



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE MISING TRIBE OF ASSAM

KEY WORDS: Mising, Christianity, Conversion, Dony-Polo, Yelam,

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ABSTRACT

The Misings are the one the major tribe of Assam and second largest group with the population of 587310. They are the offshoot of mongoloid stock while linguistically they are Tibeto- Burmans and most of them are inhabited in nine districts of upper Assam they had their own traditional beliefs and practices but since their time migration to the plain of Assam they were under gone a course of acculturation. It had resulted in the influence of religions like Hinduism, Buddhist Tantricism and Vaisnavism among the Mising. In the 20th century, the Mising got attracted to Christianity and got converted to Christianity in various causes. Their conversion to Christianity impacted on the Mising tribe in different aspects. The objective of this paper is to study /on the impact of Christianity among the Mising tribe of Assam.

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The Mising has been maintaining their age-old traditional practices since the time immemorial. They were given full autonomy. The Ahom ruler had not interfered in their internal affairs. The change is the law of nature and no individuals can avoid the changing of life cycle. The Mising could not confine themselves from the influence of plain Hindu culture of Assam. It is natural that as a dominant religion of Assam influenced the Mising peoples of Assam. On the other hand the religious concept of Hindu has resemblance with the religious concept of Assam. In case of Christianity, they had not agreed to accept it; they always considered it as a alien religion. However in late eighty the Christianity began to spread among the Mising of Assam.

The Christian attitude towards the non religious elements was positive. Their attitude towards the indigenous language was positive one. The Christian Missionaries were the first persons to putting the Mising language in writing form to impart religious education to them. With a view to spread Christianity they published books, pamphlets and articles in tribal language for the first time, it actually re-enforced the culture. Their main trust on development of language and literature has positive impact on the peoples as even the village folk could be able to read and write in simple way.

As a result of induction of the Christianity among the Mising an internal psychological tension is emerging between Christian community and non-Christians. The latter charged the former of uprooting socio-cultural fabric and indigenous faith, beliefs system and practices. The Christians were being charge with eroding the cultural and religious fabrics of society. The Christian converts desist from joining or associating social functions including national festival. The practices which are contrary to their religion are termed as sin and hence they openly denounce and disassociate from such practices. On the other hand, Christian attitude towards the indigenous food habits are quite adjustable as like other denominations they do not insist restriction of apong and sharing sacrificed or killing animals. In Mising traditional society, hospitality of a guest generally marked with sharing of *Apong*(wine), *Adin* (meat) and *Apin*(rice). Whatever may be religious significance in it but from health point of view the

banning of alcohol has a positive impact as many peoples are dying due to excessive drinking especially foreign liquor, which causes serious ailment related to liver, peptic ulcer, kidney troubles heart and lungs.

According to Sashidhar Pegu, Christianity is not suitable to adjust with the traditional social system of Mising. Because, the Mising practices the clan exogamy and endogamy in their matrimonial system. Marriage within same clan is strictly prohibited. The offender might be faced punishment such boycotted from the society, isolation from the village unit and imposition of fine. Further, the tradition of Mising has not socially allowed and recognized the inter-caste marriage system. Moreover, their tradition has not allowed the woman (who come to society by inter-caste marriage) to participate in the religious functions until performing the salvation ritual. But Christianity had no marriage restriction. So, there is no scope of restriction in the inter-caste marriage. Hence, it has great scope of violating the age old traditional marriage system and social values in the Mising society.

The converted Mising woman enjoyed full freedom and equal status is comparison to the man in the Mising society. There is no social restriction on the woman in the participation in social and religious function. But in the traditional Mising society, the Mising women are not allowed equal right to the man. They are restricted in entering some places and debarred from participating in the religious function. It will obviously weaken the traditional restriction on the woman in the society.

Further, Sashidhar Pegu argues that Christianity in Mising society destroyed the basic value of morality. In Mising society, women are restricted during the menstruation period especially in participation in the socio-religious function. Similarly, the murderer, thief, adulterer, incest are always subjected to rigorous punishment and such alleged persons are restricted from joining any socio-religious function because the morality of Mising demands that a person should be free from such vices or crimes. However, there is no such provision in Christianity. All kind of crime or sin committed by a person can be pardoned just through mere confessional prayers; it is indirectly encouraged the people to do such immoral activities. The system of punishment is very mild that it will never restrain a person from committing such crime. It is observed that a good number of such morally degraded Mising persons converted not only into Christianity but also other religions.

The induction of Christianity broke the food restriction and religious taboos of the society. As Christian has no food restriction. After performing some rituals such as *Dobur Uie*, *Taleng Uie*, *Urom Apin*, *Dodgang*, *Ali-Aye-Ligang*, *Po:rag* festivals the Mising abstain from taking some food items. Besides, adaptation of Hinduism prohibited them in taking of beef and buffalo. But Christianity allowed them to take beef

and buffalo. Hence, Christianity has broken the food restriction in the Mising society.

The Christian community argues that with the introduction of Christianity, the morality of peoples has not been degraded but a lot of immorality that prevailed in society has been wiped out. There were lots of confusions and a feeling of insecurity mounted in all respects mentally insecure, because of the fear psychosis prevailing owing to the superstitious belief and practices. In Mising tradition, a living person performed lot of sacrifices and rituals in order to avert danger. Physically, a person felt insecure because an individual has not got widespread well wishes from his friends at the time of troubles. In other words the sense of collective help is absent as everyone busy in their individual problems. The economic condition is unstable because their income is also being wasted in the performance of rituals and sacrifices. Economic consciousness was lacking as many people are confined and believed in traditional mode of economic activities which forced them to remain from hand to mouth.

Kartik Chandra Pegu of Jonai informs that the introduction of Christianity among the Mising, progressively given up the evil practices such as forcibly abduction, polygamy, superstitious beliefs and rituals. The Christian reformative measures and their educational activities consciously or unconsciously acted the major works of reformation in the society.

The adoption of Christianity led to the abolition of traditional faith, practices and festivals. Even it abolished their home made traditional rice beer (Apong). Further, Sunday became compulsory holiday for them. Earlier, Mising village was a single unit for all religious, agriculture related festivals and all the purpose. Villager now divided in to two rival groups such as Christian and non-Christian, particularly in some of the Mising areas such as *Sadia Sub-division, Jonai, Silapather, Dhemaji, Dhakuakhana Sub-division*, and riverine areas of Lakhimpur district and Lohitmukh area of Sonitpur District. In the areas like in *Barpomua, JengraiMukh, Lakhimi, Chenaichuk, Kalia, Puroni, Bijuli, Bengkuwal, Charaibari, Joriguri, Rajabari Pather* were influenced by the Baptist Missionary of Nagaland. On the otherhand, in *Ubota, Neul, Cherfai* were influenced by the Catholic Missionary. In these areas only ten percent peoples were converted to Christianity. The non-christian never allowed the Christian Mising to participate in their social and religious functions. As a result, the age old village unity which was nourished up with proper care by their forefather began decay. Moreover, it also helped in the growth of new religious institution and functionaries. The traditional *Murong Okum* and *Nam-ghar* were replaced by the setting up churches. Their traditional priest Mibu were replaced by the Pastors. The converted Mising began to observe the different Christian festivals such as *Christmass, Easter, All Saint day, New years day, Good Friday*. The converted Mising not participating in the traditional rituals and festivals.

They considered it just superstitious deeds. AS a result of the development emerged two types of new socio-religious organizations, Christian and non-Christian. The Christian formed socio-religious organization like *All Mising Baptist Kebang* and *All Mising Baptist Convention Kebang* to promote and save their interest. The rapid spreading of Christianity among the the Mising has alarmed the people those who believe and are still indigenous culture and belief system were formed in later part of eighty's. The *Mising Donyi-Polo Yelam kebang* is one of the organizations that pledge to preserve, promote and propagate the indigenous religion

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FOOTNOTE AND REFERENCE

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