

Socio-Economic Basis of Mising's Urge for Identity

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Abstract: The Mising are one of the plan Tribal groups of North-East India, also have Socio-Economic and political problems due to anti peoples of the British colonial rules. Even after an attaining independence the national leaders of the government fail to resolve the urgent a long pending problem of the Mising tribes. Firstly the issue of Mising language continuously drew the attention of the government for decades. Secondly the seat reservation issue start during the British colonial rule, like wise issue of protection forest right, belt an block preservation have been major issue during the post-independence periods. Interestingly the demand for self-rules the Mising organization raised the question of autonomous council to eliminate their Socio-Economic hurdles in their day to day way of life. The Economic condition is more than 90% peoples are beyond measurable. They have to lead their lives by way of Substance Economic.

Keywords: Autonomous Council, Demand for Self-Rules, Economic Condition, Misings, Tribal Group.

Introduction:

The Misings are one of the most prominent sons of the soil of Assam. The Misings are most of prominent due to the fact that it is the second largest tribal groups among the plan tribes of Assam. Accordingly to 2001 census reports, the Mising population numbered to 587310 out of 3308570 ST populations in Assam, 17.8% of the total ST population in the state¹. The different tribes of Assam (such as the Bodos, the Misings, the Sonowal Kacharies, the Deoris, the Lalungs, the Mrches etc) who originally belonged to Mongoloid blood, came to this region from the East and South Asia at different periods of history.²

Methodology:

The methodology of this work historical-cum-analytical approach has been followed.

Objectives:

- I. To filled up the gapes of enquiry on the question of Socio-Economic condition of the Misings.
- II. A measure of maintaining socio-economic and political identity of the Misings.

Analysis:

In the past, they established their respective kingdoms and remained free and independent for a long period. These tribes were not prepared to live under what they considered to be the dominance of others. They had never been brought together under any central power prior to the advent of the British rule in this region. Since the British occupation, the tribes and races have always been fighting for their distinct socio-political existence. As such it appears that the British did not consider it profitable to develop the transport and communication networks in the tribal areas except when such was strictly necessary for movement of troops. When the relationship of the recalcitrant tribes vis-à-vis the British was established, Exclusion and partial exclusion policy was adopted mainly aimed at reducing the administrative expenditure on the concerned tribes from the British pocket.³ The tribal areas which were so declared were left to manage their affairs in the matter of internal management of their communities so far as it did not clash with the British administration. This policy is no way approved of complete independence of the tribes concerned.

It may be noted that under the British rule the tribal communities of Assam remained backward economically, educationally and even politically.⁴ As a result, unfortunately thought inevitably the tribals failed to occupy prominent place in the British administration. Important positions were held either by

The non-Assamese or the Assamese Caste Hindus. The tribal's were deprived of their "due share" of administrative jobs and other privileges under the British Government. They also think that they have been robbed of the constitutional protection contained in the provision for tribal belts and blocks (Assam Land Revenue Manual, 1970). The Bordoloni Sub-Committee of the Advisory Committee of the constituent Assembly recommended that the plains tribes of Northeast India should be treated as a minority and protection of their land should be considered by the Minority sub-committee (Report of the Bordoloni Sub-Committee, 1947).⁵ Thus, the plains tribals of Assam were denied the elaborate constitutional protection contained in the sixth schedule of the constitution.⁶ The plains tribal Congress leader, Rupnath Brahma, submitted the list of plains tribals to the Minority Rights sub-committee of the Advisory Committee. The constitution (1950) recorded a list of scheduled

tribes outside the autonomous (hills) districts of Assam, who are regarded as plains tribal's of Assam. The plains tribal's were recognized as a separate political entity in Assam under the 1935 reforms. The Fifth Schedule of the constitution also made some provisions for the protection of excluded and partially excluded areas of the British period. The constitution provided for making of laws and restrictions on residence, movement, etc., in the interest of tribal's, reservation of seats in Central and State legislature, recognition of special claims for government jobs and appointment by the president of special officers and commission to report on the condition of the tribals from time to time, and so on.⁷ The state has also been directed to promote with special care educational and economic interests of the tribes and other weaker sections and protect them from social injustice. But

the plains tribal leaders complain that those provisions are not yet effectively implemented for benefit of the tribals. As a result, the tribals remained much more backward than the dominant section of the Assamese society.⁸

Like the other tribal's, the Misings are also economically depressed and backward in terms of educational development. The problem faced by the Misings is in essence the problem of less development. Communities living with a comparatively advanced group of people under a common political system. A greater portion of them is extremely poor. Although the weaker section of the dominant Assamese and the Misings have been equally poor, the elite among the non-tribal population were larger, better equipped and better trained than the hitherto almost non-existent Mising elite.⁹ The conflict for economic and political power has been essentially between the growing strength of the Mising elite on one hand and the non-Mising local elite on the other.

Thus it seems obvious that much of the Mising problems of Assam today, can be traced in their economic backwardness. Complication over possession of land seems to have prepared the ground for consciousness in Mising community. It has been a long standing grievance of the entire plains tribal people including the Misings of Assam that their lands and property have been alienated and transferred ceaselessly to the hands of unauthorized non-tribal outsiders through the process of illegal occupation, purchase, money lending and mortgage by their encroachment. It may be mentioned that the Misings have been easy targets for many glaring exploitation and injustices for decades due to the "illiteracy" and "simplicity".¹⁰ Like other tribal communities in Assam a bulk of the Misings are also agriculturists. Agriculture has been the main source of their livelihood. Thus the president of the MBK maintained: the Misings are prescriptive citizens and the agriculture being the mainstay of their economic, their survival without land unthinkable.¹¹ He further asserts that "they are the best paddy growers in Assam and have the best cultivable land which might have aroused jealousy in other people". Thus it seems obvious that the problems of land alienation has assumed a very alarming proportion. From the beginning of this century, immigrants from the then East Bengal infiltrated into their area swallowing up many of their old villages and the most fertile areas.¹²

There has been also resentment about the intrusion of immigrants in recent years who occupied patta land (Govt. waste land) unclassified forests and even reserved forests of the entire northern of the Brahmaputra Valley. Attempts to evict this immigrants have so far failed because of their strong financial standing and the tribals including the Misings often lost their land through mortgage and litigation, the Mising leaders suspect that certain political leaders of Assam are behind these developments, The immigrants are also supposed to have had other undesirable effects on the Mising e.g. the spread of tribal belts or the habit of taking opium. The age-long activities of the non-tribal leaders and money lenders and the adverse socio-economic efforts of recent urbanization and industrialization without careful arrangements for their economic protection and rehabilitation, discrimination and injustice among the Misings.¹³ Moreover, the imposition of ceiling on agricultural land holdings has seriously affected the illiterate and ignorant Misings and their joint family system.¹⁴

The Mising elite have tried to draw the attention of the Government through letters in newspapers and representation for immediate measures to revive tribal blocks and belts to safeguard the interests of the Misings in particular and tribals general in these areas and have appealed that delay introducing such measures may frustrate the tribals and lead them to take desperate action. In a memorandum to the Chief Minister (1984) the TMPK has complained that the plains tribals including the Misings have been uprooted in a systematic and a planned way from their soil and that the "stepmotherly" treatment of the administration, dominated by the non-tribal people, have reduced them to the state of the second class citizens of the state.¹⁵

Concrete steps towards the amelioration of the conditions of these weaker sections, started with the initiation of community development schemes and special multipurpose tribal blocks in the beginning of first plan period in 1952. Tribal land was sought to be protected through the application

TMPK has complained that the Government has been not sincere in protecting the tribal belts and blocks under successive ministries dominated by the non-tribals, they are repeatedly and massively breached.¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, not only the Bangali Hindu refugees east Pakistan but even landless immigrant Muslims were allowed to settle there Non-Assamese cultivators, particularly from Bengal, had been allowed to occupy lands within the tribal belts and blocks areas. In fact, the tribal elite were critical of the immigration policy of the Government which characterized as "policy of invitation" of landless peasants.²⁰ This led them to believe that the increasing number of non-tribals in particulars, and non-Assamese Indians in the state in general, were posing a threat to the tribal identity. As for the Assamese caste Hindus, they had no difficulty with the state Government machinery to back them, in interpreting and modifying the definition of belts and blocks to their advantage.²¹ Further since the tribals lacked all protection from the inroads of money-leaders, large number of them some found themselves within a means of livelihood "Land alienation" was the direct result of economic exploitation and political domination. As a result, most of the Mising people do not have that land patta though they have been since immemorial time.²² The Mising elite very often alleged; they were not granted Government loan or any other assistance, because they were not granted Government loan or any other assistance, because they have nothing to mortgage in exchange. There has been extensive loss of land through sales by Misings to non-Misings, not only for business purpose, but for the erection of residential dwelling.²³

Moreover, the tribal sub-plans are not based on any assessment of the actual requirements of the tribal population. In the aforesaid memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, (1984) the TMPK has complained that the portion of the money earmarked for the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) are irrespective of whether the inhabitants are tribals or non-tribals.²⁴ It has been gathered from experience that the fund requested to meeting the various needs of the TSP areas is much more than what is provided in the TSP budget. This had led to serious stagnation in the developmental activities for scheduled tribes. The problems has assumed acute proportions particularly in the Department of Education.²⁵ The tribal elite asserts that during the last few years, huge sums of money had to be re-appropriated from general plan in order to extend to the TSP areas the benefit that have already been extended to the general areas, Last year i.e. during the financial year, 1989-90 fresh and increased ad-hoc grants were sanctioned to M.E. and High Schools located in general areas, but similar benefits were not extended to the schools under TSP areas for want of fund. They also complained that what could be more ridiculous than this situation? The TSP was meant for the accelerated development of the

tribal population, but far from achieving acceleration, the TSP has failed extended even those benefits that have already been given to the people of the general areas.

The Misings are also educationally backward than other non-tribal population of the state. As compared to other sections of population in Assam, the Mising are also lagging far behind in the sphere of education.

As per 2001 census, the percentage of the literacy in Assam was 63.25% out of which males constituted 71.28% and Females constituted 54.61% among the scheduled tribes communities including the Mising community, the percentage of literacy was 62.52% which lower than the state percentage. The level of literacy among the males was 72.34% which among the females it was 52.44%.²⁶ The particular Mising 52.57% out of which males constituted 63.34% and females constituted 39.98%. Therefore Mising are educationally backward than non-tribal groups.²⁷

Further, the Mising elite feel that the large scale increase of population of the plains tribal people in the state, the existing 10% reservation quota stands inadequate resulting difficulties to many scheduled tribes students in getting admission in the reserved seats whereas they are competent and deserving enough to get admission in the general seats. On the other hand, many Government and semi-government institutions are yet to implement the principle of reservation for scheduled tribes students. For instances, seats have not been reserved for scheduled tribes students in most of the deficit colleges of Assam.²⁸ It is this sense of being unable to compete that provides the principal justification for the Mising Community to organize themselves to adequate opportunities for their all round development.

It may however, be noted that the spread of education has emerged as a strong factor of consciousness and has given the Misings a sense of distinct identity. Modernization and advancement in the field of literacy and education have aided the growth of new political awareness among the Mising Community. In a way, religious and socio-cultural changes have come about almost together. Educated political leaders have emerged on the development of the Misings. As far as it could be ascertained, evolution of social and political awareness as a group and in political activities among the Misings took place in the last four decades. As a result, the Misings became increasingly conscious for their distinct identity.

Conclusion:

The above study appears that the socio-economic situation compelled the Mising people to organize themselves in different organizations like Mising Agom Kebang (MAK) (Mising literary body) Mising Bane Kebang (MBK) (Mising Cultural Body), Takam Poien Kebang (TMPK) (All Misings Students Union), MMK (Mising Meme Kebang) Mising Women Body) etc. are responsible of the community. So I expect these organizations will contribute great change to the Mising society bringing about new, inspiration in the spheres of education, socio-cultural, political and economic development.

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