



The Occupational Role and Social Status of Mising Women (A Study based on 50 Mising Women in Dikhowmukh Area)

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Abstract

Occupational roles often shape social status, as active contributions to economic and cultural spheres can enhance recognition, respect and empowerment within a community. This paper focuses on the occupational roles and social status of Mishing women from Dikhowmukh area. It explores their significant involvement in traditional industries like weaving and agriculture, while addressing the social and economic barriers they face. The study highlights the impact of cultural heritage on their lives and emphasizes the importance of fostering initiatives to enhance their empowerment and societal participation.

Theoretical background

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It’s not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.” (Swami Vivekananda) Women are at the heart of creation. Without women, creation, progress and development are not possible.

Women play an undeniable role in building a healthy and strong society. It is no exaggeration to say that women contribute more to a society than men. Women have played an active and important role in socio-economic, religio-cultural, political, educational and administrative activities outside home. But yet in many places, traditions, limited mobility and lack of voice or access to information make women the most neglected and exploited group.

Assam the easternmost state of India is the abode to various tribes. Every tribal group of Assam has its own fascinating culture which includes dress pattern, dwelling, diet, art, music and dance. The Mising is the second largest tribe in Assam. The Mising, sometimes called Miri are an indigenous community inhabiting parts of the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Misings are recognized as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian Government under the name ‘Miri’. According to the census of India conducted in 2011, the population of Mising in Assam is approximately 7(seven) lakhs. It constitutes 2.07% (as per 2011 census) of the total population of the state. As per 2011 census the Mising constitutes 17.8% of the tribal population. They live in 10 districts of Assam: such as Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Majuli, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat. One of their peculiarities is that they prefer to live mostly in riverine areas. The society is patriarchal. The women are more active than the men in certain spheres of life and are experts in weaving. They are involved not only household work but also with agricultural field.

A good number of works have been done on issues relating to socio-economic conditions of tribal people in India and also on women in particular, specially the tribal women of India in the last two decades.

Snehalata Panda, in her paper “Socio-economic Status and Domestic Violence Against Tribal Women” published in the journal “Man and Development” September, she has discussed the status of tribal women in their society along with the violence they have faced. Walter Fernandez has given a detailed account of the changing status of tribal women of North East India in the modern age in his book entitled, “Modernization and Women’s Status in Northern India”. However, here little emphasis is given to the changing status of Mising women, and Mising women’s role and position in society is not studied adequately.

Although many works have been done on the Mising tribe, it is negligible in number compared to the works on other tribes of north-east due to lack of evidences or resources. Dimbeswar Doley has highlighted some references to the Miri-Mishmi tribes of the north-east frontier of India which occur in the historical chronicles written by Shihabuddin Talish. Durgeswar Doley, in his work “The Socio-economic Life of the Miri Tribe” discusses about the impact of social factors on the economic life of Mising people. Some papers on the Mising tribe in a seminar on “Tribal Women and Development”, later edited by N.A. Hazarika, Jawahar Jyoti Kuli, in his paper “The Role of Mishing Women in the Field of Economic Development” attempts to highlight the role of women in economic development of the Mising society. He feels that training facilities should be provided to them for better improvement of their textile work. Niroda Doley discusses the problem of development of tribal women living in Assam with reference to low level of female literacy, heavy pressure of work, lack of commercial attitudes etc. in her paper, “Problems of Development of Tribal Women in Assam in Different Spheres. Tabu Taid in his work “Ekuki Nibondha” presents a paper on position of Mising women. He has critically analyzed the various social norms of Mising society which lower the position of Mising women as a secondary person in the society. He criticizes various ritual taboos of Mising society which underestimate the position of women. But he has not done in-depth study into the socio-economic problems of Mising women. Review of literature never ends. Here are some of the examples of other works which is discussed relating to my topic. Thus we have seen that none of them have focused especially on the occupational role and social status of the Mising women. So this work is just an attempt to study the occupational role and social status of Mising women. It will be looked from a gender perspective study.

Theory of feminism

Feminism is a major branch within sociology that shifts its assumptions, analytic lens, and topical focus away from the male viewpoint and experience towards that of women. In doing so feminist theory shines a light on social problems, trends and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective within social theory. In this research work the researcher finds that the feminist theory is relevant to the research problem. Since the study mainly concerned with the women, so it is looked from a feminist perspective. The women’s issues should be viewed away from the male viewpoint and experience. The occupational role and the social status of the Mising women can be understood and can make reliable with the feminist perspective only. So the researcher gives special preference to it while studying the research problem.

Subaltern perspective or subaltern theory

Ranajit Guha first used the concept of 'subaltern' to signify anyone in India who did not belong to the 'elite' and therefore included peasants, workers, impoverished landlords and others whose behavior exhibited a combination of defiance and deference to the elite. Subaltern studies analyses the binary relationship of the subaltern and ruling classes and thus studies the interplay of dominance and subordination. The Mising women can be considered as subaltern because they are the dominated and subordinated in the society. Mising community exists in the subaltern studies. But their womenfolk are mostly involved in this because in spite of playing a vital role in the Mising society and in their families the women have to suffer from lower social status. Mising women are more active in many aspects than men. Since they do various economic activities, the social status of them remain deplorable till today. They have to suffer from discrimination in various aspects such as education, economy, cultural practices etc. A typical patriarchy system still exists in the Mising society for which the womenfolk are deprived from participating in the developmental activities of the Mising society.

That's why the study is being conducted with making a close relation to the subaltern studies. It will help the researcher to find out the oppression, dominance and exploitation that the Mising women face.

Objectives:

The following are the basic objectives of the study

- a) To find out the participation of Mising women in economic activities.
- b) To examine the role of Mising women
- c) To observe the socio-economic status of Mising women.

Field & Methodology

The study was conducted in Thekeratal Mising Gaon which is in Dikhowmukh of Sivasagar district. The village is situated in the east of Sivasagar district. The village is under Sivasagar Revenue circle and Gaurisagar Development Block. The village is situated about 17 km away from Sivasagar town and 7 km away from Gaurisagar. Most of the people of the village belong to below poverty line category (BPL). People are not involved in government job or services. They earn their bread through cultivation, animal husbandry and other business. They are not highly educated. But the new generations are interested in higher studies and are doing so.

The researcher used sampling method at the time of selection of the respondents. In this study, the researcher selected 50 respondents from the universe. The whole family regards as unit of respondent. Since the study was related to the socio economic life of the Mising women, therefore the researcher selected respondents, through simple random sampling, who were definitely representative of the Mising community and the Mising Women. The universe of the study was taken purposively.

The researcher had collected the primary data from the respondents through an interview schedule and this schedule was canvassed to the respondents. Observations are also used to collect data. Secondary data were collected from the government records, books, journals, articles, research paper, internet etc.

Discussion

Every individual has his/her own role to perform in different aspect of social life. But the role performance is always guided by the background of the role player. The role of an individual in society, his/her attitude towards different aspects of the world, his/her opinions regarding various happenings around etc. are determined by his/her age, sex, education, marital status, religion, occupation and income etc. By social background we mean age, marital status, size of the family, nature of family, education, income etc. of individuals of a particular society. By knowing the social background we can get the manifestation of human behavior and their mode of thinking. There is a great importance of different dimensions of individual life. So, before going to analyze the data collected from individuals, it is worthwhile to analyze age, sex, education, marital status, religion and occupation etc. of the respondents. Each of these aspects has a unique significance from sociological point of view and therefore the social background of the respondents has been taken into account.

Table1

Types of family

Sl No.	Type of family	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Joint	5	10%
2	Nuclear	45	90%
		Total=50	100%

The table presented the structure or nature of family of the respondents. The table reveals that 10% of family belongs to joint family and nuclear family exists among the 90 % respondents.

Table 2

Educational qualification

Sl no	Educational qualification	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Illiterate	5	10%
2	Below HSLC	12	24%
3	HSLC	11	22%
4	HS	17	34%
5	Graduation	5	10%
		Total=50	100%

Education is also another important factor to be taken into consideration while analyzing the social background of the respondent.

The table presented above shows that majority of respondents of the study, i.e. 34% were passed in H.S. Next to this, 10% respondents were found whose educational standard was illiterate. The table further shows that as many as 24% of women's educational standard were below H.S.L.C. and another 22% was H.S.L.C. passed. The table also reveals that 10% of respondent's educational standard was graduation.

Table 3**Main occupation of the respondent**

Sl no	Main occupation	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Handloom and textile	12	24%
2	Animal husbandry	30	60%
3	Agriculture	5	10%
4	Making rice beer	3	6%
		Total=50	100%

Occupation can determine one's mode of living behavior and other aspects of individual life. Table 3 shows the occupations of the respondents.

From the table it is seen that most of the Mising women are involved in animal husbandry. It consists of 60%. Another 24% of the respondents are involved in weaving and only a few women do cultivation. Most of Mising women make rice beer while is called 'apong'. But they make it traditionally not for business purpose. In Mising societies there can't be seen any govt. job among women.

Table 4**Income of the respondent**

In the study of social background of the respondents, income is another important component to throw light on the social background of the respondents.

Sl no	Income	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Below 5000	43	86%
2	5000-10000	7	14%
3	10000-15000	0	0%
4	15000 and above	0	0%
		Total=50	100%

The monthly income of 86% Mising women is below 5000. Only a few earn 5000- 10000. That is why the economic condition of Mising women is very poor.

Role and status are part and parcel related with each other. In a society every human being plays some roles in their day to day life. It is a rational term. In a community or organization, every individual is bound to play social roles. On the other hand, status is simply a position in a society or in a group. A position or status is simply the means of identifying a particular social role. Everyone enters a social institution with an identity. This identity refers to his/her position or status.

In spite of the role of Mising women in socio-religious, economic and political sphere, their status continue to remain deplorable till today. A typical patriarchal mentality still exists among the Mising community, for which the Mising women are deprived from participating in the developmental activities of the Mising society which creates obstacles in fulfilling their potentialities. The inequalities that exist between men and women in the Mising society are however more visible in the rural areas compared to the urban areas. Women have no right to inheritance, although she is a major contributor to family economy. This is evident from the fact that the womenfolk enjoy lower position than the men folk in terms of rights and privileges.

However, she has the right to claim her private income which she earned from private cultivation or Rikseng Arig from rearing of domestic animals, poultry or from weaving and also has the right over the ornaments and dress items. Similarly, the women are debarred from taking any decisions taken by the male members of the family, although they are generally consulted regarding matters like holding of any social or religious ceremonies in the family or decision regarding children's education, division of property and marriage.

Women are generally deprived from participating in the social activities due to various factors like illiteracy, unawareness among the women early marriage, family responsibilities, poor economic conditions, preferences or support of male members to participate in social activities etc. Although the prevailing discrimination against women is denied by most of the Misings, some facts clearly reveal that Mising women are accorded a lower status in their society.

The lower position and status of the Mising women is not restricted in the family sphere alone but also in the Mising society as a whole. In the religious field, the role and position of the Mising womenfolk are lower than the men folk. For instance, the Mibu, the traditional Mising priest is always from the male section of the society. Moreover, the women-folk are not allowed to sit in the same row with the men-folk or with the Mibu during performing rituals and sacrifices.

The researcher tries to investigate on the occupational role, the Mising women play and their social status. Some questions were raised in the field through interview scheduled regarding the status of them and their occupational role in the changing situation.

The Mising women of Thekeratal village have been traditionally involved in weaving, piggery, agriculture etc. Respondents do not use any advanced technical tools. They are involved in all these only for their subsistence livelihood. So, the economic condition of those is very pitiable. 100% Mising women are involved in their traditional occupation.

Reason of involvement in economic activities: Reason of involvement shows the economic status of the respondents. Choosing an occupation by own wish reflects the higher economic and social status. Table 5 shows this:

Table 5

Reason of involvement in economic activities

Sl no	Reason of involvement	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Own wish	18	36%
2	No alternative	12	24%
3	Will of the family	0	0%
4	Traditionally	20	40%
		Total=50	100%

Majority of Mising women i.e. the 40% do their work traditionally. 24% have no alternatives and 36% women involve in this in their own wish. There are not found any women who are a part of economic activities only for the will of the family.

Table 6**Duration of involvement in occupation**

Time factor is also another important criteria regarding the study. The research find some data about their involvement in the occupation.

Sl no	Duration(in years)	No of respondent	Percentage
1	0-5	4	8%
2	5-10	15	30%
3	10-15	17	34%
4	15-20	8	16%
5	More than 20	6	12%
		Total=50	100%

Mising women are involved in their work traditionally, 34% of women are working from 10-15 years, 8% are doing from 0-5 years, 30% are doing from 5-10 years, 16% are involving from 15-20 years and 12% are involving from more than 20 years.

Table 7**Taking professional training by the respondents**

Taking any professional training shows the efficiency at work. Following table shows the participation of the Mising women in professional training and workshops.

Sl no	Taking professional training	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Yes	17	34%
2	No	33	66%
		Total=50	100%

Most of the Mising women are not professionally trained. Only 34% of them are trained. They were taken training of 11 days and 3 months. Certificates were given to them in the training. They were taught to bring up their animals, how to use medicines etc. They also got training on pickle making.

Table 8**Chief earner of the family**

Every family has their main earning members. It can be the husband, wife, children or other family members. The main earner of the family reveals the family condition and the dominance of patriarchy or matriarchy.

Sl no	Main earner	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Father	0	0%
2	Mother	0	0%
3	Husband	47	94%
4	Self	3	6%
		Total=50	100%

Though the Mising women are the major contributors to the family, they considered their husbands as the main earner of their families. 94% women have their husbands as the main earner. Only 6% women are found who are the main earners of the household.

Table 9

Membership of self help group

Sl no	Membership of SHG	No of respondent	Percentage
1	Yes	48	96%
2	No	2	4%
		Total=50	100%

On the basis of the income, expenditure, savings, debt position, standard of living etc., the investigator analyzed the economic status of women. Most of the respondents are the members of SHG. Self help group organized the people and bring changes to them. Every individual needs some financial support while they needed. So they take loan from self help groups. The respondents have taken loan from SHG or other financial institution only for productive work like piggy, weaving etc.

Casting vote is an indicator of political participation and awareness. All of the respondents casts their valuable votes. All Mising women are politically aware.

By whose decision the vote is being casted reveals the right to take decisions in political sphere. They were asked whether they vote by their own or by the will and decision of others. Then almost 50% women said that they vote as per the choice of the husband. And others vote by their own choice and only a few vote as per the decision of the family.

The Mising community though small in size occupies an important position in the society, economy and polity of Assam. Having diverse ethnic origin, representing racial stock, with a distinctive socio-cultural system, their cultural ethos, a unique way of adaptation to different ecological niches and a distinctive social structure of their own, they seem to respond to processes to social change quite differently to other communities. Most of the tribal women of the state are in the midst of continuities and change while on the one hand, their tradition bound practices continue to exist, on the other hand, they adopt to new wider forces. With this background in mind an attempt is made to understand how new socio-economic changes are accepted or rejected by the tribal women of the state in general by the Nine major tribal groups (Bodo, Mising, Barman, Kachar, Deori, Hojai, Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Tiwa, Mech and Rabha) living here.

In this chapter the researcher intends to explore the changes occurred among the Mising in Assam specially the women. Globalization is a universal phenomenon. It is one of the aspects which spread its impact on the role and status of the Mising women. Through globalization various changes touches Mising women and their day to day life. In fact their attitude, thinking has also changed. Sanskritization is also another crucial factor that has led to changes in their lives.

The Mising social structure is in the transitional process. The process is continuing. In the post independence period, several efforts have been made by government to improve the conditions of the tribes. But women are forbidden from many rights though they contribute equally in every field of society. In the recent decades the exposure of the Misings to newer economic

and social influences has had an impact on the lives of Mising women and their identity. The issue of their empowerment is conceptually interconnected with the concept of identity. Here the focus is an impact of socio economic change in the lives of Mising women.

Mising women are mainly engaged as labors of workers in agriculture or allied activities. They play a very active role in the economy. They play a more active role than men in family activities including financial income. The Mising women are generally seen carrying bundles of firewood or doing work and babies are on their backs. This is a common scene in the Mising village. Women are actively participated in various activities to help in the family's expenditure, but their contributions are never counted. Even the women also do not want to acknowledge their contribution.

From the field study it is seen that 100% Mising women are involved in various traditional activities as such as agriculture, weaving, piggery, guttery, making rice beer etc. In the field there cannot be seen any women who has changed her occupation from traditional to other type of occupation. But when it was asked to them whether they are interested to any other work apart from their traditional occupation then 48% women show interest. They said that they are interested in other kind of occupation such as govt. job, teaching professionals and business and so on. But they lack of it because of their educational qualification and their unawareness or unconsciousness. They don't know about other employment opportunities. So they are stucked in their traditional occupation. For the lack of education and training they even cannot apply any advance technologies to their work. The traditional work can be done scientifically and widely, but professional training and workshops are required for it.

Mising women get good earning from selling pigs as the popularity of pork increases day by day. Generally women have to fully involve in rearing pigs. Men are only for selling it in the markets. However, adequate veterinary facility and knowledge of scientific breeding has left the livestock with poor gene pool. This restricts the Mising women to bring changes to their occupation. 24% of Mising Women of the studied field earn their income from the selling of their textile productions.

A Mising woman is a born weaver and textile designer. Mising textile products have a great demand in there. But it needs a great hard works and devotional times. Due to the household activities many of them cannot give full time in it. So they cannot be involved in this as profession. However commercialization of the weaved products are found to be low because of the factors like lack of infrastructural facilities, adequate market facilities government support etc.

Formerly selling of wine was unknown but since two or three decades this business became popular and a few women are located in it. But the womenfolk feel shame to admit as wine seller. So this is not growing among them. This way some changes are seen in the Mising community specially the role of women in occupation. Still continuity exists in the mode of occupation. They still involve in their traditional occupations and earning through it and maintaining their livelihood. Continuity can be seen more than change of occupation among the Mising women.

Mising women work a lot in maintaining a family in much more than that of the men. She needs to perform all kinds of jobs ranging from the usual household chores to outdoor works for livelihood of the family. She is responsible for maintaining the home in order by performing the day to day activities required for the family.

With the changing time the social status of Mising women are changing as well. Normally they are given a very low status in the society. In spite of playing an unavowed role in the family and the society they are considered as inferior compared to men. They are dominated in the field of economy, education, religious activities and cultural practices.

But the social status of Mising women has changed now. They are given respect and dignity for their contribution to the economy of the family. The researcher finds that the respondents have power or capacity in decision making. Regarding choosing an occupation, decision making power in household matters and family planning, decision of casting votes etc. 100% Mising women have the right. They also admired that they are actively participated in the social, cultural, religious and other activities. They also took part in the political sphere.

From the above discussion, it is seen that the Mising women of the study area get a higher status. Though they do not get higher status than the men, they are given a very good position in the society.

Findings and conclusion

In this research the researcher discussed briefly about the occupational role and social status of the Mising women. At the end of the discussion the researcher has drawn some findings on the basis of the discussion. The findings are as follows-

1/ After the Bodo, the Mising is the second largest tribe in Assam. Mising are recognized as a scheduled tribe by the Indian Government under the name 'Miri'. Although the Mishings are patriarchal the women play prominent role in the society. Most of the Mising women are involved in animal husbandry. They raise pigs, chickens, goats etc. Men do not involve in these works.

2/ The study reveals that the Mising women do not use modern technology in their agricultural activities, animal husbandry and weaving also. The rate of literacy is low among the Mising community specially the women. They do not acquire higher studies and one fourth of the respondents are illiterate. So most of them are unaware of the advanced machinaries.

3/ Women take active participation in economic activities and sometimes more active than men. The monthly income of the respondents are very low, which shows the pitiable economic condition of the Mising women. Most of the Mising women are involved in traditional occupation. Apart from this they have interest for other occupations as well.

4/ above 90% women are the members of SHG and taken loan from SHG or any other financial institution. All the respondents are listed in BPL category. They can take advantages of the SHGs..

5/100% Mising women are politically aware and they used to go to cast their votes. They cast their votes by their own choice and sometimes by the choice of the family. All the Mising women are involved actively in social and religious activities. Women are not discriminated in their fields.

6/ Mising women of the study area get a higher status. Though they do not get higher status than men, they are given a very good position in the society.

Conclusion:

The Mising tribe constitutes a major segment of Assamese population. They have contributed to the growth of Assamese culture. In this research work investigator makes an investigation into the occupational role and social status of women in Mising society of Assam considering different aspect of their contributions.

Thus, in the conclusion we can say that the Mising women play an important role in all spheres of life i.e. social, religious, economic and other cultural activities. In fact, from the study it has been found that the women are comparatively more involve in productive and unproductive activities than men. Thus, it can be said that the Mising women have a role to play and in fact, have been playing since time immemorial in all socio-economic and religio-cultural activities in the family as well as in the society. Almost all kinds of activities either socioeconomic or religio-cultural and decision making are incomplete without the active and sincere co-operation of the womenfolk. 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. Further the women remain the most exploited and downtrodden sections of the Mising society although their contribution to the society in socio-economic and cultural development was great.

It is found from the study that the Mising women are socially discriminated in the areas of education, occupation, religious and cultural practices. Generally she is given a lower position in the family and in the society and her status is placed below her male counterpart. In decision making also she is much lower than the male folk both in family and in society and only a few among them have decision making powers. However, with the advent of modern education and changing lifestyle, the condition and standard of the Mising women have been increasing but still much to be done.

If the State and the Central Government can announce and implement various development schemes and programmes in the Mising society, then it also should reflect the development and upliftment of the Mising women in the society. Because without development and improvement of women, the country's half population, it will not be possible to bring development and progress in the society.

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