CHAPTER-7

Conclusion

The foregoing pages are about the review of what we have studied in the preceding chapters. A systematic and socio-philosophical study of one’s culture is the first and foremost requirement for any comprehensive understanding of any tribe in the world. Our study attempts to comprehend the Mishing culture of Assam from the socio-philosophical perspective. We try to perceive the relevant definitions, theories and concepts related to the culture of the Mishing community, mostly found in plain areas of Assam.

The first chapter “Introduction” deals with the outline of the whole research work in a very brief manner. The chapter mostly discusses about the meaning, definition and concept of culture, culture and society, socio-philosophical outlook of the Mishing culture. Here, we have included the broad objective of the research work, review of literature, statement of the problem, methodology and significance of our study. The chapterisation of our research work is also made in this chapter. It comprehends an overall idea about the Mishings and their socio-philosophical life.

Thus, if we attempt to understand the meaning and components of culture, we find that culture includes all those objects, concepts and ideas which have been transmitted socially amongst generations and have undergone changes at the influences of neighbouring culture. In a narrower sense it means enrichment of mind, refinement of taste and manner, maturity of moral outlook. Culture in its broadest sense is that which is socially rather than genetically transmitted.\textsuperscript{1} It is that which children learn by virtue of
their being brought up in one group rather than another, and in its totality. It is that which distinguishes one human group from another. According to the Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, “culture” comes to mean a general state or habit of the mind, with close relations to the idea of human perfection. It also comes to mean a general state of intellectual and moral development in a society as a whole. It means the general body of arts and the whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual, of a given society. This complex development represents an attempt to think in new ways about man’s social, moral, and intellectual life at a time of profound and manifold change. In one important respect, reviving in stressing importance to culture was a part of a general reaction against mechanistic philosophy and against what were regarded as its social consequences in the merging industrial civilization. Thus, culture in a broader sense consists of ideas, knowledge, morals, law, literature, language, customs, beliefs, taboos, codes, tools, techniques, institutions, works of art, music, dances, festivals, ceremonies, religious practices, and rituals etc. Other related components covering almost all aspects of the human life and living are also significant components of culture. In a narrower sense, culture is refinement in general and refinement of values in particular. This narrower concept of culture is more humanistic and we are more concerned about it.

The second chapter attempts at defining the origin, history, earlier habitat, and migration of the Mishing Community to the plains of Assam. Meaning of the term ‘Miri’ and ‘Mishing’, and also their relationship with Chutiya and Ahom kingdom in the plains of Assam are explained in this chapter. It has been revealed in the study that since time immemorial, different clans from different time moved to Assam and form a multi-coloured society. Among them Ahom, Khamti, Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa, Dimasa, Moran, Chutiya, Sonowal-Kachari, Deori and Mishing, etc are the descendants of
Mongoloid group. Their physical features identify that they are of Mongoloid origin. The Mishing is one of the indigenous tribes of Assam. In the past the Mishing people are also known as ‘Miri’. The word ‘Miri’ is used by the non-Mishing people of Assam. In some religious books, Ahom Buranji, books about ethnic groups and also in some official documents we find the term ‘Miri’ instead of Mishing. Despite, the word ‘Miri’ does not only imply the Mishings in the plains but also refers to some other tribes dwelling in the hills. According to Sir George Grierson, “Abor, Miri and Dafla are the Assamese names to imply the population living in the hilly areas between Assam valley and Tibet.”

It is difficult to identify the exact time, from when the Mishings are named as ‘Miris’. The term ‘Miri’ is used by Sankaradeva in his ‘Kirtan Ghosa’. The British writer E.T. Dalton, E.A. Gait and Waddell also considered the Mishings as Miris. Thus, numerous observations prove that the word ‘Miri’ has been used by the Assamese people to consider the Mishings in the plains.

The Mishings do not have any written documents about their origin and migration. They possess a rich oral chronicles in the form of legends, myths, folk tales and folk songs. The legends of the Mishings have been preserved through their age-old tradition, and no tradition can be built on absolute untruth. So, due to the absence of written documents, these oral chronicles could be used as source materials to trace out their origin and early migration. The Mishing and their hilly natives have popular myths about the origin of the ‘Man’. Myths are narratives which shape the views of a particular community and that are by and large reflected in their culture. Through the genealogical verse called ‘Abang’ (religious hymns), the Mishing community tends to cultivate their age-old myths. In ancient Indian literature and the Vedas it was mentioned that the Mishings and other tribal groups were inhabitants of North East India. The Aryans
considered them uncivilized and identified them as barbarians, Asuras, Danavas, Dasyus, etc. These aboriginals were at first named as ‘Kirata’ in *Yajur-veda*. The Mishings are identified as a branch of the large Mongoloid group and China has been assumed to be their original racial resident. Their migration can be understood by the study of their language. In this regard, G.A. Grierson and D. Doley developed that these tribal groups were assimilated with other Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups and they were migrated to this land lately than those other linguistic branches. Archaeological evidences provide numerous facts regarding the ancient history of the Mishings and also other tribes of North Assam. They have close affinity with tools used in ‘Yunnan’ in China. Other material cultures too provide information about the main source and migration of the Mishing people. In rituals, they sacrifice animals by making suffocated. Similar practice is found among the Amodopa tribe of Eastern Tibet.

Factually, the symbolic material culture like *Yoksa* (religious sword), *Dogné* (a kind of bead) are valuable asset of the Mishings and these things are found in China also. Again, the Mishings create co-ordination and good will with their Chinese counterpart. A number of scholars said that the Mishings had inhabited in the Eastern Himalayan region in Tibet in the hoary past. Later they migrated to Siang valley of Arunachal Pradesh and finally to the plains of Assam. Based on available data, it is found that the Mishings after leaving the hills, at first entered into the Chutiya Kingdom. In this regard, Lakshmi Devi mentioned as such “Much before the Ahoms came to Assam, the Mishings were undergone influences from the plains civilization.”

Thus, naturally a social relationship had grown between the Mishings and the Chutiyas. According to Mishing folk sayings, when Ahom King attacked the Chutiya Kingdom, then Chutiyas went to the Mishing village and gave their identity as Mishings to save their lives. Because, the Mishings
already entered into the Ahom Kingdom and they got considerable attention from the Ahom King. The Chutiya people became part of the Mishing clan and they become known as ‘Pagro’. Again, this clan is also known as “Chutiya Miri”.\(^5\) According to Padmanath Gohain Barua, there are three categories of Chutiyas. They are Hindu Chutiya, Ahom Chutiya and Miri Chutiya. Hence, all these information clearly indicate that the Mishing people inhabited earlier in the Chutiya Kingdom. The Ahom history also explained the relationship of the Mishing people with Ahoms. The Ahoms entered into the State of Soumar in 1228 A.D., at that time whether the Mishings lived or not had been unreported in history. Initially we have found that the existence of Mishings during the reign of Swargadeo-Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) but not in the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-41). In the later period we have found in the reign of Burha Raja (1611-49), Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-69), Gadadhar Singha (1683),etc. Assumptions are made on history that “in the month of Aahar, the King Swargadeo-Suhungmung came to Dihing and gave the name “Thaumung-Mungtao” to a Miri family Lakli Khutsan Sakat Tayuosulung-Kurein and gave them seat in front of the society.”\(^6\) This view developed the fact that marital relationship already built up between the Mishings and the Ahoms. And consequently Tayuosulung-Kurein grew up to Ahom caste. At that time, the Mishings also practised the shifting cultivation and did not have the instinct to settle in a specific place. Thus, they did not have their own home place or State. It means in the pre-feudal tribal stage, the Mishings came under the Ahom Kingdom. It is also found that in the Ahom administrative system engaged a numbers of Miris. But, once more the Mishings had organized rebellions to secure their self identity as well as to get free from the Ahom rule for several times. Apart from it, the Mishings maintain good relationships with Ahom in terms of all aspects of social, political, economic, cultural, religious lives.
etc. It has been made clear that the Mishings are in co-relationship with Ahoms in the plains of Assam.

The traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Mishings are well examined in the third chapter of our research work. Traditional animism and new influences from other prevalent neighbouring religions have been also analysed here. The Mishings had their own traditional beliefs and practices based on the worship of nature. They do not worship any specific gods or goddesses rather they believe in different Spirits. As Lakhi Nath Pegu opined that animism, animatism and super-naturalism came to be the basic ingredients of the Mishing religion. They perform numbers of rituals regularly in different times to appease those spirits. The main reasons behind performing these rituals are for the well being of the people as well as for the prosperity of their crops. They simply invoke the names of Do:nyi-Polo (Sun-Moon) and Se:di-Melo (creator of universe) at the beginning of performing any ritual. The Mishings consider them as the supreme God. Thus, their religion is known as Do:nyi-Polo religion. The Mishing people worship some of the spirits such as Urom uie (departed soul), Dobur uie (dobur puja), Taléng uie (sky spirit), Kum:sung uie (granary spirit), Yumrang uie (forest spirit), Asi uie (water spirit) and Péjab uie (duck spirit). They believe that these spirits are directly or indirectly involved with the social as well as family life of this world. Rituals to appease the spirits are performed by the Mibu. The Mibu is the sole priest of the community. He has supernatural power gifted by the almighty and thus he can only offer the solution to any evils or maladies inflicting a family. The Mibu has his own Abangs (religious hymns) regarding origin of the universe, birth, death, marriage, rituals, festivals etc. The Abangs chanted is known only to him and is not in any written form nor is it understandable to anyone. He is also known as the “medicine man” as traditionally
people relied upon him for any evils.\textsuperscript{9} The Mishing people follow their own beliefs and practices at the time of pregnancy, child birth, death rituals, marriage and having new house.

It has been found that the Mishings never had any particular place for worship. As such their rituals were performed either at home, granary, paddy field, and forest, under a tree or in the bank of the river. Moreover they did not have any prayer song and instead it was the \textit{Mibu} who chants various \textit{Abangs} at the time of different rituals and those \textit{Abangs} were beyond the understanding of common man. There was no religious text prevalent among the Mishings. They depend on \textit{Abangs} to maintain their traditional system.

Apart from the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Mishings, they also perceived influences from other beliefs and practices upon their life in due course of time. As an outcome of these influences, different sects of Hinduism like Shaktism, Saivism, Tantricism, and Neo-Vaishnavism emerged in the Mishing society. Later, Christianity also largely influences the Mishing socio-religious life. Among the aforesaid influences the Neo-Vaishnavism is more prominent. It did not occur all of a sudden. It was the result of a close contact for centuries between the two cultures. As explained by Margaret Mead, M.J. Herskovitz and Jatin Mipun that “the dominant culture often influences over the weak culture justifies the nature of Vaishnavite influence over the Mishings.”\textsuperscript{10} It has been found that the Mishings are less populous. The fact is that their culture is less organized and gradually is being absorbed by the dominant culture of the mainstream society in almost all aspects. As a result many changes have occurred in their traditional beliefs and practices. At present, neither they have totally given up their traditional system nor have they adopted complete form of Vaishnavism. It is appeared

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as an ad-mixer of them. Therefore, today one can predict the nature of the Mishing religious beliefs as a shift from animism to polytheism. They believe in many gods and goddesses and diverse methods of worshipping, depending on their traditions which show an attachment to polytheism. Though some families claim themselves as traditionalist, even they are under Vaishnavite influences. Now a days their traditional rituals are conducted by Bhakats with *Nam Kirtan* and *Hari Nam*.

It appears that the Mishing society has undergone some changes after being influenced by Vaishnavism. One important change is the division of the Mishings into different sections. These sections are *Kewalia*, *Bhagavatia* and *traditionalists*. *Kewalias* are seen to be more liberal and can take *apong* and meat and there is no much rigidity in the rituals performed by them. During the time of prayer in *Namghar* *apong*, curry, fish etc. are often served to the Bhakats. On the other hand, the *Bhagavatias* strictly prohibit the use of fish, meat and wine and they preferably wear white dresses during the time of rituals. The so-called traditionalists are also not free from Vaishnavite influences. Regarding all the groups it has been found that apart from adding many new rituals, the influence of Vaishnavism is being resulted in their traditional rites and rituals assuming dual characters. Traditional rituals like *Urom To:bag, Bamud:nam or Ag:nam* are still practised but despite having the use of *apong*, meat and fish, the difference lies from the traditional practice of the Mishings is that it is now presided by the Bhakatas in place of *Mibu*, and accordingly now they chant *Hari Nam* and *Nam Kirtan*. Now a days, the *Mibus* are almost disappearing and they have been replaced by the Neo-Vaishnavite Bhakatas who are taking the responsibility for conducting their rituals. The emergence of Bhakatas has changed the character of the society. The gradual disappearance of Mibu seems to make the community less worried of the malevolent Spirits. However, it is
seen that some of the *Mibu Abangs* are uttered even by these new priests in time of performance of some rituals. The Mishings believe that Bhakatas also have the similar magical power as that of *Mibus* and therefore they allow Bhakatas to conduct the necessary rituals or to detect the causes of their sufferings and diseases. Thus, the Bhakatas now a days achieve a place of honour in the society.

Another important aspect of Mishing religious life is that a section of people adopted Christianity. This conversion process started during the colonial period among all the hill tribes of the North East and continues till date. But it came very late and slowly to the Mishing society in the plains. Christianity encouraged people to give up the traditional religious practices and embrace the new one. However, a few Mishing people of Assam accepted Christianity and gave up all forms of earlier practices and embraced Jesus as their Saviour. It may be mentioned that the aversion of tribals towards Brahminical Hinduism and the imperialist policy of the western capitalist countries have attracted Mishings to Christianity.\(^{12}\) Added to this is the level of indiscipline and countless number of expensive traditional rites are involved in their traditional practices. Besides, in due process of time the tribe began to face many new complicacies, one of those was the absence of getting equal status within the Hindu fold of society. The Mishing people entered into the caste system and occupied a low status in it. This was quite an unusual development for them since it was never found in their traditional system. This conversion to Hindu religious practice was no longer able to give protection to the tribes. Rather, it exerted domination and subjugation on the tribal life style on the one hand and hereby oppressed as well as exploited the people on the other. Instead of being cooperative to their needs, Hinduism maintained a gap with the Mishing people. It generated a great dissatisfaction among the community and the tribe started losing hope
in the Hindu ritual practices. At this moment “the administrative and political concessions extended by the colonial state, and the spread of the modern education introduced by the Christian missionaries, often with the help of the colonial State were the most decisive.”

On the other hand, the missionaries offer dedicated service to the poor people through educating and caring the sick and suffered. The sympathy and assistance from missionaries in times of distress played a great role behind the conversion. They helped mainly the weaker sections of the community. Most of the people who have been very recently converted to Christianity are unemployed and belong to economically weaker sections. In this context we may mention Sri Jiban Chandra Saikia, a teacher at the Jengraimukh H.S. School, Majuli, who claimed in 2000 “Majuli was experiencing regular crop failure in the past five years, allurements in cash or kind were enough to win over the haggard Mishing tribals by missionaries.”

Thus, the adoption of Christianity has led to the continuous disappearance of traditional beliefs and practices amongst the Mishings in the plains of Assam. In the past, the Mishing village acts as a single unit for conducting all religious, agricultural and festival related practices. But due to the impact of Christianity and other religious influences, the said practices have undergone changes. Now a days, in some villages, we find both the Christian and non-Christian groups. The age-old village unity, which was nurtured with proper care by their forefathers, is gradually decaying. The new trend has helped in the growth of new religious institutions and functionaries. Churches have come up in the place of the Murong and Namghar. Pastors have been replaced by the traditional priests (Mibu) and Christian festivals have been observed in the Mishing society. However, adopting a new religion, in the strict sense is the same as adopting a
new way of life. In this regard, B. Pohlong says that earlier practices of one’s religion differ from the practices of another. Therefore, changing from one religion to another involves the changing of one’s practices. Or we can use Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language-game’, the rule of one game differs from the rule of the other. Therefore, changing one’s religion or adopting a new religion amounts to adopting a new way of life determined by the new religion.¹⁵

Practically it is not possible for one who adopts a new religion to uphold the same way of life, to which he/she belonged earlier. It is inconsistent to claim that one can retain the way of life even when religion changes, for them religion is the core which determines the way of life of a community. The meaning of a word or anything is determined by its use and in the context in which it is used. Traditions, practices, beliefs, rituals, etc., can be meaningfully understood in the context in which they are used. When used in another context or forms of life, they will lose their meanings. Therefore, a person who has changed his/her religion can’t claim to have the same form of life. This means that the person who has changed his/her religion can’t claim to retain at the same time, his/her original culture, because with the change of religion he/she has acquired also a new culture.

The fourth chapter emphasises on detailed explanation about the origin and the process of celebration of both *Ali Aye Ligang* and *Po:rag* festival. The folk tales and beliefs associated with these two agro-based festivals are examined in this chapter. Apart from these two aforesaid festivals another three non-traditional festivals viz. *Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu* and *Magh Bihu* observed by the Mishing society are also highlighted here. *Ali Aye Ligang* is one of the national festivals of the Mishings. This festival is related with sowing of crops. Primarily, the Mishing people depended on agriculture for their
livelihood. Ahu paddy is their principal product and they choose the month of Fagun as the best suitable season to sow Ahu paddy. Hence, the Mishing people warmly celebrate Ali Aye Ligang in this period. They celebrate this festival on the first Wednesday of the month of Fagun which is considered as an auspicious day. According to the folk beliefs of the Mishings, Wednesday is holy and symbol of prosperity. It is also Lakshmi (Birth day of Goddess Lakshmi) day for them. On that day the head of the family symbolises the custom of beginning of the process of sowing of seeds. The head man of each family goes to the field with a handful of seeds, a Yokpa (Dao), Apong, Purang (boil rice), Take (Ada), Pi:ro (wild reeds), Si:pag (cotton), Si:pag onno (cotton threads), preferably in a bamboo made basket. Then the seeds are sown in the particular area of the field and chant the name of the forefathers like ‘Sedi-Melo’, ‘Karsing-Kartag’, ‘Do:nyi-Polo’, etc. to bear as witness in the process of sowing seeds, in the mother earth for abundance of crops and good harvest. The Mishing people believe that they are the creator of all things in the world. This belief is also a tradition as they use to utter names of their forefathers in all the social festivals including Ali Aye Ligang.

On the auspicious day, all women folk of the village are busy for preparing ‘apong’ and ‘purang’. Both are essential items of ‘Ligang’. Our study reveals that the two varieties of apong are prepared and used by the community. One is called ‘Nogin apong’ (white rice beer) and another one is called ‘Po:ro apong’ (black rice beer). The respectable guests and visitors irrespective of age, sex, and social status are served with ‘purang’, (boiled rice) ‘apong’ and delicious fish curry etc. They feel that this hospitality is not only for the sake of duty. But it is the moral responsibility of the Mishing society to properly serve their guests and also to keep alive their own tradition. It has created a sense of respect and human value in the minds of the villagers. In this
way feast continues throughout the village. In the evening time the head of the family again takes the names of their forefathers and also pray to the goddess of fertility. According to them if they don’t take the names of them then the crops will not be abundant in the field as well as society will not prosper in the coming days. After feast is over the young boys and girls start performing a form of dance known as ‘Gumrag-So:man’ (Gumrag dance). The Mishing people believe that ‘Gumrag-So:man’ evokes germination of seeds. Lakshmi will be satisfied and will bless for good harvest if ‘Gumrag-So:man’ is performed on the ‘Ligang’ day. Hence it is basically an appeasing dance of the goddess of fertility. Usually the young boys and girls of the village irrespective of sex take part in the ‘Pakso-Moman’ (dance-song). They continuously perform ‘Gumrag’ from house to house till the early hours of the following day. One of the most significant aspects is seen that the dance follows the rhythmical tunes of the beats of the drums and cymbals. They dance in a circle imitating the eternal cycle of life. This dance is performed to appease the goddess of wealth and fertility. The participating youths wear dresses woven by themselves reflecting their cultural self-image and identity. Now a days, in some villages the tradition of house to house dance is replaced by single ‘Gumrag so:man’ performed jointly by the villagers. The villagers generally observe taboo from field works for three days and the custom of breaking off it is known as ‘Ligang Liglen’. And in connection with the end of taboos, they arrange a brief function calling upon their forefathers. This marks the ending of ‘Ali Aye Ligang’ and the people of village again devote their time in the paddy field. Thus, the celebration of ‘Ali Aye Ligang’ not only reflects the socio-cultural identity of the Mishing people, but also plays an important role in the cultural convergence with the greater Assamese society.
Another important agriculture based festival of the Mishings is called Po:rag. It is observed after the completion of harvesting. Regarding the meaning and origin of the term “Po:rag” different scholars have expressed their views differently. According to Chandra Kanta Lachan, former President of Mising Agom Kebang, the word ‘Porag’ is derived from ‘Apong Agrag’ (Apong+Agrag=Porag). According to Ganesh Pegu, ‘Po:’ means Apong, ‘Rag’ means Celebration. That means celebration of apong drinking festival. Generally, Po:rag festival is organized and conducted by the young boys and girls of the village. To observe this festival, the villagers collectively select two important persons to lead the function properly. One is called ‘Migam Bora’ and another is known as ‘Migam Borani’. Both the Bora and Borani direct the young boys and girls respectively. The Bora and Borani are responsible for all the village youths and supervise them while conducting different social activities. Both the leaders are dynamic and have multifarious talents, who smoothly carry the youths as like parents, philosophers and friends.

The Mishing people generally have the desire to observe Po:rag for three days. Now a days, in some places the Mishings celebrate Po:rag for five days. ‘Murong’ is an important place where the Mishing people celebrate the Po:rag festival. But in some of the Mishing villages we do not see permanent Murong house. Hence, they construct a temporary house to perform the function. They decorate it with their colourful dresses like ‘Ri:bi Gāsēng’, ‘Yambo’, ‘Ēge’, ‘Mibu Gālug’ etc. to reflect traditional costume of the community. Some musical instruments viz. Dhol, Tal, pempa, gungang, etc. also play important role in this occasion. They invite ‘Minom groups’ (guest) from other Mishing villages to participate in this special occasion. At the first day of Po:rag, the Minom groups are warmly welcomed by the host village. On the second day all ‘Minom
groups’ perform cultural programme with their traditional songs and dances. It is also noteworthy that all girls who are already married from their village to other villages are especially invited as special guests with their spouses and couple of other companions. They also sing and dance on the festival. Thus, Po:rag is a virtual festival of reunion and happiness. The villagers pray to ancestors by lighting lamps. They wish before Do:nyi-Po:lo (Sun-Moon) and Karsing-Kartak (creator) to protect and flourish all creatures, crops, etc. Besides, a ‘Mibu’ (priest) is invited to lead the prayer-dance ‘Ni:tom-Sunnam’ and ‘Po:nu nu:nam’. The boys and girls follow the ‘Mibu’ in long queue and sing those prayers in chorus. Now a days, this tradition has become less practised in some of the Mishings villages. Po:ro apong is abundantly used in this festival. The Mishings prepare huge quantity of liquor with the help of a ‘Po:bor’ (tool for preparation of po:ro apong) for the festival. At present most of the Mishing villages very rarely celebrate this festival due to its heavy expenditure.

Apart from the above two cited traditional festivals, three non-traditional festivals are prevalent among the Mishings. These are Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu and Magh Bihu. In the past when the Mishings inhabited in the hills then they never practised the said non-traditional festivals. After being immigrated to the plains, they directly or indirectly co-existed with the people in plains for centuries and exchanged their cultures with them. As a result, their independent cultural traditions become integrated with various cultural elements of the plains. The impact of other cultures on the lives of the Mishings can be considered as a natural phenomenon. So, the Mishing people accept the permanent agricultural system, tools of daily life, housing pattern, food habits, dresses, religious beliefs, and also three Bihu as mentioned above from the Assamese speaking neighbouring society. As of now, the Mishings also celebrate the Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu
and *Magh Bihu* along with their traditional practice of *Ali Aye Ligang* and *Po:rag* festivals. *Bohag Bihu* is also known as Rongali Bihu. It is observed from the day of Sankranti between Chot and Bohag months of Assamese calendar to the next three to seven days. The Mishings also observe the tradition of cow-bath in the river on the day of ‘*Garu Bihu*’. During the time of bath the cows are given small pieces of gourd, brinjal, thekera, ketkuri (keturi) etc. which are prepared in the previous night. It is important to note that only the male persons are present at the place of the cow bath in the river. The women are not allowed to participate in the said occasion because they think that it is the duty of the male members only. At the evening time they tie up the cows with new rope made of herbs of ‘*tora*’ fibre in the cowshed. A mixture of black gum, mustard oil and turmeric powder is used for massaging the body of the cows. Besides, they are also given some cakes with salt to eat. All these practices are inherited from the Assamese culture.

On the other hand, like other tribes the Mishings also start singing ‘*Hunsori*’ in the evening of *Garu Bihu*. The young boys and girls initiate the practice of singing ‘*Hunsori*’ at the house of the village chief (Deka Bora). The reason behind this practice is that the village chief occupies the highest hierarchical position in their societal structure. He takes all the final decisions regarding the arrangement of the festival. It is also mandatory to sing *hunsori* at every household of the village irrespective of poor or rich. The Bihu songs, pepa, gagana, flute, drum beating, and dance rhythms are tuned to their own Mishing costumes. They also wear their own traditional dresses at the time of Bihu. Hence, the practice of Bihu is somewhere enriched with Mishing characteristics. After the Bihu *hunsori* and Bihu performance was over, the host of the household bows down before the Bihu *hunsori* group and offers some betel nut and money. The youths seat in a circle and bless the concerned family for their prosperity and liberation from the
disturbances of evil spirits. This social value dearly adhered by them not only to have an ordered social life, but also appease malevolent spirits, and to bid good-bye to the departed spirits; so that unpleasant happenings can be deterred. After completion of their Bihu performances in all the houses of the village, they arrange a feast at the village where irrespective of age, sex, old, boys, girls, men, and married women folk unite. In the evening the youths organise ‘Bihu uruainam’ (farewell to Bihu). The place for ‘Bihu uruainam’ has been selected at one end of the village in the river bank, a crocodile is created at sand and on the head of it, a leafy branch of a tree is planted. The youths dance and sing encircling the crocodile only to offer farewell to Bihu. The girls put earrings, bangles, ribbon, etc. and the boys tie hand-kar-chiefs on the bank and head of the crocodile. They offer money to the crocodile and bow down for blessing and wishes that the whole year shall pass peacefully. At the end, they go home without looking back. Because, there is a belief that if they look back then they will be troubled by sleepiness and tiredness. Today, this tradition has undergone changes due to impact of other cultures.

Like the Bohag Bihu, the Magh Bihu is also observed in the Mishing society. The Magh Bihu starts from the day of Sankranti between Puh and Magh months of Assamese calendar. The day before Sankranti is called ‘Uruka’. The Mishing people observe Magh Bihu for two days. This Bihu starts with lit fire in the Meji. It is the period having abundance of crops, vegetables, fishes, etc. and the villagers attain some short leisure from the works of paddy fields. Every household stores plenty of food items. Thus, the abundance of food items everywhere, directs us to term it as ‘Bhogali Bihu’. But this festival gradually secures an independent position in the Mishing tradition. Like other ethnic groups the Mishings also make ‘Meji’ on the night of Uruka. But unlike other
ethnic groups they do not make different groups of Mejis in a single village. The boys make two Mejis in a village on the river bank and all people of the village help them in the work. One is made taller than the other. The taller is called ‘Male’ Meji and the shorter is called ‘Female’ Meji. The belief behind formation of these two kinds of Mejis is that they were both man and woman in the past. It is based on metaphysical assumption. In the Mishing language, the act of making the Meji is called ‘Ma:gh pa:hanam’. On the day of Sankranti, in the very early morning before crows appear in the sky, they first set on fire in the male Meji. They believe that before putting fire on the Meji, it is not good sign that crows fly above the sky. When half of the male Meji is burnt, the female Meji is also put to fire. The villagers offer ‘Ambug’ (powder of fried rice), sweet potato to the burning Meji. They also memorize the names of the Sun, the Moon, cloud, rain, and also their forefathers and seek blessing for their own family. Besides, the families who have no children, people having sickness, sorrow, depression, etc. also come to the Meji with full pot of apong and betel nut. They beg blessings from the assemblage people to fulfil their desire. This tradition has been prevalent from the past till date amongst the Mishing community. They feel that in this way they will be able to reach their goals. One important custom perceived during this festival is that the boys and girls visit every house of the village and take at least a piece of potato. Otherwise, there is a belief that if they do not take anything from any household, they would be born as pig in their next life. The adults also go house to house of the village and drink apong. The Mishing people do not practise Bihu dance and song in this festival. In Bhogali Bihu the entire focus is on feast. It is a time for eating and merry making after a successful harvest. Apart from the two Bihus, the Mishings also observe Kati Bihu in a very limited scale. On the evening of the Sankranti between ‘Ahin’ and
‘Kati’ month, the earthen lamps (Saki) are lit at foot of the household ‘Tulsi’ plant, within the house, in front of the granary, in the garden and paddy fields. To protect the maturing paddy, cultivators whirl a piece of bamboo and recite rowa-khowa chants and spells toward off pests and the evil eye. On the day of Kati Bihu, the Mishing people not celebrate it like the other two Bihus, just in the day time the villagers go house to house of the village, where they consume apong and share their pleasure and sorrows with the family. Thus, the fourth chapter gives us a picture of Mishing traditional and non-traditional festivals alongwith their inherited rituals.

The fifth Chapter titled “Socio-Political Life, Language and literature” more specifically discusses about the super structural fineness of the Mishing society. Crucial role played by marital and blood relationships are also studied. The Mishings have Primary, Secondary and Tertiary groups based on their three categories of relations. First category relations are primary as well as direct and other two relations are derived from the first category relations. Significantly, the Mishings never allow arranging marriage within one’s own clan. Because they belief that originated from the same forefathers. Rather they follow inter-clan marriage that make them integrated with different clans. Other social evils like ‘child marriage’ and ‘dowry’ had not yet been reported. The girls and boys marry before attaining a certain age generally 18-20 years and sometimes more than that. In Mishing society, the guardians of the bride exercise the custom of offering certain price to the groom. That is known as bride price, which may be in the form of goods and animals, but there is no fixed price. Divorce cases are rare in Mishing society. So far as their religion, marriage and other social systems are concerned, the earlier Mishing society was rigid and orthodox in comparison to the present society. This flexibility appears more amongst the educated sections of the community.
An attempt is made to uphold a reflective discussion on the family life of the Mishings in this chapter. The discussion will expound how the families of the Mishings exert social values. Over and above, some manners amongst the members of the Mishing families remain unrevealed but should be revealed are also detailed in the chapter. As an agrarian community, the Mishings have joint families and the senior most person of the family takes all important decisions. It reveals their patriarchal structure. Among the females, the wife of the family head attains supreme position and other members work according to the direction of their heads. Considering the patriarchal structure in property inheritance, practically the sons inherit fathers’ property. Daughters are often nullified from the property rights. After family, we have to comprehend the Mishings Clan and Kinship system. The Mishings draw clans from the name of their forefathers or deities. Some of the Mishing clans are Kuli, Kutum, Kaman, Doley, Pegu etc. They have some sub clans also. Besides, there are existence of a few clans amongst the Mishings, which are the results of their contacts with the Chutiyas, Ahoms and Bhuyans, i.e. Chutiya Miri. Again, the Mishing Kinship is bilateral and consanguinity attains supremacy over affinity. The Mishing kinship terms indicate the position and identification of individuals, their rights and obligations within the family ambit. Generally, kinship terms indicate certain categories of relationships from the point of view of marriage. Here, we have to remember that the Mishings marriage system allows the following three systems—formal arranged marriage, marriage by elopement, and marriage by force. But in all the three systems, they have their unique system of taking blessings from the elders and society as a whole. The joint family structure of the Mishings is also unique. They have the practice of ‘Rigbo’—asking the villagers to help in the paddy field, if one family is unable to complete the work in time.
Each tribe is symbolic regarding its specific food habits. The Mishings are not an exception to it. Two inevitable traditional dishes of the Mishings are ‘Namsing’ (dry fish) and ‘Purang’ (boil rice). They have immense use of dry fish, different dry leaves, bora rice, khar, wild vegetables, pig, chicken, chilly, ginger, black pepper etc. to prepare their food items. The Mishings use a particular drink made up of rice known as ‘Apong’ (rice beer) and use it in almost all their rituals, celebrations and day to day living. Apong brings physical and mental amusement to them and another Mishing folk belief associated with the use of Apong is that daily use of it can prevent the formation of stone in kidney.

The institutions of Mishing socio-political life are also widely studied in the chapter. Murong ghar is constructed as the village club to arrange collective social functions of a Mishing village. In the social life, amongst the senior group a significant democratic as well as administrative unit, known as ‘Do:Lung Kēbāng’ (village council) and among the youths ‘Mimbir-Ya:me’ (youth council) occupy considerable position in the Mishing society. The youth group under the leadership of Bora and Borani conduct almost all public works in collective manner. Here ‘Daglige’ is a mode of collective and remunerative performance arranged by the youngsters. In the Mishing political life, the village headman known as ‘Gam’ occupies significant position. Traditionally, ‘Kēbāng’ acts as the village courts to deliver justice and settle disputes among individuals and groups. The introduction of Panchayati Raj institutions somehow decreases the powers of Kēbāng, but at present too Kēbāng holds significant position in the Mishing social life. Like a few other tribal groups of Assam, the Mishings also signed the historic Mishing Accord with the Assam Govt. in 1995 and accordingly constitutes the Mishing Autonomous Council. It works for the all round development of the Mishing people in
the Council’s area covering eight districts i.e. Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. Thus, the role of mobilising, articulating and shaping political behaviour of the Mishings has been shifted from traditional Gams to Panchayats and to Autonomous Council. Importantly, there is no political party specially representing the Mishing community as like Bodos in Assam. But their representations as well as political consciousness have been gradually increasing day by day and it is a good sign for the community sentiment. Because it will further help them to comprehend their political rights, obligations and enhance their political knowledge. However, it is remarkable that every society has certain social ideals to bring it towards progression. It is universal that democracy, liberty, equality, justice and fraternity are the core objectives to be achieved by every society. The Mishing society also tries to attain these morals by their practices as well as institutions. The social organizations like Kēbāng, Mimbir-Ya:me, Rigbo etc. play crucial role in this regard. The cooperative mechanisms developed by these Mishing organizations by and large facilitate the morals and mould the social behaviour in the right track to achieve the same.

The chapter again discusses about the language and literature of the community. Considering their language, the Mishings represent the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Due to not having their own script, they now follow the modified form of Roman script. In October-1986, the Assam Govt. introduced the Mishing language as one of the subject in primary schools of Assam. The language has a phonological system of 29 (twenty nine) phonemes, 15 (fifteen) of which are consonants and 14 (fourteen) vowels. The Mishing literature was especially composed mainly of oral versions i.e. folk songs, folktales, proverbs etc. Their written literature emerged at first in the wake of the movement led by the Guwahati Agom Kēbāng (1968) and Mising
Agom Kēbāng (1972). They play an important role in publishing a number of books to flourish Mishing culture, society and tradition as a whole.

The sixth chapter studies about the weaving, dress code, religious arts, ornaments, housing patterns, cane and bamboo works, day to day usages and tools of the Mishing society to carry on domestic and outdoor activities. These elements are integral part of their folk art and folk craft which are well practised in their daily activities. The study reveals that weaving as a cottage industry developed among them due to impact of the differences in ecological and geographical situations between the hills and plains. The differences are noticed in terms of cloths and attire, texture and colour, the art of decoration in the medium of colour threads and loom and loom accessories. The Mishings of the plains have embraced the great tradition of their non-tribal neighbours and developed their own costume not different from the earlier one. Of course, they have created a tradition of Eri culture and earned loud praise in recognition for their craftsmanship. Earlier all cloths were woven from home spun cotton yarns. But less production of cotton yarns in the plains led the Mishings women folk not to desire to spin cotton. Paat and muga silk yarns, though commonly not produced by them, they used these yarns to some extent. Now a days, we notice that all cotton yarns required for making cloths of different nomenclature are purchased. As may be mentioned that mill made yarns such as kecha-shuta, maju-shuta, sharu-shuta, one-ply, zero-ply, etc. are used by the Mishing women in weaving. To produce textile items, they use Loin loom as well as Throw- shuttle looms in the plains. In some places we have seen the use of fly-shuttle loom to produce textile items by the Mishing women.
The making of traditional dresses for men and women such as *Mibu gālug* and *Ége*, has been found in both its modernized and traditional form. A bigger section of the Mishings today accepts readymade garments for everyday use and also in the purpose of festive wears. Actually, the males, except a few old people, wear mill-made or readymade garments in preference to the traditional dresses. But weaving in a traditional loom has become rare and is confined to some aged women folk. However, in the absence of home-spun cotton they weave it in one-ply acrylic yarns or one ply or two ply wool, etc. The weaving of *Gadu* is a symbol of status and dignity of a Mishing family, but due to poor production of cotton as well as lack of experts and dedicated weavers this product is now rarely used in the society. The reason behind it is that the mill-made yarn has become more popular and production of cotton has sharply declined. Yarn is brought from market, though a small quantity is spun in the village also.

The Mishing textile design, motif and colour combination is unique among the textile tradition in the plains of Assam. The textile design is an artistic expression of the craftsmanship of a weaver. On the otherhand, a motif is a symbol of various specifications which is used to create a design on the textile material. The design, motifs and colour combination are so much attractive that their fabric has crossed limits of the other tribes and become the desirable fabric of the elite class in the entire Assam. The dress materials consist of specific designs of nature, trees, stars, moon in the sky, pictures of birds, animals and various geometrical patterns etc. The local craftsmen usually design the traditional cloths by using floral patterns, image of animals like elephants inter-spread with lions, deer, horses, flowers, leaves, birds and spring etc. Traditional motifs like fish, cons and crossed swords, etc. are also used. These designs and motifs used by the indigenous weavers on textile items are only for increasing the
outer beauty of the dress and to enhance market value of the commodity. These motifs and designs express the inner feelings of the weavers and they picturise it in the form of different natural symbols. Hence, no superficial meaning is associated with these motifs and symbols. The Mishings use motifs of mostly white, red, black, yellow, blue and green colours and provide desired attractive beauty to their products. Besides, these motifs are the manifestations of the aesthetic view of craftsmen. The Mishing weavers are very much close to the nature and to their socio-cultural tradition is evident from the motifs and designs they use in their textile. Apart from that the Mishing weavers draw special designs and motifs from the neighbouring communities and well implement it in their clothes.

The chapter broadly discusses about the traditional housing pattern of the Mishing society. The compact pattern of settlement is found among the Mishing tribe. The villagers prefer to build a house at the nearest place of agricultural field in the areas where water is available for drinking, irrigation and other usages. The houses of the Mishings are not arranged in rows or in any other definite order. The complete houses are usually about 40 feet to 100 feet in length and 10 feet to 15 feet in breadth. But it may be varied pattern of houses based on family structure. They collect raw materials of timber, bamboo, reeds, cane, straw, stone and iron rods for construction of a house. The villagers, friends and relatives help in the construction works. They are served with apong and also are offered food; no payment has been made. As we find in the study, a traditional Mishing house is not divided into different rooms. There are only two doors in the house, one in front (tunggeng yabgo) and the other in the back (yapkur yabgo). There is no provision for windows because such provisions usually allow the sun light, rain water and cold wind to enter and subsequently create trouble. There are different parts
seen in the Mishing house. These are chutal (*lotta*), ladder (*ko:bang*), veranda (*Tunggeng*), main entrance, room for sleep (*soyer*), fire place(*mérom*), side for foul, back door and side for storing water, etc. and so on. There is no partition in a traditional style of house but different portions of the house have different names and uses. At the middle of the house the fire place is made. The fire place separates the house into two parts called ‘*Ri:Sing*’ (upper side) and ‘*Koktak*’ (lower side). The upper side is the place for the head of the family as well as male members and the lower side is generally occupied by the females. The fire place is a symbol of the house because it makes the division of the whole house. It is revealed in the study that every Mishing house contains cowshed and granary. The cowshed is built for the purposes of rearing and caring of domestic animals. And the granary is a store house in which paddy with rice grains are kept.

The process of acculturation is also visible in the traditional housing pattern of the Mishings. Most of the villagers prefer to have modern houses in place of their traditional housing pattern. Those who are in good economic condition, they have now started constructing *pucca* building in place of their traditional house. As observed during the time of study, is that, though the economically sound families have constructed *pucca* buildings but in each building, there is a traditional *Chang ghar* which is used either by aged persons or for arranging pujas and festivals. The aged villagers are incapable of adjusting themselves with modern *pucca* building and prefer traditional *Chang ghar*. It is seen that most of the villagers have their kitchen hall which is attached to the main house. This is one of the most significant influences of the non-tribal Assamese people. Formerly the Mishings had no separate kitchen. It is set up within the sleeping halls of their houses. Another significant change too has been witnessed is that some of the newly constructed houses have guest rooms and provision of latrines. This
trend was not found in their traditional houses. The guests or co-villagers can directly enter into the fire place for any sort of discussion.

Apart from the housing tradition, cane and bamboo are the most essential materials used by the Mishing society. The folk men are expert in the art of bamboo and cane articles. The Mishing artisans of Assam largely utilize them for various crafts works. From the bamboo and cane they make tools with different attractive designs. They also use it in every possible way such as construction of house, household goods of daily uses like baskets and containers of different shapes and sizes, headgears, fishing traps, mats, fuel, dao-sheaths, and even use as food. The Mishing people are akin to reside in the river side, because they are experts in rowing and fishing. They adopt various methods for fishing. The people don’t use many tools for fishing. A few valve traps like Sepa, Uvoti, Khoka are woven with bamboo splints with a valve fitted to it and these are placed on the way of water following in low depths. The traps like Pollo, Juluki and Jakoi are used in group fishing.

Generally, basketary is practised in each Mishing household. The Mishing people produce basketary items mainly for one’s own family utilization. There is no household with basketry as a primary source of livelihood. The basketry is generally practised for domestic consumption. Some old skilled craftsmen, who are unable to work in the field, devote their full time to basketry work. The items produced by such men are sold in local market. In the social sphere of Mishing folk life basketry attains a core place. It is a part and parcel of the total cultural sphere of a particular area. It is related to ritualistic associations, domestic and social spheres in various ways. The basket makers of Assam including the Mishings have never formed a separate occupational group like the potter
or blacksmith. Each and every workman of the village folk possesses the practical knowledge of basketry. However, there are some expert basket makers who take the craft for livelihood. The basket makers are generally cultivators with agriculture as primary occupation and they try to utilise their leisure in basketry. Only the men folk seem to engage in this craft. So it can be said that the basketry is exclusively man’s affair.

Another significant aspect we have seen during the time of field study is that music plays a very important role in the socio-cultural life of the Mishings. The traditional dance and music are related to their festivals, marriage ceremony and rituals. The folk singers are accompanied by various instruments that serve as echo of the singers and give a life to their songs. The musical instruments mainly consist of wood, bamboo, brass and iron strings. They popularly use musical instruments like flute, horn, drum, papa, cymbals etc. and those are produced by the folk music lovers at their own skill and interest.

All these material aspects such as weaving, ornaments, housing pattern, fishing traps, basketary, musical instrument, etc discussed in this chapter are essences of the Mishing socio-philosophical life. They picturize their feelings, emotions and environment through these elements used in daily life. Their thinking, belief system, rituals, weaving, housing pattern, etc. reflect aesthetic and social values of their community and by and large shape their moral, philosophical life. These material aspects are the mirror to look into the Mishing community for any laymen. Their unique identity is well reflected through these aspects examined in the chapter.

Thus, in the concluding remarks, we find that every society reflects its colours through its cultural traits. Culture can exist only when society exists, and every human
society is accompanied by a culture. One’s culture appears as a mirror to understand the social connotations, social values, beliefs, practices, knowledge, ideals, etc. and through these it regulates the outer behaviour of individuals in a society. As a dynamic issue, culture always leaves the unused prospects and adopts new traditions. Cultural sustainability depends upon its prolonged usage within one’s own community. The Mishing culture is not an exception to it. The Mishing society has been undergoing tremendous changes due to amalgamation of a number of factors. Among those the physical environment is the prime reason of social change. It includes the slow and sudden geographical and climatic changes caused by riverbank erosion, flood, deforestation, which greatly influence the social system and bring transformations in society. Secondly biological factors like population growth also bring significant changes. Thirdly urbanisation, spread of education, scientific outlook and advancement in the field of technology may be considered to be other important sources of social change. Here, we can incorporate the increasing role of mass-media, tele-communication and transport facilities of the contemporary times. Besides, current scientific discoveries also bring effective changes in their domestic and other spheres of social life, which by and large attributed to modification in their tradition, customs, institutions and beliefs.

The last but the most dominant factor is culture. Culture, as Maclver and Page pointed out has two aspects, i.e. valuation and expression. Now both these aspects undergo transformation as the man’s sense of valuation and his way of appraising things varies from age to age. Again, the individuals’ mode of expression also changes along with the time. These are the reasons underlying the variety of cultural interests that we find in a community. Culture influences society and society in turn influences its culture. As per the Mishings are concerned, the significant social changes in due course of time
reshape their traditional cultural aspects. Consequently, the Mishing culture as well as civilization also assimilates new values and practices. Numbers of their past practices have been disappearing and lots of new practices at the influences of neighbouring groups have been adopted by the Mishing society. Thus, questions can be raised in the following way—are the new changes will overlap the original practices? Is there any reason behind the adoption of new practices? Is there no reason behind their traditional beliefs? How the Mishing society will sustain originality and age-old traditions? –to answer all the above mentioned queries, we have to entrust views from different perspectives and comprehend the new trends observed in the Mishing society as well as practices in comparison with their own age-old trends. In this regard, by considering the Mishing social set up, we tend to observe the following aspects. In the Mishing society, as like Marxist ideas there is no extreme economic disparity as well as exploitation between men and men. Again, the aspect of structural functionalism also strongly appears in the Mishing society. The religious framework and cultural traits create powerful bond between different sections of people in the Mishing society. It enshrines the sense of civic, etiquette, tradition, morality, responsibility towards one another and respect for the people and the law. These practices cannot be applied with coercive forces rather they are internalising through religious sanctions. In the Mishing society, we find almost all the festivals are marked with association of some important events, occasions, offering sacrifices, obligations, prayer, performances of rites, and rituals. They are not simply celebrated for entertainment and recreation but have deep meanings. All such activities are preceded by religious act. The Mishing religious practice is neither to free them from past karma nor for liberation as is held in many Eastern religions like Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism because they have no concept of karma system or belief
in rebirth in the strict sense of the term even if they believe that good man will always be rewarded while bad man or sinners will have negative reward in this life or in the next life in the land of the dead.

They also observe too many gennas. It means not allowing the whole people of the village in religious activities. That ultimately slowed down the pace of development to a very great extent. It is observed that there were too many taboos which we find unreasonable in modern context. It gives extra trouble to the people. Taboos unnecessarily suppress people's freedom to work, move around, enjoyment, relaxation. It did involve a lot of superstitious beliefs. But as taboo is essentially bound up with religious belief, people dread to go against it. They believe that violation of taboos will bring undesirable consequences to the whole community.

The strong clan and kinship system reflects the identity of the Mishings. It helps in organizing the society. This is a wonderful way in which each and every member of the society is a relative of everyone and no one is left out when one follows the clan system accordingly in all works of life. As there are two major clans and their marriage system is exogamy or inter-clan marriage, one belongs to one particular clan (father's clan means patrilineal society) and the other clan is one's mother clan that everyone is a relative in one way or the other. Besides the beautiful sights, there are ugly sights as well. Clan transcends the villages. Inter clan rivalry was also there at times which was responsible for the slow growth of the tribal community. Clan is still a strong factor and kinship is the basis of their identity. This system too have demerits when one goes to the extreme of identifying oneself with only one's clan that results in serious inter-clan dispute or rivalry in relation to land ownership system. To remove such kind of disputes
among clans, we need to raise social consciousness as well as scientific reasoning for overall development of the community.

As regards to their socio-political life, the Mishing people of each village nominate their ‘Gam’ as the head of the village council and entrust him all the responsibilities to decide as well as carry on their social activities. It is not a hereditary institution. Rather it is democratic. The consensus opinion of the majority forms the final decision on any matter. Yet the decision of the leader or head (chairman of the village council) alone is not above the wishes and desires of the village council. But like other cultures of the world in ancient time, where women were suppressed at various level, this tribal society did not include women in the decision making body. When half of the community's population are not treated equally and are underestimated, it cannot be called a truly democratic society. Hence, it is observed that in almost all fields of Mishing socio-cultural life we find that either new changes occur or there are continuous disappearances of past practices.

Besides, though the community came in contact with the culture of the plains of Assam since 16th Century, but they were hardly influenced by prevalent religions of the plains. They were basically the followers of traditional ritual practices, even after they are assimilated and made imitations of the Hindu religious practices of the greater Assamese Community. Sri Sri Sankaradeva and his followers were successful to convert a few people of the community to Neo-Vaishnavite faith but the Mishings are very less aware about the hidden faith of the Hindu sect of Sankaradeva. After Sankaradeva, factors like the less attention from the Hindu orthodox outlook of the religious leaders, prevalent casteism and emergence of new mindset amongst the educated elite middle class Mishing group to form and restore separate identity of their traditional culture,
etc. are a few reasons behind having a unique tribal set up of the Mishing Community in Assam. Impact of westernisation and modernisation of socio-cultural lifestyle adhere them to adopt Christianity as an alternative to their traditional practices. But one cannot say that they have purely left their age-old traditions and completely switfed to this new western religion, rather they combiney practise their traditional rituals along with the new changes they have adopted from Vaishnavism as well as from Christianity.

Since Independence, the constitutional protection and economic help create a new environment for this indigenous tribe to move forward. Education plays an important role here to empower them. Consequently, the growing educated middle class people carry on a number of developments to protect their culture i.e. restoration and documentation of their oral literature in a acceptable new written form, enhancement of their language and literature, rising their socio-political awareness etc. through establishing institutions like Mishing Agom Kebang, Bane Kebang and so on. All these developments bring a new look to Mishing culture. As these developments are directed by the influences of the Mishing middle class so, they are widely prejudiced by the Assamese reference group. Undoubtedly, the essence of the Mishing tribal society, like co-operation, social bondage, village self-government etc. has been decreasing and marketization, professionalism and individualistic outlook are flourishing in the contemporary era. No society at present can be free from the impact of globalization, westernisation and market economy. But it is noteworthy that a tribal society can only persist, if its unique patterns and usages are carried on. Thus, the need of the hour is to restore as well as strengthen the Mishing tradition along with the adaption of dynamic and relevant influences of the greater Assamese society.
Nevertheless modernisation brought scientific understanding in their daily socio-familial practices but yet superstitions play an important role in their ritual beliefs and practices. Their maximum practices fail to supplement any reasoning. Thus, our study attempts to make an appeal before the civil society groups of the affluent Mishing society to play an important role to lead the Mishing society towards such a height, where they have less superstitions, more scientific reasoning, more emphasis on value based education system and developing their language, literature, creating consciousness about social happenings, cleanliness and hygiene, making people more participative in their traditional socio-cultural practices, etc. and so forth. The Mishing society can only flourish when each and every Mishing person internalise his/her traditional-cultural traits with scientific reasoning and practise them at their best; so that the whole world can comprehend them as a colourful ethnic plain tribe of Assam with their unique blend.

Now, by taking into account the above aspects, it can be asserted that culture is an inevitable part of every social set up. It is the back bone of social life that tightens unity amongst the people in regard to their material as well as psychological attachments. Again, culture includes all the abstract and concrete products of group life and transmits these from generation to generation. Ethnic identity of a society can only be flourished through culture. From pragmatic point of view, the objectives of every social life revolves round two aspects viz- knowledge and aesthetic value. Culture develops the both. However, culture is a cohesive force that fosters a sense of “we feeling” amongst the members of a particular society. It also regulates human behaviour according to the social norms. So far the Mishings are concerned, they have a specific cultural identity and which is well reflected in their specific dress-code, food habits, social and family ceremonies, art, music, literature, customs, folklore, religious practices, and so on.
Hence, culture is a means to bind all the members of a particular society into one common bond of unity so as to reach their social ends. The Mishing society too is not an exception where culture has a far reaching effect on it. The Mishing culture itself is the means for uniting all the members and it brings a social cohesion for attainment in socio-philosophical goal for the larger interest of their group life.
References


4. Ibid., p.9

5. Ibid., p.10


18. Ibid., p.39

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