

## CHAPTER III

### CULTURAL HETEROGENEITY AND UNITY AMONG THE MISING

#### **Migration, changing settlement pattern and Identity**

The pre-migration Mising status merely speaks of a structural base of society as the present situation shows it. Indeed the lack of a hierarchical or structural base of society shows the need to reconsider the issues related to identity formation amongst the various social sub-groups. While others may think of Mising as a simple society but the Mising social structure shows sort of complicated social stratifications. The social structure of the Mising has enough potential to explore their existence as an ethnic group. Though the Mising is considered to be a homogeneous category, in fact, it is not. In short, in the first place, the existence of clans in the Mising society is one of the most outstanding societal components. The clan system of the Mising has experienced or witnessed several permutations whether in terms of its segmentation at various levels and thus it speaks of different kinds of social interactions in a different social context. Moreover, apart from the practice of clan exogamy, the picture is consistent with the history of the nature of ‘sociability of clans’ which is seen in the features of historic clan alliances or groupings. Each individual has their own clan identity to enter the member affiliations of the community. Moreover, 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. Hence, there are heterogeneities within this group of people fashioned by different historical circumstances. It is worth noting that except for its historical tradition of origin these divisions of the Mising into several groups today seem to have minimal significance. Nevertheless, historically the existence of the named group is a living reality to others in different periods. Therefore, it appears that to understand the nature and to define the

traditional Mising social sub-group identity, there is a need to question how and on what basis these named identities were being 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 resembles to understand whether this had any effect on the formation of a homogenous identity.

Hence, the Mising social structure presents a complicated social stratification. In short, the Mising have multiple or layered identities whether in terms of group affiliation or clan identities and here I seek to establish how and why this is so because they now formed as a single ethnic group. Indeed, the collective consciousness of the Misings propagates a shared history of migration and experiences in the valley. Examining the history of this collective consciousness to understand the processes, as well as the rationale, behind the consciousness in the past enables us to see why the Mising are not Mising only but the conglomeration of diverse social sub-groups. We, therefore, seek to explore in this chapter what being a member of a sub-group means or implies, and how this has come to be. Secondly, the chapter will also try to trace the ethnographic context of the history of the emergence of these named social sub-groups among the Mising. Towards this end, the analysis will be made of the Mising understanding/ local traditional views on group formation to understand how this group formation/ identities 'becomes' and makes who they are.

On the other hand, the analysis of cultural change among the Mising is still largely embedded in acculturation theory. Many works have been done on the issues of acculturation or assimilation of the Mising. However, most of these works have not adequately addressed a range of issues like clan mutation, the degrees to which the immigrating Mising have changed the course of adaptation in the valley. These works limit their objectives to the issues of external aspects of the ethnic culture, such as food, language pattern, or religious ritual in general, without integrating the much-needed analysis of social structure or social

assimilation within the group. Indeed, there is a need to shift the research away from the description of cultural traits and towards a concern with the ethnic dimensions of Mising identity formations and the nature of their formation at different times. Besides, greater emphasis would be given to addressing how the social structure with diverse social identities as an ideal pattern of society persists to maintain their ethnic identity. On the other hand, the phenomena related to physical adaptation and a shared or common material culture is studied within the framework of an ecological perspective.

One needs to remember that these named sub-group identities have emerged or are assumed to have developed after they migrated to the Brahmaputra valley. Migration to the valley no doubt resulted in the creation of new forms of social interaction and social relationships through which the basis of group affiliation/identification and in the field of other social domains were reproduced and transformed. This situation does speak of a 'change of consciousness' or a new process of identifying emerging historically. To be properly understood, the specificities of this dynamic process of self-recognition/ascription and identity need to be examined in the historical context in which it took place. The historical narrative or the traditional views or histories are also useful in locating why and how the processes of identification have occurred.

### **The Study of Identities:**

A brief digression, however, on how identity issues have been studied is perhaps useful to situate my study. A key theoretical debate in social science today concerns the issue of identity, or the discourse of the process of identification in society. Kobena Mercer, in his "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics" has stated that... as a keyword in contemporary politics, it has taken on so many connotations... one thing at least is clear-identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be

fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. From this angle, the eagerness to talk about identity is symptomatic of the postmodern predicament of contemporary politics."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one needs to remember that the issue of identity and social identity formation has also been an important aspect of study within the disciplines of social science and humanities, as Stuart Hall holds the view that "the logic of identity is very important in a whole range of political, theoretical, and conceptual discourse."<sup>2</sup> For instance, historian like Romila Thapar claims "an identity has a genealogy and knowing it would help us understand why it came into existence". Perhaps as such, she finds "claims to status also imply that notions of identity go into the making of history." Identities have to be created, as they are not inborn. Here the historian has to trace the history of the creation of an identity and then see how the created concepts play a historical role."<sup>3</sup> As a result, the study of identity refers to a social context or specific socio-historical circumstances. The study of identity has always been an important aspect of the discipline of ethnography.

However, ethnographers such as Fredrik Barth have identified the fact that, with some theoretical difficulty, the differences between cultures and their historic boundaries and connections have been given much attention; the constitution of ethnic groups and the nature of the boundaries between them, have not been correspondingly investigated.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps as a result of this finding it has been conceptualised that identity is inextricably associated with ethnic group and ethnic groups' membership depends on ascription and self-ascription implying "categorical ethnic distinction entails social processes of exclusion and

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<sup>1</sup> Mercer, K, 1990, *Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics*" In Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity : Community , Culture, Difference*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, Stuart, 1997, *Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*, in Anthony D.King (eds), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System-Contemporary Conditions For the Representation of Identity*, University of Minnesota Press, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Thapar, Romila, 2014, *The Past As Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History*, AIEPH, New Delhi, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Barth, F, 1969, *Introduction* in F. Barth (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, the Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, Oslo, p. 9.

incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.<sup>5</sup> This appropriation is sometimes studied within the context of acculturation or the acculturation process among emigration groups, encompassing the entire gamut or range of such as social identity and social cognition in the context of immigration groups. The notion/idea of self-categorization, group boundaries as a framework for understanding the process of social identification as well as social diversity forms an important part of such studies. Closely related to these notions of categorisation has also been the need to see its social implications, as it has been argued that "... categorisation is arbitrary or capricious, once they are articulated and recognised in terms of dividing lines, the groups thus classified acquire derivative relevance..."<sup>6</sup> However, it has been argued, for instance, that social context creates meaningful group boundaries and that social identity is a socially construed category that shifts depending on situational pragmatics.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the environment and ecology have always provided the main framework to address the issues of cultural or ethnic differentiation. The study of ethnic identity or ethnicity under these two frameworks in the context of the form and distribution of culture has amply reflected the nature of cultural ecology. Sometimes in the study of plural situations (societies), an ecological paradigm helps in the explanation of "variable trajectories of ethnic differentiation or assimilation under different historical circumstances in which it provides" 'how particular cultural traits may be useful as adaptations to particular environments and modes of substances.'<sup>8</sup> In fact, Barth's main argument is that "the distribution of ethnic groups is controlled not by objective and fixed "natural areas" but by the distribution of the specific

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Sen, Amritya, 2006, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Penguin, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Padilla, M.A, Feb 2003, *Acculturation, Social Identity and Social Cognition: A New Perspective*, Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Sciences, Vol.25 No.1, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Barth, F, 2000, *Enduring and Emerging issues in the Analysis of ethnicity*, in Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (eds.) *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Het Spinhuis, p. 18.

ecological niches which the group, with its particular economic and political organization, is able to exploit.”<sup>9</sup> This situation/experience, in turn, in the context of the ethnic group, resulted/facilitated in the formation of a particular identity with some specific features derived from that particular context.

The above noted theoretical stances thus clearly provide the arguments about the ‘deconstruction of monolithic and essentialist concepts of culture and identity.’ On the other hand, it challenges the traditional meaning of identity as an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation’ as Stuart Hall further maintains, "The notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, and call themselves the same is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the other... Thus, identities can never be defined by "essence or purity, but are constructed by an acknowledgement that they live “with and through" difference and not despite it.”<sup>10</sup> Apparently, it does again speak/hold the view that identity is not a ‘naturally constituted’ entity; rather, identities are constructed within, not outside of discourse. We need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices...<sup>11</sup> More importantly; it shows the need to consider the specific social and historical context to understand a particular ethnic identity. There is a clear absence of a single, unambiguous ethnic association in the formation of such identities. whereas Roosens concludes that " ethnic identity can best be defined as a feeling of belonging and continuity-in-being resulting from an act of self-ascription, and/or ascription by others, to a group of people who claim both common cultural tradition. Ethnic identity can take its drive and pattern from an interplay of oppositions with outsiders, but it mostly

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<sup>9</sup> Barth, F, (Dec., 1956), *Ecologic Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan*, American Anthropologist, New Series , Vol.58 No.6 p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, Stuart, 1997, op cit. p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Barth .F, 1996, *Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity?’* In Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay(eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage, p. 4.

combines this source of differentiation with an internal source of identification... depending upon historical circumstances and situations."<sup>12</sup>

### **Historicity and subgroup formation on the River Banks:**

As already stated, the division of Mising into various named social sub-groups forms an important part of the discourse of Mising as an ethnic identity. The structural distinctiveness of these groups or the social heterogeneity is a phenomenon worth exploring in the understanding of Mising as an ethnic group. It reflects the need to comprehend the 'inner differences, inner contradictions, segmentation, and fragmentation' of Mising as a collective identity.<sup>13</sup> While the structural distinctiveness within the Mising social identities provides for ways of 'seeing' each other and with greater particularism, each of the sub-groups identifies themselves with it in their own way.

Indeed, as it is already stated, movements or migrations play a crucial role in Mising's imagination of collective identity construction. It is therefore necessary to look at Mising's reflection on their migration from the hills to the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. It is already mentioned that today's Mising society is constituted by different groups of people. Indeed, the historical origins of the Mising's division into Barogam, or Twelve Chiefs, and Dahgam, or Ten Chiefs, as well as *Pagro, Delu, Shayang, Dabuk, Oyan, Moying, Samuguria, Tamar*, and *Somua*, have been much debated. There is no authentic or definitive evidence to show its cause of division into *Barogam* and *Dahgam*. According to a legend as recorded by Sonaram Panyan Kotoki<sup>14</sup>

"When the Mising settled in the plains, they founded two villages, one consisting of *Dah(ten) kuri* (a unit of twenty in Assamese) and the other of *Baro(twelve) kuri*. To administer the

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<sup>12</sup> Roosens, E, 2000, *The Primordial nature of Origins in migrant ethnicity* in Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (eds.) *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Het Spinhuis, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, Stuart, 1997, op cit. p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Kotoki, S.P, (1935) Reprint 2001, *Miri Jatir Burnaji*, Published by M/s Bagis & Co. Dibrugarh, p. 37.

village, it was decided that a *Gam*, or village chief, was to be appointed according to the number of villages. Hence, one *Gam*, or village chief from each *Dahgam* was appointed for one village, and twelve *Gam*, or *Barogam*, were appointed for the next village, and henceforth the terms "Dahgam" and "Barogam" came into existence."

In another folk theory, as mentioned by J.S. Bhandari, as in the following:

"The Ahom king of Sibsagar entered into an agreement with the Mising to ensure order and maintain peace on the borders of the Ahom Kingdom." The Ahom kings recognised twelve *Gams* from one cluster of the village and another ten *Gams* from the other village. These village chiefs were the clan chiefs and were paid an annual retainer (to the Ahom king). "Since then, the Ahom, it is said, propagated the terms *Dahgam* and *Barogam* for different clans of the Mishings."<sup>15</sup>

Mention may be made that the *Pagro* Mising constitutes the section of Barogam and the rest of the other sub-groups represent the Dahgam. However, from the above-stated folk theory, it appears that both the terms "Dahgam" and "Barogam" are of Assamese origin. As previously stated, the two named divisions currently have no significance in the social order of the Mising society, but historically, the existence of the term is a living reality to others at various times. In this connection, it is worth noting that the census report of 1881 stated that:

"The Miris are divided into two mutually exclusive sections, which are respectively known as *Barogam* and *Dohgam*. A third appellation of their is Chutia- Miri which they say,

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<sup>15</sup> Bhandari, J.S, 1984, *Ethno history, Ethnic Identity and Contemporary Mishing Society*, University of Delhi, Delhi, p. 14.



was given by the Ahom Kings and which seems to denote they were found resident in Chutiya dominions at the time of their conquest by the Ahoms”.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Rajnai Kanta Bordoloi, the then Sub-Deputy Collector of North Lakhimpur is said to have the opportunity to observe the social custom of the Mising and to learn its language during his tenure. The famous novel *Miri Jiyori* was written in the year 1894 at the time of his return journey to Barpeta. Here he also mentions thus: “The Miri had two *Khel* namely the *Dahgam Khel* and the *Barogam Khel*. Within the Barogam there are number of small Khel such as *Chutia*, *Doitiyal* etc while the Dahgam Khel have small *khel* such as *Oyenkia*, *Moyingia*, *Saregia*, *Damukial*, *Samuguria* etc.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the division of the Mising also appear in “Preliminary Notes On Miris: Secretariat Administration (Record and Library); Department; Intelligence Branch Diary-NO-3 OF 1897, NEFA” as ...they (plain Miri) are now a mere section of the Assamese population; and though they keep themselves separate from Assamese, they have adopted the Hindu religion and celebrate the feasts. The several clans of Saiengya, Aiengya, and Chutia have more or less different customs from each other, they are all very much more like Assamese than Hill Miris, and it often requires a practiced eye to tell a plain Miri from an ordinary Assamese.” While some British administrators like Waddel(1902) wrote, “ The division of this tribe(Mising) have not been made out satisfactorily... Their division by the Assamese into *Barah-gam* and *Do-gam* does not seem to be of any structural importance.”<sup>18</sup> But it is in the analysis of clan structure and the social structure that one encounter the structural distinctiveness of these named groups especially of the *Pagro* or *Barogam* . The following description of tradition related to the origin of group name can be considered to look into the issue. Amongst these group *Pagro*,

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<sup>16</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, *The Mishings of Brahmaputra Valley*, Second Edition, Dibrugarh, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Bordoloi, Rajanikanta, (1880), (Reprint), 2006, *Miri Jiyori*, Sahitya Prakash, Guwahati, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Waddell, L.A. (1902) Reprint 1975, *Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Delhi, p. 58.

*Dambuk*, *Monying*, *Dello* are the largely inhabited Mising population in the Majuli Island while the others group are found to be lived in different parts of Assam.

**Pagro:** The *Pagro* Mising is generally considered as the largest amongst these groups.<sup>19</sup> The following clans are found among the *Pagro* group such as Doley, Pegu, Kuli, Kutum, Kumbang, Lagachu, Patir. Some of their villages in Majuli are *Ratanpur*, *Gajera*, *Jengarimukh*, *Borpomuwa*, *Cherpai*, *Matmora*, *Mowamari*. Traditionally the *Barogam* sections of the Mising are called as *Pagro* and occasionally as *Chutiya Miri* and even some writers as *Doitiyal Miiri*.

Indeed, it was from the evidence of historical relationships between the Chutiyas and the *Pagro* Mising that established the arrival of the Mising into the valley. It is also evident that the Mising, especially of Sadiya, a sub-division of Tinsukia District, served the Chutiya king as *Hatighahis*, or grass supplier to the elephant.<sup>20</sup> It appears that the Mising might constitute the political domain of the Chutiyas to a considerable extent by this time. Hence, the Mising did not seem to remain aloof like the Nagas, Daflas, and other hill tribes; indeed, they had been under the civilising influence of the Plains long before the coming of the Ahoms, as pointed out by L. Devi<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, some scholars believe that the Ahoms recognised the Mising as '*Chutiya Miri*' since the Ahoms found them living under the Chutiya Kingdom at the time of their conquest.<sup>22</sup> However, it is believed that the origin of the term *Chutiya Miri* lies in the matrimonial ties between the Chutyia and Mising.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the Ahom monarch, Suhungmung, succeeded in inflicting a crushing defeat on the Chutiyas in the year 1523. It is said that after this defeat, some *Chutiya* families took shelter in the neighbouring Mising villages to escape the Ahoms and were finally assimilated with

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<sup>19</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Devi, Lakshmi, 1992, *Ahom Tribal Relations*, Panbazar, Guwahati, Second Edition, p. 202.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> Rajkonwar, Sarbanada, 2000, *Itihase Soaura Chashata Bachar*, Banalata, Guwahati 1, p. 382.

the Mising. J.S.Bhandari opined that it was due to this 'miscegenation' of the Chutiya and Mising that the non-tribal Assamese sometimes referred to this section of the Mising as *Chutiya Miri* and as *Pagro*, meaning one who lost purity by the other section (Dohgam) of the Mising.

It is noteworthy that S. P. Kotoki was the writer who mentioned the word *Pagro* as '*Jatijowa*', which in Assamese mean one who has lost his caste. However, this view receives a sharp reaction from within the *Barogam* Mising. While Nomal Pegu asserts that *Pagro* means pure in blood. He explained it to be derived from two words, *Pagnam* and *Aro*, i.e., *Pagnam*+*Aro*=*Pagro*, meaning pure blood. Nomal Pegu appears to draw his assertion by observing the records of ET Dalton's remark on the nature of various clans of the Misings. ET Dalton wrote, "There are clans the *Saeingia*, *Aeingia* who crop their hair like the Abors...The other clan cloak themselves and dresses their hair more after the fashion of the Assamese, but they kept their blood pure and have lost none of the physical characteristics of the tribe".

Thus, it appears that the *Pagro* Mising maintained its clan exogamy or the endogamy of the tribe without losing its blood ties to the clans. N.C. Pegu admits that there might be a social relationship/interaction with the Chutiyas, but that relationship was not necessarily matrimonial. As a matter of fact, instead of this assumption, he shifted his attention to other forms of interaction with the chutiyas, which have been prevailing among them in the maintenance of taboos and rituals. Citing one Phatik ch. Baruah's contention was that when the Mishings were at *sadia*, some Mishing families also offered goats and gourds to goddess Khechai Khati following the chutiyas. Hence, those families desisted from partaking of goat's meat and gourd and the tradition remained with them, Pegu concluded that "this had nothing

to do with any matrimonial relationship with Chutiya."<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, this is the case with some clans such as Medok who still maintain taboos concerning goats and gourds in their daily lives.

The following groups form the Dohgam section of the Mising.

**Samuguria:** According to N.C Pegu, the Samugurias were the splinter group that entered the Ahom Kingdom while others were at Sadiya. The Samugurias comprised the non-speaking Mising social sub-group. While their tradition maintains that "a small group of families of Mishings came down to the plains bereft of their families and married women of the plains offered by the Ahom king as a reward for their bravery in killing some deadly snakes .Hence, they were given settlement in a place called Samguri, and they ultimately came to be known as "Samuguri Miri." They have settled on the banks of river Ranganadi in Lakhimpur District and on the banks of the Dikrang and Dhansisri rivers in Golaghat District.<sup>25</sup> The clans under them are *Pao, Bori, Paje(Paji Padi), Morang, and Taye.*<sup>26</sup>

**Tamar:** Like the Samugurias, they also don't speak the Mising Language. Indeed, their tradition also maintains that they were given settlement by an Ahom monarch under a tree called "Temi" located near a river, and therefore those people who lived there were known as *Temar or Tamar.*<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Nomal Pegu opined that the term *Temar* had been derived from 'Temak', a Mising name for the 'Sewa' tree. <sup>28</sup>.They are found to be settled in an area east of *Dhansirimukh* on the south bank of the river *Brahmaputra* in Golaghat District, and some of their villages are situated in the lower *Dikrang* area of Lakhimpur District.<sup>29</sup>

The clans under the *Temar* are *Loying, Pao, Bori, Morang, Paje, and Taye.* Mention may be

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<sup>24</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Loying, Tankeswar, 2006, *Mising Janajivan*, Golaghat, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Pegu, L.N. & Dutta, S, 2004, op cit., p. 209.

made that the *Bongkual* group also shared the same characteristics as those of the Samuguria and Tamar groups. It is believed that this group originally had three clans, namely *Pao*, *Dao*, and *Morang*, at the time of their migration to the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>30</sup> The main area of settlement is situated at the confluence of the rivers Dhansiri and Brahmaputra in Golaghat District.

**Delu:** - The Delus settled on the banks of the rivers Dihing, Disang, and Dikhow—the tributaries of the Brahmaputra in the Sibsagar District of Assam. According to their tradition, they migrated to the valley from the south bank of the river Brahmaputra, and therefore they came to be known as *Delu*, which means *Lohit*, the early name of the river Brahmaputra.<sup>31</sup> There are two Delu villages under Lohitpuria Gaon Panchayat in the Upper Majuli Development Block, namely Lason and Sikari, inhabited exclusively by their clan members on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. The following clans are found to be comprised of the Delus. These are *Panging*, *Yein*, *Taye*, *Mili*, *Gam*, *Narah*, *Shinte*, *Payeng*, *Pame*, *Bori*.<sup>32</sup>

**Moying:** According to Sonaram Payang kotoki (1935), the Moyings migrated from a very narrow strip of land in the hills, which is why they are known as Moying, which means "narrow strip of land."<sup>33</sup> Opinions differ; however, as other writers believe they are so-called because they lived on barren and infertile land. There is a village named Moying in the Upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh, inhabited by the Minyong group of the Adis.<sup>34</sup> They are exclusively found to live on the banks of the *Buroi* and the *Jiabharali* rivers in Sonitpur District. In Majuli, they have a good number of villages such as Karichuk, Jokaibowa, Selek,

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<sup>30</sup> Loying, Tankeswar, 2006, op cit., p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Pegu, L.N. & Dutta, S, 2001, *Different groups of the Misings and their Origin: An Historical Analyses* NEIHA, Tezpur, p. 206.

<sup>32</sup> Bhandari, J.S. 1984, op cit., p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Kotoki, S.P, (1935) Reprint 2001, op cit., p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Doley, Buddheswar, 1997, *The Mising, the sons of Nature*, Dhemaji, p. 35.

Putuki, Kamalabari, and Garmur. The clans under this group are *Gam, Narah, Kardong, Padun, Payeng, Pame, Payun, Shinte, Dapag, Polong, Padi, Hatulla, Mili*.

**Dambuk:** This group of people is believed to have migrated from a place called *Dambuk*, situated in the upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh, and therefore they are referred to as *Dambuk or Dambukial*. One supposition about this group is that they are newcomers to the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>35</sup> They are believed to have arrived in the Valley during the Burmese invasion. While there are legends narrating how the clans of this group fought with the Burmese in present-day *Murkong-selek*. It is here in this place that some section of the Mising encounters with the Burmese, where the latter received a miserable defeat. According to N.C.Pegu, the word '*Murkongselek*' provides an interesting reading... where *Murkongselek* stands to testify – how the gold and silver (*Murkong*) ornaments looted from Assamese villages were found scattered in later years in a place which latter on came to be known as *Murkong* (silver), *Selek* (field).<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that they too share a common tradition of origin, migration and clans names along with the Padam group of the Adis. It is noteworthy that they too share a common tradition of origin, migration, and clan names along with the Padam group of the Adis.<sup>37</sup> The major areas of settlement of the inhabitants of this group are situated in *Lower Subansiri, Lower Ranganadi* of Lakhimpur District.<sup>38</sup> In Majuli, their villages are Bonoria, Chapori, Dhunaguri, and in Kolia village. The clans found among them are *Taid, Mili, and Perme*.

**Somua:** They are so-called because they were found to be of a simpler nature, or *Soha-mua* in Assamese, than the other Mising groups, and thus the word *Somua* appears to have been

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<sup>35</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p.18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> Payeng, S, 2011, *Mising Janajati: Samaj aru Sanskriti*, Jagaron, Guawahti, p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

given by the Assamese people.<sup>39</sup> According to N.C, Pegu, "in all likelihood, the name "samua" was given by the Ahoms for the service they rendered." Another important characteristic of this group is that they don't build their houses on a raised platform, as in the case of the other groups. They prefer to live in a traditional "mud house" in a similar way to the Buruk Chutia and Morans." Indeed, they have abandoned the traditional rituals and feasts such as *Ali-aye-ligang* and instead observe a ritual known as 'Modi' and have adopted a religion similar to the Vaishnavites.<sup>40</sup> The *Samuas* lived exclusively in *Tezu* and *Namsai* in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that the *Samuas* have now altered their identity as *Adi-Samua* since the government of Arunachal Pradesh has not recognised the Misings in the state as Scheduled Tribe. It is reported that some Mising clans of this group changed their clan title or surname, as in the case of *Regon* as *Dai*, *Narah* as *Ratan*, and *Payeng* as *Tayeng*, in the hope of getting economic benefits in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>42</sup>

***Shayang:*** It is believed that the *Shayang* originally used to live in the *Pesa: Sa'yang* hills located in the *Padam(Adi)* area of Arunachal Pradesh, and from there they migrated down to the Brahmaputra Valley and came to be known as *Shanyengia* or *Shayang*.<sup>43</sup> Their villages are located in the Lower *Subansiri*, *Alimur Bebjia*, and *Boginadi* in North Lakhimpur District and Tinsukia District. They have villages in Laika, Rigbi, and Philobari. The following clans are found among them: *Borang*, *Regon*, *Dang*, *Pame*, *Pasar*, *Basing*, *Medok*, and *Koman*.<sup>44</sup>

***Oyan or Oyegia:*** Sonarm Payeng Kotoki, in his *Miri Jatir Buranji (1935)*, has recorded that the *Oyan Miri* or *Oyengia*, like other groups too, belong to the Minyong Abor or Adi. He wrote that it was only after the Burmese expulsion from Assam by the British that the Oyan

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<sup>39</sup> Padun, Nahendra, 1970, *Somua Misingor Bhasa aru Sanskriti*, in Bhregumoni kagyung(ed) *Mising Sanskritir Alekhya*, Guwahati, p. 22

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Pegu, L.N, 2004, op cit., p. 209.

<sup>43</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> Kotoki, S.P, (1935) Reprint 2001, op cit., p. 71.

migrated to Assam due to the increasing oppression by the *Minyong Abors (Adi)*.<sup>45</sup> Some of the Oyan villages are found in *Oyan Gitung* near Pasighat district of Arunachal Pradesh, *Obhata Oyan, Ghunasuti, Batua Tapit Oyan, and Bali Oyan* near *Silapathar* of Dhemaji District.<sup>46</sup> The clans under them are *Bori, Pao, Panyan, Taye, Mili, Pertin, Morang and Pait*.<sup>47</sup>

Hence, the above description of the various groups of the Mising appears to indicate that there is no general agreement in most of the literature on the very nature of the formation of Mising social sub-groups. Nevertheless, a few observations may be made about the tradition of group identity. First of all, it appears that greater particularism is associated with in-group identity. Every group has its own tradition of origin, migration, and historical events associated with them. It appears that group names are named after the location of the habitat areas, as in the case of the *Delu, Samuguria, and Tamar*, while some groups have maintained the name of their parents' village in the hills, as in the case of *Sa:yang, Moying*, and even descriptive names (*Chutiya Miri*) given to them by their neighbour. As a result, it can be assumed that after migrating to the Brahmaputra Valley, a specific group used to live exclusively of its clan members in one contiguous region, and thus clans are of direct relevance to the formation of these named groups. More importantly, as seen from the above description, all of these groups are not clan specific since in every group one can find a similar clan name or surname. Hence, it speaks of the amalgamation of clans into these named groups. It is noteworthy that even among the *Tamar*, which form one of the non-speaking Mising dialect groups, are reported to have clans such as *Pegu and Doley* of *Pagro Mising*.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, members of the same clan are found in different named groups, including

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, *op cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Kotoki, S .P, (1935) Reprint 2001, *op cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Gopal Morang, Telephone interview, on April 10, 2018



in the non-speaking Mising dialect group. This is the case, as seen from the description of the groups with many clans like the Mili, Gam, Padi, Bori, Pogag, etc.

Therefore, it appears that the Mising traditional grouping system/categorisations have witnessed substantial development over the years, and more importantly, it seems to be a case of a constant process of development resulting in the distinctiveness of social structure amongst the various social groups of the Mising. Besides, although at the cultural level one may not find watertight differences among these groups, the distinctiveness can be seen from variation in the dialect and even in the ritual performance, which taboos are maintained by certain clans' members. For example, Tabu Ram Taid, for example, has commented that "Mising as a whole has acquired a few phonological, grammatical, and lexical characteristics during the centuries of their habitations in the Brahmaputra valley, which are not found in Adi now... the one called *Say: Yang* is closer to Adi than the other dialects... One would come across a minor local variation of the same social dialects, particularly in the area of vocabulary... The speech of the eight sub-groups amongst Mising may be divided into two broad groups on the basis of two easily identifiable markers: one morphemic and the other lexical."<sup>49</sup>

While Needham observed that " although each clan possesses many different words to express the same meaning, they are so accustomed to mixing them up with others that it is really difficult to ascertain what word should be used for a particular thing by a particular clan."<sup>50</sup> But group-specific language variation is a living reality which may indicate a certain configuration of intragroup relations developed in a specific social condition and ecological niches. Similarly, variation can be noticed in the making of their traditional rice beer or beverage called *Apong*. The Mising have two types of *Apong* i.e. *Po:ro* and *No:gin A:pong*. Our field visit tells us that among some social sub-group, the making of *Poro Apong* is quite unpopular and almost absent. This is the case with social-sub-group like the Tamar,

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<sup>49</sup> Taid, Taburam, 2009, *Mising Gompir Kumsung: A Dictionary of the Mising Language*, North Guwahati, p. 9

<sup>50</sup> Needham, J.F, 1886, *Outline Grammar of the Shaiyang Miri Language as spoken by the Miris of that clan residing the neighbourhood of sadiya*, Shillong, Assam Secretariat Press, p. ii.

Samuguria, etc. Therefore, it appears that within these different named social sub-groups of the Mising, distinguishable processes of cultural change have undergone in the course of their adaptation to their new socio-cultural milieu.

The factors promoting such differential changes amongst the groups appear to have been closely connected to the migratory status of these groups, and, obviously, the ecological settings are more important to understand this historical process of cultural change. It seems clear from the above group-specific tradition that the nature of Mising migration to the Brahmaputra valley doesn't speak of simultaneity, whereas it might be possible to explain that large clan groups comprising both territorial or localised and dispersed clans, with strong traditions of cooperation and mutual help in their downward journey in many successive waves, have migrated to the valley. According to J. Bhandari, the smallest group to be migrating was the segment of a clan, i.e., lineage.<sup>51</sup>

The tradition of these different groups also maintains its version of historical circumstances that forced them to move to the valley. The Adi tradition, on the other hand, contains many internecine feuds which might mark the nature of relationships between different groups of today's Adi-Mising in their course of co-habitation. N. Lego recorded several such internecine feuds that finally resulted in the migration of clan groups from the Siang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh to the Plains of Assam. He, however, used the term "war" as the key term for these inter-clan feuds, such as the *Dangga-Naroooh* and *Padam War* (1585), *the Tayung-Taye war*, *Garin Gare war*, *Boking Anggon Scare War*, and the *Talu-Tadak war*.<sup>52</sup> However, the absence of such inter-clan feuds in the tradition of the *Pagro* Mising clans seems to stand remarkably for their claim as the early emigrants' group. Therefore, it appears that the popular claim of the Adis to the Mising as runaway slaves may

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<sup>51</sup> Bhandari, J.S, 1984, op cit., p. 101.

<sup>52</sup> Lego, N, 2005, *History of the Mishings of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, Arunachal Pradesh*, Itanagar, pp. 22-30.

apply to the later emigrant groups who were forced to leave due to the growing internecine feuds as noticed in the record of Lego. On the other hand, it is evident from the accounts of many British officials that most of the Adi-Mising relations were centred on the intensions of the Adis to establish their supremacy over the Mising.<sup>53</sup> While the historicity of "these wars" is debatable, the prevailing ecological factor for internecine conflict cannot be ruled out. It is already stated that Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous terrain where the shifting agriculture of slash-and-burn is the chief operational activity of the people. Therefore, ostensibly, there might be inter-clan feuds among these groups for the possession of cultivable land, which ultimately resulted in the dispersal of groups to take downward movement from the hills.

Hence, it appears that the Mising migration to the Brahmaputra valley occurred in many successive waves. Perhaps looking into the tradition of migration, we can safely place the social sub-groups of the Mising as early and later migrant groups. As a result, the Pagro Mising appear to be the first migrant group to arrive in the plain in the 13th to 14th centuries CE., with the other groups arriving in the 16th century C.E.<sup>54</sup> However, J.S. Bhandari held the view that the Mising emigration to the valley commenced around the 16<sup>th</sup> century and "ended" in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> In fact, his analysis of one hundred years of census reports (1871–1971) gives a shred of ample evidence to understand the nature of Mising emigration to the Brahmaputra Valley. He observed that the Mising population was first listed in the year 1871 and it was only 13,786 distributed in the districts of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, and Darrang.

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<sup>53</sup> The account of Mackenzie, Hamilton on the tribe reveals that the Adis treated the Mising as their runaway families despite its long period of emigration and settle habitat in the plains of Assam.

<sup>54</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> Bhandari, J.S. 1984, op cit., p. 99.

Table 2: The Growth of Mising Population between 1871 and 1971

Year	Population	% of increase
1871	13,786	-
1881	25,636	85.96
1891	38,430	49.91
1911	47,719	21.57
1921	68,706	23.03
1931	84,946	23.98
1941	NA	-
1951	108,736	27.96
1961	163,453	50.32
1971	259,351	58.78

SOURCE: J.S. Bhandari *Ethno history, Ethnic Identity and Contemporary Mishing Society* University of Delhi, 1984 p.101 (See also the Report on the Census of Assam, 1901 in Appendix-iv)

In the face of such evidence, J.S. Bhandari draws on the fact that the period between 1881 and 1891 witnessed growth of the population by 85% in the first decade and 49% in the next decade. He further maintained that this period was marked by the consolidation of the British administration in upper Assam, which "induced" a new wave of immigration into the plains of Assam. He identifies quite clearly that before the consolidation of the British, the district of Sibsagar was the safer region for the immigrants' social sub-group of the Mising, with a record of 49% higher concentration of the total population as compared to Lakhimpur district, where the Adis often attacked them. He thus concluded that the increase in the population of the Mising was not due to its natural growth factors, but rather the

establishment of British control in upper Assam that resulted in the immigration of the Mising from the hills till the end of the twentieth century.

Hence, from the above discussion, it appears that Mising motives for leaving their homeland were mixed and, more importantly, these several successive waves of immigration have resulted in the formation of group-specific social structures within the Mising of Assam. It is from their migratory status that it can be explained that each of these groups might have had a separate duration of interaction with the existing local populace which gave rise to the development of differential cultural life, whether in the spheres of ritual that pertains to ancestor cult, manners and customs or in their way of speaking, even though these differences are negligible. This situation also explains why their points of identification are different from each other. These points can be illustrated by looking into the "aspects of inner structure' of the social sub-groups.

Each social sub-group has its own traditions of "social construct", reflecting the picture of structure or the relationship between specific clans and groups. No doubt, such traditions of social constructs need to be contextualised to avoid a mere generalisation of the development of such social institutions in a society. This is largely reflected in the tradition of social relations or kinship patterns among the groups of the Mising. For example, among these named sub-groups, the *Pagro* Mising shows a clear demarcation of social boundaries to give a picture of the structure. Generally, the following clans are found in the *Pagro* Group of the Mising. These are *Doley*, *Pegu*, *Kuli*, *Kutum*, *Kumbang*, *Mili*, *Lagachu*, *Patir*, etc. Here, we can find a clear demarcation of social relations among these clans. This relation can also be inferred from the terminologies that the Mising use to maintain the social status of every clan. Hence, it appears that the Mising use the term *Urom Bibosunam Brrang/Biro-Birmang*

<sup>56</sup>(brother and sister) to denote those clans who have shared a common *Gummin* or Ancestry to perform ancestor worship or *Urom Uie* and hence, literally, the term signifies the affiliation of clan brotherhood through a common ancestor. Hence, marriage alliance is prohibited.

Similarly, in the case of clans, which are not genealogically connected but traditionally accepted as brothers through a fictive tie, is known as *Tomminsun Brrang/Birmang* <sup>57</sup>(brother and sister). Here, again, marriage is not allowed between clans who share a fictive tie of brotherhood, and it is parallel to incest and hence taboo. Finally, those with whom the clans can enter into matrimonial relations are referred to as *Igo-Magbo*(bother-in-law), i.e., affinal (related by marriage in law)<sup>58</sup>division. Mention may be made that this structure can be defined to a great extent in the context of the division of these clans into two intermarrying units. The following table shows the picture...

Clan Brotherhoodwith Doley	Clan Brotherhood with Pegu
Kuli	Patir
Kutum	Lagachu
Kumbang	Sungkrang
Mili	Kardng
Misong	

Table 4: Showing:-Pagro-Mising Social structure. Among these clans there is no blood ties but traditionally accepted as *Biro-Birmang*(brother and Sister) of all members of these clan. For example the clan such as *Kuli, Kutum Kumbang, Misong* are traditionally considered as clan brother.

<sup>56</sup> Kuli, J.J, 2012, *The Misings: Their Clans, House and Food Habits*, in J.J. Kuli(ed) *The Misings: Their History and Culture*, Ayur Publication, Second Edition, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 160

<sup>58</sup> Nanda, S & Warms, R.L, 2002, *Cultural Anthropology*, Wadsworth, Seventh Edition, p. 220.

Kinship terminologies are considered to be related to society or social life. According to Lewis H. Morgan, kinship terminologies are a system of consanguinity and affinity that has to do with a person's recognition of their genealogical relationship and, therefore, describe to us the actual organisation of kinship order. Radcliff-Brown, on the other hand, argued that kinship terms serve as a guidepost for interpersonal behaviour or etiquette, implying appropriate reciprocal rights, duties, privileges, and obligations.<sup>59</sup> Specifically, the Pagro-Mising kinship terminologies indicate the rigid division of the people into two kinship groups, namely, consanguinity and non-consanguinity or affinity, which further signifies the structural basis of the society. This very aspect of structural base appears to be a common paradigm for different groups of the Mising, which constitute the society. On the other hand, the social structure of the Pagro-Mising group finds its justifiable interpretation in their oral tradition. The legend that connects the formation of this social alliance of the *Pagro Mising* lies mostly in the narration of clan migration. However, folktales explain how, between the two clans, *Doley* and *Pegu* finally agreed to establish a permanent relationship of affinity, or "*Mitur*." The above-stated legends thus appear to have accounted for the theoretical origin of the existing social alliance of the Pagro- Mising with a division of the people into exogamous units. Indeed, the analysis of these legends to a great extent would reveal some convincing assumptions on the issue of Mising social organization. The social function of these legends appears to have primarily been to establish kinship relations, to emphasis the legitimacy of exogamous units within the group, and it stands for clan migration into the Brahmaputra Valley. Perhaps the theme of migration in the legends shows some interesting insights into the nature of clan migration. All the claims of clan movement reflect the geographical location associated with certain clan groups. More importantly, it is held that a clan, as a unilineal, exogamous kinship unit, cannot move as a whole. Since people of the same clan

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<sup>59</sup> Elman R Service, *Kinship Terminology and Evolution*, Published by American Anthropological Association, Accessed: 26/02/2014 04:10, p. 750.

can't intermarry, the clans had to have other clans with them.<sup>60</sup> Taking into consideration this nature of clan migration, the tradition of Pagro-Mising clans' migration as stated in the passage aptly supports this view. At the same time, this shared customary behaviour and bond further extended over to the rules of the preferential marriage system among the different groups of the Mising. It is, at this stage, the group-specific marriages with a clear demarcation of the marriage unit became most apparent. Indeed, until recently or still, this attitude of preferential marriage within a group appears to have been the dominant norm. S.Raj Kumar (*Itihase Suora Chashta Basar, 1950*) stated that it is a matter of shame to the family if their girl is to be married to a person with whom they have no relation of affinity.<sup>61</sup> S. P. Kotoki, in his book 'Miri Jatir Buranji (1935)' recorded that group such as *Delo, Ayengia, Moying* were not taken women from other groups in marriage.<sup>62</sup> Precisely, this pattern of marriage alliance shows some sort of symbolization, and emphasises its shared ties, which appears to be another important reason for keeping clan-specific group identity over time. The interpretation of its social implications, on the other hand, gives many interesting insights into the issue. Firstly, to establish marriage alliances, both parties had to be of the same affinal group, and hence, in the case of people who do not have group-specific clan identity, marriage alliances were not possible. Besides, this restriction was also extended by disallowing people to enter a house who failed to identify their clan. The status of marital stability in terms of group-specific marriage alliance can be seen in its perpetuation for a long time. Secondly, the bond of brotherhood and marriage bond described in the tradition can be explained as a process of defining the boundaries of a social sub-group.

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<sup>60</sup> Wesley, Bernardini, 2008, *Identity as History: Hopi Clans and Curation of Oral Tradition*, Journal of Anthropological Research, Vol. 64, University of New Mexico, Accessed: 26/02/2014 04:51 p. 488.

<sup>61</sup> Rajkonwar, Sarbanada, 2000, op cit., p. 385.

<sup>62</sup> Kotoki, S. P, 1935, reprint, 2001, op cit., p. 50.



Yet to explain further the question of the inclusion of clans in a particular group or the presence of members of a clan in a different the following observation may be made. The evidence of clan wise movement is also found in their folktales. The folksong runs as follows:

*Aditokke togdolo.....*

*Taide kidinngge togdolo*

*Taie kidinge togdolo*

*Allagde amo:so miturem patio-tone*

The above-stated folksong contains a reference to the clan migration, whereas it speaks of the Taid and Taye clan migrations without female members, and thus it came into contact with local women and established a *mitir* (affine) relationship.<sup>63</sup> So, it becomes possible to interpret that some clans might have migrated without local kin, and as such clan either joined in the already existing group by altering or reinterpreting its identity as a member of that group. So, it becomes possible to interpret that some clans might have migrated without local kin, and as such, the clan either joined the already existing group by altering or reinterpreting its identity as a member of that group. Sonarm Panyang Kotoki (1935), on the other hand, recorded, "If a member of one named group lived amidst another named group, he got his identity after the existing named group. So it appears that clan mobility cannot be excluded in the process of group formation. The consideration of clan mobility helps us to analyse the social structure to define the very social relationships that were shared by different clans of the Mising of Assam over time.

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<sup>63</sup> Dutta, Birendranath & Taid, Taburam, 1992, *Folksongs of the Mishings*, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Guwahati, p. 31.

Hence, the Mising's sense of possession of permanent land seems to be irregular throughout the history of their habitation in the Valley. It was only in the post-independence period, with the introduction of flood control policies that finally helped them to abandon the nature of their migratory status.<sup>64</sup> Looking into this situation, it can be asserted that with the constant change in habitation, there was a process at work by which clan mobility could occur, as well as continued readjustment in the existing social relationships in order to regulate social order in the society. Precisely, the migratory status or the undermined number of immigrants entering into the valley in many successive waves, the constant change of habitation and the increasing rate of population resulting in the dispersal of the clan into different localities finally gave rise to the present situation where a member of a clan and even a member of a sub-clan, and extended family or lineages or *Ope*, is found in every named social sub-group throughout the district and villages. The segmentation of clan (*Opin*) into sub-clan or extended family (*ope*) and individual family (*Erang*) does not appear to be concentrated in a single geographical location or in the current Mising village pattern.

Above all, it appears from the above discussion that the different groups of the Misings experienced a web of heterogeneous social relationships which resulted in the development of considerable variations in their cultural life. It does translate the varied pattern of historic interaction and negotiations with different socio-cultural entities after their arrival in the Brahmaputra valley. Most importantly, it appears that Mising group identity acknowledges fluidity in affiliation and recognises a set of similar categories in the form of clan identity and migration tradition, which paved the way for the recognition of similar experiences or familiar groups' identity. Secondly, the mobility of clans from one group to another, as seen from the above-noted description, was a regular feature due to their

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<sup>64</sup> Doley, Durgeswar, 1998, *The Socio-economic Life of the Miri Tribe*, in J.J Kuli(ed) *The Mising: Their History and Culture*, Ayir Publication, Guwahati, p. 107.

migratory status and other environmental factors, which in turn made a possible shift to a more generic identity as " Mising" from those of the existing separate "sub-groups". Their unification, or a rather gradual self-realization as a single ethnic group, was the result of their shared tradition of migration into the valley from the hills of the Himalayan range.

To illustrate further the comments as noted above, it is clear that, by the first half of the twentieth century, it was becoming gradually acceptable to consider those from beyond the confines of one's group as being of one's own ethnic membership. A larger identification as a 'Mising' was thus being claimed and realised, as opposed to the earlier custom of identifying oneself as belonging to one village identity with a particular group identity. As a matter of fact, it is through the "named sub-groups" that the Mising as a collective identity is worked out. Besides, it was or is still in the named sub-groups identity that gives an individual his/her identity as Mising. At the same time, the larger Mising identity is certainly significant, and Mising does glorify their Mising-ness as their common identity. Thus, it can be argued that these named social groups, with their specific clan identity, substantiate and formalise the Mising as a collective identity and make the inclusion and exclusion of individual identity explicit. In other words, it speaks of the dynamic nature of a group identity, stressing the fact that a social sub-group is often a conglomeration of different clans migrating to the valley in a different time and space, and most importantly, it includes clan members sharing a common ethnic identity with sometimes formerly unknown non-mising clan identities, albeit still predominantly Mising, who have been brought together by the similar or rather shared historical circumstances throughout the sojourn in the valley as described in the current chapter.

## **Ecological Adaptation and Material Culture:**

Ecological studies, on the other hand, are said to provide evidence of the environmental background of a culture.<sup>65</sup> It was noted above in the description of the various social groups of the Mising that the people are invariably inhabited on the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The Mising villages are located on the banks of rivers such as *Simen*, the *Burisuiti*, the *Tongaani*, the *Jiadhohol*, the *Subansiri* or *Obonori* in Mising, the *Gunasuti*, the *Boginadi*, the *Ronganaddi*, the *Dikrang*, the *Buroi*, *Dibru*, *Dihing*, the *Disang*, *Dikhow*, *Dhansiri*, and the island of Majuli. Hence, it can be seen that along the bank of the river has been consistently the area of settlement of the Mising since the period of their arrival into the valley. The occupation of Mising settlement on the bank of the river speaks of the significance of various kinds, which in turn has a profound effect on their cultural life and thus leads them to earn the name riverine people.

Indeed, to understand the emergence of different social sub-groups of the Mising, one has to look for the historicity of life on the banks of the river. The advantageous ecological setting indeed facilitated the settlements of different sub-groups for their own living. As a result, these social groups witness a strikingly similar adaptation to the natural environment, which inevitably leads to the expression of a common material culture. To give it further elaboration, if we look into the historic sub-group formation, it speaks of greater particularism in terms of distinguishable cultural variations, as it is already discussed in the current chapter. However, their cultural component shows a remarkable similarity in terms of 'ecological adaptation, resource utilization', and thus it expresses a common material culture and cultural identity.

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<sup>65</sup> Thapar, Romila, 1987, (Reprint) *Ancient India Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, p.176.

The brief description as noted in the following would be sufficed to highlight the above noted phenomena among the Mising.

### **History of Mising settlement pattern:**

#### ***Pre-migration Mising settlement Pattern:-***

The experience of state penetration of any kind in Arunachal Pradesh can be termed as recent phenomena. No doubt the existences of the process of region formation find its place in some 15<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan text and in Ahom chronicles of seventeenth century.<sup>66</sup> Sarah Hilaly has observed that “though the cultural profiles of the groups reveal strong influences of dominant cultures around them, yet the culture of the majority of the group despite interactions remained distinctive from these state influences... in their independent status, they negotiated state powers through raids and control over trade networks...exchange of commodities of materials well as cultural value strengthen the internal bonds despite conflicts over territory and trade...the mediaeval period, therefore witnessed the evolution of the extended Eastern Himalayas as a distinct region, through specific instruments of the surrounding states, yet never subjugated till the end of the colonial rule. The control of the states could at best be described as ephemeral.

Historically, with the existence of a multiplicity of tribes, the region shows the fluidity of social identities. There is an urgent need to locate the prevailing social settings or conditions in the area to understand this phenomenon. The real key to the understanding of the social conditions lies in the study of the mode of material setting in the region. Thus, the study of the "settlement geography" under the idea of heartland and hinterland or of the core and periphery can also be used to explain the early mode of cultural pattern in the region<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Blackburn, Stuart, (2003/4) *Memories of migration: notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India*, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research p. 39.

<sup>67</sup> Sharma, R. S,1983, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, p. 10.

Most importantly, social anthropologists have defined the status of early evolution of human society as follows: "The first stage starts with the advent of which is a collection or group of people for hunting or other similar primitive food gathering activities.... In the second stage, the element of kinship is important."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it is conceptualised that "when people take to food procuring activities, they form stable combinations cemented by ties of marriage and kinship, claiming some real or supposed ancestor." They may develop their own language..."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, it has been suggested that certain basic conditions of material setting are inextricably associated with the development of tribal society.

These above-noted features in the context of the Tani can be best illustrated by looking into the deep-rooted clan system or segmentary lineage system and the practice of shifting (Swidden, jhum, 'slash-and-burn') cultivation, trade networks, among others. In other words, we can speculate on the role of these social entities or factors in the understanding of the nature of social conditions or in the aspect of social interactions. To begin with the Mising, like the other Tani groups, have a segmentary lineage system based on patrilineal descent principles. The Mising have a strong sense of genealogy with a tradition of claiming origin from a common ancestor. In short, the clan system of the Mising appears to have witnessed several permutations, whether in terms of its segmentation at various levels or its social relations in a different social context.

Secondly, the region was traditionally difficult for individuals, or even small groups, to forge into uninhabited territories unsupported. The environment is harsh and rugged, the jungle is extremely thick, and therefore the "daily practices' like building shelters, clearing agricultural fields, fencing, and so on require the involvement of a large group of people. Apparently, these very situations necessitate the development of kinship elements. Secondly, it has been suggested that "grain cultivation has come relatively recently to the Tani area, and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. xix-xx.

that early Tani groups must have balanced a more rudimentary vegeculture with the hunting and foraging strategies that are mostly retained today." vegeculture strategy can indeed be therefore attributed to early groups in the Tani area ...much more thinly distributed on the ground than they are in modern times, as they would have had to exploit and travel across much larger areas...mean that permanent settlement on a large scale would have been all but impossible."<sup>70</sup>

However, with the introduction of paddy cultivation, settlements became more permanent in the Tani area, along with the foundation of a large area of cultivable land. Indeed, we have enough evidence or clues to the development of social groups occupying particular territory (i.e. village territory or Dolung) or clan land on a permanent basis. However, it must keep in mind that "a large portion, if not the majority, of the land area is either too steep or too high in elevation." So, there must be constant population movement due to the scarcity of cultivable land and other factors such as overpopulation. While the memories of migration among the Tani are vivid, they are often associated with their current identities and origins. But the very nature of population movement does not speak of "mass movement". Rather, it forces some 'micro-movement' or even an extended family (ope) to split in search of a new cultivable land, and thus it might join another familiar or other linguistic group already settled in a comparatively different social context.

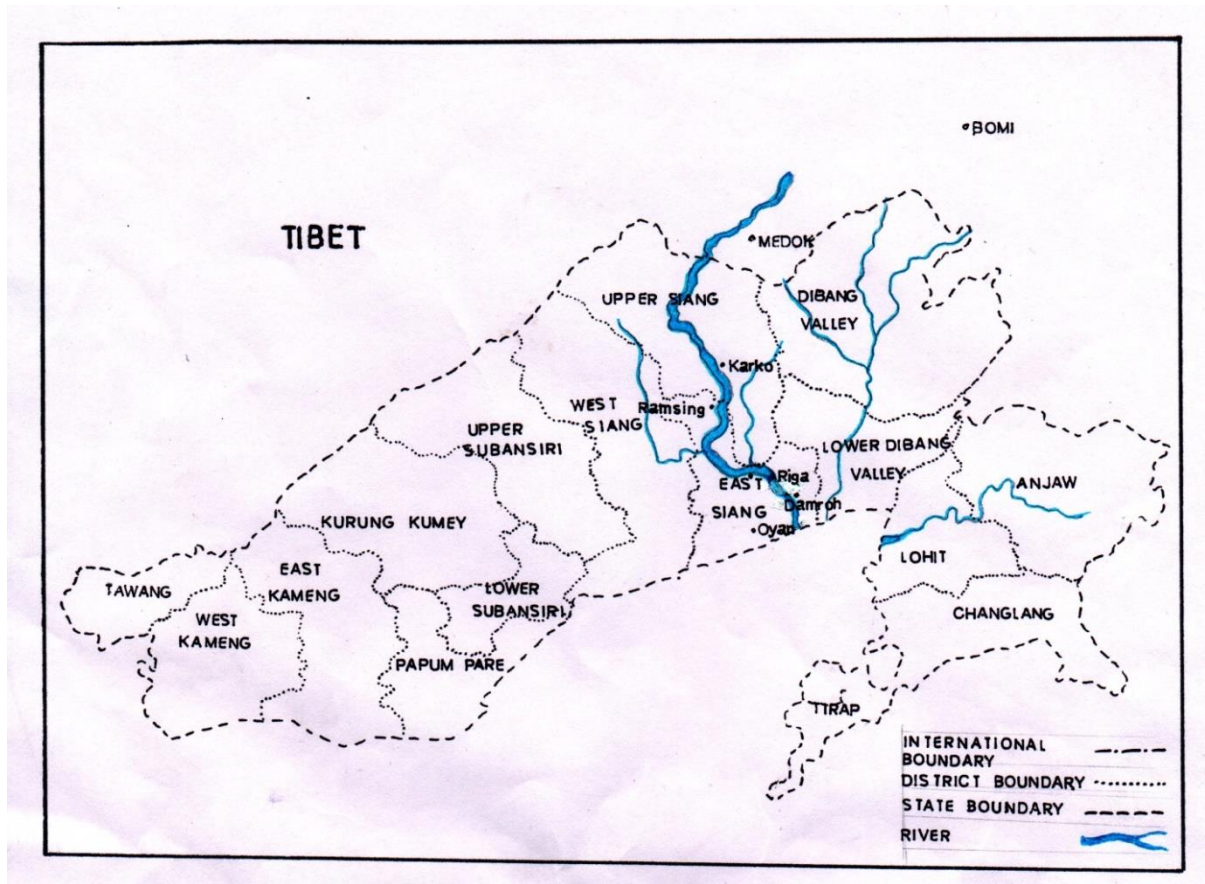
Hence, it appears that this pattern of migration might have resulted in the formation of a village or territory group based on particular clan members. Here we can assume an evolution of two forms of identity formation, namely the village clan and the dispersed clan. A village clan or a localised clan is termed as an organized, exogamic, decent group in a

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<sup>70</sup> Post, M.W & Modi, Yankee, 2011, *Language Contact and Genetic position of Milan(Eastern Himalaya)* Anthropological Linguistic, pp. 255-256.

particular village, whereas a dispersed clan is a named descent category found across several villages which is not organized.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, from the historical accounts from British anthropologists, at least, it is also clear from the settlement pattern of the Adi villages, where generally a group of families belonging to a few specific clans lived together, and initially they introduced themselves as members of the



**Sketch Map of Arunachal Pradesh (Names appeared and other locations mentioned in the study) i.e. Upper Siang, East Siang, Karko, Oyan, Ramsing, Riga, Damroh; Medok and Bomi located in Tibet.**

specific village group.<sup>72</sup> Examples of this type can also be found in the works of Europeans such as A. Hamilton and G.D.S. Dunbar. Hamilton in his 'In Abor Jungles of North East',

<sup>71</sup> Carol R, Melvin E, Burton P, *On the Development of Unilineal Descent*, Journal of Anthropological Research Vol 30 Accesses date – 10-1-2014, p. 77.



writes, "Many sections of the Abor (Adi) tribesmen name themselves after the tract of the country in which their particular clan has settled." This is the case with the Pasi, Panggis, Karkos and Komars.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, Jogendra Nath has observed that in Tibetan and Adi tradition, a village is named after the chief of the founding clan.

In this regard, mention may be made of *Pegu Siang*, or the pond of the Pegu-a clan of the Mising, situated in between the present Ramsing and Karko on the right bank of the Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>74</sup> *Noroh arik*, or the agricultural field of the Norohs (clan name of the Misings) of Damro—the Padam village is another example of clan identity in the hills.<sup>75</sup> Besides, the tradition of Mising clans such as Regon, Kardong, Padun, Doley, Bori, etc., has maintained their ancestral villages in different parts of the east Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>76</sup> For example, the existence of *Regon Aa:mong* or the land of the *Regon*, *Kardong Nimke* (rest place) of *Sikko* village in an area of 3 km away from present Pasighat, *Leying parak of the Loying* clan at *Damro* village, *Tayung Gomung* in *Karko* village of *Tayung*, and *Taye* clan support their tradition of ancestral village in the upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>77</sup>

As seen from the above description, clan identity was associated with the geographical habits or territorial identity of village names. This situation thus gave rise to the concept of a social group occupying particular territory (i.e., village territory) or communal land (clan land) under the system of tribal council or collective bodies. Here we can have some insights into the development of polity mechanisms that the social group adapts to

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<sup>72</sup> Roy Sachin, 1996, *Marriage and Kinship among the Padam Minyong* in J.S. Bhandari(ed) *Kinship and Family in North East India*, New Delhi. p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> Hamilton, A, 1912, *In Abor Jungles of North East India*, Indian Edition, New Delhi, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> Nath Jogendra & Pegu Naba, 2012 *A Cultural History of the Misings of Assam*, Prithivi Prakashan, Guwahati, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Padun Nahendra, 1970, *Gotra Devota( Gumin)*, in Bhriyumuni Kagyung(ed) *Mising Sanskritior Alekhya* Guwahati, p. 289.

<sup>77</sup> Doley Pankaj, *The Clan System of the Mising of Assam*, unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Gauhati University 2013, p. 39.

maintain life in a particular habitat.<sup>78</sup> In the absence of formal law and order institutions, there emerged a collective body as a way of arriving at a decision among the men of a residence group or village group. As such, the institution of present day *kebang* among the Adi-Mising is clearly the legacy of their early polity mechanism.

Thus, from the above discussion, especially the process where groups with segmentary lineage systems in a shifting cultivation setup does not seem to coincide with the idea of a coherent social unit such as a tribe or ethnic group. Furthermore, the process clearly speaks of a high degree of mobility of clan identities in social terms or conditions, and thus it does not appear to indicate any essence of particular traits, nor does it speak of a tightly bound ethnic corporate to form group identity. But it does explain that the plural identities of these people are largely due to the above-noted environmental settings and their specific processes of social interaction. However, it appears that the village clans might operate as a corporate unit since, traditionally, clan members lived together with other clan members in a cluster of houses, sharing resources and labour responsibilities of their *dolung*, or village. The very practice of community hall among the Tani clearly testifies to this fact. For example, among the Adis, it is known as *Muusup, Deere; Murong* in Mising; *Naptek* in Milang; and *Lapan* in Apatani, which were often used to build on mountain ridges or plateaus adjacent to water sources and croplands of the area of the nearby clan neighbourhood.

### **The Physical Adaptation of the Mising**

The Mising, as it is already stated, resides mostly on the banks of the river. The traditional Mising village, or *Doulung*, comprises 20 to 30 houses built on bamboo platforms raised about 6 to 8 feet using timber posts or wooden posts for supporting the super-structure. Mention may be made that the Adis also share this platform houses. But there are some

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<sup>78</sup> White, E.B, 1967, *Survival Through Adaptation*, New Yorker Magazine, p. 2.

variations in its structure. Sachin Roy observed, ‘the level for the floor is obtained by driving stilts, wooden or bamboo, in the hill-side varying in length with the fall of the slope. The shortest stilts are those nearest to the hill-side and the longest away from it.’<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the Mising houses were built over small boulders conveniently facing the riverside or offering a disorderly and ideally suited to adapting to flood waters.<sup>80</sup> The houses used to be the longest ever in the memory of the elders as N.C. Pegu further recorded ‘a single house often contains a family of 30 to 40 people living commonly in one long rectangular hall varying from 50 to 150 ft. in length and 15 to 20 ft. wide.’<sup>81</sup> There are some marked contrast in the platform-type (*Ka:re-okum*) houses of the Adis and the Misings. Sachin Roy observed ‘the pitch of the roof in an Adi house is made high in order to help draining of the rain-water. The roof slopes down to the platform to protect the walls from high wind.’<sup>82</sup> On the other hand the Mising houses are rectilinear with an angular roof stifled downward.

The Misings follow a distinct pattern in the building of their houses. The raised platform consists of five layers i.e. *Ertok, Jo:pong, Bener, Porpiyam, and Piso* or the floor made of bamboo. Similarly the pitch of the roof contains another five layers i.e. *Soying-dugying, Bangkung-Ba:re, Sotem, Ni:pir-Tarte:, and Se:lab*. They termed this customary five layered patterned as *Ta:lepe rumngoko-Keigpe rumngoko* which explains that the ‘five layers above the platform would protect from sunshine and rain, storm, and thunderbolt and the five layers below the platform would protect from poisonous insects, snake, scorpions and polluted soil-bound air.’<sup>83</sup>

The structural pattern of the houses of the Mising speaks of its physical adaptation strategies. The traditional Mising house, known as *Taleng Ukum*, is made from natural

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<sup>79</sup> Roy Sachin, 1959, *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture*, Shillong, p. 54.

<sup>80</sup> See appendix-V for Adi-Mising house pattern.

<sup>81</sup> Pegu, Nomal, 2011, op cit., p. 65.

<sup>82</sup> Roy Sachin, 1959, op.cite., pp. 61-62.

<sup>83</sup> Pegu, Indreswar, 2019 *The Mishings of North East India*, Dibrugarh, pp. 56-61

materials such as canes (calamus), bamboo (bamburtulda), reed, and thatch. The slated roof was covered either with palm leaves (takou) or with thatches. The jointing points of the construction are tied with cane cords. Therefore, the houses are not enduring, and it is said that the Mising never repaired. Instead, they prefer to build a new one. It is interesting to note that the bedroom corner of the floor is always compartmentalised with a door-less partition (*Sotum barey Kane Soyar*).<sup>84</sup>

Another important feature is the fireplace known as *Meram* in the middle of the house. In the first place, the *Meram* is a much needed place for childbirth, especially for postnatal with charcoal massage with leaves of castor plant (*Matsum*) and for preparing organic liquid food with chicken and other medicinal herbs (*Marsang*). Besides cooking, it is also considered a place for certain prayers. Usually, before taking the first sip of Apong, the forefinger of the right hand is dipped into the container, some prayer is muttered, and then a drop of the Apong is poured into the corner of the *Meram* in respect of the ancestors. Indeed, the *Meram* occupies an important place among the Mising. It is a clear expression of the traditional knowledge of storing food and other essential commodities. Hence, the Mising have their own design of storing food and seeds on a three-tiered bamboo platform with the shelves placed over the *Meram*. The first shelf is known as *Perap*, and the second layer is known as *Ra-bboo/rapte*. The uppermost layer of the bamboo shelf is known as the "Kumbang," which is kept hanging from the roof. The *Perap* is used as an oven or hearth for smoking fish and meat and for drying firewood and paddy during the rainy days. Furthermore, a large quantity of fish is smoked in the *Perap*, and a portion of the smoked-fish known as "*Ngosan*" is ground to make rough powder, or popularly known as *Namsing*, and stored in a bamboo container for the upcoming lean period. In the *ra-boo* or *rapte*, pitchers filled with *apong* are kept during the winter to keep the wine warm and prevent it from

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<sup>84</sup> Pegu Peter, 2019, *Economic History of the Miris*, Mishing Society of Mumbai, Guwahati , p. 159

becoming sour. Vegetables and other essential food items are stored in the *Kumbang*. There is another storage place called *sansali*, a mat made of bamboo placed in the living room where rice and seeds are kept so that floods do not damage them.

Thus, their house building structures show a rich repertoire of traditional knowledge for physical adaptation to floods. It is also clear from the above discussion that their *Taleng Ukum* is ingeniously designed to suit the 'adaptive requirements' as they constantly prefer to live in a riparian area. In his work *The Unquiet River: A Biography of the Brahmaputra*, Arupjyoti Saikia argued that the Miris, too, reclaimed floodplains and also lands on the Himalayan foothills across several centuries....the Miris had adapted to the extreme hostilities of the floodplains by developing floodplain-friendly housing/habitat and agricultural patterns.<sup>85</sup>

### **Subsistence Pattern:**

The Mising were shifting cultivators before their arrival in the valley. Indeed, they did not abandon this practice for a long period in the Brahmaputra Valley. It is evident from the account of W.W. Hunter where he stated, "They may be classed as nomadic agriculturist people, seldom staying in one place for more than four or five years, but moving away to a fresh locality as soon as the soil of their field becomes exhausted."<sup>86</sup> It is also observed that they had become accustomed to growing winter crops, but at the same time, they continued to maintain 'a crucial relationship with the hill economy to fulfil challenges provided by the dangers of extreme floodplains'. Hence, it appears that the Mising cultural practice and social structure are largely affected by their adaptation to the 'floodplain environment' especially in the sphere of subsistence economy.

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<sup>85</sup> Saikia, Arupjyoti, 2019, *The Unquiet River: A Biography of the Brahmaputra*, oxford university Press, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> Hunter, W.W, 1879(reprint), 1998, *A Statistical Account of Assamvol-1*, Guwahati, p. 239.

Another variable for this situation can be used by considering the subsistence economy and ecological questions in accordance with population growth. Considering the natural subsistence resource scarcity (land, wild food resources) and social evolution, an anthropologist like Michael J. Harner states, "The role of the means of production is essential to the understanding of social evolution... it differs from Marxism, emphasizing the scarcity in the means of production."<sup>87</sup> He further maintained that with this theoretical model based upon the concept of scarcity, it is possible to predict the evolution of social structure, including changes in descent, political organization and social stratification.<sup>88</sup>

Keeping these views in mind here too, the dispersal of the Mising population, the segmentation of clans into lineages, or *Ope* in the context of the Mising, can be examined. While it has already been discussed that the very process of migration and shifting cultivation gave rise to the distribution of clans into different localities. This process was accompanied by other factors, such as continuing population pressure. Hence, the rising or simple growth in population density would reduce the fertility of land, which in turn forced them to nearby land in search for virgin land. The settlement pattern of the lineages or *Ope* like the sub-clans, is again found to be inhabited in one contiguous area or in the typical Mising Village. As previously stated, the typical Mising village or Dolung consisted of 20 to 30 houses, where a single house could contain 30 to 40 people, sometimes reaching 100.<sup>89</sup> Hence, it appears that even in this very situation, when the number of households increased, over a period of time, it would lead to a scarcity of subsistence resources in those typical Mising *dolung* or villages. As a result, a segment of a clan, i.e., major lineage or *Ope*, would shift to a new area by founding a new village. Therefore, it led to the conviction that the working of these historical processes may be identified as the chief determinant of the segmentation or fragmentation

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<sup>87</sup> Harner, M. J, 1970, *Population Pressure and the Social the Social Evolution of Agriculturalists*, Published by University of Mexico. Accessed: 28-02-2015 14:31, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> Contemporary Mising Villages, as seen in Majuli, usually consist of more than 50 houses.

and dispersal of the Mising population into different localities. In other words, a dispersed and sparse Mising population (social structure) finds its explanation in the adaptation to its immediate environment. It was due to their very practice of swidden or shifting cultivation that gave rise to the development of a distinct social structure.

Further, shifting cultivation has been continued by the Mising for several reasons in the Brahmaputra Valley. First, Mising settlement areas were not suitable for any kind of permanent cultivation since the soils of a riparian area are made of alluvial soils. Second, the habitation areas of the Mising were constantly exposed or subject to periodic flooding and erosion—a situation that inevitably led to the scarcity of arable land resources and might have forced the Mising to witness a long history of unsettled life without any permanent homeland. This scenario of shifting settlements from one place to another is seen even today.<sup>90</sup> As it is noted earlier, even during the advent of the British, the Mising were found to be leading a sort of nomadic life under a system of shifting cultivation. Durgeswar Doley held the view that with the advent of the British, which facilitated many immigrants from outside Assam, the Mising families gradually left places of urban areas such as the present Paltan Bazar area of Dibrugarh and the court area of Lakhimpur in the fear of losing their culture in the areas surrounded by jungles. Here again, the fear of an epidemic, as he maintained, forced them to move from one place to another better place of habitation. Moreover, "The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886" also shows that during that time the Mising had no permanent settlement for which the government could collect house tax from them.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, we can assume that with the increase in population and lack of arable land and, most significantly, with close habitation with the lowland plain population of the Brahmaputra Valley, they adopted a new "lowland Valley cultivation". In fact, the

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<sup>90</sup> Our field study in the Majuli and Matmora areas of Dhakuakhana shows that people had to shift their villages to new areas from time to time following the changing course of the river, erosion, and lack of arable land due to floods, etc.

<sup>91</sup> Doley, Basanta, 2008 *Mising Samaj-Sanskritir Samikhya*, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, p. 38.

transformation of the socio-cultural aspects of the Mising and their adoption of the habits of the non-Mising population in the valley find their explanation in the early association with the lowland valley culture of Assam.<sup>92</sup> Hence, farming activities became indispensable for both the male and female members of the community. In fact, if we observe the lowland valley cultivation among the Mising, it shows their mastery over this system. They now completely change the farming implements, which is evident from the words borrowed from the Assamese language. Some farming and harvesting tools and implements such as *Nangal*(*Gota and Fangphal nangal*), *Jungali*, *holmari*, *dila*, *dila-jori*, *ahot-jori*, *esari*, *binda*, *bira*, *kasi*, *joboka*, *moi*, *muthi*, *dangori*, etc. are clearly examples of Assamese loanwords. The usage of loanwords such as *esang*, *homar*, *tinishir*, *charihir*, etc. for the parcelling of land speaks of their mastery over the newly adopted lowland cultivation system.

Likewise, after abandoning the age-old shifting cultivation they fostered upon terrace cultivation. Adoption of animal energy for furrowing and tilling of soils before sowing seeds was the pre-requisite characteristic of terrace cultivation. As a result, for the first time, they domesticated cows to plough the soils. It is interesting to note here that the Mising have no indigenous name for cows and bullocks, which shows that the husbandry of the cow was never their custom during the time of their sojourn in the hills.<sup>93</sup> Thus, over a period of time, there has been a drastic change in the agricultural pattern of the Mising. Their traditional shifting cultivation is almost extinct. While the adoption of amro, or a dry variety of rice or rabi crop, and wet-rice cultivation appears to have given them more socio-economic stability. For its advantageous ecological reasons, *Amro aarig* (cultivation) had gained popularity among the Misings. *Amro* cultivation is defined as a "short-matured" variety crop that is

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<sup>92</sup> Nath, D, Mar-April, 2009, *Misings in the Plains in Middle Ages in Pro Mising Action*(ed) Jorhat, 12

<sup>93</sup> There is a word '*sobo*' that stands for a cow in Mising. But the widespread usage of this word in farming activity is very minimal among them.



cultivated in a dry climatic condition without standing water in the field.<sup>94</sup> Hence, unlike wet-rice cultivation, the Mising had no occasion to employ any sort of irrigation system for their farming activities. Most significantly, due to the availability of 'forestland or fallow land and also prairie grasslands' in the vicinity of the Mising settlements, utilisation of these arable lands became easier for the *amro*, or dry variety of rice cultivation. However, this cultivation requires high-labour-intensive engagements like cutting, drying, log removing, clearing, reclamation, etc. (*siuhlo-nuhnam, pihdum -gurnam*).<sup>95</sup> This might be the case that the joint family system of the Mising survived for a long time throughout their habitation in the valley. On the other hand, the spirit of cooperation of the *Ope* (extended family) in the sphere of economic activities has apparently been replaced by two organisations of interdependence at the village level. These two organisations are the *Rigbo-Guinam/Bonam and the Daglik-alig*. Under such labor-intensive farming conditions, an individual Mising family seeks the assistance of a neighbour or villagers (*reegbo-tani*), generally from youths (*Ya:me-Mimbr'e*), for ploughing the agricultural field.

While the practice of wet-rice cultivation or Kharif crops (*amdang arreeg*) is said to have been adopted much later. Peter Pegu opines that "prior to the sixteenth century, the Miri peasants had no active participation in the *Sali* production until the state patronisation in the later century."<sup>96</sup> We have not come across any evidence that river waters were taken to the farming fields by any primitive mechanical means... In a way, no artificial irrigation was needed to supplement rain and water, which were in abundance in the region.' he added.<sup>97</sup>

Besides, D. Nath has observed that

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<sup>94</sup> Pegu, Peter, 2019, op cit., p. 195.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

‘The Mising in the heartland of the Ahom Kingdom had undergone a complete process of metamorphosis in so far as their economic pattern was concerned... The Ahom were also accustomed to the transplanting system of cultivation, or *Sali* cultivation... Thus, under the system (paik), Mising people were shaped to the need and were compelled to leave their shifting habits and become settled agriculturalists. This is how in many places of Assam, particularly on the south-bank of the Brahmaputra within the jurisdiction of the present districts of Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Nagaon, Mising have now settled *Sali* cultivators.’<sup>98</sup>

The Mising system of wet variety rice cultivation is another significant aspect of their mastery of the lowland cultivation system. *Aamdang* and *bau* varieties were cultivated in wet conditions but reaped in the dry season. The system of raising *bau* rice requires double crop land, where peasants can sow seeds of different crops at a time for two harvesting seasons of the year. The seeds of *aamro* and *bou* were sown together at the same time. Another technique used by the Mising for *bau* cultivation was to sow its seeds in the form of *Poirang*. This mode of growing rice is conditioned by soil type, ecological state, and climatic adjustment. "It is interesting to note that *Poirang* is done on land that holds sufficient water in order to moisten the ground for the germination of the seeds. While the condition of the soil is initially wet, the optimum level of water in proportion to the growth of the plant over the field is essential. The practice of cash crop cultivation is a recent phenomenon among the Mising. However, Peter Pegu opines that by the sixteenth century, the Miri peasants moved to another spurt of extensive cultivation by introducing cash crops into their scheduled agenda of farming. Dew-soaked autumn crops of mustard oilseeds (*petu-areeg*) and pulses, particularly black-gram (*peyhreed areeg*), are produced abundantly on a regular basis.

### **Women’s work and knowledge on physical environment:**

The other food resources, besides the variety of rice among the Mising, are obtained from livestock raising, collection of wild plants, and to a large extent, fishing in the streams

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<sup>98</sup> Nath, D, Mar-April, 2009 op cit., p. 12.

and narrow rivers. Women are called the biodiversity experts of the world.<sup>99</sup> The Mising women, too, played a predominant role in their subsistence economy. Their ecological knowledge and expertise are central in the management of household activities and agricultural activities among the Mising. They are the primary producers of food and secure the food for their family and for the community, as in the case of societies across the world. Mising women developed their diverse skills and knowledge involved in livestock raising (pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, etc.) collection and preparation of plant foods, and collection of fuel wood and fodder from their surrounding forest. The Mising rears pigs, fowls, goats, etc. for various purposes. It is said that many Mising families used to possess elephants, a herd of cattle, cows, and buffalo in large numbers. They have a special reverence for elephants. It is said that a dead rite (*dadgang*) is performed if a domesticated elephant dies. In fact, the women folk's collection of wood, bamboo, cane, firewood, plant food, and so on from the forest had been the common picture of a typical Mising village. A large variety of edible parts of different plants serve as a staple food among the Mising. The Mising women have an in-depth knowledge of the availability of the edible parts of different plants in different seasons. Some of the common wild plants collected from the forest (*Yumrang*) are: Pakkom (*clerodendron colebrookiamis*), Nekung (*polygonum assanicum*), Patang owing, Takuk, *Tajikicus spp.*), ombe (*sarchoclamis pulcherrima*), Takpiang, okolbiring, okang(fern leaves), gurban (*meliosma simplifolia*), marsang (*spilanthus acmella*). Among the edible roots: potatoes, sweet potatoes (*Pagli*), *Topioca (Singi-ali)*, aloes of different kinds like: kamrali, singkuir ali, mayong, lodor, etc.

It would be interesting to note here that the traditional method of making a beverage known as *Apong* is an integral part of their day-to-day life. It is not merely a drink; it is

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<sup>99</sup> Shiva Vandana, 2016, *Who Really Feeds the World? The failures of agribusiness and the promise of agroecology*, North Atlantic Books, California, p.121

deeply ingrained in their socio-cultural life. Without *Apong* the Mising's traditional religious rites and other rituals, festivals cannot be performed, and it is also served to guests as a "welcome drink". It has been observed that in any kind of ritual activity, the prime offering to numerous spirits (uis) is made of *Apong*. "A cup of *Apong* after a day's heavy labour gives them the much-needed sleep and prepares them for another hard day ahead," writes N. C. Pegu.<sup>100</sup> Two varieties of *Apong*, differing in taste, colour, and even in the method of preparation, are found among the Mising. Of them, one is called *Nogin Apong*, which is creamy white and this rice beer is produced by the fermentation of the boiled rice. The other one is called *Poro Apong*, which is a dark greenish colour due to the addition of ashes of straw and paddy husk.<sup>101</sup> Here again, we can observe the in-depth skill and knowledge of Mising women in the identification of different medicinal wild plants while preparing for *Apong*. An extract of various wild plants called *Epob* or *Epob kusere* (medicine) is added while preparing the *Apong* in the right proportions. It is found that more than 50 different wild plants, including some domesticated plants, along with grinding rice, are used to make the *Epob*. Some of the wild plants used in the making of the *Epob* are – *Injari*, *Delipoka*, *Rukji* (*Cyclosorus dentatus*), *Gintetere* (*Polygonum hydropiper*), *Derimasiri*, *Horu Manimuni*(*Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides*), *Baelang annae*(*Artocarpus hetrophyllus*), *Pineapple leave*( *Ananas Comosus*). *Taabut Annane* (*Saccharam officinarum*), *Rikhom*, *Oppi Kusere*(*Rauwolfia serpentina*) *Pekijikjik*(*Costus speciosus*), *Panimoduri*, *Jolokia Bon*, *Boyong annane* ,*Gumuni*(*Dracaena trifasciata*), *Titaful*(*Phlogacanthus curviflours*), *Dalseni*(*Curcuma longa*), *Pumrong*, *Ruktak*, *Durun bon*(*Leucas plukeneti*) *Bor manimuni*(*Asiatic bennyworth*), *Bogalatur*(*Bhringraj*)-(*Eclipta alba*), *piyak susag*, *Tulsi* (*Asimum tenuiflorum*), *Mursee* (*Capsicum frutescens*), *pipoli* (*Piper longum*), *Narasingha* (*Murrya koenigii*), *Tejpaat* (*Lauruj Novilis*), *Raamnaam Kusere*, *Kurtuk Kartak*, *Tita phul* (*Phlogacanthus curviflorus*),

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<sup>100</sup> Pegu Nomal, 2011, op. cit., p.73.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

Tapaat Tungkor, Maha Taake( *Zinger officinali*), Jaaluk(*Piper nigram*), Bael Paat( *Aegle Marmelos*),etc. are also collected.<sup>102</sup>

Besides, observations can be extended into other forest resources upon which the Misings heavily used to depend in their day to day lives. The history of the penetration of market-economy into the interior of the Misings villages is recent phenomena/development. As such till 1940's the Mising villages in rural set up did not have the opportunity to access marketing amenities.<sup>103</sup> For that reason the use of cosmetic product for maintaining personal hygiene and other related stuff was unknown to the Misings. It is noteworthy that the Misings have the traditional knowledge of making 'natural-detergent' from some forest herbs and shrubs for keeping their clothes and hair clean and healthy. As such the Misings women used a forest herb known as *susang* for washing hairs. This forest herbs, identified as a semi-creeper of lichen family was abundantly found at the fringe areas of the Misings. It is found that the Mising women used to collect the stems of the *susang* herbs and grinded it to extract its skins from the woody kernel and when the skin become pasty and soapy they used it as a shampoo for washing their hair.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the tender twigs of *sinkgi*( Bombax botanical name- hepta phylum) sprig were also used for hair washing by Mising women folk. The elephant fruit ( Botanical name: *Dilles indica*) known as *chamapa aye* among the Misings is not only cooked recipe but also the let-out part or core of the fruit called *champa padum* is used as hair washing shampoo.

On the other hand, apart from actively being involved in labour-intensive agricultural activities and in other household activities for livelihoods, Mising women are well-known for their textile products. They are even called the preservers of Mising textile culture as they

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<sup>102</sup> This information is collected from Mrs. Mira Doley Pegu. Here an attempt has been made to provide the scientific names of some of the plants that the Mising women collect for the making of the epob.

<sup>103</sup> Pegu Peter 2019, op cit., p. 279.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 280

retained the only loin loom that was used for weaving during the time of their sojourn in the hills.<sup>105</sup> As such, the *Gadu*, or popularly known as mirijim in Assamese (which is ‘a heavy blanket-soft and fluffy on one side and plain on the other’), is one of the most illustrative examples of Mising women’s skill and expertise in textile products.<sup>106</sup> The *gadu* is made of cotton ticking and it is said that the weaving of a full-size *gadu* took almost a year starting right from cotton cultivation to the application of looms for production.<sup>107</sup> Thus their traditional weaving machine is known as *Ko:rat*. This weaving tool is made of bamboo, wood, animal bone and there is the spinning wheel to spin the cotton yarn. The following components are associated in the making of *Gaddu* in *Ko:rat* i.e. *Pa:gi-Pe:kong-Popi-Dulum, Be:long*, (made of animal bone) *Sumpa and Tulta*.<sup>108</sup> No doubt the modern sophisticated blankets have virtually replaced this traditional hand-made *Gaddu*. However, the utility of *Gaddu* clearly testifies to the fact that the extreme hostility of floodplain environment necessitated the weaving of this heavy blanket among the Misings. Medieval Ahom chronicles also testify to the existence of the heavy blanket among the Misings.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, Peter Pegu has observed, ‘unlike other community where the weavers comprise of men too, in Mishing society the weaving is a feminine monopoly; men are not allowed to even touch the loom... it is said Mishing girl dances before she walks and weaves before she clothes.’<sup>110</sup>

It is interesting to note that rice is an important component in their day-to-day lives. It is used on a number of occasions, like in the traditional therapy practice by the Mising and certain beliefs are also found to be associated with rice. In the case of *Kaa:rag*, or a sudden illness (headache, stomach pain) which is believed to be caused by the spirit of a dead person,

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<sup>105</sup> Taid, Taburam, 2013, op cit., p. ix.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>107</sup> Pegu Peter, 2019, op cit., p. 178.

<sup>108</sup> Personal Interview with Mrs. Nirmala Doley Pegu at Bokulguri, Dhakuakhana, on 12/09/21

<sup>109</sup> Hossain Ismail, 2015, *Mising Samaj-Itihash Aru Sanskritir Oitijya*, Panbazar, Guwahati-1, pp. 61-67

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

the senior male or female member of the family picks up some rice grains and offers them on the outside in the name of the dead person.

Likewise, as a riverine community, the practice of fishing is quite popular and is extensively done by the Mising. However, fishing is commonly done depending on seasonality. They are generally found to be harvested fish during the onset of the monsoon which known as *Ngotum* in Mising when the small ponds, streams, etc. are filled with freshwater from the Overflow Rivers, and the other time in *Ngotok* means when the flood water recedes during September and October. As a result, the excess fish caught during these times is smoked and prepared for *Namsing*. The Mising exercised several indigenous methods for harvesting fish from deep running water, springs, swampy areas, and ponds. They use different kinds of fish attractants and fishing implements besides catching by hand. The female folk generally prefer ‘*zurki* and *chalconi*’ as fishing trapping implements. Some of the traditional Mising fishing implements made of bamboo and cane are: *Dirdang*, *Turji*, *Porang*, *Dirtok*, *Podi*, *Eji Jamborok*, *Di-bung Raashak*, *Ko:liya* etc. (See the appendix V for Mising fishing implements)

Overall, the Mising had adapted to different ecologies where they settled in. their mode of resource use in the settled cultivation stage also reflected attributes which they had carried from the hunting gathering stage. The experience of the Mising is therefore rich and diverse as is reflected in their agriculture, animal husbandry, food habits, textile and housing.