

## EMERGING TRENDS IN WOVEN TEXTILE FABRICS DESIGNS OF TRIBAL MISING COMMUNITY IN ASSAM

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### ABSTRACT

The textile designs and motifs have symbolic significance and they indicate a heritage of people and their beliefs. The Mising people are the second largest tribe population in Assam. The art of ornamenting handloom fabric of the Mising community is an age-old traditional technique and custom from time immemorial. Symbols in textile motifs play an important role as a mirror of human cultural tradition. The Mising weavers portray their dreams into reality on various dress items with color threads. These designs can be categorized broadly as floral, plant, animals, structures and geometrical. The most attractive point of Mising textile design in fabrics is the contrast and combination of different colors chosen, expertly with significant meaning attached to such designs. The woven designs of the Mising textile design are almost exclusively of an angular geometrical type and there occur formal arrangement of lines and bands to elaborate patterns of diamonds or triangular decorations. However, there is a tremendous wave of change in the Mising textile design in the last few decades, in order to meet the changing demands and lifestyles. An attempt has been made to study the Mising textile design in woven fabric and its emerging trends in present status.

**KEYWORDS:** Designs, Mising, Textile, Woven Fabrics

### INTRODUCTION

The textile design in Assam is symbolic of the different tribes and ethnic group of the region. The development of a particular kind of art or design in a region is related to the historical continuities, religious cults, immigration of artisans from other places and contract of cultures.

Few countries in the world have such an ancient and diverse culture as India. India's North- East is strikingly different compared to other parts of the country. Folk-lore in North-East India indisputably forms an invaluable part of the literary, cultural and historical tradition of our country (Singh, 1985). Clothing is used to fulfill personal needs; it also communicates the human conditions, traditions and values of a society (Kefgen and Specht, 1981).

Assam is a land of various tribes and communities located over the entire span of the state. The Mising, a well-known community of the Mongoloid stock linguistically belonging to the Indo-Tibeto-Burman language family are the second largest tribe population in Assam. The Mishing or Mising also called 'Miri' are an ethnic group inhabiting the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam. The textile designs and motifs have symbolic significance and they indicate heritage of people and their beliefs. The identity of the Mising as a distinct ethnic community is deeply embedded in their folk cultures and traditions. The art of ornamenting handloom fabric of the Mising community is an age-old traditional technique and custom from time

immemorial. Handloom industry plays an important role in the socio-cultural and economic life of the people. It is one of the major ways of earning livelihood next to agriculture. However, there is a tremendous wave of change in the Mising textile design in the last few decades in order to meet the changing demands and lifestyles. In order to understand the age old Indian traditional textiles, a study was carried out on the Mising textile design:

- To identify the traditional costumes and the textile designs in woven fabrics of Mising tribe of Assam.
- To study the emerging trend of Mising textile design in woven fabrics.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mising dominated areas of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji District of Assam. Following purposive sampling method, elderly women and women weavers were selected as the respondents. An appropriate interview schedule was prepared according to the objectives of the study for data collection. The information collected was represented with the help of photographs. Existing literature available in various journals, books, websites, etc. related to the topic has been consulted with a view to develop a broad theoretical framework of the present research, in the right perspective. The conclusions of the study are drawn on the basis of the results derived from the data analyzed and personal experience gathered through the field visits and observations.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The Traditional Costumes of Mising

The costume is a distinct mark of tribal identity. The missing costumes are very colorful and embellished with intricate motifs and designs. Mising tribe has its own pattern of clothes, and thus an individual can easily be identified by this dress. Costume means manner of dressing, wearing the hair, and in later time to dress. It is the mode of fashion of personal attire and dress, including the way of wearing hair, style of clothing and personal adornment belonging to a particular nation, class, or period (Anon., 1933). Different types of apparels and fabrics of Mising tribes are made on their handlooms with simple implements and equipment. By way of systematic analysis, the various costumes worn by the Mising men and women may be divided into the following units:

- Traditional dresses worn by Mising men.
- Traditional dresses worn by Mising women.
- Traditional ornaments, headgear and Utility articles worn with the dress

### Traditional Dresses Worn by Mising Men

*Mibu Galuk* is a front opening sleeveless jacket, with stripes of designs over the back and waist available in different colours. The back side of the *galuk* is attractive due to artistic works. It is worn by all the male folks on special occasions or festivals and social, cultural functions. *Gadu Galuk* is another form of jacket woven with thick cotton threads suitable for winter. *Jinrek or Tongali Dumer* is a waistband woven with motifs of flowers, bars and diamonds designs in red colour at both ends. It is tied as a girdle at the waist over *Galuk* and *Gonro Ugon* (dhoti). *Tapum-Gasor (Eri Shawl)* is a shawl worn in winter and it is woven in hand spun eri silk yarn. *Erpob* is a muffler woven in red colour with different colours of stripes. *Gonro ugon or dhoti* is worn on socio-cultural and religious functions. Simple artistic designs are woven thin on the both ends.



**Figure: 1: Left To Right (Mising Youths Wearing Colourful Traditional Costumes,  
Woman Wearing a Gero, Colourful Mekhela Chaddar or Ege-Gasor Worn At Ali-Aye-Ligang)**

### **Traditional Dresses Worn by Mising Women**

*Ege* is a lower garment, worn from waist to ankle level and two or three folds are given at the front waist. Mising women use different types of ege such as Mosang ege, Geging ege, Tapum ege, etc. *Mosang Gasoris* an upper garment worn with the mosang ege. The color and design of the museum gas or are similar to the mission Ege. *Gero* is used to tie around the waist and chest on top of *ege* (mekhela). The design is woven in the center of the cloth with coloured threads on white background and sometimes woven on black background. *Sori Potali or Rumbu* is similar to *Gero*, except that the body in this case is woven in check with red, black and white colour. *Segreg* is mostly used by the old ladies at home wrapped around the bust. *Ku: Pobis* thin and fine textured fabric used by grown up girls to wrap around the body beneath the armpits covering the upper part of the body. *Seleng Gasor* is woven out of light cotton yarn worn occasionally instead of a *Ri: bi* or a gaseng. *Pe: Re* is also a type of Gero. The cloth is designed with narrow stripes of red, black, yellow, green and white colour with black or green border. Stripes of red colour predominate to give out a reddish appearance of the cloth. *Ri: Bi*: Woven with different stripes, such as red, yellow. The stripes are distributed throughout the body at regular intervals. Simple designs of zig-zag lines and diamonds with red coloured threads are woven at both the ends of the cloth. Worn by the young girls on top of Ege on special occasions such as Ali-A: ye-Ligang, Po: rag and other important cultural functions. *Gaseng* is similar to *Ri: bi* gasor but different in colour combination. It is basically made with red coloured thread giving intensively red look. Narrow strips of black and white thread are sparsely woven in transverse direction over the body of the cloth. Floral and geometric designs with red coloured threads are worked at both the ends of the cloth. It has important cultural significance and used by both male and female as shawls on special occasions *Nesa: g* is a plain check material woven without design. It is used to carry a baby, tied to the back by a woman while at work or during travel.

### **Traditional Ornaments Headgear and Utility Articles Worn with Dress**

The dress and ornaments form a constituent element of human culture. Their history is as old as those human beings itself. It seems quite certain that dress evolved not only to fulfill a need for warmth and decency, but also express an inward love for beauty. (Sahay, 1973).

Mising women are fond of various types of ornaments. The earrings worn by the ladies are called *Kentus*. Different kinds of kentus observed are- *birbiri*, *takar*, *jangphai* and *thuria* or *turi*. Neck ornaments are called *Doksari*. Several kinds of Dogsari are used by the Mising women. These are *tapi*, *golpata*, *tapilang*, *sumyalaksin*, *Dogne*, *Jonbiri*, *Gujarat*, *maduli*, *dugdugi*, *chains (tadok)*, and different type of bracelets (*konge*). *Dumar* or *Merpung* is also used for headgear by the males as turbans and females used *Dumpun* to decorate their hair by making hairballs (*khopa*). *Bapun* is made with different colourful yarns. *Sagon* is a small bag made of leather or woven with cotton or wool

having certain motifs is carried by man folk. *Payag* or handkerchief is carried by women with a knife, in which they put betel nut for use while going outside.

### Mising Textile Designs in Woven Fabrics

Weaving is the exclusive preserve of the Mising women who start their training in this craft before they reach their teens. The wide range of textile product reflects the mastery of Mising weavers; it is a traditional craft, which they have been nurturing since time immemorial. The most attractive point of Mising textile design in fabrics is the contrast and combination of different colors chosen, expertly with significant meaning attached to such designs.



**Figure 2: Mising Woven Fabric Designs Left To Right 1<sup>st</sup> Row (Garogamic, Lakshinghai, Korai or Potom) 2<sup>nd</sup> Row (Kongar, Case, Ghaigamic, Lekegamic)**

Figure 2: illustrates that the unique feature of Mising textiles is bright color combination, elegant designs and motifs. The chief characteristics of Mising design is the use of geometrical shapes in the form of triangular shapes and diamonds along with bands of lines. These contain the curvy and the wavy lines which may represent the hilly areas and the rivers moving in zig-zag ways. The zig-zag ways are more common in *gaseng*, *galuk* and *ribi*. Some interpretations of the designs vary from village to village, and the simple triangles were regarded as the mountains which are broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. The dotted designs represent the footprints of small birds on a sandy riverbank etc. The *Ghaigamic* is seen mostly in triangular or diamond patterns. Some of the patterns are named as Kachighai, Korai or potum, Katari, Panjok, Tipan Apun, Tigurgamic, Lekegamic, Capsonmosang, Peke or Desu etc.



**Figure 3: Gadu or Miri-Jim (A Quilt Made Through Loin Loom)**

### Gadu

The Mising also make a very special textile called Gadu, a hand-woven quilt popularly known as Miri-jim that is fluffy on one side and woven on a traditional loin loom. It is extremely intricate and time-consuming work made by ginning and spinning of pure cotton fibre. The warp is cotton spun into thick and strong yarn and the weft is spun into soft yarn, cut and inserted piece by piece to form the fluff. Generally the cloth is first woven in narrow width and then two pieces of such cloths are stitched together by hand. This particular form of quilt is very heavy and disappearing due to the ready availability of inexpensive blankets in the market. Nowadays this piece of work is modified by the artisans and

commonly done on blankets, mattresses and floor coverings. The work is known for its beauty, excellence in traditional designs and durability.



**Figure 4: Motifs of Mising Design 1<sup>st</sup> Row (Zig-Zag, Triangular, Deer or Dumso, Bird or Peke) 2<sup>nd</sup> Row (Butties, Tree Motif, Diamond and Fan Motif, Fisheye Motif)**

Figure 4: illustrates that the motif in the Mising designs reveals their closeness to the nature. The main items of floral motifs are flower, tree, bird, creeper and fish, etc. The expert artisans construct a draft copy for weaving called *Mimang* (chaneki) or *Gamic* (design). The Mising weavers portray their dreams into reality on various dress items with color threads. The butties, generally seen in the Indian traditional textiles are woven into Mising textiles in the form of star or flowers, which appear all over the women’s costumes. The designs generally consist of geometrical patterns in various forms of birds (peke), deer, horse (Dumso), butterfly, and sprays of flowers, star, and trees in a number of combinations. Floral butties on black background is often compared to the night sky. Continuous diamond forms and waves feature very prominently in the borders of Mising textiles. The colours used in Mising textiles have significant meaning related to nature, such as black represent darkness, blue represents sky, green represents green the nature.

**Emerging Trend in Mising Textile Design**

Fashions change from year to year, there are certain customs or Folkways, concerning clothing which, although may change in time due to fashion, nevertheless prevail in any given cultural group over a long period of time. There are customs or Folkways relating to location as well as time of day (Ryan, 1966). The emerging trends are analyzed in the following ways as:

**Role of Cottage Industries**

The study found that a gradual disappearance of handloom weaving as a household craft has been marked in recent years. But, the craft of weaving Mising textile designs in Assam still continues, with the growing cottage industries as a living craft and as an integral part of Mising culture. Skill development and upgradation of the artisans have adopted diverse design elements to complement the use of orthogenetic design in order to keep the products interesting and in demand.



**Figure 5: Training on Design Development in the Fabric and Skill Up gradation in a Cottage Industry (Chandana Industry at Lakhimpur District of Assam)**

In figure 5, it shows that the growing cultural awareness about the specific indigenous textile items and training the youth for skill development plays an important role in keeping the textile tradition alive. Moreover, it provides livelihood to the rural economy. The commercial endeavour among the Mising weavers is leading to the evolution in the design and structure of the traditional garment of the community.

### Contemporary Textiles



**Figure 6: Contemporary Textile Items Left To Right  
(Clutch, Wall Hanging, Shirt, Kurta, Cushion Covers)**

Figure 6: reveals that the Changes in the motifs and designs from traditional geometric to recently adopted innovative and vivid patterns are noted. With the influence of modern society, the various items have been prepared or made by using different traditional and contemporary textile items, which include the Mekhela-chaddar, shirt, wrapper, shawl, sari, pillow cover, napkin, table cloth, salwar-kameez, jacket, rug, bed cover, drapery materials etc. These have created many original ideas and satisfied his inner yearning to express it in visual form. In some cases, the innovative category of motifs does not contain any symbolic meaning. A harmonious blending of traditional designs and colors are still being maintained and used in the different Mising textiles items. While other have by and large switch over to the contemporary designs of more vivid and symbolic nature, but the traditional Mising textile designs having symbolic meaning are still in demand.

### Marketing Initiatives and Influence of Mass Media



**Figure 7: Woven Products of Mising Textile Designs Displayed: From Left to Right  
(At Local Market by Chandana Bastralay, at a National and International Trade Fair (IITF)  
By Karpungpuli (K) Society of Lakhimpur District of Assam)**

It was found that the products of Mising textile designs on woven fabrics were provided a marketing platform via state, national and international trade fairs and exhibitions by the government and non-government organization. E-marketing is a growing platform for the manufacturers, designers, retailers and the consumers. Moreover, due to impact of mass-media (television, internet and mobile phones which is available now) on the younger generation, it has influenced them to contemporize their design and dressing style. Thus the Mising textile designs on woven fabrics have played an important role in the upliftment of socioeconomic scenario of rural Assam in great extent.

## CONCLUSIONS

Diversity in Mising textile forms is astounding and it represents rich cultural heritage. Mising weavers painstakingly create designs on textiles for everyday and occasional wear. Within the Mising societies, weaving textiles and designs on textile reveal a deep symbolic nature that encompasses their culture. It also has social implications with regard to gender and status. The beautiful costumes and hand woven products of Mising tribe of Assam reflects the skill as well as the creative capability of the weavers. The study found that the motifs and designs were inspired by nature, their belief and folklore. However, the younger generation was unaware of the symbolic meaning of the designs. It can be said that, there never was a pristine or an unchanging Mising society, while Mising in the present 'exotic' setting trying to adapt them effectively. Rather, we may discern the ways in which Mising ethnicity is being actively and consciously remolded in the present era.

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