

## **CHAPTER III**

### **FOOD IN INDIAN SOCIETY: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MISING COMMUNITY**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Foodways refer to the study of folk cookery and these are the social, cultural and economic ways to construct people and society as well. Foodways, as a part of folk culture, cover the food production, preparation and preservation processes as a social phenomenon. Food in culture, tradition and history often refers to the methods of cooking and consumption of food. The study of foodways is carried out by sociologists, anthropologists, historians and folklorists in their own fields. It is an attempt to study the preparation and consumption of food among the Misings of Assam.

Food is a prime factor of life. Food related customs, rituals, beliefs and practices provide us to satisfy our social norms. Food tries to bridge the gap of outside world and the inside world of the body. In the process of socialization, the individual identity and transformation of culture from generation to generation, is of central importance to internalize norms and values of a society. The life cycle of an individual starts socialization process during his/her infancy and it continues throughout the life. Socialization is an active process throughout an individual's life. The socialization process in foodways of an individual begins after he or she was born. At this stage the infant prefers to have liquid foods. This process gives scope to introduce various food items and to prepare suitable food for the young. Thus at the early stage a child gets the chance to think and learn to differentiate between food and non- foods.

#### **3.2. INDIAN SOCIETY AND FOOD**

“Food should be multiplied. That is the sacred rule. The earth is food indeed; space eats food and is itself dependent on the earth, [while] the earth [in turn] depends on space. Food, then, depends on food.

He who knows that food depends [and is firmly based] on food, has [himself] a firm basis; he becomes an owner of food, an eater of food, rich in offspring, cattle and the vital force of Brahmin, rich in fame.” (Taittirīya Upanishad III, ix, I, translated by Zaehner 1966: 143). (cited in Khare, 1976; pp. vii).

From the earliest Vedic period to contemporary times, the cultural landscape of India is connected with food. Food plays multiple roles in Indian society. It is not only a biological necessity but also an economic commodity, medium of social and familial interaction, in ritual and social transaction food plays as primary ingredient, as a marker of social boundaries, food focuses ethical concerns in religious virtuosi among common people. Thus food is a necessary part of Indian society and continues to be at the heart of Indian ritual practice by maintaining common etiquette, social behavior and theological speculation. In the Vedic age, sacrifices of animal were in vogue; the cattle reared offered as meat to their gods and in return asked for cattle wealth so that their practice of sacrificing cattle and eating meat might continue. The process of sacrificing cattle in Vedic period is called *pasubandha*. In contemporary celebration of cowherd god Kṛṣṇa in the region of Braj, the central attraction is the “mountain of food” (*annakuta*) created and consumed by the devotees (Toomey 1992). In India, every ceremony is celebrated inevitably with a feast. *Sraddha* is celebrated in period of oblations as food links the dead with the living. The ritual of daily begging- the receiving and giving of food links the Buddhist and Jaina monks with the laity and the Hindu *samnyasins* with the common folk. In the legal literature of *dharmasastra* and in the mind of ordinary people; there are issues related to food such as preparation, permission and distribution etc. how one should prepare food, from whom one can accept it, with whom one can eat, what one is permitted to eat were mentioned in the text. A similar thought is echoed in the famous creation hymn of the *Rgveda* (10.90.4) when it divides all things into those that eat and those that do not eat. While fasting is the most common potential act of ordinary people, ambivalence toward, and even fear of, food is a hallmark of most traditions of Indian asceticism (Olivelle 1991).

Food has different dimensions from nutritional support to biological and cultural construction. Food works as a common human phenomenon by transforming nutritional necessity to a medium of thought and communication. To understand the social structures and relationships it is necessary to study food. In recent times it is noticeable that the cultural use of food and such use of foods are regarded as major religious and cultural traditions. Mary Douglas in her writings focuses the application of anthropological categories and methods to the study of complex and contemporary societies. In “*Deciphering a meal*” (in Douglas 1975) wrote on modern British meal and “*The Abominations of Leviticus*” (in Douglas 1982) she analyses the ancient Jewish food prohibitions and shows how food habits can be fruitful for the study of complex cultures.

Food is a medium of expression and it reflects the food habit that was developed in modern urban and technological societies, but at the same time the sever disturbances in eating behaviour have increased. Recent increase of “food disorder” is found in diseases like anorexia and bulimia. Anorexia has also permitted interesting parallel studies between modern fasting girls and pre-modern anorexic in saints and thrown significant light on the cultural creation of food, as well as of holiness and sickness (Bell 1985). For the study of rich Indian material anthropological and historical studies of food in the West should provide fruitful models. R.S. Khare is a pioneer in the study of food in India and has edited a book named *The Eternal Food* (1992). It is one of the remarkable works of his valuable contributions. In Khare’s work it is clear that he argued to study Hindu religious and cultural attitudes toward and cosmological speculations regarding food by combining anthropological work. According to Khare, “foods for the Hindus represent essentially two interrelated dimensions– as a nutriment for remaining alive and as a cultural principle of cosmological creation” (1976b, 119).

It is observed that notion towards food in India has been changing two aspects i.e. culinary changes and modes of public dining. Now the pan- Indian trends are more visible as a national cuisine has not yet emerged. The regional cuisine is also changing as the fast food is crystallizing out of familiar regional preparation. Even new concepts are emerging regarding foods which are served

in formal occasion and the type of food which are preferred to serve as a daily cuisine. Many discourses are going on Indian food centering the social and religious rituals of the Indian society. The global market of ethnic dining is expanded with the new forces of global commercial integration. The aim behind this ethnic dining is to focus food as nutritious as well as food as social and ritual norms. In Indian society, the ideas of traditional medicine, healing practices and rituals are the same one under the age of globalization. People are aware of the excess of consumerism and waste, the ethnic food is the marker of social identity, success and cultivation. With the increasing food related health diseases the cultural status of people and meanings of Indian cuisines are also changing. Thus nutritionist, ethnographers and columnists are attracting towards Indian food or ethnic restaurants. Politics of food in countries like India have merged with a new concept by the traditional concern of ethnography of food- the cooked and the raw, the pure and the polluted, the sanctified and the profane. The new self- awareness is allowing a kind of politics of 'authenticity', not within the cultures being exposed to globalization, but within the dominant culture of global cosmopolitanism, driven by the ideas of alien that is familiar and the exotic that is accessible (Nandy, 2004). The Indian cuisine and the Indian cultural life are defined not within the geographical boundaries of India. Indian considers the Indianness as a form of ethnicity. Now to define the culture of a society is not confronted within a limited geographical boundaries of India rather the notion of ethnicity is important and to understand the domains of life, cultures of food within our country. India is the most diverse country regarding food and for its colourful culture. India has borrowed food heavily from every corner of the world. Indians have imported food to make it Indian. Many food items came to India lately. There are always a few ultra-nationalists who claim that these preparations and ingredients are Indian and the foreigners, either dishonestly or out of ignorance, consider them to be originally theirs (Nandy, 2004). The best examples are cauliflowers and mushrooms. Indian vegetables- papaya, potato, tomato, cashew nut, maize, capsicum, rajmah, tapioca and French beans. The Indian cuisines would have been poorer without them. The chilli, an essential part of Indian cuisine, came to India from South America. So also pineapple, guava, chiku came from outside India. Indian food such as pear, cinnamon,

lychee, peach, cherry and ubiquitous drink tea came from China. Cauliflower came from Europe and onion came to India from Central Asia. India is famous for its spices. Indian spices include a variety of spices grown in its subcontinent. Some of the spices are used not only to cuisines as ingredients but as things with medicinal values. These are garlic, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, fenugreek and asafoetida. With the diversity and uniqueness of food, India has opened certain cultural avenues towards the world. Not only the ingredients but food recipes also came to India from its sub continents. K.T. Achaya did a systematic study on Indian food. *Idli* the pride of South Indians of all the hues, acquired its present form from Indonesian kings who visited India to look for brides (Achaya, 1998a: 104- 5). Achaya opines that *jalebi* might have come from Persia. Likewise kebabs came from West and Central Asia. Biryani and pulao the types of rice are usually prepared with meat. In ceremonial occasion in many parts of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan is not completed without these two rice items. The term *pulao* or pilav might have come from Arabic and Persian. It is true that in Sanskrit- in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛiti*- and in old Tamil the term *pulao* occurs in (Achaya, 1998b: 11). Now it is well known that *biryani* and *pulao* carry the mark of Mughal times and is a symbol of Persianized high culture. There is difference in taste of Indian pulao and Persian *pilaf* and of late it has been influenced by Chinese fried rice also. Many imported foods are not in its original form as they are modified and the applicability of using these recipes has been changed. The contribution of Latin America to India can be guessed in respect of the use of chillies in curries, pickles, chutneys. The rediscovery of potato has changed the face of Indian cuisines, which is a substitute for cereals in Europe and it is used as a green vegetable in North America. Now there are at least three hundred preparations of potato mentioned in well known cookbooks and many of them are claiming to be originally Indian recipes.

The Indian cultural variety is recognized for its celebration, management and transformation as food is in centre of every occasion and rituals. The imported recipes have now dozens of varieties such as *pulao*, *kabab* and *biryani* etc. In an Indian restaurant one can get more than hundred types of biriyani which indicate the celebration of diversity in Indian dining.

The taste, balancing is no longer recognized as natural ethnocentrism. It is noticeable that one's favourite version of a particular preparation is followed by everybody. They consider their own preparation method to be superior to local preparations. The new classifications of favourite version and superior or inferior are emerging with the new avenues such as new media; sound marketing and exposure to international food are getting privilege and rigidity in status relationships among the various recipes.

### **3.3. FOOD AND POPULAR CULTURE**

Subordination is a matter not just of coercion but also of consent. Cultural Studies has commonly understood popular culture to be the ground on which this consent is won or lost. As a way of grasping the interplay of power and consent, two related concepts were repeatedly deployed in cultural studies' earlier texts, though they are less prevalent these days – namely, ideology and hegemony ( Barker, 2000; pp. 10). Ideology has different meanings that claim universal truths to understand it historically. Time now has changed. The class divisions of social formations and the constructed character of nationality are shown by television news now-a- days.

Popular culture has become a privileged topic of research since the late 1960s in American Studies. At that time popular culture in the form of TV and advertisement was becoming more important in representing the cultural images and both became culturally hegemonic force. The impact of political and aesthetic ramifications of post modernity on popular culture is more visible with the success of cultural studies. Many scholars have conceptualized the analysis of popular culture and they defied popular culture in diverse way. Four common uses of the term “popular” are identified by Raymond Williams. These are: which is well liked by common people, which is deemed unworthy or inferior, work deliberately seeking to win favour with people and forms of culture made by people for themselves.

Popular culture is constantly changing within an arena of large heterogeneous groups of people. It prevails on money economy and possesses more numerous individual relationships. As a hallmark this trend is cropped up

frequently in newspapers and conversations. The popular culture is spreading due to urbanization, industrialization, increase in leisure time and rise of formal education. The popular culture of food is changing very fast. The political interplay of cuisines and mutating tastes not only influenced the popular culture of food but also the collective experiences in contemporary times. Food is associated with tradition as well as personal and collective livings. The first one gives us the notions of health, diseases, nutrition or it represent as cultural marker of status, taste and cultivation. The later one reflects the milestones and trauma. While talking about food in the context of popular culture it refers to a taste for distinction. Food consumption and food ethics both are demonstrated within the medium of popular culture. Both the notions are preconceived systems. In simpler way food ethics is an outcome of social awareness and it talks about the impacts on personal consumption that has on the environment and farmers. Within the domain of food ethics, self- respecting concerns about nutrition and personal health also fall. In consuming food, distinction is an alternative outlook which may or may not contain ethical outlook. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) by Pierre Bourdieu, the term “distinction” denoted class distinction, and much of his text was devoted to identifying the differentiating elements between social classes. Cultural representation was the primary concern of Bourdieu. How the social classes preserve their privilege inter- generationally is emphasized in his work. The popular notion of equal opportunity for social mobility was denied by Bourdieu. He assumes that in the recognition of circumstances there is a level of pragmatic rationale or practical sense and there is also self modification. In the era of food fusion we are living in a world of cross cultures or diverse world.

Food is a part of popular culture and the eating practice is affected by the trend of a culture. The eating trends are related to cultural practices and beliefs. In contemporary time, food has become more popularized as well as it is fashion for example, in *iftar* (it is a religious observances of Ramadan) places like Hyderabad where people break their fast with Haleem (originally Arabic dish). Like that in Assam “*kharikat dia mass*” (roasted fish) which is now easily available in restaurant is prepared in oven. Thai food is the best

example as exotic which needs no introduction. The taste of such food makes it distinct by the juxtaposition of hot, sour, sweet and salty flavours. It is the society who generates the idea and objects of popular culture. There has been an increasing trend of eating away from home towards consumerism; also increasing use of dietary and herbal supplement as well as ethnic diversity in diets. In developed countries the mainstream population is following a new trend of consumption culture of low fat food, low calorie, natural and fresh ingredients. With the growth of fast food restaurants and use of convenience food the notion of Americanization of diets is also growing. Government and food industry are working to develop the need of certain basic foods to reduce the international food shortages and nutrient deficiency problems. The trend of eating away from home is increasing and the proportion of money spent in restaurants has also increased. The fast food lovers dine at restaurants, cafes and these are visited by all types of people. The popularity of this international food is increasing from a child to an elder one. KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken), McDonald, CCD (Café Coffee Day), Barbeque Nation the famous fast food brands which are internationally available. Now any kinds of food can be shared from different parts of the world. The global businesses of food and beverage companies have made it possible. The improved menu, dining experience upgrades and rapid expansion across the globe, the growth of consumer food services have made it possible to reach new consumers continually. The McDonald and KFC as an American fast food groups have become the dominant fast food chains across the world. The tag-line of these branded fast food groups are attracting people more. The brand KFC “So Good” reflects two notions, its freshly prepared food made from original recipes and the entire experiences of good food with family and friends. “I’m lovin’ it” the tag-line for McDonald fast food global brand promise that it is simple and fast enjoyment. This brand tag-line is reflecting to provide fun to customers. The tag-line reads “The World On A Grill” and Barbeque Nation stands for it. This brand has brought the concept of a live grill among the food lovers. Café Coffee Day stands for its tag-line “A lot can happen over coffee”. CCD is one of the most popular hangouts among the youths. These tag-lines try to influence the consumers. Another perception of these tag-lines is to enhance the relevance of the value, extend its reach and give it renewed vigour. The



strategy of the branding food is also to attract the young generation and to focus on the ethical consumer value. The ethical issues can be understood how different cultural environments may influence, for this cross cultural perspective is necessary. Media plays an important role to spread the foodways across the world. Visual media i.e. film and different materials of advertisement are creation of efficient consumers. This study focuses on how food as popular culture implements their international marketing strategies in different markets of various countries and how the specific national culture affects.

### **3.3.1. FOOD AND ADVERTISEMENT**

Advertisement is an active medium and an effective tool for the business of communication. Earlier attempt of advertisement was not to create consumers but now it endeavours to create audience and consumers. It has become an important part of mass media. To connect customers, catching customer's psychology, following the minds of the audiences, satisfying the customers by introducing new brands, new products, image, and new life style and so on, and advertisement is one of the most important tools. Advertisements in one side try to innovate a modern culture or new life style by introducing new products, with new concept of the brand, show their service items and also try to make sense of the industry. To get all the public information advertisement is the easiest way to reach the customers and through the media customers can choice the products. Thus advertisement has become a part of people's life. There are many methods of advertisement such as TV, radio, online advertising, newsletters, sales letter, print project, brochures and catalogues etc. The screens inside airport, the hoarding on the wall of shopping malls, public bus terminus and markets depict cosmopolitan life of modern time. To introduce the image and utility of the product, advertisement is an effective tool. To attract more audiences advertisement needs attractive design and content. The quality, picture, text, colour and the style or the language are the connections to create public attention.

As the saying goes, “we eat to live but we don’t live to eat alone”. Food we consume to live but to live a life regularly to consume food is not the purpose of life. If we imagine a world where consumption never ceases, we use bare survival and starvation continues at the same time. The act of consumption is a basic way of a structured and organized society. If consumers aspire only traditional needs then there is nothing to be required beyond this. The economic expansion is also consumer centric. In this situation, advertisement comes to play a vital role. Stuart Ewen talks about the new industrial situation with its hordes of cheap mass produced goods needed and he calls it ‘a continually responsive consumer market’ (1976:32, cited in Corrigan1997; pp. 66). In this situation consumers looked for reliable goods, reliable consumers are needed by good manufacturers; the newly produced goods need a market. Manufacturers have to fabricate both goods and people. For this, efficient consumers are needed and advertisement needs to be aimed at to create the targeted consumers. Ewen lists some of the terms advertisements used to create new inadequacies in their readers so that manufactures might supply the solution: “sneaker smell”, “paralysed pores”, “vacation knees”, “spoon- food face”, “office hips”, “underarm offense”, and “ashtray breath” (1976, pp. 97, cited in Corrigan1997; pp. 66). The readers are constructed as massed and gendered consumers by advertisements. The social movements like feminist movement may be harnessed to sell more goods through what Goldman (1992) calls ‘commodity feminism’.

Television is a key media to affect the food choices of people. Food advertisement accounts for twenty- two percent of all television advertisements (Federal Trade Commission, 2007). In 2005, thirty four percent of all money used on television advertisements was spent on food products; McDonald’s (a fast food restaurant) spent 776 million dollars on advertisements, whereas Quaker (noted for offering healthy food alternatives) spent 183 million dollars (Cardello, 2009). The influence of advertisement has aim at how consumers perceive food i.e. it has developed a homogenous food culture. In advertisements the taste of the products is less important than its appearance. Those who watch more television they prefer to choose such foods which they often see in commercials of the television. The aim of advertisement is not to

promote health consciousness but to promote a product in the market. Even in magazines and newspapers the foods are portrayed in different contexts as healthy and nutritious. To publicize foods through advertisement, the two key media television and magazine are used. People prefer organic food which is highly processed and healthy food like vegetables and fruits which contain vitamins, minerals are nutritious. But fast foods which are chronically fatigued are easily available in restaurants. Marshall McLuhan, the famous Canadian media theorist and also known as father of the notion of “global village” gives the idea on advertisement: Ads are not meant for conscious consumption. They are intended as subliminal pulls for the subconscious in order to exercise a hypnotic spell, especially on sociologists (1964, pp. 228).

The modern advertisements have certain essential characteristics. Advertising is a method used in business to promote the quality and services of the products among the customers. To increase the sales, advertisement promotes goods and its quality in a very positive way. Here the products themselves become the mediators. Advertisements generate desires in customers. The desire is important to create relations with others; this is also a target of modern advertisements to look out where the individual and society meet. Advertisements also concentrate on the ways of making the individual a successful social being. Psychologist Allport who argues in support of this approach says that, ‘our consciousness of ourselves is largely a reflection of the consciousness which others have of us....My idea of myself is rather my own idea of my neighbour’s view of me’ (Allport, 1924: 325, quoted in Ewen, 1977, pp. 34). Ewen remarks that ‘this notion of the individual as the object of continual and harsh social scrutiny underscored the argument of much of the ad texts of the decade [1920]’ (1977, pp. 34, cited in Corrigan1997; pp. 68). Advertisement aims at creating a group of people who will be consuming a particular product. Advertisement also reflects the trend of sophisticated marketing and targeted general consumers as well as narrow bands of consumers. Ewen (1976, pp. 41- 4) discussed advertising in the US in the following way,

“As a way of creating national homogeneity and thereby overcoming the tensions that seemed to spring up in countries marked by a great heterogeneity in population. Social solidarity was

seen to be strengthened by the emergence of the person as consumer as opposed to the person as a member of a specific ethnic group. Consumer goods claim to construct the nation as a culturally homogeneous entity, multiculturalism notwithstanding. If we all are consumers of the same products, then we are all the same culturally, no matter where we originate from". (cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp.68)

Advertising attempts to overcome other social divisions by creating the notion of mass consumer. Ewen (1976, pp. 43) further says; 'by transforming the notion of "class" into "mass", business hoped to create an "individual" who could locate his needs and frustrations in terms of the consumption of goods rather than the quality and content of his life (work)' (cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp.69).

In advertisements, the problems of life are turned into advantages considering the problems of capitalist and industrial societies as a system; they interpret that by the uses of particular product individual problems can be overcome. "In media and cultural studies, scholarship on magazines has occupied a less central and prestigious place than scholarship on other media" (Angela McRobbie, 1997, pp.192). We can look at how gender is used in advertisement and women's magazines as gender plays an important part in consumer culture. Erving Goffman's (1979 [1976]) account is on gender relations in advertising and Robert Goldman's (1992) analysis shows how feminism has been used by advertisers to sell goods, both these notions give us the idea of gender in advertisement (cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 70). Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979 [1976]) is an excellent collection of 508 advertising images of the 1970s. He looked at five main themes which represented in advertisement: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, family and ritualization of subordination (cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 70). Women's magazines play another important part of advertisement. Subject position is very important to attract the readers' attention. Another important analysis of women's magazine is its title and the contents. The titles of these magazines focus on women in different perspectives such as a member of a class, members of a relatively undifferentiated mass and status. The title and feature articles of the magazines seem that the major concept of these

magazines is family. The fundamental concept including all aspects is mainly creation of transformation. Actually what sort of women are the women of women's magazines; the title of the magazines focuses the women of women's magazine. Sometimes the titles are not quite informative about how woman' has been constituted as a social category. Ballaster et al. (1991) examine British women's magazines from the late seventeenth century through to 1988. Janice Winship develops ideas by researching on women's magazines to explore on double- edged nature.

“Many of the guises of femininity in women's magazines contribute to the secondary status from which we still desire to free ourselves. At the same time it is the dress of femininity which is both source of the pleasure of being a woman- and not a man- and in part the raw material for a feminist vision of the future... Thus for feminists one important issue women's magazines can raise is how do we take over their feminine ground to create new untrammelled images of and for ourselves?” (Winship, 1987: xiii- xiv).

The titles alone are not sufficient to provide the information regarding class/ mass distinction and the analyses have proved that 'woman' has not replaced 'lady'. Women are still located in domestic sphere and women are placed in different status. The titles of the magazine have constructed more individual types of women. The titles of the magazines are caught up in traditional areas to focus on subjects like marriage and the family (Brides, Modern bride, Parents, Working mother) or age groups (Seventeen, Teen, Young Miss). The class- subject and the mass subject both are important to signify the personal/ status category subject and have disappeared completely. The contents of the magazine rather than the title focuses as classed subjects and massed subjects. According to Ellen McCracken (1993: 84, 196- 8),

“There has been a drift back to class coinciding with the emergence of groups of women who earn high salaries. This new class belonging is not constructed through titles, but by such techniques as targeting only women who live in upscale postal codes with certain magazines (*Newsweek Woman*), or advertisements that appear only in issues sold in those areas, or restricting circulation to the well- off by raising cover prices”.

The class/ mass distinction is created by the items of advertisement within the general category of consumer. 'Lower- priced cosmetics.... are

usually advertised in magazines that reach women with moderate spending power... while ads for more expensive make-up lines appear on the pages of *Vogue or Town & country*- magazines with upscale readers' (McCracken, E., 1993, pp. 92). Goldman remarks,

“Advertisements almost never self-consciously raise the question of class. This may well be so, but this does not mean that they do not construct class in more subtle ways. This advertised usually connote mass or class (for example, cosmetics one can buy in a local supermarket as opposed to those available only in specialized outlets), or the characters are of a certain social type” (1992, pp. 151).

According to Winship (1987, pp.75), ‘the signs are subtle: French roast coffee and croissant, she’s an editorial assistant, he an engineer. “Heroines” and “heroes” never work on the factory floor or live in council houses’. Marieke de Mooji (2005, pp.5) the Dutch scholar and consultant in cross-cultural communication talked about advertisement “[... ] the decision to standardize has more to do with corporate culture than with the culture of markets and nations. Many global advertisers are not market oriented: they are product oriented”. In magazines the print advertisement are selected as a sample set of magazines known as “celebrity magazines”. Many elements of popular culture like TV, books, films and celebrities are the features of this type of magazines.

### **3.3.2. FOOD AND CINEMA**

Cinema is one of the most important agents of popular culture. Many people watch movie as their hobby, they watch movies outside and at their home. Even some people have habits of watching movie daily. Thanks to VCR, DVD, DVR, TV that people can enjoy movies in their leisure time. Now while waiting for a train or waiting for a pre paid cab playstations; iPods now allow us to watch a movie with the changing notion of technology. Films are entertainment sources for the audience and it is also the way to understand the perception of people. Representation of food in films provides cultural assumptions about gender relations, social interactions and development. A fine meal with a rich flavour sometimes makes us remembering a movie. In

mainstream media food has taken an important place in a variety of ways. Scholars like Ferry (2003), M. Dunn (1999), Negra (2002), Nicholson (2001), Poole (1999), and Tellote (1985) are among those who incorporate the idea on the use food as symbolic devices in films. Food plays a predominant role in films and it has always a significant motif. In Nicholson's view (2001, pp. 279),

“[S]ome movies are food movies.....and some are not.” More specifically, he distinguishes between films that “feature food in passing.... as a mimetic prop” designed to “ground” characters or action and endow them with celebrity and dimension, and those that “use food as a [central] symbolic object.... charged with cinematic power and resonance”.

Nicholson describes, “the manifestation of food as powerful cinematic feature of and in film is perhaps inevitable, given its ‘symbolic priority over the other motifs’ not only culturally but universally” (2001, pp. 280). In fact, the films of the later variety- or “food films”- arguably have coalesced into a bona fide genre in contemporary popular culture. Films such as *Babette's Feast*, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Woman on Top*, *Chocolat*, *Tampopo*, *Eating Raoul*, *Tortilla Soup*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Soul Food*, *Big Night*, *The Cook*, *The Baker's Wife*, *the Thief*, *His Wife*, and *Her Lover*, *No Reservations*, all released within the last 20 years, feature food not simply as a primary motif but as the axis on which they turn, promoting one critic to characterize the genre as “culinary obsession movies” by Gleiberman (2002, pp. 62). The presence of foods in films relates the environmental situation to reflect the attitudes, behaviours and values. In films mostly the foods are represented to focus the men's character as strong, determined, and powerful and can assert over other men and women. The role of fighters and winners (fit or athletic) are known by their physical appearance of the protagonists. The representation of food in films is significant with the notion of masculinity and feminity. A scene of woman around food in the absence of men confirms that men also share and celebrate it. Food is a tool to control and negotiate gender to establish their social roles. Food plays the role to signify the cultural marker of a group to identify them from others. In films food plays important role to focus emotional and intimate values related to food. But this aspect is a way to look into masculinity and reveal that it is less connected with power and social

performance. Now in movies both women and food are prominent as well as visible. Men around food in films are very common scenes. As media reflects the brand, new interest in food is a consequence of popular culture about what makes a man a man? The masculinity and femininity as a cultural construction and images; food is a key to interpret both the factor as it well versed that men are far from being experts in domestic and daily life. Food is a key medium to reproduce and destroy cultural assumptions about gender relation through the medium of film. Representation of food in films provides the socio- political, economic life of a society. Film establishes the connection between reality and outside world. Food represents the identity of a culture, ethnicity, religion and marker of power, capital, and class. Negra emphasizes that in many of these films- in addition to advertisements for chain restaurants that capitalize on imagined “old- world” cultures- “increasingly figure within an associative web of ethnic food fiction” (2002, pp. 62). She also opines that, food is the symbolic means by which this is achieved- fetishised in these films, it functions “as the magical agent of resolution... and transcendence” (2002, pp. 64). French sociologist Louis Althusser developed the concept of ideology in the early 1970s. Althusser also influenced the debate on gender and masculinity by suggesting that gender, patriarchy, family and even sexual desire reveal their character of ideological formations. They aim in fact at reproducing the existing cultural and social order within institutions such as the state, the school, the workplace, and the army (Althusser, 1971, pp. 211).

“All ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relations of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (Althusser 1971, pp. 164- 65).

The symbolic role of food is important to explore the food politics and cultural identity in popular film genre. This exploration also focuses on intersect of race and gender in those representations. Food as motif is represented in films. Contemporary anxieties are focussed to promote desire and for consumption with others. In food studies “food film” genre plays an important role. This category helps to reveal the role of food and its presence in



movies. Film criticism has often employed the analytical tool of the genre, interpreted as a group of movies that present a recognizable set of similar narrative elements, images, setting, mood, format and relationship to the audience (Nicholas 1976: 111 – 217; Nicholas 1985: 165- 301; Chapman 2003: 159- 194). The genre would thus provide templates for the film industry and filmmakers, while at the same time creating expectations and interpretive grids for the viewers (Browne 1998; Neale 1999 and 2002). The observations of Ryan and Keller create the notion that genre can constitute a powerful ideological weapon to reinforce on audiences boundaries, proper behaviours- both public and private- and even social and political beliefs (Ryan and Keller; 1988, pp. 77- 78). Theorists have debated about the definition of genres, oscillating between considering them as social conventions based on the accepted cultural consensus within audiences, or identifying them by using elements that are specified in advance (Grant, 2006). Robert Stam discusses on the existence of genre and he pinpointed, the main question is whether genres really exist in the world or they are just the constructions critics and theorists; and, as a consequence, if the study of genres should be prescriptive or descriptive (2000). Langford opines that, other authors have used genre analysis to examine the film industry response to cultural changes (2005). Basically these authors have emphasized on while dealing with food in film whether the theorization on genres is useful. Nicholson developed his study on Kubrick movies in 2001; he distinguishes movies on the uses of food from two different points. The movies where food is used to enhance the realism of the actions, the setting, or the characters where food is used just as a prop and the movies where food plays a central role as symbolic element “charged with cinematic power and resonance” (Nicholson, 2001, pp. 279). Food films is a category to analyze the “neo genre” theory (by Rick Altman in 1999, Steve Neale in 1999 and 2002) to transform the classical genre theory to identify the visual and narrative structures which are internal to the movies. Laura Lindenfeld analyses on “food film” that food is the main narrative engine, instrument of conflict resolution and as turning point in the plot. She also analyzes that food itself is a central character within the economy of the movie. Lindenfeld analyzes how “food is often the vehicle through which utopian states manifest themselves in the films” (Lindenfeld, 2003: 6). O’Neill (2003)

and Cockburn (1977) discuss on “food porn” as aesthetics and often relate some remarkable factors like sexualized, sensual visual style and the enhanced shooting techniques applied to food. These factors define how “food porn” also focuses that final consumption is lacking due to material qualities of food and physical participation of audience. Helene Shugart has developed on food genre and says how food and identity is necessary to express and negotiate race, class and gender tension. Many food movies popular with white audiences “exoticisation, fetishisation, and ultimate consumption of the Other in ways that certainly showcase and reinforce conventional patterns of power and privilege especially as relevant to race/ ethnicity” (Shugart, 2008, pp. 71-72). In movies masculinity and femininity especially related to food. Men are portrayed as hegemonic images by reasserting power structures and women are depicted as busy with domestic life. The American food movies are focused by narrative and visuals and on performing intersexuality. These aspects are relevant to define “food films”; for example *Tortilla Soup* (2001), *Mostly Martha* (2001), Oscar Winning movie *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), *No Reservations* (2007). Anne Bower in the edited volume *Reel Movies* analyses the role of food star’s in terms of the specific settings like kitchen, restaurants, dining room etc, camera attention and the film narrative arch. According to Bower this film narrative archs which will “consistently depict characters negotiating questions of identity, power, culture, class, spirituality, or relationship through food” (2004, pp. 6). “What is and what isn’t within the genre of “food film” is, of course, somewhat subjective, with each viewer deciding individually that a film’s use in food is so dominant and pervasive as to put it within the classification rather than just in the class of films using food as but one of many elements contributing to a movie’s setting, characterization, plot, or theme” (Bower, 2004, pp. 6). Film scholar Cynthia Baron states, “One hopes that the writing on thematic and iconographic constants will increase attention to narrative and audiovisual detail in filmic representations of food, rather than serving to exclude various films or various filmic strategies from analysis” (2006, pp. 103). She studies the representation of food as plot of the film specially food is cooked and how much it is relevant to the scene, the specific time allotted to characters and how food is referred to the story element, narrative voice, general voice. She also emphasizes on cinematic

choices such as editing, framing choices, camera movements, lighting etc to analyze the representation of food in movies. James Keller's works on food films in *Food, Film, and Culture* where he emphasizes on filmmakers as chef/ or artist and their role as cinematic hunger artists, who "exploit the audience's visceral response to the imaginary of food in a fashion similar to the manipulation of sex on scene" (Keller, 2006: 5). He warns against "the reductive assumption that food in film always signifies desire" since there are many kinds of appetite (Keller, 2006, pp. 8).

Cynthia Baron discusses the reasons how scholarship on food deals with movies, the fact behind this "most scholarship on food as a cultural construct has often been concerned with questions of personal expression, a realm that is ostensibly at odds with the realm of modern mass media forms like film" (Baron, 2006, pp. 98- 99). Gaye Poole's book *Reel Meals Set Meals: Food in Film and Theatre* published in 1999 is the first full length book where food is analyzed as a "polysemous signifier that can articulate in concrete terms what is very often internal, vague or abstract" (Poole, 1999, pp. 2). Food has symbolic meaning to provide dramatic focus in performance. Food conveys the meaning when on the stage and on screen to pass physical matter between the characters, food works as catalyst to bring people together. Representation of food is looked within the larger frame work of film narratives by Jane Ferry. Ferry looked very closely to uncover the role of food in cultural meanings and social interactions. Her work "explores how eating scenes articulate conflict or cooperation, inform an individual's or group's place in society, and express personal identity. By underscoring the culinary images, this study shows how film provides clues as power and meaning that food imposes both externally (social, economic, political environment) and internally (interpersonal environment of an individual and interpersonal environment within a social group)" (Ferry, 2003, pp. 1). To determine narrative styles, plot, characters many scholars have adopted methodologies from cultural studies, film and literary criticism in single movies. To determine cultural symbolic elements and to interact with personal identities and social dynamics scholars have adopted these methodologies. Anne Bower presents a collection of essays in *Reel Film* that "help us see that the semiotic use of food are even more

multivalent and powerful than the concentration of ‘food films’ ‘alone would help us to understand’ and “make clear that the consumption of food can stand for the consumption of any aspect of culture- whether cultural traditions, cultural hybridity, the hyperconsumerism of our post modern Western world, or some aspects of gender conflict or definition” (Bower, 2004: 7). Quoting Poole (1999), Cynthia Baron states that “What unites the two lines of research- the studies of food in film and the work on food and film viewing- is the shared understanding that food and food behaviors can be discussed in semiotic terms and that food is a signifier “that can articulate in concrete terms what is very often internal, vague or an abstract” (Baron 2006, pp. 95). In *The Mimetic Faculty* the physical and tactile nature of cinema is defined as “a sensuous and bodily form of perception”, Benjamin (1978). In 1960s the spectator’s body and its interactions, metaphorical expression and focusing on their cognitive aspects were influenced by structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis and film theory. “This subject, however, was not to be confused either with a physical spectator setting in an auditorium, or with the individual who had to be imagined standing, as it were, ‘behind’ the camera. The subject of psycho-semiotics, in other words, was a textually constructed subject- a formulation which in itself begged many questions, not least whether it is appropriate to speak of a film as text at all” (Buckland, 1995, pp.10). Laura Mulvey outlined the Lacanian approach who theorizes on body and its reflection in movies. In 1981 Linda Williams in her Essay *Film, Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess* defined horror, porn, and melodrama as “body genres”, focusing on violence, sex, and emotion, which provide physical jolts and “sensations that are on the verge of respectable” (Williams, 1981, pp. 701). Vivian Sobchack has developed a new approach to the issue and analyzed the experience as she refers to as “the kinaesthetic subject”.

“Even at the movies our vision and hearing are informed and given meaning by our other modes of sensory access to the world: our capacity not only to see and to hear but also to touch, to smell, to taste, and to always to proprioceptively feel our weight, dimension, gravity, and movement in the world. In sum, the film experience is meaningful not to the dies of our bodies but because of our bodies. Which is to say that movies provoke in us the “carnal thoughts” that ground and inform more conscious analysis. Thus, we need to alter the binary and bifurcated structures of the film experience suggested by previous formulations and, instead, posit the film viewer’s live body as a carnal “third time” that grounds and mediates

experience and language, subjective vision and objective image- both differentiating and unifying them in reversible (or chiasmatic) process of perception and expression” (Sobchack; 2004, pp. 60).

We cannot say that in food movies similar phenomenon happen. Sobchack notion is not reflected in all movies.

James Keller in *Food, Film, and Culture* argues that,

“The cinematic hunger artists manipulate gustatory imaginary in order to increase the sensory response of the film audience to a medium that cannot access smell or taste, but, nevertheless, seeks to create a full sensory response to a strictly visual and auditory medium. Food cinema thus invokes the gustatory appetite in a fashion similar to the arousal of the libido through romantic and sexual imaginary, accessing the full sensory experience of the actor and, subsequently and vicariously of the audience” (Keller; 2006, pp. 1).

In movies food is not only the main theme but audiences are getting to see food related situation and environment in movies. In television and magazines also the attention is given to food related issues and health consciousness is increasing among people. The eating and cooking as well as food preparation and production are dealing with an interesting venue for upcoming talent like Master Chef Programme, many several reality shows and internet videos especially in YouTube where whatever we want from any part across the globe we can watch.

Food in Indian society is being studied recently with a renewed interest as part of a certain questions related to cultural identity and the unique history of each region. While K T Achaya’s work a pioneering effort at a pan- Indian levels many other works followed suits and they based their studies on primary sources such as texts and inscriptions such as the Manasollasa. Focus on regional politics and the question of region began from the 1960s and were mainly confined to questions of political authority like kinship and state and questions of language. One of the problems with such an approach was that though it helped to bring about the rich contribution and vibrancy of the regions and regional politics like the Cholas, Marathas, Avadh etc. the reliance on the primary sources and a referent was the state society. Such a method naturally led to the bypassing of societies that were not fully incorporated into

the state and where oral traditions were paramount. This factor explains the lack of significant writings on Mising food culture in the present period as the scope and method of studies relating to food was predominantly historical. In contrast anthropological studies on tribes focussed more on the social aspects like kinship and other questions of immediacy thus prevailing a gap in the area of research on food. To fill in this gap the approach adopted is one of field work to collect the primary data and only then proceed to systemize the same and theorize such a data.

In the colonial period and the early years of independence the lack of self sufficiency in food production and the looming threat of famine with memories of great famine like the Great Bengal Famine were fresh. In the post colonial period one of the important questions was the issue of self sufficiency and it signalled the victory of western science over Indian traditional practices resulting in a bias towards monoculture crops like rice and wheat through methods of artificial and scientific farming. It led to the eraser of millets and crops suited to the semi arid areas and other crops in different eco zones. An extension of this was also the lack of focus on regional cuisines and food cultures since the monoculture crops that formed part of the narrative of green revolution in the 1960s and 70s led to the implementation of public distribution system that favoured both rice and wheat in different states. As part of the five year plan, the focus of the 1<sup>st</sup> five year plan was on agriculture and in this context the Department of Audio Visual Publicity and other Department of central Government like Family Planning and Child and Health Care extolled the practices of both the monoculture crops. The mass media of the AIR (All India Radio) and later the Films division also continued on these lines thus generated a large volume of literature on both rice and wheat as part of the green revolution program of self sufficiency in the print and visual media. Till 1975 it was compulsory to screen the trailers of the films division in all cinema Theatres and the focus was the lines of self sufficiency and scientific agriculture followed but the resultant monoculture. It is in this context of a top down approach in both planning and extension work that the lack of literature, popular culture production and advertisements of the Mising community stand in contrast to the larger statist narratives.

As pointed out in the earlier chapters that the Misings are adapted to a specialised eco zone using a wide variety of techniques and cultural tools to reproduce their societies in the riverine area of Assam and have largely been successful in their endeavour without a significant intervention from the state. Thus the lacks of data on certain aspects of Mising food culture, particularly the aspects associated with modernity have not been represented in print and other areas. It is with this objective in mind- the need to present a holistic picture of the Mising food culture by locating them in the current globalized context is the purpose of this exercise. We, therefore, have to rely on field work to generate primary data and combine it with the larger narratives of food in India.

### **3.4. FOOD AS POSITIVE REPRESENTATION**

Now the first and greatest of necessities is food, which is the condition of life and existence—Plato, *The Republic*; 360 BCE (Translated by Benjamin Jowett)

It is unusual to think of food as being political in the global food system. The official institutions of government play important role within the current food regime. The slogans like “think globally and buy locally” to nurture a substantial food system are not practicable. In realities this slogan is far from being practical. It is better to produce our necessary goods including food locally and organically for the better health of our people. But we must try to expand the marketing of these goods to different parts of the world in this time of globalization. It is better to think globally and to work locally than to work globally and think locally. Modern food system did not originate in national and international politics but it is seriously now-a-days discussed everywhere for the safety and security of food. Food safety and security are managed by federal state and local institutions. Now in everyday life political clashes arise over food. In modern age politics of food hardly confines to such institutions. The three main structures play important roles on food in production, distribution and consumption. Food politics also occurs because of economic disputes. In modern age the quarrels of different nations have

unfolded that food is used as a political weapon. Now food politics demonstrates not only food safety or security but also food biotechnology, agricultural policies, international trade. However unfolded debate on food matter gives rise to long standing political controversies. Apart from economic disputes; food politics is also an important part of subjects like Cultural Studies. In this discipline food is studied from social and cultural view points. This approach is concerned with eating habits, cultural patterns and observing their influence on human behavior.

Williams identifies culture as “ordinary”, he was elucidating the potentially transparent nature of those everyday elements that form the very backbone of our existence (1958, pp. 4). Food is a vital thing and food is the culture of everyday life. Daily consumption of food is often considered as mere substance. Food is not only a way to survival rather it is much more than it. To view ourselves and others food is a key factor. Food permits other aspects of our life from personal to professional. In social and political issues food is a centre and it is a core in case of popular media. Henderson asserts in her essay how and why food, and our practices associated with its production and consumption, should be viewed as a form of communication and called for scholars within the field to take up food as a serious form of study (1970, pp. 3-8). Lindenfeld and Langellier suggest regarding the rise of interest in food studies (2009). Food studies as an emerging area of study it is important to know the reason behind study of food as communication and the use of food as a means of communication in social cultural practices. Food is used as a communicative process to understand the world. Communication through food conveys to create understanding with others through verbal and non- verbal language. In this concept we can understand food as non- verbal means forms of communication by which we can share meaning with others. Roland Barthes analyses on food and she defines it as,

“A system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society”. (Cited in Counihan and Van Esterik, 2008, pp. 29).



Scholars like Mary Douglas and Lévi- Strauss (1983) both have emphasized that food can view as adhering to the same practices as language because food is a code that can be seen to express patterns about social relationships (cited in Counihan and Van Esterik, 2008, p. 44). The main reason behind why food should be viewed as a form of communication is very important to explore. The reason behind this is that it is directly linked with culture and ritual. Rothenbuhler defines ritual as, “the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life” (1998, pp. 27). Thus rituals involving food help us to view our life more seriously. During important events like birthdays, weddings, funerals, other social customs food is always centre of it. Food is always part and parcel of festivals. In Mising community particularly focusing on food in some festivals like *Ali- a:ye- Li’gang* and *Po: rag* food is symbolically within the rituals to express love, happiness and life. Rothenbuhler opines, “Within our daily experiences, the ways that we eat and dine with others can be categorized as ritualistic because they involve repetition, expected behaviours, and roles for both the participants and the food” (1998).

Food is a common factor of our daily lives. Through it we create cultures. Montanari in *Food is Culture* (2006) analyzes food within the framework of culture by asserting when food is produced, prepared and consumed. Spurlock expresses that, “through its absences and presences in everyday life, food and foodways highlights the moral, aesthetic, and ethical concerns of a given cultural milieu” (2009, pp. 7). Food acts as a process of conveying culture and also as a means of communication. For arguing on food as communication Carey’s (1992) is important one, “Food is one of the most readily- available symbols that we have at our disposal, which can be viewed from both the perspectives of communication and culture”. Food acts as communicating with others as well as demonstrating personal identity as well as ethnic identity. “Food is a product and mirror of the organization of society..., a prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena” (Counihan; 1999, pp.6). Food is a symbolic representation to communicate, create, manage and share meanings with others and it is the construction of our personal identity. We eat and sometimes we refrain from consuming certain

food and it refers our personal identity as a vegan, omnivore, and carnivore or as a foodie. Food also acts a source of comforts and it has linkage with emotion and memory. Apart from individual connection with food, it is also used as a means of communicating our identities with others through our process of preparation and eating. In case of identity food is used as a means of identifying with others. Visser says, “Food connects people, both physically and symbolically, when we sit down to dine together” (1993). Burke argues, you persuade a person only so far as you align your identity with hers through the use of language (1969, pp. 55). If we analyze rationally, based upon the types of food we eat it helps identify with others and we can feel a common with those who have common eating habits with us. Sharing and discussing of food create a form of discourse. Narratives and stories are process to convey and learn about the notions of food, its relationship to natural world. To understand our own group, our societies, cultures food serves as a socializing mechanism. These aspects are not in a large scale like discourses on food occur within larger social structures like popular culture, government and media. Discourses of food often face clashes with each other because of issues related to food.

Fiske opines, “As discourses all of these dialogues about food, and its associated practices, operate as ‘sites of struggle’ with significant social and political implications” (1997, pp. 5-6, cited in Cramer, Greene & Walters, 2011; pp. xiii). We consider politics as expounds of power as it is an institutionalized centre. Even political dimensions are also there in our everyday practices. Cooks argues in *You are What You (Don't) Eat? Food, Identity, and Resistance*: “For those of us interested in embracing our identities as political and in seeking openings in the tactical moments and performances of everyday life, eating and cooking offer important sites of preservation and imagination” (2009, pp.108). In contemporary society, the discourse about our relationship with food is nothing than practices of our daily life. Food is become more important as a communication, as a means of expression. Food also acts as manifestation of identities, way of social relationship, form of discourse and ritual. There is a strong need to apply methodological and

theoretical approaches as food become the centre of social, cultural and political phenomena.

When we talk about food as our own it is always right and positive. Even food acts as a non- negative representation. Positive representation must be acted and for that food is to be regarded as good in taste and it is good enough also. In other words, it must *stand for* something valued, something or someone better and higher- on the positive scale, perhaps reaching finally to the divine, to the ultimate taste of pleasure of the food of the gods (“ambrosia”, Vernant, 1989). Food taboos are important to define the boundaries prohibitions and permitted foodstuffs, situation, preparation and incorporation in terms of time. A specific dynamic principle to categorize food is introduced by temporary food prohibitions, and especially those structured along the age grade categories. A food which is now prohibited- regarded as dangerous or poisonous- for us/ me will be permitted after the initiation or after passing through a sequence of achievements (cf. Lewis, 1988, pp. 147 cited in Falk, 1991).

Something to be avoided now but in the future to be welcomed food acquires a dual character. There are two types of food- good and bad. It is a process of transformation through representing something good; which are to be desired and something which are good in taste. Though there is a link between representation and sensation but such relation sometime differs from each other as the fundamental cultural food categorizations in forms of edible and inedible. The negative sequence of taboo- forbidden- distaste is determined through the connection between right and good. The dual role of food indicates that in future it creates a positive representation by referring it as good and permissible. Now it plays the role as bad and forbidden. This construction is based on the structure of social boundaries. In certain rituals some foods are allowed and some are forbidden outside for a specific time and place. This temporal situation creates distinctions between everyday food and festive food. The act of process of daily consuming is sometimes considered as ordinary. Food is recognized as sacred when we offer it to deities. Devotees are communicating with the gods by offering food. Food offered to the god is known as *naivedya*. This does not mean that every offering to the deities has

specific meaning. The *prasāds* are distributed to the devotees which is a ritual of transformation. It is a process of returning the offerings to the devotees. Though gods are in iconic and non- iconic forms; still offering food to the deities is a kind of ritual all over the world. In Mising community offering to the deities is nothing special than food. The offering clearly distinguishes the ceremonies and offer in a standard combination. Offering food is special because it is celebrated on special occasion as well as sacred occasion. After migrating to plain areas of Assam; Misings have started *Bhagabati* religion where non- vegetarian food and beverages are strictly prohibited like other religious ceremonies. Misings are the worshippers of *Uyus* (spirits) and *Miboo* (the priest) plays an important role in the worshipping process. He gives the direction and advice to offer chicken, pig, fowl, *apong* etc to the imaginary spirit. Ritual is observed with offering food and this symbolizes distinctive offering to god and goddesses. Thus offering some specific food characterizes certain ceremonies and festivals. This identification of rituals, festivals and ceremonies with specific food is well known in every society. People have their belief that in dedication towards specific deities they prefer to prepare such foods on those occasions.

Celebrating festival is an important part of every community across the world. From day to day life activities people get relief and share love, joy, emotions. In celebration of festivals food is always centre of attraction. Therefore, special food and drinking special beverage are arranged for each occasion. Generally celebrations of festivals and ceremonies come once in a year. Community celebrations give us sense of belongingness. The identity of the community is well expressed in their celebrations of customs and ceremonies. The taste of the food of a particular community is found in the sights, smells, taste and ambience of the items. In Mising community celebration of festivals starts in the order of annual cycles of harvests. Spring festival like *Ali- a:ye- Li'gang* is associated with agriculture. It is held in the month of February to pray Mother earth for the production of *ahu* paddy. The community feast during this festival is really important for the Misings.

Food acts as a medium of exchange. Food is a powerful symbol of identity and acceptance. The preparation and consumption of a particular

community's ethnic food can be a powerful symbol when it is accepted by other. Foodways is an indication of emotion. Foodways play an important role as social acceptance. Social acceptance is assessing through social involvement. The involvement of food socially conveys a lot of social information through local food varieties. To interact with others or to settle a dispute food acts as a weapon. *Kebang* is an important institution and a social organization in Mising community. Mising society tries to settle political issues in the *Kebang* like land disputes, money suits, civil cases, remarriage, kidnapping, communal disputes, theft cases and rape cases. People settle these disputes amicably by offering food and beverages between the two parties. This ritual function is known as *Urom* to please the definite lineal of ancestors. The people try to solve the disputes locally among themselves without going to legal action through pork and *apong*. If a person caught doing something punishable according to their customary law; he is panalised and he has to throw a party to the society to be in their midst. In Mising society food is an integrated part of social, cultural and religious life. In the process of legitimisation food is really very important. There are different marriage systems in Mising community such as formal, forced, marriage by elopement and simple ceremony. Formal marriage is called as *midang* (*mi-* man; *dang-* taking away). In this marriage, generally an elderly person or the father of the boy goes to parents of the girl or close relatives to submit marriage proposals. A bundle of betel nuts (areca) offers from bride's side to the guardian of groom. In final fixation of marriage, boy's side has to pay *po:ro apong* (rice beer), dried fish and areca to the groom's family. These are process of legitimisation through food.

The preparation of varied food items according to their customs and traditions and other cultural practices related to food are still maintained by them. Food can be manipulated like other symbols. To understand the essence of a religion universally it is very important to know how food is essential in any religious adherence. There is a deep rooted connection between food and religion and the connection is very complex in certain context. Religion is sometimes very individualistic; it is important to relate religion to a social norm. Food is used to mark and symbolize as matter in general theme. Mary

Douglas in her article “*Deciphering a meal*” mentions about the classification of animals according to holiness and author has very aptly talked about the ways food communicates holiness which provides an identity. Claude Lévi-Strauss described food as a type of language and people can express reality through perception of food habits. The author has described the consumption of cooked and raw foods as sacred stories and prohibitions. The myths and taboos accentuating various cultures also mention the differences between nature and culture. Religion has been gaining grounds in Mising community in recent times. During the course of the field work it is observed that the perspectives of religion have been changing from time to time. Due to this there has been a transformation from traditionalism to modernity. This has affected the entire community to a large extent. Mising people have converted from their traditional religion into Christianity, Vaishnavism and Islamism (*the prominent ones now*). The traditional Hindu Misings have however maintained their distinct traditional culture even though they are very less in number. The traditional Mising community has a different ideology with respect to the food habits. They have maintained the age-old beliefs and customs related to food with respect to religious ideals. They are of the notion that the food habits they followed have various nutritional aspects. This created a balance and for their traditionalism to survive they have started using the herbal plants as used in ancient Indian Ayurvedic system as ways of treating people and also as items for consumption.

The basic religious cult is easily identified by the food habits and it is often like the mirror which reflects the distinct attributes of the Mising community. The kitchen is regarded as a sacred space in every Mising household. It acts as a platform during a religious performance or any rituals attached to the community. This space signifies the cooking conditions as well as the offerings laid for the deity. The preparation process begins in the kitchen known as ‘*chang Ghor*’. This acts as an important model for carrying out all the religious proceedings as this is also based on rituals, norms and folk beliefs and behaviours. The foods used for any rituals are easily available in the local area and mostly they are prepared at home. They celebrate the traditional Hindu religion with much enthusiasm. The use of a traditional rice beer called

*apong* is in vogue during this period of celebration. It is accompanied with *éyek* (pork) and *porok agin* (chicken) and various green leafy vegetables. Without these food items the religious functions are incomplete.

### **3.4.1. THE ECONOMY OF THE MISING SOCIETY**

The soil and climate condition of Assam both are favourable for growing a variety of crops. The economy of Mising community is agro- based. The main source therefore comes from paddy cultivation and also they produce some *rabi* crops. Though plain areas are suitable for cultivation but due to rain water and excessive flood they are facing water logged problem. Domestication of animal supports the family to earn. But there is no significant increase in productivity as Misings are facing the problems of flash flood. Due to this problem they are not self sufficient and deficit in food grains. Varieties of programmes like irrigation, drainage system, and flood control measures are still unable to provide by local self government. Livestock is the second to crops in the economy of rural Assam. After land a man's first investment is in livestock. Bullocks which pull the plough and cart are important animals which provide milk and manure. For agriculture animal manure is considered as necessary. As livestock provide people most of their livelihood as livestock and land are determined as wealth of the family.

For the society agriculture is like a family enterprise. All the members of a family work in the field by expecting a good harvest. The village people have three annual crops and the yearly cycle is run by harvesting these crops. The works of villagers is governed by harvesting in the field. The main crops are known as *lahi- sali*, *rabi* and *ahu*. The *lahi- sali* is harvested in the month of September- October, in early winter; *rabi* crop is planted during the month of December- January and *ahu* crop is harvested in June- July, in the mid-summer. The villagers sell the harvesting products in the market and earn their income. They sell potato, ginger, mustard seed, banana and seasonal vegetables. In some places sugarcane and mustard are also grown and mostly they plant in alluvial flat lands nearby river banks various pulses *matimah* (urad bean), *mogumah* (mung bean), *masurmah* (lentil).

Fishing is another occupation of the Misings. They catch fish for house consumption and they sell fish in the market also. Thus fish marketing is another part- time gainful occupation. During monsoon season fish drying is another practice carried out by them. But due to poor communication in summer season they are not able to sale in the market inspite of the market value. Now- a- days, a substantial number of Misings are engaged in various businesses like bamboo plantation, domestication of pig and cow are also their source of income. The age old traditional cottage industry is also sources of engagement especially in sericulture some people are also absorbed.

Most of the craftsmen are earning by engaging themselves in bamboo craft. Use of milk is very recent in Mising society and they consume milk in small amount. Villagers earn cash by selling milk. We cannot deny the role of women in Mising community. They are self sufficient. They also earn for their household. Women folk are expert in weaving; from a young girl to an old one every woman knows the art of handloom. This art helps the women to meet the need of their clothes by themselves. Different kinds of silk such as *eri*, *muga* and *pat* occupy a unique place of production of these silk varieties. In the production of silk yarn and fabric and rearing of *eri* silk worm is spread among them. Now in market, *Miri mekhela sador* is in high demand in national and international market and women earn money by selling these colourful costumes. There are no significant industries but small scale units including weaving, bamboo or cane industries are registered. Their productions are getting more value due to high quality even in the competitive market of highly finished machine goods.

Mising people are employed in other sectors like trade, commerce and industries. The adverse effects of flood and sand deposition have made farmers land- less and regular occurring of flood is a chronic problem to them. To carry out horticulture practices a large number of people shift to greener pastures. This has adversely affected the whole economic and social structure of the community scattered in different districts of Assam.



### 3.4.2. THE SEASONAL CYCLE AND THE FOOD PRODUCTION

In Mising community people are engaged in agriculture throughout the year. They engage themselves four types of agriculture in four different seasons. Now surplus production is very important. Earlier when they were food gatherer they never produce any surplus and never have they stored food. They did not have the notion of how to keep ready food as there was no surplus. The vast transformation in Mising community has happened from the stage of food gathers to the period of food producers. Time has changed. Now the people plough more and they produce more. The surplus production helps to store food for future. In course of time tremendous changes have been noticed with their equipment and technique. Still in rural areas of India, folk cookery and folk technique of cultivation exist. The food productions in traditional methods are still a living art among the Misings and other people of Assam. The character of agriculture is determined by two factors, the method of cultivation and nature of crops production. The cultivators of Mising society produce crops like *ahu*, *lahi*, *sali* and *baou*. But *ahu* and *bau* paddy are main food crops. *Baou* crop takes time to grow and it is not easily damaged by flood. Whereas they sow *ahu* seeds and *bau* seeds in the same plot of land. The Misings living in flood affected areas do not prefer to grow *sali* paddy. They harvest *rabi* crop during the winter season. During winter season cultivators produce various vegetables, mustard oil seeds, eatable roots, dal, potato, leafy spinach etc. It is clear from the previous discussion that almost every household is directly or indirectly connected to agriculture. Any development in this sector is important for the overall development of the community. Agriculture activities are often performed manually. The use of tube wells for the lift irrigation has brought major changes to the farming system. Some local innovation has made possible to plough the land. The use of machines in agriculture activities has expanded the agriculture and development of their society. The Misings have passed through several stages of development; hill dwellers where their economy was based on food gathering, hunting and fishing. After migrating to the Brahmaputra valley, apart from physical mobility; their cultural contact with the permanent resident villagers brought a

great deal of economic and cultural changes. They started *jhoom* cultivation along with hunting and fishing. This stage of production was entirely for the purpose of consumption. Gradually they adopted permanent cultivation and discontinued the shifting cultivation. The most important factor to determine foodways is environment and economy. Agriculture is such an area that basically produces a diet that people can afford. Staple items that are cheap to grow must be produced.

The agricultural product determines the economic condition of the Mising society. Land is a private property in every family. In Mising society both private cultivation and group cultivation exist. They cultivate rice in an extensive scale. They are self sufficient in rice cultivation though in unavoidable situation very little is imported. Apart from rice cultivation, they produce other products like pepper, betel leaves, chillies, onion, turmeric, ginger, mustard seeds and arecanuts and so on. In Mising villages fruits like jack fruits, bananas, mangoes etc are available. In cultivating fields wild vegetables and spinach generally grow which have nutritional and medicinal values. The wild leafy vegetables are also included into their diet as common food in this society in general. Misings are fond of non- vegetarian food items and fish and meat are their favourite items. They have their own livestock from where they collect the meat and fish are also available from nearby rivers.

### **3.4.3. CLASSIFICATION OF FOOD**

Food classification is consisting of a large number of items which help to classify and identify food. This classification of food helps to combine the diverse food and the level of nutrient one gets. The classification of food helps to identify the types of food one group of people consumes and the ingredients they use in their daily life. After the field work it is necessary to classify the foods to identify what types of food the Misings consume and ingredients they use to prepare their everyday food.



**Figure: 12**

### **3.5. THE PREPARATION METHODS OF VARIOUS RECIPES**

In Mising society the preparation method is mainly based on rice. Rice is the primary production among all the grains. Besides being the staple food rice is used in preparing *apong* (*rice beer*). Thus rice works as the main ingredients in their food habit. They prepare food in different ways in various occasions. Food is a necessary part of human being. We need varieties of food in our diet. Everything is acceptable if we know the preparation method of an item, still preference in food is given on the basis of taste. Similar taste and similar combination create inherently love to take food as a diet. The food symbolizes the ethnicity. The value of food differentiates the identity of a community and food related practices of a community. During fieldwork, it was noticed that communication is the actual modes to bridge gaps in cultural foodways. There are some different features of the food habits of Mising society. They possess certain specific characteristics which differentiate them from other groups of Assam. Generally Misings prefer boil food to get nutritional value. Not only their daily diet is unique but their socio- cultural and religious customs are also different irrespective of food. The health conscious people of this society prefer to prepare food to get medicinal food value from their daily diet. In this context I would like to discuss some recipes specifically prepared by Mising society. The unique recipes are “ethnic” in the sense that they are truly Mising.

#### **RICE**

Rice is a staple food among the people residing in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Assam rice is a staple food over the year. Earlier discussion makes it clear that Misings produced *ahu*, *sali*, *baou* and *lahi*. The corns of *lahi* are smaller in size and others are big in size. The *ahu* and *baou* are red in colour. The harvested crops are dried on mats then hulled by means of the husking device called *ural*. This wooden mortar is operated by a pestle. *Apin* or boil rice has nothing remarkable in the methods of preparation. Before

preparation of boiled rice, the husked rice is washed with water. The rice cooking pan is placed on the hearth and adds water with it. When water gets warm, rice is put into it and boiled. Rice is not separated from the gruel. Rice (*apin*) is very often also served as breakfast in most of the family. The villagers prepare *apong* the famous rice beer by a large amount of rice. Other eatable items are *shira* (flattened rice), *muri* (puffed rice), *pithaguri* (powered rice) and *akhoi* (popped rice). Different types of popular *pithas* (cakes) are also prepared from rice.

### **PURANG APIN**

Community feast is common in Mising society especially during *Ali-a:ye- Li'gang*, they arrange the feast. The significance of *purang apin* is that rice is boiled in some small packets of green leafs of *tora paat* (leaves of Zingiberaceae). The rice bundles are boiled in a big pot called “*bor karahi*” and are served with the leafy packets. With the *purang apin* various seasoning vegetables are prepared as curry to take with it.

### **APONG**

*Apong* is an integral part of the Misings community. In socio, religious and cultural life *apong* has significant role. In Mising community everyone is skilled in cooking and they have aesthetic sense. Every household prepares tasty food by using simple technique like boiling, steaming or smoking. Mising food requires many ingredients (mostly herbs available in home or market) and lots of time to prepare and process them but takes less technique for preparation of tasty plates with fine smell and appearance. We find harmony in taste and texture as well as balance in hot, sour, sweet, spicy and salty in Mising food. Their food processing is basically possible in rural or semi urban households.

*Apong* (rice beer) preparation starts with collection and selection of particular rice grains. Rice grains are dried in the sun and the seeds are husked to a mill or in an indigenous husking instrument called “*ural*”. After cleaning the rice, it is boiled in the same manner as it is prepared for a meal. Then, the boiled rice is spread on a flat wide bamboo tray called “*dola*” for “*po:ro*

*apong*” or “*sāi mad*”. The ash of the paddy is then mixed with it before the *pitha* (the source of fermentation) or the medicine is mixed with it. For “*apong*” only the “*pithas*” (*E’pob*) are mixed. *E’pob* is a kind of cake which is prepared from the plants and herbs. To accelerate the fermented process opok is used to prepare *apong*. The herbs and plants are collected from the nearby area and some are grown with the cultivated crops. Generally in the process of preparation they collect as much as possible. The mixture form is now covered by banana leaves and then kept in a clay pot called “*kalah*” and allowed for further fermentation for a day or two. During the summer period, two days are sufficient but during the winter, it requires about three to four days for full fermentation. Now-a-days many people use plastic vessels instead of clay pot but the quality of the beverage produced in the clay pot is better. In this process the mixture gets a decomposing appearance and some bubbles appear which signify that process of fragmentation has taken place. Now the raw form of the “*apong*” is ready but a lot of work has to be done for proper preparation. Before serving, the beverages have to be diluted by adding water. This liquid is filtered through a filter made of bamboo splits called “*shekoni*”. Only for “*sāimad*” or the “*por apong*” the “*shekoni*” is used, basically the raw form of “*apong*” is filtered by using muslin. After the filtration the rice beer becomes ready for serving. The amount of water added to the beverages would determine the strength of the drink. Approximately three litres of rice beer is produced from one kg of rice grains.

The fermentation and extraction process of *nogin apong* is different from *po:ro apong*. First the rice grains are cleaned to cook. Then the cooked rice is transferred to a banana leaves or bamboo mat. The fine grains are allowed to keep cool. *E’pob* powder is added in adequate quantity to the rice grains. The rice grains and *e’pob* both have to mix properly and the mixture has to transfer to an earthen pot and with the paddy straw the mouth of the pot is closed for few days. In winter it takes 8-10 days and in summer 5-6 days for complete fermentation. The process of extraction of *nogin apong* is easier in comparison to *po:ro apong*. From the earthen pot some quantity of fermented rice is taken out and keeps in a container and adequate amount of water is added and then stirred. The content becomes milky which is transferred to

*korai* (weaved from split bamboo) and it need to shake. In the *korai* the rice grains are retained and after filtration it forms the *nogin apong* is collected in a container. *Nogin apong* is important in certain rituals like *na bhât khua or amgo bonam* (after first production of rice this ritual is celebrated), *kumsung ui, tale'ng ui, rokpung ui* (For worshipping to the goddess Lakshmi these rituals are celebrated; *Lakshmi* is the Hindu goddess of wealth, prosperity).

There is an important role of *apong* in the life of Mising society. Without serving *apong* no social occasion can be complete. From birth to funeral, sowing to harvesting, friendship to revenge, in abduction and murder, from happiness to sorrow *apong* is served. *Apong* is a part of diet and every household in a village prepares it. As *apong* is a necessary part of diet, there is no age bar to refrain from drinking it. It is necessary for all medications, rituals and celebrations and thus it has become a part and parcel of Mising society. To welcome their guests they need *apong* in ceremonies like birth and marriage. When the bride- groom's party goes to propose a girl, *apong* is served as an item of dowry and lot of *apong* is carried with them.

*Apong* preparation in household creates serious drain on the economy of the Misings. As they spend huge amount of rice to prepare *apong*, they generally run short of cereals.

## **CURRY**

In a society folk cookery is connected with culinary objects, skills, food habits and in other side it is connected with beliefs, taboos, symbolic system of a culture. The foodways of a community give an idea of them by preparation methods of different curries. The curries are different in taste; mainly sour, bitter and alkali.

*Sour Curry* is prepared with items like lemon juice, *owetenga* or *chompa* (*Dillenia indica* L.), tomato, *thekera* (*Garcinia pedunculata*), *tengamora* (*Hibiscus Suddarifa* L.) and *tenga sak* (sour spinach) and so on. All these are added as ingredients to the curry. They prefer to have it with fish and this popular sour curry is made during summer days.

*Pork with owetenga* or *chompa* (*Dillenia indica* L.) is one of the delicious recipes of Misings. While preparing this recipe they first boil the pork and then fry it. After frying the meat, owetenga is mixed with it. In pork there is fat which may be not scientific to consume frequently and that is why they prepare this recipe as owetenga diminish the fats of *éyeg* (pork). They also put *onger*, a kind of spinach with pork.

They prepare pork with various wild plants which are having medicinal value like *mesaki*, *takuk*, *tazik*, *pakkom* and so on. They prepare this item by boiling the pork. After boiling the meat they add the wild spinach on it. The preparation of pork with *bet gaj* (rattan shoot) and *black lentil* is unique. Consumption of pork in this way never harms and they prefer to prepare with this ingredients. *Pork with banana flower* is prepared by the Misings. First they boil the pork and then fry it with a little bit of oil. After frying the pork banana flower is mixed with it. They are fond of eating this item.

Chicken is also prepared with rice powder which is a delicious curry prepared by the Misings. After frying the chicken, water is added in it. After mixing the chicken with water, rice powder is put on the curry. The taste of this item is very delicious.

## **ALKALI CURRY**

Alkali is known as *khar* in Assam. From the roots or barks of banana tree *khar* is prepared. To make *khar* the dried roots or barks are burnt in fire. After burning the bark or roots the ashes are treated in an open pot. There is a little hole in the bottom of the pot. Water is added on the ashes and is allowed to deposit on another pot.

The dried fish known as *namshing* is prepared as chutney. People prepare it and cover it by banana leaves and keep it to burn. While preparing chutney salt, chili pepper, garlic, onion and coriander are added to make it more delicious. It is also prepared with radish green, mustard green and taro. As we know that Mising people are inhabitants of nearby river area so they process this item in such a way that people can have it during flood period also. *Namshing* is preserved inside a clay pot and keep it under ground for few



months so that people can take it for at least two years. Though many ethnic groups of Assam take dried fish as their food still the preparation and preservation methods of Mising community is unique and interesting. Like this the process of bamboo shoot or *ikhu* is also different from others. It is used to pour on the mixed curry mixed with fish and various vegetables even fried or fired too.

*Patot diya* is one of the favourite foods of Misings. This item is prepared by roasting or boiling. Basically fish is prepared by this method. Before processing the food; the cooked items should be cleaned and ingredients like onion, garlic, mustard oil, salts, chillies, mustard seeds are also put on it. After mixing it all the things are placed with a layer of banana leaf very carefully. This is taking on the hearth of a fireplace and when the leaves of the bundle are scarred, the preparation is removed from it. The substance is taken out from the leafy bundles and is ready to serve.

Preservation of food is very important otherwise food will be spoiled. There are lots of ways to preserve food. The chemical changes are taking place in food in course of time. These changes are happening due to bacterial action, oxidation and enzymatic action. As a result the vitamin of food and colour are spoiled. Earlier the folk may not know the actual action but they knew some process to preserve the food. The main important preservation processes which they have been maintaining are fermenting, salting, smoking and drying. In fermentation process they use bacteria into the food grains and thus allow them to ferment to preserve the food. In preparing the *apong* they use this process. Salting process is used as salt does not spoil it and bacteria cannot live in a very salty environment. They packet the fish, meat and fruits with salt the way lemons are preserved by this method. Smoking is a well known process; the foods are hung over the fire. They dry the food to preserve and to form a protective coating. Fish, meat are preserved by smoking. Drying of food directly under sun shine is very useful to preserve certain seasoning foods. In this process the sunlight evaporates the water molecules. Mising prefer to preserve fish, meat and certain vegetables by using this method. Folk medicines or chemicals are added to improve or preserve of certain vegetables. Basically flavour, texture, colour and quality of these eatable items are

improved by the food additives process. Turmeric, salt, tamarind and juice of certain vegetables are preserved. The use of turmeric powder gives long life to the food substance. The growth of fungus can be controlled by using of dry leaves. In Mising society dried fish or namshing is a favourite item. They catch fish in abundant quantities to preserve for rainy season. They preserve fish by sunning. While drying big fishes they cut it into small pieces. Salt is rubbed in the grills, mouth and scales of the fishes. Drying of the fish by applying salt solution penetrates into the fish to grow it firm and hard. The dried fish are kept in earthen pots or bamboo tubes with tight covers. Bamboo shoot is also preserved in Mising society. They collect soft bamboo shoots and wash it. After washing bamboo shoots they cut it into small pieces. They ground the pieces in ural to make it softer. Then bamboo shoots are kept dried in bamboo tube or bottle to preserve for future. During rainy season they take the preserved bamboo shoots.

### **3.5.1. EVERYDAY FOOD**

Now a day, eating food is not only for hunger but for fashion and taste too. Eating out or eating at home makes differences. Eating inside household asserts the whole preparation and processing process, serving way and maintains tradition where as eating outside household gives complete opposite picture. Eating outside at any moment does not have any social connection and there is no traditional custom. In this reference the assertions of Zeldin are feasible. Zeldin emphasises on “eating out” from the angle of opportunity and why this culture is emerged and established; though an ongoing issue on “eating out” opportunities are well experienced and perceived by consumers. In every society this eating away from home or “eating out” is a common phenomenon in the context of globalization. Still every community maintains and tries to reveal their tradition by eating inside the home or eating with family. Though difference might be there between male and female but this “eating inside household” asserts identity of social contacts. In every family they maintain schedule to prepare, cook and to eat food. The tradition based society maintains such schedule to assert ethnic identity through food. Ethnic food does not mean that they are ethnically distinctive or isolated and new food

items can be perceived as ethnic food after the pattern of establishment. Ethnic identity is a recent area of research and this issue has revived the ethnic food, new food and trends are adopted as ethnic with the distinctive characteristic to establish. The eating schedule of the Mising people is quite different from the non tribal people of Assam. They do not use the term “breakfast”, “lunch” or “dinner”. Rather they prefer to say “*sah tirta*” (breakfast), “*apin dotoa*” (lunch & dinner). Rice is the staple food of Mising people. Early in the morning they take meal and in lunch as well as in dinner also they like to have the same items. The Mising people usually get up early in the morning and they become busy with their household work as well as in the agricultural field. During the fieldwork it was noticed that those who worked in the paddy field of others used to go early at four o’clock in the morning and they absorb themselves in labour work for rest of the day. As they are very hard worker and their way of earning is very hard they need to consume such foods which have vitamin and nutritious food value. It is well known that the rice beer (*apong*) which Misings prepare has substantial amount of vitamin so after coming from paddy field in morning and evening time the men take *apong* (rice beer) to refresh themselves. They prefer to take heavy diet (especially rice) early in the morning. Mising people are very fond of taking traditional food especially they prefer boiled food in their daily diet and the popularity of boiled food is still prevailing in their society. Mostly they prefer items like pork, rice beer, the wild *tora gaaj* (cardamom). *Apin* (rice) is the staple food of the villagers. Along with *apin*, they take boiled edible leaves *lai xak* (mustard greens), *dhekia* (fern), *paleng xak* (the garden spinach), *morisa* (*Amaranthus caudatus*) *mula xak* (radish shoots) *agin* (meat) and *ango* (fish). The traditional rice beer “*apong*” is one of the most popular drinks among the villagers. Basically Mising people prefer pork and take chicken more; they take less mutton, duck and pigeon meat. *Namshing* (dried fish) is another favourite food item among the villagers. The villagers have their own agricultural field so they never bother to go to market for the purpose of buying vegetables. Among vegetables the villagers like mostly *omita* (papaya), *kosu thur* (taro-stem), *kosu* (taro), *kumura* (white guard), *rongalao* (pumpkin), *koldil* (banana flower), *betgaj* (rattan shoot), *bondhakobi* (cabbage), *fulkobi* (cauliflower), *ulkobi* (kohlrabi),

*jatilao* (bottle guard), *bengena* (brinjal) etc. *Ikhu* (bamboo shoot) is another popular item among the villagers and they cook *ikhu* in different styles.

### **3.5.2. THE RITUAL FOOD AND CEREMONIAL FOOD**

Ritual observation and religious ceremonies are observed in public place of a village but life cycle like marriage, birth and death rites of the members are performed in the household. The Misings celebrate certain festivals like *magh bihu*, *Ali- a:ye Li'gang*, *bohag bihu*, *chang kubuwa bihu*, *kati bihu* and *porag* (these festivals are celebrated by Misings). In ritual and festivals people celebrate the occasion with full enjoyment and they prepare certain food. Basically ritual events include offering of food to one's ancestor. In Mising community, food creates and maintains the social relations and cultural practices between people and feeding others is very important. Food is an essential element to celebrate. It is not possible to celebrate a festival or ritual without food. Celebrations are having religious and rituals components. Participation in rituals is an important social obligation as important as in successful productive work like agriculture.

.The Misings follows their traditional tribal religion. They worship nature and deities and sacrifice birds and animals. They do not worship trees or animals. The priest or *mibu* is the respected person who performs the religious functions by means of their traditional lore. The Misings regard the donyee (sun) and polo (moon) as their ancestors. They regard the moon as their father and the sun as their mother. The traditional Mising society is converting into various sects and their socio- religious norms differ from each other. They are different in practitioners, context, meaning and intention. Those who have followed *Vaishnavism*, *Krishna Guru*, *Sarania*, *Islamism* have started to refrain from taking pork, chicken as animal sacrifice is sin for them. Even they are no more performing their traditional customs and rituals which are not favourable in their new religion. The fasting concept is also very new to them. They are restraining from attending other rituals and religious ceremony. Instead they are observing "*naam kirtan*" instead of offering sacrifice and bloodshed. On the contrary, the traditional and Christianity believers Misings are taking pork

and other non vegetarian items. Apart from it, the Christian Misings are having restrictions from taking rice beer; they have adopted to celebrate Christmas, Good Friday and Easter festivals and prepare cake which is a new trend in their culture. They go to church for prayers which signify a remarkable change among those Misings converted to Christianity. Thus the variations of food provide restrictions among the religious groups which share some prohibitions. They celebrate rituals like *Dabur*, another kind of ritual performed for criminal abstinence and proper growth of agriculture has certain features. This ritual does not entertain the use of oil and other non-vegetarian items in the performances. Only the *po:ro apong* (a kind of rice beer) is being used in this ritual. Basically they use vegetables like *kumura* (white guard), various leaves, and five numbers of cocks.

The Mising community identifies certain food items which are consumable as their own. This brings into account their adherence to religiosity as well their traditionalism imbibing in them the spirit of self-identity. As for example, certain food items commonly used are *namshing* (dry fish), *apong* (rice beer), *ikhu* (bamboo-shoot), *éyeg* (pork), leafy vegetables and spinach. The Mising community prefers mostly boiled food (including non-vegetarian items) which makes it different from the food of other similar tribal communities. This preparation process is connected to the various religious affiliations and hence food plays an important factor in the religious proceedings. It is accompanied with *pork* and *chicken* and various green leafy vegetables. Without these food items the religious functions are incomplete.

In traditional Mising society marriages, births, funerals mark transition in the life cycle. Depending on the economic condition people serve food in rituals and ceremonies. The funeral ceremony of the Mising known is as *Dadgang* where pork, *apong* and various vegetables are cooked with the use of oil. Only the *p:oro apong* is being used in this ritual while there is no hard and fast rule in the selection of *apong* in *Dadgang*. In connection to these rituals there are some food lore too prevailing still within the community with respect to religion and rituals. For example: In the funeral ceremony urad bean is very essential. Till the funeral ceremony is over *kosu* (taro), *kumura* (white guard), *dhekia xak* (fern), *halodhi* (turmeric), *panilao* (bottle guard), *ango* (fish)

*rongalao* (pumpkin) are not taken by family members. The *Dodgang* ritual is very expensive and that is why all the family members perform this ceremony together on the basis of economic condition. There is no hard and fast rule to perform this funeral ceremony; it may be after ten years of the death. For a formal marriage proposal, boy's party approaches the girl's parents with *apong* and betel leaves and nuts as presents. While entry in a new house (*griho probesh*) *apong* (rice beer), *agin* (meat) and *ango* (fish) are necessary to complete the ritual.

In Mising community marriage is celebrated in formal and informal way. In marriage *poro*: *apong* and *battle nut* both are essential to fulfill the ceremony. While giving food for the first time to a baby they celebrate it a ceremony. In this occasion a pair of cock or fish (in white colour) is essential. In festivals like *Ali- a:ye Li'gang* they celebrate it with full enjoyment. As Misings are an agriculturalist community therefore among the festivals this is a prime one related to agriculture. *Ali- a:ye Li'gang* is associated with agriculture, with the beginning of the *Ahu* paddy cultivation. The first Wednesday of the month of *Phalgun* of the Indian calendar the festival is celebrated. The villagers prepare food and drink for this festival in the morning and in the afternoon the heads of the families implant a handful of *ahu*-seed in their respective fields by reciting prayers to the Mother Earth. They have great feast on food and drink such as *purang apin* (boiled rice), *apong* (rice beer), *agin* (meat) and *ango* (fish) eating vegetables are also cooked. After completing the rituals in the field; the head of the family offer few drops of *apong* in the four corners of the *me'ram* (fire place) in their respective households.

*Po: rag* festival is arranged by the youth organization of Misings (*Kebang*). This festival is also associated with agriculture. In the month of *aaghon* and *Phalgun* the Misings celebrate *Po: rag* festival. It is like "grand reunion festival". At the end of a good harvest this festival is usually celebrated. The celebration started with feast and prayers. The *murang* house is renovated and the festival is observed in the *murang* of the village. The members from the neighbouring villages and the married girls of the village, staying in a long distance are also invited. Villagers arrange large number of food and drink in

advance. *éyeg* (pork), *apong* and *po:ro apong* is essential part of this festival. Feast is an integral part of it. The feast for the youths known as *yame munbir donam* means the feast of harmony. The villagers celebrate the “*Nodi Puja*” once in a year to Jia Bhorali River. In this function apong, chicken and pork are very essential. In the funeral ceremony urad bean is an essential item.

We conclude that the relationship between food and human being is very significant. Food is one of the central activities of our life. To understand food in different cultural settings food is present in society, popular culture, advertisement and cinema. But in Mising community business equipments, investments are yet to come. Extensive kind of help of advertisement is needed to promote the culture. Without celebrity popular culture is nothing and it will not attain popular kind of status. They are lacking such sources to popularize their food through film and advertisement. These vary according to its importance but in the discussion analysis on positive aspects of food are focused. In other part of the chapter food is focused in the life of Mising community and an attempt has been made to show how food has become a part of their culture. This culinary art entrenched its place in society. It reflects that the culture and tradition of a traditional society is immensely related to food and food related practices.



**Figure 13**



**Figure 14** (Photography by Yamini Gogoi)





**Figure 15**



**Figure 16**



**Figure 17**



**Figure 18**



**Figure 19**