

Mayamara alias Matak-Moran Rebellion (1769 – 1805): As an Intellectual Anachronism in the Politics of Peasant Movements of Assam

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ABSTRACT: Hitherto there has never been an end to the controversy on the roots and nature of historic Mayamara alias Matak-Moran rebellion of Assam (1769-1805) which paved the way for the decline of magnificent Ahom Monarchy that had been ruling the greater part of the Brahmaputra valley since 1228. A section of scholars has tried to call it a religious war or ‘crusade’ waged by the Mayamara *Vaishnavas* against the oppressive *Saktaism* of the Ahom Royal family, but unfortunately except a few scholars like Prof. Lila Gogoi, Prof. D. Nath and Prof. S. Dutta, no others has taken care of the internal disturbances within the Matak during the rebellion which would later determine the ethno-political destiny of the various communities within the Mayamara sect. Some scholars like Dhruvajyoti Bora and Amalendu Guha have tried to reinterpret this event as a class struggle on the part of peasants. However, on the eve of this uprising class consciousness hardly grew among the commoners, as the consciousness of both the contemporary elites and commoners was dominated by varying ‘sectarian’ as well as ‘ethnic’ consciousness that can be assessed in terms of the dominant ideologies of the era. There are contradictory views between the local writers and the British colonial authors, and among the local scholars themselves regarding the roots and nature of Mayamara Rebellion. Hence an attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the same.

Key-words: Ahom, Crusade, Ethno-political, Matak, Mayamara, Moran, Saktism, Vaishnavism.

Date of Submission: 19-12-2017

Date of acceptance: 16-01-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The word ‘Matak’ or ‘Mayamara’ refers to a sect or religious way of life based on the ideas of Aniruddhadeva, rather than denoting a specific ‘tribe’ as mistakenly labeled by some British writers. There have been several branches within the sect. such as Moran-Matak, Ahom-Matak, Kachari-Matak, Chutiya Matak, Kalita-Matak, Nadial-Matak, Brahmin Matak etc. In 1940, the Satradhikar of Mayamara Dinjoy *Satra*, Chabua (Dibrugarh), Jivakanta Goswami appealed to all Mayamara disciples with a letter under the title “*Sadau Mayamara sisymbargaloi guhari*” (appeal to all Mayamara disciples) as follows.

“*Bastabikatee Oxomot Matak bola kunu jati nai. Mayamara Vaishnava dharmar pracharak Sri Sri Aniruddhadevar matabalambixokolokee Mayamara, Puroi Bhakat ba Matak sampradai bulee.*” (Boruah 2011: 187) – ‘In fact, there is no *Jati* (tribe) in Assam called Matak. The people who believes in the religious ideology of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva are known as Mayamara, *Puroi Bhakat* or Matak community.’ Today Matak and Morans are largely concentrated in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of upper Assam. Besides, Matak can be seen in Sibsagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur and Darang districts. Some of the Moran-Matak live in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, mainly in the Mahadevpur region. Some of the Morans and Matak got assimilated with the Ahoms with the passage of time. Today, the original ethnic and cultural identity of Morans can be assessed only among the Moran-Matak concentrated in Tinsukia District. Whereas majority of the non-Moran Matak are the inhabitants of Dibrugarh district, north to the Burhidihing river. It comes to our notice that in 1769, the Matak irrespective of their ethnic identity together raised a banner of rebellion against the Ahom Monarchy that changed the destiny of Assam forever. Different scholars offered their views about the roots, nature and the scope of this rebellion. Among them Amalendu Guha, Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bora, Prof. Lila Gogoi, Prof. D. Nath, Prof. S. Dutta and several others highlighted various aspects of the Mayamara Rebellion. We can observe the presence of contradictory remarks in the writings of those authors while applying their own perspectives and ways of evaluation to interpret the event. Nevertheless, during the four decades of the prolonged rebellion, various ethnic groups and communities that had come under the same sectarian umbrella, “Matak”, gradually became more assertive by revealing their own ethnic identity. Specific Identities backed by sectarian affiliations

became effective means for the political as well as spiritual figures of the era to pursue and justify political objectives and authority respectively.

II. PEASANT REBELLION: AN ANACHRONISTIC INTERPRETATION

Some scholars like Dhrubajyoti Bora and Amalendu Guha blamed the erstwhile “Paik” system of Ahom regime and its rigidity as one of the causes behind the rebellion. Hence, they would like to call it a class struggle in the form of “peasant rebellion” against the Ahom Monarchy. It may not be simply denied in one sentence, as under this system certain amount of fixed physical labour was imposed upon the all able bodied males within the age 16-50. However, generally they had to exercise physical labour for the welfare and security of the state from 20 years of age. Naturally some scholars now would tend to say that the peasants had been gradually becoming dissatisfied with the existing *paik* system. The smallest unit of the *paik*, called *gots*, consisted of four *paiks*. Several *gotes* together constituted a *khel*.

“The *paik* and *khel* system was able to mobilize a vast labour force at any given point of time for all the functions of the state. Though this system was essentially based on coercion and was very strict, it did however provide a good measure of social security and because of its ethnic, kinship, and other social bindings it also provide a sense of belonging. The state that emerged in Assam in the Middle Ages ultimately depended on the efficient functioning of the *paik* and the *khel* system.” (Nirmolia 2012: 03)

Bora has tried to put the fabric of ‘peasant uprising’ on Mayamara Rebellion with a Marxist perspective in terms of ‘class struggle’. Even some scholars try to call it the pioneer of peasant movements of the North-East. It may be denied the same way Ramachandra Guha denied the thought of Amartya Sen on “Multiculturalism”. Sen described Akbar, the Great Mughal as a ‘pioneering multiculturalist’ of the 16th century India as he possessed considerable amount of tolerance towards the Hindus and other religious groups. But it is the Anachronistic view of Sen, according to Guha i e ‘attribution of things or thought at a wrong place and wrong time.’ Guha believes that Indian secularism is the fruit of the national crisis of the first half of 20th century, resulted by thoughts of Nehru and Gandhi to prevent communal bloodshed in post-independent India. Therefore, according to Guha, the deeds of Akbar were indeed of a typical kind of tolerance, but not ‘secularism’. Moreover, the idea of ‘multiculturalism’ comes from the American Academy.

“Sen claims that ‘Akbar’s championing of religious tolerance.....is rightly seen as providing one of the major building blocks of Indian secularism’..... It is correct to identify Gandhi and Nehru (if Tagore less so) as the principal architects of India’s ‘constitutional secularism and Judicially guaranteed multiculturalism’. However, this came about not because Gandhi and Nehru were inspired Akbar’s example, nor indeed by contemporary western examples either. Rather, their work in this regard was a product of deep personal belief on the part of both men, of their own experience of the bloodletting caused by religious intolerance, and of the political compulsions of constructing a democratic state in a multi-religious nation. Indian secularism was a dynamic creation of its own place and time, not a reflection or elaboration of ideas articulated in the same place 400 years previously or in another place in more recent times.” (Guha 2016: 230-231)

The writings of Guha make us to realize that intellectual anachronism has become one of the negative aspects of the cotemporary scholarly thoughts. Inspirations in fact motivates the next generation. However, it’s fallacy to expect that the new generations will always be imitating the deeds of the past generations whether they were fair or not. The self-consciousness as well as typical kinds of morals of people will spontaneously flourish on the basis of existing socio-political scenario. It can be noticed that scholars often get obsessed with the imported Political theories and use to apply them in explaining the indigenous movements (such as Mayamara rebellion of the 18th century Assam). However, trying to practice the theory is always appreciable. Theory without practice is of no use, but at the same time one should not forget that indigenous movements or assertions across the world have often been backed by indigenous kind of isms or crisis. Nobody can say that Mayamara Rebellion inspired the American Revolution which occurred 6 years after First Mayamara Rebellion (1769) in 1775. The Second and Third Mayamara rebellions of 1780’s - 90’s were contemporary to the American Revolution and French Revolution respectively. Extent of communication, distance and most importantly the variations in contexts do matter when one incident is to be explained as influential on some other contemporary or upcoming events. Although some socio-economic issues did exist during the Mayamara rebellion, it was hardly a peasant movement.

The irony here is that the Matak-Morans or Mayamaras has not given the slogan of economic liberation. They gave the slogan of “*Mori jaau maari jaau, Guru reen huji jaau*” (We get killed and shall kill and thus pay the debt of our *Guru*). In several post-Independence literary works, Mayamara Rebellion has been reinterpreted directly in relation to the class struggle without properly taking into account whether class consciousness grew in the contemporary Assamese society or not. It very often leads to the creation of intellectual anachronism.

According to D. Nath, “Following Amalendu Guha, Dhrubajyoti Bora wrote his ‘Mayamara Gana Abhyutthan’ (1983)” where he attempted to show that the event “was a peasant movement”. “Although a serious

study on the great 18th century revolt of Assam, Bora's work suffers from certain methodological drawbacks." (Nath 2000: 35)

It can be said that without proper assessment the elitist politics behind the political behaviour of the commoners of the 18th century Assam it's hardly possible to explain the roots and nature of Mayamara Rebellion. The indigenous ideologies, beliefs, and most importantly the process of socialization, Sanskritisation and Politicisation of both political elites and commoners pursued by the contemporary *sakta* priests as well as by the *Vaishnava satras* played a crucial role in determining the socio-political behavior of both elites and commoners. On the other hand, some political elites of the era such as Ragh Moran, Naharkhura and Swargadeu Gaurinath Singha played politics behind the veil of typical non-Brahminic and Brahminic spiritualisms of the era respectively.

Now the questions are –

1. Who were the peasants during the Mayamara Rebellion?
2. Were the commoners of the era driven by similar class consciousness?

During Ahom regime, especially the commoners of upper Assam being influenced by tribal socio-economic culture, never developed a class consciousness in terms of their socio-political status. During Ahom regime, the Moran-Mataks were mainly involved in 'shifting' or *jhum* cultivation like tribal people from hills, a practice continued by the majority of the Morans even during the Colonial era. The British recognized the high lands inhabited by the Moran-Mataks and surrendered by dense jungles as 'Upper Matak'. A. J. Moffat Mills in his Report on the Province of Assam (1853) mentions about the dependence of Morans on shifting cultivation. He highlighted that the Morans were greatly migratory due to jhumming or shifting cultivation, whereas the Mataks of "Lower Matak" were habituated with permanent settlement by virtue of their stable way of cultivation in the same lands. The Mataks who lived immediate north to the Burhidihing river and other parts of Assam were the cultivators of '*Sali Dhan*' (a method of growing paddy in low lands) introduced by the Ahoms (Dutta 1996: 128-129).

Furthermore, the Nadial Mataks of upper bank who played an active role in the rebellion were mainly the fishermen who were in fact the first generation of the Mayamaras or Moamarias. The Rebellion was raised by the *Hatisungi* Morans (who had to catch and train wild elephants for the Ahom Government) with whom Ahom Authority had nothing to do in the affair of cultivation. E. A. Gait in his work '*A History of Assam*' remarked in reference to the Morans as follows.

"At the end of the Ahom rule, they occupied the country between the Dangari and Dibru rivers, they paid no revenue but supplied various products of the jungles such as elephant, dye, honey, mats." (Dohutia 2016: 235)

The Mayamara Rebellion was organised together by the Morans, then a nomadic ethnic group, the fisherman community of north bank and the well settled Mayamara elites and commoners of the south bank together. That combination was largely influenced by some political calculations behind the veil of religious-sectarian unity. Saying in Marxist line, Religion or Sect truly became an 'opium' for elites and commoners in 18th century Assam in the forms of both *saktism* and *Vaishnavism*. After the death of Sankardeva, the emerging fragments in the forms of four *Samhatities* in *Vaishnavism – Brahma, Purusa, Nika* and *Kala* further strengthened the addiction of common masses towards sectarian belief. Apart from commoners, the political elites of the valley too got fragmented in religious lines by virtue of their loyalty to different *satras* belonging to different *samhaties*. Such loyalty and affection of masses led to creation of a section of religious elites in the forms of *Gurus* and *Satradhikars* in the second half of the 17th century. Many of them would later become aspirants of political power due their great ideological and moral influence upon the political elites as well as commoners. It would not be an exaggeration to opine that in the 17th and 18th century Assam, the socio-cultural life of the commoners were governed by various *satras* of the Brahmaputra valley. The involvement of the Moran-Mataks in Ahom administration was different from that of the other Mataks. Neither the Ahoms nor the Mayamara Satra interfered in the internal affairs of Morans who lived under their own *Gaonburhas* (village headmen).

The Ahom State of the Brahmaputra valley was not a 'nation state' like that of its European counterparts of the 18th and 19th century, exercising similar degree of political authority over all that fell within its political boundary. Moreover, the complicated geo-political scenario of the North-East marked by large number of tributaries of the Brahmaputra, dense forests and hilly terrains very often discouraged the Ahom Authority to pursue a highly centralised political structure. It was a multi-ethnic state, and accordingly the degree of loyalty of various ethnic groups towards the central authority had always been fluctuating with changing time and context during the prolonged Ahom regime in the valley. The mixed socio-economic environment as well as the decentralised political establishments of the contemporary Brahmaputra valley was hardly conducive to build a class consciousness among the commoners. The commoners of the era were largely conscious about their respective ethnic or community affiliations, although they belonged to same religious sect

whether it was Mayamara *Vaishnavism* of *Kala Samhati* or any one of the other three *samhaties* of Assamese *Vaishnavism*. Therefore, during the 18th century the common people of Assam were divided in sectarian lines along with their ethnic divisions.

Moreover, there is another difficulty to place the peasants as a specific class in Assam unlike the industrial workers of the West. In Assam cultivation has been a popular culture as a way of livelihood, celebrated by the people. It has never been a mere profession imposed by the elites in the form of socio-economic compulsion. Likely to the contemporary Mughal government of India and the British government of Bengal the Ahoms never had neither standing professional regiments prior to the regime of King Kamaleshwar Singha (1795-1811) nor they had professional peasants to boost the economy of the state. The huge shortage of manpower in Brahmaputra valley as compared to the Ganga-Yamuna plains of mainland India was a major cause behind it. During those days being peasant was a natural profession for the commoners as there were plenty of fertile lands along the Brahmaputra valley. Cultivation had been a culture of the aboriginal communities of the valley since time immemorial prior to the arrival of Sukapha in 1228. In Assam peasantry was not an artificial manmade class like that of the industrial workers of the West who were bound to work in the industries by virtue of their poverty. Under Ahom administration the persons who were recruited in the army during political disturbances were *paikes*, whereas the same *paikes* were commoners during normal circumstances. During the absence of the head from the household it was the duty of the state to look after his family.

The same peasants working for the state belonged to the numerous *satras* of Assam as disciples. Accordingly large number of disciples of Mayamara *satra* were no others but peasants. Therefore, in the prolonged Mayamara Civil War peasants were mobilized both by the Royalists and the Mayamara leaders against each other by virtue of their fragmented political and sectarian loyalty. The non-Mayamara commoners hailing from other *satras* of the valley either took arms against the Mayamara commoners or remained neutral. During this civil war some commoners of the valley, for example several villagers from the Bosa and Doyang-Dhansiri valley refused to join the Royalists army, whereas at the same time they didn't offer any support to the rebels (Gogoi 2007: 118). Majority of the Mayamara as well as non-Mayamara commoners remained mere tools, driven and sacrificed by political as well as religious elites to fulfil their political objectives.

Therefore, even after recognizing certain confinements imposed upon the commoners within the *paik* system, it can be argued that the prevalent multi-sectarian and the multi-ethnic socializations as well as the presence of tribal socio-economic practices in the 18th century Brahmaputra valley hardly provided a base for the commoners to build a class consciousness by virtue of their belongingness to the same politico-economic apparatus. The Assamese elites of the era too was divided in ethnic and sectarian lines. While the Ahom elites occupied the most important administrative posts, there were several high ranking officials hailing from caste Hindus, Chutiyas, Morans, local Muslims, Miris (inclusion of Miris or Misings in the elite Handique family of Ahoms, who came to known as '*Miri Handique*'), etc. Even the Ragh Moran and Naharkhura Moran, the two key leaders of the rebellion were the high ranking Moran officials of the Ahom Court. Apart from those political elites, there were numerous Caste Hindu religious elites in the form of *Satradhikars* of *Satras*, and in the form of priests of temples and the Royal Court who possessed huge amount of donated wealth and land property.

Both the political elites and religious elites of the era tried to get their works done by influencing each other. Very often the ideological differences among the respective *satras* influenced the political behaviour and objectives of the elites as well as of the commoners. Therefore, likely to the commoners even the elites of the kingdom were fragmented in the lines of ethnicity, caste and sectarian affiliation. Such a diverse socio-political scenario was hardly conducive to the growth of 'class consciousness' in the valley.

The Moran-Mataks still regret the fact that their community would have been included in the scheduled tribe list way back under Government of India Act, 1935, when Simon Commission was appointed (1928) for the purpose. But the presence of Caste Hindu entities within the Mataks became an obstacle in the path of pursuing S. T. status. Furthermore, there was no educated person among the Morans to represent their case, as such they were left unnoticed. Now this community is determined to prove their tribal identity which is distinct but plagued by awful backwardness. The Morans call themselves "*Habitolia*" (people from jungles), whereas they call other Mataks alias Mayamaras "*Mukolia*" (people from open areas). The *Hatisungi* (the *Khel* who caught and trained elephants for the Ahom State) Morans who would raise the rebellion in 1769, had been annually offering trained elephants to the Royal Court as an age old custom. Unlike the Morans, the *Mukolia* Mataks lived north to the Burhidihing River, Majuli and north bank in Lakhimpur. Some of the *Mukolia* Mataks living in the proximity of Ahom Capital Rangpur were directly involved in Ahom administration. Several members of the elite *Duwarah* family of Ahoms belonged to the *Mukolia* section of the Mayamaras, many of whom were high ranking officials of the Ahom Government on the eve of the rebellion. Most of those officials offered moral and strategic support to the rebels. When the rebels were marching towards Ahom Capital in late 1769, they were regularly being informed about the political scenario of the Ahom Court, and military strategy adopted by the King and the officials against the Morans.

Moreover, following the model of Ahom socio-economic system, the first Matak king Sarbananda Singha himself retained pike system in his newly formed Matak Kingdom (1788) with Bengmara as its capital, recognized by the Ahom government later in 1805. So did the other Matak Chiefs in Sibsagar, Majuli and Lakhimpur which came under their jurisdiction for a few years. In an agreement signed in May 13th, 1826 between Matibar Barsenapati, the son and successor of Sarbananda Singha and the David Scott, the British representative, three months after the Treaty of Yandabo (February 24, 1826), the Barsenapati clarifies as follows.

“The pykes belonging to the Phukons, Burrooahs, Brahimins and others that are under me amount to 160 Gotes, and my own amount to 260 Gotes of these 42 Gotes are my own Liksoos.....300 Gotes remain, deducting of these 150 are fighting men, 150 labourers; these I will furnish according to the custom of the country.....” (Dohutia 2016: 62)

So, it can be noticed that the entire administration in the Matak State was more or less an imitation of the erstwhile Ahom administration of the pre-Mayamara rebellion era. According to this treaty, the Matak Chief didn't have to pay the British any revenue. He offered those of 300 Gotes of Pikes to the British government. Had the Mayamaras possessed a sincere grudge against the prevailing Pike system of the era, they could have developed their own administrative mechanism. Perhaps the common masses of contemporary Brahmaputra valley had been socialized with the Pike system since its formal establishment by Momai Tamuli Barbaruah in 1609, during the regime of Swargadew Pratap Singha. Even after the formation of a virtually autonomous Matak state in 1805, with which the Mayamara rebellion came to an end, the leading figures among the Mataks could not think of an alternative to replace existing system whether it was good or exploitative. Perhaps they didn't feel its necessity in the prevailing socio-economic scenario.

Shrikumar Dohutia, a prominent scholar from Moran-Matak community hailing from Kakopthar, Tinsukia, is of the view that- “the common masses were self-sufficient and prosperous on the eve of the rebellion. The Morans greatly cooperated with the Ahoms until two of their leaders from *Hatisungi Khel*, namely Ragh Neog and Nahor Khura Saikia, newly converted to Mayamara Vaishnavism, were brutally punished at the capital Rangpur in 1769 as some elephants provided by them to the Royal Court were allegedly unfit”.

Notably the peasant movements in the 19th century colonised Assam took place in lower Assam, instead of the Upper Assam, inhabited by the so called peasant rebels, the Matak-Morans. The peasant uprisings in Phulguri (1861) of Nagaon district and Patharughat (1894) of Darrang district were the immediate results of rapidly increasing rate of agricultural tax imposed upon the peasants which didn't exist before 1826. The local Tiwa (Lalung) peasants of Nagaon were largely the victims of Phulguri Dhewa. Three who were executed, and five of the seven who were deported to ‘Kalapani’ (isolated Andaman islands where the influential political prisoners were kept under surveillance during British era in India) belonged to Tiwa tribe. Indibor Deori opined (2013) that Tiwas had autonomous spirit earlier too during the Ahom regime. According to him, it was the Tiwas who organised the *Phulguri Dhewa*, a peasant movement in Phulguri near Nellie (Nagaon) in 1861, protesting the taxation imposed by the British.

Similarly it was the decision of the British government to increase the agricultural tax by 70-80% in 1893, which was going to break the backbone of the peasants of Darrang and thus, resulted finally in violent protest. Darrang too had never been directly under Ahom Administration, being ruled by the descendants of legendary Koch King Naranarayana who were semi-autonomous rulers under the Ahoms since 1616 till 1826. During Mirjumla's invasion of Assam in 1662, the Koch ruler of Darrang sided with the Mughals. During the Third Mayamara Rebellion taking advantage of the anarchy in Ahom Kingdom, Hansanarayana, the Koch ruler of Darrang waged a war against his overlord Gaurinath Singha in the upper bank. However, he was killed in an encounter. In 1805, Krishnanarayana, the ruler of Darrang refused to join the Ahoms in an expedition against the Kacharies and the fugitive Mayamaras in Nagaon. Existence of an autonomous spirit can be seen among the Koch rulers as well as commoners of Darrang during 17th-19th century, although after the collapse of the ‘Koch-Hajo’ Kingdom now they were vassals of the Ahoms since the 17th century. Even today Koch-Rajbongshi population is predominant in Darrang and Udalguri region of the upper bank. They consider themselves as elite section among the all the Koches of Assam.

It should be noted that the Ahom administration treated the commoners carefully. The Koch peasants of Darrang region were much conscious about their rights even in the 17th century and it was backed by their ethnic pride which they possessed once being a part of the mighty Koch Kingdom of Assam. When necessity arose they never hesitated to lodge complaints at Ahom Court. Around hundred years before the Mayamara Rebellion, in 1685, from Darrang, a person named Fatik Hazarika led a ‘representative body of 100-members’ to Gargaon, the Ahom Capital. They expressed their local problems caused by frequent land survey and consequent revenue escalation. Ahom King Gadadhar Singha kindly accepted them and took measures to remove their apprehension. (Ali 1994: 05)

III. ETHNOCENTRISM AND CASTEISM: OVERSHADOWING PEASANT IDENTITY

Aniruddhadeva alias Harakanthagiri Bhuyan, the founding father of the Mayamara-Matak sect, belonged to Kayastha or *Bara Bhuyan* community of Brahmaputra valley. His descendents considered themselves as equal to the Brahmins, and they never forgot their Kshatriya roots. It is highlighted by some sources that earlier the Kayasthas were “Sword-Men” of Hindu kings which reflects their origin as warriors. In Medieval Assam the Kayasthas were largely considered as Shudra who were locally known as Barabhuyans or simply as Bhyans, literally refers to a ‘land owner community’. It should be noted that the proponent of the Assamese Neo-Vaishnavism Sankardeva himself was a Kayastha, and earlier he was the owner of an estate in Nagaon region, whose forefathers left Kanauj (present day Uttar Pradesh) during the late 12th century and the early 13th century Mohammedan Invasions of North-India. They migrated eastwards and took shelter in Bengal. After that migrated to the Kamrup-Kamata State amid the 13th century spreading themselves in the Lower and Middle Assam. Gradually they established their own estates both in the North-Bank and the South-Bank. Notably while they were involved in commercial activities and cultivation in the Brahmaputra Valley. At the same time they maintained their own small army for self-defence. Furthermore, they were involved in literary activities based on ancient Hindu Scriptures. So, there is a popular saying in Assam that-Bhuyans are experts in both the *Astra* (weapons) and the *Sastra* (Scriptures). Some scholars like Prof. Hiren Gohain and Prof. D. Nath emphasise on the presence of ethnic as well as caste elements during the rebellion. In their view the rebellion can be considered as an assertion on the part of Chutias and Morans to restore their respective kingdoms which had been lost to Ahoms several centuries before. Prof. Gohain argues that the nature of Mayama rebellion can’t be assessed without taking into account the ethnic dimensions. Even A. Guha who attempted to interpret the rebellion in terms of class struggle did recognise the presence of ethnic elements in the rebellion.

The Kayastha alias Bhuyan chiefs of Brahmaputra Valley had their own autonomous principalities which were later subjugated by the growing military might of the Ahoms and Konchs in the Middle Assam and the Lower Assam respectively. Even in early 17th century the Bhuyans who lived between the Bharali river and the Dhansiri river of the North Bank rose against the Ahoms refusing to pay tax. Their rebellion was crushed by the Ahom army, but the incident and the traditional Bara-Bhuyan pride would have a long lasting impact upon the psyche of Bhuyans for relentlessly striving for their own political destiny as well as ethnic identity even under the Ahom rule. Their leader Uday Bhuyan who was executed by the Royalists was contemporary to Aniruddhadeva. Although there was no evidence of any connection between the two leaders, similar kind of autonomous spirit can be observed among the descendants or successors of Aniruddhadeva.

Nityanandadeva, the Mayamara spiritual head allegedly remarked in Ahom capital Gargaon at a Royal ceremony: “*Aan Mahantahakalar prabhab aaru khyamata mur lagat tulanar jugya nahai. Mur eakmattro hamakakhya hol Indrabangshi Ahom Swargadewhee.*” (Hussain 2007- 2008: 152-153) - ‘The influence and power of other Mahantas even don’t deserve to be compared with that of mine. The only person who deserves my equal position and status is the Ahom king as the descendant Lord Indra.’ (translated from the Assamese original by the author) For his such provocative argument Nityanandadeva was executed by Surampha alias *Bhaga Raja*, the contemporary Ahom king.

Astabhuj Mahanta in 1760’s took initiative to make the Morans his disciples. It can be literally refers to a Goddess who consumes fresh meat as her food noticed that from the very beginning of the Ahom regime in 13th century Morans had been inalienable part of Ahom army as earlier the number of Ahoms had been very less. Marriage relationship with the Morans helped the Ahoms to increase their population as well as to consolidate their gains in the Brahmaputra valley. The Mayamara Mahanta knew well that without the support of Morans the Ahom administration would lose its military might as well as an important base of support. That’s why the Mayamara *satra* tried to create an ideological rift between the Morans and the Ahom Royal family by converting the Morans to Mayamara Vaishnavism. Likely to the *sakta* Ahom Royal family who had been the worshipper of *Bhagawati Gokhani* (Goddess *Durga*), the Morans too had been *sakta* being the worshippers of *Kesaikhati Gokhani* (Goddess *Kesaikhati*, literally refers to a Goddess who consumes fresh meat as her food) of Sadia prior to their conversion into Mayamara Vaishnavism.

Shrikumar Dohutia clarifies that even after being converted to Vaisnavism the Moran-Mataks occasionally still follow their age old typical tribal tradition of worshipping goddess Bhagawati and Lord Mahadeva. Practice of worshipping the ‘Mother Goddesses’ can be observed as a wide practice in the tribal societies of North-East India. *Kesaikhati Gokhani* (literally refers to a Goddess who consumes fresh meat as her food) was such a local Mother-Goddess for the Chutias and the Morans and many other local tribes since time immemorial prior to the arrival of Ahoms where hardly any considerable impact of Aryanization or Brahminism can be seen. The *Deories* (local Chutia priests) offered sacrifices and prayer to the Goddess. Notably, on the eve of the Matak Rebellion the Moran-Mataks offered sacrifices to please goddess Bhagawati and even their Mayamara Vaishnava spiritual head was present on the occasion.

Therefore, it can be noted that the Moran-Mataks who played the most active role in the Mayamara rebellion among the all sections of Mataks have been influenced by the *Sakti* (Supreme Power of the Universe in

the form of a 'Mother Goddess') worshipping since time immemorial. Such kind of practices generally can't be seen among the Mataks who are the disciples of Mayamara Dinjoy Satra of Chabua. Whereas the Moran-Mataks are largely the disciples of Mayamara Tipuk Satra of Doomdooma (Tinsukia) and other 12 Satras which are the branches of the main satra. It was established in the late 18th century by Bhabananda alias Krishnabhujdeva, a disciple of Astabhujdeva to convert the local Moran tribe to Mayamara sect.

Thus, the newly converted Morans in the second half of the 18th century became a part of the prolonged standoff between the Mayamara Sect and the Ahom Dynasty. The Mayamara Mahanta would later use the militarily experienced Morans as his militia to counter the Royalists. Thus, the sudden rise of open rivalry among the *Hatisungi* Morans against the Ahom Authority became a catalyst to the existing antagonism between the Mayamara and the Ahom government.

When after the first Mayamara rebellion, the Moran-Mataks acquired all the higher political positions of the state, Saptabhuj conspired to kill Naharkhura, Ramakanta and Ragha, the reigning Moran leaders to place himself at the throne. Even being a religious figure, the actions of Saptabhuj were the reflections of an autonomous political spirit still alive among a section the descendants of Bara Bhuyans. It can be noticed that during the Third Mayamara Rebellion, in 1791, the Mayamara *satradhikar* Pitambardeva placed the *deka-gokhain* Bharathi at the Throne of Rangpur who came to known as Bharat Singha. Therefore, Bharat Singha's assertion was in way the revival of the lost *Bara-Bhuyan* glory of the past, as his identity now shifted from the *deka-gokhain* in religious domain, to the 'king' of political domain. 'The dream of becoming King' that had been dreamt by the *deka-gokhain* Saptabhuj 23 years ago while constructing the *Barbheti* of Jorhat in 1768, now became true with the coronation of Bharathi, a Kayastha (Dohutia 2016: 131). However, later he was killed in an encounter by the Ahoms in 1801.

The Moran section of the Mataks declared Sarbananda alias Mejera, a Chutiya-Matak leader as their king in Bengmara. Although earlier the ethnic identical difference between the Chutiyas and Morans were not visible under the sectarian umbrella, gradually the political as well as sectarian relations between the descendents of Sarbananda and the Moran-Mataks deteriorated. Sarbananda and his descendents were loyal to the *satradhikars* of the Khutiaputa *satra* of Jorhat and later they became devotee of the newly established Mayamara Dinjoy *satra* in 1833. On the other hand, the majority of the Moran-Mataks remained disciples of the Mayamara Tipuk *satra* situated at the bank of Tipuk river of Doomdooma. Thus, to a considerable extent the Moran-Mataks got alienated from the non Moran-Mataks of the Dinjoy *satra*.

After the death of Matibar Barsenapati in 1839, when Bhagirath Maju Gohain, the grandson of Sarbananda Singha became king of the Matak Kingdom, the Morans appealed to the British government to liberate themselves from the role of Majugohain. The founder of the dynasty Sarbananda was a Chutia-Matak which gradually caused alienation of the Moran-Mataks from the politics and administration of the Matak Kingdom.

The Chutiyas who had a well organised kingdom centred around Sadia at the time of the arrival of Sukapha in 1228, lost their political power to the Ahoms after three centuries, in 1523. The descendants of the erstwhile Chutiya elites sometimes raised the banner of rebellion to revive their glory of the past. Instances of such rebellion are even found in the 17th century Ahom history, although such uprisings were confined in smaller remote regions of upper Assam and suppressed without difficulties by the Ahom administration, either by military or by diplomatic means. Sarbananda Singha belonged to the *Buruk* clan of the Chutiyas who became a devotee of the Mayamara *Vaishnavism*. Allegedly in the administration of the Matak State the Chutia-Mataks were given advantageous position as compared to the Moran-Mataks. Even in the 'Upper Matak' region where the population of Morans has been predominant, they became mere subjects devoid of any important political positions. Notably most of the regions between the Brahmaputra and the Burhidihing river which fell under the jurisdiction of Matak State after the 'Ahom-Matak Agreement of 1805', had been parts of the erstwhile Chutiya Kingdom in the early 16th century. Therefore, it can be argued that the prolonged Mayamara Rebellion which finally led to the creation of a semi autonomous Matak State in 1805 facilitated a section of Chutiyas which fell under of Mayamara sect.

The Morans who had been in fact the creator and the backbone of the prolonged rebellion and suffered a lot during the entire courses, were now kept alienated from the political achievements of the agreement. The Morans now were bound to return to their remote villages surrounded by dense forest. Being overpowered by their own Mayamara brothers, the Morans now would never be able to again think of becoming the owner of the Throne of Assam. The post-1839 developments may be considered as another act of rebellion on the part of Moran-Mataks against the Chutiya-Matak dynasty established by Sarbananda in 1788. British officials Captain Hanny and Captain Vetch opined that the Morans, who had been the main participants of Mayamara Rebellion, were sidelined from the newly formed Matak Kingdom. Moreover, from the writings of British officials the growing rivalry between the spiritual heads of the Mayamara Tipuk *Satra* and the Mayamara Dinjoy *Satra* can be accessed which became separate spiritual hubs for the Morans and Mataks respectively (Dohutia 2016: 48).

IV. CONCLUSION

Scholars like Prof. Hiren Gohain and Prof. D. Nath emphasise on the presence of ethnic as well as caste elements during the rebellion. In their view the rebellion can be considered as an assertion on the part of Chutias and Morans to restore their respective kingdoms which had been lost to Ahoms several centuries before. Prof. Gohain argues that the nature of Mayamara Rebellion can't be assessed without taking into account the ethnic dimensions. Even A. Guha who attempted to interpret the rebellion in terms of 'class struggle' did recognise the presence of ethnic elements in the Rebellion (Nath 2008).

In this context Foucault, the great post-modernist philosopher of France can be quoted who argues that every society and community has its own "regime of truth" which determines its power politics. For the Mayamars, their *guru* (spiritual head) was the "earthly image of God" and thus he was even regarded superior to the *Swargadeo* (political head) of the state. The mere militarisation of the Mayamara commoners to retain the dignity of the spiritual elites of the Mayamara *Satra* and to fulfil the political aspirations of few rebel leaders perhaps could not have paved the way for the future peasant movements of the Brahmaputra valley which occurred at the aftermath of imposition of the exploitative British colonial taxation on the peasants of Assam. A group of people with a definite system of belief and a strong leadership, while facing any crisis, doesn't necessarily need to learn a lesson from a particular event either contemporary or of past. They can have their own specific context and accordingly specific way to react.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Sun Gogoi "Mayamara alias Matak-Moran Rebellion (1769 – 1805): As an Intellectual Anachronism in the Politics of Peasant Movements of Assam." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, pp. 20-27.