

**TRANSITIONAL PHASE OF ACCULTURATION OF THE MISINGS VIS-À-VIS  
THE ASSAMESE SOCIETY DURING MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF ASSAM**

**DURLAV RAJ TAID\***

\*Asst. Professor, Dept. of History, Lakhimpur Girls' College, Assam, India

**ABSTRACT**

Acculturation is a process in which various ethnic and racial settings come to interact, free of encumbers, in to a socio-cultural pattern of the larger community. But this process of acculturation is a gradual and delicate process in which the footmarks involved were almost indiscernible. The Mising tribe of North-East India had been on a verge of assimilation during medieval age. Like the acculturation of Visigoths to the Roman civilisation, this process of assimilation of the Mising into the convention of the Assamese society was not a placid action. Rather it involved perennial suffering from slavery under the warrior tribe like Abors to exchange of swords with Ahom Kings, which finally culminated with the advent of Neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam. The objective of this paper is to see the transition process of acculturation during the medieval period.

**KEYWORDS:** Acculturation, Mising, Assamese Society, Neo-Vainavite, Ahom, Medieval Period

**Methodology:**

Both primary and secondary data are extensively used in preparing this prepared. Although scope of this paper is confined only to the medial age of Assam history, but as deemed necessary, field study had been undertaken to justify certain views.

**Objectives:**

The initial focus of this research work was to concentrate solely on the transitional phases of acculturation of the traditional belief of the Mishing Vis'-a-vis' the Neo-Vaisnavism during the medieval period of Assam. But the main hurdle in this research work is lacking of historical data regarding the social life of Mising society during the medieval period. In one or two places of the Vaisnavite texts, scanty but typical sarcastic metaphors can be found as regard to the subordination of the Misings during that period. But they are in no way helpful in giving any convincing picture of transition process of assimilation. From such texts only this can be conjectured that the mass population of Mishing community was never really interested in Neo-Vaisnavism as the ideology of neo-vaisnavism did not agree

with their traditional practices. Further this can be hypothesized that even the masters (Gurus) might have been reluctant to accept this tribe to the fold of Namdharma as the traditional way of living of the Mising tribe was inimical to the ideology of neo-Vaisnavism. Wherever modicum of instances were found of accepting Misings as pontiff of neo-Vaisnavite Satras, this can be treated only as exception. Hence this is evident that acceptance of this tribe to the Assamese society was never an easy process.

**Findings:**

No bona fide references reckoning the migration of Mishing tribes to Assam within any datable period are available. There is an invariant argument regarding the time of migration of the Misings to the Brahmaputra valley. Grounded on the primary and secondary data this can be safely concluded that the process of migration might have taken place between 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is only a matter of conjecture that even in the pre-historic period the Mising people used to trade with Assam or certain kind of bartering might have taken place. While preparing this paper, in a visit to Pasighat region of Arunachal Pradesh, this had been come to notice that a number of Misings are still residing in their ancestral homeland; and as revealed in interview by those local Misings of Pasighat area, their forefathers were in constant touch with Assam for their subsistence and they are even today in touch with their counterpart of Assam through matrimonial alliances. Even history corroborates this view that the Misings under the lordship of Aboar tribes used to raid the frontier Assamese villages during the periods of different Ahom kings to have the basis requirements of living, or they had been used by their masters as middle-man or negotiator.

Naturally a question arises as to why at first place the Misings left their ancestral place. Based on the traditional ballads of Misings (called Kaban) this paper tried to seek this answer. Reading between the lines of the Kabans (ballad of Misings) this can be theorized that living in the plains of Assam was considerable easier than the hardships of the hilly tracts under the Abor lordship. Besides, there were constant feuds between different tribes of the hills for covetous possessions. It can't be said that before migrating to Assam the Misings did not enjoy any freedom in the hill. Possibly their freedom did not last for long in presence of formidable warrior tribes like Abors. Before migrating to Assam they were under the over lordship of the Abors which might not be a peaceful coexistence. In this context, in absence of proper data, this would not be judicious to say anything of the nature of Mising-Abor relationship.

Even after their migration to the Brahmaputra valley certain sense of alienation was still prevalent since they could not snap up their ancestral relationship with the tribes of hills. Exaction of tax in kind from Misings by their previous Abor masters continued for some time as before. For all rituals and traditional laws the Misings were still dependent upon their hill masters. Matrimonial relationship with their kinsman in the hills still continued.

If we accept that the migration of the Misings had taken place during the period of Chutiya supremacy in Assam, the process of acculturation might have started to take place only then. With the passing of time, their previous relationship with the Abors might have become somewhat slackly. The term Miri Chutia which was ascribed to the Mising subjects during the supremacy of Chutia can be treated as a clue to the fact that the process of assimilation of a formative nature might have taken place during Chutia period. The term Miri Chulita is a direct reflection that Misings subjects were accepted to the vast fold of the Chutias. The process of assimilation of the Misings started during the supremacy of the Chutias in Assam. The account of Deodhai Asam Buranji places the Chutia ruling family to the earlier part of 12<sup>th</sup> century. Again to accept the Assamese chronicles incorporated in the *History of the Shans* there were thirty-four kings before the cotemporary Chutia king of Sukapha (who entered the Brahmaputra valley in 1228). If this is to be accepted as fact then the antiquity of the initial process of assimilation of the Misings can be pushed back to further hundreds of years. According to Lakhi Devi's *Ahom Tribal Relations*, the Abors claimed something like absolute sovereign over the Miris of the plains whom they considered as their dependents and runaway slaves. During Ahom rule in Assam the Miris acted as go-betweens of the Abors and traders of Assam. The term 'Miri' which is an Assamese word signifying as go between, originated from this circumstances. The Abors also claimed right to all the fish and gold found in the rivers flowing in their territories. The Ahom government, who was always anxious to conciliate their highland neighbours, accepted this claim and exempted the Miris of all revenue charges. and thereby acknowledged the subjection of the Miris to the Abors." This amply reflects that the Misings' initial contact with the Assamese society was more of a political compulsion rather than socio-religious in nature. The Ahoms applied the term 'Chutia Miris' to certain Miris who used to be subjects of Chutia kings prior to the annexation and subsequent submerging of the Chutia subjects to the Ahom kingdom during Ahom king Suhungmung Dihingia Raja( 1497-1539A.D).

After the downfall of the Chutias, during the Ahom supremacy the Misings had considerably acquainted themselves with the Assamese culture. Henceforth the Assamese spring festival Bihu became very much part of Mising society and continued to live in the Brahmaputra valley. Accepting the records of history this can be said that the Misings were within the political boundary of two important dynasties of Assam, i.e. the Chutias and the Ahoms. Except this fact the process of assimilation never did take place till the emergence of Neo-Vaisnavism in Assam. Influence of the Neo-Vaisnavism was so much so that the traditional tribal believes were very easily either supplemented or accepted in tandem with the ancestral elements. There is no certain record available to investigate the contacts of Misings with the plains of Assam in ancient period. Regarding the earliest contact the Chutia chronicles provide some light. The Chutias, who formed a dynasty during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, subjugated some section of the Mising population in the vicinity of Sadiya as their subjects. The Ahoms chronicles too corroborate this view. As stated above these Chutia subjects were called Chutia Miri or Sadiyal Miri. In absence of any proper record this can only be speculated that certain kind of cordiality existed between Chutias and Misings.

Even after annexation of Chutia territories by the Ahoms it can't be said that any kind of reconciliation took place between the Misings and Assamese. Frequent instances of raid into the Assamese areas were undertaken by Misings. Jayadhaj Singha's reign witnessed such a pillage of the Mishings to the Ahom territory in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It was only during the popularity of the Moamoriya Satra that, in general, gamuts of tribes were found into the Neo-Vaisnavite fold. Even then, this process of amalgamation was not complete. Although in certain part of the Brahmaputra valley tribals like Moran, Motak had been completely taken into the fold Neo-Vaisnavism, but in case of certain tribes like Bodos, Ahoms, Mishings Neo-Vaisnavite wave could not sweep them entirely. There cannot be a single attributive reason for that, but number multiple socio-cultural factors can be said responsible for the hindrance of this process.

Although the Mishings entered the Brahmaputra Valley as early as 12<sup>th</sup> century, unlike other immigrants the Mishings never did give up their identity. This assertion of identity was never aggressive. Rather this identity was imbibed in their very culture, in their way of living, dialect and heritage. Basically a hill tribe, the living style of the plains was remained alien to the Mishings. As such the Mishings never felt at home with the main stream of the Assamese society.

**Conclusion:**

The migration period of the Mishings from present Arunachal to Assam was nearing the period of the migration of Ahoms from present Burma. Whereas the Ahoms were accepted to the main stream due to their advanced mode of living by 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Mishings maintained their uniqueness in all its fervor. Even egalitarian outlook of Sankaradeva could not take the Mishings in to the Neo-Vaisavite fold.

In spite of the entire odds one should not deny that certain amount of assimilation took place to the main stream of the Assamese society. Without any second opinion this can be stated that the egalitarian philosophy of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement was the prime bonding factor between the primitive culture of the Mishing tribe with the main stream of the broader Assamese society.

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