A Study on the Socio-Economic Condition of Women of Mising Community in Assam: An Overview

Achintya Kr Saikia¹ and Horen Goowalla²

¹²Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Mariani College, Jorhat, Assam

ABSTRACT

The original habitat of Misings, in the distant past, is said to be somewhere in the Tibeto-Chinese border. Misings and the Adi tribes come under the broad group of Indo-Mongoloid races and are referred to as Kirata, in Indian epics. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, apart from the Nagas and the Jayantias, the Mongoloids of India speak the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. Misings, forming a fragment of this race, fall under the category of the Tibeto-Burman speakers of the great Sino-Tibetan group. Misings mainly subsist on agricultural products. Earlier when there was suitable fertile land, cash crops viz., oilseeds, pulses and vegetables were produced on commercial basis, but now it is rarely done because the devastating earthquake of 1950 made vast cultivable lands of the Mising society villages totally unfit for cultivation. An attempt has been made to highlight the socio-economic condition of women of Mising community of Assam.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic status is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Misings, a tribe of Assam in north-eastern region of India, were earlier known as Miris. Waddle (1901) was the first author to mention the name Mising in preference to Miris. The original habitat of Mising, in the distant past, is said to be somewhere in the Tibeto-Chinese border. Misings and the Adi tribes come under the broad group of Indo-Mongoloid races and are referred to as Kirata, in Indian epics. According to the Linguistic Survey of India, apart from the Nagas and the Jayantias, the Mongoloids of India speak the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. Misings, forming a fragment of this race, fall under the category of the Tibeto-Burman speakers of the great Sino-Tibetan group.

Mising mainly subsist on agricultural products. Earlier when there was suitable fertile land, cash crops viz., oilseeds, pulses and vegetables were produced on commercial basis, but now it is rarely done because the devastating earthquake of 1950 made vast cultivable lands of the Mising society villages totally unfit for cultivation. It is seen that well-educated youth Misings available in the villages are not getting engaged in non-agricultural occupations. Although the main source of income for average Mising families is livestock (pig, goat, poultry, etc) farming, its large-scale farming is not at all conducive in the Mising villages in absence of veterinary units. In spite of these limited income sources, the villagers waste enough quantity of rice grains for preparation of indigenous liquors in connection with religious ritual functions. As such the economy of Mising society, more particularly in the villages, is not sound but becoming weaker gradually. The natural calamities, work culture, illiteracy, employment avenue, family structure, social customs tradition, religious beliefs and practices and mass media (particularly television) are directly or indirectly influencing in arresting the economic development of the Mising society.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study about the socio-economic condition of women of Mising community of Assam.
2. To suggest some measures for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of women of Mising community.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In this paper, both primary and secondary data have been used. Primary sources include oral traditions and interviews, etc. Secondary sources include books and journals, etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To prepare this paper, research work has been carried out in five Mising villages of Jorhat district. The methodology adopted for the work is descriptive and narrative in nature. The analysis of socio-economic status of Mising women here implies an examination of their contribution such as participation in economic activities, educational progress, involvement in political activities, etc.
activities and other productive activities, socio cultural, political and religious activities, etc., and its impact on the society as a whole.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

**Educational Status of Women of Mising Community**

The Mising women of India have a lower literacy rate compared to other social groups, because they struggle for survival, and therefore, under compelling circumstances most Mising youths are losing faith in agricultural occupation and becoming traders of food grains, livestock, vegetables, fishes, weaving and cottage industry products and others. The significant transition in occupation from agricultural to non-agricultural 'trade and commerce' is attributed to the influences of mass media, marketing centres, abundance of agricultural products and other commodities, benefit, self-confidence, commitment and transport and communication facilities.

**Economic Activities of Women of Mising Community**

Mising women play a major role in the co-management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, livestock production, etc., but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstition and many other social and cultural factors. The participatory role of Mising women in improving their living conditions by fully exploring natural endowments and alternative uses must find an appropriate place in the strategic approach.

In Mising community, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population. In Mising society, women are most important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depend on them. Even after industrialisation and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Similarly weaving also forms a major part in their day-to- day life. Many also work as labourers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. However, Mising women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and other factors.

The traditional craft of weaving is a very bright aspect of Mising culture. It is an exclusive preserve of the Mising woman who starts her training in the craft even before she reaches her teens. For men, she weaves...
Political Activities of Women of Mising Community

In the political sphere, the role of the Mising women is not less important. The most important political organisation in the Mising society is the ‘Dolung Kebang’, which is an organisation or association for discussing various problems or important issues of a village or more. In this Kebang, both the male and female members of the society take part in arriving suitable solution. But the most important political organisation in which women have equal rights along with the men folk is the ‘Mimbir Yame’. This organisation is the benevolent organisation where the young unmarried men and women of the village are its members. In this organisation, welfare activities are discussed and performed by the youth of the villages.

Socio-Economic Status of Women of Mising Community

In spite of the above-mentioned role of Mising women in the socio-economic, religious and political sphere, their status continues to remain deplorable till today. This is evident from the fact that the women folk enjoy lower position than the men folk in terms of rights and privileges. Traditionally, a woman cannot inherit any property from her father or family as a matter of rights. The women are also debarred from taking any decisions regarding children's education, division of property and marriage. A very important example of the lower position and status of the Mising women folk is the well defined and division of rooms especially in the kitchen in the two portion called Riseng and the Koktog; the former refers to the upper portion and is occupied by the male members of the family and the latter refers to the lower portion and is occupied by the female members of the family. In Riseng, the most valuable and important properties of the family are kept, and the kitchen articles are kept in the Koktog. Thus, privileges to sit in the Riseng is a status symbol in the Mising society, but the women are deprived of the privileges, which shows the lower position and status of Mising women.

CONCLUSION

Thus, in conclusion it can be said that the Mising women plays an important role in every sphere of life, i.e., social, religious, economic, political and other socio-cultural activities. In fact, from the study it also has been found that women are comparatively more involved in the both productive and unproductive activities than men. Thus, it can be said that Mising women have a vital role to play, and in fact playing since time immemorial in all socio-economic activities and the decision making are incomplete without the active and sincere co-operation of the women folk. But the position of Mising women in the domestic and social life is not up to the expectation the way she contributed in all fields. It is found from...
the study that Mising women are socially discriminated in areas of education, occupation, religious and cultural practices. However, with the advent of modern education and changing lifestyles the condition and the standard of the Mising women have been increasing but still much has to be done.

Therefore, if government and social scientists are committed to social responsibility of upliftment and development in the society and to create awareness about the condition of women and promote social justice, then by addressing the all round problems of the women can become a more effective vehicle of bringing in progress and social change in the country. If the state and central government can announce and implement various developmental schemes and programmes in the Mising society, then it should also reflect the development and upliftment of the Mising women in the society, because without development and improvement of women, half of the population of the community, it will not be possible to bring development and progress in the society.

REFERENCES