

Emerging Trends in Mising's Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract: The Mising is one of the distinguished tribes of Assam with rich culture. They had been handed down their beliefs and practices from the time immemorial. As a result of the impact of plain culture, a considerable change has been noticed in their every sphere of their life. In spite of its impact they have been able to maintain majority of beliefs and practices without harming originality which distinguished them as a separate nation. At present, Mising religious belief is hybrid of tribal beliefs and practices and various form of Hinduism. They suited it to their tradition. A few number give up their age old beliefs and practices and embrace alien religion like vaisnavism, Anukulism, Satya-Sai-Baba, Donyi-Polo-Yelam and Christianity. The changing of their religion impacted on their socio-cultural and economic life.

Key word:- Universe, Spirits, deities, human soul, rituals and sacrifices, priest, changing.
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1. INTRODUCTION:

Beliefs in the existence of supernatural powers are almost universal. While men could realize these forces superior to them and they established a relationship between themselves by offering worships. They propitiated the supernatural powers for acquisition of the things or objects they desire. Thus, religion is essentially recognition by men of powers stronger than their own and attempt to obey with that power. The real purpose of religion is to express people's beliefs about this universe.

Human societies have developed certain and cultural mechanism for the conduct of daily life and in order to cope up with the nature. Religion has come into existence in human response to the apprehension of some supernatural and supersensory powers. The experience of certain day that sudden happenings of disease, death and unexplainable have led tribal people into believing in the other material visible world. People established a kind of close relationship between themselves and these powers by adjusting themselves to it in two ways,- enchanting or practicing some techniques, by offering Puja or worship to propitiate.

The Mising are the second largest tribal group of Assam with 5,87,310 population as recorded in 2001 census report. Originally, they were hill dweller, dwelt in the eastern parts especially Siang valley of Arunachal Pradesh, migrated to the plain of Assam around the 13th century A.D. Historically, culturally and even in term of language, the Mising have a close affinity with the neighbouring tribes such as Adis, Nyishis, Apatanis, Pasi-Padam, Minyong, Tagin etc. of Arunachal Pradesh. Like other tribes, the Mising believes that they are also descendant of Abo-Tani. All these groups are known as Tani group of tribes. The Mising are residing mostly along the river banks of Brahmaputra and its tributaries. So, they are called '*riverine people*'. Presently, they inhabit in eight districts of Upper Assam.

Unlike other religions of the world, Mising religious beliefs and practices evolve in their constant attempt to adjust themselves with environment which surrounded them. Their original place of inhabiting, the routes of migration and plate lands were not suitable for peaceful life. They tried to adjust themselves with nature and free from disease, suffering and misfortune. But, the natural phenomena remained mysterious to them. Their curiosity to know who were the creator and controller of the natural phenomena led them to compose series of myths which are embodied in the *Abang*. Out of curiosity and explanation, the Mising beliefs originated.

The beliefs and practices of each and every society of the world have manifested through celebration of ritual and ceremonies. *Animism* is the common phenomenon among the tribes of the *Tani* group of North-East India. They believe on existence of numerous benevolent and malevolent deities and spirits in and around their habitat. The Misings are one of the prominent member of the group. Attempt has been made in this paper to examine the beliefs and practices prevalent among the Mising of Assam and changing trends of their religion.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study is ethno-historical in nature. Both archival sources as well as oral sources have been used. The study has been mainly based on field work. The most important primary sources have been generated thorough oral literature by conducting extensive field works. The selection of informants for the intensive field work has been examined on the following basis, for indigenous belief system, deities, spirits, ritual and sacrifice. In the aspect of old Mising person with age above 55year, *Mibu* (priest) and *Satullas, Bhakats* (clergy) were selected in order to construct and reconstruct socio-religious realities. For the aspect of changing pattern of the society under the impact of modernity and alien culture, informants were selected among the professors, teachers, Govt. officials and students.

The scholar used “participant observation” by joining in the important occasion like social and religious function, community gathering, group discussion and individual interaction. Those experience or reminiscences as a Mising is reflected in this study.

3. DISCUSSION:

The beliefs and practices of Mising are based on animism and supernaturalism. Their religious beliefs systems are based on three major belief systems viz (i) About the creator of universe, (ii) Existence of spirits and deities around habitats, (iii) About the human soul. According to their belief, there is a supernatural power which is omnipotent, and omnipresent and omniscient. They believe that all beings and things of the universe have been created by the supernatural power called *Sedi –Babu*.

As far as mythological belief, at the first stage of the world, there was no light, no creature, no land, or soil, no water, no rock in the cosmic world. This stage is called *Keyum*. *Keyum* implied beyond the reach of human knowledge and imagination. *Keyum* means beginning of the beginning or past of past or infiniteness or vacuum. The silence of the vacuum was shattered by divine vibration. The divine vibration or cosmic vibration underwent many stages with indescribable slowness. They believe that after passing the stage of *Keyum* the *Yumkang* emerged. *Kasi* emerged after *Yumkang*. *Siang* emerged after *Kasi*. After *Siang*, the stage of *Abo* was emerged. *Bomuk* was emerged after *Abo*. *Mukseng* was the last stage before the emergence of *Se:di*. Again it is the *Se:di. Babu* who created *Mé:lo Nane* and out of their conjugal effort *Ditem* (Earth), *Adiditem*(Hills), *Nei-néngam* (Trees with leaves), *Péyi-péttang* (Bird with different feather), *Rukji-merang* (Ants and insects) were created and gave them their respective voices.

Along with *Se:di-Me:lo*, the universe created a series of Gods and Goddesses those are counted as *Diling ->Li:tung->Tuye->Yepe->Pédong*. According to their legend the *Pédong Nane* is considered the progenitor of the first human being. So, the *Adi-Mising* considers *Pédong Nane* as their primary progenitor or the first mother. The *Pédong –Nane* created a series of Gods and Goddesses. They believe that *Abo-Tani* is the youngest son among the sons of *Pédong- Nane*. He was conceived as the first human being by them.

Se:di has a pairs of searching eyes with which he keeps vigil on humanity. The two eyes are interpreted to be the *Do:nyi* (the Sun) and *Po:lo* (the moon). However, the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo* (the Son-Moon God) comes next to *Se:di-Me:lo* the creator. The *Se:di-Me:lo* (the creator) became obscure and silent after the creation. So, no sacrifice is offered to his name but their name invariably involved in the sacrificial and ritual occasions. On the other hand, they give popular dignity to *Do:nyi-Po:lo* the combined divine figure of *Do:nyi* (the Sun) and the *Po:lo* (the Moon) who is regarded as the symbol of the creator and protector or savior.

Although, the *Do:nyi* and *Po:lo* can be literally interpreted as the Sun and Moon, they convey certain ideas having direct bearing on the spiritual and physical life of the people. As far as the physical aspect is concerned, the term *Do:nyi-Po:lo* conveys the vision of the Sun and Moon which gave warmth, energy and benevolent light to humanity. While on the other hand, the spiritual interpretation is based on the belief of the tribes in the supreme spiritual identity which they call *Se:di* to whom the *Do:nyi* and *Po:lo* are the pair of two searching eyes. Thus, the warming ray of the physical Sun in the *DAY* and cooling light of the Moon at *NIGHT* are the elements of symptoms of the creator. Therefore, the Mising conduct themselves in the name of *Do:nyi-Po:lo* to realize the highest order of truth. For the Misings, the sun and the moon as such are not the object of worship. They regard *Do:nyi-Po:lo* as the highest divine figure.

The Mising includes those deities in benevolent spirits whom the creator vested power to look

after the wellbeing of the mankind. These deities are nearer to *Se:di* the creator. Most of them are grandson of *Se:di*. The most prominent benevolent spirits are *Doying Bote*, *Yidum Bote*, *Pedong Nane*, *Kongki Bote*, *Boki Mone*, *Bomong Mone*, *Kine Nane* and *Dadi Bote*. They worship them to protect them from the affect of malevolent spirits. On the other hand, the malevolent spirits are closer to the *Pedong Nane*, the mother of material world. The prominent malevolent spirits are *Banji Bote*, *Lesi- Bote*, *Biri- Bote*, *Ledang_ Bote*, *Niji-Nipong*, *Medang- Mone*, *Polung-Sobo*, *Karpung-puli* etc. The Mising worship them by sacrificing animals.

The Mising believes that the human soul is immortal and lives in the other world (*Uie-among*) eternally. It is also believed that the soul does not leave this world immediately or a couple of month after the death of the person. The *Urom* (departed soul) is believed to continue to stay in this world even after performing *Urom-apin*. Until and unless the *Dodgang* is performed, the *Urom* remain in the world. After performing *Dodgang* the soul goes to the other world called *Uie-among*. The worship of ancestral spirits is another important feature of their religious beliefs. They believe that the souls of departed forefathere (*Urom*) are benevolent to the family members and held the responsibility of health and happiness of the family. The Mising pays homage to the ancestral spirits on all occasions by naming their names.

Rituals and sacrifices have been essential elements of tribal society. Both are complimentary in nature because there cannot be a ritual without sacrifices. Ritual is a process of identification and negotiation with aggrieved deity or spirit while sacrifice is final agreement between the two. After establishing the causes of disease and identifying the spirit responsible for it as ascertained by divination; their next step is to propitiate the spirit to leave the patient and take an animal in place of his or her. Their traditional rituals or sacrifices are performed with the domesticated animals. The Mising performs a number of rituals such as *Do:bur Uie*, *Taleng Uie*, *Urom Uie*, *Dodgang*, *Gu:min-Soin*, *Po:rag*, *Ali_Aye-Ligang*, *Yalo-Gognam*, *Okum Dhangaria*, *Yumrsng Uie*, *Asi-Uie*, *lakhi- uie* etc in their life cycle and it can be classified as daily, half yearly, annual and occasional.

Mibu (the priest) plays an important role in their socio-religious life. He is the mouth piece of the people to communicate their grievances and suffering to the spirits for redress. He has spiritual powers to diagnose the cause of ailment and prescribes the offering to cure the ailment. *Mibu* is a dynamic person and plays multiple roles. When a person falls sick, a *Mibu* is called to detect the cause of sickness, he consults omen by rice eggs and rice beer and determines the kind of sacrifice to be offered. His functions are varied and multifarious, when he performs puja and rituals he is a priest, prescribing medicine, he is a doctor. Further when he is securing the blessing of the Spirits, he is the spiritual guide. Besides, he is maintaining the great responsibility in keeping records of oral history and genealogy of the tribe.

4. CONCLUSION:

Although, the Misings are maintaining the traditional and cultural patterns including their language and traditional beliefs and practices, some changes have been noticed in their life and culture to some extent. Since, the Mising migration down to the plains of Assam, they had gone through constant influences of other religions prevalent among the people of Assam. As an outcome of these influeces, different sects of Hinduism like *Shaktism*, *Saivism*, *Tantricism*, *Vaisnavism*, *Satya-sai Baba*, *Sat-Sangha* and *Christianity* emerged in the Mising society. They did not accept it totally in the beginning and gradually incorporated some of their beliefs and practices in their own religious functions. The present Mising religion is an admixture of Vaishnavism, Tantricism, Buddhism and tribal beliefs. Now, they perform some rituals such as *Satjonia*, *Najonia*, *Akaisjonia*, *Jalkai*, *Pejab Uie*, *Yumrang Uie*, *Okum Dhangaria*, *Aai Uie* etc. and these are non-traditional for the Mising in origin. It is to be noted that a large number of Misings have up their age old religions and converted to various form of Hinduism like Vaisnavism, Anukulism, Satya Sai Baba, Donyi-polo-Yelam and Christianity.

As a result of adopting and practicing new faith they have given up some age old traditional beliefs. Many valuable rites and rituals have already been lost from society. It is apprehended that many new alien elements made its impact on their traditional culture which is still being protected in the lips of the unlettered bards; it will die within a few decades unless active measures are adopted to keep it alive. The penetration of alien religion in their age old practices has affected the socio-economic life. Till today, Misings are continue to practise some superstitious beliefs without knowing the scientific facts. It is considered to be one of the major causes of the backwardness of Mising

community. The study also reflects that how far the Mising are successful in preserving their age old traditional value.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

At first, I would like to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to my Ph.D supervisor Prof, Sudhir Kumar Singh , deptt of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, for his sincere guidance and constant encouragement in preparation of this research paper. I would like to express my thanks to Dr. S.N. Singh, Head, department of History for his valuable suggestions. Lastly, I express my deep sense of gratitude to the people those furnish required information during my field study.

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