CHAPTER-6

An overview of Material Culture of the Mishings

6.1 Introduction

Culture is the manifestation of the living pattern of any human group. Material culture is none other than the concrete aspect of social living where from one can comprehend the life-style of a particular group. Objective aspect of one society can be well reflected through matters. Thus, material culture combines every item used in household and in social phenomenon. According to Dorson, “Material culture responds to technique, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generation and subject to the same forces of conservation tradition and individual variation verbal act.”

Hence, one can signify that the idea of material culture includes all the aspects from techniques to formulas, practised as well as conserved from ancestral generations to succeeding generations. Again, a few changes found in such practices as because of individual variation of activities.

Physical life style of each human group reflects the material cultural patterns of its own. Architecture, housing patterns, day to day usages and tools used in everyday living are parts of material culture. It means all the matters, necessary for persuasion of culture of a particular group. It consists of manmade objects having external, mechanical, and utilitarian significance such as tools, furniture, automobiles, building, dams, roads, and all other physical substances etc. that shape human civilization and change according to passage of time and new scientific experiments. Thus, any creation out of some concrete materials used by the members of the society can be identified as an object of
material culture. The concept of material culture is nevertheless the outcome of human efforts in concrete, absolute, format and is the result of civilizational necessities. Human perceptions, ideological values, beliefs and aspirations, gave birth to another kind of adoptive cultural patterns, more popularly the thinking style that can be recognised as non material culture. The non-material, abstract ideas, those are usually shaped by human groups in different stages in the form of matters; accordingly lead to the growth the non material culture.

Like all civilizations, the Mishing society also develops its unique blend of material culture. That is well reflected through their dress code, weaving, food habits, religious arts, ornaments, housing patterns; tools of day to day use to carry on domestic and outdoor activities etc. All these elements are belonging to their folk art and folk craft which are well-practised in their daily life activities. The study of material culture is a significant approach to comprehend the social behaviour of a group life. Here, we attempt to figure out some integral aspects of the material culture of the Mishing society. These are discussed below:-

6.2 Handloom -Textile in Assam

Assam has a glorious cultural tradition in textile and handloom weaving. Handloom weaving is one important cottage industry and an ancient craft of Assam. Handloom gives insight into the way of life of the people. Assamese weavers produce varieties of cloth with fineness of texture and colourful designs. The decorated woven fabric always attains highest weightage as they are an expression of the tradition and culture of the people. The skill of weaving has been mainly inherited from generation to generation through enculturation. Everything made by hand is precious and has an
excellent market in the international world. Over and above, the age-old traditional fabrics have the utmost status in handloom textiles.

Assam has one of the richest traditions of woven textiles made from different materials by using variety of techniques. There are however, immense variations in the style of weaving and designing that have by and large been retained and perpetuated by the people because of their distinct cultural traditions expressed through their socio-cultural lives.

The craft of hand weaving, as an ancient art, has drawn upon a rich tradition of myth and symbol and has a fantastic fondness of imagery. The culture and tradition of handloom weaving is best illustrated by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. Regarding Assamese womanhood he says, “Every woman of Assam is a born weaver. No Assamese girl who does not weave can expect to become a wife, and she weaves fairy tales in their clothes.” Weaving is essentially a female craft in Assam with certain exceptions.

According to Barthakur (1986), in every Assamese household, particularly in rural areas, there is at least one loom for weaving clothes. Looms, therefore, not only have an economic importance (because it provides self employment), it is also considered as a status symbol for the Assamese households. Weaving as a handicraft, occupies such an important place in Assamese society that both culture and economics are interlinked to it. Silk dresses, produced in the family loom with beautiful and eye catching design is a prestigious and pride possession for every Assamese lady. It is a must for every social function of the Assamese people. As a matter of fact, dresses and
designs produced in handloom not only have the economic importance but also represent a sentiment which is manifested in the social customs of the people.  

Among the north eastern states of India, Assam enjoys a place of pride for its rich heritage of artistic handloom products. There is an immensely rich assemblage of tribal cultures in this region. The beautiful hand woven products of the tribal and non-tribal of this region not only reflect the skills of individual weavers and artisans, but the creative capacity and deep perception of beauty in colour and design of the people as a whole. The very socio-cultural lives of the communities are revealed significantly in their textiles. The traditional handloom fabrics of Assam unfold the creative genius of the local weavers. An overview of handloom-textile tradition of the Mishing tribe in Assam has been observed here on the basis of the secondary sources as well as intensive field study:--

6.3 Traditional Weaving of the Mishings

The traditional dress-code reflects the rich art of weaving prevalent among the Mishing women. Each cloth produced by them reflects their aesthetic sense, perfection of art and desire. Usually with combination of multiple colours, they produce inspirational cloths. The art of weaving of the Mishing women has its uniqueness as well as prominence. This rich tradition has been kept alive by the Mishing women since ancient times and it is the symbol of their colourful existence.

The traditional craft of weaving is a very intense aspect of Mishing culture. It is exclusively maintained by the Mishing woman, who starts her training in the craft even before she reaches her teens. The Mishing women also have a good knowledge of natural
dyes. For the men folk, they weave cotton jackets, *Gonor ugon* (Dhoti, man’s dress), *Mibu gālug* (sleeveless jacket), *Dumer* (towels), *Lingkāb* (a muffler), *Gālug* (a shirt), *thick loincloths*, etc. For themselves, variety of clothes such as *Ége* (skirt-like garments), *Ribi* (a sheet with narrow strips, wrapped to cover the lower garment and the blouse), *Gāseng* (a type of shawl having broad stripes of contrastive colours), *Seleng gasor* (a light cotton sheet, occasionally worn instead of a ribi), *Riyā* (a long scarf), *Géro* (a type of shawl, usually off white, wrapped round the waist to cover the lower part of the body), *Segrég* (a type of waist cloth for married women), *Pohtub* (a scarf used to protect the head from the Sun, dirt, etc) and *Niség* (a cloth tied over the shoulder for carrying babies) etc, are also prepared by them. They also weave the gamochas, the traditional cotton scarf and Assamese cultural symbol that are bestowed on honourary guests visiting the village.

Weaving is practised by every woman in the Mishing community and there is no particular weaver caste among them as in other parts of India. It is basically a female prerogative and men folk are not found to be weavers in the community. Of course there are some male members of the society who show inclination towards weaving and occasionally weave on the loom of the family.

Before yarn had been produced by modern textile factories and available in the market, the Mishings cultivated their own required amount of cotton and obtained cotton yarn by spinning them. They also use some silk yarns, but sparingly they use endi yarn obtained from silk worms fed on the leaves of castor oil plant. However, they later learnt the use of the golden muga (silk obtained from worms fed on the som tree) and the white paat (obtained from silk worms fed on mulberry leaves) from their neighbouring
communities. Even now Mishing women weave clothes by using muga and paat silk very sparingly. Thus weaving cotton clothes is the principal domain of the Mishing weaver.

The Mishing women are distinctively prominent for their exquisite handlooms, especially their mirijim shawls and blankets, and they reinvent their traditional diamond pattern in weaving by using their favourite colours such as orange, yellow, green, black, red, etc. The Mishings also make a very special textile called Gadu. It is the traditional Mishing blanket that is fluffy on one side, and it is woven on a traditional loin loom. It is extremely intricate and time consuming work. The warp consists of cotton spun into thick and strong yarn, and the weft of cotton spun into soft yarn, cut into small pieces of insertion, piece by piece to form the fluffy. Sadly this particular form of weaving is hurriedly disappearing due to the ready availability of inexpensive blankets in the market.\(^4\)

The history of weaving tradition found amongst the Mishings society is hardly known. The practice of weaving has been passing from generation to generations. Weaving had been once the biggest criterion for a bride and such skills guaranteed better spouse. It can be said that weaving among the Mishing community is an inherent skill. As an everyday habit each Mishing woman practise weaving. But it requires a great deal of exposure to represent the present valley in the commercialised world of weaving.

Although it is noteworthy to point out that Mishing weavers of the plains of Assam and Mishing weavers of the Arunachal hills are different from one another regarding their techniques and designs. The Mishings of the plains of Assam accepted and adopted the weaving techniques of the Assamese people as well as the handloom.
The Mishings of Arunachal Pradesh have a very less usage of handloom items. They weave materials using their hands and waist and it is a primitive way of weaving. But the Mishings of Assam got the opportunity of using handloom after settling in the river banks of Assam. Not only that but the environment and nature of Assam were found in their works. Birds that are peculiar to Assam were found weaved in the works of the Mishing and they even borrowed some of the traditional Assamese weaving designs and patterns.

6.3.1 Raw materials of Weaving

In earlier times, cotton as well as all the three varieties of silk (eri, muga, paat) fabrics were produced by the indigenous weavers in Assam. Cotton was grown as a household crop and spun into yarn, especially among the Mishing community, to weave different textile items. The silk yarns were produced and used extensively in rural homes. Eri was the most popular silk reared, spun and woven by the Mishing people. Paat and muga silk yarns, though commonly not produced by them, yet they use these yarns to some extent. They obtain the materials in the cocoon stage from the non-tribal plain Assamese people and spun these into yarn for weaving in the home looms. At that time, cotton is the main textile variety produced by the weavers of Assam. However, in recent times use of acrylic and polyester yarns for production of various textile items gradually being increased. Rayon is often being used traditionally with cotton to produce an imitation of silk fabric.

Eri silk yarn is used occasionally to weave shawls of various sizes and blankets for use in winter. Besides using it in shawls and blankets, eri silk yarn is also used by the Mishings for weaving items. *Tapum ege* and *Pe-charpi-pekok* are good examples of such
traditional items. These are highly cherished items in the respective tribal communities. As a household craft, muga and paat silk weaving is becoming less common in these days. Paat and muga silk cocoons generally reared by the villagers are spun into yarn to produce different indigenous textile items for domestic use as well as for limited sale.

Now, it is clear that there are important elements of continuity in the weaving traditions among the Mishing community of Assam. However, many changes have also been incorporated in this aspect of material culture due largely to the impact of external factors. Such paradigm of change is to be seen in the increasing popularity of acrylic and polyester yarns in the recent years. Easy availability of these yarns in varieties of colours and comparatively in low price are found to be the major reasons of this new adoption as expressed by the indigenous weavers.\textsuperscript{5} Now-a-days, the Mishing weavers entirely depend on mill-made yarns. Some common types of yarns like \textit{puwa muthi, maju shuta, shoru shuta, ull shuta, pokua shuta, zero ply, one ply, two ply, etc} are used by the Mishing weavers.

\textbf{6.3.2 Weaving looms of the Mishings}

Weaving consists in regular interlacing of two sets of threads crossing each other at right angles. The Mishing weavers weave in “the plain weave method” by lifting half of the warp thread at the same time for an opening to pass the weft by a shuttle. A loom is the framework across which threads are stretched in parallel order and tension for weaving of cloth.

There are many kinds of looms but the principle is the same in all of them. The Mishing weavers use two types of Loom. The names of the looms are loin loom and throw-shuttle looms. The process on both the looms can be summed up as follows:
6.3.2.1 Loin loom

The traditional loin loom is tied on a strap to back of the weaver. The other end of the loom is hung on a wall in front of the weaver. The weaver sits with the legs stretched to the front and goes on weaving in a sitting posture normally on the ground.

A common loin loom consists of the following parts:-

(i) Front bar :- The front bar is a circular wooden bar put in between two loops fixed to the wall of the house.

(ii) Breast bar :- The warp is fixed between the front and the breast bar. The breast bar is also a circular wooden bar.

(iii) Sword :- The sword is a flat wooden piece and rests in front warp, one end of this sword is blunt and the other end is pointed.

(iv) Heald bar :- It is made of bamboo and is circular in shape.

(v) Circular bamboo bar :- This is another circular bamboo bar but is a little longer than the former and is placed after the heald-bar.

(vi) Lease rod :- It is a rod or a bar positioned between front bar and circular bar, separating the warp in two sets.

(vii) Back strap :- This is made either of leather or cloth. There are two loops at the ends of the back strap, which are attached to the notches of the front warp bar.

By and large all types of weaving can be done in the loin loom. The possibilities of weaving pattern in a loin loom are unlimited. The weaver sits with a loom fixing the
back strap, keeping her legs against the foot treadle, which are adjustable for keeping the loom in tension. The weaving in the loin loom is governed by the shedding motion, the picking motion and the beating motion. The heald bar is lifted up with the left hand and the circular bamboo bar is pressed down by the right hand simultaneously. The sword is then placed in the shed and kept vertically and the weft is passed from the right side by the right hand by means of the shuttle and picked up by the left hand. The weft is then beaten up by the sword. The sword is then taken out and the centre shed is produced through which the shuttle is passed by the left hand and is picked up by the right hand. Thereafter the sword is placed to beat the weft. The process is repeated. When the weaving just begins, the two-bamboo splits work as the first weft. This is the technique of plain weaving of once up and once down of the bamboo treadles of a loom and the process is continued till the weaving is completed.

6.3.2.2 Throw-Shuttle Loom

The loom in which the shuttle is thrown across the shed by hand is called throw-shuttle loom. The loom is fitted to four posts fixed on the ground. The shedding is effected by a set of healds operated by the foot. The beating up of the weft is done by a bamboo reed to a sleigh. The important parts of the throw shuttle loom are: --

(i) Sleigh or slay :- It is a wooden frame accommodating the shuttle box, reed and swings forward and backward. In its forward motion the last pick of weft is beaten up to the fall of the cloth, and in its backward motion, the shuttle is allowed to pass over the slay-race.

(ii) Shuttle box :- It is a wooden case for the shuttle with the spindle and a picker. The shuttle box is grooved inside lengthwise to accommodate the picker. The top
of the box is open and the shuttle rests in the box for the intermediate period between two successive picks.

(iii) Shuttle and Spindle :- The shuttle is placed vertically to the weft and it passes through the process of weaving. When the loom is stationary, the shuttle remains in the shuttle box. The shuttle contains the spindle on which the weft yarn is wound.

(iv) Picker- It is a piece of leather placed in grooves inside a shuttle box on which the spindle is kept. The picker is used to give blow to the shuttle to drive it from one box to the other.

(v) Reed :- The reed is the comb through which the warp passes.

(vi) Heald :- Healds are required to form a shed, which contains a series of twin loops.

(vii) Treadle :- The treadle is a pedal or lever to which a heald is connected by means of cards.

(viii) Lease rods :- The division of warp threads into one, two and two, and so on is termed as base. Two rods pass between these divisions of warp and are known as the lease rod.

(ix) Warp beam :- This is a roller beam used to twist threads and cloth in lengthwise.

(x) Fabric beam :- The roller fitted in front of the loom, upon which the cloth is wound while weaving is the fabric beam.
Throw-shuttle loom consists of a hollow cubic structure with four vertical posts, one at each corner. These posts have four sides and there is a notch on each post. On these notches lie the cloth and the warp beams. On the lower half of this hollow structure, there are two horizontal wooden bars connecting the vertical posts on each side. There is a wooden bar connecting the upper ends of two posts on two sides of the operator on which a circular bamboo pole is kept. On this bamboo pole a string is rolled. The free ends of string tie the heald- rods. The heald consists of two string loops crossing one another.

The warp beam and the cloth beam both are circular wooden beams. On one side, it contains a hole. A bamboo-stick is passed through this and put against the horizontal beams fixed at the lower half of the wooden posts. It is called as break that keeps the warp, and the cloth beam fixed on a particular position. The reed consists of bamboo teeth kept tight by two bamboo frames.6

6.4 Different parts of the Handloom of the Mishings

The handloom is a simple machine for weaving. It has many parts which are mostly made of wood and bamboo. These are the parts used by the Mishings in their traditional weaving:-

Yapa : A flat and long piece of split bamboo thrust across between the two rows of the threads in the warp of a loom.

Uga : A kind of reel with a handle for winding thread on.

Jeti : A kind of very thin slices of bamboo meant for use as ropes.

Tulutang : A beam of a handloom, warp roller and cloth roller.
Po:pi : A kind of spindle for spinning yarns.

Be:long : A small piece of flat deer bone, pointed at the two ends, used in crafting floral motifs in handloom clothes.

Benegolong : A long sharp quills of a porcupine used in craft.

Maku : A shuttle made of wood. To provide a rectangular passage for fixing the Mograng (mohura/quill) with thread wound on it, the space at its centre is kept open.

Mograng : A piece of reel with thread round around it, for use of a roof in weaving Bobbin.

Ra:si : The reed used in a handloom to weave the waft, harness, heddles.

Ou : A stick used for the heddles of a loom.

Kanchi : A brush made by tying up a bundle of midribs.

Kunki : A basket used to keep Mohura/mograng.

Garakka : The treadles of a loom.

Karhance : An instrument used by weavers in extending the warp threads.

Chereki : A contrivance for winding thread.

Nachani : Lever

Nachanee-jori : A kind of rope attached to the Nachanee.

Kamee : A long narrow piece of split bamboo.
Sali : A thin, long and round split of bamboo.

Potal : A pair of split bamboo poles with a pin to hold the breadth of the woven part of cloth in the loom.

It can be mentioned here that the parts of the Mishings’ handloom are the same as the handloom of the other communities living in Assam and their names are also the same or similar to a great extent. This might be because of the Mishings adoption of the handloom of the Assamese people. Though the names of the parts of handloom are similar to that of Assamese community, these are pronounced in a typical accent by the Mishing community.  

6.5 Mishing Textile

The Mishings have a very rich and colourful textile tradition. The textiles are produced mainly to meet the requirements of the household. The Mishing girls produce almost all the clothes required for their lives both before and after their married lives. The Mishing weavers produce traditional textile items in their looms. These artistic textiles are Œge (Mekhela), Ribi-gāseng, Gero, Rihā (The breast cloth), Tapum-gāchar (Eri shawl), Mibu-gāluk (Sleeveless jacket), Ugon (Dhoti), Yāmboo (Wrapper), Dumer (Gamocha), Tongali (Girdle), Gadoo or Miri-jim (cotton rug), and Dumpang kapoor (pillow cover), etc. The brief description of these items are illustrated below:-

6.5.1 Œge

Œge is worn to cover the lower part of the body from waist down to the ankle level. It is tucked around the waist by the young and unmarried girls. Married women
wear it to hang down from the breast level. Generally it is woven out of cotton. It is woven out of eri silk also in rare cases which is named as *tapum-ége*. It is considered as one of the most cherished products of the people.

The most common colour of *ége* is traditionally black. On the black base, ornamentation is done with yellow, red and white colours. In case of eri silk *ége*, called ‘*tapum-ege*’, the design is worked in red, black, blue colours, etc. The traditional design of the Mishings consisting of diamonds and flowers in geometrical forms is still used as the main border design at the bottom of the *ége*. This traditional design is named *ghai-yammig*. Small butis named *punjer* symbolizing star, deer, horse, butterfly, etc., are arranged in geometrical order above the main border design. With the availability of acrylic, polyester yarns of various colours, now a remarkable change with regard to raw materials used and the ornamentation patterns have been witnessed in Mishing textiles in general. Generally *ege* is a unique dress of the Mishing women folk. It is worn by them in both household and on other important occasions such as festivals, marriage ceremony, rituals and so on. *Ége* in term of its significant colour combination and varied designs represent the typical Mishing textile identity and other communities can simply assume it by witnessing the costume.

### 6.5.2 Ribi-gāséng

Ribi-gāséng is an indispensible part of Mishing textiles. It is regarded as the distinctive dress of grown up unmarried girls. It is used to cover the upper part of the body on the top of the *ege*.

Ribi-gāséng is woven out of cotton and always with stripes of red, black and white colours. The strips are distributed throughout the body or at regular intervals. A
cross border design with zig-zag lines and diamonds are woven in the pallav and also in the body of the cloth at regular intervals. This traditional design is named ‘yapapacha’. Although *Ribi-gāsēng* is an item of women’s apparel, it is also used by men as turban, dhoti or as a drape (as upper garment) on ceremonial occasions. It has important cultural significance; since it is worn at formal and ceremonial occasions.

### 6.5.3 Géro

It is a richly decorated cloth with elaborate designs used by married women to tie around the waist and chest on top of the *Ége*. Wearing it is considered as a sign of being married.

Géro is woven out of cotton. Based on the design used, it is named ‘*Kem-nam-géro*’ and ‘*Ki-bu-nam*’. The former is tied around the waist and the latter around the chest. It is woven white, with bold designs of about forty to fifty c.m. width in red, black and yellow colours. The design is always woven in the centre of the cloth. *Géro* is an important item of the bridal dress. Those people who possesses it and thereby able to use it, are praised and appreciated.

Another form of *géro*, named *Charuchamang géro* is also a continuing example of the Mishing traditional textile. It is specially woven to carry a baby, tied to the back, by a woman while at work or during travel. It is akin to the two other geros mentioned above, except that the body in this case is woven chequered in red, black and white colours. Here, the design consists of small geometrical motifs and arrangement of lines. It is interesting to note that three to five pieces of *charuchamang-géro* are woven with care and kept ready by a girl before her marriage. But this rich and traditional textile item
is gradually getting replaced by plain cloth woven for the purpose. This plain version is called ‘Nichek’.

### 6.5.4 Rihā

Although rihā is a recent adoption as an item of dress of Mishing women, it is considered as an important item in these days. It is used to cover the upper portion of the body. Rihā is woven out mostly of cotton. However, the hand spun eri has been used in weaving the Rihā. The traditional design with diamonds, called ‘ghai-yamik’, along with other small geometric motifs are elaborated in the cross borders at both ends of the Rihā. Designs are worked in yellow, red, white and any other colour contrasting to the base colour. The Mishings women wear this dress in the occasions of festival, marriage ceremony, Dodgang, and other important functions of the village. The Rihā made woman more comfortable to wear Chadar above it, so that the physical structure of the lady becomes vibrant.

### 6.5.5 Tāpum-gāchar (eri shawl)

It is a typical cloth woven out of hand spun eri and used as a shawl in winter seasons. The border designs with motifs like flowers, diamonds, ridges of hills and lines are woven as side borders and cross-borders in brown or maroon colour. ‘Tāpum-gāchar’ is a highly prized textile item of the Mishings.

### 6.5.6 Mibu gālug

Mibu-gālug is a simple sleeveless jacket for men. It is made by two side seams leaving about twenty five to thirty centre meter for sleeves towards the fold at shoulders. Gālug is generally woven out of white cotton yarn. Border designs of geometrical forms

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are woven in red and black colour at chest level, both in front and back. *Galug* made of cotton fur with a lining of plain cloth is called ‘*gadoo-gāluk*’. *Gālug* can be wear in any occasions. But Mibu *gālug* is more perceived in Ali aye ligang, and Po:rag festival. At the time of performing of rituals, it is commonly seen as an identical dress of Mibus. Now a days, the inherent beauty of the dress attract other communities to buy as well as wear this dress in social plateform.

6.5.7 *Ugon*

It is an item of traditional male dress of Mishings society. It is worn in dhoti fashion to cover the lower part of the body from waist downwards. *Ugon* is woven in cotton. It is woven white with fine red lines at two ends. The *ugon* produced out of hand spun cotton is called gonor-ugon i.e. the real *ugon*. It has special importance since it is worn on religious occasions.

6.5.8 *Yāmboo*

It is used as a wrapper in double layers over the actual dress. It is an important item of the traditional wedding dress for both bride and bridegroom. *Yāmboo* is woven out of cotton. It is woven in white colour on which the ornamentation is done in red and black at regular intervals.

6.5.9 *Dumér*

*Dumér* is a piece of cloth akin to gamocha in plains Assamese culture. It has multiple uses as turban cloth, towel, men’s loin cloth, etc. It is also used by grown up girls to wrap round the body beneath the armpits covering the breasts. In the latter case, it is called ‘*kupop*’.
Dumér is woven out of cotton. However, the size varies as per multiple uses. It is generally woven in white colour with borders in red. The border designs with geometrical and floral motifs are worked as cross border at one or both the ends.

6.5.10 Jinrek or Tongāli

It is a piece of fairly thin cloth akin to dumer but a little longer and wider. It is an important item of men’s dress on ceremonials occasions. Jinrek is woven out of cotton. Traditionally jinrek is woven in white colour. The designs with motifs like bars, flowers and diamonds are worked in red and black colour at two ends. It is tied as a girdle at the waist over galug.

6.5.11 Gadoo or Miri-jim

Gadoo is popularly known as Miri-jim. It is a cotton rug with furry surface. It is used over bed during winter to rescue from cold. It is an item depicting the glorious textile tradition of the Mishings and it occupies a place of pride among the textiles of Assam as a whole. Weaving a gadoo by ginning and spinning of cotton collected from one’s own farm was a special enterprise of Mishing women. It is a pious hope of every Mishing mother to be able to provide a gadoo to all the children when they get married. It is woven out of thick cotton yarn as warp and cords of cotton slivers in the weft after every three to four ground picks. This fabric is generally woven in narrow width, and two such pieces are stitched together to bring them to the size of a blanket. Preparing a gadoo involves a lot of time and labour and only elderly married women take up the work. At present, the practice of weaving gadoo has undergone changes. Now, the cotton required for weaving gadoo has mostly purchased from market.
6.5.12 Dumpāng kapor (pillow cover)

Dumpāng kapor, a cloth used simply as pillow cover is also woven with harmonious blending of colour and design. It reflects the artistic mind of a Mishing woman. It is generally woven out of cotton. The fine border designs are made with motifs of peacock, deer, doll, etc., in combination with lines. The designs are woven in yellow, black, green and white throughout the body of the cloth generally on a red base. The Mishing maidens weave dumpāng kapor and keep them ready along with other clothes; for taking away the same to the groom’s house after marriage. Otherwise, they are considered unskilled in spinning and weaving.

In addition to the above categories, the Mishings had another essential textile item named payeg or hachati, which served the purpose of a napkin or a purse. These napkins or handkerchiefs are never stitched by Mishing women, but woven with designs in the last piece to come off the loom. Another traditional textile item, they prepare and commonly use is ‘munang’ (bag). It was stitched out of hand woven material. It is akin to the dumpāng kapor in respect of colour and design. Payeg or hachati and munang are not much in use at present. But they still occupy a place of pride in Mishing socio-cultural life.8

6.6 Textile Designs and Motifs

The Mishings are engaged in nurturing the weaving craft since time immemorial. The typical usage of designs, unique colour combinations and selection of motifs prominently characterizes the Mishing clothes. Among the Mishings, it is crucial for brides to wear self woven clothes during their weddings. Priority is mostly given to
bright vibrant colours and the clothes are exclusively designed by using different coloured threads like orange, yellow, green, black and red. The dress materials are made of specific designs of nature, trees, sceneries, group of flying birds, sprays of towers, various geometrical patterns, stars, and so on. The Mishing people also preserve their rich traditional textile motifs. The Mishing weavers draw special designs and motifs from the neighbouring communities and well implemented them in their textile items. The local craftsmen usually design the traditional clothes by using floral patterns, images of animals like elephants inter-spread with lions, deer, horses, flowers, leaves, birds and spring etc. Traditional motifs like fishes, cons, crossed swords, etc. are also used. The Mishing textiles use motifs on white, black or other background colours and provide them an exotic look. The bird motifs are usually kept in red and white colours. They are mostly triangular in shapes and rhythmically follow a triangular pattern. In comparison to the men's garments the style, colour combination and design of women's garments are more intense and brighter. The Mishings have their own traditional techniques of colouring the designing threads. The womenfolk are proficient in the use of simple handlooms for weaving their clothes.

One fascinating aspect that found out about the Mishing textile designs is that the weavers also seek to capture the essence of the changing world through their interpretation with the medium of motifs. Therefore, rather than viewing designs and motifs as the expression of a closed world of illiterate craft persons one must consider them as the reflection of the aesthetic experience of a real group of people. Thus, the study seeks to offer the following set of observations regarding the Mishing textile design and motifs based on the field study:-
The women’s wear displays a huge number of motifs drawn from the natural world. The predominant motifs are the floral motifs but plants, creepers, wild animals; fruits also find creative expression through their fabric.

6.6.1 The rose motifs (péyāpay gāmīg): The ‘péyāpay gāy gāmīg’ happens to be one of the most coveted motifs applied to the Mishing textiles by the traditional weavers. Although many novel motifs have penetrated the Mishing textiles scenes as the peyap gai gamig still enjoys enormous popularity among the weavers of Mishing fabrics.

6.6.2 The lotus motif (podhum gāmīg): Another favourite motif of the Mishing weavers is the podhum gāmīg. The lotus motif represents the weavers’ sense of aesthetic values in Mishing textile and retains primacy among the floral motifs.

6.6.3 Bird motifs (pēttāng gāmīg): There are a number of recurrent motifs applied in Mishing textiles. These bird motifs reflect the close man habitat relationship in Mishing textiles. The most prominent among the bird motifs is the Tode pēttāng gāmīg and peacock motif. The Tode pēttāng gāmīg is variously interpreted in the fabric and provide an exquisite quality. It is important to note that many floral and creeper motifs are mixed with the bird motifs to express a natural scenario reflected through the fabric in Mishing textiles.

6.6.4 Fruit motifs (api:aye Gāmīg): One interesting feature of Mishing textile is the prevalence of a number of fruit motifs. Our research identifies the abundant use of two prominent fruit motifs during the field study. The kopak gāmīg or the banana motif provides a dimension to the Mishing weavers search for meaningful motifs to decorate their fabric. Another prominent motif is the Maati kathal gāmīg or the pineapple motif.
6.6.5  **The fan motif (Méyap gāmīg):** The Mishing weaver seems to be inspired by items of functional utility in the schemata of her design. One strong example here is the méyap gāmīg. Méyap is the hand fan used by the Mishings in hot and hurried summer days. Méyap is made of bamboo splices with a device of a bamboo pole attached to it so that it can be rotated in clockwise and anti-clockwise motion.

6.6.6  **Indigenous parasol motif (Japi gāmīg):** Another functional item that finds aesthetic expression in Mishing textile is the Japi gāmīg. The japi is the ubiquitous parasol used as a headgear by farmers in the rainy season in the Brahmaputra valley. It is made of bamboo and palm leaves with a conical central portion that fits in firmly above the farmer’s head to protect him from the Sunlight and the rain. The Mishing weavers aestheticize the motif of the functional Japi and reflect beautiful design in her fabric.

6.6.7  **The club motifs (Gada Gāmīg):** Another curious addition to the world of motifs executed by the Mishing weaver is the Gada gāmīg or the club motif. The Gada has many associations with the mythological world in the Brahmaputra valley and it is not surprising that the Mishing weaver could have been imbued with the mythic consciousness while incorporating the motif into her fabric.

6.6.8  **The hand motif (Alāk Gāmīg):** The artistic expression of the quintessential folk crafts person derives from many sources. In one primordial moment in the history of the evolution of the motifs, patterns and designs, the weaver may have stumbled upon the idea of creating something her own out of purely idiosyncratic reasons. The Alāk Gāmīg betrays traces of the creativity of the folk artist through her fabric.
6.6.9 The coin motif (Paisa gāmīg): The world of the folk artist is not necessarily a closed world of inward looking creativity. As the barter economy slowly gave way to the money economy, changes were visible in the folk world of primeval times. The paisa gāmīg reflects the Mishing weavers’ appreciation towards changes of economic life and her artistic interpretation of one of the most significant symbol of modern economy, i.e. the coin.

6.6.10 The book motif (The Kitab gāmīg): As knowledge became the universal imperative of the 21st century and literature became the agent of modernity. The Mishing weaver picked out the motif of the book to represent the shift from a mythological world to the modern world of education.9

The last two motifs, namely the coin motif and the book motif, serve one of the most interesting aspect of textile design and motif of the Mishing community. As against the pervading notion that the folk mind is always confined to its mythological mores, the motifs discussed above display a mind that is open to new innovations and experimentations. This fact alone goes to establish the inference that the folk mind engages vigorously with the way of life that a community reflects through its customs and practices in the traditional sense. As far as motifs and designs are concerned, some of the motifs used in Mishing fabric are being increasingly viewed as symbols of identity formation by the Mishing cultural experts and activists in the present times. They have retained the traditional motifs and designs. A harmonious blending of traditional designs and colours is still being maintained and used in different Mishing textiles. While others have by and large switched over to the contemporary designs of more vivid and non-
symbolic nature, the Mishings have been more conservative and they still use their traditional geometric designs having symbolic meanings.

6.7 Mimāṅg (Chaniki)

Mimāṅg is a model copy or a documentation containing different types of weaving motifs and designs. It gives detailed information on arrangement of lines, shapes, colours, etc about different designs. The basic pattern is known as ‘Gāīgāmīg’. It articulates in graphic details, follows a particular system called ‘Alām’. It contains straight, angular, rectangular, triangular, square form etc. To shape specific designs, the knowledge of mixing different colour threads, utmost concentration, eyesight, patience and skill are required. Another form of gamīg is called ‘Appun gāmīg’. It mostly includes designs of flowers, animals, birds etc. The Mimang or draft copy helps the weaver to trace the motifs in required colours. Thus, expert Mishing weavers use it at the time of producing different colourful textile items.

The following tabular form represents Mimang:-
The names of different patterns (Gaiganig) are represented according to their underlying meanings in mashing language. Such as Korot-a saw, laksin- a finger or a toe nail, méyab-a type of fan, yammig and Koligai- different types of designs and tayob-a scorpion.
6.8 Contemporary Mishings dress habit: A shift from tradition to modernity

Globalization brings changes to traditional cultural trends with due course of time. No ethnic group is untouched from the influences of Globalization. Changes of habitat and assimilation with other cultures are significant factors to bring new practices along with one’s traditional usages. Regarding the Mishings, their traditional practices too have undergone changes, when they migrated to the plains of Assam from the hills of Arunachal Pradesh. Elements of their traditional material culture are now revised as well as replaced by new and other models of neighbouring communities. Though their traditional dresses are still very popular among different sections of the society but earlier dresses are now being replaced by machine-made products. Earlier from the cultivation of cotton to production of colourful threads are done in every Mishing household. Now the Mishing womenfolk are fond of buying threads from market. Their traditional motifs and designs are also admixed with dress designs of other communities. As like threads, almost all accessories of loom are now brought from market. Due to the influences of global market and professionalism, the whole world today adopt jeans, polyester, velvet, nylon and other easily accessible products. The Mishings are not an exception to it. A common example one can put here is that Mishing girls now-a-days put on woollen shawls and synthetic saris quite freely.\(^\text{11}\) Besides, it is important to note that Mishing dresses are also commercialised and become popular in the world market due to its own models and beautiful craftsmanship. Finally, we observe that aesthetic values of the objects used by Mishing community in weaving and textile products are decreasing day by day. It is primarily due to a shift from traditional items to
adaption of modern products as well as techniques and their easy accessibility and market values.

6.9 The traditional Mishing House

The Mishings people usually build traditional house. In Mishing language house is called ‘Okum’. Generally, they prepare to construct houses near to water site. Settlement is almost compact. Prominent among other factors that determine the location of the house are the link path to the house and reasonable separation from the neighbouring houses.

A plot may be abandoned even after the house has been constructed. In most cases the reason among the family members or a general belief that the plot will bring ill luck to the family. The Mishing villages are always established on the bank of a river despite facing too many troubles every year due to natural calamities like flood and erosion. The distribution of villages is seen along the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. A typical Mishing village consists of 10 (ten) to 100 (hundred) or more houses constructed in a haphazard manner without proper planning. Compact settlement is adopted for economic reasons of paddy cultivation and other Ravi cultivation as these two types of agriculture require large labour force for transplantation and harvesting. Moreover, the Mishing people have also developed other non-agricultural activities and cottage industries which are also located in the same settlement.

In the ancient times, the need of defence from external lawless elements was important. This also led to compact settlement. Some social customs and traditions are also significant factors for house constructions. The houses are often constructed facing the river. Whenever a plot is to be selected for the construction of a house, some
religious tests are to be performed. This ritual is called ‘Pénam’ (blessing). Before the construction begins a Mibu is invited to utter whether selected site is free from evil influences or not. When the holes are dug in the ground for the post of the house, Mibu, the priest of the village examines the scope by observing magico religious test. He puts some rice grains bound by a leaf into the holes. Each bundle contains as many rice grains as there are family members. On the next day the bundle is to be taken out and examined. It is believed that if any insect found inside the bundle, then the members of the family will suffer skin diseases if they still utilise the foundation. If the grains are found separated to each other there is a probability of quarrel among the family members. And if any of these grains is lost, this plot is abandoned. Some time three or four plots are rejected due to unfavourable pénam (blessing). This test exerts psychological influence upon followers to practice Pénam to attain divine intervention in their affairs. The main motto of these magico religious beliefs meant to pray god to improve human health, ward off threats or avoid natural disasters. Now a days, this ritual is rarely practised as homestead land is gradually shrinking due to population growth, natural disasters, and development projects etc.

The Mishings consider Monday, Wednesday and Thursday are week good days for starting of the construction works of a house. The days on which parents have died are considered bad. Whenever a new house is to be constructed the owner starts collecting bamboos and wood. In bye-gone days there was no question of purchase or sale as the bamboos and wood were collected from the forest. The villagers, friend and relatives help in house construction. In this customary assistance, the male relatives and neighbours take part in actual construction work. They are served with apong and at noon they are offered food; no payment is made.
At first, the central post is erected at the same time holes are dug at some distance from one another on which supporters of the platform, of the house are placed. The day on which the members first start to use the newly constructed house is observed as Akum Gisag. On this occasion they arranged feast and invite the villagers and relatives.

6.9.1 Materials used for house construction

From the earliest time of building to the time of industrial revolution, timber, bamboo, reeds, cane, straw, stone and iron rods are the raw materials used for architecture. These are locally available in the hills and plains of Assam. Various species of bamboo and cane are found in this area, which are suitable for basket making, mat weaving and constructing houses. Woods are used in the form of logs and planks. Logs are used for the instructual frame works of the house and provide support to the foundation. Logs are also used to make the floor of the house. Strong logs are used to give support to the fire places. Logs are also used to make the ladders. Planks are used to make doors. Bamboo walls or matting is tied to the logs or planks with cane or thin bamboo strips.

6.9.2 A typical house

The dwelling house of the Mishings varies in construction according to the family strength. Though a few numbers of better built houses are seen, they are comfortable and multipurpose. The ground plane of their ordinary dwelling house is rectangular and of about 15 (fifteen) to 25 (twenty five) feet in the length and 8 (eight) to 12 (twelve) feet in the breadth. The plinth of the floor of the house is gradually raised by flat form of bamboo or wood. The wall posts are about 7 (seven) to 10 (ten) feet in
height. The wall post and the flat surface form supporting posts or logs are planted vertically on either side of the house.

The main ridge-pole is placed across the two main posts and held in position within the holds made on the top of the post or fastened with ropes made of cane. Two more tie-beams or purlins are placed parallel to the ridge pole over the wall posts on either side. The remaining five to seven pairs of rafters placed in similar position over the purlines and the ridge poles. The ends of the rafters are fixed and fastened with the tie-beam with the rope of cane, or iron nails. Free ends of the rafters are projected about 1 (one) to 2 (two) feet from the purlins.

To make a strong support to the roof some additional poles called *Eayings* are given length wise under the rafters. The part of the roof that placed on outside of the house is known as *panipota*. In the opinion of the Mishings, the house contains ten layers, five at the roof portion. And other five at the platform of the house, in the Mishing language it is called “Tatoto rumongok kow o: gobo rumongok”.

**6.9.3 The foundation and platform**

The whole house rests on the foundation of wooden logs. The floor is raised about four or five feet high from the ground. The floor of the house is in the form of a platform; supported by lateral logs tied to the vertical logs which are planted in the land. The wooden beams placed breadth wise above the posts of the platform are called ‘*Ertong*’ (karka). The bamboo or wooden beams placed length wise upon the *Ertog* are called *jopong*. The small size bamboo placed and tied with *jopong* is known as ‘*Bonor*’. Some thicker flat logs or planks are used below the bamboo floor matting to make it strong. Long pieces of split bamboo form the smooth platform (*pisso*) which they use to
sit, sleep, and take meals and to perform all household works. Bamboo is crushed and then knitted finally to make the floor matting.

As the floor of the house is raised from the ground level, the area below the platform is used by the pigs, dogs and such other pet animals. This space is also used to store wood, log and such other material which may be required for maintaining and repairing the house.

6.9.4 Posts and crossbars (lintel)

The posts and crossbars function doubly as load bearer and supporter in construction. The job of the cross beam or bars is to bear loads that rest on it without deforming or breaking. The job of the post is to support the cross bars and the rafters without crushing.

6.9.5 Front portion

Most of the houses have a front verandah called ‘lotta’ which is covered by the extended part of the roofs of the main house but this portion has no side wall and flat form. It is an open space generally used for husking paddy, weaving, performing other crafts and storing domestic and agricultural articles. It is sometimes used as shelter of goat, cow etc. The ‘lotta’ portion in front side of the house has been followed by ‘tunggeng’ part, which can be reached by climbing the ladder (ko:bang) with the help of the side handle rod called ‘Da:jong’. ‘Tunggeng’ is an open space at the front portion of the main house having flat form but no side wall. It is four or five feet high from the ground. The ladder may be of different designs. A wooden log tied at the top and dug in the ground is cut at different places to facilitate the placing of steps while climbing. The
‘tunggeng’ is used to sit during day time. Formerly the unmarried boys slept on it. It is observed that in some houses the ‘tunggens’ are big enough to accommodate a number of people.

**6.9.6 Entrance to the main house ‘Yabgo’ (Door)**

Immediately after the tunggeng portion of the house, the door of main house is fixed. A typical Mishing house contains two doors for entrance and exit and no window. The front door is called Tunggeng koyapog and the back door is termed as Eyapo-kurku-koyapog. The front door or Tunggeng koyapog is generally fixed on the right side of the front wall.

The door may be hanged up on the top or side of the walls to open and shut. Doors may be revolved about the vertical axis in the centre of the opening. A large variety of materials are used for door construction. Wood, bamboo, metal or a combination of these materials are commonly used. Doors are made of wooden planks and supported by wooden frames. The doors made of bamboo strips with strong bars have no frame, but they are tied suitably with the wall posts. Doors made of bamboo strips are most common in the villages.

No windows, ventilators and chimneys are provided in a traditional house. But some families today provide these things and have almost modernized their houses. There are several reasons for not providing windows, more doors and ventilators. Such as during winter cold breeze enters into the house and make it colder. Secondly the rain water may enter inside the house. Thirdly, windows and ventilators may harm the side walls.
6.9.7 Division of the house

There is no partition in a traditional style of house but different portion of the house have different names and uses. The systems of partition with bamboo made walls are not found in their traditional house. The first half of the house is known as ‘Soyar’. It is a portion in a house used as bed room for sleeping. Generally having two parts—one part is Tuggeng Soyar in front and another part is a Yapkur Soyar in back side. The front Soyar is for the head of the family and the back Soyar is for other members.

At the centre of the house the fire place ‘Méram’ is established. The fire place separates the room into two halves called ‘Ri:sing’ (upper) and ‘Koktog’ (lower) portions. The upper portion is considered as more sacred and prestigious portion of the house. The important articles of the family are kept in the upper part. Rituals are also performed in this part. The elderly male members of the family and some important male visitors can also sit. The female members during their menstruation period are not permitted to come to this portion. The women are not allowed to sit in the upper part. They can sit and eat in the lower part of the house. This custom is made the status symbol of the men-folk of Mishing society.

The last part is the ‘panisang’ or ‘Kare’. In some houses this portion is lower lending to the back door. The floor is also of the same materials as that of the main house. It is used to store drinking water and for washing utensils. There is an extended shed on one side of the main house to keep the fowls. This shed is called ‘Kok-dung’.

6.9.8 Fire place or Méram

The fire place or ‘méram’ is the most important place in a Mishing house. It is placed in the centre of the house. In case of a bigger family there may be one or two or
more méram inside the house. In such cases the site of the hearths are selected in such a way that they cover an equal floor area.

*Méram* serves for cooking and it is also the sole comfort against the chilly winter nights. The men and women have to bring a load of firewood daily for the day’s consumption. The members discuss their household problems, sometimes jokes are made and folk tales are narrated near the fire place. Above the fire place there is arranged a hanging bamboo net work of shelves for keeping the fire woods, dried fish and meat for preservation.

### 6.9.9 Size of the house

The entire land area of the house depends on the size of the family. It is depending upon the length and breadth of the house. The Mishing house can be divided into three types- a small house for a small family having one fire place, secondly, a big house which is extra ordinarily bigger than the general category of houses. Such houses are possessed by the joint families having three or four fire places. Finally, the medium or general types of house have two fire places. The majority of Mishing houses come under this category.

### 6.9.10 Decoration of the house

In earlier days the heads of the wild animals killed by the members of the family were displayed on the wall. These heads are reminders of the hunting expedition of the family. Some families decorated the walls with the skins of wild animals like deer, tiger, monkey and goat. These skins are used as mattresses. These are of course not used regularly.
Some families plastered the walls with mud and cow dung. But in most cases the traditional house walls are not plastered if there are no windows or ventilators. The plasterings of the walls prevent light into the house.

6.9.11 Latrine

There is no provision of latrine in the house and the people relieve themselves in the neighbouring jungles and riversides. A few houses have constructed urinals at one corner of their compound. As for sanitation, there is hardly any regular arrangement in most of the villages. The domestic animals clean their natural toilet.\textsuperscript{12}

Significantly, our research observes the vital fact that the present day Mishing housing pattern has been shifted from the traditional to the modern model. The new form somewhere lost the traditional bamboo and cane works; rather it is emphasizing on the RCC, pacca models. Changes in livelihood patterns, outlook, durability, affordability and accommodation related issues etc. are the reasons behind this new shift. But still there are traditional forms of houses existing in the Mishing inhabited are showing their rich tradition, aesthetic beauty and matter of pride.

6.9.12 Granary (kumsung)

The construction of the Mishings Granary is a speciality in its own. The Granary is known as ‘\textit{Kumsung}’ in Mishing language. Every Mishing family has a Granary. It is a store house for grains to cons, cane throughout the year. The granary is usually constructed at a considerable distance from the dwelling house so that fire cannot reach and damage it. It is also a platform house whose floor is made of bamboo matting woven thickly and plastered with mud mixed with cow-dung. Each wall is also plastered half.
One small size door equal to a window is fixed in the house. The size of the granary also depends upon the needs of the family.

The type of granary made by the Mishing folk is quite suited to protect corns from floods, dampness as well as from insects.

**6.9.13 Cowshed (Gohali)**

Every Mishing house contains a cowshed. It is called ‘Gohali’. Cowsheds are erected and fenced around keeping gateway for entrance. No walls are made in the cowshed. Sunlight is taken into consideration in this case also. It is cleaned in every morning. Smoking arrangement at night is made in the cowshed to protect the cows from mosquitoes.

**6.10 Art in ornaments**

Ornaments are the expression of artistic mind of both the maker and the user. The style of making ornaments and decoration of them are some of the artistic features in the history of Assamese folk art. The common use of similar kind of ornaments among the women folk of the Mishings is the striking characteristic of their art. The names of the ornaments are usually taken from flowers or fruits. Some ornaments of the Mishings community are often very finely crafted in many pleasing designs. They are elaborately decorated with stones. The golden ornaments are called *Aven-Attav* and the silver ornaments as *Murkong-Attav*.

The earring known as *Thuria* or *Turi* has its own distinctive feature in the form of a lotus having a heavy stem. It is made of gold and studded with uncut rubies on the both sides. This ear ornament is still prevalent since generations among the Mishing
womenfolk. The artistic minds of both the maker and wearer are reflected through such *Thuria*. Some earrings are made with tiny star at the top and a crescent below. It is studded with pearls or tiny precious stones. The wooden earring called *kentu* also bears some floral motifs. The *Dugdugy* which is worn as neck ornament is like the shape of a leaf. Rubies of different shapes are studded on it. It is commonly made of gold but silver made *Dugdugy* is also prevalent.

Imitating the figure of a fish the folk artisan made a sophisticated “U” shaped necklace called *mogordana* which was most popular in Assamese society along with the Mishing ladies. It is a “U” shaped metal piece without any joint whose two ends are like the mouth of two fishes and the surface is moulded like the body of a fish. *Dholbiri* is another neck ornament like the shape of a drum. The whole surface of the *Dholbiri* is studded with red and blue stones which attract the eyes of a person easily. Similarly another neck ornament of the ladies used, named as *Cipatmoni* is the copy of a fruit called *Kordoi*.

The bangles also have their own good artistic qualities. The *Gam kharu* as it is called by the people is usually made of silver which carries the motifs of creepers, stars, flowers etc. It is made of gold also. Sometimes, the artisans purposefully embossed floral or animal designs on their works. Such ornaments give stimulations and satisfaction to the folk. The ornaments of the Mishings portrays mythological influence of their religion, are superior in quality and craftsmanship.

The gold beads are not naturally solids, but hollow and are filled with rosin or wax. The jewellers produce an ornament from the smallest possible amount of the precious metal. The *Dholbiri*, for example is also a hollow cylindrical ornament filled
with resin. This makes it as light as pith. Very fine filigree work is performed on 
*Gamkharu*, necklace, *Dugdugi* and on bracelets. The outer surface of a bracelet is of gold 
and the inner is of silver, elaborately ornamented with flowers, wreaths etc. Ornaments 
are sometimes based with coloured stones. Necklace made of gold and red coral beads is 
also found in some houses. The coloured stones and occasionally the parts of the body of 
animal like teeth and claws are artistically put together on an ornament. The techniques 
used were pierced work, engraved relief and filigree.  

Wearing a number of the said ornaments with the different dress combinations 
reflect the artistic beauty of the Mishing women. Ornaments are the matter of proud and 
reflections of social positions too. Thus, the Mishing women used them with inner joy 
and self satisfaction to portray their bodily beauty more vibrantly.

**6.11 Art and craft of the Mishings**

Folk Art is a human skill in making something useful to mankind. The primary 
aim of folk art is not only beauty but a thing useful to society. It includes the hereditary 
monopolistic decorative works of the artisans which reflects their skill and available 
resources of the geographical area. Artifact gives pleasure and serves some practical, 
social and economic ends. Again, Folk craft grows out of the necessity to meet the 
everyday needs of people. It is an expression of the human spirit in material form which 
fulfilled the needs and gave delight to mankind. Handi craft of any region reflects and 
preserve the experience of man under varying circumstances. The forms and 
techniques of the folk craft remained unchanged or unaffected over generations. The 
Mishing community has a proud heritage of handicraft which carries both aesthetic and 
decorative value. Primarily it serves their daily life needs. The folk craft is called *Modvt*
Monam by the Mishings which includes wearing or Sumnam panam (weaving, dress-designs, motifs, textile items and tools), cane and bamboo works or Jeingia ponam. Here, we attempt to systematically analyse some integral tools made up of using cane and bamboo items.

6.11.1. Bamboo works

Cane or bat and bamboo are the most useable things of Mishing society. They are expert in the art of bamboo and cane articles. The Mishing artisan of Assam largely utilise for works of various crafts. From bamboo and cane they make tools with different attractive designs. The raw materials of bamboo are distributed throughout the State in different altitudinal zones. Abundance of bamboo has made them heavily dependent on it for their survival. Bamboo is an essential resource for them. Bamboo is deep rooted in their culture and tradition. It is used in every possible way such as construction of house, household goods of daily use like baskets and containers of different shapes and sizes, hunting gears, fishing traps, snares, mats, fuel, dao sheaths, ritual-altars and even used as food. Fine strips of bamboo are used to tie.

Bamboo is extensively used for religious purposes. All the religious paraphernalia, the altars and the images representing various spirits are made of bamboo. During Dobur puja, the biggest ritual of the Mishings, altars of the deities are made of bamboos and leaves.

Bamboo shavings are used as headgears and accessories by the Mishings folk. A large part of the Adi-Galo of Arunachal hunting tool kit consist of bamboo made tools. Apart from making tools, bamboo is also used for cooking purpose. Cooking in bamboo receptacle is still practised on many occasions which seem to be one of the age old
practices still followed even in the modern times. Big bamboo receptacles are also used for carrying and storing water and small hollow bamboo tubes are used for drinking purpose. Bamboo is also a much preferred food item for them. As a food item, it is cooked in different ways in different forms.

6.11.2. Cane works

It can be used to make baskets of different shapes and sizes. Baskets made of cane give a smooth finishing. The procurement and processing of cane is an arduous undertaking. Matured cane collected from the forest is trimmed and then twisted round in several coils. The coils are then kept on the drying rack over the fire-place for some days. The constant smoke from the hearth seasons the cane, making it durable and insect-proof. The fine strip of cane is then soaked in water to further strengthen them.

The people of the plains and hills of Assam have their own bamboo and cane products with distinctive features and typical designs. The products of various types in hills or plains differ from one another in shape, design and uses, and so on.

Some Mishing specimens using cane and bamboo are illustrated briefly below:

6.11.3. Basketry Items used in the Mishing Society

(i) **Cbong/japi (Headgear):** It is a headgear used instead of an umbrella. The Mishing people used in the field protection from the rain. Two similar nets of hexagonal weaving are woven having a “V” pattern in the centre which is equal in size of a man’s head. In the midst of these two nets, leaves of tokow (a kind of palm) after drying under sunlight are placed smoothly. A jute string is provided at
the inner side of the “V” shaped portion which helps the man to bind with his neck.

(ii) **Duli/Gampa (Storage basket):** It is a “U” shaped basket. But its diameter in the mouth portion is greater than the bottom. *Gampa* is longer and wider than any other baskets. It is used for storing paddy, seeds etc.

(iii) **Epo/Kula (Winnowing fan):** It is a hyperbolixes structure of bamboo made plates used to clean the corn and paddy. The boundary of such *epo* is tightly bound by bamboo bars suitably tied with cane strings. The interior end of the fan is flat and the rims of the two sides gradually become higher, reaching the maximum height at the back.

(iv) **Challoni (Sieve):** It is woven with fine bamboo splits. Small holes are made between two wraps and wefts woven by twill technique. In middle portion two pairs of wraps wefts are used which create quadrants in the *Challoni*. These are named as ghai which are wider than other splits. It is used for sieving paddy, rice and pulses and also for washing fish.

(v) **Dolla (bamboo tray):** Dolla is a circular bamboo disc with thin strips and strong boundary rods tied with cane strings. It is used for drying corns under sunlight.

(vi) **Pasi (basket):** It is “U” shaped basket made of bamboo strips and boundary has been stitched with cane strips. It is used to carry and store a number of articles like vegetables, rice grains etc. there may be very thick holes or sometimes the holes between the strips of bamboo are a bit larger as per the requirement of the item it contains.
(vii) **Khorahi (small basket):** It is also a “U” shaped basket like pasi but its strips smaller in width than the pasi. Generally it is used to clean any corn, rice with water. The water passes through the smaller holes but the corn could not pass through it. It has also rod bars binding it at its boundary. The *Khorahi* is woven in plain and square form but is gradually bent in round form at the time of final stitching by flexible cane strips.\(^\text{15}\)

### 6.11.4. Fishing traps of Mishng Society

The Mishings living in the river side are expert in rowing and fishing. They adopt various methods as well as tools in fishing operations. The people do not use many baskets for fishing. A few valve traps like Sepa, Uvoti, Khoka are woven with bamboo splits with a valve fitted to it and place on the flowing of water of low depts. The traps like Pollo, Juluki and Jakoi are observed in group fishing. Description of these traps are given below:-

**i. Jakoi**

The Jakoi is used by the women folk in community fishing in shallow pools or rivers sides. The trap is triangular at its front or mouth and conical at the end. Small holes are keeping in it so that water posses through it. To produce these holes the warps and wefts are arranged at least 1 mm. distance while weaving it. A handle and a string are provided with the trap to pull it in water. The joining portion i.e., the upper side of the trap which can be called diagonal of the triangle is woven with hexagonal method of weaving creating comparatively bigger holes.
ii. Juluky

Bamboo strips are split first into three feet long and one inch wide and that half of its length is again split into small sticks. One such piece contains three or four small sticks which are shared by rubbing with a sharp knife. These are then woven with cane strings following the twined method. It is then formed like a hollow cylinder whose lower diameter is three times greater than the upper part. A ring of bamboo and cane ropes are fixed at its upper mouth to facilitate it smoothly. Juluki is used for fishing in shallow water.

iii. Pollo

Pollo is a fishing trap made of bamboo and cane used in group fishing in river or pools. In making the strips of a pollo, only the green portion which is harder than the other is utilised. Hexagonal twin method of weaving is applied. A number of circular rims of different diameter from top to bottom are applied which act as weft of the traps. The shape of the pollo resembles that of a dome with short stem of about six inches diameter open at the top. Diameter of the bottom varies from three feet to 3.5 feet and the height varies from three feet to 3.5 feet.

iv. Chepa

The Chepa is made of bamboo strips and fine cane strings in a round dish fashion. The strips are woven in twin fashion. The two ends of Chepa are kept close but one end can be open when required. In the middle portion two holes are kept and they are provided with two bulbs kol. The small fishes can enter into the device but cannot come out of it. Uvoti, khoka, pawa are similar fishing traps.
Besides the above baskets many other baskets of twilled and checker pattern are made to store dried meat, fish and salt. The work is always done in the household and produce mainly for one’s own family. There is no household with basketry as a primary source of livelihood. This basketry is generally practised only for domestic consumption. Some old skilled craftsmen, who are unable to work in the field, devote their full time to basketry work. The articles produce by such men are sold in local market.16

6.12 Musical instruments

The Mishings are rich in their traditional dance and music which are related to their festivals and rituals. The noted music is the soul of such folk songs. The singers are accompanied with various instruments which serve as echo of the singer and give a life to their songs. These simple traditional instruments are also some examples of their craftsmanship. The traditional Mishing instruments are discussed below:-

6.12.1 DUMDUM (drum): It is a hollow wooden trunk about fifty to sixty c.m. in diameter and two feet long. The two ends are slightly narrow. Cow hide is stretched tightly on both the ends by means of strings. It is beaten by a stick on right hand and accompanies songs and dances.

6.12.2 TOK TOK or KOKTER: It is a piece of bamboo with two knobs at its two ends. It is cut vertically into two equal levels so that the lower knob is closed or uncut. It is a very simple device which produces sounds like clapping hands, and is generally used in Oi:nitoms.

6.12.3 LUPPI: Luppi is made of brass metal. It consists of two equal size metal plates whose central portion is bulged and conical having a small hole through which jute made
rope is inserted to facilitate it with the hand. The operator takes two luppies on his two hands and hit them smoothly. This produces the musical notes. *Luppi* is accompanied with the *Dumdum*.

6.12.4 **GUNGA**: It is a mouth organ made of a small bamboo which produces sweet musical sound.

6.12.5 **PAMPA (horn)**: It is also a mouth organ made from buffalo’s horn and reeds. The operator blows air by his mouth and the fingers gradually open and closes the holes of the pipe. Two different varieties of pampas are observed— one is *Tuler pampa* and the other is *Aguk-Tapong*.

6.12.6 **DANDUN**: It is a string instrument similar to a violin.

6.12.7 **DUMPAK**: It is a simple musical device made from bamboo shoot.

6.12.8 **KAKTOG**: It is a chatter type of string instrument made from very simple materials.

6.12.9 **LAWNONG and BARBANG (bell)**: It is a circular metal plate of brass about three to five mm. thickness. It is hung by a string and sound is produced by beating it. The lawnong is rung at a time when someone dies in the village, at the urgent call of the *Kébāng* and in *Gumrag* dance of Ali-aye-ligang festivals. In all these occasions the ringing bell informs the villagers.

6.12.10 **KURULI (flute)**: It is a flute made from bamboo; it has two varieties-*kotopong* and *Futuk*
6.12.11 YAKSSA (sword): While the priest dances in connection with some rituals he uses the sword called Yakssa. Some metal plates are arranged on it which produces sound by their movements.\(^{17}\)

It is observed that the above mentioned musical instruments are primarily used in special socio-religious occasions like \textit{Ali-Aye-Ligang}, \textit{Po:rag}, \textit{Bohag Bihu}, marriage functions etc. These instruments reflect the cultural identity and social values of the Mishing society.

Now, it is obvious that with the changing contemporary situations the lives and living patterns of the Mishing society is itself rolled towards a new phenomenon. The earlier thick density of population in the Mishing villages is often being witnessed in the present era. Shrinking of agricultural land, changes in livelihood patterns, transforming family patterns towards more nuclear life, are some of the reasons behind spreading out the present Mishing society from the ancient bulky inhabitation. Accordingly a few Mishing families now have been moving towards urban locations. But it is wrong to express that the earlier housing patterns, family structures, ideologies, religious practices, etc and so on are lost. At present too we have the traditional Mishing attire seen in their earlier habitats reflecting their traditional socio-familial mechanisms. But again, they undertake the changes of the present time and accomplish the age-old traditions with modern practices.

Thus, this chapter confers an idea about the comprehensive material equipments of the Mishing society. The chapter deals with materials of weaving, dress-code, ornaments, housing pattern, handicrafts etc. and all these matters reflect their cultural attire along with rich aesthetic values and social norms of the Mishing society.
References


14. Ibid., pp.47-48
15. Ibid., pp.70-73
16. Ibid., pp.74-75

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