



## Religious Rituals of the Mising Tribe of Assam

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the component of the sacred performance mainly performed by the priest or his assistant, where rituals or sacrifice played a very important role to propitiate the deities and spirits. The worship and offering are associated with shamanistic performance. The sacred performances are essentially solemn situations of worship those are observed during the sacrifices. Purity is strictly observe in all occasions otherwise the spirits may become displeased and it may be resulted disaster to the persons, family and village concerned.*

*The Mising are second largest tribal community of Assam. They mainly inhabit in the eight district of Upper Assam. Their rich traditional culture distinguished them as separate community from other communities of the region. Since the time immemorial they perform some Uies to propitiate their Gods and Goddess. This paper throw light the rites and rituals performed by the Mising in their life cycle and also unfold method followed and food items used for the perform the ritual. The rituals performs to appease two types of spirits-Agam Uie(benevolent) and Pomjir Uie( malevolent)also discussed. It also categorized the sacred performances as individual, family and community. The objective of sacred performance is discussed clearly in this paper. It is thrown light on the role of Mibu(priest) and Satulla(clergy)in their socio-religious life. Domestic animals are very important part in their religious life.*

*After migrating to the plains of Assam, the culture of plain considerably impacted their culture. The penetration of alien culture and it impact on their cultural life minutely discussed in the paper.*

**KEYWORDS : Uies,Pomjir, Agam, Mibu, Satulla**

One of the components of the sacred performance mainly performed by the priest or his assistant, where rituals or sacrifice played a very important role to propitiate the deities and spirits. The worship and offering are associated with shamanistic performance. The sacred performances are essentially solemn situations of worship those are observed during the sacrifices. Purity is strictly observed in all occasions, otherwise the spirits may become displeased and it may be resulted disaster to the persons, family and village concerned<sup>1</sup>. The normal sacrificial objects are range from egg to buffaloes. As a result of the impact of Hindu religion, the tribal become liberal in some extent in this regards, the sacrificial offering are replaced by sweet and fruits. Their original puja articles are rice, fowl, chicken, fish, turtle, edible vegetable and country liquor.

The Mising are second largest tribal community of Assam. According to census report of 2001, the total number of Mising population in Assam was 5,87,310. The Mising originally dwellers have been residing mostly along the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, that's why they are called riverine people. They presently inhabit in the eight district of Assam namely- Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Tinsukia. The Mising are very conscious of maintaining their own culture. In spite of living in the midst of Assamese culture they able to exist their own culture without affecting the originality. In case of Sacred performance, they had been performing a series of traditional ritual since the time immemorial. They perform their ritual on need base. Whenever they are suffering from ailment and other troubles, they perform it for remedy. They offer worship and sacrifice spirit on the ground that you take the life of animal and relieve the person from the suffering or troubles.

The life cycle of Mising is more or less centre rounded by the three important rites of passage viz birth, marriage and death. Some other rituals and ceremonies connected with different stage of life also observed in their life cycle.

In Mising society, whenever the pregnancy is detected, the couple begin to maintain certain types of taboos till the give birth of a baby. In the course of time, the couple abstained from killing any kind of life, crossing roof, visiting the dead family and taking certain food items<sup>2</sup>. After delivering a baby, the family strictly maintains three to five days taboo. In this period, they abstained from participating any kind of religious function, visiting distant place and agricultural works. On the third or fifth day, a ritual called Uchi is performed by Satulla to breaking taboos. On this occasion, baby is given name<sup>3</sup>. After performing Uchi the parent of child allowed to visit the neighbouring family but could not participate in religious function till the appearance of new Moon.

Defining marriage as a union between man and woman such that children born to the woman recognize legitimate offspring of both parent in the Mising society. Marriage created a social relationship and reciprocal right between the spouse and husband. Marriage is neither a contract nor a mere a sacrament and child bearing is not only purpose of marriage in their society. It has spiritual value which basic purpose being facilitating of union of two souls for attainment of perfection of life<sup>4</sup>. Their tradition believes that the soul of bachelor or a man with out son never attain complete peace as he has not leave any descendant to propitiate him. Moreover, marriage assumed an extremely important place in the society because only son's son is ritually enjoy to offer sacrifice to ancestral spirits of his deceased grandfather after death of his father. Ultimately, a marriage evolves socially prescribe norms by which the union is given public recognition<sup>5</sup>.

Death is universal truth. In Mising society, just after confirmation of death a Le:long (a bell) is ranged from high place to inform about the death. The peoples within the hearing distance suspend their works immediately for day and come to pay homage to the departed soul. The dead person is bathed, put oil in hair and cosmetic in the body, comb properly the hair and dressed with new dresses. The curse is brought to the burial place with procession of friends and relatives. Six cubit feets of land is purchased on value of 25 paise for the sack of the body by the relative. A grave is dug east-west wise about six feets length, three feet wide and four feets deep<sup>6</sup>. After buried the body a symbolic house is constructed over it and a cloth is placed on the sheet and all the area is fenced by around with bamboo trellis. The family member immediately abstained from all kind of works till performing Urom Apin which held on fifth day. After it , the ritual to depart deceased soul called Dodgang is leaving for many years.

Dodgang is final purification festival to farewell the departed soul(urom) from the world . It is believed that after performing Dodgang, the soul goes to the Uie Among for peaceful living and family member breaks all the relation with departed soul. After performing it ,the soul never expected to return to human world in any form<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to these sacred performance, the Mising performs numerous other performances those are categorized as daily, half yearly, annual, and occasional. Méram Piday is a daily performance of Mising. On this occasion, the head of the family worship the departed soul of forefather by pouring a bowl of Apong in the four corner of Méram to protect them from any kind of occurrence and seek blessing from them. Moreover, this ritual is performed in some special occasion such as on the beginning of constructing new house, purchasing of new assets and property, beginning of sowing crops and on the occasion

of living for distant place<sup>8</sup>.

Dolung Dobur is a half yearly sacred performance of the Mising. It is observed on the 15th of Assamese month Jet and Kati. It is collectively observed by the villager on the community basis. On the occasion, they worship Do:nyi-Po:Jo, Karsing-Kartang, Se:di-Melo, Domug-Dongkang, Rukji-merang to protect the villager from epidemic, unnatural death, natural calamities, destruction of life and property, welfare of domestic animals and for good crops. Another five types of Dobur such as Burta Dobur, Arig Dobur, Pityang Dobur and Poni Dobur are observed on family basis in different occasion<sup>9</sup>.

The Mising performs certain types of rituals to appease their household deities and soul of departed forefathers. They believe that the household deities and soul of departed ancestor held responsibility for good health, happiness, and protect the family from the evil spirit<sup>10</sup>. Their displeasure resulted to the catastrophic and dead of violence. Proprietary ritual is the only way to ward off malevolent spirit<sup>11</sup>. To appease the deities and spirit they perform Napuroni or Bacharakia Pinda and Okum Dhangaria atleast one time in a year.

Apart from these, they perform some rituals occasionally whenever they feel necessary. Of these, Taleng Uie is prominent one. Taleng Uie means God of heaven. These deities held the responsibility of thunder, lightning, storm, cyclones as well as drought<sup>12</sup>. These natural phenomena may cause unexpected occurrences including unnatural death and destruction of property. So, every Mising family performs it to propitiate the heavenly deities by sacrificing and offering foods and drinks. Earlier, it was performed in the interval of five years. But now a days it is performed whenever family feel necessary.

Ancestor worship is one of the important features of religious belief of Mising. They live in the Uie Among and occasionally visited dearest one by signaling some uncommon occurrence. They must be appeased by proper offering. Displeasure of ancestor resulted the occurrence of uncommon accident<sup>13</sup>. In order to appease them they perform a series of rituals namely Urom Uie, Gumin-Soin, Kusak and Giyat Uie.

The Mising performs ritual to recall the Yalo(soul) of human being. They believe that Yalo is roaming about the temporarily leaving the body under care of Eji during illness, deep sleep, and terrible frightened. That period, the affected person fall in serious illness. The person could be revived before crossing the Kaje-Patang and reach the Sine-Mebo(the land of spirit)<sup>14</sup>. They perform two ritual called Yalo-Bamud and Yalo-Gognam to recall the Yalo.

According to their mythology, there are numerous malevolent spirits around their inhabits. Generally they live in pond, stream, big trees, river, jungles, hills mountain etc. They are always revengeful and jealous to the mankind. They are appeased by proper worship Whenever, the human being enters in their field, they become offended and harm on the man<sup>15</sup>. In order to get rid of casting evil eyes, the Mising performs some sacred performance called Asi Uie, Pomsu Uie, and Yumrang Uie. These are performs in the outskirts of house.

After coming to influence of the culture of the plain some rituals of Assamese culture penetrated into the Mising culture. These rituals are Satjonia, Najonia, Akaisjonia, Jamma Rista, Borsewa, Lakhimi Uie and pachjonia. Although these rituals are non-Mising in character but these are performed through their traditional system. They use traditional food item like rice, Chicken, fowl, turtle, fish and Apong<sup>16</sup>.

The Mibu plays very significant role in their socio-religious life. He has the spiritual power to diagnose the cause of ailment and prescribes the offering to cure the ailment<sup>16</sup>. Earlier, he performed the all religious function of Mising. As a result of the influence of Vaisnavism a new class of priest called Satulla and Sadhuburah emerged in the Mising society and begin to perform traditional ritual except Do:bur Uie<sup>17</sup>. The emergence of Satulla and Sadhuburah reduced the position of Mibu in the Mising society. Moreover it is noteworthy to mention that the domestic animal of Mising plays important role in their sacred performance as majority of their ritual perform with domestic animals.

In conclusion, it is to be noted that the Mising performs numerous rituals conservatively without knowing the scientific fact. It is one of the major cause of their backwardness. On the other hand they expended huge amount and wastage time to perform these rituals which affected their economic life. They follow their traditional system to performing the ritual. Till the present time, they use the traditional food item with minor change. Recently a few number of peoples converted to other religion like Vaisnavism and Christianity and give up their traditional religion competely. An elite group of Mising formed a organization called Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang and also made arrangement to give new shape of traditional religion. They also try to preserve and promote the traditional religion on scientific basis.

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