

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN MISING (MIRI) COMMUNITY OF ASSAM - AN ANALYTICAL EXPLANATION.

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Abstract:—

Mising is the second largest tribal population of Assam, mainly the rural inhabitants. Like other womenfolk of developing nations, most of the Mising women are engaged in primitive economic activities and work hard to fulfill the day-to-day necessities and to uplift their economic status. This paper highlights the role and status of women in the educational sphere and the participation of womenfolk in farm and non-farm activities like agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, sericulture, horticulture, and other activities such as weaving, etc. They earn sufficient money through these activities which are called the private property of womenfolk. Hence, this paper tries to focus on women's roles and status of Mising community in socio-economic and other allied sectors. In Mising community outdated agricultural practices, lack of basic infrastructure, lack of proper marketing mechanism, exploitation of middlemen, lack of credit system, village money lending system, lack of economic empowerment, lack of leadership quality, illiteracy, poor health status, and natural calamities like perennial flood are the main obstacle for the economic development. It is worth mentioning that the women's role in the Mising community is notably very poor in every aspect. They contributed to every day-to-day socio-economic life for family or community. But the Mising women's Status in socio-economic aspect is still lower than the men folk. Hence, this paper attempted to highlight these all aspect.

Keywords:- Mising Tribe, Women Role and Status, Tribal Women,

Introduction:-

India is a country of diverse ethnicities. Among this diversity, the Mising is a prominent ethnic community inhabited particularly in the state of Assam. There are various tribes in Assam amongst them Mising (Miri) community is one of the second largest plain tribes of the state. As per the 2011 census of India, the population of Mising tribe is 680424 out of which 334638 are female and 345786 are male. In Mising community it is a patriarchal social structure. Usually, patriarchy means male dominion over women. In such a state the division of labor between males and females is highly visible even though it is a universal phenomenon. In every type of society it tribal, modern, or industrial society males and females perform more or less different tasks in day-to-day life. The sexual division of labor is the delegation of different tasks between males and females. Sexual division of labor can be defined as a separation of labor along the lines of gender. Usually, men remain engaged in bread earning activity, and of course, women also participate in economic activity but that is not considered as prime duty. Their primary duty is to look after the household work such as cooking, washing, cleaning the room, feeding domestic birds and animals, nurturing children, and so on. Though women are engaged in economic activity and assigned lighter jobs, like planting, weeding, harvesting, etc. But whereas men folk are assigned the risk and heavier tasks like clearing jungles, felling trees, carrying heavy loads, etc... In modern industrial society, women in general are engaged in performing physically less heavy jobs than men. Which denotes that more women remained confined to unpaid domestic work. Thus in every type of society men and women play a different role in family and social structure and their role defines their status positions in social structure. However, it needs to discuss the meaning of role and status before going inside the main themes of the study. In sociology two frequently used terms are role and status. Each person in every society has some task and responsibility and performing it smoothly can be called a role. According to the changing social division of labor, the tasks of individuals are divided into two such as doctor, laborer, soldier, teacher etc.... and performing these as assigned to everyone could called a role. On

the other hand, the term status refers to positions signifying a degree of prestige, deference, or respect that its occupant enjoys. Thus, it is the expectations of the role performance of an individual. In the status positions of teacher for instance a teacher is not expected to play a student's role. Status thus is often distinguished from and related to other positions through its assigned rights and obligations. Hence, this paper focuses on or will highlight the role and status of women in the Mising community in socio-economic and other allied spheres.

In every social system, basically in third world countries men and women performed the differential roles in socio-economic spheres. Misings are also no different from it. Basically in Mising society, women are engaged in domestic tasks or play a household role while male are engaged in productive and other economic tasks. In social life, women do little in matters of collective or community interest. The differential role pattern in domestic and community life of both men and women however is not the same in every social system. As in economic aspects, men and women mostly remain preoccupied with some economic activities. In general male daily life is devoted to activities that earn something for a living. Such tasks can't performed equally by men and women in all social systems. It is, therefore, important to understand the role difference of men and women in the economic and social life of different cultural groups. So, here an attempt has been made in this chapter to understand the socio-economic role and other applied sectors of women.

Objectives:- The major objectives of this paper are mentioned below:-

1. To analyze Mising's women's role in socio-economic, religious, and other social functions.
2. To analyze the Status of Mising's women in family and community and other decision-making proposes.

Mising's women's Role in Socio-economic, religious and Social Life:-

Family is an institution and basic kinship unit of social organization. In Mising society there are also two types of family systems there is joint family and the nuclear family. But, in the present times due to the emergence of a complex socio-economic situation the traditional joint family structure gradually declining and nuclear structure becoming popular among the new generations, especially among the elite sections. However, there is still a large number of joint families are there in the village areas, although not exactly in traditional forms. Thus now both joint and nuclear families are found in Mising community. In Mising community women basically play a role both in the family and as a whole community. Like other communities, there are also multiple kinds of occasions, where every member participates as a matter of custom and traditions. Occasions like religious celebrations, marriage, and other relief work. On occasion women's participation is not the same at all; there are different occasions to occasions following discussions.

Religious Functions: - There are sets of religious beliefs of a given community manifested and performed based on such beliefs. The divisions of functions between men and women largely rely on such belief. In many other communities, women are believed to be impure by menstruation. During such periods women are deprived of participation in such religious events. In Mising community also believes at same. So during the period of menstruation women are not allowed to participate in any religious events. But, significantly if the menstruation occurred just a night before holding any religious function then it would be immediately canceled and held after the period of menstruation is over. But on usual days the participation of women in such functions is very important without their participation such an occasion can't be held. So, women played a very important role in religious events. There are major religious functions of the Mising community are the UromApin or Dodgang (a funeral ceremony), Urom (ancestral worship), Di-sag or Pitsag promissory oblations), and Dobur (a sacrifice spirit worship), etc. these are held as prescribed by custom and traditions. Besides these traditional rituals, the Mising also performed some other religious functions.

In religious functions, women performed entire indispensable tasks. They not only do the chores but also serve the male participants. There can be regard that man not performed at all except offering blessing. The rituals are initiated by "Satula" and after that woman partner of "Satula" holds

up the Apong (rice beer) and offers it to his mouth. This is followed by the other Bhakots and their respective female partner in the same manner. Thus the functions could not be held without women's participation. So women's active participation in religious functions held by either family or community is indispensable.

But it is important to note that women can't become a "Satula". She neither leads the rituals nor offers blessings and seeks the blessing of the deities. In the traditions, women could not be a MIBU (A seer). Besides these women are not allowed the enter Do:bur Ui is strictly prohibited. They believe that childbirth also populated a family as long as the baby is not taken out of the home for the first time birth and the rituals are not performed for the occasion, as observed during menstruation periods. It is believed that their entire village gets populated by menstruation and childbirth of women in the village. So it is unable to recognize menstruating women why entire women keep away from the Dobu Ui. This Dobur Ui is performed both in family and community. But while women can't enter places where community or village Dobur Ui is performed, their participation in family Dobur is indispensable. In such functions, women also play a significant role.

Role in Collective Social Activity: - In the Mising community there have been some provisions of collective labor, Such as "Rigbo" and "Dagleg". Here will focus on the collective role performed by women. Rigbo is a collective labour rendered to a family by its fellow villagers. If there is a family unable to perform or complete their harvesting or cultivation then they invite the villagers. In response request, one member from every family is sent to the inviting family for a day and they form a group and freely perform tasks of that family. Thus the Rigbo is collective help to a needy family by the fellow villagers. The sex-wise participation is based on the nature of the work to be performed. Whether it is for weddings or harvesting traditionally assigned to women. There are several kinds of in the same village in a year where women have more roles than men. Their help is sought for more variety of jobs, like weddings or harvesting and preparing Apong for religious and social functions. Thus women have more extensive roles than men in community life.

Role in Community Festival: - Mising community observes two traditional festivals i.e. Ali-Aye Ligang, Po:rag. Besides they also observe some other festivals like Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu, Magh Bihu, and several other festivals. Ali- Ali-Aye-Ligang is the annual crop-sowing folk festival of the Mising community. It is celebrated on the first Wednesday of the month Fagun (February). They used to sowing-crop in the middle of February. To mark the beginning they used to celebrate the occasions with some ritualistic functions and merry-making. Mising basically an agriculture-based community and they observe lots of festivals but not the same as Ali- aye-ligang (simply Ligang) observe on the same day with the same manners. So they regarded it as a national festival of them. Agriculture is the source of livelihood for Mising tribes. They have been surviving for immemorial time. So they started sowing crops by celebrating this festival. For these occasions, womenfolk become busy in preparations of food and drink quite ahead of the day. They started preparing Apong and other essentials for celebrations. Apart from exchanging goodwill among the families of the villages, Ligang is celebrated by offering food and drink to the family visitors and merry-making by the young boys and girls. For these, the preparation is responsible for women. They offer Apong, smoked fish and Purang (pocked boiled rice), etc... which are important food items for the occasions are ready in the time. They receive guests and family visitors with the items of delicious food made by them. Men folk bother a little for these participations although it is their job to provide required materials.

As stated earlier the festival celebrates for start of sowing seeds and it is customarily performed by the head of the house. But the women have to make seeds and allied materials like a mixture of ginger, smoked fish, Apong, etc. ready in a basket for the purpose. During the celebrating festival males move across the villages eating Purang and drinking Apong, whereas women hardly can move to immediate neighboring houses as they stay busy receiving guests and serving them. Thus women play more extensive roles than men in celebrating annual festivals in Mising society. Po:rag is also a huge festival of Mising community lasting for five days. For this purpose huge arrangement is made which involves a considerable amount of money, labor, and time. At this festival, the guest is invited

from a particular village where maximum youths and other elder persons of the villages are attended. The items of this festival same as Ligang festival. So female members of the youth organizations are given the responsibility of rearing pigs for Po:rag. It's also their duty and responsibility to preparation of Apong, collections of food materials, cook, and serve the guests. The girls participated in group dance led by Mibu (priest) in the functions. In this festival, the inviting village guests welcomed through singing and dancing in which girls must participate. Thus from welcoming and serving guests women have to perform all the jobs. During the days of celebrations, entire village becomes festive. Hence women play a great role in their community life.

In addition to their traditional festivals, the Mising also celebrated Bihu which is the annual festival of the non-Mising Assamese community. Every year Mising people celebrate three bihu, namely, Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu, Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu, and Kati Bihu or Kangali regularly with entertainment and merry-making. During this Bihu season, women become busy preparing to celebrate Bihu. In Bohag Bihu there is a custom that new towels are presented by womenfolk to elderly male relatives, friends, and young girls to their lovers on the occasion of Bohag Bihu which is a New Year celebration. The towel must be homemade by women. So women are engaged to prepare all these things. In Bhogali Bihu women also play a significant role. They have to prepare dig-out yams, sweet potatoes etc. boil them, and prepare all other sweet items related to the festivals. The Kati Bihu women play a significant role. On the day of celebrations, women light oil flames of cotton in barks of elephant fruits in front of the house and in the paddy field. Thus this is generally done by womenfolk. Hence, it can be said that womenfolk of the community play a major role in observing various festivals.

Women's Role in Family:- In Mising communities generally or traditionally prefer joint families. Though in modern times some prefer the nuclear family, there are still a large number of joint families in Mising community. Mising women keep themselves busy in their day-to-day life. It's a fact that women's life is burdened with countless loads of work. This process starts from childhood. After she has the ability to look herself, a girl needs to take care of her younger brother or sister. Her mother assigned the duty to look after them and go for the work. Sometimes they send them to others for work if her parents are poor. Hence, in fact, the girls in the family enjoy less freedom but take more responsibility. After the become adolescence, the girl needs to help her mother with her domestic work so that she can learn them efficiently. During this age girls undergo the training of domestic work under the guidance of their mother. So they engaged in the morning to before bad. The women prepared a traditional delicious strain of Apong (rice beer). Once or twice a week, she is to prepare Apong. The Mising have two varieties of rice beer which are called Poro Apong, the black variety, and Nugin Apong, the white variety respectively. After the marriage women in Mising society have to play a very significant role in running the family. It is a custom that newly married women must leave bed earlier in the morning than all other members of the household and get them up by starting to find rice. But before doing so, she is to fill all the jars with water so that every member of the household does not find them empty. It is a customary practice that a newly married woman is not entrusted with the responsibility of cooking meals but has remained busy with countless chores in assisting elder women. They also go to paddy fields. On returning from the paddy field, she carries a bundle of firewood on her head and her on the baby if she has. As soon as she reaches home, she has to be busy in feeding pigs and another task. In most villages of the Mising community women basically keep themselves in different tasks in the evening more than men. In fact, the men folk get release from the burden of daily work after the sunset. But women remained busy with various domestic works till late at night. Thus women's role in a Mising family is more significant than that of men.

In the contemporary context, some changes take place in the activity of the Missing women. As observed and studied in two villages, women are no longer engaged in the hard and laborious works like rice pounding, grain threshing, load carrying, etc. Nowadays paddy grain is milled for which hauler machines are available in rural areas. Formerly women used to collect wild vegetables, leaves, firewood, etc. from the forest. But now forests are not around Mising village and therefore, the

practice has been given up. Now the collection of firewood has become responsibility of men folks as it has to be collected from either a market or far place forest. And moreover, in recent times the traditional joint family structure has been broken into the nuclear family...couple preferred separating themselves from the family immediately after the marriage and starting to live in an independent nuclear family. In such family, domestic chores become less as the number of members becomes limited. Thus women get relieved from work in day-to-day life. Besides, in the changing times Mising parents are also realizing the importance of education. So parents are sending their children to school and college of education. They no longer send girls to carry babies on their backs and to remain at home as babysitters.

Women's Role in Economic Spheres: - The livelihood source of the Mising community is agriculture and their economy is also mostly dependent on agriculture. In the remote past when the Mising used to live in hills, they practiced Jhum cultivations. And later they adopted the settled cultivations after migrating to the Plains of Assam. After that they grew in the plains were paddy, mustard oil seeds, pulses, yams, and varieties of local vegetables. Mustard, pulses, and opium were then grown mostly as cash crops. At present Mising basically produce only mustard oil seeds, garlic, and pulse as commercial crops. Their cash income depends largely on the production of these crops. But, in present, some Mising people are also engaged in non-agricultural occupation which has been gradually emerging in Mising community. Like in other community, Mising also has the provision for allocations of tasks. Thus, allotted tasks between men and females are also availed in the Mising community. The economic works which the Mising women performed refer to cultivation, weaving, and livestock keeping. The women of Mising community during the cultivations of Jhum Kheti played a vital role. In this system, women were to clean the ground after burning the cut-down trees and harvesting was exclusively done by womenfolk. Thus Mising women could not considered only as spouses of men folk but also engaged in the labor force in agriculture productions. Even now, if the crop is paddy, especially of Ahu variety, seeding is harrowed and thinned by the men folk and the women weed out the unwanted herbs when they sparsely grow. Right from that stage onwards till harvesting, women are expected to bear the responsibility of looking after the crops. In the case of other crops like, mustard oil seeds, pulse, etc. harvesting and threshing and all other associated jobs like winnowing, cleaning, etc. are done by women.

Besides Mising shows two types of property systems i.e. one is family property and private property. Family property is for all whereas private property is only for women. Besides the common cultivations for the family as a whole, they also cultivate for the private paddy like mustard oil seeds, pulse, tomatoes, and chilly for the commercial purpose. This is called "Rikseng Arig" (private cultivations). And sell it for the private earning to buy their ornaments, clothes, cosmetics and other individual needs. But in recent times the system of private cultivations is disappearing fast from the community. Now very less women are cultivated for private earning. This may be due to the shortage of suitable or fertile land for such cultivation. Because of population explosions, land has become scarce even for family cultivation. Rearing animals and birds is also another important economic activity of Mising women. Every adult girl rears pigs, fowls, and goats for her own private earnings. These birds and animals have good markets in the villages. In every worship chicken, pigs, and fish are required. For small-scale rituals, chicken is enough. But in large-scale rituals, pig is a must and fish is only a supplementary requirement. Besides every community ritual or festival, these items are must needs. So these are very demanding in the Mising community. Now the demand for these items increasing in every market.

Weaving is another important job that every Mising woman is expected to do. It is a traditional job for them. Every Mising girl is expected to be an expert weaver. Thus weaving skill is an important qualification of Mising girl for marriage. Because in the past a girl not good at weaving was least preferred for marriage. Even before settling in the plains, the Mising women used to weave clothes for entire family members. Because during that time there were no sources to get clothes. Mising women relieve their men of purchasing blankets by weaving kinds of warm clothes called Gaddu. So they had to be self-dependent on all requirements for living including clothes. They also

weave colorful clothes, such as Gerom, ege gasor, niseq, dumer etc. are popular varieties of cloths they produced. So in the present context, their produce cloths are able to get at national and international levels for business purposes. Although every Mising woman does not weave cloths for sale, some of them have adopted weaving as a means of earning income.

Mising Women's Status in Socio-economic, and others social spheres:-

Indeed, the existence of society always relies on social relationships. Interaction among individuals is essential for social relationships. In any interaction situation, everyone is not expected to respond to the stimulus in the same way. Because everyone has his own different identity which is already there even before entering the social institution. For instance, in an institution one needs the consent of his\ her immediate senior and he also needs consent from immediate senior in the same way for any institutional matters. Thus everyone entered in social institution with an identity. Simply this identity refers to his position or status. This status is a hierarchical position. It's a position in a social group in relation to other positions held by the individuals in the group. Hence the status of people might be lower, higher, and equal to each others. Through the rights and opportunities enjoyed by individuals or groups can be identify the status of the people via compared to each other. So, an attempt has therefore been made to understand the status position of Mising women. The analysis is based on rights and privileges enjoyed by the women of the community in different spheres of daily life.

Property Rights:-

The property right is a very exclusive and basic necessary right of every individual in social life. Without this right, no one can live with dignity. Some political or sociological thinker rightly defined that without economic or property rights the political and social right is meaningless. Basically in the present context of changing society status measured on the basis of property. On the other hand, in an open class system, a large amount of property person enjoys a high social status. Thus property becomes an important determinant of social status. In traditional Mising society property of the family consists of land, livestock, agriculture, etc... Besides, the Mising have two kinds of property system – one family property and the other private property within the family. The family property is owned jointly by all family members of the family. The private property is owned by individual female members of the family. They rear domestic birds, animals like chickens, pigs, goats etc. and produce mustard oil seeds, potatoes, and some commercial crops for private income as personal property which is called Rikseng. These income women are used to buy their own personal needs like ornaments, clothes, and other necessities. The male members work for the whole family. Whatever they do is for all family members. So the question of privacy does not arise for male members. The female members also participate with males in agricultural activities but female members can't claim the family property. The family property is absolutely under the control of male members of the family. In the case of a nuclear family, the husband is the owner of the property. His wife can't claim to share equally though they earn equally.

The inheritance of property is turned into a patrilineal order. Thus the property shared from the father to his sons, not his daughters. In case of the death of widower, if he has no sons but all daughters, his property is enjoyed by his unmarried brother. So, the surviving male members automatically retain the ownership of family members. But the problems arise in the case of the nuclear family in which there are no other male members except the head of the male members of the family. So after his death right to own family properties goes to the widow and his daughter. But such cases are very rare in the Mising community because they generally live in a joint family. So in any case the property right is monopolized by male persons in Mising community. The women have rights only to the properties that they receive as a gift at the time of marriage and which they individually earn by themselves through the Rikseng system. But someone extremely lost this property also. The family property basically vested in the hands of a male person. Only a few

numbers of women can share family property and it also can be said that those who are able to share family property are educated.

Status in Social Sphere: - In the Mising community the women play a vital role in social life. In this agriculture-based society, women are contributed in every aspect. It rightly can state that the Mising women are comparatively performed household tasks rather than other community women. But, on the contrary in the case of social, political, educational and political aspects it seems less progress than other community women. Here its focus is to analyzing the social status of women in Mising community. The right to participate in the decision-making process is one of the determinant elements of status, without such rights one can't enjoy any status positions in the social structure. In the Mising family system is based on the principle of patriarchy where the father or oldest male member is the head of the family with whom the final authority of the family matter is vested. He is the final authority to decide the decisions on any matters that concern the family as a whole. But, in fact, the head of the family holds the discussion with female and other members of the family. According to the Mising tradition, this is the ideal role of the head. Female members are also consulted but mostly in raising crops, marriage, and holding religious and social functions but, not on property matters. But, all the opinions of others can be ignored in the final decision but, their opinion is not considered as essential for deciding any family matters. In almost every village there is an institution which discusses and makes decisions for the community. The nature, power, and functions of such institutions vary from society to society. In Mising such institutions known as "Kebang", that is council. This is democratic by nature. Every adult member of the village may be a member of the Kebang by birth. The head or presiding person of the Kebang is called "Gam". Any elderly wise man of the village who are expert in the customs and traditions, and personal integrity is selected as Gam. A village Kebang functions as a legislative, executive, and judicial body. It enacts laws for the village community, executes decisions, and settles disputes. But in all these processes, only men have right to participate. Women may attend the session of the Kebang but not with the right to participate but as an appellant or the witness of the case. Hence, women have no right to participate in decision-making process in the community or public matters. Thus, with respect to rights to participate in the decision-making process in family and community matters, Mising women are inferior to men.

Privileges:- Privileges refer to some social benefits socially granted to a person or group occupying a particular status position in social structure. Those who are of higher social status enjoy more privileges than those who are in lower-status positions. Thus the privileges enjoyed by the person or group of persons indicate the status positions in social structure. In Mising society, women enjoy little or no privileges and are always treated as subordinate to men in all respects of social life. In this, all the domestic tasks are performed by the women, not by men at all. Women must serve food and drink. The male members of the family remain waiting to be served by female members. Thus, women have to serve the male people as per their customs. According to Mising custom, women would not sit in the same row as men in the house. In Mising societies, houses are called as "Sa:ng Ghor" (Kitchen) which are horizontally divided into two parts. It's divided through fire-places in each room; i.e. "Ri-sing" (upper) and "Koktog" (lower). The place Ri-sing is the place for sitting elderly men and respectable guests and the Koktog are for women, young children, and inferior in social positions, Ri-sing is meant for sleeping, keeping important materials, and holding rituals. Thus, it's regarded as a superior as well as a sacred part of the entire house and the Koktog is meant for washing utensils, cleaning foodstuff, preparing drinks, and keeping all day to today's necessity sorts which are used in various works. So, Koktog is considered an inferior part of the house. Thus who have the privilege of sitting in Ri-sing are treated as superior in terms of social status and this privilege is denied to women. Even the female members who have high social status, well-educated, and respectable service are not seated exactly in the same row as the male person on the Ri-sing side. She can seat in the Ri-sing area but not in the same line as the man. This division applies to all social functions. In religious matters also, Mising women are denied privileges though

they perform all the preparatory jobs from the beginning of the functions to the end. Men performed only the priestly part of the whole rituals whereas women couldn't perform any part of the priestly role. The women can't become a Satula (priest) or Mibu (Seer). Their task was to do the chores and serve the male participant by food and drink. They are not entitled to shower blessings. Thus, in the case of religious functions males enjoy higher privileges than women. They are treated as helpers and subordinate to men.

Conclusion:-

Thus, it has already been stated that womenfolk of the Mising community play a very significant role in family and social life. 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. But the positions of Mising women in the domestic and social life are not up to the expectations the way they contributed in all fields. Thus, the whole questions of socio-economic role and status of Mising tribes is a matter of traditions and belief. The traditions of the present role pattern and status assignment emerged in certain compulsive situations of living in the process of social development.

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