

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

Role of Development Council's In Assam For Tribal Belts Regional Development

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**Acharjya Mohan Das; Role of Development Council's In Assam For Tribal Belts Regional Development-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x, Keywords Autonomous, Development, council, tribal, participation.**

**ABSTRACT**

Autonomous and Development council devotes the Tribal people for active involvement and participation in the administration. The councils does not involve only in the policy formation and planning but to implement the policies in the far-flung tribal regions in order to achieve socio-economic and political development. Assam region comprises of various ethnic tribes assimilating and merging their socio-cultural attributes directed towards upliftment and a provision for their active participation in local self-government for their regional developmental aspects. In contemporary the tribal people are facing lots of challenges and problems for their survival.

This paper's basic objective is to examine the tribal people and their active participation in Autonomous and Development councils and how far the objectives of the Council's has executed in the Tribal belts of Assam with special reference to Mishing Autonomous Development Council.

*Keywords* Autonomous, Development, council, tribal, participation.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study's findings will help policymakers shift their focus from policy formation to implementation. This research will help in policymaking of the development of tribal people in the remote areas, through creating awareness on active participation, providing socio-economic justice, and weathering the expected deprivation in the future.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

India is sovereign democratic republican country as stated by the preamble of the constitution. The local self government institutions are included in the state list of the VII schedule of the Constitution and in the part IV as Directives Principles of State policy in Article 40. The Directives Principles of State Policy

are like the instrument of instruction as there is no constitutional binding for the State government to act as directed by the constitution. The tribal population of India comes to about 104 million in 2011, which constitutes about 8.6 per cent of total population. This population comprises about 427 tribal communities.

After the adoption of the Constitution in the beginning many experts were of the view that it was unitary in character. But as years passed, its latent federal property has been unfolding. A degree of flexibility in Centre-State relations was initiated by bodies like the Finance Commission and Sakaria Commission. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 which introduced the three-tier Panchayats in districts all over the country has carried the process of federalism to its further logical extension. Other politico administrative boards like Gorkha Hill Council Darjeeling, Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council and North Eastern Council have made their appearance on the horizon also speak of the growing demand for devolution and federalism. The demand for ethnic autonomy by the large ethnic tribes in Assam led to the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council in 1993. The Government of Assam responded to similar demands and other Councils viz. the Mishing Autonomous Council and the Rabha-Hasong Autonomous Council were formed in the year 1995. This was followed by three more Autonomous Councils which were formed in 2005 viz. Deori Autonomous Council, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council and the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council<sup>[3]</sup>.

The Government of Assam have been taking various steps to accelerate development process for the welfare of Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in the State through democratic decentralization of power and empowering the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities to participate in the planning, monitoring and implementation of Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) schemes in grass root level by constituting Territorial Councils, Autonomous Councils and Development Councils for different Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in the State.

**The various Autonomous Councils constituted by the Government of Assam are under the following heads:**

- *Territorial Councils under Sixth Schedule of Constitution of India*  
*Statutory Autonomous Councils constituted under State Act.*

The Autonomous Councils are given varying degrees of autonomy within the State Legislature. In Assam there are 3 Autonomous Councils under Sixth-Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Statutory Autonomous Councils are constituted for Social, Economic, Educational, Ethnic and Cultural advancement of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities living in Core Areas as well as in Satellite Areas covering many districts of Assam. There are six (6) Statutory Autonomous Councils namely Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, Mising Autonomous Council, Tiwa Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council, Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council and Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council.

The Mising Autonomous Council was established under the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 passed by Assam Legislative Assembly with its headquarter at Gogamukh, Dhemaji. An interim body of MAC was constituted in the same

year. The Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 provides that the Mising Autonomous Council shall be constituted “comprising of **Satellite Areas and Core Areas** for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Mising and other Scheduled Tribe communities residing therein.”<sup>[5]</sup>

The Act provides for constitution of a 36 member General Council and a 15 member Executive Council out of the General Members. The General Council and the Executive Council ran on ad-hoc basis with nominated members since its inception till October, 2013 when first election to the MAC was held and an elected body has assumed office on 6th November, 2013 which is now functioning smoothly.

As a state subject and Tribal inhabitant region, the Autonomous Council has its own composition, power, functions and resources. The tribal's development has not materialized its objectives in true sense of the terms. This provision of the Assam Government gave a little hope regarding the practice of tribal people participation in framing the policy and decision making. In the study it has been found that government of Assam hardly realized the importance of the Mishing Autonomous Council through investigation; own experience and observation study the problems and prospects of the Mishing community<sup>[9]</sup>.

## **2. Objectives and scope of the study**

By introducing the Mishing Autonomous Council, the new Act ensure the Mishing people for active participation in framing policy and decision making at grass root level. In the study it has been found that powers are concentrated in the hands of some elite political leaders. Besides, majority of the tribal communities who are poor have remained mostly isolated and away from active participation in Autonomous Council elections. The mishing people only participate in voting once in five years. The objectives of council administration with the devolution of funds, functions and functionaries have not been reflected in the core and satellite areas.

The provision of Autonomous council has a significant role in decision making process, identification of Mishing beneficiaries for various developmental schemes and measures. But it has not been seen in these council under study and Mishing people active involvement also has not been reflected in local affairs as provided by the councils act. This study intends to examine the question of Mishing people participation in Autonomous Council and how far the objectives of the Act has excluded in Mishing dominated areas with special reference to upper northern Brahmaputra valley region.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The framework and proposed methods for the research are given below.

The study is a blend of descriptive and action research for Tribal people of Assam. The census method (i.e., complete enumeration survey) was followed. Both primary data (from Council officials, villagers, survey on mishing village,

departmental records) and secondary data (analysis of both the print and digital literature) were used.

To outline all potential opportunities of council and explore some unusual and unconventional opportunities based on existing facilities and available know-how, proper implementation and provision of council's plan and programs could be catered for.

Content analysis and experts' opinions were used to design in order to arrive at some suggestive measures to benefit the Mishing community.

#### 4. Functioning of the Autonomous Council

The Mishing people active participation in formation of Autonomous Council's body is essential for the successful working of democracy and regional development. The aims and objectives of the Autonomous Council is to decentralize and devolution of powers and functions and empower for tribal area development. But it is not mean that mere existence of adult franchise and periodic election. In the present context an autonomous council to be called the

**Mising Autonomous Council** within the State of Assam comprising of the areas of the Village Councils as may be notified by the Government in the Official Gazette. The Mising Autonomous Council shall have maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution. The Mising Autonomous Council shall have a General Council and an Executive Council as provided herein after. *Village Council*: There shall be a Village Council for each block of villages as may be notified by the Government under sub-section (1) of Section-3 consisting of approximately 6000 to 8000 tribal population. For the purposes of sub-section (1) above, there shall be as many village councils as may be specified by the Government by notification in the Official Gazette<sup>[5]</sup>.

THE MISING AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL ACT, 1995 As Amended by ASSAM ACT NO VIII OF 2001 and ASSAM ACT NO XXI OF 2005 AN ACT To provide for the establishment of an authority in the name and style of "THE MISING AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL" and for certain matters incidental thereto and connected therewith. *Preamble*: Whereas it is expedient to provide for the establishment of the Mising Autonomous Council within the State of Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution, comprising of Satellite Areas and Core Areas for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Mising and other Scheduled Tribe communities residing therein. It is hereby enacted in the Forty-sixth Year of the Republic of India,<sup>[5]</sup>

(1) This Act may be called the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995.

(2) It extends to the whole of the state of Assam.

(3) It shall come into force on such date as the State Govt. may, by a notification in the official gazette, appoint and different dates may be appointed for different provisions of the Act or different areas.

The Mishing Autonomous council has completed its term through decades. The new act made the common Mishing people (the voters) to take part in the decision making process. But the developmental measures yet to be formulated at the remote tribal areas. A new innovation with various developmental livelihoods schemes and program has been initiated through the funds allotted from the Assam Government. The mishing autonomous council has set up various infrastructure and asset for proper implementing the developing schemes at various tribal inhabitant areas<sup>[5]</sup>. The awareness generation campaign has been conducting at various areas to make the Mishing people familiar with the innovative developmental schemes and programs by the official member in co-operation with the general mass. The welfare and developmental schemes and projects taken up by Mishing Autonomous Council must conform to the policies of the state government for similar nature of schemes. In case of individual beneficiary oriented schemes, apex level and constituency level committees are constituted for proper implementation and monitoring of schemes.

In the investigation it has been found that the developmental schemes and programs are not fully implemented at the very remote areas that led to deprivation of the Mishing people to active involvement in the decision making process. Generally the elected member and other officials' are not fully aware of the allotted funds released by the Government for different development and welfare schemes. The transparency of fund allotted and utilized by the council and accountability should be ensure by the social audit and supervision. There has been observed that no change in the attitudes of the Mishing people regarding the participation and direct involvement in decision making activities.

The Mishing Autonomous Council is not free from party politics, the elected member are from the influence of tribal political party and also national level political party. The political party influence also reflects in the selection of beneficiaries for any developmental schemes. The general Mishing people does not involve directly or indirectly in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the council's policy framework. Mishing women participation in policy framework has still been significantly low in comparison to 33% reservation<sup>[8]</sup>. It was positive aspects that has develop the interest of women participation in autonomous council.

From the above study, it is found that the Mishing Autonomous Council act has not been able to fulfill the aspirants of the Mishing tribes and achieving the objectives by formulating their plan and policies to overcome the misery of the Mishing people.

## **5. Finding of the study**

Through analysis of the above study, sum-up the finding with some suggestion in way of conclusion. The Autonomous Council reveals some sort of defects in proper functioning, particularly the general Mishing tribe active participation, role of council in remote areas and creating awareness among the tribes in the local affairs. The superior authorities, bureaucrats and political party directly or

indirectly controlling over the council activities may lead to defective features for overall development. In order to examine the inter-personal questionnaire and interview has been conducted to the Mishing tribes of Dhemaji .....and their elected representatives about their role and responsibilities in regard to councils activities. Some of the negative aspects reflected in due course of study in achieving the goal of council act may be summarized as

1. Lack of general awareness of Mishing people about the council's programs and policies.
2. Mishing people get confused about the Council policies and State Government policies as they merge.
3. Lack of proper co-ordination between the elected representatives and mishing people.
4. Non-accountability of elected representatives to the Mishing voters.
5. Non-grass root level planning and policy framework.
6. Target and selection of developmental schemes and programs beneficiaries by the ruling party.
7. Red-tapism and long official procedure formalities deprived the Mishing people.
8. Lack of efficient and expert official for implementing the developmental schemes
9. Influence of party organization.
10. Elected representatives interested to satisfy the political party leader rather than general mass.

### **6. Suggestions**

On the basis of the findings, field study experience and observation as suggested for effective ways for proper functioning and implementation of the developmental schemes of Autonomous Council for overall achievement of the goal.

1. The elected representatives should take initiatives to review the socio-economic condition and timely inform to the executive of the council.
2. Transparency and social audit must be done for proper implementation of developmental measures.
3. Check and balances of the executive authority of the council.
4. Developing awareness generation camps to popularize the schemes and programs of the council.
5. Beneficiary selection must be done on basis of the needs of the Mishing people not through any political agent.
6. Minimizing the gap between the executive and the general Mishing people.
7. Provision of opportunity to Mishing people to express their problems and grievances without hesitation.
8. Reducing the control of influence by the bureaucrats and political leaders in execution of plans and policy.
9. The sole responsibility of the Mishing people to elect honest, educated and efficient representatives in order to achieve the developmental aspects.

10. Efficient taxation policy to generate funds for developmental measures in the council areas.
11. Active involvement and women participation, NGO, self help groups and other people's organization must be involve in policy framework at grass-root level.

### **7. Conclusion**

It is true that in-spite of immense potentiality of resources, revenue and fund allocation of the Autonomous Council, the Mishing tribes of Assam has been lagging behind at socio-economic and politico overall development. The Council should realize and feels the problems and prospects of the Mishing community and take necessary initiative for smooth functioning and implementation of developmental activities at grass-root level. Active periodic monitoring and supervision by the Council may triggers the fruitful achievement of the tribal community.

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