CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Adis

The Adis are the most important tribe living in the (Siang) district having quite a good number of sub-tribes. The Adis were formerly known as the Abors. The term ‘Abor’ means in Assamese an independent, remote and unknown people and is applied somewhat loosely to a number of tribes and clans, specially those who occupy the hills east of the Miris as far as the Dibang river. But the people living there call themselves Adi and not Abor.

Adi is a language spoken by the Adis, one of the largest hill tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Though they were formerly known as Abors, their tribe name as per the census records is Adi. The Adis are sub-divided into different sub-tribes. Among them are Padam, Minyong, Pangi, Shimong, Ashing, Pasi, Karko, Bokar, Bori, Ramo, Pailibo, Milan, Tangam and Tagin. The Padam and Minyong are the largest groups.

The total population of the Adis according to the 1991 census is 1.2 lakhs, and they constitute the largest tribal group in Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis spread over in the East, West and Upper Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

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Pradesh. The Adi-inhabited area is about 21,229 sq. kms. excluding the areas in the Dibang and Subansiri valley.²

1.2. The place of Adi in the Tibeto-Burman family of languages

Tibeto-Burman is generally regarded as a member of Sino-Tibetan family. Most of the classifications done on Tibeto-Burman are based on their genetic relationship, in which the languages so classified are claimed to have descended from a single ancestral language Tibeto-Burman. Tibeto-Burman is one of the four language families of India. The other three are Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic. Grierson observes that Tibeto-Burman languages stand out as a distinct family as compared with Tai and Chinese (Grierson, 1966, p.5). Tai and Chinese follow the subject-verb-object order whereas Tibeto-Burman languages use subject-object-verb order. There is no grammatical gender. Grammatical categories like case, number, etc., are expressed by free words added after the noun rather than by bound morphemes suffixed to the noun. They are thus like adjectives and follow the head noun.

Grierson classifies the Abor-Miri and Dafla in North Assam group, "The Abor-Miris and Daflas speak dialects which are so closely related that they can justly be considered one and the same speech form." (Grierson, 1966, p.568).

Benedict (1972) organized the Tibeto-Burman family into seven nuclei, a helical model as presented below.

TB Classification (Keyed to lines)

Benedict (1972)

Tibeto Burman

- Tibetan – Kanauri
  - Bodish
  - Himalayish
- Bahing – Vayu (Kiranti)
  - Abor – Miri – Dafla (Miris)
- Burmese – Lolo (Burmish)
  - Kachin
  - Kuki – Naga
  - Bodo – Garo (Barish)

Figure 1. Benedict's classification of the TB languages of Northeast India.

He further classified the nuclei as having different members of languages. Among the seven nuclei, the classification he proposed for Abor-Miri-Dafla (Miris) is presented below:
DeLancey (1991) has modified this model of Benedict in several respects. Benedict's Kuki-Chin-Naga, Abor-Miri-Dafla, and Bodo-Garo subgroups, spoken in NE India and adjacent regions of Burma, are lumped together under the purely geographical rubric of Kamarupan (Kamarupa, the
Sanskrit term for Assam).³ The term ‘Kamaruppan’ was first introduced by Matisoff (1991), which Robbins Burling (1999) comments it as being inappropriate and misleading as it is used ‘simply as a convenient geographical catchall in which to toss these northeastern languages when their genetic subgrouping was unclear.’⁴

Burlings further says that DeLancey, who wrote the articles on Tibeto-Burman for the *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (DeLancey 1991), grouped all the Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeastern India together, but instead of calling them "Kamarupan" he used the term "Baric". Burlings found this ‘a particularly unfortunate choice’ because “Baric has been used to refer to just one particular subgroup of closely related Tibeto-Burman languages, and never before has “Baric” been used to embrace all of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Northeast India.”⁵

Sun, in his Ph. D. dissertation (1993), gives a new name to the branch of Tibeto-Burman languages which were previously known as the Abor-Miri-Dafla, Mishingish, North Assam, or Mirish, which is Tani. His arguments for giving this new name to the mentioned branch of Tibeto-Burman languages in his own words are that in the days of the Linguistic Survey of India, the expedient term ‘North Assam’ was used to refer to the little known Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in a stretch of land between

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Tibet and Assam. This geographically based label, adopted by Weidert (1987) to denote specifically the languages we now call Tani, is not very useful because of its misleading vagueness. The other old term ‘Abor-Miri-Dafia’, composed of names of the three major tribal groups speaking these languages, must also be discarded, since the outdated pejorative exonyms it is based on are now resented by native speakers of these languages. The term ‘Mirish’ (Benedict 1972), widely recognized as it is, is inappropriate because it is also based on the objectionable exonym ‘Miri’ which not only sounds offensive to its bearers, but covers only a small subset (e.g. the Misings and the Hill Miris) of the Tani-speaking tribes. Robert Shafer’s term ‘Mishingish’ (q.v. Shafer 1967) is superior, but unfortunately also suffers from incomplete reference, since the term Mising is not recognized by such other major groups as the Apatanis, the Bengnis, and the Adis. There is, therefore, a real need to find an alternative term that can be readily acceptable to speakers of all languages belonging to this group...speakers of these languages share a legendary ancestor by the name of Abo Tani, with whom they all proudly identify... it seems, therefore, reasonable to designate this group of Tibeto-Burman languages as Tani.6

Burling (1999) has also adopted the name ‘Tani’ as suggested by Sun (1993). The membership of the Tani group is clear, but the internal relationships have been muddled by an ethnic classification that is only vaguely related to the language classification. The Tani area, barring a few

aberrant linguistic islands, seems to consist of a continuum of mutually intelligible local varieties shading gradually into one another (Sun 1993:8).

Sun's Tani stambaum is reproduced in the following figure. The languages on the left side of the tree include those that are sometimes called “Nishi”, while those on the right are more often called “Adi”.7

![Stambaum of Tani languages](image)

**Figure 3. Stambaum of T.-S. Jackson Sun’s classification of Tani languages.**

**Conclusion**

Adi is generally believed to belong to the Tibeto Burman family of languages. However, there have been differences in the classifications put forward by various scholars. Of the classifications discussed in this chapter, that of Sun (1993) seems to be the most appropriate, moreover, Burling

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7 Robbins Burling, “The Tibeto Burman Languages of Northeastern India”...p. 13
(1999) also evidently shares his views. In view of their discussions, the researcher also considers the classification of the two mentioned scholars, most plausible.

The above discussion has placed the Adi language in a somewhat less vague position than it had been in the past. The credibility of the classification of Adi under the Tibeto-Burman family of languages is also confirmed by the fact that the language also seems to fit well into Subbarao, Kevichusa and Kumar’s Typological Characteristics of Tibeto-Burman Languages, (1999).