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## *Urom Uie: A Family Ritual and Tradition of the Mising*

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### ABSTRACT

The research article “*Urom Uie: A family ritual and tradition of the Mising*” explores the rich family ritual and tradition of the Mising tribes of Assam. It provides an in- depth account of the *Urom Uie* ceremony, highlighting its significance as a family and community ritual. The paper details the preparation process, rituals involved, and the collective participation that sustains this tradition. Additionally, it examines how modernization and changing social dynamics influence and reshape the ritual over time. By documenting these evolving practices, the article offers valuable insights into preserving cultural identity amid contemporary influences, emphasizing the importance of maintaining traditional values within a transforming society. The paper is based on case study of Pa:ling *Urom* ritual practiced by the Do:le *Opin* (clan) of Kocheh village of Ujani Sissi Tangani GP of Sissiborgaon RC of Dhemaji district of Assam

Key Words: *Urom Uie*, Ritual, Tradition, Modernization, Cultural Identity etc.

### Introduction

#### Overview of the Mising Community

The Mising community, Assam's second-largest Scheduled Tribe, has greatly influenced the state's socio-cultural and historical landscape. Known for their unique traditions and belief systems, they primarily depend on agriculture, cultivating the fertile lands along the Brahmaputra and Subansiri rivers. Their main settlements are located in upper Assam districts such as Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, and others, often near rivers vital for their livelihood. As per the 2011 Census, their population was around 738,000, mainly in Assam, with a significant presence in Arunachal Pradesh. Originating from the Tani tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, they have inhabited the Brahmaputra Valley since ancient times, with archaeological and linguistic evidence dating back to the 13th-14th centuries BC. Their culture is predominantly animist, venerating celestial bodies like the Sun and Moon (*Donyi-Polo*). The community observes the *Ali-Aye-Ligang* festival to celebrate the sowing season and agricultural prosperity. While maintaining traditional customs, they have adapted to modern practices, including marriage rituals. Their language, *Mising*, is central to their identity, though some have embraced Christianity and Vaishnavism. The government supports their social and cultural development through autonomous bodies, helping preserve their traditions. Their spiritual life revolves around reverence for nature and spirits called '*Uies*,' with rituals involving sacrifices to maintain harmony and protection.

#### Objectives of the Research Study

The objectives of the research are to know the significant of *Urom Uie* in the family within the Mising community, fosters family bonds, community identity, and cultural heritage transmission. It involves specific rituals, ceremonies, and practices rooted in historical origins, but faces challenges from modern influences. Promoting awareness of *Urom Uie* is crucial to preserving Mising traditions for future generations.

#### Space of Research & Methods of Data Collection

The data collection for this research study was carried out in Kocheh village, Ujani Sissi Tangani Gram Panchayat, within the Sissiborgaon Revenue Circle of Dhemaji district. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including the individuals who perform the *Urom* ritual, household heads responsible for conducting the ceremony, and several senior family members. Additional methods employed encompassed participant observation, videography, photography, and telephonic conversations. Secondary sources such as community-related books, souvenirs, scholarly articles, and online information from Google were also consulted to enrich and substantiate the research. The names of the key informants are documented in the appendix at the end of the report.

#### Significance of the *Urom Uie* Ceremony

The *Urom Uie* remains a cornerstone of Misings' ritual tradition and cultural practice within the families of the community. It embodies their spiritual worldview, emphasizing harmony with nature and reverence for ancestors. The ceremony fosters community cohesion, as people come together to perform

collective sacrificial rites and offering to the departed souls believing that their spirit is present within the habitation sites in various forms, share meals, and celebrate their cultural identity.

Furthermore, *Urom Uie* plays a crucial role in preserving indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, and ecological wisdom. It serves as a living link to their history, beliefs, and social values, passing these elements down through generations.

The *Urom Uie* ritual ceremony of the Misings is a vibrant testament to their rich cultural tapestry. Its origins rooted in animistic traditions have evolved over centuries, adapting to changing circumstances while maintaining its fundamental spiritual and social significance. Today, it continues to be a vital expression of Misings' identity, resilience, and their enduring relationship with nature and ancestors.

### **Origins of the *Urom Uie***

The origins of the *Urom Uie* ceremony are believed to date back centuries, rooted in the Misings' animistic belief system. Historically, the Misings revered nature and deities associated with rivers, forests, animals and deceased of human beings (spirit), believing that these elements inhabited spirits that influenced their daily lives. The *Urom* ritual likely emerged as a means to appease these spirits, seek their blessings, and ensure societal harmony.

Traditionally, the *Urom Uie* is performed during agricultural season, such as the sowing or harvesting seasons, to invoke divine favor for bountiful crops and to appease the departed soul of human. It also marked significant life events like seeking divine protection for the family, community or commemorating ancestral spirits. The ritual is therefore, both religious and social, serving to reinforce communal bonds and cultural identity.

### **Cultural Significance within the Mising Society**

The *Urom Uie* is a significant cultural ritual for the Mising community, symbolizing their spiritual beliefs, social unity, and cultural identity. It is performed during the post-harvest season to honor deceased family members, rooted in animistic traditions that emphasize respect for nature and ancestors. This ritual aims to seek blessings for prosperity, good harvests, and cosmic harmony. It also serves as a unifying event within the family clan (*opin*), involving collective participation in rituals and offerings, which strengthen social bonds and pass down oral traditions. The offerings, made from locally sourced items like rice, herbs, and rice beer, reflect their ecological consciousness and sustainable relationship with nature. Additionally, *Urom Uie* helps preserve the Mising language and cultural stories, fostering a sense of identity and pride. More than just a ritual, it embodies their worldview, values, and social fabric, reinforcing their connection to ancestors, nature, and community. Amid modern influences, the continued practice of *Urom Uie* remains vital for maintaining their cultural heritage, ensuring the resilience and continuity of the Mising's unique traditions for future generations.

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## **Analysis and Reflection on the Fundamentals of Field Data Collection**

### **Who are the Doley clan (*Opin*)?**

Before discussing the Doley clan, it is essential to understand the concept of a clan. A clan is a substantial social unit composed of individuals connected through kinship, shared ancestry, or collective identity, often forming a distinct social or cultural community. Traditionally, clans are extended family groups that can trace their lineage to a common ancestor and typically possess unique customs, symbols, and social responsibilities. In broader contexts, a clan may also represent a close-knit group united by shared interests, goals, or affiliations.

Scholars such as Boruah (2002) have examined the social fabric of the Mising community, highlighting the significance of clan-based kinship systems, including the Doley clan. These clans form the foundation for social interactions, marriage alliances, and community governance, reflecting a structured social order rooted in ancestral lineage. According to Baruah (2010), the Mising tribes, including the Doley clan, uphold a rich oral tradition and customs that preserve their cultural identity. These studies underscore the vital role of clans like Doley in rituals, festivals, and traditional livelihoods such as fishing, agriculture, and weaving.

The Doley clan is a prominent lineage within the Mising community, an indigenous ethnic group primarily inhabiting Assam, India. The Mising people belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic and ethnic groups, renowned for their vibrant cultural heritage, traditional practices, and social organization based on clan or khel systems. Recognition of the Doley clan, like other clans within the Mising society, is grounded in ancestral lineage, social customs, and kinship ties, which are crucial for maintaining social structure, cultural identity, and community cohesion.

Among the various clans of the Mising tribe - an Assamese tribal group - are Doley, Pegu, Taye, Kuli, Regon, Bori, and Patir. These are just a few examples from a society comprising nearly fifty identified clans, which are organized into larger groupings such as Pagro, Chayengia, and Ayengia. Additional examples include clans like Kaman, Kutum, Pamegam, Kumbang, Mili, Morang, Noroh, Taid, Payeng, Padun, Narah, and Payun.

The Mising clan structure is hierarchical, with society divided into larger units such as Barogam and Dahgam, which are further subdivided into various clans. Clans are also associated with sub-groups like *Pagro*, *Chayengia*, *Ayengia*, and *Moyengia*. The origins of these clans are traditionally traced back to the name of a forefather or, in some cases, to the Supreme Being believed to have created the universe.

### **Traditional *Urom Uie* Practices of the Doley Clan (*Opin*) Rooted in Ancestral Heritage**

In Doley clans' *Urom Uie* practices, two main rituals are observed: *Kensa Urom* and *Bhakat Urom*, both involving sacrificial offerings of a totally black male pig (*kasinam*). *Kensa Urom*, performed in honor of ancestor Pa'ling, is highly delicate, requiring strict adherence to protocols at a sacred site within the *Ukum koktog*, the Chang house backyard. Detailed procedures are outlined for this ritual. *Bhakat Urom* is conducted in the front courtyard of the

Chang house, where the pig is sacrifice. Afterward, the family seeks divine blessings and performs a cleansing of the pig to maintain ritual purity, underscoring the sacredness of the ceremony.

### **Folklore on Pa:ling (Ancestor)**

According to various traditional narratives, it is widely believed that in earlier times, the Mising people were skilled hunters, often venturing into the nearby jungles surrounding their settlements to hunt game. Their daily lives were deeply intertwined with the forest, which served as both a source of sustenance and cultural significance. One prominent legend recounts an incident involving Pa:ling, a revered figure from their ancestral lineage. During a hunting expedition into the dense forest near his village, Pa:ling mysteriously disappeared and was never seen again. Tragically, he was apparently attacked by Rhino and died. According to folktale it believed that on that morning before going for hunting Pa:ling fight with both of his wives. Out of anger the first wife (*E:pong*) curse ( [solemn utterance](#) intended to invoke a supernatural power to [inflict](#) harm or punishment to him jungle) him while expediting the jungle. His death body was brought from the jungle by covering with white shawl. This tragic event has left a lasting imprint on the Doley clan collective consciousness. At the beginning the *Urom Uie* in his name was performed by Priest (*Mibu*) for several years but now the well known senior member (Aikoi Doley) conducts the rituals with maximum care. Till today, the descendants of Pa:ling perform sacrificial *Urom* rituals known as "*Kensa urom*" or "*Kesa kati*" in his honor, seeking to appease his restless spirit. These rituals are conducted with utmost reverence and are believed to prevent any malevolent influence from his spirit that might harm the Doley clan and their families. As per their families' traditional norms after nine generation *Urom* is converted into *Nopurukia* ritual (performed with *Késung*/Tortoise).

Consequently, the tradition of performing these ancestral rites continues, with each generation conscientiously carrying forward the legacy with respect and devotion. The elders ensure that the rituals are performed correctly, maintaining a spiritual link with Pa:ling's spirit and safeguarding the harmony of their families. This enduring practice exemplifies the deep-rooted respect for ancestors within the Mising culture, serving as a poignant reminder of the profound bond between the living and their ancestral spirits.

### **Time Period of *Urom Uie***

The *Urom* ritual is a significant ceremonial event that unfolds over two days within the family domain. On the first day, strict normative practices are observed, and access is limited exclusively to the immediate household; outsiders are prohibited from entering the ritual boundary. The boundary of the household is sealed with *Piro* (a wild tall varieties of grass) symbolizing the indication of entry restriction for the ritual. This initial day is regarded as the most auspicious, marked by a series of sacred rites and elaborate performances conducted by the family members. These rituals are performed with meticulous care, reflecting the spiritual gravity and cultural importance of the occasion.

On the second day, the ceremony is opened to a broader audience, including relatives and well-wishers from the village community. During this day, the celebration takes on a more communal character, fostering social bonds and collective participation. A notable feature of the second day is the serving of a special offering - half of a pork carcass is set aside to commemorate the occasion, symbolizing abundance and communal sharing.

Traditionally, the second day is referred to as *Do:lad Tilad* in the Mising dialect, emphasizing its cultural significance and distinctive nomenclature. Overall, the *Urom* ritual embodies a harmonious blend of sacred observance and communal celebration, reinforcing familial bonds, spiritual beliefs, and cultural continuity.

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## **Preparation for the *Urom* Ritual**

### **Timing and Selecting the Auspicious Day**

The timing and selection of an auspicious day for the *Urom* ritual among the Mising community are deeply rooted in their traditional calendar and cultural beliefs. *Urom*, being a significant ritual tradition that marks blessing from all the ancestral departed souls performed during harvesting season or post harvest and celebrates gratitude for a bountiful crop, prosperity of the families, requires careful planning to ensure its successful observance.

Traditionally, the Mising people determine the appropriate day based on their lunar calendar and auspicious timings derived from local astrology. The community elders and priests play a vital role in selecting the most suitable date, often consulting traditional almanacs or observing specific celestial events. They look for favorable lunar phases, such as the new moon or full moon that are considered auspicious for starting new ventures or conducting important rituals.

The timing also depends on agricultural cycles, as *Urom* coincides with the completion of rice harvesting, which is central to Mising livelihood and culture. The festival is usually held shortly after the harvest, during a period when the land is deemed most fertile and the community is in high spirits. This timing emphasize the ritual significance as a thank offering to deities for their blessings and as a communal celebration of prosperity.

Furthermore, specific days of the week or particular lunar dates are preferred, based on traditional beliefs about their impact on the ritual's success. For instance, certain days are considered more auspicious for invoking divine blessings and ensuring the prosperity of the upcoming cycle.

In recent times, with increased interaction with modern calendars and external influences, some communities might choose dates that align with both traditional auspicious timings and practical considerations such as weather conditions or social schedules. Nonetheless, the core principle remains: selecting an auspicious day for *Urom* is a collective, culturally guided decision that aims to maximize spiritual and communal benefits, reinforcing the ritual significance as a harmonious and prosperous beginning.

### Ritual Objects and Offerings

The *Urom* ritual, a vital cultural tradition within the Mising community, encompasses a profound assembly of ritual objects and offerings imbued with deep spiritual significance. These items are thoroughly prepared and employed during ceremonies to invoke blessings, ensure prosperity, and foster harmony with nature and the divine. Central to the ritual is the sacred sacrificial site at *Ukum Koktok*, located in the backyard of the *Chang ghar* (traditional stilt house of the indigenous Mising tribe of Assam), which is consecrated as a holy space for offerings during the Pa:ling *Urom Uie* ceremony. Traditional arrangements, including rice grains, rice beer (*kutlad manam po:ro apong*), and water, are carefully placed for purification and sacrificial purposes. Decorations and ritual norms enhance the sanctity of this space. Rice beer, a vital offering, symbolizes reverence and hospitality towards ancestors and deities. Items such as *tamul* (areca nuts) and *paan* (areca leaves) symbolize auspiciousness and tradition. When offered alongside prayers and chants in the Mising dialects, they reflect respect, gratitude, and aspirations for prosperity. These rituals highlight the community's deep spiritual connection with nature and their ancestral heritage.

### Role of Family Members and Community Participants

The *Urom Uie* of the Mising community is a significant traditional ritual event that involves the active participation of various family members and community participants, each playing vital roles to ensure the ceremony's success and spiritual efficacy.

Family members are the primary custodians of the *Urom* ritual. Typically, the eldest male member of the family assumes the role of the priest or ritual leader, responsible for performing the core rites and ensuring that all traditional procedures are thoroughly followed. He is assisted by other male family members, including elders who provide guidance rooted in ancestral customs. Women also play crucial roles, especially in preparing offerings, cooking traditional foods, and participating in ritual. Younger family members are involved through learning and assisting in various tasks, ensuring the transmission of tradition and cultural knowledge across generations.

Beyond the family unit, community participation is vital to uphold the collective spirit of the *Urom* ceremony. Village elders and religious leaders often oversee the event, ensuring that the ritual adheres to traditional standards. Community members gather in a designated ceremonial family house, to witness and partake in the ritual festive. Their participation includes offering prayers and contributing traditional offerings. The involvement of the entire community fosters a sense of unity, reinforcing social bonds and cultural identity.

Additionally, specific roles are assigned to different village elders groups. For example, senior men are given the task of killing and clean the sacrificed pig for executing more rituals activities and women may perform filtration of traditional *po:ro apong* (rice beer). While, other prepare ceremonial paraphernalia. The participation of community leaders and elders also lends spiritual legitimacy to the ritual, emphasizing its importance in maintaining harmony between humans and nature.

In essence, the *Urom* ritual is a collective effort that intertwines familial responsibilities with community involvement. This collaborative participation not only ensures the proper conduct of the ritual but also strengthens the cultural fabric of the Mising society, preserving their spiritual beliefs and social cohesion across generations.

### Breeding and Raising Pigs for *Urom* Ceremonies

The family is required to rear a fully black male piglet, known as *Eyeg*, from a very tender age to serve as a vital component of the *Urom* ritual. From the time the piglet is born, it is meticulously cared for and maintained within the household premises. After reaching the age of one year, the piglet undergoes circumcision, referred to as *Kasinam*, marking a significant preparatory milestone in the ritual process. The piglet is then nurtured further until the formal *Urom* ceremony is conducted. In breeding the pig for *Urom* ritual it is belief that the pig must be breed till eruption of horn of the pig then the pig is ready for sacrificial.

The ritual, known as *Urom tosag*, is performed in the name of a designated family member, symbolizing a sacred offering and a spiritual connection. During the *Tosag*, a specific emblem or symbol is ritualized-carefully inscribed or consecrated-and then placed inside a bamboo conical container known as *Urom tosag* in slab. This symbolic artifact is hung just beneath the roof of the household, serving as a spiritual safeguard and a vessel of ancestral blessing. The *Tosag* remains in this *slab* position for approximately three to four years until the main *Urom* ritual is carried out.

When the family attains both the mental readiness and financial stability necessary for the elaborate celebration, they seek guidance from an astrologer, known locally as *Pangikanam*. The family consults with the astrologer to determine an auspicious date for performing the ritual, ensuring that all spiritual and cosmic factors are aligned for a successful and harmonious ceremony. This careful planning underscores the significance of the *Urom* ritual as a revered cultural tradition, embodying spiritual devotion, ancestral reverence, and communal unity.

### *Apong* Preparation: A Sacred Cultural Tradition

Traditional rice beer, known as *Apong*, holds a central and sacred role in the *Urom* ritual, serving as an essential spiritual and cultural element. Two distinct varieties of *Apong* are prepared in advance to facilitate the ritual ceremonies: *Nagin Apong*, characterized by its white hue, and *Po:ro Apong*, which is either black or brown. The preparation of these beverages employs two unique indigenous techniques, each rooted in ancestral knowledge and traditional craftsmanship. Typically, these brewing processes commence approximately one month prior to the scheduled ritual celebration, known as *Po:ro*. However, for *Nagin Apong*, a shorter fermentation period of one to two weeks is often sufficient to achieve the desired quality and potency required for ritual use. The preparation of both varieties of *Apong* is a communal effort, involving close family members and village relatives who come together to ensure the beverages are brewed with precision, reflecting the collective spirit and cultural continuity of the family and the community.

This collaborative approach not only sustains traditional brewing methods but also reinforces social bonds among community members. The meticulously prepared *Apong* becomes more than a beverage; it embodies cultural identity, spiritual significance, and ancestral heritage. Its consumption during the *Urom* ritual signifies a connection to the divine and the ancestors, serving as an offering to invoke blessings, prosperity, and protection. The careful preparation and communal participation underline the importance of tradition and unity in preserving the cultural fabric that defines the *Urom* ritual and its associated practices.

#### **Invoking the Ritual Performer/Shaman (*Míging Gognam*)**

Following the formal confirmation of the celebration date, the family initiates the process of gathering key participants essential for the ritual. Central to this gathering is the appointment of the main ritual performer, whose expertise and spiritual authority are vital for the successful execution of the ceremony. In addition to the primary performer, the village shaman (*adu míging*) is invited to assist, offering spiritual guidance, ritual knowledge, and support to ensure the sacred proceedings are conducted with awe and care. The involvements of the shaman accentuate the spiritual significance and traditional authenticity of the ritual. The participating members comprise individuals from within the village community, ensuring the collective involvement of local traditions and customs. Furthermore, members from the maternal side are also invited, highlighting the familial and social bonds that underpin the ceremony. These participants often include elders, relatives, and community members who contribute their blessings, support, and participation to uphold the cultural heritage. This collaborative effort reflects the deep-rooted communal values, spiritual beliefs, and cultural identity that are integral to the ritual, fostering a sense of unity and continuity across generations.

#### ***Ékam natnam* [collection of *Tora paat* (alpinia nigra leaves) for the event]**

This traditional practice is primarily carried out by family member who is conducting the ritual, often in collaboration with few village youths. However, this tradition was very much practice during earlier time but in the recent years this has been less practice in the Mising villages. This could be because of the availability of disposal plates in the local markets for their use or could be due less availability in jungles due destruction of environments within their periphery of the villages. The family members with the help and support of the young boys undertake expedition to the nearby jungles. If the required quality of *Tora* leaves is not available they opt for *Kamro ékam* wild varieties very popular in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, a vital element for their *Urom* celebrations. If necessary they set up temporary camps in the hills for two to three days, depending on prevailing circumstances, to harvest and gather the leaves. The community also receives assistance from close relatives who are married into families residing near the Arunachal border, fostering a sense of kinship and mutual support.

#### ***Oying Manam* (collection of edible natural vegetable herbs)**

This traditional activity is mainly undertaken by families' womenfolk a few days prior to the ritual. The women of the household along with some village women venture into the nearest forests to gather natural herbs, leafy vegetables, and other botanical ingredients essential for the for the ritual performance to honor feast and host the invited guests. In recent times, due to the dwindling availability of natural herbs in the local jungles, they increasingly travel to the nearby hills of Arunachal Pradesh to fulfill their requirements. The most commonly sought-after herbs include *Tazik*, *Ombe*, *Takuk*, *Onger*, and other natural botanicals that serve as essential ingredients for the grand rituals and celebrations. However, this tradition too has been decreasing in the recent times due to scarcity of the herbs in the nearby forest and also easily available other vegetables in the local markets.

#### **Preparatory Measures and Ritual Purity Protocols for the *Urom* Celebration**

In the week leading up to the *Urom* ritual, the family thoroughly ensures that all necessary ritual items are collected and prepared to facilitate a smooth ceremony. The day prior to the event, the designated celebration site or household undergoes a purification process to cleanse and sanctify the space. To uphold the strict norms of ritual purity, women experiencing menstruation are required to leave the site during the ceremony, as their presence is considered polluting during this sacred time. Some family members arrive a night in advance to stay within the ritual house, thereby maintaining the prescribed standards of pollution and purity. This practice ensures that the entire environment remains auspicious for the rituals. All members associated with the *Urom*, including relatives from both paternal and maternal sides, convene at the designated family residence where the rituals are to be performed. Throughout this period, the family diligently strives to uphold the principles of purity, carefully managing pollution and sanctity in accordance with cultural norms. Women on their menstrual cycle are strictly prohibited from participating in the ritual activities, emphasizing the importance of ritual purity in this sacred tradition.

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### ***Urom Uie* Ritual Procedures**

#### **Pre-Ritual Cleansing and Purification**

One day prior to the *Urom* ritual, the entire household and surrounding premises are thoroughly cleaned to create a sacred space for the ceremonial activities, both inside and outside the house. Preparations are made to accommodate sacrificial rites, ensuring that the environment is pristine and free from any form of pollution. Ritual practitioners and shamans are summoned to the residence, having maintained purity and cleanliness in accordance with traditional standards.

Close family members are also permitted to attend, contingent upon their confirmation of purity and absence of pollution. Women experiencing menstrual cycles are prohibited from participating in the first day of the ritual, particularly during the sacrificial proceedings.

On the eve of the ceremony, the household boundary is sealed with a *Piro* plant (*Phragmites karka*), a kind of wild reed, symbolizing the sanctity of the ritual and emphasizing the restrictions and significance of the occasion. Only individuals within the confines of the household premises are permitted to partake in the initial phase of the *Urom Uie* ritual.

#### Preparation activities to conduct the *Urom Uie* (Day-1)

On the day of the *Urom Uie*, family members diligently prepare themselves for the sacred ceremonies, primarily focusing on the sacrificial offering of the pig. They attire themselves in traditional garments, predominantly white, symbolizing purity and sanctity for the occasion. Prior to the main ritual, preparations are meticulously made within the *Chang ghar* or *Taleng Ukum*, including lighting earthen lamps to invoke divine blessings. The *Urom Tosag* is carefully untied and positioned for the ritual performance. Essential items such as *Dora* (traditional handicraft ritual mate), require sacrificial items like *Piro* plants (*Phragmites karka*), *Píro* (bamboo handicraft for sacrificial activity), *Copit* (small bamboo spear made for performing sacrificial norms), *Takpi* (wild variety tree handicraft for pillow (*dumpang*) of the sacrifice pig), *Ruktak*, *Tabang*, a small pot full *kutlad manam po:ro apong* (first filtered *po:ro* rice beer without alteration), jar of water, *tamul pan* (acrena and leaves), *Dogné* (traditional ritual necklace made of precious stones/beads), *Sípak* (cotton), rice grains (*Ambin*), *Po:ro apong* bundles, *Tora paat* or *Kamro* leaves, (*ta:ke*) ginger, *po:ro arug* (some raw quantity of unfiltered *po:ro apong* is kept in a *tora* leave for putting vermilion on the forehead to mark the occasion), cooking utensils, handcrafted bamboo spoons (*pínaw*) one piece, edible herbs, vegetables and other ingredients use in preparing food items are arranged systematically to facilitate the rituals. The family members, united in devotion, collectively seek blessings for the smooth and auspicious conduct of the ceremony, invoking the spirits of their ancestors and departed loved ones. These acts of reverence highlight the deep spiritual connection and respect for lineage that characterizes the ritual. Every detail reflects a profound commitment to tradition, emphasizing purity, worship, and the collective hope for divine favor and ancestral blessings during the sacred *Urom Uie* celebration.

#### Invocation of Deities and Ancestors

The performer conducts the *Urom Pitpusunam* (rituals for dispelling spirits from the household) ceremony by delicately sprinkling rice grains throughout the house, focusing on doorways and corners, extending up to the main entrance. This act symbolizes cleansing and warding off malevolent spirits, ensuring a harmonious environment. During the ritual, sacred hymns are chanted, invoking ancestral spirits and seeking their blessings. The family members remember and honor their departed loved ones, expressing reverence through prayers and remembrance. Additionally, the *Doley opin* invokes ancestral spirits such as *Tabalung*, *Sirguiyan*, and *Olibonduki*, reaffirming their spiritual connection and seeking protection from negative energies. This ritual not only purifies the household but also reinforces familial bonds and ancestral ties, fostering spiritual harmony and safeguarding the home from malevolent influences.

#### Adorning the *Dogné*: Traditional Attire for the *Urom Uie*

The ritual performer begins by preparing symbolic offerings, including raw *Po:ro Apong* and sliced ginger placed on *Tora Paat*. Prior to donning the *Dogné*, family members undertake specific ceremonial activities. In cases where traditional *Dogné* is unavailable, a makeshift version crafted from white cotton thread is used, symbolizing the authentic attire. The *Dogné* is a sacred mala made of precious stones, imbued with profound ritual significance, passed down through generations as a cherished heirloom integral to ancestral rites. During the rituals, offerings such as money are placed in a *Horai Bota* for each performer, reflecting reverence and gratitude. Family members adorn themselves by placing white cotton on both sides of their ears and applying *Po:ro arug* on the forehead, behind the ears, and on the arms. Small bites of *Po:ro arug* are held in the hands as symbolic gestures. This meticulous process embodies respect for tradition, ensuring that all participants adhere to established norms before seeking blessings from *Ru:né- Píné*, the creator of humanity.

#### Preparation and Conduct of the Sacrificial Ritual

The sacrificial site is meticulously prepared in accordance with traditional customs, with guidance from senior community members who oversee the placement of ritual materials. In the case of *Urom Uie*, the departed *Pa:ling's* ritual ground is established at the *Ukum Koktog*, located behind the house. All necessary resources for preparation and decoration are transported to the site and arranged accordingly.

The essential materials include *birina* (wild grass), *píro* (bamboo crafts prepared specifically for the sacrifice), *dumpang* (pillow crafted from *takpi ísing*), *ruktak* (*Thelypteris angustifolia*, a wild fern), *tabang* (*Imperata cylindrica*, a sharp grass), *piro* (wild reed, *Phragmites karka*), *tora paat* (variety of leaves), *copit* (small bamboo spear used in sacrificial rites), rice grains, *po:ro apong* (locally brewed rice beer, first filtration), and a sharp knife. The ritual ground is thoroughly cleaned, and two holes are excavated at a distance equivalent to an arm's length apart.

In each hole, a *birina pisum* (cluster of grass) is planted alongside a *piro* and a *takpi ísing*, secured with ropes made from bamboo, standing upright to support the sacrificial elements. Supporting structures, including *ruktak*, *tabang*, and additional *píro*, are tied with *tora paat* (leaves) and arranged vertically, holding the *birina* and *piro* on either side. The central placement features the (*dumpang*) pillow, symbolizing the core of the ritual.

Three ritual layers are meticulously arranged: the *píro*-3 pieces, *ruktak*, *tabang*, the pillow (*dumpang*), and supporting leaves, forming the sacred altar. The pig destined for sacrifice is then prepared: it is washed with water for purification (*Asi piyarnam*) and positioned at the site with its chest facing upwards towards the sky.

The ritual commences with the pouring of water over the pig, followed by sprinkling rice grains and pouring *apong* from head to toe, invoking blessings. The pig's chest is then cut open, and the *copit* (bamboo spear) is inserted into the heart to symbolize the sacrifice. During this process, the pig is gently strangled with two bamboo poles placed around its neck. The other family members also touch the *copit* with the left hand flowing the traditions they

been practicing from the past. The *copit* filled with blood is taken out and kept in the down the roof slab of the *chang ghar*. It is belief that no single drop of blood should fall on the ground or no any animals should lick the blood. The waste materials used during cutting of the pig is allowed to throw only after the completion of the ritual.

### Main recipes of the *Urom Uie*

The main course of the *Urom* recipes is pork meat prepared in various ways, each with different names during the ritual ceremonies. According to *Kensa Urom* norms, mustard oil is not used during cooking; however, in the case of *Bhakat Urom*, mustard oil may be used if required. The primary recipes, as per *Urom* norms, are described below:

**Yikad Oying:** This recipe is a quintessential element of *Urom Uie* cuisine. It is prepared using the pig's fat, blood, heart, and liver, combined with grinded black pulses (*Peret*), rice flour (*Pithaguri*), dal along with chilies, ginger, and garlic.

**Jo: Sag Oying:** This is one of the main dishes of the *Urom Uie*. It is prepared with pork meat along with edible herbs such as *onger*, *osin*, *dirmi*, *takuk*, *tazig*, *ombe*, *yorid*, *tayo*, *nekpisumi*, etc., and seasoned with chili, ginger, garlic, and turmeric.

**Jabor Oying:** This dish is prepared using pig intestines, complemented by locally available natural herbs known as *Jabor Oying* in the Mising dialect. The recipe highlights traditional culinary practices and reflects the rich cultural heritage of the community.

**Eyeg adin with Pitang and Peret oying (pork meat with rice flour and black pluses):** This dish is one of the principal recipes prepared for ceremonial rituals. It is crafted using ground rice flour (*Pitha guri*), black pulses (*Peret guri*), and pork meat (*eyeg adin*). Serving as a dal-like accompaniment during the ritual, the dish boasts a rich, brownish hue and is renowned for its delicious flavor. As a cherished traditional delicacy, it has been passed down through generations, embodying the culinary heritage of the community.

**Boiled Pork Meat (Ranam Eyeg Adin):** This dish involves cutting pork meat into uniform pieces and boiling them in a large cooking vessel with water. Various flavorful ingredients such as garlic, ginger, chili, turmeric, and salt are added to enhance the taste. Occasionally, elephant apple (*padum*) is incorporated to impart a unique flavor. The preparation emphasizes traditional culinary techniques and showcases the community's rich gastronomic heritage.

**Késsett Oying:** This supplementary dish is prepared by combining various vegetables with pork, seasoned with flavorful ingredients.

**Adin and Koldil Oying (Pork with Banana Flower):** This is a significant dish traditionally prepared during rituals. It features pork cooked with banana flower using a conventional method, seasoned with a flavorful paste made from ginger, turmeric, garlic, and chili.

### Pindo Binam: Appeasing and Honoring the Spirit

The rite known as *Pindo Binam* is a sacred act of offering food to ancestral spirits, intended to honor and appease these revered entities. This ceremonial practice involves presenting carefully prepared offerings in the names of the departed to ensure their happiness and satisfaction in the afterlife.

During the rite, pork meat-prepared from various parts of the pig-is cooked meticulously with rice in a traditional vessel called a *Gonti*. The cooking process employs a substantial firewood log approximately the size of a thigh, which serves as a support for the vessel. A handcrafted bamboo spoon, known as *Pinow*, is used for stirring the food and serving it into designated leaves containers called *Kosag*. Notably, the entire cooking and serving process is performed solely with the left hand, reflecting cultural customs and spiritual significance.

Once cooked, the food is transferred into *Dukuli*, a disc-shaped bamboo basket, and left to cool. In the accompanying *Urom* ritual called *Paling Do:le*, two *Apin Kosag* - serving as offering plates - are placed on *tora* leaves: one for *Paling* (the ancestor) and the other for his two wives. The setup includes a traditional mud structure with four square holes, designed to hold water glasses called *Asi Consuk* on the right and rice-beer glasses called *Apong Concuk* on the left, both arranged on *tora* leaves. Two *Apin Kosag* are positioned adjacent to these holes, with all offerings presented exclusively using the left hand.

The *Apin Kosag* structures or symbols often feature depictions of pigs, crafted from various parts of the pork meat, symbolizing prosperity and abundance within the ritual context. The offerings are made by pouring water and rice beer (*Po:ro Apong*) into the respective glasses, invoking blessings in the names of the departed ancestors and seeking their favor.

Subsequently, the two *Apin Kosag* are gently pulled aside, turning them to face the sunset-an act symbolizing the transition of spirits and the cycle of life. It is believed that the spirits partake of the offerings when the *Apin Kosag* is made accessible to livestock, which are allowed to consume the remnants, symbolizing the spirits' participation in the earthly realm. The used cooking vessel and other used items are kept aside in a particular place till the next day without cleaning.

Upon completion of this sacred act, participants prepare for the *Jo:sag* ceremony held in the *Taleng Ukum/Chang Ghar*, continuing the series of ancestral rites that uphold the spiritual and cultural heritage of the community.

### Jo:sag Eating Ceremony

The *Jo:sag* is a revered cultural ritual that embodies community bonding, spiritual reverence, and ancestral veneration. Central to this ceremony is the symbolic serving of food on a traditional large plate known as *Rémku arém* supported by the *Vera* (Assamese) /*Mensong* (Mising), a three-legged, disc-

shaped brass metal plate that holds profound cultural significance within the family conducting the ritual. The *Jo:sag* functions as the focal point of faith and belief, representing unity and spiritual connection.

During the *Urom Uie*, the *Jo:sag* is meticulously prepared and elaborately decorated with pork meats and an array of cooked curries, all prepared in accordance with ritualistic norms and obligations. The ritualistic placement of pork, particularly pig parts, symbolizes structural strength and prosperity, reflecting deep-rooted cultural symbolism. The dish is filled with rice, various pork delicacies, and an assortment of curries, each meticulously crafted to honor ancestral spirits and invoke blessings.

Just before the *Jo:sag* ceremony, the *Jikini Kupak* ritual practices are performed by the *Adu miné* (old woman) of the ritual. She collects a small portion from each food item used in the ritual, binds them together, and wraps them with *Tora Paat*, leaving one side open. This is then offered to the departed souls of the families by throwing it down from the *Chang Ukum/ Taleng Ukum* while pouring water and *Apong*. This act demonstrates respect for the ancestral departed souls, symbolizing that they are given food first, and it is also a request for good fortune and sustenance on the occasion.

The ceremony begins with the designated individual, whose name the *Urom* is conducted in-referred to as *Tosag*-being the first to partake, signifying respect and acknowledgment of spiritual hierarchy. Subsequently, family members gather around to partake in the *Jo:sag*, sharing the meal with love, reverence, and communal harmony. Alongside the *Jo:sag*, traditional rice beer, such as *Po:ro* and *Noggin Apong*, is served, enhancing the celebratory atmosphere.

This ritual transcends mere sustenance; it is a sacred act of honoring ancestors, seeking their blessings, and reinforcing familial bonds. The entire family's participation in the *Jo:sag* eating ceremony makes the *Urom Uie* a grand and meaningful cultural event, symbolizing unity, faith, and cultural continuity.

The second day of *Urom* ritual, *Sogbe Tinam* and *Do:lad Tílad* features a less formal approach to ritual. All are welcome to participate in the family's celebratory occasion. Key practices of the day include:

#### ***Sogbe Tinam :***

On the second day, *Sogbe Tinam* holds significant ritual importance within the community. During this ceremony, a portion of leftover pork is skillfully cooked with various natural edible herbs. A single pot of *Po:ro Apong*, preserved from the previous day, is shared among the participants of the second-day ritual. Subsequently, a *Jo:sag* is prepared for the family, although fewer traditional norms are observed during this preparation. Essentially, the second day is dedicated to the communal act of inviting and hosting villagers, fostering unity and social cohesion.

#### ***Eyeg Adin Banam (Roasted Pork):***

Pork meat is cut into specific sizes and roasted over an open flame. There are various methods of preparation, including *Khorikaa* (Assamese), fire-roasted barbecue pork cooked on skewers, typically seasoned with a flavorful paste of ginger, garlic, and chili. The roasted pork are served to the guests visiting the family on that particular day.

#### ***Do:lad Tílad:***

The second day of the *Urom* ritual is observed as *Do:lad Tílad*. During this sacred occasion, half of the raw meat is carefully hung in the *Ukum koktog*, a traditional wooden structure positioned near the roof of the household. This act serves as an offering to guest spirits and is integral to the ceremonial proceedings conducted on this day. The family extends invitations to village relatives and friends who have either directly or indirectly contributed to the success of the ritual, fostering communal participation and solidarity. Additionally, a *saki* (earthen lamp) is lit to uphold ritual norms, symbolizing divine presence and spiritual illumination. The family, along with the *Joyori ope*, seeks blessings from the *Siné mébo* (departed ancestral spirits) - hoping for their continued protection and favor. This day reinforces communal bonds, ancestral reverence, and spiritual harmony within the ritual tradition.

#### **Concluding Rituals and Feasts**

After the observation of the ritual certain restrictions are followed by the family for three days.

#### ***Yodnam: Abstaining from Certain Foods and Activities***

A set of restrictions is observed, involving abstention from certain food items and activities. For instance, families refrain from consuming meat or slaughtering livestock for a period of two months. During this time, the primary ritual in whose name the *Urom Uie*, is conducted, the river crossing and entry into the forest is prohibited till *Píde Píyar* (removing of restriction). Additionally, families do not share money or rice grains with others until the appearance of the new moon. Furthermore, for an entire year, they abstain from performing any sacrificial rituals.

#### ***Píde Píyar/Removing of the Restriction:***

This ritual is performed to lift certain restrictions within the family, following the *Urom Uie* ceremony conducted three days after the celebration. The primary officiant of the *Urom* is once again invited to remove these restrictions.

Herbs such as *Tapa Batu* (the tip of the pumpkin plant), *Pagli Tuiying* (the tip of sweet potato herbs), *Enge* (yam leaves), *Oiyoi Oying* (wild herbs), *Patang Oying* (wild edible herbs), among others, are carefully washed and arranged on *Tora leaves*. These are then wrapped with one side left open and heated gently under ashes-a process known as *Pamnam* in the Mising dialect.



Once the herbs are ready, the ritual proceeds with the *Pide Piyar* ceremony performed in the hearth of the house. Offerings of *Panam* items are made on three legs of the *Kira* (a sacred cooking stand in the middle of the hearth), accompanied by pouring water and *Poro Apong* into the *Kira*, and *Méram Gulong* is also performed. These acts seek the blessings and permission of the spirits to safeguard the family and ensure the continuation of their daily livelihood activities.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, all family members are instructed to bite a piece of the *Panam* offerings and then keep it on a *Tora leaf*. This marks the end of the restriction-breaking rites.

### Reflection on the Importance of *Urom* Rituals

The *Urom* rituals of the Mising community are vital expressions of their spiritual and cultural identity. Rooted in animistic beliefs, these ceremonies serve to honor ancestors, seek divine blessings, and maintain harmony with nature. They reinforce familial bonds and community cohesion through collective sacrifices, offerings, and shared rituals, ensuring the transmission of traditional values and ecological wisdom across generations. The rituals also uphold social structure, respect for elders, and cultural continuity amidst modern influences. Overall, *Urom Uie* embodies the community's deep reverence for their heritage, illustrating how spiritual practices are integral to their social fabric, environmental harmony, and cultural resilience.

## Conclusion

The research article explores the rich cultural heritage of the Mising tribes of Assam, focusing on the significance, practices, and evolving nature of the *Urom* ritual. It details how this indigenous ceremony functions as a vital family and community event rooted in animism, nature worship, and ancestral reverence. The paper describes the origins, mythological foundations, and historical development of *Urom*, emphasizing its role in maintaining social cohesion, spiritual harmony, and ecological balance. It highlights the intricate preparation, including selecting auspicious dates, gathering ritual objects and herbs, breeding sacrificial pigs, and preparing traditional offerings like *Apong* (rice beer). The ritual involves elaborate procedures such as purification, sacrifices, communal feasts, and ceremonial offerings to ancestors and spirits, all performed with strict adherence to traditional norms. Despite influences of modernization and religious conversions (to Christianity and Vaishnavism), the community endeavors to preserve and adapt their customs. The article emphasizes the importance of documenting and understanding these traditions to foster cultural continuity and identity in a changing society. Overall, it portrays *Urom* as a profound expression of the Mising community's spiritual worldview, social bonds, and environmental stewardship, vital for their cultural resilience.

### Glossary of Terms

#### Some of the Vernacular Terms used while describing the text in the article

Vernacular Terms	Meaning in English
<i>Ambin</i>	Rice Grain
<i>Apong</i>	Traditional Rice beer (beverage)
<i>Ali –Aye-Ligang</i>	Agricultural Sowing festival of the Mising tribes
<i>Asi</i>	Water
<i>Apin Kosag</i>	Meaning cook rice items served in a plate
<i>Adin</i>	Meat
<i>Asi Consuk</i>	A glass made of tora leave for ritual purposes
<i>Apong Concuk</i>	A glass prepared of tora leave for ritual purposes
<i>Aran oying</i>	Kind of curry prepared with inter organs of pork meat and edible herbs
<i>Bhakot Urom</i>	A kind of sacrificial ritual done for departed soul died of natural death
<i>Copit</i>	Spear made of bamboo prepared for sacrificial of the pig on the day
<i>Do:le Opin</i>	Doley clan
<i>Du:mer</i>	Traditional Mising towel white in colour
<i>Donyi Po:lo</i>	Sun and Moon
<i>Dogné</i>	Kind of traditional ritual ornament wore in the neck made of precious stones/beads
<i>Dora</i>	Traditional bamboo/cane handicraft ritual mate
<i>Épop</i>	Medicinal herbs used in preparing rice beer

<i>Eyeg adin</i>	Pork meat
<i>Eyeg adin banam</i>	Roasted pork meat
<i>Giyori</i>	Female person
<i>Gonti</i>	Traditional rice cooking vessel use by the Misings
<i>Horai botta</i>	Offering vessel for ritual
<i>Jabor oying</i>	Curry made of natural available edible herbs
<i>Jo:sag</i>	It's a huge ritual rice plate placed with lots edible pork meat and curries to enhance the ritual occasion
<i>Kensa Urom</i>	A kind of sacrificial ritual done for departed soul died because of unnatural death
<i>Kampon Gasor</i>	White variety of long woven clothes use during ritual performance
<i>Kamro ekam</i>	Wild variety of leave plant found in the hilly areas of Arunachal Pradesh
<i>Kasinum</i>	Circumcision
<i>Késsett oying</i>	Supplementary curry
<i>Lotta</i>	Front open courtyard
<i>Mibu</i>	Priest of the Mising community
<i>Miging gognam</i>	Invitation of shamans for performing the ritual
<i>Mensong</i>	Referring large family disc plate use during big ritual event like Urom, Marriage, Po:rag etc.
<i>Nao bhat Uie</i>	It's a sacrificial ritual perform by family with chicken or pig
<i>Nao purukia Uie</i>	Ritual of family perform with tortoise
<i>Noggin apong</i>	White variety local beverage of the Mising
<i>Opin</i>	Clan
<i>Oying</i>	Curry /dishes
<i>Oying manam</i>	Referring women folk make expedition to nearby forest for natural herbs for rituals feast.
<i>Pan</i>	Areca leaves
<i>Poro apong</i>	A black/red in colour of rice beer
<i>Po:ro arok</i>	Raw quantity of unfiltered poro apong is kept in a tora leave for putting vermilion on the forehead to mark the occasion
<i>Piro</i>	Very important variety of plant connected with the Mising rituals and culture. 'Piro' plant (Phragmites karka), a kind of wild reed,
<i>Pínow</i>	Spoon made of bamboo for ritual ocassion /handcrafted bamboo spoons
<i>Peret</i>	Black pluses
<i>Pithaguri</i>	Rice flour
<i>Peret guri</i>	Black pluses flour
<i>Pindo binam</i>	A sacred act of offering food to ancestral spirits, intended to honor and appease these revered entities.
<i>Píde píyar</i>	It's a removal of restriction after sacrificial ritual celebration in Mising Community
<i>Padum</i>	Elephant apple
<i>Ru:né Píné</i>	Creator of humans
<i>Ruktak</i>	'Ruktak' plant (Thelypteris angustifolia) - a type of wild fern
<i>Rémku arém</i>	Traditional large ritual plate (disc shape) specially use during urom, po:rag and marriage ceremonies.

<i>Saathjonia Uie</i>	A kind of ritual perform by family with fish or pig
<i>Siné Mébo</i>	Referring departed soul
<i>Slab</i>	Referring down portion of the roof of chang house
<i>Sípak</i>	Cotton
<i>Tani</i>	Man / human being
<i>Ta:ke</i>	Ginger
<i>Taleng Uie</i>	A kind of family ritual
<i>Tora paat/Taling ékam</i>	A wild variety of plant leaves found in the forest areas
<i>Tabang</i>	A wild variety of leave plant use for rituals purpose, 'Tabong' (Imperata cylindrica) - a sharp grass
<i>Tamul</i>	Areca nut
<i>Takuk</i>	Variety of edible leaves very big in size
<i>Takpi ísing</i>	Wild variety of tree the community consider auspicious. Handicraft for pillow of the sacrificed pig
<i>Uie</i>	Spirit
<i>Urom Tosag</i>	A kind early ritual practice performs to promise to appease the departed soul after some years and ask for blessing till the ritual is conducted.
<i>Urom pitpusunam</i>	Ritual for dispelling spiritsd from the household
<i>Vera</i>	Three leg holder for keeping the large disc shape plate
<i>Yikatt oying</i>	A variety of curry prepare in urom ritual
<i>Yodnam</i>	Abstaining from Certain Foods and Activities
<b>Source : Data collected during field study</b>	

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