

A CASE STUDY ON VILLAGE SYSTEM AND VILLAGE ORGANISATION OF THE MISHING TRIBE OF ASSAM

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Abstract

A Mishing village contains a number of households belonging to different clans. There is hardly any single clan village among the Mishing. In a village, there is a cluster of households belonging to the same clan. Every Mishing village has an independent organization, called *do:lungkebang* (village council) headed by a *gam* (Chief). A senior man of personal integrity and well versed in Mishing customs and traditions is selected as *gam*. the village administration was carried out by the *kebang* under the leadership of the *gam* who acted as friend, philosopher and guide to the village community. The main objective of this study is to know about the village system and village organisation of the Mishing tribe of Assam. This study is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary data. The study has taken secondary sources from books, articles, edited books, published and unpublished thesis etc. For primary data, the study has taken major Mishing dominated district including Demaji, Majuli, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Golaghat and Jorhat district of Assam.

Keywords: Mishing Tribe, Village System, Assam.

Introduction

Assam is aptly called miniature India. Waves of people belonging to different ethnic groups poured into this region from the pre-historic time. It is really difficult to know the people of how many racial origins live in Assam; as the different races and ethnicities such as the *Negrīts*, *Austroloid*, *Mongoloid* and *Cacasoids* came from west and east directions and settled in the region in different phases of times. B.M. Das (1974) has divided the Assamese people into two major racial groups such as the Indies Assamese comprising the Hindu castes and the Muslims who come from Cocasic blood, Karbis, Bodos, Misings, SonowalKacharies, Dimachas, Tiwas, Chutiyas, Kochas, Hajongs, Mech, Borahis, Deoriesetc. belong to Mongloid stock. Nine of them living in the valleys are recognized as scheduled tribes. They are –Bodo, Miri (Mising), Deori, Hujai, SonowalKachari, Lalung (Tiwas), Mech, Rabha and Burmans. The tribals have their own languages. The Bodo language is comparatively developed. It has been used as medium of instructions up to secondary level in the Bodo dominated areas. It is also opted as study in

mother language up to first degree level. The Misings are also making considerable efforts for development of their language. Until 1960 the Misings did not have their own script. Now they have adopted Roman script and they are publishing literatures in the language. The language has been systematically learnt at primary schools in Misings dominated areas. Similarly, other tribal groups have been making efforts to develop their own languages. The SonowalKacharies, ThengalKacharis, SaraniyaKacharis and Madahis although a part of the greater Bodoethnic group, do not have their own language. They have no trace of their original language at all. At present Assamese is the mother tongue of these tribes. Literatures pertaining to their history, culture and other aspects of life are written in Assamese language. From both oral and written literatures it is clear that Mishing of the plains migrated from the present state of Arunachal Pradesh. Before migration the Mishing of the plains belonged to different clans or groups of the Adi tribes. At that time there was no any particular group called *Mishing*. The community known as Mishing, is the conglomeration of the different clans of Adi group which left their abodes in the hills and settled in the valley. There was no occasion for different clans to get together and move down the plain at a time. Different clans gradually migrated in different points of time and through different routs under different circumstances settled in different localities in the valley. A section of the Mishing was once called *chutiyamiri*, because they settled first in *chutiya land*. But nowhere in any historical literature of Assam it is mentioned why and when did the miris come into contact with the Chutiyas and settled in their kingdom. It were the *pagro* group of the Mishing who were at that time called *chutiyamiri* (Rajkumar:2000). There are another group of Mishing, which is known as *samoguriya*. They do not know the Mishing language. According to a folk study this group of Mishing under some unfortunate circumstances happened to kill their own men and women in a dark night while they were living in the hills. Having come to know about the incident in the next morning they had become totally upset and out of remorse the group immediately left the place and flouted down on a raft in river Dibang and landed on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Assam. The Ahom monarch appointed them to kill a big python which swallowed many men and animals of some villages of locality. The skilled Mishing archers killed the python by a poisonous arrow for which the king settled them in a place where there were plenty of a kind of tree called *sham*. So, they came to be known as *Samoguriya Mishing* that is, Mishing settled in the area of sham tree. Since they did not come with any women, they married some local non-Mishing woman for which they lost their own language but retained their social customs, religious beliefs and practices. SrimantaSankardeva (1449-1569) also mentioned in his *Kirtana Ghosa*. (*Kirat Kachari, Khasi GaroMiri, Jowana Kangka Goal, Asom Muluka, Dhubaje Turuka, Kubas Mlecha Chandal, Asoma Muluka Rojoka Turuka* (Bhagawati:2/53). So, from these facts it can be ascertained that different clans of Mishing were

already settled in Assam before fifteenth century. They came batch by batch mainly to find better land in the plains for cultivation.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to know about the village system and village organisation of the Mishng tribe of Assam.

Methodology of the Study

This study is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary data. The study has taken secondary sources from books, articles, edited books, published and unpublished thesis etc. For primary data, the study has taken Mishng dominated district of Assam such as Demaji, Majuli, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Golaghat and Jorhat district of Assam.

Village System

The Mishng of Assam lives in villages in sporadic manner in the midst of other non-Mishng communities. As different groups came down from the hills through different routes and in different points of time, they settled in different areas though mainly on the banks of river. A group of family consisted of different clans forms a village. So, a Mishng village contains a number households belonging to different clans. There is hardly any single clan village among the Mishng. In a village, however, there may be a cluster of households belonging to the same clan.

A Mishng village contains generally not less than 50 households and its number goes up to five hundred or so in a stretch. The houses are built scatteredly mainly for the reason that the house site is selected by divination. The house is built only in the site which is found to be proper by test of divination. As proper sites are not necessarily found in row, so houses are built scatteredly in the village.

Village Organization

Mishng live in villages without any central authority. They do not have any particular land or region to be called Mishng mother land under any single authority or ruler. They are self ruled people by democratic political system called *kebang*, in which every person irrespective of age and sex freely express his / her view. As such, every Mishng village has an independent organization, called *do:lungkebang* (village council) headed by a *gam* (Chief). A senior man of personal integrity and well versed in Mishng customs and traditions is selected as *gam*. He may belong to any clan but he must be able to earn confidence, respect and good will of the fellow villagers. This is the principle of selecting a *gam* for the village community. He holds the office so long he earns the confidence and appreciation of the people. He may be removed

from *gamship* if he loses confidence of the members of the village community. He may be succeeded by his son if the son is found worthy of the office. So, *gamship* is not hereditary (Kagyung:1989:12). It is a democratic institution established by the common people of the unanimously. Literarily the *kebang* means public meeting to discuss and to decide any problem. So, the *do:lungkebang* is concerned with every type of problems of the village community. The nature of problem may be personal or family disputes, a criminal offence, violation of customs, inter-village conflict, natural calamities, epidemics, socio-religious function etc. Whenever some problems arise a *kebang* is held and decision is taken on consensus of opinions of the people attending the *kebang*. Any person irrespective of sex and age can attend the *kebang* and participate in the deliberation. The session of the *kebang* is presided by the *gam*. Having heard the views of the participants the *gam* gives his considered views and asks for approval of the *kebang*. The *kebang* approve of *gam*'s decision which is considered as final and irrevocable. Once the *gam* declares the final decision it is abide by all without question and carried out without fail. If consensus is not arrived at decision is differed and in such a case another session of the *kebang* is held on another day for further discussion and consensus of opinion. Such situation, however, arises rarely. If problem is related to inter-clan dispute, senior members of the clans involved from another village or two may be invited for advice and suggestion in settling the dispute. In case of inter-village problem *kebangs* of both the villages hold a joint meeting and settle the problem. Thus the Mishings have long tradition of resolving their problems democratically by themselves. Until recent past the Mishings did not resort to police and court for settling any interpersonal dispute among them. Even violent crimes like kidnapping, maiming, murder etc. were tried and settled by the *kebang*.

Thus the village administration was carried out by the *kebang* under the leadership of the *gam* who acted as friend, philosopher and guide to the village community. Justice and security of the community was maintained through the *kebang* and the *gam*. In recent time however, the institution has become weakened under the impacts of the emerging changes in the general society of the country. The British administration introduced appointment of *gaonburah* (village head) for the Mishings village also and the system is continued till now. The *gaonburah* is granted some power and privileges to act on behalf of the district administration for maintaining peace and order in the village and also to look after some other problems. Now, *gaonburah* presides over the *kebang* in discussing all the problems which were discussed and solved earlier under the leadership of the *gam*. At the same time, *panchayati raj* has been introduced in the country after independence. Now all problems including minor crimes are dealt with by the *gaonpanchayat*. Introduction of these two institutions rendered the institution of *gamship* defunct and *kebang* too weak. Now, *kebang* is rarely held to discuss some problems relating to traditional customs and socio-religious matters. Under the changing situations Mishings people have started

taking their personal problems to state authorities for solution. Thus the traditional perfect democratic system of Mishing village administration has been replaced by modern institutions like *gaonburah*, *village panchayat*, *development committees* etc. which have generated conflicts and discussion, among the Mishings who once lived in amity and unity.

Conclusion

Formerly every Mising village had a *gam* (chief), *do:lungkebang* (village council), and *ya:mimibir* (youth organization). Now, these are no longer found to be in existence. In place of these traditional institutions new organizations such as youth club, development committees, students union etc. have been established. The *gam* has been replaced by *gaonburah* (village headman) appointed by the district administration. He is responsible for management of the village affairs. Development aspect has been looked after by the village *panchayat*. In one of the sample villages Barpoma a development committee has been established. Thus the Mising villages have been coming under the control of the modern organizations.

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