

# A Brief History of Mising Language Studies

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## Abstract:

The Mising language is one prominent language among the ethnic languages spoken in Assam. It is spoken by about five lakh people in twelve districts of southern Assam. The Mising language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, the second language family in the world. There is no long history of discussion or practice of this unwritten Mising language. It is seen that the study of Mising language began in the late nineteenth century. It was introduced through the efforts of some Christian missionaries and some officers of the British bureaucrats. From the early twentieth century, the language was revived by some local people. Subsequently, various people have discussed various aspects of the Mising language. It has been studied through grammar, dictionaries, basic linguistics, scripts, edited books etc. Recently several researchers have received doctorate degrees on the Mising language. This paper attempts to present a brief introduction to the development of the Mising language from the late nineteenth century to the present.

**Keyword:** Mising, Language, Study, History, Development

## Introduction:

Assam one of the states in North-East, has been inhabited by many ethnic groups since ancient times. Most of these ethnic people, rich in their own culture still use their own language. The Mongolians are one of ethnic groups living in Assam and the Misings are one of the tribes belonging to the Mongolian ethnic group. Like other tribes, the Misings are culturally rich. Their spoken language is called Mising. Although the Mising language has been spoken since ancient times, there is no tradition of old written literature due to lack of scripts. There is a recent tradition of literary practice in this language with an anciently determined script.

Conscious thought about the Mising language began with the Missionaries who came to preach Christianity and some British officers. Missionaries such as William Robinson and J. Herbert Lorrain wrote various articles on the Mising language. However, the first basic grammar of the Mising language was written by the British officer J. F. Needham. The Missionaries later enriched the history of Mising language by compiling dictionaries. They started the study of the Mising language by compiling grammars, dictionaries etc. There are many books on Mising language including grammar, dictionaries, linguistics books, various journals, memoirs, original books, edited books, published articles, scientifically prepared research books etc. When studying the history of Mising language practice from the earliest times to the present, the content of the available resources can be classified as follows for the convenience of discussion.

1. Grammar

2. Dictionaries, lexicon, terminology books
3. Books about Script
4. Original books, Edited books, other articles
5. Research papers.

### **Grammar:**

The missionaries who came to preach the Christianity were the first to learn the Mising language and discussed the grammar of the Mising language. In some articles published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal discuss about the Mising language. The journal published Delton's *On the Miris and Abor* in 1945 and William Robinson's *Notes on the Language Spoken by the various Tribes Inhabiting the Valley of Assam and its Mountain Confines* in 1849. These articles include descriptions of grammatical aspects of the Mising language, vocabulary of Mising and other indigenous languages etc.

The first basic grammar of the Mising language was written by J. F .Needham. He came into contact with the Mising language while working as an Assistant Political Officer in the Sadia and Balipara border areas. As a result, he published the Outline Grammar of the Sha:yang Miri Language based on the spoken forms of the Sha:yang, one of the sub tribes of Mising tribe. This grammar was published in 1985 by Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong. The grammar is modeled on English grammar and covers ethnic identity, morphological characteristics, sentences, words etc. as well as a comparative discussion of the *Padam* language with the Sha:yang dialect. Although the grammar is based on the spoken forms of the Sha:yang tribe, who are among the various tribes of the Mising people yet introduction to the Mising language also depicted here. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, published in 1909, page no 584 discusses about *Abor* and *Dafla* as well as the Miri or Mising languages. From pages 622 he compares words and sentences of these three languages.

Nahendra Padun's one of the significant book *Mising Asomia Path* (1981), which is based on grammar. It is an important book for those who want to learn the Mising language. A grammar of Mising language was published by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. In 1987 Baloram Das edited *Mising Grammar* was published. In the same year 1987, Nahendra Padun wrote *Mising Gomlam* as a primary school textbook. It can be said as a simple grammar for younger students. The North-East Bhasa Samittee which was formed in 1980 at L. Barua College published *Mising Bhasar Samu Porichoi* in 1988. The book is mainly prepared for teaching Mising language. This book contains a vocabulary and some grammatical aspects of the Mising language. One of the most notable grammars written in the Mising language is the *Mising Gomlam–Potin* by Tabu Tide. The grammar was published in 2010 and covers all the grammatical aspects of the Mising language. The book analyzes the place, nature, preposition, words, verbs, genders, adjectives, nouns, infinitives, sentences etc. of the Mising language. There are many different grammatical terms translated into Mising language and Assamese and English words are provided which makes it easier for the general reader.

### **Dictionary, Lexicon, Terminological Book:**

The first dictionary of Mising language is *A Dictionary of Abor Miri Language*. It was compiled by the missionary J. Herbert Lorrain. They learned the local languages and wrote and published grammar and dictionaries of those languages, especially to spread the message of religion. Lorrain's *A Dictionary of*

*Abor Miri Language* was published in 1901 for such an approach. During his stay in Sadia, Lorraine learned *Mising* and *Adi* languages. The said dictionary is 572 pages long and divided into four volumes.

In 1915 Sonaram Panyang Kotoky published his book *Miri Duwan*. Panyang Kotoky was a Mising ethnic person but used the word *Miri* instead of *Mising* like non-Mising writers. This is because the word *Miri* was popular among the onamising people both spoken and written at that time. This is evidenced by the ancient texts or literature. Some of the old Assamese literature as well as a few English texts used the word *Miri* instead of *Mising*. It has also been seen the use of the word '*Duyan*' instead of the word '*Duwan*'.

The *Miri Duwan* of Panyang Kakoti cannot be described as a dictionary, but it gives some insight into the vocabulary of the Mising language of that time. This book contains 316 words. Here the nouns are divided into different categories. Whatever the quality of this book, its historical value cannot be denied. This book was published in 2013 under the editorship of Jyoti Rekha Hazarika.

In, 1917 a non-Mising writer named Dharmananda Duwara wrote a book named *Miri Duwan*. This book was re-published by Dibrugarh University researcher Mousumi Rekha Khaound by modified the title as '*Dharmananda Duwara Tamulir Miri Duwan*'.

No dictionary was published for many days after Lorraine and Sonaram Panyang Kotoky. However, a few people did some prepared word collections. Word collection usually took place before Lorraine's dictionary was compiled. Among those who were prominent in collecting such words were William Robinson, B. H. Hodgson and John Beames. Sir George Campbell, Edward Tuid Dalton etc. also worked on the vocabulary of the *Abar*, *Dafla* and *Mising* languages. A book containing Mising vocabulary named *Tani Agom-Manab Bhasa* was published in 1974 by Ganesh Pegu. The book was published by Sri Bishnuram Barua, Kamalabari, Majuli.

Some of the notable post-independence books are Kamal Chandra Parun's *Mising Path* (1958), Bibhison Pegu's *Miri Duwan* (1963), Jawaharjyoti Kuli and Neheru Pegu's *Mising Agam Parring* (1988), Bhaba Doley's *Mising Sabdabhandar*(1994). The second dictionary of the Mising language is the *Assamese Mising Dictionary* compiled by the North Eastern Language Committee. In this book Assamese words are translated into Mising language. Another book of the same committee is *Mising Bhasar Samu Porichoi* (1988), in where Assamese words are translated into Mising language along with the collection of some synonymous words. However it cannot be identified as a complete dictionary.

Several dictionaries of the Mising language were published in the 1980's. The significant among them were Khagen Pegu's *Mising-Asomia Abhidhan* (1986) and Prafulla Yein's *Mising Glossary* (1987).

In the mid nineteenth decade Taburam Taid's *A Dictionary of Mising Language* (1995) was published. This is a trilingual dictionary of Mising, Assamese and English languages. This was followed by Administrative Officer Jitmal Doley's *The Pronouncing Mising, Assamese, English Dictionary* published in 2005. The writer himself mentioned in the introduction that he wrote the book on the basis of Lorraine's dictionary.

In 2003, Mising Agom Kebang published *Mising Gompir* (The Mising Terminology). The editor-in-chief of this dictionary was Nahendra Padun. This is a collection of administrative, academic, grammatical and other terms arranged in the English alphabetical order. At the end of the book he also reviews the loan words of Mising language.

In 2009, Nomal Pegu's *Agom Nerring* was published. This is a concise dictionary of practical Mising words. In 2010 Taburam Taid published *Mising Gompir Kumsung*. This is an expanded edition of *A Dictionary of Mising Language* published in 1995 by ABILAC, Guwahati. This large scale dictionary explains the meanings of Mising words in Mising language as well as English and Assamese. This is a trilingual dictionary. The dictionary analyzes in detail the segmental and supra segmental phonemes and morphological aspects of the Mising language in the introduction. The appendix presents Mising phrases and discusses some of the narratives present in the Mising language.

Ghanashyam Taye's *Sankhpta Mising- Asomia Sabdakosh* was published in 2016. The dictionary begins with an introduction to the Mising script and some morphological aspects of Mising language. In the index parts some of the phrases used in Mising language, different animal's voice and contrast between short and long vowels are shown.

In 2018, Nahendra Padun's *Asomia Miching Sabdakosh* was published by *Miching Agom Kebang*. This dictionary is arranged according to the Assamese alphabets. The 135 pages dictionary contains only the letters from 'o' to 'g'. The next part has not been yet published, although it is mentioned in order at the end. The *Miching Agam* published Gommu-Terminology in 2012. This is a trilingual dictionary in Assamese, Mising and English.

### **Books on Mising Script:**

The Mising did not have their own script, which caused some confusion in the beginning of language practice. In the early period some writers used Roman, some Devanagari and some Assamese scripts. Thus, the use of different scripts by different people led to script-centric confusion. To end this confusion of scripts, many individuals later began to search for a stable script. The search for the script was led by the Guwahati Mising Kebang. Under the leadership of Nahendra Padun and Tabu Tied various script centric experiments were conducted at Guwahati Mising Kebang. As a result they have been published various books on scripts. Initially the Guwahati Kebang conducted experiments to determine which of the three scripts; Devanagari, Assamese and Roman could be the specific script of the Mising language. As a result of such experiments Nahendra Padun's book *Mising Bhasar Lipi: Ek Porikhyamulok Aasoni* published in (1969). The book was a scheme to establish the Assamese script as the Mising script with minor changes suitable for the Mising language. The Roman script was later tested as the Assamese script was limited in representing all the sounds of the Mising language. Nahendra Padun wrote the booklet *Mising Agam Luir* in support of the Roman script. Later, *Mising Agom Ayyir* was published in 1971 under the joint editorship of Tabu Taid and Nahendra Padun. The Mising Agam Kebang (Mising Sahitya Sabha) was formed in 1972 to determine the script. The leaders of the Mising Agam Kebang further simplified this script scheme. Many books were published by various individuals with various arguments to make the Roman script universally acceptable. Such works include - Nahendra Padun's *Mising Bhasar Babe Sonsodhita Roman Lipi* (1980), Bhriyumoni

Kagyung's *Mising Aagmelang Aabrrig* (1980), Nomal Chandra Pegu's *Mising Aabrrig* (1982), *Mising Agam Mimang* (1974), Tabu Taid's *Mising Bhasar Banan Paddhati* (1983), Kalinath Panging's *Kromobiwartanat Mising Lipi: Eti Samu Itihash* (2019) etc are noteworthy. These books are mainly script centric but their historical importance in the study of the Mising language cannot be denied.

### **Original Books, Edited Books and other Articles:**

Works written on linguistic formulas are not very common. Some articles by different authors are seen published in edited books, memoirs, magazines etc. The name of Nahendra Padun can be taken for the first in case of original written works. His two original books are available so far- *Mising Bhasar Aavash* (1997) and *Mising Bhasa Shikhya* (2016). Both these books analyze various aspects of the Mising language linguistically. The book covers the formation and development of Mising language, differences in dialects and causes of dialect formation, discussion of script, interrelationship between languages of Mising people, problems of determining the nature of Mising language, synonyms of Mising language etc. The Mising language learning book is designed to help people who are very enthusiastic about the Mising language. The book analytically discusses about the identification of consonants, vowels, pronunciation of sounds, conjunction and its types, word types, suffixes, inflection, nouns, verbs, infinitives, word compression etc. The notable feature of this book is that the grammatical rules are given in Mising language. Since the practice of Mising language is not so old, an attempt has been made to give the grammatical terms in Mising language in its own way. Earlier Tabu Taid in his Mising grammar *Mising Gomlam Patin* (2015) had given the grammatical terms in Mising language

Nahendra Padun's *A Few Aspects of Mising Languages and Culture* is a book in English. The book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses languages and the second part discusses culture. The language section discusses the identity of North-Assam language group, the birth and development of the Mising language, Mising phonetics and the influence of the Mising language on the Assamese language.

Khagen Pegu's book *Mising language and literature* (2017) published by Mising Adne Ape: (Mising Writers Association) contains several articles on language. It discusses Mising language and education system, Mising language synthesis, Mising consonants or word addition, word inflection, Mising spelling errors, Mising root words prevalent in Assamese language and the challenges of globalization in Mising language etc.

The number of basic works on linguistics is still counted on the fingertips. This proves that there is still apathy among the Mising people towards language study except for a few prominent people. Instead it is seen in some article collection books and in some specific author's original books contains a few linguistic articles. Similarly in different memoirs published in various occasions also contains a few articles on language.

Along with other tribes Mising tribes some language related articles were seen in the magazine *Asomor Jonojati* (1975) published by the All Assam Tribal Language and Culture Development Council under the editorship of Manoranjan Lahiri. There are some articles on tribal languages published in the journals of Assam Sahitya Sabha. In particular two tribal special issues edited by Nahendra Padun and

Samsing Hanse covered tribal languages. In 1982 issue edited by Nahendra Padun contained articles on the Mising language among other ethnic languages. Similarly articles on the Mising language were published in the 1985 issue edited by Samsing Hanse. In the Golden Jubilee issue of Sivsagar College Magazine, an article by Nahendra Padun on *Mising Barna Parisoi* was published in English. The article in the said magazine published in 1973 is entitled as ‘Mising Phonemes’.

In Dr Arpana Konwar’s article ‘*Asomor Tibbot- Bormi Bhasa: Eti Porisoi* which included in her book *Bhasa Sahitya Addhyayan* (1995) also discusses about Mising language.

One of the Mising language related article was included in the book *Bhasatattar Katha* (1996) published by the welcoming Committee of the Assam Sahitya Sabha conference held in Bokakhat. The book edited by Dr. Dipti Phukan Patgiri contains an article by Kailas Chandra Talukdar entitled *Mising Sabda Sambhar*. The article provides a brief introduction to the Mising language’s own words as well as imported words.

Another book published by Assam Sahitya Sabha is *Asomor Bhasa Porisoi* (2005). The chief and associate editor of this book is Dr. Promad Chandra Bhattacharaya and Dr. Nahendra Padun respectively. The book contains an article by Nahendra Padun entitled ‘*Mising Bhasa*’.

Other books on the Mising language include Dr. Satyendra Narayan Goswami’s ‘*Studies in Sino-Tibetan Language*’ (1988), Dr. Dipti Phukan Patgiri’s ‘*Bhasatatta*’ (1991), Dr. Upendra Nath Goswami’s ‘*Asomia Bhasar Udbhob Samiridhi aru Bikash*’ (1991), *Language of North-East* (1997) edited by Phanindra Narayan Dutta Barua, Bhimkanta Barua’s ‘*Asomia Bhasa* (1997), *Bhasar Etibitta* (2002), Dr. Promad Chandra Bhattacharaya’s *Aspects of North –East Indian Language* (2003) etc. Dr. Bhim Kanta Barua’s *Bhasar Etibitta* (2002) includes an article entitled *Mising Bhasar Logot Adi Bhasar Tulona*. This article compares the sounds, forms, words and sentences of both *Adi* and *Mising* language.

Tabu Taid’s *Akuki Nirbondho* (2007) includes an article entitled *Mising Bhasa Sahitya*. It presents a brief introduction to Mising language and literature. The Mising language is briefly discussed in the second chapter of Upen Rabha Hakacham’s book *Asomor Bhasa Upobhasa* (2001). Dr. Basanta Kumar Doley’s book *Mising Somaj Sanskritir Samikhya* also introduced Mising language. In 2010 Ank-Bak published a notable book entitled *Asomia aru Asomor Bhasa*. The book is edited by Biswajit Das and Phukon Chandra Basumatary and contains an article by Dr. Basanta Kumar Doley entitled *Mising Bhasar Rup*. The article mainly focuses on the morphological analysis of the Mising language but also provides its phonetic introduction too.

In 2011, Jatin Payeng published a book *Mising Bhasa Sahityar Samu Samikhya*. The book is published by Shabd Prakashan and discusses linguistic issues such as analysis of vowels and consonants of Mising language, suffixes, imported words of Mising language, analysis of similarities and differences between Mising language and Galong language.

There are also articles on language on some memoirs published at various sessions of the *Mising AgamKebang* (Mising Sahitya Sabha) and other Mising national organizations.

**Ph.D. Thesis:**

Several thesis have been prepared on Mising language from various universities and awarded Ph.D degrees on it. According to the available data scientific research on the Mising language has only started since the last decade of the twentieth century. The research works received are listed below in chronological order.

Kailash Chandra Talukdar completed his research work on *The Mising People and their Spoken Language: A Critical Study*(1992). The research was conducted by the Department of Modern Indian Language (MIL) at the University of Guwahati.

In 1993, Tianshin Jackson Sun, a researcher at the University of Michigan published *A Historical Comparative Study of the Tani (Mirish) Branch in Tibeto Burma*. The Mising language belonging to the Tani group is also discussed in this research paper. This year Boloram Bhuyan from the Assamese Department of Dibrugarh University published his research work entitled *Samoguria Mising-Ati Bhasa Sanskritik Adhyayan* and received Ph. D. degree on it.

In 1994-95 Bisturam Konwar received Ph. D. degree from the Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University for his research work on *Mising Bhasat Asomia Bhasar Upadan*.

In 1996 Basanta Kumar Doley's *A Morphological Study of the Mising Language* published. This book discusses the morphological aspects of the Mising language in detail. The study was conducted under the department of English, Dibrugarh University.

In 2010, Jyoti Rekha Hazarika received her Ph. D. from the department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University for her research work on *Asomor Tibbot Bormi Bhasar Adhyayanar Itihas*. In the same year Jogendra Pegu submitted his research work *Dialectical Variations in Mising and the Interference of Dominant Language* to the department of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University and received Ph. D. degree on it.

In 2017, Gakul Chandra Gogoi submitted his research book entitled *Asomor Mising Bhasa- Samprodai Dwibhasik Sthiti: Samaj Bhasa Boigyanik Adhayayan* to the Department of Assamese Dibrugarh University. In the same year Dipak Kumar Doley submitted his research work entitled *Padam aru Pagor Upobhasar Rupotatta: Ek Boiporityamulok Adhayayan* to the Assamese Department, Dibrugarh University and received Ph. D. degree for it.

Mouchumi Rekha Khaund submitted her research work entitled *Mising aru Deuri Bhasar Logot Asomia Bhasar Aadan Prodan* to the Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University in 2018 and received Ph. D. degree for it.

In 2019, Dhurbajyoti Doley submitted his Ph. D. thesis entitled *Asomor Mising aru Arunachalor Adi Janagosthir Minong Foidor Bhasar Rupotatta* to the Assamese Department, Gauhati University and received Ph. D. degree for it.

In 2020, Seema Bhuyan submitted her research work titled *Asomot Tibbat-Bormi Bhasa Sarchar Porompora aru Bortoman Sthiti (Promod Chandra Bhattacharya Bisesh Ullekhonere)* to the Assamese Department, Gauhati University and received Ph. D. on it.

Alakananda Saikia submitted her research entitled *Ujani Asomor Asomiabhasi Nrigosthiyo Foidor Bhasa Byabohar (Mising, Deuri aru Sonowal Kochari Bhasar Bisesh Ullikhansaha)* to Assamese Department, Gauhati University in 2021 and received Ph. D. degree for it.

### Conclusion:

The discussion showed that the study of the Mising language began in the late nineteenth century. The pioneers of the study of Mising language were Christian Missionaries such as Lorraine and Robinson and the British officer Needham. While the Missionaries wrote articles highlighting the grammatical aspects of the Mising language, Needham pioneered the study of the language by writing a basic grammar based on the spoken form of *Sha:yang group*. The study of the language later gained momentum in the hands of several local people. The first of these persons to be mentioned is Sonaram Panyang Kotoky. The first Mising person to do research on Mising language was Panyang Kotoky. Concurrently several other individuals contributed to these discussion. The study of the language which was active during the pre-independence period gained another momentum in post-independence period in the hands of two Mising people who played a pioneering role. They are Tabu Taid and. Nahendra Padun. They have determined a specific script for the unscripted Mising language and highlighted various aspects of the language. In addition to writing various books on language, many articles on language have been published in various memoirs and magazines. Apart from Nahendra Padun and Tabu Taid, various linguists have also discussed the Mising language. Such linguists include Upendra Nath Goswami, Ramesh Pathak, Dipti Phukan Patgiri, Bhimkanta Barua, Arpana Konwar etc. Scientific research on the Mising language began in the last decade of the twentieth century. A lot number of people have done their Ph. D. work on Mising language and some are still working on it.

The study of Mising language which began in the late nineteenth century has not taken a unique pace although it has passed more than the present century. Many aspects of the Mising language have not yet been discussed. There are six dialectical forms of the Mising language, but all these dialects have not been studied in detail. There is room for the new generation of language seekers to study these aspects of the Mising language.

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