

# Religious Beliefs and Cultural Cotour of Mising Community of Assam: with Special Reference To Dhakuakhana Sub Division

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## ABSTRACT:

The Misings are one of the scheduled (Plains) tribe of Assam. Formerly they were called Miris in the plains. Originally they belonged to the Hill tribes known as Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. The Misings are formed by different class of the Adi groups, which migrated to the plains of Assam, in different points of time around the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century. They settled in the midst of different castes and tribes of Brahmaputra valley. Thus the Misings formed ethnic of greater Assamese society.

The Misings are belong to the greater group of Tani people who belong to a Sino-Tibetan linguistic group inhabiting in the Indian states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Tibetan refers to the Tani people as the Lhobas. 'Lho' means south and 'Ba' means people. Lhobas meaning "southerners" i.e. people who reside in South Tibet. Mising is a subgroup of the greater Tani clan or so called "Lhobas" as addressed by the Tibetans. In older times, Mising and other Tani people traded swords and other metals to Tibetans in exchange for meat and wool and used Tibetan language for written Communication as they had no written language of their own.

In this research work I would like to focus and highlight about the religious believes and traditional cultural affinity of Mising community of Assam.

**Keyword:** Religious, culture, Mising community, autonomous, language, highlight, traditional, believes etc.

## INTRODUCTION:

The Misings are one of the scheduled (Plains) tribe of Assam. Formerly they were called Miris in the plains. Originally they belonged to the Hill tribes known as Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. The Misings are formed by different class of the Adi groups, which migrated to the plains of Assam, in different points of time around the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century. They settled in the midst of different castes and tribes of Brahmaputra valley. Thus the Misings formed ethnic of greater Assamese society.

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The earlier mention of Misings in Assam comes from the Ahom Buranjis (Ahom's History) when Misings were still independent hill-tribe towards the north of the Brahmaputra valley after their migration to the plains. In 1615, the Misings raided Ahom territory and the force sent to subdue them failed. In 1655, the Misings launched another raid which resulted in a successful counterraid by Ahom forces during which the Misings were subjugated. They agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom and gave 12 men for the two they burnt. Afterwards many Misings were given high positions in Ahom administration, evidence of their greater cultural contact with the Assamese compared to other hilltribes.

The Mising or Miri karnis (archers) who were employed in the Ahom army rendered great service in suppressing the Nagas who obstructed the supply of food provisions to the Ahom army during Rudra Singha's expedition of Kachari kingdom. The Misings also served in the Jaintia expedition of Rudra Singha. Although, the Misings living near Sadiya gave trouble to the Ahom government during the 17th century, they became submissive by the reign of Rudra Singha, afterwards they remained peaceful till the end of Ahom rule. Even during the Moamoria rebellion, when most hill tribes turned rebellious towards the Ahom government, the Misings or Miris remained neutral.

### **Meaning of the word "Mising":**

Mising is an endonym which literally means "cool man." According to the folklore of mising, the word 'Mising' is Derive from two words, namely "Ami" (man) and "Ansing" (Cool). "Mi" is the suffix of the word Ami and "Sing" is the suffix of the word Ansing. So literally Mising Means cool Man. On the other hand according to somehow, the origin of the term 'Mising' is believed to be coming from the river named Siang that connects with Brahmaputra in Assam. Misings are also known as Miri in the constitution of India. Miri, is an exonym commonly applied by plains Assamese people. There is still much scholarly debate on the origin of the term "Miri." Some colonial scholars argued that I miri' referred to their status as intermediaries between plains people in the Brahmaputra Valley and hill tribes towards the north. More recent scholarship associated miri with being religious functionaries with Tani hill-tribes. So when the Misings migrated to the plains they were identified as coming from the Miri pahar ('Miri hills'), whose feats of magic would have been well-known back then, and the name stuck. Whatever may be the meaning of the word 'Mising' or 'Miri' it is confirmed that misings are the indigenous and second largest tribes of Assam after the Bodo's. The Mising or Miri are one of the ethnic Mongolian tribes of Assam having their own cultural traits and their religion. Originally they were hill dwellers and living along with the Adis in Arunachal Pradesh. They are now spread over wide range of the plains and are found in the district of North Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sivsagarh, Golaghat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia. The Misings have been gradually assimilating themselves with the other indigenous people of the plains of Assam and their culture. They have now become a part and parcel of the greater Assamese society and have been contributing a lot to the growth and enrichment of the Assamese culture especially in the field of religion.

### **Migration:**

There is no written history about Misings migrating from the Himalayas to the plains of Assam but history was passed down orally in the form of folk songs and stories by their ancestors from generation to generation and is still prevalent among their society. Although they were initially hill dwellers, they later migrated to the plains in search of fertile land and started living on the banks of rivers i.e. present day Assam. A theory suggests that the Misings presently living in the plains of Assam were not a single ethnicity, but it evolved into being one when many people from various Tani ethnic groups of Arunachal

Pradesh migrated to the plains of Assam. Surprisingly, this explains the presence of many Mising clans with different Mising dialects and levels of development. As per historians, the Misings came down to the plains in two groups, the Barogam and the Dohgam. 9 Another theory suggests that the Misings in hilly areas of the Subansiri-Siang region were subordinate to the Abors and so migrated to the plains to escape their plight. Mising folktales speak of an ambush on Burmese soldiers on the Brahmaputra, implying Misings were established in Assam before the Burmese invasions of 1817. I. However, during the early British period, Misings continued to move down to the plains since even then they would continue to face raids from their former Abor overlords. British administrators also tried to force many Misings back to the hills into their old subordinate status. However, when the British pacified the hill tribes, the Misings were able to live in peace in the plains. In 1924, educated Mising people formed the Mising Bane Kebang (Greater Assembly of the Misings), now an important Mising organisation.

### **Food and Grocery:**

In the Mising community, grocery items and food practices are deeply rooted in their rich traditions, with rice as the staple, supplemented by various vegetables and non-vegetable items, including traditional fermented foods like Apong (rice beer) and Namsing (dried fish).

Here's a more detailed look at their traditional food:

### **Staples & Dishes:**

- **Rice:** The cornerstone of the Mishing diet, consumed in various forms, including steamed rice and sticky rice (purang apin).
- **Vegetables:** The Mising people collect many of their vegetables and non-vegetable items from nature, often prioritizing those with medicinal properties.
- **Non-Vegetarian:** The Mising community is known for their nonvegetarian diet, with fish and meat being common staples.
- **Traditional Dishes:** Besides rice, they prepare traditional dishes like Apong (rice beer), Namsing (dried fish), and Iku (fermented bamboo shoots).

### **Fermented Foods & Beverages:**

- **Apong (Rice Beer):** A traditional Mishing drink, slightly sweet with a mild spice kick.
- **Poro and Nogin (Rice Beer Varieties):** Two varieties of rice beer, with poro being a dark tippie and nogin a lighter, milky-white craft
- **Epob (Yeast Starter):** Egg-shaped starter cakes made with rice powder and a mix of forest leaves, barks, and herbs, used to brew the rice beer.
- **Dried Fish (namshing):** A common method of preserving fish.
- **Bamboo Shoot (ikhu):** A popular ingredient in Mishing cuisine.

### **Preservation:**

- They have traditional methods for preserving food, such as drying, smoking, and fermentation.

### **Food Preservation Techniques:**

- **Namsing:** A traditional fermented fish product, Namsing, is prepared by drying, smoking, and fermenting fish, resulting in a unique taste, flavor, and high nutritional value.

- Iku: Fermented bamboo shoots are also a part of their traditional food, prepared using bamboo stems, earthen pots, and traditional grinders.
- Apong: Rice beer is prepared using traditional methods and stored in clay pots.

**Storage Practices:**

- Perab and Rabbong: Shelves made of bamboo are used to store food items like fish and meat, and Apong in clay pots.
- Kumbang: Another layer at the ceiling level is used to store vegetables.
- Tunggeng: A balcony-like extension outside the house is used for sitting and storing grains.

**Content Analysis of the Area:**

The Mising community of Dhakuakhana Sub-Division of Lakhimpur District, while influenced by Vaishnavism and Hinduism, retains strong traditional beliefs and practices rooted in animism, naturalism and ancestor worship including the worship of deities like Sedi- Melo and Donyi- Polo. Originally the Misings are animistic in their religious outlook. Their religious philosophy is mainly based on animism. They believe SEDI MC:LO as the earliest worldly beings representing male and female principles. They consider DI:NYI and PO:LO as their mother and father respectively. They also believe in the existence of ABO TANI, KARSING KARTAG etc. As their forefathers from immemorial past. Apart from the above deities, the other deities like YARI, MUGLVNG, CSAR, ASI etc. are considered to be the spiritual beings possessing power much greater than man.

The Mising people are superstitious. The minute affairs of individuals and even the greater and more important events of the world, they suppose to be under the influence of divine spirits and agents. They believe that these spirits delight in sacrifices. They call these spirits as UI. There are different types of UI such as TALCNG, DOBUR UROM PO:SUM, CJUMVN etc. sacrifice of animals are performed to pacify them. Misings practice their own animistic belief, called Donyi Polo the Sun and the Moon God. They are still mainly animists and adopted some aspects of Vaishnavism after the Bhakti movement that was started by Sankardev, (1449-1568 AD), the saintpoet of Assam. Their creation myth is as follows: first was Sedi babu, the Supreme Being. He created Melo-Nane, and together they created Ditem (the Earth), AdiDitem (the mountain), NeiNegan (green-leaved trees), Rukji-Merang (Acalypha indica and insects) and Peyi-Pettang (birds and animals). They also created the sun (Donn) and the moon (Polo), the wind (echar), water (aasl), fire (fm), and other aspects of the universe. Sedi then created Diling, whose descendant Pedong gave birth to Dopang, Domi and Doshing. Domi is son, Miniyong, was the ancestor of the Misings.

Misings believe in different supernatural beings haunting the earth, usually unseen. These supernatural beings fall into four categories: uyu or ui - usually malevolent spirits inhabiting the waters, the woods, the skies, etc. capable of causing great harm including physical devastation, urom Do-sum - hoverina spirits of the dead, who cause illness or other adverse conditions, guhmen-sohing - benevolent ancestral spirits, and epom-yapom - spirits inhabiting tall, big trees, who are generally not very harmful, but who may abduct human beings occasionally, cause some physical or mental impairment and release them later. Barring the epom-yapom, all the supernatural beings supposedly need to be propitiated with sacrificial offerings (usually domestic fowl), both periodically and on specific occasions of illness, disaster, etc. Even the benevolent guardian spirits are propitiated from time to time for the all-round wellbeing of a household. The god of thunder is propitiated from time to time, and although not worshipped or propitiated, the Sun

(who they call Ane-Donyi 'Mother Sun') and the Moon (who they call Abu Polo 'Father Moon') are invoked on all auspicious occasions.

The MIBU is known as the head priest of the society. He is believed to be empowered with some supernatural powers and on all important religious occasions he conducts as chief priest. The leader of their animistic faith is called a mibu (also called miri earlier), their priest or medicine man, who is supposed to be born with special powers of communion with supernatural beings. While mibus are on their way out amongst the Misings owing to the introduction of modern education and healthcare amongst them, propitiation of supernatural beings continue to mark their religious life. In addition, they have embraced in the valley some kind of a monotheistic Hinduism as passed on to man, who is supposed to be born with special powers of communion with supernatural beings. While mibus are on their way out amongst the Misings owing to the introduction of modern education and healthcare amongst them, propitiation of supernatural beings continue to mark their religious life. In addition, they have embraced in the valley some kind of a monotheistic Hinduism as passed on to them by one of the sects of the Vaishnavism of Sankardeva.

Now, Hinduism has been influencing in some places in the religious beliefs of the mising people. The performance of worship in the NAMGHR, recitation of KIRTAN or BHAGAWATA etc are some of the examples. Now a days moreover then Hinduism, some of the Mising people influencing by Christianity. Who have given up totally their traditional religious practices. And they also quite opposed to the traditional religious beliefs and practices.

In the plains the Misings adopted new mode of production and way of life. Under the impact of neo-Vaishnavite movement that emerged in Assam in the 15th 16th century the Misings gradually incorporated some of the beliefs and practice of the neoVaishnavism in to their own religious system which might be called spiritism, not animism.

The Misings do not believe in the existence of soul in every living object, but believe in the existence of some malevolent and benevolent spirits which they call uei living in the deep forests, water, high hills and mountains. The spirits are propitiated to avoid danger and difficulties of life and properties, under the influence of Hinduism an in the plains the Misings developed the idea of Hindu gods and goddesses. They have also adopted the sects of Kalasamhati of neo-vaishnavism and thereby become disciples (Shishya) of the Kalasamhati Satras (monesties). As result the mode of worship of the Mising community has completely changed but not their original beliefs about spirits. As such they maintain the sacrificial worship which is contrary to the neo-vaishnavism. Thus now the Misings have peculiar religious system called Keoliya which is a mixture of tribal animism and Hindu neo-vaisnavism.

### **Population:**

While Dhakuakhana, Assam has a diverse population including Mising people, the specific Mising population within the Dhakuakhana Municipal Board is not explicitly stated in the provided search results, but the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) area, which includes Dhakuakhana, has a population of nearly 800,000, with 74% being from scheduled tribes.

### **Culture Contour:**

The Mising community of the Dhakuakhana subdivision of Assam, Known their riverine lifestyle and traditional practices, have a culture deeply rooted in agriculture, fishing and animistic beliefs with a strong emphasis on nature and the supernatural.



The Misings have a variety of different types of folk songs.

- **Ahbang** - It is a verse of hymn of praise and worship of gods and goddesses. Ahbang is sung by the Mibu (priest) at rituals. There is also community Ahbangs generally used in Pobua or Porag, a ritual festival, praying for better crops, health and happiness.
- **Kaban** - It is one of the oldest forms of Mising folk songs. It is lamentational music.
- **Tebo Tekang** - It is a romantic lyric.
- **Siuhung Nitom** - It is a melancholic song.
- **Bini** - These are lullabies sung either at home or in the field when taking babies to places of work. The baby is tied to the back of the mother or the young babysitter.
- **Midang Nitom** - This is usually sung at the time of ushering a bride to her new home, often in order to tease her.
- **Oi Nitom** - It is the most popular form of Mising folk song, sung by Mising youths when they are working or moving about the fields, woods, etc. It is a part of the Mising Soman (dance). There are many types of Mising dances, and each has its particular rules. Gumrag is performed five times in circles. Drums and cymbals are the usual musical instruments for the dances.
- **Mibu Dagnam** - It is a dance performed mostly during Po:rag, the harvesting festival, observed in the Murong, the community hall of the Misings. The priest sings the Ahbang while performing this ritual dance.
- **Selloi** - Song and dance often performed for fun with the accompaniment of drums or cymbals. It marks the beginning of the influx of the Mising people from hills to plains of Assam.
- **Lereli** - Occasionally, all sections of Mising people indulge in singing and dancing lereli in sheer fun and merriment, especially at meeting old friends.
- **Ejug Tapung Soman** - This is a very ancient form of dance performed to the accompaniment of ejug tapung, a wind instrument resembling the snake charmer's been.
- **Gumrag Soman (Gumrag Paksong)** - This dance is performed on the occasion of AliAye-Ligang.
- **Lotta Soman** - This dance is performed on any occasion, as an expression of joy or community celebration.

### Festivals:

Mising people celebrate various festivals, though, the two chief traditional festivals of the Misings are the Ali Aye Ligang, and the Po:rag, both connected with their agricultural cycle.

Ali-Ayé-Ligang is a festival marking the beginning of the sowing season, and marks the start of a new agricultural calendar. Ali-Ayé means seeds in a row, and Ligang means sowing of seeds. Ali-AyéLigang starts on the second Wednesday of February, considered an auspicious day, and lasts for five days. Ali-Ayé-Ligang is a five-day festival. The celebrations begin with the heads of families sowing ceremonially rice paddy seeds in a corner of their respective rice fields in the morning hours and praying for crop abundance. Young men and women participate in the occasion by singing and dancing at night in the courtyard of every household in the villages to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals, and a gong. The gong is not used on any festive occasion other than the Ali-Ayé Ligang. Similarly, the drums have specific beats for this festival. The troupe accepts from each household offers of rice beer and fowls. After the singing and dancing in this way is over, the youths hold a feast on the third day. Po:rag is the post-harvest festival of the Misings. Harvesting of paddy rice in autumn is usually observed now sometime in

early winter or early spring. But there was a time when a harvest in summer was very common amongst them and so, Po:rag was celebrated earlier in the months of August or September also.

Another occasion called Dobur is an animistic rite performed occasionally by the village community by sacrificing a sow and some hens for different purposes. The form of observance of Dobur varies according to the purpose. In the most common form, the younger male members of a village beat the walls of every house in the village from one end to the other with big sticks to drive away the "ghosts and goblins hiding" and hold a feast there.

### CONCLUSION:

The misings are the second largest tribes in Assam after the Bodos. The misings were originally hills tribes who migrated to the plains of Assam prior to the advent of the Ahom. They did not give up their beliefs and practices at all despite living in the midst of caste and tribes professing various cults. As such the Misings lived completely an independent socio-economic life. They maintaining their religious system intact until emergence of neo-vaishnavism in the Brahmaputra valley. After a long period of study, from ancient to the contemporary of Mising Philosophy it is observed that the religious beliefs and practices of mising community of Assam is still needs more interpretations. Specially, during these days of modern materialistic society the spiritual sensibility is a must. The sense of religious purification can help in many and varied ways in moulding and disciplined social system. It is supposed that, this research work will be able to enlighten various facts i.e. maintaining religious purification, moral consciousness, observing disciplined society in the Mising community. Having studied the research work on the topic " Religious Beliefs and Cultural Contour of Mising Community Lakhimpur District of Assam", I have felt great interest and therefore selected such a relevant topic.

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