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## INDIGENOUS DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF THE *MISING* TRIBE OF ASSAM

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### Abstract

The Mising tribe also known as Miri is one of the significant indigenous communities in state of Assam, India. The community's unique traditions, especially their intricate relationship with nature and the Brahmaputra River, provide insight into their resilience and adaptability. The study further explores the tribe's traditional governance system, agricultural practices, festivals, and evolving role in modern Indian society.

### 1.1 Introduction:

Misings are one of the indigenous tribes of Assam. Racially they belong to Mongoloid stock and ethnically to the Adi groups of Arunachal Pradesh. The *Adis* (hill men) are the tribes who are known by different names occupying the middle and the north eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh bordering China. Some of the families and clans of the group living in the undivided Siang district of the state migrated to the plains and settled in the upper Brahmaputra valley in the thirteenth-fourteenth century. It is these migrants *Adis* who formed the Mising community of Assam. The term Mising means people of the same blood or ethnic origin. It is a fact that all Misings trace their origin from the same first ancestor called *Abotani* (the first father of mankind). Use of cane, wood and bamboo in house making, *chang ghar*, *murong*, bachelor dormitory, bachelorette dormitory, use of meat and fish, use of rice beer, patriarchal society, use of *tamul-paan*, democratic society, monopoly of women in the field of weaving are the finest cultural features of Mongoloid (Padun, 1989).

At the time of their settlement in Assam the Misings were called Miris by the non-Misings and officially recorded as Miri. The Miris did not belong this land earlier, when *Swargadeo*

Sukapha had conquered this land with the help of cannons and infantry soldiers, the Miris escaped from the clutch of the Abors, the Miris started to settle in this land subsequently (Naobaisha Phukan, 2007). Sir Edward Gait (1984) interpreted the meaning of the term Miri as 'go between' in view of the fact that the Misings performed more or less the role of interpreter of the hill tribes and the plains people, who were ignorant of the language of each other. The appellation *Chutiya Miri* was also used by the Ahom rulers when the kingdom of the former was annexed to their kingdom.

Another interesting proposition was that the Misings had migrated from a place called *Mungri-Mungram* situated somewhere in hills of Patkai ranges and followed the path of the Ahoms. It was suggested that the people of Assam called them as Miris or man from *Mungri Mungram* (Pegu, 1981). So, Pegu contends that "A more acceptable suggestion would be, therefore, that the word Miri derived from the improper intonation of an Adi word Miris-meaning an institution of priest or poet. The people of plains picked up the word Miri during their casual contact with the hill people quite ignorant of wider meaning of the word."

Lego (2005) studied "the word Mishing stands for mi (man) +shing (pure) =Mishing (pure man) is the correct term as Mishings consider themselves as real or pure descendants of *Abotani*, the first ancestor of all *Tani* group which refers to the *Adi, Apatani, Bugun, Galo, Hill Miri, Miji, Nyshi, Sulung* and *Tagin* of Arunachal Pradesh (p. 42).

## 1.2 Origin and Migration:

Lego (2005) holds the view that original home of all the Mongoloid tribes was Mongolia (between China and Russia). The Adis *Penge* (funeral hymn relating to birth, life and death) locates the original home of the Adis and Mishings to the north (China). The Adis still remember their places of settlement as *Pedong Lipik, Doni Lipik, Uja-Maja* (Lasha), *Irbo Lipik, Mihum-miyang* (Myang), *Kumting, Jerung Kumting, Nyanggu Kumting, Nyangga Kumting, Ngerek Kumting* etc (p. 65). He also refers to George A. Grierson's view that North-China between the upper waters of *Yang-Tse Kiang* and *Hoang-Ho* was the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese races and from that starting point successive wave of immigration entered Assam.

However, Nath (2012) contends that the tribes of the Adi group are the descendants of the common ancestor *Tani* or *Abo Tani* (Father Tani). In his attempts to trace the Adis further back, he found them to be the descendants of a vast group of Mongoloid people called *Chiang* who resided in the vast region called by the same name *Chiang*. Geographically this group of people were situated in north of the Shang and Chou dynasty of China at her northern extremity. From Chiang these people of Mongolian origin gradually moved towards more fertile valley of central and southern Tibet where they adopted a more settled and partly agricultural way of life. This central and southern Tibet seems to be no other than the *Yarlung* valley including Lasha. He contends that the Mising who belong to Mongoloid racial stock as a people who developed

agricultural life in Yarlung valley of Tibet around 1400 BC. Nath refutes the theory that present Mishings originated from some of the people of Mongoloid origin who migrated to the south-east of the Mongolia country. According to him all the Tani group of people living in Arunachal Pradesh including the Misings of Assam belong to the Tibetan group of Mongoloid who professed Bonoism- a kind of animism in pre-Buddhist period in Tibet. The *Tani* Group of people who like the *Adis*, the *Nishis*, the *Hill Miri*, the *Apatani*, the *Tagins* and others of middle and upper parts of Arunachal Pradesh believe that they are the descendants of the common father *Tani* or *Abotani* (Father Tani).

The Tani group of people in which present Misings are included moved from Yarlung valley to present Arunachal in 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century as result of introduction of Buddhism in Tibet which the Tani group resisted (Nath & Pegu, 2012). In Bhattacharyya's (1973) view the ancestor of the Tani group including the Adis and Mising followed one of the tributaries of Salween and Irrawady towards Rima (upper vicinity of Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh). Further there, they pushed on and followed the course of rivers which the Adis called Nyalum Siang which is the Zayul River in China and Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh. They stayed in Zayul valley for some times. This is the region where Ponku Tadog (blue and green beads) so highly prized by the Adis, was manufactured in plenty (p. 34-35).

After sojourn in Zayul valley they moved on a track along the Chindruk River and reached the high pass called Dajing-la in China and Dajing-Ego in Adi. They crossed it and came upon the Po River which Adis called Namgong Siang where Tani and Taro are said to have lived together. Po is a large tributary of the Tsang Po (Siang) river which flows through the area known to the Adis and Taro country. The country may be taken the area around snowy monastery in North-Eastern Tibet (now China) where Tsang-Po River girdles the Namcha Barwa Hills ranges.

Prof. Mibang (1991-92) has furnished two probable causes of the migration of Tani group including the Misings. He states that the consolidation of Tibetan power under the Yarlung dynasty and the introduction of Buddhism as state religion in 7<sup>th</sup> century AD caused an uprising in the central Tibet during the early part of 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Further king Shrong-Tsan Gampo annexed Minyang territory by means of conquest which is remembered by the Adis as Mihum Myang land and these two events hastened the movements of the Adis towards the southern direction.

However, Nath's (1985) conclusion is that the Misings came out of Mongolia, sojourned for many centuries in the Chiang region in north-east Tibet and then migrated to Lasha a region as U and Tsang district or Yarlung valley and came to Arunachal taking the Tsang Po course.

The Misings according to Pegu (1981) settled at first Riu Rega after crossing the Doshingla Pass then Kiling Liteng (or Kiling-kange) along the Sisap River and later at Karko simong areas and stayed there for a long time. From there different groups dispersed to different areas and some of them-mainly the Pagro group moved towards the plains along the Siang valley. There are many

folk tale currents among the Misings about how and why some of them came down to plain and settled in some areas of the Brahmaputra valley.

The period of migration to the Assam plains may be presumed from their relation with Chutiyas who had kingdom in the upper extremity of Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is evident from the fact that at the time of attack on the Chutiyas by the Ahoms in 1523 AD some families took refuge in Mising families. When Chutiya kingdom was annexed to the Ahom Kingdom the Mising tribes living in land were classified as Chutiya Miri, Chutiya Deori, and Hindu Chutiya etc. Sankardeva who started neo-vaisnavite movement in Assam in the 15<sup>th</sup> century adopted one Mising young man as one of his disciples. It also suggests that the Mising were already settled in the Brahmaputra valley in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century. From the mentions of Miris in the Ahom history also it can be safely said that the Misings begun to trickle into Assam plains towards the latter part of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. During the Colonial period the Miris were already well settled in the upper part of Assam. Henry Hopkinson adopted some forward policy against the Abor and some Miris (Misings) involving an attack on a Behea village, fifteen miles from Dibrugarh, and occupations of few villages below the hills (Bhattacharjee, 2007). The Miris were found in 1925, by Captain Neufville, in habiting the plains and lower hills, along the north bank of the Brahmaputra from the Sisi District of Luckimpur as far as the Dihong River (Mackenzie, 2003).

In summing up on the origin and migration on the Tani group of tribes in which the Mising are included migrated from Chiang region of Tibet. From Tibet to Yarlung valley and from Yarlung to Arunachal and from Arunachal to Assam some time in 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century. Now Misings have been settled mostly along the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, taking cultivation as the chief occupation, and have part parcel of Assamese society and culture.

### **1.3 Social System:**

The Mising community is made up of as many as 51 clans and sub-clans which are exogamous to each other. They call clans *opin* which are known by different names. Each *opin* has its own ancestor from whom lineage of a person is traced. Members of a can write the same surname like *Pegu, Doley, Kuli, Charo, Taye, Taid, Chayengia* etc. Each clan has its own sub-clan which may write different surnames according to some special character or events or place of residence associated with the sub-clans. However, the Misings have also a system of clans alliance formed by different clans. Members of allied group do not establish any marital relationship among them. For example, clans like *Doley, Kutum, Kuli, Kumbang, Taye* etc. form a group of paternal relationship and they do not establish any marital or sexual relationship with each other though they belong to different clans. The alliance has no any significant function except in the sphere of marital relationship. It is not known under what circumstances and for what purpose the alliances were originally formed, but the practice has been maintained as matter of tradition.

### **1.4 Dwelling System:**

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Misings live in piled house which they call *taleng okum* (house with raised platform). The platform is raised four to five feet above the ground level. It is a rectangular single house divided into more than one living room depending upon the number of single families living in the house. Each room marked by a fire place (*Meram*) and partitioned by some walls and cloth hangers. The head of the family live in the last rooms where rituals are held. Important visitors are also seated and entertained in the same room.

Mising house has only two entrances-one in the front and the other in the back yard. At both ends spacious verandas are kept, for leisurely sitting and for keeping some ordinary materials. The front veranda is called *tunggeng*, where new visitors are seated for introduction. Persons coming for ordinary business are seated in the front veranda and discussed matters in it. The back veranda is called *yapkur* which mainly meant for womenfolk for their day to day uses and also for keeping some household things.

The Mising houses are constructed by wooden, bamboo and cane materials and thatch grass for roofing. Wooden ladders (called as *Ko:bang*) are fitted in front and back of the house for climbing to the raised platform. One or two spacious platform called *kare* are attached to the main house for drying paddy grain in the day time and for leisurely sitting and gossip in the evening in the summer time.

On every fire places a ceiling, made of bamboo splits is kept hanging for the purpose of smoking fish and meat which the Mising relish most. The ceiling is called *perab* and another *perab* called *rabbong* and above the *rabbong* there is *bangkkoong* for keeping earthen jars containing the raw stuff of rice beer (*apong*). It is important to note that Mising regard fire place (*meram*) most sacred. It is constructed in the middle of the platform dividing in into upper area called *rising* and lower area called *koktok*. The adult male members sit and take meals in the *rising* and the women and children sit in the *koktok*. Important visitors are seated in the *rising* and womenfolk and children are at *koktok*. Rituals are performed only in the *rising* marked off by the fire place (*meram*). Members of the family also sleep only in the *rising*. Thus, *rising* has ritual significance and social status of a person. The fire place must be kept cleaned and safe from damage. It is the important duty of Mising housewife to clean all the fire places in the morning and sweep the whole platform one end to another, every morning.

Mising house does not have any separate prayer room. The room where the head lives is used as a place for worship. There is also no practice of everyday prayer among the Misings. However, the head alone performs some rituals when he goes out of home on some important matter or start sowing seeds or harvesting crops. Prayer is offered by touching the eastern corner of the fire place and pouring drops of *apong* in the name of the family ancestor.

Thus, a Mising house serves all purposes of the family such as preparing and eating foods, entertaining guests, performing rituals and sleeping. It is a living house in all sense of term. Every

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Mising households maintains a grain house called *kumsung* carefully. It is constructed at the distance of at least one hundred meters away from the residential house to its eastern side, mainly for safety reason from fire, which may be caught in the residential house. Granary is treated most revered place by the Misings. Persons without bath and clean clothes or woman are mensuration is not allowed to enter the granary at all, generally after bath and in clean clothes one can take out grains out of the granary. The male persons enter only for some repairing work.

### **1.5 Village System:**

Like many other tribal communities, the Misings also live in villages consisting of a number of households belonging to different clans. Their villages are mostly located along the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Generally Mising village is constituted by a number of households ranging from 50 to more than 100. The houses are built in scattered manner within the territorial boundaries of the individual villages. It is because, suitability of a house site determined by divination according to their beliefs and method. As house is set up in any site which is found to be favourable by divination. As a result, the houses are set up anywhere without any regard for any systematic village system.

### **1.6. Village Administration:**

Every village has a system of administration called *do:lung kebang* (village council) for orderly community life. The literary meaning of *kebang* is public gathering for discussion a problem affecting community life.

Thus, the Misings were self-ruled people. They had never been under any ruler until their settlement in Assam. Their every village was an independent organization under the rule of *kebang*. Whenever a problem affecting community life arises *kebang* was held under the chairmanship of the village headman called *Gam*. A senior man who is known for the personal integrity, knowledge of customs and tradition of the community and has leadership quality is selected as *Gam*. He holds the office so long he earns the confidence and appreciation of the people. He may be removed from *Gamship* if he loses confidence of the village community. He may be succeeded by his son if found worthy of the office. So, *Gamship* is not hereditary. It is a democratic institution established by the common people.

So, the *do:lung kebang* (village council) is concerned with every problem be it inter-personal or inter village conflict or socio-religious functions. It is more or less obligatory on the part of the head of every family to attend *kebang* and participate in its decision-making process. Any person irrespective of sex and age can attend *kebang* and participate in its deliberation. Having heard the views of the participants the Gam gives his considered view and decision on the problem

which is generally approved. If consensus is arrived at the decision declared and a law, it becomes which must be abided by all members of the village community. In case of inter clan problems, members of the clans involved are invited from other village for advice and suggestions in settling the matter. In case of inter-village problem *kebang* of the both villages joint *kebang* is held and settled the problems. Thus, the Mising have long tradition of resolving problems democratically by themselves. Even violent crimes like kidnapping, maiming, murdering etc., were tried and settled by the *kebang*.

Thus, the village administration was carried out by the *kebang* under the leadership of the *gam* who acted as friend, philosopher and guide to the village community. Justice and security of the community was maintained by the *kebang*. However, the institution has become weakened under the British rule and the post-Independence time. The British administration introduced appointment of *gaonburah* (village head) for every village of Assam including Mising village. The *gaonburah* acts as link man between the district administration and the village community. His duty is to report any important problem of the village to the district administration. Now, *gaonburah* (not always) presides *kebang* instead of the *gam*. Gaonburah's comments and recommendation are necessary for the village people to get some benefits from district administration. At the same time, Panchayat raj has been introduced in the Mising villages also, Panchayat President, and Members have also become important persons among the Mising folks. Thus, the traditional democratic institution of the village administration has been replaced by new institution like *gaonburah*, Village Panchayat, Development Committees etc.

### **1.7 Youth Organization:**

Another most important traditional institution of the Misings is the Village Youth Organization called *yame-mimbir*. As soon as a boy or a girl becomes 12-13 years old, he or she automatically becomes a member of the organization of the *yame-mimbir*. Main objectives of the *yame-mimbir* is to organise their traditional festivals *ali-aye-ligang* (harvest festivals) the *bohag bihu* (spring festival), *po:rag* (community feast), *Do:lung Dobur* (community worship), to render voluntary services to the families in distress under some unavoidable circumstances, to help families in arranging marriage ceremonies of their fellow members, to maintain discipline among the young boys and girls, and to perform other works for the community as a whole. Whenever a family needs it requests either the boy or the girl group according to the nature of job for help and in response the group renders free services for a day to the family.

The main jobs for the families need help are raising paddy crops, constructing new house or repairing old ones etc. in time. Many families fail to complete tilling land and sowing seed, weeding, harvesting in time under varying circumstances like death or illness of family members, loss due to draught, flood and erosion etc. Mising houses are made up of wooden, bamboo, cane and thatched material which are fragile and therefore, easily destroyed by storm. In such situation

the affected families need collective labour to repair or reconstruct the house. So, the *yame-mimbir* on request comes forward to render help to the family in need. Similarly, more labour is necessary in holding marriage for preparing huge quantity of foods and drinks which are most important of items for entertaining invitees in Mising marriage ceremony. As such, the *yame-mimbir* voluntarily comes forward to help the family in preparing the materials in time.

Now-a-day, the Mising youths like those of other communities are becoming busy in their studies and other career related activities. As such, they find no time to render help to needy families of their villages. Under these circumstances, the traditional institutions of self-management system of the community have been decaying in the Mising society.

### **1.8 Food Habits:**

The Mising may be called voracious eaters of rice with meat and fish, cooked in curry mixing mainly leafy vegetables in it. They eat chicken, pork, mutton and deer meat but avoids horse, dog, monkey, snake meat etc., as some other tribes relish them. The Misings strictly prohibit beef. A beef eater may be ex-communicated but they do not abhor, duck and goat meats though these are not popular among them. Meats of these birds and animals are not used in socio-religious functions-not even in entertaining a guest. A Mising family honours a distinguished guest by killing a hog and offering its meat with a kind of rice beer called *po:ro apong* and therefore, *po:ro apong* is required in major socio-religious functions. They also prepare white variety of rice-beer called *nogin* but it is hardly used in important socio-religious function.

Like many other tribes Mising did not use tea as daily beverage. Similarly, they hardly used milk as food although they keep milk cattle for milk which was meant for sale. Misings also hardly used *dal* (lentils) and other varieties of grams except black pulse and oil preparing various types of food items except meat. It is only in cooking meat they used oil and not in other varieties of food items. Now-a days, however, these food items have become common to them. Many Mising families take tea regularly instead of *apong* and serve to visitors. *Apong* has become rich man's drink now and rare item for socio-religious functions. It is prepared mainly for religious function in which *apong* is a must item. Without *apong*, socio-religious function is considered incomplete. Similarly, no social function without *apong* is performed. *Apong* must be served to the invitees to a social function. Thus, *apong* continue to be cultural item for the Misings.

### **1.8 Dress:**

Writing on Mising dress Pegu (1981) rightly states that it is difficult to say with precision how the Mising men and women dressed centuries back in the hills. However, it appears that they did dress better covered than their counterparts in the hills from the very beginning. They are now found dressed in anything from shirt and pant by men, *slwar-kurta* and *sarees* by women. Yet their traditional dresses are very much in use till today particularly the women dress. Men folk use the

same dress as non Mising of Assam wear. But the womenfolk wear modern as well as their traditional clothes made by themselves particularly the married ones. After marriage, traditional dress called *ege* (cloth to cover the lower part of the body from the waist to ankle) and *gero* (cloth to cover the upper part from hip to the breast) are compulsory for a woman. Wearing *ego gero* symbolizes the marital status of a woman. The unmarried girls wear only *ege* to cover the lower part and blouse to cover the upper parts of the body. The young girls also use a piece of cloth sufficient to cover the chest called *ku:pak*.

All Mising traditional dresses are home-spun. In the past more or less every Mising family used to grow cotton to make yarns for making garments out of it. Male clothes to cover the lower part of the body from waist to below knee are called *ugon* and the shirt called *galuk*. They use mainly black, yellow, deep red and bottle green colour. Female cloths are colourful and quite attractive, Mising *ege*, *ribi*, *gaseng* and *mibu galuk* (priest shirt) are not only among the Misings but also in the non-Misings for their colourful designs as well as quality. *Mirijim* popularly known as *gadu* is a kind of heavy cotton rug used in the winter is also wanted by non-Misings and popular for its attractive design and quality. Thus, Misings have their own typical dress reflecting their artistic culture.

### **1.9. Language:**

Like other tribes the Misings have also their own language which they call *tani agom* (human language). It is the same language spoken by the *Adi* groups of Arunachal tribes with a little variation in terminologies, accent and pronunciation. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, the Mising language belongs to the north Assam group of the Tibet-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. The north Assam group consists mainly of *Miris (Misings)*, *Dafala (Nishi)*, *Abors (Adis)*, but least with the *Misimis*. These languages could be termed as *tani agom* or *tani language*.

The Mising language had been in oral literature like folk tale (*do:ying*), folk songs (*ni:tom*), elegies or rhapsodies (*kaban*), lullabies (*ko: ni:nam*) etc. One American Baptist Missionary named William Robinson (1849) who prepared a brief grammar of Miri language published in the Asiatic Society of Bengal as early as 1849. Later on, J. F. Needham, an Assistant Political Officer in Sadia and Balipara border areas published under the title *An outline Grammar of the Shaiyang Miri Language* as spoken by the Miris of that clan residing in the neighbourhood of Sadia in 1886. This was followed by Rev. J. H. Lorrain's publication of *A Dictionary of the Abor-Miri Language* in 1910. In 1915 Sonaram Panyang Kotoky published a book named *Miri Duan*. In the post-independence time an organization called Mising Agom Kebang (Mising Language Society) was established in the year 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1872. And this is the highest body of the Mising people. Meanwhile primers, grammars and dictionaries besides books and articles, magazines etc. in Mising language have been publish. Arrangement for teaching the language at the primary schools

established in the Mising dominated area has also been made by the State government. Thus, Mising language has been developed from colloquial to written language in which literature has been produced.

### **1. 10 Polity:**

Unlike some tribes the Misings had no any common ruler like a king or chieftain. Their every village is an independent political unit called *kebang* (public gathering), whenever a problem of public concern arises *kebang* is held and the problem is discussed openly by the common people of the village decision is taken on consensus of opinion of the participants in the delivery of the *kebang*. Normally the head of every family of the village attend *kebang* although any person irrespective of age sex can attend and participate freely in its deliberation. The *kebang* is presided by the head of the village called *Gam* who is selected unanimously by the village community on the basis of some virtues like personal integrity, well versed in customary things, economic status and command over language and displayed leadership quality. The *Gam* presides the *kebang* and after having listened to views and opinions of the participants expresses his own view on the problem and its resolution and asks for approved. If approved, the *kebang* ends in the same day, if not it continues for the subsequent days until consensus is arrived at.

The *kebang* system continued until Panchayat Raj was introduced in the post-Independence time. During the period of Ahom rule the Misings maintained their traditional *kebang* except in case of serious problems of law and order. However, by introducing the *Gaonburah* system the British administration limited the power and function of the *kebang*. In the new system by and large, the same *gams* were appointed as *Gaonburah* (village head). He had been granted some power and privileges and functions to perform. As such the *Gaonburah* had become more powerful than the *gam*. As a result, *gam's* importance as village authorities gradually declined. The Panchayat system was introduced with certain power and functions for rural development. The Mising villages have also been included in the system. As such, individual from some Mising villages also become members of the Panchayat. At the same time the *Gaonburah* system also continues. So, under the impact of these new statutory institutions functioning as agencies of development as well as local administration the traditional *kebang* system has lost much of its earlier importance. The *kebang* is still surviving only for the socio-religious function but not for maintain social and moral discipline and justice in the village community. It is no longer presided by the village *gam* but by either the *Gaonburah* or by the Panchayat president or member. There is no longer any *gam* in Mising villages. In his place there are *Gaoburah*, Panchayat President, Member, Members of Development Committee etc. in the villages.

Like any other tribal communities, the Misings have also become a part and parcel of the Indian political system in the post-Independence time. They now participate in the National Political process by casting votes, contesting election to State Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha,

Panchayat bodies, joining National and Regional political parties etc. Meanwhile number of Mising, both men and women have become members of Assam State Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Some of them have become Ministers also.

Apart from this the Misings have become quite conscious about their own problem in the changing social, political and economic system of the country and need of their own collective efforts in forms of modern organization. Accordingly, they have formed a National organization called *All Assam Miri Sanmillan* in 1935 which was renamed as *Bane Kebang* (Mising Conference) in 1956 to work for socio-economic development of the community.

The *kebang* raise grievances of the community from time to time with the Government and demand for solving them. It also creates awareness among the common people of the community about importance of education, social reformation, cultural development etc. through the organization. The *kebang* raise demand for proper and speedy implementation of the development programmes. It may be mentioned that on demand of the *kebang* the Assam Government granted an Autonomous Council in the name and style of Mising Autonomous Council, for all round development of the community by their own genus. It is constituted by the members elected from amongst the electorates of the community. The council is granted some financial and executive power for implementation of development programmes. It is more or less a semi- Government within State.

A student union named as *Takam Mising Porin Kebang* (TMPK) has also been formed to work for development of education in the community. Apart from this political organization named as *Mising Mimak Kebang* (Mising Revolutionary Organization) was established in the year 1993, to protect the political rights and interest of the community in the multi-ethnic nation and multi-political party system.

Thus, the Mising have become an integral part of the National political system of the country.

### **1. 10 Festivals:**

Main festivals of the Mising are *Ali-Aye-Ligang* meaning sowing seeds. Mising have been paddy cultivators since time immemorial. They grow the summer variety of paddy for sowing is started from the month of January. The festival is however, observed on the first Wednesday of the month of Phalguna that is in mid-February/March which is the pick time of paddy cultivation.

On the day head of every family goes to field and broadcast a handful of paddy grain in the eastern corner of the field and offer prayer to *Do:nyi-Po:lo* (sun and moon), *Sedi-Me:lo* (creator of the universe) and the ancestor of the family for safe and healthy growth of the crops. He then comes back home and offers prayer to the departed souls of the family by offering few drops of

*apong* in their names. Meanwhile the womenfolk get busy in preparing *purang* and *apong* for family and the visitors. *Purang* is packed boiled rice of particular variety which is soft and tasteful; it is taken with milk or meat curry or dal etc. It is a typical Mising snack prepared for the occasion of *Ali-Aye-Ligang*. The adult persons exchange family visits and enjoy with *ngosan* (smoked fish) which Misings relish very much.

In the afternoon the grown up young boys and girls start a kind of singing and dancing called *gumrag so: man*-a group dance in steps. The party holds *gumrag* in every house, hold of the village offering prayers for its well being in the coming year. The family offers *apong*, *purang* and other food stuffs to the *gumrag* party. After one or two days of the programme the young boys and girls feast the collection of the stuffs. It is also observed as New Year celebration.

*Porag* is a community feast for the folk. According to Tabu Taid, *Porag* is a festival of reunion of the people staying outside the village. In the natural process some people particularly, the female members leave their own village on marriage and they cannot come back so frequently. The village people also remain too busy in day to day works finding no time to visits their friends and relatives of their own village. Therefore, a grand feast is arranged at least once in a period of five years for the village folk as well as for those who are staying outside the village so that they can leisurely enjoy foods and drinks together for a day or two, with some merry programme of dance and music by the young boys and girls of the village. For that purpose, a large open hall called *murong* is constructed in an open space in the outskirts of the village. The programmes of entertaining the guests singing and dancing are carried on in and outside the hall for three days. The function is inaugurated by a ritual performed by traditional priest called *mibu* and ended by singing and dance competition by the youths of the host and the next neighbouring villages.

All the village folks irrespective of age, sex and *minom* (guest and invitees) are entertained by serving sumptuous foods with meat rice beer. They are entertained batch inviting first the old men and women of the village followed by the *minom* (guest) from other places, housewives of the village with their men and youths of the neighbouring villages. In the days of *porag*, the village becomes quite festive enjoying rice beer, by the senior people and songs and dance by the youngsters of the village. It is also an occasion for get together with the families of the men and women who originally belonged to the village but staying out it setting on some occupations. Thus, *po:rag* is not only a festival but also a mechanism of maintain social solidarity of the village community in particular and of the society at large. It is held at the interval of every five years in general or according to the convenience of the individual village.

Now-a days, however the *po:rag* is becoming rare occasion mainly due to financial constraints and lack of time and labour for it. It involves considerable amounts of money, materials, time and labour. To celebrate it large quantity of food materials including meat, fish and rice-beer is required which are not easily affordable for the present youth who are getting engaged in career

making activities. They cannot spend so much time and labour for a grand feast like *po:rag*. As such, the festival is gradually dying.

### **1. 11 Bihu:**

Besides their traditional festivals, the Misings also celebrate three national festivals of the indigenous ethnic groups of the Brahmaputra valley. The festivals are the *Kati Bihu*, *Magh Bihu* and the *Bohag Bihu*.

*Kati Bihu* is one day celebration in mid-September/October by erecting burning oil choked cotton thread in earthen pots called *chaki* in the crop field and in fronts of the house and granaries. It is, a ritual observed against attack of epidemics which destroy crops and or human beings. It is rather observed solemnly without any feast and fun.

*Magh bihu* is a harvest festival celebrated in the middle of the January. The Misings celebrated the festival by setting fire to a large piled post called *meji* set up by bundles of dry hay, early in the morning by offering prayer to fire, fire god and ancestors for well being of the families, cattle and crops. Sweet potatoes and other edible wild roots are main food items for the children for the occasion. The menfolk enjoy rice beer with smoked fish on that day.

Bohag Bihu is a spring festival, welcoming the New Year that begins in the middle of April. It is celebrated by merry-making by the young boys and girls. They form their own groups and hold singing and dancing among themselves. Mixed groups are also formed for *husory* (group singing and dancing) held in the open yard of every house of the village wishing to the families for happy and prosperous New Year. The celebration goes more than a week. Now-a-days it has become an organized musical and dancing function for which professional singers are hired and dance competition is held for the young girls.

The Misings adopted these festivals from the Assamese communities in the plains. Now these have become part and parcel of the Mising festivals being observed by them regularly.

Being exposed to Hindu religious system and culture the Misings have also started like *Durga puja*, *Dewali*, *Janmastomy* and birth anniversary of Sri Sankardev-the founder of neo-Vaishnavism.

### **1. 12 Summing up:**

The Mising were originally hill tribe living in the present Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock and ethnically to Adis of the same state. From there some clans and families gradually migrated to the plains and settled in the upper Brahmaputra valley in the 13-4<sup>th</sup> century. They established their habitats along the banks of river Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

Mising society is constituted by a number of clans each being exogamous. There are cluster of clans among whom marriage is prohibited although they do not belong to the same clans. They follow patrilineal kinship system for which a woman gives her kin surname and adopts her husband's surname after marriage.

Village is the unit of territorial organization of Mising society. A number of families ranging from 50 to more than 100 constitute a Mising village which may be located in the several non-Mising villages. Thus, unlike many other tribes Mising do not have any homeland, of their own as such, in the plains.

Each Mising village community is administered by what they call *do:lung kebang* (village council) and *yame-mimbir* (boys and girl youth organization). *Kebang* means people gathering for discussing a problem. Whenever a problem affecting community life arises *kebang* is held and decision is taken on consensus of opinion of the participants. For every village there is a headman called *gam*. He presides the *kebang* and given the final decision of the *kebang*. The *gam* selected by the elderly persons of the village in view of his personal integrity, knowledge about the customs and tradition of the community, general family background and financial status. He may be removed from the position if he loses confidence of the co-villagers.

*Yame-Mimbir* (youth organization) organizes village festivals, volunteer works for families in needs and maintain disciple of the youths. Now-a-days however, these organizations have been declining against the rise of Panchayat in place *kebang*, *gaon-burah* in place of *Gam* and clubs and unions in place of *yame-mimbir*.

Until recent past the Misings were solely dependent on agricultural economy producing rice, black pulse, mustard oil seeds, potato and various vegetable and spice. But of late they are going for various occupations in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the state economy. Women of the community are also coming forward to work in various non-agricultural occupations for independent earnings. Thus, there have been considerable changes in economic life of the Misings today.

Educationally also the Misings like their neighbouring scheduled tribes have been gradually advancing though less than their counter-parts by scoring hardly per cent literacy rate and producing number of graduates, post-graduate, doctorates in different discipline and profession in like legal practice, medical practice, engineers, college and post-graduate teaching etc.

Mising have their own dialect which has been developed in to language in the last five decades or so. A number of standard literacies works including dictionary, grammar, story books etc., have been produced. Thus, the language is progressing well within some limitations.

Despite living for more than five centuries in the midst of various ethnic groups Misings have been able to maintain their cultural traits which are reflected in their festivals, social customs, songs and dance and way of life. They not only celebrate their traditional festivals called *Ali-aye-Ligang* (sowing festivals) and *Po:rag* (community feast) but also traditional Assamese and Hindu festivals.

Thus, the Misings are vibrant society trying to raise their socio-economic status to equal with those of the developed neighbouring communities.

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