



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND FESTIVALS OF THE MISINGS OF ASSAM

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Abstract:

Assam has a population of 31,169,272 according to 2011 census, of this a sizable number is tribal population. There are around twenty three tribes living in Assam, Boro, Karbi, Rabha, Mising, Dimasa and Tiwa are regarded to major tribes from the point of view of population. The missings also spelt as mishing by some people were known as Miri in the past. They live in the districts of Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of the Assam state in India. The traditional religious beliefs and practices amongst the Misings are animistic in nature. The two chief traditional festivals of the Misings are the Ali-a:ye ligang and the po:rag both connected with their agricultural cycle.

Keywords: Misings, Assam, Population, Tradition, Festival.

Introduction:

The Mising Tribe of Assam forms of the greater Mongoloid horde occupying the hills and vales of North-Eastern India. Sir George Grierson(1927) has categorically divided these Mongoloids, Linguistics researches reveal that the Mongoloids of India, excluding only the khasis and Jayantias, speak Sino-Tibetan languages; and the Misings who form a fraction of this race, fall in the category of Tibeto Burman speakers of the greater Sino-Tibetan groups(challerji 1974).

The Misings are peace loving people. Both men and women are hard workers. The women are comparatively more hard working than men Mising many families peacefully live together in a single house. All the members abide by the orders of the head of the family. The women weave clothes, cook meals and collect edible roots and vegetables from the forest. There is natural cooperation between men and women, and women are not treated superordinates. The oldest man in highly respected in the family and the villagers.

Objectives of the Study:

- To explore the history of development of weaving textile.
- Know the Mising people Tradition beliefs.
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Discussion:

The Misings believe Abotani to be their ancestor who is supposed to be a son of the Sun and the Moon. The Misings regard the sun to be feminine and the moon to be masculine like many other tribes of the region and believed them to be husband and wife. The Mising people inhabiting the plains believe Gumin as one of the earliest ancestors, the forefather of a lineal family of Abotani.

A traditional Mising house is stilted. It has a thatched top and is patterned simply like the letter 'T'. It is built easily with wooden posts, beams, truss and supporting forks, but bamboo is used extensively for flooring and roofing.

The traditional chief of a Mising village was called a Ga:m. He presided at the sittings of the village Ke:bang.

In the Brahmaputra valley, the Misings have undergone a process of acculturation: the culture and civilization of their Assamese speaking Hindu neighbours, both Aryan and Non Aryan, have influenced their native culture extensively over the past centuries. Misings believe in different supernatural beings haunting the earth, usually unseen. These supernatural beings fall into four categories, viz. *uyu or ui, urom po-sum, gu-min so:in and epom-yapon*. Barring the *epom-yapom*, all the supernatural beings need to be propitiated with sacrificial offerings and both periodically and on specific occasions of illness, disaster, etc. Nature worship as such is not a common practice amongst Misings. But the God of thunder is propitiated from time to time. The Sun and the Moon are invoked on all auspicious occasions. Mibu is the leader of their animistic faith. Who is born with special powers of communion with supernatural beings while Mibus are on their way out amongst the Misings owing to the introduction to modern education and healthcare amongst their religious life.

The traditional religious practices of the Misings make three major belief systems, viz. beliefs about the creator of the universe, beliefs about the existence of spirits about around human habitations and beliefs about human soul. Although the Misings introduce themselves as Hindu, yet, it is difficult to find a nomenclature for the Mising religion. They follow Mahapureishia Vaishnav Dharma and they worship different gods and goddesses. Worshipping of spirits, sacrificing of fowls and consumption of rice beer are practiced hand in hand with the Vaishnava ideals. According to which worshipping of different gods and goddesses and sacrificing of animals in the name of God is prohibited. They worship the spirits underlying thunder and lightning (Mukling Teleng), earth and water (Among Asi), air and fire (Esar Emi). The belief of the Misings, they are benevolent to human beings, protect their farms and families from damages and misfortune.

Festivals of the Misings:**Ali – a:ye Ligang:**

The two chief traditional festivals of the Misings are the Ali-a:ye Ligang and the Po:rag, both connected with their agricultural cycle. Ali-a:ye Ligang, a five day festival is observed in mid-February to mark the beginning of their traditional agricultural cycle. The celebrations start on a Wednesday, which is considered an auspicious day by the Misings, with the heads of families sowing ceremonially rice paddy seeds in a corner of their respective rice fields in the morning hours and praying for a good crop during the year as well as for general plenty and wellbeing. Young men and women celebrate the occasion by singing and dancing at night in the courtyard of every household in the village to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and a gong. The gong is not used on any festive occasion other than the Ali-a:ye Ligang. The troupe accepts from each household offer of rice beer, fowls, and cash. Mising people singing and dancing in this way is over, the youths hold a feast on the third day. The taboos are over on the fifth day. The festival concludes with eating and drinking in the evening.

Po:rag:

Po:rag is the post-harvest festival of the Misings. Po:rag was celebrated earlier in the months of August or September also. Entertainment during the celebrations is open to everyone, young and old, of the village, and invitations are also extended formally to many guests, some people of neighbours' villages to join the celebrations. Po:rag is a grand festival of reunion. The sole responsibility for organizing the festival is vested in a body of young men and women, called Mimbir-ya:me.

Bihu:

In addition to the three traditional festivals, the Misings adopted in the valley the three Assamese seasonal festivals, viz. the Bohag Bihu, the spring festival of gaiety and mirth, observed in mid-April, the Magh Bihu, the post-harvest festival, marked by plenty of fasting and the Kati Bihu, which is bereft of any merry-making or feasting pleasures, observed in mid-October. The Bohag Bihu, with all its gaiety, involving singing and dancing for several days in gay abandon and the Magh Bihu have been observed by the Misings almost like native festivals. Some of the features of Bihu dances in recent times, boys and girls dancing together, for instance may have been borrowed from the Misings.

Dobur:

Another occasion, called Dobur, is an animistic rite performed occasionally by the village community by sacrificing a sow and some hens for different purposes, such as to avert a likely crop failure and ensure general wellbeing of the community. The form of observance of Dobur varies according to the purpose.

Conclusion:

The Mising people believe that diseases are caused by some spirits or by some evil persons. It has been found that the Misings had their own traditional beliefs and practices that is being gradually threatened. The Misings have been maintaining their traditional beliefs and practices though only partially. The Mising followed certain health practices of their own. The traditional notion about disease of the people is that there are unknown spirits behind all kinds of disease making them suffer. The Mising have a well organized social structure with tribal characteristic. From the point of view of folklores and folk songs, the Misings are very rich. They have their traditional health care practices and observe certain pujas for prevention of unknown disease.

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