

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scope and Objectives of the Study:

The Northeastern region of India is well known for its socio-cultural diversity. Here, numerous ethnic tribal groups lived for long periods with some shared ethnic characteristics as well as striking commonalities in terms of oral narratives of migration, distinctive way of life and other cultural components. Assam which is the focus area of this work alone has as many as 23 tribal communities constituting 12.82% of the total population.¹ The Misings, the second largest tribal ethnic group in the State of Assam of the Northeast India are the subject matter of this Study.² They are the second largest after the Bodo Kacharis in terms of population (17.8% of total ST population of the State, 2001 Census Report).³ As per the Census of 2011, their present population is 6,80,424 and its urban population is 16,582⁴(0.41%). Densely populated Mising villages are now concentrated mostly in the flood plains of the upper Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Disang, Dikhow, Dhansisri, Disoi, Dikrong, and Kherkotia rivers.

The Mising formerly known as Miri to its out-group populace were hill dwellers until they earned the epithet 'riverine' people of the Upper Brahmaputra Valley after their migration. They speak their language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch

¹ S Saikia, B Medhi B. Kr. Medhi, 2012 *Spatial Distribution of Tribal Population and Inter Tribal Difference in Population Growth: A Critical Review on Demography and Immigration in Assam*, ISOR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences(JHSS), p. 2

² The Mising were listed as Miri in the Indian Parliament's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders Act as a Constitution Order in 1950. There are diverse views regarding the spelling of the word among scholars. Some of them prefer to use the term 'Mishing' and others as Mising. The *Mising Agom Kebang* (the Supreme Literary Body of the community) has advocated the spelling 'Mising'. In this study we prefer to use the appellation 'Mising'.

³ S, Saikia, 2012, op cite p. 2

⁴ Census of India 2011, Director of Census Operation, Assam

of the Sino- Tibetan language family. They have a distinctive social organization based on patrilineal clans (*Opin*). However, they have refashioned their ways of life by ecological adaptation and by the processes of ‘acculturation after their arrival into the Brahmaputra Valley which occurred at different times in successive hordes commencing from about thirteenth to the fourteenth century CE.⁵ As such to a large extent, the life and customary practices of the Mising have been influenced by the culture of their dominant Assamese-speaking neighbours. For Mising, assimilation to the dominant Assamese speaking Hindu culture may include learning of Assamese language, textile culture, changing food habits, adopting the method of settled cultivation, etc., and more importantly in the case of their beliefs system they have adopted a kind of a ‘monotheistic Hinduism’.⁶ This is evident from the penetration of ‘Vaishnavite Hinduism’ in their culture. For example *Naamghar* (Prayer Hall) becomes a regular feature of their village life which had never been a part of their traditional belief system. Moreover, the influence of Vaishnavism resulted in the division of the people into some named sects – *Kewaliya*, and *Bhagavattia*. The bulk of the population belongs to the *Kewal Dharma* or *Kewalia* sects performing rituals with the help of *Bhakats* by offering *Apong* (traditional wine), meat (pork, chicken) alongside singing the *harinaam* (holy songs about the glory of Lord Hari). Apart from Vaishnavism it has been found that in a region like the Majuli Island different sectarian beliefs such as Saivism, Saktism, Tantricism, and, later Christianity have also influenced the lives of the people.⁷ The acceptance of Christianity by the Mising people in a region like

⁵ The history of Mising’s arrival into the Brahmaputra valley is still a subject of great contradiction. There are a host of explanation for Mising migration history which has been discussed in details in the current thesis.

⁶ Taid, Tabu, 2013, *Mising Folk Tales*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, p. x.

⁷ Pegu, Indraneel, 2013, *The Religious Beliefs and Practices of The Mising*, published Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, p. 215.

Majuli-the river island speaks of varied significance. Analysing the census reports of 2001, Peter Pegu, a Christian by faith stated ‘Now, Christianity has visibly percolated to the Mishing heartland too-as a visible number of 3631 members of the community’s population acknowledge the lines of spirituality, solace, solemnity and serenity endowed upon by the Christian faith. Indeed, Christianity was not a new phenomena in the Miri society; its presence in the community was long felt, though non-significant, and been reported throughout the decadal censuses since 1931.’⁸

According to the Census report of 2001, as he further maintained ‘Hinduism dominated the scene through and through. Hindu population of the community accounted for 98.8% or 580411 persons. Local pantheons, animism and some other religious outfit were taken to 2824 souls.’⁹ It has been also observed that the process of acculturation among the Mising, virtually lead to the emergence of a dynamic Mising society.¹⁰ This ‘culture shift’ of the Mising, therefore, becomes a crucial aspect when addressing the Mising as a distinct self-identifying social group or tribal ethnic group and on the questions of other societal development of the Mising in the Brahmaputra Valley.

However, one of the most distinguishing features of Mising social life is marked by their ‘resilient riverine lifestyle’. The bank of river had been consistently the area of settlement of the Mising since the period of their arrival into the valley. Their *Taleng Ukum* (traditional house on stilts) is ingeniously designed to suit the ‘adaptive requirements’ as they constantly prefer to live in a riparian area. On the other hand, the same *Taleng Ukum* or the house that is built on a bamboo platform raised about 6 to 8 feet stands as a symbol of their ethnic identity. While many of their cultural components i.e. socio-religious practices, ritual activities, food habits, kinship systems, etc. persisted

⁸ Pegu, Peter, 2019, *Economic History of the Miris*, Mishing Society of Mumbai, Mumbai, p. 340.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹⁰ Mipun, Jatin, 1993, *The Mishings(Miris) of Assam, Developemnt of a new life style*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 54.

and remain untouched by the transitional phases or ‘the acculturation processes’. The Mising Cosmology or worldview, on the other hand, retains an overall paramount position amidst the transitional phases which helped them in their self-realization of a distinct identity. Importantly, Mising cosmology is reflected in their subsistence system, language, kinship, ritual practice, and landscape.¹¹ Indeed, Mising as a distinct ethnic group maintain its identity through their elaborate system of ritual and symbolic structure and many of which show the survival of archaic and early mode of belief system.

The study of Mising oral tradition, on the other hand, becomes imperative in exploring the world view in general and in making sense of the cultural past in particular. The Mising oral tradition as a historical source consisted of various kinds of narratives, songs, rhymes, proverbs, and other popular creative expressions which are considered to be highly rich in terms of both quantity and quality.¹² Indeed, the Mising have their way of recollecting the past ways. The uses of the terms such as *Lekke doying*- literally the past stories, *Doying doying peki doying* – a tale, tale of dove and the phrases *Mennying Konyying* is equivalent to the English “Once upon a time” by the story teller in the Mising Oral tradition speaks of its historical sense.¹³ Most significantly, in most of these narratives there are the direct references to the social milieu reflecting the society’s historical experience of an event. Similarly, other issues and principles also amply find their place in their oral tradition such as the code of social conduct, the theme of clan origin and migration, kinship relations, legitimacy of exogamous clan units, etc. The shared Oral tradition plays a crucial role in sustaining

¹¹ Hilaly, Sarah, 2015, *Trajectory of Region Formation in the Eastern Himalayas*, in Indian Historical Review, Sage Publications, ICHR, p. 300.

¹²B. Datta, T. R Taid, *Folksongs of the Misings*, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, 1992, p.1.

¹³Taid, T, *Mising Folk Tales*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2013, p. xxii.

the cultural and social values among them. It is worth noting as some writers like Birendranath Datta, and Taburam Taid observed "...Mising folklore is not the erstwhile hill affiliation but the remarkable manner of adaptation of the hill modes and mores in the wider cultural setting of the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley."¹⁴ In short Mising cosmology and social practices contains idioms of both the hill and plain. For this very nature of the contents of the Mising oral traditions, one has to be careful enough while interpreting and formalizing the folklore. It is also found that these folklore sometimes stands in the way of a general agreement on the status of the Mising during the time of their sojourn in the hills.

The Mising celebrate the three traditional Assamese socio-cultural festivals, i.e. *Bohag Bihu*, or *Rongali Bihu* the spring festivals, observed in mid-April, the *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu* observed in mid-January, and the *Kati Bihu* or *kongali Bihu* -observed in October at a time when paddy crops are in their formation stage. However, the celebration of social-religious festivals of the Mising viz., *Ali:Aye:Ligang*, *Po: rag*, and the performance of rites such as *Dobur* marked their distinctive cultural life reflecting their mode of production, and ecological base. These ritualized activities and practices are rooted in their ecological setting and worldview which in turn forms the 'undercurrents of their lifestyle pattern.' These socio-religious festivals are the essential components to form an intricate network to create a sense of collective identity and thus appear to have played the role of a shared Mising ethnic identity. Persistence of these cultural components thus became the relics of the Mising past which in turn mould/shape the present and future aspirations of the community.

¹⁴ Dutta, B, *Folksongs of the Misings*, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, 1992, p. 1.

Misings' traced their roots from the Tani group of communities of Central Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁵ The Mising shared a long history of strong cultural and linguistic relationships with these communities such as Adis, Nyishis, Apatanis, Tagins, and Galo. At the same time, the overwhelming recognition of commonalities among the Tani group led to the speculations of the existence of bounded, homogenous 'ethnic entities' in the distant past. Basically, the myths of the Tani people seem to share an essential internal perception that links them to a common cultural landscape, hence the Mising narrative of oral tradition is one of the expressions of the shared cultural or rather manifestation of a hill practice. This study explores the scope of further research on the ethno genesis of the 'Tani people' as a site for locating Mising identity construction.

Another significant aspect of Mising ethnicity is their distinctive social structure. The society is constituted by different Social sub-groups namely the *Pagro*, *Delu*, *Shayang*, *Dambuk*, *Oyan*, *Moying*, *Samuguria*, *Tamar*, and *Somua*. While more than fifty different and distinct clans are comprised of these groups. While there are heterogeneities within this social sub-group fashioned by different historical circumstances, it appears that to define and understand the nature of the traditional Mising social sub-group identity, there is a need to question how and on what basis the name to these identities were given or constructed or how the process emerged historically. More importantly, it became imperative to distinguish these divisions to define the differences along with the fundamental resemblances to understand whether this had any effect on the formation of a homogenous identity as Mising. Hence, the

¹⁵The ethnic tribal groups of central Arunachal Pradesh, i.e. the Adis, Galo, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Hill Miri, and the Mising of Assam are collectively referred to as 'the Tani people or' the Tani group of communities'. Recent linguistic debates or studies of these communities confirm Tani's status as a major division within the Tibeto-Burman family. (See details in Tianshin Jackson Sun's *A Historical-Comparative Study of Tanis (Mirish) Branch in Tibeto-Burman (1993)*).

Mising social structure presents a complicated social sub-group division of the people. But the Mising social sub-groups witness a strikingly similar adaptation to the natural environment. Their cultural component shows a remarkable similarity in terms of ‘ecological adaptation and resource utilization’ and thus it expresses a common material culture and cultural identity.

Nevertheless, the fragmented and non-cohesive Mising social structure is a living reality to others. Therefore it is important to examine the ‘internal cultures’ and historical contingencies that led to the formation of a heterogeneous/non-cohesive social structure among the Mising. Further due to this heterogeneous social structure, the sense of solidarity among the Mising remains within the social sub-group level and is more obviously visible within the clan and the village level for a long period. Yet to enrich our understanding there is an urgent need to examine the intersections between ‘internal and external levels of analyses to understand the self-realisation of Mising collective consciousness. It can be argued that the rise of Mising as a distinct ethnic group involved a great deal of self-identification and redefinition of their status. Historically, the social awakening played an important role in the realization of Mising collective identity.

It is within this context the present work offers an ethnographic analysis of Mising ethnicity, cultural practice, and life ways as they settled in varied landscapes in the upper Brahmaputra valley.

The objectives of the Research are:

- To explore the interactive relationship of Mising with the environment to understand their ethnic identification.

- To find out how ecology has influenced the culture of the Mising?
- To study the Mising social structure in the context of the complicated social sub-group division.
- To look into the role of oral traditions, cosmology and cultural practices as a unifying factor of Mising collective identity.
- To examine the intricacies of Mising social movement and identity politics.

Review of literature:

In recent times, historiographical debates on the study of tribal communities became the main concern in the academic domain. The colonial and post-colonial Anthropologists have categorised these communities under the dichotomies of tribes, Adivasi, traditional, primitive, etc. The colonial anthropological construct of ‘tribe’ referred to communities that were assumed to be primitive and uncivilized and geographically, culturally, and economically separated from the mainstream.¹⁶ In the context of the North-east India it is found that the colonial and even the post-colonial anthropologist generally studied the ‘tribe’ of the region as a static whole through the enumeration of a culture where each tribe shows its own distinctive culture. However, the existing literature review shows that there has been a drastic shift in the understanding of culture and hence in the study of the cultural past and identity of ‘tribal ethnic group’ in north east India. For example, the eastern Himalayan region has been categorised as ‘culture area’; depicting the ‘complexes of cultural traits’ maintained by many communities. The regions show the diversity of social identities which may be the source of developing a new paradigm to study the ‘nature of culture’

¹⁶ Dasgupta, S, 2016, *Introduction: Reading the archive, reframing the ‘adivasi, histories*, IESR 53, 1, p. 2.

that exists amongst these societies and the social boundary of different Social group within historical context. This situation on the other hand opens up a new direction to examine the cultural practices of the ethnic groups in general by the issues related to the process of identity formation in particular in north east India. Hence, it can be assumed that the analysis of an ethnic group from a historical perspective could produce a significant aspect of cultural diversity and the aspect of 'diversity in human adaptation'. While a few studies of this kind have shown that addressing the issues related to social identities requires the use of 'multiple theoretical lenses.'

Above and all when it comes to addressing the issues of diversities of social identities in the north east India it's speak of 'ethnic phenomena'. Social anthropologists on the other hand have attempted to address how the history of this phenomenon can be best depicted. Citing Brumfiel's contention that ethnicity is not important only as the prehistory of modern groups it is an important structuring principle in many societies in the past, Geoff Emberling stated "ethnicity then, is a necessary precondition to adequate understanding of the past."

Frederik Barth on the other hand highlighted the conventional Anthropological understanding of the term ethnic to designate a population which:¹⁷

1. Is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. Shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms
3. Makes up a field of communication and interaction

¹⁷ Barth, F, 1996, *Introduction*, In F. Barth (ed.), 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference'. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, p. 10.

4. Has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

However, Fredrik Barth rejected these previously held views of ethnicity as he believes “such formulation prevents us from understanding the phenomenon of ethnic groups and their place in human society and culture... this also limits the range of factors that we use to explain cultural diversity: we are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecologic factors, through a history of adaptation by invention and selective.”¹⁸

On the other hand, there have been a drastic change in the understanding of culture as Sheila Greeve Davaney observes, “in contrast to earlier notion of culture as the deposit or accumulation of knowledge or meaning produced by elites, or as a body of beliefs and values shared by all members of group such as nations or religious community, culture now is viewed as the dynamic and contentious process by which meaning and with it power is produced, circulated and negotiated by all who reside within a particular cultural milieu.” Citing F Barth famous dictum “ethnic identity, more than anything else was a feature of the ‘social organisation of cultural difference, rather than a ‘nebulous expression of culture’ and that the boundaries of ethnic group organisation did not necessarily coincide with those of culture’”. Joy L.K. Pachuau’s *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* (2014) is another remarkable work on the issue pertinent to ethnicity. As she argued, ‘Ethnicity was increasingly seen and studied as ‘situational’ rather than primordial; it was considered fluid, rather than

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

bounded, as constructed, rather than objective.’¹⁹ She further elaborates that “the manner in which a group construed both itself, namely its self-ascription, and its relationship with other groups determined the boundaries, and this was to be the subject matter of ethnicity/identity studies. Besides she highlighted that most of the debates related to the issues of ethnic identity centre around “the supposed ancient origins of ethnic groups, as ‘perennialists’...which has often been essentialized as primordial” Therefore, she has attempted to address the tension between ethnicity’s allegedly ancient roots and modern manifestation in the form of whether ethnicity is primordial, innate and intrinsic.

Hence, it shows that the historiographical account of the ethnic tribes of Northeast India is varied and diverse in terms of its scope and orientation. Identifying the region as an ‘epistemological hotspot’ author like Jangkhomang Guite has observed that ‘this highland massif has evolved, over a period of time, an infinite number of frameworks and constraints...making access difficult to conventional historians. It has societies composed of disparate mass of population criss-crossing the rugged landscape, of small-scale communities of recurring chores, constant worries of godly and ungodly dims and raptures, beyond and within networks of social, economic, and human exchange, diversity within and without village communities...suggesting a miniscule world ‘out of time’.’²⁰ Hence, exploring the world view or the tribal universe of the region appears to be prerequisite to understand their cultural past and identity. This situation ineluctably draws theoretical attention to understand the relationship between humans and the environment in north east India. As such Manjil Hazarika observes, “North east India may be considered to be an archetypal region for understanding

¹⁹ Pachuau, Joy L.K, 2014, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 20.

²⁰ Guite, Jangkhomang, 2019, *Against State, against History*, Oxford University, New Delhi, p. xvi-xviii.

humans and their relationship to the environment in systemic context.”²¹ Accounting for this relationship is therefore, crucial and provides the most compelling reason to focus on ecological approach to know their subsistence and settlement patterns in the region where they live a distinctively pattern way of life and developed their cultural identity.

On the other hand, the study of these ethnic tribes is difficult due to the lack of written source materials and other historical records and perhaps these people had no writing system of their own.²² Most of them have discovered their identities ‘in the gaze of others’ where the constituted or making of the past by the others does not resonate their ‘locally specific logics of self-construction.’ But they have their histories in oral narratives. Besides, they have shared so many related cultural components. However, most of the ethnic groups in the region exhibit a remarkable diversity in several aspects of their cultural component. Nevertheless, intriguingly they shared striking similarities in terms of their ‘cultural practices, economy, subsistence patterns, and ecological adaptation’. Hence it has been observed that these shared cultural characteristics of the ethnic groups form an integral part in the understanding of the relationship of humans to their environment in the region.²³ It thus as Guite has observed... the mountains, the ecology, and the rugged landscape...can be an exciting

²¹ Hazarika, Manjil, 2017, *Prehistory and Archaeology of North East India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 20.

²² It is interesting to note that almost all the tribes of north-east India have the creative expression of ‘how they lost their alphabet’ in their oral tradition. According to the Mising version of the story as recorded by Taburam Taid, "the Mising succeeded in preserving the deer-skin, containing their alphabet, carefully for a long time, but they started having apprehension that the deer-skin might get damaged in some way... so in order to preserve it safely forever, they ate up." (see details in Taburam Taid’s *Mising Folk Tales*, 2013, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi)

²³ Hazarika, Manjil, 2017, op cit., p. 23.

site of surveillance into their worldview, attitude, mentality and even their physical attributes.²⁴

Within this context, the review of literature for the present dissertation is categorized into the following sections viz., works related to the theoretical understanding of ecology, culture and identity, and works on Mising cultural past and identity

Works related to the theoretical understanding

There is a massive scholarly curiosity to understand the relationships between humans and their habitats throughout the ages. Scholarly investigations of this relationship over the years have used a great variety of approaches to provide a theoretical understanding of the subject. In the western world, scientific theories regarding culture and environment are traced back to Greek scholars of the 4th century BC such as Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Polybius, and Ptolemy²⁵ who developed an explanatory view of culture and environment. A serious notion of ‘geographical determinism’ and the concept of cultural evolution had been developed in the 17th to 18th centuries. On the other hand, within the discipline of history, the idea of the impact of the Physical environment on civilization was first adopted by the Annales School of historians to describe the long-term developments that shape human history. With a new ‘methodological innovation’ in history writing, this new school of thought insisted on a ‘broadened and deepened history’ by rejecting the event-based narrative of

²⁴ Guite, Jangkhomang, 2019, op cit., p. xix.

²⁵ Freilich, Morris, Jan., 1967, *Ecology and Culture: Environmental Determinism and the Ecological Approach in Anthropology*, The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research, Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3316830>. Accessed date: 14.139.207.130 on Sun, 13 Jun 2021 07:01:58 UTC

history.²⁶ Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre insisted that history deals with every aspect of human life and hence historical account should be made on totalization of disciplines like anthropology, sociology, economy, psychology, geography, etc. that deal with human life. They termed this approach as interdisciplinary, where all social science and humanities would be united by ‘the same sacrosanct principle of writing honest, rigorous and conscientious narratives’.²⁷

The annals school of thought is still considered to be the most influential and unavoidable reference work on whose concept, ideas along with disciplines like Archaeology and Anthropology became the roots of the foundation of Environmental history as an academic field in the 1960s.²⁸ Rodrick Nas coined the term “Environmental History” in his article ‘American Environmental History’ to discuss the impact of past human societies on the environment. It can be noted that there is a marked difference between western consciousnesses’s towards the environment with that of the eastern world. Western societies tend to hold the view that humans are separate from the environment. This dominating view on the physical environment or nature tends to the conviction of separating themselves from nature and conquering it.²⁹

There were various ways of seeing for the environment in social theory as J.R.Mcneill writes, “Environmental history is many things to many people. My preferred description of the genre is the history of the mutual relations between

²⁶ Arthur Marwick, 1970, *The Nature of History*, The Macmillan press Ltd., p. 74.

²⁷ Diogo Paula Maria, 2020, *The Perfect pair: Bloch and Febvre and History of Science and Technology*, Journal of History and Science and Technology, vol.14. No. 2, p. 74.

²⁸ Dhanaraju, Vulli, 2016, *Introduction*, in Dhanaraju (eds), ‘Regional Environmental History : Issues and Concepts in the Indian Subcontinent’, AAKAR, New Delhi, p. 2.

²⁹ Sutton Q. Mark, Q. Anderson, 2014, *Introduction to Cultural Ecology*, Altamira Press, Third edition, p. 2.

humankind and the rest of the nature.”³⁰ In Short, Environmental History is defined as a kind of history about human interaction with the natural world or the interaction between culture and nature. However, the social scientist who tried to explore the nature-human interface had failed to realise the notion that as ‘the environment changed, and that human agency changed them in ways that in turn shaped human affairs.’³¹ Therefore, environmental historians plead for recognition that nature not only exists but also changes...it changes both of its own accord and an account of human action, and in so doing changes the context, in which human history unfolds.”³²

Besides, as far as the Human-environment relationship is concerned, as the critiques of environmental history have argued, to understand/explore the nature-human interface environmental historian adopts an interdisciplinary approach. And thus environmental historian emphasises adopting certain key concepts from disciplines like ecology, biology, economics, etc. to understand this interdisciplinary nature of environmental history. John Opie argues that environmental historian needs to combine an understanding of the methodology of the general historian with knowledge of modern scientific ecology.³³

It is therefore pertinent to discuss the history of thought on human interaction with their environment outside the academic discipline of History. The term Ecology first appeared in the writings of US naturalist Henry David back in 1858 and the concept received scientific treatment from German Biologist Ernest Haeckel in 1866.³⁴ Interestingly since then the concept took a dual development within civil society one as

³⁰ McNeill, J.R, 2003, *Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History*, History and Theory, Theme Issue 42, No.4, December, p. 6.

³¹ Ibid., p. 41.

³² Ibid., p. 42.

³³ Dhanaraju, Vulli, 2016, op cit., p.5

³⁴ Little Paul Elliott, 2007, *Political Ecology as ethnography: a theoretical and methodological guide*, Horiz. Anthropol, Vol.3, No.se Porto Alegre, p. 2.

the ecology social movement and the other as a scientific discipline within the academic world. However, during 1930s ‘human ecology’ was established to study human societies by applying the method of natural ecology.³⁵ Human ecology includes two major subdivisions as ecological anthropology (which deals with more human biological ecology) and environmental anthropology (deals with more ‘cultural’ or humanistic side of the field known as cultural ecology).³⁶

The term ecology is defined as the study of the relationship between organism and their environment.³⁷ On the other hand, human ecology is understood as the study of the relationship and interaction among humans, their biology, their culture, and their physical environment.”³⁸ While social scientist tends to include social phenomena as a part of the environment with which human cope. They tend to distinguish the relative influence of social and physical environmental factors in human behaviour and institutions.³⁹ In short, human ecologists study many aspects of culture and environment by addressing the question such as ‘how and why cultures do what they do to solve their subsistence problems, how groups of people understand their environment, and how they share their knowledge of the environment.’⁴⁰

However, there is no general agreement on the question, of what constitutes an ecological approach as R.F Ellen further held the view that “over a period of one – hundred years the man-environment problematic has been successively reformulated,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁶ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson, 2014, *Introduction to Cultural Ecology*, Altamira Press, Third edition, p. 3.

³⁷ Gold, Tim, 1992, *Culture and the Perception of the Environment*, in Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds), ‘Bush Base: Forest Farm Culture, Environment and Development’, Taylor & Francis e-Library 2002, p. 39.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁰ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. 2014, op cit., p. 3.

and old approaches have given way to new ones...as a result, a contemporary 'ecological approach' may refer to a particular version of system-analysis particularly the study of self-persisting systems, an interactionist model derived from the concept of ecosystem, casual hypotheses of cultural materialists type..."⁴¹

Likewise according to Jonathan Hughes, "the application of the term 'ecology' to humans takes it beyond the exclusive realm of biology since the relation between humans and the environment is importantly mediated by social and technological factors whose study is beyond the scope of that science...the terms 'ecological' and 'environmental' carry different association. The former tends to place more emphasised than the latter on the holistic or systemic aspect of the organism-environment relation."⁴²

Likewise, John W. Bennett maintained as he put "this word(ecology), now almost done to death by its attachment to the environmental movement of our own time, originated in biology, where it continues to connote the work done by the researcher on plants and animals living in the natural milieu...The ecological problems associated with the human species are very large in number and at this juncture, probable impossible to synthesis in a general theory or sub-discipline. He further holds the view that social scientists have a special problem in using the word ecology since social scientist tends to include social phenomena as part of the environment with which humans cope, their central problem becomes one of distinguishing the relative

⁴¹ Ellen, RF, 1979, *Introduction : Anthropology, the Environment and Ecological Systems* in Burhum P C, Ellen R F (eds) 'Social and Ecological System' , Academic Press, London, p. 1.

⁴² Hughes. Jonathan, 2000, *Ecology and Historical Materialism* Cambridge University Press, New York, p. 9.

influences or functions of social and physical environmental factors in human behaviour and institutions.”⁴³

Thus it appears that the relationship between humans and the environment is indeed complex and diverse across the disciplines. However, the most problematic or complex issue is the assumption that culture is crucial in the conceptualisation of the relationship between humans and their environment. Here a great deal of debate and controversy has been made in the quest for addressing the assumption that the relationship between humans and nature / physical environment is determined by culture. On the other hand, ‘the ubiquitous and multidimensional ‘definition/understanding of the concept of culture often creates some fundamental problems in the conceptualisation of social phenomena. As such within the field of cultural anthropology, there are some intense debates and uncertainties regarding the relevance of culture to the understanding of human ecology.

The relationship between the environment and human society was theoretically approached by the American Cultural Traditions in Anthropology starting only in the early twentieth century. As such, Franz Baos, guided by the influence of the German Diffusionist School put forward his theory of historical particularism, reviving the notion of history and physical contextualization of cultures from the early ideational view taken by classical evolutionists like E.B. Tylor. Since history must assume a physical context, the notion of an environment of the physical area and geographical location of culture was introduced in the cultural-historical approach of the Americans.

The first major theory regarding the interaction of culture and the environment of whose circulation has continued since the time of classical Greece is environmental

⁴³ Bennett W John 1976, *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation*, Pergamon Press, INC, p. 2.

determinism. According to this view, the environment shapes culture, which means not only that environmental factor determines cultural characteristics but also that environments act on culture. This theory, in its various forms, examines how cultures and cultural features originate, change, adapt, and function.⁴⁴ However, the method, assumptions, and general direction of this theory have been questions from within the discipline of anthropology as some anthropologists claimed ‘this approach fails when it is held the belief that the environment and the life within it are fixed and unchanging... this premise is now known to be false, as environments are constantly changing.’⁴⁵

Despite its pitfalls, this theory opened up the possibility of explaining all cultural features and cultural diversity through reference to environmental influences. The environmental factors theory continued to have an impact on the works of American anthropologists such as Boas, Wissler (1926), and Alfred Kroeber (1926), a direct student of Boas. They developed a new concept known as ‘environmental possibilism’. In possibilism, instead of treating the dynamic or creative influence of environmental factors, they shifted their attention and the environment was seen as a limiting or enabling factor rather than a determining factor.”⁴⁶ For instance, based on this theory, Strehlow (1965) argued that the relatively productive environment enabled the Aranda people of Australia to develop a more elaborate tradition of art, ritual, and mythology than their neighbours to the west, who lived in a harsher environment.⁴⁷ But this assumption, as K. Milton pointed out, ‘*failed to explain the detail of Aranda culture, the context of their myths and ritual, and the nature of their religious knowledge.*’⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Milton, Kay, 1996, *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, *Introduction to Cultural Ecology*, Altamira Press, Lanham, Second edition, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁷ Milton kay, 1996, op cit., p. 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

Likewise, Mark Q. Suttan and E.N. Anderson have observed that the concept of 'Possibilism' describes an interactive process between culture and the environment. The choices available in the environment may be limited by the capabilities of the culture or vice versa, and as the culture and environment evolve (change), the interplay also changes.⁴⁹ However, this approach, as Kay Milton says, suffers from a lack of analytical potential to account for cultural diversity... with more and more data available for comparison, the model weakens as similar traits are often found in diverse traits in a similar environment.'⁵⁰

Somewhat related to the theory of environmental determinism was the idea of cultural area hypotheses developed by Alfred Kroeber and Clark Wissler. They presumed that a contiguous spatial location would show similar cultural traits and attempted to systematise the theory by putting forward the notion of a centre and a periphery in cultural development. This concept helps anthropologists to compare cultures within generally similar environments and to determine the extent of influence from cultures outside the culture area, such as diffusion or migration. However, some scholars find that the concept has some weaknesses. They criticised the definition of a single area that contains considerable environmental and cultural diversity, the use of somewhat arbitrary defining criteria, and the assumption of a static cultural environment, which seemed too cumbersome and speculative to scholars.⁵¹ But the concept continues to be useful as unit of comparison or referential to geographic regions and culture traits.⁵²

The development of these theories on the interaction of humans and the environment gave rise to analytical potential methodology and a more convincing

⁴⁹ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, op cit., pp. 23-24.

⁵⁰ Milton kay,1996, op cit., p. 42.

⁵¹ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, op cit., p. 18.

⁵² Ibid., p.18.

theory on the subject. It is already noticed that the theory of environmental determinism appears to have silenced the question about “the origins of particular cultural features and patterns that characterised different areas. As a result, Julian Steward developed the methodology known as ‘cultural ecology’ in the quest for a more precise understanding of the relationship between cultures and their environments, as well as to explain the origins of specific cultural institutions.⁵³ As a matter of, by the mid-fifties, the field of ecological Anthropology showed some renewed interest in cultural evolution by scholars such as Leslie White, Marshal Shalin, and most notably Julian Steward. They attempted to develop a diachronic method, but only Steward developed what may be called a dialectical method or multilineal cultural evolution.⁵⁴ The theory is based on the assumptions that the evolution of a specific cultural feature occurred within their local environment and that a close examination of the relationship between specific cultural institutions and their local environment features will reveal how and why those institutions both originated and persisted.⁵⁵

According to J. Steward, all cultural institutions cannot be accorded the same ecological status. He offered the concept of a "cultural core" of those features "most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangement," which are directly linked to environmental factors.⁵⁶ In short, the ‘cultural core’, which includes social, political, and religious patterns, has to be established through empirical analysis. Thus, the methodology of Steward’s cultural ecology consists of three fundamental

⁵³ Milton kay, 1996, op cit., p. 43.

⁵⁴ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, op cit., p. 22.

⁵⁵ Steward, Julian, 1955, *The Concept and Method of Cultural Ecology* , in Haenn Nora and R. W. Richard (eds) ‘The Environment in Anthropology : A Reader in Ecology, Culture, and Sustainable Living’, New York University Press, Newyork and London, 2006 p. 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

procedures. These are as follows:⁵⁷ First, the interrelationship of exploitative or productive technology and the environment must be analysed. Second, the behaviour patterns involved in the exploitation of a particular area by means of a particular technology should be analysed. And third, the extent to which the behavioural patterns entailed in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of culture should be ascertained.

It is noteworthy that cultural ecology has made a significant mark in the conceptualisation of the relationship between culture and the environment. According to Kay Milton, "by identifying a core set of relevant environmental features, cultural ecology created the concept of an integrated system, effectively as an "ecosystem" within which cultural and environmental features interact."⁵⁸ Furthermore, Steward did not believe that the environment was the only factor influencing cultural change. For him, some cultural traits are determined to a great extent by purely cultural-historical factors by means of random innovation or diffusion. However, these are relegated as secondary features which are less closely connected to the environmentally determined core. This distinction between the 'culture core' and secondary features was one of the most problematic elements of the cultural ecology as stated by Milton. He further argued that 'Steward's methodological guidelines gave no criteria for deciding where the cultural core ended and the secondary cultural features began... contrary to the claims made for it at the time, cultural ecology provides no clear model for explaining how cultural features originate and persist. "⁵⁹ Likewise, Mark Q. Stattan and E.N. Anderson have argued that 'Steward was correct in recognising the difference between

⁵⁷ Julian Steward, 1955, op cit., pp.7-8

⁵⁸ Milton Kay, 1996, op cit., p. 44.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

the biological and cultural aspects of human ecology, but he was wrong to view humans as separate from the rest of the environment.⁶⁰

However, some anthropologists in the 1960's adopted a different approach in anthropology to address the issues of human beings and their environment. These anthropologists have denied or rather modified the theory that would describe the relationship between human beings and their environment as deterministic in either direction. Now, instead of either shaping or being shaped by environmental factors, humans are understood to interact with their environment in a mutually constitutive way.⁶¹ Within this broad approach, namely the ecosystem and the concept of direct perception, have important implication in cultural theory.

As such, it is argued that "the use of cultures and their parts" or cultural features, has been the principal unit of analysis and object of explanation in ecological anthropology.⁶² Steward tied or placed culture into the environment; while a new approach called "new ecology" tied or placed culture into the emerging science of system ecology, or ecosystem.⁶³ The ecosystem model was devised by Andrew Vayda and Roy Rappaport. They argued that human cultures were not unique but formed only one of the population units interacting to form food webs, biotic communities, and ecosystems.⁶⁴ "An ecosystem," according to Rappaport, is "the total of ecological populations and non-living substances bound together in material exchanges in a

⁶⁰ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, op cit., p. 26.

⁶¹ Milton Kay, 1996, op cit., p. 55.

⁶² Rappaport, A. Roy, 1979, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, University of Michigan, North Atlantic Books, p. 59.

⁶³ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. EN, 2010, op cit., p. 26.

⁶⁴ Milton kay, 1996, op cit., p. 26.

demarcated portion of the biosphere.⁶⁵ They pointed out that cultures do not engage in ecological relations; cultures may induce people to polish their fingernails, but food supplies do not limit them, disease does not debilitate them, nor do predators feed on them... These things happen to populations, which in turn prey upon and affect the survival opportunities of other populations. Thus, the human population, occupying ecological niches, became the principal unit of analysis, and cultural ecology gave way to a broader human ecology.⁶⁶

However, the ecosystem model was challenged by the "direct perception model" on the ground that it reduces the environment to a cultural construct, and it was held that the root of this difficulty is confusion between perception and interpretation.⁶⁷ According to Milton, "the broader and explicit aims of ecological anthropology are to explain the external relations of human societies, to address the relationship between culture and reality, which culture supposedly models or constructs."⁶⁸ Tim Ingold who developed the 'direct perception model' within the discipline of ecological anthropology writes 'persons endure through a continuous intercourse with their environment. To him "This intercourse is a life process...ecological anthropology must be centrally concern with the mutual constitution of persons and environment."⁶⁹ He further argued that the supposition that 'persons can neither know nor act upon their environment directly, but only indirectly through the medium of their cultural representation' rests upon the

⁶⁵ Rappaport, A. Roy, 1979, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, University of Michigan, North Atlantic Books, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Milton Kay, 1996, op cit., p. 57.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁹ Ingold, Tim, 1992, *Culture and the Perception of Environment* in Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin (eds), 'Bush base forest farm: Culture, environment and development', Routledge, London and New York, p. 40.

cognitivist account of perception...deep lie in the western dualist worldview'.⁷⁰ For him, it creates an impermeable barrier between the environment and people's perception of it. To him 'People do not need to construct reality in order to perceive it; rather, we perceive it directly, through our active involvement in it.'⁷¹ Likewise, we don't need to know the world in order to act in it, by making use of what our environment offers us its "affordances."⁷²

Considering Tim Ingold's stands in the issue as persuasive arguments, Milton, on the other hand, delve into another significant step in addressing 'how culture and its ecological role might be usefully conceptualised.'⁷³ It is noteworthy that Tim Ingold defines 'culture is a framework not for perceiving the world, but for interpreting it, to on self and others. We don't have to interpret things in order to perceive them, and much of what we perceive, we fail to interpret, i.e., our knowledge of them remains tacit.'⁷⁴

As such, by taking the above noted discussion further, we can review Kay Milton's important observation towards a theory of culture's role in human-environment relations. Indeed, she highlighted the importance of the implication of Ingold's definition of culture for a better understanding of human ecology and cultural theory. In accordance with Tim Ingold's understanding of culture, she agreed to the view that everything that exists in people's minds is constructed,... some of what we know, think, and feel about the world comes to us directly through our experience, in the form of discovered knowledge, but differed as she maintained 'insisting that these meaning, these perceptions are part of culture. Meaning vary between cultures because

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷² Ibid., p. 42.

⁷³ Milton kay, 1996, op cit., p. 62.

⁷⁴ Ingold. Tim,1992, op cit., p. 53.

those who hold them engage them with the world in different way they act differently within it.”⁷⁵

Hence Kay Milton recognised and clarified the role of culture in Human-environment relations. She argues that culture consists of perceptions as well as interpretation; it does not create a barrier between the real worlds, but rather situates us within the world. She suggested three key features in dealing with the definition of culture. First, culture exists in people’s minds and is expressed through what they say and do. Second, culture consists of perceptions and interpretations. These encompass the full range of emotions, assumptions, values, facts, ideas, norms, theories, and so on, through which people make sense of their experience. Third, culture is the mechanism through which human beings interact with their environment.”⁷⁶

Apart from the above noted discourse on the relationship between humans and the environment and the role of culture in it, there are so many other methods which are considered far more reflexive and inter-subjective as the methodologies of study change over the years. The relationship between humans and their physical environment has been extended to social. That is, “other people” are seen as a milieu which influences human behaviour and with which humans must cope; hence, the social environment must be given a weight equal to the physical in our ecological theory⁷⁷. As Anderson pointed out, “humans and their cultures are an integral part of the environment ... the shape and form of the environment is dependent on its history, a history that includes humans. Humans are self-aware, cooperative, technological and highly social. This

⁷⁵ Milton kay, 1996, op cit., p. 63.

⁷⁶ Ibid.,p. 66.

⁷⁷ Bennett W John 1976, op cit., p. 1.

unique combination does separate humans from other organisation, making their interaction with the environment complex and fascinating,”⁷⁸

As such, some important perspectives can be taken into consideration for looking at methods adopted for understanding what constitutes an ecological perspective and how it is conceptualised in relation to culture and society. The most ground-breaking work was ‘*Nature and Society*’ edited by P. Descola and G. Pallson. These authors aim to revisit the ecological anthropology on new theoretical terms. Apart from introducing new nature-society interfaces from a variety of theoretical and ethnographic perspectives, they criticised the western model of studying nature-culture dualism. As they write, ‘little attention was paid to how non-western cultures conceptualised their environment and their relation to it...’⁷⁹ P. Descola highlight that ‘the conception of nature are socially constructed... they vary according to cultural and historical determination.’⁸⁰ He therefore said that the dualist view of the universe should not be projected as a universal paradigm. As such, it is conceptualised that ‘Etymologically, the concept of the ‘environment’ refers to that which surrounds and therefore strictly speaking, an environment incorporates just about everything, except that which is surrounded...Rather, person and environment embrace an irreducible system, the person is part of the environment and likewise, the environment is part of the person.’⁸¹

P. Descola further highlighted the fact that ‘the ethnographic studies expand the realm of non-human organisms to include spirits, monster, artefacts, minerals or any

⁷⁸ Sutton Q. Mark Q. Anderson. N E, 2014, op cit., pp.1-2.

⁷⁹ Descola, P, Pallason, G, 1996, *Introduction*, in Descola. P. Pallason(eds) ‘Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspective,’ Routledge, London p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.18.

entity endowed with defining properties such as conscience, a soul, a capacity to communicate, morality, the ability to grow, a social conduct, a moral code etc.’⁸² Likewise, S. Howell has also strongly advocated the ethnographic approach to human-nature relationship.⁸³ As noted by Ben Campbell “...steps such as these taken by the possibilities for anthropological thinking about ecology into distinctly post-dualist terrains, and offer a set of innovative analytical resources for understanding different ontologies of human-environmental relations.”⁸⁴ ‘It is only since the 1980’s that a number of anthropologists have realised the social scientific advantages of going beyond the nature-culture divide, or of doing more than work with paradigm of cultural constructions of nature.’⁸⁵

Works on Mising Cultural Past and Identity

Many accounts of a large number of tribal communities, including the Mising were written based on both secondary accounts and first-hand experience by the British administrators. The accounts of British officials such as L.A. Waddle, E.T. Dalton, William Robinsons, N. Needham, and E.A. Gait contain some important information of the Mising in colonial period. Among them, mention may be made of L.A. Waddle’s, *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*, (reprint, 1975) where he found that the Mising did not intermarry with their namesakes of the hills which can be used to examine clan exogamy of the Mising. . He observed in his book that the Mising were in a transitional stage from maternal to paternal society. William Robinson too observed some features of the Misings society in his “Descriptive Account of Assam” (reprint, 1975).

⁸² Ibid., p. 82.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 126.

⁸⁴ Cambell Ben, 2013, *Living Between Juniper and Palm: Nature, Culture and Power in the Himalayas*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

However, an historical study of pre-literate societies requires the study of oral traditions. Within the discipline of history, there has emerged a new perspective on reconstructing historical phenomena. Hence, modern historians have begun to give emphasis to oral tradition and oral history to make up for the social history that went unrecorded. Paul Thompson (*The Voice of the Past: Oral History, 2003*) claims that, “oral history . . . can be used to change the focus of history itself and open up new areas of inquiry... Oral history is as old as history itself. . . It was the first kind of history.’ Donald A. Ritchie defines oral history as "Memory is the core of oral history, from which meaning can be extracted and preserved" in his "Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide" (2003). Simply put, oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews.” Jan Vansina stated in his 1961 book "Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology" that "Oral Traditions are historical sources of a special nature." Their special nature derives from the fact that they are unwritten sources couched in a form suitable for oral transmission, and their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings.... Oral tradition consists of all verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past. This definition implies that nothing but oral traditions -that is to say, statements either spoken - or sung-enter into consideration.” Similarly, Karen Armstrong in his work, *A Short history of Myth* provides some fascinating insights into the understanding of Human as ‘meaning-making’ and ‘myth-making’ creatures.⁸⁶ Here the author addresses the titular question ‘what is a myth’ in the first chapter of the book. She further argues that ...a myth /Mythology is not out of this world, but about enabling us to live more intensely within it...usually inseparable from ritual...is about the unknown...speaks of another plane that exists alongside our own world...a myth was an

⁸⁶ Armstrong, Karen, 2005, *A Short History of Myth*, Canongate, Edinburgh, pp. 3-10.

event which also happened all the time...and therefore is true because it is effective not because it gives us factual information.⁸⁷

While the *Mising* oral tradition as an historical source consisted of various kinds of narratives, songs, rhymes, proverbs, and other popular creative expressions, which are considered to be highly rich in terms of both quantity and quality.⁸⁸ As regards the books on oral traditions mention may be made of Taburam Taid's, *Mising Folk Tales*, (2013). The book contains details about the Mising folklore of various natures and themes. Nahendra Padun's *Mising Ni:tom : Mibu Aa:bang* (2005) and recently the book *Abotani Upakhyan* (2021) is regarded as the sole authority on the study of *Mibu Aa:bang* or on the priest lore of the Mising. The book also contains the creation myth of the Adi-Mising, which is preserved through the institution of *Mibu Aa:bang*. Similarly, mention may be made of Obang Tayeng's *Folk Tales Of The Adis*(2003); Verrier Elwin's *A New Book of Tribal Fiction* (reprint 1991). Both these books have provided remarkable stories that prevailed among the Adis and other ethnic groups such as Sherdupens, Ashings, Shimongs, Ramo-Pailibos, Khambas etc. of Arunachal Pradesh. These stories more or less strikingly speak of a common theme with those of the Misings, who, on the other hand, have shared common cultural ties at least with some (Adis) of these ethnic groups.

However, it is the study of the Adi society of Arunachal Pradesh (the cognitive tribe of Mising) that can give a better perspective towards the understanding of the social history of the Misings. Sachin Roy's *Aspect of Padam Minyong Culture* (1960)

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-10.

⁸⁸ B. Datta, T. R Taid, 1992, *Folksongs of the Misings*, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, p. 1.

is considered the pioneering book on the Adis.⁸⁹ The book deals with the cultural life of the Adis in details. Some major works on the history of the Adi society are Tai Nyori's *History and Culture of the Adis (1993)*, J. Nath's, *Cultural Heritage of Tribal Societies vol-1(Adis)*. Both these books are descriptive and comprehensive in nature. N. Lego's book "*History of the Mishings of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam*" also deserves to be mentioned here. One important point to consider when considering this book is that the data for this book was gathered from people living in Arunachal Pradesh, which would help to explore the Mising community's perception in the memory of the Adis. It also deals with the tradition of clan migration to the Brahmaputra valley.

While speaking of the Mising's engagement with history writing, it can be traced to one individual named Sonaram Panyan Kotoki. His keen interest and questions about the Mising's past eventually drove him to embark on "the painful journey" to collect oral data, as he put it. His collection of oral data eventually led to the compilation of a book which was originally scripted into Assamese by one Upendra Thakur. The book under reference, titled as *Miri Jatir Buranji* was thus published in 1935. Hence, S. Kotoki became the first person amongst the Mising to write about the community's speculations on their origin and past. Soon after this work, there were other important contributions. As such, Nomal Pegu, a physician by profession, deserves a special mention here. It was he who brought out the first book published in English on Mising history in 1956 as *The Miris or the Mishings of the Brahmaputra Valley* (first published 1981, revised edition 2005, second edition 2011). It deals with the issues on the origin, migration, and cultural life of the people and the identity formation of the Mising. Other major works on the history and culture of Mising society

⁸⁹ Roy, Sachin, 1960, *Aspect of Padam Minyong Culture*, North East Frontier Agency, Shillong, p. 255.

include J. J. Kuli's *The Misings: Their History and Culture* (1998) and Bhrigumuni Kagyung's *Mising Sanskritir Alekhya* (1970). It's a collection of critical essays on various aspects of the Misings including the social structure.

On the other hand, Jatin Mipun's *The Mising of Assam* (1998) provides a thorough examination of the socio-cultural transition of the Misings of Assam. The author has highlighted the process of acculturation that the Mising experienced after their migration to the Brahmaputra Valley. But the author seems to overlook the change and mutation that some clan groups had experienced in their transitional phase. Moreover, mention may be made of: L. Pegu and Dutta's, *Different Groups of the Misings and Their Origin: A Historical Analyses* (2001). The article deals with the settlement pattern of the different groups of the Misings and their origin, but without questioning the inclusion of clans into different groups. *Miri or Mising: A Historical Analysis* (2000), on the other hand, is a detailed examination of the most contentious issues concerning the origins of the words Miri and Mising by the same scholars.

Similarly, Bali Narayan Phukan's, *The Mising, their Origin, Migration and Relationship with the Mipang- An analysis* is another article that deals with the origin of the tribe with some emphasis on its relationship with Mipang or non-Mising in a historical context. Besides, as regards to the history of the Misings in the medieval period, Durgeswar Doley's, *The Miri-Mishmi as described in Persian Chronicles* in *Pro Mising Action Vol-5 – June 2008-* describes the political, social, and economic condition of the tribe in the 16th century A.D.

Furthermore, on the part of the transitional phase of the Misings community, a large number of books have been written by many scholars. Among them, Damudhar Nath, in his, *The Mising Society in Transition* (1998) highlights how the Mising

Community of Assam got influenced by other cultures in their day-to-day life after their migrations to the Plains of Assam. Indraneel Pegu, in his work titled *Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Misings of Assam (2013)* has discussed the traditional religious practices, ceremonies of the tribe and the transition of their religious views in detail. *Ekuti Nibandha* by Taburam Taid is an effort at a critical analysis of the religious practices of the Misings especially the *DOINYI POLO* religion, and refers to the confession of the people to Vaishnavism. Taburam Taid in his *Glimpses(2007)* demonstrates the composite culture of North-East India along with some focus on the Barak Valley. He did a comprehensive study on different ethnic community of Assam with special emphasis on their cultural aspect. Peter Pegu's recent book, *Economic History of the Miris (2019)* is another significant work on the community from economic perspectives. He highlighted in details the interactive relationship of people and nature at large which shaped a distinct Mising social structure.

The literature review reveals that most of the available works have shown changes among the Mising in terms of their religious outlook, dress, food habits etc., without integrating factors such as modern socio-political setup and ecology. Most of them have completely ignored or maintained silence on the issues of Mising ethnicity and the history of its shared consciousness of a collective identity. Furthermore, works on Mising cultural practises can be re-evaluated in terms of how the same group of people have experienced different cultural practices over time. This is the gap that this research would focus on.

Emerging Aspect of Investigation and its implication:

An overview of Origin and Migration of the Tanis

It is evident that there are many summaries of existing opinions-short and-long and these keep getting repeated without too much attempt at considering other alternate perspectives. The uncertainty regarding the origin and migration of the Tani people still remains a subject of speculation. Belonging to the Tibeto-Burma language family, it clearly suggests the origins of these people lie either north of the Himalayas or east, beyond the Patkai Hills, which separate Arunachal from Burma. Hence, there have been dividing views on the debates on ‘origins and migrations’ among the scholars. Indeed, by the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly with research scholars like Sachin Roy (1960), Tarun Bhattacharjee (1965, 1975), and other linguists like Sten Konow (1992), Gerison (1990), Sun (1990), G. Dreim (2001), Post (2012), Stuart Blackburn (2013), Toni Huber(2012), and Yankee Modi (2012), who added some serious consideration on the Tani people's origin and migration while clearly establishing their language as a discrete group within Tibeto-Burman group. These insights, on the other hand, have brought a new and sharper focus on the issues under reference. As early as 1902, in his *Notes on the languages spoken between the Assam Valley and Tibet* Sten Konow summaries his findings as follow ⁹⁰

‘The tribes in question were gradually driven into present homes from a locality where the different branches of the Tibeto-Burman family were in mutual contact. This point to the country about the headwaters of Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers as the locality

⁹⁰It is notable that Konow's work is considered to be the first modern study on the Tibeto-Burman language. (See details in Konow. S, 1902, *Notes on the Languages spoken between the Assam Valley and Tibet*, Oxford University Press, p.136. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25208376>, Accessed: 04-12-2017 10:02 UTC

from which the North Assam tribes crossed the Brahmaputra and wandered westward to their present habitat....The mountainous region which in their home may be considered as a backwater that was gradually filled up from the great Tibeto-Burman current which, in the course of time, split up and followed into Tibet and further India.’

Contemplating the above noted reasoning Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* states that the Language of Central Arunachal or Tani Language showed evidence of “various waves of Tibeto-Burman migrations.”⁹¹ Linguists such as Van Driem added another speculation on the possible homeland of the Tani people. He identifies Sichuan (and possibly Yunnan) as its “geographical centre of gravity”. Indeed, Driem added further weight to the assumption that speakers of the language of central Arunachal left that homeland sometime before the seventh millennium BC and spread along the Brahmaputra Valley and into the surrounding hills.⁹²

It is noteworthy that linguists such as Stuart Blackburn have termed the above noted arguments as the “Burma/China hypothesis”, whereas he finally identified that “irrespective of the ultimate origin of the people of Arunachal Pradesh /Tani, most historians have argued that they did once live in the riverine corridor and then moved west, crossed the Patkai hills, entered the Brahmaputra Valley, and then moved into the hills, north of the rivers...in its most broad outlines, the Burma/China hypothesis is supported by most scholars of Arunachal.”⁹³

On the other hand, the second hypothesis (Tibetan hypothesis) argues that the homeland of the Tani people lies in the north. As a matter of fact, most of the authors

⁹¹Stuart Blackburn, Toni Huber(ed) *Origin and Migration in the Extended Himalayas*, Brill, Leiden & Boston, 2012, p. 7

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.8

⁹³ Blackburn, Stuart, 2003/4, *Memories of migration: notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India*, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, p. 40.

based their speculation on the oral tradition of the communities under reference. These authors rejected the Burma/China hypothesis by advocating that “the present inhabitants of central Arunachal crossed not the Patkai Hills, but the Himalayas and have made some arguments that “most migration occurred at points where two rivers (The Upper Subansiri river in the Tsari region and the upper Siang(Tsangpo) cut through the Himalayas into Arunachal Pradesh.”

However, it was Sachin Roy's monumental work *Aspect of Padam-Minyong Culture* that sparked a race among scholars to understand the Tani people's cultural past. Indeed, his explanation of the Adi culture has been the source of considerable debate and dispute, especially regarding the migration of the Adis and other allied tribes of the Tani people. Sachin Roy, who was trained in Anthropology at Calcutta University, knew the importance and limitations of oral data and started his research by collecting oral sources. However, he was unable to fully agree with migration legends, which formulated the idea that 'the Tribes of central Arunachal Pradesh migrated from a region south of the Himalayas. As matter of fact, S. Roy's explanations built on the hypothesis of comparative material culture, religion, and art are seen in the following discourse –

“The pattern in general corresponds to what obtain among the Mongoloids of the south eastern Asia. It is characterised on the material side by abundant use of bamboo and cane...on the social side independent villages, corporate life... these features link the people with the cognate groups in the south rather than in the north... a closer scrutiny will reveal that a culture-shed line runs a few miles south of the Himalayas...north and west of this line extends what may be called the area of Tibetan pattern... that the Two culture on either side of this line are different is so self-evident that it requires no proof to established it. They differ in almost all traits and

features...Adi culture thus in distinct aloofness from Tibetan Culture ...in all the features in which it differs from the Tibetan, it resembles from the “trans-Brahmaputra hill people.”⁹⁴

Sachin Roy’s arguments on the origin and migration have been challenged subsequently by authors such as T. Niyori, J. Nath, etc. Niyori whose hypothesis was based on oral histories, have completely rejected Roy’s views that a lack of Tibetan cultural traits among central Arunachal tribes rules out a Tibetan origin as illogical. He argues that the similarities between Adi and Southeast Asian cultures can be explained by the fact that migrants assimilate the material culture of their new locations."

It should be noted that the above-given accounts indicate simply the kinds of arguments formulated by various scholars so far, and hence there was no complete consensus among scholars. However, more recent arguments from linguists such as Sun, Mark W. Post, Yankee Modi, Blackburn, and Toni Huber regarding the question of the formation of linguistic areas, diffusion of linguistic features, language contact, and subsequently the study of individual ethnic groups/communities of the Tani, the nature of their recent movement of people belonging to the Tani community altogether suggest a newer and sharper focus on the cultural past of the people.

Tianshin Jackson Sun, in his *A Historical-Comparative Study of the Tani (Mirish) Branch in Tibeto-Burman* (1993), has explored various linguistic questions. First of all, he formalised the new term ‘Tani’ to refer to the tribes of central Arunachal Pradesh(AP) and the Mising of the Brahmaputra Valley. Secondly, his study found Tani to be ‘roughly equidistant from Tibetan, Burmese, and Garo in terms of basic

⁹⁴ Roy, Sachin, 1960, op cit., pp. 254-259.

vocabulary, which confirms the status of Tani as a major division in the Tibeto-Burman family'.s

He further asserts that “the Tani speakers represents relatively recent waves of Tibeto-Burman migration to AP and all the way to the Brahmaputra plain... the striking linguistic similarity of Tani tribes distributed over an extensive territory, the distinct racial types among the present day Tani speakers... and enclaves of non-Tani languages... demonstrate the remarkable expansion of the ancestral Tani languages to areas originally occupied by other linguistic groups...”⁹⁵

On the other hand, following the explanation of Sun, Mark W. Post in his "The Language, Culture, Environment, and Origins of Proto-Tani Speakers" has made an attempt to reconstruct the pre-historical roots of the Tani people from a linguistic perspective. Post basically accepted the concept of Sun's formulation of "relatedness" or "ancestry" of Tani languages and stated that "they share at least one common ancestor which can be systematically reconstructed to some extent... this ancestral language whose historical name is unknown to us, then referred to as "Proto-Tani." He added further weight to this formulation by stating that "the Tani languages in fact largely form what is sometimes called a "dialect chain" in which nearly every population is able to converse with its neighbor... but genetic relatedness is not the only dimension we need to consider when attempting to characterise the distribution and history of Tani languages. We also need to consider contact and areal diffusion. Hence, Post conveniently summarises the conclusion of this research... “There existed at least one pre-historical population who spoke a language of primarily Tibeto-Burman ancestry, from which the modern Tani languages primarily descend: “Proto-Tani”. This language,

⁹⁵ Sun, J.T, 1993, *A Historical- comparative Study of the Tani(Mirish) Branch of the Tibeto-Burman*, PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, pp.11-12.

or a near ancestor, was probably spoken by a hill tribal population or populations not very different from most Tani of today, in an environment not very different from modern-day central AP. At some point in the history of this language...that Proto-Tani... may be used as a lingua franca, potentially in the Subansiri and/or Siang river Valleys. Subsequent to this period...several populations' splits, beginning with a single split (resulting in two well-defined "Western" and "Eastern" branch...).Despite these splits... intra-Tani population contacts remained constant in most cases, leading to a broad overall cultural-linguistic equilibrium which has endured more or less up to and including the present day."⁹⁶

Similarly, Yankee Modi, in his *Towards an Understanding of Language Distribution in the Tani Area: Social Organization, Expansion, and Migration*, on the other hand, derive a slightly different perspective to address the question of the "creoloid structure' of the *Tani* languages. He argues that the question of the creoloid structure of the *Tani* language, as proposed by McWhorter and Delancey in terms of state formation and the spread of dominant lingua francas, cannot be applied in the area but through the social organisation of Tani groups... the segmentary lineage system, marriage practice, and agricultural system of Tani speakers conspired to create conditions that enabled... the Tani language to spread, simplify, diversity, and converse. " Hence, he derives his conclusion that" a range of factors may have conspired to give rise to the types of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity... on the other hand, to repeatedly

⁹⁶ Post, M.W, 2012, *The Language, Culture, Environment and Origins of Proto-Tani speakers: what is knowable and what is not (yet)* in Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn Eds., *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalaya*, Leidan, Brill, p.182.

produce ethno-linguistically heterogeneous communities in the Tani area who were then motivated to homogenise their speech via compromise and simplification."⁹⁷

Toni Huber, in his paper, *Micro-migrations of hill peoples in northern Arunachal Pradesh: Rethinking Methodologies and claims of origin in Tibet* added another possible explanation for some of these phenomena, namely the nature/process of origin and movement with a new methodology in the region of Far eastern Himalaya. The paper presents a complete contrast with the previously held views on the notion of origin and migration by rejecting it as a mere “speculative readings of an older generation of largely superceded scholarship on the early history of Tibet, the Tibetan Bon Religion, and so on.”⁹⁸ Case studies of certain northern Subansiri hill people along the frontier such as Mra, Na, Bokar as he stated “demonstrates the value of a different and more sophisticated method of documenting and understanding origins and migrations in the region”⁹⁹. Huber argues for the careful consideration of the very nature of ‘push and pull’ factors in explaining the migration process in the region. He proposed that the movement of people in the region should be examined as “micro-migration” since the pattern of the population generally: small numbers of individual or smaller size groups moving relatively short distance...such micro-migration are not only simple or unidirectional: some moves can be temporary, with return back to the original sites...”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Modi, Yanke, 2015, *Towards an Understanding of language distribution in the Tani Area: Social organisation, expansion and Migration*, In M.W. Post, Stephen Morey and Scott Delancy (eds). “Language and Culture in North East India and Beyond: In honour of Robbins Burling, Canberra, Asia Pacific Linguistic, pp. 246-262.

⁹⁸ Huber, T, 2012, *Micro-migration of hill peoples in northern Arunachal Pradesh: Rethinking methodologies and claims of origin in Tibet*, In Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn, eds. *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalaya*, Leiden, Brill, p. 99.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.98.

In his important paper, *Memories of migration: Notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India*, Stuart Blackburn has provided a comprehensive review of the most of the literature on the origin and migration in the region. His study of material objects such as Tibetan beads and necklace among the tribes of the region appropriately point out the underlying cause of significance and choice is as he stated “to shape the perceptions of the past as well as construct current identities.”¹⁰¹

Here, we have quoted at length some of the linguistic arguments and more recent arguments to illustrate the varied and complicated history of these discourses and, most importantly, to show how these arguments stand in relation to those of the Adi-Mising construction of their past. The reviews and discussions make it clear that there is a varied and long tradition of explicitly or implicitly explaining and answering the issues concerning the origin and migrations of the Tanis in the region. In spite of the dividing line, at least there is a tacit agreement on the Burma/China hypothesis of migration. Secondly, it shows the increasing complexity in the discourse of population movement and hence its origin theory. Most importantly, there may not be a common ground or agreement in many respects (with the native writer’s speculation), but these emerging aspects of investigation continually endeavour to seek new methods, refine the old notions/ideas, and indeed, explore the previously unknown data. As such, the debate on origin and identities can be investigated through other perspectives, potentially the historical linguistic. There is a need for a comparative study of material culture to address the issues of ethnic identity. Likewise, a comparative study of ritual practice, other practices, etc. Moreover, as is evident from the foregoing discussion there is a huge gap between fully correlating the linguistic evidence with the study of material culture in the analysis of the origin and migration of the region.

¹⁰¹ Blackburn, S, 2003/4, op cit., p. 40.

The research Questions:

- (i) How have ecological settings influenced cultural formation among the Mising?
- (ii) Why are there linguistic variations among the same group of people?
- (iii) How does an ethnic group like the Mising negotiate with their own cultural differences?
- (iv) What is the impact of identity politics on the culture of the Mising?

Time-Frame of the Research:

A time frame or period is the foundation to any work on history. However, the study of pre-literate societies or ethnic group from a historical perspective has its own challenges. Just as locating myths in historical timeline is difficult, so is the movement or migration of ethnic group, distribution, settlement pattern, acculturation and assimilation, which are the common parameters of ethnicity studies. Therefore, historians need to incorporate all these phenomena by going beyond a time-frame to retrospect with process and change that the ethnic groups underwent. As such, the time-frame for the present thesis is taken from the pre-migration period to the passage of the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 by Assam Legislative Assembly with its headquarters at Gogamukh, Dhemaji, Assam, the latter being as a result of the long-drawn-out Mising identity movement.

Methodology:

The conceptual and theoretical framework of this work falls within the ambit of ecological approach and ethnicity studies. This study treats ‘the role of history’ or the ‘instrumentality of history’ to address the issues of collective identity and to study the

distinctively patterned way of life among the Mising. Therefore, both primary and secondary sources are supplemented by ethnographic data. The primary sources include official documents of archival record, Census Reports, and recorded interviews. Similarly, the secondary sources of information are mainly collected from published books, dissertations, journals, research papers, and articles published on authentic internet websites.

One important conceptual issue that concerns this work is the ethnographic approach to human-nature relationship in the context of Mising. It has been conceptualised that 'environmental factors are active participants' or active agents of change rather than a mere setting for history.' So, there is an underlying significance to consider how a society perceive and defined their identity in relation to their environment. Oral sources and literature are supplemented with anthropological and sociological understanding of culture and identity. The approach here taken is eclectic as it uses both inductive and deductive logic as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses. It is already stated that an historical analysis of Mising cultural past and identity requires extending to the other ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh, especially with the Adis. As such, it took me to conduct my first fieldwork in *Kelek Mirbuk village of Pasighat*, situated in neighbouring states, in the years 29-01-2016 and 30-01-2016, which gave me some interesting insights into the understanding of Adi-Mising Identity. Hence, at the beginning of the fieldwork, my immediate instinct was to interview the senior academic personalities of the Adis, such as Osong Ering (the first graduate from the state), and another important personality, Arak Megu (Bhasa Samman award conferred on Megu by Sahitya Akademi, 2012-13-14). From them, I tried to find out the "Adi perception of their allied Mising" whereas still the seniors of the latter consider the

Mising as 'Clan Brother' along with the question of shared tradition of history and migration.

On the other hand, within Assam, the area of study was primarily base on Majuli, the largest river island of the Brahmaputra River, as Mising are the predominant tribe on the island. Majuli, the River Island of the Mighty Brahmaputra lies between 26°- 45' and 27°- 15' north latitudes and 93° -39' and 94° -35' east longitudes.¹⁰² It is located at 85 meters above the sea level and is at a distance of about 40 kilometers from Jorhat town.¹⁰³ It is believed that Majuli emerged as the largest riverine island as result of the southward migration of the Brahmaputra in the first half of the 18th century A.D.¹⁰⁴ The river island is divided into two administrative Blocks i.e. *Ujani* or Upper Majuli Development Block (Number of *Gaon Panchayat* is 8) and *Namoni* or Lower Majuli Development Block (Number of *Gaon Panchayat* is 12). According to 2011 Census, the total population of the Island is 1, 67,304, out of which the Mising population is 61, 902(43 per cent). The social composition of the total population comprised the Gossain, Kalitas, Ahoms, Deuori, Sonowal Kachari and Keots. Majuli is still far lagging behind in transport and communication as compared to other parts of the state. Waterway is the only means of transportation and communication with the outside world. As far as the road connectivity in the interior of the Island is concerned it is not all-weathered. The nature of flood situation (2-3 times in a year) on the other hand, disrupts the communication from one village to another. This study conducted field survey at Ratanpur Miri Gaon Panchayat in Upper Majuli Development Block which is dominated by social sub group viz., Pagro-Mising villages such as Ratanpur Kuli gaon, Maj Ratanpur, Ujani Ratanpur, Gajera Gaon, Gudang Gaon and Chandi

¹⁰² A.K. Bhagabati, B.K. Kar, A.K. Bora,(2001) *Geography of Assam*, Rajesh Publications, New Delhi, p.23.

¹⁰³ D. Nath, 2009 *The Majuli Island*, New Delhi p.5

¹⁰⁴ A.K Bhagabati, B.K. Kar, A.K. Bora, op cit., p. 23

Gaon. These villages are concentrated along the course Kherkotia suti or Stream. Dividing into 10 wards (division of population for the purpose of election) it has a total population 8,091 of souls of which around 6000 are the Pagro-Mising. The people of these villages under study are mostly peasants whereas only 5% of the total populations have engaged in government services (most of them are teachers). On the south part of these villages, the regular havoc created by the mighty Brahmaputra has increasingly worsened the economic condition of the people. On the other side due to the high growth rate (50%) of population from 2900 (2001) to 6000 in 2011 and the lack of employment opportunities a large number of people of young age has increasingly migrated to the urban areas like Sibsagar and Jorhat town and even outside of the state. These people are engaged in urban centre as labourer in building activities, as rickshaw puller etc. Thus, in short the people of the villages under study are exclusively rural people who still beliefs in superstition of witchcraft practices.

Moreover, other Mising settlements in diverse cultural landscapes in the Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Golaghat and Sibsagar districts are explored in this work. Many Mising villages in the district of Golaghat such as Upor Tamar Gaon, Santipur Miri, Bali, Aamdang Gaon, Dokochi, Soguri and Borghuri have been visited in the second half of the year 2016. These villages are concentrated along the course of the river Galabeel, Doiyang. Among these villages Upor Tamar and Santipur Miri Village are inhabited by the non-speaking Mising social sub-group such as Samuguria, whereas it has been reported that the Santipur Miri Village was formed in the 1950's by the people who migrated from Upor Tamar, Ranga Nadi Gaon. During my visit, I have observed that within this group there has been a considerable difference in the area of religious affiliation. The people of Santipur have completely adopted a new religious practise

known as "Sankari Sang Dharma" whereas there has been an issue/conflict of celebrating *Ali-ayi-Ligang*. However, my interviews show that the identity of being Mising is still extremely important to the people of both these villages.

Being a member of this community, the researcher has some advantage in understanding the complexities of the issue with the help of those experiences that are shared with other members of this community. The view point, therefore, is of an "insider", an inquirer who is familiar with the worldview and has knowledge of the language of the society being studied. To address the question of objectivity, the 'outsiders' positions have also been considered in the present work. Moreover, the study has been guided by comparative method whose uses become more pertaining to the pre-literate society where there is a dearth of available sources. As such, comparative analyses have been used to explore the whole question of the diverse and heterogeneous nature of Mising cultural practices.

Organisation of the Study:

Following the above noted research questions and themes the thesis is organised into five chapters

Chapter I, *Introduction* gives a brief outline of the research. Apart from tracing the statements of the problem it covers the objectives of the study, review of related literature, an overview of Origin and Migration of the Tanis, and methodology as well as organisation of the chapters.

Chapter II, *Ecology, Myth and History*, provides indigenous (local) ideas of nature-human relations. Using this theoretical framework, it explores Mising's worldview or cosmology and how this worldview has been fashioned by its distinct ecological setting.

Chapter III, *Cultural Heterogeneity and Unity among the Mising*, deals with the complicated Mising social structure in the context of cultural heterogeneity and unity among the Mising. Here, the cultural patterns of Mising is seen as a product of historical contingencies but also as results of the successive waves of migration and due to its nature of interaction with ecological setup.

Chapter IV, *Social Movement and Identity Politics* examines the aspects of Mising social movement and other ethno-national movements in the realisation of collective identity. The underlying emphasis in this chapter is also to trace the role of ethno-national organizations such as Mising Bane Kebang,(MBK) Takam Msing Porin Kebang(TMPK), Mising Dirbi Kebang (MDK) in the process of gradual self-realisation of Mising collective identity.

Chapter V, *Conclusion*, summarises the analysis of the previous chapter of the thesis. Within an elaborate concept of *Ecology, Culture and Identity* it attempts to explore the whole questions of dynamic Mising ethnicity and the structure of attitudes that sustained with their basic tenets and identity.