

# Educated Mising Women And Their Role In Social Development: A Case Study In Moinapara Village Under Dhemaji District Of Assam.

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The Misings, constitutionally known as the Miris, are riparian and agrarian people dwelling in upper Assam with distinct language and culture. Most of the people engage themselves in agricultural activities. Realizing the limitations of agriculture as a major income source, few people are shifting from agriculture to other vocations that prove prospective in terms of earnings. Growing education together with pressing necessities is also widening the horizon of their outlook towards opting for new vocations. An attempt has been made to look into the diverging profession of the Mising women ranging from agriculture to beautician in a given village.

## Introduction

The Misings are the second largest tribe of Assam scattering over 10 districts of the state, namely Sonitpur, Biswanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Majuli with a total souls of 680424 as per 2011 census. Traditionally they are agrarian people using primitive mood of production and as such, they are still in a state of poverty.

The Misings are patriarchal and the power of decision making within the family goes to the headman, either it may be the father or the eldest son. Despite this fact, the womenfolk also are equal shareholder of the productive activity in the family. Rather, it is not untrue that the women are the sole bread earner in some families. Thus the womenfolk play a vital role in income generated activities in a Mising family. Modern education is playing a strong role in empowering the whole society without any barrier. Like the other societies, the Misings are also involving themselves in acquiring quality education to uplift their standard of living. The main focus of this paper is to study the role of education in changing the mindset of the people in general and the women in particular in a small Mising village called Moinapara towards income generating activities. The study is basically based on primary data. But secondary sources of information are also used to arrive at the conclusion.

The Misings are riparian people living mostly along the banks of river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Rice is their staple food and they use much of their time in cultivating more food grains. Hence they are directly exposed to monsoonal flood every year suffering huge loss to livelihood and economy. As agriculture is the only means of sustenance, they are regarded as the worst sufferer of flood. Further, the food grains obtained from agricultural activities is not enough to meet up all the basic necessities of daily life. Though not a flood affected village, the people of Moinapara are also getting pressure from various angles – joblessness, drug smokers, increasing population but decreasing income source and such other related problems. Thus it becomes imperative for the able men and women to opt for another option of earning other than agriculture. As the women folk remain busy with the household problems including the care of the children, they suffer the depth of the problem more than their male counterpart. They shoulder not only the domestic chores but also the caring or educating their children at the same time.

## Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this paper is to

- To study the educational status among the women,
- To study their role in economic activity, and
- To cast a peep into their domestic problems in choosing a profession independently.

## Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. For collecting primary data from the field, a suitable questionnaire was prepared. The response was collected by face to face interview. For secondary information, various books, journal articles and newspapers were used. After the interview, analytical method has also been employed for arriving at the conclusion.

The interview was carried on throughout the village. Each and every woman was personally visited and interviewed. Emphasis was given upon the women having graduate and higher degrees as they possess representative quality related to our topic of study.

### Analysis of the field study

All the data were collected from 155 families of the entire village to have a clear cut picture of the status of women among them. The data so collected are presented in tabular form for the convenience of comparison.

#### i. Sex ratio

Sex ratio is taken into account as it reflects the number of women comparing to their male counterpart in the society. The sex ratio of the surveyed village has been plotted in the table below –

**Table: 1 – Sex ratio of the surveyed village –**

Sex	No. of persons	Percentage
Male	334	48.62
Female	353	51.38
Total	687	100%

The table shows that 48.62% are male and 51.38% are female population. The female outnumbers the male persons in the village. Democratically, in a society where more than half of the total population is woman, they can coercively dominate the decision-making process in every sphere of life; may it be domestic or social. Of course, it should be remembered that for that end, the women should have proper knowledge of the social system they live in.

#### ii. Educational status

Education is one of the most important key tools for social development. It is told that education of the woman and social development goes hand in hand. Whenever a woman is educated, she is capable of reading information of various types in various levels and then by imbibing the information she is able to set to action, which may be termed as empowerment. An educated woman gets more skilled and informed. She is able to avail all sorts of govt. initiatives as well as bank loans etc. for the betterment of her family. She is also able to take better care of her children than the illiterate one which may range from imparting quality education to her children to maintaining a healthy environment in the family she lives in. Further, she properly understands the importance of education and thus has greater likelihood to send her children to school. Thus it becomes imperative for each and everyone to be educated. To be educated in true sense is possible only through the extensive reading of a variety of books bearing on a subject that a reader will be able to acquire in-depth knowledge of the subject. By being able to analyze and compare different viewpoints as expounded in various books, a reader will be able to develop his or her capacity for analytical and critical thinking. This will enable him or her to formulate independent viewpoints and opinions. Only then the effort of quality education comes true or a man or woman turns into human resource. Keeping this aspect in mind, the social workers may undertake arrangements within the village to facilitate open reading so that each and every member of the society can read varieties of books at their own effort and convenience.

The educational status of women of the surveyed village is plotted in the table below –

**Table – 2: Educational status of the people in the surveyed village -**

Educational qualification	No. of persons	Percentage
Illiterate	135	19.6
Below HSLC	296	43.08
HSLC	77	11.2
HS	71	10.33
Graduate and above	108	15.72
Total	687	100

The table shows that 43% of the people are half baked or only partially educated. Only 15.72% are educated enough, or it may be said, up to the rank of the total population. We still need to go to the ratio of the female education of the village to find out the number of empowered women and their depth of involvement in the development-related activities of the village.

Table – 3 below depicts the male-female ratio of the people of the surveyed village having graduate and above educational qualifications –

**Table-3:** Educational ratio between male and female of the surveyed village –

Sex	No. of persons	Percentage
Male	66	61.2
Female	42	38.8
Total	108	100

Thus, the number of able women keeps decreasing to contribute their best for the development of the village or the community they belong to. These 42 nos. of women are again divided into govt. job holder and unemployed or self-employed one. During the survey it was found that out of 42 graduates and post graduate women, 17 women are engaged in govt. services and the remaining 25 women are dependent upon their husbands for living.

### iii. Occupational pattern of women of the surveyed village

An attempt was made to look into the occupation of women in the village. The data collected from the field is depicted in the table below –

**Table – 4:** Occupational pattern of women of the surveyed village

Sl. No.	Occupation	No. of women engaged in.
1	Agriculture and allied activities	156
2	Rice beer selling	29
3	Weaving	57
4	Govt. service	17
5	Others	19
6	Total	278

It is clear from the above table that as the agriculture is the principal source of living for the village people, majority or almost half of the women are engaged in this field. Although selling rice beer is not a regular phenomenon or no shop is particularly established for selling it, most of the housewives keep it ready at home for sale. Weaving forms another source of income. As most of the women remain busy with the domestic chores, they hardly spare much time for weaving. Thus the income from this source is minimal. As they are born weaver, they hardly spend their time idly. Even the govt. job holding women use to sit in the loom as and when they get a little free time. The women engaged in other profession includes selling of vegetables which are available in their kitchen garden, shop keeping, stool making, tailoring, beautician, poultry rearing, pig and goat rearing etc. income from which is very meager. The remaining 75 women are non-productive due to their health and old age. They are required to be fed by the family members.

### iv. Economic activities of women of the surveyed village

Table -4 above clearly shows the occupational pattern of women of the surveyed village. As the village is situated by a little township, they do not have extra land for cultivating mustard, black pulses or lentil etc. The people solely depend upon agriculture for subsistence. Whereas some of the men are engaged in vocation like driving, electrician, shop keeping and day laborer, most of the women remain busy within the household activities like cooking, feeding the livestock, weaving, tailoring etc. Mention is to be made that the figures of the table – 4 are transitory; no clear cut demarcation can be made between two professions. A woman may sell rice beer; at the same time, she is also a weaver.

### v. Findings

1. As they are agrarian people, most of the women work in agricultural sector. Earning from this sector is nominal owing to the fact that they use primitive methods. Further, they have no idea about the demand and supply of a market. So they produce only rice grains and no other crops for selling.
2. Some of the educated women are choosing alternative source of income like tailoring, beautician, shop keeping etc. This shows a major shift of profession from agriculture to other profit making sector.
3. The literacy rate of woman in Mising community is not at par with the other communities of Assam.
4. Illiteracy of the parents is another reason behind the low level of education. Such parents give little importance to education.
5. There are only a few cases of school dropout in the village.
6. More preference is given to the male child in education comparing to the female ones.

7. Early marriage is one of the strong factors behind the under developed Mising society. In completion of education is a direct reflection of their early marriage.

#### **vi. Discussion**

It is seen from table – 2 above that almost half of the total population is half educated. Their capacity to read the texts of their children is a matter of doubt. And it is a matter of great social concern that it forms majority of the population of the village. Further, it is not possible that the illiterate people have no say in the social system. Rather, the aged are experienced enough of their traditions and customs and as such, they have greater responsibilities in the society. The literate people may not be socially educated enough to interact in the matters relating to social system or control.

Table – 3 depicts the ratio of male and female having government jobs. The women having govt. job are the most privileged ones in the village. They have the advantage of sending their children to a well-equipped school for education by being able to afford the cost at their own capacity. They are also privileged to engage other jobless women to weave clothes for them on payment or sharing basis. They have much time after their job time to look after the family affairs; may it be caring their children or carrying on other jobs of their choice.

The remaining 25 nos. are the main problem pulling group among the village women. As they do not have a regular income source of their own, they need to venture on weaving, poultry rearing, pig rearing, goat rearing, rice beer selling and the like; income from which is not enough to maintain a healthy environment in the family. Because weaving a pair of clothes may take several weeks as she is required to feed the family members, sending the children to school, feeding the livestock; and after completing all such minor dailies; she may have hardly any time for weaving. Furthermore, selling is another matter. As they are not a regular clothe weaver, they need to wait for prospective buyer. They hardly get it. The same may be spoken of poultry selling or the selling of other livestock. Preparing the rice beer is a daily family need. But nowadays it is becoming a growing business in rural standard. It was seen at the time of interview that some of the educated women in the village hesitated to interact on this topic which reflects that they were bound to opt for it so as to earn a little extra money within the family boundary. They were not happy choosing this option for earning money.

One more striking matter was observed. Most of the educated women were of the opinion that they hardly get the right to go to the bank or other offices to avail the bank loan or other govt. initiative especially meant for women. On enquiry, some of the respondents reveal that their husbands use to pass some derogatory comments which force them to stay back at home to avoid awkward situation within the family. This is the curse of patriarchal family system. Although it is considered that education of the women and the social development goes hand in hand, the capable women do not get the right to opt for the right choice at the right time.

Two women were found to be running shops ably in the village. They told that they were enjoying better life as they get a regular income, though little, out of which, they are able to pay the school and conveyance fees of their children regularly, purchase a pair of clothe as and whenever they wish after fulfilling the family necessities and the like. Their smiling faces reflect their satisfaction.

Some of the govt. employed women were of the view that they have nothing to do with the society they live in. The only best thing they can do is to educate their children properly at their best. Their view reflects the selfish nature of human character. They have been turning into a group of privileged people to enjoy the external beauty of life and nothing else. The concept of overall social development will become null and void unless all the able women put their heads together to educate the entire society in terms of social interaction and mutual understanding. Educating the entire village people demands a collective endeavour and this effort should be started within the four walls of a family. And for that end, a woman must be intrinsically educated to understand the value and meaning of life thereby able to be pulling out the internal beauty of human life. Only then the society will transform in true sense.

Only one woman was seen engaging herself in stool making out of bamboo and plastic cane. While interacting, she was of the view that she can earn a fair amount from her vocation, because she is able to sell out a stool at Rs. 700/= to 900/= per piece, as her stool were not only strong in terms of longevity but also beautifully framed employing various designs in it. She told that only the bamboo is cut by her husband or son; rest of the other works is done by her. She is able to knit a stool within two days.

#### **vii. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that education plays a vital role in developing a society. The educational status of the Mising women are still remains very poor, as more preference is given to male child. It shows lack of financial and moral support from the family. Patriarchal family system imposes another hindrance upon their right to work. The women should be given liberty to carry on a profession at home or other places which beneficial to the family. In order to make them financially and socially strong, proper education and training should be given prime importance. Only then the society will be dynamic in true sense.



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