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[Editorial/Head Office: 108, Gokuldham Society, Dr.Ambedkar chowk, Near TV Towar,Badlapur, MS ,

Contact Off : 09822307164

**SOCIO- CULTURAL LIFE OF THE MISSING TRIBES OF ASSAM: A
SOCIOLOGICAL NOTE**

Social Science

Dr. Jayanta Dowarah

Assam

Introduction:

The North Eastern part of India is popular as well as in constitutional parlance consists of seven states viz: Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura. Though this area is inhabited by different tribal groups, having their distinct structural, cultural, and Linguistic identities. In these seven states there are many tribes and ethnic group inhabited in both the plains and hill areas of each states Dubey (1978). Among these states, Assam is one of the states in north- east region and this state has many tribes and sub groups spreading over (the Assam) both upper and lower , plains and hills, Southern and Northern parts of Assam.

Coming to Assam leaving the earlier history, as per schedule caste and schedule tribes as per tribal Amendment Act of 1976 there are nine schedule tribes (Plains) and fourteen Scheduled tribes (Hills) were recognized. The scheduled tribes (Plains) are found mostly in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Plain scheduled tribes are Bodo Kachari , Barmans of Cachar, Deori, Lalung, Mech, Missing, Rabha, Sonowal kachari and Hajong of Assam. Among these Plains scheduled tribes the Missings are also included as one of the Plains scheduled tribal Community. Thus, the Missings are one of the distinctive and major (plains) scheduled tribes of

upper Assam on both Southern and northern bank of Brahmaputra River. It is the second largest scheduled Plains tribes of Assam (Bordoloi et.al 1987:99).

Concentration of Missing Population in Assam:

We have already stated that the Missing Community is the second largest scheduled tribes of Assam. The Missing are found to be habited in different places of eight districts of Assam viz., Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Sonitpur and Tinsukia. Das (1995:4) showed that the Missings constituted 16.15p.c of the total tribal population of the state. Basing on the percentage the total population of the Missing tribe was 4,64,224 upto 1991. Now we have discussed about the socio-cultural life of the Missings of Assam under different headings.

Housing Pattern:

In general, the Missing are living in river banks. The Missing constructed their house with a raised platform which is four to six feet above the ground level. Missing generally lives in chang ghar, facing towards east direction and houses varies in length from 50 to 150 feet according to the size of the family members, While the breadth is generally 15 to 20 feet. The houses are made of wooden or bamboo posts and bamboo splits and thatched roofs and a place keep open known as 'Verandah' of the house and there is an open platform either in the middle of the house or in the end. Generally, inside portion of Missing house, rooms are kept openly. In each house there is a fire place known as 'Meram'. This fire place size is 4ft x 3ft, made of 2 thick wooden frames and filled with soil, where cooking is done. Further, Two Changs (Platform made of bamboo splits) are kept hanging above the Meram are known as 'Perap and Rapte'. Among this two chang, the lower chang is called 'perap used to keep meat and fish for smoke drying and the 'Rapte' which is 2 ft above the 'Perap' meant for preserving 'Apong' (rice beer) filled in the earthen pots.

Family System:

Family is regarded as a Social institution of the Missing. Das & Hazarika (2013:102) "Primarily Missing are patriarchal, patriolocal and patrilineal. Father is all in all among them."

The family is governed by the head of the family. The oldest person comes to be head of the family. Generally, male person get more authority in the family after death of his father among the Missing.

The nature of family among the Missing are seen both of joint and nuclear. But joint family is common characteristics of the Missing. In a Missing family, the senior most male member in terms of his age becomes the head of the family in his own. He is sole authority of the family; his consent is must in deciding any kind of family matters. He represents the family in public affairs. The family property is acquired or disposed off in the name of the head.

Marriage and kinship system:

Marriage is another major social institution of the Missing. Marriage is a universal social custom for them. Both boys and girls marriageable age is from 18 years above. Monogamy is the general rule and second wife is taken after the death of his first wife. The rule of marriage of tribe endogamy and clan exogamy is strictly followed in case of marriage. Practice of polygamy is also found among the Missing, but not polyandry at all. Widow re-marriages are prevalent and permissible among the Missing. Child marriage is not prevalent among the Missings. Chutia (2004) there are three types of marriage i.e., Da-bo-Midang, Kumsu-Midang and Dugla-La-Num. Da-bo-Midang types of marriage is huge expenditure. Kumsu-Midang also popular marriage among them and this type of marriage expenditure is less than – Da-bo-Midang Marriage. The popular marriage i.e., Dugla-la-Num is most famous acquiring life partner. It is less expenditure and also due to gradual expansion of education among the Missings. Marriage are to be formalized and socially acknowledged by performing certain rituals and social functions by both the parties i.e., the girls and the boys family. There is no dowry system among the Missings. Kinship system is another important social institution of the Missings. The Missings are patriarchal, patriolocal and patrilineal kin groups. In paternal side all persons belonging to a ‘Uram’ are regarded as a member of the same kin group “Uram is a kind of ancestral group which is worshipped by a family”.

ClanSystem:

Like other tribes, the Missing are divided into different clans Pegu (1956) identifies as

much as 42 clans among the Missing. The clans of the Missing are not based on hierarchical order. But Padun (1972) examined the 23 nos. clans of the Missings viz., Bomi, Chaba, Kandar Miya:Pangkong Miyong, Lo:ying, Long:gring, Ta:ree, Ba:ju, La:Rin, Ba:Nung etc.

Economy:

Economy is regarded as a major social institution of the Missings. Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Missings. Among the primary occupations, cultivation of khariff varieties of paddy like Shali, Ahu and Bao paddy are most popular. Missings raise rice, mustard, potato and pulses etc. are the main agricultural items. Among them shali paddy is main agricultural product. Generally, Missings cultivate mostly Ahu and Bao paddy. Yein (2012-148) states that Bao rice is a primitive types of rice close to the ancestral stock from which all other rice types cultivated today evolved. Ahu paddy is also cultivated by the Missings community. They also produce mustard, potatoes, pumpkin, garlic, onion, pulses, and few varieties of winter crops. They rear different domestic animals for their household work viz., elephant, buffalo, cow, bullock and horses and these are used in their agricultural activities. They also rear goat, pig, hen, pigeon, fowl, and duck for household consumption and also use for sacrifice in their respective religious rituals.

Religious Beliefs and Practices:

Religion is one of the major social institutions of the Missings. Kalsanghati is the most popular religious cult follows by the Missings; Kuli (2003:97) gave a description that the Missings themselves believe to be progenies of the Sun and the Moon and at the beginning of any religious activity. They worship these 'Uies' and while worshipping these spirit, they offer "Apong" (rice beer) sacrifice pig or chicken depending upon the importance of the Uies which are worshipped. The traditional religious priest of Missings is called "Mibo", with whom the Missings perform most of their religious functions and rituals. Missings in the past buried the dead and a ritual was performed seven days from the date of death. But now-a-days, Missings adopted different religious cult viz, Mahapurukhiya vaishnavism, Neo-vaisnavism, Nam-kirtoniya, Bhagawatia etc.

Food and drinks:

Missings are non-vegetarian community. They like fowls, pigs, hen, duck and fish etc. and these are regular food items for them. Meat and fish is regularly taken as food items by them. Generally they always make the food by boiling green vegetables. The most favorite drink of the Missings is 'Apong' a locally brewed rice beer. There are two types of Apong viz., 'Nagin Apong' and 'Po-ro Apong.' 'Po-ro Apong' is traditional one, which is required in religious functions. The rice is pounded in the house of their own with an indigenous machine known as 'Ural'.

Dress pattern:

Dress pattern of the Missings are varied in nature. The Missings use to wear clothes made by them. The cloth are made of cotton, Eri, wool which they produce from mill made thread. The male dress consists of 'Ugan', 'Mibogaluk' and 'Dumar'. 'Ugan' is a piece of cloth being three to four meters in length and one metre to one and half metre in breadth generally used for covering the lower part of the body from waist to knee or just below the knee. 'Mibogaluk' is a kind of turban, which the male wear. The female clothes are called 'Ege' a kind of dress for covering the body from breast to ankle in a single piece and 'Gero' is a piece of cloth to fasten over 'Ege' covering waist to knee or just above.

The female dresses of the Missings are colourful and attractive. The women also wear ornaments like ear-ring, chain, 'junbiri', 'keru' etc. made of gold and silver.

Socio-Political Organization:

Socio-political organization is also an important social institution of the Missings. In every village of Missings, there is a council known as 'Kebang', which constitutes by village elders. Missings had their own system of socio-political institution known as 'Kebang' and it was among the Missings since time immemorial. Traditionally the 'Gam' i.e., head of village presides over the meetings of the council. He is similar to present day 'Gaonbura'. The 'Kebang' generally settles the disputes among the villagers and other criminal offences. 'Kebang' performs the functions of legislature, executive, and judiciary of the village. Apart from 'Kebang' there is

an institution known as Muimbuiryame. It is an organization of the youth of the village community had to abide by his decisions and orders.

Social Festivals:

Like other community social festivals are also observed by the Missings. Ali-Ai-Ligang and Po:rag is two important and traditional festivals of the Missings. Borah (2012;41) "Ali-Ai-Ligang is considered as the festival of inauguration of sowing of seed of Rabi crop as well as welcoming of new year." It is held on the first Wednesday of Fagun month i.e. in first week of March of the year. The onset of monsoon is marked by the celebration of Ali-Ai-Ligang, festivals of cultural significance of the Missings. The task of implanting seed is done by the head of the family in the festivals.

Po:rag is another social festival which is observed by the Missings after harvesting of crops. It is observed with elaborate programme of prayers to 'Chedi-Melo' and their legendary father and mother. Donyee 'po:lo' headed by Mibo with feast and funster. They also observe Bihu like Assamese people ie., Bohag, Kati and Magh Bihu. Bohag Bihu is favourite social festival of the Missings. Bohag bihu is observed very joyfully by the Missings. Like Bohag Bihu, Kati and Magh bihu also observed by the Missings.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion about the socio cultural life of the Missings of Assam it can be commented that they still preserve their traditional social institutions and maintain all the socio-cultural and socio-religious life. Traditionally, socio-culture is one of the societal norms. They preserve all traditional customs from past to the present. But due to indigenous and exogenous changes like education, development of transport and means of communication, technological innovations some changes in their overall traditional life styles are being noticed among the Missing communities.

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