

## Priesthood among the Misings tribe of Assam



### History

**KEYWORDS :** Mibu, function, mouth-piece, position, mediator, changing

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### ABSTRACT

*In Mising society, the 'Mibu' or 'Miri'(the traditional priest) performs all sorts of religious rituals as well as ceremonies. The Mibu plays a very significant role in their society. He is the mouthpiece of the people to communicate their grievance and suffering to the spirits for redress. The Priest is believed to have knowledge of a divination. When he is summoned in case of sickness or temporal distress they consulted omens by rice, egg and rice beer (Poro Apong). Further, he determined kind of Sacrifice to be offered and detect the spirit, whom it is to be offered. The function of a Mibu are varied and multifarious, when he performs Puja and other rituals, he is a priest, when he is attending it he is a spiritual guide. Further, he maintains the great responsibility of keeping records of oral history. In normal life Mibu invokes the blessing of benevolent deities on behalf of the family and the peoples.*

*The Mibu, a priest in their beliefs is a very important person. He is recognized to be a mediator between mankind and supernatural power. In Mising society, Mibu Performs all the works of propitiation and offering of sacrifices while officiating in community socio-religious functions, individual rites connected with life cycle and illness. So, Mising society has conferred him highest authority of religious administration. In Present situation, due to emergence of Bhakat, Sattula, and modern education had greatly minimized the position of Mibu in Mising society. In this paper an attempt have been made to reflect origin, education, position, functions of Mibu in the society. Present position of Mibu would be discussed in the paper.*

### Introduction

The Mising are second largest tribe of Assam. The riverine tribe resides in the nine districts of upper Assam. According to census reports of 2001 the total number of Mising community is 5,38,333 . They have Own separate folk songs, folk dances, folk literature, beliefs and practices, custom etc which distinguished them from others communities of Assam. Due to acculturation with the culture of plain they become integral part of Assamese culture, subsequently lost some own culture. Such example is the MIBU of Mising society. In this paper an attempt have been made to highlight the origin and present position of MIBU.

The Mibu, a priest in their beliefs and faiths. He is recognized to be a mediator between mankind and supernatural power. In Mising society, Mibu Performs all the works of propitiation and offering of sacrifices while officiating in community socio-religious functions, individual rites connected with life cycle and illness. So, Mising society has conferred him highest authority of religious administration. In Present situation, due to emergence of Bhakat, Sattula, and modern education had greatly minimized the position of Mibu in Mising society.

### Position of Mibu

Mibu has got high position in the Mising society from the time immemorial. In real sense, Mibu means a priest. Etymologically **MI**. Means man (mankind) and **BU** means father – thus giving us the meaning father of mankind. It may be resulted from the fact that Mibu recite the history of mankind through their **Mibu Abang**. On the other hand, Mibu had Prerogative supernatural power to Predict about the present and future. There are very few number of Mibus Scattering among Mising those are inhabiting in the plain of Assam.

### Education of Mibu

In institution of Mibuism of Mibu and their right to the Priestly activities are not hereditary a Son of Mibu may not become a Mibu. According to their belief, the acquisition of the qualities of Mibu is purely super natural and other wordly. Certain youth shows signs of becoming a Mibu from a very childhood. It is also believed that certain signs or Symbols may appear to a mother through her dream to signify that her child would be a priest. The child have to abide by certain taboos like avoiding of eating garlic, Pomkin, fam yam, amaranth, cariander. Crab, eel fish, carp and singimas . He also abstains from taking food from the house

of deceased family for a period of one month. If the Mibu fails to observe these taboos, he may lose his gifted power.

### Qualification of Mibu

The Mibu never possessed his power of Mibuism by birth. But they were gifted individual possessing of rare eloquency, power of observation developed since childhood. In order to possess the power of Mibu such as the spiritual knowledge and Sacred verses, he under go a lengthy process of training and hard labour which required by carefully listening to the recitation of every socio- religious ceremony. In the time of childhood, Mibu is eloped by the **épom** (Spirit) to the jungle and gave training of the recitation of Abangs quality of medicinal plants; memorize the items used in the rituals, activities of the spirits and system of wordship to appease spirits. There is no institution-alized training for Mibu in Mising society. He got training from the **épom** and elder Mibu to obtain quality to become a perfect Mibu. After completion of training he was released by the Epom.

### Dresses of Mibu

The Mising priest has own separate dress and ornament which have great significance in religious trait. It is believed that such dresses and ornament enhanced the spiritual knowledge power, wisdom, supernatural power of confidence to the priest in officiating rites and rituals. Incomplete in putting ritual dresses and ornament may adversely affect the Mibu in Propitiating Spirit and deities. The Mibu wears only hand woven cotton cloth while he performing ritual and ceremony such as **Mibu Dagnam** and **Mibu Shoman**. His most essential dress for performing ritual are **Mibu Galuk, Ugon** and **Dumer**. Mibu Galuk is called **Gandaluktong** and the **Ugon** and **Dumer** are called **Ganar Gansal** and **Dumar** in Mibu language.

According to animistic belief of Mising some spirits survives after the physical death of man. The **Eji Yalo** (soul) is undestructive and immortal. It is believed that **Yalo** is capable of roaming about temporary leaving body under care of Eji during the serious illness, deep sleep or terrible frightened. After death, his Yalo is roaming around the earth until performing **Dodgang** ceremony. It is generally believed that illness is believed to be caused by the **Uies** (spirit) and **urom** (spirit of dead) .when a person encroaches upon a particular domain in the jungle, the spirit may get angry and capture the soul of the encroacher or any of his family member and damage crops .some urom (spirit of dead person) cause illness to human being.

### Functions of Mibu

The Mising priest has a wide range of functions in the life cycle of Mising beginning from birth to death. Mibu diagnose the cause of human beings physical, mental and spiritual ailment, cause of accident, committed suicide and unnatural death. Mibu is generally consulted when there is no way out in spite of their best effort in illness or misfortune. Some benevolent spirits help him in incarnation and divination. When the Mibu starts singing and dancing in Mibu Dagna, he goes into trance and in a state of hysteria, he tells the cause of the illness and detect the evil spirits responsible for the ailment and decided the nature of sacrifice to be offered it. This function is called **MIBU DAGNAM**.

Unlike the priest of other community Mibu also performs the all traditional rituals of Mising society. He performs rituals such, as *Taleng Uie, Dobur uie, Dadgang* (of unnatural death), *Sat-jonia, Na Purukia, Dhangaria, Ai Manoni, Kanya Kalar Dosh, Yalo-Gagnam and all kind of Yumrang Uie* (evil spirits). Further he performs *Ashi Kadnam Mibu Shaman, Eg Mannam* and *Ponumg Nunam* religious functions in their religious festival Porag.

It is a traditional duty of Mibu to perform his service without discriminating rich and poor whenever called for. He never demanded any presents or cash for his service. Earlier he was offered **Dogne** (Colour reed) for his service, But now a day due to lack of dogne, cash money is offered for his service.

### Conclusion

The adoption of Hinduism led to the emergence of the new Bhaktiya cult among the Mising. Moreover, it led to the emergence of the new group of priest and clergy know as Bhakat and Sattula. The new group of priest adversely affected the position of Mibu. They captured the previous place of Mibu and began to perform all rituals of Mising except Dobur Uie. They take the traditional food items like Pig, fowls, rice and Apong. Further, the adoption of Hinduism led to the establishment of **Namgarh** in the place of **MURONG OKUM** in the Mising villages. Mibu become rare phenomenon in the Mising society. But it is noteworthy to mention that the tribe has full faith on the supernatural power of Mibu till today. Today also when all efforts to cure illness failed and in case of unnatural death and occurrences of accident the aggrieved family takes help of Mibu to detect the causes of the occurrences.

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