

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Food is an important cultural construct of a community besides being the most essential item for survival of human beings. The present study intends to explore the relations between food and the community, the way food is socially and culturally constructed in the Mising society. Food is a marker of identity of a community. The preparations and practices of food habit help to understand the social relations and focus the cultural identity. This area of work includes issues like changing food practices, food in the age of globalization, food and gender relations etc. Food is also used as a ‘metaphor’ to convey concept. Food is used metaphorically so that it helps to understand the inner dynamics of a community. In every community or in every culture, foodways have important roles to play signifying various meanings. “[Food] is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors” (Barthes, 1975, pp. 49-50). The historical evidence also reveals that the effective communication of human being is organized only through the foodways of every cultural system. “The cuisine of a people and their understanding of the world are linked” (Soler 1973, pp. 943). Lévi- Strauss states, “natural species are chosen [as “totems”] not because they are ‘good to eat’ but because they are ‘good to think’” (1963, pp. 89). Food as a metaphoric term conveys different meanings and also mediates between nature and culture. The relation between nature and culture is universal in human society.

Fischler (1988) discusses on symbolic potential of food. He also carried out his discussion by arguing that food is absolutely central to our sense of identity. However, it is not only true that the eating patterns of a given group assert its collective identity, its position in a wider hierarchy, its organization, etc... Fischler argues how food is also central to our individual identity. The human individual is constructed by biologically, psychologically and socially and the speculative study is important to explore how food is related to identity formation (Fischler, 1988). The human relation with food is always complex as it combines two different dimensions from biological to cultural and the other

is from nutritional to symbolic function. But both the dimensions are linked together. For instance, we can very well go in for a broader analysis of the various perspectives of food which have been widely known in Mising community.

1.1. THE MISINGS: LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The North East India is also one of the most diverse and colourful regions of India consisting of geographically a varied topography, so also various races, tribes, cultures and societies. The indigenous inhabitants of this region have great wealth of variations. Assam is a state of north east India which is often called the gateway to the north east. The latitude extends from 20° and 22° north and 89°.46 and 97. 5' east longitudes. In 2011 census the total population of Assam is found to be 3, 11, 69,272 out of which 1, 59, 54,927 are male and 1, 52, 14, 345 are female. The overall literacy percentage is 73.18% (literate total persons 19507017) and the male literary rate is recorded as 78.81% (literate total men 10756937) and female literary is 67.27% (literate total women 8750080). Assam comprises a total area of 78,438 km and is sharing its boundary in the north with Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh; Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya in the south; Manipur and Nagaland in the east. Assam is bounded by Bangladesh in the west. She is a melting point of many ethnic groups. Topographically there are three zones, such as the Brahmaputra valley in the north; in the middle the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills and in the south Barak Valley.

The important mineral resources of Assam consist of petroleum, natural gas, coal and lime stone. Coal and iron are important and the smelting of these ores is also important for industry. The climate of Assam is tropical. The monsoon starts in the mid- May and continues till September. The winter starts in the mid- October and continues till March. The humidity is quite high during the summer and it's cool in Assam during winter.

1.1.1. PEOPLE OF THE STUDY

Assam is situated in the migratory route of mankind and it is a home of many races. The local culture is enriched and formed by the people of different races and cultures. The tribes of both hills and plains have different ethnic and linguistic background and they have coloured and variegated the culture of Assam. Among plain tribes Mising community occupies the second position with a population of 5, 87,310 as recorded in 2001 census. It is a major indigenous tribe whose main home land was especially the Siang Valley of the present Arunachal Pradesh. In earlier days, Misings were known as Miri. The Indo- Mongoloid tribe earlier settled in Arunachal Pradesh. In course of time Misings migrated to plain areas of Assam and settled down in near the Brahmaputra banks. Thus their life style and culture both are centred to the river. Now the inhabitants are basically scattered down in eight districts of Assam viz. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sivsagar, Sonitpur, Golaghat and Jorhat. Misings are gradually spreading to the banks of rivers- Dihing, Dikhow, Subansiri, Ranganadi and Dikrong. The erosions of Brahmaputra have forced Misings to move to other places. The word Mising is a blend of “mi” man and “asi” water. Still the origin of Mising community is controversial. Some says “mi” man and “yashing” means “bright or good people”. Misings are the second largest scheduled tribe of Assam. As per the census report of 2001, the total literary rate of Mising community is 60.1% (male 71.4% and female 48.3%) which constitutes 17.8 % of total population. The Misings are included in Tibeto- Burmese language speaking group. They have very attractive varieties of material culture and they also have an excellent taste in colour. Misings are self sufficient and their works show the technical perfection in home made products. It is noticeable that Mising culture is assimilating themselves with the other indigenous people and their culture residing in the plain areas of Assam.

1.2. MIGRATION OF THE MISING SOCIETY

There is no written history of the Misings. To know their origin and migration details we have to depend on the oral traditions which are still

prevailing in their society. There are many stories related to their migration but no definite and satisfactory discussion has been written yet. There is no systematic account of the Misings and no definite historical account can be made regarding their migration. Misings brought certain traits of culture from the hill with different batches of migration. British Officer Col. F. Jenkins wrote to A. J. M. Mill, in a letter on 4th June, 1853, about the tribes of Assam:

Miris and Abors are kindred tribes and more or less intermixed in the hills extending from Luchimpoor (Lakhimpur) to Dibing. The Abor generally occupy a jurisdiction over the latter, whether in the hills or on the plains. From the Persecution of the Abors arising throughout Upper and Central Assam is small clans in the midst of jungle, mostly along the banks of the great rivers and their tributaries. The Miris near Lakhimpur are not mixed with the Abors, and the Abors beyond the Dibang and up to the Dibong are with the former exchanging the products of the plains for canoes and large timbers. (cited in Sarma, 2004, pp. 10).

There are three or four possible routes of migrations. The routes indicate that Misings were migrated through north or the mountain passes of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. The valleys of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra from the west are also a route. Passing through Bengal or Burma by sea and the Assam-Burma routes, one over the Patkai passes in the north-east leading from the Lido- Margherita road to China through the Hukawang valley in Burma, and the other through Manipur and Cachar in the south- east or south of Assam. According to linguistic researchers Misings fall in the category of Tibeto- Burman speakers of the greater Sino- Tibetan group. In this connection like other Sino- Tibetan language speaking groups of great Mongoloid group of people, the Misings originally were the ancient inhabitants of the upper courses of the Yangtse- Kiang and the Hoang-Ho rivers of north-western China. According to professor S.K. Chatterjee, Mongoloid tribes from Western China speaking forms of Sino- Tibetan speech appear to have been pushing south and west from their original homeland from pre-historic times, but certain large scale movements might have begun in the early part of the first millennium B.C. (1974, pp. 20-23). But Dr. P.C. Choudhury has concluded that it is uncertain to predict, when and how the migration and settlement of various branches of Tibeto- Burmese family took place on Brahmaputra valley; but, the weight of evidence proves that the migration of tribes is to be attributed to different periods in history of the land and that most of them, if not all, came

after Indo- Aryan speakers from the west (1987, pp. 75). Based on the distribution and occupation of particular areas groups of people came to known as Bodo, Mizo, and Naga. Still migration continues from one place to another after the division and occupation. P.C. Choudhury has made a few references which indicate that some tribes had already settled in this land before the first century AD; the Anthropophagi of Ptolemy or the Alitrophagi of Ammianus Marcellinus were probably a branch of the Mishmis or Nagas; Ptolemy mentions other tribes, confirmed by Ammianus. The Garinaoi may be identified with the Garos; Nabannoe, the Rabhas; Asmeraoei, the Miris; Batoe, the Bhutias and the Nagalogoe, the Nagas; Barrhai, the Bodos etc (1987, pp. 83-84). The tribes of Tibeto- Burman group of North- Assam branch like the Aka, Dafalas, Miri, Abor and Mishmi are now are occupying the foot of the hills in the north, extending from western Assam to Sadiya in the east (Linguistic Survey of India; 1987, pp.85). Nomal Ch. Pegu expresses, “The etymology of the word ‘Miri’ is debatable and ambiguously used by many writers to denote numbers of tribes of the hills and plains” (1956, pp.4). Edward Tuite Dalton quoted in 1872 thus: “For a long period under the Assam Government the Miris manage to themselves the entire trade between Assam and the Abars; and as being thus the only medium of communication between the two peoples, they obtained the name ‘Miri’, which means mediator or go between, and is the same word as ‘Miria’ or ‘Milia’ used with signification in Orissa” (1989, pp.28). L.A. Waddell writes, they call themselves ‘Mi- shing’, but are known to the Assamese as ‘Miri’. The Dafalas call hill- Miris ‘chi-Mur’ (1975 ed., pp.57). E.A. Gait also considers the meaning of ‘Miri’ is to be ‘a middleman’ but Nomal Chandra Pegu opines that the word ‘Miri’ is derived from the improper intonation of the word ‘Mirui’ - priest prevalent amongst the Adi group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the word had come to the Adis from Tibet, as the Tibetan language, Mi-means man, Ri-means hills (1956, pp.4). Thus the word “miri” is used in ancient and medieval literary texts of Assam. And it refers to the tribe of Mising.

The people having Mongoloid (as the early inhabitants of these regions) features have been frequently referred in *Puranas* and *Tantras*. To make the general idea of the early history of the Mising such literary sources are taken

into consideration. Originally Misings were hill dwellers and in course of time they migrated to various plain areas of Assam. In Arunachal Pradesh vivid legendary evidences of dwelling of Mising people have been found. The existence of some legends is accepted as folk history among the Misings and these are transmitted generation to generation. These legends are related to migration of the tribe from hill areas to Brahmaputra valley. The popular stories relating to their migration are analyzed to trace out their migration routes and cultural traits which they have brought with them.

According to J. Doley, ‘it is worth mentioning that the Misings migrated to the plains due to increasing fragmentation of land holding, ecological crisis caused by intense cultivation and chronic deficit in flood production in the hill areas. The geographical situation of hill areas also made the livelihood of the Misings very difficult and intolerable by unfriendly topography interated by mountains and passes” (1999, pp.47). Among the ethnic groups of Assam Mising or the *Miris* as they were known earlier, has an enormous contribution to the cultural as well as the traditional social system. Racially a Mongoloid stock of people, the Misings have ethno- linguistic affinity with the Adis and the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh. Misings after migrating to various plain areas of Assam during the first half of nineteenth century, changes occurred in their culture, ecology, economy and social life.

1.2.1. FOOD AS MATERIAL CULTURE

Since the inception of human civilization, material culture of the folk people has been playing a pivotal role. Materialization was a part of their action. The primary needs of human being are food and clothes since the beginning of civilization. In the discipline like folklore, the object of material culture attempts to study living and non- living methods and the handmade item’s technique, styles and methods are also studied. The study of material culture looks into the traditionally oriented groups and tribes about their cooking procedure, settlement patterns, artefacts, technology, symbolic and religious art etc. The scope of this study refers to the total physical culture of the community. The importance of material culture is seen in academic and

applied contexts. Now the field of material culture of various social groups across the country is an important part of study among the interdisciplinary subjects like sociology, anthropology, art history, archaeology and linguistics. Technological changes and industrialization both have created certain problems like social, cultural and unequal development in material culture.

Material culture includes folk cookery as an important area of study. Food habits are not the domination of materialistic consideration but it needs the availability of food stuffs, climate condition and social- religious pattern of life. Earlier during the development of society mankind consumed food- raw or roasted. The concept of cooking and its development made the man invent pottery and utensils. The introduction of cooked food brought a great change in diet. The human food system made remarkable changes by the evaluation of methods for preservation of food and its industrial production. Both the preservation and production concepts have changed the differences in local diet and materially influenced the diet of people. Earlier the productions were used as both food and fun. According to Don Yoder, folk art of cooking and food habits both are traditional domestic ways of cooking and consumption pattern. There is an association of beliefs and practices related to food habits marked by regional variation. The everyday cooking is based on tradition; it is opposite to commercial, institutional and scientific- nutritional versions of cooking.

Don Yoder defined folk cooking as:

“The scope of the study of folk art of cooking and food habits is wide which includes the food themselves, its morphology, preparation preservation and social and psychological functions, and their remification into all other aspects of folk culture” (D. Yoder, “Folk Cookery” in Dorson *Folklore and Folklife- An Introduction*, pp. 325, 1972).

Food habit has biological supportive activities and it is an aspect of cultural behaviour. In Goody’s view (1982:37), providing and transformation of food can be conceptualized in terms of five main processes; such as production, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal. In socio-cultural aspects, these five factors have linkage with modern food system. The diversity of food habits is another aspect of socio- cultural life. Regional and

local variations of food habit are conceptualized to understand the taste and nutritional support of food towards human food system. Mary Douglas defined foodways as a kind of language encoding patterns of social relations, particularly those connected with social boundaries and with processes of inclusion and exclusion (Douglas 1975).

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Food is a prime factor of life. Human foodways and the web of food practices and beliefs related to food assert the principles associated with life. When we talk about foodways of a community the whole notion is constructed by the society. The acceptance of society is generated by certain integral parts like traditional beliefs, rituals, ideologies related to food. In disciplines like Cultural Studies, many academic theories can help in understanding representation of culture. Food studies reveal the ideas how the approaches have changed across time and space to study a multi disciplinary subject and how our foodways are determined by culture as well as by biology. In this purpose the concept of food is immensely used. The prevalent understanding of food, in general and the potential for cultural behaviour, in particular is generated by ideology. Human foodways are the result of complex relationship of human nutritional needs, ecology, human logic or lack of it, and historical accidents. Human being makes food, but according to Marx in history, “they do not make it just as they please” (Marx, 1986: 276).

The ideology related to food is not uniform or homogenous in every community across the world which varies from society to society. The difference arising out of different geographical locations, the heterogeneous groups of people that constitute the Indian society have thus differed on the basis of place, time, class and caste. The historical evolution of society in course of time and the study of variation and change of human diet explore how these ideas have been changing across time and space. The study of food in the disciplines like Cultural Studies can be one way to understand the area as generalizable and predictive principles in the domain of other culture. This area is benefitted as it can reveal the early society and the evolution process of

human diet and by analyzing it one can draw some conclusions about the scope and validity of this area and hold of such ideas over the minds of people by looking into the matter of dietary customs continued to be used to maintain the tradition. In academic disciplines like Cultural Studies, it is a multi disciplinary subject and observes the representation of culture by studying various fields. Different academic theories help this discipline to understand the representation of culture. As a discipline cultural studies has drawn from areas and the purposes of cultural studies are analytic, pedagogic and political. For examining the representation of culture different theories have drawn from varied field sociology, film studies, literature, political economy, folklore theories, philosophy. Cultural studies combine different theories thus it laid emphasis on this areas to study the cultural phenomena in various societies.

To study cultural values and norms among other different fields of social science, folklore is one of the most important areas to be studied by the researchers to reflect the culture in a society in different forms. Food studies help to overcome the gap across disciplines and analysis of folkloric material from the perspective of culture can lead to understand how food is related to nature and culture. There is a need to survey food studies in folklore to acquire knowledge and customs through the device of culture.

It is important to look at the representation of cultural values, norms and beliefs through the mode of food. Every community follows certain norms which make the community different from others. The customs and traditions determine various food items and cultural practices related to food help to assert identity of a community. If we think rationally food is very complex when it works for identity in different levels. The study of food enables us to understand the connection between nature and culture. It also indicates socio-cultural dimensions to take cultural/ structural or semiotic approach. The cultural or structural approach treats food as “good to think” within the same environment. On the contrary semiotic approach refers food that people manipulate it to make statements about and to challenge social relations. Food is poised between the “natural” and the “cultural” worlds (Lévi- Strauss, Volume 1, and Chapter 9). The study regarding food should be more analytical and it requires empirical investigation. Food stands at the crossroads of the

“external” and “internal” natures. External nature indicates the physical environment and internal nature refers the nature of human biological and physiological functioning. Civitello’s (Volume II, Chapter 14) opines, “We can only really understand the nature of foodways and food production in the present day if we contextualize current human interventions into the physical environment as part of broader trends and processes within all of the history of evolution of the human species”.

In India, subject like Cultural Studies helps to concentrate on cultural consumption. In particular, consumption in the context of cultural studies is centred on the generations of meanings in the process of consumption. Folklore would do well to concentrate on the domination of culture and ideological difference in a society. Folklore, in general, and, consumption, in particular, carries ideological meanings supportive of the social order. The consuming practices are enjoyed by every community across the world. This vast notion is considered to be used in wide range and consumption of food and its related cultural practices have been selected as the primary object of the study. The representation of food and the cultural construction related to food practices in the context of socio- cultural and historical dimension will be examined.

As in the earlier discussion it is mentioned that the study of food is one of the important dimensions of Cultural Studies. Like other aspects, food related proverbs, riddles, folk songs are famous in society and it is preserved in course of time. Those who do not have written documents, in their society the folk elements are orally transmitted from one generation to other. Consumption related study is very important in the present day to rectify their own identity through the medium of food. Food reflects the culture of a society. There must be a careful observation to study food of a community. It is noticeable that in a society food is continued to be used in different perspectives, e.g. rituals, religion, festivals, ceremonies and every day activities. Hence it is important to study food in both the contexts- tradition and modern. In the present work the analysis of food will be confined from local to national level. A food study, particularly of Mising community is focused but foods belonging to other ethnic communities of Assam have not been included in this dissertation.

In north east, the study of food is very important area as such study would provide us a very useful analysis of food from nutritional support to cultural phenomenon. It is important to examine how the representation of food constructs the identity of a community. In north east India, food study is a very new area of research and it remains as a virgin field. In the field of folklore the entry of food study is very new with different theories to generate. In north east very few works of this area are done and in Assam this area is very new. The present work analyses the food related cultural practices in Mising society by looking at the ethnic assertion of this community through different food elements. Since the study of food related cultural practices of Mising community is the primary objective of this study, therefore, food is used only as medium of the study. Therefore, apart from food related cultural practices, other notions related to food such as globalization, gender relations to food, perception of people regarding food have also been studied. The third chapter of this work presents a discussion of various uses of food in different rituals, festivals, religion based on which it attempts to examine the representation of food in every day practices of life.

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Over all the aim of this study is to identify the eating patterns of Mising community. The objective of this study includes,

Identifying changes in consumption patterns

Studying consumption experiences and lifestyles

Studying the cultural aspects of consumption in Mising community

Examining the relationship between consumption and globalization

To assess consumers perceptions and attitudes towards contaminated foods in Mising's traditional food.

The overall aim was divided into several research questions. These specific aims are:

1. To understand food studies in the context of different methodologies.
2. To make a broad survey of preparation and processing process of various recipes of Mising society. It studies how different methods are used in field studies and the problem of applying these methods into the field.
3. To investigate how consumption shapes the life style of Misings living in the rural Assam. To explore the food related cultural practices in Mising society.
4. To examine the gender role regarding food preparation and processing in Mising society. It studies the women's relationships to food and kitchen space and tries to interpret them on the basis of ecofeminists perspective.
5. To understand the role of globalization in the consumption and everyday life of urban, semi urban and rural people. To assess consumer perceptions and attitudes towards contaminated foods. It studies how the concept of globalization has affected the foodways of Mising society in general.

1.5. VALIDITY AND THE SCOPE OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present research explores the quintessential food elements of a particular ethnic group especially how food is an essential element and cultural practices are related to food including rituals, ceremonies and festivals. How the traditional society is maintaining the historic and cultural connection is a topic to focus. The present research is trying to think about food by exploring these connections to establish the validity of food study. Food study being an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary area of research attracts people from diverse areas of sociologists, anthropologists, historians and folklorists.

Although research related to Mising community has been conducted by various scholars who are noteworthy. But no attempt has been taken to explore the food as an integrated part the Mising community from cultural perspective. Now it is our function to find out how this nature based society is still maintaining their culture and an attempt has been made to explore this virgin field from socio- cultural and historical vision. In this context the research conducted is to be feasible and unique and tries to find the thinking of the Mising people to create their present food habit.

1.6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To carry out the research work researcher has to go through various books (print), eBooks, research papers published in journals. The study needs lots of reading as it is a virgin field of research in Assam. This area has mainly drawn attention from the field of social sciences.

Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch's *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods* (2009) is based on the research methods in food studies along with a brief description of various food studies with methods from different disciplines. Authors have described the basic ethics of food studies and found how food itself becomes a methodological tool for it. Why food study is diverse and the importance of food studies in present field of research is very clearly described in the mentioned book. This book is helpful to construct the basic notion for the research of food studies.

Among numerous theoretical works Szeman, Imre and Timothy Kaposy's book *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*. Part 1 & Part 2 eds. (2011) can be regarded as an important work on cultural theory. Different essays help to understand what cultural theory is. In this anthology theorists have discussed how theory works and what it means, the understanding of theory has changed over the time in a very systematic way. Theorists have given general frameworks as well as organizing principles for future analysis and investigation. In the anthology different cultural theories work as a tool for analyzing activities, practices and artifacts are presented. An assessment can be

made what theorists have contributed to their societies and the overall framework of social life.

Cultural Studies: An Anthology edited by Michael Ryan (2008) is an important theoretical book to illustrate theories on Cultural Studies. Mike Featherstone, Roland Barthes, Sze Tsung Leong, Douglas B. Holt, the essays are classic and contemporary. These are designed to use in both international and interdisciplinary arena. The essays are the settings for different departments from literature, communication to film studies, anthropology. The diverse fields have helped to understand the leading scholarship of this complex field.

Chris Barker's 3rd edition on *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2008) is one of the best introductory books with a broader range of theories and issues to understand the subject Cultural Studies. The author has given a critical overview to understand theory and method. This is a leading book to know the basic foundation of theory, different phase of development in the subject of Cultural Studies, the multiple meaning of culture and the question that occupy in the field today. The concise and accurate definitions have expanded an indispensable tool for the readers.

Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil eds. *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and society* (1997) is an introductory book to sociology of food. Authors have highlighted the social and cultural dimension of the human food system. Apart from this the production, consumption and distribution of human food system is clearly discussed by the authors. The consciousness of human health is another important part of this book. The everyday act of eating and the new ways of thinking about food is also attracting the food critiques. The areas which the book has covered are origin of human subsistence and the development of the modern food system; food, the family and eating out; diet, health and the body image. The meanings of meat and vegetarianism provide comprehensive overview to help the interdisciplinary field studies.

K.T. Achaya's *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food* (1998) provides a coherent and accessible introduction to attractive Indian food. This book

explores the history of Indian diet. Author has very aptly described the history and evolution of Indian food based on different sources- history, botany, literature, archaeology and genetics. He has detailed out Indian cuisines in different varieties, dishes and food materials. From pre- historic to modern cooking method a systematic study has been discussed in separate chapters. The ingredients, cooking methods related to Indian food is minutely described in this book.

The Mishings (Miris) of Assam: Development of A New Lifestyle (1993) by Jatin Mipun includes socio- economic background of Mising community. The author has portrayed the whole aspects of Mising society and discusses the traditional Mising community as well the impact of modern communication in the development of Misings. This is an introductory book and it throws light on every aspect of this community. The acculturation of Mising community in language, religion dress, tools and implements are discussed and gives a detailed account of this community. To understand social, religious, cultural, economic levels of Mising community this book is effective.

Ashok Sarma's book *Folk Culture of the Misings of Assam: Tradition and Change* (2004) is an important book to understand the socio cultural life of the Mising of Assam. The material culture of this second largest ethnic group is influenced by oral narratives. The folk art, crafts, architecture, ornaments, costumes, food all have been studied in depth by the author. Dr. Sarma has examined their traditional life pattern, legends, myths and tales which have influenced in Mising society. Apart from these, author did a vast range of study on their art, craft activity, metallic tools, earthen pottery used in traditional cooking process, food preparation and preservation. The traditional life is eroded by the impact of modernisation and urbanization has affected their folk culture. This informative book has given an insightful study on this ethnic group.

E.N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (2005) is an interesting book to the food critiques. This book deals with basically what we eat and why we eat. The importance of rice as a staple food is vastly discussed by the author. The spices, sweets and coffee have got an

important point of discussion. Why we love to have these as a part of our eating habit? The choice of food has two dimensions i.e. social and cultural and why people eat nutritional diet is also an important approach to the study. The economic part related to food is curved out in the context of globalization which the author has given importance in the book. Food is also important when it is related to religion, traditional medicine, ethnicity and environment. The author has given some suggestive information to control food security, malnutrition, hunger and starvation.

Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan ed. *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* (2005) book gives an in depth study on food centred activities in gender relations. Authors have constructed gender identity across the culture and also highlight how gender hierarchy is created by food. The gender relationship considered by investigating the control of production, distribution and consumption of food contributes to men's and women's power and social position. Authors have also explored the maleness and femaleness related to connotation of food and tries to establish social value of men and women. The attitude of men and women towards their bodies and issues like the legitimacy of their appetites has also been examined in this book.

1.7. AIM OF THE STUDY

The Misings of Assam carries different characteristics by its distinct art, craft, costumes, and architecture and food habits. This ethnic group is distinct by their food habit as the preparation; processing and preservation methods of Mising community are unique. But till now the foodways of Mising community is a virgin area of research.

The aim of the present study is to collect data on the food ways of the Mising society. The present work intends to analyse the changes of food habits due to various factors and to explore the responsible causes related to this.

1.8. METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

To carry out the research work, data have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. For primary sources data have been collected directly from the field. To conduct my fieldwork, I visited various areas of Lakhimpur, Majuli, Sonitpur, Dhemaji and Kamrup metropolitan. These are the districts of Assam. From the field study foodways of Mising society was observed and their changes were also brought into notice. To explore the areas techniques like interview and observation methods were used. Non- participant observation method was also used to conduct the research. To obtain the present scenario, position, transition of culture and to secure certain proper information interview method was used. The two fold purposes of collecting data which researcher has classified to analyse the data. Later the available data were classified into chapters and sub- chapters to discuss in a systematic way. The collected data were analyzed to make it relevant in present time and the foodways of Mising society was examined to interpret and analyzed in order to fulfill the research work.

To collect the secondary data I have selected a number of research articles, published journals, books, census report and related websites to make it descriptive analysis. A good number of books written by folklorists and social scientists were also read to establish the work scientific. To collect the secondary material researcher did library work in IGML of University of Hyderabad, Central library of Tezpur University, NECTAF library Tezpur University.

To get an indepth study at micro level, during the fieldwork some case studies were taken to concentrate the practices still continuing in contemporary Mising society. Apart from these techniques, a camera was used during the field work to collect the specimens which help to illustrate the data.

Some information has been collected from my informants. I have tried my best to collect the true and authentic information of the foodways of the Mising society. I have also tried to give an authentic description by collecting from the fields and theoretical training. As there is no written history of Mising society and culture therefore, researcher has to collect most of the information

from the widely prevalent oral history. The cooking preparation, processing and preservation works described in different chapters are based on personal observation during the field study.

The methodology of my work is basically based on the work of many thinkers working in the field of food and cultural theory. The present work is based basically on certain important methodologies i.e. cultural hegemony, discourse analysis, theory of ideology, feminist theory, postmodernism and cultural global theory. These assumptions are followed in my work to study food in different context of Mising society. The present work is carried out through different textual analyses of various texts of food and culture.

1.9. CHAPTERIZATION

This work is classified into six chapters. Chapter wise division is done to incorporate different ideas. The present chapter is a gist of the entire work. It includes an introduction to the research in food studies as well as the signification of conducting the research. Objectives of the work, review of literature, statement of the problem, chapterization are included to frame this chapter following a brief outlining of the importance of this research.

Chapter two entitled “Understanding Food Culture: Different Methodologies” deal with the trends of different methodologies in food studies. In this context different discussion on importance of food studies, historical methods, general discussion on oral history, perception of food and health among the Misings and several concepts have been looked at. The researcher also includes different methods like folklore, ethnography and oral sources.

Chapter three entitled “Food in Indian Society: A Special Reference to Mising Community”, observes a statement on how food is related in Indian society. This chapter is based on secondary and primary data. The secondary data is used to analyze how food is represented in popular culture, films and advertisements. While talking about food in different context the present study tries to incorporate with Mising community by giving a brief description on

preparation methods of various recipes as well as a short statement on food in everyday life, the seasonal cycle, food in ceremony and ritual.

The fourth chapter entitled “Women and Food: A Study of The Mising Community” observes theoretical and conceptual framework of gender relations to food. The role of women in general and Mising society in particular have been analyzed under various subheads such as gender, environment and food; displacement of women in the name of development and food production; food, gender and space; defining kitchen and dining space and culinary practices as an approach to gender study. The present study is also focused on the relation of Misings with river.

The fifth chapter entitled “Globalization and food: Impact on Mising Food Culture” deals with the impact of globalization as well as locating Mising community in a globalized world. Along with this, the effect of globalization and the trend of rapid changes in food habits have been analyzed. Rise of consumption studies, theoretical discussion, globalization and politics of identity, globalization and the Misings all these subheads are included to analyze globalization in terms of food. Along with all these descriptions, this chapter tries to bring out theoretical discussion on globalization.

The sixth chapter as a concluding one includes the summary of the current study and the findings of the current research are described. Both primary and secondary data reveal important findings regarding food culture of Mising community. The main aim of this work is to observe the foodways in society, in general and in Mising community, in particular. For this purpose various food theories and approaches related to food are discussed. In addition to this, how food is represented in various field of study to identify the community is also observed as well as giving importance to such study in the field of social sciences.

1.10. LIMITATIONS

This dissertation for the PhD work has certain limitations. There must have some limitations and constraints while doing PhD as it is an academic

degree so researcher must have to follow the specific time frame. Thus research has felt the limit of time and need to limit the study. The study of food is not possible to complete by drawing all the perspectives from various fields as there are immense ranges of communities in a society. Therefore, researcher has limited the study by relating it to only food related cultural practices and has included only Mising community to study.

This chapter as an introduction mainly focuses on objectives, validity and the scope of research questions, statement of the problem, review of literature; chapterization on the Mising community and food have been briefly discussed. The methodology of the study has been discussed in chapter second in a brief account. In the following chapter we will discuss on the methodologies of food studies and an overview in general.