In this chapter, our focus is to analyze the changing life of the Mishing women. The Mishings as a community have passed through several stages of development. Originally the Mishings were hill dwellers. At that stage, their economic and social condition consisted of food gathering, hunting and fishing. They moved to the plains of the Brahmaputra valley and came in contact with permanently settled Assamese villagers. The physical mobility and cultural contact with the Assamese peasantry brought about a great deal of economic and cultural change among them.

The growing contact with Assamese peasantry has its bearing over the Mishings and they developed their permanent settlement in the form of villages, adopted permanent cultivation and gradually discarded shifting cultivation. Now in many areas, their agricultural products are surplus and almost in every village, some of the families are engaged in trade, business, contract and service. A few of them are professionals. Of late, like N. Pegu observes on the different
tribes have tried to show the relationship between physical mobility sociological interaction, accumulation and change in economic organization. He analyzes the impact of communication on tribal villages. Some of the sociologists and anthropologists have focused their attention about the question of tribal development. The focus of the present chapter is to prove in the following issues.

1. Education
2. Dress
3. Politics
4. Occupation

During the British period the socio-economic condition of the Mishings was very much backward. There was no proper system of transportation. Very few educated people were found in the Mishing society. Only after the improvement in transportation and the impact of accumulation, the economy of the people has been gradually developing to a certain extent

**Education**

The education of the villagers of this study is satisfactory. Satisfactory in a sense that though the respondents are mostly
illiterates, their children are qualified or literate. It is mainly due to the establishment of L.P. school, High Schools in the village areas inhabited by the Mishing people. In Dakhinchapori gaon there is one Primary School, one Middle school and one High School. In the Primary School, there are two Mishing teachers and two non-tribal Assamese teachers. About 88 students of the village come to this school. The Middle School has one Mishing teacher and seven non-tribal Assamese teachers. About 140 students of the village come to this school to acquire knowledge. There is one High School where the Principal is a Mishing man; in this school there have 60 students.

The Mishings prefer education for their children. They said that education help technical and non-technical side. In the Dhakhinchapori gaon all parent want their children to be educated. According to them the educated children will lead them in their future.

As far as the development of the entire Mishing, community is concerned; the respondents have also given much stress on education. During the time of discussion in the field, most of the respondents told that, the progress of the Mishing society will come automatically. However, to apply the agents of changes
properly, education is highly essential and therefore, according to them, education is one of the main factors for the development of their society. That is why majority of the respondent preferred education as the foremost criterion for development of their society.

Total population of 1991 and distribution of rural and urban people are shown in the following tables-

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4,67,7907</td>
<td>4,862</td>
<td>4,62,928</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total literate people in Rural area</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,96,942</td>
<td>129,699</td>
<td>167243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total literate in urban area</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>999</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Educational distribution of Dhakhin Chaporí gaon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total Student</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L. P.</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. V.</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As informed by the villagers there are 10 graduate, 3 post graduate degree holder and one MBBS and 7/8 other diploma holder in the village. In fact the above educational standard of this village is satisfactory as total percentage of literate of Mishing. Mishing girl are equally go to the educational institution.

Dress

There is a saying, that Mishing girl can dance before she can walk and can weave before she wears any apparel. Justifiably, they are born weaver and have more knowledge about color.
scheme and attractive designs. All the traditional dresses for man and woman are home made and home spun. Black, different types of yellow, deep red and bottlegreen on white back drops or vice versa, are their favorite colours. The main dress of a girl is *ribe gaseng* with blouse. A blouse is added to the upper part of the body, gason covers the lower part of the body, and the *ribi* connect the upper and lower part of the dress. The old women use only the *ege* (akind of lungi). The upper part of the body is wrapped by ege and it covers up chest and knee, one piece of cloth is sufficient to cover the body.

Now a days the Mishing women, as a result of interaction with other non-tribal people, have started wearing other types of dress like *sari, chalwar kamij, frock, pant* etc.

During the time of fieldwork, two hundred respondents expressed their view on their dress. According to them the *ribi gaseng* is a heavy dress and is not possible to use all the time. So they use the comfort types of dress. But they are not neglecting their traditional dress also.

The views of the women asked regarding dress during field study is as follows
Out of 200 women of different age groups 98 of the age group of 20+ like to use sari and salwar and mekhela. 80 girls of the age group of 16yrs like to use the salwar and sari. 15 girls of the age group of 10 like to use the salwar and frock (age group 10) and the 7 girls like to use the pant.

Therefore, it is clear that the women like to wear comfort and different type of dresses. The society is not putting bar on the freedom of dresses of the women. However, the Mishing women prefer traditional dresses as a symbol of their heritage and culture.
Politics

The acculturation and communication have accelerated the pace of development. Now, the Mishings as a community are not isolate. The process of democratic decentralization has arose tremendous political consciousness among the Mishings. This can be proved by their participation in elections and positions occupied by them in state level hierarchal of the different political parties. The improved nature of social development is visible among them through the spread of modern education, growth of educational institution, availability of medical facilities and access to modern channels of communication.

In the political sphere also over the years, the Mishing women are not given their due rights. The traditional political organization of the Mishing is called kebang, which means public meeting. Kebang are generally convened to solve disputes of any nature in the village. A kebang is presided over by the gam (the village head man). Head of every household of the village and also the senior male persons of the village are invited to take part in the deliberations of the kebang. Women are not invited to the kebang. A woman can attend the kebang as an appellant or witness.
to a case of litigation. In this context, she is only allowed to plead her case by herself. This clearly indicates that in the Mishing society women were also deprived of their political rights.

In the political sphere, the communication has played important role. The Murang and kebang are gradually losing their status as decision-making body of the people. As observed in the field, the newly emerged leaders are replacing the traditional leaders and the former are more and more alert in acquiring new knowledge and ideas and for maintaining their status. They have been trying to improving their information level. In the same way communication have helped simultaneously in the field of political participation and in knowing government plans and programmes.

On the other hand, Mishing women have participated in the state level and gaon panchayat election. They have started playing active role in the election.

Some years ago women were not allowed to participate in kebang (Local assembly). Now they can participate in politics and give advice in every sphere of the gaon panchayat or to other political organization running.
Occupation

During the British period and prior to it, the socio-economic condition of the villagers was not good. No literate person was seen in those days. Even no means of transportation was there.

The villagers under study are essentially agriculturist. Some of the main agricultural products of the people are paddy, mustard seeds, black pulse, jute, potato and some other vegetables. The main crop is the paddy. The people grow three types of paddy *Sali*, *Ahu* and *Bao*. The production of paddy, mustard seeds and black pulse are very limited. Due to the process of acculturation and communication, the occupational structure of the people is changing gradually. Now few villagers are engaged in other occupations like government service, business and contract.

Occupation of the respondent in this following table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondent = 325
The above table indicates that the villagers under study are mostly agriculturists. Agriculture is their main occupation. Out of 325 respondents, 300 people are engaged in agriculture. Only 15 are in government service and 10 are engaged in other occupation like business, daily labour and others.

The work and occupation of married and unmarried women are same except in household responsibilities. Like the tradition of other communities, in the Mishing society also the hard works, which are relating to construction, hunting, husbandry, are done by male members. On the other hand, the household activities are left to the women. The main occupation of women is farming and weaving. Household activist such as sowing and seeding, managing food, collection of vegetables, preparation of *apong* and service to family visitors, collecting fine woods are done by women. It is clear that woman's works is lighter than those of men. But such unlimited work of women are not looking down by male member. Rather, they are encouraged to cover and accomplish all daily activities appreciated.

Now a days some Mishing women have established small hand loom industry which is managed by themselves. The village women are engaged in agriculture and some literate females are
joining private school. Most of the Mishing women prefer teaching and nursing jobs.

There are no special traditional institutions for training and education of the women in Mishing society. The girls learn their work by own efforts or learning from friends, elders and mothers or by individual observation as well participation in works. Presently, the government has provided training centers in the district emphasizing weaving, knitting, tailoring training of the woman. Such training is a part of woman education. The vocational training scheme is now being initiate by Indian government for weaving, tailoring, knitting, reading and writing. Many women of Lakhimpur district are benefited by there schemes.

The 1991 census report, shows that the illiteracy rate of the Mishing community are 2,97,941 Male illiteracy rate during this census were 1,30,170 and female literacy 1,67,771.

As per 1971 census, the literacy rate of the Mishing community was 18.20 percent. The male and female literacy rates during that census were 28.54% and 7.54% respectively. In 1991 census, the literate people are 2,97,941 male27.8%female35.75%. Litaracy without education 8,989( m- 1,084 f-7905).primary level 20,110
From the above description it may be rightly assumed that the literacy rate is gradually developed in this period.

In practice, the girls play a very important role in agriculture field. Mishing women give maximum time in cultivation. Hence, the main reason of less literacy among the Mishing women is that the parents are not willing to send their daughters to school even after the establishment of school in their locality.

Secondly, the girls and parents ignored the importance of education. Hence, they are not interested in the education of their female children.

Now the female members of the community move forward for their right in education. The government and education department is also started motivating the people for equal education for both sexes.

Today son and daughter are comparatively more educated than their parents. The highest literacy standard among the literates is up to L.P. School. All the literate women are able to read and write Assamese language. In the Lakhimpur district the percentage...
of educated female who have completed the Post Graduate degree is 10%.

In addition to it, the adult education programme, the Angnwadi scheme is being implemented in Lakhimpur district since the year 1984-85 for pre-school education and health care of children of both sexes of age 3 to 6 years. The same scheme covers the health cares and nutrition as per records of the available with the Anganavdi centers. The scheme is not only carrying small kids but pregnant woman are also covered under it. Total 50 Mishing women are Anganwadi worker in Lakhimpur district.

Another benefit is given to tribal women of Lakhimpur district for their welfare is under DRDA implemented under this scheme, the woman have been provided facilities of owning animals, tailoring and knitting with TRSEM scheme etc.

The weaving and knitting training is a part of women education. This programmed is implemented in Lakhimpur district by the industries department since the year 1970-80 to impart training to local girl above the age group 15 years and the scheme is continuing .After the girls trained in weaving and knitting the department supplied weaving knitting materials to them in subsidy
with training certificates. In Lakhimpur district 300 trainees obtained training certificates and 50% Mishing women trainers have got other benefits.

Whatever might be the number of educated and literate Mishing women it seems to be poor even today. The education policy of the govt. has a good deal of impact on these women. Man and women now could be aware of the importance of education. Many women have learnt reading and writings. Many Mishing girls have been benefited by school facilities and have attained the higher classes. The education makes them conscious about their social life. Education have developed their mind. The parents also think that their girls must be educated before their marriage.

**Change and development**

In the Mishing society women were neglected in general and exploited in marital affairs in the past. Neither they attempted to stand against the male nor the male thought for equal rights and privileges of the womenfolk. Their lives were quite primitive. Such conditions prevails from the beginning of the women generation. In town areas status of the women
have undergone changes. It is different to locate the starting point of the changes. Gradual changes began in their status after division of Mishing Autonomous council. Panchayat system help to develop their situation. After establishing schools for equal education for both sexes, after enforcing administration instructions for judicial deals and after implementing government schemes for women welfare. Remaining static means that their general status remain same as that of the male. Though some condition of female life remained unchanged, their status in the field of politics representations, employment, marriage and divorce, recreational activities, training, education and literacy, food habits and dress, has distinctly changed.

Recently a women candidate appointed as a district president in the Lakhimpur district. They have been given equal chances in employment. They have right to choose their own life partners in present time. Love and intercaste marriage are happening some times. Now women have right to divorce husband in genuine cases. The women mind are modernizing in ways of dress and dance. Women have been trained in weaving, knitting, tailoring etc under govt. provided facilities. At the beginning of education women were not allowed to go to
school. But recently they have equal access to them. Women literacy have been increasing year after year. The standard of living of town women including food habit, dress, and way of behaviours are changed. The changing situation and modern outlook of among them have considerable impact on the folklore and folk life of the Mishings in general and the women status in particular.