



## Influences of Sankardeva on Mishing society: a study on Luhitmukh village of Sonitpur District

### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

The Vaisnava religion that emerged in Assam during 15th century has also influenced Mishing beliefs and practices in a significant way. In that time, various evil practices were committed in the name of religion which affected whole social structure. Mishing society was also not accepted from it. But Religion of Sankardeva had to reduce all those bad evils. Sankardeva established a religion based on equality which is eksaran naam dharma. This is paper intent to study, contribution of Sankardeva in Mishing society and effects of Vaishnavism in their day-to-day life of Mishing people.

### Introduction

Northeast represents religious diverse region, along with various indigenous religions major religions are also practiced by communities living in this region. Today, religious change in varied forms of taking place amongst the communities in Northeast India. These changes are taking place among the followers are well-established religious as well as small communities that have been following their traditional beliefs. In this study I intent to explore the religious changes that have occurred among the Mishings living in Assam and contribution of Sankardeva on Mishing community.

Mishing tribe is considered as the second highest tribal communities of Assam. Mishing have rich cultural, religious tradition. In recent time, Mishing religion has come to be seen as fusion of different religious sect, such as Hinduism Vaisnavism, Saktism, Tantism, which has arose due to their dire necessity of spiritual uncertainties. After their settlement in plains of Assam since 12<sup>th</sup> century, Mishing's have experienced new era. In 13<sup>th</sup> century, the encounter with the Ahom also brought certain changes among the Mishings. Further, the Vaisnava religion that emerged in Assam during 15<sup>th</sup> century has also influenced their beliefs and practices in a significant way. Use of *Saki*, Assamese prayer songs, offering betelnut, leaf became a part of their rituals after their encounters with these new religious practices.

### Methodology

In conducting the study, a fieldwork was took place within the particular village. In this case descriptive research design is based on qualitative research. For study of religion and impact of Sankardeva among rituals practices among Mishing religion I applied qualitative method. I

Both primary and secondary data were the sources of data collection. For the primary data collection both structural and unstructured interview was took by me. Primary data collected from village headman, both men and women. I emphasized on senior person of village for proper information about religious belief, practice, and rituals.

Another supplementary technique was incorporated with study; those were Non-participant observation, oral history.

### Village profile

The area Luhitmukh village is located under Luhitmukh Gaon pachayat, Pub-Chaiduar block of Sonitpur district of Assam. This village is located 20-23 km away from Gohpur sub-division. This area has mainly Mishing tribe dominant area.

### Finding of the Study:-

#### Contribution of Sankardeva and mishing society:

Sankardeva published a religion based on equality which is eksaran naam dharma. Under eksaran naam dharma Sankardeva gave saran to various people irrespective of caste, class and race. Among those

people Paramanda Ata was also there. Paramanada ata was belonging to Mishing tribe, he was born majuli. Earlier his name was Pakkon. Later on he got influence of Sankardeva. After that he achieved extreme level of happiness. So Sankardeva gave his as Paramananda. Paramananda was very brave and strong, so Sankardeva was interested to go anywhere with Paramaanda. Paramananda ata able to established EkSaran naam Dharma so that Sankaerdev had appointed Paramananda as a Satradhikar of gangmow Satra. Paramananda ata had also contributed established eksaran naam Dharma. From earlier periods of Vaishnavism, Sankardeva's had great influential persons for mishing society

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, various evil practices were committed in the name of religion which affected whole social structure. Mishing society was also not accepted from it. But Religion of Sankardeva had to reduce all those bad evils. In my field area almost 40% of Mishing People has been covert into Vaishnavism. They have take Sankardeva as their Guru and try to assimilated with mainstream culture and religion. In Luhitmukh village, they have naamghar also where the community prayer is held. As per the information of people of Sankar sanghar, in that village Sankar sangha prathamik is also there, where people get together and discuss about religious issue.

Mishing have adopted Hindu religion but their belief in *Donyi-polo*, (*sun and moon*) is remnants of the past, which are still practice by the community. Mishing people believe Donyi-polo as their supreme power or god. But in my area of study, 12 household worshiped Sankardeva cult.

*Mibu*, a priest, has special power and considered as leader of the faith. They believe that he have capacity to connect to God and Goddess. *Sadhu-Bura* is less power than the *Mibu*. He is alsoa part of traditional practices. *Sadhu-bura* is doing work under the village. *Bhakat*, *medhi* are the newly adopted parts of their rituals. Who covert into Sankar - Sangha, *Bhakat* are takes main part of their rituals. *Bhokat* read *kirtan-performednam-posong* etc, which is common in mainly I observed. They have some folk tale about their celebration of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. Very interesting, when mishing people arrange a religious function then they started with the words of Sankardeva which are "joya ramoo bolo, joya hari bolo". Those words are in seperable to mishing society.

Like the festival, Mishing has adopted "Sankardeva tithi", "Madhavdeva tithi" and "Krishna janmastami" also. By performing those rituals, practices they try to adjust and they trying become friendly with Assamese culture, Assamese society, as well as people of nearby those areas. Now they recently have covered into Vaishnavism without destroying their religion on scientific basis.

Apart from this, when people are trying to follow Sankardeva, Madhabdeva cult then it has become challenges for their traditional belief system. Many of Mishing people belief that which help to

ignorance their own belief system.

Main folk festivals observe one is *Ali-Ai-liang*; another one *porag*. This festivals start with when head of the family sowing small amount of paddy seeds. *Ali-Ai-liang* is celebrating for ten days. After the 10<sup>th</sup> day they are celebrated 'lig-gen' which means departing. **Porag**, it is important fest during the spring. Apart from those practices, *Mishing* people performed annually *Bor-sewa*, *Sankardeva's tithi*, *Madhabdeva's tithi* *jotmashtami* collectively, for wellbeing of people of village; it has performed by the *Bhakat*, *Sadhubura* and *Satula* etc. In those rituals nam Pasang, prasad are takes main part. This is contribution of Sankardeva.

The marriage is a relationship between two families. Taboo is strict towards the same clan group; we can say that Mishing are clan exogamy but tribal endogamy. Mishing people have two forms of marriage: Midang (arrange one) & Gandharba vivah (love marriage). After adaptation of Vaishnavism Mishing society are vastly adopting the Nam-Prasang as the main rituals of the Mishing marriage system. On the other hand Use of Saki, betelnut and leaves, Sari are also embrace by Mishing community as a part of their culture. After the great influence of Sankardeva, Use of apong and other traditional food are removing for their society.

The Mishing people of Luhitmukh believed that children are blessings (Rune: pune) Good. Family performs this practiced after the days of childbirth, which called as "xusi kora. Among the Assamese people after a month they performed "xusi sokam" which opened people of that family formally allowed for other rituals or another aspect of society and other people also allowed to take food in that family. In that "xusi sokam" sacred food "Prasad" also distributed among Mishing people, they also perform same rituals and give sacred food to elderly person as well as the children. The sacred foods are also another charity of Sankardeva on that particular society. Prayer, which is related to this new faith Assam's Vaishnavism, i.e Nam-*kritan* also takes after that .after it sacred food "*Prasad*" is distributed to everyone.

The study in that particular area, I found that Mishing had adopted some kinds of Vaishnavism but their animistic custom and rituals like *Dodgang* and *kaj* which have made them unique one .Use of holy water, cooper pot, sorai, covering the grave with a piece of white cote, performing *Tiloni* etc. are sign of adoption of new religious faith among them. On the other hand, *medhi* and *bhakat* are new addition of Mishing culture.

It is find that now-a-days, food habit of Mishing people are similar as Assamese people. After Hinduisation lot of changes is taking place in terms of food habit, Rice become staple food, the people have three meals in a day. Hinduism taught them notion of purity and pollution, they taught what should take and what should not take. Instead of *Apong*, now-a-days Mishing people offer betel nut to the guest, which is part of Assamese culture. Another changes take place in terms of tea, today tea among them next to *apong*, Mishing people abandon food item like pig, beef, beer. Event after influence by Assamese people they did knew how to serve food in front of guest; they also learnt certain thing like eat cooked food, drink clean water. Very importantly after influence of vaishnavism Mishing people had learn disciplines, cleanness etc.

Mishing people are rich in their culture. They have their own dresses for both man and women. But when they got influence of Sankardeva or vaishnavism they sense of dressing was change and they are trying to wear dress according to their comfort. Only their traditional rituals they wears their tradition dress.

#### Conclusion:

After the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Vaishnavism emerged in Assam and Mishing came under the influence of this new religion. They gradually co-existed with this faith and their belief system. Sankardeva used the

"Saki", betelnut and leaf which become a part of Mashing 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 Bhakatiya system replacing the traditional system of mishing society. Instead of traditional practices like sacrefing chicken, pig and apong are replaced by "nam-kirtan", "saki", Sarai etc. and offering blessing to "seuki" started with worshipping of Ram, Hari, Krishna, Sankara-Madhava. In terms of Mishing religion of Luhitmukh village of Biswanath district, constructed a namghar to regular worship. In every morning and evening regular prayer is performed by Mishings, Mishing people believed in the word of Satradhikar. According to them Satradhikar have spiritual power. But Satradhikar took advantage from this situation and try to convert people under him. It is the true part of contact of the Mishing with Vaisnavism. So influential role-played by the satras nd gradually intermixing of their traditional belief and practices and vaishnavism emerged. Since the Namghar, satras become part of their everyday practices.

So Mishing have become more or less hybrid of many religious cult, although day adopted new rituals, practices, behavior, but they do not forgot traditional rituals. Those traditional practices are unique in nature those things, make them strong. Therefore, we can say that Mishing traditions are still strong enough and there have rich culture and always try to protect their culture, language, rituals among others.

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