

MIRI-JIM (GADU) - A TRADITIONAL HAND WOVEN BLANKET OF MISHING COMMUNITY OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Assam enjoys a place of pride for its rich heritage of artistic handloom products. There is an immensely rich assembly of tribal cultures in this region. The tribal people produce textiles which indicate a great deal about their belief, culture and relationship with the environment. The tribes of Assam include Boro-Kachari, Mishing, Mech, Lalung, Chutiya, Dimasa Cachari, and Karbi. The Mishing women are well known and famous for dexterity in their weaving. In addition to their laborious task in agricultural activities and household management, they manage time for weaving clothes for themselves and the other members of their family. The present study was an attempt to study the traditional hand woven blanket - Miri-Jim (Gadu) of Mishing community. The study aims to explore the techniques used in preparation of yarn and the implements incorporate in weaving of Miri-Jim.

KEYWORDS: Handloom, Mishing, Textiles, Traditional Blanket and Weaving

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

The North-Eastern part of India consists of seven states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In these states, there are many tribes and ethnic groups inhabited in both the plains and hilly areas of each state having their own languages, dialects, practicing different customs and rituals. Among these seven states, Assam is the gateway of North East India. Assam enjoys a place of pride for its rich heritage of artistic handloom products. The beautiful hand woven products of the tribal and non-tribal of this region, not only reflect the skills of individual weavers and artisans; but the creative capacity and deep perception beauty in colour and designs of the people as a whole. Tribal people express their cultural identity and distinctiveness through their social organizations, language, rituals and festivals and also, through dress, ornaments, arts and crafts (Panigrahi, 2006). Assam comprises of both tribal and non-tribal populations. The Assamese tribes include the Boro-Kachari, Mishing, Mech, Lalung, Chutiya, Dimasa Cachari, and Karbi.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To explore the techniques used in the preparation of the yarn and the implements incorporate in weaving of Miri-Jim.
- To study the socio-cultural importance of Miri-Jim.

- To know the current status of the weaving of Miri-Jim.

THE MISHING COMMUNITY

The Mishings or Misings or Missings are the major indigenous ethnic group of Assam in North-East India with their unique style of living and even with unique culture. They are the second largest tribal group of Scheduled tribes (plain) of Assam following the Bodos in Assam (Bora, 2014). They have their own language, social customs and traditions, religious faith and practices and own way of life which differentiate them from other ethnic groups. They are concentrated in the upper Assam districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia (Pegu, 2005; Taid, 2007). Their inhabitants are found on the bank of Brahmaputra, Simen, Burisuti, Togani, Jiadhol, Subansiri, Ghunasuti, Boginadi, Ranganadi, Dikrong, Pichola, Buroi, Jiabharali, Dibru, and lower parts of Dihing, Disang, Dikhou, Dhansiri and Bharali on the south bank (Pegu *et al.*, 2013).

WEAVING CULTURE OF MISHING COMMUNITY

The beautiful handloom products of Assam as a whole with distinctive characteristics produced by indigenous weavers in different ethnic groups have contributed immensely to the textile tradition and its rich heritage. Among various cultural practices, weaving culture has played an important role in shaping the cultural identity of Mishing. The handloom is found in every household of rural Misihings and women folks contribute a lot to the development of this culture showing their artistic talents. The Mishing women are well known and famous for dexterity in their weaving. In addition to their laborious task in agricultural activities and household management, they manage time for weaving clothes for themselves and the other members of their family. Girls are taught the art of weaving since their adolescence (Doley, 2017). Different types of cloths and garments of Mishing tribes are made on their handlooms with simple implements and equipment. These implements and equipment is made of either bamboo or wood. Different apparels are used on different occasions in the socio-cultural life of the Mishing society. Mazumdar (1987) stated that the Mishing have very rich and colourful traditional textile. Spinning and weaving are typically feminine activities among the Mishings. These constitute a living art form and a way of life with them. The textiles are produced mainly to meet the requirements of the household. The missing women manage time for weaving clothes not only for themselves, but also for children and men folk. They are well known for dexterity in weaving. The traditional woven apparels are mainly- *Ugon* (dhoti), *Mibu-Galuk* (jacket), *Jinrék* (girdle), *Dumér* (gamocha), *Ege* (mekhela), *Ri:bi Gasor* (chadar) *Gaséng* (shawl), *Géro* (wrapper), *Tapum-Gasor* (eri shawl), *Pe:re* (chadar), *Gadu* (blanket), *Nisék* (baby wrapper) *Yumtag* (handkerchief) etc.

MIRI-JIM (GADU)

It is a kind of hand woven blanket, popularly known as Miri-im, used during the winter season to keep the body warmth in the cold nights. It is an item depicting the glorious textile tradition of the Mishing community and occupies a place of pride among the textile of Assam as a whole (Mazumdar, 2013). *Gadu* is the most important and prestigious product of the Mishing weaving craft. The *gadú* is different in both front and back side. One is the furry front surface and the other side is the rough back surface without furry.



Figure 13: Miri-Jim (Gadu)

A standard size of *agadu* is measures about ten feet in length and eight feet in width. It is a precious wedding gift from a mother to her children when they get married. *Gadu* is made by ginning and spinning of pure cotton fibre woven in a special type of loom with some special traditional implements. Production of *gadu* involves a long process. It is a very

slow and steady process. The preparation for *gadu* production goes on steadily along with the day to day life of the Mishing people. It is interesting to note that the preparatory works of *gadu* making are done in the off and leisure time, such as during rainy days when they do not go to the field. Even no particular time is fixed for preparatory works, such as ginning, scutching, rolling, and spindling. It takes approximately one month to complete the weaving of one sheet of *gadu*.

PREPARATION OF YARNS

The matured cotton pods (*Si:pak*) (Figure 1) are collected from own farms and dried in the sun. Then the cotton seeds are removed from the cotton by a ginning machine called *Ko:red* (Figure 2). *Ko:red* is made up of wood. After ginning, scutching is done by *Pag:ye* (Figure 3). In Mish language, the soft and fluffy scutched cottons are called *Pagmor* (Figure 4.). The *Pagmor* are then rolled up to a long linear yarn called *Rébung* with a stick called *Pi:kong* (Figure 5) on a low stool *Bungéng*. The *Rébung* (Figure 6) are then spun into thin and compact thread with a hand driven spindle called *PO: pi* (Figure 7). In Assamese, *po:pi* means Takli. The *Po:pi* for *gadu* is normally thicker and heavier than the *Po:pi*, which are used for general clothes. The rounded part of *Po:pi* is made out of the shell of a turtle and the handle is made out of bamboo. The prepared threads are rolled into a rounded lump of *Dulum* (Figure 8).

WEAVING

The threads of *dulums* are wound out with the help of *Letai* (Figure 9) in the form of skein. *Letai* is made out of bamboo. After that, the skeins are starching with rice starch and dried to make the thread more compact and hard. These threads are again rolled into a number of *dulums*. The continuous threads of *dulum* are used as warp in weaving. But for the fluffs of the *gadu*, the threads from *dulum* are cut into three inches in length called *Dupid* (Figure 10). The *dupids* are inserted with the weft thread after every 3 to 4 ground picks with the help of *sumpa* (Figure 11). *Sumpa* is used to tighten the woven cloth and is made out of wood. The uniformity of inserted *dupids* is adjust with the help of *Be: long* (Figure 12). Traditionally *be: long* was made out of animal leg bone, but now a days it is made out by bamboo (Pegu, 2012). The weaving process is done on handloom. Generally the cloth is first woven in narrow width and then two pieces of such cloths are stitched together by hand. A standard size of *gadu* measures about ten feet in length and eight feet in width (Doley, 2014).

METHODS OF WASHING

The washing process of *gadu* is also done by Mishing peoples with a special technique. For that purpose banana leaves are burnt to make ashes. The ashes are mixed with required amount of water and then filtered to get alkaline solution that acts as a detergent. A required quantity of such solution is collected in a big container which is sufficiently big to dip the *gadu*. The *gadu* is dipped in that solution and kept for four to five days. By this process the *gadu* gets soften and all the dirt's present in the *gadu* is removed. After washing it takes about one week to dry up.

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPORTANCE

The socio-cultural importance of *gadu* is that, it is customary to present a full size *gadu* to the sons and the daughters by the mothers at the time of their marriage. In many cases *gadu* is a status symbol of a family. Family not having *gadu* is looked down upon with derogatory remark such as “A worthless family without a piece of *gadu* cloth”. So *gadu* is not only an item of physical need, but is also a symbol of social status for the Mishing community. Now-a-days it has been observed that there is a growing scarcity in the production of *gadu due to* a number of reasons, such as lack of

expert weaver, non-availability of raw materials and on the other hand easy availability of ready-made blankets, quilts and rugs as substitute of *gadu* and also due to the change of lifestyle in the society.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE WEAVING OF MIRI-JIM (GADU)

At present, there is growing impact of science and technology, in one or the other way, in the weaving craft of Mishing community. The necessity to produce cotton plants in the fields for yarns has reduced considerably because of easy availability of varying qualities of cotton threads in the market. Moreover, the repeated effect of floods in Brahmaputra and its tributaries has inundated a major portion of high fertile lands suitable for cotton cultivation, in the Mishing inhabited areas. For this reason, they have become reluctant to produce cotton in their limited cultivating land other than growing food crops. And the weaving of *gadu* is a laborious and time consuming process as compared to the recent weaving process. Availability of the ready use of quilt, blankets etc. has also decrease the production of the *gadu*.

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CONCLUSIONS

This type of study will helps inexploring the traditional textiles of ethnic communities and also helps to preserve the traditional art form. Since these forms of folk artsymbolise their culture and tradition.

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