

Traditional textile motifs and designs of Mishing community of Assam

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■ **ABSTRACT** : India is a nation with vast and ancient traditions. The country blossoms with colourful traditional dresses that various communities and tribes of different states wear. The present study was an attempt to study the traditional textile motifs and designs of Mishing community. The study aimed to document the colour combinations, form of designs, different techniques used to form the designs and the traditional names of the motifs and designs. Data were gathered through personal visit to the common weavers and photographs were taken to support the study. This type of study will not only help in the preservation of the traditional motifs and designs but also broaden the design base for the textiles products.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Traditional textiles, Traditional motifs and designs, Mishing community

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Designs are of great importance when it comes to give an enchanting and intriguing look to the textile products. They play a vital role in bringing about a drastic change in appearance of different items produced by the textile industries. A fabric or cloth with designs is capable of having a more captivating impression than the ones without them. Designs of various types can be inspired from a variety of sources like nature or from the folk arts and crafts (Sangama and Rani, 2012; Anila and Savita, 2013). The weavers from Assam weave beautiful designs generally involve animals, human figures, flowers, birds and diamonds. The designs in Assam are symbolic of the different tribes and ethnic groups of the area. Women weavers work from a graph of small designs which are generally geometric patterns embellished with floral tracery in

between coloured strips and is woven on a loom with traditional colours.

The present study aimed to study documentation the traditional textile motifs and designs of Mishing tribes of Assam. It also covers the present status of the Mishing traditional textile motifs and designs.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology is the scientific way of conducting a research in order to obtain reliable and accurate results. It describes the procedure which has been adopted for the work (Kaur and Dewan, 2013). Six districts of Upper Assam- Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat were purposively selected for the study, considering the main habitant of the Mishing Community. Wide range of Mishing traditional textile

motifs were documented and collected from the selected districts through Random Sampling methods and also through personal visit to common textile weavers.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study, studied the background of the Mishing community, their weaving practices, the uses of colours, motifs and designs in textiles etc.

Origin of Mishing community :

The Mishings or Misings or Missings or Miri are major indigenous ethnic group of Assam in North-East India with their unique style of living and even unique culture (Sarma, 2004; Borang, 2007). They and are the second largest tribal group of Scheduled tribe (plain) of Assam following the Bodos in Assam (Bora, 2014; Dowarah, 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 group. They have distinct entities from the rest of the tribes of Assam with their special culture and tradition (Baruah and Kalita, 2007; Saikia, 2013). In Assam, they inhabit the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam (Pegu, 2005). The total population is more than 8,50,000 in Assam but there are also more than 50,000 Mishing people living in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh namely East Siang district, Lower Dibang Valley, and Lohit. They are belonging to Mongoloid group and are categorised as the Scheduled Tribe by the constitution of India.

The weaving culture of Mishing community :

Among various cultural practices, weaving culture has played an important role in shaping the cultural identity of Mishings. 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 Mishings women are expert in weaving and their skill to combine colours and designs have given them a special position in Assamese clothing culture. The textiles are produced mainly to meet the requirements of the household (Mazumdar, 1987). Mishing 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. A young woman not expert in weaving finds it difficult to get married with a man of her choice. '*Gadu*' (Fig. 2)-a kind of heavy cotton woven by Mishing women are well known among the non-Mishing people. These cloths fetch good price in the local markets. In earlier days the Mishings were self dependent in cloths. Each of their family used to grow cotton and rear silk worms and prepare threads for weaving all kinds of cloths they needed not only for day to day use but also for ceremonial and religious functions. In the changing circumstances, the Mishings are going for mill made cloths, but they have not given up their tradition of weaving cloths for the members of each family. The women still feels proud of wearing their self made decorative cloths. According to Morang (2014), the woven textile items are mainly- *Gadu* (blanket), *Tapum-gasor* (eri shawl), *Dumer* (gamocha), *ege-gasor* (mekhela-chadar), *gero* (worn on top of *ege*), *ri:bi*



Fig. 1 : Traditional handloom



Fig. 2 : *Gadu* (Hand woven blanket)

(woven with multicolour stripes worn with *Ege* in special occasions), *Gaseng* (same as *ri:bi* but the stripes are wider used as shawl or chadar), *pe:re* (multicoloured chadar), *Mibu galuk* (sleeveless jacket), *Ugon* (dhoti) etc.

Colour combinations, motifs and designs of Mishing traditional textiles :

The Mishing women are born artists, which reflect in their designs of their clothing. By dint of the hard work, knowledge, experience, imagination and skill, the Mishing women can weave varieties of cloths and garments with unique specialities and characteristics for use to all other members of the family. Most of the cloths are decorated with designs and patterns of different motifs to make them beautiful and attractive. The Mishing designs reveal their closeness to the nature. The stars, the moon in the sky, the flowers of different varieties of nature, pictures of birds, animals, historical monuments and so forth, are very beautifully designed in their looms. The designs and patterns are generally woven in the body and fringe parts of the cloth as per their types. Barooah and Dedhia (2015) mentioned that the unique features of Mishing textiles are bright colour in combination, elegant designs and motifs. The chief characteristics of Mishing design is the use of geometrical shapes in the form of triangular shapes and diamonds along with bands of lines. Continuous diamond forms and waves features very prominently in the borders of Mishing textiles. The triangular designs represent hills, which are narrow at the top and broad at the bottom. The butties, generally seen in the Indian traditional textiles are woven in Mishing textiles in the form of star or flowers, which appear all over the women’s costumes. The designs generally consist of geometrical various forms of birds, deer, horse, butterfly and sprays of flowers, star and trees in a number of combinations. Floral butties on black background is often compared to the night sky. Most of the dresses are of multicolour with massive designs except few are of single colour with simple or without design. Colour selection is a centre of attraction of the Mishing fabrics. The colours used in Mishing textiles has significant meaning related to nature such as black represent darkness, blue represents sky, green represents green pasture of nature. Married Mishing women wear with horizontal red, white and black stripes to keep evil eyes away.

The designs, patterns and motifs are called *Gamik* in Mishing. There are different varieties of *Gamiks*. The gamiks are systematically preserved using finely made split bamboo with strong thread in a model format called *Mimang* or *Gamik mimang* (Fig. 3). The weavers use the *mimang* as model and pick up designs and patterns from it for their new cloths (Doley, 2014).

The basic pattern, known as a *Gai-gamik*, expressed in graphic details, follows a particular system called *Alam*. The graphic designs consisting different forms of straight, angular, rectangular, triangular and square directions ultimately gives rise to a particular design or shape. In giving shape to specific pattern, mixing different colour threads, care, concentration, eyesight, patience and skill are required to a weaver. Moreover, a good weaver should have thorough knowledge in every aspect of a *gamik* inclusive of graphic directions their names, techniques and utilities, related to it. Some forms



Fig. 3 : *Mimang*

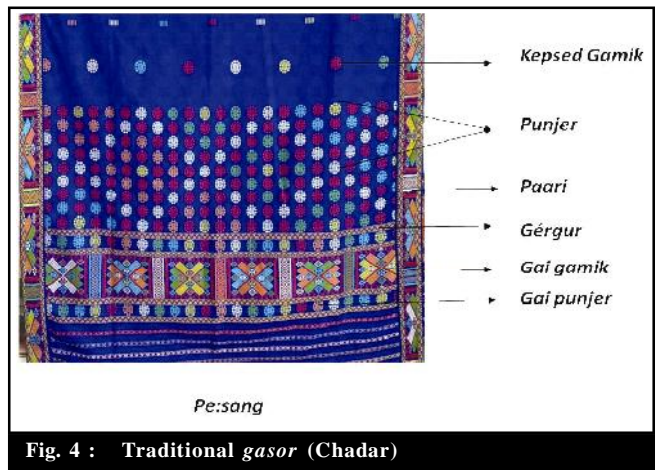


Fig. 4 : Traditional *gasor* (Chadar)

of *Gamik* which are devoid of *Alam*, being represented by circular, semicircular and some other irregular lines could be grouped in a category called *Appun gamik* and it mostly includes designs of flowers, animals and birds (Kuli, 2012). Most of the Mishing women are expert weavers and hence it could be said with proud that there are very few women in other communities who can compete and beat them in the field of their weaving capabilities.

The following terms and designs represent the Mishing weaving arts

Duksub-dugjar : Graphic lines converging and diverging to a particular point in horizontal direction (Fig.5i)

Duggyi-duksang : Graphic lines converging and diverging to a particular point in up and down direction (Fig.5ii)

Ke:si konggar : A type of *alam* (Fig.6i)

Korod-koli: A kind of handsaw (Fig.6ii)

Méyap: A group of hand fans (Fig.6iii)

Ta:yob: A Caterpillar (Fig.6iv)

Do:ni: Sun motif (Fig.7i)

Iki: A design of twenty five paisa coin (Fig.7ii)

Péki: A dove (Fig.7iii)

Marsang appun: A design of vegetable flowers (Fig.7iv)

Takar: A design of stars (Fig.7v)

Moimang: A picture or a photo

Nasoni: A dancer

Mokorang: A spider (Fig.7vi)

Po:pir: A butterfly (Fig.7vii)

Ngosig: A design of a fish scale (Fig.viii)

Yokmo:rengke: It means a poisonous arrow (Fig.7x)

Kingkub-ki:lab: A pattern of repetition at regular interval

Kebyir-kebgur: A type of *Alam* at borders of a cloth

Tigur: A type of *alam* at borders of a cloth

Ebong: A wicker hat used as an umbrella (Fig.7xi)

Gorgé-Tignam: A type of *Alam* bordering the principal pattern horizontally by both sides.

Keteri: Cross shape designs (Fig.7xii)

Karpumpuli: A kind of small geometrical designs (Fig.7xiii)

Adoli: A design of fifty paisa coin

Dosnoya: A design of ten paisa coin

Pa:me: appun: A design of orchid flowers (Fig.7xiv)

Babori appun: A design of plant flower

Dumsung: A deer

To:de: A peacock



i. Duksub-dugjar

ii. Duggyi-duksang

iii. Géryi-Gérsang (horizontal)

iv. Duggyi-duksang

Fig. 5 : Different arrangement of *punjer gamik* used in *ege-gasor* (*Mekhela-chadar*)



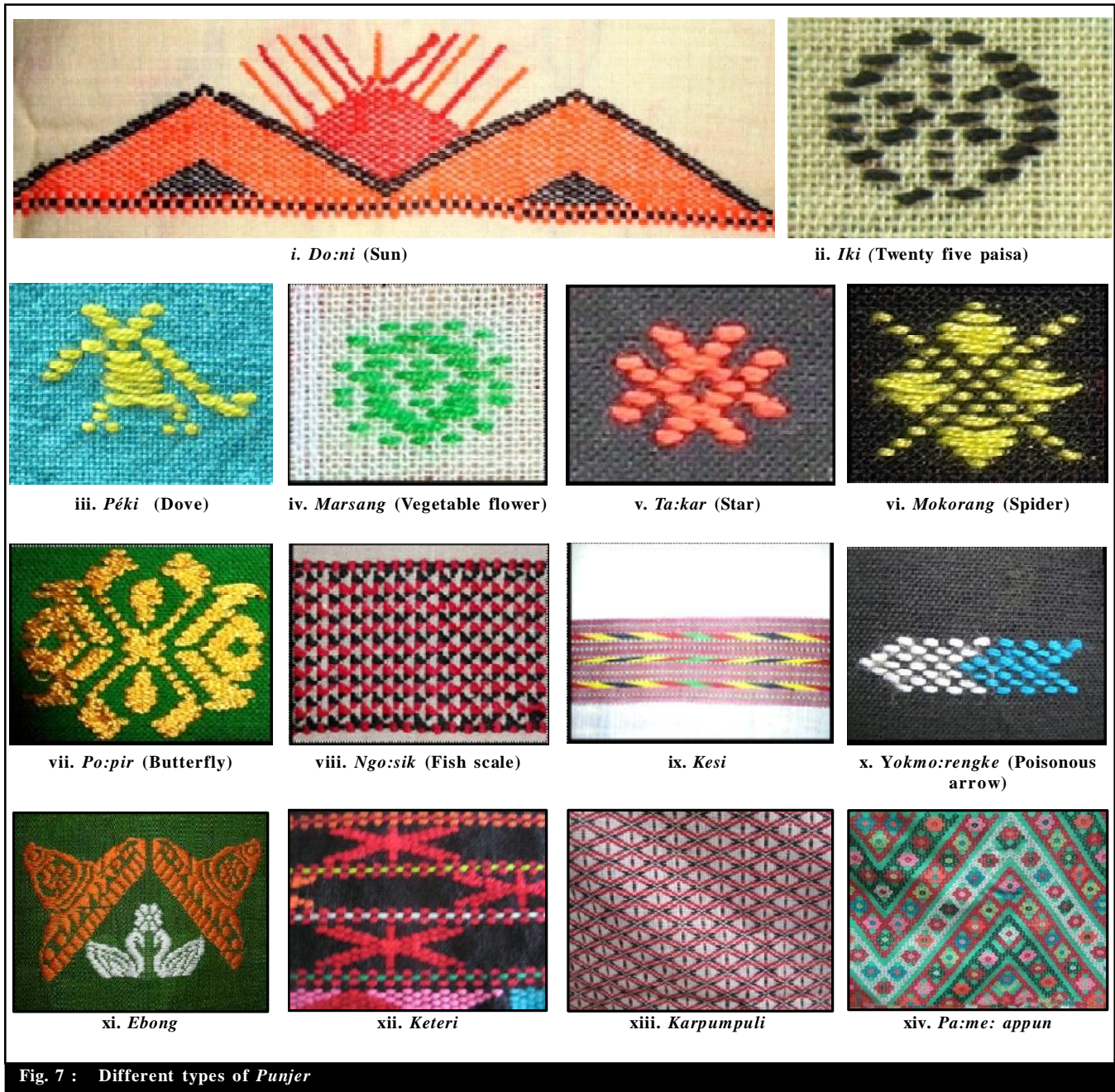
i. Konggar

ii. Korod-koli

iii. Méyap

iv. Ta:yob

Fig. 6 : Different types of *gai gamik*



Tasang akang: A weaver birds nest

Sité: An elephant

Tasmohol : The Tajmahal

The present status of the Mishing traditional textile motifs and designs :

At the present time, there is growing impact of science and technology, in one or other way, in the weaving industry of this society. The necessity to produce cotton plants in the fields for yarns has reduced considerably because of easy availability of variable qualities of cotton threads in the market. Moreover, the repeated affect of floods of the 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. Of course, some poor families in remote areas still pursuit the habit of silk and muga worm production with some interest to fulfil their requirements mostly through traditional way without adopting scientifically developed methodology resulting always low production.

On the other hand, there is noticeable improvement in the quality and standard of Mishing weaving craft production. The unique patterns of *Gamik* represented in woven dresses would always reflect distinctly the attractive as well as incomparable beauty of designs. Now-a-days, the Mishing women have been looking forward to commercialize these valuable products in the market which is a positive step towards financial benefit for themselves and to their families. Individual entrepreneurs, organisations, government agencies can also play great role in promoting the Mishing weaving craft.

The Mishing society has got a high expectation from the “Cultural idol” section of the society in respect of preservation and all-round further development of this industry as a mark of its age old tradition and identity in recent years to come.

Conclusion :

The cloths and garments woven by the Mishing weavers with fine attractive patterns, designs and brilliant colour combination are gaining popularity now-a-days. Weaving is a traditional craft of Mishing community, which they have been nurturing since time immemorial.

The unique patterns of designs represented in woven dresses would always reflect distinctly attractive as well as incomparable beauty of designs. Mishing motifs and designs has a particular meaning attached to it and is drawn with a specific purpose in mind. In fashion trends, there is always a demand for something new and artistic. The rich treasure of these traditional art will give shape to the modern art and will make art conscious section of the society aware of such rich heritage of old civilizations.

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