

THE AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT AND MISING TRIBES IN ASSAM: THE ROLE OF MISING NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**UTTAM NARAH**

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Abstract

The fundamental issue in North East Indian Region is the demand for autonomy. The North East India region, particularly Assam, is known as the “land of ethnic diversity,” where so many ethnic tribal groups have been living since time immemorial. The self-consciousness and tendency toward self-rule among the ethnic groups are seen as inspiring sources of tribal identity and autonomous movement. The tendency to remain isolated and independent from the rest of the mainstream communities drives them to demand autonomy so that they can continue to live as an independent tribe as they did previously. The Mising tribe is known as the second-largest tribal community in Assam, and they have also had a long history of demanding autonomy. This study sought to investigate the trend of the Mising Autonomous Movement and the role that their national organisations play in it.

Keywords: Mising Tribe, Sixth Schedule, Autonomous Movement, and Self Rule.

Introduction:

In northeast India, demands for autonomy remain among the most fundamental points of contention in politics and among the general public. Autonomy is a term that indicates “self-rule” or “making one’s own laws,” and it comes from the Greek words “auto” which means “self” and “nomo,” which means “law” or “rule.” So, it illustrates having autonomy over one’s own affairs. It also suggests that one is free to decide whether to let others influence or control them or to be independent and in charge of one’s own destiny. In terms of politics, autonomy refers to a person’s capacity for self-rule or their ability to enact laws so that they can be preserved and execute their own affairs. The collective mobilisation of individuals or groups seeking autonomy to control and execute their affairs is known as an “autonomy movement.” The North Eastern part of India, particularly Assam, is considered as the land of multi-ethnic groups, which reflects the colourful identity within diversity. The Mising is one of those ethnic groups, and they have also been demanding autonomy to protect their socio-cultural and political existence in the region. Every tribe in North East India has a unique history, culture, and language that have all played a significant role in the development of their sense of self and ethnic distinctiveness. Due to their distinctive identities, every tribal group asserts the right to self-rule so that they can rule their affairs without outside interference or control. The concept of self-rule and identity consciousness inspired the tribal groups to demand the autonomy movement to create an autonomous council for their region. Since Assam was created and split into several other states, there have been seen numerous indigenous tribal movements for autonomy. The Bodo movement for territorial autonomy and the Mising movement for autonomy have been two of the most prominent ones. The Misings haven’t yet turned to violence, unlike the Bodo movement,

which has a militant tendency. The primary objective of both of these movements is the inclusion of their territories under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees protection and makes provisions for the self-governance of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

This study examines the emerging role of national organisations of the Mising tribe in the autonomous movement and how do they play in creating self-consciousness among Mising Tribes.

Objectives of the Study:

This study is proposed to evaluate the following objectives:

- 1) To assess the trend of Mising Tribes' autonomy movement.
- 2) To investigate the role of Mising national organisations in mobilising the autonomous movement.

Methodology of the Study:

To defend the proposed objectives, the qualitative method has been used in this study. The descriptive and analytical ways of data evaluation have been used to evaluate and examine the data gleaned from secondary resources like books, journal articles, newspaper articles, etc.

Scope of the Study:

The Mising tribe that inhabited Assam and the role their national organisation played in mobilising the autonomous movement in Assam are focal of this study. This study looked at the roles of the *Mising Bané Kébang* (MBK), *Takam Mising Porin Kébang* (TMPK), *Mising Mimag Kébang* (MMK), and *Takam Mising Mimé Kébang* (TMMK) in vibrating autonomous movement along with the various organisations that existed in the Misings. Especially, the TMPK, MMK, and TMMK are known to be the steering wheels of the autonomous movement of Misings, so special importance has been given to these three organisations in this study.

Significance of the Study:

This study is demarcated to examine the trend of autonomous movement among Mising tribes as a whole. The autonomous movement is a result of a perceived lack of treatment from the government and other authorities in a specific region. Similarly, the Mising tribes have expressed dissatisfaction with the government or mainstream society, so they have demanded autonomy to live independently without outside interference. The movements are organised and led by Mising Tribes political or social leaders, students, middle-class citizens, or civil society organizations. They have been vigilant in organising public opinion and articulating people's grievances and interests in order to instill self-consciousness among Misings. The act of creating self-consciousness is very significant for preserving the identity of any tribe. Thus, the significance of this study lies in how national organisations of Misings play a pivotal role in making and creating self-consciousness among Misings, as well as how they can transform this self-consciousness into a movement for autonomy.

Discussion on the Autonomous Movement of Mising Tribe and the Role of National Organisation of Misings:

The second-largest group of plain tribes in Assam is represented by the Misings. They have their own way of traditional beliefs, history and socio-cultural practises that are built on core ideas like social harmony, love, respect, cooperative tradition, and supportive understanding. Over time, the Mising tribe changed as a result of the entrance of missionaries and the British administration. The Mising Movement has been the most pacific and nonviolent tribal movement in Assam today. Despite having its roots in colonial times, this movement had become a progressive political, cultural, and social movement by the last decade of the 20th century. The Mising tribe's alleged experiences of injustice, deprivation and prejudice in Assam are causes of the origins of the Mising movement. The Mising tribes significantly focused on creating an autonomous council and inclusion of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution so that they could be administered their territory independently. The Indian constitution makes special provisions for the administration of tribally dominant areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram under the 244 Article and the sixth schedule of the constitution.

The socio-political organisation of a nation or society is essential to its development. Every country in the global community has established their own socio-political organisations to address its problems and grievances. These organisations each have distinct ambitions and goals to develop their respective communities. Similarly to this, to solve issues that have emerged among the Mising tribes, they have formed a number of socio-cultural and political organisations. Different socio-political organisations have been created among the Misings in order to fulfil their socio-cultural and political aspirations. Due to this, a portion of the Mising elite had the firm opinion that the issue facing the Misings was the issue of less developed communities coexisting with a relatively advanced group of people under a single political structure. They seemed to be significantly more socio-politically backward than other groups. According to a segment of the Mising elite, the ruling elite of Assamese society was primarily responsible for their underdevelopment. Due to this growing sense of abandonment and hardship, the following socio-cultural and political organisations have been established in Misings: "*Mising Bane Kébang*" (1924; MBK), "*Takam Mising Porin Kébang*" (1971; TMPK), "*Mising Agom Kébang*" (1972; MAK), "*Mising Dirbí Kébang*" (1980; MDK), "*Takam Mising Mimé Kébang*" (1990; TMMK), and "*Mising Mimag Kébang*" (1993; MMK). Hence, "*Kébang*" is the Mising term for organisation or institution, so it is required to present a brief understanding of it. One of the most significant organisations among the Mising tribes is the *Kébang*. Its major goal is to take the required actions to protect and vibrant the Mising identity and combat their socio-economic and political backwardness. The *Kébang*, is the oldest organisation in Misings which played the role of today's Panchayat. Every dispute or decision made by the Mising tribes has been settled through the *Kébang*. In the erstwhile Mising society, nothing could be done without a definitive directive or proclamation from *Kébang*. Due to serious socio-political issues and grievances confronted by the Misings, *Kébang's* goals and objectives have been shifting. This study delves deeply into the most socio-politically active *Kébang*, namely MBK, TMPK, MMK, and TMMK.

It is a truth that our society has mounted the developmental pyramid due to organisations like these. At the very beginning, the Misings were organised under the banner of “*All Assam Miri Sanmilan*,” which was formed as far back as the year 1924 at Majuli under the presidentship of *Pitambar Dev Goswami*, Satradhikar of Garmur Satra. This organisation was later known as the *Mising Bané Kébang*. Accordingly, the first conference of the proposed organisation, the *Mising Bané Kébang* (MBK), was held in May 1927 at Bhekelimukh under the chairmanship of A.C. Tonsoi. The Mising elite established the MBK to counter illiteracy and superstition among the Mising. The majority of its leaders have expertise in education and come from the elite section of the Misings. Thus, it would seem that MBK gradually pulled in the most educated Mising. Most noteworthy, MBK established a movement to protect and promote their own culture, customs, and traditions along with their efforts to abolish illiteracy, superstition, and economic backwardness. A small group of government employees has been in charge of MBK affairs since the organisation’s inception, and some MBK members eventually grew accustomed to mingling with the *Provincial Congress Committee*. Up until 1940, the MBK supported the British authorities and was loyal to them. The MBK had a significant impact on keeping in touch with the public when the Assam popular government was established after independence. The Bamunidalani Conference of 1975 serves as a concrete indication that the MBK conferences were marked by direct government relations. This MBK conference received significant assistance from the Assam government. Following the conference’s grand launch, chief minister Charat Chandra Singha joined other ministers like Hiteswar Saikia and Lakhyanath Doley in attendance. Since then, the MBK’s conferences have been characterised by overtly pro-government sentiment, and on occasion, the organisation has behaved in a manner that is virtually akin to being pro-government.

However, the TMPK is most critical in maintaining the unique identity of Misings. The Mising Society’s overall growth has been a fundamental goal of TMPK since its foundation. A number of Mising student organisations had been established prior to the establishment of the *Takam Mising Porin Kébang* (TMPK). *Assam Miri Chatra Sanmilan*, the original name of the Mising Students Union, was established in 1933. After the nation gained its independence in 1949, the *North Bank Mising Students Union* was established and the *Murkangselek Transferred Area Students Union* was established in 1952, and the *Arunachal Pradesh Mising Students Union* was created with Medini Mohan Doley serving as its president. All of these student organisations were eventually merged and placed under the *Assam Arunachal Mising Students Union* 1971, which later took the form of the *Takam Mising Porin Kébang* (TMPK). One of the main objectives of the TMPK is to promote the Mising nationality in terms of culture, language, literature, and politics. The union declares that it will make an effort, primarily to further the fight for social justice and constitutional protection, which directly entails the civic inclusion of the sixth schedule of Indian constitutions. By implementing changes from numerous angles, the TMPK also works to strengthen and protect the Mising cultural heritage. The drive to demand an autonomous council and to include Mising Autonomous Council in the sixth schedule has been led by the TMPK in recent days. Assam has also been experienced in a number of democratic movements geared at regaining tribal ownership of their land, language, culture, traditions,

and most importantly the rights of political self-rule. The *Mising Mimag Kébang* (MMK) and *Takam Mising Mimé Kébang* (TMMK), which were established in 1993 and 1990, respectively, are the organisations responsible for setting up this movement campaign too. When it is necessary to uphold the distinct Mising identity, TMPK doesn't hesitate to address specific political issues too. For instance, the *Mising Students Union* petitioned the Indian government to reannex the Murkangselek transfer region to AP in August 1978. Gradually, TMPK, MMK, and TMMK have strategically started a movement to demand the distinct identity of Misings. As a result of the movement, they initiated democratic agitational programmes such as bandhas, picketing, mass mobilization, etc.

Since the inception of TMPK and TMMK, the only women's organisation of the Misings, and MMK, the revolutionary organisation of the Misings, they have jointly struggled to keep the distinct national identity of the Misings alive. These organisations have been fighting for the upliftment of the Mising people in all aspects and for the establishment of their right to self-determination and autonomy through the Sixth Schedule. Noteworthy is that *Naresh Taid*, *Boga Medak*, and *Anjana Pegu* were martyred at the hands of government forces against the backdrop of the Mising struggle. The example of sacrifice shown by these three great martyrs for the Mising nation will always inspire the agitators of the Misings who come forward for the upliftment of their society as a whole. Just as everything changed with time, the course of the Mising national struggle changed under the leadership of the new, emerging, and dynamic leadership of the Misings. These include *Dr. Ranoj Pegu*; the founding general secretary of MMK, *Paramand Chayengia*; the former general secretary of TMPK, and *Usharani Kumbang Pegu*; the former president of TMMK. Their leadership has given a new impetus to the national movement and inspired the Mising youths. Although the Misings have not yet received autonomy through the Sixth Schedule, the revolutionary national organisations have been fighting for inclusion in the Sixth Schedule as their main demand. The Mising national organisations have taken over the schedule of the movement with the support of public gatherings from various perspectives, and the inclusion of Sixth Schedule demands has been strategically moved by adopting new logic of the parliamentary movement along with the street struggle. Along with all these strategic movements, national organisations have been participating in debates and discussions with the government administration to seek a fruitful conclusion to their demands.

The Mising national organisations have also been speaking out on the burning issues of Assam along with the Mising autonomy. TMPK, MMK, and TMMK have been working jointly with the mainstream national organisations in Assam against the *Lower Subansiri Hydropower Project* since its inception. The Mising National Organizations have been demanding a scientific study on the impact of the dam on the lower region before the final construction of the dam. They demanded that concrete measures be taken to protect the lives, property, and environment of the people of the lower part of Assam. As the impact of education on the overall development of a nation is unique and remarkable. Concerning the significance of education they demand that emphasis be placed on the promotion, preservation, and practice of their language, literature, culture, and traditions in order to preserve their national identity for future generations. The Mising national organisations

protested against the state government's failure to take any steps to recognise the Mising language, and as a result of drastic movement, the Mising dialect was recognised as a language on October 30, 1985. Accordingly, in 1986, 100 Mising language teachers were recruited in schools with a predominance of Mising students, and later, another 130 language teachers were recruited, for a total of 230 language teachers recruited in highly Mising populated areas.

Hence, the Misings are a riverine ethnic group, and they have intensified their agitation, considering the problem of floods and erosion as one of the main demands of their national organisations. The Mising people are socio-economically devastated by the floods that occur every year because they live along the river. The Mising national organizations, particularly the TMPK, MMK, and TMMK, have repeatedly demanded that the government should declare the flood issue of Assam a national disaster. Particularly, TMPK is trying to create a comprehensive movement under the slogan "*New Face, New Struggle*" to allow the younger generation to join in the process of the national struggle. In parallel, national organisations such as MBK, TMPK, MMK, and TMMK took the initiative to raise awareness on the diseases of building a civilised society such as vices and superstitions, etc., in order to remove or eradicate such superstitious beliefs from the Mising society.

Consequently, on April 28, 1998, Shri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the Chief Minister of Assam, P.P. Verma, the Commissioner and Secretary of the WPT and BC department, and the leadership of Mising National Organization namely Paramamda Chayengia (then General Secretary TMPK), Purusuttam Doley (then President TMPK), Chandiram Pegu (then President MMK), Bhanumoti Pegu (then President of TMMK), etc. signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Amendment of the MAC Act. Likewise, the MBK, TMPK, MMK, All Tiwa Students' Union (ATSU), All Rabha Students' Union, and the Autonomy Demand Struggling Forum delivered a unified memorandum to the chairman of the cabinet sub-committee. This memorandum was submitted to the Assam government in a meeting of the subcommittee on August 4, 2003, at Janata Bhawan, Guwahati. The memorandum addresses the following topics:

1. "The Mising, Rabha, and Tiwa (Lalung) peoples of Assam have been calling for the establishment of an autonomous council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution for more than two decades and have never accepted the farce of the boundary-less Mising Autonomous Council (MAC), Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC), and Tiwa (Lalung) Autonomous Council established under state Acts. No amendment to other grants of the sixth schedule is acceptable to us at this stage."
2. We demand that clause 15 of the Bodo Accord be implemented solely under the Sixth Schedule because we fully agree, on principle, that RHAC/MAC/LAC created under the Sixth Schedule should provide rights, protection, and opportunities to the Scheduled Tribe (P) as a whole of the respective area or areas and not to a particular community or tribe alone.

3. The only source of widespread corruption today originates from the RHAC, MAC, and LAC, who have completely failed to grant tribal people self-rule. These councils have become meaningless and ineffective. So we urge the Government of Assam to pass a resolution in today's meeting for the immediate inclusion of RHAC, MAC, and LAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which will automatically cover the Bodos' inhabitation in these council areas.

Under the leadership of Tankeswar Rabha, President of the Nikhil Rabha Students Union, a strike was organised on December 18, 2004, at Dispur, Guwahati, in support of the demand for the Sixth Scheduled. Both TMPK President Hemeswar Pegu and All Mising and Tiwa Students Union President Pranab Jyoti Mosrong of them participate in the strike movement. Additionally, the tribal organisation issued a joint press release outlining the idea of MAC. The proclamation of TMPK and MMK to oppose any political activities by political parties in Mising areas until the political parties proclaim their stance in favour of including Mising autonomy in the Sixth Schedule is causing a severe concern for all consequential groups. In light of the aforementioned circumstance, the MBK called a meeting of all Mising political leaders on December 14, 2003, in the North Lakhimpur District Library to generate a unified opinion on the subject. Regardless of their political affiliations, all of the participants indicated their support for the Sixth Schedule demand and threatened to leave their respective parties if those parties did not take a clear stance in favour of a clear solution. All participants agreed that the MBK should convene an all-party meeting in Guwahati. As a result, the MBK called an all-party meeting, inviting all political parties, on January 4, 2004, at the Hotel Ambarish, Ganeshguri, Guwahati, in order to reach an agreement on a democratic and easygoing solution to the demand of the MBK, TMPK, and MMK for inclusion of Mising autonomy in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

The leaders of TMPK, MMK, and TMMK once again submitted a joint memorandum on MAC and related issues to Tarun Gogoi, the then Chief Minister of Assam, in Dispur, Assam. On May 31, 2010, representatives of the TMPK, MMK, TMMK, MBK, and MDK met with WPT and BC Minister Mrs. Pramila Rani Brahma, Departmental Commissioner Secretary Shri Laxmi Phangsu, Chief Secretary of the Assam Government, and other key figures. A discussion that lasted about an hour was followed by the delivery of a note to the group. At MLA Bhuban Pegu's residence, TMPK, MMK, and TMMK's joint steering committee met on June 1 of that year. They discussed any negotiations they had with the government at the time, as well as the MADC and Sixth Schedule Demand Committee, and how they attempted to restrict the Mising nationality. In Guwahati's Hotel Framcity on June 4 and 5, 2010, there was once again a joint steering meeting of the TMPK, MMK, and TMMK. On June 4 and 5, 2010, two days were dedicated to discussing the government. Discussions covered the government's reactions, the Sixth Schedule requirement, organisational issues, etc. Bharat Narah, Minister Rajiv Luson Pegu, Sumitra Patir, an MLA, and Bhuban Pegu were also present during the conversation.

Recently, various issues, including the inclusion of MAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, flood erosion, the Big Dam, and the appointment of ST/SC TET-

qualified students under the reservation system, were listed in a memo that was submitted to Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, on November 29, 2014. It's interesting to note that the TMPK recently brought all the national organisations of Misings under its dynamic leadership as part of a united movement for autonomy. The Mising people aspire that their united movement would be strengthen and defend their national identity as well as their demands to independent autonomy and national issues.

There is a lot of enthusiasm and optimism in response to recent developments in the process of Mising's autonomy development. There is plenty of time for reflection as the Bodos rapidly approach their final phase, while the Misings' campaign for autonomy has, for the overwhelming part, remained transitory. The authority's impulsive and volatile response to the autonomy movement openly reveals the sensitive temperaments of the Misings, who rejected any submissive protests employing weaponry. While some use violence to express their grievances, the Misings, despite the considerable latency, largely retain decorum, remain devoted to genuine non-violence, and only use democratic channels to do so. A visible progressive movement was also inhibited by the pernicious consensus that expediency politics generated. The drive for autonomy, which is a natural and constitutional prerogative of the Misings, has gained some attention in light of the recent MAC elections. If effectively utilised, this may be a strategic turning point. The fact that individuals who have been tirelessly leading the movement have a strong mandate for running things is all the more heartening. This time, the party in charge in Dispur doesn't seem to have started a ridiculous manoeuvre for which it has a tendency. Although everyone is optimistic, much work remains. Long before the exhilaration subsides, it is now necessary to fortify the resolve. The path ahead is somewhat perilous. Any sincere effort might not be successful due to the council area's large population dispersion along the Brahmaputra's banks as well as the fact that the majority of the territory is frequently inundated with floods. In addition to a shortage of power, energy, capital, communications, market, and technologically qualified manpower, it will be necessary to scavenge and delve through the dregs of a society that is plagued by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, corruption, debauchery, superstition, and necromancy.

Conclusion:

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that there are numerous Mising organisations, such as the TMPK, MMK, TMMK, MBK, etc. whether directly or indirectly, each of these organisations has made a substantial contribution to justifying the Misings' demands for autonomy. They work to promote the socio-economic, cultural, political and most importantly all-around development of the tribe and of every Mising society that falls within the MAC territory. They have put a lot of effort into protecting the distinct identity of Mising as well as their language and literature. For making sense and vibrate the demands of autonomy for the Mising tribe, they presented numerous documents or memos to the government at different times. In Assam, the Misings are represented by a large number of organisations that serve the local population. However, TMPK, TMMK, and MMK are rumoured to have played a more significant and active role in the autonomy movement than other organisations like MBK, MAK, MDK, etc. In Assam, many gatherings and conferences

have taken place at various times to discuss the demands of Mising autonomy and preserving the distinct identity of Misings. They have submitted many written memos outlining the requests for granting autonomy and inclusion of their autonomous council in the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. At varying stages in the movement, they also had the assistance of Tiwa, Rabha, Bodo, and other tribes to carry out their demands and aspirations. They have also taken part in a wide range of other activities, including protests, picketing, bike rallies, dharnas, and other social gatherings. MAC is at last established after the constant struggle of Misings under the existing organisations of the Mising Tribe. Under the bold and dynamic leadership of TMPK, MMK, and TMMK the socio-cultural, educational, political, transportation, and economic aspects in the Mising have been improved as compared to earlier. Through the strategic movement being launched by the Mising national organisations, the demand for inclusion in the sixth schedule will be very noteworthy. The parliamentary movements along with street movements of the Mising tribe, particularly those headed by the TMPK, MMK, and TMMK; too, require in-depth theoretical and empirical research and evaluation. However, under the dynamic and progressive leadership of their national organisations, the Mising people are still carrying out a rare cycle in the political history of India as a peace-loving tribe.

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