



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

SOCIAL ISSUES OF THE MISING TRIBE OF BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

KEY WORDS: social structure, social issues,superstition,role of elite group,leadership, remedies.

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ABSTRACT

The Mising are one of the distinctive tribe of Assam. They mainly live in undivided nine districts of upper Assam. Socially, Mising are well disciplined. They follow very strict rules and regulation in their social life. Stern action like *Yodpaknam, Menpaknam, Dormonam, Gidladnam* taken against the person who violated social rules and regulations. The peaceful Mising for the smooth functioning of their society they formed some social organizations. These are *Dolung Kebang, Mimbir-Yame and Rigbo-Ginam, Daglig-alig*. These organizations smoothly perform social functions of the tribe. In spite of maintaining well discipline and social rules and regulations their society is backward. In the 21st century, the Mising had been believing witchcraft hunting, existence of evil spirits and performs different type rituals to satisfy them. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore the social issues responsible for the backwardness of the Mising society.

Introduction:

Society is not stable rather it is dynamic in nature. But most of the tribal societies are static. In rural India the societies are still clings to the same old cultural structure. There has never been any stunned variation in its political situation, economic conditions and social organization which is inspired by the community for their welfare and harmonious co-existence.

The Mising are one of the distinctive tribe of Assam. Originally they were hill dweller settled in the nine district of upper Assam. According to the census report of 2011, the total number of Mising population in Assam is 6,80,324. Their main inhabitants are bank river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The river bank area is very fertile for cultivation. They produce good crops in this area. In Assam, river bank area is eco-friendly on and the Mising tribe live peacefully. The Mising have own unique culture which distinguished as a separate community. As a dweller of riverine areas they frequently suffering from the problems of flood and erosion of land. They learned to adjust themselves with this problems.

Objectives of the study:

The main objectives of the study are-

- 1) To study the social structure of Mising society.
- 2) To study the social issues of the Mising tribe.
- 3) To suggest the remedies.

Methodology of the study:

Methodology is one of the important aspect of the social science research. The research is done by using the behavioural and empirical research method to understand the social situation of the Mising tribe in the micro level area. Not much secondary information about the social issues of the Mising is available. The study is done on primary sources of information, although the secondary sources are applied whenever it is required. For the study, the primary sources of information is collected through structural questionnaire administrated at the household level. Field survey is conducted in the Mising villages scattered in the Brahmaputra valley. For the secondary sources of information, the relevant books, research journals, magazine, News papers periodical are review

Finding of the Study:

The Mising are socially well organized. They obey certain strict rules and regulation in their society as well as the household. The Mising always obeys rules and regulation in terms of work, like social functions, fishing, merry making etc. The primitive method of social group or polity is prevalent among them. There is democratic setup where members the society have power to point out any problem of them in their society. For each village there is a **'Dolung Kebang'**. The aged men and head of the family is the member of the Dolung Kebang. It has jurisdiction over its own village at micro-level. Any complain regarding social and otherwise brought to the notice of the Kebang. Their headman called **'Gam'** generally delivers the judgment consulted with the selected elders

of village. Generally the decision of Kebang is accepted as final by the villagers. Of late the position of kebang is eroded due to existence of the Gaon Panchayat.

The co-operation in socio-religious matters among the Mising is a silent feature. There is such institution called *Mimbir-yame* (committee of youth). The young boys and girls are the member of the organization. The main function of this organization is to perform the activities covering the development of the village and extent help to the individual families in socio religious occasions. The elderly persons are also involved for maintenance of discipline, training of tribal etiquette and social responsibilities. Disciplines were maintained by some selected office bearer called *Bora, Barua, Bhuyan, Dekaborah, Boki, Tiribora* etc.

Rigbo Ginam is another co-operative activity like *Mimbir-yame* organized for a day in smaller scale. *Daglig-alik* is another institution, where a family in need is rendered help collectively in priority basis and returns them by rotation. Of late, youth club libraries and such socio-cultural organization have taken much of the old traditional activities of *Mimbir-yame* but *Mimbir-yame* still survives in all of the villages

In bye-gone days there were *Murong* house (dormitory) for each village. The *Dolung Kébang* generally held *Murong* house. *Murong* is heart of culture and socialization of Mising society. The Youths learned the art and craft in their respective *Murong* house. It was the duty of the youth in those days to protect the villages from enemies of outside from the *Murong* house. A *Murong* house is construct for celebration of *Po:rag* and *Ali-Aye-Ligang* festivals. Today, the important of *Murong* house is neglected and naturally these are not well maintained. During festivals, however, the *Murong* get a new look. After came to influence of *vainavism*, in some villages, the **Namghar** (public congregational hall) are constructed in place of traditional *Murong* house.

The Mising village are situated along the river courses of the river mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries of upper Assam. They centered mainly in the river areas of undivided *Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Golaghat* and *Tinsukia* districts of upper Assam. Recently large number of Mising family settled in the *Guwahati* city. Generally their houses face river and not far from the river

Mising are patriarchal and patrilineal in their society. Their women are debarred from attending *Kebang* and certain rituals like *Dobur Uie* but they are treated with kind regards like a delicate but valuable company deserving love and protection. In fact they are quite sturdy and laborious. Their busy day starts with the indispensable practices of husking paddy in the early morning and ends in feeding the family at dusk after a full day work. They render help the man in all agricultural works.

The Mising women are idol of their culture. Every Mising woman is expert weaver and weaves clothes not only for herself but also for

all the member of the family. Further, the women folk weave a kind of heavy cotton rough which called *Gadu* (Mirijim) is well known among the non-Mising people. No economic right is given the Mising women. Traditionally they could not claim over any property of her father. She has to content herself whatever she got at the time of marriage as dowry.

Woman plays a very important role in their economic life. They extensive participate in the system of production by rendering physical labour in the agricultural operation. Further women folk earn personal income by selling chickens, Pigs, Indi cloths. Their saving is used to buying clothes and other personal effects. There is also a system of private cultivation among the member of the same family in Mising society. The system is called *Riksang Arig*, in this system a young girl cultivate a plot of free land for growing generally mustered oil seeds which she sells for her own private income.

In the Mising social life man and woman have differential status and position. The woman has lower position than the man in the hierarchy of social status. The woman has no role in taking decision either in the family or in public she may express her opinion while taking decision on family matters.

The Mising have traditional custom to divide the inside room of their typical houses into two parts called *Ri-sing* and *Koktog*. The fire place is the partition position of the division. The upper portion of platform called *Rising* which specially reserve for menfolk and religious functions and males guest are seated there. The woman folk sit in the *Kaktog* lower portion of platform.

The Mising follows strict discipline in their social life. They imposed stern punishment that violated the social rules and regulations. The individual or family is socially **Yodpag** (boycotted) and relation with water and fire is also prohibited. On the basis of the crime the person or family is **menpag** (expelled) from village. The Mising are very conscious of maintaining social discipline. Their strict social discipline leads them living a peaceful life. Although, the Mising maintains very peace life, they are socially backward. With a view to find out the causes social backwardness of the Mising tribe, a series of field study had been done. From the field study we find out some causes of responsible for social backwardness of the Mising tribe. The following are the issues of their social backwardness.

Lack of education:

Education played pivotal role in social progress. Social progress clearly indicates a general development in community in the terms of economic, social and cultural aspects. A educationally backward community could not think the social development. The Mising community of Assam also educationally backward. The recent census report of 2011 indicates that their literacy percentage is 69.27. Due to lack of education they believe some superstitious beliefs, practice different types of rituals. They can not explain any fact scientifically. Further, lack of knowledge they cannot think any matter widely. They deprive of the recent developed knowledge of the world.

Backward communication:

It is no doubt that communication plays vital role in human life. Road communications play a role in connecting people and also ensuring socio-economic growth of a country. Further it provides access to employment, social, health and education services makes a road net work crucial in fighting against poverty. Road open up more areas and stimulate economic and social development. The ninety percent Mising lives village. Their main inhabiting areas are situated in the bank of river Brahmaputra and its tributaries of upper Assam. Further, large number of family lives in Sand Bar(Chapori) of Mighty Brahmaputra. The communication system of these areas are very backward. Road communication is dilapidated. Many areas are not connected with the main land. Again some areas are remained disconnected for more than six months. Moreover, majority of Mising villages are not covered by the electrification. They are deprive off enjoying modern T V programme which highly essential in the present situation. So far

communication of Mising area is concerned, the mobile phone is very essential for modern life style. But the mobile companies are failed to provide network coverage in the all Mising inhabited area. Under these circumstances, the Mising failed climb the ladder of social progress.

Superstitious beliefs:

Superstition is an another social problem. No any society is free from the superstition. The Mising are also not free from the superstitious beliefs. They believe the existence of two types spirits- benevolent spirit and malevolent spirit. Due to affect of malevolent spirit a person nor family fall in the distress. In order to free from the affect of malevolent spirit, they perform rituals to satisfy them. They believed even today that disease is affect of evil spirit. To satisfy them they perform rituals. Instead of taking the sickly person to the hospital for medical treatment they offered pork, fowl, turtle, fish etc to the evil spirits. So, in many time the sickly person died without medical treatment.

Since time immemorial, the Mising believe the witchcraft hunting. Every year some families or persons become the victim of witch craft hunting. In the recent time, the practice of witchcraft hunting increased in the Mising society. The spread of modern education among them could not remove the superstitious beliefs. It is a great social drawback of the Mising society.

Poverty:

Poverty is one of the social issues of Mising tribe. Ninety percent of the Mising people's main occupation is agriculture. They produced crops in traditional method. They have not applied any scientific method to produce more. Till today, except some crops they produced crops for own consumption not for cash. So, their annual income is so less. Majority of Mising peoples are suffering for financial problems. Due to poverty the Mising are lagging behind in education, business and other aspects.

Frequent migration:

The Mising migrated frequently to change their inhabitant due to various causes. Due to affect of flood and erosion they have to change their inhabitant. Their inhabitant area is affected by the every year flood and erosion. Further large number of Mising family lives in Sand Bar (Chapori). The main flow of Brahmaputra is changing every year. Every year flood and erosion washed away huge plots of land, villages, forest and property. Large of number family take rearing animals as their profession. Under such circumstances the Mising change their inhabitant in search of suitable land and they could not settle permanently in a place. Temporary settlement could not provide a good social condition.

Cultural bottle neck:

In compliance of culture the Mising observes some festivals and rituals. They expended huge amount in observing it. It is their culture to sacrifice animals to worship gods and goddess. Further, it is their custom to entertain their guest with pork, fowl and Apong(rice beer). It is noticed that they performed many unnecessary rites and rituals without explaining scientific facts. The Mising, in spite of thinking social progress they are busy in medieval activities. Their conservative culture has not allow held some social activities those are essential for social development.

Backward mentality:-

Earlier, the Mising youth has ambition to perform great festival and organizational work for the development of society. They performed great festival like Po:rag, Amrag, Da:ro Midang, Ali-Aye-Ligang and conference of ethnic organizations. Presently, the Mising youth lost the mentality of observe such great festival and conferences. Without observing such festivals and conference we cannot imagine about the development of a society. Due to their backward mentality they cannot think of achieve such great work.

Impact of politics:

The present political situation adversely affect on society. Social unity is one the important character of Mising society. As result of the impact of the politics, their society lost the unity. The political parties are alluring the Mising people with their populist activities.

So, the Mising people divided into different political groups. A section of Mising is running after to take advantage of the government facilities in place of performing their daily works. In this way, they wasted their valuable times. Making social development collective is totally neglected.

Lack of medical facilities:

Medical facility is highly essential for healthy living in the present society. The medical facility of our country has not covered all communities. Whenever the people deprive off the medical facilities they superstitiously practice some rituals. It is become only way to get rid of the problems. The Mising of Brahmaputra valley also such community deprive of medical facilities. For the medical treatment of simple disease they have walk many kilometers. It is noticed from the field study that the government established very few number of hospitals in the Mising inhabited areas. But the condition of the hospitals is very pitiable. Doctors, nurse, medicines and other facilities are not available. As a result many patients died without medical treatment.

Lack of pure drinking water:

There is no pure drinking water facility in the Mising dwelling areas. Majority of the Mising people drink water from river. Water from river is not pure for drinking in all the time. Every year the people suffer from water related disease. Many of them died of it. People are not conscious about the water pollution. The water testing programme of government and non-government organization revealed that in many areas arsenic is found in the water of tube well. The government pure drinking water facility is not covered all area. Water pollution is a great concerned for the Mising society.

Lack of Sanitary system:

The sanitary system is very essential to maintain a healthy atmosphere. Only twenty percent Mising people have sanitary latrine. Eighty percent people do it in open space. It leads to the spread of various type of disease. Further, such situation make the atmosphere unhygienic. It is noticed from study that Swacha Bharat Abhijan of government is not successfully implemented in their areas.

Failure of elite group:

Elite group of any community played very important role in making a society socially conscious. It is worthy to mention that due to spread of education some elite persons emerged in the Mising society. It is their responsibility to make aware the people about social backwardness. The Mising elite group has not take any such step successfully to make the people socially aware so far. They fail to enter among the common peoples. On the other hand, the common people also failed to approach the elite group and learn knowledge from them. It is found from the field study that some elite organization like Mising Bane kebang, Mising people Justice Forum, Mising Senior citizen Association etc are formed to drive work for the development of Mising people. But interestingly they have not followed any programme to make people socially aware.

Failure of ethnic organization:

Since the time of colonial rule, some Mising ethnic organization were formed to reform the backward society of Mising and make them aware about the important education. Such organization was Mising Bane Kebang which was formed in 1924. For the development of education, the student organization Takam Mising Porin Kebang was formed in 1971. For the political consciousness, the revolutionary organization, Mising Mimak Kebang was formed in 1993. In addition to this, for the development of language and literature a literary organization Mising Agom Kebang was formed in 1972. These ethnic organizations had been working for the development of the tribe in their respective field. But they are not fully success in their ways. The student organization TMPK fail to make aware about the important education. The dropout rate of Mising students in every stage is so high. On the other hand, the Mising language is imparted in class III and IV in the some schools of Mising dominated area. After imparting it for 35 years it has not make any improvement. It is running previous two classes. In political sphere

they completely fail to elect efficient person as their representative. Thus the ethnic organizations unable to take appropriate measure to make socially conscious the tribe.

Live in unhygienic environment:

The Mising lives in river bank areas. These are low land area and not suitable for hygienic living. In rainy season these areas are submerged by the water. After flood a muddy situation prevailed in the areas. It is a tradition of Mising society to rear fowl, pork at home for own consumption and performing rituals. Majority of Mising family has not make separate arrangement for rearing animals. So, they lived together with rearing animals in same house. As a result they are affected by the different types of diseases. Under such situation, the tribe could not think of their social development.

Religious beliefs:

The Mising are animistic in their religious beliefs. They believe the existence of supernatural power. The name mother Sun(Do:nyi) and father Moon(Po:lo) are reciting in the rituals and festive occasion. Moreover, they worship malevolent spirits in the witness of Sun and Moon. In various occasion they worship departed soul of forefathers. After came to influence of different forms of Hinduism the Mising began to worship Hindu Gods and Goddess. So, they incorporated some rituals in their religious beliefs. As results, the number of rituals considerably increased in their society. With a view to perform these rituals they expended huge amount of money in year. It is their traditional beliefs that inability to perform these rituals means suffering from different type of hardness and disease. So, they are very conscious of performing these rituals. It is noticed from the field study that the Mising had been worshipping some evil spirits till today. They worship it without explaining the scientific facts. It is a great drawback of the Mising society.

Recently a trends of conversion of religion is development among the Mising. Earlier the Mising only incorporated some rituals of the Hindu religion with their traditional religion. But presently Some Mising completely give up their traditional religion and converted other religions including Christianity. The trends of changing religion is great concerned for the Mising tribe. The religious syncretism among the Mising is a great social drawback of their religious beliefs.

Patriarchal Society:

The Mising are maintained patriarchal social system in their society. Father or elder person is head of the family. Other members of the family follow his order. As a patriarchal social system the women are not given chance to take part in taking decision in family matters. In this way, the women folk are not given equal right. Women should have role in taking important decision. As women folk are not given chance to taking decision; so, correct decision could not be taken in many times for the family. Without giving right to all we could not think about the equal development of a family.

Use of dual language:

The Mising generally used dual language in their daily life. They speak mother tongue to exchange their words. But in cash of acquiring education they use the Assamese language. In lower level of education, the mother tongue best to acquire education. They feel difficult to learn education with an alien language. As a result, large number of student compel to leave their schools in the early stage.

Excessive use of country liquor:

The Mising use two variety of rice beer –Po:ro Apong and Nogin Apong. They use these two variety in performing rituals. Besides, the Mising entertain their guest with the Apong. They also consume it as food item. Some Mising family also prepared one kind of country liquor for business purpose. They earn some income from it. At the present time, some Mising family or person excessively use the three variety and created unfavourable situation. Due to excessive of country liquor the Mising suffered from different type of stomach trouble. Many of them died of it.

Further, such a situation completely destroyed situation study.

Lack of leader:

History says that in the success of a nation there is great role of a leader. There are many such instance in the world. No such leader is emerged in Mising society to lead the community. An efficient leader is highly necessary who would be undisputable and acceptable to all. Only such a leader could lead the socially backward Mising community in the right way.

Inferiority complexity:

Naturally tribal people have inferiority complexity. Like other tribes the Mising also hesitated to mix up with people of other society. They like to stay in isolate atmosphere. Due to complexity they hesitated to take part in the social activities. So, they could not complete with the others. It is a great drawback of social development for the Mising.

Find difficult to follow the leadership command:

Historically Mising have no kingdom. Their different groups live together in a village under the guidance of Gam. A most efficient person is selected as Gam to conduct the village. They follow democratic process in taking any decision. Traditionally, the Gam has taken earlier consent from elder persons before taking any decision. During the Ahom period the Mising enjoyed full autonomy in internal matters. It is a habitat of Misings to live independently. So, the Mising find difficult to follow the command of leader. To achieve the social development, following command of leadership is highly necessary.

Lack of proper recognition:

The Mising has not learned to offer due recognition to a person who achieve success in any social work. Social recognition is highly necessary to encourage a person for social work. Some Mising person able to made success in different field. But they are not given due respect from the Mising society. Thus the Mising has not received encouragement from society to perform great work.

Conclusion:

The Mising are socially disciplined tribe. They maintained strict social discipline in their daily life. The violation the social rules and regulations is a great crime in the Mising society, stern action is taken against it. He or she might be socially boycotted or expelled from the village. Further, he or she might be imposed fine. In spite of maintaining strict social discipline, the Mising are socially very backward. In the twenty first century also they believe the existence of evil spirit and practice large number of rituals to appease them. Normally the Mising are very liberal in accepting the alien religion. The Mising are greatly influenced by Neo-Vaisnavite Movement of Saint Shremanta Sankardeva of 15th century. It is noticed from the study that the Mising incorporated some culture in their culture. But they observe these culture in their own traditional system. By accepting culture, the Mising enriched their culture.

In spite of having rich culture the Mising are socially backward. Many causes including education are responsible for it. Since the independence our government created some departments to remove the backwardness of the tribe. The government also adopted some policies to improve their condition. But the government is fully successful in solving the problems. In addition to these, the government of India formed some development council for the some communities of the Assam. The Mising have also a autonomous council for the development. The council is running more than thirty departments. Due to misappropriation of fund the council failed to improve the condition of Mising.

The census report of 2011 focused that the literary percentage Mising tribe is not so bad in comparison to other community. The educated Mising youth fail to avail the government jobs. Day by day the percentage of unemployment considerably increased in the society. Large number of educated youth wastage their valuable time by playing card, carom Board, chess etc. They are failing in acquiring quality education. Moreover, the educational

institution are not available in all Mising inhabited areas. For higher education, they have to cross long distant. Many of them deprive of acquiring higher education due to financial crisis. Moreover, the Mising has number of ethnic organization; these organization has not adopt successful programme to make the socially aware. The newly emerged elite group also fail to impact them. On the other hand the common people are not approach to learn education from educated class. They keep themselves distant from them.

The government and ethnic organization have responsibility work for their social development. They must ensured education for all Mising. Modern communication facility must be provided, since they could be aware about the latest development. The various schemes taken for the development of the tribe should be fully implemented. Frequent flood and erosion is burning problem of the Mising. Permanent measures should be taken to solve it. Economic employment is highly required for the advancement of the Mising tribe. Superstitious beliefs and practices should be avoided since it is one of great drawback of the Mising society.

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