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### A Study on the Agricultural Festival of the Assam's Mising Tribe

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#### ABSTRACT

The tribal communities in North-East India celebrate many festivals associated with agriculture. Some festivals are celebrated at the beginning of the cultivation. Some traditional festivals are celebrated wishing the growth of the crops after the farmers are done with plantation. On the other hand, many post-harvest festivals are also celebrated. These festivals reflect the unique culture and tradition of every tribe. Misings are one of the remarkable tribes of Assam. They belong to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. Similarly, from the linguistic side, they are part of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family, the second largest linguistic family of the world. The Mising tribe primarily depends on the agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, like all the agrarian societies in the world, the Mising society also revolves around the rituals, beliefs and tradition associated with the agriculture. The festivals of the Mising tribe derive from such popular beliefs and rituals. Ali-Aye-Ligang and Po:rang are two major festivals of the Misings. Ali-Aye-Ligang marks the beginning of the cultivation. On the other hand, Po:rang is a post-harvest festival. This paper analyses these two festivals of the Mising tribe.

#### 1. Introduction

The human civilisation has developed through various stages. The advent of agriculture brought many changes to the ancient human society. The permanent human settlement began with the beginning of the agriculture. Agriculture is a complex activity compared to hunting and gathering. It involves preparation of the land for farming, sowing and harvesting. These activities are long, uncertain and tiring. Therefore, it requires patience, beliefs and far-sightedness. The agricultural activities are mostly dependent on the nature. The weather

always poses a challenge to the farmers. The attacks of insects or pests also create problems in the farming. To get relief from these challenges and wishing the crop growth, the ancient agrarian societies used to worship the agricultural fields with songs, dances and various offerings. Every human society considers the earth as mother. They found a connection between the children and grains or agricultural produces. They believed that fertility of the land will be increased if the mother earth was satisfied. Therefore, diverse rituals and tradition originated in various societies of the world for the gratification of the nature. The agricultural festivals derived from these popular beliefs and rituals. The tribes of North-East India region also celebrate various agricultural festivals. Like all the agrarian societies in the world, the society of the Mising tribe in the North-Eastern state of Assam also revolves around the rituals, beliefs and tradition associated with the agriculture. The festivals of the Mising tribe derive from such beliefs and rituals. Ali-Aye-Ligang and Po:rag are two major festivals of the Misings.

## **2. Analysis of the topic:**

Ali-Aye-Ligang is the most prominent agricultural festival of the Mising tribe. This festival is celebrated for fertility of the land and abundant harvest. The meaning of the word 'Ali' is potato-like root vegetables or legumes. 'Aaya' refers to the fruits or seeds. On the other hand, Ligang means beginning of sowing. So, this festival signifies the onset of sowing. The development of agriculture of the Mising tribe can be divided into three phases.

- (a) Ali-Ayno or Jhum cultivation
- (b) Semi-Jhum cultivation
- (c) Permanent farming

Ali-Aye-Ligang is celebrated on the first Wednesday of the month of Phagun. The Mising people regard Wednesday as holy. So, most of their festivals are celebrated on Wednesday. Though Ali-Aye-Ligang is celebrated on the particular Wednesday of the year, the preparation begins before a fortnight. Po:ro apong (a type of rice beer) are served in Ali-Aye-Ligang (also known as Ligang). Since, preparation of this rice beer requires ashes, so arrangements are made much before the particular day of the festival. In the ancient times, people used to go for hunting before the Ali-Aye-Ligang. The meats of the preys were distributed among all the villagers. The pieces of meat were kept dry. Later, the tradition of community fishing also evolved. The fishes were also dried. Because, dry fishes or meats are regarded as an integral part of this festival. On the day of Ali-Aye-Ligang, the girls and women prepare rice (Aampi Aambrin or Bora Chaul) covered with leaves. This rice is called Purang or Purang Aapin. Various curries including black lentils, dry fishes are served with Purang. Oil is avoided in the curries. According to the popular beliefs, the crops get dried or diminished before they are reaped if oil is used.

'Lriggad' or sowing are done in two ways—community and personal. Earlier, Lriggad was done by the families separately. Now, this activity is carried out collectively. On the other hand, some people take part in both the means.

The dance performed in the Ali-Aye-Ligang is called 'Gumrag Pakach.' The songs (Ni:tom) are known as 'Brirog Ni:tom'. The meaning of Brirog Ni:tom is

the festive songs. After the rituals of sowing are done, the young men and women dance Gumrag Pakach in a circle. The youth organise Bihu at night. They perform Bihu songs, Oi ni:tom or Aaliaay. In the Bihu of Ali-Aye-Ligang, importance is given to the dance than the songs. In this Bihu performance, the female dancers represent various activities like hunting, fishing, reaping crops, weaving etc. They participate in this event wearing traditional attire. An example of Brirog Ni:tom is given below:

“Lo: lo: lo: lole: lole:

Daboi lole: lole: lole:

Disug sugab sugab badia

Rowgam gamb gamb bodia.”

(We are elated to get together here. Like the deer becomes happy when he meets the mate, the people of society are also overjoyed today to meet their companions) (Regon, Durga; Ali-Aye-Ligang:Iyar Baisitya, 126)

The beats of the drums performed in this festival are different from that of other festivals. According to the popular belief, if Gumrag is not performed or Borkanh (Bel metal instrument) is not played in Ali-Aye-Ligang, the seeds do not grow. A special event called ‘Lriglen’ takes place on the last day of the festival. The rice beer and parts of the food cooked for this festival are offered near the fireplace. Following that, everyone enjoys the rice beer.

Po:rag is another major agricultural festival of the Misings. This festival is observed in the months of Aaghon and Phagun. It is not mandatory to celebrate Po:rag every year. It is celebrated after the gap of 3-4 years according to the conveniences of the villages. This festival is celebrated post-harvest. It is also known as ‘Nora Siga Bihu.’ Though Po:rag is celebrated from Wednesday to Friday, in many places, its celebration lasts for five days. It is primarily a festival of young boys and girls. For Po:rag, Murangghar (A recreational point or house for the youth) is of utmost importance. The young boys of the village build this Murangghar before a year of the festival. The young boys and girls meet at this house and form a committee prior one year to Po:rag. ‘Migom Bora’ and ‘Borpuwori’ are the top positions of this committee. Young boys and girls from other villages are also invited to this festival. They are termed as ‘Minom’.

All the preparations including collection of money, meat and Aapong are done one year before Po:rag. This process is called ‘Daglik’. One member from each family needs to take part in this process of collection. The first day of the festival is called ‘Isang’. On this day, the Migom Bora and Borpuwori are welcomed to the Nigamghar with a procession of dance and songs. They take part in the rituals of Isang. They welcome the Minoms (Guests) to the Murangghar. The Minoms perform dance and songs on the first day. The process of filling rice beer in Pobor (A bamboo pot) begins from midnight. A Chang (bamboo platform) is made to pour the beer. Migom Bora and Borpuwori along with the guests and villagers make five rounds around the Murangghar. Then Migom Bora and Borpuwori pour the rice beer from the bamboo platform. Following that, everyone starts to sing hymns. After that Agomannam (Offering of pigs) begins. Offering the pig to the god, the

villagers pray for the well-being of the village. The Isang or the first day of the festival ends.

Po:rag is mostly celebrated for five days. Arrangements for food and drinks are made for this festival. On the first day, Minoms are served and given farewell. The women who are married to other villages are invited for the feast on the next day. They come with their husbands. They also bring Aapong (rice beer). On the third day, the daughters-in-law of the village are served with the feast. All the villagers take part in the feasts of fourth and fifth days. Meat and rice beer are essentials for this community feasting.

On the last day, when the feast concludes, the villagers accompany the Nihom Bora and Borpuwori to their homes with dance and musical performances. On that day, they serve pork and rice beer at their cost. This festival strengthens the unity and ensures cultural exchanges among different villages.

### **3. Conclusion:**

Like other tribes of Assam, the livelihood of majority of Mising people is farming. Ali-Aye-Ligang and Po:rag are directly associated with the agriculture. While Ali-Aye-Ligang marks the beginning of sowing, Po:rag is a post-harvest festival. These two festivals reflect the rich culture and tradition of the Mising tribe.

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