CHAPTER-2

Historical Background of the Mishings of Assam

2.1 Introduction

Assam is situated at one of the greatest route of migration of mankind. Since time immemorial, various human races and cultures have come to this State in different times. They settle in the Brahmaputra valley as well as in the Barak valley and form a multi-coloured society with their specific civilization and culture. The present population structure of Assam is an assimilation of mainly five human races. They can be categorized as Nordic (Aryan), Mongoloid (Kirat), Mediterranean (Dravidian) and Petro-Astroloid (Austrict) and Negreto. Amongst them some small as well as big groups like Ahom, Khamti, Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa, Dimasha, Moran, Chutiya, Sonowal-Kachari, Deori, Mishing etc. are the descendants of Mongoloid or Mongolian clan. It is obvious to mention that no scientific study about the Mishing tribe living in the riparian areas of upper Assam has been conducted till date. Therefore, our research is an attempt to trace out the historical background of the Mishing people of Assam.

2.2 Meaning of the term ‘Miri’

The Mishings are also known as ‘Miris’ in earlier times. The word ‘Miri’ is used to identify the Mishings by the non-Mishing people of the plains of Assam. In Mishing Language, there is no word as ‘Miri’. The term ‘Miri’ was used to imply the ‘Mishings’ in a number of religious books, Ahom Buranji, books related to ethnic groups, and also in some official documents. Due to having its own separate language each community
categorizes other people through its different meaningful terms. In the past, the Assamese people named the different tribes of Assam differently. Abor, Dafla, Aka, Mikir, Lusai etc. are the names given by the Assamese people. Instead, these tribes recognized themselves as Adi, Nishi, Hrusu, Karbi and Mizo respectively. But it is admissible that the word ‘Miri’ does not only indicate the Mishings. It is not synonymous with the word ‘Mishing’. In fact, the word ‘Miri’ is used by the people of the plains without creating distinction between the ‘hills Miri’ and the ‘plains Miri’.

The Mishings occupy an area from the Eastern Himalayas in the North to plains of Assam in South, especially to the borders of Brahmaputra Valley and from the Dihong (Siang) and Dibong valley in the East and to the last part of Darrang district in the West. According to Sir George Grierson, “Abor, Miri, and Dafla are the Assamese names to imply the population living in the hilly areas between Assam valley and Tibet”. He developed the fact that in the Census report of 1891, Sixty (60) Mishing people were found in Nagaon district. Again in 1901, only one (01) Mishing person was found in Kamrup district. But authenticity of such information is based on speculation.

It is difficult to identify the exact time from when the Mishings are named as Miri. In Assamese Language, at first the word ‘Miri’ was used in the writings of Sri Sri Sankaradeva in his ‘Kirtan Ghosa’. He mentioned the contemporary communities living in his time in Assam with the following words:-

“Kirāto Kachāri, Khasi, Garo, Miri

Javana Konko Guwālo etc. ”

“Kirāto Kachāri, Khasi, Garo, Miri

Javana Konko Guwālo etc. ”
Thereafter, references to the word ‘Miri’ have also been found in Sri Madhavdeva’s Namghosā/510. It mentioned as “Hari buli tore Miri Asom Kachāri…” meaning people belonging to communities like Miri (Mishing), Asom (Ahom) and Kachari get salvation only by chanting the name of Hari.

Besides, in old Assamese writings especially, in Ahom Buranji, in the writings of Sahabuddin Talish and Md. Kazim, in Parshi Buranji (Parshi history), in the writings of British period and in Government records and Gazettes, etc. the word ‘Miri’ was viewed in different times.

The Miri people of Dafla hills in Arunachal Pradesh are known as ‘Hills Miri’ and the Mishings in the plains of Assam are known as ‘Plains Miri’. British Anthropologists tried to describe the appearance of the word ‘Miri’ and they defined the identity of the Mishings. But such information brings complicacies in defining the Mishing’s identity. Probably, the writings of E. T. Dalton, E A. Gait, and L. A. Waddell identified Mishings as Miris. After 1911, the Nation Theorist of Austria, Bahamn Purar Hyman Draf, in his investigative work ‘The Himalayan Barbary Hills’ included the reference of the ‘Hills Miri’.5

The well known writer Sonaram Panyang Kataki expresses that there is no caste as Miri in reality. Rather, the Mishings are known as Miris in the plains of Assam. Both Tarun Chandra Pamegam and Nomal Chandra Pegu state that the word ‘Miri’ is derived from the term ‘Mirur’ that means the priests of the Mishing society. In the religious practices and socio-cultural organizations of Adi, Nishi, Mishing and Mishimi of Arunachal Pradesh, the ‘Mirur’ (priests) play an important role. The Mishing people believe that the Mirur are the agents of God. The Mirur have some supernatural powers
and can identify as well as carry on treatment to people, who are in illness or in trouble. Those tribes follow the Mirur and identify themselves as successor of Tani or Abotani (first human being). In the Adi-Mishing Language, Mirur is known as ‘Mibu’ (knowledgeable person). It can be conceptualized that the word ‘Mirur’ used in Adi-Mishing language has been used in some sort of destroyed version in Assamese language, and that in the long run appears as Miri. Numerous observations prove that though the word ‘Miri’ has been used by the Assamese population to consider the Mishings, but it is not an original Assamese word.⁶

Though, lots of similarities are found between the Mishing and the Tibetan language, the word ‘Miri’ had come to the Mishings from Tibet. As in Tibetan language the word ‘Miri’ can be explained as –‘Mi’ means Man and ‘Ri’ means Hill. Accordingly, the Mishings are the men of hills or hills-man. Again, the Mishings identify themselves as successors of ‘Tani’ means Man. In Mishing language, the term ‘Lasak’ (the capital of Tibet) is pronounced as La-Sa, that means to lift up or elevated land or place. As such, the Tibetan languages have immense influences upon the Mishing Language. Dogne (a kind of bead) and Yoksa (the religious sword) found in Tibet are also popularly used by the Mishing people.⁷ Thus, we can assume that the Mishings brought both these objects from the Tibet.

Alexander Mackenzie in his book, The North East Frontier of India points out about the Miris that “Captain Neufville, who had travelled among the Miris in 1825, found the existence of the Miri (Mishing) people inhabiting the plains and lower hills along the north bank of the Brahmaputra from the Sisi district of Lakhimpur as far as the Dihong (Siang) river.”⁸ Robinson also developed similar views about the existence of the Mishings. According to him, the main dwelling places of the Mishings are Baskata and
the lower hills areas in the north side of Lakhmipur. From that area, they went downward to the plains of upper Assam and stretched consequently. Reflection of Robinson’s statement was also seen in the paper ‘Orunodoi’ in the following manner “the original habitat of the Mishings was the small hilly areas of Baskata and the north of Lakhimpur, slowly they moved to the plains and settled thereafter”. Later, Edward Gait also expressed that the Mishings in the plains were obedient to British and known as the peaceful and innocent people of hills of North. All these writings prove that the term ‘Miri’ is not only used to mean a particular tribe rather it implies more than one tribe who lived in both the plains and the hills.

It is relevant here to mention that, since the ancient times the Assamese people gave three names to the people who are living in the hilly areas of north east. They are Abor, Miri and Dafla. Nevertheless, the imaginary hilly areas where from the existence of these tribes can be stretched are the Abor hill, Miri hill and Dafla hill. Therefore, it is believed that Miri hill is the original habitat of the Mishings and the ‘Plains Miris’ also came from the Miri hill. But a number of writers explained that the plains Miris did not come from the Miri hill. They came from Abor hill. Thus, Hamilton pointed out that the name Miri is wrong. For the first time E.T. Dalton categorized the Miris into two groups, they are Miris and Hill Miris. Here, the term ‘Miri’ is used as an opposite word to that of Hill Miris. Thus, Dalton used the word ‘Miri’ to imply the Miris who lived in the plains.

Here, usually a question arises, what is the relationship or what are the similarities between Miris and Hill Miris, due to which both the sections are named as ‘Miri’? In this regard, Haimendorf said that the similarity was based on imagination. He said that the Assamese people, who met them in the Hill, assumed that those people
might have some relations with a tribe known as Miri who lived towards the slopes of hills. Therefore, the Assamese people designated them simply as Hill Miris.\textsuperscript{11} Verrier Elwin mentioned that due to lack of appropriate name— they were named as ‘Hill Miri’. On the other hand, Grierson titled the Plains Miris as Asomiya Miri. S. Dutta Choudhury says “the Hill Miris have been inhabiting a wide stretch of land in the bank of the Kamla river in Subansiri, is a district of Arunachal Pradesh are entirely separate from the plains Miri”.\textsuperscript{12}

2.3 Etymological meaning of the term ‘Miri’

Almost all scholars who wrote about the Miris mentioned that the name ‘Miri’ was given by the Assamese people. In Assamese language ‘Miri’ means middleman, mediator, by-lingual, etc. In this regard, Datlon opined that from a very long time, the Miris of the plains managed the government business activities between the Abors and the Assam government. Thus, the Miris were the only inter-mediator of trade between these two groups and therefore, they were known as ‘Miri’ meaning mediator or middleman.\textsuperscript{13} This perspective of Dalton was later reflected in the writings of Gait and his followers. But there is no word as ‘Miri’ in Assamese language to mean mediator or middleman. The Hemkosha Dictionary mentions the meaning of the word ‘Miri’ as one group of Hills tribe residing in the plains since a long time. Therefore, it is evident that ‘Miri’ never means the mediator or middleman in Assamese language; rather the Ahom Kings or the British employed them as mediators. But both the Abor and the Miri are of the same root, thus both the linguistic groups have understandings amongst them. The Miris who came to the plains and stayed in contact with Assamese people were able to speak Assamese language too. Regarding the relationship between the Abors and the
Miris language, Lorrain said that “both the languages have close affinity. Comprehensively, such language is known as Abor–Miri language. Assumption can be made that Abor is the original one and other languages are derived from that”.14 “As mediators, Miris helped Government in the functions of Abor-boruah. Thus, Government in return gave the Miris collectively an annual amount of Rs. 118/-only as consolidated pay”.15 This quotation of Raibahadur Padmanath Gohain Barua proved that the British used Miris as Mediators. But at the same time, this system of consolidated pay offered by the British which normally applied for the Mishings is subject to make inquiries. On the other hand, according to Surjya Kumar Bhuyan, the Abors employed the Miris as mediators in their business activities in Assam. But this opinion of Bhuyan appears as unscientific in reality.16

In fact, the word ‘Miri’ was given by the non-Miris. Especially, the Assamese speaking people use the name ‘Miri’. Despite, it can be conceptualized that, the term Miri is derived from the wrong pronunciation of the term ‘Mirui’. But ‘Mirui’ and ‘Mibu’ are the priests of the Abor and the Miri societies respectively. Actually the ‘Mirui’ keep alive the rituals related to folk-beliefs and folk history. The ‘Mirui’ offer necessary sacrifices, read fortune, and if somebody falls in illness; then for his cure pose dances and prayers too. In the process of moving from the hills to the plains or migration to different parts of the plains for settlement, the people who follow the persons having the quality to read fortune usually identify themselves as the followers of ‘Mirui’.17 Therefore, the fact that the non-Miris named the said people as ‘Miri’ is not unjustified. Thus, in the plains the people who acquainted themselves as Miris are none other than the Mishings.
2.4 Meaning of the term ‘Mishing’

Since the ancient times the Miris living in the plains are identified themselves as Mishings. They never identify themselves as ‘Miri’. On the other hand, the non-Miris called them as ‘Miris’, not as Mishings. Thus, earlier we found that the Mishings tried to recognize themselves as ‘Miri’ in outside places. Instead of their own titles, the Mishing people too developed the tendency to write the name of their tribe in surnames like other tribes such as Bodo, Kachari, Deuri, etc. Mohichandra Miri, Kamala Miri, Nomal Chandra Pegu-Miri (Pegu used this title in the article entitled ‘Miri Janajatir Bihu’ published in the Magazine “Ramdhenu”) etc. are instances of such an affinity.

Probably, J.F. Needham initially was able to discover this fact that so-called Miris in the plains originally identified themselves as Mishings. He pointed out that, the Miris who reside on the banks of the Brahmaputra, Dihong, and Dibong rivers, in the neighbourhood of Sadiya, call themselves as Mishing. Later, considering this view of Needham, Grierson tried to give explanation regarding the meaning of the term ‘Mishing’. He said that ‘Mishing’ means ‘a shing man’ and it has similarities with the term ‘nyi-sing’ used by the Daflas to mean them. On the other hand, Grierson explained the meaning of the term ‘nyi-sing’ as ‘sing-man’. Therefore, according to Grierson, the original meaning of the term ‘Mishing’ is ‘a shing man’, that has no meaning. Hence, Grierson’s prediction might also use the term ‘a sing-man’ to mean the Mishings, instead of his articulation as ‘a shing man’ (that was meaningless). Thus, we can develop the fact that Grierson was not able to offer correct meaning to the term Mishings.

On the contrary, the Adis developed that the term ‘Mishing’ used in their Miyong society indicates the opposite meaning of the word ‘Mipak’ (non-Mishing). As per the
traditional folk beliefs of Miyong society, at the time when the Miyong people came to the earth, then they killed a Methun. Before they had cut the Methun, they asked people of each Gotra to sit in circle and accordingly distributed the meat of Methun among them. Other than Dupak, Gao and Mechar Gotra, all other Gotras got their portion of Methun’s meat. Thus, these three gotras are known as ‘Mipak’ and all others are called ‘Mishing’. Another popular folk saying is that once upon a time wife of a common man was kidnapped by ‘Oupam’ (a kind of God). The ‘Oupam’ forcefully made the lady his wife. Finally the husband of the lady killed the ‘Oupam’ and rescued his wife. Their successors are called ‘Mipak’. On the other hand, J.H. Lorrain in his ‘A Dictionary of the Abor-Miri Language’ (1910), used the words such as Assamese, Foreigner, persons in abroad, socially boycotted, homeless (Aghari) as meaning of the term ‘Mipak’ and used the word ‘Miri’ as the meaning of the term ‘Mishing’. Thus, the discussions above simply help us to develop that the Mishing means usually the successors of honest persons.

The Mishing society uses the word ‘Mipak’ to denote the meaning of the term ‘Kripag’. It again indicates the meaning of the word ‘Assamese’ that mentioned in the Lorrain’s Dictionary. In Mishing language ‘Ami’ (man) + ‘Kripag’ (not included in counting) formed the term ‘Mipak’ (non-Mishing) and practically, it means Assamese speaking people. On the other hand, etymological meaning of the word ‘Mishing’ can be explained as: ‘Ami’ (Man) + ‘Yashing’ (white) = ‘Mishing’ (white man or good man) or ‘Ami’ (man) + ‘Anshing’ (polite)= ‘Mishing’ (polite persons or peaceful persons). Therefore, the Mishings can be identified as polite, honest and peaceful persons.

The Mishings have been residing in the river valleys in plains of Assam since 12th Century and identified themselves as successors of Abotani. Other than the Mishing, a
number of tribes have also identified themselves as successors of Abotani who are living in the present middle part of Arunachal Pradesh. Among them the tribes like Padam, Pashi, Galaong, Bakor, Bori, Apatani, Tagin, etc. are to be mentioned. It is significant here to remember that, there is no tribe known as the Mishing in hills now. The Mishings left the hills since long ago and they have been living in the plains of Assam from last 900 years. All the above discussions make it clear that the Mishing means the one indigenous tribe of Assam and the Miri means the people of a number of hill tribes including Mishings too. Hence, the Miri means not only the ‘Mishing’ people. Rather, ‘Mishing’ and ‘Miri’ are not synonymous words, as ‘Miri’ includes a number of tribal groups who identify themselves as successors of Abotani.

Though a number of national and foreign writers wrote about the Mishings in different books and articles, but in a number of writings, we find that the two words ‘Miri’ and ‘Mishing’ have been misused or wrongly interpreted. Such as, according to H. K. Barpujari, “the relatively semi-hilly areas of Himalayas are named about the names of sub-mongoloid groups lived in such areas as Bhutia, Oka, Dafla (Nishi), Abor (Adi), Miri (Mishing) and Mishimi”. In this quotation the word ‘Mishing’ is used under bracket to mean the word ‘Miri’. It means both the words are synonymous. But, practically it is unjustified to feel that the ‘Mishings’ lived in that hill, so that hill is named as ‘Miri Hill’. Again, there is no available authentic information to prove that Mishings were moved from that particular hill to the plains. Or in the so-called Miri-Hill, there is no ‘Mishing’ tribe in existence whom we can identify as the rest of the Mishings found in the plains. Thus, the words ‘Miri’ and ‘Mishing’ have been used synonymously as he failed to differentiate both the terms.
Another historian Satyendra Nath Sarma gave the similar wrong and incompatible interpretation as “a number of Mishing clans are yet living in the hilly areas of Arunachal Pradesh. They are known as ‘Hills Miri’ or ‘Mishing’.” In fact, no ‘hills Miri’ identify themselves as ‘Mishing’. According to S. D. Choudhury, “The Hills Miris are, therefore, not to be confounded with the Miris of plains.” So, we can assume that the Mishings are none other than the Miris, who are living in the plains.

Regarding the Mishing speaking people, Upendranath Goswami, in his book ‘Bhasha-Vijnan’ expresses perverted information. He says that “there are a few number of Mishing speaking people in Assam”. Here, normally a question arises, where the Mishing speaking people are mostly residing? Goswami felt that probably, the Mishing speaking people are primarily living in Arunachal Pradesh. But the fact is that the sole living place of Mishing people is Assam. Last 1971 Census report stated that in Assam there are 2,59,551 and in Arunachal Pradesh there are 3,359 Mishing people. Another eminent writer cum researcher Sarbeswar Rajguru also developed information about the ‘Mirijim’, the noteworthy weaving creation of Miris. He said that ‘Mirijim’ is a type of blanket produced by Miris and used either as carpet or as warm cloth in winter. In fact, the Mirijim cloth is the cloth used by the Mishing families in winter, which they called ‘Gadu’. But practically, the Mishing people never use ‘Gadu’ as carpet. Again, Lakshmi Devi in her book “Ahom-Tribal Relations” gave the list of Mishing clans as- 1. Dambukujal 2. Chaingia 3. Mayengiyal 4. Oyengial 5. Lachongoya 6. Dahutial 7. Bongkual 8. Tamaragoyal 9. Jongoya 10. Pangoya 11. Pani-pau 12. Youranggoya. It is considerable that there are no clan named as Jongoya, Pangoya, Pani-pau and Youranggoya found in the Mishing society. Basically, this wrong information was at first
revealed in the Census report of 1881 and Lakshmi Devi used that wrong information in her book.

The above mentioned occurrences are a few instances of prevalent wrong information found about the life and society of the Mishings. Thus, we can assume that lack of systematically developed scientific case-studies is the main cause behind such wrong information.

2.5 The Origin of the Mishings

The Mishings have a popular myth about the origin of man in the earth. But what is a myth? Myth is a traditional story concerning the early history of people or explaining a natural or social fact. Myths are usually set in the remote past and deal with the origin of the universe, gods and human beings. They include a special class of stories that are vivid, concrete, and intelligible to all people in a particular culture. Again, myths can also be defined as false beliefs. The Mishing society also held certain myths and they are preserved in the form of Abang (religious hymns), that tell about the origin of the earth and life. According to the Mishing popular myths, the Se:di-Melo is the creator of the universe and gives birth to both human beings and the Sun-Moon(Tani or Do:nyi-Po:lo). The Sun-Moon created Abotani (first human being). Again, both the Mishings and Adis consider Abotani as their successor. The Abangs of both the Mishings and Adis reflect that in ancient period, they came from the northern side by crossing the Himalayas, and settled in ‘Bakati’ region. According to Mibu (priests) and the Mishing legends, they came from the hilly areas of ‘Rigi-regam’. ‘Riga’, a place of Arunachal Pradesh may be the said ‘Rigi’. It is situated at a distance of 150 k.m. north from Pasighat. Now, Adis are the inhabitants of that area.
Although, the Mishings have not any script or written documents about their origin, but the popular Abangs are the significant oral literatures for them. In ornamental literature of Abangs, we find the stories of the origin of the Mishings, various subject-matters, the origin of the living creatures, creation of universe, sources of the origin of social institutions, theories and their most ancient history, etc. Abangs again tell the stories of the origin of the custom of Methun to be offered to their ‘God’, stories of hunting, etc. The speech and language of Abang are not universal and very difficult to comprehend. The Abangs are made alive through the practices of one class of Mibus. The Mibus are generally talented as well as knowledgeable. They can memorize them without any fault and sing them continuously. They can comprehend as well as explain significance of those Abangs. With the invention of new observations and practices, worth of the Mibus is now declining. We can compare these Abangs with the hymns of the Vedas.

Ancient Indian literature and Vedas attempted to trace out the original racial habitat of the Mishings and other tribal groups inhabited in North East India. Beginning with the Vedas, we have occasions to find evidences of the existence of tribal population in this region. Although, they do not contain any specific reference to the Mishings in particular, this set of literature contains some descriptions of the ethnic and cultural traits of those tribes basically similar with those of the present day Mishings. Beside, the accounts of early travelers who either visited or heard of this region, also contain scant information of the tribes. The Puranas and the Tantras make frequent references to the people having Mongoloid countenance. Here such literary records are taken into consideration to make a general idea of the early history of the Mishings in Assam.
Historically in due course of time, influences of ancient Aryans gradually spreaded to the North East India and they became assimilated with the aboriginals residing in the region. The Aryans first considered them uncivilized and identified them as barbarians, Asuras, Danavas, Dasyus, Mlecchas etc. It is now the “consensus of opinion among the Indologists that in Sanskrit the term Kirata” which is found mentioned in the Yajurveda for the first time, “indicated the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the North Eastern areas of India, who were Mongoloid in origin”. This Veda mentioned a Kirata to be a cave dweller. The Atharvaveda refers to a Kirata girl who is said to have dug out a drug with shovels wrought of gold on the high ridges of the hills”. There is no doubt regarding this word as it was a Sanskritization of some Sino-Tibetan tribal name. In this regard, the writings of S.K. Chatterji are considerable. There are certain words in Neo-Indo Aryan languages which are connected with the racial name Kirata. Again, the following quotation reflects the fact that the aforesaid Mishings or Mishimis are identified as Kiratas; “It is therefore, conclusive that the ‘Kiratas’ included among other tribes the Mishings and the Mishmis as well; and that the term ‘Kirata’ has more association with these tribes than with any other tribes of the race.”

The Mishings are identified as a branch of the large Mongoloid group. From the study of the physical anthropologists the Mishings are of Mongoloid race. According to Col. Dalton, “They (the Mishings) are of yellow Mongolian types, tall, and powerfully framed but with a slanting gait and sluggish habits”. China has assumed to be their original racial resident. “The original habitat of these people appears to have been North Western China covering the courses of the Yang-tsze Keang and the Huang-Ho rivers. Migration of these Sino-Tibetan speakers of Central Chinese region towards south and
west possibly had taken place since pre-historic times, but as asserted by Prof. S.K. Chatterji, certain large scale influx seemed to have begun in the early part of the first millennium B.C.  

The main sources of people’s migration can be understood by the study of its language. G.A. Grierson studied Mishing language as well as languages of other similar racial groups like Adi, Mishimi, Apatani, etc. and included them under Indo-Chinese race particularly, Tibeto-Burman North Assam branch. He developed that these tribal groups are assimilated with other Tibeto-Burman Linguistic groups and they are migrated to this land lately than those other linguistic branches. According to D. Doley-- “It is therefore, certain that the North Assam tribes have already migrated and settled in their present habitats since the beginning of the Christian era.”

Archaeological evidences provided numerous facts regarding the ancient history of Mishings and also other tribes of North Assam. In Sadiya, Abor Hills and Mishimi hills, certain cultural equipments of Neo-lithic age such as Jadeite, gneiss or dolerite made of local rocks, limestone, and bones have been discovered. These equipments are mostly used in agriculture, in hunting animals etc. They have close affinity with equipments used in ‘Yunnan’ in China. According to A.H. Dani, “the prolific use of jadeite further strengthens the link with Yunnan, in fact, with the discovery of a specimen in the Mishimi Hill; the cultural contact of this region with Yunnan can hardly be doubted. Indeed the main tool types of Yunnan and the Sadiya Frontier Zone are identical and the use of the common material, jadeite, firmly establishes the identity.” Again, he said that “the analysis of tools suggests that the Neolithic cultures in Assam, as represented by these stone tools, are of late origin. The earliest possible date is linked us with the chronology of the developed Neolithic’s in the countries of South east Asia and
As A.H. Dani, describes that the North-Assam tribes have lately migrated from the Chinese province of Yunnan, and settled in their present habitats. Apart from this, the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarma (G.E.=510=829/830 A.D.) also refers to the term Abara-Parbata (pradarbhumi tyabara parbata uttara) which the authorities have held to be referred to the present Abor-Hills. The reference to the word ‘Abor’ in this rock inscription of 829/830 A.D. confirms that the North-Assam tribes have settled in their present habitats since the beginning of the Christian era.

Numerous similarities and lots of studies developed the fact that Mishings and other tribes of North Assam have close relationship with some tribes of China and East-Tibet. According to Col. Waddell “They have decided Mongoloid features so much so as to remind me in many ways of Tibetans and Lepchas.” According to Meerkepchas Wrath, “At any rate, their (the North Assam tribes) features leave no doubt that they are of Mongolian origin. They have the typical Mongolian cheek-bones, round faces and broad noses……like all hill people, they are of study race, capable of great excretion and their musculature is very well-developed, especially the thighs and calves which are very strong. They are generally speaking a short race, but look rather imposing, especially in full wardress, their colour varies from olive to dark brown, and like all Mongoloid races are practically beardless”. According to G.S. Guha, many of the tribal population of North-Eastern India, such as the Miri, Naga, Bodo etc. are not true Mongoloid races unlike the Tibetians and the Turki-speaking people. He says, “The tribes living in the hills on the Northern and Eastern frontiers of Assam represent a separate type with a head shape either wholly of with a tending to be dolichocephalic, the transverse diameter being narrower and the occiput protruding somewhat. In the flatness of the nose, face, high cheekbones, oblique-slit eyes and absence of hair on the face and
the body, they are however essentially Mongoloid (the Dolichocephalic Mongoloid type) and must be regarded as a different branch of that great race which entered from South-Western China." The investigation regarding the blood group of the North-Assam tribes reveals that they have higher frequency of gene A and B. As Sachin Roy says, “They resemble most of the Assam tribes, having gene A and B”. These important features of blood groups distribution is found in most of the people South-China...The study of their dermatoglyphics based on finger prints.....shows similarities with those of the Chinese and to some extent with those of the Japanese.” The studies of their physical features, blood group and dermatoglyphics reveal that the North-Assam tribes belong to the typical characteristics of what is known to Eickstedt as “Homo sapiens palaeo Mongolicus” which is dominant in the tribes of Assam and extends into Yunnan and South-Eastern China.

Material culture of other groups also provides information about the main source and migration of the Mishing population. In various rituals, the Mishings sacrifice animals by making them suffocated. Similar practice is found among the Amodopa tribes of Eastern-Tibet. Considering this fact Haimendorf developed the idea that culture dissemination spreads across the frontiers. Yoksa is a sacred religious asset for the Mishings. In this regard, Nomal Chandra Pegu said that in ancient times (since 20 successors) the Mishings brought Yoksa from Tibet. According to him, “some believe that a few Yoksas have come down from their original abode. However, there is hardly any doubt about its Tibetan origin.”

Amongst the Mishings and other similar tribes of North-Assam, ‘Dogne’ is the most precious bead. They use to purchase and sell it amongst themselves. Col. Dalton and some other experts said that the origin of such practice was found in China.
exception to the other groups, the Apatanis of the North-Assam employ in their
cultivation the method of terrace-cultivation, other than the method of shifting
cultivation, in valleys and flat lands raised on low-level group which Haimendorf calls
late Neolithic culture. The method of terrace-cultivation is assumed to be introduced in
India by the Austric tribe. The Apatanis are believed to have adopted the said system
from the Austrics in South-East Asia sometime in the unknown past. As Col. Waddell
maintains that the Mishing people are in a transitional stage from the maternal to the
paternal practices. They retain the survival of the maternal stage along with the paternal
practices; but it appears that only recently they have adopted the paternal. As if to
emphasise the change of relation to his child, the father is represented as a second mother
and he goes through the fiction of a mock childbirth, the so-called ‘couvades’. He lies in
bed for forty days after the birth of his child and during this period he is fed as an
invalid.\textsuperscript{44} It is interesting to note that this custom has not been reported from the groups
of the North-Assam tribes. Most probably, the Mishings must have adopted this custom
from some matriarchal Austric tribes such as now represented by the Minangkous,
Palaungs, Riangs, Was, Stiensgs, Lemets, Mois, Bahnars, Khasis of South-East Asia
sometime in the remote past. Most of the thirteen characteristics of culture of the Tibeto-
Burman tribes as pointed out by W.C. Smith are found amongst the North-Assam tribes,
except the practice of head-hunting and some other cultures. The custom of betel-nut
chewing and the construction of bachelors dormitory (Murong) are said to have been
adopted from their Austric predecessors of South-East Asia.\textsuperscript{45} It is perceptible from the
above mentioned instances that the diffusion in their material cultures might have taken
place due to intermixing with various human races in course of their migration from
South-China to their present habitats.
The Mishings are originally proficient in weaving colourful clothes, especially clothes made up of ‘Eri’. They developed the trade of ‘Eri’ in between hills and plains as well as between India and China since the ancient times. Thereby the Mishings became a part of Indo-Mongolian group. Their racial affinity and their original ancestral abode prove most advantageous for them to successfully carry on trade with China and India. Trade in Chinese silk and Chinese bamboo flutes through routes running amongst the hill tribes had been carried on by them between the two countries. Production of ‘Endi’ cloth and the popularity of bamboo flute amongst the present Mishing tribe, might have been their heritage from China. As such Huen Tsang’s “South-Western barbarians” of China inhabiting to the North East of ancient Kamarupa were the brothers of the Mishings.  

Apart from trade relations, the Mishings create co-ordination and good will amongst the India and China. They used to live on the hills during the time of arrival of Huen Tsang. According to Huen Tsang, frontier hilly areas of India and China are not the part of Kamarupa. He mentioned that the people of Kamrupa were honest, short and tall, and black in colour. On the other hand, in the hilly areas, there were people of Kirata origin having close affinity with China.

The sources of the period following Huen Tsang, do not contain any distinct information about the Mishings as a separate tribe. The religious works like the *Kalika Purana* (10th century) and the *Yogini-Tantra* (16th century) mentioned about the Kirata people of Kamarupa. The *Kalika Purana* speaks of them as of shaven heads and yellow skin. They were strong, ferocious ignorant and addicted to meat and drinks which are but genuine indicative of Mishing culture. Considering all these facts, we may perhaps confer the idea that China was the original racial habitat of the Mishing people of Assam.
2.6 Earlier Habitat

A number of scholars opined that the original habitats of Sino-Tibetain Mangoloid races are the river valleys of Howang-Ho of North-West China and Yangtse-Kiang. The Mishings and the similar racial tribes, especially the successors of Abotanis of Arunachal Pradesh moved from west China through Tibet and came to river valleys of Siang and Dibong. Thus, the whole eastern part of Himalayas became the dwelling place of linguistic families of Tibeto-Burman group of North-Assam branches.

In the Middle of the river valleys of Subansiri and Kamala under the Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, the so called ‘Miri hill’ was situated. Its east part was known as ‘Abor hill’ and west part was known as ‘Dafla hill’. In these three hills such as Dafla, Miri and Abor, where the Mishings lived before they moved to the plains, were the earlier habitats of the Mishings. Regarding the migration of the Mishing society, the folk tales refer to two rivers. They are Siang and Sikang. Thus, it is not hard to assume that they moved and entered into Assam through the river valleys of Siang and Sikang (Dibong). On the other hand, Siang and Sikang rivers are found in the Abor hill. Briefly, it can be said that Mishings came to the plains of Assam from the Abor hill. Besides, it is believed that Abor and Miri are of the same origin; their ancestors are the same. The authenticity of this fact is found in the existing traditional social rites and rituals of earlier Abors (now Adis) and Mishing society as well as in their mutual understanding over each-other’s languages too. In this regard, Dalton gave a clear picture. According to him, “mainly, the Miri refugees of Abor hill are sub-ordinate of the leader known as Gam.”48 According to Mackenjie, undoubtedly due to having same origin both Abors and Miris have similarities in all objective aspects. Hamilton felt that the Miris
Mishings) were originally Abor migrants coming from Dihong valley. Apart from this, almost all foreign writers pointed out that the Mishings (Miris) were generally believed to have been the fled slaves of Abor. All these discussions make it clear that the earlier habitat of the Mishings was not Miri hill; rather it was Abor hill.

2.7 Migration to the plains

The Mishings were originally hill dwellers. In due course of time, they came down gradually to the plains and extended their settlement towards the whole bank-line of the river Brahmaputra. Regarding the stretch of habitat of the Mishings, John M’Cosh’s recording in 1837, states that the “Miris occupy that strip of alluvial land along the north bank of the Brahmaputra, from the large Island Majuli to the river Dihong, the northern branch of the Brahmaputra; and bounded on the north by the hill country of Abors.” Again, according to Alexander Mackenjie, “the Mishings had extensively cultivated the tract of Bardalani, Sisi and Dhemaji.”

Like the Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koches, Ahoms and some other Mangoloid groups, the Mishings as a tribe cannot form their own State in the region. Cultural traits and recent migration towards the plains are the main reasons behind their inability to form a unique State. As pointed out by S.K. Chatterji that “they have always remained in a very primitive stage, and never had any occasion to advance in civilization like some of their cousins and brothers in the plains and in Nepal.” Lack of settled agriculture is one of the most important factors behind the formation of State by the various tribes. Absence of such an aspiration towards Statehood is another reason behind non-formation of their State. Even in recent times the tribe practised jhum cultivation. Robinson observed that “the Mishings are labourious and highly industrious people, and seen partial to living on
the skirts of the forests, clearing new grounds which they cultivate for a year or two, and recovering elsewhere when the soil is adjusted." The Mishings have the character of living in isolation. This instinct appears as a reason behind prevention of its process of forming State. In this regard, D. Nath wrote that “this habit of isolation is a legitimate heritage of the tribe from China, and this can be shown by the fact that the Chinese till the beginning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century believed in isolation and the contact with any outsider was not only prohibited, but also hated. The custom of performing the nine prostrations called \textit{kow-tow} has also been prevalent in some way among the Mishings of Assam, which they term as \textit{Kumnam}.”

Various such elements help us to conclude that amongst the large Mongoloid race, the Mishings are the part of “Palaeo-Mongoloid” race. From the perspectives of physical features, language and other cultural elements, the Mishings can be identified with the aboriginal tribes of South-China and of Eastern Tibet. Again, the names like Mishings, Minyong, Mishimi, Milong, Nisi, Ami, Tani etc. are however, quite similar with the names of aboriginal tribes such as Miao, Miaotse, Hmeng, Lolo, Ussu, Lutse, Amodopa, etc. who lived in regions like Yunnan, Szechuan, Kwang-si and Sinkiang provinces of South China. They had migrated from South-China to the North-Eastern regions of India through the meeting places of Western Burma, Eastern Tibet, South-China and North-Eastern India. They had to intermix with various human races and that become evident in their languages, physical features, cultures and traditions. The migration of the North-Assam tribes has taken place during the middle period of the pre-history and the 6\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. They started residing in India before the 1\textsuperscript{st} Century of the Christian era.
According to a Mishing legend, the ancestors of the Mishings first lived with their offspring at a place called Killing-Kangey, in the upper course of the Siang river. After passing many years at that place they moved downwards to the lower valley. The Mishings believed that when they migrated from Killing-Kangey, they had to cross a very rapidly flowing stream. Only after days of prayer, propitiations to the deities by the Mibu, they finally found two very strong creepers climbing over a gigantic tree holding it erect near the rapid stream. Finally, with these creepers they were able to cross the stream. These creepers are referred now as Ma:ying and Mankong creepers. It is also believed that they came from the Ki:lling-Kangey(a divine place like Swarga, though it is now identified as Ka:rkó area of Present Arunachal Pradesh) to this earth through steps made up of gold and silver. The Ma:ying and Mankong are the names of Gold as well as Silver steps respectively. Probably, from the top of the high hills they came to the plains with the help of two creepers, both are of golden and silver colours. It is found in folk tales that while came to the plains, they found a river. While crossing that unknown river one of their colleague drowned and therefore they named the river as Siang (drown in water). After crossing the river they moved a far and found another river where they found the dead body of their colleague drowned in Siang. Thus, they named that second river as Sikang (dead). Earlier the Siang and the Sikang were famous as the Dihong and the Dibong. Here, a lot of controversy arises regarding these folk tales. If the dead body of the drowned person was found in the place, other than the place where he drowned, then we can assume that either both the rivers are the same or one may be the tributary of the other. But in reality, the Siang and the Sikang are neither one river nor one is a tributary of the other. Thus, either the dead body found in the Sikang was of some other person, that was not the dead body of the person who drowned in the Siang or the river
Sikang may not be the river Dibong rather that was the tributary of the Siang. Thus folk tales can be hardly limited by confusions and doubts.\textsuperscript{55}

However, it is significant to mean that probably due to the search of more fertile agricultural land, refusal to subjugation under other tribes and eco-social reasons the Mishings left the hills and initially entered into the Chutiya kingdom. But the written information found is that before the annexation of Ahom King in the Chutiya Kingdom, the Mishings entered into Ahom Kingdom too.

2.8 Relationship with the Chutiyas

Before the Ahom had come to Soumar, the Mishings entered into the Chutiya Kingdom. In this regard, Lakshmi Devi mentioned in the following way “Much before the Ahoms came to Assam, the Mishings were undergone influences from the Plains civilization.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, naturally a social relationship had grown between the Mishings and the Chutiyas. Lakshmi Devi also said that in 1673 A.D. by killing his own brother Udayaditya Singha, the Deka Raja Chau Chulengfa taking the name Ramadhwaj Singha occupied the crown. Previous attempts to dominate the Chutiyas were tend to be continued by the King and accordingly the new King employed Barua in the field. The Barua of Tinimukhia crossed the river Dihing through boat and went to Tiru. Then they entered into Chutiya village. By taking bow and arrow the Chutiyas fled to the Mishing village and took shelter and consequently, settled there.\textsuperscript{57} According to the Mishing folk tales, when Ahom King attacked the Chutiya Kingdom, then Chutiyas went to the Mishing village and gave their identity as Mishings to save their lives. Because, the Mishings already entered into the Ahom Kingdom and they got considerable attention from the Ahom King. Hence, with the passage of time, the Chutiyas found in the
Mishing villages became Mishings. The group which gave Mishing identity became known as Pagro. Probably, due to the loss of clan’s honour, this clan was known as ‘Mipak’ (non-Mishing) + ‘Aar’ (True) = Pagro. Again, this clan is also known as ‘Chutiya-Miri’.58

Raibahadur Padmanath Gohain Barua divided the Chutiya’s into three categories. They are (1) Hindu Chutiya (2) Ahom Chutiya (3) Miri Chutiya.59 Again, the Mishings are divided into two clans, viz, Dahgam and Barahgam and the census report of 1881 gave them a third name called ‘Chutiya’. This name was given by the Ahom Kings and it shows that while Ahoms attacked the Chutiya Kingdom, they found those Mishings, dwelling in the Chutiya Kingdom. E.T. Dalton, also expressed possible connections between the Chutiyas and the tribe of Miris known as Chutiya Miris. This explanation is further clarified by Brown in the following way - “the relationship shown by Dalton amongst the Chutiya Miris and Chutiya seemed imaginary. But linguistic witness provides evidences in its opposite perspective. I feel that they came during the reign of Chutiya Kingdom, therefore they are known as Chutiya-Miri”60

Above mentioned references reflect the point that either we call the Chutiya Miri or Miri-Chutiya, both are of the same group of Mishing people who earlier resided in the Chutiya Kingdom. According to the popular Mishing folk sayings people of ‘Doley’ Gotra from the ‘Pagro’ clan at first came to the plains and while the Doleys returned to their place, then the people of ‘Pegu’ Gotra came to the plains. Therefore, the Doley families built the houses in front of the roof towards east and ended the house towards the west and in opposite to that the Pegu families built their houses. Thus, probably people from both the Gotras at first entered into the Chutiya Kingdom but for the first time Chamuguria’s entered into the Ahom Kingdom.
The Ahoms created Soumar Kingdom in 1229 A.D. The relationship between the Mishing and Chutiya people developed in the pre-Ahom period, and later that emotional attachment contributed towards the development of joint rebellion against the Ahom King. Such an instance arose in 1665 A.D. Taking advantage of the time while the Ahom King was busy in dominating the Naga rebellion, then Miris with the combination of Dafla and Chutiyas started a rebellion against the Ahoms.

2.9 Relationship with the Ahoms

The period of entering of Ahoms into the Soumar State was in 1228 A.D. At that period, whether or not they found the existence of the Mishings is somewhat unreported in history. In Ahom history, at first we found the Mishings during the reign of Swargadeo-Suhung mung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539 A.D.) not in the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-41 A.D.) as written by Lakshmi Devi. History says that “in the month of Aahar, the King came to Dihing and gave the name Thaumung-Mungtao to a Miri family Lakli Khutsan Sakat Tayuosulung- Kurein and gave them seat in front of the society.”

This view developed the fact that marital relationship already developed between the Mishings and Ahoms. Consequently Tayuosulung- Kurein was grown up to Ahom race. Surjya Kumar Bhuyan said that Gotra of some Ahom aristocrat families were set up by some non-Ahom castes, races, tribes and communities such as Barahi, Chutiya, Garo, Koch, Kachari, Maran, Hindu-Kalita, Hindu-Dhoba, Miri, Mugal and Muslim, etc. It is considerable that the idea of Ahom King Sukafa to “dominate the smaller kings and form a single dynasty” helped in the growth of inter-caste marriages. Sukafa started battle against such tribes and defeated them. Then he tried to establish friendship with them.
He then treated those tribes equally and in order to form one caste, encouraged inter-caste marriages.

At that time, the Mishings practised the shifting cultivation and did not have the instinct to settle in a specific area. Thus, they did not have their own home place or own state. It means in the pre-feudal tribal stage, the Mishings came under the Ahom kingdom. Therefore, there was no doubt about the occurrence of their conflict with the Ahom Kingdom regarding its own specific territory of the Mishings. Besides, the Mishing society is virtually peaceful, environment friendly and lovers of integration. It was proved in their culture as none of their songs or dances referred to war. Therefore, the Ahom Kings made those peaceful Mishings a part of their own and loved a lot. Ahom not only loved them as subjects rather Ahom kings adopted Mishing boys as son of the royal family. It is found that, during the reign of Bhurha Raja (Suchengfa or Budhi Swarga Narayan or Pratap Singha, 1611-49), from Baruk one family of Borgohain Known as Vokola Borgaohain and settled in Dihing. Though he had no son, he adopted a Miri boy and gave him the name Miri-Handique. His successors are known as Miri Handique at present.63

It is already mentioned that during Ahom reign the system of inter-caste marriage has got appreciated and encouraged. Here, one folk tale about the Chamuguria clan of the Mishing society is prevalent. According to it there are two villages in two different sides of a river. With the increasing rivalry between the two villages, people of one village decided to cut (kill) all the villagers of their rival village in that fortnight. In order to do that they prepared a Bhur (banana rake) since evening and arranged a big feast. While they had sharpened their Dao (big knife) to kill their rivals on the one hand, on the other, they had taken meat and liquor also. After that heavy liquor party, they cut the
wrong rope of the *Bhur* (banana rake). Accordingly, the *Bhur* went wrongly and despite getting the other side of the river, they had reached their own village. But they failed to recognize their village and killed their own family members, relatives and they came to know that fact in the next morning. When they realized that they killed their own families, they felt immense misery and left that place forever. After moving aimlessly, they went to Ahom Kingdom and requested the Ahom King to give them asylum. At that time, Ahom Kingdom had been facing the threats of ‘Dahi Snakes’ and Ahom king asked the Mishing people to kill that ‘Dahi snakes’ from its roots and if they could do the same then they would be permitted to take asylum in the Ahom Kingdom. Then those unfortunate people decided to kill those ‘Dahi snakes’ (a very dangerous snake growing very fast at that time and place). After the adventurous success to end up ‘Dahi Snakes’ from the Ahom Kingdom, they were praised and gave shelter behind the ‘Cham’ tree. Therefore, those Miris were later known as ‘Chamuguria Miri’. It is found in the popular sayings that Ahom King gave their girls to Chamuguria Miris in the later phase and made them complete Assamese. Therefore, Chamuguria Miris used Assamese language to exchange their feelings. From this perspective, it is obvious to say that Chamuguria Miris were the first Miri group who went and settled in the Ahom Kingdom.

It is found that lots of Miris were got engaged in the Ahom administrative system. It is proved from the prevalent non-Mishing titles, especially associated with the titles furnishing administrative responsibilities, such as Kari Pegu, Patgiri, Handique Barua, Konwar, Changmai, etc.

There are two obvious processes that can be identified if we look at the mode of participation of numerous tribes in the ways of social formation of Assam. One is the process of co-operation and other is the process of security to restore self-identity. The
above mentioned discussion reflects the process of co-operation. In its opposite trend, at that time equally, as like the Mishings, similar small tribes too were engaged in conflicts to secure their self identity. Thus, the utmost affection shown by the Ahom King failed to convince the Mishings also. Accordingly, when they got advantageous time as well as situations, they had engaged in revolutions against the Ahom Kings. “During the reign of King Chutyangfa, a number of small scale battles were fought and among them battles of Daflas was the prime one. In 1653, Ahom Swargadeo, gave soldiers and arms to Burha Gohain and Barpatra Gohain, and sent them to annex the Dafla Hill by moving upwards through the Dickrong river. But trickily the Daflas blocked them and killed a number of Assamese soldiers. It compelled the Burha Gohain and Barpatra Gohain to go back to their Kingdom. Then, the Swargadeo sent two other leaders to attack the Dafla. The Dafla by taking help from the Miri jointly counter attacked the Ahom annexation but they failed in the hands of Ahoms and accordingly, surrendered to the Ahom King.” On the other hand, during the rule of Swargadeo Jaydhwaj Singha, the King heard that Miris killed (cut) their own people, and accordingly, in the month of Bohag, sent people to catch people of 12 villages, i.e.--the Rungrai 1, Sarunima 1, Taku1, Nalmiri1, Pachu1, Dirihar Miri1, Ratachi Miri 1, Dipak1, Chansiri1, Diyamaria1. The Mishings were broken down before the Ahom persons and all Miris decided to bow down. Accordingly, they sent messengers to the son of Tamuli--Doloi and told that “they had done a big crime”. In answer, the son of Tamuli-Doloi said that “How do you are great –rather you are the slaves of Chutiya King? – if you want to bow down then you have to give people doubled in numbers as much you have killed”. In this agreement, the Miris gave Swargadeo; 12 persons, 30 Methuns, 20 Pahumara dogs, 5 Patkhia Chains (moni), 20 Jim Cloths, 20 Cikara Daa’s as their punishment. It is important to note that through this
way the symbols of Mishing culture and the unique creation of weaving of Mishing women Mirijim came to be known in the Ahom society.64

But the Mishings were never quite at that point, though in different times they had surrendered before the Ahom Kings, but even if they got conducive environment, they had again started revolutions. During the reign of Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-69), taking the clue of Naga rebellion, the Mishings with the help of Chutiya and Dafla also started a rebellion. Though the Mishings started rebellions again and again, but failed to do significant damage to the Ahom State. But during the rule of Gadadhar Singha; they had conducted massive killings in Sadiya. “In the fifth day of the month of Sravan; wednesday, during the reign of Gadadhar Singha in 1683 A.D., the Sadiyal Miris cut (killed) a number of people by lit fire in houses. They had taken lives of women and sons too, and destroyed the Handique Gohain bar.” In the year 1687 the Ahom king ended up that rebellion in Sadiya. Probably, that was the last rebellion of Mishings against the Ahom Kings.65

It is significant here to remember that we cannot recognize the explanations found in Ahom Buranji as purely neutral. But they reflect the socio-political relations between the Ahoms, Mishings and other tribes having equal status to that of the Mishings. Though the Mishings had started rebellions, again and again, against the Ahom rule, it is difficult to understand the reasons behind them. It was already mentioned that there were no specific and own the Mishing territory. Thus, reasons behind such rebellions are to get their State free from Ahom reign, is not a relevant aspect for discussion. Therefore, it can be assumed that those open minded Mishings started their rebellions against the taxes imposed by the Ahom rule upon them. But history is silent about this fact. Besides, they were very sensitive about their cultural
aspects and any harm to such cultural aspects may appear as causes behind their rebellions too.

2.10 Time of migration

It is difficult to say that when exactly the Mishings came to the plains from the hills or whether all of them at a time or in different time line came to the plains of Assam. But from the above discussions, it is not difficult to arrive at a conclusion that the migration of the Mishings occurred from the hills to the plains of Assam. Other than history, Vaishnava literature also talked about the Miris (Mishings). In the writings of Sri Sri Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva, we witness discussions about the Mishings. It proves that in the 15th and the 16th century, the Mishings were recognized as significant indigenous tribe of Assam. Thus, from the administrative information, from religious books, other writings and from history, we can arrive at the end that the Mishings started their migration to Assam since the 12th Century. Because the Ahoms came to Soumar in the 13th Century and the Mishings came to the Chutiya Kingdom much earlier than that.

The Mishings were not completely migrated to the plains from the hills at a time. But they came in different groups in different time. In the report of Mills “officers of the establishments or Mouzahdars are deputed to test these returns the best way they can; they frequently amongst the Merees find able bodied males not returned or assessed, as this tribe is continually receiving additions from the neighbouring hills.” The last part of this quotation proves that the migration of the Mishings started in the 12th Century but it is continuing till the first decade of the second part of 19th Century.
2.11 Present Habitat

At present, the Mishings are primarily located in the Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Golaghat districts of Assam. Besides, in the river valleys of Lohit, Siang and Subansiri in Arunachal Pradesh, the Mishings are residing. Apart from the banks of the river Brahmaputra, the Mishings are residing in the banks of different tributaries, sub-rivers, and branches of rivers too. The Mishing villages are found in the banks of the rivers and tributaries of mainly Jiabharali, Buroi, Marnoi, Secha, Pichala, Kachikata, Dikrong, Lohit, Tekeliphuta, Tuni, Pava, Ranganadi, Amtola Balijan, Rangajan, Daghoria, Ghagar, Adiunti, Ko-pak, Kora Saporı, Maijan, Kadam, Boginadi, Khaboli, Subansiri, Dambukialgaon, Majuli, Migmang, Jiadhal, Laiphulia, Maridhal, Gai, Sisi, Tangani, Kulajan, Akajan, Bhurisuti, Dimow, Simen, Jaji, Dikhari, Gali, Rayang, Janekarang, Telam, Jonai, Guijan, Luijan, Laika, Diburu, Dihing, Dikhou, Bhogdoi, Tarajan, Sileku, Siang-Sikang, Sisiri, Lali, Kundil, Dhansiri, Sarikaria, Kherkata, and so on.

The Mishings are very much fond of living in the bank of the rivers and tributaries. Flood and riverbank erosion destroy such Mishing inhabited villages, their agriculture and crops. Yet they never want to leave those places. May be in Chars or Saporis they try to live with a lot of hurdles. They never want to live in the developing areas like urban towns and cities. Though, urbanization and the process of development reached places like Lakhimpur, Dhemají, Silapathar etc. and also in some other Mishing inhabited districts of Assam. Since the recent past, due to spread of education and placement in various sectors in urban places, a number of Mishing people of new generation came out from their traditional habitats and accordingly settled in urban
locations. But it never seems that they are not at all satisfied in their ancient habitats, rather time and job factor bound them to do consign.

It is clear from the above account that the tribes of North-Eastern India belonged to the great Mongoloid race of mankind. Their ancient civilization flourished somewhere in the upper courses of the Yangtse Kiang and Hoang-Ho river valleys of North-West China. They were migrated from South-China to the North-Eastern regions of India through the meeting places of Western Burma, Eastern-Tibet, South-China and North-Eastern India. They have had to intermix with various human races, which are evident in their language, physical features, cultures and traditions. Due to the lack of appropriate written records or historical evidence about the origin and migration of the North-Eastern tribes, their historical background is shrouded by darkness. The Mishing is also a branch of the large Mongoloid group. As per the oral testimony of the Mishings, originally they inhabited in the north and the central part of China. As a result of human migration, they gradually moved towards to the eastern Himalayan region in Tibet and entered into the northern and eastern hills of the Arunachal Pradesh. They used to live in the hills till the middle age. As per the popular folk belief, in Assam, at first they entered into the Chutiya Kingdom at Sadiya and gradually a social relationship grew-up between the Mishings and the Chutiya people; but it has no substantial time factor. After the Chutiyas, the Mishings also developed a good relationship with the Ahom reign. In fact, before initiation of Neo-Vaishnava movement, they developed relationship with the Chutiya and the Ahom people in Assam. Gradually they came into contact with the greater Assamese community. Of late, in search of their livelihood the Mishing people are scattered in different places throughout Assam. They have immense contribution in the formation of a greater Assamese society. Thus, as an indigenous tribe, the Mishings
have today played an important role in the formation of a rich socio-cultural trend in Assam.

After analysing the historical background of the Mishing people in Assam, we find that the tribe itself is an assimilation of a number of populations irrespective of place, reign and sections. Again, their culture incorporates a variety of religious practices too. Thus, in the next chapter we try to elaborate religion, the nature of the religious beliefs and practices of the community and their changing trends.
References


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47. Ibid, p.37
49. Ibid, p.8
57. Ibid, p.83
58. op.cit., Doley, B.K., p.10
60. Op.cit., Doley, B.K., p.10
61. Ibid, p.11
62. Ibid, p.11

Note: It is noteworthy that different scholars generally use the two terms “Mishing” and “Mising” synonymously as per their convenience. In our research work, we have used the term “Mishing” instead of “Mising”. But both the terms are correct and imply the same tribal group having same meaning.

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