CHAPTER-5

Socio-Political Life, Language and Literature of the Mishings

5.1 The Mishing Social Life: An Introduction

Society is nothing but a collective human grouping having more or less a similar interest to settle permanently in a specified area. They follow similar livelihood patterns, and share similar way of living as well as culture. Every human being with an inherent social instinct always settles socially. Primitive human beings engaged in hunting and gathering food for their sustenance. So, usually they moved from one place to another in search of food. Being lived socially was a dream for them. They were not well-equipped with stable cultivation. But due to the advancement of technology and human civilisation, correspondently people started living permanently in a specific area. Gradually they started practising cultivation. To satisfy their agricultural needs they have started living socially and accordingly their history, culture, socio-economic as well as religious and political life have been growing. Therefore, centuries ago Aristotle says, “Man is a social animal”.¹ The existence of coordination, uniformity and common hood provides life to the social wheel, otherwise the feeling of oneness become extinct. Thus George Simmel defines sociability as the true essence of society. Regarding coordination C.H. Cooley says, “Co-operation arises when men realise that they have common interests.”² Moreover, every human civilisation functions with having common socio-economic interest among individuals. Social culture shapes their behaviour and those are reflected in the performances of their collective activities.
The term ‘society’ has been defined by a number of social philosophers from different stand points. Among those some of the major definitions can be considered as follows:-

According to Maclver and Page, “Society is a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever changing, complex system, we call society. It is the web of social relationships. And it is always changing.”³ This definition reflects that society is a network of social relationships. An individual is related to others through the ties of kinship, marriage, neighbourhood, caste, occupation, religions, political parties, rights and duties and other activities etc. Thus, an individual becomes part and parcel of several layer groups through these different multiple relationships. These relationships do not occur at random. Rather these are patterned. Therefore, sociologists define society as the pattern of social relationships formed through interaction of its members.

Giddings defines, “Society is the union itself, the organisation, the sum of formal relations in which associating individuals are bound together.”⁴ This definition of society emphasises upon the organisational aspect. Society is not merely a conglomeration or collection of scattered human beings. Rather, its members are bound to one another. Between them we have the existence of some formal relations which are based upon and pertaining to family, race, class and other institutions. Society is an organised group of individuals. Morries Ginsberg is of opinion, that unorganised personal relations should not be ignored and the term ‘society’ should be used for the whole tissue of human relations, whether they be direct or indirect, organised or unorganized, conscious or unconscious, co-operative or antagonistic’. He makes a distinction between ‘society’ and ‘a society’.⁵
The term ‘society’ is used in a wider sense, and it refers to the whole range of human relations, may be they are direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious. The term ‘a society’ is used in a narrower sense. A society has a ‘certain locus, permanence history’. A society is a collection of people held together by certain enduring relationships with some common interests and having a recognizable structure. Within any given society there exists various groupings of men for specialised social purposes.

Hence, a close interrelationship always exists between people and society. Society is none other than collection of people. Accordingly, culture of a nation grows with certain rules and regulations that wish for development of everyone’s humanitarian qualities, religious practices, habits and mores. Since time immemorial, different civilizations grow within cultures of different races. A Mishing society also represents the above mentioned characters and symbolises sociability. The social life pattern of the Mishings is diverse. Their civilization also formulates certain specific rules and practices.

People themselves are attached in different relations in a social set up. Amongst them, marital and blood relationships play very crucial roles. In the Mishing society, according to closeness and integrity, hearty human relationships are categorized into three classes--first, second and third. The direct relationships are of first category such as husband-wife, father-son, mother-daughter, father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister, etc. The second category relations are derived from the relation of the first category such as father and uncle are of first category relation but relationship between uncle and nephew are of second category. Again, relations with brother in laws, sister in laws are of third category relation.
The Mishing woman never speaks the name of her husband, father-in-law, elders to show respect towards them. Generally the Mishing women maintain distance from father in laws and other respected persons. Every Mishing family maintains control over its members. This system contributes towards a secured social system. From the family, the child learns feeling of offering service, love and affection, coordination, lesson of forgiveness, listen order, etc. Here, from the family each child learns about moral values of the society and becomes familiar with traditional religious and cultural practices.

Sexual instinct is a part of human life. In Mishing society, polygamy is prevalent amongst the Mishing male members. Again, the custom of widow remarriage is also socially accepted. Generally the Mishings have joint families. In Mishing family, usually aged person acts as the head of the family. He takes decision in every matter of the household. The wife of the family head occupies the next respective position in the family. She offers advices to other female members about different household activities. The brother or the eldest son helps the family head in maintaining the activities of the house. Joint family system contributes a lot regarding conservation and permanency of Mishing culture. As joint family system have a number of members, it is easy for the family to send one or two members to participate in public activities of the village. The Mishing society is patriarchal. Sons inherit the father’s property. The daughters have no right over her father’s property but during the time of marriage or thereafter, the Mishing family offer domestic animals, jewellery etc. in the name of dowry.

One of the important basis of Mishing social organization is clan (opin). The Mishings are divided into certain clans. One clan includes a number of sub clans (opin). In Mishing system marital relationship among one’s own clan is prohibited. Marital relationship is possible between inter clans. Clans are patriarchal. After marriage a girl’s
clan has been converted to her husband’s clan and her children attain the identification of their father’s clan.

‘Rigbo’ is one of the best instances of joint social system in Mishing villages. If one Mishing family is unable to complete its activities of paddy field in time, then the family seek help from other villagers. This system is called ‘Rigbo’. Accordingly all villagers help the family to complete their activities. Apart from that, the Mishing society collectively performs activities like fishing and hunting. The Mishing girls perform the act of weaving in a long hut collectively.

The Mishing social life is structured on the basis of democratic practices. Democratic practices here involve mass participation in social activities. The term ‘democracy’ is derived from the Greek word ‘demos’ meaning people. According to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people. Every Mishing village has one administrative unit known as ‘Kēbāng’. Kēbāng is constituted by older male members of the village. Woman membership is not at all appreciated in the organization. Among the members of Kēbāng, one efficient person is selected as headman known as ‘Gam’. The kebang actually acts as an institution to settle disputes among villagers and maintain moral and social code of the village. All Mishing villagers get equal right and position in socio-religious institutions.

The organizations of young boys and girls (youths) participate in all social as well as public festivals and institutions. This youth organization is known as ‘Mimbir - yame’. It is a democratically formed institution. Here, from the young boy’s part; there is one headman known as ‘Bora’ and from the girls part there is one ‘Borani’. They provide
leadership to youths in almost all public works such as ploughing, carrying paddy to home, building houses, arranging marriages etc.

Another significant collective social practice to conduct a number of public works by the Mishing youth is ‘Daglige’. In ‘Daglige’, the organization takes a certain amount of remuneration from the concerned household in return for performing their collective work. From the collected remunerations the youth raise public fund, and use that in public expenditure like building Murong house, arranging porag festival and so on.

In the Mishing society women are conceded as mother. Therefore, the Mishings recognise the Sun as ‘Une Do:nyi’ that is Mother Sun. Besides, the Mishings identify rivers as Mother. But the Mishing women in real sense are socially overlooked. Social freedom amongst the Mishing women is limited. Females are not included in social organizations and justice delivery mechanisms such as Kēbāng. On the other hand, in day to day activities Mishing women perform a lot in comparison to their male counterpart.

Hence, the Mishing society symbolises a unique blend of living as well as culture. The Mishings perform numerous socio-religious, political, economic activities through different platforms at domestic and societal levels. It comprises of their specific mode of food habits, dress-code, family structure, clan and kinship ties, religious practises, socio-political and administrative affairs, linguistic and literary activities, etc. All these affairs constitute essence of a Mishing life, upon which the sustenance of Mishing civilization depends. Here, we attempt to comprehend some of the integral attributes representing the Mishing social life.
5.2 Family

One of the most important primary groups of human society is family. It plays vital role in our social life. It is the most basic of all social groupings. All societies large and small, primitive and civilised, ancient and modern have some form of family or the other. The family is the first group in which we find ourselves. It provides for the most enduring form of relationship. Every one of us begins, grows and ends up our lives within the ambit of family. Thus, family is one of the universal institutions which appear in every age and every society. It is the principal organ out of which the community develops. According to Ballard, ‘the family was the original social institution from which all other social institutions developed.’ According to Burgess and Locke, ‘Family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption; consisting of a single household, interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister creating a common culture.’ Hence, family can be described as a primary group because among its members we find an intimate relationship and face-to-face contact. It is also primary in the sense that it is normally the first group in which child’s social interaction begins, and it also ‘influences the individual and shapes his attitudes and behaviour patterns.’ The origin of the term ‘family’ can be traced from the Roman term ‘famulus’, meaning a domestic slave and ‘familia’ meant a collection of slaves attached to a household. This is the simplest form of family. It may also exist in its complex form such as polygamous family and the joint family which are so common in India.

Generally the Mishings have joint family. In joint family system every member of the household share common roof and common kitchen (Murom). Incomes of all the
family members are kept in a joint fund. The head of the family by considering the need of all members spend that money. In such a joint family all male and female members as well as children attain equal privileges, despite being an earner or non-earner, married or unmarried. According to Karve, “A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.” In the language of Davis, “The joint family consists of persons having a common male ancestor, female offspring not yet married, and women brought into the group by marriage. All of these persons might live in a common household or in several households near to one another. In any case, so long as the joint family holds together, its members are expected to contribute to the support of the whole and to receive from it a share of the total product.” The said structure of joint family is widely prevalent in the Mishing social set up.

In Mishing family usually aged person acts as the head of the family. This family head is all in all. He receives respect and obedience from all other family members. He takes decision in every matter of the household. He controls behaviour of all family members and sometimes warns them for wrong deeds. The wife of the family head occupies the next respective position in the family. She offers advices to other female members about different household activities. The brother or the eldest son helps the family head in maintaining the activities of the house.

The joint family significantly contributes towards making children more social. The feelings of cooperation providing service, love and affection, tolerance etc. are properly learnt by children of joint family system. Members of joint families look after the benefits of each other while delivering their activities. Joint families develop feelings
of unity and collective working among the members. Besides from the joint family they learn to work without one’s self interest.

Joint families support the collectivist social system of the Mishings. Here, each member according to his/her ability provides labour. Each of them consumes as per need. The society is able to sustain work efficiency of each member as the joint family system ensures proper division of labour. Joint family system contributes a lot regarding the conservation and permanency of Mishing culture. As the joint family system has a large number of family members, it is easy for the families to send one or two members each to participate in public activities of the village. The Mishing people feel mental security in the joint family system.

Joint system is one of the very significant social systems prevalent in the Mishing society. Presumption can be made that the custom of working collectively begins in the Mishing society. That members of the Mishing family take food from one kitchen, perform household activities jointly, prepare rice by four/ five women, work jointly in paddy field, take food collectively from one big dish, etc. are examples of joint activities performed in Mishing houses.\textsuperscript{13}

5.3 Property inheritance

In Mishing society, the father’s property has been transferred to his sons. The daughters have no right over her father’s property. Property has been distributed equally among the sons. No son can claim property till the father is alive. But a small amount of the property can be allotted at the consideration of the father if a son is married and lives separately. Earlier the Mishings have no permanent property because they are migrated from one place to another.
Usually father distributes property among his sons. After the death of the parents, the sons inherit paternal property. If quarrel occurs among the brothers then older villagers or Kēbāng distribute property among them. If the property distribution is done when the parents are alive then one part is kept separately for the parents also. The son who takes care of his parents in old age, usually after the death of his parents that particular son gets that part of parent’s property. There is no prevalent custom about offering property rights to girl child. But during the time of marriage or thereafter, the Mishing families usually offer domestic animals, jewellery etc. A widow can inherit her husband’s property. If she remarries outside the clan of her husband, then she will automatically lose the inheritance, but does not, if the remarriage is done within the same clan of her husband.  

At present with the spread of education and urbanisation among the Mishing society, the custom of inheritance of property has been gradually changing. Variation of laws of inheritance is also observed among the different sections of this community living at different parts of Assam. Apart from property relations, the Mishing Joint family structure has been undergoing tremendous changes with the passage of time and usually among the educated and employed Mishing youth, we witness a shift towards nuclear, scattered families.

5.4 The Position of Women in the Society

Scholars expressed various views as regards the position and existence of man and woman in society. These explanations are based on biological, anthropological, practical, interactive, Marxist and Freudian points of views. Among these, the point of views extended by S.B. Ortner is especially mentionable. In the decades of seventies of
the last twenty century a book titled ‘Women, Culture and Society’ edited by M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere included an article “Is Female to male as Nature is to Culture?”, in which Ortner said that the reason behind women’s declined position in the society is not biological but cultural. Because physically women are weaker than the males, their position is not degraded, but because of cultural traditions women’s position is degraded than the males. He explains that culture is better than nature in all societies. But culture is controlled by males. Men control culture with the help of skill and technology, and that is why nature and women are considered inferior to culture. The physical structure of a female bears the capacities of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation which a male cannot bear. Therefore, the involvement of women in regard to socio-religious and some other public aspects remains in limit, yet their relation with other members of the family in fact is deep-seated.\textsuperscript{15}

Having admitted the view of Ortner, it can be said that the four reasons behind women’s restriction in the society are menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. But these are proved to be incorrect at the last phase of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The modern women are not machines to give childbirth. The childbirth is dependent on the wishes of the woman. So a woman can control the other three factors except menstruation. Here, we can incorporate the popular feminist perspective that tries a lot to empower women and make them free from the exploitation of men in both domestic and social fields. Feminists tend to ensure democratic rights of women aimed to bring equal status and dignified living for them along with their male counterpart. Considering all these aspects, we attempt to comprehend the socio-familial position of Mishing women in Assam.

The woman of north east is provided with two separate existences under the social infrastructure. They are patriarchal and matrilineal. In the Khasi and Garo society
in Meghalaya, women enjoy some better position considering matrilineal system in society. But still they are not completely free, even partly they are prevailing male domination. In Assam the Mongoloid ethnic group of people have patriarchal structure. Therefore, the existence of women is lower than that of men in such society. The objective of this study is to determine the position of Mishing women in the society.

In comparison to non-tribal people, the tribal people are in a better condition when their women enjoy more freedom. But freedom is meaningless if it is without right. The Mishing women like other tribal women enjoy freedom, but this freedom is freedom of work, which is nothing but a burden.

A day of a Mishing woman starts with household works such as husking paddy, filling the water jars, lifting water, cleaning the fire place, washing the utensils and dishes, giving fodder to pigs, preparing foods, etc. She also goes to the paddy field to work with males, and then goes to the forest to collect fire wood, wild vegetables, catching fishes, then coming back home, prepares food, feed the family members and guests, bath the children and completes other works. After having taken the lunch, she again goes to the field to complete the rest work. Whole the evening the Mishing women carry a bundle of fire woods, on the back carrying the child and making the thread on the hand, which is a very normal scene to look at. Coming back home, she starts all household works, looking after the children, tendering the pigs with fodder, tendering goats and chickens, filtering apong, then preparing food for the night and she is the last person to go to bed after having served all family members. Even when she is free from cultivation work, she is busy with weaving. It is evident that Mishing women are more active compared to the male counterparts, but they enjoy very little rights over property.
The word “freedom” is associated with “right” and the word “right” is associated with duty or role to be followed. The Mishing women play a vital role in family but they are given very little freedom without right.

The Mishing women are not given any right. They play a major role in generating property and making income, but at the father’s house as well as at the husband’s house she is deprived of any property. In the Mishing society the right of property like any patriarchal society, goes to the son after the father’s demise. The only property held by the women is the income which she receives from selling her pigs, chicken etc. and some utensils and pot, jewellery, clothes received from the parents at the time of marriage. When the husband dies, the widow can live with the family and if she has a son, the son can inherit the father’s property, when he is adult. If she marries another person, she cannot claim property. The Mishing society has the tradition of widow marriage. Generally when the husband dies, the widow can marry the elder brother or the younger brother of the deceased. If the widow has a daughter and she wishes to marry outside the family, she cannot claim any property. In fact, no women can claim right over property in the Mishing society.

The Mishing woman has no right over buying or selling of property. No importance is given, even if some women speak out about property right. At the time of some festivity where large quantity of apong is needed, then only women’s opinion is emphasised where that quantity of apong is possible to collect or not. As regards the marriage of the daughter or son, no importance is given to the views of a woman.

There is no membership of women in ‘Kêbāng’. So the result of judgement as regards pre-marriage pregnancy goes against the concerned girl. Because women could
give only witness, but could not take part in decision making. Even no value is given to
women’s comments at Yame-Mimbir (youth organization).

The Mishing houses are divided into two parts length wise. The point up to the
main pole is called ‘Ri:sing’ and down part is called ‘Koktag’. The religious activities are
held at ‘Ri:sing’, and no dirty things are kept in that part. The ‘Koktag’ part is used to
keep utensils, vegetables, and to cut meats and fish and to filter apong. The honourable
people and guests are seated at the ‘Ri:sing’ area and women are not allowed to enter
that area. Symbolically it is the honourable area of the house.

The Mishing women cannot lead religious functions; they are not allowed to do
that. They cannot become saints. They cannot bless at the religious functions. The only
job of Mishing women at religious function is to prepare food for the saints and religious
leaders, to filter apong and to chant religious hymns along with them and to serve them.
The food and apong should be served to the leaders by the women. The menstruation
period of women is looked down upon as ‘Nahrore-mahnou’ (dirty things). During that
period no woman can participate in any religious function. So, if any ‘Dobur uie’
(religious function) is to be held in the village, such women are sent away on the
previous night to another village.

The men can marry more than one wife. But a woman cannot maintain physical
relation with married men. Whatever misdeed is committed by the husband, a woman
has to tolerate like a good wife. Even the good wife should not object to the physical
torture meted out to her by the husband. The ‘good wife’ cannot do that.

The above discussion makes it clear that in the Mishing society the women are
crippled by some so-called rules and regulations. So in the words of Ortner the elements
involved in the super structure of the Mishing society have made the creativity of women crippled. They are under the impact of male domination. But it should not be forgotten that progress of society is dependent on the progress of women.

5.5 Clan

A clan is a unilineal kin group which is usually exogamous. It claims descent from a common ancestor, and is often represented by a totem. The totem is a species of an animal or a plant or more rarely a class of inanimate objects. The belief and customs of the community are associated with these objects. Clans are of either matrilineal (matriclan) or patrilineal (patriclan) descent, recruiting the children of either male or female members accordingly. But they do not know the genealogicalities with the ancestor/ancestress. A clan is usually segmented into lineages, which are the branches of descent from a common ancestor.

The ancestor or mythical ancestor, through whom the descent is claimed, may be human, human like animal, plant or even inanimate object. The ‘Gotra’ (a group among the Hindus) represents clans. These clans are larger groups and are geographically more dispersed. The clans may have a common totemic name and common ritual taboos against eating the flesh of the totemic animal.\(^\text{16}\)

The Mishings are one of the important and indigenous tribes of Assam. Like other tribes the Mishing society also has the existence of clan system. Members draw clans from the names of their forefathers or from the names of deities. They believed that there is a creator of the Universe. And the living beings of the world were created by a Supreme Being. Therefore, they trace their ‘opin’ (clan) from the name of that creator. For them, the mystery prior to the creation of earth is the Keyum (vacuum). From the
Keyum, seven incarnations took place. They were Yumkang, Ka:si, Siang, Anbo, Bo:muk, Mukseng and Se:di. Nothing was created in the universe prior to Me:lo and the Se:di. Later on, after the creation of Se:di and Me:lo, several incarnations took place. They were Se:di, Di:lling, Li:tung, Tu:ye, Ye:pe, Pedong-Nane (perpetuating mother). As they believed that, the Pedong-Nane is the supreme creator or mother who created the Gods and Goddesses, human beings, animals, plants, insects and other creatures of this world. They regarded all the incarnations as deities. But the Mishings cite the name of Mother Pedong-Nane (mother rain); when they count their clan, because she is regarded as the creator of all.17

Some of the Mishing clans are Kuli, Kutum, Kaman, Kagyung, Doley, Pegu, Panging, Morang, Mipun, Lagachu, and so on. The Mishings have sub-clans and clan-deity’s also. For instance, Le:dang, and Le:tung, Gejera, Patiri are some of the sub-clans of Doley clan and their deity is known as She:bo. Clan deities are not so important now a days in their social activities. There are few clans among the Mishings which came into being as a result of the contact with the Chutiyas, the Ahoms and the Bhuyans. Some of the Chutiyas took shelter in the Mishing villages when they were defeated by the Ahoms (1376 A.D.). Later on, they got married with Mishing women and became Mishing. The name Chutiya-Miri or Miri-Chutiya is the result of those inter-community marriages.

Like the Chutiyas, during the Ahom reign and the Burmese aggression, many Ahoms took shelter in the Mishing villages and settled down permanently. Hence, many Mishing families have adopted Chutiya and Ahom surnames (e.g. Konwer, Handique, Gogoi, Gohain, etc.). The surnames are not regarded as clan names though they use them after their names.
Till the last part of the nineteenth century, the Mishings did not use their clan name as surnames. At that time, the Mishings introduced themselves according to their father’s names. Later on, the name of the father was regarded as the clan name and from then onwards clans have been playing an important role in all their social activities. Nowadays, a man is not allowed to enter into the household if he does not know his own clan and clan-deity. Of course, this practice is not strictly followed by the Mishings.\textsuperscript{18}

5.6 Kinship

In all societies people are bound together by various bonds. The most universal and the most basic of these bonds is based on reproduction and it is called Kinship. Kinship rises two kinds of bonds. First, there is the bond between spouses and relatives on either side and secondly, there is the bond between parents and their children and that between siblings, which are the children of the same parents. The first kind which arises out of a socially or legally defined marital relationship is called `affinal kinship’ and the relatives are called `affinal kin’. The relationships based on blood ties are called consanguineous kinship.

A kinship group is called a broad range or narrow range according to the number of persons it includes. Thus, the modern kinship system is a narrow range system, whereas the primitive siblings are a broad-range sib. The modern family recognizes kinship with both the parents’ families of origin and therefore it has been called a bilateral grouping. Of course, this recognition may not be equally weighted on either side. Then there are sibs which completely ignore one of the two lines of descent, and are called unilateral groups.\textsuperscript{19}
If a common ancestor is the binder of a people they are called cognates. In case their common ancestor is a male they are called agnates or agnatic kin or patrilineal kin, whereas descendents of a common female ancestress are called uterine kin or matrilineal kin.

The study of the kinship system among the Mishings of Assam has brought out the following points: - Mishing kinship is bilateral and consanguinity has primary importance and affinity comes next. A person is born in a family and thereby develops a relationship with his or her procreators and their parents in the ascending generation as well as his or her siblings in his or her own generation. This kinship relationship plays a pivotal role in the life of the person providing food, shelter, protection and education till his or her maturity. The person is now ready for his or her affinal relationship from around the age of fourteen to twenty years in case of female and eighteen to twenty five years in case of male. Generally kinship terms indicate certain categories of relationships from the point of view of marriage.

The origin of the kinship terms among the Mishings is not known. Even so a kinship term indicates the position and identification of a Mishing individual and his rights and obligations in his family. Some of the primary and secondary kins are indicated by denotative kinship terms and others are referred to and addressed by classificatory terms. The people use denotative terms, such as *Abu* or *Abo* and *Abbatta* and *Abboi* to denote father, father’s elder brother and father’s younger brother respectively.

The terms of relationship and mutual address used by the Mishings are as follows:-
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<th><strong>English</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mishing</strong></th>
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<td>Father</td>
<td>Abu or Babo</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Ané or Nané</td>
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<td>Brother</td>
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<td>Brother (elder)</td>
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<td>Wife’s brother (elder)</td>
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<td>Wife’s brother (younger)</td>
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<td>Māmo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wife’s sister (younger)</td>
<td>yígné</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son -In –Law</td>
<td>Māgbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son’s wife</td>
<td>yāmēng</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above mentioned terms actually reflect various kinds of Mishing kinship relations. Every individual occupies a position in the intra-family relationship. One is a father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, and brother or sister and so on. Being in such a position, one has certain rights against one’s fellow-kins and reciprocally one is
obliged to perform certain function for their benefit. One is also bound to observe some norms under the prevailing culture of the society in one’s behavioural patterns towards all fellow-kins. In such family relations different individuals secure the privilege of enjoying different rights and at the same time face the problem of bearing different obligations.

5.7 Marriage system

Marriage is a universal social institution. It is the institution that allows social sanction to man and woman to establish sex-relationship between them and to produce children. Edward Westermark defined marriage as, “is more or less a durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring.” Edward Malinowski defined, “Marriage on the whole is rather a contract for the production and maintenance of children than an authorization of sexual intercourse.” From the standpoint of the society the sole object of sex-gratification is the production of children, as W.G. Summer and A.G. Keller very aptly remark, “the marriage institution is the organisation for societal self-perpetuation and is parallel to the industrial organisation for societal self-maintenance.” According to M. Gandhi marriage is “Spiritual union through the physical.” The physical lust in man and woman is ennobled and purified by mental love, good will, friendship and co-operation of both the married partners when they are tied to each other by the bond of marriage union. Accordingly, we witness the prevalence of marriage system in almost all the societies.

The Mishing marriage system has unique characteristics and comprises of attractive rules and regulation. Marriage system is common and particular irrespective of all societies. The Mishing marriage system includes three forms of socially recognised
and equally popular systems. One is called Midang (formal-arranged marriage), another two methods are Dugla-lanam (elopement) and Kumna-sola-lanam (marriage by force). Both these systems are socially recognized and equally popular among the Mishings.

5.7.1 Formal marriage

The Mishing have their own traditional marriage systems. They are very strict in regards to their clans (Opín). The boy and girl of the same clan cannot marry even ‘if Sun rises in the west’. People of same title or race cannot marry each other as they are thought to be originated from the same Gumín-So:yin (forefathers).\(^{24}\) 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. Besides, some people of different titles also belong to same Gumin. Here if the Gumin is same among the people of different titles, the marriage among them has been prohibited. Such as the people titled Kutum, Kuli and Mili etc. are of same Gumin known as ‘Bomi’. Therefore, marriages among the people of these titles have been restricted. On the other hand, marriage can be arranged among general relatives, relatives from the part of uncle (from mother’s side) and aunt (from father’s side).

When boys and girls become young, they are eligible for marriage in the Mishing society. In Formal marriage system, generally from groom’s side people start the system of asking as well as introducing the bride and her family. Normally in the months of Aghon, Magh, Fagun, and Bohag the Mishing society arranges marriages. These months are considered fortunate by the people to commence any good activity.

When the bride is chosen, the parents or guardians of the groom give information to the bride’s family. Accordingly, the parents and guardians of the bride arrange food
and other requirements to welcome the members from the groom’s side. On the specified
date, when the people from the groom’s part arrive at the house of the bride, the relatives
and head of the village from the bride’s part are invited. Then the family take their
opinion about the marriage. It is known as ‘yamne-tadnam’. On the consensus of all
members present the Mishing society arranges the marriage. If the decision for marriage
is curtained, on that specific day, the bride side openly inform the groom’s part. Again to
decide the date for marriage and other necessary arrangement the members from both the
bride and grooms part assembled. It is known as ‘Yamne-Tadprir’.

After prolonged discussion, when the marriage is fixed, the groom usually comes
to the bride’s house in an interval of seven to ten days and performs a few works. It is
known as ‘Magbo Dugnam’. Magbo means son-in-law and Dugnam means working in
one’s father-in-law’s house. Earlier Magbo Dugnam had been performed for three to five
years. But now this system is less practised among the Mishing society, due to impact of
education and broaden sphere of their thinking.

At the time of marriage the well dressed groom comes to the bride’s house. The
groom with two of his friends of similar age and two young girls arrange Yamgur
(accompany) and in the middle of them the groom is asked to sit. Following the groom
two persons carry two containers of dry fish. Besides according to earlier decision people
from the groom’s side carry certain numbers of pigs, pots of po:ro apong and betel–nut.
In this system there is no rule of offering money to the bride’s side. When the groom
arrives in house of the bride, aged women from bride’s part warmly welcome the groom.
Usually in front of the bride’s home they arrange pandel and ask the groom to take rest.
The actual marriage starts in the next day morning.
For the Mishings, a ritual of the marriage is like a festivity. On that day all the young boys and girls, aged persons, kids etc. wear new clothes. In the Mishing society at the time of marriage, there are prevalence of dances and song with dhol-tal, etc. In the day of marriage, the assembled villagers offer a number of gifts to the bride and wish blessings from their heart. At the specified time, the groom is welcomed to bride’s ‘Chang ghar’ and both bride and groom are collectively asked to eat ‘Pinpu-apin’ (rice). The assembled people also take food with fish, meat, apong and rice. After the feast has been over the bride- groom takes ‘Sewa’ (blessings) from priests, parents of the bride and from the assembled people. After taking blessings, the groom takes the bride to his home.

In the Mishing marriage system, in groom’s house a new footstep called “kobang”, is decorated tightly with piro leaves, in front of the door steps two full pots of water, tool, bucket of rice and paddy, etc. are inevitably used. The new steps and tools are made of a special wood. When welcoming the bride- groom they use to sing marriage related Mishing folk songs. Besides when the bride is prepared to send with the groom, the bride cries in a special rhythm known as ‘Yamne-Kumnam’. It is full of sorrows and very well example and well described in Mishing folk literature.

5.7.2 Dugla-lanam

The Mishing society has another system of marriage known as “Dugla-lanam”. That is elopement of girls. If the parents of boy and girl do not agree with the marriage or due to poor economic conditions, the loved boy and girl usually take the path of Dugla-lanam. In this system the boy takes away the girl and both of them stay in a secret place. After one or two days one messenger is sent to the bride’s house to inform about the
elope. That system is called ‘Dughat’. The person may be a relative of the groom or any aged person of the village. He should be clever and affluent in talking. After sending the ‘Dughat’ bride has been brought to the groom’s house. The Mishing society uses the similar system of welcoming of the new bride as that of the general system of marriage. After completion of the initial ritual the new couple is asked to touch the rice or the paddy arranged in the door steps. After that they take ‘Kunnam’ (sewa) from the groom’s parents. At night of the special day when the new bride-groom enters into the groom’s house usually the Mishings organise ‘Yamne Tonsang’. Here the guests are welcomed with po:ro apong filter by the new bride.

After completion of one or two months of taking away the girl, the people from the groom’s part visit the house of bride to offer the value of the girl known as ‘Orai-alig’. A number of aged men and women along with a selected affluent parent known as ‘patiri’ go to the bride’s house and give them apong as well as betel-nut. This system is usually performed at night. The value of alig is usually given in the form of money or domestic animals. After offering money and betel-nut, people from the groom’s part request the bride’s part to take ‘alig’ (demand from the part of the bride’s house in return of the taking away of the girl). As the groom has taken away the bride without informing her parents; therefore as a moral responsibility people from the groom’s part apologise before bride’s family and ask them to take ‘alig’ (demand) as a value of the bride. It is a prevalent custom of the Mishing society to socially request the bride’s family to forgive the groom for his elopement. Sometimes both parts are engaged in quarrels regarding the value of ‘alig’ (demand). Usually in taking alig either in joy or in quarrel both the parts take plenty of apong. There is no specific value that has been decided for ‘alig’ (demand). Some parents just only take five rupees in the name of alig. For alig in every
household of the bride’s village, people from the groom’s part offer one betel-nut each. It is known as alig from the bride. 

5.7.3 Kumna-sola-lanam

To avoid the heavy expenditure to be incurred in case of holding the Midang marriage, another but less practised marriage system among the Mishings is “Kumna-sola-lanam”. ‘Kumna’ means to take blessings of the elders, ‘sola’ means to pull on by force and ‘lanam’ means to gain or receive. That is to gain a bride first by pulling on a girl (may be unwilling girl) by force and then marry her with taking consent and take blessings from the parents and elders of both sides. It is a simple and less expensive marriage system. Here, often instant marriage ceremonies, at a day’s notice are arranged and only the most intimate and close relatives are invited. This form of marriage is generally practised by following a compromise between the bride and the groom’s parties in case of forceful abduction of an unwilling bride by the groom.

5.8 Widow marriage

Child marriage is restricted in the Mishing society. But the system of remarriage is prevalent among them. The early aged widows or the people who lose his wife can also arrange remarriage. Such marriages are not held expensively; rather they are performed in a very simplest way. The widow can get married with the younger brother of her husband; but elder brother cannot marry his younger brother’s widow. Again after the death of one’s wife the person can marry with the sister of his late wife.

5.9 Divorce

“Divorce” as M.H. Neumeyer defines it, “is a legal dissolution of the marriage relation by a court or other body having authority to dissolve a valid marriage contract.” The institution of divorce though very widespread now-a-days is an old social
institution to be found prevalent in most countries, though the circumstances in which
divorce was permitted differed in different ages and places. A few divorce cases are also
witnessed in the Mishing society. If problem occurs between couples the respected
people and elders try to settle them. Especially in inevitable cases, they ask the society to
judge their case. The accused person has to stand before the society and has to give fine
as per the decision of the society. If divorce is occurred; then both the husband and the
wife have the freedom to be engaged in remarriage again. In the Mishing society some
causes of divorce are observed. These causes are mentioned below:-

i. If both husband and wife are mutually willing to end their marital
relationship, then the “Do:lung Kébāng” (village council) can give
approval for divorce. No question of compensation arises in this regard.

ii. If husband cannot afford maintainace then the wife can leave him or
divorce him.

iii. If husband marries more than one wife then one of the wives may leave
her husband.

iv. If husband inflicts repeatedly physical torture on wife she can divorce
him.

v. If husband behaves indifferently to wife and loose character, wife can
divorce him.

vi. If for some reason or other the couple remains childless for a few years,
and then the husband or the wife can seek divorce.
5.10 The tradition of Birth and Death

Both birth and death are universal phenomena. Different societies in the world accept this from their own point of views and also they perform the rituals associated with birth and death from the same perspective. The Mishing people also perform the rituals associated with the two important events from their own point of views.

5.10.1 Birth

The Mishings consider the birth as something impure or dirty thing. As soon as the labour pain begins the pregnant woman is shifted to a separate room. A Mishing house is not generally separated with construction of walls. But for the child bearing woman a separate room is temporarily made out of the house. There hangs a long cloth on the bamboo bar of the house where there is a provision for the woman to hold the other end of the cloth to enhance the delivery. This cloth is called ‘Chahlag’. For the woman there is also a provision of fire place making out of a bowl with soil, where there is constant fire. The experienced women of the village serve the pregnant woman right from the beginning of pain up to the time of safe delivery. This facility to the child bearing woman is called ‘Ao Kahnam’.

There are some social beliefs or taboos among the Mishing people as regards persistent of labour pain. If the child bearing woman is ‘Imur-grimur’ (criminal), or if she is disrespectful to senior people the child birth becomes troublesome. In that situation the woman is asked to confess her crime, so that the birth process becomes easy. In some villages the woman is given to drink the foot wash water of the husband. The delivery room is exclusively under the occupation of the experienced women, none
other is allowed to enter the room. Even the husband is to stay outside, except in certain unavoidable reasons.

During the delivery time new hand woven clothes are kept ready for the mother and the new born baby. At that time the woman can wear only new clothes. As soon as the new born baby is delivered the birth vein is cut and knotted with cotton threads. No knife made of iron is used to cut the vein, instead a bamboo blade is made out of a piece of bamboo and with it the vein is cut. After the vein is cut, the baby is bathed clean and put into a new cloth. After the birth, the mother is given to eat chilly chicken curry cooked with (jhal) black pepper ‘bihlangani’ and drink ‘apong’. This ‘jhal eating’ continues up to the time when the woman is allowed to come out of the room. This is called ‘Ao Yadnam’. So relatives and neighbours who come to visit the mother and the baby, they bring with them chicken and ‘apong’. In some villages the new mother is not allowed to use bell metal plates, but instead given to use banana leaves.

The new mother cannot go through the door used by others. So that she can go out alone, a new door is made out of cutting a wall of the house. She is also provided with a separate ladder to ascend the house (Changghar). But now a days this tradition is disappeared. When she goes to the river to bath, she must have a knife with her. The new born baby is also protected with a knife or a handful of master seeds beside the pillow. Some even prepare a pillow of master seeds and the baby’s head is put on it. In case of female child on the odd day (generally fifth day) and in case of male child even day (generally sixth day) is chosen to hold the coming out ritual. That day both parents must drink blessing water (Shanti water), that water is prepared by a saint or a senior member of the village. This coming out ritual is called ‘Uchinam’ (purifying ritual). This ritual is
not the beginning tradition of Mising society which is evident from the term ‘Suchi’ (purification).

On the day of coming out ritual, the naming ceremony was also held the same day. Generally the names of Mishing people were comprised of two letters. The second letter of the father’s name was used to begin with the son’s name. For example, if the father’s name was ‘Batum’, the son’s name was too started with ‘Tum’ and finally the name of the son was ‘Tumkang’ or ‘Tumbang’.

After the coming out ritual is held, the family members of the newborn baby can visit the neighbour’s houses, but they cannot take part in any religious functions till new moon of the next month appears in the sky. They cannot undertake long journey, and the new mother cannot cook the family’s food. During these days the new born's mother wears over the ‘mekhela’, under the waist, a coloured cloth called ‘Gero’.

5.10.2 Death

Every human being is mortal. It is a natural fact. Even death is painful to all. So that people can express sorrow, misery and all come to know the death of aged person, except the death of children; a drum is being beaten continuously on the roof of the house of the deceased. Sometimes bell metal is being rung in the place of a drum. As soon as the people hear the sound of the drum or the bell, they come to the specific house and help in arranging the last rituals for the deceased; even the people from neighbouring village come leaving aside their works in the field. At dead the body before buried a ritual of purification is performed by washing the body with holy water mixed with other sacred elements. The hair is combed and new clothes are worn at the opposite way as the normal people wear. There is a belief that after death everything is held just opposite.
The whole of the body is covered with cloth and brought to the foreground. Then the body is put on the Changi (carrier made of bamboo) and brought to the burial place.

The Mishings do not cremate the body; they bury it in a hole. At the time of making the hole, four Anna (twenty five paise) is paid as a price of the land. Then, the dead body is put to a runkug (a coffin made out of old wooden boat) and it is brought to the hole and covered with soil. Finally, a white coloured cloth is spread over the burial place and the entire place is covered with bamboo fencing. As per the Mishing traditional belief system the ‘whiteness’ generally signifies the state of being pure and the colour of ‘white’ symbolises holiness associated with the deceased soul. After that all the belongings of the deceased are hang on the fencing on a belief that all those clothes are now impure and may bring misfortune to the family. So, those are left in the burial place.

Before the people come back from the burial ground a fire is held on the foreground, there is some mustard oil in a bowl, and some dubari (holy grass). As the people come back the host of deceased person keep a handful of mustard seeds and throw to them. They then take bath and in the wet condition they take warmth from the fire take oil from the bowl and then change their clothes. Then they come to the Chang Ghar (house). On the third day of death ‘Tilani’ is observed. But this is not the own tradition of the Mishings. After coming to the plains of Assam and settled closely with the people practising the Hindu religious faith, they accepted this tradition. The word ‘Tilani’ is not a Mishing word, but an Assamese one. The meaning of ‘Tilani’ is given in Hemkosh in this way—“Tilani, a field of the sesamum plants; a ceremony performed by the low-caste Hindus on the third day after death.”

The people of higher social position maintained lower attitude towards the people who observed ‘Tilani’.
After the ‘Tilani’, the Mishings observe *Urom Apin* or *Uchi* (purification) function and then *Dodgang* (Adya Shraddha). These two functions are held considering the financial condition of the concerned family, there is no specific timeframe to arrange these two functions.

### 5.11 Food habits

Food is the highest essence for the existence of any living being. None can survive without food irrespective of either human or animal; not to speak of the plants. This is why food for all is the first need. For the entire human race food has two fold influences on both body and mind. For the growth of the corporeal existence of man food makes a gradual expansion on human physiology that impact on the human intelligence. So, behind the sharp human intelligence and prompt capacity of comprehension the striving effect of food is to be highly recognized.

Geography and climate shape food habits of inhabitants of a certain area. When the Mishings stayed in the hills they used to eat mainly potato, taro, fruits, meat attained through hunting. With the passage of time they came to plains and gradually fish, meat, fruits, rice become the main food of Mishings. Besides, after getting influences from a number of other communities, some other food items entered into the Mishing food habits. But traditional food items and process of preparing them is still prevalent in the Mishing society.

With the changes of time and circumstances, a number of significant changes appeared amongst the Mishings. Earlier they engaged in hunting animals for meat. Later they started rearing some domestic animals and became able to produce meat
domestically. They built fishery to get fresh fish. Gradually after acquiring knowledge of cultivating different crops, they also started to produce a number of food items. Earlier, the Mishings were only reliant on wild vegetables. Now, they are dependent on vegetables made up of cultivation. Previously they used to drink red tea without milk. But at present they often drink milk tea. Again, the Mishing had the system of eating boiled vegetables in water, later they used oil in preparing vegetables to eat. Fish, meat, vegetables, green leaves etc. are the daily use food items of Mishing. They make fish and meat dry to use for longer periods. ‘Namsing’ (dry fish) is one of the fond food items amongst the Mishings. It is one kind of the ancestral food items of the Mishing people. The ingredients use to prepare ‘namsing’ are dry fish, taro leafs, and other different wild leafs. After properly washing leafs, they mixed them properly with dry fish and prepared a thick pest. They keep the pest within bamboo and cover tightly with paddy straw. After keeping one month within the bamboo tube, the ‘namsing’ become ready to eat.

The Mishings use to rear animals like pigs, chickens, goats, ducks, pigeons, etc. at home and use to eat their meat. In festivals as well as rituals; they use a number of pigs and chickens. They feel very proud and happy when they are able to serve their guests with chicken, fish or meat. Generally everybody is ready to serve their guest with fish and meat.

In ‘Ali aye ligang’ and in some other festivals, they use to serve purang. ‘Purang’ is made up of Bora rice. For ‘purang’ the wet Bora rice is packed in tora leafs in small-small packets and boile them. The purang is served with dry fish, salt, ginger and chilli. Other than ‘purang’ they use to prepare pitha (cake) from Bora rice during the time of festivals.
One of the important ingredients used in preparing Mishing dishes is ‘khar’. It is prepared from fire ash (sai) made up of fired dry leaf and skin of mati pulse trees. The Mishings filter the ash with a very small quantity of water and that khar is used in the dishes of pulse, banana tree and amrin dishes. In these dishes they use dry fish or namsing. Amrin is one of the important dishes of Mishing. It is prepared from the broken parts of rice. Usually it is boiled as like the dishes of pulse and generally added with khar, dry fish or namsing.

Wild leaves and vegetables are the main food items of Mishings. While the Mishing women collected fire wood from jungle they collect wild leaves or vegetables like ambe, takuk, tagik, gurban, akorbiling, nokung, takpiyang, koldil, jeying, dheka, etc. As per taste now a days, the Mishings use mustard oil to prepare vegetable dishes. But according to the Mishing tradition, they usually boil the vegetables in water. Apart from these dishes, the Mishings are engaged in cultivation of potato, cabage, radish, mustard green, spinach , bottle gourd, white gourd, lady’s finger, tomato, chilly, parwal, brinjal, butter bean, ridged luffa, etc. They include these edibles in their daily recipe.

In ancient times the Mishings used various types of potato (kath alu) dishes as prime food instead of rice. At present these food items are used in their traditional festivals only. They also cultivate potato in both homestead and cultivated land. The Mishings use various potatos such as mayong, sungkrik, ingti, pagril, kamoril, etc., in their traditional festivals and in rites as one of the staple dish. Apart from these, they are also engaged in cultivation of ginger and haldi. The Mishings are cultivating jack fruit, mango, banana, papaya, litchi, etc. These fruits are immensely used by them and also sell in the market for income sources.
Apart from chilli, ginger, haldi, black pepper etc, the Mishing society uses limited number of other masalas. They use to prepare all these food items tasty by cooking them differently as roast, boil, fry etc. ‘Ra:ngsor oieng’ is one of the important dish amongst the Mishings. They boil certain green leaves without using salt, chilly and any other masala. After boiling, they mix those with salt, chilli and eat them with rice. ‘Pritu ra:sor’ (mustard plant), tule: ra:sor (mustard green) etc. are essential staple food of the Mishings. The different cooked items of the Mishings are mentioned below:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mishing term</strong></th>
<th><strong>English term</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apín</td>
<td>rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amprí:prínam</td>
<td>boiled rice within bamboo tubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amrín</td>
<td>curry made up of breaked rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alāng</td>
<td>liquid curry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aāmnām</td>
<td>food items prepared by using sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adín oyíng</td>
<td>meat curry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amku apín</td>
<td>rice prepared from new food grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambrin</td>
<td>rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambug</td>
<td>chira or jalpan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāgiom</td>
<td>curry prepared by using oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bākfrípo</td>
<td>dry curry of dry fish or meat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bā:nām roasted

Oyīng curry

Ong:oyīng fish curry

Pā:rāt curry made up of pulse

Pāmnām food items prepared by cooking in leaves

Purāng boiled rice with leaves

Pīnor hot rice

Pīnkāng cool rice

Rā:sor a type of boiled leafy vegetables

Rā:nām adīn boiled meat

Rā:nām curry without using oil

Sompā alāng liquid curry of outenga and so on.

Tītjét chatni

Yongēt mixed boiled food supliment (pitika)

Besides, the Mishing people use some of the traditional leaves and roots as their food items. Local names of some of those food items are ---Takung, Kukpiyang, Tagig, Pakkom, Pasum, Marsang, Okang, I:kung, Jeying and Pagli/nginti, Ma:yong, Noar ali, Take:ali, Kamrali, Singgali, Ngekug, Ngeseing dumbing, Ngeri, Ngere, Nginti kakpong, Be:ni and so on.\(^{29}\)
5.12 Apong (Rice beer)

The Mishings use to prepare one kind of drink made up of rice. It is known as *apong*. In their day to day life this liquid is used as a food. But, *apong* is more than a drink; this product has been integral part of the social, cultural and religious life of the Mishing people. It is produced by fermenting cooked rice with locally prepared starter cakes called “*Epob*” (*starter cake*), which in turn is prepared from mixture of rice flour and plant ingredients. This unique product is consumed in social and day to day life, the most preferred occasion being after a hard day’s work. Besides, *apong* is used in all cultural and religious occasions like traditional marriage, rituals, death ceremony, adyasadha and festivals, etc. *Apong* is considered as a symbol of honour and receiving guest with a glass of *apong* is a matter of pride for the host family. Oral history of the origin of *apong* touches upon their origin, religion and habitat and therefore, the Mishing people consider this product as their cultural heritage. In the light of this, we investigated the cultural history of *apong*, preparation of “*Epob*” (*starter cake*) and local technology of extraction of *apong* and cultural values of *apong* amongst the Mishing community. We also discuss the role of women in the production of *apong* and scope for development of this local product.

5.12.1 Preparation of Epob (starter cake)

*Epob* (starter cakes) serve as microbial culture for fermentation of substrate to produce alcoholic beverage or *apong*. Preparation of *Epob* is a tedious and exclusive job of women folk. Rice grain is the major component of *Epob* along with leaves of many plant species. Preparation of *Epob* involves multiple steps and requires many days for completion. In the past more than a hundred varied nature of plants are said to have been
used but today *Epob* is prepared from less number of plants in addition to rice grains because day by day varieties of plant species become extinct and people too have less knowledge about those plants. The forests herbs are usually collected by expert Mishing women. It is noteworthy to mention that each plant used in *Epob* is said to provide specific property to the final product. After a process of optimum drying, they mix those herbs together by grinded in a *Ki:par*. This ground form is again mixed with soaked rice powder thoroughly and finally is shaped in forms of oval, egg or round balls known as ‘*Epob*’ (starter cake).

*Epob* is one kind of medicine made by the Mishing women. It looks like *lado*. To prepare *Epob*, some of the required essential elements are wild leafs, buds, and some creeper types of plants. For preparing ‘*Epob*’, the Mishings collect approximately one hundred wild leaf plants. Among them names of some essentially used plants are *bormanimoni, horumanimuni, banjaluk, bhilongoni, bam kolmou, kuihar, dhapat tita, lai jabori, pipoli, jalokia, kopou dhekia, akorbili*, etc. All these leaves are made dry and then they mix them with the boiled rice powder. After that one by one they make ‘*lado*’ (circle). These lados are kept on *dola* (open container) covering with straw paddy. These are put inside the pot and kept in the safety place.

**5.12.2 Production of Apong**

*Apong* is an alcoholic beverage of cultural significance of the Mishing community. It is produced by fermenting cooked rice with herbal-based starter cakes called “*Epob*”. Two types of *apong* are produced by the Mishing people. The *apong* which is produced by fermentation of cooked rice with locally prepared “*Epob*” is called *Nogin apong*. This is a common beverage which is produced in day-to-day life mainly
for consumption. *Po:ro apong* is produced by fermenting mixture of cooked rice, ash of partially burnt paddy husk and straw with locally prepared “*Epob*”. For the use of ash, *Po:ro apong* is also locally referred to as *Saimod* (sai:ash; mod:liquor). Preparation of *po:ro apong* is tedious and time consuming for which this beverage is usually prepared during festivals and rituals. There is however, no bar in production of *po:ro apong* during normal times. *Po:ro apong* is usually produced from glutinous or sticky rice varieties, and also the best quality of “*Epob*” is used for fermentation. During preparation of “*Epob*” and *apong*, Citrus fruits are kept away from the vicinity because it is said to make *apong* acidic or sour.

### 5.12.3 Fermentation and Extraction of Nogin Apong

Rice grains are cleaned, cooked and then transferred to a bamboo mat or banana leaves; these are worked to fine grains and allowed it to cool. Then adequate quantity of powdered *Epob* is added with the rice grains, properly mixed and transferred to an earthen pot and after closing the mouth with paddy straw and *Rukji* leaves kept for a few days. In warm weather it takes five to seven days but in cold weather it takes eight to ten days for complete fermentation.

Extraction of *Nogin apong* (white rice beer) is comparatively easier than *Po:ro apong* (black rice beer). Some quantity of *Nogin arug* (fermented rice) is taken out from the *kili’ng* (earthen pot) in a container and adequate amount of water is added and then stirred. On stirring the content becomes milky which is then transferred to *Korai* (sieve, weaved from split bamboo) and shaken gently. While the rice grains are retained in the sieve, the filtrate, which forms ready to consume *Nogin apong*, is collected in a
container. The left over substrate called *Nogin tonrug* is used as pig feed and fish bait or given to cow.

### 5.12.4 Fermentation and Extraction of Po:ro Apong

The preparation process of *po:ro apong* (black rice beer) is little bit varied. It is a lengthy process which requires rice, paddy husk and herbal medicines. While brewing *po:ro apong*, at first, cooked rice have been mixed with burnt paddy husk. After that it is kept on the dola (container) to become dry. The dry cooked rice is now entirely coated black by the residue of the burnt paddy husk. The dry stork paddy and pieces (tuh guri) are mixed with burnt ashes. These ashes are mixed with rice. Some pieces of *Epobs* are broken in powder form for mixing with ash paddy and kept it for several hours after which it is preserved in an earthen pitcher or packed by banana leaves. These are carefully kept in a safety place for more than one week. In warm weather it takes six to seven days but during cold weather twelve to fifteen days is required for proper fermentation.

For filtering *po:ro apong*, they use a cone like splitted size of bamboo basket which is called ‘*Ta:chug*’. The latter is hung from a post and its wall. In the *Ta:chug*, they put paddy straw and also keep some pieces of banana leaves inside the lower cortical end for clean filtrate. Now *po:ro arug* (fermented rice) is taken out from the *Kili’ng* (earthen pot) and put inside the ‘*Ta:chug*’. And after pouring water over the *Ta:chuk*, slowly it comes out as liquid *apon* through the *Ta:chuk* and it is collected in a container for ready consumption. Water is added 3-4 times for proper extraction of *apon*, further addition of water is not encouraged as it is said to decrease the strength (i.e., intoxicating effect) and sweetness of the beverage. The remaining substrate after
extraction is called *Po:ro tonrug* which is manually removed from the *Ta:chug* and used as pig feed or as fish bait. Again, it is pertinent to mention that the whole process of extraction is exclusive job of women. Ready to consume *po:ro apong* is generally straw colored; sometimes it may be reddish-black depending upon the skill of the woman concerned. The Mishing folk believe that having two or three glasses (about 500ml) of *po:ro apong* a day can prevent formation of stone in kidney but needs further investigation to substantiate this local claim.

*Po:ro apong* is one of the important drink used by the Mishings. Other than Mishings, some of the North Eastern tribes also prepare such a liquid alcohol. The families are very happy to offer *po:ro apong* to their respective guests as well as relatives.  

5.13 Social Groups or Associations

A society is a larger social unit, composed of smaller social units called social groups. For a proper understanding of the nature of society and social life of the individual knowledge of the social groups is essential. Though individuals belong to society in general, their day to day social activities are performed in some group or groups. These social groups play a very important role in the social lives of the individuals. They mould their lives and shape their character, and deeply influence their habits, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts. According to Maclver and Page, any collection of social beings entering into distinctive social relationship with one another is called a “group”. Hence, “a social group is a collection of individuals interacting on each other under a recognisable structure.” Thereby, it is confined that social group is a congregation of some individuals who become united together with some definite end.
In a primitive society associations or groups are formed to fulfil its needs. The Mishings as a primitive community also have such associations that help them to fulfil the socio-economic, administrative, religious and ritual practices and requirements of the community. These groups perform different functions. Their main aim is to bring socio-economic uplift of life, living and culture of the Mishings. But at the same time they are not separated from ritualistic manners and other purposes. Some core social groups of Mishings are mentioned as follows:-

(i) Do:lung Kébāng (village council)
(ii) Mimbir Ya:me (youth organization)
(iii) Rigbo ginam (cooperation)
(iv) Daglik-Alik (reciprocity)
(v) Abir ginam.32

5.13.1 Do:lung Kébāng (village council)

It is one of the supreme social bodies of a Mishing village. The organization of the body is traditional. It is constituted by the elderly people of the village. There is no rule and regulation to get its membership. But if the Kébāng is not satisfied with the work of a particular member then he may be removed by a substitute. No Mishing women are allowed to get membership in Kébāng. But she can raise her voice if situation occurs. Sometimes she will be invited when her opinion is felt by the Kebang. Specific assignments have been given to each office bearer of the Kébāng.

This body takes all important social decisions of the village and settles disputes having social interest in the Murong house. The village headman takes initiative to
conduct those specific cases. It delivers judgement for the cases reported and renders punishment to the offenders. The mode of punishment is imposed on the basis of the nature of the crime. Usually fine imposing in the form of money or property is taken from the offenders. That money or property is offered to the victim to compensate his/her losses. The punishment system can be called reformatory because it aims to educate or reform the criminal from his/her inner self. The offender should understand that he/she got punishment due to his own faults, so that he can reform himself, it never stands for the good of others. It can be considered as warning for the offender as well as for other villagers, which prevent them from committing similar offences in future. Though the people do not follow rigorous retributive theory but in a kind of mollified form, they use the concept of imposing punishment to reform the offender.

The village headman carries on the activities of the Kêbâng. He must be efficient, knowledgeable, social, dynamic and neutral about the needs and problems of the village. All members of Kêbâng collectively sit together and select the village headman, whom they popularly called “Gam”. There is no specific tenure of office of the headman. He works at the will of the members. There is no system of hereditary chief seen in Mishing villages till now. The powers and functions of the headman are applicable in his own village only.

5.13.2 Mimbir -Ya:me

To perform day to day activities, all human beings require cooperation and help from each other as no human being is independent. Without social cooperation no society can sustain. Group life in society inevitably calls for an understanding of each other’s needs and aspirations for a mutually beneficial life. Among the Mishings the group called ‘Mimbir Ya:me,’ discharges the most vital cooperative functions. It is a
benevolent youth organization of the village. The unmarried boys and girls are the members of this social organization. It is the most important and powerful organization in rendering social services to the village. Whenever a family wants help to build a house, to transplant and harvest paddy, to conduct a feast in a festive occasion like marriage, death ceremony, reaping, ploughing in the field and clearing jungles for cultivation, etc. the *Mimbir Ya:me* offer services to the family. The family headman formally invites the *Mimbir Ya:me*. Here, Deka Bora is the key functionary who takes care of the multifarious activities towards an individual family or group of families. A needy family approaches the Deka Bora by formally placing the request with a packet of betel-nut as a mark of respect and informs him about the date for help. The Deka Bora calls a meeting among the members to inform and decide about the fixed date and time of the occasion and strategies behind performing the activity. After that through ‘Barik’ (messenger), he informs every household of the village. The young men usually participate here to help the family on the fixed day. The family has to offer them *apong*, cooked rice and vegetables with some amount of meat in the occasion. In case of poor family, the youth are satisfied with *apong* and betel-nut only. They do not demand any huge amount for the particular work. Sometimes money is paid to them and they deposite that into their public fund for some important occasions such as ‘*Dopan Ti:pan*’ and other purposes too.

5.13.3 Rigbo Ginam

Another group organised to perform voluntary works in the village is called ‘*Rigbo Ginam*’. Here, the group work is organised for a very short period to help the needy persons. The nature of work is the same as that of the *Mimbir Ya:me*. Generally *Rigbo Ginam* is organised to work only for a short span of time. At that time certain
works are done in cooperative manner and the village youths join in such works. The *Rigbo Ginam* is observed in the Mishing society. It is basically based on an economic enterprise. It is advantageous for all the people of the village. However, the very idea of helping someone in need is noble and beautiful-something that reflects the godly side of a human being.\(^{33}\) It is because of this consideration that *Rigbo* too is a bright hue of the Mishing culture.

**5.13.4 Daglik-Alig**

Another form of a working organisation called ‘*Daglik-Alig*’ is also prevalent amongst the Mishings. It is a sort of general reciprocity which is widely practised in the village.\(^{34}\) When a family needs help; it asks from another family and this is reciprocated when help is needed by the helping family in future. The Mishing villages are predominantly based on agriculture. Certain activities concerning staple food production are repeated year after year. Thus, these practices inevitably call for large scale reciprocity among the people for years.

**5.13.5 Abir Ginam**

*Abir Ginam* is a means of rendering physical labour on invitation of co-villagers who cannot otherwise get things done by his effort. A women reaper can extend an invitation to her colleagues in reaping her harvest. It is a means which fosters mutual understanding of individual problem as well as paves way for fellow feeling. This system helps the people for social integration at the village level.

At present, with the increasing use of new technology as well as education amongst the Mishing people, the custom of working cooperatively has been gradually decreasing. But these practices are still prevalent in their socio-cultural life. Besides having the above
mentioned social groups another two socially important institutions are actively performing work in the Mishing society. These are discussed below-

5.14 Murong (Dormitory)

Murong is the most important and useful traditional socio-cultural institution of the Mishing society. Since time immemorial the Murong system has been playing important role among the Mishing society. The Murong is constructed in the middle place of the Mishing village. It is essential to have a Murong in every Mishing village to reflect their socio-cultural unity and economic strength. Although the term ‘Murong’ house is also used by some tribes to denotes youth clubs of unmarried boys and girls (bachelors dormitory). For the Mishing people the Murong has much more importance for their socio-cultural identity. It is a symbol of village unity, integrity and assimilation. The performances of collective social functions, feasts, festivals, training of dancing and singing, etc. are some activities arranged in Murong house. The youth as well as villagers assembled in the Murong to chalk out the programmes and to take significant social decisions.

5.15 Namghar

Namghar is a place of offering prayer in the Mishing society. Every Mishing village has a Namghar. Some Mishing villages use Namghar as a centre of settlement of disputes. After hearing the complaints; the punishments are given by the Kébāng. That may be imposition of fine in terms of money or excommunication. In Mishing language it is called ‘Yodnam’. It is considered as the severest form of punishment. The villager can impose upon this on any people of the village for a serious crime. In this regard N. Pamegam speaks “There are no courts of law, no jails. The only penalty is public
disapproval. A man who rebels against custom will be isolated and considered outcaste. This is a sort of social boycott.”

On the other hand no physical torture is prevalent amongst the Mishing people whatever may be the nature or impact of the offence. The immoral acts and major offences are dealt with severity. In such cases fine is imposed and purification rites are necessary.

If we consider the objectives behind formation of different organizations and institutions, then first and foremost aspect we find is that human beings try to develop their creative abilities through certain mediums. These medium inculcate the feelings of unity, brotherhood, integrity and friendship amongst the people. These mediums in course of time turn to be some organizations and institutions. These institutions enlighten and develop consciousness to eradicate superstitions and evil practices prevalent in the society, and accordingly enrich rational and intellectual discourses within the community. In this regard, Dewey opines that associations and institutions are not ends in themselves. Their function is to promote intercommunion among the members. Our individual thoughts, experiences, emotions and sense of values are communicated to others through such associations and institutions. Thus, they discharge the important function of generalising the different experiences of the members.

5.16 Social problems of the Mishing society

Well being of every society requires proper adjustment between the interests of individual self and social life. The aspect of common good is a matter of establishing the sense of balance between individual and social beings. Cooperation, brotherhood, non-violence, tolerance and respect are the parameters to attain common good. But as every human being is unique in his/her tests and aspirations, there are always fields of
probable contestations among people from different backgrounds. When people disagree to lose his/her self interest for the cost of common good, then the selfish interest leads to occurrence of social problems. Each society has some specific issues marked by its composition, socio-economic background and geographical locations. The Mishing society is not an exception to it. The Mishing socio-cultural set up has been facing lots of issues having economic, religious, and psychological connotations. Social evils can be broadly identified as poverty, unemployment, superstition, early marriage, lack of awareness about health and hygiene, proper educational facilities etc. All the above said issues are backed by a number of reasons that widely affect the Mishing social sphere. The first and foremost among those are flood and bank erosion; as the Mishings are mostly riparian people. Their prime livelihood is agriculture and flood as well as bank erosion affect them much. Again, they are far away from using modern technologies in agriculture, thus, their production is less as per their consumption demands. Less the level of income leads to other spheres of problems like failure to send for proper educational facilities, lack of awareness about hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness, unemployment, etc. Besides, superstition is also an issue generated by the problem of poverty, as the poor people are unable to reach the medical facilities and they often move to so-called “Bej or Ujha”. Accordingly, the so-called ‘Bej’ misleads the innocent people with the help of a group of selfish persons and situations like witch hunting occurs. Practically, the common people do not have adequate knowledge about the diseases and problems. They believe that diseases and problems occur as a sign of pointing out their sins by their almighty God. This kind of simplicity of the villagers is often advantageous for the selfish group. It is sensible here to mention that, at the present era of globalization too, the Mishing ethnic group fails to be detached with their primitive ideologies and
thinking due to the lack of scientific outlook and inability to reason correctly the villagers rarely follow modern beliefs. Their primitive ideas are often seen in their behavioural expressions. Hence, they are yet very backward in their economic, religious and psychological expressions. The above discussed issues by and large hamper them to attain proper educational facilities and the overall development of the Mishing society is in peril. Thus, miles have to go for achieving a considerable height by this second largest ethnic group of Assam to assert themselves as an empowered community before the world.

5.17 Political behaviour

Society comprises of a number of human groupings. With the passages of time human history experiences massive growth of population and accordingly in due course, every group of people become aware about the freedom, rights and political recognition necessary for their self assertion and formation of nationality. From the French revolution; the human race acquired ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity. It is the basis of democratic society. In democracy, we have elected representatives to run the country on behalf of the whole human groups. Here, political behaviour is the core of any democratic structure. It can be realised by evaluating the standard of people’s consciousness about the political game. Reasonable voting behaviour is a key here, to evaluate the level of political consciousness among voters. The term ‘political behaviour’ includes a number of measures such as level of people’s awareness, political consciousness about day to day political happening, reasonable voting, percentage of casting vote, and so on. People’s voting behaviour is usually determined by a number of factors like party ideology, leadership, level of development carried out under the rule of one party, popular policies, money and muscle power, political and development related
results, etc. Political awareness again can be explained with the political entitlement of citizens. And in broad sense political entitlement is synonymous with political rights such as casting vote, participate in election hold candidature form political organization, etc. In reality, political behaviour simply denotes people’s political views, ideologies and level of political participation. It is formulated from influences of a number of institutions starting from family, teachers, peer groups, media, impact of election results, political debates, social groups, etc. However, a biological inclination also influences upon people’s political behaviour.

Political behaviour of every social group is formulated by the inherent consciousness and demands for self determination and identity of the group. As per Mishings are concerned, under the indirect influences of Britishers, they develop demands for separate identity and politics. In 1920’s a group of tribal leaders attempted to accommodate their traditional tribal identity with colonial culture and accordingly unite themselves. It is the first attempt to achieve the identity of tribal groups in Assam. Besides, the Mishings develop specially Kébāng (village council) as significant traditional and civil organization, which has been playing leading role in rising identity consciousness amongst the Mishings. These Kébāngs are systematically and democratically formed councils of village elders. The Mishings have six Kébāngs starting from Mishing Bané Kébāng (Mishing people general conference) (1924), Takam Mishing Porin Kébāng (All Mishing student union), (1933), Mishing Agom Kébāng (Mishing literally organization) (1972), Mishing Dirvi Kébāng (Mishing cultural organization) (1980), Mishing Mimag Kébāng (Mishing Action Committee) (1986), Takam Mishing Mimo Kébāng (Mishing Women Organization) (1990). These Kébāngs have been acting especially in the fields of safe-guarding the interest of Mishings, to
fight against their socio-cultural and economic backwardness, to struggle for the achievement of just and constitutional rights through democratic process, upliftment the Mishing nationality regarding the Mishing culture, language, literature, political and social justice, and so on.\textsuperscript{38}

Traditionally the Mishing Kébāngs have exercised as village courts to deliver justice and settle disputes between individuals and groups. After the introduction of Panchayat in the Mishing inhabited areas of Assam, the powers of the traditional Kebang’s have been decreasing day by day. Panchayats are the medium of providing decentralise political and economic powers from the State level to the grass roots. The Mishings too have been undergone new experiences from participating in Panchayat at the village level.

Considering Bodos as their reference group the Mishings also develop their demands for Sixth Schedule status. Under the banner of the Mishing Autonomus Demand Committee (MADC) and the Mishing Bané Kébāng (MBK), the Mishings developed their full fledged movement for autonomy. On 14\textsuperscript{th} June 1995 the leaders of the MADC and MBK signed a Memorandum of settlement most popularly known as the Mishing Accord with the Government of Assam. Accordingly, they constituted the Mishing Autonomous Council. The accord offered the status of Apex Council to MAC consisting of satellite areas of village council called the Mishing Village Council (MVC). The MAC act has been further amended by the Assam Act No. VII of 2001 and Assam Act No. XXI of 2005, respectively.\textsuperscript{39} Practically, for all round development of economic, educational, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of Mishing people as well as all other
communities residing in the council area, the MAC was run on ad-hoc basis with nominated interim bodies for long 15 years.

The first election was held in October, 2013 and 34 Members were elected to constitute the General Council which assumed its office on 6th November, 2013, with Sri Paramananda Chayengia as Chairman and Dr. Ranoj Pegu as Chief Executive Councillor. The Headquarters of the MAC is located at Gogamukh in Dhemaji district of Assam and covers compact 'Core Area' as well as 'Satellite Areas' in eight districts namely, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia.

Traditionally, the village chief that is ‘Gam’ has been playing as a dominant personality and has immense influence upon mobilising common man of the respective village. People follow his direction in every aspect of their life, especially in maintaining as well as shaping their socio political life. Gradually, the Panchayat appears significantly and the villagers attain a platform to participate more in political life and become able to articulate their political consciousness. It is noteworthy that, Panchayat offers uniform standard to all areas all over India where people from grass roots receive equal position in electoral competition. The Mishing people again receive the benefits of 33% reservation for ST (Scheduled Tribe) population too, in their respective dominance. Alongside with this, the formation of Mishing Autonomous Council is another significant political step through which, the people of eight districts, i.e. Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, specially attain their own kind of autonomy to work for the development of their culture, language, education, socio-economic and political life.
Thus, the role of articulating, mobilising and shaping political behaviour of the Mishings has been shifted from traditional Gams, to Panchayats, to Autonomus council. It is relevant to mention that there is no special political party representing the Mishings as like the Bodos have BPF or BPPF. The Mishings therefore, participate in electoral politics normally under the banner of political parties like Congress, BJP, AGP and Ganashakti etc. Despite having no specific party inclination, the levels of political participation among the Mishings have been gradually increasing. They have MLAs and even Speaker in the State legislative Assembly. At present too, the Assam legislative Assembly has Mishing MLAs representing different political groups. All these aspects reflect the growing political consciousness amongst the Mishings about the political life and happenings of the contemporary world.

5.18 Language and literature

Languages can be understood as a particular set of speech. Social manners and customs of a particular community are also the parts of the greater culture of a community concerned that speaks them. Languages do not differ only in pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar, but also through having different "cultures of speaking". It is the most developed form of human communication. Human beings use language as a way of signalling identity with one cultural group and different from others. Even among speakers of one language, several different ways of using the language exist, and each is used to signal affiliation with particular subgroups within a larger culture. As the second largest ethnic tribe of Assam, the Mishings too have a definite type of linguistic identity. The Mishings have a unique type of language representing their cultural life, and their history itself starts with oral format. With due course of time, the Mishing language achieves considerable development. It has attained contributions from a
number of scholars and undergone influences from other neighbouring non-Mishing communities.

The Mishing language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. The Mishings call their own language as ‘Tani Agom’. In Mishing language ‘Tani’ means ‘Human being’ and ‘Agom’ means ‘Voice’. Even the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh like-Adi, Nishi, Misimi, etc., also call their language, ‘Tani Agom’. Some Linguists and research scholars name the ‘Tani Agom’ as ‘Branch of North-Assam’ as per the geographical location of the language. The Mishings had originally no script of its own, but Roman script in modified form is being now used for their language. It has been introduced as a subject language in primary schools in the Mishing dominated areas in Assam with effect from October, 1986.

The source of Mishing language is Tibeto-Burmese. On the other hand, the Tibeto-Burmese language itself is from Sino-Tibetan race. In the diagram below it is shown how Suniti Kumar Chottopadhyay describes the Sino-Tibetan language family.

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Sino-Tibetan

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Tibetan</th>
<th>Himalayan</th>
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Tibet-Burmese

Miri (Mishing)
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The phonemes and Alphabhet:

The Mishing language has a phonological system of twenty-nine phonemes, 15 of which are consonants and 14 vowels. These phonemes may be represented in tabular forms as follows:

**The vowels:**

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<tr>
<th>Short description</th>
<th>Phoneme</th>
<th>Letter</th>
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### The Consonants:

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<th>Articulatory Feature</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H (h) is included in the alphabet for occasional use in loan words containing the /h/ sounds or aspirated sounds. The glide /w/ is not a phoneme in the Mishing. However, it is realised in morpho-phonemic situations involving a glide from /u/ to other vowels.  

The formation of the Mishing language is worth nothing. It is to be mentioned that in Mishing language, all the vowel and consonant letters are used in initial, medial and final position. For example-
Vowels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/o/</td>
<td>oying (curry)</td>
<td>sorog (rhinoceros)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td>o:ri: (coriander)</td>
<td>ko:red (cotton gin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>asi (water)</td>
<td>kopag (banana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a:/</td>
<td>a:m (paddy corn)</td>
<td>ba:yom (brinjal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i/</td>
<td>iki: (dog)</td>
<td>jeying (cane)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>i:kung (bamboo shoot)</td>
<td>pi:ro (a kind of reed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/</td>
<td>ukum (house; home)</td>
<td>ollung (boat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u:/</td>
<td>u:lu (a variety of ape)</td>
<td>ku:dum (front part of boat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>eyeg (pig)</td>
<td>leke (ancient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>e:long (a kind of fish)</td>
<td>me:rang (ant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e'/</td>
<td>e'kkam (big leaves)</td>
<td>kesung (tortoise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e’:/</td>
<td>e’:jo (old woman)</td>
<td>le:bang (rainbow)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consonants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/k/</td>
<td>kuyab (a hoe)</td>
<td>taksi (cockroach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/g/</td>
<td>go:nor (a variety of kite)</td>
<td>me’gab (pincers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ng/</td>
<td>ngosan (dried fish)</td>
<td>ongo (fish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/</td>
<td>sisug (stag)</td>
<td>asub (bed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/j/</td>
<td>jabne` (duck)</td>
<td>ajon (companion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ny/</td>
<td>nya:nyur (insect)</td>
<td>anyag (millet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/</td>
<td>tayi’g (lice)</td>
<td>site’ (elephant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/</td>
<td>dorkang (earthworm)</td>
<td>tadog (beads)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>ni:tom (song)</td>
<td>anu (new)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the Mishing language certain rules are followed in word formation. A number of prefixes and suffixes can be added to the root-word in Mishing language. For example-

*Alag* ‘hand’, *lakpong* ‘an arm’, *lakpar* ‘to be muscular’, *lakpum* ‘to place the two palms of the hands together’, *lake* ‘the left hand’, *lagbig* ‘the right hand’, *laglong* ‘arm-bone’, *lagmid* ‘hairs of the hand’, *laksin* ‘tips of the finger nails’, *lakser* ‘to have cleft fingers’, *lakk* ‘finger’, etc.

In Mishing language, we have found six dialects. They are *Pagro, Sa:yang, De’lu, Oyan, Mo:ying* and *Dambug*. Regarding the Mishing language, no detailed research work has been done so far in the field of the dialects of Mishing language. Especially we witness three main stages regarding the development of the Mishing language. Those three stages or periods started with the old period -i.e. till 1886. It was marked by prayer songs and folk tales. The second phase i.e. the medieval period was found from 1886 to 1968. It was a period of experiment about the Mishing language led by Christian Missionary and a number of Mishing linguists by publishing various write ups. The third i.e. the present period started from 1968 and it is marked by expansion of Mishing language as well as literature under the organisation of the *Mishing Agom Kébāŋ*.42
The Mishing literature was composed mainly of oral literature such as folk songs, folk tales, proverbs etc. The written literature emerged at first in the wake of the movement led by the Mishing Agom Kēbāṅg (The Mishing Literary Organisation). At present, the Mishing literature has been growing rapidly and the Mishing Agom Kēbāṅg is making untiring effort in inspiring writers, compiling and publishing literary works in different fields of literature.


To settle the rising controversy about a common and scientifically accepted script for the Mishings, in 1971 a seminar was convened at Jonai and finally the Mishing national convention brought to the fore the Mising Agom Kēbāṅg on 18th April 1972. In 1974, the organisation formally accepted a modified version of Roman script to flourish the Mishing literature.43

As pioneering works on the Mishing language, the contributions of foreign missionaries are noteworthy. Some of those works are ‘Comparison of Indo-Chinese Languages’ compiled by N. Brown published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1837, ‘Notes on the Daflas and peculiarities of their language’ by William Robinson, *Journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal*, Vol. XX (1852) and so on. In the field of Mishing grammar, the works of Robinson can be considered as the first one.\(^{44}\)


With the spread of education and increasing number of readers, scholars, researchers, etc. the Mishing language has been experiencing qualitative development in terms of its deep study and explore new heights. Accordingly, both the Mishing language
and literature are expected to attain high degree of maturity in near future. The *Mising Agom Kēbāng*, other civil and social organisations of the Mishing people as well as civil society groups have considerable responsibility to enrich and widen the horizon of the Mishing language and literature.

From the discussions above, it is clear that family, clan, kinship, marriage system, food habit, socio-political organisations, language etc. are the essence of the Mishing social structure. These are some of the ingredients of social development. Further, it is obvious that if the members of the society dishonour the rules and traditional practices of the Mishings then the entire system will be weakened. Here, structural-functionalism emphasizes the matter of consensus amongst the members of the society relating to the performance of various roles along with the requirements of structural construct to maintain social order. Hence, by internalising the above matters, the Mishing society also maintains unity and amity amongst their social structures and functions since long past. These have contributed a lot to the sustenance of their unique socio-cultural life.

In the chapter, we focused on the components of the Mishing social structure. Though they are practising the age old social systems like family, marriage, clan etc. but after being influenced by modernity and other neighbouring societies their socio cultural life also witnesses a number of changes. Each culture flourishes through both material and non-material aspects. While the social structure offers an idea about the non-material aspects, with the help of the succeeding chapter we endeavour to broadly examine their material equipments.
References


2. Ibid., p. 105


10. Ibid., P.65


12. Ibid., P.324


22. Ibid., p.94

23. Ibid., p.95


39. Ibid., pp.153-161
41. Ibid., p.247
43. Ibid., p.258
44. Ibid., p.260
45. Ibid., p.261

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