CHAPTER – 2

ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON THE MISHINGS

This Chapter comprise of two parts. That is part A and part B. In part A ethnographic note on the Mishings with a brief introduction of the community, origin and migration, population composition and various social, cultural and economic attribute of the Mishings have been described. Part B dealt with Mishing society and flood.

PART – A

ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON THE MISHINGS

2.A.1 Mishings

Mishings are one of the plain tribes of Assam. Among the nine scheduled plains tribal groups they are second in terms of population after the Bodo community. They claim themselves to be of Tani origin. The Mishings believe that they were the offspring of Abo Tani, a legendary father of mankind, as far as their folk tales narrate. Besides the Mishings, a number of tribes known as Padam, Galo, Apatani, Nishi, Bokar, Bori, Ramo etc. occupying the central part of Arunachal Pradesh trace their parentage to Abo Tani. All these tribes including the Mishings of Assam may therefore be described as progenies of Tani stock.

In the plains, the Mishings preferred the alluvial river banks, especially the banks of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries for their settlement. In “Topography of Assam”, John M’Cosh (1837) had written “The Miris occupy that strip of alluvial land along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra from large island Mujali to the river Dihong the northern branch of the Brahmaputra and bounded on the north by hilly country of the Abors.” Alexander Mackenjie records that the Mishings had extensively cultivated the tract of Bardalani, Sissi and Dhemaji.
Another British ethnographer Robinson thinks that “the chief seat of the Miris appears to be the low hills north of Banskotta and Lakimpur, from whence they have spread themselves out into the plains at the foot of the hills, and emigrated in large numbers throughout Upper Assam” (1975:356).

At present the Mishings inhabit districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Golaghat. Mishing people found the most fertile land on the banks of River Brahmaputra and settled on sides of the river. Though their production was great, frequent floods prevented them from climbing the economic ladder. The main festival of Mishing tribe is Ali-Aye-Ligang in the month of February which is the harvest festival. They speak language known as Mishing language.

They continued their practice of living in thatched houses raised on bamboo stilts, known as Chang ghar (platform houses) or traditionally known as Taleng Okum. It was a protection against flood waters during the rainy season, although the original logic behind raised houses was protection from wild beasts. The yearly floods ensured that the Mishings lived a life of abject poverty and misery. Agriculture being their main occupation, flood affects them in more ways than one. Moreover, due to their affinity towards living close to river banks brings about Malaria and other water-borne diseases. But 90% of them still continue to live along the banks of Brahmaputra and its tributaries, unfazed by the disasters striking them.

2.A.2 Origin and Migration: A Brief Overview

The Tanis or Amis are one of the early, if not the earliest, groups of human races migrating to the north-eastern region of India sometimes in past. The Tanis or the Amis are variously known to the other people as the Misings, Mishimis, Pa:dams, Minyongs, Galongs,
Daflas, Hill Miris, Apatanis etc. The language, culture, and traditions of these tribes are one and the same (Doley: 2012:13). The Misings and its mountainous natives have a popular myth about the origin of the man in the earth. The Mising genealogical verse called *A:bangs* tell about the origin of the earth and life. Sonaram Pa:nyang, a Mising interpreter, records a number of legends and myths of the origin of the Misings and Adis. These myths throw some light on the traditional origin of the different sub-tribes of the Adis and the Misings. According to this tradition Pédong-Ane prolific in procreation and gave birth to many sons. Some of them are *Do:mi, Do:pang, Do:shing* and *Donga*. From Do:mi came the Minyangs, from Do:pang the Pa:dam, from Donga the Galong and from Do:shing came the Misings (Pegu: 2012:53). The Misings officially recorded as Miri in the list of Schedule Tribes of India under Constitution Order 1950 are originally a hill tribe of the Himalayas region of north eastern India. Either for their better wisdom or in their necessity of cultivable land they migrated down along the Siyang river in several small groups in different period of history. It is believed that the first group of Misings landed in the upper region of the valley sometime between 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. when the area around Sadiya was ruled by the Chutia kings. The Misings belong in general to the Tibeto-Burman family of the great Mongoloid race. According to Chatterjee, these Indo-Mongoloid races were referred as “Kirata” in the epic of Mahabharata and Ramayana, and even before that in Yojurveda and Atharvaveda. Their original abode was in the upper courses of the river Huang-Ho and Yangtse-Kiang in the North West of China and they entered India around 2000 B.C. Here in the Brahmaputra valley amidst the alien communities and faith the Misings had to adapt themselves to the new environment and changed social circumstances and thus there grew up a new social order along the courses of the Brahmaputra, Subonsiri, Ronganadi, Buroi and Bhoroli river in the northern side and the confluences of Dibru, Dihing, Disang, Dikhow and Dhansiri.
river in the south. The name ‘Miri’ was given to them evidently by the plains people but they always preferred to be known by their own name ‘Mising’ (Pegu: 2012:61).

Table 2.A.1 Chronological table of the History of Mishings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-historic Period</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3000 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000 BC</td>
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<td>500 BC</td>
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<td>300 BC</td>
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<td>200 BC</td>
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<td>100 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>450 AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>930 AD</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1100 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1244 AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>1496 AD</td>
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<td>1603 AD</td>
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<td>1644 AD</td>
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<td>1648 AD</td>
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<td>1663 AD</td>
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<td>1669 AD</td>
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<td>1673 AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>1681 AD</td>
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<td>1696 AD</td>
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<tr>
<td>1714 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197 AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Asinang Onam, (Date) A Journal of Research and Review of Mishing History, Ethnology and Language
2.A.3 Population

Table 2.A.2 Population trend of the Mishings from 1971 to 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Total Population of the Mishings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>259551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>467790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>587310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>680424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India from 1971 to 2011

According to 1971 census, the total population of the Mishing in Assam was 259551. In 1980, no census could be done due to Assam agitation launched for detection and deportation of foreign nationals. In the year 1991 it was recorded with a total population of 467,790. In the year 2001 it was increased to 587,310 with male 299,790 and female 287,520 respectively. At present according to Census 2011 total population is 680424 persons.

Table 2.A.3 Distribution of Mishings in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley including Sonitpur district, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Mishing Population</th>
<th>Proportion of Mishings to total ST (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>185,906</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>165,843</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>92,058</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golaghat</td>
<td>47,539</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>44,092</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>23,849</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>17,203</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>9,332</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2001
2.A.4 Social, Cultural and Economic Profile of the Mishings

2.A.4.1 Group and Clan

Pagro, Delu, Oyan, Dambug, Sa-yang, Moying, Samuguria, Temera and Bongkul are the major groups of the Mishing community.

The Opín (clans) of Gu:min are all blood related brothers known as Urom Bibosunam Birrang originating from a common ancestor father (Abo-tani) and there is no restriction in offering prayers in rituals in a common platform generation together. There is an another form of brotherhood existed in the society which has been traditionally accepted as affiliated brother called Tominsunam Birrang from different Opín (clans). In both types of brotherhood, marriage among themselves is strongly forbidden in the society (Kuli: 2012). According to Kuli’s (2014) “Mising Folklore” sixty six clans have been identified. These are Koman, Kuli, Kutum, Kumbang, Koptag, Kardong, Ngate, Saro, Sokiyal, Sintë:, Sungkrang, Siram, Jime:, Taku, Taid, Tape, Tango, Tayung, Tao, Tarag, Dao, Da:long, Da:ng, Dole:, Darág, Noro, Pasum, Pa:me:, Pa:nyang, Pa:dun, Pagdig, Pangging, Pa:yêng, Pe:gu, Pa:tír, Polêng, Pertin, Pérme:, Pao, Pa:id, Pa:sa, Padi, Bori, Borang, Ba:sínq, Mo:di, Médog, Mo:rang, Mipun, Mili, Misong, Me:gu, Régon, Lagasung, Légo, Yirang, Yein, Lo:ying, Risong, Taye, Pogag, Pa:ju, Mirang, Ra:tan, Mekab and Mei.

2.A.4.2 Marriage System

Several forms of marriage systems are present in Mishing community. Formal marriage (Midang), elopement (Dugla la-nam), informal (Kumna la-nam) and forced or kidnapped (Sola la-nam) marriage are some of the marriage systems. Marriage within ‘gu:min’ (clan) is strictly prohibited. For example, Pegu boy cannot marry a Pegu girl, because people sharing the same
surname are considered as brother and sisters in the community. If they do they are excommunicated from the society.

Formal marriage or Midang consist formalities, it may be a love marriage or arrange marriage but the marriage is done formally. In formal marriage a proposal is submitted by the groom’s parents. After acceptance from the bride’s parents, they finalise the wedding ceremony. On the wedding day they observe some rituals and formalities with full programme of entertainment.

Informal or Kumna la-nam marriage system differs little from formal marriage. In this type of marriage only the ritual part is observed with minimum formality.

*Dugla Yamne La:nam* or marriage by elopement is a common form of wedding in the Mishing community. In this type the boy elopes with a girl of his choice and the two get married, when parents of either the boy or the girl are opposed to marriage or when they cannot afford formal wedding due to financial reasons. However, elopement is formalised after negotiations between both the families.

Marriage by force system is vogue and very rare. When a girl refuses to get married with a boy, then the boy may force to get married. In this type both the parents never prefer the marriage. However, after they are settled with some formalities to accept the couple socially.

2.A.4.3 Socio-Religious Festivals

**Ali A:ye-Lígang**

The Mishings have rich traditional culture of their own, although they are assimilating themselves socio-culturally in the mainstream of the Assamese culture; still they maintain
performing their own beliefs and customs on different occasions. Amongst the festivals, very peculiar to the Mishings is the “Ali A:ye Lígang” basically called sowing festival. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. So, for good harvest they perform Ali A:ye Lígang which marks the first sowing of seeds. The literary meaning of “Ali A:ye Lígang” stands for first sowing of roots and fruits in which “Ali” stands for seeds, “A:ye” for fruits and “Lígang” for sowing. Roots and fruits were their staple food of livelihood in the hills. But due to influence of Aryan culture in the plains, rice cultivation has become a part of their agricultural production. Ahu paddy was their principal product and such the oncoming of the “Ahu” and “Bau” season is marked with the celebration of Ali A:ye Lígang and the beginning of agricultural cultivation. They pray, dance and feast as a part of the festival.

In the past the day for Ligang celebration was not fixed. It was celebrated on different villages according to their convenience. The unification of the Mishing came up throughout Assam only after the birth of the Mishing Ba:né Kébang Mishing socio-political organisation in 1938, and the same body unanimously decided on 6th November 1956 that Ali A:ye Lígang would be celebrated every year on the first Wednesday of February. The selection of Wednesday for celebration of Ligang is based on the belief that it is a day of prosperity and welfare for beginning of all kinds of activities of public as well as of individual interests.

‘Apong’ and ‘Purang’ are the most essential items of Ligang. Two varities of ‘Apong’ exist in the community (Nogin and Po:ro) which is special inevitable items of ‘Ligang’. The elders and guests visitors are served with ‘Apong’, ‘Purang’ and a delicious curry prepared usually with fish and meat. Feasting continues throughout day hours and in the evening the head of the family again prays their forefather including ‘Koje Yanggo’ (Goddess of fertility). After the feasting merry making starts in the form of ‘Gumrag-So:man’, it is a combination of dance
and beating of drums and cymbals. ‘Gumrag-So:man’, it is a Lakshmi to satisfy and bless for good harvest. Paksong Moman (dance song) usually youths performs ‘Gumrag’ from house to house. The men folk wear ‘Gonro Ugon’ (Dhuti), ‘Mibu Galug’ (Shirt) and ‘Dumer’ (Gamusha) and the womenfolk wear ‘Ege’ (Mekhela), ‘Ribi Gaséng’ (Sador), Géro (Pothali kapur), Ségré etc. ‘Gumrag So:man’ usually lasts the whole night. The villagers observe a period of abstinence from field works for two to three days and breaks it known as ‘Yodlen Kunam’ by instituting a brief function calling upon the forefather. This marks the ending of ‘Ali A:ye Lígang’ and the people start devoting their time in the field works of cultivation.

**Po:rag**

Po:rag is also one of the socio-religious festival of the Mishings. Payeng’s “The Mishings “(2015:81) stated that Po:rag was generally celebrated after completing the harvest Guni-Amro (Ahu) crops for a period of three to five days. Po:rag celebration needed huge work force and expenditure, so unlike the Ali a:ye Lígang the Po:rag is celebrated after a break of around five to ten years. It is not clear how the word Po:rag is being derived but a wider scope of interpretations indicated that Po:rag has been derived from two Mishing words Apong and Agrag. Murong house play essential role in Po:rag celebration. A village cannot think of Po:rag festival without Murong ghar and Mibu. Mibu preformed all the sacrificial rituals of the festival. The preparation for the celebration starts from one or two year earlier. So, they work united for the common saving purpose. After sufficient saving for the occasion they fixed the date of celebration taking the consent of the Mibu who is going to perform the rituals. The villager holds meetings when necessary. It is also seen that various committee is formed for the smooth functioning of the celebration. The Yammin ope (group) and the Po:rag organisation committee are two important committee. Yammin ope mainly performed the prayers and rituals along with
the Mibu. The Po:rag organisation committee looks after the all round functioning of the Po:rag celebration. Minom ope is also invited from some other village in order to assist during the celebration. The celebration takes place for three to four days. Pigs and Po:ro apong are some of the essential criteria of the celebration. The whole village irrespective of age, sex, caste enjoy the feast and dance.

*Dobur Ui* (Worship of Spirit)

The Mishings practice a number of rites and rituals for the welfare of the individual family and for the common or collective welfare of the village. The *Dobur* occupies a special position among such rites. It has got different parameters of observances like individual family *Dobur*, collective village *Dobur*, specific-mission *dobur* like the *Kosan Dobur* for successful hunting and safety of the hunter and *Mo:pun Dobur* for a family’s agricultural safety and protection from different adverse factors. It may be noted that the women are not allowed to participate in the *Do:lung Dobur* making it an affair exclusive performed by the male folk of the village (Payeng, 2015). These three types of dobur have various norms regarding its sacrificial performance of the rites and rituals.

2.A.4.4 Murong system of the Mishings

The Mishings have a unique social institution called Murong which can be termed as backbone of their social institution by its own nature. It has been followed as their tradition from immemorial past and which reflects their social unity and economic status of the village.

‘*Murong*’ which is slightly longer than an ordinary Mishing “*Chang Ghar*”(*Taléng Okum*) and has no walls. It is the most beautiful and gorgeous building in the village. The Murong house is termed used in some tribes to denote youth dormitory. Also, it has a much more
important social significance for the Mishing people. In the society it is a symbol of village unity, integrity and assimilation. The performance of collective social functions, feasts, festivals, training of dancing and singing etc. are some usages of Murong. Besides, it can also be used as guest house for some honourable guests and as a court of social justice.

The Murong house is constructed usually in the central or the peripheral part of the village for convenience of the visitors. The Murong presents a very spectacular sight and is the most beautiful and thatched roofs. The decoration and construction is so superb that one is bound to the filled with awe and admiration at such indigenous skills. The beams are made of wood and their surveils are decorated with pictures of Do:nyi (Sun), Po:lo (Moon), Takar (Star), Sormon (Corcodile), Site (Elephant) etc. They reflect some of their traditional beliefs as Ru:né Pi:né. The particular varieties of woods used are tapíd, takinang, tale, tangno etc. with the belief that evil spirits cannot take shelter in the Murong. It is the choice of the good spirits only.

There are also some important parts of the Murong i.e. Méram (Fire place), Pérab (constructed by bamboo kept hanging over each méram for drying various materials), Ko:bang (step made of wood), Ta:sug (conical shaped structure made of bamboo use for filtration of wine (Po:ro Apong) etc.

A Murong house is necessary for performing Po:rag (Po:rag Tinam) the best socio-religious festival of the Mishing people. It is a harvest festival. The host village invites the youths (Mímbir-Ya:me) organization from a neighboring village to participate in every aspect of the festival. A Priest (Mibu) is invited to conduct the prayer to Sedi-Me:lo, Do:nyi Po:lo etc. At least six to eight pigs are sacrificed in the name of different deities. They pray to their forefathers offering Apong, meat etc. in the festival. The Mibu sings at night the A:bang (Hymns) leading
the dancing youths in a circle. The festival continues for three consecutive days. The Murong house is open to all sections of the Mishing society on all social occasions including the Po:rag festival.

It also reflects the economic status of the village people because its construction and performance of Po:rag are directly connected with heavy expenses both in material and manpower.

Besides, Murong can also be used in various purposes. Any type of disputed opinions of the village peoples are settled at Murong. The Do:lung Kébang (Village organisations) deliver judgement and punish the offenders. It paves the way of social integration of the communities at the village level.

It sometimes acts as training ground for singing, dancing for the youths. Also it can be used to entertain the distinguished visitors and guest.

2.A.4.5 Economy

Agriculture is the main of economy of the Mishings. They grow different varieties of rice paddy, some of which they sow in spring is harvested during summer; some others are transplanted during the rainy season and harvested in autumns. It is seen that almost 90% Mishing people involved in agriculture works. They cultivate Ahu and Bau, along with Sali. Sali is traditionally planted in July-August and harvested in November-December. In terms of yield pursuit of cultivated land, Sali is obviously much higher than Ahu in terms of harvesting. Because the label of natural fertility of the wet land Sali fields are constantly enriched by yearly floods, and the process cultivation involve much more human labour inputs and care than Ahu which is sown broadcast.
The Mishings women play a very active role in the economy, but they have unequal status compared to men in that society. They play a more active role than men in family activities including financial income, but they cannot claim for property rights after getting married.

The Mishing women are generally seen carrying bundles of firewood on their heads and babies on their back, while they go to collect firewood or harvest crops in the fields.

This is a common scene in a Mishing village. With the advent of various new circumstances such as new marketing demand, shortage of agricultural lands, new government policies, economic downfall due to floods, modern education etc. the Mishing people have engaged in different fields like business, government services, wage labourers etc. In late twentieth it is seen that Mishings people at a remotest Mishings villages are engaged in various activities.

They rear pigs and fowls only for consumption and ceremonial needs. However, they have no economic use of it. But, from around 1970-80, due to compulsive economic pressure, they have started to think for business purposes. They earn livelihood by selling pigs as the popularity of pork has increased day to day. Generally, women were fully involved in rearing pigs. In earlier days men are employed only for selling it in the markets. But in late twentieth century, male also simultaneously started to invade in pig rearing, poultry, goat farm etc.

The Mishing women are expert weaver and handloom designer. Mishing women did not use their handloom products for commercial purposes. They produce their dress for their own use. They made various traditional handloom productions like (Ege Gasor) Mekhela Chador, Shawls, blankets, Mibu galuk (men’s wear traditional dress) etc. today various handloom textiles exhibitions are promoted by the state and central government. Mishing textile products have
earned a great demand now-a-days. Traders collect Mishing products from Mishing villages. In
the late twentieth few Mishing women earn a good substantial amount from the handloom and
textile works. Further the wage labourers increased in the last decades of the twentieth century
due to loss of agricultural lands in floods. Medical expenses, lack of permanent income source,
negligence of savings habits, etc. They become compelled to engage as wage labourers in
various sectors ranging from agriculture to industrial activities. In the late twentieth century, it
has been found that a few young men and women are coming forward to accept the opportunities
of government policies.

Formerly selling of wine was unknown but since two or three decades back this business
became popular. In thoughs70-80’s Mishing people felt ashamed to admit as wine seller. In the
late twentieth century, it is found that the Mishing people buying and selling rice beer at urban
and rural areas.

2.A.4.6 Dress and Ornament

Dress

The Mishing have traditional dress of its own. Their dresses can be described in two from
woven for men folk and women folk with beautiful designs in various styles. Men wear Ugon,
Gonbor (the waist or loin cloth of man), Gonro-ugon (a long waist or loin cloth of man),
Gontung ugon (a short or loin cloth of man), Galug (a shirt), Gadu galug (a shirt made of a gadu
cloth), Mibu galug (a mibu shirt), Dumér (a towel), É:tub (a turban) and Língkab (a muffler).
Whereas, the women wear Ege (the lower garment), Riya (a long narrow cloth wrapped over the
breast), Kegrég or ségrég ( a type of waist cloth for women), Ri:bi (a type of shawl), Gero,
Gaseng (a type of shawl), Gale (a type of waist cloth), Bimbung, Pé:re (types of shawl),
Gapagare (a type of waist’ cloth), Yambo (a type of shawl) and Po:niyang gasor (a type of shawl for bride). Other than their traditional dresses they also wear the cloth made by the modern technology in their day to day live.

**Ornament**

The Mishing women wear Dogné, Tadog, Kentu, Pisiríng, Kongge, Onsalmora, Kodoni, Golpot, Sondrong ar, Ikoli, Puali, Li:tog etc. They are also accustomed with the modern jewelleries.

2.A.4.7 Socio-Cultural Organisation

Socio-cultural is a key to the Advancement of a nation or community. All nations of the world community form their own socio-cultural organization for giving a solution to their respective problems. These organizations have their specific aims and objectives (Pegu, 2014). The Mishings has too has socio-cultural organizations of it own. Some of the socio-cultural organizations formed by the Mishings are Mising Bané Kébang (MBK) 1924, Takam Mising Porin Kébang (TMPK) 1972, Mising Agom Kébang (MAK) 1972, Mising Dirbi Kébang 1980, Takam Mising Mimé Kébang 1990, Mising Mimag Kébang 1992 and Mising People Justice Form (MPJF) 2009.

The Kébang (institution) play a vital role in the Mishing Society. It primary objectives is to fight against their socio-economic backwardness and to take necessary steps to preserve their traditional culture.

**Mising Bané Kébang**: This organization was formed in the year 1924 to fight against illiteracy, economic backwardness and superstitions. It also works for conserving and developing
their own language, culture, customs and traditions of the Mishings. The first conference was held in May 1927 at Bhekelimukh under the Chairmanship of A.C. Tonstoi. The organization is formed at different level. Of all the Mising Bané Kébang (Central body) is the apex body followed by the Bangke Kébang (Sub-Units) and lastly, the Do:lung Kébang (Village Units). There are Presidents, Vice-Presidents, General Secretaries, Joint Assistant General Secretaries and other executive members at each level.

**Takam Mising Porin Kébang:** This student organization has been playing important role in all round development of the Mishings. It formed in the year 1927. The number of student organization formed at different periods known by different name like Assam Miri Chatra Sanmilan (1933), North bank Mising Student’s Union (1949), Murkongselek Transferred Area Student’s Union (1951) and Assam Arunachal Prodesc Mising Students’ Union (1971) was unitedly formed as TMPK. It is formed at four different level-Takam Mising Porin Kebang (Central body), District Committee, Regional Committee and Village level committee. At each level there are Presidents, Vice-Presidents, General Secretaries, Joint Assistant General Secretaries and other executive members.

**Mising Agom Kébang:** MAK is a literary organization and it was founded in the year 1972. The MAK has also been hierarchically organized from bottom to the top as follows-Mising Agom Kébang (Central Body), Bangké Kébang (Sub-Units) and Affiliated Units. At each level there are President, Vice-Presidents, General Secretaries and Assistant General Secretaries and other executive members. The primary units are responsible to the District Kebangs who in turn are subordinate to the central organisations. It has been working for the all round development of the Mising Culture in General and of Mising language and literature in particular. Its main activities are: (i) to compile and publish various books in Mising language,
(ii) to collect and publish Mishing folk literature, (iii) to take necessary steps for the introduction, and (iv) to perform such other activities as would promote the Mising language and literature.

**Mising Dírbí Kébang (Mising Cultural Organization):** The organization was founded in the year 1980 for the preservation of Mising culture.

**Takam Mising Mimé Kébang (1990):** Takam Mising Mime Kébang (All Mising Women Committe) is also an important organization of the Mising. This organization is responsible for their identity movement for upliftment of socio-cultural, language time to time. This organization like TMPK, MMK has also been hierarchically organised from bottom to the top.

**Mising Mimag Kébang:** The Mising Mimag Kébang the Mising Action Committee was formed at a meeting of National Convention held at Jonai (1993), in Dhemaji district, MMK also demand their identity movement time to time. Democratic agitation programs, such as bandh, picketing mass mobilisation started. MMK, at each level there are President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary and other executive members. MMK (Central body), District Committee, Anchalik Committee and Village level Committee.

**Mising People Justice Form:** This Socio-cultural organization was form in the year 2009. It consists of MPJF (central body), Districty Committee, Anchalik Committee and Village Level Committee. The objectives of the forum is to conduct educational programme in missing villages to develop the community, undertaking medical programme for proper health and sanitation among the community for better health.
2.A.4.8 Kébang System of the Mishings

In Mishing villages one comes across elders assembled in the Dere or Murong or Community hall, discussing, debating or arguing on certain subjects. Such a body, officially assembled for the purpose, is called the Kébang, and it arbiters on social, political, cultural or judicial matters brought up to it for counsel and disposal. This local self governance system of the Mishings has not been documented properly until today also because a vast majority of the Mishings is still illiterate. However, it is easily intelligible to the local people since it is traditionally handed down and practiced since long (Chungkrang, 2006).

The Kébang has a three tier system. The lowest and the most effective unit is the Do:lung Kébang or the village council. All adult male members of the village are members of the Kébang. Above the Do:lung Kébang, there is the Banggo Kébang, consisting of villages falling within a certain geographical area, with leading elders of do:lung kébangs. The next in order of hierarchy is the Bogum Bokang Kébang. It is represented by the influential members of the do:lung and Banggo Kébangs. Bogum Bokang Kébang is the supreme body within the traditional self governance system.

The Kébang function under six different matters such as judicial, social, cultural, political, morality and administration of the villages.

2.A.4.9 Religious Belief and Practices

The Mishings believe that the universe was created by a supreme heavenly power defined as ‘Sedi Ba:bu’ (Sedi the Father) and ‘Melo Na:né (Melo the Mother) and consider themselves as the progenies of the Sun (Do:nyi Ane i.e. Sun Mother) and the Moon (Po:lo Abu i.e. the Moon Father). These deities are held to be omnipotent, omnipresent and always
benevolent to mankind. Therefore, on every occasion of social and religious function, the Mishings offer prayer first to these deities. In fact, no auspicious function starts without the names of ‘Sedi Melo’ and ‘Do:nyi Polo’ (Doley, 2012).

The Mising people are superstitious. The minute affairs of individuals and even the greater and more important events of the world, they suppose to be under the influence of divine spirits and agents. They believe that these spirits delight in sacrifices called as Ui, and hence different types of Ui such as Taleng Ui, Dobur, Urom Po:sum, Gu:min etc. with sacrifice of animals are perform to pacify them. The Mibu, is believed to be empowered with some supernatural powers and on all important religious occasions he conducts as Chief Priest. Now, Hinduism has been influencing in their religious beliefs and performance of worship in the Namghar, recitation of Kirton or Bhagawata etc. are some of the examples (Kuli, 2012). It has also been observed that the Mishings have accepted Christainity due to various factors.

2.A.4.10 Education

The Mishings of Assam came into contact with what is called modern education only during the concluding decades of the 19th century. Prior to the advent of the British in Assam in 1826, the Misings were totally ignorant of modern education. It only during early decades of the 20th century, that the Mising people started getting modern education. Charu Chandra Doley and Muhi Chandra Miri (Patir) were the first Arts and Science graduates from the community in 1926 and 1927 respectively. These two pioneers of the Mising society along with their friends worked hard to popularise education and launch a reform movement in the Mising society by forming a conference called Miri Sanmellan in 1924 which was subsequently redesignated as Mising Bane Kebang. Generally, the presidents of its open sessions were invited from non-
Mising educated elite and the speeches delivered by them left enormous impact on the common masses. As a result, the Mising people began to realise the importance of modern education (Morang Doley, 2015). According to the Census 2001, the literacy rate amongst the Mishings was 60.1 percent (male-71.4% and female-48.3%), which was lower than the rate of 62.5% (male-72.3 percent and female – 52.4 percent) for all the Scheduled Tribes of the state. As per Census 2011 the literacy of the Mishings 71.4% in case of male and female literacy is 48.3%. Among all the tribal groups of Assam, it is observed that the gender disparity among Mishings is the highest in Assam with 71.4% male literacy against 48.3% female literacy. This clearly indicates that there is a gender disparity of 23.1% in literacy.

2.A.4.11 Role of Mishing Women in the Mishing Society

When women are economically and socially empowered, they become a potent force for change. In Mishing society women play a very significant role in economic life. They extensively participate in the system of production by rendering physical labour in the agricultural operation. Except clearing jungles and driving plough the womenfolk of the community perform almost all kinds of works connected with agricultural production. Right from the stage of preparing the soil for spreading seeds up to the harvesting crops the Mishing women associate themselves in the entire process of agricultural production (Doley, 2012).

In Mishing Society women occupy a very significant role, especially in their economic life. The womenfolk of the community perform almost all kinds of works connected with agriculture. Right from the stage of preparing the soil for spreading seeds up to harvesting crops, the Mishing women associate themselves in the entire process of agricultural production. In addition the women manage time for weaving clothes not only for themselves but also for
children and men-folk. A young woman who is not an expert in weaving finds it difficult to find a husband of her choice. It is the duty of the woman to prepare meals, and the apong (rice-beer). Village women have the additional duty of collecting vegetables and firewood, and fishing. By selling pig, chicken and woven-clothes the women can earn personal income for buying clothes, ornaments and other personal effects. This income is not necessarily shared even with the husband. They generally bear the expenses of providing clothes for their children. There is any season that can be called ‘off season’ for them in a calendar year. Women have no rights to inheritance although she is a major contributor to family economy. In the event of her husband’s death, a widow can enjoy the share of her husband’s property by getting married to her deceased husband’s younger brother. She cannot marry the husband’s elder brother, who is considered a father figure. Women have absolutely no place in the community’s decision making bodies (called Kébang). A woman may come to a community meeting only as an appellant or as a witness in a case of litigation. The formation of Mahila Samities at the village level, the status and rights of women has been given much importance. In political matters too, the women have no role. In some religious functions the Mishing women play secondary roles of preparing and serving apong, and cooking food for the invitees. A woman can never become a Mibu (priest), and can never sit in the same row in which the male priest or co-priests are seated. In many other religious rituals, like the dobur ui, women’s access is prohibited. All decisions in family matters are taken by the male members. Her opinion may be taken into consideration regarding children’s marriage. Though women scholars judge this as discrimination, some others deny that this is an instance of discrimination against women, but is done to maintain social discipline. Facts clearly show that Mishing women are accorded a lower status in their society. But education, which is still limited for the girls, is certainly bringing about a sea-change.
A better balance has to be achieved between women and men in making decisions that affect the life and economy of rural Mishing society, through the active encouragement and involvement of women's associations and networks and the promotion of women into planning. The empowerment of Mishing women and equal opportunities for both sexes are fundamental in reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition in the Mishing Societies.

Some of the Constraints faced by Rural Mishing Women are high illiteracy rates and poor living conditions among rural Mishing women; lack of leadership and inadequate participation in the organisational and economic affairs of their agricultural cooperatives; absence of property inheritance rights, restriction on acquiring membership of agricultural cooperatives consequently being deprived of farm credit etc.; inadequate health care services in rural areas; inadequate water supply for household and farm operations; lack of appropriate agricultural technology aimed at reducing the physical burden of farm women; inadequate access to credit and agricultural inputs and other services; lack of female farm extension workers; lack of marketing facilities and opportunities; traditional, religious, social and cultural obstacles; less participation in decision-making – even within the household; male migration/urban drift which increases pressure on women; lack of opportunities to improve socio-economic status of farm women; lack of skills and attitudes in leadership and management development; and lack of supporting functions for women’s organisations and allocation of funds for them in cooperative organisations.
PART – B

MISHING SOCIETY AND FLOOD

2.B.1 Flood and Socio-cultural Life of the Mishing

As noted in part A, the Mishing have settled in the district of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Tinsukia and Golaghat. Their main occupation is agriculture and they habitually reside in the river belts. It has been observed that their general economy is directly affected by flood and soil erosion. Since the people reside mainly in the riverine belt. It has been noticed that majority of the Mishing people are still living in flood affected areas. This colourful ethnic groups living amidst the fellow non-tribal Assamese people for many centuries has been able to maintain its traditional socio-cultural traits un-impaired in spite of the changes that have taken place in the socio-politico-religious life of Assam (Bordoloi et al., 1987). Having the tradition of living along the banks of rivers, the habitats of Mishing have been constantly exposed to floods and erosion, for which they have to often shift from one place to another (Doley, 2008). Although majority of them are still living in rural areas, it is noticed that for better socio-economic conditions, employment opportunities, accessibility, rural to urban migration either temporarily or permanently is gaining ground among the Mishing in recent times, which have resulted in adoption of new urban culture sometimes at the cost of age-old cultural traditions. Kuli (2014: 51) in his book “Mising Folklore” has mentioned that the Mising people are almost always exposed to floods and erosions which damage their land, crops and other properties- crippling their economy day by day. Hence, they are still economically one of the weakest sections of the Assamese population. Pegu (2012) has described that “the Misings are riparian and they are mostly found to inhabits the areas which are in the vicinity of rivers/rivulets. Riparian life style, though once upon a time, was considered to be ideal for a
farming community; it has been a boon as well as a curse for the Misings after the devastating earthquake of August 1950. Extensive erosion, frequent floods damaging crops and other infrastructure have now been seen as recurring problems outweighing the benevolence gifted by the floods in the form of irrigation and enhancing fertility of cultivable areas of the people. Experiences have taught the Misings to look for alternative spots for fresh settlements, although call of the sources of easy availability of waters or rivers has not been ignored on account of past sorrows caused by the source itself.” He further mentioned that ‘in the past, land was plenty for cultivation. Even absence of artificial manure’s was never felt as the agriculturists could rotate the areas of cultivation at the interval of a couple of years. Moreover annual inundation would have brought with it alluvium and leaving the fields of cultivation fertile for a bountiful harvests when the flood recedes. The situation has now changed and the change has not always been for good/better. As has been indicated, hundreds of Misings have been affected by erosion and devastating floods of the Subansiri and the Brahmaputra particularly as after effects of the earthquake of 1950. People lost their ancestral abodes and cultivable land. While they got themselves rehabilitated in areas not known to them, land was scarce and they had to settle for a relatively limited area at least compared to their past possession (2012: 172-173). Also in the same volume in another paper titled “Patterns and Causes of Land Alienations of the Mising Tribe” Doley (2014) has revealed that having the tradition of living along the banks of river the habitats of the Misings were constantly exposed to flood and erosions, for which they had to shift from place to another very often. As traditions die hard, the process has been still continuing. This is one of the most important factors responsible for their acute perennial problem of land scarcity. The Misings are the regular victims of flood and erosions throughout their long history of settling down in the valleys of the Brahmaputra river. They are, under the circumstances,
compelled to live almost an unsettled life without any permanent home land. Till today, the Mising people are trying their best to find a peaceful and permanent land suitable for agricultural cultivation in order to cope with recurring flood.

The Mishing community builds thatched, stilt houses and granaries on stilts, while others build houses with high plinths but build granaries on stilts. People store food and save money for bad times and try to keep themselves informed about flood situation and warnings as preparatory measures, sometimes using their folk beliefs and observational experiences. They take shelter on high platforms close by or on the road or on embankments with their cattle if they are in danger of being displaced and have to move houses or villages. Transportation during floods is usually on rafts made from the wood of the banana tree and they help each other in rescue and evacuation operations. Most of the villagers are skilled swimmers and know how to use boats and rafts. They try various methods of cultivating paddy of different varieties whenever there is a slight respite from floods. Some of them have grown alternative crops and vegetables with consistent efforts but on a subsistence scale. Other villagers have engaged in alternative livelihoods, such as daily-wage labour, fishing, selling dry fish and country liquor (sometimes against cultural taboos), and providing menial labour for government projects, whereas others have migrated to get work. Their adaptive capacities need to be augmented by well-designed interventions aimed at making people more proactive and communities self-sustained so that they are ready to face future hazards (Das, Chutiya & Hazarika, 2009).

2.B.2 Flood in Mishing Folklore and Folk-life

Folklore is the body of expressive culture, including tales, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs and so forth within a particular population
comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The academic and usually ethnographic study of folklore is sometimes called folkloristics.

Folklore is a body of traditional belief, custom, and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and academic means of communication and instruction. Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular, and even ‘literary’, but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole (Benjamin:1938).

In the writing of Kuli “Mising Folklore” (2014) says that folk literature of the Mising can be described under board headings Folk Song and Folk Tale. The Folk Songs can be grouped into (i) Devotional songs (ii) Love songs (iii) Songs of lamentation (iv) Lullaby and Nursery rhymes.

It is striking that very few legends and folk tales regarding flood disaster have been found. Only few legends regarding the Bolia Pani of 1950 have been recited by some of the old members of the families. But, however in the recent years various folk songs reflect the socio economic disaster prevailing in the Mishing society due to flood havoc. Various flood related songs have been sung by different singers. One popular song that became very popular in recent times after 2009 when the Matmora embankment was broken. The following song reveals the situation after breaching of embankment-----
Okkom dola du:boyén okkom tí:la du:boyén
Donam tí:nam kama:la kogo:l du:nép ika:bong
O ru:né amig pagbop iyébong
Oiya matmora majuli Mishing réngamé dungko dakko kama:bong
Matmora majuli Mishing réngamé dungko dakko kama:bong
Pi:ri pe:re ommangé Mising réngama amig pagbopé ingabdu:bongé
Matmorém biyagla lenam a:mém lumapto
Du:té dagténg ukumém a:né raggo ko:paktoné
Migom tani kídi:dé réngam ngasod kangkuma:l
Donam tí:nam kama:la Mishing réngam singabdu:né
So:bo menjég ukumém Mishing réngama a:né assé pu:bomka:né
  So:bo menjég ukumém Mishing réngama a:né assé pu:bomka:né
Gejig geron arígém Mishing réngama sulli potap ipakka:né
Bornoi assé bida:la matmora baliém moyagoula
Pu:mu assé biddag kamon birinapé
Kapé turyén réngama dungko dakko kama:bo
Pumi assé bidla gidak kerkota majuli:pé
Oiya Mishing migomoi dungge:la Mising réngam ngasod kangkuma
  Mising migom dungge:la Mishing réngam ngasod kangkuma
Me:di kutum tekeliputa gudang dangdoraé lamté gi ko kama:la
Paitar ollung ko:la dungé
Migom tani kídi:dé réngam iyém tínggé:la
Kinsu pa:su ma:némpé disperso tedla du:né
Ali géssing kuma:pé sor kar binam murkongém tikadaré dopagdu:né
Ali géssing kuma:pé sor kar binam murkongém pongkog bidi dopagdu:né
Rajniti gílangkul Mishing taniyé pakeminsul singabdu:né
Migom lédul gíminné réngam ager germa:pé motorsai kel dugamdu:né
Matmora kekonté Mishing réngamé rígdu mikkong lusula
Mokeminsul singabdu:né oiya
Oiya ditag ditagoi ara:lo matmorrém géssí:ma:m pu:mi assé biddubyé
Ditag ditag ara:lo matmorrém gési:ma:m pu:mi assé biddubyé
Sémnop réngam du:tímíl matmora majuli asi ara:b lumtidyé
Ileksoné a:yémil réngam luyum lupola
Migom tanip badge:kul okol duksil du:dokun
Réngam ainam aimangko lekod gíka:l kangkuma:né
Réngam ainam aimangko lekod gíka:l kangkuma:né
Réngam ainam aimangko lekod gíka:l kangkuma:né.

**Meaning** - the song begins with background sound depicting the hue and cry noises made by the people, crying for help, crying sound of the animals, sound created by the flood, sound of people trying to help each from emergency flood situation and the fearful movement of the people during the breaching of embankment takes place.

We have no food, shelter due to the lack of food, we have to resort to begging like a beggar for the rest of our lives and some have to work like a servant in other’s homes. Our social life gets affected in every form. Villages, houses, properties and crops field had been destroyed by the flood. So, the song reflects after such severe incident of flood how would the people live in such situation. After the breaching of embankment in Matmora and Majuli in different places inhabited by the Mishings and the Mishing villages have been turned into desert due to sand casting and river bank soil erosion prevailing in their villages have made them homeless them to live a life of poverty. The breaching also eroded our houses, destroyed their paddy fields but in that time of flood disaster no
political representatives of the area have turn up for helping the affected people. The song, revealed that Mishing people have been dying because of starvation. It also describes that the sheds of our domestic animals were washed away by the Brahmaputra flood. The vast standing crops fields of the area were turned into desert. The water continues to flow in the nearby areas and created more and more problems for the people. There were Mishing Minister in Dispur (the Govt. of Assam) but no one have turned back to see the problems of the people so now they are compelled to to live like the refugees of Bangladesh changing their places here and there. Due to washing away of various roads villages the people faces problems in transport and communication. The boats (fighter ferry) were used for rescuing and communication of the people at that time of flood emergency. With lots of things happening in the Mishing areas the VIP’S or the ministers pay deaf ears to the problems of the areas and are being sitting in the Dispur as if nothing has happened. The schemes allotted for the repairment of roads and bridges are after flood occurrence have been misused by the corrupted contractors and ministers. Due to such flood disaster the people have left their cultivation work and jumped into dirty politics for their personal motives. The sudden joining of politics has results in family conflicts within the brothers of same father and created family division. The involvement of the Mishing leaders with the corrupted political representatives has created conflicts with the villagers. The
further reveal that if the repairment of works of the breached embankments will not be done properly by the people then for the remaining years to come the Mishings of such areas have to live under flood for years to years. But during the times of election the representatives’ candidates visit the affected villages and distribute money for casting vote for the corrupted govt. during the election. Even after winning the elected ministers never turn back properly to the people of the area.”