

Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore

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for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English)**

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DECLARATION

I, Mrs. Shanti Doley, hereby declare that the subject matter of my thesis entitled *Environmental and Ethical Issues in Mising Folklore* is the bonafide record of work done by me and that the content of the dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

20th December 2017

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CHAPTER I

THE MISING TRIBE: THEIR EVOLUTION, LOCATION, POPULATION AND FOLKLORE

The *Vishnu* and *Markandeya* Puranas describe division of the World fairly well mentioning that India is the centre of the World with Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and to its east are the Kiratas and to the west the Yavanas (Das 2012:1) . In the same way, it is easily recognized that the Caucasian races of nomadic Aryans and mediterranean Dravidians predominate in the populations of the north and the south respectively and the Mongoloids predominate in the east which comprises of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA) Nagaland and Manipur. This, however, does not mean that there are no other racial elements among each of these broad divisions; For example, the Negroids had intermixed with the Proto-Australoids; when the Aryans were spreading from Western Punjab to Northern Bihar, a racial fusion of the speakers of Aryans, Dravidians and Austric languages thus was taking place. In Assam and Northeast Bengal, the Dravidians have, to a great extent, been replaced by Mongolians, while in the Surma Valley and the rest of Bengal a mixture of races has taken place in which the recognizable Mongolian element diminished towards the west and disappears altogether as Bihar is reached. So there has been racial intermixing among the population of Assam, the Mongoloid pressure is heavy because of the large number of tribes of these racial stocks. Their physical features are described as a short head, a broad nose, a flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and a yellow skin (Das 2012: 2). But there are numerous other races also. Traces of negroids are to be found among the Nagas as among some South Indian tribes (Ibid.). The Khasis who speak an Austric language might have picked up their speech from same proto-Australoid race before they migrated to Assam region. The Kaibartas, a scheduled

caste of Assam, are held by some to be of obvious Dravidian origin and the Dravidians are said to be distinguished by a long head, large and dark eyes, fairly strong beard, a black colour, and a very broad nose, depressed at the base, but not so as to make the face look flat. Then there are the Aryans, with a long head, tall and well-built, having a fine long prominent nose and a fair complexion, who came to Assam from across Bihar and Bengal. All these peculiarities of physiognomy are encountered in Assam.

There is no evidence to show that any race of man evolved itself in the whole of the Indian sub-continent. Any ancient Indian race or tribe that settled here had come from across the frontiers, eastern or western to Assam also were tribes and several other races used to migrate in the remote past, not recorded in history. The Negroids of the Neolithic stage of pre-history, trace of whom are found among Nagas, were perhaps the first to come. Naga tribes, of course, are Mongoloids who came much later; they might have absorbed some blood of the Negroid of much earlier times. The next race came to India are proto-Australoid of the Palaeolithic stage of culture. The Khasis and Jaintias of Meghalaya, like the Khols and Mundas of central India, speak Austric languages belonging to the proto-Austric languages. The Khasis and Jaintias of Meghalaya are Mongoloid by race who had adopted in the remote past Austric (Mon Khmer). Meghalaya next in order of time to come were the Mediterraneans who spoke Dravidian languages. Some people assume that Kaibartas, mentioned above and the Banias of Assam are descendants of the Dravidian speakers who belonged to a very high stage of civilization, to judge from the findings of Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro. This would suggest that their time of dispersion from their Northern homeland was before 1500 BC about the times of Aryan invasion from the Northwest.

The Aryans took several centuries to spread eastwards along the Ganga valley. They are said to have reached northern Bihar only by 700 BC; as such they must have

come to Assam only after that. Anyway there is evidence in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, estimated to have been written between 500 BC and 400 BC to show that there are contacts between Aryans and the Mongoloid. The *Ramayana* even mentions that the kingdom of Pragjyotish, an ancient name of Assam, was founded by Amurtarajas whose grandson Viswamitra performed his austerities on the bank of the Kausika, probably the modern Kosi. Both the epics describe the Kiratas, Mongoloid people of Assam, as shinning like gold, handsome, and capable warriors.

It is difficult to ascertain when the first settlers of Mongoloid actually come to Assam. But it can certainly be said that when the basis of Hindu culture was being laid by Aryan, Austric and the Dravidian people in the rest of India, the Mongoloid made their presence felt in the north eastern region. So their arrival in Assam might have been during the time when the Aryans were coming from the North West after 1500 BC or sometime later from their original homeland in western China in the first millennium BC. But it is difficult to ascertain when they reached the territories on either side of Brahmaputra from the point of their dispersion, and traversed and spread to Thailand, Indo-China, Burma and the Himalayan tract. From Tibet to distant Ladakh, numerous Mongoloid races inhabit the hills and plains of Assam also. They are reputed to have made large scale monuments. They are scattered all over Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile NEFA), Nagaland and Meghalaya. Meghalaya is spread out in the region of about 22,429 sq. km. with population of a little over 13, 36, 600 sq. km. Verrier Elwin, while visiting the Tagin country for the first time in 1959, in the far north of Subansiri division of Arunachal asked an old chief, 'who created the world'? The tribal chief replied immediately, 'I have no idea but I did not do it, It was long before my time' (Das 2012: 22).

LOCATION

The Mising, known as Miri also till very recent time, with a population of 6, 87,310 (as per 2011 Census), constitute the second largest plain tribes of Assam, the first being the Bodo –Kachari group with a total population of 8, 87,142 as per the census of the same year. The settlement areas of the tribe are Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Sonitpur, Darrang, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam. The Misings are a distinct tribe inhabiting the areas north of the mighty Brahmaputra river in upper Assam, and they are also known as Miris, but they call themselves as ‘Misings’ in reference to the former which to their minds sound somewhat derogatory (Pegu 2011:1).

The question of their original abode often baffles many inquisitive minds in Assam. There has been considerable confusion among the plain people living next to them concerning their real identity. It is no small wonder that systematic studies on the life and culture of the Misings have been attempted. Their tradition and religious beliefs escaped even the notice of the western inquisitiveness. *Miri-Jiyori* an Assamese novel by R.K Bordoloi appears to be exception; the pioneer novelists of Assam has shown a commendable sincerity in presenting the social behavior of this hitherto unknown tribe during the turn of the nineteenth century, but for which they would have remained ever little known neighbor even to the people of Assam. However, the Mising people have been striving hard in their humble way to gain a rightful place in the democratic set up of the present day.

Tracing back into antiquity no tribes singularly known as ‘Miri’ or ‘Mising’ could be identified in words like “Kinnara, Kirato, Gandharba, Ashura” which are found in the profusion in the epic of the *Mahabharata* and even before the word ‘Miri’ had its first

appearance in Assamese devotional writing of Sri Sankardev and Sri Madhavdev, the two great Vaishnavite scholars of the 16th century Assam. 'Miri' means 'go between' (Pegu2011: 2) and it seems that the idea has evolved from A.Macckenzie whose writing earlier makes mention of the Miri as thus: "The Abors and Miris coming originally from the same habitat are still alike in all material respect as to warrant us in calling them earlier and late migrant of the same tribes, the Abors as the last comers retaining more of their pristine savagery and hardihood while the Miris have been to some extent influenced by free association with the plains and the settled habitats of civilization under the Assam governments, the Miris acted as go between of the Abors and traders of Assam" (qtd in Pegu 2011: 3).

The Misings who had been inhabitant of the Abor hills prior to their migration to the plains were employed by the Ahom kings as 'Dubhasi' or 'Duania' meaning interpreter during their contact with Abors (Pegu 2011: 3). Keeping the Ahom traditions, the British retained many of the leading Miris as 'Dubhasi', Gam or Kotoki to maintain a peaceful hill-plains relation, the unique positions such enjoyed by them, at the beginning of the British rule which impressed the English writers naturally and as such they stuck a new meaning of the term Miri as go between. However, they did not offer any suggestion as to origin of the word 'Miri' itself.

The term Miri is an Assamese word signifying go between. As recorded earlier the term 'Miri' has been found referred by the Vaishnavite scholars. The Ahom kings could not have employed the Misings as 'go between' much earlier than this period. Besides, there is no lexical evidence to show that the term 'Miri' being used as synonym of middle man in dealing with people of the hill long after its origin and usage. Therefore, the assertion appears untenable and as such its origin has to be found elsewhere. Another interesting proposition was the Mising who had migrated from a

place called Mungri Mungram situated somewhere in the hills east of Patkai ranges followed the path of Ahom. It was suggested that the people of Assam referred them as Miri or man from Mungri Mungram. The Ahoms, a Shan tribe, belonging to the great Tai race, came across the Patkai range under the leadership of Sukapha and established a kingdom 'Mungdum Sunkhan' (golden valley) in Upper Assam in 1228 AD. But some say that the Ahom called the Mising as 'Kha-Kanglai' or 'Pangdin' (Pegu 2011: 40).

Further the word 'Miri' was not used to convey the same meaning as now in the early period of its origin. Instead the groups of independent tribes living in the northern hills in upper Assam was referred as 'Miri' in absence of any known name for the individual tribe and their habitat as 'Miri-Hills'. But by the turn of many centuries, the western ranges of the vast hilly tract had come to be known as Aka-Dafla hills and the eastern part as the Abor hills for various reasons of historical process, leaving only the upper Subansiri basin between the Aka-Dafla and the Abor hills as 'Miri hills'. And the tribes living in this basin, in the absence of better name, was referred as 'Hill Miri', the Mising living in the high mountainous ranges of Abor hills migrated down along the Siyang valley and occupied the foot-hills around 13th century AD. The people of the plains began to call them as 'Plains Miri' in contradiction to the 'Hill Miri' of Subansiri basin. However, the British authors had made it clear by stating thus:

The Hill miris inhabit the Subansiri valley as far as the plain. They must be no way confounded with the Miris of the plains of Assam, who have in time past left hills and settled in the plain have become a distinct community. (Pegu 2011: 6)

It would be evident from the above observations that the history of the 'Miris' would not essentially mean the history of the Misings but also of the Minyong, Pasi,

Padams and other tribes whoever profess the tradition of 'Mirui' (Pegu 2011:6). Further studies suggest that the word MIRI derived from the Tibetan word MI (man) and RI (mountain) meaning 'man of the mountain' and the term cover all tribes coming down from Tibet and living north of Assam in the earlier centuries. Therefore, it would be imprudent to call only the Misings as 'Miri' which they reject as derogatory (Ibid.). The Miris occupy that strip of alluvial land along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra from large island Majuli to the river Dihing the northern branch of the Brahmaputra and bounded on the north by hilly country of the Abors. (Pegu 2011:9)

The riverine areas in the northern banks of the Brahmaputra stretching from the old site of Sadiya in the east, down to the confluence of the Jiahorali few miles of Tezpur town in the west, lying approximately between longitude 93 degree east and 97 degree east and latitude 27 degree north and 28 degree north could be loosely considered as the Mising area. But numerous villages of other communities have also been located in Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Sibsagar and Sonitpur district on the other hand many of their villages have also been found outside the areas of the foregoing description, in places like Namsai, Dhillabari, Saburu-Sainaki, Laika, Gandhia-miri, Gomariguri and so on. Besides, many of their villages are seen clustering around the confluence of the Dihing, the Disang, the Dikhow and the Dhansiri rivers with the Brahmaputra river in the south.

This sub-tropical region is fertile with heavy rainfall and luxuriant of the Brahmaputra river. A few small tributaries which deserve mention are the Dikari, the Simen, the Gogra, the Gainadi, the Jiadhol, the Konanoi and the Boginadi, the fury of which appear in dramatic suddenness and leave behind a trail of sorrows to those who live by their banks. The Siyang river which is the continuation of Tsang-po of Tibet cut through the Abor hills and enter the plains at Pasighat arising from Semayandung glacier

near Manas Soruvar, the Tsang-po flows towards east through Tibet for many miles and takes a turn southwards approximately at latitude 29.35N and longitude 95.20E. At this bent the river encircles a high mountain –there are steep rapids for about 30 miles, and few miles below it, the river enters Indian territory where it is known as Siyang amongst the Misings and Adis.

The Subansiri is the most fascinating river of the Mising area, it has its origin in the north in the Indo-Tibetan border and emerging out of the snow-clad mountain, it cuts across the land of the ‘Hill Miri’ and touches the plain at Dolungmukh (now Gerukamukh). The Subarnasri (golden beauty of the past), is fondly called ‘Oboneri’ visits the Mising area annually and leaves behind a rich layer of alluvial soil and promotes luxuriant growth of paddy and other. But it has been a great cause for sorrow as well as frolicsome ‘Obonori’ of the gold old days because suddenly fast and furious. It took a toll of about thousands living besides causing non-descript damages to their homestead in wake of the disastrous floods that followed two days after the great earthquake of 1950 still haunt the people of the tragic memories of 1950 still haunt the people of the area.

Touching down the plains, it flows from north to south to meet the Kherkatia Suti—a stream of Brahmaputra from this point onwards the river is known as ‘Luit’ after receiving its two main tributaries namely the Ronganodi and the Dikrong. Ultimately meets the main stream of the Brahmaputra river at Subansiri–mukh, the tri-junction of the district’s boundaries of Lakhimpur, Jorhat and Sonitpur.

Generally the temperature of the region is high, foot hill area generally humid as a result of the higher rainfall with average of 94 degree annually. But the area lying

along the banks of the Brahmaputra has more moderate climate and lesser variation around the year with northern breeze blowing along the big river.

Four seasons are distinguished depending on the temperature and rainfall. The summer (*Divi*) starts from May when sky is overcast almost all the time and heavy downpour in the hilly region causes sudden swelling of the rivers and streams flooding the banks and the low lying areas, summer continues with torrential rains alternating with brief spell of sunny days causing sweltering heat by the end of August. The rapid growth of mosquitos and leaches of various description during the swamps. The period from September to October is the Autumn (*Divi-digin-rison*) when the climate gets milder with only occasional showers from November, the temperature falls rapidly and winter (*Digin* starts). The turbulent river becomes tamed and transparent, water flows down the rivers with all serenity. Mist (*Delumukh*) lies in riverine areas like a white blanket covering their villages.

From February, the spring (*Divi-digin-rison*) begins. The climate warms up gradually with thunder and lightning begetting smart showers alternating with dusty south-western wind flowing at day time. Blooming of flowers fresh in the naked branches of *Kombong* (peach) tree heralded as the arrival of the spring and it has gone into their poetry as thus:

Dermi situnge Tirmeko Tirmanage

Kombong Appune Riyipko Reyabe (Pegu 2011: 13)

(The dermi trees are blowing, the kombong flowers are dancing in the wind)

Simolu (salmolia mulberry cum) and *Modar* (*Erythrina indica*)-two common trees seen in this part of the country begin to bloom painting a red hue in the blue horizon cuckoo

(*Kowung*) and *Keteki* two favourite migratory birds are seen and heard singing in the valley once again from mid-march to May. The spring season is heralded by a colourful festival observed with much jubilation heavy downpour and swelling of rivers re-appears in the scene such completing the full cycle of the year.

Their habitation spreads over eight districts of upper Assam and villages are concentrated along the course of the Brahmaputra, Simen, Burisuti, Tongani, Jiadhal, Subansiri, Gunasuti, Boginodi, Ronganodi, Dikrong, Pichola, Buroi and Jiabhoroli river including the island of Majuli. In the south, their habitation is concentrated along the bank of the Dibru, lower part of Dihing, Disang Dikhow and the Dhansiri river. Only in recent time they have started building their homesteads along the railway line in Jonai, Gohpur and Jamjing areas.

Till the time of the Chinese aggression in 1962, there were no road communication worth the name inside the mainland of the Mising areas. The people from Sadiya used to visit their kith and kins in Majuli or further down by country boats. The North Trunk road from Tezpur to Sonarighat traversing the area was not even graveled and remained suspended most of the time in summer season. The alternative communication from North Lakhimpur to Jorhat via Kamalabari–Neamatighat is no way better, however, the extension of the N.E Frontier Railway up to Jonai Murkongselek across the Subansiri River has opened up great opportunity. But much more remain to be done and desired. Samarjan and Gainodi are two troubled sport of Dhemaji district even today.

The Mising now number around lakhs of people spreading over eight districts of Assam and small part of the plains portion of Arunachal. Statistical account of Assam 1879 reported a good number of them settling themselves at Kaliabor area. A few of

their villages have also been reported in Goalpara district of Assam and Darjeeling district of West Bengal which has not been authenticated yet. Reporting on the census of 1901, James Hastings gave an account of the Mising thus: “Of the Miris, 46,720 persons were enumerated within the British territory of whom about half represented themselves as Hindus and half as animists” (Pegu 2011: 15). The Misings are sturdy people. Their general colour and complexion vary from bright golden to dark brown. The Misings comprises of several loosely knits and apparently indistinguishable groups namely Pagro, Delu, Shayang, Dambuk, Oyan, Moying, Samuguria, Tamar and Somua. The Pagro form the large single group. The Moying probably comes next to them. The Bonkual can be taken with Tamars as they do not constitute a group by themselves, for they are very small numbers. Shayengia, Moyengia often mentioned by some writers are no other than Shayang, Moying and Oyan group.

Situated in ‘one of the great migration routes of mankind’, the region of North – east India, once forming the greater state of Assam, forms a museum of races. The Misings officially recorded as Miri in the list of Scheduled Tribes of India Constitution Order 1950 are originally a hill tribe of the Himalayan region of North eastern India. Either for their better wisdom or in their necessity of cultivable land, the Misings belong in general to the Tibeto-Burman family of the great Mongoloid race. Their original abode was in the upper courses of river Huang-Ho and Yangtse-Kiang in the north west of China and they entered India around 2000 B.C. Some authors believed that the dispersal date was even before the advent of the Nordic Aryans in the soils of India.

Here in the Brahmaputra valley amidst the alien communities and faith. The Misings had to adapt themselves to the new environment and changed social circumstances and thus grew up a new social order along the courses of the Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Ronganodi, Buroi and Bhoroli river in the northern side and the

confluences of Dibru, Dihing, Disang, Dikhow and Dhansiri river in the south. The name “Miri” was given to them evidently by the plains people but they always preferred to be known by their own name ‘Mising’.

However, the generally accepted opinion regarding the origin of the word Miri is the improper intonation of the word. Miri is the improper intonation of the word ‘Miri’ meaning priest prevalent amongst the Adi group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It is also suggested that the word had come to the Adis from Tibet, as in Tibetan language. Mi-means man, Ri-means hills.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The Misings had no alphabet of their own. A story is told on their lost alphabet. *Doying Babu* (The Father of Knowledge) as the story goes, gave alphabets to mankind in the beginning of the world and the Misings had their alphabet written on a deer skin. As time passed due to frequent internecine feud and change of habitation, their ancestors became worried about the safety of the alphabet, and after a prolonged deliberation decided to consume the deer skin, so that none can harm the alphabet at any time.

The language of the Misings is to some extent similar to that of the Adis of the Siyang valley of Arunachal according to the linguistic survey of India. The Mising language belongs to the North-Assam group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. The North-Assam group consists mainly of Miris (Mishmi), Dafla (Nyisi), Abors (Adis) and Mishmi. The Mising language resembles the Adis, but least with the Mishmis. These languages could be given a generic term as ‘Tani Agom or Tani language’. The North Assam group of languages can be termed as ‘Tanis’ as well.

The Mising language has the characteristic of two special high central vowel and 'iu' (as in *Miriu*) addition of which gives a peculiar sound a real tongue-twister for any foreigners. Monosyllabism is not dominant in Mising language though it is one of the main characteristics of Tibeto-Burman languages. It may be possible that monosyllabic base words have been combined with prefixes or suffixes or other words to give the present form. The word 'ager' is cited as an example 'ager' means works, 'ager-ger' can be verb meaning to work, here 'ger' is the base modified by the prefix 'a' and the main base is repeated to bring back that sense. An interesting feature of Mising language is the dropping of the first syllabus in forming compound word from two words having two syllables for example- 'Pagrig' (cotton farm) is the resultant compound word from Sipag (cotton) and 'Arig' (farm) in which both the first syllables 'si' and 'A' are dropped such is the case in 'Ginmur' from 'singi' (Simalu tree) and 'Ginmur' (Simolu cotton). This process has been conveniently used also in differentiation of masculine and feminine genders like "Rokpo" (cock) from "porok" (fowl) and "Abo" (father), Rokne (hen) from porok (fowl) and "Ane" (mother).

It was William Robinson who prepared the first grammar of Miri (Mishing) language and published in the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1849 AD following his preliminary ground works with the Christian missionaries and the British administration made an attempt to bring the 'Miri-Abor' language to be a book in Roman scripts during the turn of the nineteenth century. J.E. Needham, Assistant Political Officer, Sadiya prepared *Outline Grammar of Shaiyang Miri Language* as far back in 1885. J. H. Lorrain undertook a laborious task of compiling the first ever *Dictionary of the Miri-Abor Language* in the year 1907. Besides the Missionaries translated the Bible into Miri-Abor language and prepared the Padam Abor Primer, but for some reason or other, the Adi-Mising were not enthusiastic about the effort of a written works nor to accept

Christianity at the cost of their own primitive faith in ‘Donyi-Polo’ cult eventually turned the Missionaries cold and less enthusiastic about their advance.

The Mising during their sojourn in the plain were influenced by the social climate of the settled communities of the plain and influx of a few local word into the vocabularies was inevitable, the language spoken in the plains thus become fluid, refined and pronunciation somewhat elongated with much modulation, but the language spoken in the hills is rather natural but impressive. The following is the modified Roman script presently used in schools:

(Adopted from-Posang Otsur)

CONSONANTS

K G Ng S J Ny

T D N P B M

Y R L W H

VOWELS

O O; A A:

I I U U;

V V; C C;

[The above vowel C and V are again replaced by E’ and I’ for reasons not fully known to all]

FOLK SONGS

Since time immemorial, their life and culture being centred round the rivers, they crave to dwell by their banks and call them a name beginning with 'si' as "Siyang", Sisseri, Siyom, Simen, Sissi, etc. 'si' being the word for water in the Mising language, these river despite occasional outrages of flood and after made disease provide them with daily necessities like food and water. The alluvial bank of Brahmaputra and the Subansiri enriched by the deposition of fresh manure carried down the river annually yield better products further, these rivers provide them with cheap transport facilities along the river courses and their unsophisticated souls find a vent of expression of inner longing in melodious 'Nitom'. In recent times many writers have classified these folksongs as they like which are confusing in themselves.

FOLK DANCE

Dance is an integral part of Mising socio-cultural life. From time immemorial dance has been occupying a very vital and unique place in their merriment and enjoyment of the Mising people. Dance is an inevitable item in each and every jovial occasion and function of the Mising society. No function of merrymaking is complete without the performance of dance. In a sense song, dance and the Misings are synonymous to each other.

Folk dance being the most colourful component of Mising cultural heritage draws attention of many enthusiasts to go into the depth and details of it through a systematic study. Dance is one of the most important components of human art. The feelings of emotions of men depend on the state of mind. It may be joy or sorrow, happiness or grief that acts on human mind. And to express the inner feelings of emotions men perform stylized rhythmic movements of different parts of the body. Such stylized synchronous rhythmic movements as a whole is called dance.

Dances are performed for various reasons and purposes. Generally dances are performed to express the inner feelings of emotions of joy, happiness, and ecstasy through merry makings during the celebrations and observations of festivals, ceremonies and other jovial occasions. Some dances are performed to demonstrate religious and devotional feelings during performance of rituals. There are also dances that are performed to mark and commemorate certain important events of individual or social life.

Depending on the characteristics and related occasions dances can be grouped as:

- (a) Merry making dance
- (b) Ritualistic dance
- (c) Fertility dance
- (d) Victory dance
- (e) Funeral dance, etc.

However all types of dances may not be found in one society or community. It varies from society to society and community to community. It is to be noted that dance may diffuse from one community to another. Specially recreational dances have the traits of diffusion to other communities whereas the ritualistic and ceremonial dances generally do not percolate to other communities or societies for certain reasons.

Dances are generally accompanied by music in the form of song or tune of musical instruments or both. Music promotes and enhances the performance of dance. Dance without music is dull and dry. So where there is dance there is music. In a sense, dance and music are complimentary to each other.

Dance is usually performed by both men and women. But in some communities women are not allowed to take part in dance. On the other hand some dances are performed only by womenfolk. The history of origin and evolution of dance can be traced as far as back to the beginning of human civilization. Even primitive men had occasions to perform dance in their nomadic life. In many communities there are interesting myths about the origin of dance. However such myths are not found in some communities. Considering all the relevant aspects it is believed that dances have originated and developed in the back drop of the practical life of human societies. And like all other cultural elements dance also undergoes changes and modifications to become more refined, varied, livelier, colourful and delightful with the change of time.

The Misings are an ethnic community under the spectrum of Tani group of people of the Mongoloid race. Characteristically the Mising people are very much fond of merrymaking and enjoyment. This is an inherent trait of them. And in full conformity with this inherent trait the mising people enjoy occasions and perform dances extensively and exuberantly in their socio-cultural life. It is said that the Misings are sons of the nature. Nature is their permanent abode and source of their livelihood. Agriculture is the backbone of their economy. They have been living in the natural environment for centuries together. As a result of this long course of association with the bountiful nature and adoption of fully agricultural life, the dances and other cultures of the Misings have originated and developed on the backdrop of their nature and agriculture based life. It is evident from the characteristics of the Mising folk dances.

It may be mentioned that no mythical story is found regarding the origin of the Mising folk dances. The form, content and features of the dances indicate that their origins are based on real and practical life. Of course, there are some myths regarding the origin of some Mising folk festivals with which some dances are related.

The salient features of Mising folk dances are its group-form and complete uniformity in movement. All the dancers perform dance by displaying the same pattern and postures in a particular sequence being synchronized in rhythm with each other. No individual dancer displays separate style and pattern on a particular note of song or instrumental beat. All must be same. It is one in all and all in one. The dances are performed by the movement of the body and its different parts in different patterns, style and postures according to the type of dance. The dances may be executed by stooping, wobbling and spiral movement of the body, swaying of hip, bending of waist, swinging, etc.

There are number of folk dances in the Mising society. Of them the important and popular ones are:

- (1) Selloya dance
- (2) Lereli dance
- (3) Gumrag dance
- (4) Lotta-so:man dance
- (5) Mibu-Dagnam dance

Selloya dance is one of the most ancient dances of the Misings. The origin of the dance is ascribed to the idea relating to the event of migration of the Mising people from the hills to the plains. As per legend and history, in the bygone days, the Mising people lived in the hilly high lands. In course of time they gradually migrated down from the high lands to the plains. The hilly places were studded with deep forests and mighty jungles. There was no easy passage through them. There was no path worth the name to move anywhere. So while the Misings migrated down the hills, they had to proceed

through narrow uneven risky path. In that difficult journey the male folk took the lead and the women folk followed them. The view in the front was not clear because of the interposing trees, bushes and unevenness of path. So the womenfolk had to enquire about which way and direction they were to follow. The male folk in the lead replied telling them the way and direction, they had to follow. This act of asking and replying between the women folk and the men folk took place through out the course of the journey of migration. And this dramatic playing took the form of song and dance sequences. And with the systematic arrangement it developed to “Selloya Dance”.

The dance is called “Selloya dance” because of the predominance of the term “Selloya” pronounced in the beginning of the dance. Selloya is an address of endearment. The songs, in the dance “Sa:se Sa:sa Selloya” means ‘O dear brother’ and O:ye selloya means ‘O dear sister’(Doley 2012: 8). These two lines of verse of the accompanying songs are repeated as refrain by the dancers is performed. It may be noted that although the dance is called Selloya as a whole there are also additional dance components of short duration with their own special forms. The distinctive feature of Selloya group of dance is that there is no use of any musical instrument except the songs without accompaniment of instrument.

Selloya is a group dance performed by young boys and girls. The dance is executed in the following way. About 15 numbers of boys and equal numbers of girls take parts in the dance. The participants get arrayed with their traditional garments. The boys wear – Gonro ugon (Traditional loin cloth-white in colour with simple designs), Mibu Galuk (Sleeveless jacket with colourful designs), Dumer (Cloth used as turban in the head), Jinrek (cloth tied in the waist)

The girls wear-Leke ege (Traditional petty coat), Leke gasor (Traditional shawl), Gero (Specially designed cloth wrapped at the waist covering the knee), Laktung galug (Short sleeved blouse). The girls also make up themselves with-Dumpun (Flower decoration in the hair-buns), Lakpun (Flower bracelet in the hands), Rupun earring made of reed (takpor), Doksori (Necklace made of beads) (dogne). Being dressed in traditional attire the boys form a row at one side holding each other with interlocking hands on the backs. The girls also form row in the same manner. The two rows take their respective positions. The boys take the leading position and the girls take the next position. Thus both the rows fall in a same line.

Lereli is an ancient dance of the Misings. In ancient times the dance was performed in the sandy surface of river banks in the moonlit night of the autumn season in a calm and quite atmosphere by the women folk and young girls. However, it is also performed in the courtyard of the dwelling house during leisure time at early night. The Mising people lead their simple life on the banks of the ever flowing rivers. In rainy season the banks are overflowed by river water. Sometimes the river belts are extensively flooded in the summer. As the autumn season approaches, water recedes leaving behind a white sandy surface on the banks. The wide open sandy surface glistening in the moonlit night of the autumn creates unique scene on the site. This picturesque beauty on the sandy banks generates deep sense of solitude and craziness in the minds of the people that come under the spell. This sense of solitude prompts to express the inner feelings of mind with a song *Le:lereliya* being accompanied by dance synchronizing with the rhythm of the song. The dance is so titled for the eminence of the word 'Lereli' repeatedly sung as refrain through out the dance.

LOTTA SO-MAN DANCE

Lotta So: man is a group of various dances with variegated forms and patterns. It is not a dance of one kind but combination of different dances rather. As the name itself implies the dances of this group are related to *lotta*. In Mising *Lotta* means courtyard and *So:man* means light hearted mirthful dances. Each and every traditional dwelling house of the Misings possesses a *lotta* in its front ground. It is an area with smooth surface with open space. This is the entry site into the house. The *lotta* usually remains free. However some families use it as the site of pounding rice with their *Ki:par* (pestle) and doing works temporarily. On this open and free *lotta* dances are performed on some occasions and they are called *Lotta So:man* (courtyard dance).

The Mising being agrarian people keep themselves busy in the works of agricultural production and day to day activities. In such leisure time they perform recreational dances on the *lotta* for pleasure and merriment. There is no particular festival for performing *Lotta So: man* dance. Of course there are some occasions on which the *Lotta So:man* dances are performed. Such occasions are (1) *Du:ne ginam* (a custom of the misings to visit the home of the bride's parents by a newly married couple) (2) *Midang* (marriage ceremony) (3) *Okum gi:sang* (house warming) (4) *Mibo mimbir-ya:me:so:man bonam* (Dance with visiting guest of young boys and girls from other village) and also other jovial occasions occurring in the society and families of the village.

The *Lotta So: man* dance is performed by the young boys and the girls and also by the married men and women. However it depends on what type of dance is being performed.

GUMRAG DANCE

The most popular and important folk dance of the Mising is the *Gumrag Dance*. It is performed during the celebration of *Ali-Aye-Ligang* the community festivals of the Misings. The festival is traditionally observed and celebrated on the first *Budhbar* (Wednesday) of the month of Phaguna of Hindu calendar year, the time of onset of spring season. *Ali-A: ye-Ligang* being an agricultural festival, the *Gumrag* dance performed on this occasion is naturally blended with essence of agricultural life and activities of agrarian Mising society.

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FOLKLORE

The term 'folklore' was first suggested by William Thoms (1946), a British antiquarian. In coining the term for the first time Thomas had a very clear idea in his mind as to what folklore means. It meant by the words and phrases such as manner, custom, observation,

superstition, ballads, and fading legends and the like of the people. Different scholars have defined folklore in different ways from time to time.

Folklore is the traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that are disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioural example. Every group with a sense of its own identity, shares, as a central part of that identity, folk traditions the things that people traditionally believe (planting practices, family traditions and other elements of world view), do (dances, make music, sew cloth), know (how to build an irrigation dam, how to nurse an ailment, how to prepare barbecue), make (architecture, art, craft) and say (personal experience stories, riddles, song, lyrics). The word 'folklore' was first coined in 1846 and began as a study of antiquities in the public mind. It appears largely to be viewed as either a subject for scholars as vaguely as something to do with ancient Greek myths and legends, as others might associate folklore with folksongs, with ancient ballads, with native Indian tales or with other stories.

Folklore is all those things but it is much more and great deal of it relates to our daily lives. It is songs, parodies, riddles, jokes and shaggy-dog stories. Folklore is the body of expressive culture including tales, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs and so forth within a particular population, beliefs, customs and so forth comprising the traditions of that culture, sub-culture or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The academic and usually ethnographic study of folklore is sometimes called folkloristics. Folklore can contain religious or mythic elements; it equally concerns itself with the sometimes mundane traditions of everyday life. Folklore is a term which refers to the collective oral traditions and beliefs of a culture. It encompasses myths, legends, jokes, proverbs, tales, fairy tales, superstitions and of course folklores. Oral traditions constantly undergo

change because of their nature. As stories are repeated people embellish or alter them, sometimes changing the content to fit with new ideas.

One of the striking features that mark out man from other animals is that human beings have culture whereas other animals do not have. But it is also a fact that natures of all cultures are not the same. Certain cultures are complex with advanced technology while others are simple with low-level technology. A dividing line between the complex, high-technology cultures and the simple, low technology culture is provided by the art of reading and writing: some cultures are literate and others are non-literate. But so far as folklore is concerned, its presence is ubiquitous in all kinds of societies, literate or non-literate.

Folklore is one of the important parts that go to make up the culture of any given people. There is no culture which does not include folklore. No group of people, however simple their technology, has ever been discovered which does not employ some form of folklore. Because of this and because the same tales and proverbs may be known to both, folklore is a bridge between literate and non-literate of societies. Folklore is not only in terms of the literate, non-literate polarity but also in terms of other polarities, such as, between the outdated and the modern, between the rural and the urban, between upper stratum and the lower stratum, and between the peasantry and the industrial workers, etc. According to the old orthodox view, folklorists were regarded as a band of antiquarians dealing with survival and bygones that did not fit in with the modern times. And also folk society and folklore were believed to be confined only to the backward rural areas and the unlettered peasant and tribal societies. There was, according to this view no folk in the urban and industrial centres and hence there was no folklore in such places. But gradually there has been a sea change in the attitude concerning who are the folk and what constitutes folklore.

According to the new revised concept, the folk society is not necessarily made up of the rural illiterate peasant mass or tribal mass but may signify “anonymous masses of tradition-oriented people” (*Bulletin of Folklore Research Department*, 1997-98: 26) anywhere. So there are folk groups as much in towns as and cities and industrial centres as in remote villages. Alan Dundas, a contemporary luminary in the firmament of folklore studies says: “The term ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is it could be a common occupation, language or religion but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it call its own....A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of tradition belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity” (Dundas in Dundas 1965:2). Also, the conceptualization of folklore has veered away from its association with “hidden, forgotten and backward culture”. The folklorists are still concerned with material traditionally transmitted from earlier times, but then, all folklore is not necessarily past-oriented. Folklore has its own contemporary manifestations and relevance. As Richard Dorson, one of the greatest folklorists of recent times observes, much of folklore is “keyed to the here and now, to the urban centres, to the industrial revolution, to the issues and philosophies of the day” (Dorson 1978:23).

In fact, folklore is where tradition is. But tradition, it must be understood, doesn’t stand for dogmatic and blind adherence to the past and its ways. What Sydney Hartland has said more than a century ago has lost none of its validity: Tradition is always being created on new traditions of modern origin wherever found are as much within our [folklorists] province as the ancient ones (Hartland 1885:117). Thus folklore plays the mediating role between the past and the present, between the old-fashioned and the

modern, between the rural and urban, between the present society and the industrial society and between the literate and the literate and the nonliterate. Significantly, the progress of technology-although adversely affecting the traditional context and texture of folklore-has not sounded its death knell, which was thought to be inevitable, rather often it has in a manner given a new lease of life to folklore and in many cases added wings to do.

All this is particularly relevant in the present Indian context. Urbanization and Industrialization have made rapid advances, particularly in very recent times, but the Indian society even now is basically dominated by the rural and peasant milieu where tradition rules the roost, keeping pace with the advances of modern civilization that folklore has kept itself alive and kicking.

Coming to the Indian scene we find that the oral-written continuum has been very much a part of the Indian cultural heritage since very early times. The entente between the two has been an outstanding feature of the Indian cultural milieu through the ages. The Indian literary story-tradition is the oldest in the world. There are the technical terms about such folklore forms as tales, songs, ballads etc. as is found in ancient Indian literature. The importance of the ancient Indian collection of tales known as *Brihakattha* is realized when one explores such traditions.

The Vedic people and especially the Buddhists and Jains made the tale subservient to the religious doctrine. *Brihatkatha* presents the tale in its purest form. The secular tale stood on its own legs for the first time (1958:17). *The Panchatantra* which has played an equally great role in the spread of India tales has, inspite of its literary character, had vital links with the oral tradition. It is believed to be collection of selected

oral animal tales retold and written down with structural and other changes so as to make them suitable for easy-to-grasp moral and political lessons meant for princes.

The role of the *Jataka* cycle of stories in enriching the tale repertoires of different countries is also well-known. Some of the other works that deserve mention in this connection are the *Vetalapanchavimshati*, the *Vikramacharitra* and the *Sukasapati*, etc. Thus the roles played by literary works in Sanskrit and Pali as well as their translations and reworkings have been long recognised in learned circles. In India the literary tradition has not been confined to Sanskrit and Pali alone. There have been a constant flow of literary works in the different forms of Prakrit and later on in the various regional vernaculars.

One of the earliest Sanskrit works believed to have been composed in the Assam region is the *Hastyaurveda* 5th-6th century BC by Palakapyaṃuni who belonged to Lauhiyadesha, one of the names by which Assam was known in ancient times. Assam being famous for the elephants, both wild and tamed, since the remote past, it is a safe guess that at least some oral lore had passed into the written work.

Two other Sanskrit works, the *Kalika Purana* (10th -11th century) and the *Yogini Tantra* of Saktism with the famous Kamakhya shrine at its centre, are veritable store houses of myths and legends that grew out of the local milieu. The 14th century Assamese version of the *Ramayana* by Madhava Kandali is claimed to be a short but faithful rendering of the great Sanskrit epic. But even here one notices one or two episodes that do not appear in the original and are believed to have been taken from the oral tradition. The same is true of most other literary version in verse and prose. There are also a whole lot of folksongs, ballads and tales that must have been inspired by the

written *Ramayana* literature-not only in the Assamese language but also in some of the tribal languages of Assam.

A remarkable thing about verbal folklore around the world is that societies geographically far removed from one another possess material which have strikingly common features. This is especially true in respect of traditional narratives like myths, legends, and folktales. Allegedly the fictional overtone of oral folk narrative diminishes and limits its realism. This allegation, popular or otherwise, is not devoid of logic. It must be admitted that a tale or myth does not consist entirely of elements of reality rather, they are significant for the lack of those elements and this lack of correspondence with description reality offers special delight. Logic of realism is not considered a requirement by story-tellers. They make the tales a deliberate poetic fiction. Normal characters, actions and situations are, perhaps, purposefully avoided. Folk narratives are distinguished by an indifference to what we call normal. The types in oral narratives are different from the typical characters, typical settings situations, and the formula of realism in modern literature. The term 'folk' was defined to be group of people who constituted the lower stratum of the society (Dundas 1978:2).

When we speak of culture in anthropological term, we comprehend it as a system, where in the material and non-material values are interlocked. For example an aesthetic object when dissected by using anthropological probes, it becomes simply an expression of the resultant of the interaction of material and non-material variables. The variables get codified in symbolic form and the codes are transmitted from one generation to another. This is how the socio-facts or artefacts continue to exist over time and space.

Folklore is commonly considered as the lore of the illiterate rural folk. Of course, a few specialized folklorists have made attempts to define the term folklore. Their attempts in defining folklore no doubt have contributed a lot to the domain of folkloristics. But one should be aware that though the term folklore is comparatively new creation, nonetheless the materials of folklore are as mankind (Handoo 1989:1).

The Misings are one of the plain tribes of the Brahmaputra valley and recognized as a scheduled tribe under the constitution of India by their traditional habitat. The Misings are riparian and they are mostly found inhabiting the areas near rivers. Riparian life style, though once upon a time, was considered to be ideal for a farming community, it has been a boon as well as a curse for the Misings after the devastating earthquake of August 1950. Extensive erosion, frequent floods damaging crops have been now recurring problems outweighing the benevolence gifted by the floods in the form of irrigation and enhancing fertility of cultivable areas of the people. Experiences have taught the Misings to look for alternative spots for fresh settlements. From the days of jhum cultivation picked up in the Brahmaputra valley, the Misings have traversed a quite distance in their socio-economic and cultural life. We confine our efforts to focus quite briefly on factors affecting economic progress of the Mising as the socio-cultural aspects are dealt with separately in detail.

LAND

In the past there was plenty for cultivation. Even absence of artificial manure was never felt as the agriculturalists could rotate the areas of cultivation at the interval of a couple of years. Moreover annual inundation would have brought with it alluvium and leaving the fields of cultivation fertile for a bountiful harvests when the flood recedes. The situation has now changed and the change has not always been for good. As has

been indicated, hundreds of Mising villages have been affected by erosion and devastating floods of the Subansiri and the Brahmaputra particularly after the earthquake of 1950. People lost their ancestral abodes and cultivable land while they got themselves re-habilitated in areas not known to them, land was scarce and they had to settle for a relatively limited areas at least compared to their past possession. In many areas of rehabilitation, the agriculturists fully depend on the mercy of nature as there is no irrigation facility at all. As a result, the farmers have to do with the limited areas of land for cultivation and without rotation of the crop fields.

Another obstacle which appears among the Mising villagers is the near absence of settled land patta. This may be due to lack of serious efforts on the part of the concerned government department to complete the task of surveying every inch of land under possession of cultivators of the state of Assam and issuing patta to all the possessors to grant legal rights and ownership. Though the amount of revenue may not be sizeable for the government, proper settlement of land possession would result in numerous positive aspects to the society. Apart from the government apathy, lack of knowledge about the benefits accruing from periodic patta land holding on the part of the farmers led most of them believe that their possession of land under their cultivation is good enough.

But some of them realized the hard reality of their life when they went to courts or government offices for official work involving worth of their possession, and they were told that their land without periodic patta was not acceptable to the courts and government officers. In many cases even bank loans are not extended as simple equitable mortgage cannot be created on land without periodic patta.

FOREST POLICY AND THE MISING:

Many flood affected people have sought rehabilitation in areas close to forest areas some of which are considered to be reserved forest. On a number of occasions, villagers of such locations suffer from the consequences of eviction. Because of unsettled nature of land, occupation, the people cannot enjoy the fruits of settled land and they live a miserable life. Sometimes the villagers who had so long been living closer to nature depend on forests as a source of their fuel for cooking. The people cannot afford the luxury of Kerosene stove and LPG.

URBANISATION

According to 2011 census 1.04% of the total Mising population is shown as urban and the rest 98.96% are rural. The process of urbanization has really been taking place in the Mising populated areas and if so is there any impact of it on the quality of life among their people. We don't have survey report on the process of urbanization in the Mising populated areas. However places like Dhemaji, Jonai, Gogamukh, Kamalabari having a sizeable Mising population in and around these administrative centers along with other communities inhabiting the areas have been considered as townships with certain facilities such as provision of electricity, roads, limited number of nursing homes in addition to government provided dispensaries, educational institutions including a few privately managed schools, limited sports facilities, rades and business establishments etc. Whether the Misings are availing the business opportunities thrown up by the growth of the townships, the answer is sadly a negative one due to less Mising traders.

Most of the Mising people of the township are government employees. The products of Mising weavers particularly garments (dress materials of various types produced by handloom weaving) are available but these weavers are deprived of their benefit.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE MISING TRIBE

The Misings form an integral part of the Assamese population. They are found mostly in the districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sibsagar and Darrang. Ethnically the Misings belong to the Tibeto-Burmese group of Mongoloid stock and originally they belong to the same group comprised of Nyishi, Minyongs, Pa:dams, Pasis etc. who are found in the districts of Siyang and Subansiri. The census report of Assam 1881 states that Miris, Daphla's and Abors are names which have been given by the Assamese to these sections of one and the same race inhabiting the mountains between the Assam valley and Tibet. In fact, the Miris of the Brahmaputra valley and Daphla's and Abors of Arunachal Pradesh have more or less identical religious beliefs, socio-cultural system and speak the same dialect. It is said that the Miris of the Brahmaputra valley and Daphla's and Abors of Arunachal Pradesh have more or less identical religious beliefs socio-cultural system and speak the same dialect.

It is said that the Miris, prior to their migration to the plains of Assam about eight centuries ago, used to inhabit the range of hills known as the Miri Hills in the western part of Siyang district in Arunachal. The Misings maintain their distinctive socio cultural system and speak their own dialect. However, in respect of religion they regard themselves as Hindu but maintain some of their traditional rituals, beliefs and practices which can simply be called tribal form of religion.

THE MISING SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

The Mising constitute a major section of the tribal population of North-East India inhabiting the region from time immemorial. The Mising people, along with other tribes of the region, were known to the early Aryans as the Cinas, Kiratas, Danavas, Asuras and Mlecchas (Nath 1985:1).

Transition in the social life of the major tribes of Assam, has been marked since the coming into the contact with political and social systems of the 16th -17th centuries. Assam, had been influenced by the process of 'Sanskritisation' which had already begun smearing the tribal societies of the Brahmaputra valley.

RELATION WITH THE CHUTIAS

When the name 'Donyi Pumi' came into being, the Misings by then came in close contact with the chutias who had a kingdom at Sadiya in the upper extremity of Assam. Thus emerging out of hoary legend, they entered into the watershed of Ahom history. The period estimated to be around 13th century AD. After a series of battle, culminating in defeat of the Chutia King (1523 AD) the invading Ahom King Suhungmung (Dihingia Raja) annexed the Chutia Kingdom and put it under an Ahom ruler known as Sadiya khowa Gohain, Nitaipal, the last Chutia King ruling at the time of Ahom invasion, fled away with his principal queen Sadhani to escape the disgrace of being captured and both immolated themselves by jumping from the summit of the Chandangiri hills into the deep gorge below. But according to another 'Buronji', Nitipal was killed by the Ahoms after a chase to the Chandangiri hills and Sahani committed suicide by jumping into the gorge below when the king was killed.

The surviving members of the Chutia royal families and Chutia noble families were deposed of their ranks and placed all over Assam, to blot out the possibility of any future up-rising. During the days of disruption, a few Deuri-Chutia families took shelter in the neighbouring Mising villages to escape the disgrace of being molested by the Ahom and disguised themselves as Pegu or Doley. But there is no evidence of the Mising ever marrying Deuri and Chutia then. The other Chutia deported to Ahom area had intermarried with the Ahom. This fact provided evidence to the formation of Ahom, Chutia, etc.

The etymology of the word Chutia Miri applied to the Pagro group of Misings suggest certain bearing upon their social relation during their sojourn around Sadiya. But this relationship was not necessarily matrimonial. Many authors are of the opinion that the Ahoms applied the term to Misings living within the Chutia kingdom to differentiate them from other 'Miris' living elsewhere. It is not surprising that British writer Dalton had some reservations about the origin of the 'Chutia Miri'. Dalton wrote in 1872: "with exception to the clan Chutia Miri, the traditions of all of them take back to the Dihong valley" (Pegu 2011: 47). But W.B. Brown ridiculed Dalton's opinion of mixing the Miris with the Chutia as imaginery and said that they are so called as they came down from the hills at the time of Chutia rule. Later observations are in accordance with the legends and belief of the Mising of the valley. But there is no truth on the assumption that Chutia Miris were offspring of Chutia born of 'Miri' women captured during a war between the Misings and Chutias. In the first place the legends never tell of a war between the Chutias and the Misings, nor a defeat thereof. However, according to one Buronji as pointed out by L. Devi, one Lukteng Chutia once plundered two Miri villages Dimow and Rupia at Dizmore area and captured some boats belonging to the Ahom king. But these Miri villages were not Mising village as recorded by a Meckenzie in 1884.

They were in fact 'Hill Miri' girls captured during the operation. There is no clan amongst the Misings which goes by that term Miri-Chutia.

The Chutia Jatir Buronji (2007) edited by S.L. Baruah and D. Nath carries an incidence of a Chutia girl given to a Miri boy who had a ring worm in his body. Even more of such stray incidences could not be ruled out. But exceptions only prove the existence of a rule. The cryptic remark of Sir Edward Gait made his *History of Assam* Chutia legends are full of all sort of impossible absurdities were not an exaggeration. This humble author also came across such a seemingly absurd story about the chutia princess. The story claimed that the chutia girl given to a Miri boy was none other than the Chutia princess.

The story goes as: "The name of the Miri boy was Nurai and had ringworm in the body. Though she was bound by the promise of her father, she refused to marry the boy only because of his ringworm. After a 'prayocitta' he was given the name Nitai (later Nitaipal). The story went on to say that Sadhani was pregnant at the time of war and such she didn't kill herself, nor killed by the Ahoms. Killing a pregnant mother was considered a heinous crime by all human society. Therefore she was taken to the hills by her relative. She gave birth to a boy there and her offspring became the Chutia Miri" (Pegu 2011: 48)

By victory over the chutias, the Ahoms succeeded in bringing the entire stretch of land from Sadiya to Subansiri river on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra under their influence. In doing so, the Ahoms, after a few sporadic conflict persuaded the Misings also to come to certain friendly terms. It is said that in an unwritten treaty, they agree to help the Ahoms in subduing the tribes of the northern hills who frequented with surprise squirmish along the Ahom borders. With that end in view, twelve leading men

from the group and ten from the rest of the late comers were selected as ‘Gam’ or chief during the rule of Pratap Singha. The ‘Gam’ hills or plains acted as spokesman or political agent of the Ahom kings as well of the British.

The downward move of the Misings from foot hills was initiated partly by the repugnant relation that grew between the Misings and a section of Pasi-Minyong and partly by an urgency of more cultivated land. It may be recalled that the Misings helped the Padams by carving out big boats to get across the Siyang and in doing so they contributed greatly to their victory over the Minyongs of the kepsi simad group. Since then a section of the Minyong began irritating the Misings deliberately by stealing away cloths and utensils when they were away at their farms. Disgusted with such neighbours the peace-loving Misings are living in and around it.

BURMESE CONFRONTATION

The Burmese invasion of Assam began first at the instance of Badan Chandra Borphukan, who was involved in feud. In a series of invasion culminating in the Yandaboo treaty in 1826 AD, the length and breadth of Assam was plundered and massacred by the Burmese atrocity. The Misings had by then settled themselves in northern bank of the Brahmaputra, alert in mind and body with awareness of encountering danger from any corner.

MURKONG SELEK

The story linked with the origin of the name ‘Murkongselek’ provides an interesting reading. A few Mising villages lying in the north bank of the Brahmaputra fell victim to an imminent attack of the Burmese popularly known as ‘Maan’. As the invading force was much greater in number, an open fight would be of no avail and such

they decided to stage a gurrila war. Despatching immediately a few smart persons to keep watch from a tree top, all the able men and woman went on an ambush and completely thwarted the ‘maan’. Two-third of the invading force was killed in the spot, while a few met watery grave in trying to get across the Brahmaputra and a few were enslaved.

It is said that gold and silver ornaments looted from several Assamese villages by the Burmese were found scattered all over the place and people came across many gold and silver coins and ornaments in later years. Therefore the place came to be known as Murkongselek from ‘Murkong’ (silver) and ‘Seleg’ (field). This Murkongselek area where a plywood factory was originally situated became an industrial centre during the British days and people from different corners of the country working as engineers and labourers found the place worthy of its name. The Misings who owned elephants had a good time, for the elephants were the easiest and cheapest means of transporting huge ‘hollock’ timbers for the company. By twist of tongue it became Murkonselek.

RELATION WITH AHOMS

The traditional ‘Buronjis’ of the Ahom period are bound in accounts of heroic deeds of the Misings. Most chroniclers recorded the historic events evidently from their own view only. But they have not maintained the distinction between the ‘hill Miri’ and ‘Plain Miris’ obviously for lack of proper knowledge of their origin and habitat as already discussed.

The earliest mention of the word Miri was found as stated earlier in an Upo-Purana composed in between thirteenth to fourteenth century. According to this history, Subinpha the grandson of Chao Sukapha became king in 1203 Saka (1281 AD) and

married Hinguli the grand daughter of Chaopang Banduk who was a Miri. Hinguli was made the principal queen and she was quite intelligent to make her grand father a Borgohain. It has not been possible to ascertain the clan and group of Mising to which company banduk belonged. However, this historical record provide an impeccable evidence of cordial relation between Miris and Ahoms.

It is on record that a small group of Mising came down to the plains bereft of their families and married women of the plains offered by the Ahom king as a reward of their bravery in killing some deadly snakes. They were given settlement in a place called Samguri and they had come ultimately to be known as 'Samuguria Miris'. There were given settlement in a place called samguri and they had come ultimately to be known as 'Samuguria Miris'. There had been sporadic conflicts between the Misings and the Ahoms since the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-41AD). But it took the gigantic proportion during Gadadhar Singha's reign. *Puroni Asom Buranji* states: "In 1683 AD in the month of Sravan (July-August), the Sadiya Miris set fire to the house of Kanu Gohain (i.e., Ahom Governor of Sadiya) and burnt to death his wife, children and inmates. The Miris also killed two hundred Assamese subjects of the neighbouring villages" (Pegu 2011: 61).

Their defeat at the hands of the king Gadadhar Singha's army convinced the Misings of the futility of continuing the fight against the Ahom sovereign. Hence, they not only ceased their hostility but established a friendly relation and rendered valuable service to the Ahom kings. One of the descendants of Miri-Handique family was appointed as Sadiya Khowa-Gohain during the reign of Gadadhar Sinha. Another Miri Handique stood by Lachit Borphukan at saraighat war and called to come out at the critical moment of the Saraighat war Lachit came out and saved Assam.

DWELLINGS: The Misings build their houses by the bank of a river perpendicular to its main stream. A typical Mising village consists of some 20 to 30 houses built on bamboo platform raised about 5 feet above the ground supported by rows of wooden posts. A single house often contains a family of 30 to 40 persons living commonly in one long rectangular hall varying from 50 to 150 ft in length and 15 to 20 feet wide. A typical Mising house has several fireplaces ‘Meram’ separated by half partitions. The spacious verandah in front is called ‘Tunggeng’ where the alien guests are entertained. A small verandah in the back is left for exclusive use of the house-wives. Some villages in Majuli and Subansiri area consists of nearly 100 houses. There are two main doors ‘Yabgo’, one in front and the other in the back ‘Yapkur’ with only one or two minor outlets in the sides. But no regular window is provided. ‘Meram’ is a square about 3 half ft x 3 ft, in size made of 2 thick wooden frame 6 inches placed high on the bamboo “Picho” filled with soil.

The evergreen forests around their habitat have varieties of plants, climbers and trees which thrive on high humid climate. Most important forest products are canes [calamus], bamboo [bambusa tulda] and trees like Nahor [mesua ferrea], hollong [diptero carpus macracarpus], mekai [shorea assamica], hillock [terminalia myriocarpa], simalu [salmonalia malburycum], Bola [morus lavigate], Titachampa [michelia champasia], Gamari [Gimelia arborra], Gandh sarai [cinna momum] etc. Thatch, bamboo [‘jati’ and ‘bholuka’], cane, wooden posts and varieties of reed like ekra, and khagari, are used as housing materials. Wooden posts used are mostly Nangor [Nahor], Takkir [Urium], Sillok [hillock], uwoi [pines] drawn from the neighbouring forests.

Thatch bamboo, canes and reeds grew abundantly in the alluvial soil of the Brahmaputra and Subansiri valley, bettlenut trees grew abundantly in the alluvial soil of the Brahmaputra and subansiri valley. Bettlenut trees are common sight in Mising

village. The houses built on platforms look elegant when constructed with meticulous care and save the dwellers from the hazards of flood that visit their homesteads annually.

THEIR FARMS

Misings are essentially agriculturists, though in early part of their migration they had occasions to use their age-old poisoned arrow and nomadic inclinations. However, reaching the fertile expanse of the Brahmaputra valley .They concentrated their efforts in ‘Ahu’ cultivation which occupy a very significant place in their socio-cultural life. Their farms are usually located beyond half a mile away from the village gradually clearing up the jungle centrifugally. As theft was almost unknown in the past, they used to build the granaries near the farms enclosed by a fencing to keep the deer and cattle out. And the farming implements were left at their respective places to be worked with next day. Lately they build their granaries close to the living houses.

Today, ploughing either by a pair of bullock or buffaloes, is the principal means of cultivation. However, hifting cultivation [jhuming] the mainstay in the past is almost extinct. ‘Jhuming’ was extensively practiced when there was abundant forest land. Till recent times, they cultivated Ahu, Mustard seed, sweet potato, cucumber, ginger, pulse, maize, etc. But now, they have taken to ‘Sali’, paddy, cultivation also in summer. If the weather is favourable, the farms promise them a good harvest and when their green treasury turns golden yellow by autumn, the farmers joy know no bounds. The paddy fields become the centre of activity, the young boys and girls come to the fields before the day break to keep the birds and cattle away. Young men and girls in groups work hard with gleeful enthusiasm and pleasant excitement humming all melody.

Ahu cultivation starts in the month of February with a sowing ceremony called ‘Ali-aye-ligang’ and in gathering of harvest are completed by the month of August. Sali

paddy cultivation begins in the months of May and harvesting last till the end of December or beyond. In earlier days, a plot of land was kept especially for cotton farming [pagrig]. The indigenous cotton was much in demand for spinning and weaving. 'Mirijim' [gadoo] a special type of cotton rug is used by the Misings.

INTER-TRIBAL TRADE

It may be noted that for a long time during pre-colonial period, especially since 16th century, Misings managed to keep themselves the entire trade of the Ahoms with the Adis. Moreover Misings also acted as the intermediaries for the Ahom. The Ahom accounts, therefore, refer to Misings [Miri] as 'go-between' of the Adis and the traders of Assam. This is how the Assamese term 'Miri', meaning intermediary, has had its origin. The Adis obtained from Misings salt, eri cloths or cloths of Assamese manufacture or any articles brought by Misings. The Misings, in return, procured from the Adis beads, daos [knives], metal cooking utensils [copper pots], some of which were imported from Tibet. Thus, to fulfill the deficiencies of certain articles, Misings and the Adis had resorted to inter-tribal trade during pre-colonial period.

WEAVING CULTURE

Assam is a homeland to a large number of ethnic tribes and groups of people having a rich and variegated folk traditions and culture. The Misings are one of such ethnic groups having their own rich traditions and weaving industry is one of those distinctive features. Like other Mongoloid communities, the different varieties of cotton, silk, muga production and weaving art are entirely carried out by women section of the society.

By dint of hard work, knowledge, experience, imagination and skill, the Missing women can weave varieties of cloths for use to all other members of the family, having

designs of artistic beauty. The stars, the moon in the sky, the flowers of different varieties of nature, pictures of birds, and animals, historical monuments and so forth, are very beautifully designed in their looms.

FOLKTALES

The Mising community has its own traditional stories, which are handed down from one generation to other. In the process, it gains in variety inventiveness from one narration to another and from one age to the next without causing much damage to the original characters and ideas. They have a legacy of rich and varied folk tales and story telling is a popular pastime. These folktales can be classified into various types. There are stories about birds, plants, family life, love and romance, humour, jealousy, cruelty, wickedness, magic, etc. Certain folktales have a combination of myths and legends. Nature inspired their imagination with added culture and including their folktales and folk literature. The folktales reflect their character, tradition, religious beliefs and social customs. After night fall, the children gather round their grandfather and hear the off repeated stories. In the grazing fields, the boys sit together and recite stories.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

They have democratic social structure in common with the Adivis of Arunachal. The Kebang a committee of the village elders, with one member from each family, was supreme (till the time the panchayat system was introduced in Assam) in all matters- social and religious within a village. Complaints regarding anything, social and religious within a village, Complaint regarding anything, social or otherwise are brought to the notice of the village 'Kebang'. The Kebang could try, deliver judgement and punish the offenders depending uponnnnnn the nature of the offences, Punishments ranged from

simple reprimand, imposition of fine in cash or kind to bodily thrashing and ex-communication.

Besides Kebang, there is another important institution called 'Mimbir-Yame' or a committee of the young men and girls. This 'Mimbir-Yame' renders help to persons in need within the village like constructing a house, weeding paddy, clearing jungles or harvesting. The family in need request the 'Mimbir-Yame' a few days ahead by delivering packet of betel-nuts giving the details of the service require. The family such helped entertains them with food and drink after the work is done, and pay them a nominal cash or kind. By the cash and kind such collected for a period of 5 years, they celebrated 'Porag' festival generally after the ingathering of the harvest.

A Mising family is headed by the father or the eldest son in absence of his father, or the mother, if the sons are minors. The family consists of the husband, wife and their children. The properties inherited are managed by the father or the eldest son in the absence of his father. Daughters or sisters given out in marriage have no claim over any property of the father. They have a patriarchal and patrilocal society. Though their women were in the past debarred from attending 'Kebang' and certain ritual functions like 'Dobur-iii', they are treated with kind regards like a delicate but valuable company deserving love and protection.

FESTIVALS

'Ali-aye-ligang' and 'Porag' are the important festivals of the Misings. The derivative meaning of the Ali-aye-ligang is Ali (roots), aye (fruits), ligang (sowing). Though they were warriors they were agriculturists since time immemorial. Whether jhuming or ploughing was employed, 'Ahu' paddy was their principal product. And such the oncoming of the Ahu season is marked by the celebration of Ali-aye-ligang, a

festival of prayers, and dance with the symbolic sowing of handful of Ahu seed into the womb of mother earth is performed. A group of villages celebrated the festival sometimes in the month of falgun and chaitra of Indian calendar. But, since 1956, the first Wednesday of the months of falgun is fixed as the auspicious day and celebrated all over with much enthusiasm and merry-making, on the day of celebration the whole community is infested with pleasant excitement. Brisk preparation of food and drink with good variety of rice soaked in water for sometime and wrapped in *Talling* leaves into sizeable packets (purang) is boiled.

‘Porag’ is a festival of prayers and feast and executed with elaborate programme spread over three days. The ‘Mimbir-Yame’ or the organisation of the young adult bears all the drudgery of making the festival a success. Because of its expensive and elaborate arrangements, Porag is celebrated at an interval of five years to a decade. The Murong-a public hall is newly constructed for the occasion. The word ‘Murong’ used widely to denote the dormitories is Mising in origin meaning a public hall.

The Murong is built in a centrally placed open meadow with its axis lying parallel to the Subansiri or the Brahmaputra river. It has a bamboo platform raised about five feet above ground with strong supporting wooden posts and beams, but without walls around. The thickly thatched roof is supported by two rows of wooden posts in both sides with one big central post called ‘Gaikunta’. The wooden posts are decorated with wood carving. The beams made of matured ‘Simolu’ are also decorated with various wood carving. In the year when the ‘Porag’ is held, the ‘Mimbir-Yame’ keep themselves busy well ahead with elaborate preparation. Young men are engaged in constructing, decorating the Murong and in collecting fire woods and other necessities.

The Mibu of Misings was the persons conversant and eloquent in verses of ‘aabangs’. The Mibus were not born, but they are gifted individuals possessing rare eloquence and power of observation developed since childhood. The term ‘Mibu’ has been derived from the word ‘Mi’ (man) and ‘abu’ (father) amongst Misings. The Mibu were believed to have certain spiritual power of looking into the dark future and could communicate with the souls of their departed forefathers.

According to a legend Abotani (father) the first man married ‘Yasi’ the daughter of Donyi (sun). Once a great famine, swept through the length and breadth of earth. So Abotani went to the place of Donyi escorted by a dog. But before reaching the place of Donyi (sun) he met ‘koje-yango’ the goddess of wealth and fertility (Lakshmidewi of Hindus). Hearing woes of mankind, ‘Kojeyango’ advised him to do. But on visiting the field after five days, to his utter dismay, a dove had eaten all the seeds. Abotani’s sorrow knew no bound and started crying aloud. Hearing the cry, a god sevkari took pity on Abotani and killed the guilty dove by an arrow. However he laid some conditions for doing him the favour. Abotani could collect whatever seeds were left in the buccal cavity of the dove which would bear fruits as ever. But he would have to arrange a ceremony to appease Sevkeri and koje-yango after the ingathering of the harvest.

It was done and Sevkari himself came down and select a man who could act as a priest and taught him the ‘aabangs’ to be recited during the ceremony. This ‘yunging’ had become later the ‘Mibu’ and the ritual to appease Kojeyango and sevkari in gratitude was celebrated as ‘Porag’ festival. Different Mibu’s have different mother-deities to recall and they recite different ‘aabangs’, but may use a common prayer while commencing the Mibu-dagnam.

The event of 'Mibu-dagnam' is carried out by narrating 'aabangs' full of poetic beauties, but not intelligible to ordinary Misings now. The Mibu occupies a position of father-figure in the Mising society. Their proud possession is a 'Yoksa' (sword). Till the coming of the Gossains of different satras of the plains, the Mibu was the only institution the Misings would consult when they fell ill. He is asked to determine the disease, cause of disaster and proprietary measure there of if he failed by this simple method, the Mibu would go for the 'Mibu-dagnam'. The 'Mibu-dagnam' is performed at night in presence of a large gathering. The aggrieved family would tie one 'dogne' (coloured bead) around the arm. After reciting some 'aabangs' to appease his 'mother deity', the Mibu includes the name of the 'Gumin' of the aggrieved family in his prayers.

According to the concept of the Misings, Eji-Yalo is undestructible and immortal comparable to 'Atma' of vedantic philosophy and Yalo is capable of roaming about temporarily leaving the body under care of 'Eji' during illness, deep sleep or when terribly frightened.

MYTH AND RELIGION

The culture and the beliefs of the Misings are related to that of the Adis of Siyang valley and most fundamentals of their beliefs can be traced back to the early day of migration. Man and Nature have lived since then facing each other for centuries.

V. Elwin writes of the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh as thus: "For centuries, the real rule of the tribal people here has been environmental, it has shaped their bodies, directed their tongue, it has been their governor, their policy maker" (qtd in Pegu 2011: 140)

For the tribal people environment or nature in the past as in the present, has denied them the material comforts, the luxuries of life. What is said of these hill people is true also to the Misings. For them nature appears forever hostile and ill-disposed towards them and adjustment with such unkind Nature has demanded them of some regulated behaviour. According to the Misings and the myths recorded earlier by S.R. Panyang, Sedi-babu (father Sedi) and Melo-Nane (mother Melo) was the creator of all animate, inanimate objects of this world. Sedi's predecessor 'Pudolondo' emerged out of 'Tapaapumang' meaning something like 'vast expanse of floating mist'.

In fact, a thought which culminates in the concept of one 'Supreme being' was apparent in the minds of early Misings. One of their 'aabangs' run thus:

Mi Kamangai Mimang Kamangai,

Donyi Kamangai Polo Kamangai,

Longe kamangai yumme Kamagai,

Amonge Kamangai Achche Kamangai,

Emme kamangai Esare Kamangai,

Sedi babu Bottebi edem pilentone. (Pegu 2011:141)

Meaning

No man was there, no matter was there,

No sun was there, no moon was there;

There was no day nor night;

There was no soil, no water,

Neither fire was there, nor air was there;

But father Sedi the Supreme Lord has created them all.

Out of conjugal efforts of Sedi with mother Melo, ditem (earth), adiditem (hills) neinengan (trees with different leaves), Peyi-Pettang (birds with different feathers) rukji-merang (ants and insects) were created and gave them their respective voices (biekke gombugem buklen motto).

This sublime thought of one “Supreme reality” who created all being, animate and inanimate objects of the universe was realized only in the later phase of Rg Vedic literature. First they doubted as thus:

“Non-being then existed not nor being. There was no air,

nor sky that is beyond it. What was concealed? wherein?

In whose protection? And was there deep,

unfathomable water”

Then they wondered as thus:

“In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha,

Born as the only lord of all existence,

This earth he settled firm and heaven established,

what

God shall we adore with our oblations?” (Pegu 2011:141)

SEDI-MELO

Sedi and Melo are conceived by the Misings as the earliest worldly beings representing male and female cosmic principles or the 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti' respectively.

Strange it might seem, that Mishing never heard of keyum before and no worker other than S.R Panyang made any mention of 'Tapapumang' and 'Pudolondoas the predecessor of sedi-melo'. The source of his information is not given. Haemandorf who made a short study of the Adi region did not hear of 'keyum' either. However Padam 'Miriu' opens his 'aabang' with such lines:

Keyum ken-mange yayanko, kero kenmange yayanko, meaning- 'keyum' is unknown and un-knowable, 'kero' is invisible and un-known. (Pegu 2011: 142)

"Keyum" as a curious mixture of paradoxical concepts of existence and non existence is an approximation to nothingness (Pegu 2011: 142). But Osong Ering in an informative study on Adi religion has noted a different opinion as regard the creation of universe nearer to the concept of the Misings. He noted thus:

"The emergence of Sedi, according to them (Adis), followed a great vibration. The vacuum was then filled with vibration. In course of time the vibration threw out koi-koyyang that is dirt out of which the sun, the moon, the earth and all objects of the cosmos evolved". (qtd in Pegu 2011: 142)

However, there is complete unanimity of opinions from sedi-melo right down to Pedong-ane. From Sedi descended a line of material being. It is recalled that Sedi gave birth to Diling, Diling to Litung, Litung to Tuye and Tuye to yepe who in turn gave birth

to Pedong. Pedong is said to a female (ane) principle who had given birth to all man and spirit (Epom). But identity of Pedong-ane is not easy.

According to a myth Pedong-ane is identified with-“Snow of the high hills that is soft and harden later on” (Pegu 2011:140). According to the history of migration ‘Pedong-ane’ was a mystical place of origin (not a human being) with eternal snow from where they had come down. Could ‘Pedong-ane’ was originally ‘Pedong-ane’ meaning raining of snow and only by twist of tongue Pedong-ane becomes Pedong-ane.

DONYI-POLO

The Misings believe that ‘Donyi’ and ‘Polo’ sprang from Sedi and Melo along with Doying-babu, but Doying-babu remained aloof as the custodian of law, truth and traditions. V. Elwin writes of ‘Donyi-polo’ as thus:

“It is the eye of the world; he is as important to man as eye is to the body. It watches everything..... Above all he is the lord of truth and an oath taken on his name is most binding of all” (qtd. Pegu 2011:143)

The Mising refer ‘Donyi’ as ‘Ane-Donyi’- (a female cosmic principle) in the scheme of the universe. As the custodian of law and truth, the blessing of ‘Donyi and Polo’ is invoked in the beginning of all solemn functions. Even today, the Misings take pride in introducing themselves as the descendants in the line of Donyi and Polo and oath taken pointing his fingers to the Sun and the Moon is most binding. It is firmly believed that nothing can be concealed from the luminous eyes of Donyi and Polo and he who ever tries to do so will surely meet his doom. They recite while taking oath:

Donyi aneno, Polo abuno, ngo lumurko ludag milo, siloke sadakne donyino,
siyumke sadakne Polono, Takam kebange kabeg Ta: beg dope sangge angge

daklangka”-etc. (O, mother sun,father moon spare me not if I am telling lie).
(Pegu 2011:144)

The thought of ‘Donyi’and ‘Polo’ have permeated each and every fibre of their existence and such Donyi and Polo are considered the visible form of the invisible Supreme deities, i.e., Sedi-Melo. So was perhaps the influence of sun (savita) amongst the early Aryan also,as evident from the fact that sage Viswamitra composed a Rg in praise of sun or savita known as ‘Gayatri’. This Rg or hymn has been recited each day by their descendants for thousands of years secretly even would not near.

Om

Bhubhurwashvaw

Tat Savitur barenyoung,

Bhargo devashya dhimahi,

Dhiyo yenah Prachodoyat.

ABOTANI

‘Abo-tani’ (father Tani) is conceived as the first ‘man’by them. Abo-taro (father taro) was his brother. True to this belief the Misings called themselves ‘Tani’-meaning ‘Man’.According to another myth recorded by Dundur, Donyi the issue of Pedong-ane, is referred as the first man who gave birth to Nibo and Robo. However, nowhere, it is given how Tani was related to ‘Donyi and thereby left rooms for speculations. It is presumed that both the names are of one individual ‘Tani’-the first man. It has also been referred that Abotani had a brother Abotaro to Robo. Robo was jealous and thought ill of Nibo. So Robo was driven to the jungle by Nibo using his superior intelligence. Since

then, the myth goes on to say, offsprings of Robo-the spirits ‘Epom’ (Aiman-ui) loom around the hills and plains to avenge the offsprings of Nibo.

KILING-KANGE

“Killing kange” is referred by some as the original abode of the Misings from where they migrated down to ‘regi-regam’. A Pasi myth recorded by S. Roy refers ‘Kiling Liteng’ as the original abode of mankind. ‘Kiling-liteng-a stone which is hollow like a cave is reported to be located at the source of Sisap river beyond Karka. These two expressions are strikingly similar and such deserve further scrutiny. It is presumed that the misings took the route along Doshing-La pass while migrating down from Tibet emerging ultimately at ‘kiling-liteng (a stone cave). Local legends around karko suggest that pe-gu-Doley group came down from Tibet by a river that flows from high hills eastward in between Bomdo and Janbo to meet the Siyang river at upper part beyond Karko.

REGI-REGAM

‘Regi-Regam’ is a household name and remembered with much reverence as the abode of their forefathers in onetime of their journey spreading over centuries. But its location is not easy to find. As the myth goes, the Misings leaving ‘Regi-Regam’ is a household name and remembered with much reverence as the abode of their forefathers in one time of their journey spreading over centuries. But its location is not easy to find. As the myth goes, the Misings leaving ‘Regi-Regam’ had to overcome a very strong rapid. Only after days of prayers, propitiation of the deities, they finally found two very strong creepers climbing over a gigantic tree holding it erect near the rapid. On cutting the creepers in one clean swip, the tree fell across the banks of the rapid like a bridge. These creepers are referred now as the ‘Maying-Mankong’ creepers.

They have thus survived centuries in constant dread of Natural natural adversities and obsessed by the perpetual fear of sudden misfortunes. It is understandable therefore that the common man attributed all the goodluck and misfortunes to some spirits ('uii'). And propriatory measures to repel these enumerable spirits engulf their every thought and doing, their very existence for that matter, for centuries.

DEITIES

Old beliefs die hard, for though the Misings had exposed themselves to various religious establishment of the valley, they still maintain much of their original beliefs often referred as 'Animism' by other. But deeper studies suggest it is not so. The basic religious concept of the Misings is somewhat akin to that of the Adis. The conceptual structure of their universe is pyramidal with animatism at the base and supernaturalism at the top life is omnipresent. It penetrates and permeates it". (Pegu 2011: 146)

The Misings believe that the creator of the universe is far more ethereal having finer texture and undefined shape who existed before creation. As per the belief of the Padam there was ethereal beings keyum. This idea has been planted on Mising recently. The other Adi tribes have different opinion about the creator. The Bori and Paibo have sichi as creator, whereas the Gallongs believe Jimi as the creator. Koyum is known about the gap between Koyum and Jimi. The creators though benign and bestower of all blessings, are in a way indifferent to the day-to-day happenings in man's life. Therefore, the Misings, in time of adverse circumstances found shelter in some benevolent spirit or deities who are more concerned with the welfare of their families and farms. And propriatory measures had to be organized to appease these lesser 'Gods'. Apart from principal deities like *Sedi-Melo*, *Donyi-Polo*, *Mukling-Taleng* (thunder and lightning), *Among* (earth), *Asi* (water), *Meruk* or *Emi* (fire), *Esar* (air) there are number

of spiritual being possessing power much greater than man. They are benevolent to human beings, protect their farms and families from damages and diseases. They have to be kept appeased by occasional offering called –‘*Teleng-uii*, ‘*Rokpu-done*’ etc. It is interesting to note that the Aryans were also worshippers of Indra, Agni and Varun.

“Koje-Yango”- the goddess of wealth and fertility (Lakshmi) is of benevolent nature. Taking no chance, koje-yango is appeased by organizing Po-rag in large scale at community level and ‘Arig-dobur’ at family lest drought and pestilence might cause poor harvest leading to misery.

The deities of the Misings could be compared with deities of early Aryan like Indra (*Mukling-Taleng*) Agni (*Emi or meruk*) Varun (*Esar*), Bhumidevi (*Among*) Lakshmidēvi (*Koje-yango*) of Vedic gods and goddesses. Besides, Rg-Veda is eloquent in praise of ‘som-deva’-the god of ‘Som-rasa’ (*Apong*). ‘Som-rasa’ was an essential part of all Vedic sacrifices or ‘Yagya’. It has also been said that Indra got all the strength from ‘Somdeva’ enabling him to destroy ‘Britrasura (a non-Aryan warrior) in their struggle.

DOBUR UII:

“Dobur uii” is one of the important rituals marked by its peculiar principles carried out with much rigidity. Of many types of ‘Dobur’ only ‘Burte Dobur’ is performed on occasion of blood shed of some grade (Pityang) and moral turpitude of serious nature. It may be organized by a single family or collectively by several families depending upon the extent of involvement. ‘Arig-Dobur’ or ‘Mopun-Dobur’ is performed by individual family to ward off attack of pest and pestilence from their fields when the paddy begins flowering.

“Dolung Dobur” performed collectively by a village deserves mention in some details. Women are debarred from attending this “Dobur”. Menstruation and child birth are considered unauspicious and they are removed from the villages on the eve of the function. Traffic and business transaction with the neighbouring villages are also suspended for the day, or till the end of the rituals. To signify the occasion, sign posts of ‘Khagri’ (reed) are put in the main gateways of the villages. Trespassing or misdemeanor is dealt with temporary confinement or retention of valuables till the performance is over.

In the morning the male members of the village collectively approach each house beating the ‘chang’ and demanding ‘ajeng’ and the family reciprocates by offering ‘apong’, fowl, pig, rice, requesting them to pray for their well being in the coming year. The ‘ajeng’ such collected from the families are brought to a circular clearing on the outskirts of the village. Two idols simulating ‘dragon swallowing an egg’ are prepared from a kind of fern ‘Ruktak’ and Tabeng (wild grass with culting edge) decorated with split bamboo, and placed in the alter facing the rising sun. Fowls are sacrificed by hitting the idols and uttering some prayers.

The queries on origin and indication of these dragon-like idols have been answered in most unqualified ways. But it is the widely shared belief that the idols represents ‘earth’ as an eternal source of productivity while the egg represent ‘life’ itself with potential power of manifestation. It reminds us of the snake-pillar found in ruins around Sadiya and installed in the political officer’s bungalow of erstwhile Sadiya town. It recalls the references made in a myth where an old woman pleaded the Padams to spare at least the stone idol. As nothing is known beyond this about the image, it may be said that it had its origin in remote past and the tradition has come down since the details

lost in the antiquity. This serpentine idol resembles the dragon image recently discovered at Malini than of Arunachal. It could be a crude imitation of Tibetan dragon.

UROM POSUM

Ancestor worship is an important feature of their ritual observed usually after the harvest. Departed forefathers 'Urom-Posum' are held responsible for health and happiness of the family, and incurring displeasure to them, may result in an accident or some uncommon occurrence. They believe that the departed souls reside at 'Uii among' (land of spirit) for a considerable period of time (say five generations) from where they occasionally visit their near and dear ones. Their visits are manifested in some unusual signs and unless propiatory measures are taken immediately, the result may be catastrophic, most malicious of them are who died of violence '*lotuyari*' and during childbirth without the expulsion of foetus. Propiatory measure to ward off these malevolent spirit (*Urom*) have to be organized-(*Urom-Tosag*) first, then well-grown pigs are sacrificed in front of a good gathering uromuii observing certain taboos. The 'Urom Posum' of the Misings in essence resemble the 'Pretatma' referred in Rg Veda where the 'atma' of a person after his death remains suspended till the 'atma' reaches heaven ultimately.

KU:SAG

'Ku:sag' is the most elaborate and expensive of the ancestor worship. It is a Porag in magnitude, but limited only to a clan or family. It comes off only in interval of several decade. The 'Ku-sag' is now maintained only by some family of Boraati, family of Matmora, Lagashu family of Lagasu gaon and Pegu family of Kulajan area as a familial pride. The 'Kusag' performed by the Pegu family of Kulajan need a 'Mibu' to lead the prayer-dance and require four rare materials (1) Karmi (fish) (2) Tasik Kirmik (bird) (3)

small squirell) (4) mongoose,all smoked to dry.This materials are ground together with salt and ginger and taken as 'Prasad'.These rare materials are symbol of agility,motility,courage and energy inherent in their small physical built.This peculiar tradition is believed to have originated in the distant past,from the days of Shang dynasty ruling old China who celebrated ancestor-worship in grandiose manner.

GUMIN-SOIN:

Ancestors of more than five generations old are believed to have receded to a higher state of existence known as 'Sine-Mobo' (land of dead) where they rarely visit their offsprings and, rarer still to become a cause for any anxiety.Instead, they become the benevolent care-taker of the family and the oldest one in the family tree are known as 'Gumin'or originator of gotra.

All the clans of the Misings, as per traditions,must have 'Gumin' exclusively of its own,or several clans bearing different titles may have common 'Gumin'.For instance,'Bomi'is said to be common' 'Gumin'of Kuli, Kutumn Mili, Kumbang. Leging is common to Panging, Pogag, Lagashu.The Megu and the Pegu have 'Kondar'as their 'Gumin' and in their household offerings, blessing of 'Kondar' is involved reciting thus:

Ato gumin, togung gumin, Kondar gumine,

Silo tatdak kadaklangku... (Pegu 2011: 151) meaning "Oh, Kondar, our great great grand fathers, bear us witness to day...."

The above observations suggest that the clans having common 'Gumin' had branched off from a single person and thus marriage between clans (opin) belonging to a common 'Gumin'is prohibited. However, deviation of this tradition is seen recently in some clans. It might be possible, that they belong to separate' 'Gumin'of same name, or the

co-sanguinity of the clans have been forgotten after long years of separation in the hills and the plains. 'Gumin' is comparable to 'Gotra'. Name of a 'Gotra' originated from the names of some sages. Gotra is similar to Latin 'Gens'. Original meaning of 'Gotra' is cowshed. But, Marriage within identical clan (opium) is strictly prohibited. Some well identical clan (opium) is strictly prohibited. Some well-known 'Gumin' (gotra) with their related (opin or clan) are given below only as example. The list is not exhaustive.

They never burn their dead, but dig a grave (ago). The demise of one who had gained honour in his life is announced by ringing a gong 'Le-nong' and, the people within the hearing distance suspend their works immediately for the day and throng to pay homage to the departed soul and to sympathise the bereaved family.

The corpse is bathed, clothed with his favourites, and placed in a coffin 'rungkung' after being wrapped in 'Empoo' (Nagadhari in Assamese). In a procession of relatives and mourners, the body is carried by four persons to the cemetery (ago-golung) located in the outskirts of the village, usually away from the river side. 6x3 feet and 4 deep of land has to be purchased nominally for sake of the dead by the relatives, a custom maintained till today with much reverence. A grave is dug east-west about 6 feet in length, 3 feet wide and about 4 feet deep. After the body is laid the head facing west, a symbolic house is built over the coffin and those attending the funeral put some soil in the grave by his left hand. After enough soil is put over it, a white sheet of cloth is placed like a tent over it and around with bamboo the grave cover. The area is fenced around with bamboo trellis-work to ward off a wild animal. The immediate family members abstain from all kinds of work till the 'Ochi' (urom apin) ceremony is held within 5 days. Nowadays 'Tiloni' is performed after 3 days leaving 'Ochi' to another day. Relatives of the bereaved family gather together and extend their helping hand.

Invitation letter is distributed in case of delayed 'Ochi' but such 'Ochi' has become a costly affair.

'Dotgang' (sradha ceremony) is held elaborately within a year or two when a good number of pigs are sacrificed in the name of the departed soul. Bigger is the family greater the number of pigs. A record number of 33 pigs were sacrificed once at Lohitmukh and people are fed and well attended. Traditionally, small packets of salt, earthen ware, and cash in small coins are offered to all attending the function. Persons who carried the coffin are handsomely rewarded. Shaving of hair of the sons during 'dotgang' is not a Mising tradition. But Misings have picked up the custom to please the gathering. Dotgang is a costly affair. Efforts to reduce the cost is the call of time, lest poor people may give up the ritual under economic pressure.

INFLUENCE OR SATRAS

But today, in spite of their old belief going strong in one hand, one may find, an elderly Mising introducing himself as 'Kewolia Bhakat'. The fact is that, the Misings, long after their migration down to the valley, were subjected to the influences of the Gossains of Sessa, Nomati Katonipar, Jokai, Elengi, Budhbari and Kuamora Satras and to their alluring doctrines.

An interesting story is told on how the Misings came under the spell of the above Gossains. One day in one Mising village, a female pig was about to be killed as she did not produce any pigling. Incidentally, a Satradhikar happened to pass by that way and prevented them from killing saying the pig was pregnant and was going to beget piglings. True to his word, the pig delivered half a dozen piglings soon after. Struck by the truth of his word, the satradhikar was taken to be one having spiritual power and the simple Misings agreed gladly to abide by his advice. Realising that the field was fertile,

the Satradhikar converted some Misings by formal 'Sharan'. Strange enough, the Vaishnavite Satras of Majuli established in order of Sri Sankardev, have side by side with these Satras for many generations. It is 'Miri (Pakkong Miri) and one 'Naga' (Nuckte Naga) discarding caste barrier to set example to his doctrine of universal religion. These two converts had come to be known as 'Paramananda' and 'Naruttam'aata respectively.

THE MISINGS AND THEIR SPEECH

Known to non-Misings earlier as 'Miri', the Misings, in the distant past, were dwellers of a land, now called Arunachal Pradesh, a state in India in the lower Himalayan region. They appear to have dwelt in the Siang (the name of the river Brahmaputra valley at one point of time in a process of migration in groups, their migration being prompted, apparently, by their quest for larger areas of fertile land for cultivation. The unmistakable cultural and linguistic affinity of the Misings of the Brahmaputra valley and several ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh, especially the cluster called Adi, points to their having been the same group of people in the distant past.

In the absence of historical records, the date of migration of the Misings to the Brahmaputra valley remains a matter of uncertainty, but some groups of Misings might have already been living in the valley or in the areas bordering the erstwhile Lakhimpur district (now divided into four districts-Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia) of Assam during, or before, the times of Sankardeva (1449-1568 A.D), the great saint-poet of Assam, as the name 'Miri' is mentioned in his devotional poetic work, the holy Kirtan-Ghosha, along with the names of the kachari, the Khasi and the Garo tribes. It is also said that Sankardeva had a Miri disciple, named Paramananda. Historical records

have references to armed conflicts of the Miris with the ruling Ahoms in 1615, 1655 or so, 1665, and in 1685. These conflicts indicate that the Misings were already living within, or in bordering areas of the Ahom kingdom in the seventeenth century and they had attacked, or rebelled against the rulers of the valley from time to time.

A subgroup of the Misings, called Pagro, who appears to have been the earliest Mising migrants to the plains of Assam, had an exonym 'Chutia-Miri' has not been explained convincingly by any writer-colonial, native or others-it indicates clearly a social contact of the Chutias, who ruled the eastern parts of present-day Assam since the early Middle Ages before the Ahoms began their six-hundred year rule of the land in the thirteenth century, with the Misings of the subgroup concerned. However nothing can be stated for certain as to the earliest date of migration of the Misings from their mountainous dwelling to the Brahmaputra valley in Assam.

As per the report of the census of India, 2001, the population of the Misings in the state of Assam at the time of enumeration was 5, 87,310, which constitutes 17.8 per cent of the total scheduled Tribes population of Assam. Numerically, they are the second largest Scheduled Tribe in Assam, the largest being the Bodos, who constitute 40.9 per cent of the state's total Scheduled Tribes population. According to the same census, 5, 17,170 (88 per cent) of the total population of Misings are speakers of their mother tongue, 12 per cent of them having switched gradually to Assamese as their mother tongue in the process of their acculturation in the valley. According to the same census, the literacy rate amongst Misings is 60.1 per cent (Male-71.4 per cent and Female-48.3 per cent) for all the Scheduled Tribes of the state.

That Misings were known to non-Misings earlier as Miri (spelt 'Meri' in an early note 'On the Meris and Abors of Assam' written by Lieut. J. T. E. Dalton, Assistant

Commissioner, Assam, dated Luckimpore, 23rd March, 1845, published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. xiv, Part1, 1845) has already been mentioned above. Accordingly they were listed as 'Miri' in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders Act of the Indian Parliament, first notified by the President of India as Constitution Order, 1950.

The word 'Miri' appears to have had its origin in an Adi-Mising word 'miri,' which refers to a shaman amongst them, as the Assamese language, in which it was first used, has no such as 'miri' in its dictionary other than the one referring to Misings. The name 'Mising' appears to have been used in print for the first time in the book *Outline Grammar of the Shaiyang Miri Language*, as spoken by the Miris of that clan residing in the neighbouring of Sadiya, authored by J.F. Needham, who was Assistant Political Officer, based at Sadiya (now a small town, bordering Arunachal Pradesh, in the Tinsukia district of Assam) and published by the Assam Secretariat, Shillong, in 1886. Needham begins his Preface with the words:

The Miris who reside on the banks of the Brahmaputra, Dihong, and Dibong rivers in the neighbourhood of Sadiya, call themselves Mising. There are six dialects in Mising Language, and they are Pagro, Sa:yang, Delu, Oyan, Moying, Somuang and Mising-Assamese. (Kuli 2012: 248)

The period of development of Mising language can be divided in three different categories. According to Padun, Mising language can be divided in three distinct periods: Old, Medieval and Modern period. The prayer songs and folktales are found in the Old period. These are found from the remote past till 1886. The middle period is from 1886 to 1968. The middle period is considered as the Age of experimentation in Mising language. For during this period the missionaries and different Mising linguists published various books in modified Mising scripts. The Modern Period in Mising

language started from 1968. It is noteworthy that from ages Mising language is expressed in oral form. But it is remarkable that although the oral form of Mising language has undergone various changes from time to time, the originality is still intact and alive. However many words and expressions of ‘Miri’ or ‘Abang’ are lost in the sands of time. It is in the days of the Christian Missionaries that the first ever Mising Dictionary and Grammar were published.

The chapter briefly presented the details of the eco-history of the evolution, migration, settlement of the Mising tribe in general and their folklife, folklore, and aspects of folk-literature in particular. The Mising tribe is very eco-friendly from the very beginning and has been continuing to be so till date.

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CHAPTER II

ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE MISING FOLKTALES

Environmental ethics is the field of inquiry that addresses the ethical responsibilities of human beings for the natural environment. Environmental ethics has emerged during the past twenty five years as a response both to new information about the interconnectedness of life and to new experiences of environmental degradation. Environmental Ethics, is not limited to ethical inquiry, but also is imbedded in a larger matrix of aesthetic, religious, scientific, economic and political consideration.

Environmental Ethics is Multidisciplinary.

Environmental ethics encompasses a surprising richness and diversity of responses to the concerns raised by the environmental crisis. As a distinctive discipline, it probably did not develop much before 1970. Environmental ethics deals with a global subject matter in a world that is just beginning to develop the ability to engage in global operation. No one set of ideas has been persuasive in convincing the majority of environmentally aware scholars that it is the key to the right relationship to the environment. As such, the field is still in a stage of active growth and development and

offers a variety of exciting ideas. Because environmental ethics concerns the human relationship to the environment, it includes all of the major perspectives on this relationship like scientific, ethical, aesthetic, economic and religious perspectives.

Unfortunately, many policy decisions are currently based primarily on some combination of science and economics. These disciplines are attractive to decision makers in that they lend themselves to quantification and computerization. However, when relied on to resolve environmental problems, they can yield false, over simplified answers. This restricted information base is further narrowed by the fact that throughout much of the twentieth century scientists have been trained to take a negative view of ethics and values, according to which values are “subjective, biased, emotional and even irrational” (Botzler,Armstrong 1998: 2).

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IS MULTICULTURAL

The environmental crisis is international. It no longer is possible for any one society to live without having a significant impact on others. The political, economic, religious, moral and aesthetic traditions, as well as institutional structures in both western and non-western societies, must be sympathetically addressed and understood to successfully develop a respectful, workable international environmental ethic. A multicultural perspective provides richer resources from which both western and non-western societies can draw to reframe and resolve environmental problems.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IS TRANSFORMATIVE

Because environmental ethics has emerged in response to global environmental crisis, many proposals address the need for a transformation of human experience.

Traditional economic arrangements that ignore environmental consequences, traditional political arrangements that impose artificial territorial limits on continuous physical process and systems and traditional philosophic and religious theories that consider human beings in isolation from their natural surroundings are all being examined and modified.

ETHIC IN ACTION

The word ethics comes from the Greek ethos, meaning custom, usage or character. Custom and usage are related to action, and it is actions that are judged as ethical or unethical. Character is judged at least partially on integrity and integrity is manifest in action. It is in actions that the weight of ethic lies; it is in actions that integrity and professionalism become visible.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: VALUES IN AND DUTIES TO THE NATURAL WORLD:

Environmental ethics stretches classical ethics to the breaking point. All seeks an appropriate respect for life. Respect for life does demand an ethic concerned about human welfare, an ethic like the others and now applied. It alone asks whether there can be non human objects of duty.

Neither theory nor practice elsewhere needs values outside of human subjects, but environmental ethic must be more biologically objective no anthropocentric. It challenges the separation of science and ethics trying to reform a science that finds nature value-free and an ethics that assumes that only humans count morally. Environmental ethics seeks to escape relativism in ethics, to discover a way past culturally based ethics. However much our worldviews, ethics included, are embedded in our cultural heritages, and thereby theory-laden and value-laden, all of us know that a natural world exists apart from human cultures. Humans interact with nature.

Environmental ethics is the only ethics that breaks out of culture. It has to evaluate nature, both wild nature and the nature that mixes with culture and to judge duty thereby. After accepting environmental ethics, one will no longer be the humanist once they were.

Environmental ethics requires risk. It explores charted terrain, where one can easily get lost. One must hazard the kind of insight that first looks like foolishness. Some people approach environmental ethics with a smile expecting: Chicken liberation and rights for rocks, misplaced concern for chipmunks and daisies. Elsewhere, they think, ethicists deal with sober concern: medical ethics, business ethics, and justice in public affairs, questions of life and death and of peace and war. But the questions here are no less serious. The degradation of the environment poses as great a threat to life as nuclear war, and a more probable tragedy.

HIGHER ANIMALS

Logically and psychologically, the best and easiest breakthrough past the traditional boundaries of inter human ethics is made when confronting higher animals. Animals defend their lives; they have a good of their own and suffer pains and pleasures like humans. Human moral concern should at least cross over into the domain of animal experience. This boundary crossing is also dangerous because if made only psychologically and not biologically, they would be environmental ethicists may be too disoriented to travel further. The promised environmental ethics will degenerate into a mammalian ethics. That is why there is a necessity for an ethic for animals, but that is only one level of concern in a comprehensive environmental ethics.

One might expect classical ethics to have sifted well an ethics for animals. Our ancestors did not think about endangered species, eco-systems, acid rain, or the ozone layer, but they lived in closer association with wild and domestic animals than we do.

Hunters track wounded deer ranchers who let their horses starve are prosecuted. Still, until recently, the scientific, humanistic centuries since the so called Enlightenment have not been not been sensitive ones for animals, owing to the Cartesian legacy. Animals were mindless living matter; biology has been mechanistic. Even psychology, rather than defending animal experience, has been behaviorist. Philosophy has protested little, concerned instead with locating values in human experiences at the same time that is dispirited and devalued nature. Across several centuries of hard science and humanistic ethics there has been little compassion for animals.

The progress of science itself smeared the human-non human boundary lines. Animal anatomy, biochemistry, cognition, perception, experience, behavior and evolutionary history are kin to our own. Animals have no immortal souls, but then persons may not either or beings with souls may not be the only kind that counts morally. Ethical progress further smeared the boundary. Sensual pleasures are a good thing: ethics should be egalitarian, non arbitrary, non discriminatory. There is ample scientific ground that animals enjoy pleasures and suffer pains; and ethically there are no grounds value these sensations in humans and not in animals. So there has been a vigorous reassessment of human duties to sentient life. The world cheered in the fall of 1988 when humans rescued two whales from winter ice.

The first lesson in environmental ethics is to respect the rights of all living beings. When we try to use culturally extended rights and psychologically based utilities to protect the flora or even the insentient fauna, to protect endangered species or ecosystems, we can only stammer. Indeed, we get lost trying to protect bighorns, because in the wild, cougars are not respecting the rights or utilities of the sheep they slay and in culture, humans slay sheep and eat them regularly, while humans have every right not to be eaten by either humans or cougars. There are no rights in the wild in the

wild and nature is indifferent to the welfare of particular animal. A bison fell through the ice into a river in yellow stone Park; the environmental ethic there, letting nature take its course, forbade would be rescuers from either saving or killing the suffering animal to put it out of its misery. A drowning human would have been saved at once. Perhaps it was a mistake to save those whales.

The ethics by extension now seems to no discriminating; we are unable to separate an ethic for humans from an ethics for wildlife. To treat wild animals with compassion learned in culture does not appreciate their wildness. They cannot acquire language at sufficient levels to take part in culture; they cannot make their clothing or build fires, much less read books or receive an education. Animals can, by human adoption, receive an education. Animals can by human adoption, receive some of the protections of culture, which happens when we domesticate them, but neither pets nor food animals enter the culture that shelters them.

Worse, such cultural protection can work to their detriment; their wildness is made over into a human artifact as food or pet animal. A cow does not have the integrity of a deer a deer, or a poodle that of a wolf. Culture is a good thing for humans but often a bad thing for animals. Their biology and ecology-neither justice nor charity, nor rights nor welfare-provide the benchmark for an ethics.

Culture does make a relevant ethical differences and environmental ethics has different criteria from inter human ethics. Equality is a positive word in ethics, discriminatory a pejorative one. On the other hand, simplistic reduction is a failing in the philosophy of science and epistemology; to be discriminating is desirable in logic and value theory. Something about treating humans as equals with bighorns and cougars seems to 'reduce' humans to merely animal levels of value, a 'no more than' counterpart in ethics of the 'nothing but' fallacy often met in science Humans are 'nothing but'

naked apes. Something about treating sheep and cougars as the equals of humans seems to elevate them unnaturally and not to value them for what they are. There is something insufficiently discriminating in such judgments; they are species-blind in a bad sense, blind to the real differences between species, valuational differences that do count morally to the contrary, a discriminating ethicist will insist on preserving the differing richness of valuation. Compassionate respect for life in its suffering is only part of the analysis.

Two tests of discrimination are pains and diet. It might be thought that pain is a bad thing, whether in nature or culture. Perhaps when dealing with humans in culture, additional levels of value and utility must be protected by conferring rights that do not exist in the wild, but in the meanwhile we should at least minimize animal suffering. That is indeed a worthy imperative in culture where animals are removed from nature and bred, but it may be misguided where animals remain in ecosystems. Wildlife veterinarians wanted to treat the disease, as they would have in any domestic herd, and as they did with Colorado bighorns infected with an introduced lungworm, but the yellow-stone ethicists left the animals to suffer, seemingly not respecting their life. They knew rather that, although intrinsic pain is a bad thing whether in humans or in sheep, pain in ecosystems is instrumental pain, through which the sheep are naturally selected for a more satisfactory adaptive fit. Pain in a medically skilled culture is pointless, once the alarm to health is sounded, but pain operates functionally in bighorns in their niche, even after it becomes no longer in the interests of the pained individual. To have interfered in the interests of the blinded sheep would have weakened the species.

At this point some ethicists will insist that at least in culture we minimize animal pain, and that will constrain our diet. There is predation in nature; humans evolved as

omnivores. But humans, the only moral animals, should refuse to participate in the meat-eating phase of their ecology, just as they refuse to play the game merely by the rules of natural selection. Humans do not look to the behavior of wild animals as an ethical guide in other matters (marriage truth telling, promise keeping, justice, charity).

But the difference is that these other matters are affairs of culture; these are person-to-person events not events at all in spontaneous nature. By contrast, eating is omnipresent in wild nature; humans eat because they are in nature not because they are in culture. Eating animals is not an event between persons but a human-to-anima event; and the rules for this act come from the ecosystems in which humans evolved and have no duty to re-make. Humans, then, can model their dietary habits from their ecosystems, though they cannot and should not so model their personal justice or charity. When eating, they ought to minimize animal suffering, but they have no duty to revise tropic pyramids whether in nature or culture. The boundary between animals and humans has not been rubbed out after all; only what was a boundary line has been smeared into a boundary zone.

Animals enjoy psychological lives, subjective experiences, the satisfaction of felt interests-intrinsic values that count morally when humans encountered them. But the pains, pleasures, interests, and welfare of individual animals are only one of the considerations in a more complex environmental ethics that cannot be reached by conferring rights on them or by a hedonist calculus, however far extended.

ORGANISMS

If we are to respect all life, we have still another boundary to cross, from zoology to botany, from sentient to insentient life. But trees and flowers cannot care, so why should we? We are not considering animals that are close kin, nor can they suffer or experience anything. Plants are not Values with preferences that can be satisfied or

frustrated. It seems odd to assert that plants need our sympathy, odd to ask that we should consider their point of view. They have no subjective life, only objective life. It takes ethical courage to go on, to move past a hedonistic, humanistic logic to a bio-logic. Pains, pleasures, and psychological experience will no further be useful categories.

An organism is a spontaneous, self-maintaining system, sustaining and reproducing itself, executing its program, making a way through the world, checking against performance by means of responsive capacities with which to measure success. It can reckon with vicissitudes, opportunities, and adversities that the world presents. Something more than physical causes even when less than sentience, is operating within every organism. Organisms use a sort of symbolic logic, using these molecular shapes as symbols of life. The novel resourcefulness lies in the epistemic context conserved, developed, and thrown forward to make biological resources out of the physiochemical sources. This executive steering core is cybernetic—partly a special kind of cause-and-effect system and partly something more. It is partly a historical information system discovering and evaluating ends so as to map and make a way through the world, and partly a system of significance attached to operations, pursuits, and resources. In this sense, the genome is a set of conservation molecules.

The genetic set is really a propositional set to choose a provocative term recalling that the Latin proposition is an assertion, a set task, a theme, a plan, a proposal, a project, as well as a cognitive statement. From this, it is also a motivational set, unlike human books, because these life motifs are set to drive the movement from genotypic potential to phenotypic expression. Given a chance, these molecules seek organic self-expression. They thus proclaim a life way; and with this an organism, unlike an inert rock, claims the environment as source and sink, from which to abstract energy and materials and into which to excrete them. It takes advantage of its

environment. Life thus arises out of earthen sources, but life turns back on its sources to make resources out of them. An acorn becomes an oak, the Oak stand on its own.

So far we have only description we begin to pass to value when we recognize that the genetic set is a normative set; it distinguishes between what is out what ought to be. This does not mean that the organism is a moral system, for there are no moral agents in nature, but the organism is an axiological, evaluative system. So the Oak grows, reproduces, repairs its wounds and resists death. The physical state that the Organism seeks, idealized in its programmatic form, is a valued state. Value is present in this achievement. Vital seems a better work here than biological. We are dealing not simply with another individual defending its solitary life but with an individual having situated fitness in an ecosystem. Still, we want to affirm that the living individual, taken as point experience in the web of inter connected life, is per se an intrinsic value.

A life is defended for what it is in itself, without necessary further contributory reference. The organism has something it is conserving, something for which it is standing its life. Though organisms must fit into their niche, they have their own standards. They promote their own realization, at the same time that they track an environment. They have a technique, a know-how, every organism has good of its kind; it defends its own kind as a good kind. In that sense, as soon as one knows what a giant sequoia tree is, one knows the biological identity that is sought and conserved.

There seems no reason why such own-standing normative organisms are not morally significant. A moral agent deciding his or her behavior ought to take account of the consequences for other evaluative systems. Within the community of moral agents, one has not merely to ask whether x is a normative system but also, because the norms are at personal option, to judge the norm. But within the biotic community, organisms are moral normative systems, and there are no cases in which an organism seeks a good

of its own that is morally reprehensible. The distinction between having a good of its kind and being a good kind vanishes; so far as any faulting of the organism is concerned. To this extent, everything with a good of its kind is a good kind and thereby has intrinsic value.

A life is defended for what is in itself, without necessary further contributory reference, although, given the structure of all ecosystems, such lives necessarily do have further contributory reference. The organism has something it is conserving, something for which it is standing; its life. Though organisms must fit into their niche, they have their own standards. They promote their own realization, at the same time that they track an environment. They have a technique, a know-how. Every organism has good of its kind; it defends its own kind as a good kind. In that sense, as soon as one knows what a giant sequoia tree is, one knows the biological identity that is sought and conserved.

There seems no reason why such own-standing normative organisms are not morally significant. A moral agent deciding his or her behavior ought to take account of the consequences for other evaluative systems. Within the community of moral agents, one has not merely to ask whether x is a normative system but also, because the norms are at personal option, to judge the norm. To this extent, everything with a good of its kind is a good kind and thereby has intrinsic value.

One might say that an organism is a bad organism if, during the course of pressing its normative expression, it upsets the ecosystem or causes widespread disease. Remember, though, that an organism cannot be a good kind without situated environmental fitness. By natural selection the kind of goods to which it is genetically programmed must mesh with its ecosystemic role. In spite of the ecosystem as a perpetual contest of goods in dialectic and exchange, it is difficult to say that any organism is a bad kind in this instrumental sense either. The misfits are extinct, or soon

will be. In spontaneous nature any species that preys upon, parasitizes, competes with, or crowds another will be a bad kind from the narrow perspective of its victim or competitor.

But if we enlarge the perspective, we typically are difficulty in saying that any species is a bad kind overall in the ecosystem. An “enemy” may even be good for the “victimized” species, though harmful to individual members of it, as when predation keeps the deer herd healthy. Beyond this, the “bad kinds” typically play useful roles in population control, in symbiotic relationships, or in providing opportunities for other species. Some biologist-philosophers will say that even though an organism evolves to have a situated environmental fitness, not all such situations are good arrangements; some can be clumsy or bad. True, the vicissitudes of historical evolution do sometimes result in ecological webs that are sub-optimal solutions, within the biologically limited possibilities and powers of interacting organisms, Still, such systems have been selected over millennia for functional stability and at least the burden of proof is on a human evaluator to say why any natural kind is a bad kind and ought not to call forth admiring respect.

Something may be a good kind intrinsically but a bad kind and ought not to call forth admiring respect. Something may be good kind intrinsically but a bad kind instrumentally in the system; such cases will be anomalous however, with selection pressures against them. These assertions about good kinds do not sat that things are perfect kinds or that there can be no better ones, only that natural kinds are good kinds until proven otherwise.

In fact, what is almost invariably meant by a bad kind is an organism that is instrumentally bad when judged from the viewpoint of human interests, often have disrupted natural systems. But as so used is an anthropocentric word; there is nothing at

all biological or ecological about it, and so it has no force in evaluating objective nature, however much humanistic force it may sometimes have.

A vital ethic respects all life, not just animal pains and pleasures, much less just human preferences. The new ones invite a change of reference frame- a wilder ethic that is more logical because it is more biological, a radical ethic that goes down to the roots of life, that really is conservative because it understands biological conservation at depths.

SPECIES

Sensitivity to the wonder of life, however, can sometimes make an environmental ethicist seem callous. A species exists; a species ought to exist. An environmental ethics make these assertions and move from biology to ethics with care. Species exist only instantiated in individually, yet they are real as individual plants or animals. The assertion that there are specific forms of life historically maintained in their environments over time seems as certain as anything else we believe about the empirical world. At times biologist revise the theories and taxa with which they map these forms, but species are not so much like lines of latitude and longitude as like mountains and rivers, phenomena objectively there to be mapped. The edges of these natural kinds will sometimes be fuzzy, to some extent discretionary. One species will slide into another over evolutionary time. But it does not follow from the fact that speciation is sometimes in progress that species are merely made up and not found as evolutionary lines with identity in time as well as space.

A consideration of species is revealing and challenging because it offers a biologically based counter example to the focus on individuals-typically sentient and usually persons-so characteristic in classical ethics. In an evolutionary ecosystem, it is not mere individuality that counts; the species is also significant because it is a dynamic

life form maintained over time. The individual represents a species in each new generation. It is a token of a token of a type, and the type is more important than the token.

A species lacks moral agency, reflective self-awareness, sentience, or organic individuality. The older, conservative ethic will be tempted to say that specific-level processes cannot count morally. Duties must attach to singular lines, most evidently those with a self, or some analogue to self. In an individual organism, the organs report to a centre; the good of a whole is defended. The members of a species report to no center. A species has no self. It is not a bounded singular. There is no analogue to the nervous hookups or circulatory flows that characterize the organism.

But singularity, centeredness, selfhood, and individuality are not the only processes to which duty attaches. A more radically conservative ethic knows that having a biological identity reasserted genetically over time is as true of the species as of the individual. Identity need not attach solely to the centered organism; it can persist as a discrete pattern over time. From this way of thinking, it follows that the life the individual has is something passing through the individual as much as something it intrinsically possesses. The individual is subordinate to the species, not the other way around. The genetic set, in which is coded the telos, is as evidently the property of the species as of the individual through which it passes. A consideration of species strains any ethic fixed on individual organisms much less on sentience or persons. But the result can be biologically sounder, though it revises. What was formerly thought logically permissible or ethically binding when ethics is informed by this kind of biology. It is appropriate to attach duty dynamically to the specific form of life.

The species line is the vital living systems, the whole, of which individual organisms are the essential parts. The species too has its integrity, its individuality, its

right to life; and it is more important to protect this utility than to protect individual integrity. The right to life, biologically speaking, is an adaptive fit that is right for life that survives over millennia. This idea generates at least a presumption that species in a niche are good right where they are, and therefore that it is right for humans to let them be, to let them evolve.

Processes of value that we earlier found in an organic individual reappear at the specific level, defending a particular form of life, pursuing a pathway through the world, resisting death, regenerating, maintaining a normative identity over time, expressing creative resilience by discovering survival skills. It is as logical to say that the individual is the species way of propagating itself as to say that the embryo or egg is the individual's way of propagating itself. The dignity resides in the dynamic form; the individual inherits this form, exemplifies it, and passes it on. If, at the specific level, these processes are just as evident, or even more so, what prevents duties from arising at that level? The appropriate survival unit is the appropriate level of moral concern.

A shutdown of the life stream is the most destructive event possible. The wrong that humans are doing, or allowing to happen through carelessness, is stopping the historical vitality of life, the flow of natural kinds. Every extinction is an incremental decay in this stopping of life, no small thing. Every extinction is a kind of super killing. It kills forms (species) beyond individuals. It kills essences beyond existences, the soul as well as the body. It kills collectively, not just distributive. It kills birth as well as death. Afterward nothing of that kind either lives or dies.

Life on Earth cannot exist without its individuals, but a lost individual is always reproducible; a lost species is never reproducible. The answer to the species question is not always the same as the answer to the collective questions, but because life on earth is an aggregate of many species, the two are sufficiently related that the burden of proof

lies with those who wish deliberately to extinguish a species and simultaneously to care for life on Earth.

One form of life has never endangered so many others. Never before has this level of questions super killing by a super killer-been deliberately faced. Humans have more understanding than ever of the natural world they inhabit and of the speciating processes, more predictive power to foresee the intended and unintended results of their actions, and more power to reverse the undesirable consequences. The duties that such power and vision generate no longer attach simply to individuals or persons but are emerging duties to specific forms of life. What is ethically callous is the maelstrom of killing and insensitivity to forms of life and the sources producing them. What is required is principled responsibility to the biospheric Earth. Human activities seem misfit in the system. Although humans are maximizing their own species interests, and in this respect behaving as do each of the other species, they do not have any adaptive fitness. They are not really fitting into the evolutionary processes of ongoing biological conservation and elaboration. Their cultures are not really dynamically stable in their ecosystems. Such behavior is therefore not right yet humanistic ethical limp when they try to prescribe right conduct here. They seem misfits in the roles most recently demanded of them.

If, in this world of uncertain moral communications, it makes any sense to assert that one ought not to kill individuals without justification, it makes more sense to assert that one ought not to super kill the species without super justification. Several billion years worth of creative toil, several million species of teeming life, have been handed over to the care of this late-coming species in which mind has flowered and morals have emerged. Such an attitude hardly seems biologically informed, much less ethically adequate. It is too provincial for intelligent humanity. Life on earth is a many-

splendored thing; extinction dims its luster. An ethics of respect for life is urgent at the level of species.

ECO SYSTEMS

Classical, humanistic ethics finds ecosystems to be unfamiliar territory. It is difficult to get the biology right and, superimposed on the biology, to get the ethics right. Fortunately, it is often evident that human welfare depends on ecosystemic support and in this sense all our legislation about clean air, clean water, soil conservation, national and state forest policies, pollution controls, renewable resources, and so forth is concerned about ecosystem level processes. Furthermore, humans find much of value in preserving wild ecosystems, and our wilderness and park system is impressive. Still, a comprehensive environmental ethics needs the best, naturalistic reasons, as well as the good, humanistic ones, for respecting ecosystems. Ecosystems generate and support life, keep selection pressures high, enrich situated fitness, and allow congruent kinds to evolve in their places with sufficient containment. The ecologist finds that ecosystems are objectively satisfactory communities in the sense that organismic needs are sufficiently met for species to survive and flourish, and the critical ethicists find that such ecosystems are satisfactory communities to which to attach duty. Our concern must be for the fundamental unit of survival.

An ecosystem, the conservative ethicist will say, is too low a level of organization to be respected intrinsically. Ecosystems can see little more than random, processes. A forest can seem a loose collection of externally related parts, the collection of fauna and flora a jumble, hardly a community. The plants and animals within an ecosystem have needs, but their interplay can seem simply a matter of distribution and abundance, birth rates and death rates, population densities, parasitism and predation, dispersion, checks and balances, and stochastic process. Much is not organic at all (rain,

groundwater, rocks, soil particles, air), and some organic material is dead and decaying debris (fallen trees, dead humans). These things have no organized needs. There is only catch-as-catch-can scrimmage for nutrients and energy, not really enough of an integrated process to call the whole a community.

Unlike higher animals, ecosystems have no experiences; they do not and cannot care. Unlike plants, an ecosystem has no organized center, no genome. It does not defend itself against injury or death. Unlike a species, there is no ongoing telos, no biological identity re-instantiated over time. The organismic parts are more complex than the community whole. More troublesome still, an ecosystem can seem a jungle where the fittest survive, a place of contest and conflict, beside which the organism is a model of cooperation. In animals, the heart, liver, muscles, and brain are tightly integrated, as are the leaves, cambium, and roots in plants. But the so-called ecosystem community is pushing itself, or else seems to be all indifference and haphazard juxtaposition nothing to call forth our admiration.

Environmental ethics must break through the boundary posted by disoriented ontological conservation, who hold that only organisms are real, actually existing as entities, whereas ecosystems are nominal-just interacting individuals. Oak trees are real, but forests are nothing but collections of trees. But any level is real if it shapes behavior on the level below it. Thus the cell is real because that pattern shapes the behavior of amino acids, the organism, because that pattern coordinates the behavior of hearts and lungs. The biotic community is real because the niche shapes the morphology of the Oak trees within it. Being real at the level of community requires only an organization that shapes the behavior of its members.

The challenges are to find a clear model of community and to discover an ethics for it better biology for better ethics. Even before the rise of ecology biologists began to

conclude that the combative survival of the fittest distorts the truth. The more perceptive model is coactions in adapted fit. Predator and prey, parasite and host, grazer and grazed, are contending forces in dynamic process in which the well-being of each is bound up with the other co-ordinated as much as heart and liver are coordinated organically. The ecosystem supplies the coordinates through which each organism moves, outside which the species cannot really be located.

The community connections are looser than the organisms' internal interconnection but are not less significant. Admiring organic unity in organisms and stumbling over environmental looseness is like valuing mountains and despising valleys. The matrix that the organisms require to survive is the open, pluralistic ecological system. Internal complexity-heart, liver, muscles, brain-arises as a way of dealing with a complex, tricky environment. The skin-out processes are not just the support; they are the subtle source of the skin-in processes. In the complete picture, the outside is as vital as the inside. Had there been either simplicity or lockstep concentrated unity in the environment, no organismic unity could have evolved. Nor would it remain. There would be less elegance in life.

To look at one level for what is appropriate at another makes a mistake in categories. One should not look for a single center or program in ecosystems, much less for subjective experiences. Instead, one should look for a matrix, for interconnections between centers, for creative stimulus and open ended potential. Everything will be connected to many other things, sometimes by obligate associations but more often by partial and pliable dependencies, and among other things, there will be no significant interactions. There will be functions in a communal sense; shunts and crisscrossing pathways, cybernetic subsystems and feedback loops. An order arises spontaneously and

systematically when many self concerned units jostle and seek to fulfill their own programs, each doing its own thing and forced into informed interaction.

An ecosystem is a productive, projective system. Organisms defend only their selves, with individuals, defending their continuing survival and with species increasing the numbers of kinds. But the evolutionary ecosystem spins a bigger story, limiting each kind, locking it into the welfare of others, promoting new arrivals, increasing kinds and the integration of kinds. Species increase their kind, but ecosystems increase kinds, superposing the latter increase onto the former. Ecosystems are selective systems, as surely as organisms are selective systems. The natural selection comes out of the system and is imposed on the individual. The individual is programmed to make more of its kind, but more is going on systemically than that; the system is making more kinds.

Communal processes, the competition between organisms, statistically probable interactions, plants and animal successions, speciation over historical time-generate an ever-richer community. Hence the evolutionary toil, elaborating and diversifying the biota, that once began with no species and results today in five million species, increasing over time the quality of lives in the upper rungs of the trophic pyramids. One-celled organism evolved into many celled, highly integrated organisms. Photosynthesis evolved and came to support locomotion-swimming, walking, running, flight. Stimulus-response mechanisms became complex instinctive acts. Warm-blooded animals followed cold-blooded ones. Complex nervous systems, conditioned behavior, and learning emerged. Sentience appeared with sight, hearing, smell, taste, pleasure, pain. Brains coupled with hands. Consciousness and self-consciousness arose. Culture was superposed on nature.

These developments do not take place in all ecosystems or at every level. Microbes, plants, and lower animals remain, good for other kinds. The under stories

remain occupied. As a result, the quantity of life and its diverse qualities continue from protozoan's to primates to people. There is a push-up, lockup ratchet effect that conserves the upstrokes and the outreaches.

The system is a game with loaded dice, but the loading is a pro-life tendency, not mere stochastic process. Though there is no nature in the singular, the system has a nature, a loading that pluralizes, putting natures into diverse kinds. It does so using random elements (in both organism and communities), but this is a secret of its fertility, producing steadily intensified interdependencies and options. An ecosystem has no head, but it heads toward species diversification, support, and richness. Though not a super organism, it is a kind of vital field.

Instrumental value uses something as a means to an end; intrinsic value is worth in itself. No warbler eats insects to become food for a falcon; the warbler defends its own life as an end in itself and makes more warblers as it can. A life is defended intrinsically, without further contributory reference. But neither of these traditional terms is satisfactory at the level of the ecosystem though it has value in itself. Though it is a value producer, it is not a value owner. We are no longer confronting instrumental value, as though the system were of value instrumentally as a fountain of life.

Ethical conservatives, in the humanistic sense, will say that ecosystems are of value only because they contribute to human experiences. But that mistakes the last chapter for the whole story, one fruit for the whole plant. Humans count enough to have the right to flourish in ecosystem, but not so much that they have the right to degrade or shut down ecosystems, not at least without a burden of proof that there is an overriding cultural gain. Those who have travelled partway into environmental ethics will say that ecosystems are of value because they contribute to animal's experiences or to

organismic life. But the really conservative, radical view sees that the stability, integrity, and beauty biotic communities are what are most fundamentally to be conserved.

VALUE THEORY

In practice the ultimate challenge of environmental ethics is the conservation of life on Earth. In principle the ultimate challenge is a value theory profound enough to support that ethics. In nature there is negentropic construction in dialectic with entropic teardown, a process for which hardly an adequate scientific theory is present. In one sense, nature is indifferent to mountains, rivers, fauna, flora, forests and grasslands. But in another sense, nature has bent towards making and remaking these projects, millions of kinds, for several billion years.

These performances are worth noticing, are remarkable and memorable and not just because of their tendencies, to produce something else; certainly not merely because of their tendency to produce this noticing in certain recent subjects, our human selves. These events are loci of value as products of systematic nature in its formative processes. The splendors of Earth do not simply die in their roles as human resource, supports of culture, or stimulators of experience. The most plausible account will find some programmatic evolution toward value, and not because it ignores Darwin but because it heeds his principle of natural selection and deploys it into a selection exploring new niches and elaborating kinds, even a selection upslope toward higher values, at least along some trends within some ecosystems. A systematic environmental ethics does not wish to believe in the special creation of values or in their dump founding epigenesis.

The notion that nature is a value carrier is ambiguous. Much depends on a thing's being more or less structurally congenial for the carriage. No value exists

without an evaluator. So runs a well entrenched dogma. Humans clearly evaluate their world; sentient animals may also. But plants cannot evaluate their environment; they have no options and make no choices.

THE ANCIENT ROOTS OF OUR ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The damaging changes being suffered today by the natural environment are far more rapid and widespread than anything known in ancient times. Today deforestation proceeds on a worldwide scale, the atmosphere becomes more turbid and opaque every year, the oceans are being polluted on a massive scale, species of animals and plants are being wiped out at a rate unmatched in history, and the earth is being plundered in many other ways. But although the peoples of ancient civilizations were unfamiliar with such recent discoveries as radioactivity, insecticides, and the internal combustion engine, the faced problems sometimes analogous to those the modern world faces, and we may look to the ancient in order to see the beginnings of many of our modern difficulties with an environment which is decaying because of human misuse.

A human community determines its relationship to the natural environment in many ways. Among the most important are its member's attitudes towards nature, the knowledge of nature and the understanding of its balance and structure which they attain, the technology they are able to use, and the social control the community can exert over its members to direct their actions which affect the environment. The ancient world shows us the roots of our present problems in each of these areas.

In a well-known and often reprinted article, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,' Lynn white traced modern western attitudes toward the natural world back to the Middle Ages. But both medieval and modern attitudes have ancient roots.

Greece and Rome, as well as Judaism and Christianity, helped to form our habitual ways of thinking about nature. And it is evident that the modern ecological crisis is to a great extent the result of attitudes which see nature as something to be freely conquered, used and dominated without calculation of the resultant cost to mankind and the earth.

These attitudes stem from similar ideas which were held by the ancient peoples who have most influenced us. Animism, which saw the natural world as sharing human qualities and treated things and events in nature as sacred objects of respect or worship, was the dominant attitude in early antiquity and persisted almost everywhere in the Mediterranean world, but it gradually gave way to other ways of thinking. In Israel, transcendent monotheism replaced animism's 'world full of gods.' Instead of being divine in itself, nature was seen as a lower order of creation, given as a trust to mankind with accountability to God. But in the later history of that idea, people tended to take the command to have dominion over the earth as blanket permission to do what they wished to the environment, conveniently forgetting the part about accountability to God or else interpreting most human activities as improvements in nature and therefore pleasing to God.

Perhaps even more important in the history of human attitudes toward nature was the departure from animism made by the Greek Philosophers. Rejecting traditional mythological and religious explanations of the natural world, they insisted on the ability of the human mind to discover the truth about nature through the use of reason. Instead of a place filled with spiritual being, or beings, a theater of the gods, the environment was to them an object of thought and rational analysis. Worship of nature became mere ritual, supposedly replaced with philosophical understanding. Since, in the words of Protagoras, "man is the measure of all things," it followed that all things have usefulness to mankind as their reason for existence. This idea has persisted in western thought in

various forms until the present, for the belief that everything in nature must justify its existence by its purposeful relationship to mankind is firmly, though perhaps implicitly, held by most people.

What was for the Greeks a philosophical opinion became for the Romans a practical reality. Early Roman animism was overcome less by the ingestion of Greek ideas than by the Roman's own demonstrated ability to dominate and to turn most things to their own profit, but both Greek influence and Roman practicality helped the Romans to develop attitudes toward nature which are remarkably similar to those expressed and demonstrated today. The Romans treated the natural environment as if it were one of their conquered provinces. If they needed any justification of this beyond their own pragmatism and cupidity, they could find it in Greek philosophy, which reached them in a late, skeptical form that had removed the sacred from nature and made nature an object of manipulation in thought and, by extension, in action. Our western attitudes can be traced most directly to the secular, business like Romans. Today the process of dominating the earth is seen not as a religious crusade following a biblical commandment but as a profitable venture seeking economic benefit.

Attitudes alone do not determine the way a human community will interact with the natural environment. People whose religion teaches them to treat the world as a sacred place may still manage to make their surroundings a scene of deforestation and erosion, because good intentions towards nature are not enough if they are not informed by accurate knowledge about and its workings.

The earlier civilizations of the near East accumulated a vast amount of information about the world through trial and error, and the information was passed on through tradition. Some of what they thought they knew was correct and useful, and much was colorfully inaccurate, interwoven with myth and folk stories.

A few Greek thinkers were the first to approach the natural world in a consistently rational fashion, demanding that reasonable explanations be found for all natural phenomena. This enabled them to begin the process of gaining knowledge which eventually developed into what might be called the scientific method. Many of the Greek thinkers were also careful observers of nature and attempt to check their ideas against what could be observed, but all of them held rational thought to be superior to what could be seen the world and assumed that the inner workings of the universe. This assumption, along with the antipathy of Greek thinkers toward work done with the hands, limited the range of their discoveries and led them into some fallacious speculations. Nonetheless, the discoveries of the Greek Philosophers and scientists are many and impressive.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Anthropocentrism is the philosophical perspective asserting that ethical principles apply to humans only, and that human needs and interests are of highest, and even exclusive, value and importance. Thus, concern for non human entities is limited to those entities having value to humans. Anthropocentrism can be traced back at least to the time of Mesopotamia, and is probably one of the older ethical positions in western civilization.

In contemporary western society, anthropocentrism often serves as a “default ethic,” a position assumed without careful consideration of alternative world views. However, anthropocentrism also is a position held by many thoughtful and reflective people as the most morally correct perspective to advocate.

Roots of anthropocentrism in western society can be found both in religious and secular philosophies. Since the persuasiveness of a religious ethic depends on sharing a

common faith and world view, those who are not adherents are less likely to find its tenets compelling. Therefore, many contemporary scholars have appealed to the more universal, secular themes first developed among ancient Greek philosophers.

Bryan G. Norton, argues that there are two types of anthropocentrism are prevalent in western society. The first, strong anthropocentrism is characterized by the notion that non human species and natural objects have value only to the extent that they satisfy a “felt preference.” A “felt preference” is any fulfill able human desire-whether or not it is based on thought and reflection.

The second type, weak anthropocentrism, is distinguished by the affirmation that non-humans and natural objects can satisfy “considered preferences” as well as “felt preferences.” A “considered preference” is a human desire or need that is based on careful deliberation, and is compatible with a rationally adopted world view, incorporating sound metaphysics, scientific theories, aesthetic values, and moral ideas. Thus, weak anthropocentrism value non-human entities for more than their use in meeting unreflective human needs. They value them for enriching the human experience.

LIMITING MORAL CONCERN TO HUMAN BEINGS

Clarifying the moral responsibility of humans to the rest of nature is one of the most difficult and controversial tasks in formulating an environmental ethic in our society. Anthropocentrists restrict the object of our moral concern largely or exclusively to human beings, who are viewed as superior to other creatures and to nature. Anthropocentrists commonly justify their position by citing unique characteristic that emphasizes the importance of the human species. For example, the human capacity to

reason plays a central role in the arguments of Kant. Kant also stresses the development and use of language in maintaining that moral concern be extended only to humans. Another justification for anthropocentrism is couched in negative terms that is, all of the arguments for extending moral concern beyond humans are illogical or not feasible. Some anthropocentrists, such as Murdy, base their positions on the observed power and biological superiority of humans in the natural world. Murdy also argues for the evolutionary necessity of taking this philosophic position.

ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE MISING FOLKTALES:

The Misings are one of the plain tribes of the Brahmaputa Valley and recognized as a scheduled tribe under the constitution of India by their traditional habitat. The Misings are riparian and they are mostly found inhabiting near rivers. Misings are a very eco-friendly race, living very close to nature. They live next to the environment that is why they make houses with bamboo poles. Thatched houses with raised platform are the shelters of Misings. The materials used for building a Mising house are cane, bamboo, wood and thatch. In many of their folktales we can find a lot of information regarding their attitudes towards the environment. The invasion of the Maans, created wide spread terror in almost all places of Assam. The Misings residing by the bank of the Dibru river knew of the cruel Maans (Burmese fields for their livelihood. They catch fish from the river and collect firewood. In the folktale ‘The Plight of the Maans’ (Kuli 2014: 134) the Misings are found residing peacefully on the bank of the Bor Luhit river. The people are hardworking producing crops in their e people were worried when they came to know of the intention of the Maans of crossing the river. The Misings requested the fisher folk not to hekp the Maans cross the river. On the other hand, the fishermen were compelled to help the Maans out of fright. As the river, was full of small riverine

islands, the local people gave a plan to the fisherman in order to teach the Maans a lesson. Their plan was to help the Maans across to one of such an island only and not to let them know the great depth of the river beyond it. The fisherman after letting the Maans cross to an island immediately left them there and hurried away in their boats. The Maans are stranded in the island surrounded by deep waters of the broad river. The cruel, blood thirsty Maans who never dream of being victims of helplessness were now in reality, in a poor plight. Because of scarcity of food many Maans died and others slowly waited to die.

Residing beside rivers the Mising community is always a victim of flood and soil erosion. In another folktale 'The Worthy offering' (Thomas 2015:12) a man from the Mising community Amig is happy as the paddy was harvested and it was the season for celebrations. Here also from the environment point of view we can see how the Mising community depends on mother earth. They plough the land, plant crops and reap it when time comes. The community celebrates after the reaping season is over. Amig had been planning for a long time for this special event in the history of his family. He needed to observe the dodging (an occasion) of his father who died five years ago. Amig talks with his Menam about the necessity of getting a male pig, at least five years old, for the sacrificial offering to appease the forefathers.

Meat eating is common among the Mising community. Every occasion is celebrated through sacrifice of animals which has become a tradition from the ancient times. But according to Carol J. Adams, a feminist writer and activist, the environmental consequences of eating animals are many. One of ecofeminism's attributes is its concern with the consequences of the domination of the earth. It recognizes that the patriarchal philosophy that links women and nature has measurable, negative effects that must be identified and addressed. When we consider the consequences of meat production and

the way by which each meat eater is implicated in these consequences ecofeminism faces the necessity of taking sides, will it choose the ecocide and environmental disaster associated with eating animals or the environmental wisdom of vegetarianism.

The relationship between meat eating and environmental disaster is measureable. In fact, advocates for a vegetation diet have created images that translate the environmental profligacy of meat production to the level of the individual consumer, the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following a vegan diet is 300 gallons; the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following an ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet is 1,200 gallons; but the average amount of water required daily to feed a person following the standard U.S. meat-based diet is 4,200 gallons. Half of all water consumed in the United States is used in the crops fed to live stock, “and increasingly that water is drawn from underground lakes, some of which are not significantly renewed by rainfall” (Adams 1998: 506). More than 50 percent of water pollution can be linked to wastes from the live-stock industry. Besides depleting water supplies, meat production places demands on energy sources the 500 calories of food energy from one pound of steak requires 20,000 calories of fossils fuel. Sixty percent of oil requirements would be cut if the U.S. population switched to a vegetarian diet.

Another folktale ‘The Tale of the Treet Bird’ (Kuli 2014: 146) also focuses upon life in ancient times among the Mising community. A brother and sister lived in the forest after the death of their parents. They support themselves on the fruits, leaves and roots of the forest. We can analyse that they rely on mother earth. They reached a village while roaming in the forest. They were treated very kindly by the villagers. So they decided to stay there and learnt the ways of farming. In those days there was available land but because of the lack of proper roads it was difficult to go from one place to

another especially when there were rains. So they built a temporary shed in their fields and lived there instead.

In time the rainy season came. Thinking that wild animals might destroy their harvest the brother went to the shed in the fields early in the morning for the whole day. The sister cooked the food and took it there. One day, because of heavy rains the roads and lanes of the village were all submerged and it was difficult to move about. Moreover, while finishing her household chores she was a bit late in cooking up the food for her brother.

After a long wait, he saw his sister from a far away off carrying a small bundle seeing the small size the brother grew angrier still as soon as she as she reached him, he without opening the bundle cut his sister into two halves with his sharp weapon. Blinded by his anger the brother realized his folly his mistake. Then feeling intense hunger once again, he opened the bundle and began eating the rice. He had his fill but the rice was still left seeing his sister's soul took the form of a small bird and sitting on a nearby tree began to say.

O Brother, tie up the bundle,

O Brother, tie up the bundle (Kuli 2014: 147)

The brother understood his sister's voice and his tears began to fall fast. He extended his arms and said, "O my dear sister, I lost my control and killed you. He repented but she did not return. From that day onwards, this kind of bird came into existence and in the lone afternoons, till today they sing sadly.

O brother tie up the bundle. (Kuli 2014: 147)

In the folk-tale ‘Yakko-kobe’s Heroic Stardy’ (Kuli 2014: 134) the Misings are inhabitants of hills and mountains. They hunt animals for their food. They consume different kinds of leaves like Takuk, Tazik etc. These ancestors of the Misings are savage people.

Yakko and Kobe were two brothers, with their own respective families. The two brothers lived a happy and peaceful mountainous life. In the course of time, they had a number of quarrels with another neighboring tribe, the padams due to some social causes. This war and it was declared between the two families.

Fore-knowing the most probable outcome of the war, yakko-kobe’s family built a large boat beforehand fix it in a safe place beside the Siang river. Their aim was to use the boat when the time comes yakko-kobe had altogether three wives. Before the war commenced they collected a large amount of chillies and dried and ground them up. On the day of the war, each of them kept a certain quantity of it in bamboo cashets and stood guard at the entry and gate of the house. One of them sat by the fire place after keeping a steady fire going on, ready to burn the chilli powder and with all weapons ready at hand.

On the fixed day, the members of the Padam family created a great din and approached towards them. When they reached the latter’s three wives relentlessly throw upon them the Chilli powder. Moreover, they burnt the chilli powder everywhere. The Padam people were totally taken by surprise by such a made of attack. Unable to bear the agony, they rolled about in the courtyards due to the burning of the chilli powder. Waiting for such an opportunity Yakko-Kobe killed all their enemies at once.

Earlier there was availability of lands and less population. A Mising family could survive by cultivating in their own lands. Due to floods and erosion many lands are transformed and submerged under water.

THE PROBLEMS OF FLOOD AND LANDLESSNESS

Cultivation is the only means of livelihood for Misings, and their welfare, enormously depends upon their having adequate land for cultivation. But the mounting problem of landlessness over the years has resulted in a serious threat to the very existence of the Mising community. Some of the factors responsible for this serious situation are noted below.

1. The Misings have mostly inhabited the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, and as such, fall easy victims of erosion and devastation caused by recurring floods. Vast fertile riverine tracts which yielded the best crops of Assam have disappeared in the process rendering the Misings landless and homeless. Needless to say, as the Misings are a riparian community, they have been the worst victims of recurring flood and erosion a problem which has been aggravated by ineffective and unscientific flood control measures.
2. Being rendered landless and homeless, large sections of the Mising people seek shelter and livelihood in uninhabited forests. But, here too, they become helpless victims of eviction operations. The so-called relief and rehabilitation measures, on the other hand, remain always beyond the reach of the unfortunate Mising people because of the interests of certain backward classes inhabiting an area constituted into a Belt and Block. Under sub sections 161-162 of the Regulation, Tribal Belts and Blocks were constituted for restricting transfers of land by sale, mortgage, lease, agreement, and exchange or otherwise. But quite contrarily,

large scale land transactions between tribals and non-tribals within the Belts and Blocks have been taking place almost freely. The report of the sub-committee of Advisory Council for welfare of scheduled Tribes (Plains) on settlement of land in Tribal Belts and Blocks and Forest lands, 1976, notes: “There is a large number of non-tribal population within all tribal Belts and Blocks. Though non-tribal, they are also protected like other, tribal protected classes of people within such Belts and Blocks and are eligible to make any sort of land transaction within the belt and Block. They have taken those advantages of making transactions of land from tribals by way of sale, mortgage etc.”

3. The total geographical area of Assam is 7,852,308 sq km out of this; about 15,222 sq km are covered by the two autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills. An area of 11,129 sq kms is under Reserve Forest excluding the two hilly districts. In the plain districts of Assam, Government has constituted 19 Integrated Tribal Development Projects for implementation of welfare schemes for the plains tribals so far. The total area covered by Tribal Belts and Blocks is 85, 80, 842 bighas covering 3980 villages.
4. There are more than 500 forest villages in the state whereas no such forest village is now in existence in the other parts of the country. The forest villages of Assam mostly consist of tribals who have been in the areas long before the Reserve Forest were constituted. All the established Forest villages have been deprived of various welfare schemes such as establishment of schools, construction of roads, drinking water facilities, and electrification of the villages. The state government has no authority over the reserve forest under the present acts and rules. No alternative suitable land can also be allotted to these forest villages for their establishment and settlement due to non-availability of suitable

agricultural land. Lands occupied by tribals in the declared forests have not been settled in their favour.

Large scale encroachment upon intrusion into tribal belts and blocks has assumed alarming proportions which the government circular dated 30th Dec. 1982 Vide No. RSD/16/82/10 has admitted: “..... inspite of specific instructions issued from time to time for removal of unauthorized occupants from tribal belts and blocks, large-scale encroachments are not only continuing but seem to be increasing” (*Annual Magazine of Mising Autonomous Council*). This clearly shows the gravity of the encroachment problem in respect of tribal land and within the belts and blocks. This has led the Misings and other tribals to a pitiable state of landlessness and homelessness within the very Belts and Blocks which were created in order to protect their interests. Another factor responsible for landlessness of the tribal communities is that the government of Assam generally chose to locate new institutions in tribal belts or blocks by evicting the poverty stricken tribal people.

The concerned Government department has never cared to issue land-holding documents to the Mising people living in Belts and Blocks, and so they fall easy prey to eviction operations. It is also advantages for the government because it does not have to bother about compensations. This was the reason why the South Kamrup (Guwahati) tribal belt and North Lakhimpur Tribal Belt and Block which were constituted in 1950 vide government order No. RD4/46/172/ dated 27/02/1950 were deconstituted vide Government Order No. RSD26/64/P1/38 dated 27.02.69. These Belts and Blocks are no longer in existence now.

The 10th clause of the Assam Accord has, ironically turned out to be yet another attack on tribal land. The clause provides for the clearance of illegal encroachers from Tribal Belts and Blocks/Government lands.

It is now apprehended that unscrupulous government officers engaged in such clearance operations will victimize the tribals themselves, because as already pointed out above, the revenue authorities of the state government have never cared to issue any settlement rights to tribals. Since the tribals cannot prove their land rights with the help of documents, they become easy victims of eviction operations. There is no irrigation system of any kind in areas inhabited by Misings. When crops are attacked by pests and diseases, there is hardly any timely help. When it is necessary for the Mising farmer to undertake fresh seed-sowing or paddy plantation after a flood, seeds and seedlings are not made available. Improved and mechanized modes of farming have not reached Mising villages. As Mising farmers are poverty stricken, they cannot afford to buy fertilizers, and so yields too, are very poor. In the present circumstances, the prospects of an agricultural economy of the Mising people are extremely bleak. The Mising people must now take necessary action themselves in this regard for their survival.

THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Article 16(4) of the constitution of India empowers as state government to make “any provisions for their reservation of appointments and posts in favour of any backward class which also includes the scheduled tribes. The government of Assam vide its circular no. AAP 66/63 382 dated 24.08.1963 made a 10% reservation of vacancies in service and posts. More than a decade over this circular was issued; records show that

the representation of tribals in various departments of the government hardly went upto 50% of the reserved quota.

The grade wise total tribal representation upto 31st March, 1975

Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Total
44	112	3942	1390	5488

The total number of employees in Assam, on the other hand, grade-wise

Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Total
1447	4505	65120	29588	100660

The rate of deprivation may, therefore, be shown as follows:

Description	Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Total
Representation Due	145	451	6512	2959	10006
Representation Effected	44	112	3942	1390	5488

(Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam 1978)

The Misings have been natureloving across the centuries and have been living on the banks of rivers since the earliest times of their migration and settlement in different districts of Assam. Their folk literature and folk life are replete with the elements of nature and they have been living simple lives since then only and their folk literature is full of various aspects of environmentalism and ethical values and they respect the traditional ways of living.

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CHAPTER III

ETHICAL AND ECO-ETHICAL VALUES IN THE MISING FOLK SONGS

Literature means simply the written records of the race, including all its history and science, as well as its poems and novels; in the narrow sense literature is the artistic record of life, and most of our writing included from it, just as the mass of our building, mere shelters from storm and from cold are excluded from our architecture. The most significant of all arts is literature. All arts is expression of life in form of truth and beauty; or rather, it is the reflection of some truth and beauty which are in the world, but which remain unnoticed until brought to our attention by some sensitive human soul, just as the delicate curves of the shell reflect sound and harmonies too faint to be otherwise noticed.

MISING FOLK SONGS

Mising oral literature is considerably rich in term of both quantity and quality. Much of the material- made up of various kind of narratives, songs, rhymes, proverbs and other popular creative expression habitually mouthed by the folk-reflects the phenomenon of cultural synthesis that we have highlighted above.

The narratives fall into various categories like myths, legends and tales .Many of the creation myths as also myth concerning the actions of the first man (Tani) are strikingly similar to those prevalent among the Tani group of Arunachal Pradesh. The most interesting and significant legends are those that tell the stories of the migrations of the various Mising groups to their present habitat as well as those explaining-the- origin of some Mising customs and beliefs. As for tales they are-of various types: Animal tales, supernatural tales, trickster tales, humorous tales, and so on. Some of these are clearly of

hill heritage, while others of later plains affiliation. The essences of the two great Indian epics have also become ingrained in the Mising social psyche.

ETHICAL AND ECO-ETHICAL VALUES IN THE MISING FOLKSONGS

The folk song of the Mising people may be broadly divided as

- (i) Songs and-chants associated with rituals (*A: bangs*)
- (ii) Songs of Love and yearning (*Oi:Ni:tom*)
- (iii) Songs accompanying ceremonial and merry making dance
- (iv) Lullabies, Nursery Rhymes and children's game song (*Ko:Nitam*)

Ethical and Eco-ethical values are abundant in Mising folk songs. The folk songs are sung by the Mising community on different functions or at different rituals ranging from harvest festivals to marriage ceremonies. A considerable number of folk songs are handed down to people from centuries past. The folk songs are primarily vocal and are seldom accompanied by instruments it comes so spontaneously to a villager that when he is ploughing or digging fields or moving homeward from the field similarly when a woman plies spinning wheels alone, she sings in full ecstasy. Folk songs are part and parcel in social occasions like PO:RAG.

ALI-A:YE-LIGANG or in wedding ceremonies, There are also folk songs sung in praise of God and Goddesses called A:bangs,kbangs are sung by the MIBU with boys and girls in- PO:RAG festival, There are Folk songs sung to lull children-to-sleep known as- me-n and-women sing song of lamentation called kabans to express grief .on different occasions the old also dances to the tunes of folk songs.

SONGS AND CHANTS ASOCIATED WITH RITUALS (*A: BANGS*)

The *A:BANGS* occupy a unique position in the life - stream of the community. *A:BANGS* are verse hymn of praise and worship to God and Goddess reflecting religious concept of Mising community. These kinds of folk songs narrates the prayer songs of the supernatural world and its impact on the Mising community in all religions there are prayers and its impact on the Mising community, in all religion there are prayers and chanting hymns or devotional songs. The person who is considered as the priest in - Mising community is known as MIBU, when someone fell ill in a family many rituals are performed. Although not many in number, the songs and chants associated with the traditional rituals are precious items of the Mising cultural inheritance. The bulk of the materials of this category consist of invocatory chants of the class known as *mibu a:bang* which literally means a priest's chants. The priest or shamans do chant while working themselves up into a frenzy during rituals, but the *mibu a:bangs* are not necessarily spontaneously poetic outbursts of priests in a trances. Most *mibu a:bangs* in currency today are pieces of inspired utterances of earlier priests which have been handed down through oral transmission. The congregation of young men and women assembled for a ritual lends choral support to the priest in singing the *Mibu a:bangs* meant for such purposes as invocation and propitiation of the supernatural powers, divination and exorcism. The language of much of the material is archaic and esoteric and as such, not easily intelligible one reason for the elusive nature of the meaning is the fact that some of the beliefs and rituals have lost their original significance as a result of culture shift.

Some *mibu a:bangs* have creation myths and genealogical legends as theirs content, given below is a specimen which contains references to such character from the Mising creation mythology as *pedong* (Primeval-Mother) and *sedi:melo* (Original Male and female Principles).

Umlayé rumna
donké lebingé rumné nomé
gorbu: bérné rumna
gorpo:yorné a:tana
ligu a:né rumna
posum togungé gu:miné nomé
éna me-loké jeié jeaddak
pédong anéka odo:démé
do:jing anéké do:jikko, jigbio namdémé
nokké a:ji ta:bé ka:ligné
ingkang yené.
Po:sum togunge gu:mina
lé:ni ta:bé gu:mína
Nolu se:dike so:yegeme
Yektum ma:pé-ka
Kéru:na:né bínpu:na:né
Lé:ni do:jigémé jigbio lanka,
Tabé manggomé
Leni manggomé
Se:dike bomongé
Unsang dosimé
Se:dí a:bangko
Ingang yekuai (Datta 1992: 4)

Meaning: Originator of the mystery of creation, originator of history, we salute you. You have taken the whole responsibility of giving birth on your shoulders and I your womb and you are like the mother of all families we salute you. This young *miri* (priest) with inspiration from you is trying to sing what mother history has bestowed while mother pedong undertook the creation, and the thing created flourished miri's like *po-sun.Toguna* and *lengni-Ta:bo*, do not block the path for the singing of songs to *se:di* mothers *keru:* and *Biripu*; you guide the skilful miris. Even in the absence of skilful miris like *ta:be* and *tani*, we have been trying to sing the songs of *se:di* as long as the sun shines.

Ato tabinam, Arammé, tadogmé

Mopé simetole

Boné bolunko, rési tapínko rele

Kamo tanéko

Do:nyi arungém dakkamnéko

Po:lo takkamnéko

Odé namti Do:bi:né

Keko namongé titoné

Bosidadiké mungginé sinnamko

Nom bidurigkuné

Nom onéng omangém

O-de tungkubo (Datta 1992: 4)

Meaning: Our ancestors, we offer you this day valuable ornaments and gold and silver with the sun and the moon as our witnesses we are showing all in the sunlight we

have today sacrificed a tusked boar in honour of the gods may you keep us well. The people of the Mising community offer tusked boar to their ancestors so on festive occasions like *PO:RAG* each family of the village sacrifice a boar. A daughter who is married is invited to her house along the family on *PO:RAG*. Every family of the village gets prepared for treating the guest with drinks and eatables. *PO:RAG* is sometimes celebrated in a village after five or ten years.

Aiké lotte ko:lilo batsang

Batsa li:man so:man ka:kuje

Ko:lilo batsang

Pi:sugai pi:mugai kamkololilo

Appunai punkongai kamkololilo

Obonori abu:dé kamkololilo

Bambula lenduné kamkololilo

Sumbur sumbur nékoya

Andéng andénga,

Sumasuli nékoya andéng andénga

Dérmi Sí:tungé tiamé:ko tia magnai

Kombong appuné punmé ko punmagai. (Datta 1992: 4)

Meaning: With short legs of small grasshoppers you are capering merrily like a grasshopper shoots have sprouted from the tree stumps and they look nice in the forest the flowers are about to bloom. Rows of young shoots and flowers are making a beautiful sight.

In the folksongs Mising people pray God for his beautiful creation the newly sprouted leaves look so wonderful in the forest. The flowers bloom in abundant which make a good sight seen in rows. Not only the human being but also the flowers thank God for his creation.

(A)

Ngokké démumi janggal pédongé démumé

Janggal dobo aliya

Janggal aliyé deboma-janggaloi (Datta 1992: 8)

(B)

Adié di:lutéle di:bokoya

Di:bo yadbo gédanga di:bokaya

Ané Do:nyi kodanga di:bokoya

Abu po:lo kondering di:bokoya (Datta 1992: 8)

Meaning-

(A)

There has been no rain in our locality.

(B)

Across the hills, o clouds, come close together O mother sun and father moon, you too render your help. The people of the community pray the rain God, to shower of their fields when there is no rain. They also appeal the sun and the moon to render their service, so that they can complete their work on the field.

Ba:bukajo jilbokajo boiya,

Arikang kajo barikang kajo ba:boiya

Ugon koyal géjan koja!

Gobin'g koyal todel koyal

Télé laengo télé

Ka:kiabi ya:me té lengsudo

Padumbí pa:me telengsudo (Datta 1992: 10)

Meaning: Come, o water! Come down, O rain! Donning beautiful waist-cloths and beautiful to wells like fresh youth come down, O

The farmer try to appease the sun and the moon, they persuades the rain God to have mercy on them in the process of cultivation.

Janggal podongé dobomé janggalai

Janggal aliye dobomé janggalai

Adi:di:lu: télé di:bokoia

Di:boko di:boya

Ba:bo kajo, jilbo kajo

Go:yingo koda, pedong koda

Arikang koda, barikang koda! (Datta 1992: 12)

Meaning: Come, drifting across the hill, O God, Come without keeping any malice in your mind [come father] let the crickets chirps, let there be rain, we need water, we the rainy season.

Not only the population but also the animals need water for survival on earth so the community of people prays mother sun and father moon to help them for their existence on earth.

Do:nyiké oua dírkembe lulu

Do:nyiké oua dírkembe lulu

Mélo do:mug dongko nolu dírkombe lulu

Yí:lig bikakui dírkombe lulu

Tolo ditu:yo:bo tolo

Doyl: dosa belo-yí:lig bikakui

Mélo do:nyié leyopé

Miksié liyopé dirigé bikakui (Datta 1992: 14)

Meaning: We are children of the moon, we are children of the sun. O clouds, come down from the sky, from the land of sunrise, come down weep-o, weep we need your tears. Don't you be offended with us, don't bear malice against us. All the living community on this earth appeals the rain God to mercy them. They seek answered for his annoyance on the community.

Mélonéki nétosim

Néringe yokboka,

Mélo na:ne síne bulu

Tangam réngam sutoka

Nolu régi régam nolu

Nédungé po:yoka

Mélo na:né sené nolu

Nedurgé senéolu

Nedunge po:yoka

Mélo ngokké yine bulu

Yi:man bodagbo

Mélo ngokké ka:ying ka:ponolu

Ka:man bodagbo. (Datta 1992: 16)

Meaning: O, our ancestor our heavenly parent you too give your blessings. Don't bear ill-will against us. O our ancestors who have left for heaven before us, be pleased to escort the clouds in a body pray do us the favour. Ancestors worship is one of the essential features of Mising community. The Mising people seek the blessing of their ancestors before any important event or work the ancestors also those who left heaven request the clouds to mercy the people living on earth.

Podongké aua di rkombe,

Do:mugké aua di'rkombe.

Nolu do:mug dongka:nolu

Géru: subitakuika

Nolu do:nya la:tog bitokul

Po:lo la:tog bitokuil

Nolu ditu: yo:bo nolu

Do:nyi do:sang nolu

Yilígé bikakuil

Nolu néki nétosin

Me:ri yobokal (Datta 1992: 18)

Meaning: Children of the rains, children of the clouds, come! Come, O clouds, adorning yourself. Keep the honour of the sun and the moon. O Gods above, don't be malicious towards us.

Le lerele ma

Koyinné gído kosanné gído lérékoiya

Rigdum do:lu:té yoksa bomné ope:o:ko

Majoddé génédé gobíngoko

Ampima pi:manga damoiya damoiya

Jikong Korong ya:meya damoiya (Datta 1992: 20)

Meaning: There they come, baring their teeth-those from villages upstream carrying swords and those from villages downstream carrying spears, in between there is a man with a loin-cloth.

Dunduli yaménga kule bangkule

Si:sorong appun lagima kule bangkule

Si:sorong appuné reyabé reyabe

Dunduli ya:meya

Adi: di:ru:to lédéngoiya

Pu:lungai pu:sungai lédéngoiya

Onkori nokori lédéngoiya

Darka sormoti kuroma sorongaua (Datta 1992: 23)

Meaning: I don't want wild flowers, you pot-bellied daughter -in-law let the wild flowers keep blooming in their splendour. Roaming around hills and deles, O my dear maiden -you will do what is not to be done.

Kuroma nam dile kuromaronga

Abíra noi pilling bomtagoné rapumde pumde

Abíra kebo niyem kanke rapumde pumde,

Adi gorom soroma domagbo goroma

Kítigdo:ye kappai kumbang apin doppai

Ko ya:meya tako ya:meya

Ambinígín gédantokané

Sarda sard sardo medamda

Sarkod me:pupu: lunga Ogyaba-egrun. (Datta 1992: 24)

Meaning:

Kuroma has given the name kuromaroriga.

O my friend, have you brought anything?

Brother-in-law, the hill has grown hot should I now weep under the platform or take my meal from the smoke-rack? Young men, lift the-carrying-basket with rice on to your back.

Adi:tokké togdoloji

Do:mug dongka:tokké togdoloji

Aying amo:so togdolo

Domangé doma:pé dola:na

Tí:mangé tí:ma:pé ti:la:na

Li:posiri lenka:bong

Lébungésin lerika bong

Taidé kidingé togdolo

Taié kidingé togdolo

Alagdé gadde:sula togdungai

Aying amo:so miturém patio:toní. (Datta 1992: 26)

Meaning: Coming down from the hills to the plains eating things not fit for eating, drinking water not fit for drinking, people were afflicted with goitre and elephantiasis. The Taid and tau clans had no women with them after coming down to the plains; they came in contact with local women and established mitir relationship.

The two clans Taid and tau came down to the plains from the hills. But they had no women, so they established marital relationship with the women of the plains. They drank contaminated water, so they were affected with diseases like goitre and elephantiasis, thus this folksong captures the history of the Mising community.

Taídbi togdolo

Lagbíg alagdo

Yoksa démna bomdagai

Lakkeké alagdog

Mitur démai gagsed minsutoné.

Do:mugé dongkangetolo

Urom po:sumém

Ngolu mosula gidange,

Oiké abba oiké ba:ba,

Nolu sido po:lo akonno

Togye émna mi:la

Pagli:dém ngo:sin ba:bila metu:né. (Datta 1992: 28)

Meaning: They had come holding swords with the right hand and with the left hand they grasped the hand of the mitirs and forged relationship in the hills they used to offer worship to their ancestors on the way to the plain, a girl of mitirs family had been waiting she said, “I knew you would be coming, For you I have roasted yam since last month.”

So the communion with the people of the plains happened among the Mising community. Many of their folk-songs are related to the history of Misings who were once hill dwellers. The legends related to their history exist among the people.

Oiké ba:ba

Nomai ngo toka:la du:né

Nngokké milbongé kama:péila

Ba:bunom ngo toka:la du:nel (Datta 1992: 30)

[She told the man of the taid clan]

“My dear, as I have no husband, I have been waiting for you. I know you would surely come”. Even the Mising community co-operated with the people of the hills, so

they extended relationship with each other, these folk tales are related to the exchange relationship with each other, these folk tales are related to the exchange of cordial relation with one another.

SONGS OF LOVE AND YEARNING (*OI-NI:TOM*):

Mising oral literature of today abounds in compositions that are the expressions of love and yearning particularly of the youthful heart. The most popular and humorous of this class of songs are those of the type known as *Oi-ni:tom* literally means songs for the beloved. *Oi-ni:toms* are short and terse compositions representing the unburdened pent up emotions of the love-struck youth and maiden, which are sung to the accompaniment of the drum (*dumdum*), the cymbals (*lu :pi*), the bamboo clapper (*toka*), the Jew harp (*gunggang*) and the buffalo-horn pipe (*pempa*); They are exquisite pieces of artistic expression outstanding for their nature lyricism, poetic sensitiveness and doctorous use of colourful images as well as for the haunting quality of their musical content, both melodic and rhythmic the word *Oi-ni:tom* has been derived from two viz. *Oi* and *Ni:tom*. The word *Oi* means younger, tender, dear and near one and *Ni:tom* means act of appeasing by singing. A singer therefore, begins each piece of *Oi-ni:tom* with the word *Oi* or *Oiya* in a high pitch.

Oiyé oiya mé:nané oiya oinom mé:nané

Kamang oi apiném domango:pé du:bo:rié (G. Taid 2015: 1)

Meaning: O my darling, my mind is so much yearning for you that I have forgotten to take scare food even.

Many feeling of love are expressed mainly through Mising folksongs. The love lorn youth give message of his love to maiden through *Oi-ni:tom*. *Oi-ni:tom* is basically song of the 'tillers'. Tillers have got inseverable relation with the nature. Misings are son of nature. They reside in the riverine area; they dwell in the foot hills, nature takes various shapes with the change of season. The sun and the moon, hills and the mountain, air and the sky, rivers and riverlets, sand and soil, trees and vegetation, birds and animals, fruits and flowers, despite nature and other events, are the things that they come across in the course of their day-to-day life. All these are reflected in *Oi-ni:tom* in the form of simile and metaphor.

Kuruang kabduné itungé íbogla

Asinang oduné ronki:ronki:la (T. Taid 2007:117)

Meaning: The fish eagle with its neck stretched. [on hearing that cry] my heart also moves with pain. Here, a lover hears the cry of the fish eagle, so he remembers his lover which pains his heart.

Do:mum do:nyidé ka:díge kangkoré

Ané nésamdé ludíge lukoré. (Datta 1992: 106)

Meaning: It is hard to bear the sunshine during cloudy weather. it is also hard to bear the chiding of the stepmother.

The Mising community believed in the system of polygamy. so it is found sometime in Mising community. So a child feels difficult to cope with this practice so he

outburst *Oi-ni:tom* when he cannot bear the chiding of a step-mother, as it is difficult to bear the sun shine during a cloudy weather.

Oinom-mé:la-dungge:la-asi pumsa:l tí:dodém

Lakkeng pongkeb pongkeblo oi nok yallom Ka:begdung (G. Taid 2015:3)

Meaning: I took water by scooping up with my palm while recollecting you, I see your shadow in every gap of my fingers.

A lover remembers his beloved, so in every arena when he took water by scooping up his palm, he sees her shadow, so in *Oi-ni:tom* the younger generation of the Mising community gets enthralled in their own way.

Obonori sullido oko asse jua:yén

Ash mé:m,an ko:né:dem kapé me:lad mola:yén (G. Taid 2015: 3)

Meaning: What water would be enough to wet the sand of Subansiri; and how to make terms with the damsel who does not think in my favour.

A lover who fails to woo his lover compares the heart of his lover to that of the sand of Subansiri, so he tries to find out a way to win the favour of the damsel he loves. So in these folksongs every lover finds word to message his beloved.

Oinom ajon jonko arígdok tongi:dém

Yumrang oi dubori partid oi tokubo (G. Taid 2015: 3)

Meaning: The stilted platform in the paddy-field where we used to get together has already been swallowed by the growing wild grass.

A pair of lovers remember their remember their time spent in the field on a stilted platform. so the lover while remembering her say that stilted platform in the paddy field where they use to meet has been filled by growing grass.

Do:nyi oadung liglígúe liglígépé

Asinang odu:né, sinsinaué sinsinpe,

Oino dogné tadogé

Oino rokpan porogé

Oinom mela du:la:mang. (Datta 1992: 110)

Meaning: The sun is about to set in the west, and stray thoughts are appearing in my mind to me, my darling, you are like a pearl, like an orphaned chick, I cannot live without you.

A lover cannot think completely without the other, so he says, himself as an orphaned chick and cannot live without the other.

Ti:né alo tingkampé ti:pumsuge:la

Digné mírsí dikkampé digpansuka:né

Oiya oisr

Reigoné doksiri

Oinom kapé meyené (T. Taid 2007: 119)

Meaning: You gave the taste of salt as it were, then why do you make me burn as if with chillies? My precious love, you are beautiful like a necklace of fine beads. How can I live separated from you?

A young maiden is compared to a necklace of fine beads. He cannot remain separated from her.

Télé gunggang bé:du:né bélé gunggang bé:du:né

píntod pentod pé daglen bidune:né

Oiye oisiri

Amiglog miksiri

Kapé méla du:yené (Datta 1992: 112)

Meaning: The Jew's harp is being played in the east, the ew's harp is being played in the west. Somebody has flittingly appeared before my eyes, [Is it you] O my precious darling, your eyes are so Lovely, how can I live-without you? One can hear the playing of the harp so a young man could visualise somebody coming up in his mind so he realised it was his lady love. The lover praises the eyes of his love. He cannot remain separated from his love.

Abung asi bittélma mé:nama

Mé:nam agom lutélma mé:nama

Idé do:nyi po:lolo mé:nama

Ngoik agom lutélyen mé:nama

Oi oi naluma

Rémagné oluma

Kapé mela du:yené oiya. (Datta 1992: 114)

Meaning: Ceaseless flows the water in the river. Endless are also the thought in our hearts in which age, in which land of new sun and moon shall we finish talking? O my soft-hearted darling, how can I stay away from you?

Obonori a:nélém singko:lapé mé:suma

Ajjoulökké piri:ti mitpanla:pé mé:suma (G. Taid 2015: 9)

Meaning: I can't dare to cross the Subansiri River by walking on foot, and I can't dare to think of forgetting our love since childhood. Here a lover express his love for his beloved and he regret that he cannot forget her since they knew each other since childhood:

Obonori Okangé oínom airu:p akangé

Akango:la du:namsém nirokang oi moyabo (G. Taid 2015: 9)

Meaning: O, the eatable ferns along the river Subansiri and O my darling, you are my great hope! Despair not all the hopes

Oi-ni: tom is basically songs of the 'tillers'. Tillers have got in severable relation with the nature. They reside in the riverine area they dwell in the foot hills. Nature takes various shapes with the change of the seasons. The sun and the moon, hills and the mountains, air and the trees sky, river and the rivulet, sand and the soil, trees and the vegetation birds and the animals, fruits and the flowers, despite nature and other events, are the things that they come across in the course of their day to day life.

SONGS ACCOMPANYING CEREMONIAL AND MERRY-MAKING DANCES:

The Mising are jovial and are dance loving people. Men and women, young and old; married and unmarried all join dancing without any inhibitions on various occasions, particularly during festivals and ceremonies like *Ali a:ye-ligang* and *Po:rag*.

There are special songs meant for the dances performed on the occasion of the *Ali-a:yeligang* festival and the term *ligang ni:torn* is being used to designate them, sung to the accompaniment of the drum(*dumdum*), cymbals(*lu:pi*) and songs, some of these songs have a solemn melodic and rhythmic structure. Most of the others sung while performing dances in the courtyards.

Lo-lo-le-lo:le-lo:le

Dabo-lo:le-lo:le-lo:le

Ru:rubyemilo kénin keninna!

Sisugb sugbo sugbo bodiya

Régam gambo gambo bodiy

Yo-ru:sém pamosulanka

Omumbulla ru:se'rn parnosulanka. (Datta 1992: 34)

Meaning: Come close when it is dark and move apart when it is light [while dancing I give us one [hog] that is as big as swamp deer [as we the community are here!] keep within bounds, my dear girls. [Dance keeping within bounds]

Yo-dumdumém dé:légtoika

Pi:seng dumdumém dí:lígtoika

Yo-orayém jo: lentoika

Sali orayém jo:lentoika!

Yo-kektenge berengetoika,

Omum ngolum kektenge bemgetoika. (Datta 1992: 36)

Meaning: Play, play on the drum. Play on the drum made from stem of the Tonga flower. Bring the tray, bring out the tray for offering betelnuts. Bring these and pay respect to us young man and women [that is the assembly that has collected in your courtyard]

Tasun komoliy, take:komoliya

A-a-soraye-ai!

Aro aro kumbang

Misa misa kumbang

A-a-soraye-ai!

Noluké éranga kébangé gikumdung

Apinko bitoka, apongko bitoka

Kébangke gikumdung!

Lottalo kébangé gikumdung

Nolusin pésolangka

Rokpungé apiném bitoika

Pobang aongém bitoika. (Datta 1992: 38)

Meaning: The shrimp is soft, the crab is soft. It is the duck-the bird hei!

You householder, the community has assembled in your courtyard, treat it with apprehension .Roast the fowl arrange for a fest, arrange for ash-treated liquor.

Lé:lo: dí:du:bong marbang dí:du:bong

Siloké longé so lokkiyém ngolusin

Dí:sangau bidu:bong!

Odém kadmangém kattom bilarigka

So:bo yegbangém ba:tom bilangka.

Arigé bokkém yumrangé bokkém

Lokkiyém nglusin la:lígdung. (Datta 1992: 40)

Meaning: We are celebrating by sounding the gong. Today we shall hail and escort the corn-goddess to your home Decant good and well fermented wine. Arrange for roasting big tusked boats. Today we shall usher the corn —goddess from the forest, from the field and put her inside your granary.

Do din pak, baro din pak

Ru:rub tomílo kenín kéninna

Lolad tomílo kéton kétonna

Ngokké modié kamangob (Datta 1992: 42)

Meaning: For ten days on end, for twelve days on end we celebrate our festival .In the dusk we come close, in the light we move apart there are still days ahead of you for having fun, but for me there are- none

Di-ingdok kangkana
Disangolok ka:Yuma
Paguri ya:me:dém karpayé appetto.
Sirarndé ramdé
Méyappé yabbomkang!
A:né oi abungoi kéreng kéreng
Buriuti abungoi kéreng kéreng
gerki ki:tora-
Ki:noi ki:noi tekeli sa:petto
Teiti teiti titou-tou
Lí:sur dempetto. (Datta 1992: 46)

Meaning: O my beloved from Dihing river,
 O my beloved from Disang river,
 [Let us have tim]
 The turbaned youth has been killed by the cross-bow.

(siramdé ramdé)
 He has been blown off by the fan blast.
 The river bank is rounded
 The Burhisuti River is winded.
 The earthen pot has been trampled under the feet,
 (Teiti teiti titou tou)
 Someone has broken the earthen pot.

Yape:ké allém ka:ma:ye

Yasumké allém ka:ma:ye

Soronke okumdé osoddag

Dírsoloi alabakkang

Tangernpé pitoném

Tamigé urangempé de:dankang. (Datta 1992: 48)

Meaning: We haven't seen yape's feet, we haven't seen yasum's feet. So they are not dancing soron's house has crumbled down,
When given a slap,
Away flew the flies.

Apin koliya pinkolo pi:malo

Rindangdang bilongoniya.

Di-ingé kangkana, disangé ka:Yuma

Rindangdang bilongoniya.

Dumre:kabbo dumsunga

Dumoni kangki: kangada

Du:re dungkan kamtiya

Perígpe yaptoika

Pésinpe yaptoika

Rindangdang bilongoniya. (Datta 1992: 50)

Meaning: Did you have enough rice to eat? Her river Dihing is beautiful, the river Disang is beautiful. [We are intoxicated] are you pretty like a female deer or are you

ugly? Whatever your looks, don't stay aloof. Dance like a jungle peasant or a jungle fowl.

Youe youa

Gépo:né omna, géyomé omma

Se:sin omma uiné:ngoi

Se:sin omma tani:né :ngoi

Se:sin omma

Domola ti:mola dung.

(Jaluguti bengena pate omma,

Jaluguti bengena pat.) (Datta 1992: 52)

Meaning: O my dear maiden, the plump maiden, the larky maiden. Are you the daughter of a God or of human being? I have always maintained you with food and taken care of you.

(Jaluguti ben napateomma; jaluguti. be gena pat.)

Da:dam boné ngo dam :diya

Se:kom tomdoaé

Gapa gené omé dém tomdoné

Da:dam boné ngo da:diya (Datta 1992: 54)

Meaning: O mother superior with whom shall we make merry? We shall merry with the girls wearing *gapa* we shall dance and show you those girls dancing.

Amo jikong koronga damboya damboya
Jikong karong ya:meya damboya damboya
Rokpíné yapímé tirabko
Bélangko lamíko
Kopagko pagmí ko
A:lok ba:lok re-re (Datta 1992: 56)

Meaning: The ground is uneven, O mates,
Uneven, young men-my mates.
The yolk of the chicken-egg,
Remove the egg-shell.
Jackfruit seeds, banana seeds.

LULLABIES AND NURSERY RHYMES

Leturkuré dugmandung réya bai réyabpé
Mimi:toka tatatoka-a-a!
Di-ingé so:bok ngemunné lending
Oiméla:lo:pe tatanpé-a-a!
Oibi kangané oibi ka:yurné
Oime lé:ti:dumlabko labbipé-a-a! (Datta 1992: 60)

Meaning: The baby sitting girls are playfully running in rows a tide having fun.
Sleep, my little one, something is floating down the Dihing river. My pet and I am
carrying you on my back, go to sleep, my lovely pet. I shall nicely do your hair.

A ajji komjinga reiya biné sin
Olo pitpanga jenang biné sin
Kapé mujiré keiré du:néiké
Ajji:sim mujiré kéiré du:né iké!
Métungé dilingeya dibiyo tu:né
Mégabé ya:sillingé sidbiyo tu:né!
Ke:dangké da:puna rénungo biné sim
Jo:joke jokpuna rénungo biné sin
Ajji sim se:kobí mujiré kéiré tu:néike! (Datta 1992: 62)

Meaning: O my little, little precious one, who has offended you? Has anybody hit you with a burning stick or with a pair of pincers? O my young pet, my flower-soft precious one, who has made you cry.

Ajji:no tayub mujiré dolangka
Nokké bía na:né bía-
Ajji:sim mujiré kéiré sutu:né!
Nokké doka na:né doka
Ngíndurné bulumém mu:mané toka! (Datta 1992: 65)

Meaning: Is it me, your mother, who made you cry? Then, my precious, suck the nectar-like breast of your mother.

Na: nébí:sinoikamangké

Ba:bu bí:sinoi kamangke

Nokké génam bomnaindém se:ko la:biyené!

Amiké génam bomnamém ka:la

No:sinoi Kabdagné

Okolog na:néme sinoi pangkupéi! (Datta 1992: 66)

Meaning: You have no mother, no father. Who will bring you clothes to wear?
You cry seeing others dressing up. Where will you find your mother now, cry as you may?

Bírnésinoi kamangké

Bírmesinai kamangké

Amiké génam bomnamém ka:bola kapiyené

Émmumpé Kabla ciu:tonemoi

Se:kobí ila doboyené (Datta 1992: 68)

Meaning: You have no brother, you have no sisters. What's the use of crying on seeing others well dressed? If you keep crying, who will do the fanning for you and feed you?

Arígémsinoi iktoma

I'síngémsinoi ikintoma

Nokke kompalse sempa ika:ne!

Se:kosin ge:yoka, sekosin payoka

Na:nébisin siko:bob a:bubi: sin sika:bo

Se:kobi genamem amiké inamem ka:la

Roué yumém kabdagbongai! (Datta 1992:72)

Meaning: You haven't learnt farming [you are so young] so this is what faith has ordained for you? No one must shout at our little one, no one must show anger at him. His mother is death, his father is death, who will take care of him now? Seeing other people dressing up and doing work, he has taken to crying day and night.

Na:nébi Katoma:namna

Ba:bubi Katoma:némna

Bírrangégom ka:la:toma

Ba:boibulukélo kabré sula du:la:bong

Nokké dokadí édémpé ikang! (Datta 1992: 72)

Meaning: When you have lost your mother, when you have lost your father, your brothers have also stopped crying for you. Now go and cry before your paternal uncles [relating your woes] so that's has become your lot now.

Arí gém ikimna:pé

Ísingém ikimna:pé

Donamém mé:boyepé

Ti:namé donamém se:ko langa:biyené

Nokké miksé dínonomangeí! (Datta 1992: 74)

Meaning: Since you don't know fanning, who will collect food for you and offer it to you [even though you feel hungry]? Alas, your tears do not cease flowing.

Magbobi:sinoi gidoku

Sati:dém takpola

Gérkubla gérlabla gidungei,

Di-ingé abu:dém

Dakkongé tonémna

Alodi boronpé gekangoi! (Datta 1992: 76)

Meaning: Look, brother-in-law (elder sister's husband) is coming in merry mood with swinging gait-an umbrella over his head. The moment brother-in-law cross the Dihing River, the water of the river took a turmeric-like (yellow) glow.

Akkung Kabyoka

A:neya Kabyoka

Tolokké sarogé gidobongke

Na:nébi:sin gérongkang

Ba:bubisin girongkang

Ngolum ye:bom yekubongéi! (Datta 1992: 78)

Meaning: Don't cry my dear, don't cry my precious. There, from upstream have come the Hillman your mother has gone out, so has your father. The Hillman will capture and take us away-don't cry.

Alagésin dírka:bongéi

Aliésin dírka:bongéi

Se:kobí:na ila doboyené

Na:nébi:sin sika:bongai

Ba:bubí:sin sika:bongai

Na:noikélo momínna dopébongai! (Datta 1992: 80)

Meaning: Our hands have been torn, our legs broken [we have lost our parent] who will work for us and feed us? We must get our food by working with our paternal aunt's family. There is no other way.

Oiyaua Kappoya pékkaue dé:ma:da

Dinaué pí:ma:da monei,

Sukké po:loso ballenau yemílo

Oiyauné Ba:bipé monei. (Datta 1992: 80)

Meaning: Don't cry, my dear. The dove's chicks have not yet hatched in the nests. There will be chicks later this month. When they are here we'll roast them and give them to our dear one to eat.

Oiyakua kappoya pékkaue dé:ma:da

Lakkepé kema:da mon,

Oiyauké arígdo taseko selekko

Oiyaumé sumbipé mon. (Datta 1992: 82)

Meaning: Don't cry my dear. The young ones of the doves are yet to learn flying. There is a stretch of ulu grass in our dear one's field. We'll lay down our dear one in that patch of ulu grass.

Oiyaua Kabyoka

Na:neniésin ba:bumésin

Arígem imolangka

Kotsulo oiyau gíangé dokudo

Oiyaunom apiném biye! (Datta 1992: 84)

Meaning: Don't cry my dear. Let your mother and father work in the field. Later, when your mother and father come back from the field they will give you rice to eat. Do not cry.

Nya:nyike arigdo boromtuli mí:nyiko

Lí:jiré bogbogla dageí

Langkapé gítoném tabíde égrikang

Talé:télog jode gikang. (Datta 1992: 84)

Meaning: There, the fruits on the two barharnthuri plants in auntie's (Father's sister's) field are looking red. When I went to pluck them, a snake blocked my way. I almost died out of fright.

Bélé sinai takkírko

Télé sinoi takkírko

Ara:dé tajikko dungai,

Takkire tu:sindém

Tajigé a:yedém

Oimésin la:bipé money! (Datta 1992: 86)

Meaning: There is an uriyam tree upstream; there is another uriyam tree downstream. I shall bring for my little one young uriyam shoots and fig fruits.

Ribi pakín parínoi

Ta:ng kané tatígoi

Ta:tobí:sin dumpé bukkang

Ya:yobí:sin kojola

Ta:to bí:sin kojola

Bulusinoi ayangpé-yepé! (Datta 1992: 88)

Meaning: They've cut down the creepers. There are hairs on the frog's back. Grandfather's hair has turned grey. The complexion of grandmother is darkish. They will fondle you.

Titi titi titapuloi

Bisonadbok sompapuloi

Oiyaubí riyadém sumto,

Sompa appundé moi

Oiyaubí tígabto

Purnima loladpé idung. (Datta 1992: 90)

Meaning:

Titi titi the tita flowers,

The champa flower of Biswanath.

Our dear maiden has woven the breast cloth. On one end of the cloth our dear maiden has woven the motif of a champa flower; the flower is dazzling like the full moon.

Na:nebi:sin opané

Ba:bubi: sin opané

Ngokkémpé opanné kama,

Amirrokké gasorlo

Koiyangé angka:né

Edemsinoi nibine kama. (Datta 1992: 94)

Meaning: My mother is poor, so is my father. There is no one poor as I. The clothes I am wearing have become all dirty but there is no one to wash them for me.

Na:nébi:sinoi ramka:né

Ba:bubi:sinoi ramka:né

Sa:sibi:sin ramka:né mon,

Se:kobi bírmé ngolum

Apiném yí:la dobope'

Kablango du:nampé ikang. (Datta 1992: 96)

Meaning: Mother has fallen ill, so has father. The elder brothers have also fallen ill.
Who will cook and feed the young sister? It has become our lot to keep crying.

Erilu eburi erilu suburi

Erilu nodire pani

Ekanto monere siniti oi takime

Oiyaubi obogoi rani. (Datta 1992: 100)

Meaning: The areca nuts tree has borne six score fruits, and six score birds are eating them, my little girl has so many suitors, to whom shall I be looking ?

Erilu eburi erilu suburi

Erilu nodire pani

Ekanto monere siniti oi takime

Oiyaubi obogoi rani. (Datta 1992: 100)

Meaning: I've left my locality, the river from which I drank water. I'll be wishing in all earnestness- My dear girlie will become a queen.

In above-mentioned extracts from various kinds of folk songs it is observed that the Misings have dependent on nature and rivers are their life-blood. In the several kinds of songs they always refer to different rivers and their sorrows and happiness. The Misings have been nature-loving across the centuries and have been living on the banks of rivers since the earliest times of their migration and settlement in different districts of Assam. The songs are full of metaphors and similes. Rivers, forests, trees, flowers, insects and different creatures and occasions are mentioned in the songs. Their folk literature and folk life are replete with the elements of nature and they have been living simple lives

since then only and their folk literature is full of various aspects of environmentalism and ethical values and they respect the traditional ways of living. The rituals and ways of right living are also reflected in the songs. Singing and dancing being the major parts of their culture, the Misings can compose and recite the songs and hence there are no limits to composition of new songs and many such songs can come into existence in future.

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CHAPTER IV

ETHICAL AND ECO-ETHICAL REFERENCES IN THE MISING PROVERBS, RIDDLES AND POPULAR PARLANCE

As it is well known about rural India, proverbs, riddles and popular parlance traditionally handed down from generation to generation not only enliven the speech of the ordinary villager but also sets before him standards of values and codes of conduct. In the different parts of Assam also there is a mass of sayings, frequently mouthed by the humble peasant and the unlettered old woman that covers a wide range of things, from the light-hearted commentary to the satirical banter, from the charming witticism to the insipid homily. There are quite a few Mising proverbs advising the acceptance of one's social and economic position. A few proverbs also warn the Mising community against laziness and shirking of duty.

Proverbs are short, they consists of different experiences of human being in their life time. Proverbs expresses different sentiments of people from the ancient times. Proverbs is a medium to mediate the different experience s of human beings since the earlier centuries. Proverbs are full of moral thoughts and ethical values. Gain it is not possible to understand the proverbs without knowing the different characteristics of a particular society. The most importance side of a proverb is to understand the meaning. Some proverbs involve moral judgment of some kind or other. Other proverbs also suggest the ungrateful nature of Mising people. Again some proverbs express the gluttonous, lazy, good-for-nothing and showy woman.

Proverbs occupy a very important position in Mising literature. Like other communities in Assam, the Misings also try to express their sentiments through these proverbs. Proverbs are called '*Lisé- Lukor*' in Mishing language. Proverbs involve the long history of human kind related to Mising community. These are words consisting full of wisdom.

Proverbs are common among Mising folk. The thoughts and sentiments of Mising people are collected in the form of proverb which forms an important place in Mising literature. According to Hem Chandra Baruah Proverbs, Riddles are of some pattern. *Lusé-Lukor* consists of eco-ethical values also. Some examples of *Lusé-Lukor* are given below:

1. *Dumbé Belammém sek kama Opan Ago mém tatkama* (Doley 2009:75)

Meaning: (It is very difficult to identify the footsteps of a small deer, in the same way no one gives attention to the words spoken by a poor man.) Through this proverb the characteristics of Mising people can be identified. Because there is no one to find the footsteps of a deer in a jungle. As finding the foot prints of a deer is difficult. In the same manner there is no person in the community to feel the poverty and suffering of a poor man. So the problem of a poor man is expressed here. In a sense poverty which is a social problem is tried to compare with the foot steps of a small deer.

2. *Ngore Sumkolo Ngopiyé Summunna Sumke Sula Sido* (collected by me)

Meaning: (When a small fish jumps seeing a big fish it falls in danger.) This proverb also provides a lesson for the Mising community.

3. *Siyang Anem Joju Topuéma Mising Asinangem Poyé Jupéma* (collected by me)

Meaning: (We can know the depth of the Siyang river but it is very difficult to know the minds of the Mising people). This proverb shows the characteristic traits of Mising people. Their mind is very difficult to be read out.

4. *Lotu Donyi Kadak Kangkori Tumbo Senamé Séduk Sékori* (Doley 2013: 23)

Meaning: (The ray of the sun in the afternoon is very strong, so woman who becomes a widow in a young age tries to beautify herself by using cosmetics.)

This proverb also tries to show that a widow wants to become beautiful by using

cosmetics. This proverb also has ethical values indicating and comparing the rays of the sun with a widow.

5. *Dumsunggé Ammon Dodag Sidummé Yerungém Gaddag*. (collected by me)

Meaning : (A deer eats grain, while a small deer takes away someone's ear)

6. *Sulli lambém Guyardak Anu Miré:mém ka:yardak* (Doley 2009: 76)

Meaning : (As it is difficult to walk in the sandy desert, the behavior of the rich people is also intolerable.) Through this proverb the behavior of the rich people in the Mising community is depicted. Their behavior towards the poor people is intolerable one. The poor people feel suffocating in front of the rich one.

RIDDLES

Riddles are called 'Solok' in Mising language. Riddles are very popular in the life of Mising villagers and other common men. Some riddles, obviously of recent origin, reveal the power of observation and of pointed expression of the Mising villagers who compose them. Some riddles are elementary which contain the suggestions for a Mising man. Riddles are also popular among children in the Mising community. According to a Mising writer Indeswar Pegu, riddles are not only a form of entertainment but also a sign of intelligence since the ancient times.

Riddles are not associated with certain people in a particular occasion in Mising community. A person who knows riddles often questions the children. Again the older people in their leisure time ask riddles. Through riddles they try to pave a life consisting of ethical values giving moral lessons to the younger ones of the Mising community. Again cowboys question each other among themselves searching answer for the riddles. Some examples are given below:

(1)

Selék lok durgon dum sung

Ali Sangkok Gunék

Nesin Nemo Domang

E Turmam Turmang (Doley 2009: 77)

(A type of animal, having six legs which does not eat grass. It cannot survive if doesn't have blood for food)

Answer: Louse

(2)

Ané dem Katé karédak

Awudém yogmo Duegpe Duegdak (Doley 2009: 77)

(There is nothing special in mother's face but her son is very spicy)

Answer : Chilli

(3)

Okummé dung

Yabgo bare kamma

Gok kala kadag gom

Tani dé

Agom Aseg Luma (Doley 2009:77)

(A house without door and wall, if someone calls there is no answer)

Answer: A Grave

(4)

Kudum Kamané Ollungé

Kungko Kamané Ollungé

Asilo sin Dugma

Robadomesin Lagima

Rede Repé Tannam dé

Tung Tung Emna Bonoudé (Doley 2009: 77)

(A boat without a bar, daily makes a sound)

Answer: Mortar

(5)

Yum ralok dumud tapor sula

Dunné mimbirdé sekkon? (collected by me), meaning ‘A girl with long hair in jungle’.

Answer: Blanket

(6)

Sonne Nokkima Manne Sori

Maané Sori léppur kamma

Pasum Pe:Rummona Amyongém

Bejémdaak (collected by me), meaning ‘dependent on others having on roots of its own’.

Answer: A climber (Plant)

(7)

There are also some riddles related to insects, birds and animals.

Yumra yumra lok Among

Kunnede sekkon? (collected by me) meaning ‘a person in forest who walks with strict measurement’.

Answer: Leech

(8)

Tanniye Kabbek melo Asilo

Ajiring kinnéde okkom? (collected by me) meaning ‘hides in water when people notice it’.

Answer : Tortoise

Some riddles are also related with things used in our day to day life.

(1)

Lolomé Alongé

Sumpama Sumnané (collected by me) meaning ‘used for weaving thick blanket’

Answer: Deer Bone

(2)

Akidé kipor dak kiyer kama

Kipor need kama melo Aponousin kama (collected by me) meaning ‘stomach is broad, if narrow there is no wine in it.’

Answer: Pot made up of clay.

POPULAR PARLANCE

Different type of stories and sayings spoken among men are called ‘Doying’ in Mising language. These different kinds of stories can be divided into three parts: (i) *Leké Doying* (ii) *Rengam Doying* and (iii) *Doying*.

1. **Leké Doying or stories:** Leké Doyings are very popular among children and common men in Mising community. It occupies an important position in Mising Literature. These stories present ethical reasoning and understanding to the younger ones. The elderly people tell stories to children in leisure time. These stories are full of moral lesson that teaches people to live a peaceful life in their community. Grandmothers tell stories for their grandson and granddaughter. These stories also teach eco-ethical values for people living in their society. Leké Doying not only provides entertainment to children but also refers morality through the different characters in the stories. *Abu tun turung*, *Tito Pettang*, etc: these stories contain many valuable advice and they show how leech, mosquitoes, birds came into existence.
2. **Rengam Doying:** Rengam Doying are arbitrary, they are prevalent from the ancient times and are a source of inspiration for people living in Mising community. These stories also possess ethical values. According to Rengam

Doying, God of knowledge. Doying Babu offered scriptures to Mising people. But they could not preserve it, which is why it disappeared from their hands. A hunter thought that if he hides the Mising scriptures in his stomach, he can preserve it, but he kept it above the fireplace so it turned to ashes.

3. ***Doying or stories***: According to Indeswar Pegu a Mising writer expressed in his book 'Mising society and culture', that there are many stories still prevalent and common among men. These stories capture the history of their ancient forefathers. Their fore-fathers lived in the jungle, ate fruits and hunt animals in the forest. The Misings could not preserve the different chronological dates regarding their origin. Different stories regarding the invasion of Burmese are still alive in the hearts of Mising people.

The discussed proverbs, riddles and popular parlances are some selected examples of the richness of the tribes' associatedness with the nature and their ecoconsciousness. Each word echoes the reflection of their concern for the ecology and environmentalism. In the recent times also they are more ecocentric than anthropocentric.

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CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE DIAGNOSIS OF THE MISING AND OTHER FOLKLORES

One of the striking features that marks out man from other animals is that human beings have culture whereas other animals do not. But it is also fact that the natures of all cultures are not the same. Certain cultures are complex with advanced technology while others are simple with low-level technology. A dividing line between the complex, high-technology cultures and the simple, low technology culture is provided by the art of reading and writing, some cultures are literate and others are non-literate. But so far as folklore is concerned, its presence is ubiquitous in all kinds of societies, literate or non-literate.

Folklore.... is one of the important parts that go to make up the culture of any given people....there is no known culture which does not include folklore.No group of people, however simple their technology, has ever been discovered which does not employ some form of folklore.Because of this, and because the same tales and proverbs may be known to both, folklore is a bridge between literate and non-literate of societies. (Bascom in Dundes 1965:26)

Folklore has conventionally been viewed not only in terms of the literate, non-literate polarity but also in terms of other polarities, such as, between the outdated and the modern, between the rural and the urban, between the upper stratum and the lower stratum, and between the peasantry and the industrial workers, etc. According to the old orthodox view, folklorists were regarded as a band of antiquarians dealing with survival and bygones that did not fit in with the modern times. And also, folk society and folklore were believed to be confined only to the backward rural areas and the unlettered peasant and tribal societies. There was, according to this view, no folk in the urban and industrial centres and hence there was no folklore in such places.

But gradually there has been a sea change in the attitude concerning who are the folk and what constitutes folklore. According to the new revised concept, the folk society is not necessarily made up of the rural illiterate peasant mass or tribal mass but may signify anonymous masses of tradition-oriented people anywhere. So there are folk groups as much in towns as in cities and industrial centres as in remote villages and hamlets. Alan Dundes, a contemporary luminary in the firmament of folklore studies says:

The term 'folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is it could be a common occupation, language or religion-but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own.... A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of tradition belonging to the group to have a sense of group identity (Dundes in Dundes 1965:2).

The conceptualization of folklore has veered away from its association with “hidden, forgotten and backward culture. The folklorists are still concerned with material traditionally transmitted from earlier times: but then, all folklore is not necessarily past-oriented. Folklore has its own contemporary manifestations and relevance. As Richard Dorson, one of the greatest folklorists of recent times observes that much of folklore is keyed to the here and now, to the urban centres, to the industrial revolution, to the issues and philosophies of the day. (Dorson in Dorson 178:23).

In fact, folklore is where tradition is. But tradition, it must be understood, doesn’t stand for dogmatic and blind adherence to the past and its ways, what Sydney Hartland had said, more than a century ago has lost none of its validity: “....Tradition is always being created anew, and traditions of modern origin wherever found are as much within our [folklorists] province as the ancient ones”(Hartland 1885:117). Thus folklore plays the mediating role between the past and the present, between the old-fashioned and the modern, between the rural and the urban, between the present society and the industrial society and between the literate and the non-literate. Significantly, the progress of technology-although adversely affecting the traditional context and texture of folklore, has not sounded its death knell, which was thought to be inevitable; rather often it has in a manner given a new lease of life to folklore and in many cases added wings do it.

A remarkable thing about verbal folklore around the world is that societies geographically far removed from one another possess material which have strikingly common feature. Folklore denotes knowledge, beliefs, customs, dress, food narratives, art forms and other traditional items of a small group; whereas socio-cultural anthropology, the sub-field of anthropology closely related with folklore, is extensive study of a community for understanding their behaviour with reference to ecological

adaptation, economy, social structure, politics, symbolic systems, deeper structures and external influences.

The Misings, as they prefer to describe themselves, are another colourful Mongoloid tribe who, like the Chutiyas, inhabit the riverine areas of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Darrang districts. Originally, they were probably with the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes which trekking down from the point of dispersion, came to the sub-Himalayan hills to the north of the Brahmaputra and were among the Akas, Abors, and Mishmi of Arunachal.

The Misings occupy a position of singular importance and significance among the large number of communities living in the hills and plains of Assam and contributing colourful strands that have been woven into the many splendoured fabric of its socio-cultural milieu. The Misings inhabit in the riparian tracts along the banks of the river Subansiri, Siyang, Dihing, Dibang, Dhansiri, Bharali and Buroi as well as the mighty Brahmaputra, the Mising offer an outstanding example of the processes of acculturation, integration and assimilation that have been consistently at work in the making of the composite Assamese culture. A Mongoloid group of people inhabiting present day Arunachal previously the Misings have lived in the eastern region of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Known more popularly to the outside world by the designation Miri until recent times, and referred to as such in all old administrative records and ethnographic reports, the community calls itself Mising and is made up of a large number of exogamous clans and groups. Ethnically they belong to the same stock as the Adis, the Nishis (Daflas), the Apa-tanis and the Hill Miris (Sometimes collectively referred to as the Tani group) of the Siyang region of Arunachal Pradesh and must have once lived in close physical and

cultural proximity of these groups. This is borne out by the fact that there is a persistent and widely prevalent tradition among the Misings to the effect that they were once hillmen, and quite a number of legends and other folklore material current among them are concerned with why and how they had come down to the plains at different times in separate groups.

Apart from distinct similarity in the matter of language the close-affinity between the Misings and the above mentioned hill groups, particularly the Adis extends into such fields as beliefs, world view, custom and even certain aspects of material culture. But what is outstanding about Mising culture and for that matter about Mising folklore, is not the erstwhile hill affiliation but the remarkable manner of adaptation of the old modes and mores in the wider cultural setting of the plains. Thus, Mising traditional culture much of which belongs to the domain of folklore runs along a channel in which two different streams mingle with each other and move towards a broader confluence.

The original Mising religion is based largely on the *Do:nyi-Po:lo* cult centering round mother Sun (*Ane-Do:nyi*) and father Moon (*Abu Po:lo*) and a certain form of ancestor worship; the Mising supernatural world is also full of various kinds of spirits (*Wi/Wiyu*) which are to be propitiated or warded off with the help of sacrifices, incantations and charms; and the priests and shamans (*Mibu/Miri*) are the mediums operating between the human and the supernatural world. At the same time, through a slow but sure movement into the fold of Hinduism of the Assam Vaishnava order, the Misings have taken over lots of beliefs and customs associated with that faith including some esoteric practices. Thus the singing of Vaishnava hymns and the performance of tribal worship with the sacrifice of pigs and fowls and the consumption of rice-beer (*Apong*) co-exist side by side.

The Mising language also tells a similar story of shifting cultural moorings. Unmistakably belonging to the family of languages spoken by the Tani groups of tribes of Arunachal particularly the Minyong, Adis, the Mising language has in-corporated many features of the Assamese language, particularly in the matter of vocabulary. Significantly, most of the Mising vocables connected with settled cultivation are loan words from Assamese. What is more, there is a distinct variety of Assamese which could be called Mising Assamese which is characterized by distinct Mising phonetic and other features.

Even the Mising dress and ornaments, both male and female represent a pleasant admixture of erstwhile hill forms, materials, techniques and designs with those of the Assam plains. After this rather passing glimpse at some of the non-verbal aspects of Mising folklore, which should serve as a helpful contextual background, we shall now pass on to the verbal material i.e oral literature for a somewhat closer look.

Mising oral literature is considerably rich in terms of both quality and quantity. Much of the materials made up of various kinds of narrative songs, rhymes and other rhythmic compositions, proverbs and other popular expressions habitually mouthed by the folk reflects the phenomenon of cultural synthesis. The narratives fall into various categories like myths, legends and tales (besides ballads which also go with songs). Many of the creation myths as also myths concerning the actions of the first man *Tani* are strikingly similar to those prevalent among the *Tani* group of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. The most interesting and significant legends are those that tell the stories of the migrations of the various Mising groups as well as those explaining the origin of the Mising custom and beliefs. As for tales they are of various types-ethnological tales, animal tales, supernatural tales, trickster tales, cumulative tales, humourous tales, and so

on; some of these are clearly of hill association while many others are of plains association.

But it is in the field of songs and other poetic compositions that Mising oral literature seems to be particularly rich. This may be due to the facts that items of such genres are the most frequently performed and to the fact that most readily available. The various types of Mising folksongs are mentioned below:

(a) **Songs of religious and ritualistic association:** The bulk of the material of this category comprises the priestly lore (*Mibu A:bang*) which is the exclusive preserve of the priests and shamans (*Mibu/Miri*), sung or chanted by the latter for such purposes as divination, invocation and propitiation of the gods and spirits, the language of much of the material is esoteric and archaic and as such not easily intelligible. One reason for the elusive nature of the meaning is the fact that some of the rituals and beliefs have lost their original significance because of the changing trends in Mising society. Some *Mibu A:bangs* have creation myths and genealogical legends as their content. The following is an example of a ritualistic chant.

Oh, our ancestors,

We are offering you today

Valuable beads and jewellery.

Keeping the Sun and the Moon

As our witnesses,

We have shown this to all

Present in the broad daylight.

Today we have killed a tusked

Boar in honour of the gods above.

Do keep us safe and sound. (Datta 2012: 273)

Some ritualistic songs are, however, not confined to the priestly function and are sung by the common folk taking part in the ritualistic ceremonies. Good examples are provided by the songs of the rain invoking ceremony performed at the time of drought. Here is a specimen:

There is no rain in our land,

Clouds, come across the mountains,

Come down close to us.

Mother Sun and father Moon.

Come down in fine loin cloths and fine napkins. (Datta 2012: 274)

(b) **Songs of love and yearning:** Mising oral literature abounds in compositions that are the expressions of love and yearning of the youthful heart. The most popular and numerous of this class of songs are those of the type known as ‘Oi-nitom’ which are comparable to the Assamese Bihu songs in both form and content.

A few examples and these are free rendering, an exact translation being next to impossible will speak for themselves.

My tears falling in the river have

Gone downstream.

My love take some water in your

Cupped hands
In the lending of the river at
Your place
You will see my shadow through
The openings of your fingers.
Drink as rice-beer the tears that
Flow by day.
Light a lamp with the tears that
Flow at night
One could even count up all the
Stars of the sky.
But the sorrows of our love-torn
Hearts are beyond counting.
Lest the predatory bird pounces
Upon the motherless chick,
Lest the girl of my love is enticed
Away by somebody else. (Datta 2012: 275)

Another form of love-lyrics is made up of love-dialogues, a series of addresses and counter-addresses between the lover and the beloved. Below is a fragment of such love-dialogue known as *lupo* in Mising:

Youth: My love let us elope along the elephant track.

Maiden: My treasure, I am not such a maiden as to elope along the elephant track; but I do love you. (Datta 2012: 275-276)

(c) Songs of lament:

Popular as *Kaban* in Mising, this class of songs consists of laments outpourings of the broken heart. They centre round such themes as misfortune or an unhappy event the loss of a loved one's life's drudgeries and miseries, and so on.

(d) Narrative songs:

Do:yings are narrative songs and as such are akin to ballads. While some *Doyings* have creation myths and etiological legends for their content. There are others which are more in the nature of ballads proper with the human element predominating in them. Since most of these song-narratives have tragic themes and thus something of the lament in them, they are designated by the term *Do:ying kaban* (story songs of lament). Song of *Gela*, song of *Deobor-Dentale*, and Song of *Binod-Pipoli* are a few compositions of this category.

(e) Songs sung on the occasion of marriage:

Mising songs sung on the occasion of marriage are something very different from what are commonly known as marriage songs in most other Indian societies. They are not pieces enlivening the proceedings at various stages of the marriage rites: they are

in effect not far removed from laments-laments of the bride at the prospects of being separated from her family, from her friends and from the familiar surroundings of her girlhood. The Mising term for marriage songs is *Midang ni: tom*.

(f) Lullabies and nursery rhymes:

Babies in all societies are lulled to sleep and young children comforted with the help of lullabies, nursery and rhymes; so are Mising babies and young children. However, one peculiarity about Mising lullabies and nursery rhymes, particularly the latter, is that in most cases they are not sung by the mother or other grown up female relatives, Mising women work hard both at home and in the field, and normally they do not have much time to spare. So while busy in the field, mothers leave the young children in the charge of tender aged girls who are kept particularly for this purpose. It is these young baby-sitters called *Nebing* in Mising who sing most of the Mising lullabies and nursery rhymes. That may be the reason why such compositions often betray a note of sadness and deprivation:

Don't cry, my pet,

Let your parents work in the field.

When they come back

We shall cook rice for you.

Your mother is not here nor your father

Who will bring clothes for you? (Datta 2012: 276)

(g) Children's game-songs:

As is natural with children everywhere, Mising children play various games to amuse themselves many of which are linked up with the singing of songs or to recitation of rhymes. The Mising term for such items is *Moman ni: tom*. Interestingly some of these game-songs contain fragments of legends concerning the migrations of particular Mising groups and also information about the coming of certain Mising customs or in the nursery rhymes or game-songs of many communities across the world.

As indicated earlier, songs of Assam Vaishnava association, Bihu songs and other Assamese songs cast indistinctly. Mising phonetic and musical moulds as well as some mixed compositions containing both Mising and Assamese elements also form part of the folklore heritage of the Misings.

Folklore is commonly considered as the lore of the illiterate rural folk. Of course, a few specialized folklorists have made attempts to define the term folklore. Their attempts in defining folklore no doubt have contributed a lot to the domain of the folklorists. But we should be aware that though the term folklore are as old as mankind (Handoo:1989:1). The term may be coined by William Thoms, a British antiquarian in 1846, but it does not mean that the study of folklore has been started only from 1846. It can easily be assumed that the materials of folklore had been studied with scholarly interest from fairly long past even long before William Thoms (Handoo:1989:1), on under various labels such as “Popular Antiquities” or “Popular Literature” and so on. Even the works of the Grimm Brothers, particularly of J. Grimm’s renowned work *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, i.e. *Household tales* (1812-14, two volumes) the first scholarly folktale collection was recognized by Williams Thoms himself. Not only William Thoms but other western scholars also accepted the work of Grimm Brothers as solid evidence of the growth of folklorist studies. Scholarly works on folklore materials were also done in Asia. The term folklore itself appears to be confusing and misleading,

because in the various nineteenth century usages of the term, folk was defined as a dependent rather than an independent entity.

The term 'folk' was defined to be a group of people who constituted the lower stratum of society (Dundes: 1978:2). According to them the term folk suggests 'peasant', non-literate or illiterate or rural people or lower stratum of the society. They tried to define the term folk viewing the relationship of folk with elite or civilized. According to them the term folk suggests 'peasant', non-literate or illiterate or rural people or lower stratum of society. They tried to define the term folk viewing the relationship of folk with elite and civilized. According to them folklore was presumed to exist only where an elite or civilized people existed. If this definition is accepted then one would have to conclude that one day folklore would disappear as soon as the peasant society would cease to be existed. But in the true sense folklore is still continuing in all societies.

Again if this definition is accepted then we will be compelled to conclude that the city dwellers are not folk and such city dwellers have no folklore. Secondly, it is very difficult to accept the view that folklore was produced by a folk in the long past and the folklore still extant today as being fragmentary survivals and the folk of today cannot produce any new folklore. On the other hand, contemporary folk are forgetting folklore day by day. And one day will come when folklore will die completely (Dundes: 1965:2). Viewing all these problems, Alan Dundes, a renowned folklorist tries to, define the term folk as "...Any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" (Dundes: 1965:2; 1978:7). The common factor may be a common occupation or language or religion "but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own (Dundes: 1965:2). A group may consist of at least two persons. Of course a group generally formed by many individuals. A

member of the group does not require knowing all the members of the group. But he should know the common core of traditions belonging to the group; traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity. The group may be formed by the wood-cutters or by the University professors and their folklore will be wood-cutter folklore or University professor folklore.

The gamut of folklore includes the following materials, folk behaviour, conversations, tradition of a particular group of people, their custom, beliefs, traditional dresses, mingling up with one another in society, attitude materials: myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, insults, retorts, taunts, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters and greeting and leave-taking formulae, limericks, ball bouncing hymes, epitaphs, epic formulae, folk costume, folkdance, folkdrama (mime), folkart, folkbelief, folkmedicine, gesture, folk instrumental music, folksongs, folk speech, folk similies, folk metaphor, names e.g., nicknames, place names, folk poetry, oral epic, autograph and place names; folk poetry, oral epic, epitaphs, autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia, jump-rope rhymes, finger and toe rhymes, dandling rhymes, counting-out rhymes, nursery rhymes and so on; games, gesture, symbols, prayers, i.e., graces, practical jokes, folk-etymologies, food recipes, quilt and embroidery designs, house, barn and fence types, street vendor's cries, traditional conventional sounds used to summon animals or to give them commands, forms like mnemonic devices, envelope sealers and the traditional comments made after body emissions particularly after burps or sneezes, festivals and public ceremonies and so forth (Dundes:1965:3).

The materials of folklore have internationally been classified into four genres, e.g.;

(a) Oral folklore, (b) Social folk custom, (c) material culture and (d) folk performing art forms (Dorson 1972:5). The ambit of oral folklore includes folnarrative, narrative folk poetry, folk epic, proverbs and proverbial expressions, riddles and folk speech. The area of social folk custom confines only to festivals and celebrations, recreations end games, folk medicine and folk religion. The gamut of material culture covers the fields of folk crafts, folk art, folk architecture, folk costume and folk cookery. The periphery of folk performing art forms includes folk drama, folk music and folk dance.

In contrast to verbal art or oral folklore, is physical folklore generally termed as material culture. Richard M. Dorson has defined the term material culture as an aspect of culture which responds to techniques, skill, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art (Dorson 1972:2). The material culture is also known as physical folklife or simply folklife.

Down from generation to generation:

The oral-history is a kind of verbal tradition which is also transmitted generation after generation. As such the oral-history mostly depends on folklore. The essential trait of folklore seems to be tradition which is orally handed Not only history but also other branches of knowledge were orally transmitted. Back of all literature stretches an unmapped and immeasurable world of oral tradition. Before man began to write, they made songs and sang them, put together stories told them. Furthermore, all human linguistic system have some basic characteristics. They are all primarily oral and auditory in their nature, i.e. they are produced with the organs of speech, and are perceived with those of hearing.

The verbal traditions associated with Buddhism and Jainism are still functioning as oral history. The Tripitakas and the Jatakas and other myths and legends connected with Buddhadeva and Mahavira and their future lives as well as their contemporary societies are the only materials on which the written history of the periods of Buddhadeva is reconstructed. This form of history can give ample evidences of Socio-political and religious life of the Pre and the Post-Mauryan periods along with the Maurya dynasty. That Asoka ascended the royal throne by killing his ninety-eight or ninety-nine brothers is found only in the Buddhistic oral tradition current in Ceylon which is also incorporated in the written history of India. Further he observes that the testimony of the inscription is supported by literary tradition which was purely oral.

The legend definitely performs the function of oral history. The principal characters of this genre of folklore are human. Legends tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chiefs and kings and succession in ruling dynasties and thus folktales may fulfill the demand of oral history. The dominant cultural interests of a particular society are reflected in oral narratives. The incidents depicted in the various genres of folklore can mirror the life of the people and their occupations and social life may in part be reconstructed from these tales. From this point of view folktales may function as oral history ranging to social, cultural, political, economic and religious histories.

According to the ideological theory of folklore particularly the folktales and folksongs glorify the deeds of national heroes. Folklore is observed as the creative expression of the working class. It may function as an echo of the past and at the same time it may function as the vigorous voice of the Present. Furthermore, folklore can perform its role as a reflection and a weapon of class conflict. So folklore may rightly be

considered as oral history. Folklore carries the folk memories of the past. Folk memories can be termed as folk history or oral history. “In the absence of writing –and it has usually been absent–the only explicit means of preserving oral evidence is to continue it orally beyond the lives or lucidity of its original human sources. These tales may serve as oral or traditional history, because “some say that history is only the reification of the opinions that prevailed in the past. If that be true then men who recall events before their own time may at best easily misunderstand the opinions of earlier men, or at worst deliberately substitute their own more or less plausible reasons to account for past happenings whose true rationale they do not know. Oral traditional fiction is always a rich and ready source of reasonable explanations for past experience. Historians have deplored this fact, while literary people have reveled in it. Richard M. Dorson has suggested a few criteria for evaluating the historical validity of oral traditions. These are; 1) Identifying folklore themes grafted into historical settings. 2) Allowance for personal and emotional bias slanting a tradition. 3) Cross-checks of multiple traditions. 4) Corroboration of a tradition from printed records. 5) Corroboration of a tradition from geographical land marks. 6) Corroboration of a tradition from material culture. 7) Knowledge of the character of an informant. (Dorson 1973:111-12).

A DIAGNOSIS OF THE DIFFERENT FOLK CULTURES OF ASSAM

The Assamese identify an individual as a member of groups like jati (caste) vamsa (lineage) and pariyal (wider family). A person's identity is expressed in relation to these groups. Personal identity is expressed in relation to these groups. Personal identity within a family is constructed on the basis of age, gender and kinship. Young village girls in Assam perform a mimic act, albeit playfully, called Bhekuli Biya (Frog Marriage). When there is no rain for days together during the months of cultivation, they

capture two frogs and get them “married”, going through all the customs of a usual marriage. Sometimes there is only one frog, the “bride”. They are bathed, the usual marriage-songs are sung, the conch-shells sounded and the “guests” entertained. At the end of the ceremony, the bride and the groom are placed on a tiny rafter and allowed to float on a river. Frogs and toads are always associated with rains. Some women in TamilNadu capture a frog and pour water over it when the rains in order to bring more rain-water. This association of toads with rains is a superstition.

There are many customs too of inducing rains prevalent in Assam. Sometimes when dry weather continues for an unduly long period village-folk raise little “embankments” around their courtyards to put the rain-god to shame, so that he softens himself and sends the rains. Contrarily, in Thailand, it is said, to stop torrential rains the Siamese priests open up the roofs of temples to drench the gods in rain-water so that they should know how human beings feel. The Assamese peasants make booming sounds by pulling at the strings of a kind of cross-bow in the belief that the sounds will induce the clouds to come and bring rain with them. B.K Barua in his book *Asamiya Loka Samskriti* has listed beliefs and superstitions of the Assamese people pertaining to religion, social customs, animals, stones, trees, agriculture and forecasts. It is well known that goddesses like Kali, Durga and Kamakhya are propitiated with sacrifices of goats. Kamakhya is offered pigeons and buffaloes. There is a strange custom of strangling a goat to death in the Siva temple at Umananda on the Sivaratri day and the devotees share the meat. Cocks, ducks and pigs are sacrificed by people of a non-Aryan origin. The Ahoms sacrifice cocks and ducks and offer fish, eggs, wine and other things to appease Khetor, Jakh, Subanchani, Kechaikhati and Yogini.

BIHU FESTIVAL

The Bohag Bihu is a spring festival, and the very name indicates gaiety and mirth. The term Bihu means two halves. The Indian climate has two principal seasons- the cold season or winter, and the hot season or summer. The Kati Bihu is accordingly celebrated just before the winter starts, and the Bohag Bihu at the close of the month of Chaitra (March –April). The changes in the season are caused by the changes in the positions of the sun in its orbit. From different positions, viz, in the Karkat, the Tula, the Makar and the Mesa are marked out the four different seasons. The productivity of the earth is influenced by the position of the Sun in its Orbit with reference to the former. In Spring, as a result of the Sun's arrival at the equatorial position in its path, Nature dresses herself in the wealth and grandeur of all the colours. Trees and Plants, Shrubs and Creepers put on a rich and gay colour and birds and insects sing new songs. The visitors of the Spring, the cuckoo and the keteki, sing soft and melodious tunes. Nature becomes rich and full everywhere and seems beside herself with joy and youth. Like a tempest at sea sending waves to the beaches in quick succession, the delight in Nature raises echoes in the mind of man.

The mind is not fixed

at home, my friend,

Oh, neither in the field;

Like the light tissues of

Dressed-up cotton.

It wants to float on and on. (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research Gauhati University*, 1993-94: 93)

The beauty of Nature has in all ages been worshipped by man and celebrated with dance and song and festivities. In this respect Bohag Bihu is principally a nature festival.

And because of this character of being nature worship, the Bihu is one of the major Indian festivals too; for like them it is broad-based and has an intensely joyous content. Like the catholic rays of the sun, the joy of the Bohag Bihu thrills everybody equally in the hills as well as the plains of Assam. In the vast joy of the Bohag Bihu people rise above their castes and creeds, races and tribes, and the Misings and the kacharis, the Hindus and the Muslims stand as one people the Assamese. Its joys have lessened the tedium and the rigour of the daily, prosaic routine of all classes- of tillers and shepherds, of weavers and housewives. Around the joys of the Bihu the fine arts of the Assamese people have remained alive. Our songs and romance, painting and poetry, dance and music have grown lively around it. It is, in short, our national festival as it mirrors the full-fledged national life.

Assam is, in the main, an agricultural country. It is around and out of agriculture that Assamese culture and civilization have grown through the ages. Her fertile soil, and the numerous life-nourishing rivers and rivulets have made Assam a veritable nature orchard. And these articles of her own produce are the articles, preferred in her festivals. Apart from the flowers and fruits, one cannot but be struck by the vital and indispensable role played in our daily life and in our festivals by our own agricultural produce-paddy, mustard, turmeric, banana and betel-nut. A bath with turmeric and pulse-paste is enjoined at the time of birth, marriage, and even death. Bereft of such a bath, a man may not get salvation-such is the belief. About the hundred and one uses of the plantain tree there is enumeration even in the aphoristic sayings of Dak. This tree, its leaves and bark are used extensively and indispensably in all our religious ceremonies and festive occasions. Sacrificial ablutions in marriage, the bath of the bride and the bridegroom requires a plantain tree to do under. Rice, husked and unhusked, is also

another indispensable article in all auspicious occasions. From rice is prepared a kind of country liquor which is with revellers a delicious drink on festive occasions.

Hence this agricultural festival is celebrated at the commencement of the seasons of agriculture. It is a festival of the village farmers. It has got nothing to do with priests and religion. The Bohag Bihu extols only those things that are directly connected with agriculture. The chief instrument of agriculture is the cow. Hence on the first day of the Bohag Bihu cows are led to the nearest stream in the morning are smeared with turmeric and pulse while recited aloud is the following verse:

Eat thou the gourd and the brinjal

And grow bigger each year,

Thy sires were small, but

Thou wilt be big. (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore*

Research Gauhati University, 1993-94: 95)

In the verse is reflected the hopes and ambitions of the happy, contented, self-sufficient Assamese farmer. His granary is full, his cow-shed contains lusty bulls and milk cows. There is a richness of life for him. Wreaths woven from gourd and brinjal slices are put on the horns of their herds. These articles have their significance. They stand for the different colours which predominate in different seasons-white, green, black and brown. In Mexico there is still extant a custom of worshipping the deity of the corns, imagining her to be represented by their colour.

The play of cowries, fight of eggs, etc with which people regale themselves at the time of the Bihu have deeper significance beneath the surface. These are institutions with their roots in the dim past which were supposed to confer for a bumper harvest. Cowries and eggs are phallic symbols in every country and stand for success in

procreation. The Bihu dance in the heart of Nature is, likewise, another manifestation of this procreative urge. In many countries worship of the Earth and Nature with dance, instrumental music, and song are still in vogue, and it is supposed to confer fertility on the soil and make it produce in plenty.

And the sumptuously embroidered Gamocha and creeper in-wrought Chadars of the Bohag Bihu are nothing but an expression of the same sense of worship. The Bihu brings to Assamese damsels and maids and housewives an intimate adoration of the colours and forms of Nature. In these clothings they weave flowers and fruits, trees and creepers in luxurious abundance. To this beauty they add something of their own and thus they verily weave fairy tales into their cloth-to be given as Bihu presents to the dear ones. The designs in the Gamocha express their sense of joy in life; they are creations out of the artist's own being.

For the same inspiration the Bihu songs constitute a priceless gem in Assamese romantic literature. They are like songs of the fairy land. In a lovely manner they mirror Assamese rural life; they express the keen sensuous feelings of the people, their abundant joy of nature, and their bewildering wonder in the unspeakable mystery of spring. They speak of the beauty and simple but passionate love of youths and maids woven in immortal fire. Each stanza is like a star in the youth's firmament of love. To understand and appreciate the beauty and depth of Assamese girls one should get to know the Bihu.

The Assamese girls'

Hands are tapering like the

Elephant's trunk

And her legs are beautiful as

Though cut in alabaster

Her face is like the choicest

Mirror,

And her waist is like

The lyre. (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research Gauhati University*, 1993-94: 97)

In simple, sweet and sensuous language the Bihu songs record the tumultuous passion of Assamese youths and maidens. Each couplet depicts a distinct amatory sentiment. Every sigh, every blush, the heartlessness of the beloved, the despair of the lovers are transcribed in simple unsophisticated words. They record how, from the time the girl arrived at womanhood, she feels a “consuming passion in her heart”, how “her mind whispers love to her” and how the “sportive youth has captivated her soul”. The youth in his own turn can sell, to get her, if need be, even the main source of his livelihood:

I shall sell the black bull of

My plough

And the milk cow, if need be,

If this will not fetch the

Money required,

Shall I sell even my brother,

So I can get her? (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research Gauhati University*, 1993-94: 97)

The Bihu songs preserve all such thoughts of the soul-bright and brilliant in a strikingly direct manner. They talk to men and women of the mundane world in the language of love. They have no touch whatsoever of the other-worldly, self-less love of

the Vaishnavite poet. The common maiden speaks in a simple and straightforward language:

Your ring of whistle reached

My ears as I was cooking;

It thrilled and made me restless

And I wept for love,

Seeming though to weep for

Smoke. (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research*

Gauhati University, 1993-94: 97)

The language is everyday speech: but it is saturated with deep sincerity. So it has become highly effective. The love we find in the Bihu songs is not the unreal exaggerated mystical love of the rarefied sky, but an earthly love, love of the here and the now, of the body. It is intensely connected with the love of flesh and blood:

On the full moon night of the

Bohag Bihu,

Shall we twain wedded be;

We shall start a home and

Settle and live,

And our two hearts be one. (*Bulletin of the Department of*

Folklore Research Gauhati University, 1993-94: 98)

The Bihu songs express the eternal desire of the youths and maids to live together as help-mates in a united life.

I shall plough the land and

Thou will plant and reap;

I shall set the loom, And thou will weave

The Bihu towel.

Love has continued since the beginning of creation. The common man and woman to start a home and work and live and enjoy. Even the stories of Hindu gods and goddesses-of Ram and Sita, Krishna and Rukmini-hold out this ideal of a settled domestic life.

In the beginning God created

the earth

And with it He created life.

And God Himself made love,

Why shall we not do it? (*Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research Gauhati University*, 1993-94: 98)

Essentially an agricultural festival, the Bihu holds out before us the ideal of a settled peaceful contented domestic life of work and pastime, sweat and ease, and therein lies its success and appeal.

Fish is an essential article of food of the people of Assam. Consequently fish plays a significant role in the cultural life of the people of the province and naturally many beliefs and ceremonies are associated with fish, fish-eating and catching of fish.

The cow is sacred probably because of its association with agriculture. It is symbolically worshipped at the beginning of each year of the Hindu calendar. To kill a cow is a big sin which is punishable. The Bodos also worship cows on that day for the growth of the family and all-round prosperity. It perhaps is reminiscent of a bygone age when primitive people were beginning to domesticate animals. Egyptians and Indians are reputed to have shown respect to cows in ancient times. Pasupati, master of animals, a name of Siva, also suggests such a belief in the sacred cow. Cowdung and urine,

besides being used as medicines, are also supposed to possess power of driving away spirits.

The lizard is considered mysterious. By tick-ticking from the wall, it augurs good or forebodes evil. Its limbs are also used in some other spells for curing certain diseases, bringing good luck and captivating subjects. The Sema Nagas believe that when a baby is born, lizards at once report the birth to the evil spirits who come and kill the baby; of course, if the baby is a girl, the lizards do not come out of their hiding. So Sema Nagas, particularly their menfolk, kill any lizard they see. Women, however, have a prejudice against killing. An Assamese, while in the midst of an argument, if suddenly a lizard call, in order to drive a point home, will at once drum his fingers on something handy and draw the attention of his opponents or listeners that even the lizard is supporting him.

There are two aspects, good and evil, to these beliefs and superstitions. The cat is another good example. No Assamese will kill a cat. Most homes have cats to kill mice. But it is not a very likeable pet. It is dreaded; it's mewing at the dead of night, sad, shrilly and lonely, is held a bad omen that brings diseases to hearers. People try to shoo such a wailing cat off the compound. Black cats are generally dreaded because they are thought to have connections with evil spirits. Some Nagas sacrifice black cats off the compound. Black cats are generally dreaded because they are thought to have connections with evil spirits. Some Nagas sacrifice black cats to cause disease to their enemies. The Assamese believe that the cat is a very envious animal. There is a folktale in Assamese according to which a cat and the mistress of the house were pregnant at the same time. The cat stole fish from the neighbours' kitchens. But the mistress gave the cat only bones and ate all the flesh herself. The cat cursed the mistress wishing to let

what was in her womb go to the mistress's and vice-versa. In course of time the cat gave birth to two girls and the mistress to two kittens.

Among birds the crow is not looked upon favourably. Its caws are sure forecasts of guests arriving or of some evil. For forecasts the cawing crow is offered three handfuls of rice placed in the courtyard and it is observed which it picks first; then follows the interpretation. Good or evil is also forecast according to the way in which a crow caws. If it caws on the roofs, it is not a good omen. One's journey is spoilt if a crow caws at its very start. The owl is an ominous bird, though it is reputed to carry the goddess Lakshmi. Its hoots forebode death if there is a patient within a hearing distance. If an owl blindly flies into your house, something evil is surely in the offing. The peacock, our national bird, is regarded very highly. It is sacred because it carried Kartika and because its plumes decorated Krishna's headgear. A peacock plume is supposed to work as a charm to recover from certain diseases. A peacock dancing wildly is an indication of gathering storms. So an imitation of a peacock is placed on the top of a house in the hope of getting protection from storms.

To the Hindus, Vasuki the serpent is supporting on his hood the earth from below from the nether world. It is a common belief that if Vasuki shakes himself there is an earthquake. There are many tribes who believe in the supernatural power of an imaginary snake-god. The Mishmis think that the earth is resting on a pillar; an enormous snake gets angry and shakes that pillar; we then feel the earthquake and many people die. Some Kukis also imagine that a snake stays coiled around the earth; at times it bites its own tail and getting hurt begins to shake which causes an earthquake. Among the Khasis, U Thlen the snake-god is worshipped by offering human blood. Formerly human sacrifices were also made to him. Many people in Assam are worshippers of Manasa or Maroi, the snake-goddess.

The Mizos believe that seeing matting snakes means serious illness, if not death; killing them brings bad luck. Some Nagas will not till a piece of land being cleared for cultivation if they come across a snake in the field as, to them, it means certain death.

In Khasi society, which is matrilineal, property is owned by women and children take their mother's titles, but even in khasi society womenfolk are not allowed to dabble in public affairs. The Khasis explain the situation with a proverb which goes somewhat like this: "If the hen crows the world will be in ruin," meaning thereby that the crowing business should remain the monopoly of malefolk.

It is perhaps women who use proverbs and maxims, also others much more than men. Do they also make them? If they do, some of the most uncomplimentary to womenfolk must have been made by them. Many of the folksongs, such as marriage, prayer and love songs, must have been composed by women for these belong to the female repertory. Marriage and love songs, such as the Bihunam type, tell us a lot about women. Yearning of the youthful heart, unhappiness at not being married off, jealousy, desire to elope, the boldness to stand on one's legs, etc. are some of the feelings expressed by the songs.

The bride is tender, does not know how to do anything. She is the pet of everyone in the family, and her parents worry that she may have to hear hard words at her mother-in-laws house. She is a beauty like Sita and she is often compared to Rukmini and it is Krishna of Dwaraka who comes to marry her.

The Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh at the foot of the eastern Himalayas, trace their ancestry to Rukmavir, elder brother of Rukmini, to carry off whom Krishna came all the way from Dwaraka in Gujarat. The ruins of Kunderi Nagar, Rukmini's city, are shown, but this is perhaps another instance of a migratory legend, getting stuck to a particular place. The Deoris dwell in the Lakhimpur district, not very far from the

Mishmis. They worship at their shrines kundi and Mama, equated to Mahadeva and Parvati.

Among the Dimasa of North Cachar Hills, in case of barrenness the couple performs a religious function called Mulilinga. In this worship, fish of cat-fish family, such as eel, mud fish, boal, cat-fish are offered in the puja. This gives the belief that such puja brings fruit to the couple. The couple, therefore, does not take these fish. If children are born thereafter, they can however, take these fish but not their parents.

Fish has been connected with fertility, marriage and religious functions. In Assam there is no restriction to eating fish and meat among many sections of people, including Brahmanas and Vaishnavas. But some sections do not eat certain classes of fish and meat. Hindus of Aryan origin who are commonly known as *Varna* or caste Hindus do not take cock and pig meat. The Dimasa Kacharis of north Cachar, a Bodo people, offer certain fishes to the gods asking favours to beget children; so they will not eat those fishes. Fish is included in the items necessary at the first stage of an Assamese marriage, *Joron*, because it is held sacred. Again on the eight day of the marriage when the couple visits the bride's home for the first time, friends and relatives are invited to a feast where fish is a definite item. In a marriage-song the belief in fertility of the fish is thus expressed: Keep a pair of *Magur* fish in a pan, put the pan before the bride, then free them in the river-you are sure to be blessed with long-living sons. When a baby is born, particularly if it is a son, the Assamese distribute fish among friends and relatives. In other ceremonies when a baby is given a name or when it is six months old, fish is included in the items of the feast. In the case of death during the time of Vrata, the family will not eat fish and meat; only after the shraddha is over "is fish touched" (*matsya sparsa*) in a feast proffered to close relatives.

Fish is offered in some forms of puja too. The Kacharis offer fish curry to evil spirits. To the Miris fish is equivalent to Lakshmi. In one of their pujas, the priest would catch a fish and carry it over a long thread tied from the pond or river where it was caught to the paddy store-house, assuming that it would assuage the angry goddess of wealth. Bhandari, to the Bodos, is presiding water-goddess of wealth. Bhandari, to the Bodos, is the presiding water-goddess of fishes; she has a huge store of fishes from where human beings can have their share, but she must be offered a cock as a sacrifice first.

The Ahoms and the Sonowals of upper Assam, in a mimic act of trying to replenish their stores and to improve cultivation, escort Lakshmi in a grand manner by way of fishing with a *Jokai* (a basket-like bamboo fishing implement) in a pond or river, carry whatever is caught-fish or simply garbage-to an altar and worship it. If the catch is a fish, it is considered much more fortunate. After the puja the 'catch' is distributed and people scatter it over their store-houses and fields. The Garos is one of their rituals performed at the time when seeds begin to germinate offer the tail of fish. The Miris prefer a place where fish abounds for their settlement in the belief that fish is the mother of wealth. Among some Nagas the first sower of seeds must partake of fish; and during harvest the first reaper, a woman, will eat only boiled rice, ginger and fish. Some other Nagas believe that to catch a large number of fish by poisoning the water is a sure sign of a good crop.

The romance of betel-chewing is widely prevalent in Assam. It is natural as Assam is situated in the heart of the vast region from Africa to Asia where areca-nut and betel leaf are chewed. Betel-chewing is a luxury indulged in by all and sundry, from prince to pauper. The leaf is pan and the nut is tamol, from the Sanskrit tambula. Non-Aryans are the originators of betel-chewing. The Monkhmer-speaking Khasis, one of the

earliest tribes to migrate to Assam, are reputed to have brought it here. *Kuai*, their word for *tambula*, may be compared with another Assamese word for the same thing, *guo*, now almost obsolete. Guwahati, the correct form for the word Gauhati, is also supposed to be derived from such formations as *gua* and *quak*, meaning betelnuts. It may be mentioned in this connection that the two English words betel and areca, are supposed to have been derived from Malayalam and Kanarese, respectively, both non-Aryan languages. So the Sanskrit *tambula* must have been a later interpolation, as nowhere in the Rigveda. Only in the later works of Charaka and Susruta, *tambula* finds mention as something.

The Garos also follow a matrilineal, custom of inheritance. A Garo woman is a woman of property. The Garo clan is recognised from the mother's side. The bridegroom comes to live with his mother-in-laws family. But ultimately one of them can own the house. Sometimes the other daughters and their husbands are provided with separate house. Garo daughters inherit the mother's property.

Among the Dimasa-Kacharis the prevalent custom is that the sons inherit their father's property such as weapons, money, land, women's garments etc. Utensils are a common property. When there is no daughter, a female relation of the mother inherits her properties and when there is no son, the father's property goes to the closest male relation. These traits may be traces or influences of some older matrilineal system. But the Dimasa-Kacharis do not consider a woman equal to a man.

FOLK CULTURE OF THE BODOS

The Bodos are numerically and sociologically one of the most important tribes of the North-Eastern India, particularly Assam. While they spread all over the plains of lower Assam and contiguous areas of North Bengal, they have intimate family ties with

many other tribes living in other parts of Assam. The Bodo language belongs to the western branch of Barish section under Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan family. The Boro speaking areas of Assam at present are stretching from Dhubri in the west to Sadiya in the East. In Jalpaiguri and other adjacent districts of Bengal, the Boros are known as Mech. The Boro language of Assam has at least four clear-cut dialect areas with a sufficient number of dialectal variations, these may be called north-western, south-western, north-central and southern dialect areas with phonological, morphological and glossarial differences. The headquarters of the Bodo language are now the three central districts of the Assam Valley, viz, Darrang, Nowgang and Kamrup, but it extends westwards through Goalpara, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar, in a slightly different forms, under the name of Mech.

At present the Boros make use of the Assamese alphabet and Roman alphabet as modified to suit their need. The Bodo Christians only usually write their text books and religious matters in the medium of Roman scripts. A section of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha has accepted the modified Assamese script for use in their text books and literature, while another section is in favour of Devanagari script. Since 1963, the Bodo language has been introduced as the medium of instruction in the Bodo pre-dominant primary schools of Kokrajhar sub-division (now district) in the district of Goalpara. This has been extended upto the secondary stage of education throughout the state of Assam.

The Bodo literature consists of the vast amount of oral literature including folksongs, folktales, ballads and proverbs and of considerable amount of written and published literature in Assamese and Roman scripts. The published literature comprises of books relating to prayers and songs, poems, stories on the one hand and journals and magazines with different types of prose and verse on the other hand. There are unpublished novels and dramas too so far.

OCCUPATION AND ECONOMY

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the Bodos. The alluvial and the plain land is selected by them for the purpose of agriculture. They mainly depend on the paddy cultivation. The alluvial land is called 'hamaha' or 'the mother of the soil'. Before making settlement somewhere they first select the plots which are suitable for the cultivation of paddy crops. For their settlement, a highland, a vast grazing field, availability of rivers, ponds or lakes nearby, jungles and forests for hunting the animals for meat and collecting firewood without scarcity, are regarded essential. The Bodos do not like to depend on the business as their livelihood.

For the cultivation of the paddy crops the Bodos select the plot of land taking some conditions into view. The land where the plant called 'dingdinga' grows abundantly is called the 'khandina ha', which is regarded as the most temporary land for the paddy cultivation.

The major part of the cultivated land of the village is devoted to growing rice, which is the staple food for both the Bodos and non-Bodo of the state.

The Bodos are hardworking class of peasants. After doing hard labour they seek refreshment. The Bodos are fond of meat and fish. They dry the flesh of deer or pork and preserve for a long period and use it as food when they are busy with their agriculture works. They are accustomed to collecting the wild vegetables from the forests, besides they produce at home. The wild vegetables are of different tastes. Some vegetables are used as medicines also. Meat is the essential item for the guests in the Bodo society. So to meet the immediate necessity as food when any guest visits one's house and to some extent for the purpose of economy they keep fowls, ducks, pigs and goats at home.

In their mode of dress the Bodos do not differ materially from their Hindu neighbours, but they show a certain fondness for coloured garments, and are acquainted

with the art of dying, the materials for preparing the dyes (usually blue and various shades of red) being supplied generally from the leaves or roots of trees. The women, formerly and even now, tie a cloth round the chest just below the armpit that hangs to the toe.

ASSOCIATED BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The social structure of the Bodos is primarily patriarchal in character. In a patriarchal system father is the sole authority of the family. About the creation of the different social groups the Bodos have a popular story among them.

In a certain period the Bodos lived in an indisciplined and unsystematic state of things. The society was full of undesirable activities and the atmosphere was unhealthy to preserve the traditional social customs and the people of the society realised the necessity of creation of different groups for certain specific works or duties. A great convention of all the Bodo people was held to solve the burning problems of the society. To that convention the first human being Mon-sing-Borai came down from Heaven with the help of a golden ladder to the earth and presided over the convention. The convention was attended by all Bodos irrespective of age and sex. The first human being Mon-sing-Borai conducted the proceedings and helped to solve the problems faced by the Bodos. It is said that the convention lasted for twelve years. Along with other things the groups called ari or hari were created by Mon-sing –Borai for the Bodos. In the early period a custom was followed by the Bodos in connection with the cremation of the dead body. Before cremating the dead body some coins were to be offered to an elderly person of the Basumatari group as revenue of the plot of land where cremation took place.

FOLKLORE OF THE GOALPARA REGION

The Goalpara region has never been a separate political entity under its own king, and its history has to be considered in conjunction with those of various political units of which it formed a part from time to time.

In ancient times it was included in the kingdom of Pragjyotisha, mentioned in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* as well as some principal Puranas, which is believed to have comprised large parts of North-East India including most of Assam, North Bengal and even portions of East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). Subsequently, the region formed a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa by which name Pragjyotisha later came to be known, for, on the authority of the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra*, both of which works are devoted to the religious history and geography of medieval Assam, it has been established that the western limit of the old kingdom of Kamarupa was the Karatoya, a river which rises in the extreme north-west of the Jalpaiguri district.

Old Kamarupa was divided into four portions viz. Kampith from the Karatoya to the Sankosh, Ratnapith from the Sankosh to the Rupahi, Suvarnapith from the Rupahi to the Bharali and Saumarpath from the Bharali to the Dikrang. Elsewhere Ratnapith is said to have included the tract between the Monas and Silghat on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, and Bhadrath the corresponding portion of the South bank, while Saumarpath as before the most easterly tract.

Bhaskara-Varman (7th century A.D), unquestionably one of the most remarkable men and rulers of his time, ruled not only over western and northern Assam (Brahmaputra Valley), but in his time Assam's dominion extended over the greater part of Bengal. Undoubtedly, the vast territory included the Goalpara region of today. But very little is known about the political fortunes of the region in the centuries following Bhaskara's time. But it may be assumed that it formed parts of the kingdoms of the dynasties that ruled Assam since then. According to the tradition of the Mahapurushiyas,

it subsequently formed a part of a kingdom called Kamata, whose ruler at the beginning of the fourteenth century was named Durlabh Narayan. In the fifteenth century the region was included in the domains of the Khyen prince whose capital Kamatapur, now in the Cooch kingdom that made its appearance after the fall of the Khy Bihar district, was sacked by the Muhammadans.

The region is more definitely connected with the fortunes of the Koch. According to the Koch chronicles, a powerful Koch chief, Hariya, whose name was sanskritised to Haridasa, was elected a sort of suzerain over all the chiefs in the area covered by the whole of the Goalpara region on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. Hariya's son Bishu, who took the name of Biswa Sinha, was the real founder of the Koch kingdom. He ruled from 1496 to 1533 (1540?) and his territory extended on the east to the Barnadi (which probably included the Guwahati region) for, he is known to have revived the sakta shrine of Kamakhya, near Guwahati. The zenith of the glorious days of Koch rule was reached during the days of Biswasinha's son, Nara-narayan, who began his career from 1533 (or 1540) as a ruler and a conquerer, an organizer and a reformer, with the all-out support of his illustrious brother Sukladhwaj. His long and prosperous reign of over 40 years is resplendent with his wars with the Ahoms, his victories over Jaintia, Tripura and Sylhet kings, his rebuilding of the temple of Kamakhya near Guwahati, his patronage of Vaishnava reformers, his temple and road building activities. Ralph Fitch, the English traveler, had visited Naranarayan's kingdom, and his account of the country speaks of the institution of hospitals for animals and of the aversion of the people to taking life, as well as of the abundance of cotton and silk cloth and musk. Evidently the neo-Vaishnavism of sankaradeva of Assam had made great progress among the people at least among some section of it. (Datta 1995: 8)

About 1580 A.D. the Koch kingdom was divided and the country east of the Sankosh (Koch-Hajo), which included Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang, was surrendered to Raghu Rai, the nephew of Naranarayan, while the territory that lay west of the river (Cooch Bihar) was reserved for the son of that prince. Disputes, however soon broke out between the two families and Goalpara was conquered by the Mahammadans who had been called in by Naranarayan's son to his assistance. The aid of the ahoms was invoked on the other side, and for some time the war between these two powers dragged on with varying fortunes. In 1637, peace was concluded and the Barnadi, which now divides kamrup and Darrang, was fixed as the boundary between Muhammadan and Ahom territory. In 1658, the Ahom advanced again, occupied Goalpara and held it for three years, but were compelled to retreat before Mir Jumla's army. From that time onwards the district formed part of the Muhammadan dominions till, with the rest of Bengal, it was ceded to the British in 1765. Under the Mughal administration Koch-Hajo was divided into four sarkars or divisions, viz, Sarkar Bangalbhum, Sarkar Dhekuri, Sarkar kamrup and Sarkar Dakhinkul of these, Sarkar Dhekuri included more or less the whole of the present Goalpara region. During the Mughal-Ahom conflicts Goalpara formed the easternmost tract where the Mughals had consolidated their position and perhaps from the name of the place where the Nawab of the region had his headquarters, practically the whole of the area covered by the old Goalpara district on both sides of the Brahmaputra came to be known as Rangamati. This name of the region continued in the early days of British occupation.

The Mughals had introduced their own settlement and revenue systems in the areas under their occupation. In Goalpara, which was under the Mughals for a sufficiently long stretch of time, the zamindari system took roots under their aegis and continued till its abolition in 1957. It may be noted that Goalpara is the only region in

the Assam Valley to have had the system; it had direct and far reaching effects on the economic and social life of the people of the region and had moulded, at least at certain levels, the cultural life as well.

The erstwhile Goalpara district experienced several changes of jurisdiction since it first came under British rule. The permanently settled portion was originally a part of the district known as North-East Rangpur. After the cession of Assam in 1826, Goalpara was annexed to the Assam Valley Division, but in 1827 it was transferred to the newly created Cooch Bihar commissionership. In the following year it was placed for judicial purposes under the Judicial Commissioner of Assam and it was finally incorporated in the new province when Assam was created into a separate administration in 1874. It again became a part of the then Eastern Bengal in 1905. In 1912 the whole district was permanently transferred to Assam.

The history of the Eastern Duars, a strip lying at the foot of the Bhutan hills, differs in some respects from that of the remainder of the district. On the break-up of the Koch power at the beginning of the seventeenth century and during the struggles that ensued between the Muhammadans and the Ahoms, the Bhutias succeeded in bringing the territory known as Eastern Duars under their control. Their system of administration seems to have been harsh and arbitrary and they soon came in confrontation with the British authorities. There followed a series of encounters after which the territory was taken over from Bhutan and tagged to the then Goalpara district in 1864.

The ranks of the Rajbanshi are recruited from the 'aboriginal tribes' and there are elements in the religious and social life of the Rajbanshi that point to some part tribal association, the tribes are still culturally exclusive groups while the Rajbanshi have very

much of an open culture. Again all Hinduised and Assamese speaking tribal do not necessarily turn into Rajbanshi.

The Rabhas are another tribe belonging to the great Bodo race, living in the plains of Assam. The heaviest concentration of the Rabhas is in the south bank of the Brahmaputra in the present Goalpara district, among whom there are both the Assamese-Speaking semi-Hinduised groups and those retaining their old tribal ways. There are also a fairly big number of Garos living in the southern parts of the region adjoining the Garos hills. Another small tribal group, the Hajongs of whom there are greater numbers in Garo Hills district than in Goalpara, have adopted a culture which seems to be influenced by that of Goalpara.

Since the Rajbanshi form the bulk of the population of the region, the inclusion of some information about their racial origin and characteristics would seem to be in order.

The Rajbansis of Goalpara are one of the race castes of Assam, and apparently correspond to the Bar Koch of Kamrup – The Rajbanshi or Koches, to use the title by which the tribe is more generally known, are common not only in Assam but also in Northern Bengal. They appear to be of mixed lineage. On the west their affinities are with the Dravidian stock, on the east with the Mongolian. The centre of the Koch power was in Cooch Bihar, and in Goalpara the tribe was in a position to be much affected by the tradition of the ruling race. The Koch Raja and his court were a considerable factor in their lives, and the tribesmen have assumed the honorific title of Rajbansi, or Men of royal stock. There seems to be no doubt that the Koch and Rajbanshi of Assam are one and the same caste.

Gait admits that the ethnic character of the people has been a matter of controversy. He refers to the views of Brian Hodgson, Buchanon and others, according

to which the Koch is akin to the Bodo, and also to those of colonel Dalton who considers them to be Dravidian, and of Risley who, While admitting an inter-mixture with Mongoloid stock, holds that the Dravidian characteristics predominate. He gives his own conclusions thus: “There seems, however, to be no doubt that the true Koches were a Mongoloid race very closely allied to the Meches and Gars. (Datta 1995:12)

The Koches of North Bengal are described as western Bodos. They are Hinduised or semi-Hinduised Bodos who have abandoned their Original Tibeto-Burman speech and have adopted the Northern dialect of Bangal; and when they are a little too conscious of their Hindu religion and culture and retain at the same time some vague memory of the glories of their people, particularly during the days of Visva Sinha and Naraharayana, they are proud to call them selves Raj-banshi and to claim to be called Kshatriyas. (Datta 1995: 12)

It may be pointed out here that some Rajbanshi wear the sacred thread in support of their claim to be descendants of ancient kshatriyas. Thus they became Bhanga Kshatriyas. The Darang Rarja-Vamsavali gives an interesting story about the Kshatriya ancestry of the Koch kings. When parasurama was massacring the kshatriyas to avenge a great wrong done by them, twelve Kshatriya princes had saved themselves by concealing their identity-adopting Mech manners and customs and marrying Mech girls.

Occupation:

As with the rural population in other plains areas of Assam, agriculture is the principal occupation of the vast majority of the people of Goalpara. The dependence on agriculture is, if anything, even greater than else where. Perhaps in no other area the rural life is so thoroughly agrarian and the folk mind so deeply engrossed with the thought of production and welfare of the crop. In fact, the Majority of the rites and ceremonies dear to the heart of the people centre round the agricultural operations at

different stages. Moreover, a considerable portion of the religious and semi-religious beliefs and practices of the region reflect an almost primitive obsession with fertility.

The most outstanding feature of the economy of the region is its lack of diversification. Apart from a few public sector establishments here and there, there is practically no organized industry. There have been professional workers, both groups and individuals, engaged in other occupations like fishing, pottery-making, ornament-making, working on pith, weaving, basket-making, etc. Grazing, lumbering and elephant-catching have also attracted some people. But it appears that due to various factors, these occupations themselves could not make those engaged in them economically self-sufficient.

Hence such people had always turned to agriculture as a subsidiary means of livelihood. And with the break down of the village economy and competition from various sides, more and more of these people are flocking to the already crowded field of agriculture.

RELIGION AND MAGIC: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:

A distractive feature of the population of Goalpara or of Assam and North Bengal for that matter is that a sizeable portion of it belongs to various tribal groups who, though not formally belonging to the Orthodox Hindu fold, reside on the periphery of Hinduisim at various stages of addimilation.

The Hindus and Muslims constituted the bulk of the population accounting for 50.95 per cent and 43.32 per cent of the total respectively. Belief in and practice of magic is most wide-spread among all sections of people in the region, Hindu and Muslim, tribal and non-tribal. Much of it is, however, connected with various supernatural beings and agencies like gods, spirits and ghosts since long kamrup has been looked upon by outsiders as a land of magic and sorcery. References to the

dreadful effects of Assamese Magic and sorcery are to be found in a number of accounts on Assam written by outsiders. There are also a few in which Goalpara, or some particular place in the region, comes in for specific mention. For example, the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, written around 1640, mentions Khuntaghat as “notorious for magic and sorcery” and gives a vivid account of the extra ordinary doings of the Magicians of this area. Goyalpara was considered to be the chief place for Magic and sorcery”.

While kali is the greatest goddess standing at the centre of the miniature felk-pantheon peculiar to the region and is regarded with the greatest of reverence and awe, it is Manasa who seems to have woven a more colorful pattern into the socio-religious and cultural fabric of the region. She is not just a divinity who is installed in a shrine and ceremonially offered Puja. Some public shrines dedicated exclusively to her do exist and she always has an important place in a community shrine. But with a vast number of people she is a household deity who is kept in the family shrine, and often at the family shrine, and often at the family altar.

BIHU FESTIVALS OF ASSAM AND THEIR PATTERN IN THE GOALPARA REGION:

The most important and popular festivals of Assam are the three Bihus which constitute a sort of a pattern, a ritual and festival complex covering the annual life cycle of the peasantry. Having both seasonal and agricultural significance, the three Bihu festivals are known as Bohag Bihu or Rangali Bihu held in mid-April on the advent of spring, Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu held in Mid-January, the coldest time of the year, and kati Bihu or Kangali Bihu coming off in mid-October in the autumn season.

“Either because the Adivasi Pull is strong or because it is the agricultural setting which still determines the social temper of the people, the festivals are looked to and are

widely enjoyed in this part of India are those associated with the beginning and end of the planting season.” The festival associated with the beginning of the faroning season is Bohag Bihu, the spring time Bihu and that with the end is Magh Bihu, the winter Bihu. The former ushers in the New Year while the latter indicates the gathering of the harvest. The spring time Bihu is the Rangali Bihu or the Bihu that cheers, while the winter Bihu is the Bhogali Bihu or the Bihu that one enjoys with food and drink. In between the two is observed the Kati Bihu, also called the Kangali Bihu, for there is nothing much to eat at this time.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS RITES RELATING TO MARRIAGE BIRTH AND DEATH, ETC:

One noteworthy feature in Goalpara is the comparatively early age of marriage in case of girls practically among all sections of the people. In Goalpara the followers of both the religions (viz. Hinduism and Muhammadanism) marry their girls at a much earlier age than is usually the custom in Assam. This practice he contrasts with the prevailing in the rest of Assam. In Assam proper, it is quite the exception for marriage to take place before the age of puberty, but in this respect Goalpara unfortunately conforms to the custom of Bengal. The Muhammadans of the district are if anything, still more addicted to the practice. Even the animistic tribes marry earlier than usual in Assam. The situation appears to have changed appreciably since then, but girls are even now married fairly early in Goalpara. In case of men, however, early marriage is not so common and a young man is not expected to get married before he is able to support himself.

In the villages, the services of a mid wife are requisitioned helps the mother with the delivery and also perform such essential functions as cutting the naval cord and giving the baby and the mother the attention needed at the time. The traditional practice

is to put the new-born baby on a winnowing tray upholstered with straw. A smoldering fire is kept constantly burning with paddy husking. Sickle or a chopper is placed under the bed where the child is kept and also under the mother's bed as a precaution against the danger from evil spirits.

The whole family, especially then mother and the child are considered to be in a state of unseemliness. The first step towards the removal of the unclean state takes place on the performance of a simple function on the fifth or seventh day. This is called *ek kamani*. On that day a Brahman is brought in to read the fate of the child and the naming of the child takes place. Fish and sweetmeats may be distributed. On the completion of one month, a more elaborate ceremony for removing the uncleanness is held. A through cleaning operation- washing and scrubbing and after this the state of uncleanness is completely removed.

The main ceremony is usually held in the courtyard where a banana sapling is planted. The mother makes offerings to the sun-god, usually with the assistance of a Brahman priest. The child is placed on a low blat stool on which a new cloth has been placed. Four small bows and arrows are placed on four sides of the stool and a fifth one is held above. Jujube thorns are placed on all sides of the stool, possibly to ward off evil spirits. The child's hands and feet are rubbed with a duck's egg and the following words are recited. "Let him have smooth hands and feet like on egg." A tub of water is placed near the spot and the child is passed across the tub seven times, wishing that it will be good at swimming.

ORAL LITERATURE OF THE REGION:

The wealth of the oral literature of Goalpara is most impressive. Strewn over the various parts of the region there are folksongs of an almost bewildering variety, a large

number of tales and ballads, apart from rhymes and riddles, proverbs and aphorisms that are intricately woven into the fabric of village life.

Vaishnavism is professed by the majority of the Hindus of Goalpara, Orthodox Vaishnavism does not have many strict adherents in the region. Consequently the number of folk songs inspired by Vaishnavism is rather limited. In the western parts of the region, most of the songs of Vaishnava association sung by the local people are Bengali kirtans. Bengali kirtans are also sung in certain parts of Eastern Goalpara where Bengal Vaishnavism is influential. However, in those parts of the region where Assam Vaishnavism has its hold Congregational devotional songs of the Assam Vaishnava school are widely sung. Of course many of these songs are drawn from Assamese Vaishnava scriptures and do not contain any local folk element. But there are some compositions of anonymous authorship which at once reflect the simplicity and spontaneity of the folk-mind and also bear a local stamp. The two most important categories of such songs are the Jhali-mati songs and the gupuni names.

MARRIAGE SONGS:

Marriage songs enliven marriage-proceedings in almost all parts of India. But the importance attached to their singing seems to be particularly great in Assam, and Goalpara is no exception in this regard. Songs are sung at almost every stage of the marriage starting from the pre-nuptial rites to the post-nuptial ones. In fact, the singing of the songs is intimately connected with the various customs and rites, often giving on insight into their nature. Although local variations do occur, all these songs have much in common in the matter of the sentiments expressed and the technique adopted in making them effective. In fact, such songs have a kind of generality about them. These songs are the creations of the unsophisticated village women and while many of them betray the lack of polish, they are not devoid of literary Value. Their great charm lies

particularly in their ability to create mood and atmosphere with rare poignancy using simple home-spun words and imageries.

FOLK CULTURE OF MANIPUR:

Manipur has a vital culture which evidences a synthesis of Indian and Sino-Tibetan cultural streams. It is in a way the easternmost outpost of Indian civilization, without denying the fact that south-east Asia is considerably beholden to India for its cultural and intellectual life. Manipur was one of the routes through which Indian civilization spread to the eastern regions. Legends current in Manipur say that the country was at one time water-logged and it was not fit for human habitation. It was the great God Siva and Uma who in their special manifestation in Manipur was known respectively as Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi who blessed the land by descending from heaven. They were seeking a suitable spot where they could perform the Laiharaoba Dance, Parent of the Rasa Dance which Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna danced with Radha and the Gopi attendants. Awarding to the Manipuri legends the snake-god Ananta came to witness the Rasa Dance of Siva and Uma along with the Meitei Hindu Pantheon, and the magic gem (mani) on his hood lit up for days and nights the entire country. From this Manipur got the name “The City of the Gem”.

In the fields of the dance, textile and metal work Manipuris have shown considerable excellence. These artistic people are staunch Vaishnava. Vaishnavism is the strong link that keeps Manipuri culture tied with Indian modes of life and thought. Vaishnavism itself has incorporated earlier beliefs and rites and dances. The Maibas and Maibis have preserved some of the older rites and forms of prayer. Atiya Guru Shidaba, his sons Sanamahi and Pakhangba, and Ima Laimarel Shidaba (Mother Earth) are still prohibited in the old way by Maibas and Mibis. Sanamahi, worshipped in every Manipuri household like a sort of family god, is sometimes equated to the sun, while

Pakhangba is considered to be the son of Babhrubahana of Mahabharata fame, a King ruling in the hazy past. Just as the Laiharaoba has thrived as a parallel to and also transformation of the famous Rasa dance, so has Holi incorporated earlier traditions in Thabal Chongi, when young people hold hands and jump, singing gaily in the moonlight, moving anti-clockwise in a circle.

The Meitel speaking Manipuris of the central plateau are surrounded on the North by various Naga groups and on the South by some Kuki groups, all interacting to a certain extent and sharing in the common atmosphere of one homeland. Hindu beliefs have percolated to other groups of the people of Manipur through the dominant Metei section. To give an example of belief that eclipse of the sun or moon occurs because a dog devours them up, later releasing them. This is apparently a non-Hindu myth, but the Purum Kukis now believe that the god is none other than Arahuketu that is, Rahu and Ketu. It is contact with Meiteis which has given the Purums the idea of Rahu and Ketu. On the other hand, worship of Sena Mehi or Sanamahi, “the administrator of the Universe,” often held as a female deity, being the wife of Pakhangba, Manipuri’s first king, and the mother of the slave who shot the elder brother of the sun with an arrow, is a male household deity among the Purums. Among Purums Sena Mehi a very important position. It is quite likely that this god has entered the Manipuri pantheon from earlier Kuki inhabitants of the land. Hodson mentions that at one time if a Manipuri prince performed the worship of Sena Mehi he was considered to be an aspirant for the throne.

The myths of Manipur, as in other lands, are associated with gods and goddesses and the beginning of things. Manipur’s history itself, beginning with Babhrubahana and Pakhangba, has a mythological start. Myths later blend into legends, with a more realistic foundation. Manipuris have attractive myths, that of Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi giving local twist to the Puranic myth of Siva and Parvati. The girl Panthoibi

happens to see the young tiger-skin clad god Nongpokning thou and falls in love. Her parents face her to marry khaba, a person she does not like. The girl becomes so unhappy at her husband's place that she at last runs away looking for her diving lover. Panthoibi meets her lover and both become overjoyed to find one another. The lovers were known to be diving. Siva and Pravati A temple was built in honor of Panthoibi and the first priest to worship her was her ex-husband Khaba!

Manipur has wandering minstrels. The minstrels recite, accompanied by the pena or fiddle, epic-type ballads like Khamba and Thoibi, recalling to the rural people a world that is past but which is upheld high ideals of heroism and sacrifice. *Khamba and Thoibi* is a lovely romantic tale, rather legendary in origin. In fact, the incidents in the ballad are said to have occurred in the twelfth century in the Moirang area. Thoibi was the niece of the king and Khamba was a down and out prince. Thoibi happens to see him while fishing and falls in love with him. Thoibi's desire to get Khamba is foiled by the jealousy of Kongyamba, the king's strongest fighter, who wants to have the lovely princess. Kongyamba, like the typical villain, tries to poison the ears of the king as well as Thoibi's father. The King is pleased at the heroism of the young lad and wants to give Thoibi to him. But in the way is the villainous Kongyamba. Poor Khamba is beaten up and tied to the leg of an elephant. He is left half dead in the forest. Thoibi learns of this from a dream sent by the goddess Panthoibi and rushes to the aid of her lover. Khamba comes round. Even then the lovers cannot unite in wedlock, for the girl is sent into exile by her father. The King then declares that he will give her to anyone who can capture a particular tiger. Kongyamba is torn to pieces by the tiger, while Khamba is able to slay it with his spear. The lovers get united at long last. Their happiness, however, does not last. Khamba becomes suspicious of his wife and while trying to test her fidelity, gets accidentally speared by her. The story ends in tragedy.

In the body of Assam's oral fiction there is a class of trickster tales. These are not exactly moral tales, they are told for amusement rather than edification. These trickster tales have two classes. In one, the trickster goes on cheating others to his own profit and in other, one brother tries to cheat another of their paternal property. The tale of 'A Jala and Tentan'-The fool and the Rogue is well known in Assamese. It is also found in one form or another from the Goalpara district to Manipur. In a version found in the Kamrup district, the paternal property to be divided is a cow, an areca nut tree and a warm wrapper. The rogue chooses the back portion of the cow, the top of the areca nut tree and the night use of wrapper. In the Meitei version the property to be divided is a she buffalo, a pomegranate tree and a mosquito curtain. The clever brother takes the hind quarters of the buffalo, the top of the pomegranate tree and night use of the mosquito curtain. In both the tales the foolish brother has to suffer. He evokes the pity of his neighbors and at their advice comes to have a fifty-fifty share of the property. In the Assamese tale the younger brother is the fool, while in the Meitei it is the elder brother who is the fool.

Belief in ghosts, apparently surviving from earlier times, is a source of some of the tales. It is said that on the first Saturday of the month thirty-three lakh ghosts manifest themselves and on this night boys and girls keep awake and pass the time playing with small shells. Here is a ghost story. Hanjunaba's mother dreamt that ghosts were eating her son. So next day she tried to stop Hajunaba from going out of the house. She made him sleep with her, but as sleep would not come to him, he slipped out and began to play with his friends. When he turned back it grew late and he noticed the ghosts waiting for him at the cross roads, trying to frighten him by dividing their bodies and scattering limbs here and there. Hanjunaba, however, had a stick in his hand and this was given to his father by one of the Umanglais or forest gods. So long as he had the

stick in his hand he could not be attacked. But as he was entering his house the stick caught in a tree and dropped the ghosts as one fell upon him and killed him.

These tales do not seem to have been collected in a systematic manner. To touch on popular beliefs, it is said that when there is an earthquake. Manipuris cry Fish! Rice! Thus addressing them to keep life from being frightened away, just as in some parts of India, When a child sneezes it is customary to cry, May you live! There are many similar tales. This is primarily because people in large parts of the world have the same field of experience and the human mind reacts in rather the same way.

NAGA TALES

The term Naga is of Indian sources, they call themselves Tenyimie. They say they had come from the Burma side. Their earliest old man was coming towards Assam and people asked him, “Where do you come from?” “From Burma,” he said. “What is your name?” “Kewhimie,” he answered. From Kewhimie, and, in modern spelling as Kohima.

This is an Angami legend. Each Naga tribe has its tales, explanatory or told just for enjoyment. Some of the tales are held in common, sometimes some of the motifs are seen to be common to one or other of Naga tribes as well as to the Kacharis or Assamese of the plains. Some of these motifs seem to be a contribution of the Mongoloid elements of the land. Naga tales have not been recorded comprehensively. Specimens are found in the monographs of writers like J.H.Hutton and J.P.Mills, C.R. Pawsey published some Sema tales in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. (1939).

There are Indian traditions relating to the Nagas, for example, Arjuna is said to have married a Naga princess named Ulupi, and there were political and other relations between Nagas and Assamese during historical times. Nagas have a tale which relates in

a way to the Assamese. Their ancestor has three sons. The old man asked them, “What will you do for your livelihood?” The first one answered, “I shall till the soil.” The second answered, “I shall be a writer,” and the third reply was, “I shall be a hunter.” From the tiller of the soil were born the Nagas, the hunter disappeared into the forest, and the writer or the one who knew writing and reading became the ancestor of the Assamese. The tale tries to explain why the Nagas were illiterate. The Abors explain a similar situation by saying that the skin on which God had inscribed the letters fell into the fire and was burnt and hence they have no letters.

Hutton gives an alternative version of the tale recounting the origin of the Nagas and the plainsmen. The husband of Ukepenofii had a terrific appearance, so he hid himself in a vessel. When his two sons grew up they wanted to see him. Their mother said, “I will show you your father, but he who gets frightened cannot get his father’s knowledge and wisdom.” When the father was shown the elder boy, who became the ancestor of the Nagas, got very frightened and ran away, but he who later begot the Indians wished to go to his father in the vessel. The father then asked his wife to take care of their elder son and he himself went to the plains with the younger boy, and that is the reason why the Nagas are poorer in knowledge and cunning than the men of the plains (*The Angami Nagas*, pp.260-261)

An Ao Naga tale of a similar type goes like this: Two brothers appear on the earth, out of an aperture in a stone. They agree not to live together. The elder one goes up to the hills for land cultivation. The younger one comes down to the plains to raise sugarcane and corn. The elder one is the ancestor of the Aos and the younger one the ancestor of the Assamese. An explanatory tale recorded by Hutton tells us of the origin of the various Naga tribes. There was in the village of Kezakonema, an old couple with three sons. “Every day they used to spread paddy to dry upon a great flat stone, and

at dusk a single load spread to dry had become two loads, for the stone was inhabited by a spirit. The three sons used to take it in turns to spread their paddy on this stone, but one day they quarreled bitterly, as to whose turn it was, and their parents, fearing bloodshed, broke eggs on the stone, covered it with brushwood, laid forests about upon it, and set the whole on fire. The stone burst with a crack like thunder, the spirit went up to heaven in a cloud of smoke, and became the ancestors of the Angami, Lotha, and Sema tribes, while from the parents who remained are descended the seven Kezami villages.

A Sema story then explains why tigers are found in jungles only. Once upon a time an old woman had three sons. The eldest was a tiger in spirit the second a devil in spirit, and the youngest a real man. They did not know their differences in spirit. They had a farm and they used to go to the field every day. But because their mother was very old, one of them had to stay at home to look after her. They stayed at home by turns. One day the eldest son remained at home. When the other brothers went away, instead of feeding his mother, he started sucking her blood. So in the evening when the other two returned from the field they found their mother very weak. But they did not know that their eldest brother had sucked her blood. On the days of their turns the younger brothers tended their mother carefully, but when the turn of the eldest brother came they found their mother very weak. But they did not know that their eldest brother had sucked her blood. They were surprised beyond measure. After a few weeks all the blood of their mother was sucked up by the son who was a tiger in spirit and she died. Then the eldest brother ran away into the forest leaving the other two. So it is said the tiger is found only in the jungle.

Nagas do not worship snake in the manner of the Khasis but that it occupies a considerable place in their subconscious. There is hardly any place to be possessed by

spirits and every such place has a large snake having some relation to the presiding spirit. There is the Yhonyu Jolha-The way how to catch birds river-on the eastern flank of the Pulebadze mountain near Kohima and the name of the river is explained in a myth in which a snake takes a prominent part. A man used to go to the foot of the Pulebadze hill and gather plumes from birds which flocked there. One day he did not return home. His relations went looking for him and found him lying on a bed of soft feathers. While trying to wake him they saw that he was dead with a small snake by his side. They did not find the cause of death till they discovered the sign of the bite on the ear. From that time river nearby came to be known as 'The Way How to Catch Birds'. The snake is seen in more than one Naga tale.

The Pulebadze peak is close to Kohima and about five thousand feet high. It is named after Pule Pule used to raise paddy in his jhum. He found that someone did considerable damage to his crop. This happened frequently. So one evening he kept watch and he saw a huge snake come out of the forest and eat his paddy. He went up cautiously from behind and let go his spear into the neck of the reptile which ran away into the forest along with the spear. Pule pursued the snake and lost himself in the forest. Afterwards his relations went out searching for him. They could hear a "ho ho" sound from amidst the forest but did not find Pule. So they raised a memorial stone on the peak, Young now-a-days go there in the winter during the Sekrenyi Puja and pour modhew desiring long life. The snake is an important figure in this tale as well. The tale of the snake which married a girl as recounted by Hutton (p.268) has an Assamese parallel. In both, the first snake marries the first girl and makes her happy while the second snake eats up the second girl.

The Assamese have certain animal tales centring on the monkey and the fox but they are not many. Probably Kacharis and Nagas have more animal tales. In all these

very often two animals try to beat one another with wile and bluff, for example, the Sema tale of the elephant and the porcupine. The elephant throws a challenge ‘who is equal to me?’ The porcupine sends a rejoinder. Does he possess quills like mine? The sight of a quill scares the elephant away.

Cheating is a distinctive feature of a large number of the tales of Assam. In Assamese various cheating tales are told of the wily rogue Tentan. Tentan tales are found among the Kacharis, Mikirs and the Meches. A character of the Tentan type is seen in Apfuho in some Lotha Naga tales. The incidents in this group of Naga tales do not seem to be found in either Mech, Kachari, Mikir, Meithei or Assamese trickster tales, but there is no doubt that Tentan and Apfuho are kins. To illustrate, Apfuho once places a dead dog near some oil seed and persuades the owner of the seed-an old woman that the dog has died at her beating. He then frightens her saying that the dog’s owner is coming up with a large number of men, and she purchases his aid in this difficult situation by parting with her pig.

Among the Angami the trickster is known as Matsuo and he is of the same type at Tentan. Matsuo, secures a lot of hide, hangs them on a tree and makes a fire underneath to dry them. The hides fall and scare them away. So Matsuo secures the money. He puts the ashes under his saddle, and when he is requested to lend his horse to a man and his mother, he says, “If your mother rides on this horse all my rupees will turn to ash.” On their promising that ample recompense will be made if that happens the horse is lent. When the old woman gets up on the horse the ashes fly out and Matsuo has to be given a large sum. The villagers are told that he has sold the ash of his burnt house. They are deceived as before when they try to emulate his example. They tie him up in order to throw him into the river. But being left alone for a while he sings attractively and persuades a cowherd to set him free so that he can sing better. He then ties up the

unfortunate cowherd to set him free so that he can sing better. He then ties up the unfortunate cowherd and makes his escape. The villagers throw the cowherd into the eater.

The tale has a close parallel in Assamese as well as in Mikir. In the Mikir tale it is a fatherless lad who tricks his malicious maternal uncles. Hutton suspects that the Angamis may have got some of their tales either from the plainsmen or from the Kacharis. He felt that references to horses or gold and Kings might have been borrowed from Manipur or the Kachari's.

In Angami 'The Jackal and the Monkey'- paralleled in Assamese by 'The Monkey and Fox' and in Kachari by 'The Monkey and the Hare'- may be a garbled version" of the Kachari tale. The tale is also known to the Aos and the Lothas, the Aos telling it of a jackal and a bear. It does not seem to be known to the Semas who are in touch with the plains. In the Ao version the bee's nest is described as a drum which the bear is invited to beat, in this motif following the Kachari version more closely that the Angami story does. In the Angami tale, when the jackal punishes its friend for the first time the latter does not take the lesson lying down. It goes off to a bee's nest and asks the jackal not to bite at it. The jackal bites at it and gets stung all over. The jackal, of course, has its final revenge on the monkey by having it drowned. In the Assamese and Kachari versions the monkey after its first act of deceitfulness (depriving its friend of a share of bananas) is all through a victim of the fox or the hare's cleverness, and the motif of the jackal's being stung by the bees may be an Angami modification. That the Angamis have borrowed tales from Indian sources is obvious if 'The Rat Princess and the Greedy Man' is taken into account. This tale can be traced back to the old Sanskrit collection. The folktales, folk songs and other aspects of folk literature are the precious treasures of literature which are on the path of rapid erosion due to the advent of

modernity and rapid urbanization. Hence the scholars need to give priority to study of folk literature for preservation of the folklore and realizing significance of human values and ethics and environmentalism.

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CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters attempt has been made to shed some light on the different aspects of the environmental and ethical issues in Mising folklore. It has been our endeavour to describe and analyze the various materials making up the different aspects of Mising folklore. It could be said that the folklore of the Mising community is like a confluence where several streams have met and their waters have flowed along one channel and yet they have retained their colors to such an extent that it is not impossible to find out each stream and to trace it to its source. From an analysis it has

been discovered that folklore and folktales all over the world, are emotional treasures of every society irrespective of its location and Mising folktales are the store-house of delicate human emotions and are also a reflection of our socio-cultural progress.

During the days of their migration, the Misings were a migratory race. They did not seem to advance down stream beyond the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Subansiri in the plains and that is why they are found to have been living in the upper part of Assam only especially in the eight districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur of the present geographical organization of Assam.

The Mising community has its own traditional stories which cover various aspects of their life and culture. From environmental point of view it is found how their crops are damaged due to flood and soil erosion, but still the Mising community is very close to nature and they never leave the banks of the rivers. In the different folk tales their habits, customs and life are reflected. The folk stories are handed down traditionally from one generation to the other. In the process, it gains in variety and inventiveness from one narrator to another and from one age to the next without however causing much damage to the original characters and ideas. They have a legacy of rich and varied folk tales. Nature inspired their imagination with added culture including their folk literature.

The social, religious and cultural life of the Mising community life is embedded in its folk songs. The ethical values are found in the folk songs which can inspire the younger ones of the Mising community. Many eco-ethical values also found place in the Mising folk songs. Mising proverbs, riddles and popular parlance also consist of ethical

and eco-ethical references. The proverbs retold also show people how to lead a good life consisting of lessons and moral teachings.

The conversations of day to day life in Mising community also capture their feelings like love, hatred and anger. A comparative diagnosis of the Mising and other folklores offers an interesting phase. The Mising are now Hindus, but originally they worshipped many gods and goddesses of Nature like those of cloud, thunder, stars, the sun and the moon. There have been influences and counter-influences among different tribes and races that came to live in Assam. A Kachari tale tells us that in the beginning there was only deep silence and the earth was very sparsely populated. The five chapters have very precisely discussed the various aspects of the study. Ethical and eco-ethical values are distinctly and profusely present in the folklore of the Misings. Several volumes of research works can be done on the same topic. The present work is new attempt among all the attempts have been made by different scholars so far. Hence more works and more fresh collection of folklore are need of the time to uncover the value of Mising folk- literature.

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