

CHAPTER – I

MISING – AN INDIGENOUS TRIBE OF ASSAM: AN OUTLINE

The Misings known in earlier times as the '*Miris*' and mentioned as such in the constitution of India, are the second largest tribe in the plains of Assam. As per 2011 census report the total population of Misings in Assam was 680,424 and they constitute the 2.18% of the total state population and 17.52% of the total scheduled tribe population of Assam.¹

i) Demography of the Misings as projected by the decadal censuses

At the time when the system of headcount of the people in the form of decadal census was legitimately brought in for the first time in British India in 1872, the Mising population in the plains of Assam was recorded as only 13917 persons, least numbers amongst all plain tribes of the state. Astonishingly, Mising population shoot-up at the whopping rate of 84.21% during the nine years that elapsed since 1872. Unconvincing rate of population growth of the state was attributed to four causes by the census authorities themselves.

“First, the earlier census may have been less accurate than the later one, and may have erred chiefly in underrating the population at that time, and in this case the excess is only apparent; secondly, the two censuses may have been taken at different periods of the year, so that there may have been an influx of floating and temporary population at one time of the year which did not exist at the other

time ; thirdly, the increase may be due to immigration and fourthly, to the natural Growth and multiplication of the spices”.²

In the next census of 1891 the Mising people got 11794 (46.01%) more members, numerically adding their population to 37430. ³

At the turn of the century, the Mising population had grown bit by bit and in 1901 for the first time overtaken the Lalunges, one of the fellow ethnics of Assam in terms of population. B.C Allen, the then superintendent of census operation in Assam, 1901 made the following observation in his report: “Each successive census has shown a very large increase in the number of the *Miris*, so that it is evident that there must be continual immigrant from the hills.” ⁴ So far gender division is concerned, when the colonial power kicked off first nationwide census operation in 1872, in that exercise, out of the total Mising population of 13917, recorded in the plains of Assam, there were 7170 male and 6747 female taking this gender division as perpetual, we find, there were only 94 women per 100 men, which means six female less to built-up much needed gender parity. The Mising population in Assam has increased substantially during the last one hundred and fifty years as will be observed from the following table.

Year	Total Mising Population	Variation	% Variation	Male	Female
1872	13917			7170	6747
1881	25636	11719	84.21	13303	12333
1891	37430	11794	46.01	19600	17830
1901	46720	9290	24.82	23773	22947
1911	57792	11072	23.7	30629	27163
1921	68725	10933	18.92	35154	33571
1931	85038	16313	23.74	43669	41369
*1941	106950	21912	25.77		
1951	115316	8366	7.82	59622	55694
1961	163453	48137	41.74	86795	76658
1971	259551	96098	58.79	131764	127787
**1981	370366	110815	42.69		
1991	467790	97424	26.31	239388	228402
2001	587310	119520	25.55	299790	287520
2011	680424	93114	15.85	345786	334638

The decadal censuses since 1872 manifest a visible demographic progression of the Mising community in the country as well as the state. Their demographically significant numbers can be seen from the ratios of Indian Mising and Assamese Mising figures in last one hundred and fifty years; the demographic progression rates were thus; there was one Mising person for every 14814 Indians and 298 Assamese respectively

in the 1872 census at the dawn of independence in 1951, there were 3095 Indians and 78 Assamese for every Mising soul. The ration further decreased to 2112 Indians and 56 Assamese in 1971. The Mising population stood firm at the ratio of 1779 Indians and 46 Assamese in the latest census of 2011.

Again the Mising were the least numbers amongst of all plain tribes of the state in 1872 with only 13917 souls. But as a result of healthy growth rate of the Misings their numbers had overtaken a number of fellow ethnics of the state:the Lalungs since 1901, the Rabhas since 1941, the Mikirs since 1961 . Here it is noteworthy that the census 1971 has revealed a couple of nerve-racking statistics pertaining to various ethnic communities of Assam.In fact from 1951 onwards the dacedal censuses have recognized Kacharis and Boro –Kacharis as two distinct groups of the ethnicity. Notably, the Boros, Meches, Hajongs, and even the Rabhas had otherwise all along been known as Kacharis from time immemorial. But, by 1971, presumably, the numerically small tribes like Mech, Hajong and also some other tiny fringes of the Kacharis might have taken side to assimilate with larger blocks either in the Bodos or in the Kacharis,⁶ as their re-discovered root.As a result of this inter-tribe migration, the Bodo-Kachari population shot-up to 6.10 Lakhs in the census 1971 from 3.45 lakhs in the previous census, where as Kacharis shrank down to 1.98 lakh from 2.36 lakh. The numbers of Hajong and Mech tumbled down miserably.⁷When this inter- tribe migrations and jugglery of numbers in respect of Bodo,Kacharis, Mech and Hajong masses were going on , the Mising witnessed a steady surge of population during the census period of 1971. They have added another chunk of 96,098 persons to the previous census figure of 1961, taking the total to 259, 551. Thus by 1971, the Mising ranked second

largest Schedules Tribes population of Assam after the Boros numbering at 610 , 459 , beating all other major sects of the province , including Kacharis, Mikir, Rabha, Lalung and Deori.

The decadal census further reveal that the drastic reduction of the Mising population as projected by the 1951- census, was a factual surprise. This census recorded a meager growth rate of the Misings at 7.62% against 25.77% in the previous census of 1941 and 45.58% in the following census of 1961. This might have most likely been owing to death –toll caused by devastating earthquake of Assam in 1950 and aftermath outbreak of bizarre epidemic where Mising people were worst affected in the Subansiri basin of the Brahmaputra Valley where Mising people were highly concentrated had witnessed a devastating catastrophe caused by unprecedented tremor to the magnitude of 8.6 Richter scales, where reportedly tens of thousands people were dead in calamity. Although, actual number of the casualties could not be counted at that point of time, nor thereafter, it is estimated that at least 20,000 Mising souls had lost their lives in the seismic disaster. ⁸The census of 2011 revealed that out of the total tribal population of 3884371 in the province, the Mising continued to be in the second largest numerals (680,424) amongst the tribal groups. Their sex ratio also broadly remained steady at 95 females to 100 males.

ii) Origin of the word ‘MIRI’ and ‘MISING’

Few years back, the Mising were known as ‘*Miri*’s in the plains of Assam. How the Mising have got the name ‘*Miri*’ is a controversial issue. The origin of the word ‘*Miri*’ is also shrouded in mystery. The origin of the word ‘*Miri*’ was first carried in an Assamese daily as far back as 1947.⁹Reference may also be made to some other views

regarding the origin of the word '*Miri*'. E.T. Dalton believed that this word was coined mainly because of the fact that the Mising were the main source of communication between Assam and the Abor tribes. In the words of Dalton:

“For a long period under the Assam government , the *Miris* managed to keep to themselves the entire trade between Assam and the Abors ; and as being thus the only medium of communication between the two peoples, they obtained the name *Miri*, which means mediator or go between, and is the same word as '*Miria*' or '*Milia*' used with the same signification in Orissa perhaps the Meriah applied to the sacrifice of the Khunds is a cognate word, the Meriah being the messenger or mediator between man and the deity . they have deep toned voice and slow method of speaking that I have noticed as characteristics of the Abors”.¹⁰

Sir E.A. Gait and A. Mackenzie also seem to support the view of Dalton. According to Gait, the word 'Miri' means 'middle man' or 'go between' they work as middle man between hills and plain and carry out the business.¹¹ Mackenzie remarked that “The Arbors and the Miris belong to the same habitat and they are still alike in all material aspects”.¹² It can be assumed, however, that the name 'Miri' was given to this particular tribe by the non-tribal Assamese people. According to Jatin Mipun, the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh called their priest 'Miri' or 'Mirin'. “It is probable that non-tribal plains people of Assam called the tribe as 'Miri' after they came into contact with the priests”.¹³ Some writers observed that the work 'Miri' is derived from the 'Mienrient' which is a part of Abor hills. The plains people being unable to follow the correct pronunciation simplified it to Miri¹⁴ . In fact the Mising had been hill-dwellers prior to their migration to the plains and were

employed by the Ahom kings the later employed them as Dubhasi or Dunia meaning interpreters in their dealing with the Abors. Keeping in line with the Ahom tradition the British rulers retained many of the leading as Dubhasi, Gam or Katoki with a view to maintaining a peaceful hills-plains relation. The unique position thus enjoyed by the Miris at the beginning of the British rule impressed the English writers to such an extent that they gave a new meaning to the term Miri the go between.¹⁵ However they did not offer any suggestion relating to the origin of the word Miri itself L.Devi asserts that the term Miri which is an Assamese word signifying a go between originated from the meaning of this word.¹⁶ But this assertion cannot be considered as authentic because there is no incident or evidence to show that the term is used to denote a go between in any part of the Assam valley. Therefore the assertion appears untenable and as such its origin has to be found elsewhere. In Arunachal Pradesh there is another tribe known as hill Miri or Porbatia Miri, but they have no cultural similarity with the Mising of the plains of Assam. Probably, observing the similar behaviors and life style with the Misings, the plain people of Assam called them hill Miri.¹⁷ A more probable suggestion is that the word Miri was derived from the improper intonation of and Adi word Mirui, meaning an institution of a priest. It appears probable that the people of plains picked up the word 'Mirui' during their casual contact with the hill people quite ignorant of wider meaning of the word.¹⁸ It has been generally noted that most of the hill people are addressed by the plains people by names which are quite unfamiliar amongst themselves numerous examples of such cases may be cited as the Karbis who are called Mikirs, the Adis are called Abors and the Nishi who are called Dafla. These names are used by people who are quite ignorant of the

clear meaning of these words .The sound represented here by UI in Mirui is difficult because it is alien to Aryan culture and is difficult for any foreigner to pronounce.

According to J.D. Anderson the pronunciation of 'Mirui' is something like the 'U' in 'UGH' or in the form of vulgar pronunciation of the word girl as 'GURL' or perhaps a still nearer approximation would be the English man's use of 'er' when he pauses in making an after dinner speech.¹⁹ We can conclude therefore that the word 'Miri' has been derived from the Mising word 'Mirui' or 'Miro' which stands for priest of the tribe. Throughout the Assamese literature and historical records (Buranjis) we find the use of the word 'Miri'. "The word Miri is used in the devotional songs of Sankardevo, the great Vaishnava scholar of the 15th century in Assam, thus 'Horibulitore Miri, Ahom, Kachari".²⁰ R.P.Srivastava observed that before coming down to the plains of Assam, the Miri's or the Misings called themselves Tanis or Amis , meaning 'man'. He further observes that the word 'Miri' derives from Mirien, which means 'man like real god' ²¹, or in other word the priest of the tribe. Whatever may be the meaning of the term 'Miri' the tribe now consider the word 'Miri' as derogatory and discard it to accept as the name of their tribe. They now called themselves 'Mising' in preference to the earlier name 'Miri' . However, even the meaning and origin of the word 'Mising which they have accepted in preference to 'Miri' is debatable. Some writers have suggested that term Mising has been derived from a combination of the words MI, a man and ASI, meaning water. This was so because by nature, the Mising preferred to reside by the river banks unless prevented by some insurmountable reasons.²² According to another opinion the term 'Mising' has been derived from *Ami* and *Ansing*, meaning peace loving people.²³ N. Lego

observes that the word Mising stands for ‘**Mi**’ (Man) + **shing** (pure) =Mising (pure man) is the correct term as the Mising consider themselves as the real or pure sons of Abo- Tani, the ancestor of all Tani group (Adi, Apatani , Galo , Hill Miri, Nishi etc.)²⁴ A popular legends of the Misings however , claim that the word has been derived from the name Mising given to an offspring of rain-god ***Do-shing***, the son of ***Pedong -ane*** or mother ***Pedong***.²⁵ Jatin Mipun offers yet another interesting interpretation of the word Mising when he says that, “the members of the tribe regard themselves superior to other people. Therefore, they call themselves Mi (Men), Yashing (bright or good) = Mising. Which means we are bright or good people compared to the people of the plains”.²⁶The Misings call the other people ***Mipag*** which means people who are not included in their community.

However, the vacillating interpretation of the term ‘ Mising’ continues to stay afloat in the inquisitives minds of the Mising intelligentsia, reoccurs intermittently pending patched- up action for an acceptable conclusion. Recently the issue has resurfaced in print – media²⁷ in the form of conflicting debates.

However, the latest version of the debate was concerned more about the spelling than its derivative -- asking questions whether orthographically Mishing or Mising. It is because of the fact that ‘Mising’ is often misunderstood as ‘missing’, which gives no grace to the community but instead a lot of embarrassment .Hence there is a strong group of Mising intelligentsia who advocate ‘Mishing ‘ in preference to ‘Mising’ in naming their community.²⁸

The name ‘Mishing’ appears to have been used in print for the first time in the book ‘ ***Outline Grammar of Shaiyang Miri language***’

authored by J.F. Needham, who was Assistant Political Officer, based at Sadiya first and then at Lakhimpur from 1882 to 1905. Needham begins his ‘Preface’ with the words : “the Miris who reside on the banks of the Brahmaputra, Dihong and Dibong rivers, in the neighborhood of Sadiya, call themselves Mishings’ (I have not yet been able to find out the derivation of the word),”²⁹ Needham’s information that Miris call themselves ‘ Mishings’ is referred to later in Grierson’s ‘ *Linguistic survey of India*’ volume III, 1909, and L.A. Waddell’s ‘ *Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*’ (1901). Much later, even prominent Mising writers, notably N.C. Pegu, the author of ‘The Miris’ published in 1956, followed colonial writers in spelling the name of the community as ‘Mishing’. Thus, the fact remains that the orthographic form ‘Mishing’ had been in currency for a long period of time . It was, however, replaced with ‘Mising’ by the Mising Agom Kebang, the apex body of the Misings established in 1972 for the preservation and development of Mising language and literature. The reason for the replacement in question is simple, there being no voiceless palato- alveolar fricative, written in English with SH (sh), in the Mising language, as it is spoken today.³⁰ It is interesting to note that the latest amendment to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order notified by the government of Assam in 2003, the Misings have been listed as ‘(Miri) *Miching*’. Here the ‘ch’ in the spelling ‘Miching’ is a transliteration of the latter used in the Assamese spelling of the word. Tabo Ram Taid rightly remarked- “Whoever did the transliteration did not take into account of the fact that ‘ch’ does not represent the voiceless alveolar fricative of ‘Mising’ in any way. Moreover , ‘Misching’ has never been used by anyone , except in this case, and so it deserves to be simply

ignored”.³¹ On the other hand , as a result of the said amendment, constitutionally, the name ‘ Miri’ still persists.

iii) Origin and Migration:

The Misings belong in general to the Tibeto –Burman family of the great Mongoloid race, who identify themselves as ‘ Tani’ or ‘Ami’ , meaning ‘man’ . The Tanis or the Amis are one of the early, if not the earliest, groups of human races migrating to the north-eastern region of India sometimes in the past and are variously known to the other people as the Misings, Mishimis, Pa: dams, Minyongs ,Galongs, Hill Miris, Dafalas, Apatanis etc. Dr. G.A. Grierson groups them into one unit under the common appellation of ‘North Assam Branch’ of the greater Sino- Tibetan groups of the Mongoloids.³² The language, culture, and traditions of these tribes are one and the same. AsB Alexander Mackenzie says. “The Akas and Dafalas are, according to ethnologists, one in race with each other, and with the tribes of Abors and Miris inhabiting the hills north of Lakhimpur... coming no doubt originally from the same habitat, they are still alike in all material respects as to warrant us in calling them the earlier and later migrations of the same tribe, the Abors as the last comers, retaining more of their pristine savagery and hardihood while the Miris have been to some extent influenced by free association with the plains and the settled habits of civilization the intercourse between Abors and Miri’s is still nevertheless constant and intimate”.³³ Scholars of various academic disciplines have unanimously held that the Mising tribe of Assam, who forms a fragment of the great Mongoloid race of mankind known as the Tanis or the Amis , had their flourishing civilization in the upper course of the Yangtse Kiang and the Hoang –Ho river – valleys of North-West China. Examining the Indian classical literatures S.K. Chatterjee holds

that different branches of the Sino –Indian speaking people which had their nidus near the head-waters of the Yangtse –Kiang and the Hoang-Ho rivers to the North –West China pushed south and west, probably from 2000 B.C. The North – Assam tribes of the Abors and Akas, Daflas and Miris, and Mishims, says S.K.Chatterjee appears to come later and to have established themselves in the mountains to the north of the Brahmaputra plains already in occupation of the Bodos.³⁴ These Indo-Mongoloid races were referred as ‘Kirata’ in the epic of Mahabharata and Ramayana, and even before that in Yojurveda and Atharvaveda .³⁵ P.C. Choudhary asserts that their migration took place in different periods of history, but his contention that “ most of them , if not all, came after the intrusion of the Aryans from the west”³⁶ is subject to proper investigation. Because some authors believe that the dispersal date was even before the advent of the Aryans in the soils of India.³⁷ The Greek and the Roman classical literatures , notably Pliny’s Natural History, Ptolemy’s geography , and the Periplus of Erythrian sea , compiled before and after the Christian era refer to the migration and habitats of the Tribe as “Meridionales”, “Meridiem”, “Asmira”, “Abarimon”, “Abali”, “Orxulao” etc. which are identified by the authorities with the names of Abors, Miris, Mishimis , Akas of the North-Eastern regions of India. It is held on the basis of such identification that some tribes had already settled in this land before the first century A.D, if not earlier.³⁸ Besides, not to speak of the information supplied by later literary works, even Vedas and the epics contain references to the Mongoloid peoples of this region and their early formation of states and joining foreign wars.

Distinctly isolated in their own spheres of activities , the Mongoloids of North –East India had escaped the eyes of the early

chroniclers and hence “ their early history was already obscure at that time, and still remains obscure”.³⁹The Misings , as such have only recently come to the limelight of history. They have no written historical traditions of their own except some disconnected oral traditions which cannot furnish authentic facts of their early history. So no detail records of this Tribe recording their early habitat and culture have been available. It appears that the true historical period of the Misings begins only from the time they are referred to in historical chronicles of the Ahoms called Buranjis and the Vaisvavite literatures of medieval Assam.

Although the Misings have no written documents of their origin and migration they possess a rich oral chronicles in the form of legends, myths, folktales and folk songs which have been transmitted down from generation to generation. A legend, in which human generations are allowed to play freely may , however , conceal a kernel of historical truth. Therefore a study of the origin and migrations of the Misings necessitates a study of the legends that grew around the Siyang valley of Arunachal. Sonaram Payeng Kataki, a Mising interpreter, with his limited resources collected a number of legends and compiled them in his book called “Miri Jatir Buranji”. We can accept them as folk history which are related to their origin and migration to the Brahmaputra Valley. Some of such stories are mentioned below.⁴⁰

iv) Legends related to the origin and Migration of the Misings

According to a tradition of the Mising regarding their origin Pedong –Ane was prolific in procreation and gave birth to many sons. Some of them are *Do: Mi*, *Do: Pang*, *Do:shing* and *Donga*. From *Do:mi* came the *Minyangs*, from *Do:pang* the *Pa:dam*, from *Donga* the

Galong and from *Do:shing* came the *Misings*.⁴¹ The most popular myth that is prevalent among the Adis and the Misingsis the *Ke'yum* line of creation.⁴² According to this tradition, originally there was emptiness in this universe. There was no shape or form, no land or water, not to speak of life. This stage was known as *Ke'yum*, meaning nothingness or vacuum. Through cosmic vibration from *Ke'yum* passed seven generations up to *Se :di –Me :lo*, in slow and steady succession as shown below:

1. *Ke'yum*
- ↓
2. *Ka:si*
- ↓
3. *Siang(Siyan)*
- ↓
4. *A: bo (Anbo)*
- ↓
5. *Bo: muk*
- ↓
6. *Mukseng*
- ↓
7. *Sedi- Me: lo*

Sedi- Me:lo, created things from a mass of mud, light emerged, land , water and life came into being. Therefore, the *Misings* and its allied groups considered *Sedi- Me:lo* as the creator or the God. From their Union following generations proliferated to give birth to human beings (*Tani or Do:ni*) in earth. From *Sedi* to *Tani*, it also took five generations as shown below.

Se:di –Me:lo



Do:lling



Li: tung



Tu: ye



Ye: pe



Pe'dong – Nane or *Pe'dong- ane'* (Perpetuating mother)

According to the above myth, from Pe'dong-Ane all living creatures have been the perpetuated and in the last Tani (Do:ni),the first man was perpetuated. Tani is therefore considered as the ancestors of the Misings and their allied groups.

The above account shows that in the Misings mythology *Ke'yum* is mentioned as the first in the genealogical line of creation. From Ke'yum to *Se:di – Me:lo*, the exact nature of the beings are very uncertain but definite form took place from Sedi , hence they recognize *Se:di- Me:lo* as the creator . From *Se:di* five generations passed till *Pe'dong-Ane'* the mother of Tani, the first man , appeared . It is significant to note that the Mising and the Adis count their genealogies not from *Tani* but from *Pedong-ane*.

The Misings have an interesting story to tell about their migration. According to this legend the ancestors of Misings first lived at a mountain area called 'Kilvng Kang-ge'. They came down from this place 'Avnko:bang'- the golden ladder and 'Murkong ko:bang'- the silver or money ladder. The two might have had some symbolic meaning as 'Avn ko:bang' means to form and cultivate and 'Murkong

ko: bang' means to trade and make business.⁴³ The ancestors of the Misings, therefore, migrated to the plains for these purposes only. From 'Kilvng kang-ge', the Mising came over to 'La:lo So:yvd' meaning waist land of dream or Tibet ?), then at Regi- Regam, Karko- simong, pege selek, Agcha selek and finally at Doyit Pumi near present Sadiya.⁴⁴ Besides, there were also certain splinter groups of Misings who had different popular legends about their migration to plains.

One such myth states that there was a Miri village called Damro in which a beautiful and expert weaver Turi lived. Turi's father at her marriageable age declared that he wanted an expert wrestler as his son in law. Hearing Turi's father's announcement a renowned wrestler Moying of Minyong clan proceeded to Damro village and easily defeated his rivals of Damro village. The father of Turi was very glad to find such a hero for his daughter and gave his daughter in marriage to Moying. This was an insult for the youths of Damro village and they made a wicked plan to kill Moying. They arranged a feast on the very day when the young couple visited their village. They threw Moying into a river binding his hands and feet. Turi also jumped into the river with her husband. The villagers of Moying's village became furious hearing the tragic incident. They also made a plan to teach the Damro youth a lesson. After some days they arranged a big feast and invited all the members of the Damro village. The youths of Damro village suspected conspiracy and they allowed only the aged people to go to the feast. When the guests were fully intoxicated the host villagers cut them into pieces. One old man of Damro, however, miraculously escaped and informed the genocidal incident to his locality. The villagers of Moying's village were comparatively smaller in number than that of the Damro village. Besides when the news of the massacre spread like

wildfire a number of neighboring villages also volunteered to help the youth of Damro village. So all the villagers of the Moyings village decided to flee away en bloc towards the plains and settled in the Brahmaputra Valley.

According to another legend, prior to their migration to the plains, a group of Misings, living on the banks of a hilly river, picked up a quarrel with the people on the opposite bank over the issue of fishing rights (some say over the elopement of girls). Consequently they decided to kill the enemies by taking advantage of the darkness of the night. After drinking rice beer they mounted bamboo raft to march against their enemy but unfortunately they cut the wrong rope of the raft and consequently after travelling for sometime, the current of the river drove the raft back to 'Ghat' of their own village. As they were under the heavy influence of liquor, they could not recognize their own villagers and mistaking them for their enemy they started murdering their own kith and kin. At sunrise they realized their own mistake. Their grief knew no bounds and in sheer desperation they left the hills in a hurry looking for solace in the vast expanse of the Brahmaputra valley.⁴⁵

From the stories of their migration it is observed that migration of the Misings occurred group by group at different times. Kilvng Kang-ge may be situated somewhere within or without the North Eastern boundary of Indian territory.⁴⁶ The migration of the Minyong clan of the Misings starts from place somewhere in the upper course of the Siang river.⁴⁷ Besides from the stories of their migration it became clear that during their migration the Mising had clashes amongst the various group of the Adis⁴⁸ Most of the scholars believe that the main bulk of the present Mising population set foot on the plains of Assam in search of fertile cultivable land. They perhaps migrated to the plains due to

increasing fragmentation of land holding, ecological crisis caused by intense cultivation and chronic deficit in food production in the hill areas. The geographical situation of hill areas also made the livelihood of the Misings very difficult and intolerable by unfriendly topography interacted by mountain passes and rivers.⁴⁹ They migrated to the plains mainly due to pressure of population . They converted the waste land of the Brahmaputra into agricultural lands.

According to Sonaram Payeng Kataki, the Misings were oppressed by the Abors by constantly committing theft, loot etc. being thus disturbed, the Misings left their abode in the hills and came to the plains beyond the reach of the Abors. Hamilton also wrote that: “ For a long time past the Abors have been cocks of Assam. Very independent and quarrelsome they had come to regard themselves as the rulers of this far distant corner of India from the fact so many Miri and Mishmi tribes have submitted to their exaction.⁵⁰

The inter- tribal relationship between the Abors (Adis) and Misings is, however, still maintained. The Adis call the plains Misings as ‘*Aying Birrang*’ (plains brothers) while the plains Misings call the Adis as ‘*Adi Birrang*’ (hill brothers). They introduce themselves as descendants of ‘*Awatani*’, the offspring of the Sun and the Moon (Donyi poli). Even today the Misings nostalgically refer to the hills in their folk songs because the hilly tracks of present day Arunachal Pradesh were once their primitive abode.

v) A Brief history of the Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley :

Most of the historians believe that the Mising came down from the northern hills in medieval times in about 14th and 16th century A.D. and came into close contact with the Chutiyas who had a kingdom

around Sodiya .However , according to some authority , the exodus of the Misings people from the Abor country was of pre-Chutiya phenomena and they probably came down at the beginning of the 12th century A.D.⁵¹ It is also interesting to note that the Misings claim that the ancient Bidarva Kingdom, the designation of the country around Sadiya as their own and its legendary king Bhishmaka as their ancestor. A popular legend of the Mising is that Bhismak's daughter Rukmini's exact Mising name was Rukuni. Rukuni means idol. She was so beautiful and enchanting that which could not but be resembled with an idol of imagination, so she was fondly called Rukuni the idol.⁵² Rukmini was the consort of Lord Sri Krishna of Mahabharata .Rukmavira, the brother of Rukmini engaged in a pitch battle with Lord Krishna to stop the love marriage of his sister Rukmini being eloped on a chariot by the later.Mising people firmly believed that Rukamavira, the valiant warrior was none but one of their brothers.⁵³ This legend lives even today in the heart of the Mising people, indicating that they were in the Sadiya region even in the classic period much before the establishment of Chutiya kingdom. Further, the old Mising people stress the king Bane of Sonitpur is one of the descendants of the Kaundila king.⁵⁴ History is, however, tragically silent about these episodes.It appears when Birpal or Birbar and his son Gaurinarayan established the Chutiya kingdom in the first half of the thirteenth century, the Misings were already there in the region, if not they lived adjacent to Sadiya, with loose or zero political control. True to their physical dispersal and mobility, changing identities and non-incorporation status , the contemporary historians termed them as anarchist or people of not being governed.⁵⁵When the Mising came down from the hills, a large number of Adi slaves join them to liberate themselves from the bondage of the Adi society.⁵⁶ The large scale

exodus of the Misings and the Adi slaves compelled the unnerved Adis to pursue the fugitives and demand them to pay compensation and return to the old haunt. But the emigrants finding the Assam valley very fertile for cultivation declined to return to the hills, however fearing vengeance from the Adis, they rather preferred to pay tribute to the Adis. Accordingly the Adis annually descended from the hills and peaceably collected tribute from the Misings in kind viz, salt, cloth, pig, iron brass plates, utensils etc. The system of tribute received by the Adis from the Misings was called '*Hanja-Lanam*'.⁵⁷ In return, the Adis protected the Misings from outside aggression of the Khamptis, the Singphos and the Burmese.

Meanwhile, Gauri Narayan, the powerful Chutiya king consolidated his position by annexing the self governing frontier of the neighboring territories including Chandangiri frontier, the area believed to be the abode of the Misings. The king included them as part of country's ethnic population and named them as Chutiya Miri.⁵⁸ Some areas of fallow as well as forest lands for their homestead and cultivation were also earmarked. In due course the Chutiya Miris had adopted Hindu cults from the Chutiyas. Some of them were given religious portfolio called 'Patir' who rendered assistance to the head priest in offertory services .⁵⁹

Following the annexation of the Chutiya kingdom in the third decade of the 16th century, the Ahoms had acquired possession of the territory on the North bank of the Brahmaputra upto the river Subansiri. This brought the Ahoms into contact with the Miris living in the northern border of the Chutiya kingdom, between the rivers Dihong and Dibong.⁶⁰ There is a popular belief that when the Chutiya kingdom was invaded and conquered by the Ahoms in 1523-24 A.D, a few Chutiya

noble families took shelter in the Mising villages and disguised themselves as Misings to escape from the disgrace of being molested by the Ahoms. Consequently matrimonial relations between the Chutiyas and the Misings developed and this is evident from the fact that in several villages Mising families still offer annual homage of '*Jal-Pinda*' to some Chutiya Mine or Chutiya grandmother.⁶¹

After the defeat of the Chutiya king, the area neighboring Sadiya was brought under the administrative control of the Sadiya Khowa-Gohain, a respectable official of the Ahom king. From this point of time it may be assumed that the Misings occupied a distinct place in the history of Assam, which is the name given to the state formed by the Ahoms. As a result of the annexation of the Chutiya kingdom, the Ahom acquired a section of the Miris as a right of conquest. This section of the Miris was known as 'Sadiyal Miri' i.e the Miris of Sadiya or as already mentioned 'ChutiyaMiri'. The liberal social outlook of the Ahom rulers was very imminent in their policy towards the Misings. In the reign of Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D), the Dihingia Raja, Taosungleing Kungring, a Miri person was honored with the title of Thaomung-Mungtao in 1526 A.D and was allowed to take his seat in the court among the high nobles.⁶² Again during the reign of king Pratap Singha (1603- 41 A.D) Bhokola Gohain, a member of the Borgohain family adopted a Miri boy as his son as he had no child of his own. The boy was made a Sandikoi, who then came to be known as Miri Sandikoi. One of the descendants of Miri Sandikoi was later made the governor of Sadiya during Gadadhar Singha's reign (1681-96 A.D)⁶³

It appears that till at least the middle of the 17th century, the Misings were not ready to submit to the Ahom authority. They used to raid villages near the hill slopes and thus created havoc and terrorized

the villagers. King Pratap Singha, during whose reign the first reference to the Miris was made in the Buranjis, therefore adopted a policy of appeasement where by he made provision for the 'Posa'⁶⁴ to the Miris. The Ahom king also appointed 'Katakis' who could keep the authorities informed about the movements of the Miris and at the same time keep a watch over them.⁶⁵ Besides, according to a verbal agreement, the Misings promised to help the Ahoms in resisting the other tribes who frequently attacked the borders. To fulfill this agreement twelve chiefs or Baro-Gams, mainly from the bigger Mising villages, and ten chiefs or Dah-Gam from the remaining villages were appointed. By way of payment to these Gams thus appointed a few hundred pieces of silver per annum was depleted from the Royal treasury of the Ahoms.⁶⁶ The Misings however continued to defy the Ahom authority. It is known that king Jayadhaj Singha (1648-63) having heard of the Miri raids had to send expeditions against them in 1655. After their decisive defeat, the Miris offered to be good citizens in future and agreed to pay annual tribute to the Ahom Monarch regularly.⁶⁷ Jayadhaj Singha, on his part, giving recognition to the proficiency of the Misings in warfare, recruited some of the Miris as soldiers and enlisted them to the Kanri units.⁶⁸ The MiriKanris played significant role in the military operations of the Ahom kings and a few Mising families of the Pegu clan are still known by their title of Kanri Pegu.⁶⁹ Jayadhaj Singha also created a post of Barua called Miri Barua, who could command three thousand soldiers' unit in the battlefield.⁷⁰ At the sametime the Sadiya Khowa Gohain and the Barbarua, the chief executive officer of upper Assam were put to the overall charge of the Miris.⁷¹ All these show that the Ahom authority was still suspicious about the activities and movement of the tribe.⁷²

Less than ten years later the repulsive spirit of the Misings found its expression when they along with the Dafalas (Nisis) and Deori Chutiyas made a combined effort to create havoc in the villages of the plains in 1665 A.D.⁷³ The Miris were defeated and they fled to the hills instead of suing for peace . In 1683 the Sadiyal Miris rose in a serious revolt during the reign of Gadadhar Singh and burnt the house of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The Ahom army took stern action and compelled them to sue for peace. The Ahom soldiers built a rampart on the border of the Assamese villages excluding the Miri territory.⁷⁴ It appears that from 1683 A.D. onwards there was no Miri rising in rebellion or devastating any village. They begun to reconcile themselves with the Ahom administration and also treat themselves as the subject population of Assam. It is because of this fact that when the British appeared and consolidated their power in the political stage of Assam, they found little or no resistance from the Miris in the process of their political integration of the region .⁷⁵ On the other hand, taking advantage of the confusion that arose out of the Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) and feeling a sense of security under the British rule in Assam, the Misings begun to repudiate the age old suzerainty of the Adis and declined to pay tribute. Moreover a large number of Misings, who had earlier continued to follow heathen customs of the mountain and primitive religious practices adopted Hindu cult and culture. There upon, the Adis severed cordial relations with Misings. The elders among the Adis used to advise their youngers as “*Mising among gima peka aro agom luma peka*” meaning – “don’t go to Mising land and don’t speak the truth to Misings”.⁷⁶ Mean while, taking advantage of the conciliatory outlook of the Ahoms, more Mising families had steadily moved out from Sadiya frontiers, in search of land and luck, further down to the Assam valley,

lodging their habitations at present day Lakhimpur, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. Thus the termination of the active link of the Misings with the people of the northern hills and their gradual reconciliation to the ways of living in the plains of Assam, had opened the way for the cultural and social transformation of the Misings in the subsequent periods.

End Notes :

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*The census of Assam in 1941 had remained half baked. Although the collection of data was completed, the tabulations could not be completed because of the Second World War and Independent movement in the Country.

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