

A Study on Livelihood Status of Mishing Women in Tribal Society of Assam

Pubali Saikia¹

1. Assistant Professor (Home Science), Vidya Bharati College, Guwahati University, Kamrup, Assam

Corresponding author e-mail: pubalisaikia1983@gmail.com

Paper Received on October 11, 2017, Accepted on November 31, 2017 and Published Online on December 22, 2017

ABSTRACT

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society. The tribal women in general and in comparison with castes, enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. It has been also observed that the status of tribal women is comparatively lower than that of tribal men. The Mishings are the second largest scheduled tribe (plains) group of Assam after the Bodos. They play a role of great importance both economically and socially. In fact, in economical structure, they play a very strong role. Agriculture is a source of income of the Mishing women. They also rear pigs, goats, poultry, etc. which form a great share of family income. A total of 120 tribal women constituted the sample of this study. It was evident from this investigation that lack of capital, natural calamities like flood and poor health status were found to be the foremost problems of livelihood for majority of the respondents.

Key words: Livelihood; Mishing women; Tribal society;

The Mishings, belonging to Tibeto-Burman ethnic group and formerly known as the Miris, constitute the second largest scheduled tribe (Plains) group in Assam. They are playing a significant role in the culture and economy of the greater Assamese society in general and tribal society in particular. They are mainly concentrated in the river side areas of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur districts of Assam. The population of Mishing in Assam is estimated to be 1,257,596 as per 2006 census. The tribal population is an imminent part of India's social fabric. According to oxford dictionary 'a tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor'. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. Mishing women are mainly engaged as workers in agriculture and allied activities. They involve in both traditional and non-traditional sectors for their overall development. They play an important as well as active role in the tribal society as compared to men. Mishings, the second largest tribal population of Assam,

are mainly the rural inhabitants. Like other womenfolk of developing nations, most of the Mishing women are engaged in various economic activities not only to fulfill the day to day necessity but also to uplift their economic status in their society. Generally the women section of the Mishing community is very active in household as well as in economic activities.

They are born weaver, skilled in agricultural and allied activities but the modes of operation of economic activities are primitive in nature. Keeping this in view, the present study was therefore an attempt in this direction with following objectives:

- i. To study the socio-economic characteristics of Mishing women.
- ii. To identify different livelihood options of Mishing women.
- iii. To identify different hindering factors of Mishing women to engage in various livelihood options.
- iv. To find out relationship between hindering factors of respondents with selected independent variables.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Lakhimpur district,

north bank plain zone of Assam on the basis of concentration of tribal women. The study is based on primary data. To collect primary data from sampling unit, a sample survey has been made and for this purpose a suitable interview schedule was constructed to collect information from the sample respondents. The field survey was conducted by selecting four representative villages namely Panbari missing gaon, Temera missing gaon, Nunibari missing gaon and Sengeli suti missing gaon of Lakhimpur district. Out of total households, 30 (thirty) households from each village were selected. A total of 120 respondents were selected as sample respondents for this investigation. The sampling method chosen for this research design is random sampling method considering the extensiveness of the study, cost and time factors. The desirable data related to socio-economic characteristics viz. age, education, marital status, family type, family size, type of house, annual income, support received etc. was collected directly by personal interview through structured type of interview schedule. The statistical techniques used for analysis of data were frequency and percentage, mean score and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics: The data with regard to socio-economic characteristics is presented in the Table 1 highlighted that majority of the respondents (58.33%) belonged to lower middle age group (31 to 50 years) and a sizeable per cent of the respondents (53.33%) were married. The data also revealed that less than half of the respondents (36.66%) educated upto class X and more than half of the respondents (52.50%) were from nuclear families having small family size i.e. 2 to 4 members. The findings are in the same line with the findings of *Doley (2014)*. Since a majority of the respondents were married so they have chosen some traditional home making responsibilities against some service outside home. The findings also reflected that women in the study area had varied level of educational qualification. With education women learn some tips which influenced them to select various livelihood options to secure their family.

The data on main occupation of family in the same Table also shows that farming was the main occupation for 61.67 per cent of the respondents followed by business (35.00%) and service (3.33%). This finding revealed that young generation preferred to earn income

independently without any work pressure that is why more than half of the family occupation was farming. Type of house possessed by the respondents indicated that less than majority of the respondents had katcha house (45.83%) followed by pucca with 29.17 per cent. Table 1 also reflected that less than majority of the respondents (35.00%) were member of one organization i.e. general member or a large percentage (65.00%) of the respondents had no membership of any organization. Social participation through membership in the present study although found not very high but quite encouraging. The small per cent of respondents had membership in an organization such as SGH in the present investigation.

It is clear from Table 1 that a small per cent of the respondents (37.50%) head of family income is between

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Category	No.	%
Age	Young (<30 yrs)	20	16.67
	Middle (31 to 50 yrs)	70	58.33
	Upper (>51 yrs)	30	25.00
Educational status	Upto class X	23	19.16
	H.S.L.C. Pass	48	40.00
	H.S. Pass	24	20.00
	Graduate	18	15.00
	Post Graduate	5	4.17
	Other courses	2	1.67
Marital Status	Unmarried	46	38.33
	Married	64	53.33
	Widow	10	8.33
Family type	Nuclear	63	52.50
	Joint	37	30.83
	Extended	20	16.67
Family size	Small (2- 4 members)	62	51.67
	Medium (5-7 members)	48	40.00
	Large (8 and above)	10	8.33
Family occupation	Service	4	3.33
	Business	42	35.00
	Farming	74	61.67
Type of House	Katcha	55	45.83
	Mixed	30	25.00
	Pucca	35	29.17
Membership of organisation	one organization	42	35.00
	No membership	78	65.00
Level of income (Rs.)	<5000	10	8.33
	5,001– 10,000	12	10.00
	10001– 15,000	45	37.50
	15,001– 20,000	33	27.50
	>20,000	20	17.50

Rs. 10001 – Rs.15,000 per month followed by Rs. 15,001–Rs.20,000. Only 8.33 per cent of the total sample households earned below Rs. 5000. The findings showed the varied level of income of sampled households.

Livelihood options of Mishing women : Table 2 showed that majority of respondents (60.83%) engaged in the weaving sector as a source of livelihood followed by agriculture with 54.17 per cent. The findings are in the same line with the findings of Dutta (2015), Hagone and Basunathe (2015) and Bori (2016). The probable reason might be due to the fact that weaving is largely a household profession and passed on through generation. Moreover, it is also a traditional occupation where women have acquired such skills from their childhood that inspired them to select in this option.

It was also reported by the respondents that they used to sale rice beer (51.66%) and a very small per cent *i.e.* 28.33 per cent were engaged as wage laborer to contribute their family income.

This finding showed the various livelihood options selected by the respondents might be because of their own choice as well as preference to reach the market value. These findings further highlighted that own interest seems to be the strong influencing factor that is why majority of respondents from different background entered in the various livelihood options as a gainful source of income to supplement and support the family expenditure.

Support received by Mishing women: The data presented in Table 3 indicated various support services received by Mishing women to engage in different livelihood options. The finding showed that majority of the respondents (60.00%) got support from husband followed by parents (31.67%) and friends / relatives.

From the above findings it can be inferred that with marriage, women learn to shoulder the responsibility of their own families and social issues as well, develop maturity in managing families which on the other had teach them to get engaged in the livelihood option to manage families. Moreover, it was reported by the respondents that they got more support from husband as compared to other tribal women, which influenced them to engage in the gainful area of livelihood.

Hindering factors: In the category of hindering factors or problems, ten attributes were identified and the data is presented in Table 4. The most common problem faced by respondents to engage in different livelihood options

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to different livelihood options

Type of activities	No.	%
Agriculture	65	54.17
Weaving	73	60.83
Selling of rice beer	62	51.66
Wage labour	34	28.33
Poultry farming	56	46.67
Piggery and fishery farming	42	35.00

(Multiple response)

Table 3. Support received by Mishing women entrepreneurs

Support services	No.	%
Parents	38	31.67
Husband	72	60.00
Friends / Relatives	10	8.33

(Multiple response)

was lack of capital and due to natural calamities like perennial flood ranked I followed by poor health status with rank II. Moreover, other problems faced by tribal women to engage in different livelihood options were lack of traditional socio religious beliefs, lack of proper marketing mechanism, exploitation of middlemen ranked as III, IV and V respectively. Problems got lowest rank were lack of awareness about government schemes, lack of support services and lack of basic infrastructure facility on the basis of the mean scores of 0.27, 0.24, 0.19 and 0.35 respectively.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that respondents from different background and socio economic status entered into the various livelihood option might be due to their economic compulsion for which they selected weaving, agriculture and farming etc as a source of income to support the family expenditure. It is also true that many women are not able to start business in spite of their willingness due to the shortage of finance, though they started their business but unfortunately they miss the route to success. Therefore, it may be mentioned that these respondents should encourage for entering in different organizations, specially in SHG as government is widened up the facilities to the members of SHGs on easy terms.

It is revealed from Table 5 that, there was no significant relationship between hindering factor (Natural calamities) of respondents with education and member of organization. The table further reflects a significant relationship between hindering factor (natural

Table 4. Ranking of hindering factors of Mishing women to engage in various livelihood options

Hindering factors	MS	Rank
Lack of capital	0.99	I
Lack of Awareness about govts. schemes	0.22	VI
Lack of support services	0.19	VII
Lack of basic infrastructure facility	0.18	VIII
Lack of proper marketing mechanism	0.27	IV
Lack of leadership quality	0.16	IX
Traditional socio religious beliefs	0.35	III
Poor health status	0.36	II
Exploitation of middlemen	0.24	V
Natural calamities like perennial flood	0.99	I

Table 5. Relationship between hindering factors of respondents with selected independent variables

Area	Independent variables	r value
Natural calamities	Age	0.036*
	Education	0.014
	Marital status	0.321**
	Member of organization.	-0.267
Poor health status	Age	0.301
	Education	-0.113
	Marital status	0.138*
	Member of organization.	0.661**

* Significant at 5% level of significance

** Significant at 1% level of significance

calamities) of respondents with age and marital status at 1 per cent and 5 per cent level of significance respectively. Hence, it can be concluded that when age increases, it improves the problem solving capacity of respondents. So it is very necessary for every tribal women to start or engage in a gainful option after getting maturity to solve different natural problems.

It is also observed from Table 5 that there was no significant relationship between selected hindering factor (Poor health status) with age and education. But it clearly

shows that there was a significant relationship between selected hindering factor (Poor health status) with marital status and membership in organization at 1 per cent and 5 per cent level of significance respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that, women should be encouraged to become member of any organization to update their knowledge through proper interaction among the members of organization to solve their different obstacles.

Since a high per cent of the respondents were married so they were aware about different health related issues and were able to solve them. Further they believed that conflicts may arise among group members hence they started their business alone which helped them to maintain their health status in a better way.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that Mishing women are not fully empowered economically as well as socially. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the settlement of infrastructure, awareness, education, competition, willingness, confidence, self motivation, mindset and encouragement from family and society. Moreover, it is further essential for the upgrading of economic development of Mishing women specially in the river bank and flood prone areas of Lakhimpur district. Government and NGO should prepare the special plan and programme for the economic empowerment of tribal women in particular. Moreover, health status and health care system are not satisfactory in Mishing areas. Through SHGs government should implement micro financing properly and provide them financial support and raise awareness programme for empowerment of Mishing women in tribal society. Hence, it is essential for government or voluntary organizations to launch special programmes for Mishing women for the overall development of the community.

REFERENCES

- Bori, B. (2016). Educational status and role in rural economic development of Mishing women in Assam: A case study in Golaghat district, Assam, *Intl. J. New Tech. and Res.*, **2** (2):122-124.
- Doley, P. (2014). Socio-economic status of Mishing women: A case study of Jonai revenue circle of Dhemaji district, *Asian J. Multi. Studies*, **2** (12): 58-63.
- Dutta, S. (2015). Livelihood of Mishing women in the present era: A case study of Dhakuakhana Lakhimpur.. <http://dSPACE.tiss.edu/jspui/bitstream/1/6998/1/Sunayana%20Dutta.pdf>
- Hagone, V. and Basunathe, V.K. (2015). Decision making pattern of tribal women in dairy enterprise in Melghat region of Amravati District, *Indian Res. J. Ext. Edu.*, **15** (4): 10-15.