



Socio Economic Status and role of Mishing Women in Society: An analysis

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Abstract: Socio-economic status is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Like in any other patriarchal society, the quality of life of women in Mising society is also determined by the socio-economic, religious and cultural factors. Owing to their gender, women suffer from systematic social injustice and they are exploited and oppressed not only as human beings but also as women. The aim of this paper is to make an investigation into the role and the socio-economic status of women in Mising society of Assam considering different aspect of their contributions, such as participation in economic activity and other productive activities, socio-cultural and religious activity, participation in the decision making etc. However, in spite of the significant role played by the Mising womenfolk, their contributions are not given due recognition by the society, social scientists, government and policy makers. This paper has been also designed to highlight how far Mising women are free to participate in the decision making process with other male members of the family and society as a whole. The methodology adopted for the work is subaltern approach to understanding the role and the socio-economic status of women in Mising society and it will be presented in the form of a descriptive narrative.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, Role, Decision making, Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION:

The Misings are known to the outside world as "Miri" and belonged to the family of Tani People. On the basis of the legends of the tribe and available historical records, they migrated from the Tibetan plateau and entered in batches in to the central belt of Arunachal Pradesh. They further moved to the plains of Assam, around the 13 th century A.D. Still, they retain their mythological, linguistic and institutional affinity with the Adis and the Nisis of Arunachal Pradesh. After their migration to the plains, considerable changes have taken place in their ecology, pattern of adaptation, cultivation, language, rituals, dress and house construction. At present, the Misings are scattered in eight eastern districts of Assam, namely- Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sivsagar, Jorhat, Majuli, Golaghat and Sonitpur. They are also distributed in the Subansiri and East Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

In any society women's role in the production process is crucial especially in a society where agriculture is predominant. Women's role in household and reproductive activities played an important part in economic activity and it provides the basis for the productive activities in the society. To maintain the system of production process, women's role in terms of subsistence activity and reproduction of children is crucial. In society where women are mostly illiterate and belong to the lower castes or tribes, they are economically, socially and politically marginalized and subject to discrimination in almost all field and unrepresented in decision-making bodies. Their contribution to

the economy of society and household goes unrecognized. This is typical characteristic of patriarchal Indian society and caste system that placed women in inferior position in the society.

As mentioned above, in the 1930s, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution in which gender equality included as a fundamental right and after independence it is recognised as an important constitutional provision in Indian Constitution. But it failed to reach the women folk in India in general and Mising women in particular due to its backwardness. In Mising society women are still in the shadow of men and women's inequality is a dominant feature of the social landscape in Mising society. Ironically 65 years after Independence Mising women are still struggling to attain almost all the basic needs like security, health, employment, education, social and economic status which is vital for their progress and nation's progress as a whole. Various problems become obstacles in the way of their progress. Problems like illiteracy, poverty, powerlessness, and over-work together with the deeply entrenched hierarchical values of the family originating from customary and religious beliefs continue to create new imbalances and disparities in Mising society which often cut across all strata of society. Above all, social and cultural norms attribute greater worth to male members primarily as providers and heirs which acts as major obstacle in the way of women progress in Mising society.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of this paper is to make an investigation into the role and the socio-economic status of women in Mising society of Assam considering different aspect of their contributions, such as participation in economic activity and other productive activities, socio-cultural and religious activity, participation in the decision making etc.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

In this paper both secondary and primary data have been used. Primary sources include oral traditions, interviews, etc. Secondary sources include books and journals. The methodology adopted for the work is subaltern approach to understanding the role and the socio-economic status of women in Mising society and it will be presented in the form of a descriptive narrative. Socio-economic status of Mising women analysis here implies an examination of their contributions, such as participation in economic activity and other productive activities, socio-cultural, religious and political activity, participation in the decision making etc. and its impact in the society as a whole.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS :

ROLE OF MISING WOMEN IN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SPHERES:

The Mising women played an important role in every sphere in the Mising society. In the field of social, cultural, religious and economic the women has a important role to play and in fact they are more hard working than the men in some cases. For instance, the most important festival of the Mising society is the Ali A: ye Ligang or the sowing festival. This is a festival of merry making and enjoyment where both the male and female members of the society participate irrespective of age. In the early morning, the women are busy in preparing food and rice bear from the guest during this festival. After the feasting, the adult boys and girls starts their merry making in the form of Gumrag so:man, a combination of dance and beating of drums and cymbals. The womenfolk with their beautiful dresses dance following the rhythmical tunes of the drum beats and cymbals and express paddy transplanting, harvesting, fetching of water, bathing, fishing etc. in their dance. Thus, this festival is incomplete without the participation of the women..

But the most important role in which the Mising women plays in the Mising society is in the economic field. The contribution of the Mising women can be best understood from the kind of economic activities that the Mising society performs or practices for their livelihood. Agriculture is the main economic activities of the Mising community of Assam. Majority of the Mising people live in villages and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Right from their daily needs like food, shelter, cloths to education and other activities they depend on agriculture. The Mising community cultivates and produces rice, potato, sweet potato, mustard seeds, black pulse and other vegetables.

The Mising people are river people in the sense that Mising people usually resides near the river banks. Since their migration from hills of present day Arunachal Pradesh to the plains of Assam they are identified as river people. They mostly settled in the bank of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries and one of the important economic activities is fishing. Apart from individual fishing by the men and women, in many rural areas collective fishing is common among the Mising community. Both the men and women folk use different kinds of fishing tools which indicates that different techniques and skills are use by both men and women. Simple and locally available material such as bamboos and cane are use in making the fishing tools. The fishing tools use by the Mising women are Jurki, saloni, jakoi, etc. S. Endle in his work *The Kacharis* very beautifully describes the fishing methods and activities of the Misings as follows:

The popular economic activity where the Mising women works without the help of the male member of the family is the cult of weaving. According to Dalton, in the Miri-Mishmi countries, textile making was almost non-existence at a noticeable scale during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The men wore a girdle made of cane painted red which hangs down behind in a long bushy tail. But this observations and descriptions of Dalton cannot be accepted as totally correct. Of course textile making as an industry did not flourished at that time but weaving culture among the people was very much existence for climatically people of the Miri-Mishmi countries could not afford to live without cloths and warm blankets during winter. The women are expert in weaving and weave variety of beautiful cloths for both men and women. In fact weaving of colourful traditional dress is the sole identity of the Mising community. Mising women usually use two types of looms i.e., mini loom and common ordinary loom. The mini loom is used for weaving Gadu or Mirijim, Mibu galug or Mising galug etc. This mini loom can be used even during leisure hour because of its simple and portable features.

Another important economic activity of the Misings which is exclusively done by the Mising women folk and is an integral part of cultural tradition of the Misings is the preparation of Rice bear which is locally popular as 'Apong'. Apong is widely popular drink in the society prepared and consumed by the Mising people as a part of their culture.

Apart from common cultivation, the Mising community practices a system of private cultivation among the female members of the same family which is popularly known as 'Ríkséng aríg'. This is a system where young Mising women cultivates crops like mustard and other pulses in a small and separate plot of free land. The earnings from 'Ríkséng aríg' solely belong to the female members of the family and they generally buy ornaments and other valuables things to be use in times of marriage and other special occasions. Thus, they reduce the burden of the family to a great extent by earnings by themselves with their hard labour.

The economic activities discussed above are outdoor economic activities and indoor economic activities which are also exclusively done and managed by the women folk includes food processing and preparation, washing utensils and cloths, looking after pigs and fowls, infants and children etc. Threshing of paddy is mostly done by the female member of the family in front porch of the granary with legs or by beating with wooden stick. However, threshing of paddy with the help of cattle is usually done by male member of the family. But if male member is not present at home or busy in other work, female member of the family gives helping hand. The most striking features of Mising society is that the organization of work among the women is based on age and generation by which they are positioned in the kinship structure.

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 Do:lungKébang which is an association or an organisation for discussion of various problems or important issues of a village or more. The various issues and problems which are discuss in the Kébang are related to developmental activities, settling disputes between two or more persons, between members of family or between two or more families or inter-village disputes etc. In this Kébang both the male and female members of the society takes 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 Ya:me. This organisation is a benevolent organisation and the young unmarried men and women of the village are its member. In this organisation welfare activities are discusses and performs by the youth of the village. Through this organisation the youth perform various developmental activities

and other social works in the village. For instance, whenever a family is in difficulty and want of manpower for sowing or harvesting of paddy, construction of house or any occasions like marriage or death ceremony, the young men and the young women of the village come together and finished the task free of cost. However, sometime they are paid for their service which they deposit and uses for welfare activities and feasting. This type of rendering physical labour is called Abír Gínam. Thus, this is the most important and powerful socio-political organisation where the Mising women enjoys equal power and rights along with the men folk.

This 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 womenfolk are not allowed to sit in the same row with the men folk or with the Mibu during performing rituals and sacrifices. The womenfolk are always placed in secondary position and they have to perform the task of cooking and serving. There are some religious ceremonies which are performed only by the male member of the society.

In the political field, the most important organisation is the Kébang, The proceeding of the Kébang is presided over by a elderly village headman called Gam. The position of the Gam is always occupied by the elderly male member of the society and women are not allowed to occupy this position. Further, the women folk are usually not consulted in arriving any important decisions concerning the village or the society although they are allowed to attend the meetings. However, as discussed above, the women folk have equal rights with the men folk in discussing and taking decision in some political organisations especially in Mimbir Ya:me organisation.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, in conclusion we can say that the Mising women plays an important role in all spheres of life i.e. social, religious, economic, political and other socio-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.

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 as laid out in the objectives of the Constitution 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 the Central Government can announced and implemented various development schemes and programmes in the Mising society then it also should reflects the development and upliftment of the Mising women in the society because without development and improvement of women, the community's half population, it will not be possible to bring development and progress in the society. Moreover, if Mising women are to find their rightful place in the society then along with the government, the NGOs, social scientists and policy makers can also emphasizes on the condition and role of the Mising women and the need of equality in the society irrespective of caste, creed and class. However, it has not been done so to the extent due to deep seated monopoly of the male chauvinism policy in the society. Therefore, the study of role and socio-economic status of Mising women as discussed in this paper has not really come about because gender policy of the government have remained primarily unchanged due to the above mentioned problems in the Mising society.

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