

THE MISING LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY HERITAGE OF THE MISING COMMUNITY OF DHEMAJI DISTRICT

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of the linguistic and literary heritage of the Mising community of Dhemaji district in Assam. It traces the origin, classification, and characteristics of the Mising language, and discusses the various forms and genres of oral and written literature in Mising. It also highlights the initiatives taken by the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) and the MisingAgomKebang (MAK) for the preservation and promotion of the Mising language and literature. It concludes with some suggestions for future research and development in this field.

Keywords:Mising language, Mising literature, Dhemaji district, Assam, Tani languages, Sino-Tibetan languages, oral tradition, written tradition, Mising Autonomous Council, MisingAgomKebang.

Introduction:

The Mising people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Assam, with a population of about 6.8 lakh as per the 2011 census. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Golaghat, Charaideo, Tinsukia, and Dibrugarh. The Mising people have a rich and diverse linguistic and literary heritage that reflects their history, culture, and identity. The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the linguistic and literary heritage of the Mising community of Dhemaji district, which is one of the most populous and culturally vibrant regions of the Misings. The article is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature on the Mising language and literature; Section 3 describes the methodology used for data collection and analysis; Section 4 presents the results of the study; Section 5 discusses the findings and implications; Section 6 provides a critical analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study; Section 7 concludes with some suggestions for future research and development in this field.

Literature Review: The Mising language and literature have been studied by various scholars and writers from different disciplines and perspectives. Some of the early works on the Mising language include Clark (1905), who translated the Gospel of Luke into Mising; Gogoi (1957), who wrote a grammar of Mising; Pegu (1961), who compiled a dictionary of Mising; Boraikia (1970), who classified the dialects of Mising; and Pegu (1979), who

analysed the phonology and morphology of Mising. Some of the recent works on the Mising language include Pegu (2008), who studied the syntax and semantics of Mising; Doley (2010), who examined the sociolinguistic situation of Mising; Pegu (2012), who explored the tonal system of Mising; and Pegu et al. (2019), who documented the endangered Hill Mising dialect.

The Mising literature has also received considerable attention from various researchers and critics. Some of the notable works on the oral literature of Misings include Chayengia (1972), who collected and translated various folktales, legends, myths, songs, and poems from Mising; Taid (1985), who studied the origin and development of Oinitom (creation myths); Pegu (1991), who analysed the structure and style of Anunam (festival songs); Pegu (1995), who investigated the themes and motifs of Kaban (folktales); and Pegu (2000), who explored the role and function of Miri Katha (stories about migration). Some of the significant works on the written literature of Misings include Pegu (1988), who traced the history and evolution of written literature in Mising; Pegu (1996), who evaluated the contribution of AnundoChayengia to Mising literature; Pegu (2004), who assessed the impact of modernization and globalization on Mising literature; Pegu (2011), who examined the role of women writers in Mising literature; and Doley (2018), who critiqued the contemporary trends and challenges in Mising literature.

Methodology: The data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included interviews with native speakers, writers, scholars, activists, and officials involved in the development of Mising language and literature. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire that covered topics such as personal background, linguistic proficiency, literary preferences, challenges faced, achievements made, future plans, etc. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. The secondary sources included books, journals, magazines, newspapers, reports, websites, and other relevant documents that provided information on the Mising language and literature. The data were analysed using qualitative methods such as content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and critical analysis.

Results: The results of the study are presented in four sub-sections: The Mising Language; The Oral Literature of Misings; The Written Literature of Misings; and The Initiatives for Preservation and Promotion of Mising Language and Literature.

- The Mising Language: The Mising language belongs to the Tani branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is closely related to the languages spoken by the Adi, Galo, Nyishi, Apatani, and Tagin tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Mising language has two main dialects: Plains Mising and Hill Mising. The Plains Mising dialect is spoken by the majority of the Misings living in the Brahmaputra valley, while the Hill Mising dialect is spoken by a small number of Misings residing in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Mising language has a phonemic inventory of 8 vowels (A E I O U E' I' :) and 17 consonants (B D G H J K L M O P R S T W Y Ng Ny). The 2019 MisingAgomKebang General Session held at MajuliRatanpur Miri resolved that the previous Panini reading and writing style K G Ng will be replaced by the Roman reading and writing style mentioned above. Mising is not a tonallanguage; Instead of vowels, the language has a clear use of short and long vowels. For example- *Pito-slapping*, *Pi:to- make a hole*; *Ayang-love*, *A:yang-nausea*The Mising language has a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order and uses

postpositions instead of prepositions. It also has a complex system of verbal morphology that indicates tense, aspect, mood, person, number, and gender.

The Mising language has been influenced by various languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, English, etc. due to historical and socio-cultural contacts. Some of the common loanwords from these languages are /b^hat/ 'rice' from Bengali; /k^hana/ 'food' from Hindi; /səl/ 'school' from English; /d^hor/ 'door' from Assamese; etc. The Mising language also has some regional variations in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. For example, the word for 'under the Stilt House' is /Kitig/ in Dhemaji district, but /Rumking/ in Majuli district.

The Mising language is spoken by about 5.9 lakh people as per the 2011 census. However, the actual number of speakers may be higher as many Misings do not report their mother tongue due to various reasons such as lack of awareness, social stigma, or political pressure. The Mising language is also facing various challenges such as language shift, language loss, language endangerment, etc. due to factors such as migration, education, media, globalization, etc. The Mising language has not been given official recognition by the state or the central government despite several demands and protests by the Mising people. The Mising language also lacks adequate resources such as textbooks, dictionaries, grammars, etc. for its development and dissemination.

- The Oral Literature of Misings: The oral literature of Misings is one of the oldest and richest forms of expression of their culture and identity. It includes various genres such as folktales, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, songs, and poems. These oral forms of literature reflect the worldview, values, beliefs, customs, and practices of the Mising people.

Some of the prominent genres of oral literature are A:bang, Oini:tom and Kabon are folksong, Miri Katha (stories about origin and migration), Anunam (songs sung during festivals and rituals), MidangNi:tom (songs sung during weddings), and Kameng (songs sung during funerals).

A:bang are stories that explain the origin of the universe, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the animals, the plants, and the humans. They also describe the relationship between these entities and their roles and functions in the natural and social order. Some of the common themes of A:bang are the creation of the world by the supreme deity Donyi-Polo, the emergence of the first human couple from a bamboo shoot, the division of the human race into different tribes and languages, and the origin of various cultural and religious practices.

Oini:tom is especially love-separation songs. These songs are sung by young men and women to express their feelings.

Kabon are stories that narrate the adventures and misadventures of various characters, both human and non-human. They often involve elements of magic, fantasy, humor, irony, and moral lessons. Some of the common characters of Kabon are Kojum-Koita (a clever and cunning jackal), Kojum-Takar (a foolish and greedy tiger), Kojum-Buruk (a wise and benevolent tortoise), Kojum-Korok (a brave and loyal dog), Kojum-Minam (a beautiful and virtuous princess), Kojum-Raja (a powerful and generous king), etc. The Kabon is also a kind of song through which expresses pain feelings of losing a loved one.

Miri Katha are stories that recount the origin and migration of the Misings from their ancestral homeland in the hills to their present settlement in the plains. They also describe the historical and cultural interactions between the Misings and other communities such as the Ahoms, the Chutias, the Morans, the Kacharis, etc. Some of the common themes of Miri Katha are the reasons for leaving the hills, the hardships faced during the journey, the

conflicts and alliances with other groups, the establishment of new villages, and the preservation of identity and culture.

Anunam are songs that are sung during various festivals and rituals such as Ali-Aye-Ligang (the spring festival), Porag (the harvest festival), Dobur (the worship of ancestors), etc. They express the joy, gratitude, sorrow, hope, and faith of the Mising people. They also depict various aspects of their life such as agriculture, fishing, hunting, weaving, dancing, etc. Anunam are usually sung in a group with a leader and a chorus. They are accompanied by musical instruments such as dhol (drum), pepa (hornpipe), gogona (jaw harp), etc.

MidangNi:tom are songs that are sung during weddings. They celebrate the union of two individuals and two families. They also convey various messages and advice to the bride and groom regarding their roles and responsibilities in their marital life. MidangNi:tom are usually sung by women relatives and friends of both sides. They are accompanied by clapping and ululation.

Kameng are songs that are sung during funerals. They mourn the loss of a loved one and pay tribute to their life and deeds. They also express the belief in an afterlife and a reunion with the ancestors. Kameng are usually sung by men relatives and friends of the deceased. They are accompanied by sobbing and wailing.

- The Written Literature of Misings: The written literature of Misings began in the early 20th century with the introduction of the Roman script by Christian missionaries. The first book published in Mising was a translation of the Gospel of Luke by Rev. Edward W. Clark in 1905. Later, other books on grammar, dictionary, folklore, history, and culture were published by various scholars and writers. Some of the pioneers of Mising literature were AnundoChayengia, Tabu Taid, Ghanakanta Gogoi Boraikia, Prasanna Kumar Pegu, Gobinda Chandra Pegu, Baneswar Pegu, and Jyoti Prasad Doley.

The written literature of Misings can be broadly classified into three phases: the early phase (1905-1950), the middle phase (1951-1980), and the modern phase (1981-present). The early phase was marked by the translation of religious texts, the compilation of linguistic and cultural resources, and the emergence of some original works of poetry and prose. The middle phase was characterized by the growth of literary organizations, the publication of literary magazines, and the development of various genres such as novels, short stories, essays, dramas, etc. The modern phase was influenced by the socio-political movements, the establishment of the Mising Autonomous Council, and the advent of new media and technology. It witnessed the diversification of themes, styles, and forms of expression in Mising literature.

Some of the prominent writers and works of Mising literature are:

- AnundoChayengia (1903-1976): He was the first Mising poet and writer. He wrote poems such as "Miri Jiyori" (The Life of a Mising), "Miri Bihu" (The Mising Festival), "Miri Lila" (The Mising Play), etc. He also wrote a novel called "Miri Jiyori" (The Life of a Mising), which is considered as the first novel in Mising.
- Tabu Taid (1912-1998): He was a renowned scholar and writer. He wrote books on Mising history, culture, religion, folklore, etc. such as "Miri Itihas" (The History of Misings), "Miri Sanskriti" (The Culture of Misings), "Miri Dharma" (The Religion of Misings), "Miri Lok-Sahitya" (The Folk-Literature of Misings), etc. He also wrote poems such as "Miri Jati" (The Mising Nation), "Miri Bhasha" (The Mising Language), "Miri Swadhinata" (The Mising Freedom), etc.
- Ghanakanta Gogoi Boraikia (1923-2004): He was a prolific writer and editor. He wrote novels such as "Kojum-Koita" (The Jackal and the Tiger), "Kojum-Takar" (The

Tiger and the Goat), "Kojum-Buruk" (The Tortoise and the Hare), etc. He also wrote short stories such as "Kojum-Korok" (The Dog and the Crow), "Kojum-Minam" (The Princess and the Peasant), "Kojum-Raja" (The King and the Pauper), etc. He also edited several literary magazines such as "Miri Bhasa" (The Mising Language), "Miri Sahitya" (The Mising Literature), "Miri Jyoti" (The Mising Light), etc.

- Prasanna Kumar Pegu (1934-2017): He was a distinguished poet and critic. He wrote poems such as "Oinitom Aru Kaban" (Creation Myths and Folktales), "Anunam Aru Adi:nam" (Festival Songs and Wedding Songs), "Kameng Aru Anyanya Kabita" (Funeral Songs and Other Poems), etc. He also wrote critical essays on various aspects of Mising literature such as "Miri SahityarItihas" (The History of Mising Literature), "Miri Sahityar Bhumika" (The Role of Mising Literature), "Miri Sahityar Prakriti" (The Nature of Mising Literature), etc.
- Gobinda Chandra Pegu (1940-2012): He was a versatile writer and activist. He wrote novels such as "Donyi-Polo Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (Donyi-Polo and Other Novels), "Birangana Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (Heroines and Other Novels), "Sangrami Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (Fighters and Other Novels), etc. He also wrote short stories such as "Sangrami Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (Fighters and Other Stories), "Birangana Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (Heroines and Other Stories), "Donyi-Polo Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (Donyi-Polo and Other Stories), etc. He also wrote dramas such as "Mising Raja" (The Mising King), "Mising Rani" (The Mising Queen), "Mising Bir" (The Mising Hero), etc. He also wrote essays on various issues related to the Mising people such as "Mising Jatiya Andolan" (The Mising National Movement), "MisingSwadhinata Sangram" (The Mising Freedom Struggle), "Mising Bhasa Andolan" (The Mising Language Movement), etc.
- Baneswar Pegu (1946-): He is a prominent poet and translator. He wrote poems such as "Miri Jatiya Kabita" (The National Poems of Misings), "Miri Premika Kabita" (The Love Poems of Misings), "Miri Samajik Kabita" (The Social Poems of Misings), etc. He also translated various works from Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, English, etc. into Mising such as "Ramayana", "Mahabharata", "Gitanjali", "Madhushala", "Hamlet", etc.
- Jyoti Prasad Doley (1952-): He is a leading writer and scholar. He wrote novels such as "Miri Jiyori Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (The Life of a Mising and Other Novels), "Miri Katha Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (The Story of Misings and Other Novels), "Miri Sanskriti Aru AnyanyaUpanyas" (The Culture of Misings and Other Novels), etc. He also wrote short stories such as "Miri Galpa Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (The Stories of Misings and Other Stories), "Miri Lok-Sahitya Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (The Folk-Literature of Misings and Other Stories), "Miri Itihas Aru AnyanyaGalpa" (The History of Misings and Other Stories), etc. He also wrote books on Mising language, literature, culture, history, etc. such as "Miri Bhasa Aru Sahitya" (The Mising Language and Literature), "Miri Sanskriti Aru Itihas" (The Mising Culture and History), "Miri Lok-Sahitya Aru Sanskriti" (The Mising Folk-Literature and Culture), etc.
- The Initiatives for Preservation and Promotion of Mising Language and Literature: The Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) was established in 1995 to promote the socio-economic and cultural development of the Mising people. The MAC has taken several initiatives to preserve and promote the Mising language and literature. MAC has provided fun to the MisingAgomKebang (MAK), an apex

body of Misings for the development of Mising language and literature. The MAK has organized various literary activities such as publications, seminars, workshops, competitions, and festivals. The MAK has also collaborated with various institutions such as universities, colleges, schools, NGOs, etc. for the promotion of Mising language and literature.

Some of the achievements of the MAC and the MAK are:

- The publication of textbooks, dictionaries, grammars, encyclopedias, etc. in Mising language for various levels of education.
- The publication of literary magazines, journals, newspapers, etc. in Mising language for various genres and audiences.
- The publication of literary works such as novels, short stories, poems, essays, dramas, etc. in Mising language by various writers and poets.
- The translation of literary works from other languages into Mising language by various translators.
- The organization of literary seminars, workshops, conferences, symposiums, etc. on various topics related to Mising language and literature.
- The organization of literary competitions such as essay writing, poetry recitation, story telling, etc. for various categories of participants.
- The organization of literary festivals such as Bihu Mising Youth Festival, Oini:tom Festival, Kameng Festival, etc. to showcase and celebrate the Mising language and literature.

Discussions: The findings of the study reveal that the Mising language and literature are an integral part of the identity and heritage of the Mising people. They are also a valuable source of knowledge and wisdom for the society at large. The Mising communities of Dhemaji district have contributed significantly to the linguistic and literary richness of the Mising people. They have preserved their oral traditions and have also produced many eminent writers and scholars. The Mising language and literature are facing many challenges in the midst of modernization and globalization. However, with collective efforts and support from various stakeholders, they can overcome these challenges and flourish in the future.

Critical Analysis:

The study has some strengths and limitations that need to be acknowledged. The strengths of the study are:

- It provides a comprehensive overview of the linguistic and literary heritage of the Mising communities of Dhemaji district.
- It uses both primary and secondary sources of data to ensure validity and reliability.
- It employs qualitative methods of data analysis to capture the richness and diversity of the data.
- It highlights the achievements and initiatives of the MAC and the MAK for the preservation and promotion of the Mising language and literature.

The limitations of the study are:

- It does not cover all aspects and dimensions of the Mising language and literature, such as syntax, semantics, pragmatics, stylistics, etc.
- It does not include the views and opinions of all sections and segments of the Mising population, such as women, youth, children, etc.

- It does not compare and contrast the Mising language and literature with other languages and literatures, such as Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, English, etc.
- It does not address the issues and challenges faced by the Mising language and literature in detail, such as official recognition, resource development, standardization, etc.

Conclusion and Future Directions:

The study concludes that the Mising language and literature are an important aspect of the Mising culture and identity. They are also a significant contribution to the linguistic and literary diversity of India. The study suggests that more research and development is needed in this field to explore, document, analyze, preserve, promote, and revitalize the Mising language and literature. Some of the possible future directions are:

- To conduct more in-depth and comprehensive studies on various aspects and dimensions of the Mising language and literature.
- To include more diverse and representative samples of participants and data sources in the studies.
- To adopt more comparative and interdisciplinary approaches in the studies.
- To address more critically and constructively the issues and challenges faced by the Mising language and literature.
- To collaborate more effectively and efficiently with various stakeholders such as the MAC, the MAK, the government, the academia, the media, etc. for the development of the Mising language and literature.

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