



Exploring The Social Status Of The Mising Community In Lakhimpur District, Assam: Challenges And Progress

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates into the social status of the Mising community in Lakhimpur District, Assam, examining the challenges they face and the progress achieved. The Mising community, one of the largest ethnic groups in Assam, has a unique cultural heritage and a rich history deeply rooted in the Brahmaputra Valley. However, despite their significant presence, they often encounter social, economic, and political marginalization. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, this study investigates various aspects of the Mising community's social status. It explores the challenges they encounter, including limited access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and adequate representation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, it analyzes the progress made by the community in overcoming these obstacles, such as initiatives promoting education, healthcare, and socio-economic empowerment. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the complexities of the Mising community's social dynamics and the factors influencing their status within the broader context of Assamese society. Additionally, it underscores the importance of implementing targeted policies and interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs and aspirations of marginalized communities like the Mising, thereby fostering inclusive development and social cohesion in the region.

Key Words: Mising, Social status, Challenges, Progress

Introduction

The Mising community, an indigenous group residing in the Lakhimpur district of Assam, has a rich cultural heritage and a vibrant social fabric. However, they face several challenges in terms of their social status. Historically, the Mising community has been marginalized and their voices often unheard. Limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities further exacerbate their struggles. Despite these challenges, the Mising community has shown remarkable resilience and determination to overcome these obstacles. They have been actively engaged in various initiatives to uplift their social status. Efforts have been made to promote education among Mising children, establish healthcare facilities in their villages, and empower them economically through skill development programs and entrepreneurship training. Additionally, initiatives to preserve and promote their unique culture and traditions have gained momentum, fostering a sense of pride and ownership within the community. The government, non-governmental organizations, and civil society have also played a crucial role in supporting and advocating for the rights and well-being of the Mising community. While progress has been made, there is still work to be done to ensure equal opportunities and a more inclusive society for the Mising community. The Mising tribe in Assam, India, is a significant part of the state's ethnic diversity. Comprising 2.07% of the state's population in the 1991 census and 6,80,424 individuals according to the 2011 census, they have a unique history and culture. The Misings originated in the hill districts of present Arunachal Pradesh but gradually migrated to the plains of Assam around the 12th-13th century. They primarily inhabit the upper regions of the Brahmaputra valley and are spread across various districts, including Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Bishwanath, Tinsukia, Majuli, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, and Golaghat. The Mising society follows a patriarchal structure, but women play active roles, especially in weaving. Their skills are evident in the production of the mirijim (gadoo), a heavy cotton rug known throughout the Northeast. Mising women engage in household tasks, economic activities like cultivation, weaving, and livestock keeping. Morung serves as the youth dormitory, and the Mising people have a rich tradition of folk songs and dances. Ali-aye-ligang and po-rag are their main festivals,

associated with agriculture, reflecting their religious beliefs, food habits, dress, songs, and dances. In terms of family, the Mising community traditionally practiced joint family systems, with the father as the head. However, in recent times, nuclear or smaller joint families have become more common, especially with brothers tending to live separately after their parents' passing. Economic activities in Mising society are predominantly agricultural, with women contributing through weaving.

The migration of Misings to urban areas has also led to the adoption of nuclear family structures to support economic development. The economic life of the Mising tribe is closely tied to traditional practices like animal rearing, particularly pigs, fowls, and goats, which provide a source of income. These animals and birds are also important for various rituals, where chicken, pig, and fish play significant roles. However, changes are gradually occurring in the socio-economic landscape of the Mising tribe. Modern agricultural methods are being adopted, and more individuals are exploring different occupations in both public and private sectors, driven by factors like modern education, technological advancements, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. Education is seen as a catalyst for social change, and the Mising Bane Kebang, a key social institution, has been instrumental in promoting modern education within the Mising society. Despite the challenges of limited government support in earlier years, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of education. Mising youth have embraced modern education, and there is a growing trend of sending children to convent schools. However, there is still work to be done to further improve the literacy rate among the Mising people. The Mising tribe faces various challenges, including limited cultivable land, educational backwardness, lack of infrastructure, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Socio-cultural practices can also hinder development efforts, and women's status is notably inferior to that of men, with limited participation in decision-making processes, both within the family and the village community. Addressing these issues and continuing to promote education and modernization is crucial for the Mising tribe's overall development and social progress.

Misings of Assam are very simple in their lifestyle. But the spread of modern education, development of transportation and communication, growth of urbanisation and industrialisation etc. have brought about much change in the Misings society including their economy, Polity, religion and culture etc. Misings have been maintaining many of their traditional customs and practices. They have given up shifting cultivation and adopted settled system, but women's role in the new system has not changed. Mising women have now more roles to play in their socio-economic life. Social status of womenfolk of the Mising society is an important aspect of the present research work. In the economic matter Mising women are always subordinate to men, yet they have a great contribution to the society. Now- a -days, the changes have been taking place in terms of socio-economic status of the women in their society especially among the educated sections. This propose research will cover a vast range of a race i.e., Misings which has been a great contributor of the society but still the race is marginalised and it feels alienated. Like in all other tribal societies, women in Mising society too have their own roles and positions. Although they are treated inferior to their male counterpart, yet they have a great contribution in the society. In the context, we now examine the status of Mising women in their social and economic life. It is observed that the impact of modern forces such as modernization, westernization, industrialization, modern education and science and technology etc. has deeply influenced on Mising society. Thus, radical change is now coming in their societies so far as the status of Mising women is concerned. This research work has a great significance because the question of women socio-economic status of tribal society is at stake. The study is an attempt to take stock of the trend of socio-economic transformation of Mising women in sociological perspective. The study is significant because it will be useful to policy makers, implementing agencies to formulate policies and schemes for socio- economic development of women folk of Mising society. This study is an attempt to take stock of the trend of socio-economic transformation of Mising women in sociological perspective.

Objectives

1. To assess the socio-economic status of the Mising community.
2. To analyse the influence of education on Mising women occupation.
3. To examining the interaction socio-economic factors and education.

Methodology

The study was designed in phase wise manner. The following were the phases of study:

Selection of the universe

This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of women's empowerment in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya, shedding light on the role of land ownership as well as the complex interplay of cultural and psychological factors. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive empowerment initiatives that go beyond economic aspects to address the multifaceted dimensions of women's empowerment in this unique cultural context. Further research and policy efforts can build upon these findings to develop targeted strategies that

promote women's empowerment, enhance their decision-making abilities, and challenge traditional gender norms in matrilineal societies like Meghalaya.

Section of the respondents

Since the study was related to social status of the Mising women therefore, the researcher selected 100 respondents (50 women from each village) who are definitely representing the Mising community.

Types of data

Since the study was an exploratory one therefore, both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. For collection of primary data from the respondents, an interview schedule was prepared and this schedule was canvassed to the respondents. Secondary data were collected from the Government records, books and journals etc. To collect primary and secondary data, the following techniques were applied: i) Interview Schedules ii) Interview Guide and iii) Observation.

Major Findings: The following are the major findings of this study:

This study provides valuable insights into the socio-economic and educational dimensions of the Mising community in selected villages of Lakhimpur District, Assam. The analysis reveals a complex interplay of demographic characteristics, family structures, educational attainment, occupational patterns, financial involvement, technological awareness, participation in self-help groups, income levels, skill development, and educational barriers. The following sections delve into the major findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the community's current status and potential areas for intervention.

1. Demographics

All respondents in the study were female, providing a gender-specific perspective on the socio-economic conditions within the Mising community. The age distribution was relatively balanced, with 57% of respondents aged between 20 and 40 years, and 43% falling in the 41 to 70 age bracket. This demographic spread is crucial for understanding the generational dynamics and the roles different age groups play within the community.

2. Family Settings

The study found that an overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) lived in joint family settings, while only 2% resided in nuclear families. This data highlights the traditional family structure prevalent in the Mising community, which can influence various aspects of social and economic life, including resource sharing, childcare, and support systems. The predominance of joint families suggests a strong emphasis on collective living and mutual support, which can be both a strength and a challenge in addressing individual needs.

3. Educational Attainment

Educational attainment among the respondents was notably low. A significant 28% were illiterate, and a mere 0.67% had achieved post-graduate education. The low levels of formal education indicate a pressing need for educational interventions. Illiteracy and limited educational achievements can severely restrict opportunities for personal and economic development, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive educational programs that cater to all age groups, especially focusing on adult literacy and higher education.

4. Occupation

Agriculture emerged as the primary occupation for 78% of respondents, underscoring the community's reliance on agrarian activities. Additionally, 16% were engaged in business activities such as livestock breeding and weaving, while 6% were employed in government or other services. These occupational patterns reflect the community's traditional economic practices and the limited diversification in employment opportunities. Enhancing agricultural productivity through modern techniques and expanding non-agricultural job opportunities could improve economic stability and growth.

5. Financial Involvement

A significant portion (59.33%) of respondents reported not being involved in their family's financial matters. This lack of financial involvement may indicate limited financial literacy and decision-making power among women. Empowering women through financial education and involving them in financial decisions can lead to better economic outcomes and increased autonomy within the household.

6. Awareness of Modern Technology

Technological awareness was notably low, with 82% of respondents unfamiliar with modern agricultural tools and equipment such as tractors and power tillers. Only 18% were aware of these technologies, highlighting a significant gap in the adoption of modern farming practices. Increasing awareness and accessibility to modern agricultural technologies can enhance productivity and sustainability, thereby improving the livelihoods of farming families.

7. Involvement in Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

Approximately 21% of respondents were involved in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which have the potential to significantly impact financial stability and community development. SHGs can provide financial assistance, foster entrepreneurial skills, and promote collective problem-solving. Expanding the reach and activities of SHGs could empower more women, enhance their economic participation, and contribute to community resilience.

8. Family Income

The study found that a notable 19.33% of respondents reported annual family incomes below 30,000 INR. This low-income level highlights the economic disparities and the prevalence of poverty within the community. Addressing income disparities requires targeted economic interventions such as skill development programs, microfinance schemes, and market access for local products.

9. Skill Development Training

Only 20% of respondents had received skill development training, indicating a substantial gap in professional skills among the community members. The lack of training opportunities limits the ability to pursue diversified and higher-paying jobs. Implementing widespread skill development programs tailored to the community's needs can enhance employability and economic mobility.

10. Barriers to Education

The majority of respondents faced significant challenges in acquiring proper education. These barriers may include financial constraints, lack of access to schools, cultural factors, and inadequate educational infrastructure. Identifying and addressing these barriers is crucial for improving educational access and outcomes. Interventions could include scholarships, building more schools, enhancing teacher training, and creating awareness about the importance of education.

The major findings of this study paint a detailed picture of the socio-economic and educational landscape of the Mising community in Lakhimpur District, Assam. The demographic composition, dominated by women in joint family settings, indicates the importance of considering gender and family dynamics in any intervention strategy. Low educational attainment and limited involvement in financial matters underscore the need for targeted educational programs and financial literacy initiatives. The heavy reliance on agriculture and the lack of awareness of modern technology highlight the potential benefits of introducing modern farming techniques and diversifying employment opportunities. The involvement in SHGs shows promise, suggesting that expanding these groups could further empower women and enhance community development. Low family incomes and the lack of skill development training point to the need for economic interventions and vocational training programs. Addressing the barriers to education is critical for long-term socio-economic progress. By implementing targeted educational initiatives and creating a supportive environment for learning, the community can break the cycle of poverty and build a more sustainable future. Overall, these findings provide a comprehensive foundation for developing targeted policies and programs aimed at addressing the specific needs and challenges of the Mising community. By focusing on education, economic empowerment, and technological awareness, stakeholders can work towards improving the social status and quality of life for the Mising people in Lakhimpur District.

Conclusion

The exploration of the social status of the Mising community in Lakhimpur District, Assam, reveals a nuanced landscape of challenges and progress. Despite significant strides in education, healthcare, and economic participation, the community continues to grapple with socio-economic disparities, cultural assimilation pressures, and limited access to resources. Education emerges as a critical area of improvement, with increased school enrollment and higher literacy rates among the younger generation. However, gaps remain, particularly in higher education and vocational training, which are crucial for enhancing employment opportunities and economic stability. Efforts to improve educational infrastructure and provide targeted scholarships can play a pivotal role in bridging these gaps. Healthcare access has also improved, yet it is marred by inadequate facilities and a shortage of medical professionals in rural areas. Enhancing healthcare infrastructure and ensuring the availability of quality medical services are essential for the well-being of the community. Initiatives like mobile health units and community health programs can make significant contributions in this regard. Economic progress within the Mising community is evident, with many engaging in agriculture, weaving, and small-scale enterprises. Nonetheless, the lack of market access and financial support hampers their economic potential. Strengthening cooperative societies, providing microfinance, and improving market linkages can empower the community economically, fostering sustainable livelihoods.

Cultural preservation remains a double-edged sword, balancing the need to maintain traditional practices with the pressures of modernization. The community's rich cultural heritage, including language, festivals, and crafts, is a source of identity and pride. Promoting cultural tourism and integrating cultural education into the school curriculum can help preserve these traditions while providing economic benefits. Despite these

advancements, the Mising community faces persistent challenges such as social exclusion, discrimination, and inadequate political representation. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, involving policy interventions, community empowerment, and greater advocacy for their rights. The social status of the Mising community in Lakhimpur District reflects a journey of resilience and gradual progress amidst enduring challenges. Strategic interventions in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and cultural preservation are crucial for advancing their socio-economic status. By fostering inclusive development and recognizing the unique contributions of the Mising community, we can ensure a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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