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Traditional Food Culture of the Mising Community in Assam: A Study

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Abstract- In the rich cultural landscape of northeastern India, various indigenous communities, especially the Mising, creatively harness the power of natural herbs to enrich their culinary traditions. This research aims to identify and analyze the nutritional benefits that food offers to these communities, emphasizing the importance of understanding their dietary choices. By recognizing food as a vital source of nourishment, we are encouraged to explore its significance beyond sustenance, including its role in shaping cultural identity and community practices. The experience of food varies widely among individuals, underscoring the necessity of examining its diverse dimensions. Over time, historians have worked to highlight the multifaceted relationship between food and society, laying the groundwork for its inclusion in social sciences. Within the Mising community, there is a strong commitment to maintaining a healthy diet, which is seen as essential for fostering personal development and overall communal health. This study seeks to investigate the factors contributing to healthy eating habits within the Mising community, while also exploring the symbolic meanings attached to their food practices. And also tries to get into the sustainability and enhancement of the unique Mising ethnic identity via the continuation of traditional food preparation and consumption habits. To illustrate a profound relationship with the local environment and agricultural systems, since traditional dietary practices are predominantly influenced by the natural resources present in their riverine and woodland ecosystems. By understanding the intricate connections between food, health, and cultural identity, we can gain valuable insights that may promote the well-being and sustainability of these vibrant communities. This study not only honors their traditions but also informs broader discussions about traditional food practices including nutrition and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Food, Culture, Tradition, Nutrition, environment, Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is renowned for its diverse populations and ancient civilizations, shaped by complex interactions between ecology, culture, and subsistence practices. Assam, in particular, functions as the scenic gateway to Northeast India and is inhabited by a mosaic of indigenous communities, encompassing both tribal and non-tribal populations with distinct cultural traditions (Chaudhury, 1959; Hunter, 1990). Food and related subsistence activities play a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic structure of Assamese society, especially in rural areas where livelihoods remain closely tied to agriculture, fishing, and animal rearing (Doley, 2005; Srikanth & Borgohain, 2014). Nutrition constitutes a fundamental biological requirement for human survival, growth, and population sustainability, as food provides the physiological energy and essential nutrients necessary for maintaining bodily functions (Katz, 2003). Humans derive this energy primarily through the consumption of plants and animals, and any prolonged inadequacy in food availability can lead to deterioration of bodily systems, resulting in disease and, in extreme cases, population decline (Katz, 2003).

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Beyond caloric energy, the human body requires specific chemical components to maintain internal balance and repair tissues, a need often fulfilled through animal-based foods in traditional diets (Katz, 2003). Nutritional deficiencies weaken the body's capacity for self-maintenance, making communities vulnerable to hunger-related illnesses and widespread health decline. Among the three basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter—nutrition remains the most essential for survival. In ancient times, human societies largely depended on foraging and hunting; however, with the advancement of civilization, domestication of animals and the development of agriculture transformed subsistence patterns (Dalton, 1978). Over time, communities in Assam adopted mixed economies involving cultivation with ploughs and oxen, alongside the domestication of cattle, buffalo, pigs, poultry, and ducks, reflecting adaptations to the region's riverine and agrarian ecology (Pegu, 1981; Waddel, 2000).

Food habits differ across regions and communities due to environmental availability and cultural preferences. For example, populations residing in riverine and coastal environments rely heavily on fish, while agrarian societies emphasize crops and livestock. Although staple foods may appear similar across Indian ethnic groups, methods of preparation, preservation, and consumption vary significantly, forming distinct food habits unique to each community (Katz, 2003; Doley, 2014). The term "food habit" thus refers not only to dietary items but also to culinary techniques, cultural taboos, and symbolic meanings attached to food. Traditional food practices form an integral part of civilizational identity, and the stability and functioning of any society depend largely on reliable food supply systems (Brass, 1974; Katz, 2003). Communities dependent primarily on hunting and fishing often require extensive territories and experience irregular food availability, which can lead to chronic insecurity and hunger, influencing broader patterns of social organization and adaptation (Dalton, 1978).

The Misings constitute one of the most prominent tribal communities and are the second largest Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in Assam. They predominantly inhabit the plains along the Brahmaputra River, where recurring floods and riverbank erosion frequently displace settlements, cause loss of property, and exacerbate their socio-economic vulnerability (Hunter, 1990; Doley, 2005). Despite these environmental adversities, the Mising population has gradually expanded across the Brahmaputra valley, and at present they are mainly concentrated in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Darrang, and Kamrup in Assam. Smaller Mising settlements are also found in the East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh, reflecting historical migration and continued mobility across the Assam–Arunachal borderlands (Pegu, 1981; Waddel, 2000). In addition, a limited number of Misings have migrated to metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Mumbai in search of livelihood opportunities.

According to estimates reported by Mising organizations, the total Mising population is approximately 1.3 million, including around 50,000 individuals residing in Arunachal Pradesh. Mising oral traditions and legends suggest that their ancestors migrated from the hills to the plains of Assam between the 11th and 13th centuries A.D. in search of peace, fertile land, and a more prosperous life, eventually settling along both banks of the Brahmaputra River (Pegu, 1981; Dalton, 1978). Even after settling in the plains, the Misings have preserved several ancient rites, rituals, and customary practices that continue to shape their social and religious life.

Traditionally, the Misings worship Po:lo (the Moon) as their paternal deity and Do:nyi (the Sun) as their maternal goddess, reflecting an indigenous cosmology closely connected to nature (Grierson, 1909; Doley, 1997). From the seventeenth century onward, prolonged interaction with Assamese society led to the adoption of certain Vaishnavite ideals, and many Misings gradually incorporated Vaishnava beliefs and practices into their religious life. Nevertheless, traditional tribal customs, rituals, and belief systems continue to remain dominant within the community (Pakem, 1990; Dutta, 2012).

Agriculture forms the primary source of livelihood for the Misings, and their socio-cultural life is closely tied to agricultural cycles. Major festivals such as Ali-A:ye Lígang and Po:rag are agrarian in nature and involve elaborate socio-religious rituals, including the sacrifice of pigs and fowls and the ceremonial consumption of rice beer (Apong), which reinforces social cohesion and cultural identity (Doley, 2005; Doley, 2014). Religious rituals are conducted by the traditional priest known as the Mibu, who performs important ceremonial and spiritual functions within the community.

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Linguistically, the Mising language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Mongoloid linguistic family, and alongside their mother tongue, most Misings also use Assamese for communication (Grierson, 1909). The community possesses a rich oral tradition encompassing myths, folklore, songs, and narratives that preserve historical memory and cultural values. Traditionally, Mising houses are constructed on raised platforms to protect against floods and are aligned along the north–south and east–west axes, with thatched roofs reflecting adaptation to the riverine ecology of the Brahmaputra valley (Waddel, 2000; Doley, 1997).

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand about the sustainability and enhancement of the unique Mising food culture via the continuation of traditional food preparation and consumption habits.
2. To study the community togetherness and solidarity via the communal sharing of traditional meals throughout everyday activities, social gatherings, rituals, and festivals, therefore establishing a robust social support network.
3. To understand the profound relationship with the local environment and agricultural systems, since traditional dietary practices are predominantly influenced by the natural resources present in their riverine and woodland ecosystems.
4. To investigate the role of sustainable economic advancement via culinary practices, showcasing distinctive traditional Mising cuisine.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a mixed-methods research approach focus to examine the significance of traditional food in the Mishing community. Primary data are collected from two Mishing villages—1 No. Dahghoria in Lakhimpur district and Silakola (Chilakola) in Majuli district. A total of 80 respondents were selected using simple random sampling. Data are gathered through observation, semi-structured interviews and informal discussions to understand food preparation, consumption patterns, communal eating practices, and their links with culture, environment, and livelihoods. The researchers closely observed daily meals, festivals, and rituals to capture cultural meanings attached to food. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, articles, and unpublished theses to provide historical context and support analysis.

IV. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

IV.I. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table:1- Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Category	Sub-Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sex	Male	31	38.75%
	Female	49	61.25%
	Total	**80**	**100%**
Age Group(Years)	25-35	18	22%
	35-45	26	33%

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	45-55	22	28%
	55 and above	14	17%
	Total	**80**	**100%**
Educational Qualification	Attended Lower Primary	6	8%
	Attended Upper Primary	10	12%
	Under Matriculation	10	13%
	HSLC Passed	26	33%
	HS Passed	18	22%
	Graduation	10	12%
	Total	**80**	**100%**

Source: Primary Data

The socio-demographic profile shows a higher representation of female respondents (61.25 percent), reflecting their central role in traditional food preparation and management within the household. The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents fall within the economically and socially active age groups of 35–55 years, suggesting strong continuity of traditional food practices among mature community members. Educationally, most respondents have completed HSLC or higher secondary education, indicating a moderate level of educational attainment. Despite formal education, traditional food knowledge remains strong, highlighting the importance of cultural transmission through family and community practices rather than formal institutions alone.

IV.II. TRADITIONAL DIETARY PRACTICES OF THE MISING TRIBE

The Mising tribe is widely recognized for its rich customary practices and distinctive culinary traditions, which form an integral part of its cultural identity. In the Mising dialect, food habits and dietary practices are referred to as Donam-Tínam or Doyid Tíyidnam, signifying the broader cultural meanings attached to food beyond mere consumption (Pegu, 1981; Doley, 1997). Rice constitutes the principal staple of the Mising diet and is consumed in combination with a variety of vegetables and non-vegetarian items, most of which are either cultivated locally or collected from surrounding natural environments. Many of the vegetables preferred by the Misings, whether grown or foraged, are believed to possess medicinal properties, reflecting indigenous ecological knowledge and traditional health practices (Kutum, Sarmah, & Hazarika, 2011).

Table 2: Dietary Profile and Gendered Labour Division of the Mising Tribe

Category	Variable	No.of respondents	Percentage
Staple Food	Ahu	60	75%

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April-June 2026

	Sali,Bora,Joha	20	25%
Total		**80**	**100%**
Livelihood Sourcing	Kitchen Garden, Forest	55	68.75%
	Market Purchased	25	31.25%
Total		80	**100%**
Morning Variation	Apong(Rice beer)	60	75%
	Tea or eat cold rice	20	25%
Total		**80**	**100%**
Gendered Labour Divison	Male: Plowing,Threshing and Hunting	48	60%
	Female: Transplanting, Weeding,Gathering	32	40%
Total		**80**	**100%**

Source: Primary data

There are several rice varieties, including Ahu, Sali, Bora, and Joha. 60 respondents i.e. 75% prefer Ahu to be the primary crop as it is most commonly grown due to the agricultural conditions suited for Ahu paddy. Others such as Sali,Bora,Joha are considered as secondary crops by 25%. In addition to these, the Mising cultivate mustard seeds, sweet potatoes, pulses, cotton, maize, and bananas contributing to household food security and subsistence-based livelihoods (Doley,2015). They also produce diverse types of rice cakes, such as Purang, Pitang, Ambug, and Sira, using Bora rice.

The Misings also maintain traditional kitchen gardens, which provide a steady supply of vegetables and herbs essential for consumption. The research indicates that 68.75% of people depend mostly on kitchen garden or forests while a very few depend on the market.

Apparently, Rice is consumed three times a day: morning, midday, and evening. In the morning, some older individuals enjoy rice beer, locally known as Apong, while others might drink tea or eat cold rice (Pin-kang Apin), among various options reflecting variations in age, preference and habit (Doley 1997; Doley,2014). Most of the respondents (75%) in the study are found to be rice beer i.e. Apong consumers while a small amount (25%) prefer to drink tea or eat cold rice in the morning. Rice is then consumed again at midday and in the evening.

In the Mising community, labour is divided by gender; women are primarily responsible for transplanting and wedding tasks, while men handle plowing, threshing, and transporting paddy bundles (Pegu,1981). Mothers play a crucial role in household duties, including food preparation, traditional milling, and caring for family members, including children. Although men tend to participate less in cooking, there are no formal restrictions on their involvement in kitchen activities. Interestingly, there are instances when men do take part in culinary tasks(Doley,2005). The study highlights 60% of the people indicating men to be the ones playing the major role in the community while other (40%) agrees on women having minimal role in outside activities but still being the most important factor of household activities.

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April-June 2026

Table 3: Distribution of Food habits and Ethnomedicinal Practices

Category	Variable	Name of food items	No. of respondents	Percentage
Seasonal Food	Winter	Cabbage, Carrots, Beets, Watercress, Coriander, and Chilli	52	65%
	Summer	Palak (Paleng), Jika, Bhul	28	35%
Total			**80**	**100%**
Utility	Both medicinal and dietary consumption	Napaphoo (Napaku), Dupartenga, Turmeri (Haldi), Mossondari, Liverwort (Manimuni),Tengesi, Pipali (Pimpoli), Dhekia, Kochu, Podina	60	75%
	Only medicinal purpose	Tulokhi, Mahaneem, Bocha, Buisahab, Kurchi, Bahaka, Sarpagandha	20	25%
Total			**80**	**100%**
Food preservation	Drying	Vegetables: Paro:Tapa (Ash gourd), Tulai Oying (Mustard greens), Talab (Garlic), take (Ginger), Pared Kar	30	37.5%
	Fermentation	Ekung (Fermented bamboo shoots), Namsing (Fermented fish), Apong (Rice beer), Pared Kar (Khar), Pickle	50	62.5%
Total			**80**	**100%**
Traditional Food Consumption	Frequently	Apin (Rice), Oying (Boiled vegetables),	68	85%

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Volume: 4 | Issue: 1
April-June 2026

		Ongo (Fish), Dayil (Lentils), Dhekia and Manimuni (Wild herbs and Ferns)		
	Rarely/Occasionally	Ceremonial rice cakes (Purang, Pitang,Sira), Apong (Rice beer), Namsing (Fermented fish), Ekung (Fermented bamboo shoots), Snail (Nobílíng), Pork curry ('I-Pitang' or 'Ye′kkad Oying, Jabor Adin Oying	12	15%
Total			**80**	**100%**

Source: Primary data

It is found that the community's food security is managed through seasonal cultivation and indigenous preservation techniques. The study indicates that during winter, 65% of the Mising households focus on growing various food items, such as cabbage, carrots, beets, watercress, coriander, and chilli. While 35% of the respondents prefer cultivating palak (Paleng), *jika, bhul*, and more during summer.

The Mising community possess a sophisticated, localized knowledge of flora to treat various ailments (Doley,2014). The present research highlights the various wild roots and plants commonly consumed including sweet potatoes, tapioca, titabhekuri, napaphoo, mossondari, dhekia, arum (kochu), podina, and manimuni. Additionally, several medicinal plants are utilized for various health issues:

1. Napaphoo (Napaku) - for high blood pressure
2. Dupartenga- for urinary troubles and kidney stones
3. Turmeric (Haldi)- for healing wounds, jaundice, or liver problems
4. Mossondari- for curing dysentery
5. Tulsi (Tuloki)- for cough and synapsis
6. Liverwort (Manimuni)- for cardiac and brain problems
7. Tengesi- for blood pressure and brain issues
8. Mahaneem- for itching, skin diseases, and other skin problems
9. Pipali (Pimpoli)- for blood problems and skin diseases

The study indicates that 75% of the respondents use these food items for dual purposes-both nutrition and medicines. Additionally, the study also shows 25% of the respondents, who identifies a specialized group of plants like *Tulokhi, Mahaneem, Bocha, Buisahab, Kurchi, Bahaka, Sarpagandha* which are only for medicinal purpose.

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Page No: 13-25
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April-June 2026

Many Mising households in Lakhimpur district share a common pond for fish and dried fish. The table highlights 37.5% of respondents using the technique of drying for food preservation.When fish is plentiful, it is cleaned and roasted over a fire. Any excess is dried on a *Me'rab* (fireplace) over the hearth and stored for future use. Sometimes, dried fish is powdered and kept in bamboo tubes. Furthermore, the importance of indigeneous food preservation as a survival strategy in the Northeast highlights fermentation as a key nutritional safeguard (Tamang,2010). The present study indicates that 62.5% of respondents produce and consume fermented items like *Ekung* (Fermented bamboo shoots), *Namsing* (Fermented fish), *Apong* (Rice beer).

Repondents from the study areas revealed that traditional meals among the them often include rice (Apin), lentils (Dayil), vegetable curry, fish (Ongo), dried fish (Ngosan/Sanne Ongo), preserved fish powder (Namsíng), pork (Eg Adin), chicken (Porog Adin), duck (Pe′jab Adin), and snail (Nobílíng), along with boiled vegetables. They also periodically enjoy a unique pork curry known as 'I-Pitang' or 'Ye′kkad Oying,' which consists of rice powder, tender banana stem (Posola), hog blood, and pork. Another dish called ‘Jabor Adin Oying’ is made with hog blood or flesh along with green vegetables and other ingredients. Among these, 85% of the respondents agrees that food items like Apin (Rice), Oying (Boiled vegetables), Ongo (Fish), Dayil (Lentils) are frequently consumed while Ceremonial rice cakes (Purang, Pitang,Sira), Apong (Rice beer), Namsing (Fermented fish) are food that are consumed occasionaly as agreed by 15% of the respondents. Furtheremore, it is found that milk consumption is quite rare among the respondents, although children are generally fed milk. Newborns are given mother’s milk for the first 6 to 12 months. Respondents reveal that powdered milk is sometimes purchased from the market and is also used for making tea. Cow or buffalo milk is boiled in a steel pot before consumption.

IV.III HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF TRADITIONAL MISING FOOD

A significant majority of respondents stated that they believe, traditional food is healthy and nutritionally beneficial, reflecting strong confidence in indigenous dietary practices. Field observations reveal that Mising cuisine is centered around rice, fresh fish, fermented foods and green leafy vegetables, which together provide a balanced and nutrient-rich diet. Respondents particularly highlighted namsing, a fermented ingredient valued that support digestion and gut health. Traditional cooking methods such as steaming and boiling, along with the use of minimal oil, help preserve essential nutrients and maintain the natural quality of food. These practices promote healthy eating habits and reduce dependence on processed foods. The minority of respondents who disagreed cited changing food preferences and lifestyle influences. Overall, the findings suggest that traditional Mising food supports both physical well-being and sustainable nutrition.

IV. IV. TRANSMISSION OF TRADITIONAL FOOD KNOWLEDGE FROM ELDERS TO YOUTH

Table 4: Transmission of Traditional Food Knowledge from Elders to Youth

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	80	100
No	0	0
Total	**80**	**100**

The data in the above table show that 100 percent of the respondents agreed that traditional food knowledge is transmitted from elders to the younger generation, indicating a strong system of cultural continuity within the Mising community. It was observed during fieldwork that this transmission mainly takes place informally within households, where elders especially women teach younger members through daily participation in cooking, collection of ingredients, and preparation during

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Page No: 13-25
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Volume: 4 | Issue: 1
April-June 2026

festivals and rituals. Women respondents aged 55 years and above strongly emphasized their responsibility in passing on this knowledge, expressing pride in teaching traditional recipes, preservation techniques, and the use of indigenous herbs. However, many elders (both men and women) also expressed concern over emerging challenges. They noted that children and youth are increasingly attracted to junk food and are influenced by Western, Chinese, and Korean cuisines, leading to reduced interest in traditional food. Additionally, respondents highlighted ecological challenges such as deforestation, floods, and the gradual disappereance of indigenous herbs and plants, which directly affect the availability of traditional ingredients. Since Mising cuisine relies heavily on locally sourced natural resources, these environmental changes pose serious threats. Despite these challenges, sustainable food practices passed down through generations continue to reflect the community's deep ecological connection to the land and their commitment to preserving ancestral culinary traditions.

IV.V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL FOOD IN SOCIAL BONDING AND COMMUNITY LIFE

The Mising community in Assam holds traditional cuisine in high regard, recognizing its profound impact on various facets of their lives, such as societal values, ecological awareness, and cultural identity (Kumari and Dutta,2012). Sharing and preparing meals together is a rich, communal experience that brings people closer in a spirit of togetherness (Souisa,2019).

Table 5: Consumption of traditional food in different domains

Categorizing the consumption of traditional food in different domains	Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Daily use/Home	Yes	80	100%
	No	0	0%
Total		**80**	**100%**
Ritual/Festivals	Always	45	56%
	Sometimes	35	44%
Total		**80**	**100%**

Source: Primary data

The preparation and consumption of traditional dishes often involve age old rituals and practices that foster community bonds, passing on knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. In this way, Mising cuisine transcends mere eating; it embodies a lifestyle that honors the community's history and their close relationship with the natural environment. The data presented in table 5 clearly show that 100 percent of the respondents consume traditional Mising food at home, indicating the strong presence and continuity of traditional food practices in everyday life. This finding highlights that traditional food in the Mising community is not merely a source of nourishment but a vital expression of culture and identity. Food practices reflect inherited knowledge passed down through generations and play a key role in maintaining ethnic distinctiveness.

The data also indicates that a majority of respondents (56%) reported always sharing traditional meals during festivals and rituals, while the remaining 44% shared meals sometimes, indicating that communal eating is a common and valued practice in the Mising community. Field observations revealed that traditional Mising food, which is largely non-vegetarian and prepared using locally sourced ingredients, is shared with great joy and pride during various social and religious occasions. Such meal

International Journal of Science and Social Science Research
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Page No: 13-25
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Volume: 4 | Issue: 1
April-June 2026

sharing goes beyond household boundaries and often includes relatives, neighbours, and members of other communities. Respondents also expressed that through these shared meals (apong, purang apin, pered oying) traditional food becomes a medium of social interaction, mutual respect, and cultural exchange. This practice not only strengthens internal community bonds but also helps introduce Mising food traditions to other communities, thereby promoting understanding and appreciation of Mising culture through everyday social engagement.

IV.VI. FESTIVAL AND RITUALISTIC IMPORTANCE

Table 6: Festival and Ritualistic importance of Traditional Food

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	72	90%
No	8	10%
Total	**80**	**100%**

The data in Table 6 indicate that a large majority of respondents (90 percent) acknowledged the ritualistic and spiritual importance of traditional Mising food, highlighting its central role in religious and ceremonial life. Field observations revealed that food is not viewed merely as sustenance but as a sacred medium through which respect and devotion are offered to deities, ancestral spirits, and natural forces. During festivals such as Ali-Aye-Ligang, young community members(women belong to 25-45 age groups)actively participate in preparing traditional items like purang apin and apong, which are offered to ancestral spirits to seek blessings for a good harvest and prosperity. These offerings symbolise a deep connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. Respondents also noted that specific foods are not only chosen for taste but are also considered auspicious during life-cycle rituals and rites of passage, where their symbolic meanings are believed to bring protection, harmony, and well-being. The small proportion of respondents (10%) who disagreed felt that spiritual practices are changing over time, yet overall the findings states the enduring ceremonial significance of food in Mising culture.

IV.VII. SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Table 7: Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Traditional Diet

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	52	65%
Agree	23	28.75%
Disagree	4	5%
Strongly disagree	1	1.25%
Total	**80**	**100**

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Volume: 4 | Issue: 1
April-June 2026

The data in Table 7 shows that a majority of respondents i.e. 65% strongly agreed that traditional dietary practices are rooted in sustainable use of natural resources. Additionally 28.75% agreed with this view, strengthening the sentiment and the community's strong ecological awareness. Field observations support this finding, as Mising cuisine is closely linked to the riverine and woodland ecosystems surrounding their settlements along the Brahmaputra riverbanks. Respondents highlighted the use of wild edible plants, home-grown vegetables, and locally available herbs, demonstrating deep knowledge of local biodiversity. Fish from nearby rivers and wetlands form an important part of the diet, while materials such as bamboo, banana leaves, and cane are commonly used for cooking, wrapping, and food preservation. These practices show a harmonious relationship with nature and a preference for sustainable resource use. The small number of respondents (6.25%) who jointly expressed disagreement felt that environmental changes and reduced availability of natural resources are affecting these traditions. Overall, the findings underline that Mising cuisine embodies ecological wisdom and cultural heritage rather than mere sustenance.

IV.VIII. ECONOMIC ROLE

Table 8: Economic Role of Traditional Mising Food Practices

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
High Economic importance	68	85%
Limited Economic importance	12	15%
Total	**80**	**100%**

Traditional foods play a key role in the economies of all the countries,culture and everyday life (Halasi,2025). The data in Table 8 show that a large majority of respondents (85%) acknowledged the economic importance of traditional Mising food practices, indicating that food-related activities contribute meaningfully to household livelihoods. Field observations revealed that traditional items such as *apong,* apart from *namsing,ekung* play a significant role in the local economy, with women (25-45 age groups) often taking the lead in preparing and selling apong, homemade rice cakes(Oppob), fresh herbs, and locally caught fish in village markets (haats), temporary stalls and local resturants. These activities provide supplementary income, strengthen household finances, and enhance women's economic participation. Respondents also emphasized the importance of cultivating indigenous rice varieties, which are well suited to local environmental conditions and contribute to food security. These traditional agricultural practices not only ensure a stable food supply but also help preserve cultural heritage. The minority of respondents (15%) who disagreed felt that income from traditional food is limited due to market constraints. Overall, the findings highlight the significant socio-economic role of traditional Mising food practices.

IV.IX. DECLINE IN CONSUMPTION OF TRADITIONAL FOOD IN RECENT YEARS

Table 9: Decline in Consumption of Traditional Food in Recent Years

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	26	33%

International Journal of Science and Social Science Research
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Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Page No: 13-25
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63671/ijsssr.v4i1.571
Volume: 4 | Issue: 1
April-June 2026

No	54	675%
Total	**80**	**100%**

The data in Table 9 indicate that 33 percent of respondents observed a decline in the consumption of traditional Mising food in recent years, while a majority (67 percent) did not perceive any significant decline. Field observations suggest that traditional food continues to be regularly consumed in rural Mising villages, where access to local ingredients and adherence to customary practices remain strong. However, respondents who reported that a decline mainly associated it with changes in lifestyle, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. Factors such as increased exposure to Western, Chinese, and Korean cuisines, growing preference for fast and processed foods among younger generations, and limited availability of traditional ingredients were highlighted as major reasons. Migration to urban areas, lack of time for traditional food preparation, and reduced access to natural food sources such as fresh fish, herbs, and forest produce were also cited. These findings suggest that while traditional food practices remain resilient in rural settings, urbanization and changing food preferences pose challenges to their continuity.

V. CONCLUSION

Traditional food in the Mishing community is far more than a means of sustenance; it is a powerful expression of culture, identity, ecology, economy, and social unity. The study clearly shows that traditional food practices remain deeply rooted in everyday life, rituals, festivals, and household routines, reflecting strong cultural continuity. Food preparation and sharing function as communal activities that strengthen family ties, reinforce community solidarity, and promote cultural exchange with other communities living in nearby areas. The dependence on locally sourced ingredients such as fish, herbs, rice, and forest produce highlights the Mising people's deep ecological connection and sustainable use of natural resources. Intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge, particularly through elders, ensures the preservation of ancestral wisdom and healthy dietary practices. Economically, traditional food supports household livelihoods and enhances women's participation through local markets. Although urbanisation and external food influences pose challenges, traditional food practices remain strong in villages of rural areas. Overall, traditional Mishing food represents a living cultural system that sustains social cohesion, environmental harmony, and economic well-being.

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