

Ethnicity of second largest ethnic group “The Mising of Assam”

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Abstract

Ethnicity is the panorama of aggregate characteristics of the ethnic groups of a particular place. Ethnic group is a particular social group which member has same descendent and common characteristics. Assam is the land of multi ethnic groups. Among them the ethnic group “Mising” is the second largest tribal ethnic group of Assam. So this article tries to visualize the ethnic background of Mising Tribe of Assam that will help others to know this particular ethnic group in details.

Key-Words ... Ethnic Group, Ethnicity, Mising Tribe etc.

Introduction

Assam is an ethnically diversified society and its lay effect on cultural sphere of the state. The ethnicity of Assam comprises taking mainly two types of people namely tribal and non tribal. All the ethnic groups have own identity, special characteristics and different abilities. Their temptation needs and demand is deferent. Therefore same treatment and academic program and process are not fruitful to all the ethnic groups in all the times. The term ethnic is derived from the Greek word ethnose. Homeric Greek prefers the term ethnic to any large group, a host of men, a band of comrades as well as a swarm or flock of animals and in classical Greek the term took on a meaning comparable to the concept now expressed by “*ethnic group*” mostly translated as “*nation, people*”. The term “*Ethnic*” implies a social division based on shared culture. People belonging to the same ethnic group believe in their common descent because of similarities or of physical type of culture or both. They need not always have the same religion or nationality. [Source- toppr.com]. The people of Assam inhabit a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society. They speak languages that belong to three main language groups: Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman. The large number of ethnic and linguistic groups, the population composition and the peopling process in the state has led to it being called an “India in miniature”. Original or earliest inhabitants of India on the basis of information provided by physical anthropologist regarding the ethnic elements, i.e. the racial groups, in the population of India, most authoritative and widely accepted classification done by **B.S. Guha**. The earliest Prehistoric settlers were the Mon-Khmer speakers currently identified with Kasi, Synteng groups with their origin in Southeast Asia. These people settled in the foothills but were pushed up into the hills (**Khasi/Garo Hills, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills**) the second group of people that spoke Tibeto-Burmese of the Eastern Himalayan, North Assam, Bodo and Naga groups of languages. These people are today identified as Monpas and Sherdukpens of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, Mising and Deoris of Upper Assam, the Bodo-Kachari groups scattered all over Assam and Karbis of Karbi Along and North Cachar Hills. After the pre history immigration Proto-historic or third major ingress into Assam are attributed to the Hindu Indo-Aryans from North India into the Brahmaputra valley after 500 BC, and around the same time, from the Gangetic Delta of Bengal into the Barak Valley. This signaled the dawn, of the proto-Historic period and the immigration continued into the Ancient period, at the end of which the first Muslims, captive soldiers of the defeated Bakhtiar Khilji (**in 1205**), settled in the Hajo area. In the medieval times, the first Muslims, captive soldiers of the defeated Bakhtiar Khilji (**In 1205**), settled in the Hajo area. This was followed by the Ahoms when Sukaphaa lead his group into the Assam via the Pangsau pass in the Patkai from South China. The Ahoms

were followed by the same ethnic people, but who were the Khamti, Khamyang, Aiton, Phake and Tuning peoples settled in Upper Assam. At the end of the medieval period a small contingent of Sikhs gave rise to a minuscule but prominent group. In the beginning of the colonial period in Assam after the First Anglo Burmese War and the Treaty of Yandabo (**1826**), the political instability led to the immigration of Kachin and Kuki-Chin people into the region across the Patkai and Arakan Yoma. They constitute the Singphos in Upper Assam, and the Kuki-Chin tribes in Karbi Along and North Cachar Hills. The beginning of Tea Plantations in Assam (**1835**) by the British led to settlement of Mundari speaking people (Munda, Santal, Savara, Oraon, Gond etc. tribes). The beginning of British administrations also led to a large influx of service holders and professionals from Bengal, Rajasthan, Nepal, etc. to increase land productivity, the British encouraged Muslim peasants from Mymensingh district of present-day Bangladesh to settle in Assam that began in 1901. The last major group to immigrate is the Bengali Hindu refugees especially from the Sylhet district of Bangladesh following the Partition of India. Inputs from these and other smaller groups have gone towards the building of a unique multi-ethnic socio-cultural situation. (*Guha, B.S. 1935, 11-13*).

Ethnic groups of Assam

Assam is the land of multi-ethnic groups. On the basis of languages they speak we can categorise the ethnic groups of Assam in four distinct divisions- Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, Ta-Kadai and Austro-Asiatic. There were eleven major waves and streams of ethno linguistic immigrants to Assam.

Following table shows the composition of ethnicity in Assam

<i>Immigration period</i>	<i>The waves of immigrated people</i>
<i>3000BCE</i> <i>2500 BCE</i> <i>2000BCE</i> <i>1500BCE</i>	<i>Austro-Asiatic</i>
<i>1000 BCE</i>	<i>Tibeto-Burman</i>
<i>500bBCE</i>	<i>Indo-Aryan</i>
<i>500CE</i>	
<i>1000CE-1500CE</i>	<i>Muslim soldiers-professionals</i> <i>Tai farmer-soldiers</i>
<i>1500CE-2000CE</i>	<i>Tai Buddhists</i> <i>Kuki-Chin ethnic groups</i> <i>Colonial Indo-Aryan</i> <i>Munda Tea labourer</i> <i>Muslim peasants</i> <i>Bengali Hindus</i>

Ethnic Background of Mising

The Mising also known as Miri is the second largest ethnic tribe in Assam. They constitute 17.8 percent of the total tribal population of Assam. They belong to the part of the Sino-Tibetan family of the Mongolian group. Sino-Tibetan family comprises many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in India and Tibet. They migrated to the Assam prior to the advent of Ahom. Ethnically the Mising people come from the same stock as the Adis, the Apatanis and the hill Miris of Arunachal Pradesh and belong to the North-Assam branch of the Mongoloid races. All this Tani Tribes share linguistics, cultural and genetic similarity. They call themselves as the Tani or the Ami which in Mising languages means a man (**Kuli, 2012, p. 3**). They were initially hill dwellers, later migrated to the plains and started living on the banks of rivers of Assam. It is predicted that the first group of Misings landed in the upper region of the valley sometime between 13th and 14th century A. D. when the area around Sadiya was ruled by the Chutiya kings (**Dole, 1978**)

1.25 The Term Mising and its spelling.

The spelling of the term Mising is sometimes written in two forms like-Mising and Mishing. The first one spelling is having a single S and the second spelling is SH. The orthographic form of the Mishing had been used for many decades till it was replaced with Mising by the Mising Agom Kebang(MAK). MAK is the apex body of the Misings Language established in 1972 for the preservation and development of Mising languages and literature. The reason for the replacement of therm Mishing with Mising is the Misings people call themselves Mising not Mishing there being no voiceless palate-alveolar fricative, written in English with SH(sh) in their languages, as it is spoken today (Taid, 2010,p.6). Further it is also revealed that the ch in the spelling Miching appearing in the lit of Scheduled Tribes, as amended by the government of India in 2002 is a transliteration of the letter used in the Assamese spelling of the word. However did the transliteration did not take into account the fact that ch does not represent the voiceless alveolar fricative of Mising in any way. Mover, Miching has never been used by anyone, except in this case, and so it deserves to be simply ignored (Taid, 2010, p.6). The Mising tribe is sometimes called Miri by non-Mising people. They were also listed as Miri in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes Orders Act of the Indian Parliament, first notified by the President of India as Constitution Order,1950(Taid,2010,4) . The term Miri means mediator or go between. Earlier Mising were the communicator between the Assam and Abor tribes. The Miri word first used in Assamese daily in 1947(on the Meris and Abors of Assam written by Lieut, J.T.E. Dalton, Assistant commissioner Assam dated 23rd March 1845).

1.26 Population and Habitat Areas of Mising

The Mising tribe is the second major ethnic group and also the second largest tribal group in Assam. According to the census in 2011 the population of Mising ethnic group in Assam is 680424 Lakhs. They live in 10 district of Assam. The ten mainly inhabitant areas of the Misings in Assam are Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar,Darang, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Golaghat, Majuli and Charaideo. In three districts of Arunachal Pradesh especially in Oyan, naming, Leku, jalam villages of East Siang district, lower Divang Valley district and Silatoo Mising village of Lohit district where Mising people are found in large scale. Now-a-days the Mising people are also found even in Guwahati area of Kamrup district of Assam and other district too. According to the census report of 2011 the highest population of Mising ethnic group live in the Demaji district the number is 185906 lakhs and Lakhimpur district recorded 165843 lakhs is the second largest Mising inhabitant district of Assam.

The total Scheduled Tribe population and the Mising population in Assam are shown in the following table-

Total Schedule Tribe population of Assam

Details	Total Population	Male	Female
Total	6884371	1957005	1927366
Rural	3665405	1847326	1818079
Urban	218966	109679	109287

Source- Census of India, 2011

Total Mising population of Assam

Details	Total Population	Male	Female
Total	680424	345786	334638
Rural	663842	337327	326515
Urban	16582	8459	8123

Source-Census of India, 2011

The above table shows that 97.56 percent of the Mising people live mainly in the rural areas and approximately 2.43 percent of the total populations live in the urban areas.

1.27 Educational Status of Mising ethnic group

Due to the various problems like poor socio-economic condition, medium of instruction the total educational picture of the Mising people not satisfactory. The literacy rate among the Mising tribe is increase in recent times. That is reflected in the Census of 2001 and 2011.

Following tables show the literacy and illiteracy rate of the Mising people of Census 2001 and 2011.

Literate population of the Mising during 2001 and 2011 census

	Total		Male		Female	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Total	288532	393130	175157	222755	113375	170375
Rural	279984	379009	2170396	215412	109588	163597
Urban	8548	14122	4761	7343	3787	6774

Source- Census of India, 2001 and 2011

Illiterate population of the Misings during 2001 and 2011 census

	Total		Male		Female	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Total	298778	287294	124633	123031	174145	164263
Rural	296919	287294	123850	123031	173069	164263
Urban	1859	2461	783	1116	1076	1345

Source- Census of India, 2001 and 2011

The above tables show that the total number of literate Mising people is 393130 as per the census 2011 whereas it was 288532 as per the census 2001. The statistics indicates that the literacy rate has been increasing. However, the literacy rate among them is not satisfactory yet. Their total population is 680424 as per census, 2011 out of which 393130 only are literate. Thus, approximately 58% of the total populations are literate in Mising society.

1.28 Political status of Mising

Political awareness of Mising people started before the independence of India. Their initial stage of self political consciousness emerged as soon as formation of their Miri Students Society “Miri Satra Sanmilon” in the year 1924. Later on, this organization changed its name as “Mising Bane Kebang. The first organization demanding separate autonomy for Mising was the North East Frontier Miri-Abor Sonmilon. This organization passed its resolution of separate autonomy for them its first session held on 20/05/1947 at Mukongselek. Mr. Howard William the political Officer of Sadiya adopted this resolution. They participate in various stages of independent movement of India. Freedom fighter Kamala Miri laid down his life for our country in 1942 during quite Indian Movement. In 1993 Asom miri Chatro Sonmilon was formed and it spread a massive intra-community awareness. In 1982 the All Assam Mising Students Union demanded autonomy under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitutions. The union permanently named as “Takam Mising Porin Kebang”(TMPK). In 1993 assimilating all organization of Mising formed a plate for named Mising Mimag Kebang(**Mising Action Committee**) in short MMK to lead the autonomy movement. They started strong movement by adopting Bandh, road blockade, mass movements. On 14 July In 1995 government signed with a so called Mising Accord with Mising Autonomous Demand Committee (**MADC**) and Mising Bane Kebang(**MBK**). But Mising people were not satisfied with this accord so they continued their autonomy movement. Finally on the basis of MAC(**Amendment Act,2005**), the Assam government notified a list of 1239 villages to be covered under core area of MAC and 392 villages to be covered under Satellite area of MAC(**Kuli,2012,158**). The Mising currently has some state autonomy under the MAC.

1.29 Economic Status of the Mising

Mising society is mainly agrarian society. Agriculture is the prime source of economy of the Mising people. They cultivate paddy in large scale, most of the family cultivate paddy twice in a year. They cultivate paddy for the first time in the month of February and after harvesting second time paddy cultivation done in the monsoon session. Similarly they are expert in Rabi crop cultivation likes black pulse, mustard seeds, potatoes, pumpkin etc. Mising Women also engage in sowing, harvesting, weeding of the cultivation. Another source of income is livestock rearing activities. Pigs, goats, cattle, hens cocks, ducks are reared domestically. The Mising women also prefer for rearing the Eri worms to produced cotton and Eri silk threads. Sometimes it is considered that weaving is a inborn quality of Mising women it is an important occupation of the Mising women. The Mising people are also expert in making handicraft items made of Bamboo and Can. In spite of these primary sources, the Mising people also engage in various government and non-government job. At present they observed diverse types of sources for income generation.

1.30 Ethnic culture of Mising

Misings are culturally rich tribe of Assam. Their unique auspicious culture attracts other ethnic people of this land. Misings are aborigine inhabitant of Assam. Theirs enrich ethnical culture form their own identity. They have unique pattern of housing, marriage, rituals, songs, dance, cuisine etc.

House

The Misings traditionally build the 'Chang Ghor' using Bamboo, woods, thatching grass and Stubble of paddy which is platform type 4 to 5 feet higher from the surface. At present they used concrete materials like tin, rod, cement, stone, sand etc. earlier they build such traditional chang ghor type house according their convenience because they mainly live in riverine, forest and hill sides. Although some family adopt modern pattern of structure also they build a Chang Ghor backside of the house. The body of roof and the plate from of the house consists of five layers each. Ganesh Pegu mentions the layers of the roofs as- Tase Selab, Saying, Nipir, Lodang-Dugying and Bangku. The five platforms are according to the Mising terms Jopong, Ertog, Bener, Porpiyam and Piso. The five layers of roof is believe as Heaven and the five layers of platforms are believed as Hell in Mising society and they stay in between two which is believed as the world. Murong Ghor is built mainly in center of the village it is regard as heart of the Mising society and it plays the role of Mising cultural recreational center. Murong means open it is a dormitory house where meetings of the village are held and their traditional Porag festival are celebrated. Murong Ghor can be considered as the court and educational centre of the Mising society (*Pegu, 2003, p. 70*).

Marriage

The term Marriage is called Midang in Mising language. The especial character of the Mising Marriage is that their society forbade marriage between the same clan, for example a boy of Pegu clan or surname cannot marry a Girl with a Pegu surname. It must be remembered during marriage that different clans of Mising consider certain other clans to be blood connected relatives from the distant past (*Payeng, 2015, p.58*). No dowry system is found in Mising Marriage system. The widow and widower remarriage is allowed. A Mising prominent scholar name Dr. Bidyeswar Doley mention three traditional systems of marriage in Mising tribe, these are 1) Daro Midang (*Arrange Marriage*), 2) Dugla lanam (*Gondhorbobiya*), 3) Kumsu-Josu Midang (*simple arrangement Marriage*).

Dress and Ornaments

Mising girls are expert in weaving dresses and also singing and dancing so, there is a saying that the Mising girl learns to dance before she learns to walk and she learns to weave before she learns to dress. One of a prominent scholar of Misings categorized the dress into three Divisions- Baby cloths, Male dress and Female dress.

The baby dresses are- Niseg, Segbi, Segtag.

The Male dresses are- Ugon (the waist or loin cloth of man), Gonbor (the waist or loin cloth of man), Gongro-Ugon- (a long waist or loin cloth of man), Gontugugon (a short or loin cloth of man), Galung (a shirt), Gadugalig (a shirt made of a gadu cloth), Tukoggalig (A jerky), Mibugaluh-(a mibu shirt), Dumer-(a towel), Etub(a turban), Lingkab-(a muffler).

Female dresses are- Ege,(the lower garment), Riya (a long narrow cloth wrapped over the breast), Kegreg or segreg(a type of waist cloth for women), Ribi(a tybe shawl), Gero(a type of shawl),Gale (a type of waist cloth), Bimbung(a type of shawl), Pere(a type of shawl), Gapagare(a type of waist cloth), Yambo(a type of shawl), Poniyanggasor(a type of shawl for bride).

The main traditional cloth of Mising is “the Gadu” it is a symbol of status and dignity of a family in the community, presenetation of a Gadu is almost compulsory in the marriage of their daughters for which the parents try their best in advance by any means to weave using cotton a Gado to maintain their honour and respect (*Kuli, 2012*).

Mising people have traditional ornaments for both male and female. Prominent Mising scholar Dr. Jawahr Jyoti kuli mentioned in 2015 some traditional ornaments of Mising male and female. These are as follow-

The man ornaments-

Kentu (Keru in Assamese it was prepared by wood in past), Marpon(waist, wrist and legs ornament), Nogora(ear ornament), Takpor(earning ornament made of dried plant of jute etc), Tadgor(blue Moni), Dogne(yellow Moni), Tateg(Ghilamoni), SiteTereng(ornament of elephant teeth), Simyo Aye (ornament made from Tiger’s teeth), Sira Aye (ornament made from wild pig teeth),

Lady ornaments used on the knot of hair

Murkong Appun(a flower made from silver),Murukong Riggab-(Ruporxolaba kata), Kebutali-(Ketelapohurkait), Riyatali(Bamboo stick),Yuan Anno (A smooth thread of black coloured)

Other lady ornaments

Doksiri(Necklace), Lingkab(Golpata), Marpong(satsori), Dumdum(Maduli), Litag(Paolmoni), Tadog(Blue Moni), Dogne(Yellow Moni), Tateg(Ghilamoni), Mukteg(VariuosMoni), Pisiring(Earning), Chondrongar (Moonlike necklace), Turi(Thuria), Jangpai(Jangfai),Takpor(a Keru worn on the ear), Nograng (an ornament to wear on ear), Ikoli(Chain of neck), Takpidoksiri(a garland of seed), Konge (Bangles), Onsalmora(a garland of neck), Gamkaru (hand ornament), Keker(finger ring)

Amongst the traditional ornaments of Mising Dogne and Tadgo is the most valued and price ornaments.

Religion

Originally Mising worship Dony means the Sun and Polo means Moon. Religiously Mising are animistic, polytheistic and naturalistic nature (*Doley, 2014, 91*). The Misings people regarded the Sun is the mother and the Moon is the father. They also worship Kine-name (*the goddesses of wealth and property*), Gumin-Soying (*the God of household*), Do-ying-Botte (*the God of household*), Sine-Mobo (God of the earth and sea) Rigji-Merang (*God of the smallest creatures*) etc (*Doley,2014, p.89*). As the perspective of the worship of the God, Goddesses, semi-gods and goddesses by the Misings people, it can be related that their religion bears similarity with that of the Hindu religion. The animal sacrifice in the name of religion is prevalent in the primitive Mising society. In the present that it is noticed that conversion from their primitive to other has been prevailing in the Mising society among them parts of people adopt Christianity and parts of people convert into Vaishnavism.

Festival and Dances

The Misings people fond of festival and dance. The festivals of Mising can be categories into Agricultural Festivals and Religious Festivals. The main agricultural related festivals of Mising are 1) Ali-Aye-Lingang, 2) Porag, 3) Am Legod, 4) Am Gadgod, 5) ApinDogod, 6) Kumsung Bamed.

Ali-Aye-Lingang

This is an agricultural festival, Ali means root or tuber type fruit/seed. Aye means fruits/seeds and Ligang means starting of sowing or planting seed. So Ali-Aye-Lingang means starting of sowing or planting seeds. It is the most popular and famous festival of Mising people. It is celebrated on the first Wednesday in February month every year.

Porag

This is a merry making and feasting festival of Missing. It is celebrated in the Murong Ghor either in the months of September-October after the end of summer harvesting or in the months of January-February after the winter harvesting (*Doley, 2014, p.51*). Actually it is celebrated during the time of availability of vegetables and rice. It needs a heavy amount of budget to celebrate. Individuals from other village are invited. All the married daughters with their family are invited compulsorily therefore it also called get-together or reunion of the villagers. Apong means rice beer and Pork are the most important food items for feast.

Am Legod

The Mising people pray God before starting the plantation of agriculture. Am Legod is such festival of domestically celebrated by Mising people. It is the festival of first plantation of paddy generally, the daughter of the family perform the activity. It is observed preparing a plot of land in the east-south corner for praying God for the better implementation and better output, placing a burning oil lamp, beetle nut and beetle leaves on Tara leaf.

Am Gadgod

It is a before harvesting festival. Through this festival the Mising people worship the Goddess of wealth Lakshmi and welcome the Goddess Lakshmi from the paddy field to their own home. When the Paddy becomes ready to harvest a girl or a lady of the family goes to the paddy field and she packs two or three pieces of grain ear (*means ear of rice*) with banana leaf and white cloth and brings to home. This grain ear is sacredly and carefully kept at the granary of home.

Apin Dogdo

It is a festival of offering newly produce rice to the God. The family invites neighbors and serves with newly produce rice Apong, pork, chicken, and fish.

Kunsung Bamed

It is a festival of purification and apology. During harvesting a number of insects are killed knowingly or unknowingly so that the Mising people also beg apology to God for this guilt. Besides other person from out of their family enter into the granary to help which is traditionally not allowed.

Dobur Uie

It is religious festival observed at the jungles or nearby the river sacrificing chicken pig etc to satisfy their Godor deities so that the villagers are saved from the evil spirits, natural calamities. It is a community festival observed in May by each and every Mising village. By doing this they prohibit the entry of the outsiders into the village.

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