

# The Agricultural Festivals of Missing Tribe of Assam From Sociological Perspective

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**Abstract:** Festivals are some auspicious dates or a period of time, celebrated in human society, consisting different rites and rituals, beliefs, traditions in it. It carries social, cultural and religious elements of a society and glimpses of unity among the inhabitants of a particular group always reflect through the celebration of festivals. Ali Aye Ligang and Po: Rag are two agriculture based festivals among the Mising community of Assam, having traditional socio-religious beliefs and unique cultural elements. The Mising community perform these festivals with the feeling of oneness till today. The study tries to look at the socio-cultural and religious aspects of Ali Aye Ligang and Po: Rag and the present status regarding the celebration of these festivals.

**Keywords:** Misings, agricultural festivals, Ali Aye Ligang, Po: Rag, socio-cultural and religious beliefs

## 1. Introduction

Assam is a land of various tribal groups including both plains and hill tribes. Where Karbi, Kuki, Dimasa etc. are the hill tribes of Assam Boro, Mising, Deori, Tiwa, Rabha are included into the criteria of plain tribes of Assam. Mising is the second largest tribal group in Assam. It is known that Misings have their origins in North-eastern hills of Assam. They came to Assam at the end of Chuniya Kingdom and starting of Ahom Kingdom. According to many academicians Misings are part of Miris in the hills. However, Misings in the plains of Assam are more likely to introduce themselves as Misings, not Miris. From their understanding 'Mi' means 'human and 'Yasing' means 'white or good'. Thus, they represent themselves as 'good people'. At present Misings are mostly inhabited in the Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia districts of Assam.

Academicians and scholars describe Misings as belonging to Mongolian stock and in linguistic description this tribal group comes under Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. Under one umbrella, which is called Mising, this tribal group has different 'Khel' (groups) and 'Gutra' (clan). The 'Khel's among Misings are Sayengia, Oyengia, Moyengia, Delu, Toyutaya, Pagar, Dambuk, Chamuguriya and Tamar. It is said that Chamuguriya and Tamar's are the first groups came into the plains of Assam. Some clans among Misings are Bomi, Miya Pangkong, Kondar, Cha-Ba, Sunga-Surang etc. Dole, Yein, Loying, Pegu, Pamegam, Taid are some of the titles added by Misings of Assam after their names.

Despite of having different clans, Gutras, socio-economic status (at present time), occupations Misings are united through their socio-religious beliefs, rites and ritual, festivals, customs which are the reflection of their socio-cultural identity as an ethnic entity.

## 2. Objectives

The study wants to analyse the agricultural festivals of Misings From Sociological point of view and to look at the socio-cultural and religious elements in it.

## 3. Methodology

The study was conducted on the basis of secondary data, gathered from different secondary sources related to the topic.

## 4. Discussion

Mising society has undoubtedly a rich and colourful culture. Specifically the festivals celebrated by this tribal community are unique in nature and these festivals carry the ethnic identity and the socio-cultural and religious aspects of that particular community. Do: bur Uie, Taleng Uie, Urom Uie, Dodgang, Gu: min-Soin, Po: rag, Ali Aye Ligang, Yalo-Gognam, Okum Dhangaria, Yumrang are some of the rituals and festivals performed by Misings both annually and occasionally. Among these ALI AYE LIGAND AND PO: RAG are two main agricultural festivals of Misings having both socio-religious significance.

Ali\_Aye\_Ligang is an annual festival of Misings and one of the important reflector of Mising identity and social integrity. It is celebrated by Misings on the first Wednesday of the month of Phagun, according to Assamese calendar. This time period is considered as the beginning season of paddy cultivation among Misings. The main objective of the festival is agricultural prosperity. The words Ali, Aye and Ligang refer roots, fruits and sowing. Thus the meaning of Ali-Aye-Ligang is sowing of seeds. The festival is basically related with Ahu paddy cultivation. Earlier there was no fixed date to celebrate Ali Aye Ligang. Prior to 1965 Mising people perform the rituals of Ligang in separate dates and the ritual of Ligang was done by the traditional priest of Misings called Mibu. It was the decision of Nane Kcebang in 1965 to celebrate the festival unanimously on that fixed date, irrespective of their locality, village, geographical distance, occupations and economic status as Misings relates the day with Lakhmi. Thus, the Mising people bring social integrity to their traditional ritual.

On that auspicious day, Misings made their traditional food, which is an integral part of Mising culture. They made Apong, Po: Ro, dry fish and meat prepared with leaf and fire,

curry of black lentil. In making the traditional food items they do not use oil as there is a belief among Misings that use of oil can be the cause of degradation in agricultural production. At the day of Ligang Mising man and woman dressed up with their bright coloured traditional attire such as Mibu Galuk, Gonru Ugon, Damer, Yakan Age Gasa, which make the culture of the tribal community distinct and iconic.

With the food items and dressing in traditional attire Mising people sow the seed in a particular area and pray to Do: nyi Po: lo and their ancestral sprites for the fertilizer of the soil and production. The elements of animism which is the fundamental religious belief among Misings can be seen here as in Ali Aye Ligang they try to satisfy their traditional Gods and ancestral sprites. According to their belief satisfaction of ancestral sprites and Sun, Moon, Sky, Earth, cloud and rain will ensure agricultural prosperity as well as social wellbeing. The rituals are followed by traditional song and dance form of Misings which are Ni: Tam and Gomrag Sa: Soman. The Missing flock enjoy through this and practice their traditional forms.

Po: Rag is another agriculture based festival among Misings. In Assamese this practice of Misings is called as 'Narasinga Bihu'. This means the ritual which was performed after harvesting. Generally Po: Rag is celebrated in the Assamese months of Ahin-Kati. Po: Rag is not an annual event among Misings. It is celebrated with a gap of five to ten years. In comparison to Ligang, Po: Rag is more expensive. Throughout the celebration of Po: Rag one can find the important role of Morung, that is the traditional dormitory of Misings. To collect the capital for this festival the tradition of collective labour is present among Misings, which is meaningful regarding development of oneness among Misings. The importance of social collectivism over individualism can be seen here. Po: Rag is mainly held in Morung. Guests from other villages, especially the women from that particular village who are married in other villages are invited in Po: Rag. After the welcoming ceremony they are served traditional food, made collectively. Pork and Apong are made traditionally for the guests. People of every age group enjoy Po: Rag with traditional song and dance and glimpses of tribal unity reflect throughout the celebration.

Change is the nature of society. Change is constantly taken place in every society. With time and influential elements tribal societies are also changing from their ingenious forms. In the case of Misings society the constant influence of non-tribal and other tribal groups of Assam since the begging of their settlement in Assam can be seen. At present one can find elements of other religions such as Hinduism and Christian in Mising life style. Ali Aye Ligang and Po: Rag are traditionally the festivals of rural Mising inhabitants as the basic concern of these festivals is agriculture. But, Mising people who are not related to agriculture, settled in different places, cities, countries with different occupations also practice these cultural traits. Thus, these agriculture based rites and rituals are established as social identification of Misings. Misings people from urban areas, away from their village collectively organize Ligang and Po: Rag in their respective places and practice their traditional traits-beliefs, food, clothes, dance, song etc. and transfer it to their

future generation. It helps them to touch the roots in changing life style. Forgetting about personal socio-economic status and benefits they performed these festivals with pride and their rich culture, customs, traditions are well presented which they have as a legacy from their forefathers.

## 5. Conclusion

To understand the a tribal society it is necessary to study of the festivals celebrated by that particular tribal community. The festivals of tribes in Assam mainly revolve around agriculture as the basic occupation of the tribes of Assam are farming till today. Misings as a tribal community of Assam are not free from the above mentioned fact. Though other forms of occupation are there at present time but only a few Mising people are engaged in other occupation. Thus Ali Aye Ligang and Po: Rag are symbols of Mising's tribal life. It satisfy their religious and spiritual sentiments as well as enhance the integrity among the tribal group. Celebration of these festivals build the oneness among the group and provide opportunity to associate themselves with their roots. These are the ways to continue their ethnic identity at this fast forward age. These festivals have further scope to establish as tourist points with their unique and colourful socio-cultural ingredients.

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