



IDENTITY POLITICS AND AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT OF THE MISINGS OF ASSAM

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Abstract

Identity consciousness and its consolidation among the various tribal groups of north-east India began long before independence, but systematic identity movement with specific goals developed in post-independence era. In the post-independence period with a goal to maintain distinct identity most of the indigenous tribes of north-east region started identity movement demanding either autonomous or separate state and their demands were conceded creating new states as well as granting autonomy. The Misings, a major section of tribal groups of North-East India lives in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh with their distinct identity also have been continuing their struggle for ethnic identity for several decades.

Key Word: Assam, Autonomous, Identity, Misings, Movement, North-East, Tribal.

Introduction: About the Community:

Ethnically, the Misings belong to the Tibeto-Burman language speaking group of the great Mongoloid race. (Survey of India, 1961, vol-11, part V-A, pp.44). They were listed as 'Miri' in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders Act of the Indian Parliament, first notified by the President of India as Constitution Order, 1950. In the latest amendment to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order under reference, notified by the government of Assam in 2003, the Misings have been listed as '(Miri) Miching'.

The Misings inhabit the eight eastern districts of Assam, viz. Tinisukia, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur. Otherwise scattered, their population has some concentration in the Dhemaji and Lakhimpur and in the sub division of Majuli in the district of Jorhat.

The population of the Misings in Assam is 2,57,551(1971 census),2001 census report 5,87,310 (Male-2,99,790 and Female-2,87,520) which constitutes 17.8 percent of total Scheduled Tribes population of Assam (3,308,570) and according to 2011 Census of India their population was estimated at 6,87,863 in persons.

Migration:

The Misings, originally a hill tribe of the Himalayan region of eastern India. Their original abode was in the upper courses of river Huang-Ho and Yangtse –Kiang in the North West of China and they entered India around 2000 B.C. (Kirata-Jana Kriti – Dr. S.K. Chatterjee-1974). They appear to have dwelt in the Siang region for long centuries, before they reached the Brahmaputra valley at one point of time in a process of migration in groups, their migration being prompted, apparently, by their quest for larger area of fertile land for cultivation. (T. R. Taid/The Misings and Their Speech).

Authentic information regarding the causes and pattern of migration of the Misings in different points of time since the dawn of their settlement in the region are not available. Yet, on the basis of folk tales and folklores it can be realized that the Misings migrated from place to place mainly in the operations of three forces, which we may call political, natural and cultural (Dr. D. Doley/Pattern and causes of land alienations of the Mising Tribe). Misings, at first came contact with the Chutiyas. After invasion of the Ahoms, the Misings were dispersed from the Chutiya kingdom and in the process, they migrated beyond the original territory of the Chutiyas and became spread along the valleys of the Brahmaputra rivers right from the foot hills of the Himalayan

ranges lying between the Lakhimpur districts of Assam and the present district of Subansiri and Siyang of Arunachal Pradesh down to the end of Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of present Assam.

Background of political Identity Movement:

A. Pre Independence (1933 to 1947)

Due to external and internal immigration the tribal of Assam became minority in their respective places. Immigration from east Bengal had assumed significant proportion in the 1930s. The line system unable to protect/safe Besides, though Govt. has constituted 'Tribal Sub-Plan' in the name of tribal development activities and providing finance to the various departments in the state. But due to lack of controlling system money has not been utilized properly. I.T.D.P has established in every sub division in Assam. But these has been working as vote collector for every ruling Government guard the land and property of tribal for which introduced tribal belt and Blocks. But due to over all corruption in Assam that belts and blocks did not work in reality in the same manner as it existed on paper. It was never strictly implemented, nor was it very effective in the absence of strong government authority at the local level.

Under the colonization schemes the government opened up reserve lands, de-reserved forests and professional grazing reserves, displacing the indigenous people. Karka Doley Miri, the representative of the Miri tribe in the assembly, opposed colonization because of the growing scarcity of land, which would restrict further expansion for the indigenous people. "Practically no suitable arable land outside the colonization areas and almost all cultivable lands have been occupied by the immigrants" and urged the government to stop the process of settlement of lands.

Besides, the tribal representatives emphasized the cultural differences between the Muslim immigrants and themselves and opposed creation of immigrant settlements near tribal villages. Karka Doley Miri, representative of the Miri tribe, drew the assembly's attention to the displacement of the Miri people of Gorumara in Sissi Mauza, Dibrugarh, and also to the cancellation of pattas (land records) to Miris and Deuris, who had settled in Bahgara and Dhunagiri in Bihpuria Mauza, North Lakhimpur.

The tribals in Assam are not only backward in education and economically but also in culturally and civilization. The reliance on liberal policies of the colonial state to improve their conditions and "civilize" them soon disappeared and most of the tribal representatives lamented that after more than a century of British rule in Assam there was a lot to be done yet. Karka Doley Miri, representative of the Miri tribe, complained that though hill tribes and the Muslim students were conferred free studentship and scholarship, no such special provisions had been accorded to the backward tribals of the plains. The backwardness was due to the absence of supportive provisions. According to him, groups like the Miri, Kachari, Deuri, Lalung, Khampti, Mikir, etc, were backward in education due to the lack of adequate schools.

B. After Independence:

After independence, some intellectuals and thinkers gave emphasis on importance of separate administration and reservations for the tribal in the field of education, govt. service and politics. In that arrangement, inclusion of 5th and 6th schedule was the main objective. Under 6th schedule in Assam, Karbi Along, North Cachar District, today's Meghalaya and Mizoram were included. Rest of the tribal dominated areas of India was included under 5th schedule of the constitution. Where government formed 'Tribes Advisory Council' in states with the tribal MLAs. But the vast tribal areas in the plains of Assam and hills of Manipur have been left out these two schedules. Dr. Bhupender Singh Committee (Three member experts committee) on plains tribals of Assam (ECOFTA) constituted by Govt. of India in the wake of Bodoland movement has strongly criticized this lapse and described it as a 'quirk of history'. And this remains the root cause of tribal agitation in Assam.

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Birth of Organization in the Community:

According to the source, some educated youths especially It. Charu Ch. Doley, Karka Ch. Doley, Padmadhar Pegu, Muhi Ch. Miri and scores of dedicated workers organized the Misings living scattered over three districts of upper Assam under the banner of 'Sodou Asam Miri Sonmilan'. First session of which was held at Gejera Miri gaon and was presided over by late Pitambar Dev Goswami of Garmura Satra in 1924. This Sonmilan is later re-named as 'Mising Ba:né Kébang'. It has the credit of cementing the various sections of Mising community into a single effective force cutting across diverse opinions and party lines.

The Mising educated youths and students played a leading role in organising the Mising community. Till this time, there was no common Mising students organisation covering the whole of Mising inhabited areas. The first Mising Student body was formed in 1933 named as Asom Miri Chatro Sonmilan. This was renamed as 'North Bank Mising Students Union' after independence. In 1951, 'Murkongselek Mising Students Union' was formed and 1959 saw formation of South Bank Mising

Students Union. All these groups were united in 1971 by forming 'Assam NEFA Miri Chatro Sonmilon'. In 1974, this sonmilon was renamed as 'Assam Arunachal Mising Students Union'. The next session of the union was held in 1978 at Dergaon and the name was again changed to All Assam Mising Students union. The next session was held in September, 1982 at All Assam Miri High School, Matmora, Dhakuakhana and it was in this session that a unanimous resolution was passed to demand autonomy for the Misings under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. Finally, in the session held on 22, 23 and 24 February, 1985 at Jengraimukh, Majuli the union was permanently named as "Takam Mising Porin Kébang (All Mising Students union)" and a popular mass movement was launched on the Autonomy demand.

Besides, there are numbers of sister organizations the community, those who has indebt contributions in struggle for political identity viz. Mising Mimang Kébang(1990), Mising Dírbí Kébang(1980, United Tribal High School), Takam Mising Mimé Kébang.

The Mising Autonomy Movement:

Misings had their own self-governing system till the advent of British colonial force. According to the source, even during the rule of 600 years of Ahom dynasty in Assam, the Misings enjoyed a great degree of Autonomy and the Ahom rulers hardly interfered into the internal affairs of the Misings.

Although the Mising people raised their demand for autonomy first in 1947, the popular mass movement was launched only in the eighties. Considering the growing popularity of the autonomy movement, the Govt. of Assam led by Hiteswar Saikia announced grant of Autonomy to the Misings and invited Takam Mising Porin Kébang and Mising Mimang Kébang for negotiation in 1994. The govt. gave a written proposal to create an Autonomous council named as Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) under an Act of State Govt. The proposal said that-

1. There shall not be any definite boundary and compact area for the MAC.
2. Revenue village having 50% or more Mising population would be identified and included into the MAC.
3. The MAC will not have any legislative power; it will have only executive powers on 34 subjects enlisted under 11th schedule of the constitution of India incorporated after the 73rd amendment.
4. Fund to the MAC would be provided only from the tribal sub-plan of the state.
5. The MAC would be created under a state Act and not under any provision of the constitution.

Chronicles of the Movements

A. MAC Accord: 14 July'1995-

Nine rounds of discussion were held between the Government of Assam and the leadership of TMPK and MMK. The TMPK-MMK insisted that 'autonomy without boundary' was an absurd proposition and was not acceptable. They also objected to the creation of 50% Mising population in a revenue village for identification and inclusion into proposed MAC. The TMPK-MMK strongly demanded that the existing 'tribal belt & Blocks' and the tribal sub-plan areas in Mising dominated areas should be included into MAC and that the MAC should be provided with powers and function similar to Bodoland Autonomous Council. But, the Assam Govt of congress-I party refused to concede to divide the Mising people. Overnight, a fake organization named 'Mising Autonomous Demand Committee (MADC)' was launched with full patronization of the Govt and put into dirty fight against the TMPK-MMK. Simultaneously, the Congress-I took up a plan to revive the 'Mising Ba:né Kébang (MBK)' to use it against the struggling Mising people. The MBK and MADC agreed to accept the boundaryless farce Mising autonomous council and organized the 32nd general conference of the Mising Ba:né Kébang on 21, 22, and 23 april , 1995 at Bilmukh under Dhakuakhana police station and invited the chief Minister of Assam for formal declaration of the council. This movement sparked strong resentment among the Misings and TMPK-MMK vowed to resist the conference. A 60-hour Bandh was called. On the first day of the conference, about five thousand Mising people took out a heroic protest march at Bilmukh and when the procession was advancing towards the venue of the conference to register their protest, CRPF and Assam Police opened indiscriminate fire killing two people namely martyr Mahananda (Boga) Medok and Martyr Noresh Taid. Hundreds were injured. As the 60-hour Bandh continued, police atrocities started in almost every Mising inhabited areas. Thousand people came out to the streets to protest. At Gogamukh in Dhemaji district, police brutally lathi charged on hundreds of woman picketers and a young girl named Anjana Pegu was wounded by bayonet. She later succumbed to her injury. The Band turned violent. Roads were blocked by felling trees; bridge were burnt down and markets were ablaze. Amidst such wide spread and strong protest, late Hiteswar Saikia, the then chief Minister of Assam came to Bilmukh by a chopper and addressed a very thinly attended meeting. He however, could not venture to announce his boundaryless autonomy Police repression and jailed of all top leaders of TMPK, MMK, the Govt. signed a so called

Mising Accord on 14 July, 1995 with MADC and MBK. Later the Govt. constituted an Interim Mising Autonomous Council headed by Laxminath Pangnging. After some months, he was replaced by Mr. Doneswar Modi. The TMPK, MMK continued their democratic agitation against the farce boundaryless MAC.

B. Mising Organization in Election:

The Mising people, for the first time in their history, participated in the general election of 1996 with the demand for Autonomy. The MMK fielded candidate in Jonai, Dhemaji, Dhakuakhana, Majuli, Lakhimpur and Bokakhat assembly constituency and in Lakhimpur parliamentary constituency. However, it could not win a single seat. The Mising people are not in majority in these constituencies excepting Jonai. As they contested the election under the banner of MMK, a Mising-non-Mising polarisation took place resulting in defeat of the minority Misings. The MMK polled more than one lac votes in these constituencies.

C. Negotiation with State Government:

In 1996, a new Govt. led by AGP came to power and the interim nominated body was reconstituted headed by Mohesh Doley. In 1998, the AGP led Govt. entered into another agreement was signed by TMPK-MMK with the Assam Govt. for demarcation of the boundary and holding the election, which remained unfilled. On 18th December, 2003 the Govt. of Assam has constituted a ministerial sub-committee to look into and submit its report within a period of six months, under chairmanship of Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, Minister, Health Assam.

On the basis of the interim Report of the Ministerial Sub-Committee, the MAC Act, 1995 was further amended, mainly to define the areas to be covered by MAC. The amendment concretized the concept of Core Area (Compact and contiguous people having more than 50% Mising population/total village 1239/Total population. 638977/SC-30165/ST-428207) and Satellite Area (non-compact and contiguous/392 villages/total popl.246002/Sc-18421/ST-160847) of MAC on the basis of 2005 MAC amendment act. The Govt. of Assam has also delimited 36 constituencies of MAC and have initiated the process of holding election to the MAC in 2005.

MAC election '2013 declaration

The Assam state election commission announced the schedule for holding election to General council constituencies. for Mising Autonomous Council on 2nd Sep'2013 and election for Mising autonomous council was declared to be held in two phases in October 03, 2013 and October 07, 2013 respectively.

The constituencies in the first phase are- Lali, Murkongselek, Gali-Bijaypur, Debing-Detag, Owang-Jonai, Sanjari Nwgr, Bhimpara-Boginadi, Ghunasuti-Pub Telahi, Obonori, Pub Dhakuakhana-Matmora, Kherkota-Dangdhara, Luit Pachim, Ranganadi, Dikrang, Jiabharali, Lohitmukh, Dhansiri Disoi, Gelabil, Sangga Majuli, Phulani Jokaibowa, Ra-Dang and Rikkong, Jorhat, Disang Dikhow, Dehing Sessa, Sadiya.

The second phase constituencies are Silasuti, Muktiar, Ujani Sissitongani, Namoni Sissitongani, Sissimukh, Jiadhah, Gogamukh, Nalbari and Mingmang. Due to massive protest by the non-Misings in two constituencies viz. Akajan and Somkong were kept postponed. After completion of 5 years term, election for second term held in the year 2018 in the constituencies of Mising autonomous council area which successfully completed its five years term. But still the various Mising organizations continuing their struggle for including their autonomous status under six scheduled of Indian constitution.

CONCLUSION

Movement for ethnic identity as a matter of fact, accounts for economic inequality, social injustice and political deprivation. Regarded as vulnerable section of the society, the tribal communities need protection not only in respect of political and economic rights but also in social justice. This is why the Misings are agitating to occupy a rightful place in the composite Assamese society and organized themselves on the basis of their distinct socio-cultural traits in a bid to maintain their respective identity. It is generally assumed that the maintenance of distinct identity would alienate them from the mainstream of Assamese society. But the Misings just want to maintain distinct identity within the greater composite Assamese society through autonomy status only to uplift their socio-economic condition in fact they realized that maintenance of a distinct identity is inextricably linked with the socio-economic development of the community. As a measure of maintaining distinct identity, they started to launch various agitations demanding autonomy on the basis of their lingo- cultural identity.

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