

The Moria Muslims of Assam



Pradyot Kumar Guha

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THE MORIA MUSLIMS OF ASSAM

A STUDY ON THE CULTURAL VARIABILITY AND DRIFT

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To
My Baba O Ma
with Love and Respect

Foreword

The ethnographic study of any group of people has its own importance. To the student of Anthropology and also some other disciplines ethnographic study is no doubt, an essential way of understanding the society and culture. From this type of study of any group may be a tribe or caste, or a religious group or sect, members belonging to different disciplines, particularly of Anthropology and other social sciences, get a good idea of different aspects of the life and activities of that particular group of people as this type of study covers material life, economy, social organization, life cycle rituals, system of social control, religion and world view etc. of the ethnic group studied. That means such type of study gives a good basic idea to its readers on a society and its overall culture and changes (if any) therein.

The people of our country including academicians, scholars and students got the rare opportunity of gathering knowledge on different societies and cultures when The Royal Asiatic Society in India was established in 1774 by Sir William Jones. No doubt in India the ethnographic studies began the journey with the establishment of The Royal Asiatic Society, but in fact, it got somewhat concrete shape in eighteenth century though ethnographic studies started in the seventeenth century in some other parts of the world. The Royal Asiatic Society (at present The Asiatic Society) gave a new dimension in the anthropo-ethnological studies in India. It inspired Anthropologists and other social scientists in understanding ethnographic studies

during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The first anthropology department opened in 1920 in the University of Calcutta. But before the Anthropologists stepped in mainly the British administrators, Christian missionaries, adventurers and others wrote some short or brief ethnographic notes. A few of them of course wrote quite detailed ethnographic accounts also.

Since the beginning the Anthropologists, some members of the allied disciplines like Geography and a few non-Anthropologists have undertaken mostly the ethnographic research among different ethnic groups and written detailed accounts. Even in present day interest on ethnographic studies is still continuing but in a low key.

From the colonial time to the present days significant changes can be seen in the ethnographic studies. Since earlier part of 20th century when the social scientists took over the ethnographic study, but particularly during post-independence period, marked changes are noticed in the conceptual framework, methodology, selection of theme for study and in many other ways. As a result the ethnographic studies here simultaneously lost much of its importance and characteristics. Not many scholars now a days like to take up a ethnographic study in true sense of the term.

The book entitled, *THE MORIA MUSLIMS OF ASSAM: A STUDY ON THE VARIABILITY AND DRIFT*, which was written by Dr. Pradyot kumar Guha for which I have written this foreword, is some sort of ethnographic study with some deviations. Rather it may better be termed as ethno-geographical study. It's main concern is the people, the Moria Muslims of Assam, and it deals in details with the society, economy and culture of the Moria Muslims. This is a holistic study and not based on the study of a few parameters only. Till date no detail ethnographic study on the Moria Muslims of Assam other than this study, is available. In Assam the members of this little known community are mainly found in Darrang, Kamrup, Nowgaon, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Dibrugarh districts. Their history of migration tells us that the Moria Muslims entered the Brhmaputra Valley sometimes during 1532 AD as the braziers but later on they settled as the traders and service holders. The present day Moria Muslims who have a population of over one lakh, are the descendants of those

prisoners who were defeated and imprisoned during the war with the Ahom king in 1532-1533. Many of these Moria Muslims later on married local widows and ex-communicated women of the lower Hindu castes. The present day culture of the Moria Muslims of Assam gives a clear impression of the influence of the local Assamese culture because these people are inhabiting in the Brahmaputra Valley for a long time. In their present day habitat they are surrounded by the Hindu castes and also some other Muslim communities. Their adaptation to the local ecological condition and social environment is undoubtedly unique.

The author collected data on the Moria Muslims from 24 villages spread over in different districts. He undertook intensive fieldwork on this people in eight selected villages. The very important aspect of this study is that it contains very rich data on a Muslim community of Assam who have so far not come into limelight. The credit for collection of a huge quantity of data, systematically analyzing these, tabulations of data, chapterization etc. definitely goes to the author. And the quality of data is certainly very rich. The author has put very hard labour in collection of data, analyzing and tabulating the same and writing this book. When published this book will definitely throw a new light on a little known Muslim community of Assam and will highlight the life and activities of this community so far not touched for detailed study. This book will also enrich the knowledge of the social scientists, administrators, planners, social workers and others about the Muslims of Assam in general and the Moria Muslims in particular.

Dr. M. K. RAHA

Acknowledgements

This book is an outcome of my Ph.D. dissertation, an interdisciplinary study on the Moria Muslims of Assam. My association with the Anthropologists has helped me to look at the society beyond the realm of Geography. During the years of my study I have been encouraged and guided by many people to whom I express my gratitude.

A number of organizations and individuals have extended me their understanding, sympathy and help in completing this work. Though it is not possible in this limited space to express my gratitude to all individually, I specifically mention a few names to whom I am grateful.

My greatest debt is to the people of the Moria Muslim community living in the villages of Assam without whose help the fieldwork would not have been possible. I offer my sincere thanks to them for their unreserved warmth and hospitality.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude to ret'd. Prof. Anindya Pal, Department of Geography and Applied Geography, North Bengal University, Siliguri under whose inspiring guidance and unmitigated zeal this research work was carried on and completed.

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(x)

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PRADYOT KUMAR GUHA

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1

Introduction

For a long time the geographers were interested in finding out the relationship between man and his environment, but recently they have become interested to know about population and the factors influencing its growth.

Trewartha (1953) proposed in his presidential address to the American Geographers of its 49th annual meeting that, geographical studies of population be systematized into a new division, namely population geography. The importance of population geography started after 1953, many eminent geographers like Zelinsky, Clarke, Garnier, Melezin and a few other geographers strongly advocated the study of population geography. Different types of definitions have been given by different scholars of population geography. But according to Trewartha (1953), "the geographers' goal in any or all analysis of population is an understanding of the regional differences in the earth's covering of people." He further pointed out that, "this involves not only number but also population characteristics, as well as growth and mobility," (Trewartha, 1969).

Another contribution to the Population Geography is the *Readings in Cultural Geography* (1962) edited by Wegner and Mikesell. This book highlighted the cultural aspects of population through, "five implicit themes—culture, culture area, cultural landscape, culture history and cultural ecology". The Soviet Geographers' idea about the population geography as

settlements geography, history of population, ethnography, labour force etc. A. Meleziñ—a Soviet geographer defines the Population Geography as, “the study of population distribution and productive relationship existing within various population groups, the settlement network and its fitness, usefulness, and effectiveness for productive goals of society” (Meleziñ, 1963).

Garnier (1965) in her book *Geography of Population* describes the problem of population geographer as—“the demographic facts in their present environmental context, studying also their causes, their original characteristics and possible consequences.”

Following Garnier’s statement Clarke (1965) mentions that, “population geography is covered with demonstrating how spatial variations in the distribution, composition, migrations and the growth of population are related to spatial variations in the nature of the place”. He also mentioned that, “while the demographer is devoted to numbers and depends heavily upon statistical methods, the population geographer relates numbers to area and relies upon maps”. According to him the scope of Population Geography includes the treatment of certain specific characteristics, such as the absolute numbers, physical, social and economic characteristics and population dynamics. Zelinsky (1966) an eminent American Geographer defined the discipline as “a science that deals with the extent and ways in which the total unique geographic character of places formed by and, in turn reacts upon a set of population phenomena which vary within it through both space and time as they follow their own behavioural laws and interact with numerous non-demographic phenomena”. He also defined that, “the scope of Population Geography, which should include the treatment of all the variables present in the census schedules of the advanced nations.” Newman and Matzke explained the population characteristics as, “the three so-called demographic variables of fertility, mortality and migration constitute a core along with, of course, their outcome, mainly population change. Perhaps an ever more central concern is population distribution. Also the age, sex and marital characteristics of population are usually given high priority, primarily because of their impact on the three demographic variables,” (Newman, 1984).

A number of geographical studies on different aspects have been made by different geographers. Among them Cumberland

had shown the growth of population in New Zealand, (1953).

David M. Smith (1977) in his book *Human Geography—A Welfare Approach*, describes, "a new systematic branch of human geography dealing with "welfare", just as economic geographic deals with economic phenomena, social geography with social phenomena". In another book on *Population Geography—A Reader* Demko (1970) had shown that Population Geography unlike other branches is highly sensitive to the time dimension. The stress has been given on the processes behind spatial variations of population attributes.

The statistical method on Population Geography was first introduced by Gregory (1963), followed by Yeates (1968) and King (1969).

Researches in Population Geography in India are so far quite limited. The first systematic research work conducted in Population Geography was initiated by G.S. Gosal in 1956 for his doctoral thesis, 'A Geographical Analysis of India's Population' at the University of Wisconsin under the guidance of Prof. Trewartha. He studied all the significant aspects of population such as distribution, growth, migration, sex-ratio, literacy, occupational structure etc. for the country as a whole. Following his work, at Micro-level Krishan wrote his doctoral thesis in 1968. He studied on the population change in Punjab's border districts of Amritsar and Gurudaspur. Chandana in 1969 worked on Haryana's districts bordering on the Union Territory of Delhi and Mehta (1970) on Bist Doab in Punjab.

The population sheets on the scale 1:1,000,000 published by National Atlas Organisation under the guidance of Prof. S.P. Chatterjee (1962) depicts the distribution of rural-urban population in seven macro-regions of India.

Ahmed in 1941 undertook a research work on, how the population distribution is influenced by the physical and cultural environment.

Another significant work has been done by L.S. Bhat in 1961, advocating for population studies in India on macro, meso and micro level, which help in regional planning. In another work Prakash (1970) had shown the population distribution and density of Uttar Pradesh using district and tahsil level data.

Some geographers have studied the process of population growth. Gosal (1974) studies on population growth in India during 1961-71 decade using district level data. H. Lall (1980) studies on population potential distribution in western Uttar Pradesh. For this study he has used the growth potential model for analysing the population concentration in the region. Sinha in 1958 analysed the population growth in Orissa who later assessed the impact of increase in population on the economy of the state, 1963. On this aspect micro level studies have made by Chatterjee and Ganguli (1943) on Nadia and Tirunelveli districts. A similar work done by Krishan (1968) on population change in the border districts of Amritsar and Gurudaspur of Punjab.

A few articles have been written on age and sex composition. Gosal (1961) attempted to analyse the regionalisation of sex composition of India's population as in 1951. He highlighted the regional contrasts in sex ratio, and examined the factors associated with these variations. Another significant work done by Sen (1963) on the sex ratio in India's population. Among the works on literacy Gosal in 1964 worked on the interpretative study of literacy in India where he had discussed the regional variations in literacy referring the factors with which these variations are related. In another work Gosal (1967) had shown the rural literacy rate in India. Banerjee (1975) analysed the literacy in Singhbhum district of Bihar by using block level data. Another significant work was done by Sharma (1968) where he had shown the growth of literacy and various causes of low level of literacy in rural Rajasthan.

In the research work on working force and occupational structure, Mehta in 1967 specially referred to the female participation in rural India. In 1975 Viswanath studied on the occupational structure of women in India by using the statewide data. Gosal in 1958 wrote an article on the occupational structure of India's rural population. He had emphasized on areal variations in the occupational structure of rural population. Krishan (1980) worked on the regional pattern of economic diversification on the basis of non-agricultural workers by using district level data. In another work Krishan and Chandana in 1974 studied on the working force and its occupational structure in Haryana. They emphasized on the low proportion of workers

in Haryana. This has happened due to very high proportion of children population and extremely low participation of females in work.

Apart from these works a few standard books have been published on Indian population by different scholars. Among them are the ones of Bhattacharyya (1978), Bhende and Kanitkar (1978) and Chandana (1986). These books are carrying important information on the characteristics of Indian population.

It has been observed that the geographic studies on Indian Muslims are very limited. Most of the works have been done by Anthropologists, Sociologists, Historians, Census authorities and other social scientists. The significant work was done by Bose (1951). He observed that "Muslim converts have continued to obey caste rules of occupational monopoly. They continue to observe the hereditary character of their occupation, to believe in the superiority of various economic pursuits and even continued to observe the old rules of endogamy". He also finds that many of the notions of superiority of the occupations continued to be in vogue among the converts. A similar work done by Siddiqui (1978) in his book *Population Geography of Muslims of India*. He stated that Muslims like other Indians also a lower class in India. It comprises mainly with the converts from non-Islamic Indians. It is difficult to distinguish them from the Hindu masses. Due to conversion little change is found in the social environment or economic pursuits and status of each Muslims in general. He also described that the distribution of Indian Muslims have its own regional framework within the general pattern of the distribution of total population of the country. He also mentioned the growth, composition and population movement, and their impact upon the cultural landscape of the country.

Several historians like Titus (1930), Qureshi (1962), Ahmad (1964) and Mujeeb (1967) have given accounts of the Muslims in the Indian sub-continent is basically about the diversity of their origin. Indian Muslims are composed of foreigners or later immigrants from such divergent regions as Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan of different languages and of different culture, and indigenous converts drawn from widely differing background on the other.

A geneological work *Tarikh-e-Hasan* (1912) in Persian by

Mir Jawwad Hussain of Gaya (Bihar) gives valuable information about the Muslim converts from Hindu castes such as Thakurs, Babhans, Goalas and Kayasthas in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. An extract from *Tarikh-e-Hasan* rendered from Persian elucidates the point. 'The Kshatriyas, the Brahmins and the Kayasthas have been among the Hindu gentries. Several (Muslims) groups have sprung up from amongst them and likewise are Mai Pathans who are quite numerous. The Goalas who were converted to Islam assumed the name of Bhatti Pathan. Their women like those of the lower classes participate in agricultural activities. In Allahabad region the goalas accepted Islam and are known as Ghosis but continue to be engaged in milk trade. In the villages of Allahabad there are Kayastha Muslims and they are engaged in the occupation of Patwar, their names are Lala such as such Hussain Ali.

This shows that during the rule of the kings many of them accepted Islam and continue to be Muslims. In the district of Jaunpur there are Muslim Thakur who are Zamindars, Talukdars who take pride in their surname of Thakur. It shows that the Thakurs and Rajas having accepted Islam continue to be identified with their ancient surnames.'

At micro-level another notable work has made by Ahmed (1962). His study based on field work, done in two different Muslim villages in Uttar Pradesh. He observed the caste ranking system and other elements of caste among the Muslims. The work of Raja, Ahmed and Siddiqui (1973) is a significant one, which traces the historical factors, which have contributed to the pattern of concentration of Muslims in India. In another study Mukherjee (1973) had shown the spatial distribution of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh on the basis of geographic patterning of the historical phenomena.

Besides the articles on the Muslims of India, several monographs also were published by different scholars. Among them Ansari's (1961) monograph based on published census reports relating to Uttar Pradesh where he finds the caste system among the Muslims of the state. Misra's (1963) monograph deals with the social backgrounds historically and their interrelationship among the Muslim group in Gujarat. Recently Siddiqui (1979) made a study on the Muslims of Calcutta in Urban Anthropology. In this monograph he has made an attempt

to find out the segments of Muslim society in the metropolis. He had also shown the interrelationship between these segments.

Relevant Studies in North-East India and Assam

The study of Population Geography is still in its immature stage in North-East India. Recently few doctoral theses and research papers have been appeared on the population of North-East India. The work of Das (1976), Bhuyan (1977), Mathew (1983), Singh (1986), Borooah (1984), Bora (1990), are worth mentioning in this line. Das has studied on the demographic characters and socio-economic aspects of tribal population of Kamrup District of Assam. Bhuyan has attempted to study the spatial consequences of immigrant population in Assam as reflected in rapid population growth, land use types, and economic development within the geographical framework of the state. Mathew had analysed on the spatio-temporal patterns of demographic, economic and socio-cultural characteristics of the composite population of Meghalaya. Barooah has studied on the evolution of heterogeneous population structure of Dibrugarh district of Assam during the period of 1872-1971 on a historical and racial background. She highlighted on the emerging pattern of variations of growth, distribution and density, occupational and socio-cultural aspects. Singh had studied in detail about the pattern of population characteristics such as growth, distribution and density, migration, occupational structure, literacy, religious, linguistic and social composition of population of Manipur in terms of plain-hill dichotomy. He also had shown the variations in distribution and density, growth, literacy and other socio-economic characteristics between the plains and the hills. He emphasised on the impact of immigration on population growth and resource base of the state. Bora has made a detailed analysis on the spatio-temporal variations of the distribution and density, rapid growth, pattern of age composition, sex-ratio, marital status, man-land relationship, pattern of work participation rate, occupational characteristics and the basis socio-cultural characteristics such as literacy and educational level, religion, language and dialects of the population of Siang region of Arunachal Pradesh. He also synthesised the intra-regional variations of these phenomena in order to divide the region into population zone. Besides

these, the works of Taher (1977, 1979, 1987) and Sharma (1985) have done significant works relating to present study. Taher had shown a diagnostic survey of spatial distribution of tribes in North-East India. In another work he had shown a spatial analysis of the scheduled caste population in Assam. Another significant work has been made on the population base of Assam. In this work he analysed the population base of Assam which is characterised by the elements of racial, social, economic and cultural plurality and at times emerge in the guise of social regeneration. He also observes that the geographical location of Assam, as the meeting place of various currents of human migration since prehistoric times, some of which are sustained, coupled with its resources, inherits such condition. Sharma attempted a comprehensive analysis of spatial pattern of sex disparity in literacy of Assam based on statistics using thana-level data of 1971 census.

Very little work has been done on the Muslim of Assam. Among these works the significant work has been made by Saikia (1978). He found the prevalence of group system among the Muslims and the remarkable impact of Islam on social and cultural life of Assam and traditional culture in the life of the Muslims. In another work Ali (1974) had shown the social relations among the three groups of the Assamese Muslims in rural and urban areas. A few M. Phil. dissertations also have made on the Muslims of Assam. Among these, Saifun Nassa's (1984) work on the Assamese Muslim society in Assam, where she had shown the interrelationship between the different groups of the Assamese Muslims from the sociological point of view. The other two M. Phil. dissertations are: Saikia (1985) and Jahan (1986). These studies mainly focused the socio-cultural life of the Muslims of Goalpara and Darrang districts of Assam. They have also thrown light on the demography, by social and economic aspects of the Muslims of these two districts of Assam. Apart from these, a few papers have been published by Irshad Ali (1974, 1979 and 1981). These studies mainly dealt with the occupational structure, socio-cultural life and Hindu-Muslim relationship of the Assamese Muslims of Assam.

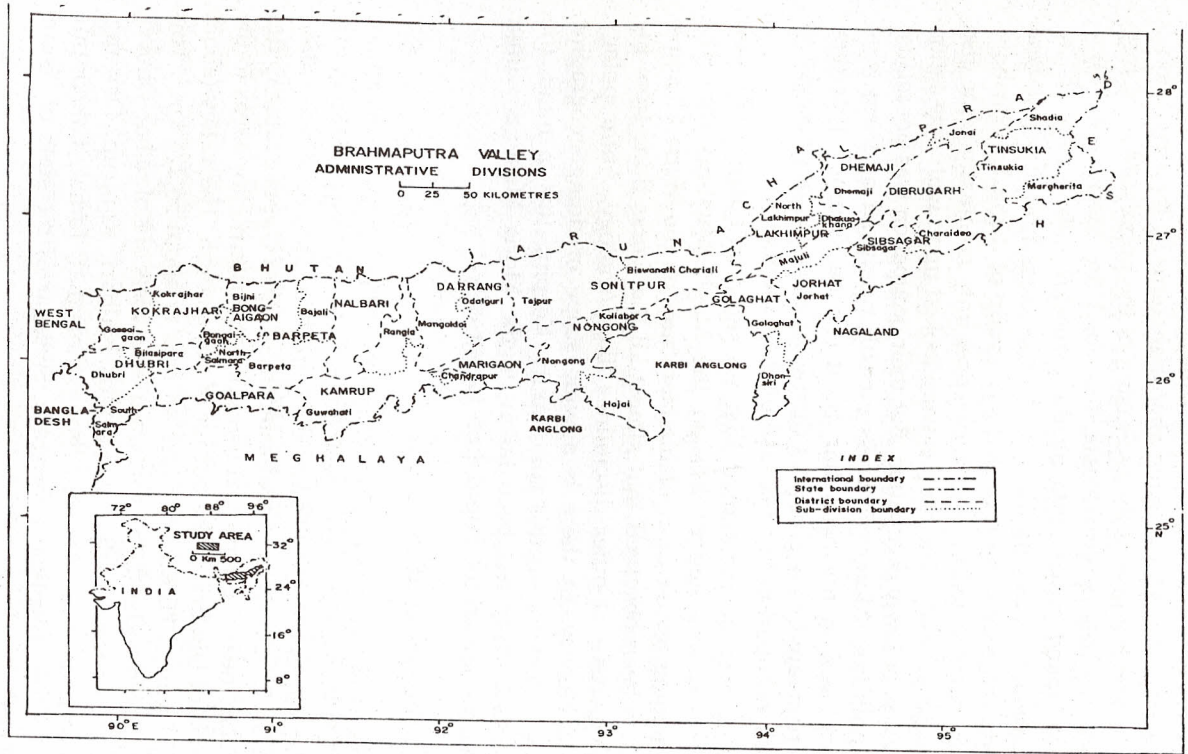
There are only a few scholars who have worked and written on the Moria Muslims. Among them Saikia (1978), Irshad Ali (1974) and Saifun Nassa (1984). Saikia mentioned about the

Moria Muslims that the Moria word originated from the term Marshiya or Murji'iy. Murji'iy the name of another sect of Muslims which emerged in the Umayyad age (A.H.40) 667 A.D. Ali writes that Morias have almost abandoned their traditional profession because of the increasing of the popularity of factory made utensils. Saifun Nessa described the Morias as, "They were looked down upon by the orthodox followers of Islam. Because of their habitat of drunkenness and quarrelsome character, they were regarded as a group of degraded Muslims. They participated in Islamic practices only nominally". She also mentioned that, "The Morias were looked upon with detestation because of lowly occupation. But their occupation was not related to pollution. Moreover, brass utensils produced by them were even used in the Namghar. So it can be assumed that they were treated as a group of degraded Muslims not because of their occupation but because of their habitat."

It may be mentioned that no significant work has been done by any geographer on the Moria Muslims from the foregoing review of available literatures on the Moria Muslims, it has been observed that almost all the works done from the perspective of other disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology and History. So there is a wide scope of doing geographic research work on this community. Keeping this in mind, the present study has been taken on the Moria Muslims within the framework of Population Geography.

1.1 Statement of the Study

The study area is the Brahmaputra Valley (25°44'-27°55'N and 89°41'-96°02'E) which is well demarcated by Eastern Himalayas, Pat Koi and Naga Hills and the Garo-Khasi-Jaintia and the Mikir Hills. It extends from the easternmost tip of Upper Brahmaputra Valley near the syntoxial bend of the Eastern Himalayas to the west of Dhubri on the border of Bangladesh. The valley (about 720 Kms. x 80 Kms.) covers an area of about 56,274 km.². This valley includes the administrative districts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Marigaon, Sonitpur, Nowgong, Golaghat, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar of the state of Assam (Fig.1).



The study in population geography is assuming great significance. At present all the factors of socio-economic and physical environments are closely related with the population studies, which give the population character and geographic significance to a society. Therefore, without studying the character of the people and the socio-economic status no sphere of human life, be its development or anything else could be meaningful conceived of. It is applicable in the case of socio-economically backward Moria Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley where socio-economic development has not been taken place. The Morias are a group of Indigenous Muslims population living in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (fig.2). The word 'Moria' originated from the beating (*mara*) of hot brass metal for making utensils. Another view is that, the word 'Moria' originated from the term Marshiya or Murjiay. Murjiay was the name of a sect of the Muslim, which came to be first known in the Umayyad age (A.H. 40) in 661 A.D. (Saikia, 1978). They came as invaders and started their career as braziers. But at present majority of them are engaged in other occupations such as business, services etc. This occupational diversification is the result of the coming of stainless steel, plastic and machine made brass utensils. In this background, a geographic study of the Moria Muslim population of the Brahmaputra Valley has been undertaken for the present work.

Their number according to the field investigation in 1988 is 23,686 individuals of which 13,677 are males and 10,009 are females. They are scatterly distributed in the nine districts of the valley and the major concentration is found in the Dibrugarh district of the upper Brahmaputra valley, where about 16.71 percent of them are live. They are categorized as More Other Backward classes.

The growth and density show the wide spatial variations. Its density is 0.42 per km.². The growth (1397.22 percent) over the decades (1911-1988) indicates that the growth rate is quite high.

The characteristics by which the character of a society can be understood are the basic demographic variables such as sex ratio, age, sex, marital status, economic variables as working force, occupational patterns and social traits such as language, religion, education etc. Sex-ratio of the Moria Muslims of the

Brahmaputra Valley is 732/1000. The districtwise variation in sex-ratio reveals the real situation of working force. It is found that the highest sex-ratio(902) is found in Kamrup district of the Lower Brahmaputra Valley while the lowest sex-ratio (538) is found in Golaghat district of the Upper Brahmaputra Valley.

The change in the demographic variables viz. births and deaths bring the change in the growth pattern, age-sex composition, marital status, age and sex, working force in different types of occupations. Age and sex pattern determine the condition for the future demographic trends. It also gives the size of the male-female working force, size of the dependent population etc.

Further, the occupational characteristics are determined by the nature and a number of socio-cultural factors. The occupational structure of the Moria population is studied on the basis of the survey made during the fieldwork. It is calculated that only 26.09 percent workers are engaged in different activities. It is mainly due to the high number of non-working dependants (73.91 percent) particularly among the females (95.13 percent) in this society.

It may be mentioned that, though they had started their livelihood as braziers but after the Independence their original profession has been given up due to the implementation of stainless steel, plastic etc. At present only 17.59 percent workers are engaged themselves in brass industry and the rest of the workers are engaged in other occupational activities.

A study of the degree of assimilation of the Morias with the Assamese Hindus of the Brahmaputra Valley shows that they are under the strong influence of the Assamese Hindu culture. They have adapted many customs in their life cycles like pre-natal, birth, adolescence, marriage etc. from the Assamese Hindus. Even they have been influenced by the superstitions of the Assamese Hindus and believe it like the Hindus. The interaction pattern between the Morias and the other groups of Muslims and the Assamese Hindus is very strong in this valley. These three groups take part in their socio-cultural and religious functions with an open mind. This has been observed both in rural and in urban areas.

The study of the degree of assimilation of the Moria Muslims

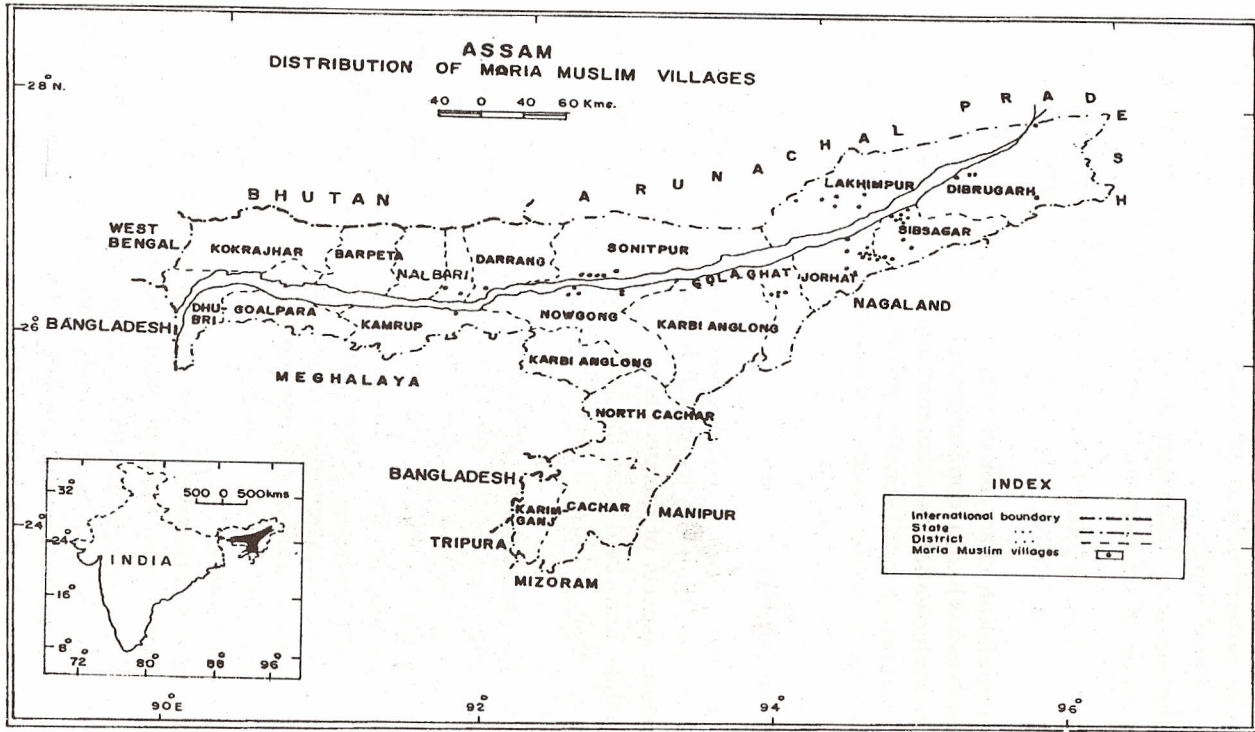


FIG.-2

with the rest of the population of the Brahmaputra Valley shows a similar pattern between the Lower, the Central and the Upper Brahmaputra Valley.

The above are the background factors, which have influenced in selection of the present research problem:

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The population character of such a community can only be understood when a comprehensive analysis of its various demographic variables, economic, and socio-cultural traits such as distribution and density, growth, age-sex composition, occupational pattern, social assimilation etc. is systematically made to this effect.

1.2 Working Hypothesis

The study has been undertaken as a research project on Moria Muslims and the main focus will be on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the people.

While doing field work the author acquired some knowledge through observation and the following hypotheses have been adopted:

- (i) The assimilation among the Morias has become an important social phenomenon due to their marital relations with the Assamese Hindu society in the past.
- (ii) Since the Moria community is a professional group of people they are traditionally non-agriculturists and do not possess agricultural land. At present their previous professions have been abandoned, which had traditional good market due to popularity of stainless steel, plastic etc. and as such they are remaining economically backward.
- (iii) Due to urbanization the literacy rate is high among the Morias than those of other population in Assam.
- (iv) Economic activities have changed through time and space in the Moria Muslims society since Independence, because of socio-economic changes in their surroundings.
- (v) Since this community is not an agricultural one so there

is a tendency among them to settle in or near an urban or semi-urban areas to avail of socio-economic opportunities.

- (vi) The urban concentration is more prominent in the case of the Moria Muslims than other Muslims in the Brahmaputra Valley.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of the present work lies in unfolding the geographic character of a community living in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Though the works on Indian Muslims have been done by the geographers, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, but little works have been done by the social scientists on this community. It may also be mentioned that, no systematic geographical work has been made on the Morias of this Valley. Although they have kept their identity as a separate class, there are marked differences in the degree of social change including literacy, economic condition etc. among them. Such a variation has been taken place through time and space.

Since they are braziers by profession and do not possess agricultural land, they are economically backward at present, since stainless steel, and plastic have pushed away their traditional produce from the market.

So, a study of the socio-economic problems of the Moria Muslims who are economically backward has a practical significance. Hope that this study will help the future researchers to get more knowledge about the population character of this society. Apart from the academic significance this study will help to formulate the development programmes for this society.

The present work on the Moria Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley provides an interesting study, from the population geographic point of view. Beginning from the geographical setting and economic and social conditions of the area, the data on the study includes the interpretation and analysis of the distribution, density, growth and size of the Morias, their demographic, socio-economic, socio-cultural characteristics. An attempt is made to show the distinctive character of this group of population from the rest of the area. Besides the collecting and reading of various relevant unpublished and published materials on this community, the researcher had to stay for a long time with them to get detailed information about them. The information thus acquired was systematized by data analysis, laboratory work and with the help of cartographic and statistical model for the interpretation of data.

The history of this community tells us that nine hundred Muslim invaders were taken as prisoners at Sibsagar district of Assam by the Ahom king after a series of encounters. The king engaged them in different types of jobs but due to their ignorance in these jobs, the disgusted king released them, and under this new physical setting, social situation and economic conditions, they ultimately settled down permanently about four hundred and fifty years ago forming a new Muslim segment—the Morias, who were braziers by occupation. Presently they are distributed in fifty-two villages in nine districts of Assam.

Considerable degree of blood and cultural assimilations have been observed between the Morias and the neighbouring people particularly the Assamese Hindus in their life cycle like pre-natal, birth, adolescence, marriage, death, festivals and superstitions. Blood assimilation took place by way of marriage with the Assamese Hindus from the very long past. They observe the Bihu and the other festivals like the Assamese Hindu caste groups. They also believe in superstitions and black magic.

In this book their economic conditions also have been discussed, considerable degree of assimilation has been observed among the Morias in respect of culture, language, food habit, dress, personal adornments, etc. with the neighbouring Assamese Hindu society. Their

(Contd. on 2nd flap)

(Contd. from 1st flap)

common language is Assamese. At present their original language, Duan has become obsolete and a few of them can speak in Duan to some extent among themselves.

It is urgently required to make systematic plans and policies to improve the economic condition and the spread of higher education among the Morias. Development schemes should be based on their present socio-economic situation for their betterment. Emphasis should be given on the development of their economy and education.

This book gives to the readers a very clear idea about the minor groups, particularly a minority. It has also highlighted the various problems faced by the little known community, particularly in the Northeastern part of India. The book will immensely help not only the academicians and scholars, but at the same time, it will act as a very useful account to the planners, administrators, social workers and others.

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