

Traditional Beliefs of Mising Tribe of Majuli in Assam

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ABSTRACT

It is intended to highlights on tradition belief of the Mising who become the second largest tribe of Assam that form the strong popularized groups in the upper Brahmaputra valley. In fact, the traditional beliefs and practices among the Mising are celebrated since the involvement in shifting cultivation. The traditional belief of Mising people reflects the culture of their society. The Mising language and culture is one of the most unique and important culture in Assam. Mising people celebrate many kinds of festivals related to agriculture and religious and others. The cloth and Jewellery is one of the important parts of their culture. The topic will indicate the importance of traditional beliefs in Mising society. In this midst of the traditional beliefs the Mising tribe reflects its beauty in their culture. The Mising tribe, the death and life, marriage, rituals, journeys, birds, Animals, Trees, storm, Rain, Day-months related Traditional beliefs have been believed since ancient times. The Mising have left some of the Traditional beliefs by transforming themselves to other religion but they are not able to leave all Traditional beliefs at once. At the end, this synoptic topic will be drawn new findings and conclusions.

1. Introduction

It is well known that North-East India is linguistically and culturally diverse region of our country and as such Assam, the threshold and the nerve centre of this region is a land of numerous castes and tribes. Among the tribes in Assam, the Mising is the second largest tribes after Bodo, belong to the Mongoloids and is also popularly believed that were dwellers of tge hills of present day Arunachal Pradesh and around 13th century, they started migrating towards the plains of Assam. This tribe and some extend of the Hill Miri and Dafala tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The indigenous traits of the tribes concerning their lifestyle, food habits, language, marriage system have been discussed in this regard to realize the dynamics of acculturation.

At present the Mising inhabit the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam. A few still live in and around Pasighat of East Sinang and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Mising were earlier called Miris and the constitution of free India still refers to these tribes as Miris. But the Mising of the plains still like to identify themselves as Mising rather than Miri. However, Probably, J.F. Nydhamat first pointed out this fact the people living aside the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra of Sadia and of Dihing and Dibong valley identifies themselves as Mising instead of Miri. The lifestyle of the Mising tribe is very simple. Mising people mostly settled on the banks Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, unfazed by the disaster striking them. They are mostly engaged in agriculture. They are also considered as expert fishermen. The Mising are now adopting the modern concept of a unclear family where the husband is the head of the family.

In the rural areas they are still living in the thatched house raised on bamboo stilts, known popularly as the "Chang Ghar". It is in fact a protection against the flood waters during the rainy season although the original logic behind them was protection from wild beasts. The front side of the house is generally faced

towards the river. The food habits and food consumption patterns of all the tribes of the state are more or less similar. Almost all the communities are non-vegetarian and relish all kinds of meat. The Mising are also no exception to it. To them, food generally means rice, leafy vegetable, edible roots, fish, pork and chicken. Numerous leafy vegetables like pakkom, Takuk, Tajik, Ombe, Okang, Nekung etc. grow abundantly in nature and have medicinal values. Mising is the second largest tribe of Assam, and most of them have resided in Assam. Their belief and Traditional beliefs reflect the culture of the Mising society. Therefore I have presented a research on the superstitious belief of Mising tribe. The population of Majuli comprises the tribals, non-tribals, and the scheduled castes. The tribal communities include the Mising, the Deoris and the Sonowal Kacharis. The scheduled castes include the Kaivartas, the Brittil Baniyas etc. The non-tribal communities include Koch, Kalitas, Ahoms, Chutiyas, Keot, Yogis, etc. In the early time they wanted some isolated areas which are steady distance from the civilized people. They wanted two or three paddy and cattle field for pastoral and seasonable production. In Assamese, it is known 'Akalo nai bharalu nai' viz. no scarcity, no store. Mising cultures constitutes with the all forms in indigenous faith, beliefs, and practices those are found among them. They entered into the Hinduisation process but they neglected the caste system. The religion of Mising is based on three major belief systems-belief on creation of universe, beliefs on Unis (spirits and Deities) and Human soul.

2. Research Aim

Mising is an unique tribe in Majuli, the life and death, religious rituals and marriages are highly dealt with traditional beliefs, this Traditional beliefs are backbone of Mising tribe. Our main aim is to bring these Traditional beliefs to the light of the society to know the Mising tribe well.

3. Methodology

Primary and Secondary data will be used and data will be analyzed. Field study will include sample survey, questionnaire and Personal interview.

4. The Discussion

The Mising community is the most important community of Majuli, The term "Mising" is made two small words "Mi" mean people and "Yassing" means fine, and this's why they call themselves "fine people". They worship "Aane Danchi" and "Abu palau" i.e. the Moon as their father and Sun as their mother nine groups the "Chayang" or the "Chayangia" the Ayan or the "pagor" the "Dambuk", the "Chamguria" and "Tamar".¹ The Mising are the Burmese branch of Mongoloid people who came to Majuli in search of the fertile agricultural land and settled down on the bank of Brahmaputra in the later part of 17th century. They contribute a lion's share in the entire agricultural produce of Majuli. The Mising have a unique process of preparing their food items-husked rice and boiled leafy vegetables, fish and meet can be deliciously served by their housewives. The Procure a flavoured liquor called "Apang" and "Chaimod" (paddy wine) from rice and its husk. They relax with this beverage at night after their day long hard filds. They offer hospitality by consuming these wines profusely during the festive occasions and the rites of their dead Persons.² Mising are indigenous community inhabiting parts of the Indian states of Assam. The Mising have left some of the Traditional beliefs by transforming themselves to other religion but they are not able to leave all Traditional beliefs at once. Nabin Chandra Sharma has divided the various types of traditional beliefs of Mising people in the following order:³

1. Religious traditional belief 2. Animal traditional belief 3. Bird related belies 4. Tree related belief 5. Miracles related belie 6. Human body and character related belief 7. Month and day related belief 8. Journey related belief 9. The other mixed traditional belief.

The Mising have left some of the Traditional beliefs by transforming themselves to other religion but they are not able to leave all Traditional beliefs at once. As Nabin Chandra Sharma has divided the traditional belief of various tribes, with that reference I hereby divided the traditional beliefs of Mising discussed them in order,

Birth related Traditional beliefs: since child in the womb till the birth of child the parents can't do any misdeeds, like telling lies, by not harming any living creatures. If they violate these, the child suffers. If the child is born before the nine months, the child is kept in the mosquito net till child completes nine months; otherwise the child will be unhealthy. If the child takes birth in new moon night the child is regarded as the evil.

Death related Traditional beliefs: Mising people dress the death body with new cloth by washing the body. They believe that their soul may rise in peace if they dress the body in new clothes. The deceased dishes are broke and buried in the graves, the deceased family remains idle for three days. In the graveyard they wish farewell to the spirit, they believe that the ghost may harm them, they say to the spirit, "we have not killed you, you don't follow us" (data from Gobind Tahu) People present in the grave throw some mud before returning from the grave.⁴

Marriages related Traditional beliefs: They believe that the lady should not elope through the back door, if they do, they would not be able to bear children, they also believe that they should not marry in new moon night. If a snake and fox crosses their path while eloping is believed as cursed. Wednesday is regarded as the laxmi day, If girls elopes on Wednesday it is believed that laxmi is gone.

Festivals and rituals related Traditional beliefs: The festival of *Ali aye ligang* is celebrated during mid-February with great pomp and show. It is celebrated for five days starting from the second Wednesday of February till the next week (first Wednesday of fagun month) Local dishes like *purang apin* (rice wrapped in special leaves), *apong* (rice beer) and dishes made of pork, fish, and chickens are served. Traditional Mising dance Gumrag Soman is performed in every village worshiping the almighty Donyi polo (mother sun and father moon) asking for good year of harvest. In the rituals of Kusak and Giyati the foods should be consumed in the same day, if the food is left over they believe that the devil may incur. In from the festival of Ali Aye Ligang till the new moon day eating fried food and ploughing is restricted. If they plough, the rice plant may not grow. Bamboo, cane, and other plants are not cut, if they do it regarded as evil. Some Traditional beliefs are related to Mising Porag Festival, the pig to be behaded in the festival is called gilt which is regarded as the creator. The liver of the killed pigs of Porag festival is used for fortune telling. The fortune telling had been done by Mibo's in the ancient times but now a days it is done by aged person. The liver and intestines of pig is used for symbol in fortune telling, they use to different parts of the liver for fortune telling, the hollow in the liver is termed as the Grave the Aago in Mising. (Data source from Lilai Yein)⁵ Dobur Puja related Traditional beliefs, in Dobur Puja the female is restricted from celebration. If any woman is seen in the river bank she is sent away before starting the Puja. If a guest comes to the village in Dobur puja, he or she is not allowed to return, if he or she returns the laxmi is believed to be gone. If the guest wants to go he or she can devote their own precious items in the village and go. The butcher of Dobur puja has to go follow rules and regulation of righteousness for a year. If a Dobur is celebrated in the village, village people won't work for five days. The village people are restricted from going away from the village.

Journey related Traditional beliefs: While setting out for new journey the family should not make tread or kill any pigs or hens etc. If they do they believe that their journey would be dangerous. Moreover, if the journeyman sees anybody defecating, or empty vessel or open hair of any lady, it is believed that they journey would be sad one.

Birds related Traditional beliefs: If A Vulture falls on the roof of the house it is regarded as ill fated, if owl cries near house it is believed that as unfortunate. In the same way if Crows cry, it is believed as disastrous. Cuckoo is regarded as the spirit of passing soul. If cuckoo bird cries in front of the house it is believe that some soul of Mising people has come hungry, and wants food.

Trees related Traditional beliefs: they believe that devil inhabits in the big trees, they believe that sour fruits and

vegetables should not be planted in front of house. Example: Ow Tanga, Tamarind, Berry trees should not be planted in front of the house. It is believed that some woods are not used in the construction of houses for example Azar wood is not used in home constructions, if Azar wood is used it believed that the unity may not prevail in that house.

Day and month related Traditional beliefs: Spring season is believed to fruitful time of the year. They believe that they should not cut hair and beard, and they should not cut bamboo and cane etc.

Food related Traditional beliefs: If they don't eat sweet potatoes on the Mag bihu they believe that a boar is born, they believe that bitter should not be consumed in winter.

Black Magic Traditional beliefs: Mising People seriously believe in Magic and Miracles, They call Maranu to the Black Magician, At Present the magician are called Daini. They believe that Maranu destroys people's life in different ways. They believe that Maranu use food, hair, nail, clothes for doing Black Magics. The Black Magic types are mentioned below:

1. Food related: the Maranu mixes chemicals in the food in the name of the victim. If they successfully feed the victim in the right place and time is known as the victory of Maranu.
2. Bonded Black magic: They use different kind of ban (bindings) in their magic for example Air Ban and Pitcher Ban is use to bind the victim and kill him brutal manner.
3. Uses of Hair and Nail, they use their hair and nail to secretly without telling the victim, they put the hair and Nail in a pitcher with a fish, it is assumed that the fish is the victim who would die just like the fish strangled in the hair.
4. Uses of Clothes: Maranu uses the clothes of the victim for black-magic purpose, they use the cloth cut secretly from the victim, they put the cloth in certain ritual in do the black magic.
5. Others uses in Black Magic: Maranu uses some other process to destroy the life of innocent people. For example Maranu buries something in the name the victim under his bed. By cutting the clothes of victim, by burying something in the boundaries of the house. In this way the Maranu performs the Black Magic Successfully.⁶

Storm and rain related Traditional beliefs: if a stool is thrown in the storm it is believed that the storm may vanish in some villages . If Doley family's boy tilts the step of Pegu's house it is believed that rain may occur. If Yein family pours water to people secretly, than it is believed that rain may occur. If the storm or rain come and if a person throws mustard seeds in the fire, it is believed that the storm may stop. If a person throws a rice in the name of devil, it is believed that rain may stop.

Animal related Superstations: In Mising tribe there are lots of animal related Traditional beliefs. If a black cat stays at home than the ghost may not be able to enter the house. They believe that elephant is an intelligent animal, if somebody says

anything bad about elephant than the evil may incur in their life. If a person ploughs and if the cow looks back at the ploughman, it is believed that the cow is evil.

Others:

Dream related Traditional beliefs: Some Dream related incident are believed to be true by the Mising people. That's why the old man suggests the person to stay away from the incident seen in their nightmares. If the eldest person of the house sees Elephant in his dream it is believed that something bad may occur. If in a dream a person sees catching a white fish than the persons is believed that he may grow rich. If a person sees somebody's death in his dream it is believed that his life span may increase. If a person sees a constructing house or somebody's teeth fallen then it is believed that their relatives may die. Dream believing Mising people also decide to be newly bought home on the basis of their support of their dreams.

Before constructing the poles of their house the constructor buries rice in tora leaves under the poles, and left for a day, if the person doesn't dream at night it is believed that the ground is alright; if the person has a dream the construction is based on his dream.

Yalo or soul resurrection: Word "Yalo" has two meanings in Mising, one is shadow and the other is the soul. If Yalo comes out of the person the person suffers from many disease, in that case even the doctor fails to cure. If such person dies than his or her soul may not rest in peace, their soul suffers and runs in the house. It is believed that the soul rest in peace only after the celebration of Dodgang (Funeral). If a person suffers from Yalo problem he or she should be given red hen or cock cooked to cure from the problem.

5. Conclusion

In this research small paper the Mising tribe Traditional beliefs have been discussed. Like other society in Mising tribe, the death life, marriage, rituals, journeys, birds, Animals, Trees, storm, Rain, Day-months related Traditional beliefs have been believed since ancient times. By socially analyzing the facts we have brought certain aims, they are:

1. Mising society's importance of Traditional beliefs. In this midst of traditional beliefs the Mising tribe reflects its beauty in their culture.
2. The Mising tribe, the death and life, marriage, rituals, journeys, birds, Animals, Trees, storm, Rain, Day-months related Traditional beliefs have been believed since ancient times.
3. The Mising tribe rituals are seen in their Traditional beliefs.
4. They Mising believe have been changed since modern scientific development.
5. The Mising have left some of the Traditional beliefs by transforming themselves to other religion but they are not able to leave all Traditional beliefs at once.

The Mising peoples traditional belief is not vanish completely, Earlier it was believed that a person should not pass by under the tree where vulture resides, if the person pass by than vulture changes its teeth. Earlier it was believed that if a person hits other persons head new horn may grow. If

a person sees Grave, he or she may not point out the grave; if they do they believe that their finger may rote. They clap their hand before they go to the toilet, if they don't do the evil come.

But this superstitious believes have vanished from their culture today.

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