



ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ETHNIC FOOD AND DANCES OF MISING TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

In North-East India different tribal people use natural herbs in preparing different foods. The primary focus of this study is to identify the nutritional support of food in indigenous community like Mising and their traditional dances. As we know that food is a nourishing substance and trying to find out the study on food rather than the relationship between food and human experience. Food is always an essential part of human society and people also experience it in different ways in everyday. In the study of food from the times of engagement of animals in agriculture; historians have been exploring the various dimensions of food for its entry into the field of study in social sciences. In Mising community people like to prefer healthy eating and to effectively promote the growth of people. The present study is trying to analyse the factors of healthy eating and the symbolic representation of food in Mising community. There are many types of Mising dances, and each has its particular rules. Gumrag is performed five times in circles. Drums and cymbals are the usual musical instruments for the dances. Mibu Dagnam, Selloi, Lereli Ejug Tapung, Sohman, Gumrag Sohman (Gumrag Paksong,) Lotta Sohman are main traditional dance of missing community.

KEYWORDS: Food, Culture, Health, Nutrition, Dance.

INTRODUCTION

The **Mising** are an indigenous community inhabiting parts of the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They were also known as *Miris* in the past and still recognized as *Miris* in the Constitution of India. Misings are recognised as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government under the name 'Miri'. Their language, Mising, is part of the Tani branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. *Mising* is an endonym and literally means "man of the soil." *Miri*, on the other hand, is an exonym; commonly applied by plains Assamese people. There is still much scholarly debate on the origins of this term: some colonial scholars argued 'miri' referred to their status as intermediaries between plains peoples in the Brahmaputra Valley and hill tribes to the north, while others such as Grierson (1909) thought it meant "gentleman," while Crooks interpreted it as "hill man." More recent scholarship associated *miri* with religious functionaries in some Tani hill-tribes. According to this view, when the Misings migrated to the plains they were identified as coming from the *Miri pahar* ('Miri hills'), whose feats of magic would have been well-known back then, and the name stuck. The Misings belong to the greater group of Tani people, who speak languages of the Sino-Tibetan family, which comprise many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in India and Tibet. All Tani tribes share linguistic, cultural and genetic similarities. They have greatest similarity with Tani peoples of the Siang-Subansiri region, especially the Padam-Miniyong.

The earliest mention of the Misings comes from the Ahom kingdom in the early 17th century, when the Misings were still independent hill-tribes to the north of the Brahmaputra valley. In 1615, the Misings raided Ahom territory and the force sent to subdue them failed. In 1655, the Misings launched another raid which resulted in a successful counterraid by Ahom forces during which the Misings were subjugated. They agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahoms and gave 12 men to the Ahoms for the two they burnt. Afterwards many Misings were given high positions in Ahom administration, evidence of their greater cultural contact with the Assamese compared with other hill-

tribes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study about Mising traditional food.
- To study about Mising traditional dances.
- To study the brief introduction of Mising Tribe.

METHODOLOGY

In this study the data were collected from secondary sources like, book, journals, internet, etc. Descriptive method is used in this study.

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

There is no written history of Misings about their migration from the Himalayas to the plains of Assam but history was passed down orally in the form of folk songs and stories by the ancestors from generation to generation and is still prevalent among their society. Although, they were initially hill dwellers, they later migrated to the plains and started living on the banks of rivers of Assam. The reason for this change of habitat is not known, but one theory says that the Misings presently living in plains of Assam were not one single tribe, but it evolved into one when many tribes from various Tani tribes of Arunachal Pradesh migrated to the plains of Assam.

The Misings currently has some state autonomy under the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC), which was formed in 1995 following violent clashes in early 90s for greater autonomy. MAC includes 40 constituencies in eight upper Assam districts comprising core areas and satellite areas. Executive councillor (EC) from 36 constituency are elected democratically while 4 other members are represented by the ruling government of Assam. Since 1983, Mising organizations have been demanding Sixth Schedule status under the Constitution of India. Various Mising nationalist organizations have been formed, like Takam Mising Porin Kébang (Mising Students' Union) and Mising Bahne Kébang (Mising Council) after inclusion of education in Mising areas. In 1924, educated Mising tribes formed the *Mising*

Bane Kebang (Great Assembly of the Mising).

According to the Census of India conducted in 2011, the population of Mising in Assam is approximately 7 lakhs. They live in 10 districts of Assam: Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Majuli, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat, and in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh: East Siang district, Lower Dibang Valley, and Lohit. The most prominent Mising villages in Arunachal Pradesh include Oyan, Namsing, of East Siang district. In Lohit District's Namsai, a good number of Mising are found, especially in the areas around Silatoo Mising village.

The Misings believe in Abotani as their ancestor and is supposed to be a son of mother Sun and father Moon of the Heavenly abode. The Mising people inhabiting by the plains believe Gu:mín as one of the earliest ancestors, the forefather of a lineal family of Abotani. The sons of Guhmín are grouped in multiple *opin*, or clans, the names of which are represented by the existing surnames in the society. They are all blood-related brothers with a social restriction of the matrimonial relationship among them.

The Misings have other groupings such as Moyengia, Oyengia, and Sayengia etc., which do not correlate to *opin*. Misings were also divided into Barogam and Dohgam, which was an administrative system introduced during Chutia Kingdom. The concepts of Guhmin and Opin have remained the basis of Mising social structure.

The Opin of Guhmin are all blood-related brothers known as *urom bibosunam birrang*, originating from a common ancestor father and there is no restriction in offering prayers in the rituals in common platform generations together. There is another form of brotherhood existing in the society which has been traditionally accepted as an affiliated brother or *tomín sunam birrang* from different *opin*. In both types of brotherhood marriage among themselves is forbidden in the society.

The different *opin* include: Doley, Pegu, Bori, Gam, Charoh, Dao, Darig, Dang, Jimey, Kuli, Kutum, Kumbang, Kaman, Kardong, Kari, Lagachu, Loying, Modi, Moyong, Morang, Mili, Medok, Medhi, Misong, Narah, Ngate, Pangging, Pasar, Perme, Pertin, Pait, Pagag, Patir, Patiri, Padi, Patgiri, Panyang, Payeng, Payun, Pao, Padun, Regon, Ratan, Chungkrang, Chintey, Charoh, Taw, Taye, Taid, Tayeng, Tayung and Yein etc.

There are further classification as Delu, Dagdung, Dagtok, Mohying, Padam, Pagro, Oyan. The traditional chief of a Mising village was called a *Ga:m*. He presided at the sittings of the village council, the *Kebang*, which deliberated upon different matters concerning the wellbeing of the village as well as complaints of individual members or groups in the community. The *Kebang* was the legal, judicial and executive authority of the community, although the final say on all matters, barring the ones relating to their faith, was that of the *Ga:m*. Cases of social and criminal offenses were heard by the *Kebang*, and persons found guilty were penalized. The *Gam* has been replaced with *Gambura* (Gaon Pradhan) a petty village level agent of the government, since the days of the British. *Kebang* now denotes any organization, similar to *sabha* and *sangha* in other Indian languages.

The traditional craft of weaving is a very important aspect of Mising culture. It is an exclusive preserve of the Mising woman, who starts her training in the craft even before she reaches her teens. All clothes the Mising wear are woven by the women of the household. Men wear cotton jackets (*Mibu Galuk*), light

cotton towels, *endi* shawls, thick loin cloths, and, occasionally, even shirtings. Women wear a variety of clothes, depending on the occasion. The *ege* is a lower garment, comprising a sheet of cotton. Above this may be draped a *ri:bi* or *Gaseng*, both cotton sheets used to cover the *ege* and a blouse. However, while the *ri:bi* has narrow stripes, the *gaseng* has broad stripes of contrastive colours. Instead may be worn a *Gero*: a sheet, usually off-white, wrapped round the waist to cover the lower part of the body, or round the chest to cover the body down to the knees or so, or a *seleng gasor*: a light cotton sheet, worn occasionally instead of a *ri:bi* or a *gaseng*. Other forms of clothing include the *riya*, a long, comparatively narrow, sheet, wrapped, a bit tightly, round the chest. Married women will wear the *segrek*, a loose piece of cloth, wrapped round the waist to cover the *ege* down to the knees. Other accessories include a *po:tub*: a scarf used to protect the head, and *nisek*: a piece of cloth to carry a baby with. The Mising also have a special and complex blanket called *gadu*, fluffy on one side, and woven on a traditional loin loom.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of the economy of the Misings. They grow different varieties of rice paddy, some of which they sow in spring for harvesting in summer, some others being transplanted during the rainy season and harvested in autumn. They also grow mustard, pulses, maize, vegetables, tobacco, bamboo, areca, etc.

The Misings follow their own traditions, called *Donyi Polo*, the Sun and the Moon God. They are still mainly animists and adopted some aspects of Vaishnavism after the Bhakti movement that was started by Sankardev, (1449-1568 A.D.), the saint-poet of Assam. Their creation myth is as follows: first was *Sedi babu*, the Supreme Being. He created *Melo-Nane*, and together they created *Ditem* (the Earth), *Adi-Ditem* (the mountain), *Nei-Negan* (green-leafed trees), *Rukji-Merang* (*Acalypha indica* and insects) and *Peyi-Pettang* (birds and animals). They also created the sun (*Donyi*) and *Polo* (the moon), the wind (*echar*), water (*aasi*), fire (*eme*), and other aspects of the universe. *Sedi* then created *Diling*, whose descendant *Pedong* gave birth to *Dopang*, *Domi* and *Doshing*. *Domi's* son, *Miniyong*, was the ancestor of the Misings.

Mising people celebrate various festivals, though, the two chief traditional festivals of the Misings are the *Ali-Ayé-Ligang*, and the *Po:rag*, both connected with their agricultural cycle. Another occasion called *Dobur* is an animistic rite performed occasionally by the village community by sacrificing a sow and some hens for different purposes, such as to avert a likely crop failure and ensure general well being of the community, or to avert the evil effects of a wrongdoing on the part of a member of the community, etc.

Traditional Foods

There are different tribal people of north east India use natural herbs in preparing different foods. Food is basic needs of people and always an essential part of human society in different ways. In Mising community people prefer natural healthy eating to effectively promote the growth.

Misings are very unique in its cultural life and their food habit is unique because of its relation with nature. The symbolic representation of food in Mising community is always significant. As Mising community is migrating from various places it is noticed that they have the capacity to adopt other culture also. They maintain their own culture and also accept culture of others very easily. After migration change in ecology is very distinct but their pattern of adaptation is considerable. It is very interesting that they have been maintain their traditional dress code and their production is famous and have already

captured the market with the brand of, *Miri Mekhela Sador'*. This example has proved that their culture is assimilating with local dominant culture. Food is a symbolic representation therefore in every community there are food related cultural practices. Mising community is not exceptional in this case. In Mising community food is an identity, process and cultural construction. Food as a metaphoric term; it conveys different meanings to mediate between nature and culture. The relation of nature and culture reveals universality in human thinking. Food as a prime factor of life is very important to prepare and manage food in everyday life. In most of our societies, women become primary actors to carry out the responsibility to manage and prepare food and to continue the traditional cultural practices. These practices reflect values and beliefs of a community. Basically on the basis of food choice perceptions of healthy eating are constructed. To identify the knowledge regarding food this perception is important. Healthy eating in Mising community is important as people have consistently recognized their eating habits as balanced, nutritious and full of variety and food values. In their diet mostly they consume medicinal plants and for that mostly they are dependent on forest resources. Local communities of northeast India are extremely knowledgeable about the local plant resources and their utilization (Sarmah, 2006, 2010; Sarmah *et al.*, 2006). Livelihood system of Mising community is focusing their knowledge on health practices and their knowledge on utilising on local plants. Based on their perception from the field it is revealed that they are still maintaining their method of food preparation. Even they cure some diseases by first hand treatment done at home. For example, malaria, small pox, skin diseases, diarrhea, vomiting, cough, gastric, blood purification, urinary discharge, jaundice, dysentery, fever, bronchitis, stomach disorder, blood pressure, nerves, menstruation problem, asthma, epilepsy diseases are cured by medicinal plants. For cuts, burns also they use ornamental plants like *chalkunwuri* (alovera). For de-worming *bet* (rattan shoot) is used as medicine. Even in accidental case like broken fracture they prefer *herhurua lata* (*Cissus quadrangula L*) as a fast track relief. For burning sensation and redness of eyes the leaves of *doron* is used. Thus the perceptions of people found relatively homogenous in different field. In general, people's perceptions on healthy eating are prevailing in Mising community from generation to generation as people of different age groups have the knowledge of traditional medicine. Misings are basically agriculturalists and most of their income comes from paddy field. In every society economy matters a lot. Thus education is interrelated with economy. It is hard to educate if the economy is poor. The social background of any community is determined by the economy. In order to survive people frame some kind of psychology to adapt with society is necessary. In the socialization process self knowledge is very important and the value represents the constant notion towards self representation. People's perception is very important to find how self knowledge unfolds. People's perception can be studied by self perception theory which is very essential to know people's own attitudes, behaviours and other internal states. People's own behaviour and circumstances are important for their own beliefs and attitudes to infer.

For nutritional support of Mising food they gave preference to boiled foods which gives more nutrition and use of oil is very less in their dishes. They are having depth idea on foods particularly on the ante natal and post natal period foods. After delivery mother is suggested to have chicken soup which is prepared with *Bihlangani* leaves (a kind of medicinal plant). *Kochu* or *Ange* (taro, botanical name is *Alocasia acuminata schott*) which is a very common food among Mising society. Girls during puberty period should restrain from taking certain

food such as pineapple, banana flower. *Bihlangani* (a kind of fern) leaves are used as medicine for rheumatic pain. Generally they eat shoots, leaves and tubers cooked with acidic fruits like *owetenga* (elephant apple), *bilahi* (tomato) and *nemu tenga* (lemon). It is useful for blood purification also.

In the fifth month of the pregnancy period of a woman, traditionally *pajap* (duck meat) must be provided with by her parents. There is a strong belief that if the pregnant lady does not eat *pajap* then her baby might be physically handicapped after birth. The meat of pigeon and *phapuk* (banana flower) are essential not only for female but men too as these increase blood. Spadin of Banana is used as medicine for the treatment of eating hair accidentally with food as sometimes one/two hair may be left inside stomach. Therefore, *Spadin of Banana* should be eaten at least one/ two time a year. Even *phapuk* (Spadin of Banana) with pigeon meat is also a nutritious food as it improves blood.

The opinion in support of the nutritional food value of *apong* (rice beer). It is useful for urine as well as for gall bladder problems. If the amount of alkali is more it helps to dissolve stone. It has nutritional as well as medicinal value. Gastric problem can be solved by consuming it early in the morning in empty stomach. Even the formation of stone in kidney can be prevented by having *po:ro apong*. Misings consider *apong* as physical labour tonic and refreshment.

Mising foods are source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. They prefer boiled food with local herbs like medicinal creeper used in curries *vedailata* (*Paederia foetida L*), *dimoru* (*Ficus glomerata Roxb*), *hati- Khutora* (*Amaranthus spinosus L.*), *nefafu* (*Clerodendrum cloebrookianum L.*), *tenga mora* (*Hibiscus Suddarifa L.*), *mosundori* (*Houttuynia cordata Thunb*) and species of fern used *dhekia* (*fiddlehead fern*) which is nutritious and useful for health. The juice of *vedailata* works as astringent and particularly they use it in diarrhea and dysentery. Use of less oil, less oily food is useful for health. Diseases like gastric is very less compared to other dominant community. In their traditional recipes green spinach and herbs are used to reduce fat.

Traditional Dances

Dance provides a form of social affirmation and a means of expressing national or tribal loyalty and power, and it is a part of religious ritual. Dance is filled with aesthetic values making it distinct from one society to another. There are many types of Mising traditional dances, and each has its particular rules. Gumrag is performed five times in circles. Drums and cymbals are the usual musical instruments for the dances. The types of traditional dances of mising community are as given below-

- **Mibu Dagnam:** It is a priestly dance performed mostly during Po:rag, the harvesting festival, observed in the Murong, the community hall of the Misings. The priest sings the Ahsang while performing this ritual dance.
- **Selloi:** This is a kind of merry-making song and dance often performed for fun, by young boys and girls with the accompaniment of drums or cymbals. It marks the beginning of the influx of the Mising people from hills to plains of Assam.
- **Lereli:** Occasionally, all sections of Mising people indulge in singing and dancing lereli in sheer fun and merriment, especially at meeting old friends.
- **Ejug Tapung Sohman:** This is a very ancient form of dance performed to the accompaniment of ejug tapung, a wind instrument resembling the snake charmer's bein.

- **Gumrag Sohman (Gumrag Paksong):** This dance is performed on the occasion of Ali-Aye-Ligang and in Mising Bihu.
- **Lotta Sohman:** This dance is performed on any occasion, as an expression of joy or community celebration. Old and young, all join in these dances.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

From this study some suggestions of missing traditional food and dances are given below-

- The foods of Mising tribes gives more emphasis on nutrition, therefore it is useful for people's healthy life.
- There are some foods found which works as a medicine, therefore it should use properly and should be further researches about it.
- The food culture of Mising culture should be introduce to other culture for cultural harmony.
- Food industry can be increased and improve on the basis of Mising traditional food.
- Traditional dances keeps a culture of people alive, by sharing and teaching younger generations, therefore it should be preserve and improve properly.
- Government should give emphasis on preservation of traditional foods and dances as cultural heritage.
- The traditional dances of Mising Tribes should be performed in national and international level platforms for the cultural identity and cultural participation.

Thus traditional foods and dances are significant parts of a culture. All of the countries around the world have different cultures. Culture is defined as people's way of life. It also include how they dress, how to speak, the type of food they eat, dances, the manners etc. The peoples belongs to the particular society responsible for the development and improvement of own culture.

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