CHAPTER-III

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE MISHING WOMEN

Society is not stable rather it is dynamic in nature. But most of the societies of the tribal communities are static. The rural India still clings to the same old cultural structures. There has never been any stunned variation in its political situation economic conditions and social organization which is aspired by a community for their welfare and harmonious co-existence. The Mishing society is one of such kind of societies.

A folk society, mainly the tribal society, makes relationship between their economic, political, socio-cultural and social life as well as their relation with other culture. We are reluctant to use the term Tribal Society or designate these people as tribal because their society had long since moved out of that level of human society, which we call tribal. In short, we call it a civilized society. This situation is understood properly to avoid misconception about their society and their culture. The tribal people presently are developing every situation in their social life. The tribal people are generally also learner but not backward.
The Mishings are well organized. They obey certain strict rules and regulations in their society as they do on the household. They always obey rules and regulations in terms of work, like fishing, merry making etc. The primitive method of social group or polity is prevalent among them. There is a democratic set-up where members of the society have a power to point out any problem of them in their society council or Gaon Panchayat or village council. The village headman (*gam*) controls this system.

The Mishing villages are situated along the river courses of upper Assam. The distribution of villages along the courses of the river Brahmaputra. According to Waddel (1901) they are centered mainly in the river areas of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, sibasagar, Jorhat and Sonitpur. Mishing village are not far away from rivers. Their houses generally face the rivers.

Education is a great leveler of social equality. In the traditional Indian society, education was restricted to higher class only. Therefore, the tribal society or other ethnic groups did not get the privilege to pursue education. This situation continued till India attained independence. After independence, India adopted her own constitution. The constitution of India has provided some
concession to the people of scheduled castes and the scheduled tribe in order to their economic, education and political status. But, the concession provided by the constitution are not guaranteed by themselves for elevating their socio-economic and socio-political status. The question is that, how much interest has been evinced by these population for enjoying the benefits provided to them by the constitution and the government for overall development of the communities, including the development of the children and women. Are they really interested to send their children to the educational institutions? Have they allowed their womenfolk to come out from household work and participate in various social economic and political activities. The focus of this chapter is to highlight the women situation in socio-economic, social, cultural and religious activities.

Social life

The Mishings are free from all sorts of social evils. They have no caste system like untouchabilities or social inequality and have no dowry system, which is prevalent in the larger Indian society. The women enjoy equal status with the male and both the sexes share the burden of life. But sometimes women enjoy less
rights and privileges than their male counterparts. As regards their inheritance property women cannot claim share in her father and husband’s property as a matter of right. Similarly, women play a marginal role in the decision making process in the family.

Women are comparatively hard worker than men. Apart from her daily activities she devotes herself in different constructive and productive activities of the family. They remain engaged in household and agricultural activities and look after poultry and piggery. In Mishings society father is head of the family. He advises all the members of the family and they obey his advice. The Mishing men and women done all the agricultural activities which help their annual income.

**Composition of households**

The important feature of Mishing family is to live in a joint family or in a nuclear family. In a joint family the wife, the husband, the brother, and sister, the in -laws and some other relatives live under the same roof. On the other hand, in nuclear family or small family, wife and husband live with their own children under the same roof. Initially, most of the Mishing families were living as
joint families with a strong economic background. But in course of time, due to acute economic backwardness most of the Mishing families started living in nuclear households. In case of married sons, establish of new house take place after one or two years of marriage. After separation, family members continue to co-operate in all matters except regular economic activities. Composition of the households in the surveyed village among 120 households is present in the following.

Table -1

Composition of the Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Category of composition</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parent with married son</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parent with married son with their children and unmarried sons and daughter</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this table, it is clear that highest numbers of the families are joint families. The number of joint families are 98% and the total number of nuclear families are 22%. There are four families having husband and wife without issue and 12 families having parents with unmarried children. The number of nuclear families with their father and unmarried son and daughter also available here.

Secondly, it is found in the category of joint or extended families that each family consists of parents with more than one son or daughter. One most important category is also found which consists of mother with married daughter and grand children. In
some joint families the daughter who has already been married but due to some reason she return to their parent's home. When asked the reason of their separation they replied that this is due to poverty and family conflict. According to the old Mishing people the joint families are gradually breaking down among themselves due to their increasing population and lack of time.

Size of the house

The Mishing build their house in raised platforms about 5-6 feet above from the ground. A typical house is sometime as much as 30/40 meter in length and 20 feet in breadth. The roof is thatched and the walls and doors are made of bamboo.

The Mishing typically live in a house, which is called *chang ghar*. Now some Mishing have started constructing Assam type house. A Mishing family has several fireplaces.

There are two main doors in a house, one in front and the other in the back of the house with one or two outlets in the sides.

In a house, all essential household equipments and articles are kept in a special order.
Family a unit

Among the Mishing of Assam the head of the family, who is regarded as its custodian, generally hold the property. After the death of father, sons and daughters inherit the property. If the father does not distribute it during his lifetime, the mother manages this distribution.

The wife and husband co-operate in different situation. They enjoy the religious function equally. They assume that the wife is the root of prosperity, enjoyment also regards as laksmi of the house. All the member of the family also cooperate in various situation.

Group and Clan

Mishing clan is very interesting among the tribal society. The clans derive their name from some natural objects or some characteristics of their ancestors. Clans are strictly exogamous. The Mishings believe that the God is the all, the creator of the universe. They believe that the living beings of the world are created by Supreme Being and therefore they
trace their *opin* (clan) for the name of the creator.¹ Mishings have so many clans. Each group consist of several clans. In the Mishing society blood relation is called *opean* and each bearing a particular surname. It is said that the clans derive their name from their original living places as well some characteristic of their ancestors. The clans are very much specific identifying an *opan* or *gotra*. Within a group and such they are inherited. One cannot adopt a surname as the desires. There are more than sixty clans in the Mishing society².

Kinship system of the people is very large. This is known as descriptive. The main feature of the system is the application of those relationships, which refer to one type of relationship only. They use the same relationship term *baboi* for father’s younger brother and the husband of mother’s sister. They use two terms for the single type of relationship a term of reference and a term of address. For example when a person addresses his father he uses the term *babatta* but when he speaks of his father the term is *abatta*³. The Mishings are

---

divided into some group. The reason for such division is not known. Moreover, such a division is undistinguishable on many occasions. The groups are, Pagro, Delu, Sayang, Dambuk, Oyan, Samuguria, Mowing, Tamar, Somua, Bihia, Bongkuall.

But Mishings are divided into two section namely, Barogam and Dahgan. No reason for this division is traced out in the contemporary history of Assam. It is said that the Ahom rulers gave the title gam to some leading influential person within a group or clan. Hence it was the Ahom Kings who originated and introduced the term barogam (twelve chief of this group) and Dahgam (ten chiefs of this group) although, there is no definite demarcation of division between these group, still there exists a slight variation in the both sections. Some of the socio-cultural systems of these two sections also differ. Among the barogam, there are several clan. There are doley, kutum, kuli pati, patir, patir, pegu, basar, pasor, kasding, miging etc.

Among the dahgam, the clan are moying, choyang, tagi, pamegam, morong, bari, panging, yein, north kaman, paw etc. A number of loosely knit and apparently indistinguish
wise sub-group in their society. There are namely the pagro, delu, shayang, dambuk, oyan, moring, samung uria, tamor samuah and the behaia.

There are forty two clans. The clans of the Mishing can be categorized according to the sub group. For example – doley and pegu clans are normally included within pago sub-group and regon, padun, morang are included with chayengoa or Agengin sub-group. The marriage system usually preferred within the sub-group. The doley prefer to marry with pegu girls because pegu and doley clan as belong to pago sub group.

A few clans are created during the reign of the Ahoms Chutia and bhuyan. Some says that the Mishings who came down through the Ahom Chutia kingdom of Sadia were known as Sadia Miri or Chutia Miri.

The Ahom kings selected some eligible Mishing members and offered them administrative post like Miri Baruah, Miri Sandikai etc. The Baruah Pegu of Dhemaji, Samua of Namsai, Patgiri of Luhitmukh areas have similarly historical part maintain there title offered by Ahom king with much pride.

The whole of the Mishing tribe is divided into three gotras.

1. Sabo (Doley) and
2. Kasder (Pegu)
3. Bemi

The Sabo are Doley gotra. The Doley gotra has four subdivisions like lasum, lodeng, ajara and patar.

The kandar gotra has also four sections, such as gupit, gudong, kari, lagasu.

The bami gotra has five sub sections. Which are pama, mili, kaman, pagun, pagang. The Mishing gotra also depending the place of dowelling.

The Mishings are divided into eight khels. Those are Sayingia, Mayingia, Dal, Pagar, Dambak, Samuguria and Tamar.

A few clans are found to be created due to the contact with the Ahoms Mirichuta and Bhuyan community in the past.

Customs relating to clan organization

The family members accepted the name of the fore father of an imaginary deity as clan. The boys belong to their father clan where as the daughter after marriage accept the clans of their husband.
Kinship

The kinship system of the people is by and large known as descriptive. The main features of this system are the application of these relationship terms, which refer to one type of relationship only.

**TABLE 2**

List of kinship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father side</th>
<th>Mother side and wife side</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sl. Relation</td>
<td>Mishin term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fa, Fa, Father</td>
<td>Taku tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fa Fa, Mother</td>
<td>Taku yoyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fa father</td>
<td>Taku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fa, Mother</td>
<td>Yayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Father</td>
<td>Aba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fa, el, bio</td>
<td>Babotta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Fo el, bro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Fa, el, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Fa, el, si, hu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Fa, yo, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>fa, yo, sister, bu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Fa, yo, bro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Fa, yo, bro, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Eldor br wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Yunger bro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Yo, bro, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>o, sis, hu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Aaughter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviation**

Fa – Father  Hu – Husband  Mo – Mother  El/el – Elder

Br – Brother  yo – younger  Si – Sister  w – wife

**Marriage system**

The marriage system of Mishing community like Hindu marriage system. But some part of their marriage system have some difference.

Mishing marriage system occupies an important place in the society. This marriage system, which a man and a women are bound in permanent relationship for enjoyment of all kinds of
pleasure social, physical and spiritual. The children of Mishing community get married just after attainment of adulthood.

Mishings parent want to give in marriage of their children as early as possible when they attain the adult hood. Marriage among the Mishing is still a socio-religious ceremony. Parents consider it to be their most sacred duty to arrange the marriage of their children. Among the Mishing community, marriage by negotiation is common. But they do not pay importance about the horoscope etc. They give importance only on the age difference. In the formal marriage system the bridegroom party discusses with the bride’s parents. On that very day, the bridegroom’s party go to the bride’s house with betel nut and milk or apong (rice bear). The betel nut are cut by the public of that village in front of both party and they take it.

The Mishing marriage system is a endogamy system. Marriage within the same clan pegu with pegu and doley with doley will never be sanctioned. Because, It is restricted within the same sub-clan also. The cross clan marriage system is common among them.

The Mishing are monogamous. However, a man is allowed to marry more then one. But some time some male may marry
spouse more than one if he is economically capable and maintaining his wife and children.

The Mishing traditional system has so many peculiarities in case of the marriage system. The boy has to work for some days at his father in law’s have before marriage which is called *Majab-daghem*. In the final fixation of marriage the boys side has to pay *Arooadum* which contain *para Apang* (rice bear) with dry fish and *goa-pan* (betel-nut) to the bride side. This event is called *tadpin*. The marriage is perform according to the Hindu religion.

The Mishing marriage system is celebrated in three different ways depending on the modes of acquiring matter.

These different ways are -

*DA: RUMidang*, *DUGLALA: NAM*, *KUMNA SOLALA : NAM*

*Da- ru –midang* is settled by the parent or guardians according to the social system.

*Dugla-la-nam*, is a type of marriage which settled by elopement at the consent of the bride.
Kumana-sola-la-nam, This type of marriage is selected marriage, but it is informal negotiation. It is performed only after receiving concept from both the parents or guardians of the bridegroom.

In marriage ceremony women sing folk song. This is called Midong Nitom.


Meaning : In the first blood of youth I had lost myself in your love. But now removed me form you. Without you my life is meaningless and is at a standstill.

II. Na : ne na : nauma, na:ne kangkan awwa

Akalo sigvne dubyo ka: ne

Du :ne cricm jintomo ka : ne
Meaning: Oh, my dear daughter why have you leave your mother alone? How can the aged mother live without you? You are like my right hand. You fetched water, cooked food and helped me in all my domestic affairs. But to day you woke no more by my side. Oh my child, How can I spend the days when you are out of my sight.

Dowry and bride price

In the Mishing society the dowry and bride price are not popular. The apong and meat play an important role in the marriage party. In early days a pig or its equivalent rupees 100 or 50 was charged as bride price payable to the parents of the bride. But letter the amount has come to many variations.

The Mishing marriage system is influenced by the other Assamese marriage system. Of late, the marriages of Mishing community have been modernized. Today, dowry system is noticed
in Mishing society also. And groom’s party does not make any demand for it. If marriage takes place by negotiation then the bride is given some kind of jeweler’s, animals from her parents. But in case of marriage by elopement she does not get anything. In this case, she can bring with her own gold and animal if she has any.

**Women relation with socio-cultural conditions**

Actual treatment or legal status, opportunity for social participation and character and extent of work are some of the factors to determine the status of women in a society. The various roles played by women in different aspect of life indicate their position in the society and their status can be evaluated.

A Mishing women has right to do from the beginning of her life till her death, A woman plays various roles as required by the society at different stage and context of her life. These stage can be broadly categorized

1. Birth and childhood
2. Adolescent age
3. Marital life and motherhood
4. Old age
Like other society, in the Mishing society a pregnant woman is always expected to give birth a son. They believe that boys are supporter for old age. But it does not mean that girl is looked down upon. She also receives equal care and affection as in case of a boy.

After the birth of a child, the mother is treated as unclean. She is neither allowed to cook nor is allowed to carry any household activities. During this unclean period mother and child live in seclusions for three days.

On the third day, they perform a ceremony which is known as susi. On that particular day satula. The village priest is invited to perform the ceremony in case of son there is male satula and in case of daughter femal satola is invited. At first satola trims a locks of hair from the forehead of the new born baby. Then believe that body is purified. The satola also selects a name for the newborn body. On the day of purification some of the villagers are invited. Invited guests are entertained with apang and some other food items. Then they perform the annaprasana ceremony. In the first day of giving rice to a child.
Up to the age of puberty, social restrictions are negligible for both boys and girls. A girl is allowed to move freely like a boy. But in their childhood days also girls are supposed to have more responsibilities. A girl charring food to the paddy field, helping their mother in grinding rice etc. but boys of same age group were either roaming from place to place playing with their friend. In the present situation, the girl and boy receive equal care and affection. They also send their sons and daughters to the school.

Most of the parents like their daughter to stay at home for helping their mother and learns weaving and other household activities after finishing their primary education. But now a day’s education is getting much importance in Mishing society. If a boy wants to marry, his parents began to look for a bride for him. If they get any information about the bride the proposal goes from groom’s house to bride’s house. In the beginning, the boy’s father along with relatives or some co-villagers goes to the girl’s house with the proposal. They take with them two large container full of apang and nine to ten pons of betel nut and betel leaf. This ceremony is known as Yamnne tamnne. If the girl’s parents accept the apong and betel leaf and nut then they fix the marriage date.
There is no clear cut system of offering invitation card in their society. But now a days some people offer invitation card according to their economic and social status.

The marriage takes place at bride’s house. The groom accompanied by his friend and relatives come to the girl’s house to marry her. Generally in a marriage the guests are treated with apong which is prepared at home. Those who can afford serve deer meat chicken also.

When a marriage is arranged in a village, it is the duty of the young boys to cut bamboos and prepare bamboo glass. Now-a-days, some people use metal glass also. apong is offered in either bamboo or metallic glass. The meat is cooked by males. The firewood is supplied by the village people. The people of the whole village take part in the marriage ceremony.

The Mishings do not have the tradition of giving gold ornaments with the bride, but now-a-days some wealthy persons give gold ornaments with their daughters.

On the eve of the marriage two elderly persons from grooms side visit bride’s place. They have to bring hundred bags of apong
and two ago (pigs) and some amount of dry fish (nogina) with them as a token of bride price. This ceremony is known a _dubbat_.

On the day of the marriage the groom party, reach bride’s house around in the morning. Initially, groom’s father begs bride’s father for his daughter. Then bride’s father tells that from that day onwards his daughter belongs to grooms family. The groom’s father accepts the bride as his daughter in law. Then the groom puts vermillion on the bride’s forehead and also in the parting of the hair.

**Religion**

The Mishing religion is based on the belief in super naturalism. The Mishings believe that the spirits which are called _uie_ live everywhere around their world. The present religion of the Mishings is the synthetic product of jnimism and Hinduism. That religion among them is known as _kewalia_ or _kalhanghati_ or _nishamlia_.

They believe that all the sickness, death, calamity and misfortune are caused by spirit’s living around them. It is further
believed that the spirits possess the same desire for food and drink those human beings have. In order to fulfill such desires the spirits trouble human beings. So that the latter offer sacrifice to the former. Thinking that the troubles are caused by the spirits, the Mishings perform various rituals by offering drinks (apong) and meat like chickens, pork etc to them. Generally, with the help of a miboo identification of the spirits causing the troubles is made. The Mishing priest has special power of identifying cause of illness, predicting future events to come and offering remedies to them.

The Uies are divided into to several groups. The Mishing society organize various puja , These are

Sanag puja — It is the worship of the sun and the moon (donyee and polo) which is observed at on every five years interval.

Urom apin — It is the annual worship of the spirit of departed of fore father for Mishing, the soul is immortal but it doesnot return to life in this world. After death it is believed to go to the uie, among the land of spirit wherefrom they visit the human world from time to time in search of food and drink. According to their belief, the yalos (souls) live in the other world with the same
desires as they used to have in their life in the world. The uram uies show sign of their desire by causing one or other type of trouble to the family of its former relatives, and therefore, the family promise to offer sacrifice of pigs and apang for immediate relief.

*Asi fire or takai uies* –

It is the worship of the water godes. Takai uies is ethereal spirits which are believed to cause rain, storm, drought, thunder and lighting. As people living so close to nature and its blessings, the Mishing consider these phenomena as blessings. Therefore, the spirits causing these must be kept happy by offering sacrifices from time to time. This *puja* are performed by individual families as well as collectively by the living community by sacrificing fowls and pigs and offering drinks and food. In initiating the *takai puja* the ethereal spirits are invoked to satisfy with the offerings dedicated to them. They are prayed to bless the family with peace and prosperity. Generally, it is believed that takai uies death is manifested through the death of a person or animal struck by lightning. Women are not allowed to participate in the function.

The Mishings are worshippers of numerous *ugus*. In this context, the *miboo* plays a significant role among them. The *miboo*
is known as the head priest of society. He is believed to be empowered with some supernatural power and on all important religions occasions he conducts as chief priest.

The *miboo* usually offers chickens in the name of *dopumdorun* and offer same ritual activities. The *miboo* knows the measure for the remedy of the suffered and lastly the family offer pig, fowls, apong etc.

**Dobiur puja**

It is one of the most important *puja* of the Mishing. They believe that the spirits causes flood, landslide & accidental or unnatural death of human beings destructions of crops by insects and others diseases. The general welfare and prosperity of a village community are also believe to depend on the blessings of the *dobiur puja*.

The *dobiur puja* is performed on the village. Just before the beginning of the function the young man of the village go to beating around every household of the village. So that the evil spirits hiding in the nooks and corners of the house run
away and leave the village. On the occasion of the *dabiur puja* neither do the village folks go out from the village nor can any stranger enter in the village. On that day all roads entering the village are closed so that evil spirits can’t enter the village.

Depending upon the purpose of the observance, the *dobiur puja* can be divided into following types

**a. Mopun Dabur or Motton Dobiur** – It is observed in the paddy fields to protect the cultivated crops.

**b. Rabon dobiur** – It is observed to protect the people from evil spirits.

**c. Buttow dobiru** – It is observed to protect villages from magical activities of unknown evils.

**d. Kasson Dobiur** – This type of *puja* is observed by the hunters who are engaged in hunting in the jungle.  

---

6. Doley D. : *The Tribes of North-East India-Religious Beliefs And Practices Among The Mishing of Assam*; PP-96-100
Festival cycle

Ritual and religious ceremonies are observed in public place of village but life cycle ceremonies like marriage, birth and death rites of the members are performed in household. An account of month wise festivals of Mishing is given in the following calendar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Calendar months</th>
<th>Assamese Calendars</th>
<th>Month Festival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January February</td>
<td>Magh</td>
<td>Magh Bihu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb March</td>
<td>Fhagun</td>
<td>Ali-aye ligung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Bahag</td>
<td>Bahag Bihu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May June</td>
<td>Jeth</td>
<td>Dobu puja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June-July</td>
<td>Ahar</td>
<td>Chang Kubuwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Hawn</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-</td>
<td>Bhado</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-Oct</td>
<td>Kati</td>
<td>Kati Bihu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-Dec</td>
<td>Aghon</td>
<td>Porag.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Religious activities of the women

Women can take part in every religious function. But they can not perform the priestly work i.e. reciting hymns, sacrificing animals etc. These are all done by male priest. There are two satula. One male and another female. After attaining certain age both male female may be recognized as a satula. A female satula is allowed to do some religious performance, such as blessing of new born baby etc. But under no circumstances she is allowed to perform task of a male satula. The female satula position is always lower then her male counterpart, on the other hand the medicine man (mibu) is always a male.