Chapter I

The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley

1. Introduction

The following work is a descriptive-comparative study of the dialects of Misin (exonym: Miri, Mising hereafter), a language of the Tani group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The dissertation is presented in three folds: firstly, it gives a description of the phonological, morphological, and morphophonemic features of Mising, secondly, it expounds the variations that exist between Mising dialects at the phonological, morphological, and morphophonological levels, and thirdly, it attempts to shed light on the various changes brought about in Mising due to interference of dominant languages. Mising traditionally recognizes eight dialects viz., Pagro, Dolo, Dambuk, Ojan, Sa'jan, Mo'jin, Somua, and Samuguria which are spoken in the eight districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia in Assam. It is also spoken by a few numbers in the East-Siang and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Mising is the only Tani language spoken in Assam while the rest of the languages which belong to this group are spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. The closest cognates of Mising are the languages/dialects spoken by the Eastern Tani sub-group.

A standardized form of Mising is yet to emerge and so the base form of the Mising language presented in this work, for comparative purposes, is data taken from the Pagro dialect. The Pagro dialect is numerously spoken by the Misings and it is intelligible to speakers of different Mising dialects.¹

¹Speakers of Samuguria dialect might not be able to understand or communicate in any of the Mising dialects for they no longer speak Mising.
In the following sub-sections of this chapter, §1.1 gives a brief background of the Misings: their origin, migration, population and the present demographic distribution, and also a brief discussion on their community life is given in the same section. §1.2 shows the linguistic affiliation of Mising based on the classification of Tani languages by Sun (1993) and Post (2007). This section also attempts to show the division of Mising dialects and gives relevant informations regarding their current status with respect to their geographical settings and their degree of exposure to other language(s)/dialect(s). The steps taken by Misig Agom Kōban (Mising Literary Society) for the revival of the language are also discussed. The few existing works on Mising are also revisited in the same section. In §1.3 the fieldwork situations, data collection, and elicitation are highlighted followed by a discussion on the key aims of the study in §1.4. The overall organization of the study is given in §1.5.

1.1. Miri > Mishing > Mising

Mising (exonym: Miri) refers to both the people and the language. Many consider the term Mising to be a blend of mi ‘man’ (derived from ami = man) and sig ‘white’ (derived from jasig = white), i.e. ‘good, figuratively’ (Taid 2008: ii). When and how the name Miri came to represent the Misings remains a matter of conjecture. In the words of Prasad (1991:4), the word Miri is derived from ami ‘man’ + iri ‘virtue’ = miri ‘virtuous man’. According to him, the priests of the Adi (hillmen) were called by this name, and when a group of Misings came down to the Assam Valley, the plain people, at the first contact, came to know that the newcomers follow the cult of Miri, i.e. worship of natural forces. Thus, the term came to refer to the whole tribe. On the other hand, Doley (2004: Preface) opines that the name is said to be derived from the Mising word miri = miruo, which signifies ‘a priest with superhuman power’. The earliest mention of the Misings as Miri is found in the writings of the saint-scholar and socio-
religious reformer Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568) who is believed to have written his literary and poetic works during 1516-1568 (Pegu 2000:2-3).

Today, the Mising speakers consider *Miri* as a derogatory term and so they prefer to call themselves Mising. Hence, they are known by this name for all purposes. Sun (1993:3) states that the term *Abor-Miri-Dafla*, composed of names of the three major tribal groups speaking these languages must be discarded, since the outdated exonyms it is based on are now resented by native speakers of these languages. These names are no longer accepted or widely used in North-East India, having been replaced by the names *Adi, Mising*, and *Nyishi* respectively. However, it is important to mention here that the Misings are officially referred to as *Miri* even today.

1.1.1. **Origin and migration**

The history of origin and migration of the Misings are based on oral traditions. According to *mibu aba* *verses of the priest*, the universe consists of one *dɔŋ əmɔŋ* ‘earth’ and two other ethereal worlds: *regi-regam* ‘kingdom of the gods’, and *ui-əmɔŋ* ‘the abode of spirits’ (Padun 1974). In terms of Mising cosmology, *regi-regam, dɔŋ-əmɔŋ* and *ui-əmɔŋ* together form the celestial configuration of *kejum* ‘universe’; *regi-regam* and *dɔŋ-əmɔŋ* remain within the orbit of the solar fraternity whereas the *ui-əmɔŋ* exists outside the host of the solar panorama and is shrouded in clouds of eternal darkness (Doley 2008:41). In the words of Pegu (2007:10), God created *ki:li-karge* ‘heaven’. In the kingdom of *regi-regam* five generations of divine family were created: *ka:si* ‘the god of gravitation and love’, *sijә* ‘God of water and rain’, *aŋbo* ‘son of Siang’, who brought about *nei-neyan* ‘vegetable kingdom’ and *rugzi-me:raŋ* ‘plant and animal kingdom’, *bomuk* ‘son of Angbo, who created *dɔ:ni* ‘sun’, *po:lo* ‘moon’, *dɔ:mir* ‘sky’, *takar* ‘stars’, *karšiŋ* ‘planets’, *mugliŋ* ‘lightening’, *kardaŋ* ‘satellite’ and *karpun*
‘the milky ways’ with his divine power, *muksonga* ‘son of Bomuk’ and *sedi* was the son of *muksonga*. God sent *sedi* and *melo* to *dutem* ‘earth’ which was created by Him before the five generations of divine family. Thus, *sedi-babu* is considered to be the first father and *sedi-melo* the first mother on earth by the Misings.

Many scholars point the origin of the Misings towards North-West China. It is evident when we go through Suniti Kumar Chatterjee’s (1954) mention of the *Kiranti* tribe who were expert in archery and hunting. This tribe, according to him is a conglomeration of many clans and the Misings has a close resemblance with them, hence, Chatterjee considers the Misings as one among them. This can be also established by the close cultural proximity between both the groups: *Mising* and the *ancient Chinese group*. Pegu (1998:16) and Pegu (2000:37) talk about the closeness of the two groups in terms of their traditions and customs; with sources (pertaining to traditions and customs) gathered from noted Chinese historians like Parker (1908), Garnet (1968), and Fitzgerald (1942). They have mentioned the similarities in terms of religious practices, festivals and traditional ceremonies relating to agriculture, and the rearing of domestic fowls and animals. The practice of offering sacrificial feasts are also said to have the similar patterning between the two groups.

There is no reliable source by which one may correctly fix the exact time of migration of the Misings from the North West province of China to the hilly tracts of present-day Arunachal Pradesh, erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). In Arunachal Pradesh the Misings occupied the lofty mountains of Subansiri, Siang, and Lohit districts. The lush mountainous ranges of Arunachal Pradesh were then called the Hills of *Aka, Dafla, Abor, Miri and Mishmi* (Adamm Hills); and the early historians identified the overall population of these Hills as *Miri-Mishmi* (Doley 2008:42). Pegu (1998) has estimated the time of migration as about two thousand years before the Christian era. However, due to lack of solid evidence, this cannot be taken for granted.

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2 The Misings are believed to be one of the racially disintegrated branches of the Miao main stream (Pegu1998:27). Some villages of the Miao and Lisu tribes still exist today near Mishmi Hills and Tirap districts bordering Myanmar. The Miao and Lisu tribes were spotted by Prof. Fitzgerald in Northern China more than two millennia before the Christian era (R. Doley 2008:47).
Based on the topography that existed during that period, Pegu (2000:38) assumes that the Misings moved eastward from the outskirts of Langzhou, Yangdeng, and Mine in the North-West China to reach the foothills of Bayan Hara, the valley where Yalum Kiang river begins its course. Moving down the river Yalum kiang they spread southwards and to the west. They crossed the Yalum Kiang, Yangtse Kiang, Mekong (Lanchang Jiang), and Chiruvana to reach a place called Deken. Deken was the meeting point of the borders of three countries: China, India, and Burma (now Myanmar). Thereafter, the Misings finally reached southern Tibet climbing many difficult hills and mountains. They lived in the Tsangpoo valley for many centuries and in due course of time they entered the Siang valley through the Doshing Le Pass (Pegu 2000:39).

The precise date of entry of the Misings to the Siang (Brahmaputra) Valley is not known. Currently, there are many controversies regarding the time of their settlement in Assam as well as in the abutting areas of Arunachal Pradesh. N. C. Pegu and D. Doley have estimated the Mising migration to have taken place around the time of the Ahom invasion in the early 13th century A.D. (Doley 2008:48). The circumstances for their migration to the foot-plains of Assam is also not as clear as one might think; many believe that an outbreak of an unknown epidemic was the sole cause while others feel that it was due to the awful treatment meted out to the Mising people by the Adi tribes (Adi refers to the people living in the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh). Though the precise reasons are hitherto unknown, the oral traditions passed down from generation to generation for centuries indicate that the main reason behind their migration to the plains was the search for a settlement in a fertile land (Doley 2008:48).

### 1.1.2. Population and demographic distribution

The total population of Assam as per the Indian Census (2001) has been 26,655,528. Of them 3,308,570 persons are Scheduled Tribes (STs), constituting 12.4

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3 In Mising folk tales Yalun Kiang or Yalong Jiang is called as Yalum Siang (which is the Siang river in Arunachal Pradesh, and Brahmaputra in Assam and the rest of the country).
percent of the total population of the state. Next to the Bodos (bodo)\textsuperscript{4}, the Misings form the largest Scheduled Tribe in Assam. The Indian Census (2001) reports the existence of 5,87,310 Mising speakers, constituting 17.8% of the total tribal population of Assam. However, a recent unofficial count jointly conducted by the Takam Misin Porin K\=ban (All Mising Students Union), Misin Mimak K\=ban (Mising Revolutionary Organization), and Takam Misin Mim\=o k\=ban (All Mising Women Organization) has put the population of Mising at 12,57,596 living in 1,724 villages in Assam (Doley 2008:52).

Mising speakers are primarily concentrated in the upper half of Assam, spreading over the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, and Sonitpur on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra river and Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat on the South Bank. The largest concentrations of Misings are in Jonai, Dhakuakhana, and Majuli Sub-Divisions in the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, and Jorhat respectively. However, a good number of Mising people have also settled in the East-Siang and the Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh. There are approximately 28 Mising villages in the East Siang District and about 17 villages in the Namsai and Sowkham Circles in the Lohit district. A mixed population of speakers of different Mising dialects is found in the East-Siang district while in the Lohit district the Somua dialect speakers form the majority. Due to a close language contact situation between Somua and some Adi (Mipol and Padam) languages/dialects, the former has merged with the latter. Today, the Somua speakers are in a transitional stage in adopting the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh for particularly two reasons: (1) language contact, and (2) convergence, and perhaps due to some political factors.

\textsuperscript{4} The Indian Census (2001) reports the existence of 1,352,771 Boro (or Bodo) which constitute 40.9 percentage of the total tribal population of Assam, and that place them as the largest tribal community in Assam.
Map of Assam: source-http://www.indiavisitinformation.com

ASSAM
2001

Map 1 – Misings are scattered in the encircled districts of Assam.


ARUNACHAL PRADESH
2001

Map 2 - Misings are scattered in the encircled district of Arunachal Pradesh.
1.1.3. Community life and culture

The Misings are known to be riverine people who have settled on both banks of Brahmaputra for centuries now. Following the course of the river, they are found from Sadiya in the East to Tezpur in the West. They continue their practice of living in thatched houses, raised (about 4-5 feet from the ground) with bamboo and wooden stilts, known as kar:rokum ‘sanghar’.\(^5\) It was a protection against flood waters during the rainy season, although the original logic assumed behind raised houses was protection from wild beasts. The house is usually long and is constructed in the shape of a straight line. The front balcony or the entrance of the house is called tungøy and the back balcony is the jabkur. The ladder by which one climbs to the house is ko:baŋ and a bamboo bar da:zoŋ is fixed near it for support. In the words of Pegu (2007:72), “Mising houses are erected on classical ethos. Their imagination of the ten-layered universe that exist five layers above and five layers below the space on which the earth rests (talə rumʊko-kəik rumʊko) is the synonymous layout of the house construction. In such a universe human being exists, so also family lives in such built-up. So the karə ‘platform’ is built on five layers: zopon, xtolg, bener, porpijam, and piso. Similarly, dugləŋ, baŋkugə, niutok, sojing, and selap are five layers. baŋkugə is indicative. One section puts top westward and base eastward and other section just the opposite. For example, pe:gu family ‘a surname in Mising’ put the top of baŋkugə towards west and base east, whereas a do:le family ‘a surname in Mising’ other way round.”

The houses built on the basis of co-operation among the community members are known as rīgbo. But today, due to the spread of education and the zeal for employment (in pursuit of a better life), a sizeable number of Misings have migrated to the cities and towns of Assam viz., to Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sivasagar, and

\(^5\) Sang-ghar ‘raised-house’- ‘a house in which the floor is raised’ is an Assamese word.
Tezpur. Joint family system is still practiced among the Mising. Every village has a *khabaj* ‘village panchayat’ where the *gaon bura* ‘head of the village’ acts as the chieftain. The *khabaj* is the supreme authority and it is he who provides a *Code of Conduct* and *Ethics* to be followed by the community people.

The *marriage system* in Mising community is simple. The tying of knots occurs in two forms: *miday* ‘marriage with ‘rituals’ and *dugbosunam* ‘elopement’. The marriage procedure goes through three stages: *jamnɔ ka:nam* ‘to see a bride’, *jamnɔ tatpir* ‘fixing a marriage’, and then finally the *miday*. There are different clans in Mising: *pe:gu, do:le, mili, kutum, pangig, pao, taik, pa:dun*, and many more. Marriage between the same surnames does not take place. However, different surnames might trace their origin from the same root and in that case marriage is not permissible within the Mising community. For instance, *pe:gu* treats *taik, sugkraŋ, pangig* (to name a few) as brothers and sisters having the same bloodline. This practice is still followed but in a strict sense it hardly exists today. Polygamy is considered a taboo in Mising community. However, there are instances where we see a person having three/four wives: *e:poŋ* ‘first wife, *e:me* ‘second wife, and *e:siri* ‘third wife’. A man having more than one wife is looked down by the Mising society unlike the *nilsi* community where a man is given more respect if he has more than one wife. Widow re-marriage is permissible and is encouraged.

The *Mising society* is patriarchal, where the males directly or indirectly dominate every walk of life. Women are entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the children and other household things. On the other hand, the males take up the

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6 *Nyishi* (paleo-exonym: *Dafla*) belong to the Western Tani sub-group of the TB language family. The census report of 1981 gives the existence of 28,488 Nyishi speakers. They are chiefly spoken in the West-Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. Sun’s (1993) study on Tani languages states that ‘culturally and linguistically they are related to the Hill Miris to the north-east and the Bengni’s of the West Kameng district.’ The Bengni Nyishi tribe traditionally recognizes three dialects: Dol, Dodum, and Dopum, each of which comprises several phratries, which in turn are composed of number of clans (Sun 1993:424).
job to plough their fields. Except for ploughing, women extend their help to men in other activities like sowing and reaping. Mising women are well-known for their expertise in weaving gadu ‘a fluffy Mising blanket’, and other traditional attires like ri:bi-gasəŋ ‘a sheet with narrow stripes for covering the lower garment and the blouse’, mibu-galuk ‘a Mising waist coat for men’, ege ‘the lower garment of Mising women’, nisəŋ ‘a piece of cloth to carry a baby with’ et cetera.

Mising festivals are chiefly based on agriculture and farming activities. gumrag so:man is the most colourful traditional dance of the Misings. This dance is performed on the occasion of ali-a:je ligag, the spring festival of the Misings. ligag marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle of the community and is observed on the first Wednesday of February. As the name suggests, ali-a:je ligag (ali-a:je = yam-fruits and ligag = sowing) is a sowing festival. Apart from this, the other festivals celebrated by the Mising people are po:rag and dobur. po:rag is a post-harvest festival usually observed in the early winter. The festival lasts for three days where all members of the Mising community, young and old, and children take part in the celebration. Besides local villagers, guests from the abutting villages are also invited to join the three-day festival. The feast includes food items like pork, chicken, fish and mutton accompanied and the favorite beverage of the community called apοŋ ‘rice-beer’. dobur is an animistic rite performed occasionally by the village community by sacrificing pigs and hens for different purposes, such as to avert likely crop failure or to overcome some evil effects of some wrong-doings by a member of the community.

Mising has a very rich culture. Until the advent of modernization the Mising people used to play their traditional musical instruments. Today most of these instruments have been replaced by modern instruments. Most of the traditional instruments were made of bamboo, which do not last for a long period. Some of the musical instruments that the community uses are as follows:
Tutok tapuy looks more or less like a flute. Unlike flute, the player blows the pipe from one end with the fingers frequently moving up and down on the pitch holes (generally six holes). One of the holes at the centre is blocked at the middle of the pipe with wax and is covered with a piece of paper which is again tied with thread. The music produced by the tutok tapuy is of high pitch.

Derki tapuy is another flute like musical instrument rarely used today by the Misings. It is made of bamboo and has three holes. Unlike tutok tapuy, air is blown from the side and not from one of the two ends of the pipe. The music produced with this instrument is low and is not capable of catching up with high notes, and it is rather slow.

Guggaŋ is made of bamboo and is of rare kind. Its usage is no more seen at the present day. P. Pegu (2007:67) opines that “the usuage of guggaŋ as a musical instrument in public events were rare in earlier generations but rendered dexterously between two persons as a means to decode private conversation added with enthralling music. The guggaŋ stalwart can put human speech in the vibrating needle which can swiftly be decoded by his counterpart. It was therefore said that the lovers, girls and boys, assiduously learn the intricate grammar of the instrument to the advantage of their private conversation”.

Lëno-marbag is a circular instrument which is made of brass, copper, and iron. It is played by hitting the disc with a stick wrapped with cotton. This instrument is mostly played on two occasions: (1) marriage rituals and (2) at the demise of some noted person. It has the function of a siren in sad events. The striking of the object by the stick produces a sound which travels as far as 3-4 kilometers.

Dumdum is a drum which is indispensable to almost all cultural programmes performed by the community. It is a hollow cylinder made of bamboo and wood and which is covered with animal skin at both the ends. One of the ends is slightly smaller
than the other. The smaller side is played with the fingers whereas the other side is hit by a circular bamboo stick called as *ma:ri* (also the thumb is used at regular intervals). The music produced is a combination of slow and fast sounds.

*Lu:pi* has to go along with the *dumdum* ‘drum’. The combination of *dumdum* and *lu:pi* produces music of high quality which often compels one to engage himself/herself in toe-tapping. This circular plate like instrument is made of brass and iron. We find a hole in the middle of each of the two plates. A player holds the plates with thread tied in the holes so as to hit each other.

Mising women are well-known for their expertise in weaving different traditional Mising attires and other necessities. Some of the them are: *ege* ‘the lower garment of Mising women folk, woven in different colours which comes in plains or stripes’, *ri:bi-gasor* ‘traditional Mising shawl which is woven by combining red, white, and black colours’, *gadu* ‘a fluffy Mising blanket weaved with cotton’, *tapum-gasor* ‘a light shawl woven with *eri’*. The Mising women’s wear outweighs the men’s. Some of the men’s traditional attires include: *mibu-galuk* ‘a waist coat for Mising men folk which is generally woven in black, white, and green colours’, *gonro-ugon* ‘linen for Mising men folk, especially worn during marriage rituals’. Nowadays *gonro-ugon* has been replaced by *dhuti* (linen worn by Assamese men folk) as a result of acculturation.

Misings have a minimal collection of traditional ornaments. Some of the ornaments of Mising women include *konge* ‘bracelet’ (made of either silver or gold), *maduli* and *dukduki* ‘neclaces made of gold and coral, and which is studded with gems and precious stones’, and *doksiri* ‘chain generally made of silver’.

The main *sources* of livelihood among the Mising villagers are agriculture, handicrafts, and fishing. Their cultivation includes different varieties of rice, paddy, mustard, pulses, vegetables, and areca nuts. The handicrafts practiced by the Mising people are mainly basketry which includes *potir/pọra* ‘coop’, *apo* ‘winnowing basket’, *do:la* ‘a circular bamboo tool for keeping grains’, *gempa* ‘a circular basket made of bamboo’. Besides basketry, fish traps like *dirdan*, *digorณ*, *poran*, in different shapes
and sizes are made of bamboo and cane. Other wooden handicraft items are oluŋ ‘boat’, ki:par ‘mortar’, and nagol ‘plough’. Apart from this, the Mising people keep themselves engaged in rearing fowls, goats, and pigs which are also added to their sources of income. And, of course, the rearing is also done for sacrificing in traditional feasts like urom-apin, dodgang, and usi etc. (traditional religious beliefs and practices amongst the Misings).

Mising have their own beliefs about supernatural beings viz., uyu or ui ‘malevolent spirits capable of causing great harm’, urom-posum ‘hovering spirits of the dead, who may cause illness or other adverse conditions’, αpom ‘spirits responsible for abducting human beings to cause disaster’, and the worship of nature do:j1i-po:lo ‘sun and moon’ which is common to all fellow Misings (Taid 2008). Excluding the αpom, all the supernatural beings need to be propitiated with sacrificial offerings which are generally done with domestic fowl in order to get rid of sickness caused by these spirits. The rituals are performed by persons having supernatural powers called mibu ‘shaman of the Misings’, but today, the Mising community has mingled with the Assamese and due to the impact of Hinduism (especially Vaishnavism), sacrificial ceremonies are performed by hattula ‘saints or pundits’.

1.2. The Mising language

Mising is included in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam, vide Indian constitution order, 1950 (modified in 1956), and amended further through the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Amendment Act 1956), as Miri. The Mising language is included in the non-scheduled languages of Tribal and Border Languages of India. For educational purposes Mising got its recognition as a language from the Government of Assam on 30th October, 1985. Since its recognition Mising has been using a Roman-based script. Mising is assumed to be the language spoken by the largest Tani group as per Sun’s (1993) comparative study on Tani languages.
1.2.1. Linguistic affiliation

Mising belongs to the Eastern Tani sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman family. Sun (2001:456) refers to Tani as a compact cluster of TB languages situated at the eastern end of the Himalayas, in an area skirted on four sides by Tibet, Assam, Bhutan, and Burma. The Tani languages fall into two divisions: Eastern Tani consisting of Mising plus many of the Adi dialects, and Western Tani consisting of dialects spoken by the Nyishi(ng)-Bengni, Tagin, Galo, and the Hill Miri tribes. Tani languages are spoken by about 600,000 indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh and Northern Assam. Figure 1 shows the Tibeto-Burman and the Tani sub-group family of languages respectively.

Sino-Tibetan > Tibeto-Burman > **Tani**

- **Western**
  - Apatani
- **Eastern**
  - Damu
  - Milang
  - Bori
  - **Mising**, **Pa:dam**, **Minyong**, **Palilibo**

- **Nyishu**, **Bugni**, **Nyishi**, **Tagin**, **Yano**, **Hills Miri**, **Galo**

*Figure-1 Tani language family based on Sun (2003) and Post (2007)*

The Misings are a close cognate of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, chiefly the **Mipog** (Minyong) and **Pa:dam** (Pa:dam) dialects, which belongs to the Eastern-Tani sub-group of the TB language family. Also close to Adi-Mising are the speeches of the
Galo (Gallong) and other members of the Western-Tani.⁷ Along these lines, it is worth to mention here that a few small groups of people at the international boundary of China are reported to be the speakers of languages closely related to those languages, which Sten Konow, in Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India*, has named as *North Assam* branch of Tibeto-Burman (Taid, 2008: xi). Towards the beginning of the 19ᵗʰ century, this linguistic branch was named *Abor-Miri-Dafla*, which was renamed as *Mirish* or *Mishingish* by Paul Benedict and Robert Shafer in the 1960’s and 1970’s. However, present day linguists prefer the term *Tani* to the other mentioned terms, as they have a strong belief that speakers of all these language groups trace their descent from a legendary ancestor, named *Abo-Tani* ‘Father Man’ (Taid, 2008: xii).

1.2.2. Mising Agom Kəbaŋ

*Mising Agom kəbaŋ* (MAK, hereafter) or Mising Literary Association was formed in 1972 with joint efforts given by the Guwahati Agom Kəbaŋ and some educated Misings. It was formed at Dishangmukh in the Sivasagar district of Assam. The first meeting was presided over by Taburam Taid, an eminent educationist who is a forerunner in the development of Mising language. Earlier, meetings were held biennially but today, it is held annually to discuss various problems relating to language issues. The Association has one hundred and twenty-five literary units (pc. Basanta Doley, the present President of the Mising Literary Association) spread across different districts in Assam where the Misings are scattered. It is due to the enthusiasm shown by this organization that the government of Assam has introduced Mising as a subject in some Assamese medium Lower Primary (LP) schools where the Misings form the majority.

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⁷ Galo is spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. It is a “transitional” (Eastern-convergent) language of the Western Tani group (Post 2007).
1.2.3. Revival of Mising language

Mising do not have a script of their own. Earlier, Mising literature in the form of short stories, articles, and books appeared in Assamese. At present, publications are mostly done with a modified form of Roman script. However, writing in Assamese is still practiced so as to reach the Mising people who are more used to reading and writing in Assamese. At first, native scholars, under the banner of MAK, experimented with the Assamese orthography so as to use it officially. However, it was later discontinued due to the problems in representing some Mising sounds. For instance, there are no characters in Assamese script which can easily represent the Mising high central vowel \(i\) and the mid-central vowel \(a\) (both long and short). Hence the Agom \(Kabaj\) opted for modified forms of the Roman letters \(i\) and \(e\) (earlier represented with \(c\) and \(v\)), respectively.

The process of reviving the Mising language is at an initial stage though; some development has been witnessed in the community. As mentioned earlier, the Agom \(Kabaj\)'s constant pressure has led to the introduction of Mising in educational institutions. As a result, today, Mising is introduced as a single subject in the third and fourth standards of Assamese medium Lower Primary (LP) schools. This programme is purely on an experimental basis. The plan is eventually to move to higher standards if it proves to be beneficial for the community. Mising is taught in LP schools in Tribal Belt Areas (TBA) where the Mising people are in a majority. Thus, in 1985, Mising was introduced in one hundred LP schools with the appointment of one language teacher for each of the schools. The Mising texts taught in the LP schools, and published by MAK, are listed below.

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8 According to Mising oral tradition it is believed that \(doji\) \(ba\:bu\) 'the god of learning' gave a script to the Misings. The script was preserved on a deer skin. The Misings ate up the deer skin by mistake and thus they lost their script for ever. On the other hand, Pegu, P (2003:22) opines that like other speeches spoken in this world, \(doji\)-\(bote\) 'God of knowledge' had covertly distributed respective alphabet to the Misings. And the Misings collected it but just hoarded in the corner of a house without bringing it to the notice of the Mising people. Thus, the Misings lost their manuscript due to their negligence.
Table 1- Mising language texts taught in the III and IV standards of LP schools

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<th>Texts taught in III standard</th>
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<tr>
<td>lakov-I (Mother-tongue)</td>
<td>lakov-II (Mother-tongue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poman moman-I (Mising Rhymes)</td>
<td>poman moman-II (Mising Rhymes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gomlam-I (Mising Grammar)</td>
<td>gomlam-II (Mising Grammar)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.4. Previous works on Mising

The history of the study of Mising language began with the establishment of Christian missionaries, and also at the time when officials of the colonial regime were posted in and around Sadiya (now in Tinsukia district, Assam) in the early nineteenth century. The main aim of the missionaries was to communicate the good news of the gospel to the people in local dialects. On the other hand, it was the obvious necessity of the officials of the colonial regime to learn the language for administrative purposes. However, others picked up the language, perhaps, as a result of contact with the Mising people for so long. The works of some eminent personalities who worked on Mising with much enthusiasm are discussed below.

William Robinson’s *A Short Outline of Miri (Mising) Grammar* (1849) is the first ever grammar attempted on this language for institutional use. The author took the opportunity of writing this grammar during his posting in Sadiya (a sub-division in the Tinsukia district at present). The data presented in this work are from the *Sa:jag* dialect of the Mising community as it was spoken in and around Sadiya. Robinson has dealt with grammatical categories like noun, verb, adjective and adverb besides nominal inflections, like case and verbal inflections like tense and mood in his grammar book. The presence of seven cases is mentioned: nominative (*fi*), genitive (-*g*), dative (-kepe), ablative (-lokom), accusative (-*m*, -me), instructive (-koki), and locative (-lo). The cases are expressed by the addition of the post-positional particles, except in the case of the
accusative, and sometimes of the genitive. As stated by the author, the position of an adjective in a sentence is immediately after noun. But, we notice that an adjective may precede or follow an NP in Sa:jaŋ dialect like any other Mising dialects. Three types of tenses are distinguished: past, present, and future. The author also gives a list of three moods: indicative, imperative, and potential. As a whole, the grammar book is not comprehensive as the title itself suggests. However, it must have served its purpose of giving a brief outline of the language at a time when there was nothing written on the language. Besides the incorporation of free translation of some short Mising sentences, the book also provides lexicography of two hundred and forty-eight words each from Assamese, Bengali, Kachari (Bodo), Mishing (Mising), Bhotia, Changlo, and Garo languages.

Joseph Francis Needham’s *An outline Grammar of Shaiyang Miri Language as spoken by the Miris of that clan residing the neighborhood of Sadiya* was published in 1886. The data presented in the grammar is from Sa:jaŋ dialect of the Mising community. Needham who was well-versed in Mising also has the credit of translating the popular story of ‘Prodigal Son’ from the Bible into the Mising language in 1886. In 1899 he also wrote an article on do:luj ka:bag ‘village court’. In Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India, these two translated stories were used as specimen of the Mising language.

James Herbert Lorrain’s *A Dictionary of Abor-Miri Language* (1910) was the first ever dictionary compiled in Mising language. The dictionary was completed in 1906, and the same was published from Shillong in 1910. The lexis (7005 in number) entered in the dictionary are chiefly from two tribes: Padam Adi and Sa:jaŋ Mising (both belongs to the Eastern Tani sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family). Mising is an agglutinative language and to understand the language better, a good number of Mising suffixes are shown in the dictionary with illustrative examples.

Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1909): The proximity between the dialects spoken by Miri (Mising) and Dafla (Nyishi) must have prompted Grierson to make a
comparative study of both the languages. However, without emphasizing on the Dafla language, the features of Mising are represented here as discussed in the survey. The sketch of Miri grammar is based on the grammar prepared by Needham on *Sa:jaŋ* Miri (1886). The study identifies seven short vowels (front vowels i, and e, central vowels i, ə, and a, and back vowels u and o). The presence of long counterparts of these vowels is also mentioned in the survey. The long vowels are shown with the diacritic (') mark above the short vowels. And the mid-central vowels i and ə (IPA) are written as ü and á respectively. The study also deals with some morpho-phonemics in Mising.

*Mising Grammar* (1991) by Bal Ram Prasad is the first ever grammar on the Mising language written by a linguist. Though many a time non-linguists attempted to do so, the works never got published in the form of a book and rather appeared slackly in some journals. Prasad’s *Mising Grammar* is based on grammatical functions rather than on grammatical forms and as it is meant for pedagogical purposes, theoretical discussions and justifications for a particular analysis are kept to a minimum. The book is divided into two broad categories: noun morphology which is followed by a description of adjectives and verb morphology followed by description of adverbs. The process of word-formation in Mising is also discussed so as to show how new concepts are expressed in the language. A chapter on syntax is also dealt with to describe the order of constituents at the surface level.

The work is based on data collected from two dialects, namely *Sa:jaŋ* and *Mo:jaŋ* dialects. The grammar is primarily aimed at the language learner and teacher. The citation of data in the book is an amalgamation of the two Mising dialects. This, no doubt, makes a reader difficult to follow. Looking into the Mising language at the present day context, the grammar would have been a boon to the community if it used data from any one of the dialects instead of mixing them.

*Mising Dictionary* (1995) by Taburam Taid appears to be the first ever dictionary of the Mising language. This is a useful reference book for both laymen and

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9 Journals of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta (1836, 1837, 1849)
linguistic researchers. The introductory part of the dictionary gives brief but clear information of some features of Mising vocabulary. The features include word classes [nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, lexical forms that may be termed as interjection and indeclinable], the occurrence of adjectives as agentive and recipient morphologically, and the presence of a good number of classifiers in Mising which share formal features of nouns in that they can be inflected for case. However, where the syntactic function is that of numerals and they do so by taking numeral affixes. The introduction shows that apart from the suffixes representing tense, aspect and mood, a large number of other suffixes are also added to verbs to express different meanings or shades of meaning. A brief note and a list of such suffixes are given in the Appendix to the book (Taid 1995:146-162).

Taking into account the immediate requirement to consult a dictionary, Taid has arranged the entries in a systematic way. However, the problem that every lexicographer face in compiling a dictionary depends on the language (s)he works on. A standardized variety of Mising is yet to emerge and so to enter each and every lexical form available in the existing Mising dialects is something which requires a much greater effort. In the words of Taid (1995: viii)

"But it would evidently be found deficient in a good number of lexical items available in the various dialects, particularly in respect of Mising speech."

Despite the gap admitted by Taid, the dictionary still proves to be very helpful for Mising language learners, teachers, and for researchers working on the language.

Inter-Lingual Code-Switching as a Socio-linguistic Phenomenon amongst the Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley: A Study by Rajeev Doley (2008) appears to be the latest work done on the Mising language. As the title itself suggests, the study focuses on Mising-Assamese code-switching by ethnic Mising speakers with their fellow Misings. The work covers the language behaviour of the Misings living in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam with emphasis on their code-switching during oral communications. The study is based on data collected from the native speakers of Misings scattered in the villages of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat,
Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia in Assam. The researcher has also collected data from native Mising speakers who dwell in the cities of Guwahati and Dibrugarh. This is done so as to give an insight into the differences that exist between the degrees of code-switching among the urban and the rural dwellers. The data which occur mostly in the form of conversations between two interlocutors are analyzed in the light of the *Markedness Model of Carol Myres-Scotton* which views linguistic choices as negotiations of self-identity and desired relationship with others. It is centered on the notion that speakers make language choices primarily to meet their own goals.

The findings of the study reveal that code-switching serves both as an index and a verbal tool for the Misings. As an index, it identifies their self-perception and their multi-dimensional identity as members of a specific group or groups. As a tool code-switching is used amongst the Misings to step in or out of their presumed identity.

1.2.5. The Mising dialects

Mising people traditionally recognize eight Mising dialects, viz. Pagro, D\textbackslash \textmu\textbackslash a, Dambuk, Ojan, Sa\textbackslash \textja\textbackslash p, Mo\textbackslash ji\textbackslash p, Somua, and Samuguria. Grierson, in his *Linguistic Survey of India* (1909:584) has made a mention of four dialects: Sa\textbackslash \textja\textbackslash p, Ojan, Dambuk, and Somua. It may be surmised that as the Misings migrated from the hilly tracts of Arunachal Pradesh to different parts of the foot-plains of Assam, some dialects like Pagro, D\textbackslash \textmu\textbackslash a, and Mo\textbackslash ji\textbackslash p, may not have come to the notice of the survey team. Recent studies have identified the eight Mising dialects viz, Pagro, D\textbackslash \textmu\textbackslash a, Dambuk, Ojan, Sa\textbackslash \textja\textbackslash p, Mo\textbackslash ji\textbackslash p, Somua, and Samuguria (Prasad 2001:4). On the other hand, Taid (1995: viii) gives a list of six dialects, viz. D\textbackslash \textmu\textbackslash a, Pagro, Ojan, Sa\textbackslash \textja\textbackslash p, Mo\textbackslash ji\textbackslash p, and Dambuk. However, Taid has also mentioned Somua as a dialect which he believes to be spoken in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh. Figure 2 shows the division of Mising dialects based on Taid (1987).
Taid (1987) categorizes Mising dialects into two major groups: (1) the geminate group (GG, hereafter) and (2) the non-geminate group (NGG, hereafter). The dialects of the GG as shown by him are Pagro, Dolu, Ojan, and Dambuk. On the other hand, Sajjan, Mojij and Somua are categorized under NGG. The present study shows Somua as a sub-dialect of Mojiij. The Somua speaking people are in a transitional stage in adopting the Mijog and the Padam Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. Besides the two major categories mentioned, Samuguria is also considered for this study. Despite heavy influence from Assamese, the Samuguria speakers have managed to retain some native linguistic features. However, today, speakers of this dialect have almost merged with Assamese. It cannot be placed in any of the groups mentioned above and it stands out to be a single variety which is fast converging towards Assamese.

The dialects of Mising, in spite of being mutually intelligible, vary on the grounds of phonology, morphology, morpho-phonology, and morpho-syntax. However, due to a close language contact situation, Samuguria exhibits variations at the syntactic level too. Variations are also noticed within the same dialect at the phonological,
morphological, and lexical levels due to (1) influence of dominant language (especially Assamese) (2) dialect convergence, and (3) different geographical settings. One obvious suprasegmental difference that one may notice within speakers of the same dialect is intonation; sometime it varies from one Mising village to another. The present status and the demographic distribution of the Mising dialects are discussed in the following sub-sections (§1.2.5.1-§1.2.5.8).

Based on the majority of dialect speakers, given below is a map of Mising dialect geography.
1.2.5.1. Pagro

The Pagro dialect speakers are concentrated in Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, and Jorhat districts in Assam, otherwise scattered in the abutting areas in the districts of Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, and Sivasagar (also in Assam). No dialect wise survey has ever been attempted by the Census of India or any local organizations of the Mising community and so it becomes difficult for one to figure out the exact number of Pagro speakers (or any other dialect speakers). My personal experience from intensive fieldwork conducted in various Mising speaking areas (covering all the eight districts where Mising is spoken), I find that the Pagro speakers form the majority when compared to speakers of other Mising dialects.\(^\text{10}\) As mentioned earlier, the Mising dialects are mutually intelligible but we notice variations at different levels which many a time pose difficulty in effective communication between speakers of different Mising dialects, especially between the geminate and non-geminate groups. A standardized form of Mising is yet to emerge and so most of the official publications are brought out in the dialects of the geminate group of Mising dialects, wherein the Pagro dialect is also included. Mising language texts taught in the third and fourth standards of Assamese Medium Lower Primary Schools are published by MAK in the dialects spoken by majority of Misings which belong to the geminate group.

We notice Assamese influence on Pagro Mising to some extent (as discussed in chapter VII). The Pagro speakers are also influenced by Mipong and Padam (Adi languages) as they live in the abutting areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

1.2.5.2. Dulu

The Dulu dialect is placed in the GG. The dialect spoken by this group is almost similar to Pagro, Dambuk, and Ojan dialects. However, we find phonological and

\(^{10}\) Pagro is a Mising clan and the numerous number of Mising speakers belong to this group (Taid 2005:95).
lexical variations between them. The differences would be expounded while making a comparative study of all existing Mising dialects in chapter 3 and 4.

The Dōlu speakers are largely found in the Sivasagar district of Assam. They are also scattered in few numbers in the other districts as highlighted in map 1 (§1.1.2). In Sivasagar it is spoken in Dishangmukh and Sensamukh. The villages in Disangmukh are Sumoni, Daibari, Dolpa, Balikuri, Amukjan (from Assamese word 'xamukzan), Milankur, Disangmukh, Ligiribari, Opala, Bhimpara, Jurjubi, Demomukh, Ramnagar, Balijan, and Santok. Sensamukh has three main villages where Dōlu is spoken and they are Sesamukh Bekuri Chaporī, No Pomua, and Lason Gaon. We find some Pagro villages like Dihingmukh and Kotiori in the midst of Ojan and Dōlu villages. The Pagro speakers have also retained their dialectal features.

1.2.5.3. Ojan

The Ojan speakers are settled in some villages in the districts of Sivasagar, North Lakhimpur, and Dhemaji in Assam. This dialect is placed in the non-geminate group of Mising dialects and it stands very close to Pagro and Dambuk dialects which also belong to the same group. Majority of the Ojan speakers are concentrated in Sivasagar, mainly in Dishangmukh ad Sensamukh. Ojan and Dōlu speaking people live together in No Pomua and Lason Gaon (Sensamukh) and they have retained their own dialectal features. However, they can speak the dialect of each other without much difficulty. A few Ojan speakers are also settled in Ojan (East-Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh). The influence of Assamese on Ojan is observed in the speakers residing in Assam while we find some influence of Hindi in the speakers settled in Arunachal Pradesh. However, speakers of this dialect have retained their dialectal features to a great extent.
1.2.5.4. **Dambuk**

Dambuk is one of the four geminate varieties of Mising dialects, the others being Pagro, Dalu, and Ojan. The speakers of this variety are less in number. They are mostly scattered in Silapathar Sub-Division and Boginodi Block in the districts of Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur (in Assam) respectively. A small number of Dambuk speakers are also settled in some villages in the East-Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. These villages include Namshing, Dambuk, and Gadum which are situated near the riverine areas of Dibang river. The present Dambuk speakers living in and around the abutting districts of East-Siang (Arunachal Pradesh) and Tinsukia (Assam) very recently migrated from Silapathar and Boginadi. The Pagro and the Dambuk dialects can be treated as one as their linguistic features are almost the same.

1.2.5.5. **Sa:jaj**

The majority of the Sa:jaj dialect speakers are settled in Tinsukia district, the uppermost part of Assam. A small number of speakers of this variety are also scattered in some villages like Jelem, Rikbi, Sile, Bahir-Jonai at Jonai Sub-Division (Dhemaji district in Assam). In Arunachal Pradesh, they are found in some villages in the East-Siang district. However, it is worth mentioning here that the speakers of all the Mising dialects are also settled in this district. Many Mising people have shifted their settlement from the flood-prone areas of Assam to the hilly tracts of Arunachal Pradesh. This very fact can be confirmed when we talk of some villages like Gadum (gadum) and Namsing (namsiŋ) situated near Dibang (dibaj) river in the East-Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Also, the migration of some Mising people from Silapathar and Jonai to East-Siang can be traced when we come across some villages like Dambuk (dambuk) village which is at Silapathar, Dhemaji district, Assam) and Liamekuri (also a village at Jonai, Dhemaji district, Assam).
**Sa:jaj** is one of the non-geminate dialects of Mising. Of all the Mising dialects, Sa:jaj and Mo:jiŋ have the propinquity with the Tani languages which are cognates of Mising, for instance, the Minyong (Mingoŋ) and Padam (Padam) dialects of Adi (exonym: Abor) which are spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. There are striking similarities between these languages/dialects. In the words of Taid, “there is a great deal of mutual understandability between the speeches of the Adi communities of Arunachal Pradesh and the Misings, especially their Sa:jaj sub-group, of Assam. Therefore, Adi and Mising may, with good reason, be considered as two dialects of the same language, which in fact, prompted James Herbert Lorrain to produce the work “A Dictionary of the Abor-Miri Language” which was printed for the first time in 1910 (Taid, 1995:vii).

**1.2.5.6. Mo:jiŋ**

The Mo:jiŋ speakers are found in Majuli, Tezpur (district head quarter of Sonitpur), Biswanath Charali, and Lakhimpur sub-divisions in the districts of Jorhat, Sonitpur, and North Lakhimpur respectively. Speakers of this dialect are also scattered scantily in the rest of the districts (in Assam) where Mising is spoken. In Jorhat, altogether there are about forty-six Mising villages where Mo:jiŋ is spoken. The area in Sonitpur where this dialect is spoken is generally known as Buruli (named after the river Bharali) amidst the Mising people. There are about eighteen villages in Buruli, and the population is estimated to be 15000 (approximately). In Bishwanath Charali it is spoken in Borgang (Bor Gaon), Tokoubari, Patiabari, Mayong, Jori, Erakhuti, Uluoni, Laon, Jomuchuk, Ujoni Kolia, Namoni Kolia, Jokhaiboa, Kolitapar, Botiamari, Korkori, Dapak, Moritoni, Pomua, Ronuchuk, Goalabari, Tan Gaon/Tanguri, Kongardubi, Tamuloni, Borguri, Nagonchuk, Boikontopuri, Puloni Karkichuk, Rongosai Mising Gaon, Nolon, Bapusola, Hatimuria, Raidangoni, Himoluguri, Patorichuk, Karzanpar, Baligoya, Boronchuk, Sitadarchuk, Kaniaczan, Nam Botiamari, Amonikura, Pagdik, Sonowal, Jharoni, Futuki, Unapora, Namoni Jokai Gaon, Ujoni Jokai Gaon, Brinabari, Dambukial, Nobhonga, and Hahuli.

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12 The names of the villages in Bharali are Rongajan, Kekukuli, Bukajan, Tou Bhonga, Bumuni Pam, 1 No. Bar Dikorai, 2 No. Bar Dikorai, Patkota Bon Gaon, Tezal Poti, Jai Siddi, Sunai Pam, Dhari Kati, Riajuli, Gudam Ghat, Sikom, Siloni (abandoned due to flood), and Tin Ghoria.
Misamari, Bihumari, Hiyalmari, Hatimora, Buraguri, Pub Gano Gaon, Sialmari, and Leptapara. These villages collectively fall under the name Buroi (named after the river Buroi). A sizeable number of mo:jiJ speakers are also found in Kabuli, Almoria, Kothalguri, Bomunogoya, Ingora, Motokur, Ghorsiga, Mili Gaon, Bukrung, Balizan, Zoriguri, Aumoni, Belang, Gelati, Kaibuluka, and Rampur villages in the district of North Lakhimpur.

The Mo:jiJ dialect is placed in the non-geminate group of Mising dialects, the others being Sa:jag and Somua. This dialect is less exposed to Assamese. Also, we do not find influence of Adi languages on the Mo:jiJ dialect as they are settled in places which are not in the border lines of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

1.2.5.7. Somua

Somua Miri speakers are very few in numbers and they are settled in Arunachal Pradesh. This group of Mising speakers never crossed the borders of Arunachal Pradesh to settle in the foot plains of Assam like the other Mising groups. Somua is chiefly spoken in Namsai sub-division in the district of Lohit in Arunachal Pradesh. It is spoken in two circles: Sowkham and Namsai. The Somua villages which fall under the Sowkam circle are Bar Mabira, MachGaon, and Morapat. Melangkung, Joypur, Samguri, Kasik, New Zintu, Donekona, New Joypur, Dadum, and Juna are located in the Namsai circle.

The dialect spoken by the Somua people is comparable to the Mo:jiJ dialect in many respects. In fact, according to Nareshwar Paleng (village head) Somua Miri is a sub-group of Mo:jiJ. The Mo:jiJ sub-group which settled in Arunachal Pradesh and who never crossed the state borders is known as ku:ri and those which migrated to the Brahmaputra valley is the sub-group known as ku:mig.

Somua can no longer be called as a Mising dialect. They have merged with various communities of Arunachal Pradesh viz. Mipoj Adi, Padam Adi, and Galo. They
are at present in a transitional stage. The name Somua Miri has been very recently replaced with the name Adi Somua. This happened when the speakers of this group were given the Scheduled Tribe status in 1994. Since then, they call themselves Adi Somua, and eventually their Mising surnames were also replaced with Mipo1, Padam, and Galo surnames, for instance: Naroh (Mising) → (became) Ratan (Mipo1), Pait (Mising) → Pajun (Padam), Taje (Mising) → Dai (Padam), Pajej (Mising) → Tajeg (Mipo1), Chinte (Mising) → Ete (Galo). In other words, the tradition and culture of the Somua Miri (now Adi Somua) which was once like any other Mising groups are now the tradition and culture of whichever Arunachali community they have joined hands with.

1.2.5.8. Samuguria

Samuguria speakers are very few when compared to speakers of other Mising dialects. It is spoken in some parts in the districts of Golaghat and North Lakhimpur in Assam. Samuguria can no longer be described as a dialect of the Mising language per se, inasmuch as that it has almost merged with the Assamese language. Assamese influence is found at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels, with the speakers retaining only some Mising filial terms and phonological features. However, the culture and traditions of Samuguria speakers largely remain the same as those of other Mising people.

1.3. Data collection and elicitation

The data presented in this work was collected during 2007-2009 in my various short and long field trips to Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia, and Dibrugarh in Assam. My field work locations in Arunachal Pradesh mainly cover two districts (East-Siang and Lohit) where Mising is spoken by a considerable number. Data in the form of word-lists, sentences, and conversation
between two or more interlocutors were collected and recorded from different varieties of Mising dialect speakers. It was collected from both older and younger generations of Mising speakers. As the core aim of the study is to focus on the dialectal variations between various Mising dialects, a word-list of about one thousand words of different lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs was prepared in order to compare the words between different Mising dialects. This was done so as to look into the phonological, morphological, and lexical variations between different Mising dialects. Mising is an agglutinative language and a good number of suffixes are found in the language. These suffixes were listed for comparison.

The geminate group of Mising dialects undergoes various morphophonemic changes such as vowel coalescence, word-medial gemination, and deletion (of word-final phoneme) when certain suffixes are attached to root words. As a result it becomes difficult for one to look into the underlying structure of a root word. To make these issues clear, a four line glossing system is adopted in this work wherever we observe morphophonemic changes. Otherwise, glossing of a sentence is done with the general three line system. Compare the following syntactic constructions (taken from GG and NGG of Mising dialects). Here, Pagro Misiŋ (PM) represents the geminate group and example for non-geminate group is taken from Mojiŋ Mising (MM).

(a) \( \text{tabb} \, \text{kon} \, \text{pa-to} \)
\( \text{tabi-} \, \text{kon} \, \text{pa-to} \)
snake-GENR girl-DEF-ACC bite-PERF
'Some snake has bitten the girl'. (GG: PM)

(b) \( \text{tabi} \, \text{mim} \, \text{sep-to} \)
snake-GENR girl-DEF-ACC bite-PERF
'Some snake has bitten the girl'. (NGG: MM)

The construction in example (a) taken from Pagro Mising shows morphophonemic changes in the two NPs \( \text{tabi} \) 'snake' and \( \text{kon} \) 'girl'. When the generic marker -\( \text{o} \) is
attached to *tabi* 'snake', we observe coalescence between the word final vowel (i) and the suffixed vowel (-ə) which results in the deletion of the word-final vowel, and the morphophonological process triggers word-medial gemination. Similarly, the word-final velar nasal *g* gets deleted when a suffix beginning with a dental *d* is attached to the root. The roots of the given NPs could be read correctly only by showing the underlying structures; hence the four line glossing system. On the other hand, example (b) taken from the *Mo:jiŋ* Mising does not exhibit any morphophonemic changes and the construction could be glossed by a three line system.

### 1.3.1. Field work situations

The Misings are well-known to be riverine people whose choice of settlement has to be always near the banks or places not far away from the rivers. They enjoy the advantages of living near rivers (for agriculture, fishing, and free firewood), yet they are asked to face certain disadvantages like flood-waters which result in destroying their crops most of the time during the rainy season. As the greater part of Mising villagers are dependent on their agriculture, their economy is challenged many a times. Of late, however, some Misings are sporadically shifting to the nearby towns/cities with the zest for pursuing better education and a comfortable life. These groups of people who now live amidst the Assamese people do not speak Mising in its purest form; hence the language data was gathered from the Mising villagers who have retained their linguistic features with the least influence from the dominant regional language, Assamese.

During rainy season most of my fieldwork locations remain sub-merged in flood waters and so the best time chosen to visit these places was during winter. But then, the people remained busy harvesting their fields. However, the love and enthusiasm of the Mising people for their language enabled me to collect relevant data from my informants who were always genial and cooperative. The recording of data was mostly done during day hours as there was no electricity in most of the Mising villages.
Besides, the Mising people take their favorite beverage *apo*ŋ 'rice-beer' at night after a hard-work day.

### 1.4. Key aims of the study

No attempt has been ever made to work on Mising dialectology. This work is the first ever attempt to expound and describe the variations that exist between different Mising dialects at various levels. With the introduction of Mising language texts in educational institutions at the primary levels, one obvious question that a linguist or a non-linguist would be eager to ask is – In what dialect(s) the Mising texts are published? Basanta Doley (pc) says that the Mising language texts are published by MAK with the geminate group of Mising dialects (see figure 2-for division of Mising dialects) though it has not been yet declared as an official language by MAK or the government. It is observed that words of different grammatical categories belonging to both geminate and non-geminate groups of Mising dialects are used in the language texts. And those words are sometimes unintelligible to speakers of a particular Mising dialect. In this study a total of about one thousand five hundreds words have been collected from various Mising dialects to show the variations that exist between them.

Language convergence is one such issue which serves as a catalyst in the loss of certain dialectal features. “Language convergence refers to a process of dialectal change in which the dialects become more like each other (or ‘converge’). This usually happens when a non-standard dialect falls under the influence of the standard, but it may also happen the other way round- as in the current development of Received Pronunciation in English” (Crystal 1980:82). Keeping these issues in focus, the objectives of this study are to look into the variations between different Mising dialects (1) at the phonological level (2) at the morphological level, and (3) at the morpho-phonological level.

Ever since the migration of the Misings from the hilly tracts of Arunachal Pradesh to the foot-plains of Assam, they have been undergoing drastic changes due a
close contact with Assamese. As a result, Samuguria Mising (one of the dialects of Mising) has almost merged with Assamese with retention of only some phonological features and few kinship terms. This study attempts to throw light on the changes brought due to influence of Assamese on Mising at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. Also, it makes an attempt to show the influence of Adi dialects (as spoken in the East-Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh).

1.5. **Organization of the work**

Following this introductory chapter, the main focus of the study is presented in six chapters. Chapter II sheds light on the phonological, morphological, and morphophonological features of Mising. Based on previous and present investigations, the section on phonology sheds light on segmental and suprasegmental features. The morphological features are discussed under two headings: *inflectional* and *derivational*, with emphasis given on the various word-formation processes in Mising. Morphophonemics in Mising is an interesting area of study and as we find striking differences between Mising dialects at this level. The morphophonemic changes like deletion, alternation, and devoicing of phonemes resulting from the attachment of different suffixes to root words are explored. Chapter III focuses on the phonological variations that exist between different Mising dialects. The differences are explored in the light of an individual Mising dialect’s closeness to other Tani languages and the degree of its exposure to Assamese. Similarly, the morphological variations that exist between different Mising dialects due to different geographical set ups are explored in Chapter IV. The striking morphophonemic variations between Mising dialects are discussed in Chapter V. It is in the light of these variations the dialects of Mising can be divided into two major groups: geminate and non-geminate. Chapter VI expounds the lexical variations observed between different Mising dialects. The variations noticed at the lexical level are mainly due to three factors: (1) geographical (2) close affinity to other Tani languages (especially the Eastern Tani sub-group), and (3) influence from
Assamese and/or other languages/dialects of Adi (namely Miṣṭong and Padam). Chapter VII focuses on the changes that Mising dialects are undergoing due to interference of Assamese at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. The influence of Adi on Mising dialects is also discussed in this chapter.

The thesis has three appendices: (A) gives a list of words of different lexical categories to show phonological, morphological, and lexical variations between different Mising dialects. (B) shows a list of verbal roots created from nominal roots by way of *aphaeresis*, and (C) shows a list of verbal roots created from nominal roots by way of *apocope*.