CHAPTER-4

Agro-based festivals of the Mishing society

4.1 Introduction

Agrarian societies are primarily based on a unique structure of economy, where people’s life cycles are mostly dealt with agricultural production. As people have taken up agriculture as their main source of livelihood and they start living socially. As a result, stable social systems are appeared. Development of the practice of agriculture brought many changes to human civilization. People gradually leave the custom of rearing animals and hunting life. And they have preferred cultivation as a means of livelihood. The stable agricultural system resulted in the process of formation of a society. To make the farmland more conducive to the production of crops starting from sowing, harvesting to collecting are very slow, uncertain and difficult. To get success, it requires persistence, belief and visionary. Each society of human civilization raised belief over earth as mother. As a mother gives birth to child, in the same way the mother earth produces crops. People believed that one must satisfy the mother earth to elevate its fertility. The increasing fertility of the farmland would produce necessary crops for them. Hence to satisfy the earth or crops field, sometimes they dance or sung songs. Thus, in the language of James G. Frazer, “some agro-centric institutions have developed in cooperation with the positive and negative magic resultant with the assimilation of dance-songs and folklores.”1 With the changing situations, the agro-centric songs, dances and mores collectively gave birth to agriculture festivals.
Each tribe or race acquires unique cultural identity by observing their various festivals. The diverse ethnic tribes of North-East India celebrate imaginary agricultural related usage. ‘Durung’ Puja of Adi’s or Abor’s, ‘Malko’ festival of Apatani’s, ‘Moasu’ of Aao Naga’s, ‘Dhanor Muthi Luwa’ festival of the Tiwas, ‘Hajagebra’ of Dimasa’s, ‘Agalmaka’ or ‘Achiroka’ festivals of Garo’s, ‘Kherai’ of Bodo’ are some of the agricultural related festivals. The Mishings are one of the important ethnic plains tribe of Assam. They belonged to the Mongoloid groups. At present, they are living on the bank of the river Brahmaputra from the Jonai sub division of Dhemaji district of upper Assam to Buroi-burali of Sonitpur district and in the southern part, from Sadiya to Golaghat district. We find indications about their geographical location in folksongs too—such as—

Adiya Talakki Buruli oi Bolopai

Mishing Oieya Rowangmoi Dupidasula Dubonoi.

Meaning:- the Mishings are scattering from Sadiya to Buruli river.

Since inception, the community has been growing with agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Likewise all agricultural societies, the Mishings tradition also comprises of numerous agro-based beliefs. These folk beliefs and practices of the rich Mishing ethnic tribes of North-East have given birth to various festivals. These festivals can be categorized into three forms:-

1. Ali-Aye-Ligang
2. Po:rag
3. Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu and Magh Bihu
4.2 Traditional festivals

Festivals are celebrations of important events in every human society which bring together people from all cycles of life. Traditional festivals are observed by the adherents of the traditional religion to mark important social and cultural events in the lives of the people and these are culminated in series of performances, entertainments, rites and rituals. Through these festivals, the values and beliefs of the people are demonstrated; they give meaning to the social, political and religious life of the people celebrating them. They are vital mainsprings in the traditional education and the remit of the people’s culture. Traditional festivals are practices carried on by a group of people since generations to satisfy their religious and psychological sentiments. With changing phases, there may be modifications in form but the group by and large use them. The festivals have recreational character too and mostly related to livelihood sources of the group life. The Mishing ethnic tribe also develops some sort of traditional festivals purely based on their livelihood pattern i.e. agricultural practices. In our research work, we have attempted to examine the following two main traditional festivals of the Mishing society.

4.2.1 Ali-Aye-Ligang festival

One of the significant festivals associated with the sowing of crops is Ali-Aye-Ligang. The word ‘Ali-Aye-Ligang’ comprises of three Mishing terms. These three terms separately imply the following three meanings:-

‘Ali’—a kind of potato crop, potato grows from land or root. Such as-- Shingali (Shimolu Alu), Kamarali (Tora Alu), Ali: (Kath Alu), Pagli (Mitha Alu) etc.
‘Aye’—fruits or seeds.

‘Ligang’—beginning of plantation or sowing works.

Thus, it collectively means the starting of the plantation programme, or sowing of seeds means the date of beginning.

4.2.1.1 Origin

According to Basanta kr. Doley, there are three types of crop system in Mishings. (1) Ali:-seed or jhum stage, (2) Shifting cultivation or half jhum stage and (3) permanent process of crop stage.³ While residing over the hills, the Mishings were engaged in shifting cultivation (jhum) by cutting jungles, burning waste materials, and digging with sharp sticks. With the passage of time, they replaced the use of sharp sticks by Dao (machte) and Kore (spade) for digging. Likewise, they cultivated Ahu paddy, gum paddy, cotton, potato, taro, ginger, chilli, etc. After their migration from the hills to the plains and contacts with the Assamese people too, they had engaged in shifting cultivation. The Mishings had been observing Ali aye ligang since they were engaged with jhum cultivation. Because, all the materials used in this festival are the crops of jhum cultivation. Besides, the literal meaning of the festival implies the same. When we look back to history, we find the beginning of Ali aye ligang in middle China probably in the 15th Century B.C. Because in the pre-historical period, during the Kingdom of Chang royal family (1766-1222 B.C.), the king himself ploughs and starts cultivation in the beginning of every New Year.⁴ That particular date also falls in the beginning of the month of February. A number of legends advocated that China is the ancestral abode of the Mishings.
4.2.1.2 Date of Ali Aye Ligang

*Do:rami situng trmic trimangoi*

*Kombo appun: riyipok riyaba.*

Meaning:- The do:rami branches of tree are dancing, how can kombo flowers laughing blossom over wind. In this season the modar-simulu blooming over the sky. In such a warming atmosphere the Mishings observe Ali aye ligang.

The winter season comes to an end in the months of *Magh-Fagun* and enters into the new season called ‘Spring’ starts. The dry leaves of trees are flew away by the continuous blowing of winds in the month of *Fagun*, new buds are seen in the trees, and again the nature refreshes itself. Newly, the *kombo* (Nora bogori) trees are blooming with red flowers in the month of *Fagun*. By birth the Mishing people are related with the *kombo* flowers. Thus the above mentioned folk songs indicate mutual relationship between *kombo* flowers with the festival of Ali aye ligang.

On the other hand, the month of *Fagun* is the best suitable month to sow Ahu paddy. Hence, the Mishing people warmly celebrate Ali aye ligang in this period. In contrast, according to the folk beliefs of the Mishings, Wednesday is holy and symbol of prosperity for them. Earlier, in different places, the Mishing people observed this festival in one of the Wednesday between the month of *Fagun* and *Chot* (Month of March) considering their geographical location and advantages and disadvantages of agriculture. But in 1956, on the second annual session of the *Mishing Bané Kēbāng* (socio-cultural organization), has undertaken the third resolution that the Mishing people will observe this festival in the first Wednesday of the month of *Fagun* (or Phalgun) every year.⁵
Since then, the Mishings dwelling areas have been celebrating Ali aye ligang in the first Wednesday. They believe this day as Lakshmi day, (birth of goddess) and on that day the head of the family marks the sowing of seeds in their respective fields.

4.2.1.3 Preparation of Ali Aye Ligang

Preparation to celebrate Ali aye ligang starts almost before fifteen days of the actual date of Ligang (In short form Ali aye ligang also call Ligang). One of the essential liquid for celebrating Ligang is Po:ro apong (black rice beer). This apong requires at least two weeks from the preparation to be ready for drinking. This apong is kept in such a place that it cannot be contaminated. Earlier, the villagers went to ki:rug (hunting) for Ligang. They had distributed the animal especially deer meat acquired from ki:rug among the villagers. Generally, fish and meat are kept dry. The dry fish is known as unghan and the dry meat is called dinchan. Both dry fish and meat are essential for the Ligang festival. At present, due to enormous application of the wild life protection laws, the custom of hunting gradually becomes extinct. The custom of collective fishing is still prevalent as the Mishings are the riparian community and generally live in the river bank. As a community work they often practice collective fishing. The necessary fire wood, straw, koupat, vegetables, etc. are collected much earlier before the festival starts.

4.2.1.4 Lriggod

‘Lriggod’ means the sacred system of sowing seeds. This can be categorized into two types such as joint and individual. Earlier, the function of lriggod is done individually in every house. Now a days, this function is held jointly. Somebody also
practises *lriggod* individually even though they participate in the collectively organized function.

On the day of festival, in the very early morning the daughters and son-in laws of the house take their bath. Then, they make small-small packages of the ‘bora’ rice *ampi ambrin* in ‘tora’ leaves which had been poured in yester night, and started preparing *purang* and filtered *po:ro apong*. They prepare one kind of chatoni by mixing dry fish and ginger (take:) which is called *trizmrig*. They prepare various types of dishes to take with *purang* (boil rice). And also prepare a dish of dry fish or meat with *matimah* (urad bean) and *kosu* (Taro) leaves along with *khar* for the rituals. The dry fish should be white colour pelt. Oil does not use on that dish. Pig, chicken etc. are not sacrificed in this festival. Because, they believe that if not follow this canon then the crops will dry as well as not sprout seeds in the filed. Of course today, they use pork in the collectively organized festival.

### 4.2.1.5 Individual Lriggod

For Lriggod *purang* (boil rice), *po:ro apong* (black rice beer), dish of *matimah* (urad bean), dry fish cooked in leaves or meat, ginger, *si:pag* (cotton), a few leafs of *pi:ro* (megela), amoni (kothia) of Ahu paddy, *si:pag onno* (cotton threads), *kathalu* (yam), *kosu* (taro), garlic, etc. are made ready in a container by the wife of the house. That container is brought into one corner of the ploughed paddy field. Before sowing seeds in that place, the leaves of *pi:ro* are pushed in the land and covered around by threads of cotton. Cotton is also kept in between the *pi:ro* and threads. After that, a piece of banana leaf is arranged with *purang*, one bowl of *apong*, fish, and cooked vegetables are kept in one corner. The seeds of Ahu paddy, *kathalu* (yam), *kosu* (taro),
komura (white gourd), chilli, etc. are sowed in the land and taking names of the Sun-Moon, Sky-Earth, Cloud-Rain, Lightening-Storm, Goddess Lakshmi and ancestors, the Mishings pray for making the land fertile and prosperity in production of food crops (this system of prayer is called petom-peki:). This activity is known as Ju:ri or Ju:ri:nam. They chant in this way:-

Silo akosinna
Ato Gu:min togung Gu:min
Sedi Melo, Do:nyi-Po:lo nolu
Taddag Ka:daglangka.
Karsing kartag, rugji me:rang
Taddag ka:daglangka,
Ngolu silo Mising ommange

Meaning:- Today, on this auspicious day our fore-fathers. Bear witness: ‘Sedi-Melo’, ‘Do:nyi po:lo’ (Sun and Moon) bear witness. ‘karsing kartak’. Ant and insects bear witness. Today, seed of ahu paddy is sown to the womb of mother earth...etc.

Nolu akosinna
Am ambinem go:samoteika,
Nei nebirem birsamoteika
Koje-yango go: samoteika...⁶

Meaning:- and you all bear witness, and bless, Let the paddy seeds sprout early, Let them have lush green leaves. May Goddess of wealth be pleased to bestow rich harvest.....etc!

When a large amount of crops have been produced, then people store the excess production and offer puja for their said God and Goddess. They offer prayer to God and
promise that they provide enough food to beggars, poor persons from their stored food. While offering Lriggod, the person of the household wear Mibu gāluk (shirt used by Mibu), gonor ugon (dhuti wear by male persons), dogné (one kind of bead) and take unfolded cotton in lower side of both the ears.

After showing seeds they throw po:ro apong in that place and conclude the festival by throwing water over that. The remaining apong was distributed among the relatives present and members of household. Some people again, clear a plot of land in the backside of their house and prepare the plot as an elevated road. Over that plot, they keep a mixture prepared by dry fish or meat and ginger in different parts in the name of their ancestors and gradually pouring po:ro apong over them. This ritual is done through the process of pindadan.

In some places, Lriggod is done by women. After completion of Lriggod, members of the family come back to their home. In the kitchen of the house too, they throw a little apong and remind names of their ancestors and Gumin so:in. Family members and housewife also drink the remaining apong. Then after, they start the feast. Every household has enough purang, apong and cooked dishes on that particular day. By forgetting violence and hatred, everybody come to each other’s house and eat Ligang.

4.2.1.6 Celebration of Ali Aye Ligang

In the evening on the day of Lriggod, the boys and girls of the village started celebrating Ali aye ligang festival. The Mimbir ya:me (boys-girls) of the village become ready by wearing their own dress for the Ligang festival. The girls dress in ribi gāséng(sador), mochang ége(mekhela), gero(pothali kapur), segrég(a type of waist cloth), etc. On the other hand, the boys wear Mibu gāluk, gonor ugon(Dhuti),
yamb:tongni(tongali) dress in waist and also a:pob(paguri) dress. In this festival they celebrate pakso monam (traditional group dance). The ‘dhol’ is beaten by the young men and it sounds as gumrag gumrag. Hence this dance is called as ‘gumrag dance’. In Ali aye ligang there is a custom of conducting bihu from the first to last number of household of the village, without leaving a single house. In some villages to indicate the first house where from the bihu will begin, some boys with the consent of the villagers hang a small container full of stones in the doorstep of the selected house at night.

The particular family responding to the indications of the villagers, according to their capacity prepare for feast and arrange pig, chicken, apong, fish, etc. Because, in ligang we find participation of all sections of society from teenagers to old aged persons. After bihu is over, the family members offer pots of apong, dishes, purang with honorary contributions and take blessings from them. Usually, there is the prevalent custom of offering some sort of value may be in the form of money or material to the bihu group as an honorarium and a matter of curtsy. Thus, reminding the names of Do:nyi Po:lo, Rono:prino (creator), forefathers, the villagers give blessings to the family. Then the villagers drink apong, eat purang offered by the family and leave the house. Every household according to their capacity offer honorary contribution to the villagers and take blessings from them. Accordingly, the villagers conduct Bihu in each house of the village. If they leave one house, that means the villagers dislike them. In such a situation, the concerned family seek excuse from the villagers and offer them feast and fine. The money collected through this manner is used in organizing ‘Dopan-Tripan’ (Collective feast) in the next or third day of the festival.
4.2.1.7 Joint Ali Aye Ligang

Today, many Mishing villages jointly observe the festival of Ali aye ligang. In order to celebrate this festival, people select a field or grazing ground. The young boys and girls followed by the villagers bring two respective persons to that community place by dancing *Gumrag*. They bring seeds of potato, kosu and some essential commodities with ahu paddy in a container (kharahi). *Lriggod* (sacred system of sowing seeds on first day of ligang) is observed in the already ploughed place suitable for sowing seeds of rice paddy. After that, by dancing *Gumrag* they revolve round the place of sowing seeds. All young boys-girls, aged male-female participate in this dance. After the dance is over they jointly take feast and leave the place to their home because they have the custom of feast at the end to mean the completion of all the activities of the particular function.

4.2.1.8 Li:len

The Mishings believe that the seeds sprout after five days of sowing seeds. Thus, they observe *Li:len* after five days. Since the next day of *Ligang*, the Mishing society observes ‘*Genna*’. The term ‘*Genna*’ simply means prohibited. It is applied primarily to the mass prohibitions, permanent and temporary, periodic and occasional, which form important part of the Mishing society. They believe that they should not cut trees, practise fishing, digging land, catch fire in the field, etc. in these days. Regarding food habits too, egg, boiled fish, fried meat in oil, sour, etc. are prohibited. They believe that violation of these prohibited aspects prevents sprouting of seeds. In the fifth day, they take out ‘*Genna*’. On that day, they prepare a dish with kosu (Taro), pumpkin (Rangalaow) and some vegetables. In the four corners of kitchen, by offering this dish with *po:ro apong*, they say as follows:-
“Silo akosinna

Ato Gu:min togung Gu:min

Sedi Melo, Do:nyi- Polo nolu

Karsing Kartag rugji me:rang,

Taddag ka:dag langka.

Ngolu silo ali aye ligangm lridgen du:neke.

Silo kolloke dotir dotir doyotriyo kunoe,

Okosino domur doyar momang:poika”.

It means sedi-melo, do:nyi polo, and all planets will listen that today we took out the Genna of Ali-aye-ligang, we will take food as earlier, and they must not find faults in such deeds.

After prayer they take apong jointly to take out the Genna. Earlier on the fifth day means on the day of Li:len, from every household; one male must go to ‘purush rugbad’ (male hunting) in the early morning after having breakfast. Especially, they go to ‘deer hunting’. When they are able to catch deer they believe that the mother earth is pleased. On that day, each house arranges ‘Saglen’ (taking out of Genna) with that meat secured from hunting. Arranging Saglen is a custom of seeking forgive from the God of Fire for their wrong deeds. By offering omoe (fire), Lri:sig (used utensils), ki:re (fire place), apong (rice beer), aadin (wine and meat), they say like this:-


Meaning:- Oh the mighty God of fire, today we take out ‘Genna’ by offering to all of you apong in the used utensils and Jankire. Please forgive us from all kinds of wrong
deeds. Today the hunting tradition has wiped out, even though by collecting meat and fish the tradition of celebrating the end of Ali aye ligang festival through the function of *Li:len* still exists. In fact, the urban Mishings societies today observe the festival of Ali aye ligang jointly. But the function of ‘*Li:len*’ and ‘*Genna*’ are not seen among them. The *Li:len* festival of the Mishings is related with the festival of ‘*Sungremong*’ of Aao Nagas.

### 4.2.1.9 Song and Dance of Ligang

The dances and songs having sexual incentive is an imaginary effort to increase production. Probably, in primitive age sexual activities in the midst of field had been considered symbolic to increase production. In the developed stage of culture, it is a mark of dance with sexual stimulus. The Mishing society has the belief that through the dance form of ‘*Gumrag So:man*’ will satisfy and bless for good harvest. *Gumrag So:man* is a combination of dance and beating of drums and cymbals. Hence, it is basically an appeasing dance of the goddess of fertility. It is performed on the day of “Ligang”. Perhaps, the tradition of giving blessings in the festival or giving blessings by moving to all families in the village is influenced by the Tantrict Buddha or Buddha Mohajan sects. When Mishings sing a song in Ali aye ligang their rhythm of the song and dhol is unique. The song of *Ligang* is called ‘*Bri:rigo*’(seasonal song). Actually, they sung ‘*Oi:nitom*’. The example of *Bri:rigo ni:tom* is --

*Lo: lo:le lo:le lo:le*

*Daboi lo:le lo:le lo:le*

*Sisug sugbo sugbo bodiya*

*Rigam gambo gambo bodiya*
Yo dumlaboim lamm chutoka

Li:ti dumlaboim lamm chutoka.

Meaning:- Come young boys and girls, comb your hairs properly and come out beautifully. Rang dhol and enjoy yourself. When we have aged then we have to become calm like hatched hen or become stagnant like old cock etc.

Asi jili jiliko, miksi jili jiliko

Asi jili pinyepe, miksi jili pinpemang.

Meaning:- The tears of my eyes are well compared to the torrent of a hilly stream. The hilly stream has chance of drying up one day, but mine is perpetual. Sometimes it also comes in such rhetoric:

Mepag name riga:do

Oko inge sa:ma:ne

Mepag name ko:need

Oko agom luma:ne.10

Meaning:- What plant on earth would not grow in a deserted land to what extent a deserted women cannot ill-use her tongue against her deserter.

4.2.1.10 Rhythm of Dhol

(i) Gumrag gumrag kek nalak gumrag keken-ci-cin gumrag gumrag rag.

(ii) Gumrag gumrag tagin tagin gumrag gumrag rag.

The dance of Ali aye ligang is known as ‘pakso monam’. Some people recognize this dance as gumrag dance because it imitates the rhythm of dhol. In this dance, the
boys and girls dance in lines as circle. This circle is like the life cycle of the Mishing people according to their belief. Changes in natural season simultaneously change the life cycle too. Again, in the rhythm of dhol the body moves as smoothly as the growing paddy in the field dance in drifting mood. Through the rhythm of dhol it tries to make the mother earth productive. They ring L:gang to refresh the hidden cloud; so that the cloud rains with a huge amount and the womb of earth become more green and fertile. Besides, gumrag dance, the dance of Ali aye ligang reflects the picture of day to day struggle of the Mishing society. The dance reflecting the posture of hunting, playing with bows and arrows are the supportive evidence to comprehend that the Mishings love hunting. Dance postures like sowing of crops, planting, cutting and bringing out of paddy to home, etc. represent their rural agricultural life. Dance-forms of playing boats and fishing characterize the life struggle of riparian people. The Mishing women are wholeheartedly related with the art of weaving. The dance related to weaving machinery (tatshal) envisages the deep interest of the Mishings in the art of weaving.

4.2.1.11 Folk beliefs related to Ali aye ligang

(i) They do not use oil in the dish prepared for Ligang as they believed that use of oil may dry their crops.

(ii) They have a belief that within the five days starting Ali aye ligang to Li:len, items like fish, meat, lit fire in the field, cutting down of trees, fishing, etc. are prohibited. If somebody performs the aforesaid acts, then they believe that the crops will not sprout

(iii) People should not cut down the living things like bamboos, cane (bet), straw, khagori etc. carrying out of the aforesaid acts, may bring evil for the trees.
(iv) If they do not carry out ‘pakso monam’ or gumrag dance in Ali aye ligang, then they believe that the insects will destroy their crops.

(v) The Mishings recognize that the fish and meat are symbols of wealth (Lakshmi). Hence, the increasing use of fish and meat in Ali aye ligang will bring forth healthy crops in the forthcoming year.

(vi) In the name of ancestors, in Ligang the Mishings offer homage in water (jal pinda), they believe that satisfaction of the ancestors will carry well-being for the society.

(vii) They believe that if they don’t ring ‘Marbang’ (a huge bell) in Ali aye ligang, then there will be no rain over the earth.

(viii) They use unfolded cotton in Ligang. They believe that cotton has imaginary myth in the process of production. Considering this fact, we can quote Richard Wright’s opinion as follows—“...cotton is an imperious woman in the throes of constant childbirth, a woman who is driven by her greedy passion to bear endless bales of cotton, though she well knows that she will die if she continues to give birth her fleecy children!”.

Thus, to satisfy the mother earth they use cotton.

4.2.1.12 Changing trends of Ali Aye Ligang

That changes occur in developments of social life is a natural phenomenon. Time brings changes to all societies. The invention of fire had transformed the living patterns of those who were in the caves or under trees; the use of wheel made the change faster than earlier. The beginning of agricultural life had taught men to build house and constitute villages. Accordingly, they left the group life of primitive stage. As such,
changes occur to all societies in this world. Both culture and society are related to each other. Hence, the changes of society also mean changes in culture. The Mishings are not an exception to this. In due course of time, with the changes of the Mishing society as well as their cultural life also brings forth changes to the practices of the festival of Ali aye ligang. A few prominent factors i.e. the advancement in science and technology, development of education, impact of globalization etc. are responsible for their changes in the practises of Ali aye ligang. On the basis of field study and observations, we can identify some changes in Ali aye ligang. These are mentioned below:-

(i) Previously the festival was held in every house, but today it is observed jointly.

(ii) Along with the traditional musical instruments, the modern instruments too are used in ‘Ali aye ligang’ festival today.

(iii) Other than maintaining the tradition of Ali aye ligang, now they organize meetings too.

(iv) Celebrating the festival in collective manner, at present, it becomes stage-oriented.

4.2.1.13 Observations

The festival of ‘Ali-aye-ligang’ is associated with the agro-based Mishing society. The sowing of rice seed is an important aspect for the farmers because their lives are related with seeds and budding of seeds. Different agricultural societies since times immemorial have been practising the system of worship of the mother earth. They have the tradition of worshipping mother earth through songs and dances. The Mishings also try to satisfy the mother earth through numerous elements like Purang, Apong, dishes, Gumrag dance and songs.
(i) Immense use of dry fishes and meat in the festival of Ali-aye-ligang, carries the significance of increasing production and preservation of food items. Though the Mishings are living in flood-prone and riparian areas, they must have enough awareness to preserve food. They use dry fish and meat not only in festivals but for their day to day lives too, such food items are considered inevitable.

(ii) Ali-aye-ligang reflects the examples of unity and fraternity. This festival reminds that unity among the villagers is essential to organise the society.

(iii) Ligang has two related dimensions. They are religious and festivity. Its religious dimension includes tradition, folk-beliefs, folkways and mores of the Mishing society. The aspect of festivity includes songs, dances and cheerfulness activities of the Ligang. Hence, Ligang gives equal significance to the rituals as well as folk arts and culture of the Mishing society.

(iv) In Ali-aye-ligang has plenty of food items are prepared as well as served. Despite having well economic position, all Mishing families arrange a number of food stuff. Significance of this practice is related with the expectation that like Ligang, the whole forth coming year will have plenty of food items.

(v) In Ali-aye-ligang, the Mishings are engaged much in dances rather than songs. Women play larger role than male counterparts in such dances. Primitive society believed that woman is mother, woman gives birth to child and such reproductive powers have magical influence over increasing growth of crops.

(vi) Regarding the dance, performed by the Mishing boys and girls, Dalton says, “The Miri girls dance the somewhat sensusal Bihu dance with great spirit, and they have a dance of their own which is quite free from this sensuality somewhat resembling the Naga movement.”

112
The youths participating in this festival wear the \textit{Ri:Bi: Gaséng}. Regarding the essential \textit{Ri:Bi: Gaséng}, we find in the Mishing folk songs as follows:-

\textit{Kaje Ajan Grikakoi}

\textit{Adiyana Taye Topo}

\textit{So:pag Arig Egala}

\textit{Ri:Bi: Gacheng Chumgela}

\textit{Ali-Aye po:raglo}

\textit{Gilen Oieya Bomlapo}.

Meaning:- Oh my dear darling (Senai), Lets go to the hills and start the cultivation of cotton. Spinning the produced cotton, prepare \textit{Ri:Bi: Gaséng}. Lets wear that in Ali-aye-ligang and Po:rag festival and both of we will dance pleasantly. Let’s go my dear darling (\textit{Ko:neng}).

Besides, looking at the celebration of Ali-aye-ligang, it is observed that the Mishings have engaged themselves in tree plantation- a part of the festival and thereby contribute a lot towards environment as well as social welfare. The festival is closely associated with the nature and it reflects several aspects of lives of the Mishing society—such as food habit, dress-code, songs and dances, musical instruments and so on. The entire process of Ali-aye-ligang is free from the influence of the \textit{Bhakats} (votary of deity). Rather the festival is run by the elderly reverend members of the villages. Mentionably, sometimes the festival is also run by the members of the Mishing families of the house.\textsuperscript{13}

Ali aye ligang beautifully reflects the society and culture of the Mishings. As they born and brought up in close contact with the nature, the thoughts of the Mishing
people are deeply influenced by the nature. Ali aye ligang is the best example here. Besides, different manifestations of their folk art and culture, such as their food habit, dress-code, songs and dances, etc. are well represented in ligang. Ali aye ligang is a good instance of unity and fraternity. It is the heart beat of the Mishing society. Again, this festival helps to nurture as well as refresh the broad Assamese culture.

4.2.2 Po:rag

Po:rag is one of the important agriculture based folk festivals of Mishings. Generally, it is observed in the post-harvest season of Ahu paddy (Guni Amro), in every two, three, four or five years. Earlier probably every year observed after a good harvest. This festival is very costly. Now, it is not possible to conduct the festival in every year. The date of celebration occurs in the month of August or September after a summer harvest or in the months of December or January after a winter harvest. At present, the Mishing people desire to celebrate in the winter season. As the village youths (girls and boys) organise and conduct this festival, thus it is known as ‘Ya:me Mimbir Donam’. The festival is not only celebrated among the youths but it also includes children and aged persons. Basically the prime objective of this non-religious festival is to be busy with food, drink, fun and dance among the youths. The use of ‘Po:ro Apong’ is very much plenty in this festival and so this festival is called ‘Po:rag To:nam’ by the Mishing Society. In the distant past this festival was said to be held annually. But, now a days, the Mishing villages observe it once after duration of each three to five years. In some village this festival is completely left. Still, the joy of Po:rag festival is felt by every Mishing people. It is observed after the completion of harvesting, thus it is popularly
known as Narachiga Bihu means ‘Po:rag’.\textsuperscript{14} (‘Nara’ means the paddy straw found in the field after cutting the ripped rice crops. ‘Chiga’ means cutting something).

4.2.2.1 Meaning of Po:rag

There is no available data as well as written research oriented records found about the history and importance of this festival. The meaning of Po:rag is expressed in different senses by the scholars of the Mishings. According to Chandra Kanta Lachan, former President of Mishing Agom Kêbāng, the word ‘po:rag’ is derived from ‘Apong Agrag’ (Apong+Arag=Porag). As the Mishing people use apong for hospitality of guests in both domestic and social life, they start preparing apong much before the celebration of Po:rag festival. For the festival the host village arrange a huge estimate to feast a good number of guests, who unite after the harvesting season. So, it is a matter of joy as well as to get blessings from God for the next harvesting. Therefore, before the beginning of the main festival, there is a system in the Mishing society where ‘Apong Agragla La:hnam’ (apong offered to god) is done by Mibu(priest). Hence, he assumed that the name of po:rag is derived from the word ‘Apong Agrag’\textsuperscript{15} According to Apel Doley, the meaning of Po:rag is nation or national congregation. According to her, Po:min+Ragnam=Po:rag, here ‘Po:min’ means community unification and ‘Ragnam’ means binding leading to unification.\textsuperscript{16} According to Harakanta Regan (70), a senior citizen of Dibrugarh, po:rag is derived from ‘Po:bar’.\textsuperscript{17} According to Ganesgh Pegu, ‘Po:’ means Apong, ‘Rag’ means Celebration. That means celebration of apong drinking festival.\textsuperscript{18} According to Baxiram Morang, there is the need of a safely situated long Chang-ghar(Murang ghar) with considerable height to contain three to four hundred bags of apong. This house is known as po:rag.\textsuperscript{19} This is to be mentioned that in the Mishing society, the use of apong is inseparable in any individual or social festival. Without
The Mishing society is incomplete. At the po:rag festival, two big size filters called ‘Po:bum’ and ‘Po:bar’ are placed in front of the Murang ghar. In the two filters inside ‘apo:po:nyg’ is poured and ‘Achikatlrlignam’ (water filling activity) is performed with great respect. Then the youths dance and sing around the po:rag location for three to five times and they pour water into it, calling the deities like Do:nyi-Polo (Sun-Moon), Sedi-Melo (creator), Karching-Kartag, Gumrin-so:yin (spiritual protector), Pedong-Nane (mother rain) with due respect. Formerly it was performed by an experienced Mibu (priest) but now a days, it is performed by Sadhu, Satula, Deka-Bora, Tri-Bora. In some villages it is done by some girls who have not attained puberty. This is done with utmost care and respect, because if the apong turns out to be of bad taste, then the entire activity is futile and it is a sign of misfortune. If the apong is good, po:rag is successful, and in the days to come it signifies good for the entire village, the people believe. It is clear that apong plays an important role in celebration of po:rag. From that point of view it can be said that the term “po:rag” is derived from apong.

4.2.2.2 Origin of Po:rag

There is difference of opinions among the intellectual sections about the origin of Po:rag, as to where did it originate, when was it initiated. In this regard some scholars expressed their views as there was not Po:rag in the Mishing society before they came to the plains from the hills. Sonaram Panyang Kataki, in his ‘History of Miri Jati’ writes, “When they came to the plains they had started to celebrate Nara-Chiga Bihu like the Assamese people, where all youths reunite. The meaning is that during the month of Ahin and Kati, Ahu Paddy is harvested and the paddy is utilised in the festival. In Miri Language it is called ‘Po:rag’.

Thereby, the author meant that the Mishing people
started arranging Po:rag only after they settled in the plains. According to another writer, “when they came to plains they had lived on the riverbanks. They believed that during the cultivation or before or after the cultivation, they had to pay respect to deity, uie, for better harvest. Because of adverse environment, the festival was celebrated. In this way, po:rag was a festival based on agriculture.”21 Over and above this, there had been an impact of the Ahom rule in celebration of this festival. The managing committee of the festival included officials like Dekabora, Tiribora, Patgiri, Borani, Tekela, Barpowari etc. who were the part and parcel of Ahom rule. Under the impact of Hinduism the Sadhu, Satola occupied the position of Mibu of the Mishings. Whatever be the matter, at all events Mishing traditional rituals are prevalent in performing po:rag. Todays Dekabora, Tiribora occupy the position of Ku:ri- ko:mang of yester years.22 The activity of Satola is done by Mibu. The festival like Po:rag is not found amongst the Ahoms. Hence, the origin of this festival can be traced back to the hills, where they lived in the past. Some instances are found among the Adi and the Mishing people that support this fact. In this respect, one important matter should be remembered that the objectives of the performances of Machup of the Adis and Murong of the Mishings are the same, though they are different superficially. The youths of both the Adis as well as the Mishings learn and practise a number of skills like fighting, dancing, about various arts and crafts, arranging collective activities, meetings of social concern and including their society’s comprehensive value system etc. in the said two institutions. Murong is the inseparable part of Po:rag. When one discusses about the origin of Murong, one comes to know about the origin of Po:rag also. The first folktale is like this-- Once there had been a famine in the world and then Abotani (first human being) brought some seeds from Ko:je-Yang and sowed them in the field. After the sixth day, Abotani came to the field
and saw that the seeds were eaten by dove birds. In his depression Abotani began to cry. Then a deity called Cheukori, came out of the forest and asked him the reason, why did he cry. Then Abotani described what had happened, and Cheukori killed the birds with arrows. Then bowls of the birds were split open and all the seeds eaten were driven out and Abotani was asked to sow the seeds again. If the harvest was good, then he was asked to perform three festivals (Dobur, Ali aye ligang, and Po:rag) in the name of Cheukori and then the deity vanished. In the meantime, the harvest was very good. According to the advice of the deity, a big Murong was constructed and a festival was celebrated with good number of guests. As a mark of gratitude Koje Yang, Cheukori, Sedi-Melo and Chine-me:bo were given sacrifices of one pig each. The people who introduced themselves as offsprings of Abotani, still celebrate the same festival which is now known as Po:rag.23 The second story is like this---the youngest son of Pedong-Na:ne and Yi:dum-Bote, ‘Tani’ once fell ill. It was a great opportunity for the blood thrusts demi gods to chuck out the blood of Tani who was ill. To save Tani from this trouble, Lit:tung Ba:bu and Li:mang-Na:ne appointed Gu:min-So:yin (Spiritual protector). Their treatment then cured Tani from illness. For the future safety of Tani, Gumin-Soyin built a house with Takmang –Takte, Le:chak, Tale, and Tan wood. There is a folk belief among the people that a house built with sacred woods was free from the existence of evil spirit. The house was decorated with bamboo grown in the horn of Methun. The house entry was celebrated by Tani and then Gumin-Soyin was offered to stay in the house. It was considered to be a holy house. Another house was built for Tani, where he used to live and started to celebrate festival annually at Machup.24 According to Nahendra Padun, a researcher and Scholar, probably from that time onward the Adi society started to hold festival at Machup with song and dance like Po:nang, Dourang,
Miri, Bari, etc. The Murong occupies a central position in the celebration of po:rag. Over and above this, the Mishings organise meetings of Kébâng and entertain guests with dance performance from the plateform of Murang ghar. There may be slight difference in the above mentioned episodes’, but it is clear that the most primitive human being of Adi-Mishing was ‘Tani’, and from his time onward, the festival of po:rag had been celebrated entering round the Machup or Murong. Though, it is folktale, we cannot overlook its importance. In fact, folktales, folk songs and folk festivals prevalent in society can be compared to rivers flowing from the time immemorial. In the words of Nahendra Padun, “when the river starts flowing, society simply can’t say, even where is the source of it that is also not known. But the nature of the river and flow of the river has a close relationship with men.”

4.2.2.3 Preparation of Po:rag

Po:rag is a social festival of the Mishing society. The whole villagers are mentally prepared to celebrate this festival almost before announcement of the probable date. They engage in discussion, preparation of work relating to po:rag. Mimbir Ya:me (girls-boys) are actively involved in po:rag related works. The young men are engaged in decoration of Murong Ukum, collection of fire woods and other necessary items. The young women are also engaged in husking paddy, preparing apong etc. One of the prime essential rice beverage for celebrating po:rag is po:ro apong (black rice beer). Thus, the concerned village collect rice from every household to prepare this apong. It requires at least two weeks from the preparation to be ready for consumption. This apong is kept in such a place that it can’t be contaminated. ‘Daglig’ is also a part and parcel of po:rag celebration. It is a type of community work in which especially young men and women
at least one member 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:rag celebration then the host offers 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. Thus, all the villagers do their duty sincerely till the time of starting of the festival.

4.2.2.4 Celebration Days of Po:rag

Entertaining guests is the most attractive aspect of po:rag. The organising village, invites the youths of a neighbouring village with groups of artists and drummer to the po:rag. In reality, people cheer up and express their happiness with singing and dancing in the festival. Thus, artists are the centre of attraction of the festival. This is called ‘Minom Nomnam’. Mib + Nomnam =Minom, ‘Mib’ means guests, ‘Nomnam’ means invited. The invited village is called ‘Minom-Do:lung’. According to ability, more than one ‘Minom’ (guest) group can be invited.

In order to observe the po:rag festival, the villagers collectively select two important persons. One is called Migam Bora and another is titled as Migam Borani. Bora conducts the young boys whereas Borani conducts the young girls. It is the duty of the young boys and girls to carry on the activities properly as directed by the Bora and Borani. The group of young boys and girls from the invitee villages, come and join in the po:rag festival. Here, usually a grand competition of singing and dancing occurs among the boys and girls. Murong appears as a meeting place of unionisation of young boys and girls. Earlier the minority Mishing villages required to maintain unity and integrity among themselves as they were lived amidst the non-Mishing population. Thus, po:rag
festival plays an important role to maintain unity among the Mishing community scattered in different areas.

Usually the main function of the po:rag starts on one Wednesday which is considered by them as an auspicious day and last for three days. But in some parts the festival is observed for five days. po:rag is generally held in a Murong Ghar, a dormitory or public hall. In some villages where no permanent house or Murong Ghar is available, the villagers build a temporary house to perform the function. The first day of po:rag is known as ‘Eshang’. On that day the villagers escort Migam Bora and Borani to Murong Ghar from one family of the village through rally with Gumrag dance. In the last day of the festival too, they accompany similarly Bora and Borani to their home with due honour. In the first day, no special party is held.

In the first day of the festival, the villagers of each Minom group are welcomed to the Murong Ghar by making a rally with Gumrag dance from the street. This activity is known as ‘Minom Yamnam’. On that particular day, they arrange special feast in Murong Ghar. Since midnight, by keeping apong in Ta:sug, they start performing the activity of Po:bor Kadnam. They select a couple of young girls (below puberty line having both of their parents) to bring water to be at first given to Po:bor. It symbolises purity and good will to conduct the whole festival successfully. In the presence as well as cooperation of Minoms, and in the leadership of Migam Bora and Borani, the inauguration of the function formally starts with the pouring of the first drop of water through the ‘Po:bor’ (a conical shaped bamboo basket used as a funnel for filtering apong in the po:rag festival) with chanting of prayers, beating of drums and young men and women dance around the Murong Ghar for five times. Till the first drop of apong falls on the utensil (patra) the young boys and girls dance continuously. The time when the first drop of
apong falls on the utensil, immediately they use ‘A:gra Mannam’ (the time to sacrifice pig). After this the procedure of sacrificing the pig starts. The full grown pig is sacrificed by killing it through a long and sharp bamboo stick pushing inside her heart. During the time of sacrifice, all villagers loudly recite the names of their believed God Sun-Moon, Cloud, Rain and ancestors in order to protect paddy-fields, cows and buffalos from all kinds of maladies. After offering sacrifices of a few pigs in the above mentioned manner, other pigs are killed by general means.

On the second day of the festival, the day time is devoted to feed the guests of honour called “Jiory-gokkunam”. Jiory are the married daughters (Mimbirs) of the host village, who have been married to the nearby villages. On the special day, they are invited and the host village offers them a heavy feast with pork and apong. They are especially invited with their spouses and couple of other companions, who can sing or dance. The married daughters can bring pots of apong and pigs. It turns this occasion into a virtual festival of reunion, marked by almost non-stop singing and dancing. They offer prayers to ancestors by lighting lamps. They pray for the protection and development of all creatures, crops, before Do:nyi Po:lo(sun-moon), Karsing-Kartak(creator). There are plenty of apong and meat in this festival. Firstly, at the end of offering apong to the groups, they start singing and dancing.

In the third day of the festival, the Minoms take farewell from the place of their formal procedure after going around the Murong five times with the sounds of the drums and cymbal. After sunset the prayer dance with Abangs (religious hymns), led by the Mibu, again takes place for the whole night. At the end of this prayer dance a concluding part called ‘Ponu-nunam’ is staged. According to the Mishings this last part of prayer
dance appears to be the reminiscence of the *Ponu dance* practised by their forefathers in the past and still practised among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh.

On the fourth day, the villagers offer party to native women of the village. On the last day, in the name of the young boys and girls, they offer feast known as ‘*Dapan-Tripa*’. It means, on that day of Po:rag festival, the young boys and girls take *apons* and roast pork in the fire and enjoy themselves. Undoubtedly, Po:rag is the festival of love and affection. As the Mishings sing a folk song as follows:-

*Aarig Brichu tamanoi*

*Okum kumring tamanoi*

*Achinang Adangoigm grila ka:la tamanoi.*

Meaning:- The paddy field is far away, the village is also in far away, it is not possible to come whenever the mind remembers.

### 4.2.2.5 Observations

At present the Po:rag festival is in peril. The first and foremost reason behind it is the economic crisis. Because Po:rag festival is generally observed for three to five days; where lots of people gather and it requires a huge fund for the purpose of maintaining it and hospitality of the guests. Earlier, production of agriculture was abundant and usually families failed to complete their works of paddy field in time. Hence, they asked the whole villagers to help them. In return of performing that collective work the villagers collect a huge amount of money and rice grains. And from that fund they arranged the Po:rag festival. Now, due to having less production, people fear to arrange such a costly festival.
Secondly, religious conversions to a great extent contribute towards dissolution of traditional folk festivals.

Thirdly, due to population growth, the limited amount of available land fails to provide livelihood to all, a number of youths start migrating towards urban locations in search of new livelihood. So, their leisure period is difficult to fix. Thus, it is not possible for youths in villages to arrange such get-together.

Fourthly, influences of other neighbouring cultures on the Mishing society is another reason behind the less practice of the po:rag festival.

Fifthly, natural calamities like flood and riverbank erosion continuously make the earlier concentrated location of the Mishings into scattered form. Accordingly, people of one village forcefully shifted to other places for shelter as well as livelihood. Thus, difficulties now appear to unite those displaced people for a festival like Po:rag.

Po:rag is a grand festival of reunion, which represents a kind of human and social value. It expresses a deep sense of traditional hospitality offered to their guests. Everywhere is surrounded by an atmosphere of joy and happiness. People leaving their sorrows whole heartedly share their feelings with their relatives and friends. This festival reinforce the relations, unity and integrity among the villages and exchange their cultural feelings too.

4.3 Non-traditional festivals

After being immigrated to the plains, the Mishings co-habitated for centuries and exchanged their cultures with the people of different ethnic groups and as a result, their independent cultural traditions integrated with various cultural aspects of the plains. This
cultural integration has been marked by a few factors. In the first place, when the Mishings came to the plains the agro production systems of the Ahom or the Chutiya royalty were based on Feudal or half feudal system. On the other hand, the agro production systems of the Mishings were based on pre-feudal/tribal system characterised by partial slavery with a touch of tribal arena. The impact of the higher Chutiya or the Ahom or all together the greater Assamese culture on the life of the Mishings was a natural phenomenon.

Secondly, if the population of one ethnic group is in the higher stage in terms of their socio-cultural practices than the other, the cultural elements of the higher ethnic group are bound to impact on the lower ethnic groups. From this point of view there is nothing unusual for the Mishings to get influenced by the Assamese culture.

Thirdly, it became of a matter of prestige for a comparatively undeveloped society to accept a developed culture from a culturally enriched society. It is ofcourse a matter of social psychology of a reference group. Once it was a matter of prestige when the Mishing people happened to incline for the traditional cultural customs of the Assamese people. Even once upon a time it was a matter of pride for the Mishings capable of being talked Assamese language.

Fourthly, it is a general account that every one fond of culture is naturally attracted to the culture of different higher savoury. It is a natural urge of human mind. If one ethnic group discovers a skilled technology which is not present in other groups, then the latter is bound to accept the technology find out by the former. Therefore, the Mishings gradually learnt a lot from the Assamese people about the techniques on different systems of agriculture, use of tools in cultivation, constructing skills of abiding
accommodation, use of attire, preparation of delicious foods, belief on the Supreme Being (religious beliefs) and celebration of the Bihus viz. Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu and Magh Bihu. In addition to these the Mishings seasonally celebrate their own traditional festivals viz. Ali-aye-ligang and Po:rag as public rejoicing.

4.3.1 Rongali Bihu or Bohag Bihu

Bohag Bihu, popularly known as Rongali Bihu is observed from the day of Sankranti between Chot and Bohag months of Assamese calendar to the next three to seven days, as per varied practices prevalent among the broad Assamese society in different spheres. At that time, store houses (Bharal ghar) of every household are full of crops and paddies, the surrounding natural environment is also green and colourful everywhere, plants and trees are beautified with new leaves and flowers, work pressure of the paddy fields are also less. There is joy and happiness everywhere. Thus, the life of common people flavours with colours; that is ‘rang’. Hence, this festival is also known as Rongali Bihu.

The Mishing is one of the agriculture based ethnic group. They have an integral relations with the raw soil, trees and creepers, the sweet blow of air, the flowers in the wilderness with the blooming of simalu, modar and the shy air tries to blow away the clothes of the Ko:neng which make the Mishing youths excited. The natural beauty overwhelms them and they dance and sing to make the earth fertile to grow crops. In view of such a joyful environment, they observe ‘Ali aye ligang’ on the first Wednesday of Fagun. But after coming down to the plains, they saw that at the time of changing colours the earth becomes exhilarating with leaves and flowers. It is more enchanting than the month of Fagun and during that magical moment Rongali Bihu is celebrated by
the Assamese community. So the Mishings, the free children of nature, welcome them it with warmth of hearts.

The Mishings use the word Biu to mean ‘Bihu’. Bihu or Biu is not the original agriculture based festival arranged by the Mishings. For them, it is Ali Aye Ligang. But, Bihu has got an independent image in the Mishing society. The songs and verses, sung and dance rhythms are tuned to their own purified costumes to signify their own cultural and linguistic identity. The beat of drum is also their own. Generally two types of verses are sung. One is sung with singing Hunsori and the other with flying the Bihu. The verses (not real verses) are sung in Assamese, but in Mishing pronunciation and in between Mishing words are incorporated. Some words are difficult to distinguish from Assamese to Mishing or Mishing to Assamese. As for example:-

*Rasati oi gang (gaon) gangoi (gaon oi)*

*Ma-jan (Mahajan) Chatalat (Chotalat) gang*

*I-bole ma-jan, si bole ma-jan*

*Ma-jan Chatalat gang.*

In the above mentioned verse what is the meaning of ‘Rasati’?, whether it is Assamese or Mishing?, it is not known. It may be an aberrant of the word ‘Hansati’ (a cloth taking together a knife, betel nut and lime). There are also some words which express geographical location within the boundary of Assam. As for example:-

*Rangpur oi Rangagaraha*

*Diburu (Diburu) jilate Unapura (Sonapur).*
There are also some verses referring to Sankardeva—

Joy guru Sankar tumi lola ponjaghar

Aami moro boroshunot pari oi gobinda oi Ram.\(^{29}\)

This type of verses is heard. Over and above this ‘Manikongor geet’ is also sung as verses ‘hunsori’. They believe that if the ‘Manikongor geet’ is completely sung during the ‘hunsori’ there is the probability of rain with storm\(^7\)

The Mishing also observe the tradition of cow-bath in the river on the day of ‘Garu Bihu’. During the bath the cows are given small pieces of gourd, brinjal, thekera, ketkuri, (keturi) etc. which are prepared during the previous night and they sing—*lau koa* (lau kha), *begenang koa* (bengena kha), *tekerang koa* (thekera kha) etc. It is important to note that only the male persons are present at the site of cow bath in the river. Then the cows are handled by a leafy branch of ‘dighalati’ instead of a stick (echari). They also bring back two-three half used *gourd, brinjal, thekera* and hang it in the roof of the house believe that it will drive away the evil spirits. At the evening time when the cows are brought to the cowshed (gohali), they are given new ‘pagha’ (rope) made of herbs ‘tora’ fibre and also a mixture of black gum, mustard oil and turmeric powder as body massage. They are also given some cakes, with salt to eat. This whole programme is followed with immense sincerity and reverence because they believe cows and ox are sacred animals and symbolize wealth. This belief has developed out of their inclination towards Hinduism. Moreover, being an agricultural based community their entire life is dependent on these animals. The Mishings prepare ‘pitha’ (cakes) during the Bohag Bihu only.
On that day at evening the village youths started singing hunsori at the house of the village head (Deka Bora). It is mandatory to sing hunsori at every household of the village irrespective of poor or rich. If a house hold is left out without hunsori being performed by the villagers it means dishonour to the household and it also means the villagers do not like the family. There is a custom in the village that the concerned family has to pay some fine for regulating the lapse. In a Mishing village some youths comprising ten to twelve members cannot form a Bihu group at their whims. There is only one Bihu group in a village and the group is maintained by organization—‘yame mimbir’. Of course, children can form separate groups of Bihu. The ‘yame mimbir’ Bihu group performs Bihu during night time at every household for the entire month of ‘Bohag’. Among the Mishings, there is no tradition of performing Bihu under the tree or at open fields.

There is no tradition of offering ‘Bihuan’ in the Mishing society. Instead the youths try to express love through dance and song. There is no restriction among boys and girls to perform Bihu together at night. The boys and girls sing and dance hand in hand at the Bihu performance. As the hunsori verses are decorated with own colour, so also the Bihu songs, pepa, gagana, flute and drum beatings are performed in Mishing colour. In short, Bihu is enriched with Mishing characteristics.

Ordinarily the songs sung in Bihu were sung in Mishing as well as in Assamese—in these two sisterly languages. Once Oi:nitom was regarded as naked song. At that time “juna mela” song was performed at Bihu. The pronunciation was followed by the Mishing tradition and in between some Mishing words were incorporated into it.

As for example:-
Chirip chirip kori kapor dui (dhui) Achili

Chiri Luitor parat

Gangakoi Chiloni Nahalo je ko:ne

Topiai (Thopiai) Nibore mon

Meaning:- To the beloved by the lover---you were washing clothes on the bank of the Luit. My beloved! Alas, I would not be a bird to lift you up with me.

Ketia paorim (paharim) Toke oi Lawari (lahari)

Ketia paorim Tok

Barnoi Ukaba (sukaba) Dubori gajiba

Tetia Paorim Tok

Meaning:- When will I forget you? No, never. But when the Barnoi (Brahmaputra) would dry up and grass would grow up it, and then only I would forget you.

Noir darat (dharat) botiai(bhatiai) goli oi Ko:neung

Noir darat botiai goli

otobor topola kai (khai) goli Ko:neung

Akaro (Asharo) nalagali maat.

Meaning:- My dear, you were carried out by the downstream, so many belongings you had, but not a single utterance you did give me!
In Mishing Bihu there was another song called ‘Roilah Ni:tom’, which was also performed. It was like this:-

*Roilah oi Charagadeu (Swargadeu) olale*

*Roilah oi batchorar mukaloi (mukhaloi)*

*Roilah doliai pastiche dola hei*

*Cham kolia chamoti kolia*

*Keku Roilah hei*

*Cham kolia chamoti kolia*

*Keku Roilah hei.*

Some point out that, this song was produced on the basis of love relationship developed between the Ahom Swargadeu and the Mishing girl Roilah. Whatever be the reality, it is true that the six hundred years of bright reign of Ahom kings left an impact upon the Mishing society that performed Rongali Bihu since then.

After the Bihu hunsori and Bihu performance is completed, the host of the household bows down to the people with some offering of money in a Bo:tā (raised plate) as gratitude and pray to seek blessings for their well being. The youths are seated in a circle. The same process is followed in the whole village. During this entire month the whole village seems to be in a festive mood. Later on a relaxed day the three groups enjoy feasts at three different households. That might the youths organised ‘Bihu uruainam’ (offering farewell to Bihu).
On one end of the village at the river bank a crocodile is created at sand and on the head of it; a leafy branch of a tree is planted. The youths dance and sing encircling the crocodile and this is the song sang in Bihu farewell. These songs are not sung in other functions. As for example:-

*Kerelangoi bengenanga*

*Amaar Biur batare jai naare.....*

*Gachar Tol oi gachar tola*

*Amaar Biur batare jai naare.....*

They repeatedly sing the above mentioned verses and then sing hunsari and perform Bihu dances. The girls put earrings, bangles, ribbon etc. and the boys tie hand-kar-chiefs on the bank and head of the crocodile. They offer money to the crocodile and bow down for blessing and wishes that the whole year should pass peacefully and they are able to lead healthy lives. At the end, they go home without looking back. Because there is a belief, if they look back, they will be trouble by sleepiness and tiredness.

Both boys and girls perform Bihu dances together and it is an independent tradition of the Mishing people. The Mishings have made Bihu with their own flavour. The ethnic groups like Ahom, Chutiya etc. allowed male and female to dance separately. Hence, once Bihu was regarded as ‘nilajar’ (shameless) ‘geet’ (song). Even in nineteenth century Assamese literate society, when male and female danced together in Bihu that was regarded as disgraceful. It was regarded as a dance performed by the women of low class people with characterless males. But the Mishings in upper Assam courageously performed Bihu where their youths male and female danced together. Haliram Dhekial
Phookan, the father of Anando Ram Dhekial Phookan in his Bengali work ‘Assam Buranji’, mentioned this practice as kuriti (unlawful Bihu) more prevalent in Soumar (Upper Assam) though he did not mention about the Mishings. He says, “Palligrame Satradhykhyerder mritahe je jatra hai sei pradhan parba apor Bihu arthat Boisakher Sakrantir din abadhi 7 dibash parjanta charak na haia Bihur gaan ekta haia thake tahate sadharan loker (low class women) strilok o lampat purush (characterless male) sakal ekatra haia (together) atyanta jugupsit nritygeet karia thake palligrame sarbapekhyya ei parba adhik kintu ei kuriti kamrupe nai Sumare adhik”.

It is not to be found in Kamrup but, abundant in Soumar (Upper Assam), who were the “Sadharan Loker Strisakal” (women of ordinary people) as mentioned by Haliram Dhekial Phukan. In this regard, Dalton clearly pointed out that “The Miri girls dance the somewhat sensual Bihu dance with great spirit...” and again he said, “during the great Bihu festival groups of Miris are to be found amongst the gayest of the revelers”.

In this way Rajani Kanta Bordoloi narrates in ‘Miri Jiyori’ as the people of the Mishing ethnic group observed Bohag Bihu. He gives a lively picture of the Mishing Bihu and says in the following way-- “Aji Bor Bihur din. Jhake Jhake Bihu goa Miri ahi Lakhimpur Bharil. Bate pathe Dhol, Dagar loi phura Miri Deka gabharue anai bonai phuriche. Bhal manuh bilakar ghare ghare dui ajak koi Mirie Bihu patiche.....”

Meaning:- On the day of bor Bihu, groups of Mishing youths thronged Lakhimpur town to perform Bihu. Every where, the young Mishings people with dhol, dagger are loitering on the streets. They perform Bihu at the houses of elite people.

This is mentionable that Bordoloi also indicates in the novel how “bhal” (elite) Assamese society held Bihu at their households. He writes, “Bhal manuhar ghar bilakar
bhitarat maiki manuh bilake lag lagi pochi kheliche. Sei kheluai tini charijani maiki manuhar lagat dui ejan mata deka babuo bohiche”.

Meaning:- Inside the elite households, the women’s got together and played pachi. Some males also took part with them. As also-

*Koto deka gane ejane sejane*

*lag lagaria bichari ani*

*kari khel kare harish antare*

*Dah pochi bool buliche tani.*

Meaning:- Many young people also gathered companions and joyfully played kari uttering ten, twenty-five.

On the other hand, against the “Bhal manuh” (elite people) the common people celebrated Bihu in this way-

*Kono konojone anandita mone*

*Palor mohak gotai loi,*

*Garalia chai jujai jujai*

*Ananda koriche pathare gai.*

That is, at that time common people performed Bihu at the open field. The tradition of performing Bihu at household by youths was not prevalent in the Assamese speaking society. This tradition came to the Assamese speaking society from the
Mishings. From this point of view the tradition of dancing together male and female is a gift of the Mishing society.

Nevertheless, the above mentioned Assamese songs and verses once upon a time prevalent in Mishing society have now been disappearing. These have been replaced by various Mishing songs and verses. But those Assamese songs and verses were of special significance in the folk life at that particular period and symbolised the life style of the Mishing society. From that point of view, in the folk-cultural study, these songs and verses are of immense value.

4.3.2 Magh Bihu

The observance of Magh Bihu starts from the day of Sankranti between Puh and Magh months of Assamese calendar. The day of Sankranti is popularly known as Uruka. The next day Magh Bihu starts with set on fire in the Meji. The secret belief behind this is to satisfy the ‘God of Fire’ to save the granary and other properties from fire, insects and related evils. It is the period having abundance of crops, vegetables, fishes etc. work burdens of paddy fields are over. Every household stores plenty of food items. Thus, the abundance of food items everywhere, directs us to term it as ‘Bhogali Bihu’. The term is derived from the word ‘Bhog’ that means food items to eat.

Like the Rongali Bihu, the Magh Bihu is also not the own festival of the Mishings. But this Bihu secures an independent position in the tradition of the Mishing society. The Mishings call it Ma:gh. Like other ethnic groups the Mishings also make Meji on the night of Uruka at the month of Puh. But unlike other ethnic groups the Mishings do not make different groups of Mejis in a single village. They make two Mejis in a village on the bank of the river where all people of the village work. One is made
taller than the other. The taller is called ‘mata’ (male) Meji and the shorter is called ‘Maiki’ (female) Meji. The act of making of the Meji is called ‘Ma:gh pa:hanam’. For the making of the two Mejis, the cowherds of the village collect dry straw, grasses and by making small bundles, they deposit them on the bank of the river since before one months of preparing the Meji. The youths also frequently get together and cut some trees and collect them dry on the river bank. On the day of Uraka, the young people collect four pieces of Simalu and Raghu tree to make Meji. Then, they are directed perpendicularly on the ground and a square size is made up. On the middle of it, a bamboo with all leaves is placed. On the ground, at the bottom, two pieces of logs are placed and upon them firewood in same size are placed and in between the bundles of dry straw, and grass are given. The four posts are tight in between with some creepers, so that they are not bending. In this way on the measurement of its height the Meji is tightly bound so that it stands erect. When the making of the two Mejis comes to an end, the remaining materials are put to fire and the young people watch them the whole night. There is no tradition of feasting on the night of Uraka. There is also no tradition of stealing duck, chicken and fencing. But now because of impact from other ethnic groups, this evil tradition is emerging in some Mishing villages.

On the day of Sankranti, in the very early morning before crows appear in the sky, it is the tradition to set on fire to the first Meji ‘Mata Meji’. Before placing fire on the Meji, it has been traditional believed that crows should not fly above the Meji. Because, the flying of crows at the moment believe to be not good signed. When half of the male Meji is burnt, the female Meji is also put to fire. A young man whose father and mother is alive, has to take a dip in the water of the river and in wet dress he has to set on fire in the Meji. As soon as the Meji catches fire and ablaze; the other villagers have a
dip in the river water and then they offer ‘Ambug’ (powder of fried black gram and rice),
sweet potato to the burning Meji. They also memorize the Sun, the Moon, the Cloud, the Rain and also their forefathers and ask blessings for their own family.

The families being no children, sick or to have desired to fulfil own aspirations; also come to the Meji with ‘Khar’ or ‘Kanji’ and full pots of *apong*. They beg blessings from the people. The public sit in a circular way; enjoy *apong* (rice beer) and ‘Kanji’ (fried food) and give blessing for fulfilling their desires. Thereafter the younger ones along with their parents seek the blessing of their paternal as well as maternal grand parents (if alive) or else they visit the cemetery with offering like *apong* and other edibles. These offerings are made to the deceased so as to appease them by removing their thirst and hunger and thereafter seek their blessings for peace and prosperity of their family. They also seek blessings of older grand parents in the village. In every bihu the parents provide new dresses for their children and manage it in whatever way possible. In every bihu the boys and girls go from house to house of the village and enjoy by eating different potatoes. This is a custom that everybody has at least to eat a piece of potato during this festival. Otherwise, there is a belief that they will be born as pig in their next life. On the other hand, the adults also visit each and every ones house to house and the host in turn offer *apong and kor* (curry made of fish and other vegetables) or discuss future work like cultivation.

Formerly, on the occasion of Magh Bihu, all the villagers jointly engage themselves in community fishing. So much was the abundance of fish that horses and elephants were also engaged to carry fishes from the *Beel* (wetlands). If somebody caught a big fish, it was distributed among all villagers. During the Magh Bihu, the Mishing societies are able to enjoy fish in abundance.
The Mishings do not make *Pithas* (delicacies) during the Bihu. But they make ‘*Ambug*’ (fried black gram and rice powder). It may be *Ambug anrirano:* (powder) or *alumno:* (ball). Those who have buffalo herds; they distribute milk to every household. It is to be noted that the Mishings consume milk only on that day, not in other days. Of course, now the Mishing consume milk regularly, and the tradition of free distribution of milk is disappeared.

### 4.3.3 Kati Bihu

Apart from the above mentioned two Bihus, the Mishings also observe Kati Bihu in a limited manner. Kati Bihu more popularly known as Kongali Bihu is actually observed in the day of Sankranti between Aahin and Kati months of Assamese calendar. During this time, the paddies in the fields are in the growing stage and the granaries of the farmers are almost empty. The Kati Bihu is intricately related to the agrarian patterns of Assamese social life, where the cultivators are facing immense hardship. Thus, the meaning of Kati Bihu lies with “poor”. This bihu can be considered as the thanks giving occasion to God and in hope for the better crops for the next year. There is not much for eating or enjoyment here. On the evening of the day, earthen lamps (*saki*) are lit at the foot of the household tulsi plant, the granary, the garden (*bari*) and the paddy fields. To protect the maturing paddy, cultivators whirl a piece of bamboo and recite *rowa-khowa* chants and spells to ward off pests and the evil eye. This Bihu is also associated with the lighting of *akaxbonti*, lamps at the tip of a tall bamboo pole, to show the souls of the dead the way to heaven. It is a common practice usually seen in every households of Assam. In some Mishing dominated localities, on the day of Kati Bihu, as like the celebration of Ligang, they prepared *purang* in the morning, during noon time some
people consume *apong*, and in evening they light earthen lamps in front of the household, in the fields, granaries etc.

By comprehensively analysing the said festivals, we can perhaps come to a few observations that the Mishings people also warmly celebrate Bihu, the ancient folk festival of Assam and its inhabitants. Again, the process of acculturation deeply influences the tribe as regards the celebration of their traditional festivals. Ali aye ligang, the national festival of the Mishings no longer seems to have its attraction. On the other hand, the enthusiasm and excitement that involve in celebration of Magh and Bohag Bihu is not found in case of the celebration of Ali aye ligang. It is because of their large scale assimilation with the greater Assamese community. Instead it is now merely symbolic, as the village as a whole celebrates it in a public hall or a field and people rarely visit every household. They no more make much preparation of food items to entertain their guests on this occasion. Because they assume that unlike the two Bihus there will not be more guests in the Ali aye ligang. After some early offerings in the morning, people throng to the place of celebration i.e. *Murong Ukum*. Moreover, the Mishing people that live far away from the village either for studies or for professional purposes rarely visit their village during this festival unlike their visit in time of Magh and Bohag Bihu. In addition to it, Porag, the post harvest festival is on the verge of extinction as Mishing villages very rarely celebrate it. On the other hand inherited festivals like Magh Bihu and Bohag Bihu are celebrated with much enthusiasm and a whole Mishing village looks in a festive mood during Bihu seasons. Thus, in spite of having local variations, Bihu remains a cohesive cultural force amongst the different communities of Assam even in the present divisive times.
In the chapter we discussed specially about the agro based traditional and non traditional festivals of the Mishing society. It is remarkable here that despite being their traditional festivals, the present Mishing society parallely practise the non traditional festivals that are three Bihus taken up from the broad Assamese culture. Besides, the above mentioned aspects, socio-political life, language and literarture comprise a vital part of one’s culture. Hence, in the next chapter, we aim to comprehend the socio-political life, language and literature of the Mishing people in Assam.
References


9. Ibid., P.80


24. Ibid., P-41.


30. Ibid. P.76

31. Ibid. P.77
32. Ibid. P.78
35. Ibid. P.6

****