8.00 BILINGUAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE MISHINGS.

8.1 Bilingualism basically indicates the existence of two languages in a speech community. These two languages must be used by a speech community in their day-to-day life very frequently. A speech community may recognised as perfect bilingual according to their nativelike competence through a constant oral use of either language including their own language.

"A bilingual is any one who possesses a minimal competence in one of the four language skills i.e., listening, comprehension, speaking, reading and writing in a language other than his mother tongue".

Bilinguality of a person or of a community differs according to his contact with a monolingual or a bilingual counterpart in a unilingual, bilingual or multilingual environment. Monolinguality is mainly found in the economically based group and the minority section or the subordinate group hold a tendency to become bilingual or multilingual.

Different type of bilinguality appears according to the nature and position of the speaker. A person with parents of different native languages living in either speech community may become a bilingual. If a person learns a foreign language or is educated through the formal Institution is a bilingual. Persons or groups inhabiting inconguous areas tend to become bilinguals.

The peoples from diverse ethnic origin constituting a nation

1. Hamers and Blank: 1989: Bilinguality and Bilingualism, P.6
having a common state or language, than the peoples of that particular body politic becomes bilingual. These factors are common in Assam, which is criss-crossed by different tribes and casts having their own languages and dialects and almost all the peoples including Mishings can speak or have proficiency in the Assamese, the state language of Assam. On the other hand some non-tribal Assamese living in the tribal areas can speak the tribal dialects besides their own mother-tongue Assamese.

8.2 The Mishings are scattered in the upper Assam region forming some small pockets among other non-Mishing Assamese. Due to long term contact they appear as integral part of the greater Assamese society. Besides other cultural give and take they are equally and spontaneously shared Assamese language. For which they appear as Mishing-Assamese bilingual community. The vast majority of the Adis, a closely related to the Mishings speak the Assamese language in broken form. Similarly the Mishing peoples are used their own speech in household life while they use Assamese outside their household affairs including educational institution or official purposes. Some section of the Mishings have lost their own tongue and they become Assamese speaking population. As a tribe they maintain the identification of Mishing (=Miri), but linguistically they are Assamese speaking community.

Under various conditions the Mishing acquired the bilingual quality in Assamese. The neighbourhood contact is one of the main factors. For different social purpose or basic requirements the Mishings use Assamese for easy communication with neighbourhood
Assamese society. To get preference in various administrative jobs and in educational institutions for academic purposes, they consider to learn Assamese. The Mishings to a great extent formed a part of Assamese culture and the process of acculturation allows their bilinguality to function. The historical development of the Mishing community is also responsible for their learning of Assamese language. After entering into Assam valley, their settlement had decentralised and established them by the Ahom rulers in the different Assamese dominated area forming some pockets within Assamese speaking population. So, during the Ahom rule the Mishings had acquired the tradition as Assamese speaker retaining their own language and developed their bilingual behaviour for all the times to come.

The speaker belong to the language minority group hold a tendency to learn the language of majority section for their betterment in a common platform. In the Assam valley, the Mishings are comparatively a small minority group than the Assamese speaking population, so they were also compelled to become bilingual for their better future.

The various political and economic reasons also compelled them to learn the state language Assamese for all purposes. From geographical point of view, the diverse ethnic groups are spatially distributed and their closed settlement pattern compelled them to learn each other's speech. This way the Mishings are also for various reasons shared with these common trends and appeared as bilingual.
Religious reason inspired people to learn a second language. A section of the Mishings are converted with the Assamese vaisnavism, and for better understanding of religious doctrines and versions of different vaisnava literature that written in Assamese is compelled those Mishings to learn Assamese.

Interference is another factor behind the bilinguality of the Mishings. These interference is mainly cultural and linguistic. Mishings are now-a-days followed some possible cultural traits of Assamese society so they switch from their own language to another, i.e., Assamese in the context of such cultural features. A bilingual Mishing use different semantic features of Assamese in different step of their conversation, mainly outside of their society. For external communication the Mishing bilingual feels some lexical gap in his language and adopt different terms for his better expression of something. This way the Mishings necessarily adopt or acquired plenty of lexical items from Assamese language.

8.3 It is noticed that a lot of Assamese medium educational Institution have been established in the Mishing speaking areas as in other rural areas of the state. Their children to a great extent educated in Assamese medium from elementary to secondary level. On the other hand some of them accept English as medium of instruction at their College level. In educational Institution teachers give their instructions in Assamese and private tutors also follow the same way. This way the Mishing youth section and most of their parents accepted Assamese language for creation of a better educational atmosphere. In this phenomenon Assamese
bears as first language till the end of 9th decade of the present century. Though the Mishing language have been introduced in the elementary stage yet the majority of them have maintained the previous idea of considering Assamese as 1st language and they appears as balanced bilingual.

8.4 It appears that a bilingual person mainly speak only one language and is also capable of speaking, reading and writing other language. In such situation one uses each language only for communicative purpose in various activities of their day-to-day life. So the mutual contact is the base of bilingualism and due to such close contact the degree of skills in the different levels are developed more or less in a bilingual situation. Mishing elite section for having their command over L-2 i.e, second language (Assamese) appears as balanced bilingual. The educated Mishings acquired all the skills i.e, listening, reading, writing, speaking in L-2 Assamese equally with L-1 i.e, Mishing. These skills of a Mishing-Assamese bilingual in L-1 and L-2 are shown in the following diagram-

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Skills

Listening  Reading  Speaking  Writing
L-1     L-2     L-1     L-2     L-1     L-2
          (Diagram No. 20)
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But the uneducated Mishings are not proficient in all skills of L-2. They understand that language and can also speak the L-2 in broken form. There are some different levels of proficiency of a
A true bilingual possesses equal competency of all skills in all levels in both the languages. In broad sense it appears that bilingual speakers may not have an equal mastery of all skills in both the languages. He may be capable to understand L-2 but may not be able to speak like L-1 language.

The elite section of the Mishings acquired sufficient skills in all levels of the Assamese language and possesses a native like competence in this language. On the other hand the common Mishing people mainly the illiterate section can speak and understand Assamese nicely. Of course their pronunciation of the Assamese phonetic sounds are defective, very often their Assamese pronunciation appears as a broken variety, it is mixed up with Mishing articulatory nature, so they never articulate aspirated consonant phonemes of Assamese. This is a regular feature in bilingual situation. Moreover, in such situations where they live forming some small pockets within the Assamese speakers and instantly acquired the bilingual quality.

The alternation rate differs between educated and uneducated Mishing bilingual. Educated Mishings are most conscious to write
L-2 language without switching but in the time of conversation in L-1 language they used various Assamese even some times English words also or very often they speak half of a sentence in Mishing and remaining part in Assamese. Uneducated Mishing at the time of conversation use L-2 words or some times in anger state to express clearly all the matter, they used extremely L-1 language words or sentences.

8.5 Now-a-days the Mishing society is well aquainted with modern means of civilisation with the Assamese society. The educational Institution provided them to know out side world. Moreover the means of mass communication served them with new information and on the other hand made them bilingual.

The circulation of Assamese news papers and journals, magazines etc. among the Mishing populatin and the Radio, T.V. transmission etc. the mass media through Assamese generally made the Mishing people to hold a tendency to speak Assamese and Mishing in their life span. Now-a-days some Mishings (mainly educated) worked in the different offices as well as educational Institution also, where they are obliged to communicate through Assamese medium and many a times this behaviour continues in their house hold life also.

8.6 The Mishings are forming an intigrpal part of the broad Assamese society like Boro, Karbi, Rabha etc. They have equally shared the scope of educational Institution, the Govt. service and other socio-political forum etc. They can participate and enjoy the programme of any common cultural show, festivals and
common cultural gatherings and equally shared in a play ground or in market complex with Assamese. This way they spontaneously turned into a Mishing-Assamese bilingual, besides that they have also proved it by writing some mishing literature in Assamese, which are generally considered as the basis of the Mishing recorded literature. Those prominent Mishing-Assamese writers and their literary works are as follows:

- S.R. Panyang Kataki ... Miri Jatir Buranji, Miri Doan.
- T. Taid ... Mishing Bhasar Banan Paddhati, Mishing Agomelang Aabuge.
- K.C. Padun ... Mishing Path.
- N. Padun ... Mishing Asomiya Path, Mishing Bhasar lipi.
- G. Pegu ... Tani Agom : Manab Bhasa.
- R. Parme ... Miro-Migol.
- J.J. Kuli and N. Pegu ... Mishing Agom Parung.
- B. Kagyung (edt.) ... Mishing Sanskritir Alekhya.
- G. Pegu ... Popur.

Actually the Mishing people have just started with their literary activities. They use to write in different branches of literature and language, the written literature in mishing is really quite a few in number. But in this meltingpot it is observed that they are very much conscious of their future existence.