

# **The Misings of Assam, Northeast India: Demography, socio-economic status, and the role of Mising Autonomous Council.**

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**Abstract**

The Northeast India harbours a myriad ethnic diversity in the form of different tribes with their unique cultures, language, etc. Assam, a Northeast Indian state, is imbued with such an immense ethnic assemblage. One such tribe is the Mising, who are concentrated in the upper Assam, mainly in the valleys of Subansiri and Brahmaputra rivers. Misings linguistically belong to Tibeto-Burman family. Unfortunately, Misings remain largely backward compared to other tribes of the region in socio-economic, educational and political arenas. Govt. of Assam established an autonomous council for the development of Mising people in 1995. However, there are a large number of constraints yet to overcome for the autonomous council to actualize its mission. The present article provides demography and socio-economic status of the Misings of Assam, and performs an in-depth analysis of the role of Mising autonomous council, its activities so far, and the way forward.

**Key words:** Brahmaputra river; Dhemaji district; Indigenous tribes; Majuli; Sericulture; Subansiri river

**Introduction**

The Misings are one of the ethnic tribal groups of Assam (Northeast India) linguistically belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family. They are the second largest tribal group after the Bodo tribe. Archeologist Rajmohan Nath stated that the ancestors of the Bodos migrated to India before 1500 BC. The Tani Clans or Misings have migrated to India after the Bodos (Pegu 2005). Before migrating to India, their ancestors were the resident of some provinces of North-West China. During 2000 BC, with their distinctive identity, traditions, customs and culture, they moved to the South of China. The Mising community belongs to Miao-Yao (China) of Sino-Tibetan family. These Sino-Tibetan ethnic tribes were known as Kirato, Kinner, Gandarbha and Asura during the Mahabharata period. During this period they used to live in the hills of Kailash, Mandara, Himrat (Himbat) and these has been depicted in the Mahabharata (Pegu 2005).

The nomadic Misings later settled in the valley of *Tsangpo* (Brahmaputra in India), migrated to Tibet and reached Abor Hills of Arunachal Pradesh, following the river Tsanpo which is also known as Siang River in Arunachal Pradesh and Luit in Assam. The tribe living in this basin was referred to as ‘Hill Miri’. The Misings then living on the high mountainous ranges of Abor Hills migrated down along the Siang valley and occupied the foothills area around 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The people of plains began to call them as ‘Plain Miri’ of the Subansiri basin. The Mising community, the son of Abotani, migrated to Assam during the Chutia rule in Sadiya and later on became the subjects of Ahom kingdom in the beginning of sixteenth century (Doley and Medak 2019). Now they are occupying the plains and the foothills bordering Arunachal Pradesh, along the North bank of the Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Bharoli River and downstream upto the Kaziranga National Park on the south bank. They are riparian people and inhabit mostly the riverine tracks along the courses of river Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Bharoli, Dhansiri, Dichang, etc. The present population of the Mising in Assam is 6,83,170 and second largest tribal community of Assam in northeast India, which is mostly concentrated in Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Biswanath Chariali, Majuli, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of Assam, having a large concentration in the last two districts.

The Misings of Assam had settled in the district of upper Assam especially at the bank of river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. They have concentrated their settlement in the present civil sub-division of Jonai, Dhemaji, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Sadiya and Gohpur on the north bank of Brahmaputra, and from Sadiya to Dhansirimukh on the South bank. Their population within these districts is 6, 83,170 as per the Population Census Report of 2011, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** District-wise population of the Misings in Assam

Name of the district	Population of the Misings
Dhemaji	2,78,592
Lakhimpur	1,77,324
Sonitpur	48,713
Tinsukia	42,224

Dibrugarh	8,787
Sibsagar	20,117
Jorhat	93,389
Golaghat	14,024
<b>Total population</b>	<b>6,83,170</b>

**Source: Census Report, 2011.**

The above table shows the district-wise population of Mising in Assam. The total population of the Scheduled Tribes in Assam is 38,84,371 (Plain Tribes and Hills Tribes population, Census Report, 2011) and of this 6,83,170 are the population of Mising in Assam.

### **Tribal communities of Assam**

The concept of ‘development’ is multidimensional in nature since it connotes different things and different people. Usually the concept is applied to understand the evolution, growth, and progress of people at large. As such, the term ‘development’ is now-a-days used almost in all academic disciplines ranging from natural sciences to social sciences in their own ways that chiefly include economics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science, education and others. Perhaps for this reason Herbert Spencer conceived development of society as a process of organic evolution. Similarly, August Comte divided development into three *viz.* theological, metaphysical and positivism. Karl Max’s theory of society is also basically a theory of economic progress leading to social development through class conflict that aims at establishing a new social order.<sup>1</sup> By and large, development of any sort is involved in bringing about a change/evolution of humanity at large. On the whole, development takes place centering around the mankind, and both are inextricably intertwined. Looking at the humanity from development perspective, the present study is intended to examine the role of the Mising Autonomous Council in the development of the Misings in Assam.

Assam may be regarded as the replica of Indian sub-continent comprising a large number of the tribal population who, according to the 2001 census, constitute 12.4 percent of state’s total population. The tribal people of Assam however, may be divided into two broad segments, *viz.* Plain tribes and Hill tribes. While the Plain tribes include Bodo, Mising, Rabha, Deori, Tiwa, Sonowal-Kachari and Thengal-Kachari, the Hill tribes are Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki and others. The present article is, however, restricted only to the Misings (Plain tribe) of the state. Like the Hill tribes, the Plain tribal people, especially the Misings, have remained backward and disorganized right from the pre-colonial era simply because of ignorance, illiteracy and impoverishment. Perhaps for such reasons, the Ahom regime (1228-1826 AD) accorded them some assignment with the hope for getting them absorbed with the Tai-Mongoloid family for establishing a greater Tai-Mongoloid state. Despite so, the tribal people failed to eradicate their diametrical backwardness. Next, the Government of Colonial India, in spite of their cynical outlook, seemed to be sympathetic towards the tribal people when they undertook some historical steps for safeguarding the basic interests of the tribal people, especially the Hill tribes and thereby ascertain their development. In this connection, the adaptation of the Assam Land Revenue Regulations 1886 (amended in 1947)<sup>2</sup> in order to intercept the alienation of land from the tribals to non-tribals can be deemed as a glaring example.

In the post-colonial era, the framers of the Indian Constitution while making the constitution had recognized a major section of the backward classes of the people as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.<sup>3</sup> As such, they were endowed with a lot of extraordinary constitutional safeguards. Some of the important safeguards include: (i) incorporation of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules into the constitution (Article 244). While the Fifth Schedule makes provisions concerning the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes throughout India, the Sixth Schedule is concerned with the administration of Tribal Areas of Assam by way of giving autonomy; (ii) Provision for special representation and reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Law making bodies (Articles 330, 332 and 334) and Government and Semi-Government Services; (iii) Provision for preventing alienation/fragmentation of immovable property of the Scheduled Tribes, the State may obstruct them on the plea that they are not entitled to alienate landed property except with the concurrence of a specified administrative authority under specified conditions (Article 19(5)); (iv) Provision for the appointment of the Commissioner for the welfare of the Plains Tribes; (v) Article 275 of the Constitution provides that special fund shall be made available out of the Consolidated Fund of India to promote the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in any state, and many others. Thus, it is witnessed that the Constitution of India has accorded several safeguards for the protection of economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as to ‘protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation’ (Article 46)<sup>4</sup>, and eventually to put them at par with other forward sections of population, and thus to bring the tribal communities in the mainstream of national life by dint of overall development.

In addition, it is seen that both the Govt. of India and State Govts. have initiated a slew of welfare schemes from time to time with a view to accelerate the pace of development of the Scheduled Tribes ever since the inception of decolonization. Some of them included Community Development Programme (1952), Special

Multipurpose Tribal Development Block (1956), and Integrated Tribal Development Project (1974) and so on. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several autonomous Councils were constituted in Assam viz. Bodo Autonomous Council (AC) (1993), MisingAC (1995), RabhaHazongAC (1995), TiwaAC (1995), Sonowal-KachariAC (2003), DeoriAC (2005) and Thengal-KachariAC(2005) for the development of the respective communities. The present article is however, restricted to the role of Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) in the development of the Misings in Assam.

**Mising Autonomous Council:**

The Mising Autonomous Council (hereinafter abbreviated MAC) was established under the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995, passed by Assam Legislative Assembly, and its Head Quarter was established at Gogamukh, Dhemaji. An interim body of MAC was constituted in the same year. The Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995, provides that the MAC shall be constituted “*comprising of \*Satellite Areas and Core Areas for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Mising and other Scheduled Tribes communities residing therein.*” The Act provides of a 36 member General Council and a 15 member Executive Council out of the General Members. The General Council and Executive Council ran on *ad hoc* basis with nominated members since its inception till October, 2013 when the first election to the MAC was held and an elected body assumed office on 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2013. The second election of MAC was held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

Core area and Satellite areas are defined by the Act as follows:

‘Satellite Areas’ mean the area or areas consisting of non-contiguous of villages predominately inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50% and above as a whole in the cluster and not necessarily in the individual village.

‘Core Areas’ means the compact and contiguous areas predominately inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50% and above as a whole in the area and not necessarily in the individual villages. The area of the MAC is shown in [Fig. 1](#).

**Mission statement of MAC:**

The Mission of the MAC is to work for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Mising, other Scheduled Tribes, Protected Classes and all other communities residing in MAC areas of Assam.

**Vision statement of MAC:**

The vision of the MAC is to create a just and developed society in MAC areas with quality of life and standards of living equal to other people and other parts of the country.

**Powers and functions of MAC**

The MAC has been provided with executive powers and functions on 34 subjects as mentioned bellow, including Cottage Industry, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Forest other than reserved forest, Agriculture, Rural Roads and Bridge, Sericulture, Education (Adult Education, Primary Education, and Up to Higher Secondary including vocational training), Cultural Affairs, Soil Conservation, Co-operation, Fisheries, Panchayat and Rural Development, Handloom and Textiles, Public Health Engineering-Drinking Water, Minor Irrigation, Social Welfare, Flood Control Schemes for protection of Villages (not of highly technical nature), Sports and Youth Welfare, Weights and Measures, Library services, Museum and Archeology, Urban Development, Town & Country Planning, Tribal Research, Land and Land Revenue, Publicity and Public Relation, Tourism, Transport, Any other matter connected with development, Municipal Board, Improvement Trust, District of Boards and other local-self Government of village administration, Tribal Welfare, Market and fair, Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic performances and Cinema, Vital Statistics including registration of birth and death, Food and Civil Supplies.

**Jurisdiction of MAC**

The Govt. of Assam, vide its notification No. TAD/BC/133/2005/52 has declared a list of 1239 villages to be covered under Core Area of MAC, and 392 villages to be covered under Satellite Area of MAC, with equal status to all the Scheduled Tribes residing therein. These villages are located mostly in riverine areas on both the banks along the river Brahmaputra and Subansiri in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia.

The list of villages was modified by deleting about 300 non-tribal populated villages at the time of holding election in 2013 and the abstract of population is given in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2: List of Villages and Population**(As per Govt. of India Census, 2011)

Sl.	Constituency	No. of Villages	Total HH	Total Population	ST Population	District
1	Lali	70	3796	22211	17215	Dhemaji
2	Murkongselek	61	7573	40458	19300	Dhemaji
3	GaliBijoypur	52	3298	20926	18493	Dhemaji

4	DebingDitak	70	5732	32308	19368	Dhemaji
5	OwangJonai	57	4560	26737	21530	Dhemaji
6	SanjariNwgr	28	2707	14207	10806	Dhemaji
7	SimenSomkong	48	4314	22858	11238	Dhemaji
8	Silasuti	63	5646	31362	12650	Dhemaji
9	Muktiar	56	6228	35959	12192	Dhemaji
10	Akajan	23	2056	37665	11501	Dhemaji
11	UjaniSissiTongani	69	5430	32816	26458	Dhemaji
12	NamoniSissiTongani	44	3756	23616	21736	Dhemaji
13	Sisimukh	35	4249	23322	18101	Dhemaji
14	Jiadhal	46	4001	20999	14817	Dhemaji
15	Gogamukh	34	4736	24656	16919	Dhemaji
16	Nalbari	44	3852	19462	13723	Dhemaji
17	Mingmang	30	3213	16819	12545	Dhemaji
18	BhimporaBoginadi	39	5216	31757	23582	Lakhimpur
19	Ghunasaki Pub Telahi	32	4365	28854	26982	Lakhimpur
20	Obonori	38	5497	32098	26426	Lakhimpur
21	Pub	34	4210	22996	18219	Lakhimpur
	DhakuwakhanaMatmora					
22	KherkataDangdhara	43	5022	28569	26029	Lakhimpur
23	LuhitPashim	33	4170	25797	18149	Lakhimpur
24	Ranganadi	32	4454	24481	14375	Lakhimpur
25	Dikrong	56	5793	34010	23562	Lakhimpur
26	Jiabhoroli	24	3742	19420	10068	Sonitpur
27	Luhitmukh	83	7692	49544	38645	Sonitpur
28	DhansriDisoi	21	5179	28156	19963	Golaghat
29	Gelabeel	31	5952	34216	22261	Golaghat
30	SanggaMajuli	41	5751	32242	27250	Jorhat
31	PhuloniJokaibowa	35	7528	38921	23555	Jorhat
32	RadangRikkong	41	4329	26538	21359	Jorhat
33	Jorhat	29	5162	29970	21225	Jorhat
34	DisangDikhow	33	5585	31463	20117	Sibsagar
35	DihingSesa	12	2130	11987	8787	Dibrugarh
36	Sadiya	28	37592	22355	14024	Tinsukia
<b>Total</b>		<b>1515</b>	<b>170683</b>	<b>999755</b>	<b>683170</b>	

**The MAC area**

The MAC area stretches along the axes of two rivers of upper Assam: the Brahmaputra and the Subansiri. The Mising tribe, belonging to the North Assam branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, is a riparian tribe and they live in the floodplains or water meadows on both the banks of river Brahmaputra from its headwaters in Tinsukia and Dhemaji district up to Kaziranga National Park in Golaghat district on the south, and up to Jia-Bharali river on the north, and along the Subansiri river from the Himalayan foothills up to its confluence with Brahmaputra. Besides, as both Brahmaputra and Subansiri are two large braided river systems, there are innumerable braid-bars or eyots (*Char or Chapori*). Some of these *Chaporis* as large as several square kilometers in area, which too are inhabited by Mising people in the upper reaches. Along with the majority Misings, other scheduled tribes, viz. Bodo, Hajong, Garo, Rabha, SonowalKachari and Deori; and some non-tribal communities also live in the area.

There are large numbers of other small rivers, rivulets and water-bodies which reticulate the MAC areas, which were once boon for prosperous livelihood. But, in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 1950, the behavior and characteristics of both the rivers changed and recurrent high flood and fluvial erosion became regular which, over the years till date, have displaced large numbers of villages, eaten away colossal areas of arable land, casted sand deposits in paddy fields and silted up the natural water bodies and ponds. As a result, the erstwhile Lakhimpur district, now Lakhimpur and Dhemaji, which was once known as the rice bowl of Assam, has become Assam's worst flood affected district with poverty looming large. People had no option but to clear forest areas for settling anew.

Flood and fluvial erosion continues to be the main problem of the entire MAC area and therefore, together with the State Water Resources Department, MAC must strive hard to find a long-term solution and devise means of livelihood that can go along well in such situation and such flood terrain. Furthermore, the commissioning of the Ranganadi dam on Ranga river in Arunachal Pradesh, which flows through Lakhimpur and Majuli before emptying into Brahmaputra, has added to flood miseries of the Misings and other inhabitants.

This dam has been the cause behind frequent and un-natural floods in MAC area. Another large hydel project is under construction on the Subansiri river, near Arunachal Pradesh-Assam border, near Gerukhamukh village of Dhemaji (Fig. 2A), is also surmised to cause miseries to the Misings with unnatural floods, erosion, siltation of the river beds, loss of fishes, chaporis, etc.

**Economic condition of MAC Area**

The entire MAC area is a zero-industry zone and the only economic activities are agriculture and allied ones which are in the most under-developed or primitive type with farmers still using wooden plough pulled by bullocks, weavers weaving their primitive throw-shuttle looms with peg-warping, cattle pasturing in the open un-tethered, pigs skittering about in the villages and women folk herding in groups to the forest or to the wetland to collect edibles – roots, leaves or aquatic creatures.

Despite being unorganized and primitive, rice, mustard oil seed and black gram are produced aplenty in MAC area owing to the availability of land during the winter, and these are the main sources of livelihood. Fishing is another means of livelihood and it too is unorganized and depends only on capture fisheries from the rivers and other water bodies. Other economic activities like cattle rearing, piggery, sericulture, handloom, etc. are small-scale homestead activities with no large-scale organized production.

Therefore, there is urgent need of intervention through skill up-gradation, farm mechanization, irrigation, introduction of high-yielding varieties, organizing the farmers into self-help groups, joint liability groups, Cooperative societies, producer groups, etc., and motivating them for organized and scientific farming which can transform the economic scenario.

Apart from cultivation of paddy, oil seed and other pulses, fishery, piggery, cattle rearing, sericulture and handloom holds ample scope for development as commercial activity in MAC area with long-term strategic planning and effective in-time intervention.

**Funding of MAC**

The MAC is funded by the State Govt. of Assam under Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP). Fund allocation to MAC was very little in 2005. In 2005, the Government, due to an agreement with the agitating tribal organizations, decided to enhance the budget allocation to MAC. Since then fund allocation has been gradually increased, although the amount always falls short of meeting huge demands and needs.

Fund allocation to MAC since 1996-1997 is given in Table 3. Fund allocated during 2010-11 was lapsed as there was no council, not even a nominated one; and fund allocated for 2011-12 and 2012-13 were revenue deposited for the same reason. Fund for 2013-14 has been released after the elected council has taken charge and the same has been utilized.

**Table3:** Year-wise fund allocation to MAC from 1996 -97 to 2017-18.

<b>Years</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1996-97	Rs. 5.12 Crore
1997-98	Rs. 5.46 Crore
1998-99	Rs. 2.87 Crore
1999-2000	Rs. 5.02 Crore
2000-01	Rs. 2.21 Crore
2001-02	Rs. 4.28 Crore
2002-03	Rs. 4.72 Crore
2003-04	Rs. 4.18 Crore
2004-05	Rs. 7.67 Crore
2005-06	Rs. 17.55 Crore
2006-07	Rs. 21.60 Crore
2007-08	Rs. 23.50 Crore
2008-09	Rs. 25.00 Crore
2009-10	Rs. 31.76 Crore
2010-11	Rs. 35.08 Crore (Lapsed)
2011-12	Rs. 41.35 Crore (Revenue Deposit)
2012-13	Rs. 45.97 Crore (Revenue Deposit)
2013-14	Rs. 53.69 Crore (Utilized)
2014-15	Rs. 58.52 Crore (Sanctioned) Rs. 29.26 Crore (Released)
2015-16	Rs. 64.37 Crore (Sanctioned) Rs. 32.18 Crore (Released)
2016-17	Rs. 147.25 Crore (Including Revenue Deposit) Rs. 117.25 Crore (Released)
2017-18	Rs. 72.00 Crore (Proposed)

The above table shows that the State Government has allocated to MAC an amount of Rs. 495.32 Crore so far since its inception till 2017-18 financial years, which is insufficient for the development of the community.

### **Scope of work in the MAC areas for development of the Mising Tribe**

#### **Agriculture**

The MAC area is completely rural and its economy is fully agrarian. It falls in North Bank Plain and Upper Brahmaputra Valley Agro-climatic zone. Land is mostly owned by small and marginal farmers practicing subsistence agriculture with single/double crop. Paddy is the staple crop grown. Farm mechanization is in a very nascent stage (Fig. 2B). The entire MAC area is flood-prone, which is a natural deterrent to intensive agriculture. Owing to the uncertainty due to flood, people desist from capital intensive crop. But there is abundance of fallow land, in the form of water meadows and others which provide ample opportunity for winter crops. Traditionally, a small portion of such available land is used for mustard oil seeds (Fig. 2C) and Autumn rice (*Ahu*) cultivation. With improvement of road connectivity network, effective motivation and well-timed supply of inputs, large number of farmers can be engaged during autumn and winter season on these vast riverine fallow land or water meadows for the following crops:

1. Boro rice
2. High-yielding varieties of *Ahu* rice
3. High-yielding varieties of potato, like Kufri-Pukhraj/Jyoti
4. Toria (TS-36 and TS-38) to replace traditional mustard.
5. Introduction of System of Rice Intensification

#### **Animal husbandry and veterinary**

Steps have been taken to revamp the infrastructure of Animal husbandry and veterinary department, which is in a dilapidated condition in MAC area. Twenty one Veterinary Aid Centre/Sub Centres have been newly constructed under plan fund of MAC.

Livestock holds an important key to livelihood and economic growth in MAC area as majority tribal population practice piggy on small homestead basis, which are being assisted to develop into organized piggy unit with better breed. Demand for meat is ever increasing which can only be addressed by small scale but large in numbers of poultry farms. Schemes are taken up to train entrepreneurs, SHGs etc. To establish poultry farms with bank linkage. The vast water meadows of Brahmaputra and its tributaries provide ample opportunity for cattle rearing-cow, water buffalo, goat and sheep. The only problem is shelter and feed during flood (Fig. 2D). So, some 100 highland platforms have been constructed and which showed excellent performance during flood as shelter.

#### **Fisheries:**

Fish farming or Pisciculture holds immense potentiality as a viable alternative mode of livelihood as well as commercial venture in MAC area due to abundance of natural water bodies including derelict rivers and rivulets, oxbow lakes, *beels* and vast areas of lowland (Fig. 2E). What is required is awareness and training on Integrated Fish farming. MAC organizes awareness and training programme for intending fish farmers in coordination with State Fishery department and at other resources centres. The MAC has taken up the following steps:

1. To conserve all existing natural water bodies for both conservation and pisciculture.
2. Construction of new ponds in feasible area.
3. Establishment of eco-hatchery.
4. Awareness and training on Integrated Fish farming.
5. Financial assistance through Bank linkage and other Govt. programme.
6. Co-ordination with State Fishery Department and other Agencies for Technical support and asset management.

#### **Handloom and Textiles:**

Next only to agriculture, handloom is the largest unorganized sector of livelihood in MAC area. Every women of the Mising community is a weaver, and Mising handloom products, particularly women wear, are high on demand in the market owing to its colorful intricate designs and usable simplicity for women of all other communities. However, Mising weavers practice peg-warping, use primitive looms of bamboo frame, bamboo reed and through-shuttles which hinder maintenance of quality and quantum of production (Fig. 2F). The MAC has launched a mission with a 5-years perspective plan on Mising handloom and textiles with the following objectives:

1. Training of Mising weavers on improved fly-shuttle looms and designing with dobby/jacquard machines.
2. Constructions of series of Weaving Sheds/Common Facility Centres in selected clusters.
3. Taking up of massive skill up-gradation training programme followed by supply of inputs to weavers so trained and registered with MAC.

4. Assistance to NGOs, SHGs and JLGs which are sincerely engaged in handloom activities.
5. Marketing support to the weavers by organizing regular marketing fairs and festivals.
6. Setting up of a Central Computerized Research and Development centre on handloom at Gogamukh for designing, product diversification, value addition and Data Bank on Mising Handlooms.

**Cottage Industry**

Schemes for infrastructure building and financial support to various cottage industries like bee keeping, cane and bamboo crafts, knitting and embroidery, pottery, etc. along with the skill up-gradation training can be executed. Tool-kits are to be procured and distributed among the rural artisans, craftsmen, etc.

**Social Forestry:**

Loss of natural forest cover is one of the causes of devastating impact of flood and erosion in MAC area. It has also rendered minor forest products like – firewood, leaves, edible plants, medicinal plants etc. scarce for the community. MAC can take up schemes to restore community forests and establish edible plant and medicinal plants garden. Plantation along roads and river banks are also taken up.

**Rural roads and bridges:**

Construction, repairing and maintenance of rural roads, culverts, bridges, Govt. or Council buildings, other public works, etc. which fall under MAC area are taken up after obtaining NOC and non-duplicity certificate from the concerned department. So far, the road connectivity in remote and bordering areas of MAC are still poor, which worsens during floods (Fig. 2G).

**Sericulture:**

Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts are traditional grower of wild silk, both Muga and Endi or Eri. Apart from the silk yarn produced from Muga and Endi rearing, the pupa or chrysalis, particularly of Endi are much sought after delicacy among the indigenous population. Because of its high protein and fat content, the silk pupa serves as a source of nutrition to fight malnutrition among children in rural area. But owing to recurring flood and erosion, scarcity of feed plants, lack of incentives, market linkage, etc. problems, the trade is now gradually dwindling. What is required now is a massive revamping of sericulture with a holistic approach. There are a good number of sericulture farms in MAC area, all in dilapidated condition without fencing/boundary wall and house for the keepers. MAC has drawn up plan to revamp sericulture beginning with restoration of all the Govt. farms and take up community plantation so that scarcity of feed plants can be reduced in the first instance. In this stage, necessary inputs are provided as incentive to the farmers.

**Education**

Education scenario in MAC area is very backward. Most of the educational institutions and academic atmosphere are affected by the following factors.

1. Poor and insufficient infrastructure of the academic institutions.
2. Poor connectivity in rural and remote areas, including border areas.
3. Inefficient and insufficient teaching personnel.
4. Poverty of the rural families, etc.

The MAC can give special thrust on education in the area as follows:

1. Construction, repairing and maintenance of educational institutions.
2. Grant-in-aid/financial assistance to educational institutions.
3. Supply of books, uniform and other educational materials.
4. Holding of training, seminar, conduct of educational tour, etc. for teachers and students.
5. Coordination with the State Educational Department for fruitful implementation of Central and State Government programme, like SSA etc.
6. Scholarship to poor and meritorious students.
7. Reward to best performing Academic institution and teachers.

**Cultural affairs**

The Mising and other indigenous communities inherit a rich folk art and culture which is the most important element of self-identity. But it is under threat of withering away due to lack of proper attention for preservation, promotion and development. The MAC has taken up schemes and programmes for preservation and practices of the art and culture of Misings and all other communities residing in MAC areas.

1. The MAC has emphasized on research work on Mising Folk culture and in this regard grant may be provided.
2. Setting up of Cultural complex and archive at different places.
3. Construction of Auditorium, Kristi Bhawan, Rangamancha, etc.
4. Grant-in-aid to Music institutions, clubs, Yuvak Sangha, society, etc. engaged in cultural activities.
5. Production of Film, Documentary, etc.
6. Publication of Books.

7. Providing of Musical Instrument to Artist and Institutions.
8. Holding of cultural festivals, etc.

**Panchayat and rural development**

Construction, repairing and maintenance of any socio-economic community assets; rural roads and dykes, highland platform, schools; infrastructure for supporting agriculture, horticulture, pisciculture, animal husbandry, etc.; infrastructure and financial support to SHGs/JLGs, Grant-in-Aid/Financial assistance to NGO, etc. are taken up. Endeavour is made to coordinate all works with PRIs for synergy and to avoid duplicity.

The MAC has make co-ordination with the State P&RD Department, NIRD, SIRD NEDFi and other such institutions for transfer of Technology, Skill up-gradation training, etc.

**Public Health and Engineering**

Drinking water and sanitation are major areas calling for intervention of substantial nature in MAC area. It is a common practice to defecate in the open, and drink water from river, pond, *nullah*, etc. in the tribal villages. Demands for installation of shallow/deep tube wells, ring wells and supply of hand tube wells are very high and MAC has no option but to attend to such demands with utmost priority. Community drinking water supply schemes are taken up in phased manner to select clusters. Public/community toilets in various public places should be constructed in phased manner.

**Irrigation**

The Agricultural practice of the majority tribal people of MAC area are still primitive in nature with rain dependent single crop cultivation and Agricultural Department of MAC shall has introduced organized scientific cultivation with multi crop practice of high yielding varieties. The schemes/works under Irrigation department are in tandem with the schemes/works under Agricultural department. Schemes like boring of wells, gully control, digging of channel, construction of bund, water reservoir, procurement of pumps etc. are to be taken up by MAC.

The MAC seeks co-ordination from the state Irrigation Department and other agencies for identification and preparation of works, technical supervision and implementation of works and asset maintenance.

**Social Welfare**

Implementation of Central or State sponsored schemes as per Government guideline. Besides, schemes for welfare of women, children, old age people, differently disable persons are also taken up. Schemes like setting up of old age home; crèche, Children Park etc. are being planned.

**Water Resource**

Flood and fluvial erosion continues to be the principal problem affecting the entire population of the MAC area. Being entirely low lying floodplains, the MAC areas get inundated every year by flood from river Brahmaputra and its tributaries and there are regular disasters caused by breach of dykes, washing away of villages and casting thick layers of sand on paddy fields. Tens of thousands of people have been rendered landless and homeless over the last few decades. Such disasters have been happening regularly due to lack of sensible and well-timed maintenance and repairing of the dykes. Lack of response from the appropriate authority in time to supplication for sanction of few lakhs of rupees to repair a damaged dyke has led, on most occasions, to breach of dyke during flood. Same story holds true for fluvial erosion too, leading to loss of hundreds of hectares of agricultural land. The MAC, as an autonomous body intervenes here very effectively with timely action attending to urgent situations which are not of highly technical in nature. (99 Nos. of flood and erosion management schemes have been executed by the Council with an expenditure of Rs. 644.71 lakhs during 2013-14. The works are mostly of RCC porcupine screening, bund construction, raising and strengthening of dykes, construction of bamboo palisades, boulder protection work, etc.).

**Sports and Youth Welfare**

Development of Playground, Grant-in-Aid to Sports/Youth Club/ Associations, supply of sports materials, assistance to individual for participation in various competitions/events etc. are to be executed by MAC. (Plans are being drawn to set up a water sports complex at Kareng Village near Bogibeel Bridge and a modern stadium at Gogamukh).

**Tourism**

Four hot tourist destinations fall partly in MAC area: three National Parks, namely Kaziranga, Nameri and Dibru-Saikhowa; and a cultural landscape, the Majuli inland island. Besides, there are many other areas with potentiality for development as ecotourism, cultural/ or ethno-tourism destination. But, the main constraint in the development of tourism in MAC area is lack of quality infrastructure and service.

MAC has already constructed three Eco Camps with bamboo cottages and Swiss tents. They are:

1. Me:poOkum at Sitadar village, Majuli: open for tourists.
2. Subansiri Eco Camp on the bank of Subansiri River near Gogamukh: open for tourists.
3. Agoratoli Eco Camp at Teliabari village near Kaziranga National park.



Proposals for construction of two more Eco Camp with Swiss tents, one on the banks of Siang River near Jonaia and the other at Dharikati village near Nameri National Park are under consideration. Packages are being developed for introduction of river cruising on Siang and Subansiri rivers.

### **Health and Family Welfare**

The health scenario in MAC area is far from being healthy and health service to the rural populations of remote areas are still an illusion. The basic objective of schemes/works under Health and Family Welfare department of MAC is to fill up the gaps in NHM works. There are large numbers of Health Sub-centres in MAC area, particularly in remote riverine areas or river island/eyots without any house/ building and/ or Nurse's quarter. The Nurse, posted in such Sub-centres, abstain from duty on the plea of lack of any building/quarter there to stay. Presently, Rural Health Practitioners are being posted in such Sub-centres without any quarter to stay. The MAC has constructed 27 Nos. of Doctor/ Nurse Quarters and Health Sub-centres during the 2013-14 financial years with an expenditure of Rs.166.16 lakhs.

### **Welfare of Plain Tribe and other Backward Classes**

A wide range of schemes preferably in coordination with other department and particularly to fill up gaps can be taken up under WPT & BC department. However, as the thrust of MAC have to remove backwardness, improve infrastructure, health, education, sanitation, drinking water, employment generation and other such supplementary schemes are taken up under WPT & BC department. Besides, schemes for strengthening of the voluntary sector, SHGs and Cooperatives are also taken up.

From the above discussion about the role of MAC in the development of the Misings in Assam, we can conclude that the MAC was constituted for the development of the Misings but it could not fulfill the grievances of this backward community. It is all known fact that the tribal people are traditionally impoverished and backward and their pathetic conditions have remained unchanged and unaltered for generations together even. The Misings are mostly riverine people for which they get themselves subjected to untold and indescribable sufferings owing to natural as well as man-made catastrophes such as recurring flood, alleged land alienation from tribals to non-tribals, unplanned destruction of natural resources by the unscrupulous contractors, displacement from homeland caused by industrial projects, socio-ecological degradation and many others. All these rampant problems have invariably forced the Mising people of the State to remain unchanged and underdeveloped socially, educationally, economically and even politically. This bunch of problems of the Misings cannot be solved by the MAC with limited power and funds. Secondly, the Misings of the State are entitled to enjoy the extraordinary constitutional safeguards as well as State's welfare schemes for their development. But in practice, it is seen that such safeguards and schemes seem to have allegedly been monopolized and capitalized by a hand full of thriving Mising personalities to fulfill their vested self interests. The MAC was constituted for all round development of the Misings as a result of a long continuous movement. But MAC has been used by every political party to engage the power hunger leaders of the community right from its inception to 2013. In this period *ad hoc* committees were entrusted to exercise powers of the MAC. The *ad hoc* committee members were not accountable to the Mising voters and they used the MAC funds to satisfy their Political Bosses and fulfill their own self-interest rather than the interest of the Mising people. As a result, the some group of the Mising people became wealthy by misusing the MAC funds. Even this, the scenario has not changed when the elected body came to power in 2013. The elected body of the MAC also failed to fulfill the aspiration of the Mising people because of the vested interest of the elected leaders. At the last, we can say that all round development of the Mising can be done only if the MAC authority works dedicatedly with proper planning and welfare schemes rather than beneficiary schemes. The lackadaisical attitudes of the scheme implementing agencies and cynical behavior of the bureaucrats towards the Mising people have to be changed. The authorities have to create friendly environment, awareness amongst the Mising people and guarantee their participation in the welfare schemes. Rampant corruptions among the Mising leadership resulting in siphoning of fund from community welfare to individual welfare have to be stopped. The increase of development funds and monitoring of proper implementation of welfare schemes by the State authority will accelerate the all round development of the community as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Misings, a plain tribe of Assam, are the second largest tribal community in the state. The people of this tribe are mainly riparian people sustaining their lives with agriculture, fisheries, cattle and pig rearing, etc. With administrative and political lapses, in addition to other factors, the tribe still lags far behind the mainstream Assam or India, more so in remote areas. To their boon, the Govt. of Assam accorded autonomy in the form of an autonomous council, named MAC, in 1995. While the motto of the council is to look after and safeguard the interest of the Mising people, their upliftment in socio-economic aspect is the dying demand of today. The MAC has initiated several developmental schemes in the MAC area. However, lack of adequate fund and other administrative lapses hinder the upliftment of community as it should have. The present article is an attempt to delineate the history, demography and socio-economic status of the Misings, and the role of MAC in their

development, while it provides an in-depth recommendation on different aspects which should be focused for the upliftment of the community. Although it lies largely on the Govt. machinery, the role of various organizations is equally important in spreading awareness and encouraging the people for a better tomorrow. Thus, Govt. as well as NGOs should work in coordination for the development of the Misings of Assam, and provide them with their long pending due.

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**Figures:**

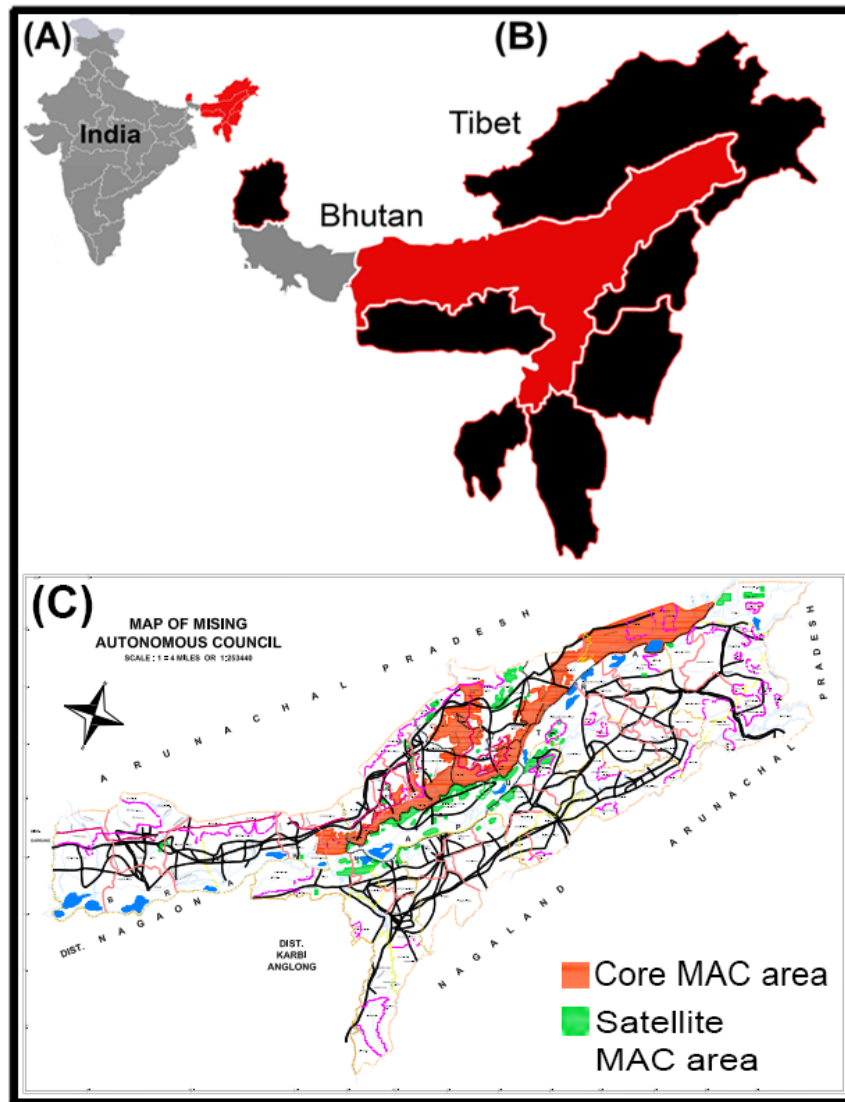


Fig. 1: Map of India highlighting Northeast India (A); Map of Northeast India highlighting Assam (B); and the area of the Mising Autonomous council in Assam (C). The map was obtained from the official website of the MAC headquarter (<http://www.macassam.nic.in/mac-area.php>).

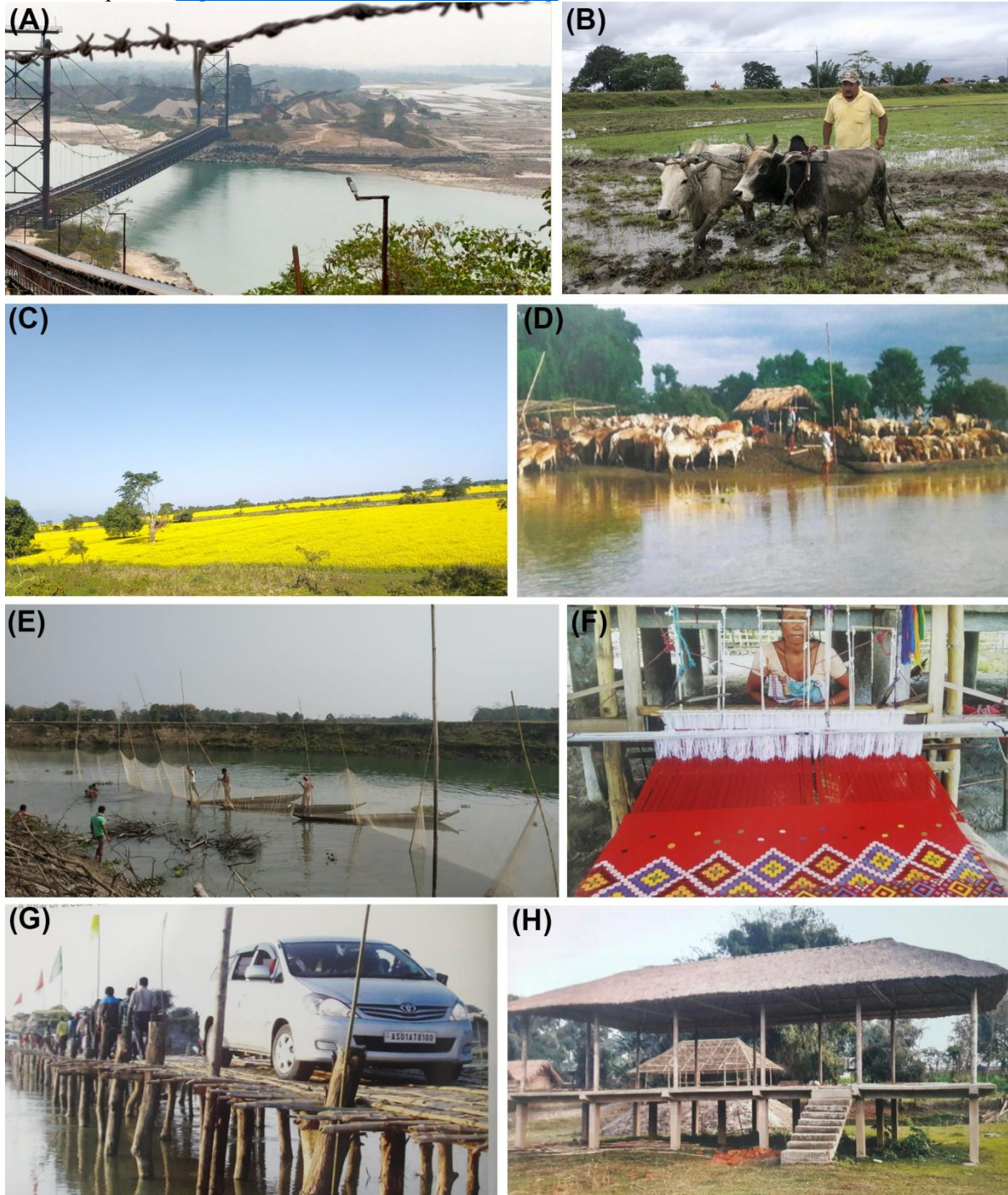


Fig. 2: Images demonstrating socio-economic aspects of the Misings in MAC area: (A) Mustard cultivation at Bangalmari village, Dhemaji district; (B) A Mising woman weaving traditional garments; (C) Traditional fishing practice from Koda (Gai) river, Petfuta village, Dhemaji district; (D) MurongGhar of Mising people; (E) Traditional and labour-intensive plough driven by bullocks at Dhemaji; (F) Cattle shelter during floods; (G) Road connectivity during floods; and (H) The upcoming Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project on Subansiri river near Arunachal Pradesh-Assam (Dhemaji) border. Photos ‘A’ by Mr. Pulok Dutta, Dhemaji College, photo ‘B’ by Dr. PurbajyotiSaikia, Dhemaji College, Dhemaji, rest of the photographs by A. Patir.