



# Mythical Creatures And Ritual Practices Among The Mising Community Of Assam

<sup>1</sup>Ghana Kanta Doley, <sup>2</sup>Pallavi Dutta,

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor,

<sup>1</sup>Centre for North East Studies,

<sup>1</sup>Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva Viswavidyalaya, Guwahati, India

**Abstract:** Some mythical creatures are found in the folk culture of every communities of the world. Generally they originate from ancient mythologies, stories, and folklore. They are supernatural characters and have metaphorical significance. In some societies they are malevolent in nature and in other benevolent. Besides, these creatures have been used to explain the human values and fears. It has observed that these mythical creatures are worshiped by them in the rituals they perform on special occasions. The Misings are an indigenous community of Assam. They have rich folk culture, where numbers of mythical creatures are prevalent. They belief those creatures both as a malevolent and benevolent, and use as a totem at the time of rituals. There are a few articles on folk culture and folk literature of the Mising community. But there have never seen any such discussion on mythical creatures or totem of the Mising community. This article tries to highlight the mythical creatures available in the Mising folk culture and their importance in their social life.

**Index Terms -** *Bíri-bíag, Mosondori, Késung, Yékpur, Dobur.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Misings are a part of greater Assamese community of Assam. They live on the bank of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries at the upper part of Assam. Earlier they were known as 'Miri'. The community name was first mentioned in the poem of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva in his book 'Bhagawat, second skanda (Sankaradeva, 2018). According to Sir Edward Gait, the word Miri was coined after their duty as an 'interpreter' between British government and the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (Gait, 1906 : 322). This statement was earlier cited by Alexander Mackenzie on his book 'History of North East Frontier of Bengal' in the year 1885. In this regards, Dr Lakhi Devi said that the word 'Miri' has come from the Assamese word '*Major manuh*', means 'Go-between' (Devi, 1984: 158). Dr Kundilya stated that the word 'Miri' is a Tibetan word, it is conjugation of two words i.e '*Mi*' Man and '*ri*' means Mountain (Kundilya, 1992). On the other hand they called themselves as Mising (Needham, 1886). Some writers say the the word 'Mising' has come from the words like '*Mi*' Man/human, and '*Ansing*', a peace loving community, among them were Tarun Chandra Pamegam, and Indreswar Pegu and others. Some folk lorist like Nahedra Padun and Kalinath Borang speak, the Mising word has derived from two word like '*Mi*' means Man and '*tosing*' means 'relative' i.e this people belongs to our own gene or relatives. The Misings are a fragment of the greater Mongoloid horde occupying the hills and dales of north-eastern India. Sir Grierson has categorically included them under Tibeto Mongoloids (Grierson, 1919: 40). According to linguistic research, the Mongoloids of India excluding only the Khasis and Jaintias, speak Sino-Tibetan group of languages, and the Misings who formed a fraction of this race falls in the category of Tibeto-Burman speaker of the greater Sino-Tibetan groups (Chatterji, 1974:20).

## 2. Review of literature:

A few books were considered for reference during the time of study. This were- Sankardeva, S (2018), Bhagawat, Eight Edition, Srimanta Sankardeva Sanggha, Golaghat, Gait, E A (1906), A History of Assam, EBH Publishers, Mackenzie, A (1984), History of North East Frontier of Bengal, Mittal Publications, Devi, L (1968), Ahom Tribal Relation- A Political Study, Assam Book Depot, Kundilya, B (1982), Mising Janjati, Needham, J.F (1885), Outline Grammar of the Shaiyang Miri Language- A spoken by the Miris of that clan residing in the Neighbourhood of Sadia, Oxford University, Grierson, G.A (1919), Linguistic Survey of India, Superintendent Government Printing, India, Chatterji, S.K (1974), Kirata Jana Kriti: The Indo Mongoloids their contribution to the history and culture of India, Asiatic Society of Calcutta, all are related with the introduction of the Mising community, naming and their community and language linkage.

On the other hand, Boarng, K (2019), Ekop Taktor A:bang, Mising Adné Ope:, Doley, Doley, G.K & Doley, U (2021), Glimpses of Mibu and Mibu A:bang, Kaustabh Prakashan, G. K (2022), Misings- Myths, Legends and Folktales, Rahul Offset Printers, Moorehead, W. G. (1885). “Universality of Serpent-Worship”. The Old Testament Student, Smart, Ninian (2020) “Encyclopaedia Britannica”. Edinburgh, Padun, N (2019), Abangor Kahini, Mising Adné Ope: are of ritual, festival and beliefs and values of the Mising community. There are description of mythical creatures, their relation, values and supernatural powers in the folk life of the Mising community.

## 3. Methodology:

The methodology followed is based on descriptive and participant observation method by using both documentary and interview technique supplemented by gathering both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected from the ground level undertaking field study though interview method.

## 4. Aim and objective of the study:

1. To study the origin of the Mising community.
2. To study the mythical creatures prevalent in the folklore and folk life of the Misings.
3. To study about the mythical creatures associated with ritual practices and their beliefs and value in the community.

## Brief introduction of some mythical creatures are-

**Bíri: biag:** This is also known as *Bíri boté*. Their habitation is in the river, canal, pond and deep forest. A type of paired reptile of both male and female, look like horned reptiles or dragons. A symbol of fertility, and purification. It is generally made up of bamboo, wild fern, usually place two raw egg into their mouth.



Picture 1: A twin snake structure/symbol, associated with *Dobur ui*, purification ritual.

**Mosondori:** A fish dragon with a elephant trunk. It symbolizes power, transformation, and perserverance. The Misings use fish dragon particularly the carp. As the carp are known for swimming upstream to reach the waterfall, it symbolises the progress, courage and stability. In the Mising community, Fish dragon symbolize harmony, marital happiness and reproduction because they multiply rapidly and sometimes swim in pairs.



Picture 2: *Mosondori*, a carp with an elephant trunk, depicted at the *Murong* house and associated with *Po:rag*, post harvesting festival.

**Késung:** This is a tortoise. These are powerful symbols of good luck, stability, courage and longevity. People use to represent them as ancestral soul. That the departed family souls keeps relation with their offspring for long time. They believe that placing bamboo made tortoise dragon symbol or structure in one's home save the entire families from any type of evil spirits, negative energy and avert any type of accidents, bloodshed. It brings the long life of a family member and sate of stabilty and sound judgement.



Picture 3: A tortoise symbol associated with *Urom ui*, clan rituals.

**Eyeg:** It is a pig like creature. It is made from bamboo, looks like a serpentine body wrapped with Tora leaves (*Alpinia allughass*) with an orifice, made up of bamboo. This structure is called *Jékpur*. It symbolizes ancestral soul, family deity that protects the entire family from evil spirits, and energy. It also is also symbol of fertility of both earth and human being. As pig is a prolific breeder, people use such totem, and offer pig to appease the fertility deity and ancestral soul or clans or lineages.



Picture 3: Pig symbol, associated with *Urom Ui* (clan ritual)

## 6. Mising mythology:

According to Mising myths the *Bírí bíag*, a snake dragon lives in both water and in a dense forest. They are considered as the owner or main deity of the forest. They are powerful and benevolent. They have controved over aquatic phenomenon like call of rain. As rain is required for crop growth, development and good harvest. This creature can influence weather and climate. On the other hand, they are the deity of the forest. Earlier days, the Misings clear forests for cultivation, burn fires and clear land for cultivation. During this processes, many trees, forests are destroyed and animals are killed, knowingly or unknowingly. They consider this act as a crime to nature. There is a myth to back it up in the Mising community- “ The Misings believe that they are the children of Sun and Moon (*Do:nyi-Po:lo*) and they were born of great *Abotani*. As his family grew, food problems began to arise. Only the hunting and gathering could not solve the food problem. So, one day after threadbred discussion with his wife *Karmi*, *Abutani* went to collect paddy seeds from *Koje Yanggo* ( Goddesses of wealth), who live in heaven and took some seeds. Later, he cleared a plot of land by slashing and burning the wild vegetation growing there and sowed the paddy seeds. But the paddy seeds were eaten up by a dove. After observing that he began to cry out in sorrow. At that time a hunter named *Seukari*, came out of the forest with a bow and arrow and learned everything from *Abutani*. He then shotted down the dove with an arrow and took out the paddy seeds from the crop and retuned to *Abutani*. The hunter advised *Abutani* to follow some procedures after sowing the seeds for protection of the seeds. According to the advice of *Seukari* (the hunter) *Abutani* cut down four *Pi:ro* (wild reed) and planted them at the four corner of the plot. Then then offered prayer to the creators, the deities of the forest, for killing unintentionally in the process of cultivation of the crop, seeking forgiveness from all those killed, naming each of them individually. Besides, *Abutani* promised to oragnise rituals after harvest” (Doley, 2022: 56-57).

In case of the mythical creature *Mosondori* ( a half carp fish and half elephant trunk), they live at the bottom of seas, rivers, lakes, or any places of water. They are benevolent and powerful symbols. This the symbol of power, unity and progress. It is always depicted at the main entrance of Murong house ( Social-cultural-religious institution). The Mising people wear clothes viz. *Mibu galug* (shirt) and *Mibu dumér* (Mufflar) bearing the likeness of *Mosondori*, specially carp scales (*ngosíg*). The numbering of the carb scales has also significant rules. Odd number is considered as luck and even is as bad luck. In the dream interpretation among the Mising community, one who see such creatures or carp in dream indicates advent of good fortune in his/her life (Doley G. K., 2021).

## The ritual practices and festivals related to the mythical creatures prevalent in the Mising community:

The Misings are animist. In their day-to-day life, they have a belief system where all natural things, including animals, plants, and even inanimate objects, and to spirits. They believe that these spirits can influence human events. They have of either positive or negative influence. They emphasize that humans have the interconnectedness between all beings, recognizing that humans are not separate from the natural world.

In their society the person who performs the ritual practices of a family or a society is called *Miri-Mibu*. The *Miri-Mibu* communicates with spirits and performs rituals to maintain balance and harmony.

The mythical creature *Bíri-bíag*, a twin snake is related to '*Dobur*', a purification ritual among the Mising community. This is representation of serpent god '*Bíri boté*', the great snake deity. This is a symbol of power, protection, holy and cleanliness from act of any sin, bloodshed, enmity, war and accident. This is also a symbol of fertility and progress. Due to its power of shedding its old skin (ecdysis) of snake, people have belief that their sin, mistake, enmity with others and towards the nature will remove (Moorehead, 1885). New, fresh skin will grow, enmity will disappear and brotherhood will develop. This is also symbol of life cycle.

The ritual festival related to mythical creature *Mosondari* (Elephant trunk and half carp fish) is the '*Po:rag*', a harvesting festival among the Mising community. This creature is considered as a supernatural power, unique features, and can be symbolic of various concepts.

This festival is organised by the village folk after every five years interval. This is organised at a house called '*Murong*'. Once it was a batchlor dormitory, the youth used to stay at the house and guarded the village from attack from enemy. It was a common platform for warfare training. Later it became a platform for cultural and ritual activities. The villagers started performing '*Po:rag*' festival with help of their traditional priest '*Mibu*'. Youth performs their activities like singing and dancing. They invite a cultural team from outside village and all the married daughters from that village are invited to attend and take part in the whole programme. The priest performs rituals by chanting hymn called '*A:bang*' for the well being of the entire villagers. A good number of full grown pigs, chicken are sacrificed in that ritual to appease the ancestral soul, mother earth, rain gods, and respective deities. There is great feast.

The *Késung*, tortoise like creature is related to the clan rituals called *Urom ui* of a family. This creature is symbol of good luck, stability and long life. If a family member falls ill or suffering from a disease for long, they invite priest and the priest makes a structure like a tortoise by bamboo and performs ritual by chanting hymn. The priest requests the ancestral soul up to nine and above generation to protect and cure the diseased person. They also perform such ritual for asking a good progeny for the new couple or couple that have not children for long years. Moreover, this creature brings fortune and prosperity to the family.

The *Eyeg*, pig like creature is associated in all most all type of rituals and festival of the Misings. Symbol of this mythical creature is '*Yékpur*'. It is made up of bamboo. In Mising evolutionary songs, there is a tale related to pig and its truthfulness in agricultural activity. Pigs are offspring of animal god '*Dadi boté*'. From the very beginning pigs have great contribution to the life of *Abutani* (forefather of the Misings). Due to its prolific nature of breeding it is considered as a symbol of fertility, and propagation of descendants (Padun, 2019).

## 7. Conclusion:

From above discussion it has observed that a good number of mythical creatures are available in folklore of the Mising community and they worship them in their life for different purposes. These are associated with their folk beliefs and values. These creatures are used to explain the unexplained, warn of dangers, and symbolize human values and fears. They have the supernatural power. They are benevolent in nature. Some of them are- Snake (*Bíri: bíag*), Carp (*Mosondori*), Tortoise (*Késung*) and Pig (*Eyeg*). These are associated with specific rituals and festivals. Snake is symbol of transformation and rebirth due to their shedding of skin. This is generally associated with the purification ritual of the Mising community. Carp is

symbol of unity, prosperity, tortoise is related with long life and pig is associated with propagation of progeny of a clan.

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In this folklore research journey, our heartfelt gratitude extends to Prof. Nahendra Padun, folklorist from Mising community of Assam, Kaling Borang, from Arunachal Pradesh who has been working in the field of folk religion 'Do:nyi-Po:lo' in that State.

A heartfelt acknowledgement also goes to the respondents, witch doctor from the Mising community, who gave me valuable information of mythical creatures and their rule in the folk ritual practices among the Mising community of Assam.

## 9. REFERENCES:

- [1] Sankardeva, S (2018), Bhagawat, Eight Edition, Srimanta Sankardeva Sanggha, Golaghat
- [2] Gait, E A (1906), A History of Assam, EBH Publishers
- [3] Mackenzie, A (1984), History of North East Frontier of Bengal, Mittal Publications
- [4] Devi, L (1968), Ahom Tribal Relation- A Political Study, Assam Book Depot
- [5] Kundilya, B (1982), Mising Janjati,
- [6] Needham, J.F (1885), Outline Grammar of the Shaiyang Miri Language- A spoken by the Miris of that clan residing in the Neighbourhood of Sadia, Oxford University.
- [7] Grierson, G.A (1919), Linguistic Survey of India, Superintendent Government Printing, India
- [8] Chatterji, S.K (1974), Kirata Jana Kriti: The Indo Mongoloids their contribution to the history and culture of India, Asiatic Society of Calcutta.
- [9] Doley, G. K (2022), Misings- Myths, Legends and Folktales, Rahul Offset Printers.
- [10] Moorehead, W. G. (1885). "University of Derpent-Worship". The Old Testament Student. 4 (5): 205–210. Doi : 10.1086/469567. ISSN 0190-5945. JSTOR 3156392
- [11] Padun, N (2019), Abangor Kahini, Mising Adné Ope:
- [12] Boarng, K (2019), Ekop Taktor A:bang, Mising Adné Ope:, Doley.
- [13] Doley, G.K & Doley, U (2021), Glimpses of Mibu and Mibu A:bang, Kaustabh Prakashan.

