

Tracing Millang Migration through Intergenerational Oral Tradition

Omiyang Gamno

Research Scholar
History

Abstract:

This study reconstructs the migration history of the Millang (endonym: Holon/Mala), a small, linguistically distinct sub-group of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, by critically analysing their oral traditions. Concentrated mainly in the Mariyang sub-division of Upper Siang District, the Millang speak an unintelligible dialect within the Adi cluster and prefer the self-designations Holon or Mala, while “Millang” remains the common exonym. In the absence of written records and given sparse colonial documentation, Millang myths, legends, folklore, and ballads serve as the primary source of their past. By cross-checking these oral narratives with limited ethnographic scholarship, this paper traces Millang migration routes and settlement patterns to produce a historically grounded account that foregrounds oral tradition as a valid source for reconstructing the subgroup’s history.

Key Words: Millang, Oral Traditions, Migration, Folklores.

The Millangs are a small, distinct sub-group of the Adi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, concentrated mainly in Mariyang Circle (Upper Siang District) and, in some villages, living alongside with other Adi sub-groups in the Districts of East Siang, Dibang Valley. They are known for speaking an unintelligible dialect within the cluster of Adi tribe. Although outsiders commonly call them “Millang,” the community prefers the endonyms Holon or Mala, and likewise refers to their own settlement as Holon, while neighbouring Adi sub-groups and other tribes use the exonym Millang for both the people and the village. Originally, the Millang occupied a single village at the time of their first settlement. Over time, internal conflicts, feuds, and the need to expand access to land resources led to a split into three distinct villages: Millang, Dalbing, and Peki-Modi. These three Millang villages are situated in the Mariyang sub-division of Upper Siang District, roughly around 94°95' N latitude and 28°29' E longitude.ⁱ According to the 2011 Census of India, their combined population in the three villages is approximately 3,000.ⁱⁱ The area is characterized almost entirely by high hill ranges, dissected by a network of ridges and furrows. The Millang-inhabited region is noted for its rich orchid diversity and is also known for the presence of Aconite (*Aconitum*) species, locally associated with the term “Phyllum.”

Because the Millangs have no written historical records and remained relatively isolated for decades, colonial administration and early anthropological fieldwork left only sparse documentation about them. Existing studies offer basic ethnographic data but lack the depth needed for a detailed historical reconstruction. In this context, the Millangs' rich oral traditions such as myths, legends, folklore, and ballads which serve as the primary means of preserving and transmitting their past. The present study therefore aims to trace narratives on the migration of the Millangs by critically analysing these oral traditions and cross-checking them with the limited available scholarship on the subgroup.

The primary cause of migration from one place to another among the tribal communities seems to be mainly in search of suitable land for settlement and agriculture. The pressure of population growth at their original place seems to have little impact on the migration. In early days, the inter and intra tribal conflicts and hostilities with neighbouring villages seems to be the main factors for migration of people in groups. In recent time, especially after the Great Assam Earthquake of 1950, many people in the hill thought these areas as inhospitable and unsafe, which led them to migrate southward in search of flat lands. This reason also contributed in migration of almost 40 percent of Millang population to the foothills of East Siang, Dibang Valley and etc.

There are various myths preserved in the memory of the Millang community about their migration from the north, commonly regarded as their original homeland. Different Opinions are found in the narratives from narrator to narrator and from place to place. However, by synthesizing the accounts on the migration route of the Millangs, it suggests that they likely migrated from upper Himalayan regions, crossing many mountains and streams.

With the absence of written script among the Millangs, there are no recorded account on their migration. However, this gap is compensated by rich oral narrations preserved and pass down among them since generations. According to these oral narrations the original home of the Millangs has been traced back to a place called *Sennyang*, in the proximity of the source of *Taro Nugong* River in the Tibet. Currently this river flows through Siang district and joins Siang River in Arunachal. From *Sennyang*, the Millangs migrated to a place *Mensurai* following the route by *Done Lireng/ Dukmem Lipik* (marked by a massive stone). They continued moved southward and arrived at *Banti Rine*. According to oral traditions it is believed that the *Doying Rine* and *Gogo Rotne*, the places mentioned in the *Abangs* are located in *Banti Rine*. According to Millang mythology, the *Gabang* (local self-governance system) originated during their settlement at *Banti Rine*. After few years at *Banti-Rine* they continued their movement southward and reached at *Irbo Lipik*, the place and period which is remembered as that point of time when all Adi sub-groups lived together.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is believed that *Irbo Lipik* marked the last common habitation of all the sub-groups of Adi tribe, and from which all of them dispersed or migrated gradually in diverse directions at different points of time. During this period at *Irbo Lipik* all the sub-groups of Adi tribe were known by different names which also

reflected their origin such as; the Padam and Millang as *Bomi*, Pasi as *Boki*, Komkar as *Boir/Bogir*, Minyong as *Bonyong*, Karko as *Botung*, Pailibo as *Boh*, Tangam as *Bomong*, Shimong as *Bogen* except Bori sub-group still known by the same group name. These successive or phase wise migration eventually led to the classification of the Adi tribe into different sub-groups, each forming its own identity within the larger Adi ethno-cultural framework.^{iv}

After staying together at *Irbo-Lipik* in social and cultural unity as a whole, the Millang group moved further, crossing the *Mima Bokjo*, a mountain pass and arrived to a place called *Taro Kumting*, located in the bank of *Taro Siang* (Tsangpo River in Tibet and Siang in Arunachal Pradesh). After staying at this place for many years, they resumed their migration southward following the course of Tsangpo/Siang River and crossed this river from a place identified as *Taro Gengkok*. After crossing the Tsangpo River, they migrated further southwards and arrived at *Dala Kumting*, which is believed to be the last settlement beyond the present Sino-Indian frontier. After establishing their settlement at *Dala Kumting* for several years, the Millangs split into two migrating groups. The first group migrated southward along the course of Siang River, entered present Indian territory (by crossing Dosa la pass (Kepangla) along the Mac Mahon Line.^v

Eventually arriving at a place called *Landu Paga*, currently situated near Gelling village. Continuing their search for fertile land, they moved out from *Landu Paga* and advance towards *Sering Segong Kumting* which is located near the confluence of Siang and Sering River (Tuting circle). From this location, they moved further southward and ultimately reached *Panggu Kumting*.

From *Dala Kumting*, the second Millang group migrated towards the south-western direction and reached a place called *Oshong Mekok*. After their departure with the other group, they initially stayed at *Jumsing Yibe* for few years. It is located near the source of Sering River, and then taken settlement at *Sering Yingkong*, (Sering river Valley). Again, after staying there for few years, this group left *Sering Yingkong* and eventually reached at *Panggu Siring Kumting*. At this place they reunited with their previously separated group at *Dala Kumting* and finally united Millangs stayed together for several decades at *Panggu Kumting*. Later, the entire Millang group further migrated together southward, following the course of River Siang on the right bank in search of better land for agriculture and permanent settlement. During the course of searching for better land, the Millangs had to crossed many streams and rivers located on the right bank of Siang River such as Ringgong, Sera Pate, etc. The group then arrived at *Migging Kumting* (currently Migging village) and stayed there for several years. However, the Millangs abandoned that area and further migrated southward, crossed the Nyitgong River. After crossing this river they found an area between the confluence of Nyitgong and Siang Rivers, which was suitable for agriculture and settlement, and named it as *Mosing Kumting*, (currently Mosing village). While staying at *Mosing Kumting* Mosing Village during a hunting expedition, they came across a flat land on other side of the Anggong River (Tuting). As a result, they migrated to this vast and flat area, named it *Janbo Reta* (Janbo-Bomdo village).^{vi} At *Janbo Reta* entire Millang population stayed together for some decades. However, it was at this settlement the Modi clan consisting of *Ketin*, *Keba*, and *Kepok* separated and migrated first towards the

southwest direction. After separating from the main Millang group, the Modi clan initially established their settlement at *Yomgong Gosing* located at the source of Siyom. After staying there for some years, the Modi clan further migrated in southern direction along the course of Siyom River and established their settlements for short duration at *Kambang Kumting*, then to *Sipung-Siyom Orik Kumting* (confluence of Siyom and Sipung River at Aalo in West Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh). Their migration continued further and they followed down the course of Siyom River and reached *Yeksi Kumting* (currently a Minyong village at Siang District). From *Yeksi Kumting*, the Modi clan shifted to *Koreng Kumting*, which is located between the confluence of Siyom and Siang Rivers and from there, their migration took to opposite direction; north eastern direction. Eventually, they crossed the mighty Siang River via the hanging bridge (Rasing village) and stayed at *Rasing Kumting* which is located on the left bank of the river. After crossing the Siang River and staying at *Rasing Kumting* their migration followed backed the route northward, which is the opposite direction of river course and reached to *Begging Kumting* and then further migrated northward and reached *Gamge Pobe*. After few years of staying at *Gamge Pobe*, they shifted to *Mogii Mone* which is an Panggi Adi sub-group near Geku Circle area of Upper Siang District. However, due to unavailability of any suitable area for agriculture there, they continued their migration and reached at *Sikung Kumting* and ultimately to *Londu Kumting* (currently periphery of present Dalbing). At *Londu Kumting* the Modi clan met the other group of Millangs again, with whom they were separated at *Janbo Reta*.^{vii}

The initial separated Millang groups consist of clans of Langkam, Litin, Libang, Ngupok, Ngukir and Mitkong, etc. After staying at *Janbo Reta* for several decades, they continued their migration southward following down the course of Siang River at the right bank. After crossing *Janbo Nyigay* finally the Millangs arrived at *Bomdo Kumting*. According the oral narratives on migration, it is said that almost all Sub- groups of the Adi tribe migrating southward mandatorily passed through this *Janbo Nyigay*. After staying at *Bomdo* or *Bomo* for some years and then they migrated to *Ramsing Siring Kumting* then to *Tabe Moleng*. From *Tabe Moleng* they moved further, continuously following the right bank of Siang River south and they reached, *Pangka Molan* below present Pangkang village. From *Pangka Molan*, the Millangs further migrated to *Diyung Ganne Kumting* (currently Sine village) and then established their settlement at *Parong Poklek Kumting* (currently known as Parong village in Siang District). After settling for few years at *Parong Poklek*, they crossed the Siang River from the right bank to left at *Tayek Piigo*, an important place often mentioned in the narratives by folklorist and expert orators related to migration. After crossing the Siang River, the Millangs settled at *Serem Remsing Kumting* which lies on the mouth of Serem River and then further migrated to *Taman Gamge Kumting* or *Gamge Pobe*, then to *Paying Kumting* and stayed there for some years, and then migrated to *Moli Reyap* and then to *Reging Kumting*, then to *Mogii Kumting*, and finally to *Londu Kumting*, where they reunited with the Modi and other Millang clans.^{viii}

From *Londu Kumting* the entire group of Millang population moved together to *Pasang Kumting* (currently, an agricultural plot of the Millangs) and finally moved to *Holon* (present Millang village).

With the passage of time, the population increase, inter-clan conflicts and disputes occurred frequently. Thus, the Millangs established Dalbing and Peki-Modi villages. The Dalbing village is named after its original founder Dalbing, who is considered as the ancestor of today's sub-clans Daltem, Dalbong, Bitin, Patuk and Binggep. Later, due to inter-clan conflicts other Millang clans such as Litin, Libang, Gamno and Mahu etc. also join Dalbing, after which village was fully established.^{ix}

Following the establishment of Dalbing village, boundary disputes and conflicts concerning grounds in general and over aconite rich mountains in particular aroused between villagers of Dalbing and Holon/Millang, the original village. Due to the separation of Millang population into two villages, the Dalbing villagers attempted to assert exclusive claim over Goi and Chocham *Sirung* (water source) and aconite mountains of Chage and Pelo and water sources. This mountains and water sources had previously been collectively utilized by the Millangs together before separation.^x

The Holon villagers tried to persuade the Dalbing villagers to maintain joint ownership of this resource, the Dalbing villagers, dispatch members of the Sapok clan to occupy the high aconite mountain, disregarding the objections raised by Holon villagers. This action provoked the Holon villagers, leading them to organize a group comprising of members from various clans to retaliate and safeguard their interests in the aconite-rich mountains. Ultimately, this confrontation not only intensified the dispute but also resulted in the creation of a new Millang village, Peki Modi.^{xi}

Despite this confrontation, both Dalbing and Holon with Peki Modi villages ultimately set aside hostilities and reaffirmed their brotherhood through customary reconciliation practices by organizing a grand feast known as *Turung*, in which large number of Mithuns were sacrificed as a powerful symbol of renewed fraternity and communal harmony. Today, members of Dalbing, Holon and Peki Modi villages continue to live in harmony.

Thus, the Millang inhabits three villages, i.e., Millang, Dalbing and Peki-Modi and are located in a triangular area bordered by the sources of Yangsang chu river in north.^{xii} Yamne River in the west and Sidip river to south. Over time, in search of better land and to occupy further land in the foothills, some section of the Millangs migrated further southward crossing the *Pogo Adi* (a mountain) and spread across the foothills of Mebo-Ayeng, Pasighat, Dambuk and Meka in the Districts of East Siang, Dibang valley, Lohit and Namsai. Recently, with the growth of population in Dalbing and Holon village, a new settlement has been established such as Kolung and Pyag/Pyak-Anyuk respectively.

In Pasang because of over population and disputes over the ownership of land, some Millangs migrated back to Londu and other members to the present village of Millang or Holon, where Soi-Sotem group of people were already settled.^{xiii}

With the passage of time, some Millangs further moved southwards in the lower plain areas from their original villages, took settlement and spread over to the areas of East Siang and Lower Dibang Valley Districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

1. Milorai Modi, *The Millangs*, Himalayan Publisher, New Delhi, 2007, p.1.
2. District Statistical Handbook of Upper Siang District Census 2011, <https://censusindia.gov.in>
3. Odol Pertin, 'Tracing the Migration Routes of Adi Tribe of the Siang Basin of Arunachal Pradesh', unpublished PhD thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University, 2015, p. 78.
4. Interview with Banung Langkam, male, elderly person, Millang village, November, 2025.
5. Odol Pertin, 'Folk History on Origin and Early Migration of the Adi-Padam Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture*, Vol: 1, Issue: 2, (December Issue), 2015, pp. 14-27, pp. 19-21.
5. Interview with Chuchung Modi, male, elderly person, Millang village, November, 2024.
6. Interview with Chuchung Modi, male, elderly person, Millang village, November, 2024.
7. Interview with Chuchung Modi, male, elderly person, Millang village, November, 2024.
8. Interview with Tapong Patuk, male, elderly person, Dalbing village, September, 2024.
9. Interview with Balim Modi, male, elderly person, Peki Modi village, December, 2024.
10. Interview with Chuchung Modi, male, elderly person, Millang village, November, 2024.
11. Tai Nyori, *History and Culture of the Adis*, Omson Publication, New Delhi, 1993 p. 47.
12. Omiyang Gamno, 'Traditional Warfare among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of the Millangs', unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Rajiv Gandhi University, 2020, pp. 14-15.