

THE MISHING TRIBE OF ASSAM: A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY

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Abstract

Assam is a state of Northeast India. Many aboriginal communities and sub-communities belong to Assam. Mishing community is second larger plain tribe community. Mishing Community has its own history of origin, socio-cultural life language, religious beliefs and customs. According to the census of India 2011, the total population of Mishing in Assam 5,87,310. They have been gradually assimilating themselves with other indigenous people of Assam and their culture. The objective of the study is to explore the Socio cultural analysis of the tribe.

Keywords: *Mishing, Marriage system, Religious, Socio-cultural, Ali-Aye-Ligang.*

1. **Introduction:** The Mishings are an Indo-Mongoloid tribe settled in the plains of Assam. Originally, they were hill dwellers and lived along with the Adis in Arunachal Pradesh. On the basis of the legends of the tribe and available historical records, they moved to the plains of Assam. Around the 13th Century A.D. Currently the community inhabits in the upper Assam districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Sivsagar, Golaghat, Tinsukia, Sonitpur, Majuli and Charaideo.
2. **Social life:** The Mishings are peace loving people. Both men and women are hard workers. The women are comparatively more hard working than men, they remain engaged in household and agricultural activities and look after cattle breeding (pig and fowl), for extra income. The members within the family follow the advice of the head of the family. Co –operation among the villagers is an important feature of the Mishings.
Rikbo-genam and ‘dagle ka-ale’ k are some of their cooperative activities organized by a family whenever there is a need.
3. **Marriage:** There are three types of recognized marriage system in the Mishing Society: they are as follows:
 - 3.1. Midang (Arranged marriage)- This types is usually planned and arranged by the parents.

Marriage within the same clan e.g Mili with Mili or Pegu with Pegu will never be Sanctioned.

3.2.Dugla-lanam: This type marriage of the young couple concerned take the initiative. The young boys and girls working together in the fields and dancing their way in the porag and Ali-Aye-ligang festivals find an easy way for their childhood love to flourish.

4. **Households:** The Mishing tribe of Assam lives along the river Brahmaputra mainly concentrated on the north banks. The village Mishing people have to face flood every year during rainy season. Traditionally people of the Mishing Community live on houses on stilts, these houses and the flight of 5-7 stairs leading to these houses have religious and social belief and practices attached to it.

The house on stilts is a big hall with a central kitchen for a large joint family. The major components of these houses are bamboo, cane and palm leaves for roofing. Bamboo is widely used for pillar, lintel, floor, roof, door etc. There is a fire place within a Mising house called as “Merum” where daily meals are cooked.

The fire place is important because it makes the division of the house. The upper side of the fire place is called “Rising” and the lower side of the fire place is called “kok tok”.



(Fig.1)



(Fig.2)

Fig-1 & 2. The following image shows the housing type of Mishing peoples in Assam.

5. **Religious life:** The present religion of the Mishings is the synthetic product of animism and Hinduism. Their religious beliefs and practices are based on three major systems, firstly about the creator of the universe. Secondly, existence of spirits around human habitats and thirdly, about the human soul.

Although the people of Mishing Society are performing some animistic rituals but in recent period some changes have been taken place in their ritual beliefs and practices to some extent.

6. **Festivals:** The traditional main festivals Ali-Ai-Ligang and Po:rag. These festivals are connected with Agriculture.

Ali-ai-Ligang specially with the beginning of the “Ahu” paddy cultivation. The festival is celebrated on Wednesday of the month of Falgun of Indian Calender. The main objective of the festival is to pray the mother-earth for the production of Ahu paddy.

Po:rag is also connected with agriculture. The Festival marks the harvesting time paddy with is celebrate with feasts and prayers. For the performance of po:rag. Murong (dormitory) is essential. Before the festival, a Murong is Constructed whose platform is 4 feet above the ground. The festival Continues for three days and concludeds with a prayer dance (ponu-nunam).

7. **Food habits:** The food habits of the Mishings as found in the field are now a days similar with the non tribal neighboring Hindus. But to a certain extent, their food habits still have a similarity with the Adis of Arunachal. The Mishing ate pig, fowl, beef and drank spirit and beer. Though Mishing people know various processes of cooking yet boiled food is still popular among them. Along with rice, boiled edible leaves (e.g- ombe, pakkam, takak, dermi etc). Dried mea and fish are very popular.

Food items made of rice, apong (rice beer) is a much popular drink among the villagers. It is of two types- Nagin apong and po:ro apong. At first villagers offer apong to their guests. Now a days the villagers offer betelnut (Tamul pan) to the guests in place of apong.

8. **Dress:** The dress of the Mishings can be divided in to two types 1) General dress for everyday use 2) Special dress for festivals and ceremonial functions.

The dress of the men is similar to non tribal Assamese. A simple white dhoti (ugon) and shirt (galuk) is the dress of the men. The dress of the women is also simple but divided into two pieces of garments. They generally wear a skirt (mosanam age') covering the part from the waist to the knee. The upper piece (gasong or gero) fastened above the breast falling along with the skirt. Occasionally, a blouse is seen to cover the upper part of the body.

The dress for particular occasions in the special product of their loom. They use the mixture of various colours eg- Red, Black, green, yellow are common. A man wears a skirt (Mibu galuk) and a dumer (towel) is a must. Only few of them use turban (paguri). The dress of women for festivals and functions are more colored and decorated. The plain dresses without colour and decoration are generally not used in festivals and rituals. Ear and Neck ornaments (kentumaduli), chains (tadok), different type of bracelets konge are very much common among the women.



(Fig.3)



(Fig.4)

Fig-3 & 4. The following image shows the Mishing women and their traditional dress.

Conclusion

From the discussion it is seen that the Mishing are now one of the major second largest tribal communities of Assam. Socio-cultural system, the mishing people are very rich. However, during the recent years, the mishing society adapting themselves with the modern day life styles without infringing their traditional values, these people must have control over their own lives. It is necessary to adopt modern views and give up evils from the societies. But while doing such type of reformed one should never forget to preserve own culture in a appropriate manner.

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