

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE *MISINGS*: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

#### 2.1 Religion:

Religion is defined as the belief in super human controlling power especially god or gods. Clifford Geertz<sup>1</sup> defines religion as collection of belief systems, cultural systems, and world views that establishes symbols that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values.<sup>2</sup> Emile Durkheim<sup>3</sup> explained religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things".<sup>4</sup> James George Frazer<sup>5</sup> is of the opinion that it is almost impossible to have universal definition of religion that can satisfy everyone. Even than Frazer tries to define religion as

“propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life...religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them. Of the two, belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please them...On the other hand, mere practice, divested of all religious belief, is also not religion. Two men may behave in exactly the same way, and yet one of them may be religious and the others not. If one acts from the love or fear of God, he is religious; if the other acts from the love or fear of man, he is moral or immoral according as his behavior comports or conflicts with the general good. Hence belief and practice or, in theological language, faith and works are equally essential to religion, which cannot exist without both of them. But it is not necessary that

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1 Geertz (1926-2006) was an American Anthropologist. He was Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. His works include *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*.

2 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973, p. 112

3 Durkheim (1858-1917) was a French sociologist. He is the author of many texts like *The Division of Labor in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, *Sociology and Philosophy*

4 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, 1964, p.34

5 Frazer (1854-1941) is regarded as one of the founders of modern anthropology. He is the author of *The Golden Bough* which appeared in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915.

religious practice should always take the form of a ritual; that is it need not consist in the offering of sacrifice, the recitation of prayers, and other outward ceremonies. Its aim is to please the deity, and if the deity is one who delights in charity and mercy and purity more than in oblations of blood, the chanting of hymns, and the fumes of incense, his worshippers will best please him, not by prostrating themselves before him, by intoning his praises, and by filling his temples with costly gifts, but by being pure and merciful and charitable towards men, for in so doing they will imitate, so far as human infirmity allows, the perfections of the divine nature.”<sup>6</sup>

In Indian context religion is defined differently by different scholars. In the words of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “Religion as a way of life is the seeking of the eternal. It is more behaviour than belief...It is an experience which affects our entire being, ends our disquiet and anguish, and the sense of aimlessness of our fragile and fugitive existence.”<sup>7</sup> Swami Vivekananda is of the opinion, “Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already within man...It is not just a talk and doctrines or theories, nor visit sectarianism. It is a relationship between soul and God. He explains that religion does not consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship...Religion consists on realization. It does not consist in subscribing to a particular creed or faith but in spiritual realization.”<sup>8</sup> *Dharma* is another form of the word religion in India. It means the law or the life lived in accordance with the law. It also signifies duties and responsibilities of a person. Thus the term ‘*Karmoi Dharma*’ is the most popular and sacred slogan in the Indian context. The word *Dharma* is associated with every religion of Indian origin. For example, Hindu practices *Sanatana-Dharma*, Jain practices *Jain-Dharma* and the Buddhist practices *Buddha-Dharma*.

Many religions may have organized behaviours, clergy, a definition of what constitutes adherence or membership, holy places, and scriptures. “The practice of a religion may also include rituals, sermons, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance,

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6 James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Great Britain, 1993, pp.50-51

7 As quoted by Paitoon Patyaiying in his book *Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Philosophy of Religion*, 2008, pp.29-31

8 Jyotirmayananda, *Vivekananda; His Gospel of Man Making*, Madras, 1988, p. 55

initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service or other aspects of human culture.”<sup>9</sup>

It has been found that different definitions of religion have been forwarded by different scholars. Opinion by foreign scholars refers mainly to belief in supernatural powers in which people believe is beyond human control. Thus different kinds of worship are necessary to appease them. However in the Indian context religion refer to having a spiritual mind and the fact that he/she is religious is determined by his activities i.e. *karma*. Even then religion in India involves lots of sacrifice and penance to appease the almighty. The major religions of India like Hinduism, Jainism, Islam and Buddhism follow definite set of rules which are said to be scripted in their holy books. They have their own particular priest to conduct their rituals in a particular place of worship i.e. temple. Thus in other words these religions are well organized and as such people have to follow these organized set of rules.

On the other hand the same cannot be said of the *Misings*. The *Misings* believe in different spirits which are divided in to benevolent and malevolent. They believe in the supernatural power of these spirits and in order to appease them various rituals are performed. However they do not have any particular place of worship and rituals are performed as per their offerings to different spirits like inside the house, below a granary, in the forests or by the side of a river. Moreover they do not have any particular god-goddesses or their image nor do they have any written text as a guideline to their beliefs and practices. However it is the *Miboo*- traditional priest and his *Ābāngs* (religious hymns) that guide them in their religious affairs. In a way their religious beliefs and practices can be termed as an unorganized one without any definite set of rules.

## **2.2 Traditional:**

The traditional religious belief of the *Misings* falls within the purview of Animism. Animism is the belief that inanimate objects and natural phenomena have souls.<sup>10</sup>

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9 *Oxford Dictionary Mythology*, retrieved 9 September 2012

10 Julia Elliott (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus III*, New York, 2008, p.26

Edward Burnett Tylor defined religion as simply "the belief in spiritual beings"<sup>11</sup> and used the term animism. He referred to two doctrines. "First, concerning souls of individual creatures, capable of continued existence after the death or destruction of the body; second, concerning other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities. Animism in its full development includes the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits, these doctrines practically resulting some kind of active worship." Here we may recall that ethnically the *Misings* of Assam and the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh belong to the same ancestor called *Tāni*.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore natural that the religious beliefs and practices of both *Mising* and the Adis are same except the differences in the name of the rites and rituals. To have a comprehensive idea of the origin of the religious practices and beliefs of the *Misings*, Tai Nyori's observation on Adi religion in his book *HCA* may be noted. He writes that,

"From the rational point of view however, it appears that the origin of the faiths, beliefs and practices of the Adis lies in their constant attempts to adjust themselves with the environments which surrounded them and in which they lived. Because, their place of origin, the routes of migration, and their present land lie in one of the most difficult regions of the world. The high hills, rocky mountains, snowy peaks, rough rivers, deep gorges, dense forests, heavy rains, storms, landslides, earth quakes, wild animals, diseases, epidemics etc are the natural factors which always stood against the normal life of the tribe. They tried to adjust themselves with the nature and wanted to live in peace and free from diseases, suffering and misfortune. However, the natural phenomenon remained mysterious to them. Their curiosity to know who was the creator and controller of the phenomenon of the nature led them to invent a number of explanations in the form of myths which are embodied in the ballads called *Ābāngs* by the

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11 EB Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, I, 1903, p. 424

12 Nahendra Padun, *Mising Janajātir Porichoy* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p.48, and W.W. Hunter, *A statistical Account of Assam*, vol-I, Guwahati, 1998, p.239 and Birendranath Datta (ed.) *Folksongs of the Misings*, Gauhati University, 1992, p. 11 and *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

Pādām-Minyongs and nyibo-āgoms, by the Gālos. Thus, out of such curiosities and explanations the Ādi religion originated.”<sup>13</sup>

Similar reasons can be ascribed to the origin of *Mising* religion as they were the kiths and kins of the Adis and lived in similar environment. As per the *Mising* oral tradition, the creation of the Universe have been described in the *Miboo Ābāngs*.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Universe is consisted of one earth and two other ethereal planets in its constellation; namely, *Régi-Régām*, *Dong-Āmong* and *Ui-Āmong*. The heaven is called ‘*Régi-Régām*’ or the Kingdom of Gods, the earth ‘*Dong Āmong*’ and the purgatory or ‘*Ui Āmong*’ is the abode of spirits. As per the *Mising* belief these three form the celestial constellation of *Kéyum* or the Universe. *Régi-Régām* and *Dong Āmong* remain within the orbit of the solar fraternity whereas *Ui-Āmong* exists outside the host of solar panorama and shrouded with clouds of eternal darkness.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.1 Statistical Account of the Religion of the *Misings* of Assam

The total *Mising* population of Assam as per the Census of 1881 was 37,410 and the Census of 1891 records the number as 25,636. No any detail records were made about the community including its religious life in the early census records. However, the Census of 2001 mentions that “of the total ST population of Assam, 90.7 percent are Hindus and 8.8 percent Christians.” Besides these two main religions, 6,267 persons are Muslims, 5,153 Budhists, and another 3,574 persons have returned pursuing various other faiths and have been categorized under “Other Religions and Persuasions”.<sup>16</sup> The Census of 2001 mentions the following details.

Total Population of Assam: 26,655,528

Total Scheduled Tribes Population of Assam: 3,308,570 (12.4 percent of total  
State population)

Total *Mising* population of Assam: 587,310

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13 Tai Nyori, *History and Culture of the Adis*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 266

14 Nahendra Padun, *Mising Ni:tom (Miboo Ābāng)*, Dhemaji, 2005, p.1. *Miboo* is the traditional priest of the *Misings* that conduct various religious rituals and the *Ābāng* is his religious utterings.

15 Peter Pegu, *In Legend and in History in Āsināng Onām* (Mag.), Mishing Society of Mumbai, 2011, p.11

16 Census of India, 2001, p.5

Percentage of *Mising* Population of Assam: 17.8 percent of the total Scheduled Tribes  
Population

Based on the available data from the Census of 1961, 1991 and 2001 an attempt have been made to make a comparison about the religion of the *Misings* of this period. Accordingly the following tables of the Census of 1961, 1991 and 2001 shows the details regarding the religious life of the *Misings* of Assam. It is shown in terms of figures and percentage as per the census of 1961, 1991 and 2001 respectively

**Table No. 2.1**

Year	1961	1991	2001
Total Population	163453	467790	587310
Hindu	161161	464076	580411
Christian	1234	825	3631
Buddhist	105	14	48
Sikhs	0	32	22
Muslim	0	7	444
Miri Religion*	953	0	0
Jains	0	0	14
Animists	0	0	0
Other Religion and Persuasions	0	2836	2661
Religions not stated	0	0	79

Source : Census of 1961, 1991 and 2001 respectively

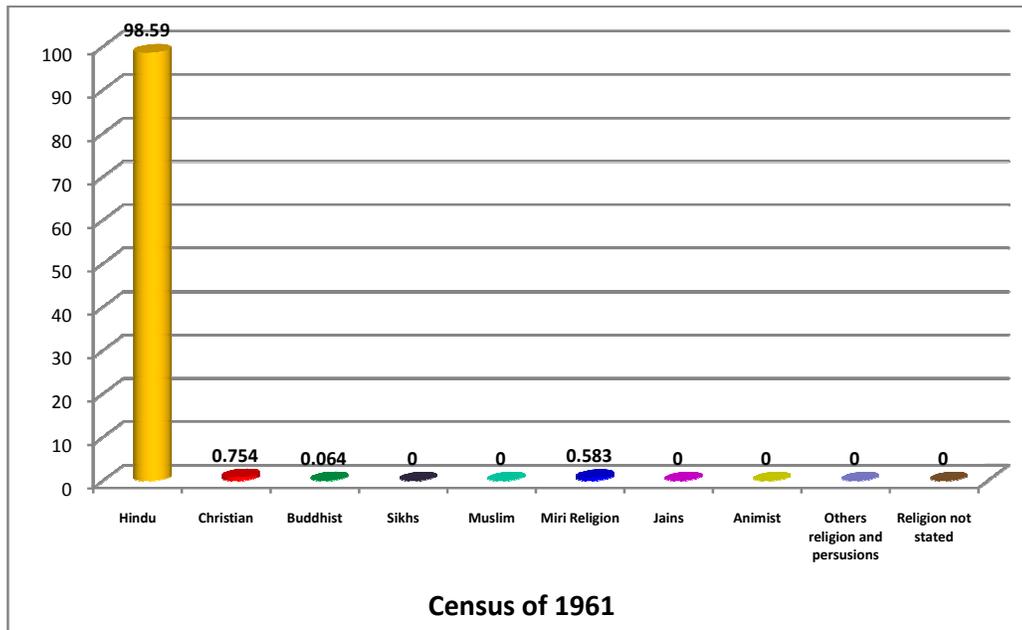
**Table No. 2.2**

Year	Hindu	Christian	Buddhist	Sikhs	Muslim	Miri Religion*	Jains	Animist	Others religion and persuasions	Religion not stated
1961	98.59	0.754	0.064	0	0	0.583	0	0	0	0
1991	99.2	0.176	0.002	0.006	0.001	0	0	0	0.581	0
2001	98.82	0.618	0.008	0.003	0.075	0	0.002	0	0.453	0.01

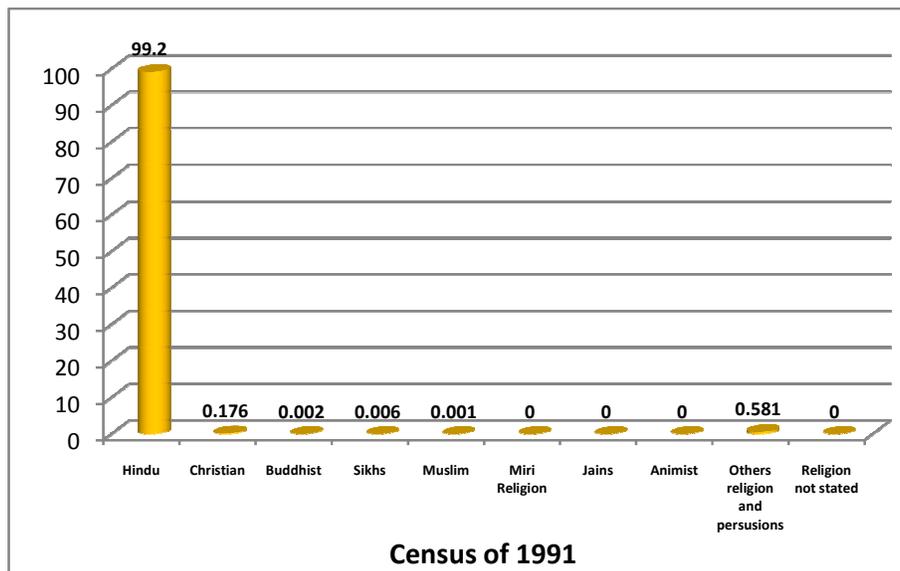
Source : Census of 1961, 1991 and 2001 respectively

\*It is not clear what actually meant for 'Miri Religion'. In all probabilities, it indicated those *Misings* who performed animistic rites and rituals. However, in the other census nowhere 'Miri Religion' is mentioned.

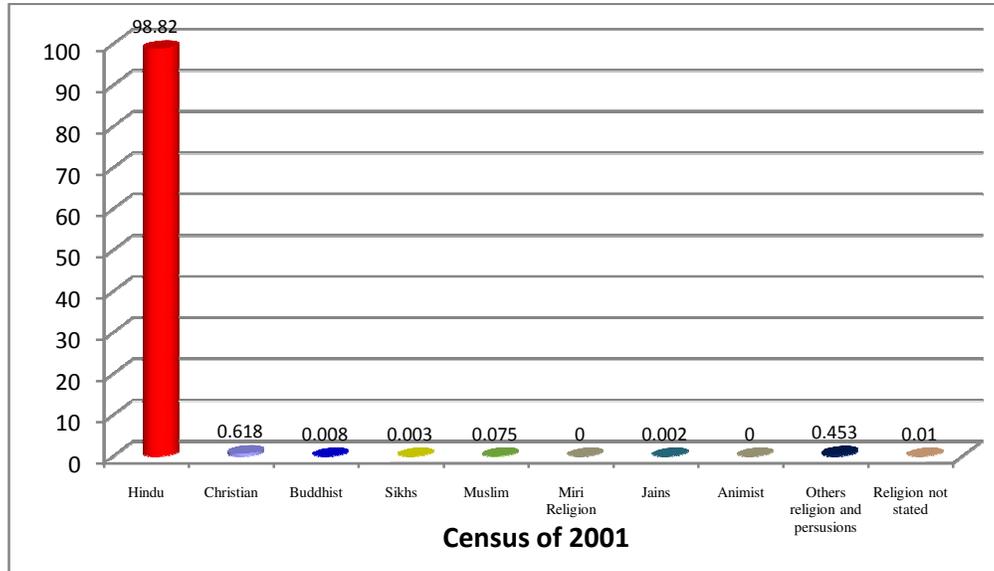
## Population in percentage



**Diagram No. 2.1**  
Source : Census of 1961



**Diagram No. 2.2**  
Source : Census of 1991



**Diagram No. 2.3**  
Source : Census of 2001

### 2.2.2 Se:di-Me:lo:

*Misings* believe that the creator of the universe was *Se:di* and *Me:lo*. They are conceived by the *Misings* as earliest worldly beings representing male and female principles or the ‘*Purusha*’ and ‘*Prakriti*’ respectively.<sup>17</sup> They are said to have evolved from *Kéyum*>*Yumkāng*>*Kā:si*>*Siyān*>*Ānbo*>*Bomug*>*Mukseng*>*Se:di* whose identities are unclear.<sup>18</sup> It is believed that thereafter *Se:di-Me:lo* set off the process of creation from *Diling*>*Litung*>*Tuye*>*Yepe*>*Pedong*. *Pedong* is said to be a female (*āné*) who had given birth to all men and spirits. As a result visibility of the universe started with *Pedong*- which literally means ‘rain’, and the mother of all.

When *Se:di* created the Universe, there was no man, no matter, neither day nor night, neither soil nor water, neither fire nor air but Father *Se:di* the supreme lord has created them all.

*“Mi kāmāngāi Mimāng Kāmāngāi,  
Donyi Kāmāngāi Polo Kāmāngāi,  
Longé kāmāngāi Yummé Kāmāngāi*

17 Nomal Chandra Pegu, *The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Dibrugarh, 1981, (reprint) 2005, p.138

18 Tabu Taid, *The Religious Culture of the Misings in Traditional Customs and Rituals of North-East India*, Seminars in Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture, Guwahati, 2002, p.57

*Āmong Kāmāngāi Achche Kāmāngāi,  
Emme Kāmāngāi Éssāré Kāmāngāi  
Sedi Bābu Bottebi édém Pilentoné”<sup>19</sup>*

The creation theory of the *Misings* is also described in the *Miboo Ābāngs* (religious utterings of the *Miboo* i.e. priest);

*Kéyum kenmāngé yā:yāngkā  
Ke:ro kāmāngé yā:yāngkā  
Kéyum se:din nā:noké  
Me:lo māmbe ā:ji māmbe dunāmé  
Kéyum me:lo Yā:yingkā  
Konnoké gollongé golnāmém  
Sedi dégro orkongé kāngkiyé  
Anékolāng ko:māngko etc<sup>20</sup>*

To a great extent it echoes the Nasadiya Sukta (creation hymns) of Rig Vedic hymns: “There was neither non-existence nor existence. There was neither the realm of air, nor sky beyond it. There was neither death nor immortality. There was no distinguishing sign of day or night. That one breathed by its own impulse. Other than that, there was nothing beyond.”<sup>21</sup> Sonaram Payeng Kataki opined that *Se:di* had predecessor named *Pudolondo* who in turn emerged out of *Tāpāpumāng*.<sup>22</sup> He was the first and only one to use the word ‘*Pudolondo*’ and ‘*Tāpāpumāng*’ meaning something like ‘vast expanse of floating mist’, which still remain unclear.

### **2.2.3 Do:nyi-Po:lo:**

*Misings* believe that *Do:nyi* and *Po:lo* sprang directly from *Se:di-Me:lo*. And they in turn consider themselves to be the progenies or offspring of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*. *Do:nyi-Po:lo* literally meaning “Sun-Moon”, is followed by many of the tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh including the *Āpātāni*, *Ādi*, *Mising*, *Tāgin* and *Nishi*. Followers of the *Do:nyi-Po:lo* tradition believe that all people of Arunachal Pradesh share a

19 N.C. Pegu, *op. cit.*, p.137

20 Brigumoni Kagyung, *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p. 143

21 Ṛg Veda 10.129.1-7

22 Sonaram Panyang Kataki, *Miri Jātir Buranji*, Dibrugarh, 1935, (reprint) 2001, p. 37

common ancestry from *Ābotāni*. The believe in *Do:nyi-Po:lo* has no written scriptures, but has traditionally been passed down orally from each generation to the next. The believe in *Do:nyi-Po:lo* by the *Misings* is based on the notion that it acts as the guardian and protector of the people in this universe. They refer to *Do:nyi* as ‘*Āné Do:nyi*’ meaning mother and *Po:lo* as ‘*Ābo Po:lo*’ meaning father. In the words of V. Elwin, *Do:nyi-Po:lo*: “is the eye of the world; he is as important to man as eye is to the body. It watches everything...Above all he is the lord of truth and an oath taken on his name is most binding of all.”<sup>23</sup>

The *Misings* believe *Do:nyi-Po:lo* as their eternal heavenly beings and even today they take pride in introducing themselves as the descendants of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*. It is strongly believed that no any deeds in this world can be concealed or hidden from the luminous eyes of *Do:nyi-Po:lo* and who so ever tries to do so will surely meet his doom. Because they believe that *Do:nyi-Po:lo* are considered the visible form of the invisible and supreme creator *Se:di-Me:lo*. They utter in every rituals begging pardon from *Do:nyi-Po:lo* for all the misdeeds done intentionally or unintentionally:

“*Do:nyi Ānéno tātlāngkā Po:lo ābuno,*  
*Ngo lumurko ludāg milo,*  
*Siloke sādākne donyino,*  
*Siyumke sādākne polono,*  
*Tākām Kébānge Kābeg Tātbege dope sāngge āngge dāklāngkā*”<sup>24</sup>

**Meaning:** Listen mother sun, listen father moon, if we have committed any mistake than today mother sun when you rise in the morning, father moon when you come out in the evening pardon us for all our mistakes.

#### 2.2.4 *Ābotāni*:

*Ābotāni* is considered as the first man by the *Misings*. The word ‘*Ābo*’ means father and ‘*Tāni*’ means man. *Ābotāni* is considered as the primal ancestor by not only the *Misings* but also by the other *Tāni* group of people viz., *Apātāni*, *Nyishi*, *Ādi*, *Gālo*,

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23 V.Elwin, *Myth of N.E. Frontier of India*, Itanagar, 1958, (reprint) 1993, p. 34

24 N.C. Pegu, *op. cit.*, p. 140

Tāgin. These groups of people believe that it was *Ābotāni* who introduced the technique of rice cultivation.<sup>25</sup>

A legend goes that *Ābotāni* was a man of jungle, a hunter and gatherer and like most of the tribes of the North-East,<sup>26</sup> their worship was outside the Hindu pantheon. The legend goes that when *Ābotāni* married *Yāsi*- daughter of *Do:nyi* there was scarcity of food in the world. Therefore he went out of this world to meet *Do:nyi* but on the way he met *Ko:jé yāngo* or Wealth Spirit and informed her about the sufferings of the world. Then *Ko:jé yāngo* gave him some seed and told him the technique of cultivation and also advised him to visit the paddy only after five days. Accordingly when *Ābotāni* went to the field after five days he found that a bird has eaten all the seeds. He began to weep in distress and having heard of it a spirit came to his assistance and brought out all the seeds from the bird and thus he was able to cultivate again.

*Ābotāni*, is a symbol of struggle of human kind for food and prosperity through difficult situations and of the need for harmony between man and wealth to bring wealth to the family. The tales of *Ābotāni* and belief in *Do:nyi-Po:lo* binds together the *Tāni* groups of people today in various walks of their life since the ancient past.

Although their traditional belief is based on the belief in *Do:nyi-Po:lo* (Sun-Moon) as their eternal heavenly beings on all animistic rites, but they do not worship them as their deities.<sup>27</sup> These powers like *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:lo*, *Runé-Péné* are not worshipped but instead invoked frequently in primitive rituals. It is the lesser supernatural beings viz. Benevolent and Malevolent spirits that are worshipped or propitiated in general. This is because they believe in the supernatural powers of these spirits.

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25 Ganesh Pegu, *The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley and their Oral Literature*, Guwahati, 2010, p.179

26 It is a very popular legend prevalent in the *Mising* society and is locally known as *Leke Do:ying*. Such legends are mentioned by Ganesh Pegu in his book *The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley and their Oral Literature*, Guwahati, 2010, p.179 and Durga Regon, *Miboo, Miro and Miboo Ābāng* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p.367-369

27 Tabu Taid, *Glimpses*, Dhemaji, 2007, p.71

The *Misings* in their belief do not worship any single name. Worship of supernatural beings can be distinguished in to four categories: *Uie or Uyu, Urom Po:sum, Epom-Yāpom and Gu:mín-So:yin*.<sup>28</sup> *Uies* are the powerful invisible spirits like that of thunder, lightning etc. *Urom Po:sum* are the spirit of the dead who meet unnatural death. They are malevolent and can harm a person or a family. *Epom-Yāpoms* are forest spirits living in trees capable of causing harm to their human neighbors. *Gu:mín-So:yin* are guardian spirits of the households and the surrounding, including agricultural fields. All these supernatural beings are commonly referred to by the term *Uie* and therefore any rituals meant to appease them is known as *Uie Inām* or *Uie Mo:nām*.

Different spirits are worshipped in order to prevent them from inflicting evils on a person, family or society as a whole. Nahendra Padun has divided the spirits as Benevolent and Malevolent based on the nature of their role. The Benevolent spirits are *Do:ying Boté*- one who inspired people the path of struggle and hard work, *Yídum* or *Ésār Boté*- Wind spirit, *Déndé So:bo*- Guardian of food grain, *Dā:di Boté*- Saviour. The Malevolent spirits are *Ro:bo* or *Tāro*- invisible and chief evil spirit that inflicts major harm to mankind, *Nomgu Boté*- spirit that can create disease and destroy crops resulting in poverty through his supernatural power, *Lé:mug Boté*- head of storm, thunder and lightning, *Bānji Boté*- one whose power results in violence and bloodshed among the people etc.<sup>29</sup> The Malevolent spirits always look for casting evils while even the Benevolent spirits turns harmful if they are not kept appeased. These spirits may come in the form of air, water, lightning, storm and thunder. “As is, however, common with animistic faiths, these world of their traditional religions are peopled with numerous supernatural beings, some benign and some malevolent, lurking all around, usually in invisible form, in forests, waters, fields, villages, neighborhoods etc. The malevolent ones cause diseases, epidemics, physical disabilities, accidents, unnatural or premature deaths etc when offended for one reason or the other and so they need to be propitiated regularly or as and when the occasion demands, for relief from the present malady or misfortune of an individual, a family or the entire village

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28 Tabu Taid , *The Religious Culture of the Misings in Traditional Customs and Rituals of North-East India (paper)*, Seminars in Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture, Guwahati, p.57

29 Nahendra Padun, *Mising Ni:tom*, Dhemaji, 2005, pp.15-16

community as well as for the prevention of their recurrence. The benign ones, including guardian spirits, spirits of ancestors, gods or goddesses of crops etc too need to be propitiated regularly, for their blessings and guidance are absolutely essential for the prosperity and happiness of the living.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore they perform various rites to satisfy these powers. These rites are performed by the ‘*Miboo*’- traditional priests who would try to know the root of the problem with his gifted power through various means, such as egg breaking, reading omens from the livers and entrails of animals or through communication with supernatural beings.

Another characteristic of their belief is offering prayers to their forefathers. In every ritual they take or remember the name of their forefathers up to ten or more generations. Only after that they follow other procedures. The basis for this prayer is that they believe that it would not have been possible for them to come to this earth without the blessings of their forefathers. It is due to their hard work, struggle they could remain in the present position and therefore offer tribute through their prayers. They believe that the teachings and blessings of their forefathers are more important than anything else. Moreover, forefathers are believed to be as benevolent spirits that guard a family from inflicting evils. However, if necessary rituals are not performed than they are believed to be dissatisfied.

### **2.3 *Miboo* and its *Ābāngs*:**

*Miboo* is the traditional priest of the *Misings* that conduct various religious rituals. The word ‘*Miboo*’ is said to originate from ‘Mi’ meaning man and ‘Ābo’ meaning father or knowledgeable. Therefore *Miboo* means a person that has knowledge or supernatural power. Characteristics for being a *Miboo* is that one must be a male; it is not hereditary and believed that a person destined to be a *Miboo* behave differently right from his young age. It is also believed that if such a man is found than he is taken away from this earth by ‘angels’ and kept invisible for months. There he is said to be trained and gifted with supernatural skills. Than, he return home and after that certain changes like having restrictions in food habits are said to be observed by him.

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30 Tabu Taid, *Glimpses*, 2007, pp.71-72

The *Miboo* occupies a father figure in the *Mising* society. After attaining the quality of a *Miboo*- carrying of a *Yoksā* (sword) and reciting *Ābāng* (religious utterings) are his strengths that help him to know about things unknown to common man. In early days the *Miboo* was the only solution to any disease, disaster inflicting a family, growing misfortune and unrest in a family. Therefore he is also known as the 'medicine man'.<sup>31</sup> *Miboo* would try to detect problems in different ways. Like, a small packet of rice wrapped in *Tālég* (*Alpinia taro*) leaves will be placed in the ceiling of the room in which the *Miboo* is supposed to sleep for the night. This is done without his prior knowledge. It is believed that if the *Miboo* is really bestowed with spiritual power, than he will able to detect and tell the details of the person who has placed the packet. And through this packet itself he would be able to detect the cause of the disease or sufferings of the family.<sup>32</sup> If he finds it difficult to detect by this method than he would go for *Miboo Dāg:nām*.

*Miboo Dāg:nām* is performed at night in the presence of a large gathering and he utters his *Ābāng* to detect the actual cause of suffering of the aggrieved family. While performing *Miboo Ābāng* he would wear only hand woven cloth. The host has to offer to the *Miboo* a cup of *Āpong*, a handful of rice, two eggs, a piece of ginger and a glass of water as these are essential items.<sup>33</sup> Besides *Piro* (wild reed) and cotton with thread are tied outside in such a way that it is connected to the *Tā:sug* (place for preparing *Āpong*). It is called *Miboo Dāg:nām* (stand) because he stands while uttering his *Ābāngs*. *Miboo Dāg:nām* performed mainly to detect those believed to have killed many people through black magic is quite threatening to watch.<sup>34</sup> It is believed that the evils against whom he is going to reveal the secrets of his misdeeds will attack him and if he falls down than he would lose his power. That is why in the process he is generally guarded by 4 girls (*yāmgur*) who catch the *Dumér* (traditional towel) tied in to his waist to prevent him from falling. In the house of one Joigeswar Doley *Miboo Dāg:nām* was performed to find out the roots of their ancestors, whether they had committed any mistakes in the past, quarrel resulted in swearing in the name of

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31 T. Taid, *op. cit.*, p.98

32 N.C. Pegu, *op. cit.*, p. 109

33 Ganesh pegu, *Mising Jana Sāhitya*, Guwahati, 1996, p. 10

34 Interview with an eye witness Dulu Pegu, Age-42 who is also a son of a vaisnavite Bhakat, Village-Borpomua on 16/ 01/2011

God or whether some *Āg:nām* (coins dedicated in the name of temple etc) was not donated in that particular temple. The reason for this *Dāg:nām* was because their was constant sickness and sufferings in their family.<sup>35</sup>

Although different *Miboo* have different methods of conducting their rituals but they start with a common prayer while performing *Miboo Dāg:nām*. It starts as:

*Dongke leninge rumnā,*  
*Dungo lebinge rumne,*  
*Ligu Āne rumne nāmnā,*  
*Pāsum togunge Gumín nomnā*

**Meaning:** Through this it seems to say like ‘Hail mother who has given me these limbs and this body’<sup>36</sup>

*Ābāng* is recited in such a way that it is not understandable to a common man. It is unwritten and passed over through the *Miboos* from generation to generation. “The *Ābāngs* may be compared with the Purans of Sanskrit literature and sagas of the Teutons. They exist in the memory of the special class of *Miris (Miboo)* and even among them only the most experienced and learned remember them correctly and understand and can explain their exact significance.”<sup>37</sup> It can be compared with Vedic hymns of Hinduism. Just as the Hindus believe Vedic hymns as words of God, *Miboo Ābāng* is believed by the *Misings* in a similar way. *Ābāng* which is known only to the *Miboos* is said to contain utterings right from origin of the universe, birth, death, marriage, rituals and festivals. Therefore if any evils are believed to inflict a family or a village as a whole than a *Miboo* is called upon who in turn try to detect the cause by uttering the *Ābāng*.

Different Spirits that the *Miboo* invoke in *Miboo Ābāngs* or religious utterings:

- I. *Do:nyi* – Sun
- II. *Po:lo*- Moon
- III. *Se:di*- Me:lo- Creator of Universe

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35 Interview with Joigeswar Doley, Age-48, Village-Borpomua on 13/01/2011

36 N.C. Pegu, *op cit.*, p. 108

37 Sachin Roy, *Aspects of Pādām-Minyong Culture*, Shillong, 1960, (reprint) 1966, p.46

- IV. *Do:yíng*- Creator
- V. *Gumín*- Race spirit
- VI. *So:yín*- Community spirit
- VII. *Kārsing- Kār:tāng* - Guardian of Cultivator
- VIII. *Kongkin Ko:māng*- Head of Life
- IX. *Āmong Āné*- Mother Earth
- X. *Dā:di Boté*- Saviour
- XI. *Gāmro*- Keeper
- XII. *Ki:no Nā:no*- Head of Lower world
- XIII. *Tu:sin Ro:dong*- Forest Spirit
- XIV. *Bi:ri: Boté*- Spirit of flood and erosion
- XV. *Di:bā Jimutāyā*- Hill Spirit
- XVI. *Do:píng Pédok*- Frog spirit
- XVII. *Bisi: Yādā*- Weapon Spirit
- XVIII. *Yídum or Ésar Boté*- Wind spirit
- XIX. *Pédong Nā:no*- Rain spirit
- XX. *Po:long So:bo*- Spirit of Destruction
- XXI. *Déndé So:bo*- Guardian of food grain
- XXII. *Sino Mo:bo and Urom Po:sum*- Ancestors
- XXIII. *Boki: Bogo*- Spiritual knowledge
- XXIV. *Sibki Na:né*- Knowledge Spirit
- XXV. *Niyā Poro*- Human Spirit
- XXVI. *Ko:jé yāngo*- Wealth Spirit

Out of these the first seven are mentioned in almost every ritual while the others are invoked based on the nature of the *Dāg:nām*. Since they believe that every natural force around them has supernatural powers therefore they believe them to be as spirits, both malevolent and benevolent. Therefore they perform various rituals to appease the malevolent spirits. Sometimes even the benevolent spirit turn malevolent if necessary rituals are not performed.

Regarding creation of this universe the *Miboo* utters its own *Ābāng* as;

*Umlāyé rumnā*  
*Donké lebingé rumnā*

*Déngo lébingé rumné nomé*

*Gorbu: bérné rumnā*

*Gorpo: yorné rumnā*

*Ligu a:né rumnā*

*Po:sum togungé gumíné nomé*

*Énā méloké jeié jeaddok*

*Pédong anéke odo:démé*

*Do:jing anéké do:jikko, jigbio nāmdémé*

*Nokké ā:ji tā:bé kā:língé*

*Íngkāng yené*

*Po:sum togunge gu:mína*

*Ié:ni tā:bé gu:mínā*

*Nolu se:dike so:yegeme*

*Yektum mā:pé-ka*

*Kéru: nā:né binpu:nā:né*

*Lé:ni do:jigémé jigbio lānkā*

*Tabé mānggomé*

*Léni mānggomé*

*Sedike bomongé*

*Umsāng dosimé*

*Se:dí ā:bāngko*

*Íngkāng yekuāi*

**Meaning:**

O originator of the mystery of creation, O originator of history, we salute you. You have taken the whole responsibility of giving birth on your shoulders and in your womb and you are like the mother of all families- We salute you. This young *Miri* (priest) with inspiration from you is trying to sing what Mother History has bestowed

while Mother Pedong undertook the creation, and the things created flourished. *Miris* like *Po-sun-Togung* and *Lengni-Tā:bo*, do not block the path for the singing of songs to Se:di. Mothers Keru: and Binpu: you guide the skilful *Miris*. Even in the absence of skilful *Miris* like *Tā:be* and *Lāni*, we have been trying to sing the songs of Se:di as long as the sun shines.

Different *Ābāngs* uttered in different rituals are mentioned in books like *Mising Ni:tom* by Nahendra Padun, Birendranath Datta (edited), *Folksongs of the Misings*, *The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley and their Oral Literature* by Ganesh Pegu, Jawahar Jyoti Kuli, *Folk Literature of the Misings* and *Miboo* by Indreswar Pegu. Utterings that the *Miboo* made in times of different rituals may be mentioned as follows;

*Ābāng* uttered in time of *Tālég Uie* (sky spirit);

“*Po:lo tādlāngkā, Do:nyi tādlāngkā, kārsing kārtāng tādlāngkā, muglīng yāri no:lu tādlāngkā, pēdong ésāré tādlāngkā, kā:lāngkā. Tākāmém lené iyyém gād:lā bidungku, érāsok tā:ni-tā:orém, so:bo menjégém kinām-rām:nām āmo:māpé ésār bi:bi:lā dumolāngkā Silokolokké āppéngom pupo jārpomolāngkā. Ngolu kanénām āger gerdāg:gom, silo kolokké mánél duyokā.*”

**Meaning:** Through this it begs moon, sun, God of cultivator, God of lightning and thunder and all other spirits to listen to their prayer for pardon of any misdeeds done knowingly or unknowingly. They beg that this worship through blood sacrifice is to appease them so that they do not have any grudge against them for their sin. They also wish for prosperity, peace and happiness which are not possible unless they pardon them.

*Ābāng* uttered by *Miboo* in times of *Do:bur* ritual;

*Okko duné nolug:ké ājengém bilente*  
*Silokolokké tolo-bolo gédāg:gom*  
*Ookosiné géník gekorsumabong*  
*Silo ngolu Ādi tolokko gélā*  
*Tālég ajéngém lā:dung ku:bong*  
*Ménā:pé ména:pé ājéngém bite:kuikā*

*Aaoi:...*  
*Írroi Írroi....*

**Meaning:** In this utterings the *Miboo* speak on behalf of the supernatural powers and inform the people that they have come all the way from heaven to remove their miseries. Therefore they ask the people to give whatever they have (requirements as advised by the *Miboo*) to appease them. They in turn assure them that they will not face any danger, nor will any evil curse upon them.

*Ābāng* uttered during *Ko:son Do:bur* performed prior to hunting in the jungles;

*So nolum le:ne ei:g bigelā simén sirāg mātālā gépé idungké*  
*Yumrā:lo ātér ātér gédāggom néné-pāné uie- utpongé géridāggom*  
*Nolu āie kāngkānpé motum pātum bilāngkā*  
*Sumyo-situm, utpongém réksuboyokā*  
*So ukum sokko āie kānkānpé kāp gélenkāji ādémépé géyāmolāngkukā*

**Meaning:** Today through offering of blood sacrifice we are going out for hunting. While in our lonely mission in the jungle protect us from evil spirits, do not allow us to face wild and dangerous beasts. Allow us to return home healthy and successful just like the way we have departed.

During celebration of *Āli Ā:ye Lí:gāng Miboo* utter the following *Ābāng*;

*Si:dé Aamniyém líggod dungké,*  
*noi néngān ngānkāmpé ngānmolāngkā*  
*nébir birkāmpé bérmolāngkā, āpir lokko pirnik imolāngkā*  
*āso lokké sonic imolāngkā, tāpum-tā:re āmomāpé piro jārkāmpé jārmolāngkā*

**Meaning:** Today is the beginning of our sowing of seeds. Allow the seeds to grow prosperously, of one rice allow it to produce ten rice, keep it free from insects.

In *Mising* society when a person is seriously ill or when fear enters his mind for different reasons it is believed that ‘*yālo*’ has departed from him. Literally ‘*yā:lo*’

means shadow but here it means soul. So they call upon the *Miboo* for recalling the soul which is known as 'yālo lāngā:nām'. *Miboo* utters in the following way;

*Sido āksinnā so amukāngké (victims name) okolāi rāmmo kimo dumélo*  
*Okokosin méngko momāpé no lomnā géladtoku,*  
*So-léné rokpo-rokné bigelā tākāmé gérik oríksulā gogdungku,*  
*No ménāpé géladtokukā, ā:né bāngok ko:dāggom Ādi bāngok bārdāggom lom:nā*  
*gélādtokukā,*  
*Sekāi okolāi kepsug-kepruglā médāggom, Tā:to-Yā:yo, Gumín-Soyin nolu māgāblā*  
*lomnā mélégtekuikā*  
*Silokolog'ké ājon āron ledélo āmukāmé (victim's name) yírlā luposulā do:mān témān*  
*motekuikā,*  
*No lomnā gédokunā gékumā:ne*  
*Élé gédoku, Élé gédoku*

**Meaning:** After invoking the names of different spirits, ancestors- the *Miboo* mention the name of the victim and then communicate directly with the lost soul. He says that wherever you are, whatever may be your grudges keep aside all such bad feelings and come back immediately. Today we are offering a pair of red cock-hen and waiting for your return. Come back even if you have crossed five rivers and five hills.<sup>38</sup> He asks the ancestors to bring back even if some crooked mind is trying to hide it. Come back so that the victim can enjoy and live happily. Are you coming? Are you coming?- there it is coming, there it is coming...

*Urom To:sāg* is a ritual dedicated to their ancestors through which they promise to make sacrifice of pig and in return ask them to protect the family from evils. They believe that sometimes the ancestors feel hungry which they try to show it through various means. Like, if someone in the family is suffering from stomach ache then they believe it is due to hunger of their ancestors and consult with a *Miboo* and act as recommended by him. However, the concerned family may not be able to perform the ritual immediately due to economic problem. In that case they promise to make sacrifices very soon and request the ancestors to keep them safe for the time being.

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38 In the *Mising* society five is an auspicious number because as per their beliefs there are 5 layers from earth to heaven and 5 layers from earth to hell.

This is also called *Porog* (chicken) *Āg:nām*, *Eg* (pig) *Āg:nām* based on the animals they would dedicate.

In case of *Urom To:sāg* the *Miboo* utter the following *Ābāngs*; O spirit, today we promise that we will offer ritual for you. Pardon us for any mistake done knowingly or unknowingly. We will offer you one big pig. Give us success in every field. Give us guidance and keep us free from any evil.

The *Miboo* also utter different *Ābāngs* in different rituals like *Tāleng Uie*, *Āríg Do:bur*, *Burté Do:bur* and *Urom To:sāg*. It is seen that in all these rituals the *Miboo* recites the name of different spirits, ancestors and than speak as if he is communicating directly with the concerned spirits. Than he informs the concerned spirit about offerings by the family, and than tell him not to have any grudges, to pardon the victim for wrong doings etc

The traditional beliefs and practices of the *Misings* consisted of a number of rites and rituals practised either on certain occasions, wishing the well being and prosperity or to remove certain evil spirits that have inflicted a person family or village as a whole. These rites and rituals of the *Misings* are mentioned below-

#### **2.4 *Yālo Lā:ngānām*:**

*Yā:lo* literally means shadow. However here it means one's invisible life preserving spirit, who keeps company in his or her lifetime and whose separation from the body means one's death.<sup>39</sup> It so happens that *yālo* might have strayed away from a person because of a shock or illness and in order to recall back *yālo lā:ngānām* (calling back the life preserving spirit) is performed. Presided by the *Miboo* who perform all the animistic rites that require the use of *Āpong* and meat. It is comparatively less expensive as only the concerned persons are allowed to attend.

#### **2.5 *Bā:mudnām*:**

It is done for different reasons like if a person is ill for a long time, if he is not good in field of academics or other activities etc It is done on the prediction of a *Miboo* that

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39 T. Taid, *Glimpses*, 2007, p.98-99

some spirits are dissatisfied or are in hunger and as a result it is inflicting sickness or various other diseases upon the family. In such cases the *Miboo* detect the spirit responsible for the problem. *Bā:mudnām* is also performed sometimes few days prior to *yālo lā:ngānām*. In such cases a pig or a chicken is dedicated to a particular spirit. It is done by removing a small part of the hair of a pig or feather of a chicken and burns it in the fire thereby dedicating it in the name of a particular spirit. And the concerned pig or chicken is sacrificed on the day of the ritual. At the time of *Bā:mudnām* the *Miboo* mention the name of concerned spirit and inform that a particular animal is dedicated in its name and thereby ask it to take away all the evils that is being inflicted upon the family.

*Se:di Me:lo, Do:nyi -Po:lo, Yumrāng uie no tāt:tekā, silo nok āminno sé eg ādorko  
bāmuddung, empil menāpé sé erāsok kinām rāmnāmmem āimotekukā.*

**Meaning:** Today this family is dedicating one big pig in your name to appease you all, therefore remove all the evils that you have inflicted upon this family.

**2.6 Āg:nām:** *Āg:nām* is very similar to *Bā:mudnām*. However in this case it is done so by tying a red thread round the neck of a chicken or a pig. Difference between *Bā:mudnām* and *Āg:nām* is that while in the former only animals are dedicated but in case of the latter it can be animal or a coin or even an iron rod (*Yumrāng uie*). However other procedures remain the same.

### **2.7 Pégā Ménnām:**

It is a rare ritual performed when unusual incidents occur in the *Mising* society. *Pégā Ménnām* means chasing away of evil spirits. As has already been mentioned elsewhere they believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits and therefore *Pégā Ménnām* takes place when they believe that malevolent spirits are harming them.

For instance when a woman dies at the time of pregnancy or a child at the time of birth, if someone commits suicide or if a person succumbed injury leading to death due to some accident than it is believed that evil spirits have inflicted the society.<sup>40</sup>

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40 Kesab Pait, *Péga Ménnam* (article) in a seminar titled 'Mising Rituals and Celebrations' organized by ICARD, Jorhat, 2006

They also fear that there can be every chance that such spirits will again attack the relatives of the victim or the villagers. Therefore after burying the deceased, the villagers assemble with drum, cymbal, plate, tin or any object that produces sound with an aim to drive away the evil spirit. During this process husband or close relatives of the deceased is chased on the belief that the evil spirit take shelter in his body. He is required to wear as little cloth as possible. Therefore while chasing, the concerned person ran from the village and have to take shelter either in a nearby pond, river or a forest. While chasing, every villager who hears the sound also participates by shouting, beating drums, cymbals etc They chase by invoking the names *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Melo*, forefathers that the spirit who have caused sudden death is being chased away so that it cannot inflict another evil.

Finally, the person who was the target of chase jump in to the water or the forest. After changing the dress he returns to the village along with the villagers.

### **2.8 Tāleng Uie (sky spirit):**

*Tāleng Uie* is another ritual of the *Misings* to appease the heavenly spirits. The word 'Tāleng' means up or heavenly while 'Uie' means spirit or ritual. Heavenly objects like air, cyclone, storm, cloud, thunder, lightning etc are believed to have supernatural power which can destroy the universe as per their own will. Therefore these upside-spirits so-called deities were kept appeased by paying occasional sacrifices or offerings through *Tāleng uie*. It is also the most expensive ritual of the *Mising* community.

For this ritual, a symbolic house is made in which three small models of *Mising* houses made of materials like bamboo, reeds and of banana plant are erected. This ritual is not open for all since it is a restricted one. Requirements of this ritual are- a young black female pig, 10-12 chickens of various colours, rice, *purāng* (boiled rice), *āmín* (grinded rice powder), *Āpong* and wild leafy vegetables like *Ombe*, *Tākuk*, *Tājig*, *Rikom*, *Tākpiāng*, *Tāyyo*, *Bāngko* and *Dermi* leaf. The black pig- symbol of fertility, is sacrificed first in favor of *Āmong āné* (mother earth). Then chickens are sacrificed, one each to all deities. On every occasion the blood of sacrificed animal is sprayed around the place of worship. The *Miboo* after preparation of all these items,

small portions of every item are placed under that symbolic house as offering to the deity. Then through a prayer procession led by a *Miboo* with his *Miboo Ābāngs* it is placed under a corner of a tree for consumption by other creatures like birds, animals etc. as they believe it to be representative of spirits.<sup>41</sup>

**2.9 *Kum:sung Uie* (granary spirit):** *Kum:sung* means granary and accordingly it is performed below the *granary* (traditional granary is raised from the ground). The objective of this ritual is to enable the granary to fill with crops in every harvesting season. In Majuli *Tāleng uie* and *Kumsung uie* are both synonymous.<sup>42</sup> Presided over by a *Miboo* its essentials are same as that of *Tāleng uie*.

**2.10 *Yumrāng Uie* (forest spirit):**

'*Yumrāng*' means forests. This is another rituals of the *Misings* in which offerings are made to the forest spirits to appease them. The *Misings* are known for their riverside settlement and in early days their places of inhabitants were full of forests infested with various deadly animals thereby threatening their safety. Therefore, to avoid any ill casting of forest spirits *Yumrāng Uie* was performed. It is performed under a tree and all the items are cooked there itself and it is not to be brought back home. Days before ritual, *Āg:nām* is performed in which an 'iron rod' is dedicated in the name of forest spirit. *Āg:nām* is especially performed when a person while entering the forest got either attacked or threatened by wild beasts. It is performed by the *Miboo* and only the family members along with the affected person are allowed to attend.

**2.11: *Āsi Uie* (water spirit):**

*Āsi* means water. Since spirits can be present everywhere therefore the *Misings* believe that the dissatisfied spirits may cast evil even on water. Their lifestyle is to a great extent depended on water for fishing, crossing river for cultivation etc, therefore it is very important for them so that water spirits remain pleased with them. Accordingly, *Āsi uie* is performed. *Āsi Uie*, however, is not seen to be performed in

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41 Interview with Padma Pegu, *Bhakat*, Age-61, Village-Borpathar on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2011 and Kanak Doley, Age-70, Vaisnavite *Bhakat*, Place- Jengraimukh, Majuli on 09/03/2010

42 Interview with a *Bhakat* named Bholeswar Doley, Age- 60, Village- Koyom Chapori, and the one who conducted the said ritual on 20/02/2012

Majuli since it is similar to *Péjāb Uie*.<sup>43</sup>

### **2.12 *Péjāb Uie* (duck spirit):**

*Péjāb uie* is another traditional ritual of the *Misings*. The word *Péjāb* means duck and the ritual is so-called since duck is sacrificed for the purpose. This ritual was traditionally performed by a *Miboo*. Main purpose of performing this ritual is when there is sickness in the family of the type of pain in leg, hand or when one cannot walk due to certain pains etc. Instead of house it is performed on a riverside. This ritual is a strictly restricted one and is attended only by the sick person and family members. Items used for ritual are duck, pepper, *pipoli* (*Piper longum* Linn), oil etc

### **2.13 *Do:bur*:**

*Do:bur* is the ritual to *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Kārsing-Kār:tāng* and *Rugji-Merāng* for their well being and prosperity. It was practised by the *Misings* since long back. It is of various types but only *Do:lung Do:bur*, *Burté Do:bur* and *Āríg Dobur* are commonly practised and thus needs special mention. *Do:bur* was performed when they believed that something evil was committed and therefore it might lead to disastrous consequences. It was performed either individually or collectively based on the nature of evils that were believed to have been inflicted upon.

**2.13.1 *Dolung do:bur*** : This *do:bur* is performed by the village as a whole usually once in a year in the month of *Iyong* (May). Women and bhakatiya people are strictly restricted from participation. Pregnant women and women having menstruation period are kept out of the village so as to prevent impurity of the ritual. The villagers are not allowed to go out of the village and if someone is to travel out for emergency reason than they must stay out of the village on the previous day itself. This is done because of the belief that luck or fortune of the village will go away along with that person. During this puja, *Ni:pir pirtum*- erection of bamboo with chicken legs or pig ear and its nails on the four boundary side of the village thereby indicating 'no entry' for outsiders. This is done as they believe that entry of outsiders during the time of the ritual spoil the serenity and purity of *Do:bur*. Therefore severe punishment is inflicted

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43 Interview with Sosimola Pegu, Age-59, Ward Member of Borpomua Gaon Panchayat, vill-Borpomua Gaon on 20/01/2012

if one commits the mistake intentionally. In case any outsiders enter the village than he/she is confined within it for the whole day. While in case of emergency they are allowed to return keeping behind valuable items. However, it is refunded after the end of the rituals. Of course if one commits the mistake out of ignorance than light punishment is issued.

On the day of the rituals, a group of villagers with stick and wooden rods visit every house to drive away evil spirits and search for *Ājéng*. *Ājéng* means offerings in the form of money or items given by each and every family of the village. It includes rice, chicken, *Āpong*, chilly, salt, pepper etc. This group beat around the wall of the house wishing that all sickness, evils of the family should end from that very day and after that family member offers the *Ājéng*.<sup>44</sup>

With the collected *Ājéng* the rituals is performed on one side of the village preferably on the riverside. On that day, swine is sacrificed. It should be a black female pig and along with that chicken is also sacrificed. One specialty of *Do:bur* is that no offering is made without bloodshed. The blood must touch the mother earth and thus exposed to *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Kārsíng-Kār:tāng* and *Rugji Merāng*.<sup>45</sup>

One interesting aspects of this puja is that a particular type of symbol is made to perform the rituals. Two idols indicating ‘dragon swallowing an egg’ are prepared from a kind of fern *Ruktāk* and *Tābeng* (wild grass with cutting edge) decorated with split bamboo, and placed in the alter facing the rising sun.<sup>46</sup> This symbol reminds one of snake worship of the present society.<sup>47</sup> But some try to opine it as a symbol of *Se:di-Me:lo*. However even that is doubtful and so the general belief is that the two idols represents ‘earth’ as an eternal source of productivity, while the egg represent ‘life’ itself with potential power of manifestation.<sup>48</sup> The villagers gather and seek the blessings of *Se:di-Me:lo*, *Do:nyi-Po:lo* and *Kārsíng-Kār:tāng* and offer prayers so

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44 Nahendra Padun, *Dobur Pujā* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p. 415

45 Budheswar Doley, *The Mising the Sons of Nature*, Dhemaji, 1997, p.81

46 N.C. Pegu, *op. cit.*, p. 144

47 Khogeswar Pegu, *Ahomor Jāti Gothonot Mising Janaghosti Āru Nadiporiyā Mising Samāj*, Dhemaji, 2003, p.39

48 N.C. Pegu, *op. cit.*, p.145

that in the coming years their paddies are well protected and the villagers are well kept and protected from evils. After the end of the rituals all participants walk from one end of the village to the other to ward off evils or malevolent gods.

**2.13.2 *Āríg Dobur or Mo:pun Dobur*:** It is one of the most important rituals of the community since they depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Failure of rain, occurrence of flood or destruction by insects would decide the faith of their future. All these catastrophic events were attributed to the will of the wicked spirits.<sup>49</sup> Therefore it is performed wishing good harvests. This ritual is performed in a paddy field in the month of *Kāti* (October-November) when the rice is about to form. It is also known as *Mo:pun Do:bur* [*āmo* (earth) + *āppun* (flower)]. It is performed by the owner with the support of one or two associates. Here chicken sacrifice is done thereby seeking blessings of *Ko:jé-yāngo* (Goddess of wealth), *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Gumín-So:yin* for prosperity of their paddy field and protect them from insecticides etc.

**2.13.3 *Burté Do:bur*:** It can be compared with the *Rikkwan* celebration of the Ahom rulers (Suhungmung, Suklenmung).<sup>50</sup> This *Do:bur* is performed to remove the evil spirit that might affect the concerned person or a family due to sins committed in times of war or family fight involving bloodshed. It is also performed when there is a sudden disaster inflicting a family like accident, house destroyed by fire, someone killed by lightning.<sup>51</sup>

*Burté* means big. It is generally performed by a single family but if other family gets involved accidentally then combined performance takes place. In ancient times *Miboo* was necessary but with the extinction of *Miboo* this came to be presided over by elderly people at a latter stage. Main objective of this *Do:bur* is to maintain social order, peace, civic sense and to remove evils caused by bloodshed.

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49 Basanta Ram Yein, *Traditional Family Ritual and Practices among the Mising: Dobur Pujā* in ICARD Seminar, Jorhat, 2006.

50 Basanta Ram Yein, *op. cit.*, 2006

51 Indreswar Pegu, *Mising Dharma Biswās Āru Paramporā* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed), *op cit.* p.339

## 2.14 Child Birth or *Aa:o Onam*:

*Mising* women have to follow strict social customs till the time of child birth. As per their belief, smooth birth and future of the child depend on the way the pregnant lady obeys these social customs. And if these customs are not followed then she might face complications at the time of birth and even the lady and her child might die. Therefore, both the pregnant lady and her husband try to ensure that they follow these customs.

*Mising* believe that a mistake committed by a girl in her early life has to face the punishment after marriage especially at child birth. If a woman develops complicity or if she takes longer time than is expected than the experienced women who are beside her ask if she has committed any mistakes (social evils). If she has committed mistakes like ill treating her husband or in-laws then in such cases she has to pour water in the concerned person's feet and drink that water.<sup>52</sup> During pregnancy, a woman should forbid herself from walking over a rope or a thread, forbid entering in to forest or cross the river. The concerned couple should avoid sacrifice of animals or if they have killed snake or lizard then it is believed that the future child's tongue will be abnormal. They also need to forbid stealing of ginger (playfully or seriously) as it is feared that the new child will have unnatural finger (six in one hand). They also avoid eating of unnaturally joint fruits as it will lead to the birth of a twin.

Availability of expert women in the village is the reason for not consulting doctors or not admitting in to hospital for child birth. After hearing the news of birth village people rush to see the new born child and bring along with them *Āpong*, chicken, *Mar:sāng* (*Polygonum plebejum R. Br.*) etc as gift. They bring these items so that the new mother can revive her energy by having a *Jaal*. *Jaal* is a curry that consists of colocasia leaf with sheath, black piper, sour and meat of hen without any oil and chilly. Immediately after birth a warm cloth is placed on the abdomen of the mother so as to relieve the pain while on the other hand the newborn baby is bathed.<sup>53</sup> Then a small *Mérām* (fire place) is arranged in the room of the new born mother and baby so as to warm them. Then the mother is offered *Jaal* and after sometime she is offered rice and *Āpong*. A bamboo is used to cut the umbilical cord of the baby and the

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52 Sadananda Payeng, *Mising Janajāti Samāj Āru Sanskriti*, Guwahati, 2011, p.48

53 Indreswar Pegu, *Mising Samāj Āru Sanskriti*, Guwahati, 2003, p.50

placenta is buried within the campus in a place covered by tree shadows. The father has to dig the mud for such burial and is done in such way so that no animals can access it.

The child is brought out of the house to receive sunlight after 3 to 5 days. On that day the father cuts the hair of the child in presence of elderly people of the village. Restrictions followed by a family after the birth of a child continue for one month. During this period the parents of the new born child can neither participate in social activity, nor cross the river or go for hunting nor visit other's house as guest etc.<sup>54</sup> However, these restrictions are lifted exactly after one month. This is known as *Po:lo kārke* (new month). On this day near relatives and the women that assisted the mother during the period of pregnancy are invited and a small feast is arranged. Then the parents bow down and seek their blessing for the well being and bright future of the new born child. Only after this process the new mother have a normal life and can also walk up to the *Résing* (eastern corner of the house).<sup>55</sup>

## **2.15 Customs relating to funeral ceremony:**

The *Mising* never cremate but intern the dead body. We have not come across a written document as to why *Mising* prefer intern to pyre. Probably the availability of land might have encouraged them to prefer burial.<sup>56</sup> Burial procedures can be divided in to two different types based on the nature of deaths: (a) Natural death caused by old-age and illness (b) Prematured death caused due to accident or sudden death without signs of illness.

### **2.15.1 Natural death caused by old age and illness:**

When a person dies than the villagers are informed by beating a drum called *le:nong* on the roof of the house. On hearing the sound itself the people come to know that

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54 Tarun chandra Pamegam, *Misingor Jonmo Āru Mrityu Husi* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p.425

55 Interior part of a *Mising* house is divided in to sections- *résing* and *kok:tog*. *Résing* is the place where only the elderly male members of the family can sit and is considered auspicious. Guest is also entertained in the *résing*. While *kok:tog* is the place for washing utensils, preparing *Āpong* etc and is the place where women and child sits or have their food. The *résing* and *kok:tog* is partitioned by the *mérām* (fire place) in between.

56 Interview with Gajendra Pegu, Age-64, Retd School teacher and former member of Mising Bane Kébāng (Mising Cultural Organization) for 6 years, village-Borpomua on 12/01/2012

someone is dead as it is quite different from the sound used in times of dance and merry making. The villagers having heard the sound of *le:nong* suspend the day's work and throng to pay last homage to the departed soul. As part of their belief they throw away any cooked food left in the kitchen at the time of death or it can be used for preparation of *Āpong*. All the villagers assemble in the bereaved family's house and help in performing the last rituals. If any children of the dead person reside in a distant place than efforts are made to wait for them so that they could see the body for the last time.

With the help of the villagers, the corpse is washed and dressed. However everything is done in a reversed way. Dress is put on the deceased front side back. *Mekhelā* or *dhoti* is tied around the waist not in a normal way but in the reverse order. Five layers of clothing are placed upon and underneath of the dead body with a white cloth, it is wrapped in *émpoo*- the bed sheet made out of bamboo.<sup>57</sup>

The dead body is brought from inside the house on a stretcher which is ordinarily six feet to seven feet long and is made of two bamboos horizontally placed and on this, two feet to two and half feet long, five feet to six feet bamboo piles be tied with rope. Then the body is let out of the house in a procession towards the *āgo* (grave) of the *āgo go:lung* (cemetery). A mustard oil lamp must accompany in such a procession. In every *Mising* village a plot of land is kept on the outskirts of the village. The said preserved plot of land is known as *āgo go:lung*.

At the time of burial some of the villagers are engaged in digging of the grave while others attend the dead body. As part of their customs, before digging the grave the plot to be used is formally purchased from Mother Earth by paying a nominal amount in the name of the deceased family. The grave is dug as per the size and bulk of the deceased but the depth should be from five to six feet. This measure is necessary to prevent noxious smell and spread of diseases caused by the decayed body afterwards.

Before putting the dead body in to the grave the *golong* is placed. *Golong* means wooden or bamboo pieces cut to the size of the width grave. They are placed before putting the *émpoo* wrapped dead body in the *rungkāng* (coffin). *Rungkāng* means a

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57 Bibushan Pegu, *Mising Simāyunām* (Article) in a seminar on 'Mising Rituals and Celebrations', I-CARD, Jorhat, 2006

spacious wooden box for containing the dead body well. It is generally used for adult and persons of reverence. The *golong* is first placed by family members of the dead praying for eternal rest of the soul followed by other people. Before laying for final rest, people circumambulate (left turn) the grave for five times by carrying the *émpoo* wrapped body and then is placed in the *rungkung*. Then the person engaged in burial task pay their last homage and than fill the grave with soil. Prior to this a handful of soil is first thrown by family members of the deceased with left hand. At that moment people say out loudly, “*démke pāke māng...*” meaning, “we have not killed you, go to your place without looking back.”<sup>58</sup> After completion of burial the area is fenced with bamboo. On the same day the family members invites all persons for light refreshment with *Āpong* in recognition of the services rendered by them for the bereaved family.

Thereafter the villagers leave for their respective homes. However before entering their houses they take ceremonial five dips in to nearby river. For those who take bath in ring well or tube well he has to pour five buckets of water on his head to purify and then he will proceed homeward in his wet clothes. On the threshold of his house he has to heat himself before the fire kept burning for the purpose. Fire is used to drive away the spirit which they believe might come from the burial place. Further he/she is purified by spreading water mixed with mustard seed upon the body as they believe it to be the best treat against evil spirit. The instrument used for the purpose of burial such as spade, axes, knife, *dāo* etc are kept under water for a week with a view to purify it.

**2.15.2 Prematured death caused due to accident or sudden death without signs of illness:** The burial ceremony for such types of death is totally different from the above one. Bathing, dressing, making of coffin etc is prohibited. There is no any rule regarding digging of the grave nor do they purchase the land from Mother Earth. As this type of death is quite tragic therefore rules are performed in a simple manner. But they plant certain types of vegetables near the grave like *kosu* (*Colocasia*) and *lāu* (water gourd) thereby wishing such type of dead never happen again. *Kosu* is known

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58 Tarun Chandra Pamegam, *Misingor Janmo Āru Mrityu Husi* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, P. 425

for irritation it causes if rub on to the body while *lāu* get rotten very easily. Therefore these are planted with the hope that a person does not have such temporary life.<sup>59</sup> However after returning from the grave the procedures that follow are same as that of other type of deaths.

After the procedures for burial is over different rituals are performed so that the death soul rest in peace:

**2.15.3 *To:lensunām* or *Ro:lensunām*:** Performed after three days and is similar to *tiloni* performed by that of the Hindus. This ritual is attended only by elderly and close relatives of the deceased. Its objective is to lift the restriction that was observed by the family as well as those who closely participated in the burial ceremony. It is a simple ceremony in which the *Miboo* through his *Ābāngs* pray for the deceased to rest in peace and sacred water is thrown on the family members and others that were present at the time of burial.<sup>60</sup> Only after this ritual close relatives of the deceased can go for marketing, work in the field, travel long distance etc.

**2.15.4 *Urom Āpin* or *Urom Uie*:** *Urom Āpin* is a ritual performed for the dead soul. This ritual is performed 15 to 30 days after the dead of a person. However, duration may be extended for a time being under unavoidable circumstances depending upon the economic condition of a family. On this day people bow down and pray in group or individually in front of a *Miboo* or an elderly person. The attendants pray for the deceased to rest in peace and also that the rest of family should be well looked after by him/ her from heavenly abode. This ritual is performed only by close relatives. It is followed by the more bigger one i.e. *Dod:gāng*.

**2.15.5 *Dod:gāng*:** *Dod:gāng* is performed for the dead soul of a person thereby wishing the soul to rest in peace. The *Mising*s believe that the soul does not leave this world immediately after the dead of a person. It wanders around the habitat of the family in thirst and hunger that he was accustomed to during his lifetime. The family concerned therefore offer food and drink within a few days through *Urom Āpin*. But even than the *Urom* (departed soul) is believed to wander in this world till the

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59 Prabhat Mili, *Simāng Yunām* (Article) in a seminar on 'Mising Rituals and Celebrations', ICARD, Jorhat, 2006

60 P.C. Yein, *Mritok Hokolor Hokām-Nikām: Mising prothā* (Article) in a seminar on 'Mising Rituals and Celebrations', organized ICARD, Jorhat, 2006

performance of the last religious function called *Dod:gāng*. It is the last rite of a dead soul and performed generally after one year. However, duration may be extended under unavoidable circumstances depending upon the economic condition of a family. In the previous night of the ritual, *Po:bor Dāgnām* is held in the early morning thereby inaugurating through prayer the *Po:bor*- bamboo cage for preparing *Āpong* (rice beer). On the day of the *Dod:gāng*, all relatives of the dead soul including his/her daughter, son-in-law and their relatives are invited back in to the village to pay their last tribute in memory of the dead soul. All villagers participate actively in organizing the event. This rite last for a day and it starts by offering tribute to *Donyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:di*, ancestors thereby wishing the wellbeing of the dead soul. All attendants also offer their last tribute to the dead soul.

After that, when the food, drink and meat preparation is ready than a portion of the food items are taken to the graveyard or any place outside home of the dead person and offer in his/her name. If it is eaten by a bird or any animal than it is believed that the soul came in the form of bird or animal to take the offerings.<sup>61</sup> It is followed by feast where pork and *Āpong* are common items. In the later part of the day, the people enjoy and dance to the tune of *Oi:Nitom* (songs for dear ones) and thereby bidding happy farewell to the dead soul. The day also turns out to be a sort of get-together for the married daughters and son-in-law, as they return to the village after a long gap.

The next day, a family feast is arranged particularly for the women of the family that were married out to other families along with their relatives. It also starts with a ritual performed by the *Miboo*. However, in recent years lots of changes have occurred after their settlements in the plains of Assam which will be discussed elaborately at a later stage.

## **2.16 Traditional Festivals**

### **2.16.1 *Āli Ā:ye Līgāng***

*Āli Ā:ye Līgāng* is the national festival of the *Misings*. The word '*Āli*' stands for seeds, '*Āyé*' for fruits and '*Līgāng*' for sowing. Therefore *Āli Ā:ye Līgāng* stands for 'sowing of seeds'. Earlier there was no any specific date for the celebration of this

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61 Durgeswar Doley, *Dod:gāng* (article) in a seminar titled '*Mising* Rituals and Celebrations' organized by ICARD, Jorhat, 2006

festival.<sup>62</sup> Since 1957 it is celebrated in the first Wednesday of *Phālgun* (February) in the spring season.<sup>63</sup> On this auspicious occasion, head of the family go to their respective paddy field and observe *Líggod* (first sowing) early in the morning. The head of the family is accompanied by his wife to the paddy field. Before going in to the field they make all the necessary arrangements, take proper bath and the wife should not have menstruation period. If she has menstruation than she do not take part and watch the proceedings from a distance. This is done so because it is believed that it will bring impurity to the whole process and thus will make the Mother Earth dissatisfied. *Líggod* is performed in a small area of about 10/8 feet in length and breadth in the eastern side of the paddy. Than it is symbolically fenced with *On: no* (thread) along with wild reed like *Ikorā* (*Erianthus ravennae Beauv*), *Nípir* and *Ginmur* (cotton) as a symbol guarding the crops from wild animals, insects etc. This is a festival where they make special offering to Mother Earth so that it increase the fertility of soil, prevent insects, wild animals and natural disaster from causing harm to the production of crops. They also seek the blessings of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:lo* and their forefathers for successful accumulation of crops.

At the time of *Líggod* they utter in the following way:

*Írroi Runé Pénen Rutei:kā*  
*Do:nyi -Po:lon Kātei:kā, Kārsing Kārtāng, Se:di-Me:lo,*  
*Do:mug Dongkāng (Muglíng Yari), Rugji Merāng, Siné Mébo, Ta:to Yā:yo*  
*No:lu Āppéngé Kātei:kā*  
*Ginmur Po:losok Āpo:né Lígāng Longéso Āli Ā:yém Líggod:dung*  
*Aa:m Aa:mniyém Pidgod:dung*  
*Sé Aa:mniyém néyi négān ngānkāmpé ngānsā:la*  
*So médésem gesi geyom motei:kā*  
*RénGāmém do:po tépomolā pu:po jārpo motei:kā*  
*Odok:késin do:pā té:pāmāné ko:goné Tāniyém bisulā mo:teikā*  
*Írroi hei Írroi hei Írroi hei*<sup>64</sup>

62 N.C. Pegu, *op.cit.*, p. 80

63 It was unanimously decided to celebrate *Āli Ā:ye Lígāng* on the first Wednesday of February in a public meeting held at Mediya-Tongani of Paik Mouza in Dibrugarh on 6th November, 1955 with Nomal Pegu in the chair. It was endorsed by then “All Assam Miching Kristi Kébang” held at Akajan Patiri on 30th December, 1956 with Karko Chandra Doley, M.L.A in the chair. Thereafter, the then Chief Minister of Assam declared a general holiday within undivided Lakhimpur with effect from February 1957.

64 Interview with Gajendra Pegu, Age-64, Retd School teacher and former member of Mising Bane Kébang (Mising Cultural Organization) for 6 years on 12/01/2012

**Meaning:** They invoke the name of creators and ancestors and ask them to keep a watch on them as in the first Wednesday of February (*Ginmur-Po:lo*) they are sowing their first seeds. Allow these seeds to beautify the whole village and germinate in to beautiful crops, allow the villagers to be self sufficient and enable us to feed the poor and the needy and so on.

Various preparations are arranged by the families to make the day delightful. Items like *Purāng Āpin* (*purāng- Alpinia taro* a kind of leaf is used for boiling rice), *Āpong*, pork and fish curry are some of the delicious items cooked for the occasion. At the beginning they offer in the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo* and their forefathers to seek their blessings for a successful harvesting season. After returning home they place *Āpong* and a small portion of *Purāng* in the four corner of *Mérām* (fire place) as a dedication to God and their forefathers. For offerings to their ancestors they make special arrangement in which they clean a small area on the backyard of their house. They raise a small part of the area with mud and there they offer *Diyā*-earthen lamp based on the number of ancestors that is known to them.<sup>65</sup> They also visit the graveyard of their ancestors to make such offerings. They offer them with *Po:ro Āpong*, *Purāng* and *Kor* (curry) and pray for their blessings. This offering is made so as to remove their thirst and hunger and appease them.

The villagers, then, visit each others house to have *Āpong and Purāng*. The whole village looks to be in a festive mood as people of all age, sex and social position are engaged in merry making. Than the people actively take part in community dance called *Gum:rāg So:mān* or *Pāk:so Mo:mān* (traditional group dance). This dance is performed to please *Ko:jé yāngo*- Wealth Spirit, who is the care taker of their green treasury, and displeasure may bring pests and pestilence, drought or flood resulting in a poor harvest.<sup>66</sup> The movement of hands and feet symbolizes the movement of paddy leaves at different stages of its growth, reaping of crops and carrying it homewards etc. While the natural process of day after night, spring after winter is depicted by moving in a circle. Their dance also reflects their traditional practice of hunting,

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65 Durga Regon, *Āli Ā:ye Līgāng: its Characteristics* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Alekhya*, 1989, p.122

66 N. C. Pegu, *op cit.*, pp. 82-83

fishing, use of bows and arrows, boat rowing etc.<sup>67</sup> Then it is followed by dance performed in every household of the village and it last till early hours of the next day. However, some may extend the period of dance to another day.

On the second they perform a sort of cultural procession in which all sections of youth participate in their traditional dress. They visit every house of the village and perform *Gum:rāg Somān* briefly and leave the house with a blessings for the well being of the respective family. On the third day they perform *Do:pan-Tépān* in which the villagers have a common feast. On the fourth day they perform *Yotnām* (restriction). During this day they restrain themselves from some works viz. cutting trees, digging mud, fishing or other field works. Items like egg, oily meat, cooked fish, fruits, *sompā* or *ou tengā* (*Dillenia indica Linn*) are not taken for the day in an expectation of high production of crops. On the fifth day the villagers go for hunting in to the forest. They may be successful or unsuccessful in hunting down wild animals but it is believed that if they are successful than Mother Earth is satisfied. Then in the evening they perform *Līgā-Líglen* and invoke *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:lo* and their forefathers and inform them that the *Yotnām* is being lifted and to pardon them of any mistakes if they have committed during this period knowingly or unknowingly.

After performing *Līgā-Líglen*, the *Misings* starts their cultivation in full swing.

**2.16.2 Po:rāg:** *Po:rāg* is a post-harvest festival celebrated every two, three, four or even five years now a days. It is celebrated either after a summer harvest in the month of August-September or after a winter harvest in the month of December-January. Celebrated after harvesting of crops to offer thanksgiving to *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Kojé-yāngo* and *Kārsing-Kār:tāng* for their blessings in the successful accumulation of crops and also to freshen their long toil in the field. “It has a special significance for the *Mising* people as it marks the ending of harvesting season and they forget their difference and meet each other and is received with flesh and *Āpong*...The festival

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67 Interview with Gajendra Pegu, Age-64, Retd School teacher and former member of Mising Bāne Kébāng (Mising Cultural Organization) for 6 years on 12/01/2012 and Prabhat Mili, Age-51, Former General Secretary of Mising Āgom Kébāng, Vill.- Phulani Karkichuk on 15/ 01/ 10

serves as a great tonic for the *Mising* people; it clears away the rust of the soul. Man also finds in this festival an outlet for his melancholy instincts. The rural folk are seen to surpass their counterparts in urban areas in merrymaking and dancing which go on for several days.”<sup>68</sup> It can also be regarded as a village ritual in which the villagers as a whole assemble together and pray for the well being of its people, domesticated animals and also seek pardon for the mistakes done by villagers in the past years.<sup>69</sup> Since is a post harvesting festival therefore it is also popularly known in Assamese society as *Norā-Chigā Bihu*.<sup>70</sup>

Certain officials are appointed for smooth celebration of the festival. This practice has been going on traditionally since long and therefore it has become a part and parcel of *po:rāg* celebration. It is not known whether they had titles of officials in their own traditional language or whether the system of appointing officials itself has emerged only after being influenced by the *Āhoms*. Like, *Migom Borā*, *Bor Puāri*, *Dekā Borā*, *Tiri Borā*, *Duliā Borā*, *Borāni*, *Pātgiri* are the title given to different people based on their duties and responsibilities to be discharged in the celebration.<sup>71</sup> ‘Migom’ means King. If any crime is committed by a person or a group in times of celebration of *Po:rāg* than he is empowered to deal with it and his decision is obligatory to all. *Bor Puāri* is next to the *Migom Borā* in position. To govern the youth (*Yā:me*) one ‘*Dekā Borā*’ and to govern the young woman (*Mímbír*) ‘*Tiri Borā*’ is appointed. ‘*Dhuliyā Borā*’ is appointed to manage the drums, cymbals etc and ‘*Bārik*’ is the informer.<sup>72</sup> Other officials like *Borāni*, *Pātgiri* are also assigned with respective duties. After appointing various officials they together fix the date for celebration and also discuss the list of invitations to be sent to the *Minom* (guests) and *Mímbír-Yā:me* of different villages.

Institution like *Mírong Ukum*, *Mímbír Yā:me* are inevitable for the celebration of *Po:rāg*. After the announcement of the possible date the whole villagers are in a

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- 68 Nandeswar Pamegam, *Porāg* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, PP. 117-118  
69 Bilash Pegu *Porāg Festival* in a Seminar on *Mising* Rituals and Celebrations organized by ICARD, Jorhat, 2006  
70 Tarun Chandra Pamegam, *Porāg* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, P. 109  
71 Tarun Chandra Pamegam, *Porāg* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p.110  
72 *Ibid.*, P. 110

festive mood engaged in discussion, preparation of work relating to it. *Mímbír Yā:me* are actively involved in *Po:rāg* related work. Young men are engaged in decoration of *Mírong Ukum*, collection of fire woods and other necessities. Young women are engaged in husking paddy, preparing *Āpong* etc. *Dāglíg* is also a part and parcel of *Po:rāg* celebration. It is a type of community work in which especially young men and women- at least one from each house, go for work like cultivation, reaping, clearing jungles, construction of new house etc. On normal occasions they won't take any thing in return but when the whole village is geared for *Po:rāg* celebration than the host offer something in return. This may be in the form of money; paddy, other valuables and such type of earning are deposited for the grand festival.

The celebration lasts for three days and starts on a Wednesday which is considered by them as an auspicious day. The night starts with '*Miboo Sumnām*' by the *Miboo* joined by *Mímbír Yā:me* and other leaders in charge of celebration. The *Miboo* utters his *Ābāng* as;

(i)  
*“Pemuklo Penkolo Relle, Relle,  
 Nebire Birkolo Relle, Relle  
 Nebire Binedem Relle, Relle,  
 Birmine Kākuje Relle, Relle,  
 (ii)  
 Dermi Situnge, Tirmeko Tirmānggāi,  
 Kombong Āppone Riyipko Reyābā,  
 (iii)  
 Dādā Bonelo, Bonengā Dādilo  
 (iv)  
 Remio Remiāa, Remikāki Remiyā  
 (v)  
 Pekāmāi Kāmdāngāi Kolopi Kolopi  
 Kāmdāngāi Litungāi Kolopi Kolopi, etc”<sup>73</sup>*

**Meaning:** It is a prayer ritual that includes comparison of different seasons of the year with that of the fruits and the nature of life that changes along with the change of season.

In the early hours of the morning (Wednesday) *Po:bor Dāg:nām* takes place. *Po:bor* is a round bamboo cage about 6 feet in length and 4 feet in diameter with an intake

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73. N.C.Pegu, *The Misings of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Dibrugarh, 1981, (reprint) 2005, p.86

capacity of around 100 packets of *Po:ro Āpong*.<sup>74</sup> *Po:bor Dāg:nām* is the occasion in which the first drop of water is poured in to the *Po:bor* amidst chanting of prayers that invoke the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Kārsing-Kār:tāng*, *Gumín-Soyin*, beating of drums and attendants dancing round the *Mírong* for five times. The water for this purpose has to be fetched by girls not having attained puberty. This is done so because a girl of this age is considered to be totally pure and purity is of utmost importance for such rituals to be successful. The process of pouring the water in to the *Po:bor* is accomplished by ‘*Migom Borā*’ and ‘*Bor Puwari*’. This collective prayer at the time of *Po:bor Dāg:nām* is known as ‘*Rébatla Penam*’ akin to ‘*Sabdo Brahma*’ in Sanskrit.<sup>75</sup> As the first drop of *Āpong* comes out from the *Po:bor*, swine is sacrificed for the purpose. Female swine is the first to be sacrificed and for the purpose a small part of the skin just below forehead is cut out round and a sharpened bamboo is pierced through it.<sup>76</sup> When the blood of the swine is scattered than the participants chant the name of *Do:nyi- Po:lo*, *Kārsing-Kār:tāng*, *Gumín-So:yin* and other spirits for their blessings. This process is also known as *Petom Pekinām* (blessings for welfare and prosperity). The *Mising*s believe that the hunger and thirst of both the benevolent as well as malevolent spirit can be satisfied only by such offerings. Such type of sacrifice will appease them and they in turn will bless the village in successful accumulation of crops, well being of the villagers and also seek for more such blessings in the future. After sacrificing two-three swine in similar process the others are sacrificed in a simple way.

On the first day known as *Isā: longé* (inaugural day) except making arrangement for the celebration no any feast is organized. On this day *Gumrāg* (dance) party give a ceremonial welcome to *Migom Borā* from his house to the venue of celebration. Thereafter they offer ceremonial reception to *Minoms* of different villages. As part of the tradition *Minoms* of 4-5 villages are invited by the host and accordingly the *Minoms* led by their respective *Deka Borā* and *Tiri Borā* participate in it.<sup>77</sup> *Miboo* is received well in advance to conduct rituals and a *Mímbír Yā:me* of a neighboring

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74 *Ibid.*, p.85

75 *Ibid.*, p.86

76 Khogen Pegu, *Po:rāg or Norā Chigā Festival* in a seminar on *Mising* Rituals and Celebrations organized by ICARD Seminar, 2006

77 Indreswar pegu, *Mírong and Po:rāg* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, p.104

village is invited as *Minom* (Guest). Besides all married daughters of the village along with their husbands are invited back and offered special treatment.

The second day is dedicated as *Jiori Longé* (day for married daughter). On this day the villagers offer special treatment to the daughters, which are married to other villages, their husbands and children. This is also the day where all the invited *Minoms* (guests) are treated. The third day is for the village women. On this day the women are rested from their tiring works and instead offered special treatment as a thanksgiving for all the services rendered by them in lifetime. However in certain villages it is held for 5 days and in such cases the schedule changes as per their convenience.<sup>78</sup>

Apart from thanksgiving to the almighty and their forefathers, the main purpose of its celebration is enjoyment among the people after season of hard labour. The ceremonial re-union of the women married off to other places, with the people of the village makes *Po:rāg* a grand festival of reunion, which represents a kind of human and social value.<sup>79</sup> It also seems to reflect the value of hospitality prevalent among the *Mising*s.

### **2.17 Marriage System:**

The *Mising* have their own traditional marriage systems. They are very strict in regards to their clans (*Opín*) and boy and girl of the same clan cannot marry even 'if sun rises in the west'. People of same title cannot marry each other as they are thought to be originated from the same *Gumín-So:yín* (forefathers).<sup>80</sup> For example- A *Pegu* boy cannot marry a *Pegu* girl or a *Doley* boy cannot marry a *Doley* girl but a *Pegu* boy can marry a *Doley* girl and vice versa. Moreover marriage between clans belonging to one *Gumín* but bearing different title is restricted. Like, *Pegu* and *Pātir* are different titles but since they belong to one *Gumín* therefore marriage is not allowed between them. *Gumín* is comparable to *Gotra* of Brahmins which prohibits

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78 Nandeswar Pamegam, *Po:rāg* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed.) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, P.115

79 T. Taid, *Glimpses*, 2007, p.108

80 Nahendra Padun, *Mising Marriage System* in Brigumoni Kagyung (ed) *Mising Sanskritir Ālekhyā*, Guwahati, 1989, P. 274

marriage between identical *Gotras*.<sup>81</sup> Therefore their marriage is limited only to marriageable clan. This system is strictly followed even today and nobody is allowed to question or violate it. However there are instances of love affair between same title but they are severely punished and dissociated from the society and even parents de-recognize them as their children.<sup>82</sup>

Different types of marriage system are prevalent in their society-

- (a) *Dā:ro Midāng*
- (b) *Duglā Lā:nām (Marriage by elopement)*
- (c) *Kumnā Solā Lā:nām*

**2.17.1 *Dā:ro Midāng:*** *Midāng* is an expensive affair and it is planned by parents and relatives. Consent of both the boys and girls are obtained now a days. A messenger is sent to the girl's house with *Ākun* (gift that include *Āpong* and packet of bettlenut and leaves) to inform them that the sender is interested in having their daughter as daughter-in-law. In a small gathering the *Ākun* is opened by the maternal uncle of the girl. If they agree to the proposal than the news is conveyed and if they do not agree to the proposal then no reply is necessary. The boy's family on receiving a favourable reply proceeds with the formal negotiation called *Yāmné-Tātnām*. It is a process in which elders of the boy's family visits the girl's house to seek her from her parents as the daughter-in-law. If this process is successful than the boy along with some of his friends visits the girl's place and stay for a night or so to develop mutual understanding. In the past the boy was required to stay for months and spread over two-three years and assist the girl in her day to day work especially in the paddy field. This tradition is called *Māgbo-Dugnām*.<sup>83</sup> This system allows the to-be couple to understand each other in a better way.

After the completion of this procedure a day is fixed for the marriage. On the day of the wedding the bridegroom is ceremonially bathed and traditionally dressed up. The water for the bridegroom's bathing is brought from the river by young girls who have not attained puberty accompanied by men and women amidst singing and dancing to

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81 N. C. Pegu, *op cit.*, p. 147

82 Interview with Napul Doley, Age-44, Village-Lakhimi Gaon on 11/01.2010 and Monjul Doley, Age- 42, Village- Daktok on 17/01.2010

83 N. C. Pegu, *op cit.*, p. 90

the tune of drums and cymbals. The water from the river is purchased by offering a coin and betel-nut and on returning when they reach the entrance of the house than they are welcomed by another party amidst singing and dancing. The place for bathing is arranged inside the corner of a house and the bridegroom and his two *yāmgurs* (assistance) that include a boy and a girl are bathed by mother, sisters and relatives of the bridegroom. During this process of bathing the bridegroom is touched or water is poured at least once especially by his close relatives. Similar procedures follow in the house of the bride for her ceremonial bathing. Then the bridegroom along with his two *yāmgurs* and the parents of the bridegroom bow down to take the blessings of *Miboo* who in turn invoke the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:lo* and forefathers for safe journey to the bride's house as well as for a smooth and happy marriage. After that the bridegroom along with his *yāmgurs* are brought down from the *Tālénng Ukum* (traditional house) amidst cheers and beating of drums, cymbals etc.

Selected persons are dispatched to convey the bride's family about the approximate time of their arrival. The bridegroom along with his party heads for the bride's home. As a part of the custom the bridegroom's party is not accompanied by his parents and his immediate uncle. Instead he is accompanied by brother-in-law or such other relatives. The bridegroom along with his companions is well received and put to rest on the outskirts of the village. There would be singing and dancing the whole night. During the night the bride and the bridegroom are allowed to dine on a common *Aarém* (dish). They are also allowed to drink *Āpong* from the same glass alternately. During this whole function widows are scrupulously excluded due to belief that they might bring ill fortune.<sup>84</sup>

Finally nuptial knot take place and the couple bow down and seek blessings before an assembly of elderly persons for a happy married life. Guests are entertained at the bride's house with various traditionally cooked food preferably pork along with *Āpong*. Almost all the young boys and girls of the village attend the wedding and volunteer to help in various works and energetically join in merry making.

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84 Interview with Rebati Pegu, Age-40, village- Jengrai Gaon on 15/ 08/ 2012 and Kumud Payeng, Age-61, village-Molual Miri Gaon on 18/8/2012.

The bride is taken to the bridegroom's house amidst celebration. She is also followed by one or two of her friends so that she does not feel isolated on reaching the new home. Then she is received by the mother and immediate aunt of the bridegroom by offering a warm hug. On the entrance of the house two pots are placed with one having water and flower leaves and the other pot having full of rice and a coconut is placed above it. Then on entering the bride is showered with water and rice on its head by the mother and aunt of the bridegroom. Immediately after that the new bride is allowed to work so as to see her working skill.<sup>85</sup> Then on the next reception takes place in the bridegroom's family in which huge numbers of people gather to bless the new couple. Immediately after the reception the new couple returns to the bride's home and stay for the night. After a couple of days a ceremony called '*Yage sullat*' takes place in which the elderly relatives of the bridegroom go to the bride's home and have a small feast. This system helps to develop mutual understanding with the elderly members of both the bride and bridegroom.

### **2.17.2 *Duglā Lā:nām*:**

Marriage by elopement or *Duglā Lā:nām* is another very important form of marriage. It can be compared to Ghandarva Vivaha of the Hindus.<sup>86</sup> This form of marriage arises out of love between a boy and a girl and when their relation is disapproved by either the parents or both of their parents. In such situations both the lover with the help of their friends fix a particular date and elope from their village. They take temporary shelter in one of the boy's relatives and than message are sent to their parents about the incident. If the boy's side has no objection to the marriage, than a messenger is immediately sent to the girl's family informing them that their daughter is safe on their side. This system is known as *Yāmné duktād*. Thereafter arrangement is made to welcome the couple in a low key ceremony.

The process to welcome the new couple is called *Yāmné-Lā:sāng*. It is a way of informing as well as giving a small feast to the villagers and also to seek their blessings. On this day the newly wed couple is properly dressed up and after

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85 Interview with Leseri Pegu, Age- 55, Village- Borpomua Gaon and Jermai Pegu, Age- 51, Village- Borpomua on 22/ 03/2012

86 There are eight types of Brahmanical marriage viz. Brahma, Daiva, Āryā, Prajāpātya, Asurā, Ghandarvā, Rakshasā and Paisāchā vide Manu Samhitā, 21 slokas by Kiran Sarma, *Assam Veda*, Guwahati, 1998, P. 64. Of all these types, Ghandarva Vivāh means the secret marriage.

performing the necessary rituals welcome the guest on the entrance of the house. Guests who attend the wedding bring with them different gifts as per their own capacities. Thereafter the day is followed by merry making, singing, dancing etc among the well wishers.

Than a group of elderly persons are deputed to negotiate formally with the bride's parents so that *Orāi binām* could be performed. *Orāi binām* is a ceremony held on the bride's home where the villagers are informed about their marriage and also the newly wed couple seeking their blessings in a low ceremony. *Orāi binām* do not take place and get delayed for many years if the bride's family is adamant about not acknowledging the new couple.

This form of marriage is a less burden on the family economically. Therefore such marriage is especially helpful to the economically weaker sections. As a result sometimes elopement among couple takes place, especially among weaker families, even with the consent of both the bride and bride groom's parents so that their marriage is less expensive.

### **2.17.3 *Kumnā Solā Lā:nām:***

In this type of marriage the boy and the girl are wedded in a brief ceremony attended by close relatives only. This can also be regarded as a marriage by informal negotiations that take place within a short notice. This takes place either because of inability to bear the expense of a *Midāng* or when both the bride and the bridegroom have passed marriageable age.

There are also instance of a marriage in which the bridegroom may take the consent of the bride's parents and forcefully take the girl away. In some cases a girl is forcibly carried away even without the consent of her parents. Though this type of marriage create uproar in the society but with the passage of time even the society along with the parents pardon the offender and accept such type of marriage.

### **2.18 Traditional House and the procedures for its construction:**

'*Tālēng Ukum*' or '*Chāng Ghar*' i.e. house with a raised platform is the traditional house of the community. A *Mising* village usually consists of around 50 houses on the riverside. It is generally 5 feet above the ground supported by rows of wooden posts.

Their dwellings are built on piles, and are sometimes as much as forty yards in length, and consists twenty to thirty inmates.<sup>87</sup> The house is rectangular in shape and its length varying from 50 to 150 ft in length and 15 to 20 feet in width.<sup>88</sup> Though the house is long but there is no any partition in between. There are several fire places called *Mérām*. Windows are rare though not completely unknown and there are two doors- one in the front and other in the back. The front side of the house have a spacious verandah called *Tungéng* and the back also have a small one called *Yāp:kur*. Inside the house there are two parts called *Résíng* and *Kok:tog*. *Résíng* is situated on the eastern side where the male members sit while the *Kok:tog* is on the western side especially for women from where they cook food in the *Mérām*, prepare *Āpong* and distribute it among the family members. Women and children are prohibited from sitting in the *Résíng*. A *Mising* house should have 5 layers in the upper part and 5 layers in the lower part. On the upper part right from bottom they are known as: *motaruwā*, *chotem*, *nipir*, *tārte* and *chelāp* and on the floor side downwards: *piso*, *porpiyām*, *bener*, *chotem* and *jo:pong*. *Chelāp* is the thatched roof while *jo:pong* is the main horizontal platform made either of wood or bamboo. The ladder (*Ko:bāng*) used for climbing up the house is made of wood with either 5 or 7 steps and a bamboo rod (*lāgjím*) to support. Some villages of Majuli consist of over 150 houses. Borpomua village of Majuli is the largest of all *Mising* villages of Assam.

The *Mising* people offer utmost respect to *mérām* and consider it as divine. Therefore in every occasion or festivals the *Mising* women wash the *mérām*, pour a little *Āpong* in to it as a tribute and offer prayer. They believe that is the *mérām* that provide the family strength, and enable them live happily and with self-satisfaction. Right above the *mérām* there are two small ceiling-like made of bamboo called *pérāp* and *rāpté*. *Pérāp* is about 4-5 feet above *mérām* and is used as oven or hearth for drying fish and meat, or for drying fire wood and paddy during rainy days. *Rāpté* is about 2 feet above *pérāp* and is meant for preserving *Āpong* and sundried items.

The *Misings* follow various methods to select a site for construction of a house. In the four corners of the selected site four small holes are dug and a small packet of rice about 5 to 10 in numbers are laid in the holes and filled firmly with soil. Next

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87 B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteer-Lakhimpur District*, 1905, p.119

88 N.C. Pegu, *op cit.* p. 61

morning they carefully examine the rice. They believe that if there is separation of rice it predicts separation of a joint family, loss of rice predicts death of a person in the near future, if any ant entered the packet or if the rice has broken than it is believed that their will be trouble in the family due to quarrel or conspiracy. If any of these problems were found than they would either change the whole site or bring a slight change in the location. Than they follow the same procedure. This whole process of site selection is known as *Āmo Yukāng*.

After completion of construction of the house, a day is fixed for *Ukum Gisāng* (entry to the new house). Prior to the entry of family members, *Aa:m gempāk* (rice in bamboo container) is placed in the house. This is followed by *Ā:si Giri* (pot water) and *Ngo:sāk Ongō* (flesh fish). This is done with the hope that the new house brings them sufficient wealth (rice); enable them to live a life with peace and prosperity.<sup>89</sup> Thereafter the eldest pair of the family enters the house. Different arrangements are made for the purpose and a *Miboo* is invited to conduct the rituals. The family members than seek the blessings of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Se:di-Me:lo*, *Kārsing-Kār:tāng* and *Rugji-Merāng* to keep them safe, secure, peaceful and with prosperity. A feast is arranged in which the relatives and neighbours are invited.

### **2.19 Traditional food habits of the Misings:**

Cultivation is the chief means of livelihood of the *Misings*. They grow paddy, mustard, pulses, and potatoes and live on leafy vegetables, edible roots and fish which constitute their staple food.<sup>90</sup> Rice is the main food of the people and is cultivated twice a year. They cultivate different types of crops- *Bāo*, *Āhu* and *Sāli*.<sup>91</sup> The traditional food habit of the *Misings* consisted of boiled food accompanied by a traditionally prepared liquor- *Āpong*. *Āpong* was an essential item in every meal. The people have three meals in a day- morning, noon and evening. Along with rice, edible leaves like- *Dermi*, *Ombe* or *Mesāki* (*Debregeasia wallichiana* Wedd), *Pākkom* or *nephāphu* (*Clerodendron colebrookianum* walpers.), *Tājíg* or *Dimaru* (*Ficus scandium*.), *Tākuk* etc were boiled either with meat or fish. Dried meat and fish were

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89 Khogen Pegu, *Ukum Gisāng or Ghar Luwā*, in seminar on 'Mising Rituals and Celebrations' organized by ICARD, Jorhat, 2006

90 B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteer*, Vol.-III, Calcutta, 1905, p.132.

91 Dambarudhar Nath, *The Majuli Island*, New Delhi, 2009, p.51

very popular among the community. The main course of their meal was very simple and generally consists of boiled rice and a curry with occasional addition of smoked pork or fish. There are various ways of preparing smoked pork or fish among the *Misings*. The meat or the fishes are roasted in the naked fire in the method popularly known as *Ba:nām*, while in the method called *Ngosān* or *Āsān* pork or fishes are dried in sunshine or in the smoke of fire and another method is the one in which it is wrapped in leaves and placed under the fire called *Pām:nām*. Moreover, *Nām:sīng* is another very popular item among the *Misings*. It is prepared by grinding fish and drying it over smoke or in sunshine. Then it is preserved in a bamboo hole called *Otung* which can last throughout the year without adding any chemical preservative and is taken often especially in the morning meal. The *Misings* were not fond of oily items and therefore boiled items of various types were found among them. Generally they used to boil whatever edible items they found. Like, fish boiled with *Sompā*, meat boiled with either *om:be* or *tākuk* or *tākpīyāng* (all wild leaves) are some of their tasty and popular curries. Sometimes only boiled leaves, plain rice, grinded chilly and salt make a popular item. These were known as *tu:le rā:nām*, *om:be rā:nām*, *tākuk rā:nām* etc. in which the former is the name of different leaves and the latter means 'boil'. In all the three meals, except the morning meal, in the other two meal- *Āpong* was common items.

Since earlier the *Misings* as a whole had a common traditional belief and practices and no any religious divisions among them therefore, there were no any restrictions or boycott of the above mentioned items on religious grounds.

**2.20 Āpong:** *Āpong* is the traditional alcoholic beverage of the *Misings*. It is of two types- *Po:ro* (black in colour) and *Nogin* (white). Out of these two the former is the most popular one. The significance of *Po:ro* lies in that while *Nogin Āpong* of the *Misings* is similar to *Haaj* of the Ahoms, *Suje* of the *Deoris* and that of the other tribal communities, but *Po:ro* is totally different and unique.

*Po:ro* is popular mainly among *Pāgro* group of the *Misings*. *Nogin Āpong* is creamy white and fermented from boiled rice, but *poro Āpong* has a dark greener colour due to addition of ashes of straw and paddy husk. The procedure for preparation of *Po:ro* is more lengthy and complicated while *Nogin* is brief and simple. Preparation of *po:ro*

starts with boiling of rice; simultaneously rice husk is also burnt to ash called *āmpé*. Thereafter both these boiled rice and *ampé* are mixed together as a result of which the colour turns black and after some time *épop* is mixed in to it. It is also called *kuse:re* (medicine) by the community. *Épop* or *kuse:re* is made of different wild leafs which are grinded together and round shaped in the form of a *lādoo* (round shaped sweets). An interview with a village lady has revealed that traditionally they mix around hundred varieties of wild leafs.<sup>92</sup> After mixing all these three items the preparation is preserved in a *kiléng* (pot). At a time they prepare for around 20-30 pots. After two weeks of preservation it is ready (ripe) for drinking. Thereafter they will take out little by little from one pot after another as per their requirement and place it in the *Tā:sug*. *Tā:sug* is a small round cage for preparing *Po:ro Āpong* and the bigger one is *Po:bor*.

*Nogin* is prepared by the same procedure of boiling rice and it is mixed directly with *épop*. Difference here is that *épop* is not mixed and therefore the colour remains white. After preparation it takes around 10-12 days to get ready for drinking. Another difference is that even in times of preparation it takes less time and the quantity of preparation is less in comparison to *Po:ro Āpong*.

*Āpong* is an integral part of *Mising* beliefs and practices. Right from rituals, ceremonies to festivals no any instance is found in which the use of *Āpong* is prohibited. By the nature of its use it can be said that they consider this drink as auspicious. The nature of inauguration of *Po:rāg* celebration reveals the sacrosanct nature of this traditional drink. *Po:bor Dāg:nām* is held as a part of inaugural ceremony of *Po:rāg* in which the first drop of water is poured in to the *po:bor* amidst chanting of prayers that invoke the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo*, *Kārsing-Kār:tāng* and *Gumín-So:yin*. Also in every rituals performed they dedicate special offerings in the form of a glass of *Āpong* and a plate of curry with the belief that it will remove the thirst and hunger of the concerned spirit for whom the ritual is meant to be. They also offer *Āpong* in the name of their forefathers. The influence of *Āpong* is so strong that they fear that *if it* is not offered than the spirits and ancestors will feel hungry and dissatisfied. They feel their status as diminished incase they are unable to serve their guest with a glass of *Āpong*.

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92 Interview with Hemalata Pegu, Age-50, School Teacher, Village- Jengraimukh Tiniali, on 05/01/2012

*Āpong* is used even to tie up strained relation or to precede further negotiation for marriage etc. If someone has committed light punishment than the *Kébāng* sanction offering of a pot of *Āpong* or more thereby indicating that he/ she has been pardoned. If there is minor dispute than also the *Kébāng* suggest the fault party to compromise by offering *Āpong*. To wind up the complicacies emerging out of marriage by elopement the first step taken is sending of messenger with a pot of *Āpong* to the girls' family as gift. Before storing new rice in the *Kum:sung* (place for storing rice) they perform a small ritual in the name of *Ko:jé Yā:ngo*- Wealth Spirit with *Āpong*. Even *Miboo* use *Āpong* to identify someone's fortune or for washing his *Yok:sā* (sword). *Āpong* is used even as medicines in times of various diseases. If a person is detected of symptoms of Jaundice than the first extraction of *Po:ro Āpong* is made to drink. It is also considered as an energetic drink if taken within limit.

The medicinal value of *Āpong* has also been proved scientifically. While describing about the advantages of *Nogin Āpong* B.S.Guha has written, "We have analysed many samples of their fermented drinks *Nogin Āpong* and found that it alcoholic content does not exceed 4%; but its nutritive value mostly in vitamins is of highest importance. It supplies 10% calories, 5.5% of protein, 5.3 % of calcium, 11% phosphorus, 29% iron, and 8% of niacin".<sup>93</sup> Similarly the *Po:ro Āpong* also have its own advantage and medicinal value if consumed within limit.

However, not much restriction is observed in the preparation of *Āpong*. But still there is a difference in the preparation of *Āpong* for private consumption and for rituals. For ritual pupose, *Āpong* is prepared especially by married women and they take bath and observe brief prayer before starting their preparation.<sup>94</sup> They also preferably prepare such type of *Āpong* on Wednesday as they consider this day as auspicious. While preparing for private consumption such procedures are not observed and even young girls are allowed to prepare.

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93 B.S. Guha, Director of Anthropolgy, Government of India in an article in 'The Assam Tribune', 15th August, 1954 as mentioned by NC Pegu, *op cit.*,p.68

94 Interview with women Soniya Doley, Age- 40, vill.- jengrai chapori on 11/ 04.2012 and Lipika Gam, Age -56, village- Garmur putuki Gaon on 14/04/2012

## 2.21 Traditional Dresses of the *Misings*:

Dress of the *Misings* can be divided in to two distinct types: (i) common dress for every day use and (ii) special dress for festivals and ceremonial functions.<sup>95</sup> Dress for every day use is simple and similar to non-tribal Assamese (or have acquired from them). Some decades ago common dress of men was *ugon* (*dhoti*) or a long colored *dumér* (towel) and a *gāluk* (shirt). Women's dress was also simple. They generally wear a skirt (*mosā:nām ege*) covering the lower part of their body from the waist to the knee. Upper piece (*gāséng* or *gero*) is fastened above the breast falling till the knee along with the skirt. Occasionally a blouse is seen to cover the upper part of the body.

The traditional craft of weaving is a very bright 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. For the male, she weaves cotton jackets, light cotton towels, *endi* shawls, thick loin cloths, and, occasionally, even modern shirt. For women she weaves a variety of clothes, such as *ege* (the lower garment of *Mising* women), *ri:bi* (a sheet with narrow stripes, wrapped to cover the lower garment and the blouse), *gāséng* (used for the same purpose as that of a *ri:bi*, but having broad stripes of contrastive colours), *gero* (a sheet 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), *seleng gāsor* (a light cotton sheet, worn occasionally instead of a *ri:bi* or a *gāséng*), *riya* (a long, comparatively narrow, sheet, wrapped, a bit tightly, round the chest), *segrég* (a loose piece of cloth, wrapped round the waist by married women to cover the *ege* down to the knees), a *po:tub* (a scarf used to protect the head from the sun, dirt, etc), and *níseg* ( a piece of cloth to carry a baby). Before yarn, produced by modern textile factories, was available in the market, *Misings* used to grow cotton and obtain cotton yarn by spinning. The use of *endi* yarn, obtained from worms fed on leaves of castor-oil plants, was probably common amongst them. However, they learnt the use of *mugā* (silk obtained from silkworms fed on a kind of tall tree, called *som* in Assamese) and of *paat* (silk obtained from silkworms fed mulberry leaves) from their neighbors in the valley. Even now *Mising* women weave cloths, using *mugā* and *paat* silk, very sparingly. Thus weaving cotton clothes is the principal

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95 Sachin Roy, *Aspects of Padam Minyong Culture*, Shillong, 1966, p.74

domain of the *Mising* weaver. A special mention has to be made here of the *Mising* textile piece, called *gādu*. It is the traditional *Mising* blanket, fluffy on one side and it is woven on a traditional loin handloom.

Dress for particular occasion is the special product of their handloom. In these dresses they use the mixture of various colors e.g. red, black, green, yellow are common. These colours are based on the natural environment surrounding them. Like, red colour signifies a *simalu* flower which is red while black colour signifies black part of that flower, white signifies cotton (*Ginmur*); green colour signifies the green paddy while yellowish part signifies the paddy when it is ripe.<sup>96</sup>

On special occasion like rituals and festivals *mibu gāluk* (traditional cloth) and *ugon* (*dhoti*) is a must for men. Only rarely a *pāguri* (turban) is used. The dresses on special occasions are used in such a way that a man would look like a *Gām* (leader). The women wear a very simple dress in their day to day life but during festivals or on some special occasion they usually wear more decorated and new ones. Women are fond of various types of ornaments. In their ears they wear ornaments of silver and wear round their necks an enormous quantity of large turquoise- like buds made apparently of fine porcelain, and beads of agate, cornelian, and onyx as well as ordinary glass beads of all colors.<sup>97</sup> Ornaments like *kentu māduli*, *tādok*, *dog:sori* etc. and different types of bracelets like *Kongé* were the parts of their traditional fashion. All dresses were the product of traditional handloom. *Mising* women were famous for weaving and their woven products like *gādu*, *gāsor*, *tāpum gāsor*, *dumér*, *mibu gāluk*, *segrég*, *niség*, *ri:bi* are worth mentioning. Two types of handlooms were used for weaving.<sup>98</sup> Firstly, one end fastened in a parallel bar and the other end fastened in the waist. This type of handloom can easily be used whenever they like- in the cultivating field, inside the house or while walking since it is small and can be handled easily.<sup>99</sup> Some of the products of this handloom are *gādu*, *mibu gāluk* and *ugon*. The second type of handloom prevalent among the *Mising* women is similar to the handlooms

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96 Interview with Gajendra Pegu, Age-64, Retired School teacher and former member of *Mising Bāne Kébāng* (*Mising* Cultural Organization) for 6 years on 12/01/2012

97 W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Delhi, 1879, p. 347

98 Jatin Mipun, *Acculturation, Communication and Development among the Mishings (Miris) in Assam*, Deptt. of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, 1981, p.105

99 Interview with Arati Pegu, Age- 35, owner of traditional shop, Place- Jengraimukh Tiniali, on 05/01/2010

used by the Assamese community. Yarn for the handloom is generally brought from the market. *Mising* people used to grow at least little amount of cotton for their handloom. This was done especially for *gādu*, which is a prestigious shawl generally offered as gift by a mother to her newly married son. The woven products of the *Misings* have a distinctive pattern and color of perfect handicraft.

The traditional beliefs and practices of the *Misings* that have been mentioned in this chapter witnessed many changes in course of time. The influence of Vaisnavism and Christianity has gradually resulted in new beliefs and practices. However, it is seen that still majority of the *Misings* have not been able to give up their traditional beliefs and practices. The nature of the beliefs and practices of the community have been discussed elaborately in the next chapter.

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