A STUDY ON MISHING TRIBES AND THEIR
TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT
The Mishing or Mising also called Miri are the second largest tribal community of Assam. The cultural
heritage of the Mishing is enriched by various colourful cultural components. The identity of the Mishing as a distinct
ethnic community is deeply embedded in their folk cultures and traditions. The traditional cultures are the ancestral root
of their identity. Hence, it is imperative to know the actual form, content, characteristics and significances of the socio-
cultural ingredients of the society. And to have a clear concept and idea about all these it requires extensive research,
studies, analysis and collection of data and evidences. The study deals with the investigation and documentation of the
traditional costumes of Mishing community of Assam. In this study the traditional jewelleries are also documented to
support the study.

KEYWORDS: Mishing, Cultural, Ethnic Community, Traditional Costumes

INTRODUCTION

India is known for diversity of peoples, their culture and religion and caste system. In every region of the
country, different types of costumes are worn. A particular manner of draping certain costumes, use of jewelleries
can identify a person from which they belong to.

Assam is the beautiful gateway of North East India, the word Assam is appropriately derived from the
Sanskrit word “asom”, meaning “peerless”. Assam is a land of rich art and culture. Assam comprises of both tribal
and non-tribal populations. The Assamese tribes include the Boro-Kachari, Mishing, Mech, Lalung, Chutiya,
Dimasa Cachari, and Karbi. Handloom textile cottage industry plays an important role in the socio-economic life of
Assamese people, particularly in rural areas of Assam. It is one of the major ways of earning livelihood next to
agriculture of Assamese people.

In order to understand the age old Indian traditional textiles, a study was carried out on the traditional
textiles of Mishing tribe of Assam.

ORIGIN OF MISHING TRIBAL COMMUNITY

The Mishing or Mising also called Miri are an ethnic group inhabiting the districts of Dhemaji, North
Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam. The total population is more than 8, 50,000 in Assam but there are also more than 50,000 Mishing people living in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh namely East Siang district, Lower Dibang Valley, and Lohit. They are belonging to Mongoloid group and are categorised as the Scheduled Tribe by the constitution of India. They have their own language, cultures, social customs and traditions, religious faith and practices. “Ali-A: ye-Ligang” is the most important social festivals of the Mishing community. To interpret the literal meaning- Ali means root or tuber, A: ye means fruits/seed and Ligang means starting of sowing or planting seeds. So, in a whole “Ali-A: ye-Ligang” means starting of sowing or planting seeds. It is celebrated invariably in spring and generally on the first Budh Bar (Wednesday) of the month of Fagun (February-March). It is a festival of praying, dancing and drinking when the ceremonial sowing of a handful of ahu paddy seeds in the earth is performed. Besides the Ali-A:ye-Ligang, the other community festivals of Mishings are- Po: rag, Am rag, Dobur etc.

THE TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF MISHING

Different types of cloths and garments of Mishing tribes are made in their handlooms with simple implements and equipments. The varieties are seen in colour combination, designs and motifs woven artistically in the clothes displaying aesthetic beauty. Most of the dresses are of multicolour with massive designs except few are of single colour with simple or without design. Colour selection is a centre of attraction of the Mishing fabrics. The Mishing women develop their peculiar floral motifs from the natural surroundings. Main items of floral motifs are flower, tree, bird, creeper and fish etc. The motifs are generally designed in a diamond, oval and geometrical shapes. Different apparels are used on different occasions in the socio-cultural life of the Mishing society. Some clothes are used in day to day life some are used on certain occasions and seasons. Some clothes are used by only one sex and some are used by both sexes.

Males of Mishing tribal wear dhoti (ugon) as the lower garment, a sleeveless jacket (galuk) as the upper garment, a girdle (jinrek) at the waist over dhoti and jacket and a gamocha (dumer) tied as turban on the head. On the other hand, females of Mishing tribal community wear a mekhela (ege) as the lower garment from waist to ankle level, a chadar (gaseng) as the upper garment and another piece of cloth (gero) is used to tie around the waist on top of ege.

Traditional Dress Worn by the Mishing Male

**Mibu Galuk:** It is a simple sleeveless front opening jacket available in different colours such as white, black, red, green, and yellow with different decorative designs. It is worn by all the male folks on special occasions or festivals and socio cultural functions. The Mibu-Galuk is sewn by hand only but the Mibo-Galuk is sewn by machine also.

![Figure 1: Mibu-Galuk](image-url)
**Tapum-Gasor (Eri Shawl):** A kind of shawl type cloth woven from hand spun eri silk yarn and worn for getting warmth in winter. Both plain gasor (shawl) and designs with simple motifs shawls are available.

![Figure 2: Tapum-Gasor](image)

**Dumer:** A kind of cloth similar to Gamocha in Assamese culture. The dumer is basically white in colour with the border in red. Beautiful geometrical and floral motifs are worked as cross border at one or both the ends. It has multiple uses such as hang around the shoulder in special occasions and used in day to day life as turban cloth, towel etc.

![Figure 3: Dumer](image)

**Jinrek or Tongali Dumer:** It is a piece of cloth a kin to Dumer but a little longer and wider. Traditionally Jinrek is white in colour with motifs of flowers, bars and diamonds designs are worked in red colour at both ends. It is tied as a girdle at the waist over Galuk and Gonro Ugon (dhoti).

![Figure 4: Tongali Dumer](image)

**Erpob:** It is a maflar, hang around the shoulder. Woven in red colour with cross stripes of different colours, such as black, white, yellow etc the stripes may be thickly or thinly placed transversely over the whole length of cloth.

![Figure 5: Erpob](image)
**Ugon (Dhoti):** It is a lower garment white in colour. There are two types of ugon. One is simple ugon without designs used in day to day life and the other is Gonro ugon with thinly placed decorative designs worn as loin cloth on socio-cultural and religious functions.

![Figure 6: Ugon](image)

**Traditional Dress Worn by the Mishing Female:**

**Gero:** The design is always woven in the centre of the cloth with red and black colours on white background. Gero is used to tie around the waist and chest on top of ege (mekhela).

![Figure 7: Gero](image)

**Sori Potali:** It is a kin to Gero, except that the body in this case is woven in check with red, black and white colour also its design is simpler than the gero.

![Figure 8: Sori Potali](image)

**Ege:** Ege is a lower garment worn to cover the lower part of the body from waist to ankle level and two or three folds are given at the front waist. Mishing women use different type’s ege such as Mosang ege, Geging ege, Tapum ege etc.
Segreg: A piece of cloth wrapped around the bust. Mostly used by the old ladies at home instead of Gasor (chadar). It is plain in colour without any designs, but with contrasting colours on borders and both the ends of the cloths.

Ku: Pob: It is a dupatta kind of fabric used by grown up girls to wrap around the body beneath the armpits covering the upper part of the body. The colour of the ku:pob is mostly white, green or blue with contrasting borders.

Mosang Gasor: It is an upper garment worn with the mosang ege. The colour and design of the mosang gasor is similar to the mosang ege.

Seleng Gasor: The length is same as other gasor. It is woven out of light cotton yarn worn occasionally instead of a ri:bi or a gaseng.

Pe: Re: It is also a type of Gero. The cloth is designed with narrow stripes of red, black, yellow, green and white colour with black or green border. Stripes of red colour predominate to give out a reddish appearance of the cloth.
Po: Tub: Used to cover the head during working time such as cooking, cleaning house etc. It is blue or green in colour with white borders. The length of the cloth is around three feet in length and one and half feet in width.

Other Important Traditional Costumes of Mishing Tribe

Gadu: A kind of hand woven quilt, popularly known as Miri-jim used in the winter season to keep the body warmth in the cold night. It is made by ginning and spinning of pure cotton fibre in special type of loom with some special traditional implements. The gadu is different in both front and back side. One is the furry front surface and the other side is the back rough surface without furry. Generally the cloth is first woven in narrow width and then two pieces of such cloths are stitched together by hand.

![Figure 12: Gadu](image12)

Ri: Bi: Woven with different stripes such as red, black and white. The stripes are distributed throughout the body at regular intervals. Simple designs of zig-zag lines and diamonds with red coloured threads are woven at both the ends of the cloth. Worn by the young girls on top of Ege on special occasions such as Ali-A: ye-Ligang, Po:rag and other important cultural functions.

![Figure 13: Ri: Bi](image13)

Gaseng: Similar to Ri:bi gasor but different in colour combination. It is basically made with red coloured thread giving intensively red look. Narrow stripes of black and white thread are sparsely woven in transverse direction over the body of the cloth. Floral and geometrical designs with red coloured threads are worked at both the ends of the cloth. It has important cultural significance and used by both male and female as shawls on special occasions.
Yambo: A special kind stripped piece of cloth. Basically the cloth is white in colour with designs of red and black colours spreading over the whole body of the cloth. It is used as wedding sheet to escort and welcome the bridegroom and the bride during marriage ceremony (Da:ro Midang).

Nisek: Nisek is a plain check material woven without design. It is used to carry a baby, tied to the back by a women while at work or during travel.

TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS

In any culture ornaments and jewelleries play an important role which adds beauty of the wearer. The Mishing tribes’ women generally wear necklace, bangles, earrings etc which are made of colourful beads, gold, silver, aluminium, coins and animal teeth.

Ornaments of Traditional Costumes of Mishing Community are Mainly

Kongge: It is a bangle worn at the wrist and is made of silver. Kongge is round in shape and no design is applied on it. There is a gap between the two ends of kongge for easy put on or put off.

Ain Kongge: Is a Gold Bangles available in both round and flat shapes. Mostly floral and geometrical designs are embossed on the surface of the bangles.

Ga: Mkaru: It is also a kind of bangles and is made up of silver. Designs of floral and geometrical patterns are embossed on it. For the purpose of opening and closing a pin with screw is used.

Onsarmora: Similar kind of ga:mkaru. But the only difference is size and shape. Onsarmora is made of both gold and silver.

Lakpun: About three inches of colourful yarns of cotton and wool are combining together tied with two strong yarns. It is worn at wrist by Mishing girls during dancing.

Tadog and Dogne: These are types of neck ornaments worn by the upper class Mishing women during religious functions. Made up of colourful beads like yellow, red, blue, white and black. Both are similar in colour but only difference is the size of beads. Tadog is made of bigger beads and dogne is made of small beads.

Takti: Takti is the type of neck ornament where numbers of plant seeds are combining together into a thread and worn by Mishing girls and women.

Ain a: Be: A: It is a gold neck ornament made of red and gold beads with a gold pendant.
Murkong a: Be: A type of flat necklace made of silver with red coloured stones.

Chandoronghaar: It is a kind of silver neck ornament and is the longest among all ornaments worn by Mishing Community.

Baltag Doksori: Baltags are silver coins. Dokors is a kind of chain made up of multi coloured beads (red and white) with different sizes. The baltag is attached at the centre of the doksori.

Lingkar: A kin of Assamese Golpota. Made of gold and silver and also made of animal teeth like Site Torong (elephant teeth), Sumyo A: ye (tiger teeth) etc.

Pisiring: Means earrings and are made of gold, silver, copper etc with or without some coloured stones.

Kentu: It is a kind of ear lobe made of both aluminium and copper metal. A layer of gold is given at the one side of the kentu. Kentu is worn by old Mishing women on religious occasions.

Turi: It is also another kind of ear lobe little bit similar to the kentu and are different in size and designs. It is made of gold and mostly worn by married women.

Takpor: A type of ear lobe and is made of stems of small light weight plants. The shape and size of takpor is similar to the kentu. Generally worn by old ladies

Anguthi: Anguthi means rings worn at the finger. It made of gold and silver containing stone or other materials like teeth of animals like elephant teeth, tiger teeth, rhino teeth etc are fixed at the centre of the anguthi.
CONCLUSIONS

The traditional costumes of Mishing tribe are unique and interesting. The costumes are woven using bright colour combination with fine attractive patterns and designs. Earlier Mishing peoples grow cotton in their own field but now a day they purchased yarns from local market which are gaining popularity in other non-Mishing communities also.

This type of study will helps to broaden the base of traditional textiles, preserve the traditional art form, diversify the designs in different forms and prevent them from going into extinction since these folk arts symbolises the culture and tradition of various types of people residing in different regions.
REFERENCES