

Mising-Ahom Relations : A Historical Analysis

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The Misings, formerly known as Miris and mentioned as such in religious scriptures, ethnographies, Ahom chronicles, and even in the Constitution of India, are the present Mising community of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of North-Eastern Region of India. Originally they were hill dwellers and lived along with the Adis* in Arunachal Pradesh. Their story of migration alludes the fact that the inter-tribal feuds compelled them to migrate from their abode to the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. It is believed that the first group landed in the upper region of the valley around 13th century A.D and their migration continued sporadically till the beginning of the 20th century.¹

The Misings, as such, had come into contact with the Chutiyas who formed a state and ruled here from about the 12th century A.D. However, after occupation of the Chutia kingdom in the third decade of the 16th century (1523 A.D.) by Suhunmung Dihingia Raja, the Misings had come into contact with the Ahoms. Since then, they had established politico-social and economic relationship with the Ahoms. Here, in this paper an attempt has been made to throw some light on the political relationship that existed between the Misings and the Ahoms during medieval period with a historical analysis.

The Assamese chronicles written in the Ahom court record that the Ahoms came into contact with the Misings as early as the 16th century A.D. It has already been mentioned that after occupation of the Chutiya kingdom in the third decade of the 16th Century (1523 A.D.) during the reign of Suhunmung Dihingia Raja (1491-1539 A.D.) the Ahoms had acquired a section of the Mising population as a right of conquest. The Misings who thus, became the subject population of the plains state of Assam, came to be mentioned in the early Assamese chronicles as 'Sadiyal-Miris' or 'Chutiya-Miris'. The Ahom king Suhunmung, allowed them not only to reside in their place on condition of paying annual tribute to the Ahom government, but also followed from the very beginning a conciliatory outlook towards them. One *Buranji* has stated that in the reign of Suhunmung, in 1526 A.D., in the month of Ashar (June-July), the king gave the name *Thaomung-Mungtao'* to one Taosunglung-Kunring and ordered him to sit in front of all i.e. the Ahom nobles. This man was a Miri (Mising) by caste.²

But in spite of their being under the domination of the Ahoms and conciliatory attitude from them, as known from the chronicles, the Misings naturally attacked and plundered the Ahom kingdom and collected their exploits whenever necessary. In order to stop the acts of plundering committed by the Misings, King Pratap Singha (1603-1641 A.D.) had to engage *Katakis* i.e. envoys and spies to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements.³ As mentioned by chronicles, the Misings used to raid villages near the hill slopes and thus, created havoc and terrorized the villagers. King Pratap Singha, therefore, adopted a policy of appeasement whereby he made provision for *posa*⁴ to the Misings also; like that he had conceded earlier to the other hill tribes of the time. The '*posa*' included grant to the tribes of villages, fisheries and fishermen at a nominal cost for their acknowledging the Ahom suzerainty by way of payment of small tributes.⁵ Again, during the reign of king Pratap Singha, one Bhokola Gohain, a member of the Bargohain family, who had no child, adopted a Miri boy as his son. This boy subsequently received the name of Miri-Sandikai and his descendants came to be known as members of the Miri-Sandikai family.⁶ One of the descendents of this Miri Sandikai family was made governor of Sadiya during Gadadhar Singha's reign.⁷

In spite of the introduction of the *posa* system by the Ahom government the Misings did not refrain themselves from raiding villages, within the Ahom kingdom in the plains. It appears that till at least the middle of 17th century the Ahom rulers confronted with the problem of the Misings. In one *Buranji* it is stated that king Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-1663 A.D.) having heard of the Miri (Misings) raids had to send expeditions against them in 1655 A.D. and got them defeated.⁸ They then offered to be good citizens in future by making payment of a regular annual tribute to the Ahom sovereign.⁹ Jayadhvaj Singha then recruited some of the Miris (Misings), registered them as his soldiers and enlisted them to the *Kanri* units or *khels*.¹⁰ The Sadiyal-Miris were placed under the Sadiya Khowa Gohain and a new officer known as Miri Barua was appointed to look after them who was made subordinate to the Sadiya-Khowa Gohain.¹¹ But the Barbarua remained as the Chief officer over the Miris in regard to wars and other important matters of the royal court.¹² Thus it appears that during the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha, the Misings living near about Sadiya gave troubles to the Ahom government. The appointment of an officer of the rank of a Barua and putting in of the Sadiya-khowa Gohain and the Barbarua in the overall charge of the

Misings (Miri) confirm that the Ahom authority was still suspicious about the movement and activities of the tribe.

Though the Misings made peace with the Ahoms and agreed to pay annual tributes they did not like to submit to the authority till about the middle of the 17th century. During the reign of King Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-69 A.D.), the Miris (Misings) of the north bank of the Brahmaputra plundered Assamese villages in 1665 A.D., combined with the Deoti-Chutiyas and the Daflas (Nishis).¹³ Though they were defeated, they fled to the hills and refused to submit. Therefore, king Udayaditya Singha (1669-73 A.D.) sent an expedition against those Miris (Misings) who had committed raids during the reign of his predecessor (Chakradhvaj Singha),¹⁴ and this time the Shimaluguria Phukan fought with the Miris (Misings) and defeated them. He brought some Miris (Misings) with him and made them to bow down before the Ahom Sovereign – their overlord.

During the reign of king Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 A.D.) the Misings proved to be more turbulent than before. From the chronicles it is known that in 1683 A.D. in the month of Sravana (July-August) the Sadiyal Miris set fire to the house of Kanu Gohain Rup Sandikai, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and burnt to death his wife, children and the inmates.¹⁵ The Ahom army then attacked the Miris (Misings) under Maupia Naoboicha Phukan, defeated them, and compelled them to sue for peace; they also built a rampart on the border of the Assamese villages excluding the Miri (Misings) territory.¹⁶ The King dismissed Kanu Gohain from office and one Dihingia Phukan, a member of the Miri Sandikai Borgohain family, was appointed as Sadiya-Khowa Gohain.¹⁷

We do not hear of any Mising uprising from this time till the end of the Ahom rule in Assam. On the other hand, we find that the Sadiyal Miris who had been engaged in the Ahom army as archers or *kanri* units since the days of Jayadhvaj Singha (1648-1663 A.D.) had rendered valuable services to the Ahoms during the reign of King Rudra Singha (1696-1714 A.D.), in subduing the other rebellious neighbouring tribes, such as, the Nagas, the Kacharis and the Jayantias.¹⁸ Moreover, the Misings figured as foot soldiers at the time when the Ahoms had made a bold attempt to drive away the Mughals from their land. On the basis of the description in the *Alamgir Namah* of Muhammed Cazim, Capt., John F. Mitchell says :

About 1660 the Assamese possessed, powerful fleets of war-boats manned by thousands of warriors; but the Muhammedans

twice destroyed the Assamese fleet. From the description given of the Assamese army, it appears at this time to have been largely recruited from Nagas and Miris (Misings) and it is evident that they were quite able to hold their own against the well trained armies of Hindustan.¹⁹

This way the Misings rendered valuable services to the Ahom kings at a very critical moment. These strong and stout people proved quite competent a match for the turbulent and warlike Nagas, Kacharis, Jaintias and the Mughals. They (tribals including the Misings) were recruited to the Ahom army in recognition of their muscular strength and capacity for endurance.²⁰ The participation of the Misings in the military enterprises of the old Assam government was facilitated by the existence of mutual friendly outlook towards the tribe. In spite of having periodic incursions by the Misings till at least the middle of 17th century, they became submissive by the end of that century and began to reconcile themselves to the plains society of Assam and gave due protection and help to the Assamese (the Ahoms) at the critical moments of foreign invasion. Even during the time of Moamaria Rebellion (1769-1805 A.D.), which resulted in great chaos and confusion within the Ahom kingdom and which prompted many of the hill tribes to commit raids within the Ahom territory, the Misings remained loyal to their Ahom overlord.²¹ Moreover, during the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-94 A.D.) the Misings fought against the Moamarias as Ahom soldiers in league with their moubtaineer brothers. This may be confirmed from S.K. Bhuyan's accounts which read, 'the Moamarias continued their ravages in full vigour. The Baskatia Barbarua collected a force of Miris (Misings) and Daflas (Nishis) and offered to attack the Moamarias provided the Burhagohain (Pumanda Burhagohain) placed them under a good commander'.²² Moreover, during Moamaria rebellion, Gaurinath Singha appointed Helimeli Solal Gohain as the governor of a big region which included the eastern end of Majuli island between the Brahmaoutra and Kollong rivers. The Gohain had maintained a big band of soldiers at his Kaliabor headquarters in order to check the unpredictable conduct of the Bhutias, Daflas and the Misings. But when the situation worsened, he made a treaty with the Daflas and then with the help of the new Barbarua, he could successfully obtain unconditional support from the Misings to face the Moamoria rebellion. S.K. Bhuyan writes, "The royalist chiefs then elected a Barbarua of the Lahan family and enlisted the support of the Miris. By their united exertions they succeeded in clearing the country of Majuli of all the

enemies.”²¹ Thus, by the close of the 17th century, the Misings because of their repeated defeats at the hands of the Ahoms proved to be loyal to their Ahom overlords and rendered valuable service at very critical moments. They also did not disturb the peace of the country till the end of Ahom rule in Assam. It is because of this fact that the British who succeeded the Ahoms in Assam found little or no resistance from the Misings in the process of their political integration of the region.²⁴

Notes and References

- * A group of communities residing in the hilly regions (Adi=hill) of Arunachal Pradesh, such as, Padam, Minyongs, Pasis, Galos etc.
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- 2. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, First published 1932, 2nd edn. Guwahati, 1962, p. 20.
- 3. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Assam Buranji* by Harakanta Barua and Sadar Amin, Guwahati, 1930, p. 40 (henceforth abbreviated as ABHB); *Assam Buranji Sar* by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Original title *Assam Buranji Puthi* (Sibsagar, 1844), (ed.) P.C. Choudhury, DHAS, Guwahati 1964, p. 32; *Assam Buranji* by Gunabhiram Barua, 1st edn. Calcutta, 1876, Reprint, Guwahati, 1972, p. 107.
- 4. *Ibid.*
- 5. ABHB, p. 40; L. Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, First Edition 1968, Second edition 1992, Guwahati, p. 200 (henceforth abbreviated as ATRD).
- 6. Hem Chandra Goswami, (ed.), *Purani Asam Buranji*, Guwahati, 1922, pp. 43-44 (henceforth abbreviated as PAB).
- 7. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 8. Golap Chandra Barua, *Ahom-Buranji*, Calcutta, 1930, p. 153 (henceforth abbreviated as AB); S.K. Dutta (ed.), *Asam Buranji*, DHAS, Guwahati, 1938, pp. 9-10, (henceforth abbreviated as ABD).
- 9. *AB*, P. 153.
- 10. Padmeswar Singha, Naobaicha Phukan, *Assam Buranji* (MS) by Tr. No. 109, Vol. IX, p. 335, DHAS.

11. *ATRD*, p. 203.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *AB*, pp. 192-94.
14. *ATRD*, p. 205; *ABD*, p. 32.
15. *PAB*, pp. 160-62; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Tungkhungia Buranji*, DHAS, Guwahati, 1932, pp. 24-25 (henceforth abbreviated as TB).
16. *AB*, p. 267; *ATRD*, p. 206.
17. *Ibid.*
18. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, Guwahati, 1930, pp. 94; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Kachari Buranji*, DHAS, Guwahati-1936, pp. 94-97; J.P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, (ed.), B. Sarma, North Lakhimpur, 1927, pp. 99-102; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, DHAS, Guwahati, 1937, p. 80.
19. Capt. St. John F. Michell, *Report (Topographical, Political and Military) on the North East Frontier of India*, Calcutta, Govt. of India, 1883, p. 30.
20. S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1965, p. 50.
21. *ARTD*, p. 208.
22. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)*, DHAS, Guwahati, Reprint, 1974, p. 236; TB, p. 129.
23. S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 333-34.
24. E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, First published 1905, Reprint Calcutta, 1967, p. 373; Col. L.W. Shakespeare, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North East Frontier*, London, 1914, p. 105.