

## CHAPTER-II

### BACKGROUND OF THE BODO AND THE MISING MOVEMENT

*Colonial and Post Colonial developments in Assam,*

*Role of Assamese middle class vis-à-vis the role of the newly emerging middle class of these ethnic groups.*

Politics of Assam has been increasingly designed by various ethnic movements in the post independent period. The demographic composition of the region is diverse with the coexistence of various ethnic groups with some shared ethnic characteristics as well as considerable varieties in terms of historical memories, distinct cultural features, customs and beliefs, languages or dialects. These ethnic groups are, however, numerically fewer in number than the dominant majority Assamese speaking group. This multi ethnic state had to face problem of assertion by the various ethnic groups basically in 1960s to protect and preserve their identity. Once a large state (227,281km<sup>2</sup>), Assam has been reduced by nearly two third (to 78,543 km<sup>2</sup>) since independence by reorganization of states.<sup>1</sup> But the movements for assertion could not be stopped by reorganizing the state. It was followed by a chain of autonomy movements by which some other minority ethnic groups demanded the recognition of their socio-cultural and political identity. A quick result was the formation of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967 as a common political platform of all the plain tribals.

In the post independent period, as a means to strengthen the nation building process the state designed policies of homogenization and assimilation in order to integrate the different ethnic categories within the fold of composite Assamese nationalism but it opened the path for more ethnic movements and cultural revivalism in Assam. Among the groups wanted to establish their separate socio-cultural and political identity in Assam by way of mobilizing their people both culturally and politically, the Bodos and Misings are significant. But while the Bodos are demanding total separation from Assam, the Misings are not in the demand<sup>2</sup> of separation and declared themselves as an integral part of greater Assamese society. However, they want to create an autonomous territorial unit that would enable them to exercise decentralized political and fiscal autonomy that would provide them space for the preservation of their socio-cultural identity.

### **The Bodo Movement**

The Bodos are the aborigines of Assam, inhabiting basically the northern part of the river Brahmaputra and having a scattered population in other parts of Assam. The Bodos are the largest plain tribe with a population of (Table 2.a) 1,361,735, constituting nearly 4.36 (Table 1.a) percent of the total population of Assam and 35.05 percent S.T population in Assam<sup>3</sup>. The Bodos are the Indo-mongoloid plain tribe from the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodos at present are mostly concentrated in the region between in the hilly tracks of Bhutan in the north and the river Brahmaputra in the south.

The region is now a politico-administrative unit called Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) within the state of Assam.

**Table 2.a**

**Population of Selected Scheduled Tribes of Assam and its Proportion to Total ST population**

Name of the Scheduled Tribes	Total Population 2001	Proportion to the total ST population 2001	Total Population 2011	Proportion to the total ST population 2011
All Scheduled Tribes	3,308,570	100	3,884,371	100
Bodo	1,352,771	40.9	1,361,735	35.05
Mising	587,310	17.8	6,80,424	17.51
Karbi	353,513	10.7	NA	NA
Rabha	277,517	8.4	NA	NA
Kachari	235,881	7.1	NA	NA
Tiwa	170,622	5.2	NA	NA
Dimasa	110,976	3.4	NA	NA
Deori	41,161	1.2	NA	NA

**Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011**

The movement for a separate Socio-Cultural and political Bodo identity has its origin in the colonial period. The Bodo demand for a separate homeland was raised while still under colonial rule. The newly emerging Bodo middle class intellectuals initiated a move towards this direction even in the pre-Independence period and formed an organization called *Kachari Yuvak Sanmilani* (Kachari Youth Association) and made specific political demands before the Simon Commission, 1929<sup>4</sup>. Further, the association submitted a memorandum to the commission for separate Bodo electorate in the Assam provincial assembly. Following the recommendation of Simon Commission four seats were reserved for the plain tribals<sup>5</sup>.

The formation of Tribal League in 1933 has a far reaching impact on the future of the tribals of Assam. The Tribal League participated in the Assam provincial assembly elections held under the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935. Accordingly, the Assam Provincial Congress Committee leader Gopinath Bordoloi formed the government by an alliance with the elected members of the Tribal League. Gopinath Bordoloi, who had a better understanding of the problems of the tribals, guaranteed the hill tribals limited autonomy in the form of district councils and the plain tribals tribal belts and blocks to prevent tribal land alienation against the backdrop of increasing communal machinations of the Muslim League and the Colonial government<sup>6</sup>. Further, in 1946 while the colonial government was preparing to transfer power to the Indians, a leader of the All Assam Tribal League, Dharanidhar Basumatary was chosen as a member of the Constituent Assembly to represent the interest of the Bodos. However, in the post

independent period to conform to the desired need and status of the tribals in Assam, a committee under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoli was constituted by the Indian Government. The Committee submitted its report to the Advisory Committee on the Fundamental Rights, the Minorities, and Tribal and Excluded areas for the consideration of the Constituent Assembly. Accordingly, the recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated into the Six Schedule of Indian Constitution. The committee recommended the incorporation of the Six Schedule<sup>7</sup> to the Constitution of India providing autonomy to the excluded and partially excluded areas by creating Autonomous District Councils.<sup>8</sup> R Pegu observes *'but the committee most probably, moved by the objective of assimilating the plain tribals of Assam into the mainstream Assamese nationality did not strongly recommend for providing autonomy to the plains tribal areas in line with other hill areas'*. Again, most of the issues drafted were drawn from the colonial policies on land regulation which found expression in the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act 1886.<sup>9</sup> In the colonial period the Tribal areas were categorized as Excluded areas-mostly inhabited by the hill tribes and as Partially Excluded Areas mostly inhabited by the plain tribals of Assam.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the Bodo inhabited areas were categorized as 'tribal belts' and 'tribal blocks'.

But during the successive governments under the dominance of the Assamese caste Hindu leaders the 'tribal belts' and 'tribal blocks' were repeatedly and massively encroached and not only Bengali Hindu refugee from East Pakistan but also the landless Muslim immigrants were allowed to settle there.<sup>11</sup> Though the intention of the creation of

the 'tribal belts' and 'tribal blocks' were to protect the 'tribal land' from being encroached upon by the 'non-tribals' and thereby to provide a protection to their traditional customs, beliefs, practices and as well as to preserve their distinct culture and identity, the intention could not succeed much because of the lack of attention of the successive Assam governments on this core issue. Encroachment by the outsiders to the tribal land caused rampant land alienation and threatened their traditional customs, beliefs, their culture and identity.

The happenings of 1960s have far reaching impact on the future landscape and geo-politics of Assam. The cultural campaigning to turn Assam into a homogenous society dominated by the Assamese way of life and Assamese Language, followed by the organization and reorganization<sup>12</sup> of the state, made the plain tribals of Assam get united and formed a Political party called Plain Tribal Council Of Assam (PTCA) in 1967. Since its formation it started a popular movement on the demand of a Union Territory for the plain tribals of Assam, called *Udayachal*, to be carved out from Assam. The PTCA movement for the new state roused the tribal people of Assam to great enthusiasm with a sense of solidarity. Further, in 1967, All Bodo Students Union was formed and they started a strong movement with the demand of a separate state for the Bodos. Initially ABSU and PTCA worked together on the demand of a separate state. However, the PTCA entered into an alliance in the short lived Janata Government, had four ministers in the cabinet and shared power in the state thereby postponing the demand for separation.<sup>13</sup> However, the disillusioned ABSU withdrew its support from PTCA in 1979 when PTCA

failed to fulfill the aspirations of the Bodos for a separate state during the reorganization process. In the meantime PTCA itself got split in 1984 with one of its militant leader Binay Khangur Bismutiary forming a new political organization called United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front, Assam (UNTLEF), which was more influential among the Christian converts, who were even more alienated from the mainstream Assamese. The UNTLEF worked together with ABSU and blamed PTCA for sacrificing the interest of the tribal people. Further, a fragmented ABSU group known as Ramsiary group parted company with Upen Brahma group on the question of tactic and strategy at this time. The Upen Brahma group undoubtedly very popular among the Bodo people, succeeded in catching the imagination of the Bodo masses over large areas and in mobilizing thousands for their programmes of action, demanding that a contiguous stretch of territory extending over the entire northern bank of the river Brahmaputra should be formed into a separate Bodoland.<sup>14</sup>

The Assam Movement<sup>15</sup> of 1980s and the follow up actions by the immediate successive government have assumed greater importance on the above mentioned context. In 1979, All Assam Students Union (AASU) and *Gana Sangram Parishad* organized the Assam Movement for the detection and deportation of foreign nationals from the state and for granting greater autonomy. The Bodos who watched the movement with fascination, were also sympathetic to the demands, basically to stop the migration of outsiders as in their own areas they were becoming minorities because of the rapid influx of outsiders. The movement was supported by most of the Bodo youths, who worked along with

AASU. The movement was ended with the signing of the Assam Accord<sup>16</sup> in 1985 and the formation of the new government by Assam Gana Parishad<sup>17</sup> with the erstwhile AASU leaders. The formation of the new government by AGP which was formed by the former AASU leader made the Bodo people more hopeful about the fulfillment of their demand. Accordingly, the AGP government included several ministers from among the plain tribal and showed their willingness to placate the tribals. But those members that belonged to the families who were more or less assimilated to the mainstream Assamese were not much interested with the separate Bodo identity.<sup>18</sup> Slowly, when the post accord enthusiasm disappeared, the tribals discovered the position of the new government not far different from the previous one.

The disappointed Bodo youths at this point thought of a different way and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) took over the lead of the movement and started a vigorous movement for greater autonomy on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1987 with the demand for the creation of a full-fledged state of Bodoland outside Assam<sup>19</sup>. While starting the movement the ABSU released a document of 92 demands<sup>20</sup>, extending a large area including socio-cultural and political security of the Bodo people living all over Assam. But with the passage of time these 92 demands essentially centered around three major political issues a) formation of a separate state named Bodoland on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, b) establishment of autonomous district councils in the tribal dominated areas of the south bank of the river Brahmaputra, c) incorporation of the Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anlong in the Six Schedule of Indian Constitution.



## **Causes of the Bodo Movement**

### **Land alienation among the Bodos**

It is a matter of fact that the Bodos have been an agricultural tribe for centuries. The base of the Bodo economy is land. But the tribal peasantry in Assam including both the Bodos and the Misings suffered economic decline with the advent of the British and their colonial policies of exploitation of the economic resources as much as possible by penetrating into the forest and hill areas and all agricultural land inhabited by the tribals, thereby affecting the traditional tribal economy and society. The newly introduced colonial land policy was quite unfamiliar to the simple minded tribal people. Everything of their community resources went under colonial taxation. The British laid the basis of private property and created feudal interest on lands including the land and the forest belonging to the tribals through the grant of 'Zamindari' to landlords.<sup>21</sup> The colonial policy of generating more land revenue by encouraging peasant migration, mostly Muslims from the neighbouring erstwhile East Bengal from the early second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and settling them in the fallow and wastelands areas of Brahmaputra valley, had worsened the position of the tribals inhabiting the Brahmaputra valley, basically the Bodos and the Misings. The presence of these immigrants was more dominant in the Goalpara district, the Barpeta subdivisions of the erstwhile Kamrup district, the foothill areas of the Karbihills, large areas of the Nagaon district and the Mongoldoi subdivision of the erstwhile Darrang district. Regarding the immigration of the

during 1911-21, from East Bengal, mostly the Muslim immigration Mr. Lloyd<sup>22</sup> in the Census Report of 1921 observed;

In 1911, few cultivators from Eastern Bengal had gone Goalpara.....In the last decade (1911-21) the movement have extended far up the valley, and the colonist now form an appreciable element in population in all the four lower and central districts.....In Goalpara nearly 20% of the population is made up of these settlers. The next favourite district is Nowgong, where they form about 14% of the whole population. In Kamrup, waste lands are being taken up rapidly, especially in the Barpeta subdivision. In Darrang exploration and settlement by the colonist are in an earlier stage. They have not yet penetrated far from the banks of the Brahmaputra.....Almost every train and streamer brings parties of these settlers, and it seems likely that their march will extend further up the B Valley and away from the river before long<sup>23</sup>.

From 1911 to 1941, in this period of thirty, the percentage of Muslim population in Barpeta subdivision unbelievably increased from 0.1 percent to 49 percent. Similarly during the ten years period of 1921 to 1931, Dhing, Laharighat, Juria, Laokhowa, angBakorimauzas in Nagaon district experienced a population growth of 100 percent to 249 percent.<sup>24</sup> Further, the migration of the Muslim Bengalis from East Bengal was accompanied by the immigration of the Nepali citizens having their main business of milk production and in case of some in smuggled timber settled mainly in the remote forest areas of Assam<sup>25</sup>. In 1931 C.S Mullan<sup>26</sup> stated<sup>27</sup> *“It is sad but by no means improbable*

*that in another thirty years Sibsagar district will be the only part in Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home*". He further observed

In Nowgong district alone, Mymensinghias occupied 33,402 acres in 1920-21, and in 1929-30, 102,363 acres, Muslims having 89,078 and Hindus 13,285 acres.

In their anxiety to get land these settlers have at one time and another caused a good deal of friction by squatting in Government Reserves or occupying the land of local people from which they are not evicted without difficulty<sup>28</sup>.

Further, with the objective of opening more land for the immigrant population the "grow more food" campaign was started and it proposed to dereserve portions of existing grazing reserves and even two forest reserves, namely 'Laokhowa' and 'Orang'. But under the pressure of sustained protest the policy was modified in 1945.

After going through a long way of modifications and changes on the land policy basically on the areas inhabited by the tribal people including the Line System, ultimately the concept of 'tribal belts and blocks'<sup>29</sup>, through a resolution in 1945 was implemented eventually by the Gopinath Bordoloi led Congress ministry in 1946 with an objective to stop the tribal displacement and land alienation among the tribals. But the successive governments in the post independence period are either not interested in protecting the tribal land or have other reasons not to do so and as a result huge encroachments have taken place in the tribal belts and blocks. It also has been seen that in the post

independence period the political parties in power with the intention to create a solid vote bank started to settle the immigrant peasants in tribal lands<sup>30</sup>.

In the post independence period another important point of concern is that each and every government has been following the practice of acquisition of tribal land in the name of developmental project. The governments have been in a continuous engagement of acquiring tribal land for the construction of railways and road transport as well as for the setting up of industrial and irrigation complexes and construction of dams etc. The Dhansiri Irrigation Project, the Jagoroad Paper Mill, the Bokajan Cement Factory, the Namrup Fertiliser Industry, the Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals are the burning examples of the said government policy that has led to the displacement of the tribal people from their own land<sup>31</sup>.

Alienation of land makes them frustrated. It became the root cause poverty. The above mentioned process forced the tribal people of Assam to migrate into remoter areas leaving behind their original habitat. Over last forty years or so, a huge section of the Bodo peasantry, the worst victim of the government land policy migrated to other parts leaving their own land, including their migration to the eastern part of river *Sowansiri*, Gohpur in the Sonitpur district, Lakhimpur district, Daiyang Forest reserve of the Golaghat district and Karbi-Anglong district etc.<sup>32</sup> Verrier Elwin rightly observes that '*tribals firmly believed that forest belongs to them and that they have a right to do what they will with it. They have been there, they say, for centuries; it is their life and they consider themselves*

*justified in resisting any attempt to deprive them of it.*' The enragement of the tribal people made its expression in various revolts like the Santhal rebellion in 1855-57, the Birsa Munda uprising during 1874-1901 etc and not excluding the Bodo movement. The Bodos, who are the worst victim of this land alienation process, ultimately got organized and started the movement for their constitutional protection, and separate identity.

### **Political marginalization: Growth of newly emerging middle class intellectuals**

In the beginning of twentieth century there was seen a gradual growth of the middle class among the Bodos. The phenomenon of the growth of the middle class among the Bodos in this period has to be seen basically in terms of two important factors. *Firstly*, the advent of cash economy among the tribals and its proliferation in the colonial period that transformed the tribal social and economic structure and *secondly*, the emergence of socio-religious reform movement among the Bodos led by Kalicharan Brahma which transcended the domain of religion and extended itself into the realm of society, polity and economy.<sup>33</sup> The impact of his efforts on the reform in the sphere of education facilitated the entry of many Bodo youths into the colonial job market thereby triggering the advent of a middle class among the Bodos. In the meantime, this newly emerging middle class presented itself as the vanguard of the interest of the Bodo people. They came forward and tried their best not only to regenerate traditional culture, heritage and original language but also to secure their collective rights and to correct the perceived injustices, discrimination and alienation from the mainstream of political and economic

development<sup>34</sup>. They started a strategic move in this respect and initiated organizing the Bodo people under the banner of some organizations. One such organization was Kachari Youth Association (*Kachari Yuvak Sanmilani*) formed in 1920s that made specific demand before Simon Commission for the group's entry into the public sphere through a provision of political and economic rights for the Bodos.<sup>35</sup>

It is because of a natural process that the spread of education among the Bodos made them politically conscious. The policies of the post independent India, basically the reorganization of the states in 1960s and 1970s and the creation of new tribal states in Northeast India with population less than the Bodos, created a feeling among the educated, emerging middle class that the demand of a separate state for the Bodos was a legitimate demand. Based on this presumption they demanded the creation of a separate state for the Bodos and sought to end the long sustained process of discrimination and alienation from the mainstream political and economic development. In the normal process it is unfeasible for the ST<sup>36</sup> Candidates to command a majority of seats in Assam Legislative Assembly in the Indian parliamentary system based on the majority principle. It is seen that even in the reserve constituencies the ST voters today constituted approximately 30 percent of the total voters because of the devious drawing of the constituency, mixture of non-tribal in the tribal constituency, ever increasing entry and settlement of people from other states and migration of the people from Bangladesh.<sup>37</sup>

The use of alleged unrestrained force by the Indian state to mitigate the efforts of Bodo movement after 1987 is one of the factors that fueled the Bodo movement. The suppression of the Bodo movement by strong hand was taken seriously by the educated Bodo youth at this time. As a result, they resolutely came forward to have their struggle for the fulfillment of their demand. Several thousand Bodo agitators were detained under various anti terrorist acts and more than three thousand people supporting the movement were at one time or another lodged in jail.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, as a result the uneven policies of Central and the state government as well as the majoritarian dominance of the mainstream Assamese, the long standing injustices, discrimination that caused an alienation for them from the mainstream of socio-cultural, political and economic development process the Bodo movement broke out. The signing of accords by the Indian government with Mizo National Front and the creation of Mizoram (1986), the signing of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Pact with Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) of West Bengal (1988) and other contemporary developments in this regard fuelled the hopes and aspirations of the Bodo people who felt that their demand for a separate state seemed feasible<sup>39</sup>. And so, with this vision and objective they started a vigorous movement for a separate Bodoland outside Assam.

### **Economy: unemployment among the Bodos:**

Economic marginalization was indeed a vital factor that particularly contributed to the resentment of the tribal groups of Assam. As discussed already, the Bodo economy is agro-based economy. But it has been seen that a large section of the Bodo people had been squeezed out of their land because of the various factors including both the colonial and post-colonial land policy. The tremendous growth of population both naturally and because of migration from outside made the process of alienation of land particularly desperate. The growth of money economy and modernization with the advent of the British made this process even more vulnerable. Many of them lost their land to the ruthless money lenders mainly from the majority community. Further, the growing trend of modernization pushed them to a back foot and they were compelled to shift into the nearby forest areas as they were not ready to live with the hustle and bustle of modern life. However, in the later period when evictions of the unauthorized occupants of the forest reserves were started, they also became the worst victim. During the post-colonial period, the traditional self sufficient economy of the tribal groups in Assam was replaced by money economy, which led to social stratification, social mobilization, occupational differentiation and changes in the traditional power relations between the tribals and the non-tribal groups.<sup>40</sup> The changes occurred as a continuous process of modernization and privatization of land held by these tribal groups and also as a process of changeover from shifting cultivation to settled cultivation.<sup>41</sup>



**Table-2.b**

**Literacy rate among the Major STs (Assam), 2001 Census (Literacy rate 7 years and above)**

Name of the scheduled Tribe	Total	Male	Female
1.All Scheduled Tribes	62.5	72.3	52.4
2 Dimasa	59.6	69.4	49.3
3 Mikir	53.7	64.1	43.0
4 Boro	61.3	71.4	51.1
5 Deori	76.2	84.8	67.5
6 Kachari	81.4	88.2	74.4
7 Lalung	61.8	72.0	51.6
8 Miri	60.1	71.4	48.3
9 Rabha	66.7	76.2	57.0

**Source: Census of India 2011**

**Table 2.c**

**Literacy rate of the Bodos and Misings of Assam, 2011 Census (Literacy rate 7 years and above)**

Name	Total	Male	Female
All Scheduled Tribe	72.06	78.95	65.09
Bodo	70.56	77.90	63.21
Mising	69.27	77.39	60.90

**Source: Census of India 2011**

As most of the time remained far away from the modernization process and their entry to the money economy was late, so they could not walk equally with the caste Hindu Assamese in the development process. The unevenness in socio-economic transformation between the tribals and the caste Hindu Assamese indeed worked as an important factor in its failure to walk equally in the development process. Both the Bodos and the Misings experienced late social and economic changes either due to their isolation as ‘partially excluded’ people in colonial period or their unwillingness to participate in the modernization process to remain relatively free from the hustle and bustle and social complexities of the modern city life. As a result, significant imbalances arose in terms of allocation and competition for the scarce resources including land as well as jobs in both the government and private sectors.<sup>42</sup> Further, in the post independent period the Bodo inhabited areas were largely neglected by the successive governments and the growth of literacy (Table 2.b and Table 2.c) and education among the Bodos (all plain tribals) was negligible. According to a memorandum submitted by Assam Plains Tribal League the literacy rate of the tribals of Assam in that time was not more than 5 percent. In 1931, male literacy rate was just 3.1 percent and female literacy was 0.4 percent (above five years). In 1921 this statics was just 1.9 percent and 0.2 percent. English literacy rate in 1921 was just 0.1 percent and even after one decade in 1931 it remained the same. In 1931 when the literacy rate of the Bodo Kacharis separately notified, it showed the male literacy of 6.2 percent while for female it was just 3 percent<sup>43</sup>.

The handful of Bodo youths who got higher education with great struggle and grim determination found the competition with the politically powerful caste Hindu Assamese particularly tough and were, very often, left with a feeling frustration and discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Again the statutory necessity of knowing Assamese language to get government job is a barrier to the employment opportunities of the Bodo youths. Altogether these factors fuelled grievances among the Bodos and worked as a motivational factor for demanding autonomy.

### **Socio-cultural marginalization**

Socio-cultural marginalization is indeed a core factor in the Bodo movement for a separate socio-cultural and political identity. While discussing socio-cultural issues, the language issue comes first. It worked as a major cause of alienation of the Bodos and other tribal groups in Assam. The struggle with the Bengalis for cultural and political hegemony started in late nineteenth century by the Assamese middle class was powerfully entrenched in the state administration and in Congress organization by fifties of twentieth century and their dream now was to turn Assam into a homogenous society adopting Assamese language, Assamese way of life and Assamese Culture as a whole.<sup>45</sup> The Language Act of Assam 1960 made Assamese the official language of Assam. The attempt to impose Assamese language on all the groups including Bodos and Misings open the door for resentment between the Assamese speakers and the other groups. This cultural campaign created a political division among the groups that it legitimized the

Assamese expectation to acquire the largest share in political administration<sup>46</sup>. The Assam official language act of 1960 which declared Assamese to be the official language of Assam gave rise to serious discontent in the minds of the different hill tribes of Assam and was one of the factors accelerating the formation of Meghalaya. Even after the emergence of Nagaland and Meghalaya, the *Assam Sahitya Sabha* persisted in its demand that Assamese be accepted as the link language of the region<sup>47</sup>.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha<sup>48</sup> has an agenda of aggressive cultural nationalism. As early as 1950, it demanded that Assamese be made the official language of the state and that barring those in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, Mizo hills and Garo hills, all schools should switch to Assamese<sup>49</sup>. According to Udayan Misra 'the *Sabhas* rigid stand on the question of Assamese being recognized as the sole official language of the state' contributed significantly to the alienation of Assam's smaller nationalities and their demand for separation. He believes that that 'a more imaginative language policy of the *sabha* could perhaps have slowed down the alienation of the hill tribes from Assamese people<sup>50</sup>.

The *sabhas* language policy also prepared the ground for the emergence of organizations like the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, earlier the plains tribe of Assam like the Bodos had largely identified with the Assam Sahitya Sabha either because the *Sabha* platform was wide enough to accommodate them as well or they did not have any independent organization of their own. But *Sabhas* stand on Assamese and the emergence of small but

influential middle class among the plains tribal speeded up the process of separation of sizable sections of these people from Assamese main stream<sup>51</sup>.

It marginalized the socio-cultural position and material expectation of the Bodos, as it was made mandatory to know Assamese language to obtain any government job. Very naturally, it generated resentment and resistance among the Bodos who were serious about the preservation of their culture and identity. The newly educated Bodo middle class zealous about their culture and language were becoming aware about their marginalized material access in the greater socio-economic and political setup of Assam. Eventually, another encouraging factor for the Bodos was that the hill tribes got their own states as Meghalaya by Khasi and Garos, Nagaland by Nagas, Mizoram by Mizos as discussed earlier. Thus, the resentment getting into a shape, the socio-cultural and political organizations like Bodo Sahitya Sabha, ABSU etc started the movement for a separate Bodo identity other than Assamese.

The urge to preserve a distinct Bodo identity and culture is indeed another important factor behind the Bodo movement. The fear of losing their culture and identity was a major cause the of Bodo movement. The *Assamization* policy created an environment where they felt a kind of insecurity towards their distinct identity. The policy of complete assimilation rather than integration followed by the successive governments including the AGP government made all the tribal groups in Assam, including the Bodos, feel that there was no chance of preserving their own culture and heritage in this process

of majoritarian domination of the ethnic Assamese.<sup>52</sup> Further, referring to the two autonomous district councils in Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar Hills, the Bodos felt that they have been ignored and so, they started mobilizing for it.

A core component of the Bodo identity is their religious belief in *Bathouism*, the worship of Bathou as discussed in our first chapter. But the practice of *Bathouism* and its related customs such as the drinking of rice beer called *Zou* and *Zumai*, the consumption of pork was not of the liking of the caste Hindu Assamese. Owing to these practices the caste Hindu Assamese relegated the Bodos to a somewhat subservient position in the socio-cultural ranking. Further, the nineteenth century has to be seen as a period of confusion among the Bodos regarding their religious belief. In this period while some of them were converted to Christianity, others took *saranas* to *Ek Sarania Naam Darma*. It was against this backdrop that Kalicharan Brahma<sup>53</sup> struggled against the relegated position of the Bodo society and tried his best to organize the Bodo people who were being scattered and confused regarding their religion. With the objective of organizing the Bodo people and to rejuvenate the Bodo religious beliefs and the customary ways of operating the system Kalicharan Brahma started a socio-religious movement called Brahma Movement in 1907.<sup>54</sup> Besides their traditional beliefs and customs, the Bodos gradually became more aware about their original language and culture. In the beginning of the twentieth century some of the newly emerging Bodo intellectuals with their extraordinary loyalty to their original language and culture tried to revive. This group of intellectuals started forming socio-cultural organizations and making clarion calls to the

people on the necessity of reorganizing themselves for recovering the last glory of the Bodos.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Movement for a separate Bodo Identity**

The Bodos since long had been feeling oppressed and denied of justice by the dominant ethnic Assamese. The disgruntlement was simmering for long. In fact, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they have been trying to consolidate a separate Bodo identity from that of the ethnic Assamese but it took the shape of a well organized movement for a separate state only in 1980s. It is already discussed that a central part of the Bodo identity is their belief in *Bathousim*, the pillar of Bodo religious and spiritual practice. But with the change of time and with the influence of Hinduism and Christianity, the Bodos became confused regarding their religion and some of them gradually converted either to Christianity or some sects of Hinduism. In these circumstances Kalicharan Brahma with an objective to organize the scattered Bodo people started the Brahma movement. It was more than a religious reform movement and extended its limit to the socio-economic and cultural field to vehemently fight against the suppression of the Bodo society and tried to revive the Bodo religious belief and customary ways of operating the society. It is significant that with the advent of the Brahma movement a section of the Bodo society became conscious about their socio cultural identity and many of them even changed their title to *Brahma* as an outward expression of their solidarity with the Brahma movement and articulation of a distinct Bodo identity. Thus the socio-religious reform movement

that got tremendous popularity among the Bodos proved to be quite influential in organizing and mobilizing the Bodo people for a future movement for a distinct Bodo identity.

Revivalism of language and literature indeed worked as a key dynamic in the process of mobilizing the Bodo people for a separate socio-cultural and political identity. In the early part of the twentieth century some of the newly educated Bodo people offered extra-ordinary effort to revive the original language of the Bodos. They made their best effort to bring out the distinctiveness of the Bodo identity basically by developing the original Bodo language and vocabulary. This group of Bodo intellectuals formed a socio-religious body named Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani in 1912 and the organization published the first book written in prose form by Ganga Charan Kachari entitled *Baroni Fisha O Aayen* in 1915.<sup>56</sup> It was followed by the formation of the first literary society of the Bodos in 1918, called the Dakhinkul Bodo Sahitya Sanmilani at Dudhnoi<sup>57</sup>. The most significant development of this time was the publication of the first Bodo journal named *Bibar* in 1924. Thus the newly emerging Bodo intellectuals came forward to save the Bodos and their cultural heritage as well as to stop the alleged long sustained injustice suffered by them in the majoritarian ethnic Assamese dominated society.

The political consciousness of the Bodos manifested itself for the first time in 1929 when they submitted a memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) demanding self rule. The Bodos demanded political autonomy at that time



because the very existence of the 'largest plain tribe' in their own land was threatened by the large scale influx and settlement from Muslims of East Bengal origin. It has been discussed earlier that the colonial rulers saw the region as an economic zone and encouraged migration for economic benefit.

The socio-political organization of the Bodos was pioneered by the All Assam Tribal League, which was formed in 1933. The Tribal League went through the first political experiment as it participated in the Assam Provincial Assembly Election under the provisions of the Government of India Act in 1935 and was an ally in the Gopinath Bordoloi led congress government. But the All Assam Tribal League could not become a mass organization of the tribal people of Assam as its demands were mainly concerned with the middle class aspiration, demands like reservation of jobs, reservation of seats in Assam legislative council etc. Another important factor which pushed the Tribal League to back foot is its ideological blinking. It is very clear from the fact that the leaders of the Tribal League were associated with both Congress and Muslim League ministries till independence.<sup>58</sup> Because of this reason the All Assam Tribal League could not capture the mass imagination and in the post independence period it got disbanded.

The formation of BodoSahitya Sabha in 1952 is a significant development in the process of mobilizing the Bodo people for a separate socio-cultural identity. The most important literary organization of the Bodos, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was instrumental in the assertion of a distinct Bodo identity and the issue of language and script was integral

to such an assertion. The period was marked by the articulation of demands like introduction of Bodo language in Bodo dominated areas, and the replacement of Assamese script by Roman Script. The organization engaged itself in the promotion of the language and literature of the Bodo society by publishing books on popular literature on folklore, history, art and culture of the Bodos. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha also gave importance to celebrating traditional festivals and of the revival and promotion of folk dance, music, and various other cultural and art forms.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha with a view to promoting Bodo language as a medium of instruction at the primary and secondary level of school education, immediately after its very initiation submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, Bishnuram Medhi in 1953. On not getting any response from the government BSS launched a mass based campaign with the demand for the promotion of Bodo language as a medium of instruction in Bodo dominated areas, protection and preservation of Bodo cultural heritage and some other socio-cultural demands. After the mass based campaign the government constituted a committee under the chairmanship of late Rupnath Brahma to assess the socio-cultural needs of the Bodos. The main recommendation of the Rupnath Brahma committee was to allow the Bodo language to be used as a medium of instruction at the primary level of school education. Accordingly, the Assam government introduced the Bodo language in Bodo-Kachari belts up to class III in 1963 and up to the secondary stage of education in 1966.

However, the plan not being properly implemented, dissatisfaction arose and soon reached its peak. In the meantime the Assam Government accepted the proposal of the BSS to introduce the Bodo language as a medium of instruction officially on 31<sup>st</sup> march 1968. The Bodo script movement was another long standing movement of BSS. In the wake of wide spread violence in the script movement the state government passed the buck to the centre which requested BSS and PTCA to accept Devanagri script instead of Roman script.

In the beginning of the 1970s the movement took a new turn and PTCA and ABSU demanded for the creation of an autonomous territorial unit called *Udayachal*. The shift in the federal structure of the government in 1960s encouraged the Bodo leaders and the ABSU to form the Plain Tribal Council of India in 1967 and fight for greater autonomy. The remapping of Assam in 1970s and the formation of federal units like Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura and two union territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh became a reference point for the *Udayachal* movement. However, slowly PTCA lost the mass base after a decade of its domination in the identity politics of Bodos particularly because of its deviation from its objectives and goals. In the meantime PTCA got split to PTCA and PTCA (progressive) as the hardliner PTCA workers, youths and students formed PTCA (progressive) on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1979. Meanwhile, the ABSU had been taking keen interest for the unification of PTCA and PTCA (P) and ultimately in the convention of All Tribal Organisations from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1984 at Harisinga in Darrang district PTCA (P) was dissolved and a new political party called United Tribal

Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) under the chairmanship of Binay Khangur Basumatary was formed. Thus the PTCA thrust for political power disillusioned the Bodo youth and the ABSU withdrew its support in 1979.

After getting disillusioned with PTCA because of its failure to fulfill the aspirations of the Bodos for a separate state during the reorganization process, and because of its greater thrust for power rather than fulfillment of their goal and principles, the ABSU took the sole responsibility of the Bodo movement and became firm about their goal to establish of a Bodoland, a separate state within India. With this goal ABSU submitted several memorandums to the central government as well as to the state government. These memorandums, basically, deal with the grievances and expectations of the Bodos. These consisted of a 92 point petition asking the government to agree to the<sup>59</sup>

- a) Creation of a separate state with the status of Union Territory in the North Bank of the river Brahmaputra for the Plains Tribals of Assam
- b) Creation of District councils in the Tribal compact areas of southern valley of the Brahmaputra in Assam.
- c) Creation of regional council for non-Karbi tribes in Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.
- d) Inclusion of Bodo language in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian constitution, thereby providing official status to their linguistic identity.

These demands, however, did not get positive response from both the state government and central government. As a response, ABSU launched a mass movement under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma on March 2, 1987. This stage was basically marked by prolonged periods of *Bandhs*, disrupting the rail and road links of Assam. Though the movement was termed peaceful by its leader, yet it resulted in considerable loss of lives due to bomb explosions, police action, and wanton acts of destruction. Property worth millions of rupees mostly government property-was destroyed and the normal life in this hitherto peaceful area was totally shattered.<sup>60</sup>

The movement for the creation of a full-fledged Bodoland got its momentum when ABSU organized a peace rally in the Judges Field, Guwahati on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1987. It was a huge gathering with hundreds of people, shouting slogans 'Divide Assam 50:50'; a slogan lasted throughout the struggle. The peace rally organized in the Judges Field has significance in the sense that hundreds of people shouted slogans for the division of Assam fifty-fifty between the Bodos and the ethnic Assamese. Immediately after the meeting the supporters of the meeting were involved in a clash with some from ethnic Assamese, necessitating the state police to intervene and the fight led to the death of one Sujit Narzary, a high school student. Since then the Bodos consider Sujit Narzary as the first martyr for the cause of the separate Bodoland.<sup>61</sup> This incident got massive protest from ABSU and they organized several demonstrations and hunger strikes in August 1987 resulting in clashes between the supporters of the movement and the state police as well as between the supporters and people from ethnic Assamese. These clashes led to several

arrests, injuries and deaths of number of activists. Slowly the agitators became aggressive towards the non-tribals living in the Bodo dominated areas and extortion and harassment on them started, mainly on the non-Bodo school teachers, clerks, foresters posted in tribal areas, and tea plantation managers and employees.<sup>62</sup> The harassment and extortion of the non-tribals were not confined only to the ethnic Assamese and they extended to the immigrant Muslims, Nepalis and Santhalis. The killings and mass kidnappings of the non-tribals and the retaliatory killings by the non-tribals affected many villages and displacement among the non-Bodo started. Serious fallout of this period was the creation of Bodo Security Force (Bd.SF), a rebel insurgent group comprising the hard core Bodo youth who took the violent means to achieve the goal of a separate Bodoland.

ABSU while continuing the vigorous movement for the cause of a separate Bodoland, also started some political bargaining with the government for a solution to the issue. But the approaches of the Congress governments there at the center and in the state the issue of a separate Bodoland were rather different. Instead, the state government attempted to undermine the crisis and started repressive action against the agitators. Both the government at the centre and the state were of the opinion that demarcation of the state was not necessary. However, to redress the genuine grievances of the Bodos and the plain tribals of Assam as a whole the government started organizing talks with the leaders and subsequently the government held nine rounds of talks with the parties concerned.

This prolonged movement had badly affected the economy of Assam and even that of the entire Northeast India because of the blockades, *Bandhs* and demonstrations by the agitator. The economic crisis created by the movement made the government of Assam think of a solution. Further, the massive violence used in the movement created a security concern in the state and forced the state government to seek a solution to the problem as soon as possible. The repression and harassment on the agitators could not stop the movement rather it has grown stronger day by day. In this situation, the state government felt that the movement, which was growing stronger over time, could not be suppressed by using force alone. Though the state government for the above reasons and others wanted a quick solution to the problem but it ruled out any need of dividing Assam and the creation of a separate state for the redressed of the grievances of the tribals of Assam and basically the aspirations of the Bodos.

With the growing instability created by the movement the AGP government led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta in July 1990 forwarded a proposal to the agitators of forming District Council (Zilla Parishad) that would provide them limited self autonomy. The state government proposed an autonomous three tier panchayati raj system for the Bodo areas with considerable devolution of administrative and financial powers. But the proposal was vehemently opposed by the ABSU and BPAC leaders in the subsequent seventh and eighth round of tripartite talks held in New Delhi between August and September, 1990 between the central government, Assam government and the leaders of the movement. Following it in the eight rounds of talks Government of India proposed to appoint a three

man committee under the chairmanship of Bhupinder Singh to clearly identify the areas of the Bodos and other plain tribes of north of the river Brahmaputra and to recommend legislative, financial and administrative powers that could be accorded to these areas. Within a time frame of 45 days the committee was to submit its report. Both the two main stakeholders in the talk, the Assam government and the leaders of the movement, accepted the proposal of the government of India and ABSU temporarily suspended the movement for the 45 day time frame.

But the subsequent political developments both at the center and the state pushed the issue to uncertainty. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 had far reaching impact on the process.<sup>63</sup> Further, the change in Assam politics in the last part of 1990 affected the dialogue process. The President of India declared state emergency in Assam in November 20, 1990 and suspended the AGP led government. Thus, the AGP rule in Assam came to an end and powers both at the centre and the state moved to the hands of the congress party. The newly formed state government, under the leadership Hiteswar Saikia shifted its attitude from ‘intransigence to reconciliation’.

Thus, after a long period of two years freezing the dialogue process, the ninth round of talks started in January 1992. Though this round of talk supposed to have discussion on the Bhupinder Committee Report, unfortunately the committee could not submit its report allegedly duo to lack of census data and this round got failed.



The unconvincing nature of all the talks and discussions made the Bodo leaders confused about the certainty of a positive result from the state side and therefore they subsequently started agitation again. Two bombs were exploded on a train running through a section of the Bodo areas killing 22 people, injuring more than 50 in October 1992.<sup>64</sup> Violent activities of Bd. SF also peaked in this period. The ABSU/BPAC leaders took the movement to a great height by organizing demonstrations, hunger strikes, *bandhs*, and blockades in national and state high ways. At this time the leaders declared a 1001 hour statewide *bandhs* beginning from November, 1992, though it was ultimately withdrawn after an assurance from the Home minister of India for a quick solution of the issue.

In an intense move to solve the long lasting Bodo problem the central government and the state government called the leaders for another round of discussion. Subsequently, the government signed the first tripartite agreement with the Bodo leaders on February 20, 1993 providing for a Bodoland Autonomous Council.<sup>65</sup> Thus the memorandum of settlement provides for the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council<sup>66</sup> having the right to control and administer the local affairs of certain specified areas. The council was to consist of 40 members out of which 35 members were to be elected and the remaining five to be nominated by the Governor of Assam. While the legislative power is to be vested on the 40 member council, the executive powers were entrusted on an executive council which was initially filled up by creating an interim Bodoland Executive Council under the leadership of S.K. Bwiswmutiary until the election. The council was

empowered to regulate on matters pertaining to control, use and management of affairs such as education, forest, health, land and revenue, cultural affairs, village councils and rural development, irrigation, social welfare, trade and commerce, town and urban planning, totalling 38 departments, mostly corresponding to the subjects earmarked for autonomous district council. The accord also assured the protection of the all rights including protection of language and culture of the non-tribal people living there in the Bodoland Autonomous Council area.

The creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council under the Bodo Accord-1993 was no doubt a positive development for the solution of the Bodo problem, though the terms of the agreement fell far short of the original demand for the creation of a full-fledged Bodoland state. Though all the parties were optimistic to have a lasting solution to the issue, yet serious disagreement arose even during the conduct of the first election and the leader of the interim BEC S.K. Bwiswmutiary resigned from the council over differences with the state government on the demarcation of the geographical areas that were to be included under the jurisdiction of Bodo Autonomous Council. As a result of these controversies the accord was being prevented from being implemented and the whole practice of accommodation was finally stalled.

Though the Bodo accord of 1993 paved the way for the establishment of peace in the Bodo areas and for the settlement of the long lasting Bodo problem ultimately it ended with total uncertainty. As a consequences use of violence was chosen again as the only

alternative by the Bodo militant groups like NDFB and BLT. Despite their inter-organizational differences regarding their main objective they started massive violence against the Indian state and pushed the state government into pressure during the late 90s and the early 2000. It is significant to mention here that while the BLT advocated for the establishment of a separate state within the Indian state, NDFB is more radical regarding their aim and objective and they wanted to secede and establish a separate state outside the territory of Indian state. With these objectives they started using immense violence and created instability in Assam and thus pressurized both the central and the state governments for attainment of their objective. As retaliation the governments also used repressive measures. The reinforcement of the repressive measures by the government weakened the militant groups towards the end of 2003 which led to the surrender of a good number of its cadre in 2003 and the subsequent integration of the former BLT cadres in central paramilitary forces.<sup>67</sup> The growing inability and the weakness of BLT forced them to accept the tripartite deliberations held at New Delhi on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003. Subsequently, the Bodo language was included as one of the recognized Indian languages in eight scheduled of Indian constitution and thus it fulfilled one long lasting demand of the Bodo movement. While one militant group, NDFB, denied the memorandum of settlement the BLT came to the mainstream and arrived at a compromise to form the territorial council, leaving aside some controversial issues for future settlement.

The socio-cultural and political assertion of the Bodos started in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, got its organized shape in 1960s and went on having discreet change in

its aims and tactics. While the movement was started with cultural nationalism with the aim of protecting its culture, indigenosity, language, customs etc from the marginalized position by choosing choose some moderate platforms to express its disagreement, it took a U turn in 1970s by mobilizing supporters for territorial autonomy and even in 1980s it went on choosing violent means for the attainment of its aim of a separate state and then went to become more radical in the coming days and started using enormous violence for the establishment of a sovereign state outside the Indian territory. The Memorandum of Settlement, 1993 was a positive development in solving the long persisting issue to some extent providing autonomy to the Bods for their social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural development. But it could not succeed because of the uncertainty in the accord regarding the territory demarcation, lack of proper initiative from the government side in implementing the accord, the opposition of the non-tribals living in the Bodo dominated areas and for many other reasons. The follow-up agreement of 2003 is a remarkable development in this respect. The accord is success in accommodating most of the long lasting Bodo demands and for providing for greater autonomy.

### **The Mising Movement**

It has already been discussed that among the tribes or ethnic groups who, started movement for autonomy as a means to cultural recognition, political representation, and above all powers to control local resources in the post independence period, the Misings of Assam has to be worth mentioned<sup>68</sup>. Mising Agom Kebang<sup>69</sup>, a literary organization

launched a cultural movement and started cultural revivalism to fight against the implementation of Assam Official Language Act 1960 alleging it as a means of majoritarian dominance, a majority imposition.

The Misings are an indo-mongoloid tribe inhabiting large parts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia districts of Assam. A few live in and around Pasighat of East-Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. They are the second largest tribal group (plain) following the Bodos. Originally they were hill dwellers and inhabited the hills lying north of the upper Brahmaputra valley in Siang and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh. According to the 2011 government of India census the total Mising population in Assam is 6,80,424 (Table-1.a) constituting 17.51 (Table 2.a) percent of the total ST population in Assam.

**Table: 2.d**

**Rural and Urban Population of Bodo and Mising Tribe of Assam 2011**

Name	Total population	Rural	Urban	Percentage of Rural Population	Percentage of Urban Population
All Scheduled Tribe	3,884,371	3665405	218966	94.36	5.64
Bodo	1,361,735	1309550	52185	96.16	3.83
Mising	6,80,424	663842	16582	97.56	2.43

**Source: Census of India 2011**

The ST population in Assam is predominantly rural with 94.36 percent rural and only 5.64 percent urban population. Among them, the Miris( Mising ) recorded a very low percentage having only 2.43 percent urban population ( Table 2.d ).

### **Background of the Mising movement:**

The movement for a separate socio-cultural and political Mising identity, organized systematically in 1960s has a long historical background. The Misings, now a plains tribe with a sizeable population, were originally a hill tribe within the ranges of Abor, Miri and Mishmi hills of the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), now Arunachal Pradesh and they came down to the plains before the reign of the Ahom kings and then began to settle in the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra and the Subansiri rivers of Assam<sup>70</sup>. Since there is no authentic document to ascertain the exact date of their migration to the plains, it is said that the Misings migrated from the hills to plains about eight centuries ago and continued to do so till the first part of the nineteenth century<sup>71</sup>. The Misings, when they came down from the northern hills, came in contact with the Chutiyas<sup>72</sup>, who had a kingdom around Sadiya. The Misings came into contact of Ahoms only when the Chutiya kingdom was invaded and conquered by the Ahoms<sup>73</sup>. Although the Misings initially resisted the Ahoms through small scale sporadic uprisings, they finally came to an agreement with the Ahoms and developed a working relationship with the Ahoms<sup>74</sup>. By this agreement, the Ahoms granted their village chiefs limited autonomy and in turn the Misings had to resist the other groups that tried to attack the border areas of the Ahoms. Thus, they started their journey with a political history having autonomy

through a village and community-based political structure and maintained this status even after the decline of the Ahoms and when British took the responsibilities of administering the Mising inhabited areas with slight modifications in this policy.

The British government categorized the ethnic groups of Assam as backward tribe, forest dwellers and non-tribal people. Besides ethnic categorization, the British government for administrative convenience included the Mising territories in their indirect rule and the village chiefs were granted some degree of autonomy like the Ahoms, for which they would have to take care of the law and order situation of that particular area. The further developments in Montague Chelmsford Report<sup>75</sup> (1919), and the developments based on the Simon Commission<sup>76</sup> (1927) recommendations have greater significance in the sense that these developments generated a separate Identity among the Misings. The colonial accounts have indeed served as a cognitive basis of ethnic distinctiveness and foundation of common Mising identity<sup>77</sup>.

The Misings were aware about their future status and autonomy at the time of Indian independence. So, some middle class intellectuals among them led by Padmeswar Doley formed a socio- political organization called North East Frontier Mieri Abor Sanmillan<sup>78</sup> and recommended to the British government to create an autonomous unit for the Misings, Abors, Daflas, and Charak Tribal communities on the basis of the ethnic affiliation the Mising shared with these communities<sup>79</sup>.

In the socio-cultural context the Misings became a part of the larger Assamese culture and community. The Ahom policy to form an integrated society of the Mongoloid tribes by the process of *Ahomisation* has opened the door for the Mising culture to become a part of the larger Assamese culture<sup>80</sup>. In this period, the Misings came into contact with the neo-vaishnava Movement led by the great Vaishnava saints<sup>81</sup>, socio-religious reformers Sankardeva (1449 A.D-1568 A.D) and Madhabdeva (1489 A.D-1596 A.D) while helped the acculturation process<sup>82</sup>. Within these hundred years of interaction they became a part and parcel of the greater Assamese culture, with even some having adopted Assamese language as their language of communication.

The developments of Assam in the post-colonial period have a far reaching impact on the Misings. As we know that ‘Nation building’ has been a dominant objective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and most countries including India has aimed at building culturally homogeneous states with singular identities<sup>83</sup>. So, in Assam also, the process was characterized by a majoritarian approach of the Assamese who started consolidation of power and tried to justify this socio-cultural dominance over the minority ethnic groups. In response to it, cultural revivalism that already started among the Misings went on to a phase of politicization of ethno-cultural identity and the educated middle class among the Misings began to configure a distinct form of Mising identity.



## Causes of the Mising movement

Verrier Elwin in his *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1949) observed: “... *the first cause of tribal depression was the loss of their land and forests. This had the effect so enervating the tribal organism that it has no interior resistance against infection by a score of other serious evils*”.<sup>84</sup> The Mising population was enumerated for the first time in 1871 and subsequently each decennial census recorded the Mising population. One hundred years of census records (1871-1971) give us valuable information (Table-2.e) regarding the Mising population.

**Table 2.e**

### **Growth of Mising Population 1871-1971**

Year	Population	Percentage of increase	Year	Population	Percentage of increase
1871	13,786	-	1931	84,976	23.98
1881	25,636	85.96	1941	N.A	-
1891	38,430	49.91	1951	108,736	27.96
1911	47,719	21.57	1961	163,453	50.32
1921	68,706	23.03	1971	259,351	58.79

**Source-**The table is taken from the article entitled “Ethnohistory, Ethnic Identity and Contemporary Mishing Society” authored by J.S Bhandari, published in “Indian Anthropologist” (1984), Vol 14, No 2

The table (Table-2.e) shows that the Mising population of Assam increased substantially in the last one hundred years (Population 587,310: Census of India 2001). Again they are exclusively rural people (only 2.43 percent urban populations: Census of India 2011). Our point here is that while their population is increasing substantially their land is decreasing. Firstly, having the tradition of living along the bank of a river their habitats till date are constantly exposed to flood and erosion for which they have to shift often from one place to another place. Secondly, while the Misings were moving from one place of residence to another<sup>85</sup> for their livelihood, other people had moved into, particularly during British reign, and occupied many permanent lands which might have been already inhabited by the Misings in the past. Thirdly, after independence when they became aware about the necessity of permanent land, the problem had taken different dimension. In the past, since the Misings had been living in temporary land, and since they didn't have much access to the money economy, there had been very little scope of buying and selling of land. Fourthly, the process of modernization forced the tribal people to shift into the forests leaving their original habitats behind. It is said that the present Paltan Bazar area of Dibrugarh district and the court area of Lakhimpur town and similar other places were originally inhabited by the Misings.<sup>86</sup> The tribal inhabitants of these areas sold off their land at minimum prices to others and moved away to live in remoter areas relatively free from the hustle and bustle and social complexities of the modern city life<sup>87</sup>. They wanted to live nearer to nature because of their dependence on forests and rivers.

As has been already mentioned the Misings are basically an agro-based tribe who depend upon agriculture for their livelihood, including livestock, mainly fowls, pigs, goat etc. But most of them became landless due to the factors mentioned above. In 1950, the Congress government in Assam established several tribal blocks and belts (about forty) exclusively for scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST), but despite this action, the various settlement policies implemented by successive Assam governments led to increasing the numbers of non-tribals in these areas. In spite of specific instructions issued from time to time for removal of unauthorized occupants from tribal belts and blocks, large scale encroachments were not only continuing but seemed to be increasing (Government of Assam 1982). Due to Landlessness the Mising agro-based economy is in shambles. Landlessness is a problem that has reciprocal relationship with poverty. The prime factor of dissatisfaction of the plain tribes including Mising is the loss of their traditional land and forest<sup>88</sup>.

Unemployment is another problem confronting the people. In the colonial period, though there was no intervention in their internal administration, yet they were affected mostly by the new economic and political conditions. Because of their non-industrial, agro-based background the Misings could not cope up with the changing modern economy. Again, they could not grow much educationally and politically. In 1971 their literacy rate was just 18.20 percent (Table-2.f), while it is 60.1 percent in 2011 it was the lowest among the major tribes of Assam. Besides other socio-economic factors that contributed to their backwardness and thereby making them inefficient in the competition,

the statutory requirement of the knowledge of Assamese language to obtain a government job was a further barrier in their employment opportunities.

**Table-2.f**

**Literacy rate of the Miri, 1971 Census Literacy rate: 7years and above**

Name of the Scheduled Tribe	Total	Male	Female
Miri	18.20	28.54	7.54

**Source: Census of India 1971**

Social exclusion is another basic cause behind the Mising movement. Though the great vaishnava saint and socio-religious reformer Sankardeva tried his best to include all the sections of society under one fold, his future descendents did not follow him. The Misings had to face a long history of social exclusion in the post Sankardeva Brahminical social setup. The most important socio-religious institution inherited from the neo-vaishnava movement led by Sankardev was the *Satra*<sup>89</sup>. But it derailed from its basic objectives in the post-Sankardev period. The *Satras* were supposed to work for the betterment of the tribal and marginalized castes. But the *Satras* confined their role merely to that of a tithe collection<sup>90</sup>. The Tribals felt marginalized in this set up and started getting converted to Christianity. At present, there are approximately 1000 Christian followers in Majuli<sup>91</sup>, the capital of the *Satras*. These people are basically from the

Phulone and Rangachahi area and belong to the Mising community. This attitude of the *Satras* naturally had a very adverse socio economic impact on the marginalized communities including the Misings.

Language is a major issue. The enactment and implementation of Assam Official language Act 1960, the effort by which Assamese language was imposed on all people was opposed, and the literary organization Mising Agom Kebang started revivalist movements to fight against it. The urge to preserve their own culture and identity is another cause of the movement. The policies of assimilation rather than integration created discontent and a fear that they would lose their identity.

### **Growth of an educated Mising middle class**

The growth of an educated Mising middle class is another basic cause. Spread of education made them politically conscious. With the spread of education they have become increasingly organized and articulate. They aspired for adequate share in the decision making process. They realized that the development of the Misings had been largely dependent on the extent of the share in political process as well as on their socio-cultural development. So they started to form of socio-cultural organizations such as Mising Agom Kebang (1972), Mising Dirbi Kebang (1980), Mising Mime Kebang (1996), Takam Mising Porin Kebang (1971) etc. At the same time, the policies pursued by the Indian government in 1960s and 1970s leading to the creation of separate tribal states made, the demand of the tribals seems legitimate.

## **The Movement for Separate Identity**

As mentioned already, the post independent developments in Assam had far reaching impact on the all ethnic minorities of Assam including the Misings. This had also greater impact on the inter community relations i.e relations between the ethnic minorities and the Assamese speaking people. The Assam Official Language Act 1960s pushed the Misings to a feared position and made them think about their distinct identity. This fact distinctly emerged when they demanded for the Roman script instead of Devnagri. In these developments the Mising educated middle class strongly felt the necessity of protecting and preserving their distinct socio-cultural identity. They started feeling a sense of deprivation in the greater socio-cultural set up. The Language Act narrowed down their material access, access to the government jobs, higher education as well as representation in the political system<sup>92</sup>. As a result, they started cultural revivalism, firstly, by promoting their language and scripts. They demanded the introduction of Mising language as a medium of instruction in the primary and higher education believing that this would ensure their separate identity first and would enable them to compete with the majority Assamese speaking group. This happened not only to the Misings but also to other ethnic tribal groups also including the Bodos.

Mising Agom Kebang led this cultural revivalism. They tried their best to develop the language in written form. Then they started publishing Mising literary works. Some of the prominent literary works such as the *Miri Path* (Miri lesson)

written by Kamal Chandra Padun and the *Miri Dowan of Mising Agom* written by Bibhishan Pegu were published during these periods<sup>93</sup> that help them best in the learning and teaching of the language. Another issue was use of script whether it would be Roman or Devnagri. Though Devnagri was being used till then, they were not at all willing to use it further more and therefore recommended for Roman script.

In the early 1980s the movement turned a different turn and Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK), Mising student's organization came forward to lead the movement. At the same time, movements for territorial autonomy started. The significance of the movement this time is that though at the beginning the movement was confined only to the intellectuals and literary society, this time it was able to beg support of the other sections of the society including the common people. With a greater mass support than earlier they started organizing protests in the streets through rallies, demonstrations etc. With a strong mass pressure the activists finally succeeded and the government in 1987 allowed the Mising language to be used as the medium of instruction and as a language in primary schools in the areas inhabited by the Misings<sup>94</sup>.

It was soon followed by the demand for greater political autonomy. For establishing greater political autonomy they demanded the devolution of the powers and demanded an autonomous body within Assam. Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK) led this movement. They wanted greater political autonomy specified in

terms of the six schedules (Art-244) of the Indian constitution. It would have allowed the devolutionary powers to a district council, an autonomous institution with legislative, administrative and judicial powers over a number of policy areas including land regulation, natural resource management, customary laws and taxation. The idea was to extend the area of the administration of the district council to several districts of Assam, areas where Mising constituted more than 50 percent as well as those areas where the Misings were a significant minority of the population<sup>95</sup>. But the TMPK-proposed model was opposed by Mising Bane Kebang<sup>96</sup> criticizing it as unrealistic and rather appealed for limited form of cultural and political autonomy in the Mising dominated areas.

The division among the Mising leaders made the problem more complex. As we have more discussion on this issue in fifth chapter of this work, despite the division the leaders of this organizations did not stop instead Takam Mising Porin Kebang with the support of Mising Mimang Kebang staged stronger movement than in the earlier years while the other group led by Mising Bane Kebang also waged vigorous struggle to attain its demand. Taking the advantage of this division, then Congress government led by Hiteswar Saikia (1991-96) choose partial accommodation and tried to accommodate some of the demands made by Mising Bane Kebang<sup>97</sup>. In this situation while the TMPK was agitating with its demands of greater autonomy Mising Bane Kebang and the newly formed Mising Autonomous



Demand Committee and formally accepted the limited offers by the government at a general conference held in April 1995<sup>98</sup>. But the problem did not end and took another beginning as the TMPK and MMK started more vigorous struggle aided by a legal battle. Ultimately it got a partial end in 2001 as the new government came forward to follow the recommendation of the ministerial committee, which offered for the creation of Mising Autonomous Council with some slight changes of the previous proposal. Although the recommendations were not satisfactory to the TMPK leaders, still they accepted the proposal as ephemeral manner with not giving up the original objective of greater autonomy. The newly created Mising Autonomous Council started functioning as a decentralized governing unit with the supervisory powers and finances still under the purview of the Assam government<sup>99</sup>.

The movement to establish separate socio-cultural and political identity by Mising got a break with the creation of Mising Autonomous Council. Though the movement posed in an organized way basically in 1960s and 1970s, it has long historical background. Besides the Assam official Language Act 1960, there are various socio-economic, political factors that contributed to the movement. After a long struggle by the Mising people, Mising Autonomous Council was created. The creation of Mising Autonomous Council under Mising Autonomous Council Act<sup>100</sup> 1995 was no doubt a positive sign. But due to some procedural lapses the council has not been able to function well for more than a decade. However a election was held in 2013 and the council was formed with Gana Sakti majority and it is trying to fulfill the expectations of Mising

people. People are expecting a lot and it is hoped that in future days under the leadership of the council the core socio-economic and political issues of Misings will be solved.

The North-Eastern region is a land of different ethnic groups known for their distinct cultures and habitats. In the post independent period, as a means to strengthening the nation building process the state designed policies of homogenization and assimilation in order to integrate the different ethnic categories within the fold of the composite Assamese nationalism however, opened the path for ethnic movement and cultural revivalism in this region. In the process of the greater Assamese formation, Big brother attitude of the caste-Hindu Assamese middle class, gradual increase of dominating attitude etc. made the tribal people skeptic and worry as to their future. And one of the main causes of their worriedness was gradual land alienation for both internal and external causes. Shrinking of cultivable land in consequence of internal and external aggression due to policies adopted during colonial and post colonial period collapsed their agro-economy. This gloomy misfortune kindled the middle class tribal people to organize the common people under one umbrella. The question of the interest of middle class is also intricate with this development. Different rules and regulations toward the tribal adopted and imposed during the Colonial period, political happenings of India including creation of new states in the post independence period intensified their Zeal for self assertion.

## Notes and References:

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<sup>1</sup> Nagaland and Meghalaya were carved out of Assam in 1963 and 1971-72; Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1971 and a state in 1986; the other states of the North East are Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura. Now it is eight joined by Sikkim.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum on the Question of Granting Autonomy to the Misings Inhabited Areas of Assam by TMPK, TMMK, MMK Guwahati, August 10, 1996

<sup>3</sup> Census of India, 2001

<sup>4</sup>Chaudhuri, B., *Tribal Transformation in India*, Vol.III, Inter India publication, 1992, p.365.

<sup>5</sup>Datta, P.S. (ed), *Autonomy Movements in Assam (Documents)*, 1993. New Delhi, 1993, p.175 .

<sup>6</sup>Gohain, H., "Bodo Agitations and Ideological Blinkers." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, No. 40, Oct. 1989, pp.2271-2272.

<sup>7</sup>The Six Schedule of Indian Constitution provides the hill tribes (Article 224(2) and 275(1)) of North East India with an administrative set up of district councils to safeguard tribal customs and way of life and secure to the tribes the maximum autonomy in management of their characteristically tribal affairs. The district councils are responsible for the local administration of such important areas as agriculture, education, forest, health, land and revenue.

<sup>8</sup>Pegu, R. "Autonomy Movements of the Misings" in J.J Kuli, (ed). *The Misings : Their History and Culture*, Dibrugarh, KaustavPrakashan, 2012, pp.148-149.

<sup>9</sup>Saikia, P., *Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in North East India*, Routledge, 2001, p.59.

<sup>10</sup>Datta, P.S., Op.cit., pp.7-8.

<sup>11</sup>Gohain, H. Op. cit., pp.2271-2272.

<sup>12</sup> Reorganization of Assam in the post independence period began in 1963 when the Naga Hills District and the Tuensang area of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) became Nagaland. Then in 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to further restructure Assam on a federal basis.

<sup>13</sup>Gohain, H. "Bodo Stir in Perspectives." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol, 24, No25, June, 1989, pp. 1377-1379.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup>The Assam Movement (1979-1985) was a popular movement against illegal immigrants in Assam. The movement, led by All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the 'All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad' (AAGSP), developed a program of protests and demonstration to compel the government to identify and expel illegal immigrants. The agitation program ended in August 1985 following the Assam Accord, which was signed by leaders of AASU-AAGSP and the Government of India.

<sup>16</sup>The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after. Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

<sup>17</sup>Asom Gana Parishad is a regional political party in Assam. The AGP was formed after the historic Assam Accord of 1985 and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the first chief minister from the party in 1985. The AGP has formed government twice from 1985 to 1989 and from 1996 to 2001.

<sup>18</sup>Gohain, H., Vol, 24, Op. cit., pp. 1377-1379.

<sup>19</sup> Though the Plain Tribal Council of Assam promised to attain *Udayachal* State for the plain tribals of Assam, but it got failed to fulfill the aspiration of the Bodos for a separate state during the reorganization of state in Asaam. Further PTCA got into split in 1984, made the Bodo youths disillusioned with it. At this point ABSU under the dynamic leadership of Upen Brahma and with its grass root popularity became the spearhead of the Bodo movement

<sup>20</sup> Why Separate State?.1987. Kokrajhar. ABSU publication.

<sup>21</sup>Sharma,C.K.“Tribal Land Alienation; Government’s Role.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.36, No. 52. pp. 4791-4795.

<sup>22</sup> G. J. Lloyd was the Superintendent of Census Operations, Assam, Census of India, 1921.

<sup>23</sup> Census Report 1921.

<sup>24</sup>Barman, S.N. *AsamarJanajati Samashya*. Guwahati, Progressive Book House, 1995, pp. 30-31.

<sup>25</sup>Sharma, C.K. Op. cit., pp.4791-4795.

<sup>26</sup> British administrator C.S. Mullan, I.C.S. was the superintendent of 1931 Census.

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<sup>27</sup>Census Report of Assam 1931.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup>Belts and Blocks is a product of the colonial policies which had created special provisions for various protected groups including “tribes”. It refers to certain compact areas of Assam predominantly inhabited by ‘tribal’ and other ‘backward’ people notified under Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (ALRR) Act of 1886 that was amended in 1947 on the basis of the recommendation by a committee headed by Mr. Hockenull. It was prepared with the ostensible objective of ‘protecting’ land from occupation by other ‘advanced’ groups other than the ‘protected class of people’ -Plains tribals, Hills tribals, tea garden tribals, Santhals, Scheduled Castes and Nepali cultivator graziers.

<sup>30</sup> Sharma, C.K. Op.cit., p.4795.

<sup>31</sup>Bordoloi, B.N., *Constraints of Tribal Development in North East India*, Guwahati, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1990, p.63.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in C.K. Sharma, Op.cit., p. 4795.

<sup>33</sup>Sharma, C.K. “The Bodo Movement-A Preliminary Enquiry into the Role of the Middle Class and the State” in G., Phukan, (ed) *Political Dynamics of North East India*, New Delhi, South Asian Publishers, 2000.

<sup>34</sup>Saikia , P. Op. cit., p.58.

<sup>35</sup>Chaudhuri, B. *Tribal Transformation in India: Vol.3*, New Delhi, Inter India Publication, 1992, p. 365.

<sup>36</sup>Scheduled Tribes (ST) are the inhabitants of area defined in article 244(1) of the fifth schedule of the Indian Constitution as an area declared by an order of the president of India to be a tribal scheduled area.

<sup>37</sup> George, S. J. “The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord” *Asian Survey*, Vol 34, No 10. Oct. 1994, pp.882-883.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Bhagabati, A.C., “Anthropological Perspectives on Tribal Development in the Assam Hills: A Preliminary Statement” in B. N. Bordoloi, *Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam: With*

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*Special Reference to the Karbis of the KarbiAnglong District*, Guwahati, Western Book Depot, 1991.

<sup>41</sup>Baruah, S., *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>42</sup>Saikia, P., Op. cit., p.51.

<sup>43</sup>Sarmah, D., “Anusuchita Janajaati: Prapyar Sandhanat.” *A:ne Billam*, Souvenir of 35<sup>th</sup> Central General conference of Mising Bane Kebang, 2014.

<sup>44</sup>Gohain, H., Vol, 24, Op. cit. p. 1377.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Misra, U., “Assam: Culture and politics.” in U. Misra , *North East India-Quest for Identity*, Omsons Publications, 1988, pp. 122-123.

<sup>48</sup>Assam Sahitya Sabha is the highest literary body of Assam. It was established in 1917 for preservation and development of Assamese language and culture.

<sup>49</sup>Misra U., Op. cit., pp. 122-123.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid. p.122.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. pp. 122-123.

<sup>52</sup> See statement on assertion of Bodo identity and demand for its protection, in *Why Separate State*, pp-49-51

<sup>53</sup>Kalicharan Brahma originally Kalicharan Mech, was a 20th-century social and religious reformer of Bodo Society. He was reverentially called *Gurudev* or *Guru Brahma* by Bodo people of Assam. He is the founder of Brahma movement in Assam.

<sup>54</sup>Kalicharan Brahma’s intellectual and philosophical conceptions were deeply influenced by Bengal renaissance and more particularly, the socio-religious reformation activities of *Brahma Samaj*, which latter culminated in the foundation of *Brahama* Religion. In addition, teachings of new-Vaishnavite movement started by Sankardev and Madhabdev also remained an integral part of Kalicharan’s philosophy. ( C. Bhattacharjee, 1996, *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movements; Case of BodoKacharis of Assam*, New Delhi, Vikash Publishing House. P. 72.)

<sup>55</sup>Pegu, J., *Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History*. Kokrajhar, 2004, p. 84.

<sup>56</sup>Saikia, P., Op. cit., p.57.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Gupta, S.S., “Socio-Political Assertion of the Bodos: An Analysis” in C.J. Sonowal, (ed) *Quest for Identity : Autonomy and Development*. New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2010, pp. 312-313.

<sup>59</sup> Why Separate State?, Kokrajhar. ABSU publication, 1987.

<sup>60</sup> George, S. J., Op. cit., pp.882-883.

<sup>61</sup> Saikia, P. Op. cit., p.67.

<sup>62</sup> George, S. J., Op. cit., pp.882-883.

<sup>63</sup> The Bodo leaders think that if Rajiv Gandhi was not assassinated, then at least some aspirations of the Bodo people could be fulfilled. (Excerpts from the personal interview with Promod Boro and Mangal Sing Hazowary.)

<sup>64</sup> George, S. J., Op. cit., pp.882-886

<sup>65</sup> The Memorandum of Settlement was signed in the presence of Home Minister, Govt. of India Rajesh Pilot, K.S. Rao, Addl. Chief Secretary, Govt of Assam: on behalf of the ABSU by president S.K. Bwiswmutiary and secretary Rabiram Brahma, and by a representative of the BPAC.

<sup>66</sup> Memorandum Of Settlement 1993( Bodo Accord), Guwahati, Government of Assam Press.

<sup>67</sup> The Hindu, 17 December 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Saikia, P., Op. cit., p.118.

<sup>69</sup> Mising Agom Kebang is the highest body of Mising people established in 1972. Mising Agom Kebang is a non-political voluntary organization, dedicated to the cause of preservation and development of Mising language and literature.

<sup>70</sup> Bordoloi, B.N., Thakur, S.G.C. Saikia, M.C., *Tribes of Assam*. Part-1, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1987, p. 107.

<sup>71</sup> Mipun, J., *The Mishings (Miris) of Assam: Developing of a new life style*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2012, p.17.

<sup>72</sup> Chutiya is an indigenous ethnic group scattered in different parts of Assam. The Chutiya kingdom was established by Birpal in 1187 in northeastern Assam with the capital at Sadiya. The Ahom overpowered the Chutiya king in 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

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<sup>73</sup>Ahoms ruled Assam for nearly 600 years from 1228 to 1826. The Ahom Kingdom was established by Chaolung Sukaphaa in the Brahmaputra Valley in 1228 A.D.

<sup>74</sup>Mipun, J. Op. cit., p.18

<sup>75</sup> Following the administrative act Montague Chelmsford Report, the areas that were autonomously controlled by the Mising traditional chiefs, were brought under the indirect administration of the British. The areas were eventually categorized as backward tracts of Lakhimpur, Balipara and Sadiya, the last tract running up to the borders of Tibet .

<sup>76</sup> In 1936 on the basis of recommendation of Simon Commission, the backward tracts were further regrouped as 'excluded and partially excluded areas' and were jointly administered with the North East Frontier Agency ( NEFA) of Assam.

<sup>77</sup>Saikia, P. Op. cit., p.121.

<sup>78</sup>Pegu, R. "Autonomy Movement of the Mising People" in J JKuli (ed) *The Misings, Their History and Culture*, Guwahati, North East Publishers, 1998, p.83.

<sup>79</sup>Mipun.J., Op. cit.,p.18.

<sup>80</sup>Phukan, G., "Ethnic Assertion in Assam, Understanding The Political Economy of Mising Identity" in R.K Bhadra and M. Bhadra (eds) *Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure, Contested Cultural Identity*, New Delhi, Rawat Publications, 2007.

<sup>81</sup>Sankardev and Madhabdev were great vaishnava saints, scholars, socio religious reformers of medieval Assam and figures of greatest importance in the socio-cultural and religious history of Assam. They by the neo-vaishnavite movement (*Eksarania naam dharma*) tried to eradicate all the evils there in the society and to establish a society based on equality.

<sup>82</sup>Mipun J., Op. cit. p. 55-56.

<sup>83</sup>Mahanta, N.G., "Ethnicity, State And Identity: From Confrontation To Co-Existence" in B.B.Kumar (ed.) *Problems of Ethnicity in the North-East India*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2000, p.130.

<sup>84</sup> For detail See C K Sharma, 2002. Op.cit.

<sup>85</sup> They practiced shifting cultivation locally named *Zoom*; still some tribes are practicing it in North East India.

<sup>86</sup>Doley, D., "Causes of Land Alienation among the Mishings of Assam" in B.N. Bordoloi (ed). *Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness*, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1986, p.54.



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<sup>87</sup>Sharma C. K. “Tribal Land Alienation: Government’s Role”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No.52. 2002.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>*Satra* is a socio-religious institution of Assam established by Sankardeva to spread the teachings of neo-vaishnavite movement.

<sup>90</sup>Sharma, C.K., “Religion and Social Change: Neo-Vaishnavism vis-à-vis the Tribal Groups in the Assam Valley” in D. Nath (ed) *Religion and Society in North East India*. DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2011, p.26.

<sup>91</sup>Majuli is the largest river made island of the world, can be termed as paradise of the neo-vaishnavite *satra* institution and its cultural heritage.

<sup>92</sup>Pegu, R. Op. cit., p.85.

<sup>93</sup>Nath, D., “The Mising Language Movement in Assam” in J.J. Kuli, Op. cit., p.148.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid. pp 150-52

<sup>95</sup>Saikia, P.Op. cit., p.127.

<sup>96</sup> Grand Councils of the Misings ( Mising Bane Kebang) played an important role in the socio-cultural reforms of the Mising society.

<sup>97</sup>Pegu, R. Op. cit., p.86.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid. p.87.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid. p.132.

<sup>100</sup>Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 as amended by Assam Act No.VIII of 2001 and Assam Act No. XXI of 2005.