

THE MATAKS
THE MORANS
AND
THE MOAMARIA
REBELLION

S. DUTTA

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is the collection of sixteen research articles on a people, who played a dominant revolutionary role in shaping and reshaping the history and culture of Assam. This is the result of further research on some unexplored aspects of Ph.D. work 'The Matak and their Kingdom', that has already been published, to supplement or amend the theme with latest findings. Some of these aspects are still subjects of debate and controversy in the history of the North East.

The Matak are the aboriginal people of Assam and are famous, as the authors of the popularly known Moamaria Rebellion.

The Morans are a predominant section of the Matak people, who played the most dominant role in the Moamaria Rebellion. They, along with the Barahis, were the first tribes whom Snkapta had to encounter in his march to the Brahmaputra valley to establish the Ahom Kingdom.

The nature of the Moamaria Rebellion, that took place in the North East India twenty years before the famous French Revolution of 1789, is still a matter of controversy. It has now been considered by many as the 'first socio-political movement' in the history of Assam.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1945 in Madarkhat area of the Dibrugarh district of Assam, Dr. Dutta has a brilliant academic career. After serving for a year as Lecturer in History in J.B. College, Jorhat, Dr. Dutta served in the premier prestigious institution Jawaharlal Nehru College Pasighat of Arunachal Pradesh for 21 years. He joined the Arunachal University as Reader in 1988, and promoted to Professorship in 1993. He is the Head of the Department of History of the same university since inception. Dr. Dutta is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. He is also currently the Jt. Secretary of the North-East India History Association.

Dr. Dutta has published a Book entitled The Matak and their Kingdom. Besides being member of several academic organisations of the country, he has published more than 30 papers in various regional and national research journals of the country.

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To My Parents
LATE BUDHESWAR DUTTA
&
SREEJUTA JAYANTI DUTTA

Preface

I remember an advice of my venerable teacher Prof. H.K. Barpujari, a noted historian of not only the North East but of the entire country, to stick to and complete as far as possible, a particular topic on subject-matter of research before making scattered efforts to take up so many projects together. Then only justice to a particular subject-matter can be done substantially. Keeping this advice in mind, I wanted to deal with different aspects of my subject matter of the Ph.D. research '*The Matak and their Kingdom*'. And his advice and my efforts paid me good dividends in the sense that I could deal with different left out aspects of my main theme in more than 20 research articles which have been published in different regional and national research journals of the country.

The present book is the collection of 16 articles pieced together in the form of original publication for the convenience of the interested readers on the subject. There is still more scope to deal with some more aspects of such an important, controversial chapter of the history of the North East, of a people who played a dominant revolutionary role in shaping and reshaping the history and culture of Assam. I shall continue my humble effort to study some more aspects of the subject. As this is a very important but still a very controversial matter in some of its aspects, I shall gratefully acknowledge suggestions to remove any omission and commission inadvertently made.

The people of Madarkhat area of the present Dibrugarh district, where I was born, under the guidance and leadership of Late Sibeswar Baruah, the then President of the Lahoal Anchalik Panchayat and a veteran freedom fighter of the area, organised a public reception to congratulate and bless me on my topping the list of successful B.A. Honours candidates in History of the Gauhati University in 1964. The people in the meeting desired me to contribute

something in future. Being in teaching profession, my study on the Matak, and the Morans is an humble effort to meet the expectation of the people, whose ancestors played a significant role in the Moamaria Rebellion and in the history of the earstwhile Matak Kingdom.

I thank my wife Mrs. Uma Dutta, Lecturer, for piecing together the articles from various journals and for inspiration to publish the same in a book form.

— Prof. S. Dutta

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Introduction

This book is the collection of 16 research articles published in various regional and national research journals of the country from time to time. This is an extension work to my Ph.D thesis *The Matak and their Kingdom* to supplement or amend the theme with latest findings.

The Matak, an aboriginal people of Assam, have members drawn from different castes, tribes and communities of Assam, such as, Morans, Chutias, Kacharis, Bihias, Ahoms, Kaivartas, Brittilas and many caste Hindus like Brahmanas, Kayasthas and Kalitas. Their common bond of unity was their sect, which developed through the Moamaria *Satra*, with the Guru (preceptor) as its head, placing all of them on an equal democratic footing. The Matak are mainly known to the readers of Assam history as the authors of rebellions against the Ahom government, popularly known as the Moamaria Rebellions. The transformation of the Matak into a militant body, has in fact, its parallel in the Sikhs. They could carve out a kingdom of their own known as the 'Matak Rajaya', that could exact recognition from the Ahom and the British Governments. It was annexed by the British in 1839. Though majority of the Matak now live in the Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of Assam, a good number of them also live in Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nowgong, Lakhimpur, Darang, and Sonitpur districts.

The Morans is a predominant section of the Matak people. They played a dominant role in the Moamaria Rebellions, so much

so, that the first Moamaria Rebellion is called the Moran Rebellion. They were the first among the tribes of Assam to accept the initiation from the Mayamara Mahanta. On the basis of their racial and linguistic affinities, the Morans are generally ascribed Bodo origin. The Morans, along with the Barahis, were also the first tribes, whom Sukapha (1228-1260 A.D.), the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam, had to encounter in course of his march to the Brahmaputra valley. Sukapha won over the Morans by the policy of coercion and conciliation. The service of the Morans was of great help in the subsequent expansion and consolidation of the Ahom power in Assam.

The Moamaria Rebellion has been considered by many as "the first socio-political movement in the history of Assam, made for the people and by the people." But opinions widely differ regarding the nature of the rebellion. It is felt that a correct analysis of the nature of the rebellion is the need of the time, which brought forth all disaffected elements into action everywhere in the Ahom kingdom by successfully challenging its monarchy based on divine origin.

The papers inserted in this book have dealt with a few aspects of the Matak, the Morans, the Moamaria Rebellion and certain interrelated areas of these aspects.

As there is a great difference of opinions regarding the origin and interpretation of the word 'Matak', an effort has been made in the first chapter to find an answer to this problem.

In the second chapter 'Bhakti Movement and Aniruddhadeva of Assam', the contribution of Sri Aniruddhadeva towards the growth and development of Bhakti Movement initiated by Sri Shankaradeva has been discussed. In fact Sri Aniruddhadeva was the founder of the Moamaria Satra and was great social reformer who had helped the origin and growth of the Moamaria or Mayamara Sect by uplifting the backward tribes and castes of Assam.

In the third chapter 'The Sikhs and the Matak : A comparative study', circumstances leading to the origin and growth of the Matak and the Sikhs communities have been discussed, who under similar situation had to transform themselves into

militant groups to raise standard of rebellion against injustice, oppression and religious intolerance of the rulers in their respective jurisdictions.

The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the origin of the Morans, a strong component of the Matak, and their contribution in state formation in the north-east.

The Matak were the standard bearers of the first rebellion in Assam against the Ahom administration popularly known as the Moamaria Rebellion in the history of Assam. But opinions widely differ regarding the nature of the rebellion. In the sixth chapter an attempt has been made to critically analyse the nature of the rebellion. In the seventh chapter, the participation of various hill tribes and their *Bahatias* in the Moamaria Rebellion has been discussed.

After the Moamaria Rebellions the Matak founded four Matak principalities, of which the rulers of two principalities issued coins. The eighth and ninth chapter deals with coins. Attempt has been made to discuss these coins with special reference to the Matak kingdom. After the 1st Moamaria Rebellion Ramakanta Singha, who succeeded the Ahom throne, is known to have issued novagonal coins. Till recently many historians were of view that no such novagonal coin had been issued by Ramakanta Singha. In the tenth chapter an attempt has been made to substantiate the fact that Ramakanta Singha actually issued novagonal coins, a rare phenomenon in the history of numismatics of the North-East.

Matibar Barsenapati, the second ruler of the Matak kingdom, was considered an efficient and capable ruler. In the eleventh chapter an attempt to assess his achievements is made.

In the twelfth chapter, the economic condition of the Matak kingdom has been discussed, which could draw attention and appreciation even from the British administrators.

The thirteenth and fourteenth chapters deal in detail of the frontier policy of the Matak kingdom in its short but eventful span of life.

The Matak kingdom faced the same fate of annexation by the British as in the case of its counterparts elsewhere in the country. The independent-minded Matak could not accept this

annexation easily. They tried to hatch a conspiracy in the north east to dethrone the British from the north east. This has been discussed in the fifteenth chapter.

After annexing and suppressing the attempt of the Matakas to liberate themselves, the Britishers accepted a policy of conciliation of the Matakas. This has been discussed in the last chapter of this book.

Thus an effort has been made to discuss some important aspects on the Matakas, the Morans, and the Moamaria Rebellion. But it is felt that many other aspects on this controversial but very important aspect of the Assam history need further study. Efforts will be continued to cover some more aspects on the subject in future.



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