak Sanmilen and its two allied organisations. Amidst their various demands one of the most significant and key demand is to provide Scheduled Tribe (Plains) status to the Mataks. However, this demand is very old and they have been carrying out their various democratic agitations and discussions with the government in regard to fulfilling this demand from pre-independence period till the present times. However, it has now become necessary to have a thorough and detailed examination that to what extent the characteristics which are mentioned in the Indian Constitution for the acquisition of ST status are reflected in case of the Matak tribal group because prior to independence AAMS has been carrying out the demand for granting ST status to the Mataks as their main demand from the government. But the Honorable Registrar General has been rejecting their demand by claiming that they do not possess those requisite characteristics which are prescribed in the Constitution for acquiring ST status. As such under the initiative of the above mentioned voluntary organisations an expert committee was formed by the Government of Assam to review the conditions for acquisition of the ST status of the Mataks as per the directions of the then Chief Minister Sri Tarun Gogoi on 18 July 2008. The honorable Chief Minister of Assam suggested preparing an ethnographic report, recommendations to be based on five (5) criteria and replies to the queries made by the Office of the Registrar General of India with the help of the experts. Accordingly, Government of Assam through a notification had constituted a three member expert committee with the following members to prepare the report on Mataks. 1) Sushil Kumar Gogoi, Member, Advisory Council, Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Chair, Dibrugarh University. 2) Tarun Kumar Gogoi, Lecturer, D.D.R. College Chabua. 3) Satyadhar Matak, Advocate, Gauhati High Court. The Committee on receipt of the letter to that effect in the last part of Sept. 2008 vide No. AIRTSC (Ethno-RS) 68/08/25 dated Guwahati 15 September 2008 called for its first sitting, commenced works w.e.f. 4 October 2008 and completed satisfactory the same on 16 Aug 2009. To shoulder the responsibility as well as the vulnerable task of determining the tribal identity of the 'Matak', the committee has gone through every aspect to the extent of its capacity so that nothing cohesive to the subject matter left unlooked and unturned. It has consulted various books in different libraries and in individual's possessions and many journals, research papers during its altogether 32 sittings. Extensive Urban and Mafussil Tours also undertook in places of importance for archaeological and ethnological field study. Some Twenty Five expertise and resource persons were interviewed (A memorandum to the Chairman, North-East MPs Forum submitted jointly by All Assam Matak Sanmilen and Sadou Asom Mottock Yuva Chatra Sanmilen, Head Office-Sarbananda Singha Nagar, Borguri, Dist: Tinsukia, State: Assam, 2015). Thus the ethnological report prepared was based primarily on study of Ahom chronicles translated from Tai language to English, research articles of eminent scholars of the very recent time, histories of medieval and modern period apart from experiences and knowledge of the faculty members nominated by Government for the Expert Committee. A first and preliminary draft report so prepared was also submitted to

the Director, AIRTSC, Guwahati for his review and comments (A memorandum jointly submitted by All Assam Matak Sanmilan (AAMS) and Sadou Asom Mottock Yuva Chatra Sanmilan to Shri Rajnath Singh, Honourable Home Minister of India on 9th March, 2015). It was after careful study and incorporation of some important suggestions received from his end, the final Draft report of the ethnic identity of the Matak and replies to the queries appertained thereto was prepared and made ready on 2 Oct 2009. The Committee also put forwarded recommendations based on the five (5) criteria which a tribal group must possess in order to be included within the scope of ST list of Assam. After examination, discussion and analysis the expert committee stated that the Matak deserves to be included within the Scheduled Tribe (Plains) list of Assam.

Demands and responses is a two way process. Mere demands are fruitless without any responses to it. Likewise, there can be no responses without any demands. Out of the various demands put forwarded by All Assam Matak Sanmilan and its allied two organisations for the all round development and upliftment of the Matak tribal group, some of the demands has been responded by the government like reservation of seats for Matak students in various educational institutions of Assam, government recognition of the death anniversary of Swargadeo Sarbananda Singha, preservation of some tanks and historical sites of the Matak by the Archeological department of Assam. Furthermore, the state government has also responded towards the issue of indigenous people, their safeguard, providing opportunities to them and towards their development and has decided to thoroughly look into the Clause 6 of the Assam accord. The All Assam Matak Sanmilan and All Assam Matak Yuva Chatra Sanmilan have demanded for creation of Anniruddha Deva Chair in Dibrugarh University. As a response to it, a discussion was held between the Vice-Chancellor, Dibrugarh University; Deputy Commissioner, Dibrugarh and Deputy Commissioner, Tinsukia on 31 October 1990 and the Government of Assam gave its approval for the same. Moreover, another demand of the Matak has been responded positively by the government and that is related to the reservation of seats for Matak students in Dibrugarh University. Further, seats have also been reserved in the medical and engineering colleges for Matak students. At present a discussion has also been undergoing for the formation of Autonomous Council for the Matak. Furthermore, since the past few decades the post of Town Development Authority (TDA) Chairman in Tinsukia has been given to a Matak person. Nevertheless, their struggles and agitations towards inclusion in the ST list are still continuing.

Findings

In one's own native place, endeavours to protect and preserve their language, culture and heritage, traditions, history can never be an offence or crime. Probably there is no tribal group of people in the world who would be willing to abandon or quit their due rights and opportunities and would agree to live like a foreigner in their own motherland. As such the Matak carried out their agitations, demands, claims and discussions with the government and other

officials for their due share and rights in the society under the banner of All Assam Matak Sanmilan.

In laying the foundation of Assam's society and culture as well as in India's independence movement the contribution of this tribal group of people is very noteworthy. Even Sukapha and his team were able to lay the foundation of their Ahom Kingdom with their help and support. However, due to times whirlpool they began to lost their identity and sovereignty. Every bit of their sovereignty was being snatched away from them by the alien government; their very existence became questionable. Their plight continued even after India's independence. In 1947 although India attained independence but the Matak state failed to regain back its sovereignty and became a part of Indian Union. Aftermath their inclusion in India they failed to gain back their land rights, their socio economic and political rights which they once possessed; were deprived of their deserving political representation, opportunities, land, properties and other allied facilities and opportunities from the government and after losing everything they became helpless and directionless (Gohain, 2017). Although the territories once comprising the Matak Kingdom were advancing and developing, but the Matak people are lagging behind in all the spheres of their life. A stage came when the Matak even feared to give their identity as Matak. The irony is that in the tea gardens and industries situated in the then Matak state now in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh are owned by foreigners and are in possession of non Matak people. The population of the Matak in the Matak dominated areas is gradually decreasing while the population of the non Matak people is on an increasing trend. In order to preserve and protect their identity, history, rich cultural heritages and traditions and to bring about all round development of the Matak people All Assam Matak Sanmilan was formed. The tribal group which was once able to change the history of Assam had to depend upon alien governments for their survival and protection of their identity. The Matak suffered untold miseries under both the Ahom and British rule in Assam.

Attempts to homogenize the distinctive identities of various ethnic groups as well as the tendency to assimilate the diverse ethnic groups' interests and demands rather than accommodating them by the ruling regimes has further intensified the issue of ethnic politics in post independence era in India. The Indian constitution has laid down five distinctive characteristics or criteria which a group must possess in order to avail the ST status. Those characteristics are: 1. Primitive Traits 2. Distinctive Culture 3. Impact of Shyness in social behavior 4. Geographical Detachments/ Isolation 5. Problem of Backwardness (A memorandum to the Chairman, North-East MPs Forum submitted jointly by All Assam Matak Sanmilan and Sadou Asom Mottock Yuva Chatra Sanmilan, Head Office-Sarbananda Singha Nagar, Borguri, Dist: Tinsukia, State: Assam, 2015). It is witnessed that the Matak tribal group possessed almost all the characteristics which are requisite for attainment of ST status as surveyed by the Expert committee formed to review the conditions for acquisition of the ST status of the Matak.

In the contemporary period, due to increased ethnic consciousness among the Matak people and due to systematic initiatives by some far sighted and eminent

persons of this ethnic group, they are slowly becoming successful in improving their socio cultural, economic and political conditions although much developments and improvements are yet to be attained. In view of their demands and claims it is also witnessed that the government has responded positively to some of those demands. Recently, the Matak King Sarbananda Singha is given state recognition as a heroic leader of ancient Assam and his death anniversary has been observed as a government programme and even an award in his name has been given to one of the eminent member of the ethnic group. Furthermore, in order to preserve the ethnic group's cultural heritage, the archaeological department has been taking various steps. For educational development of the youths of this ethnic group, reservations in universities, medical colleges as well as engineering colleges has been made by the state government. The textbook of secondary education even includes the study of Matak within its curriculum.

Conclusion

The history of Matak is that of a struggling history. Starting from how they lived independently in the Saumar region to the Ahom invasion whereby they became friends and maintained a cordial relation with them to how their independence got alienated gradually from them and were brought under the Ahom rule followed by the historic Moamoriya rebellion against the Ahom aristocracy where they played the lead roles, incorrect listing of their tribal group in the census which made them lose their tribal status till the struggles in the contemporary period, this tribal group has made numerous endeavours to maintain their own identity and independence amidst all its struggles. In the post independence period they had to struggle and fight for their due rights and opportunities. Under the banner of their voluntary, non political organisation they carried out their demands, memorandums and discussions with both the Central and State government and were even successful in fulfilling some of their demands towards their development and upliftment. They are now included in the list of More Other Backward Classes (MOBC) by the Government. The Matak tribal group if not given due constitutional safeguards and protections by the government and if their demands are continuously undermined, then a time will come when they will completely lose their identity and will become an extinct tribal group of people who will survive only in the pages of history and not in reality.

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