

## HANDICRAFTS IN ASSAM AND ROLE OF MISING TRIBE: A STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

*Sonaram Kalita*

*Research Scholar, Department of History, Panigaon OPD College, Panigaon, Lakhimpur, Assam, India*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The topic has been analyzed on handicrafts practice among Mising Tribes of Assam due to focus them in society for their active role in the measures of traditional products. In fact, traditional art and crafts are succinctly seemed in the universal economic agenda i.e. from the incipient age of civilization the people practicing their need based handicraft items. It is seemed that the Mising tribes are also taking initiatives to sustain their production for household activities and they have one of the peculiar characters in the work culture in the tribal society. They know to do all type of work either cultivation, household, horticultural or handicrafts where mostly preoccupied with economic validation. Accordingly an attempt has been made to understand such tribe's economic role of the Mising society. The first part of the topic will focus on a historical overview on specific area. In the second, the topic will focus to understand the role to improve in a reliable socio-economic life and try to disguise the difference of man and tribe in production of livelihood measures. In the third, it will highlight how to Mising women participate in the employment generation, redistribution and innovation in the pace of modern. Although, these tribe of the section are adversely dominated by men as well as for keeping them as a household wife, but in the comprehensive study the quantity of works are large than a man. Lastly it will highlight on education which is the most important for the sustainable handicraft production and this topic will be drawn some new conclusions at the end.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Tribe Empowerment, Traditional Craft, Production, Generation and Redistribution, To Hold the Picture of Socio-Economic Status*

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### **Article History**

**Received: 09 Mar 2020 | Revised: 25 Mar 2020 | Accepted: 03 Apr 2020**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional art and crafts are succinctly seemed in the economic agenda of the world i.e. from the incipient age of civilization the people practicing their need based handicraft items. In fact, the Mising tribe are the first and foremost particular groups who accept karkhana system in Assam, those implemented by Mughals in India helped in the cluster method in the development of handicraft production and redistribution upto nook and corner of the state. The impact of this cluster production entered among the tribal groups of all regions in the state. The Mising community in Assam was their exceptional living in the mostly peripheral and river alluvial land where they have earned their fundamental need by themselves. Hence, after the plough agriculture introduced, the people started their permanent settlement and cooperation. The labour division after the initiating food economy in societies, the marriage practice was started due to connect the agriculture and horticulture. Mainly the tribe is related with the practice of horticulture. There were some substitute practices in continuation with agriculture and horticulture those handicrafts to sustain the fundamental needs of people for shelter, clothing, feeding. It is found that in every social system man and tribe have similar contribution to the economy of

a state. But tribe are exceptional in the present time in context of their role in household apart from the traditional role is also attempt in this topic. In a comprehensive study, it is seemed the Mising tribe has one of the peculiar characters in the work culture at the tribal societies. They know to do all type of work either cultivation, household, horticultural or handicrafts where mostly preoccupied with some economic activities. In general, major part of once daily life is devoted to activities that earn something for living. Such activities are not performed equally by man and tribe in all social systems. In some systems tribe perform different types of jobs from those of men and in some other systems not much difference are maintained in economics activities. It is, therefore, important to understand the role difference of man and tribe in economic life of different cultural groups. Accordingly an attempt has been made in this chapter to understand the tribe's economic role of the Mising society.

In the remote past when the Misings lived the hills, they practiced jhum cultivation. Tilling of land by a cattle-drawn plough was unknown to them in those days and slash and burn method of agriculture was the only method for them. This system of production continued even after day settled in the plains. Jungles were cut down and let to dry; and then were burnt. Seeds were then shown without tilling the soil. In this context, Dalton said, "This tribe have with few exceptions confined there cultivation to the alluvial flats bordering on the large rivers. They cut down the trees, but do not remove them, and then cutting and burning the brushwood, they hoe up the ground between the trees and plant in it everything they grow, rice, opium, a little cotton, maize, millet &c., for two or three years in succession, when they think the soil in exhausted, and then they leave it and go over the same process elsewhere. The observation of Dalton precisely sums up how the Misings operated agriculture in jhum method not only in the hills but also in the plains for centuries until they started settled cultivation with adoption of cattle drown plough. Like any other society, the Misings have also tradition of work allocation for tribe. The works allotted to them may be categorized as household or domestic or economic works refer to cooking, cleaning, feeding domestic birds and animals, tending children, serving men folk and all other domestic chores. The economic works which the Mising tribe performs refer to cultivation, weaving livestock keeping. In jhum cultivation, tribe's role was considerably significant. In this system, tribe were to clean the ground after burning the cut - down trees, hoe the ground, plant seeds, weed out the herbs, look after the crops, chase of animals and birds and so on. Harvesting was exclusively done by the tribe folk. Thus, the Mising tribes were considered not only as a spouse of men folk but also as a labour force in agricultural production. They were considered essential for viable economic life.

The Mising tribe pursues the handicrafts as a part-time occupation to produce the cloth required by each family, but they detest production on commercial basis. However, it is found that the professional weavers are rare. The implements of weaving which were and still are common in almost all the Assamese families are quite few in number, Besides various types of looms, ugha, chereki, mako, Chitraranjan weaver instrument, spinning wheel, neothani, etc., are some of the accessories required for weaving. As many as twelve types of looms are said to be in use in the State which may be broadly grouped under four categories, i.e., Throw Suttle Loom, Loin Loom, Pit Loom and Fly Shuttle Loom. The first one is found in almost every found in almost every Assamese household while the second one is in common use among the hill tribes. Te Bengali weavers who have migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) mostly use Pit Loom. The Fly Shuttle loom which is recent introduction is an improved type of frame which considerably increases the output of the weavers. Historically, it is found in India is the oldest cotton producing centre of the world; it was famous in the world for its craftsmanship in cotton weaving and dyeing. It is seemed that the art of cloth printing also India had earned a name for it at the age old handloom industry in India has passed through several historical and political developments. In this topic an attempt has been taken to study the origin, historical growth and development especially in handloom sector.

## **OBJECTIVE OF TOPIC**

The main objectives of this Topic are-

- To examine the demographic, economic important of Mising tribe in Assam.
- To find out the types of handicrafts production in Assam and participation in handicraft making, selling and business.
- To evaluate how Mising Autonomous Council take initiative toward the economic advancement of Mising Tribe
- To study and examine the role and status of Mising tribe involves in handicrafts production with particular reference to their empowerment issue.

In fact, the handicraft is the most important income generation of India in terms of providing employment to backward and down trodden people, maintaining the heritage and culture of the country, contributing in export sector. The historical development of civilization have been brought the culture of dress-wearing from the origin and past glory the handloom industry may be better termed as a time honored cottage industry. The evidences reveal that handicrafts plays very significant role in particular economy in respect to tribe's rights and opportunities to own resources, education and participation in gainful employment, access to credit and savings in the family as in society. The Mising tribe are mainly involves to a greater extent in weaving, livestock's development, horticultural management, fishing, traditional dress and cooking food, and working in the field.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Having the historical incognitos, it is found that in the recent time study on tribe has received a great deal of attention throughout the world. Many studies have been meanwhile conducted in different countries dealing with role and status. A vast literature has been developed on this aspect of tribe's participating in the handicraft practice are devoted a small number of scholars. Dr. Jawahar Jyoti Kuli in his Book 'the Mising their history and cultural' portrayed about the history of Mising, migration and socio-culture life. Including language and literature like wish their socio-cultural changes in the present context are also comprehensively and identity in North-East India composed a number of Articles on the tribal society and their problems indentify crisis of National groups etc. Presently, the Misings of Assam came into modern education only during the concluding decades of the 19th century. Prior to the advent of the British in Assam in 1826, the Misings were totally ignorant of modern education. It was only during early decades of the 20th century that the Misings people started getting modern education. Charu Chandra Doley and Muhi Chandra Miri (Patir) were the first Arts and Science graduates from the community in 1926 and 1927 respectively. These two pioneers of the Mising society along with their friends worked hard to popularize education and launch a reform movement in the Mising society by forming a conference called Miri Sanmellan in 1924 which was subsequently re-designated as Mising Bane Kebang. Generally, the presidents of its open sessions were invited from non-Mising educated elite and the speeches delivered by them left enormous impact on the common masses. As a result, the Mising tribe began to realize the importance of modern education. Many books and articles based on research have been published on tribe issues.

## **HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Weaving is another important job that every Mising tribe is expected to do. It is traditional job for them. Every Mising girl is expected to be an expert weaver. In the past, a girl not good in the weaving was least preferred to marriage. Thus,

weaving skill\* was an important qualification for a Mising for marriage. Even before settlement in the plains, the Mising tribe use to weave clothes for entire members of the family. In those days, it was an indispensable job to meet the requirement of cloths for them as there was no other source to get clothes at that time. In the past, the hill dwelling people were completely out of modern market economy. So, they had to be self dependent in all requirements for living including clothes. As such, tradition of making clothes developed in them and the tradition is still carried on although the Misings are now completely exposed to modern mill-made clothes extensively. Yet the tradition of weaving has been maintained. Rearing animals and birds is also another important economic activity of Mising tribe. Every adult girls rears pigs, fowls and goats for her own private earning. These birds and animals have good market in the villages. In every worship chicken, pig and fish are required. For small scale ritual, chicken is enough. But for large one, pig is a must. Fish is only a supplementary requirement in most of the rituals. The Mising like any other tribes of the reason were completely agriculturist in the past. They could never think of non agricultural occupation except selling some of their product for gash incomes in those days. They sold livestock and some of their veracities of cash crop directly to the buyers.

The beautiful handicrafts fabrics show the creative genius of individual weavers whom tradition has made brilliant artisans. Traditionally, the skill in the art of weaving and spinning has always been held to be one of the highest attainments of an Assamese woman. In comparison with such context in case of the marriage proposal it is seemed that the proficiency of the would-be bride in Bowa-kata, i.e., skill in spinning and weaving is counted highly. During the rule of the Ahoms, elaborate arrangements were made for keeping in the 'Royal Store' sufficient quantity of clothes of different varieties for presentation to foreign courts and dignitaries<sup>1</sup>. It is also found that until the beginning of the present century the whole of the cloth requirements of every Assamese family were secured from the family handloom. But with increasing competitions from mill-made cloth, the family handlooms now supply only special varieties of clothes for tribe and for social and religious purposes. Even then in rural areas, women still depend on home-made clothes woven from mill made yarns. After this the handloom clothes produced mainly to the family needs, there is very little trade in hand-woven clothes therein.

During the British Period Indian cotton and silk goods could be sold for a profit in the British market but at a price 50-60% lower than the cost at which the British goods could be produced as such, to be able to dump the cloth produced by their Lancashire and mills in India and to prohibit Indian exports to England. India was converted into an importer of cotton goods from England from 1813 to 1830 which is not enough to depict succinctly the tribal production during the British rule, or even resorted from the barbaric production of Indian artisans. Moreover, this traditional craft of India is alive even today and Indian artisans is stood the test of the time and have kept this great craft alive despite various hardships they have had to face. This traditional craft possesses inherent vitality and great potential which is not enough to prove that. It is also help in maintenance of cultural heritage demands that this traditional art of our country should be preserved. It can be considered that India is the birthplace of cotton manufacture, and it is as old as our human civilization. From that time the hand spun yarn and the hand woven cloth has been handed over from one generation to other generation. Development of the Handloom Sector through Govt. Programs during Pre and Post Reform Period, the government of India initiated many promotional programs for the growth and development of Handloom Industry. The government's attention was drawn on Agriculture by the Royal commission in 1928 and the Commission recommended the need for the development of village industries on co-operative lines. It is necessary to survive of rural industries to face the increasing competition from the organized sector. The industry seemed to have faced a period of adversity perhaps due to the disturbed fortunes of the ruling kings and nobility in olden times. It could not thrive well during the British regime as

the latter did not take any interest for the progress of this Tribal people particularly for Mising Community in the State. But after independence by efforts of then government have begun to make good progress in the livelihood measures for the peripheral villages and riverine inhabitants. Mostly, the rearing is done to meet the requirements of the family though there are a few professionals who practice it more or less on commercial lines.

Presently, Mising Autonomous Council, Mising Takam Porin Kebang, Mising Gana Sakti etc. are ample proof for the development of tribe artisans in the handicrafts production. The North East Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation set up in 1977, has initiated a number of steps to promote the growth and development of handloom and handicrafts in Assam. Towards this end, the corporation supplies raw materials and working capital to the handloom sector and provides facilities for the marketing and the handloom products. Under this guidance, handloom and handicraft products from the North East have been displayed in various trade fairs and exhibitions held in festival market. For the benefit of these weavers, training programmes, construction of work sites, supply of looms and other schemes have been taken up. District Industries Office is at the core of the village industries programme as same and undertaken by the Assam Khadi & Village Industries Board. It is now generally recognized that all of the development programmes under those organization is the most essential to restore the balanced socio-economic growth. It is seemed that the Board is trying to replace the traditional implements with the improved ones and to introduce improved methods of technique so that the rural artisans may increase their productivity.

## **FINDINGS OF THE TOPIC**

- The handicraft habits among the Mising tribe require more training and up gradation of knowledge of entrepreneurship at par with modern trend keeping the traditional aspects in totality. It may be mentioned that the Mising tribe subsists primarily on agricultural economy based on production of cane and bamboo materials.
- Tribe should be given necessary support to create interest for involvement in handicraft sector of the state. They would have certain impact to make them more organized to solve their own problems. The rice is product mainly for domestic consumption where mustard seeds and pulses are produce for commercial purposes. They are hard worker than men.
- Mising family is livestock namely fowls, pigs, goats etc. Economically they are one of the weaker sections of the Assamese population. The actual burning problems are demanded by the local inhabitants. Corruption plays an important role and public fund is misused.
- Area is mainly flood affected, where many time, seasons do not allow for progressing the schemes. They are basically agro-based and more than 99% busy on agriculture. Due to heavy erosion, flood stands as road closer for permanent construction. Annual repairing become major syllabus for the year and in the name repairing fund is not properly used.
- Political leaders enjoy more privileges due to ignorance of the people. People are not interested in official correspondence and major part of the people does not know about the proposed scheme or fund position where the area is very backward and no newspapers, T.V. i.e. comfortable communication. Departmental inspection, proper audit would have to be need to control/check the misused of fund.
- Training, seminar, workshop, public meetings are badly required for sustaining major issues.

- State government should strictly scrutinize the activities of Council and public allegation should be honored and due to lacks of education the people are not cooperative for which they feel uneasy to express their demerits. Traditional belief is another important burning issue, which directly or indirectly impact on socio- economic condition.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the above all it is found that handicraft reached a very high point of perfection under the Government. For this the Mising tribe should come forward and under such a context the positive role of family, society, state are very essential to generate and sustain the process. It is found that Assam silk was produced on trees and the stuffs made of them were very brilliant amongst the Tribal people. It is seemed that how to run successful handicrafts with sustainability is a matter of concern for every new person in the field of entrepreneurship. It is easy to open an enterprise but equally difficult to sustain it. A weaver should always keep in mind some important aspects. It should be remembered always that an enterprise runs well because of the employees and its consumers who benefit from it. They should look in to the following points to respect profession, respect and reward employees, demonstrate constructive criticism to our employees, offer appropriate salary, give yearly incentives through salary hike, be polite to our handloom entrepreneur. Socio-economic development is one of the measures at present context of India.

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