



Syncretism Among Mishing Religion

Priyanka Tamuli

ABSTRACT

Mishing people of Assam considered second highest tribal community. They traditional followed primitive religion. But Mishing faced different changing era, many changing happened among their everyday life as well as their religion. So that, Mishing religion has full of syncretistic nature. Sanskritization, cultural contact is influence Mishing people to large extent. By performing those rituals, practices they try to adjust and they trying become friendly with environment. Syncretism occurs in term of religion, rituals, Festivals, beliefs and practices. This paper, attempt to look how syncretism takes place in Mishing religion and their day to day life.

KEYWORDS : syncretism, religion, Mishing people, belief system

Mishing of Assam, are considered as one of homogeneous tribal group, Mishing are the second highest tribal communities of Assam. Mishing have rich cultural, religious tradition. Since 12th century Mishing people experienced different changing era, changes occupied all sphere of life. In 13th century, Ahom came and gave them certain changes. In 15th century Vaisnavism emerged, after that and like other tribal community, Mishing came influenced by the new religion of Vaisnavism. Use of saki, Assamese devotion song, offering battelnut, leaf used by them for the first time and became part of their life. When Mishing people settled in plains of Assam they experienced certain unexpected disease, accident, misfortune and the plain land were not suitable for them. By adopting new religion or offering puja or worshiping they tried to adjust with environment or people of plains.

Originally Mishing are hill tribe of Northwest China, Tibet, Mongolia and travelled down from Manas Sarovar, around 8th century. Around 700 years ago, they move on Assam. The Mishing people looked for most fertile land of Assam, so that they chosen riverbank of Dihing, Disang, Dikhaw, Subansiri, Ranganadi etc because of riverbank gave them protection against their enemies.

Mishing religion is intermixing of Neo-Vainavism, supernaturalism and animism. This intermixing of animism and Hinduism, among Mishing known as *bewail, Kalhanghati, or Nishamlia*. Donyi and polo are the main part of their belief system, at the same time they also perform their traditional rites, rituals, worshiping spirit called *Uie*, offering *Apong*, sacrificing animal are also part of their religion. Literally Donyi polo means donyi as their father or polo as their mother. Apart from deities like Donyi-polo, sedi-melo, Mukling-taleng they have also other deities to worship like Among (earth), asi (water), Emi or meruk (fire), esar (air) etc. They have also benolent power. Mishing people occasional offering worship to those deities like Taleng-ui.

The traditional religious system of Mishing based on of three major belief systems. Those are....first, about the creator of the universe; second one is the existence of spirits; third is about the human soul. Firstly, The Mishing people considered Donyi (the sun)-polo (moon) as their father mother. *Donyi and Po: lo* is the pair of two searching eyes of sedi. Donyi-polo is the truth, beauty of life, which enlightens the mind of people, and bright stone that attract the mind of Mishing people. Donyi-polo is the source of light, creator of universe and protector of all creatures. Secondly, the Mishing people believed that "Ui" the spirit which living in the forest, river, streams, water, ponds etc. These spirit has evil eyes and responsible for all melodies of man which is desire of these spirit. Thirdly, The Mishing people are belief that human soul is immemorial. After death of a person the soul alter in kind of spirit, which called "Ya:lo" which means invisible. After death soul does not leave suddenly, it stays around the family or relatives.

Ancestor worship is another feature of the Mishing religion. The Mishing people believe that after death the ancestor become gods in heaven and they will look after health happiness, fortune their descendants. Fore father are benevolent towards the family. Mishing people pay respect to those ancestors on all their occasion, rituals, and festivals. In Every rituals they performs with sacrifices domestic

animal like, pig, fowls, eggs, fish and turtle to satisfied their ancestor. *Urum-posum* is common feature of Mishing tribe for health and happiness of family, which is annual ancestor worship

Mishing are traditionally follower of Hindu religion but their *Donyi-polo, sun, and moon* are chief god and goddess of worshiping. In Hinduism, faith in sun and moon are still prevalent. We have known them as "*surya devta and Chandra devta.*" Among the Mishing people, also most of them worshiped puja or Hindu God and Goddess such as Durga, Lakshmi, and Biswakarma etc. Devi durga popularly known as Aai sanam and worship as supernatural power. During the period of sick of people, they parallely worship sprit and deities around habitats. They worship them for good heath, along with that Mishing is adopted new faith reliefs for chicken pox, small pox etc, for that the worship "Aai" and drink purifying water. By performing those rituals, practices they try to adjust and they trying become friendly with Assamese culture, Assamese society, as well as people of near-by those areas. Hari naam also perform and where the villagers offer regular rituals

Mibu, a priest, has special power and considered as leader of the faith. But after adopting Hinduism *Bhakat, medhi, Satula* are the newly adopted religious performer of Mishing religion. "*Satula*" "*sadhu-bura*" is accomplished after the adaptation of Sankari dharma. *Sadhu, satula* and *bhakat* have replaced religious function of *Mibu*. Along with those religious leader *satras* are influence on Mishing religion. When Mishing people faced inequality from *satras* then they convert into Hinduism and adopted Assamese rituals. They gradually co-existed with this faith and their belief system. *Sankardeva* use the "*Saki*", *battelnut* and leaf which become a part of Mishing rituals. Some of Mishing people covert into *Bhakat* and attaining *nam-kirtana*. The *Bhakat*, which have high social status and cultural capital in term of *nam-kirtana*, become *Satula*. So that *Bhaktiya* system replacing the traditional system of mishing society. Instead of traditional practices like sacrificing chicken, pig and apong are replaced by "*nam-kirtan*", "*saki*", *Sarai* etc. and offering blessing to "*seuki*" strated with worshiping of *Ram, Hari, Krishna, Sankara-Madhava*.

Along with those festival and rituals, they take part in *durga puja, lakshmi puja, shiv puja, Sat-jania, na-jania, akal-jonia* etc. Mishing people also annually perform *Bor sewa* in village *namghar*. *Bhakat, satula, Sadhubura*, performs it. After the introduction of *Bor sewa a Muronghar* is established in that village which never part of their tradition. In fact *satjonia, najonia, akaljonia, aie puja, ghar daghariya* were also borrowed from non-Assamese tradition. In those Mishing tradition becomes more or less a hybrid or combination of different sects of Hinduism.

In most of the villages, Mishing people constructed a *namghar* to regular worship. In every morning and evening regular prayer is performed by Mishings, Though they treated *Donyi-polo* as supreme god, few people belief in Hindu god-goddess, many of them also perform puja during *durga-puja, Lakshi puja* and sacrifice animal in prominent "*Than*" called etc. On the other hand, *Sankardev* and *Madhavdev* are influential religious leader for them.

Like other community, the Mishing people have also been under the influence by modernism. We watched modernism impact on various aspects like economic, political, social and culture. Through modernity, neighboring village affected the Mishing people. Earlier mishing religion later converted themselves to Christianity and some other converted Hinduism or *Sankari* dharm. Nevertheless, they have their own ethnic culture tradition, though they are following other religion but today itself they observe their traditional practices.

Due to certain circumstances ancestor worship also given up by Mishing people. They hold *nam-kirtan* to remove all the misfortune and difficulties. Instead of ancestor worship, *nam-kirtan* is performed on occasion of marriage, birth and death rituals. After adaptation of *vasnavism* they have totally given up the apong, meat, fish, etc. Apong, Fish and meat are used as necessary indigenous rituals only. Some death rituals are different from Hindu tradition but some ritual adopted from native Assamese village. In terms of purification ceremony after birth, Mishing people use "*santi pani*", distribution of sacred food which emerged out of Assamese culture. Today they take care of women and used scientific method for the process of birth.

Food is the sign of culture. There is some unique feature in food of Mishing community. They use meat like pig, chicken, Apong in any religious ceremony and any festival but after Hinduisation, amount of using meat or apong are become less. In fact, people of Sankari dharm or kewolia bhakat become vegetarian. They follow ideology like non-violence, love of all the life of the earth. However, the notion of purity and pollution emerge recently, people of Sankari dharm do not take food from others, and they take those people as impure.

Like other community, the Mishing people have also been under the influence by modernism. We watched modernism impact on various aspects like economic, political, social and culture. Through modernity, neighboring village affected the Mishing people. Earlier mishing religion later converted themselves to Christianity and some other converted Hinduism or Sankari dharm. Nevertheless, they have their own ethnic culture tradition, though they are following other religion but today itself they observe their traditional practices.

The tremendous change touch Mishing world, culture and tradition, due to various reason they gradually lost their glorious history but major section of society tries to preserve their own culture, identity. Conscious people of their community are creating strong cultural awareness among Mishing people and work for protection for their language, rituals, culture, and festivals. Most of places they lost their own cultural identity or tradition but in some remote area people still deals with beautiful culture. Mishing people have no idea about their some superstitious belief till today, without knowing scientific reason they performed all those practice.

References:

1. Mipun jatin, 1993, The mishing of Assam, New delhi, Gyan Publishing House
2. .Kuli, Jawahar Jyoti. 1998. "The Mishing: Their history and culture". Dibrugarh: Kaulstambh Prakashn
3. .Pegu, Nirmal. 2011. "The Mishing of Brahmaputra valley" Dibrugarh: The Author.
4. Kaman, Ranjit, "Religious belief of Tribes of Assam: With Special Emphasis On The Missing Tribe" in Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JB&SSR)
5. Kaman, Ranjit, 2014 "Religious rituals of Mishing tribe of Assam." in GJRA.vol-3
6. Yein, B. R. 2011. "The rituals celebration after death in Mishng society," in ARSI.BE-THAL BAPTIST CHURCH: Jorhat.