Chapter 5
HEALTH CULTURE OF THE MISHING

Health is of universal interest and concern. All human societies, notwithstanding the scale of development, have a concept of what makes a healthy living as well as the conception of illness. According to Mukherjee and Nandy (1986), health is not only the result of interaction between an individual's hereditary contribution with his natural and cultural environment but it is largely determined by the biological and cultural adaption and evolution of the society and the population. In fact, health and illness are used as two polar words. Tribes are relatively isolated and autonomous groups. The existence of own cultural and medical system is one of the important features of a tribal society. The tribal social structure has its own structural and ethnic specificity and the diseases that inflict upon the tribals are likewise specific to the attribute of their social structure. Moreover, the knowledge of disease, their classification and etiology are constituents of their cultural system and they develop methods and ways of curing the diseases (Kaushal 2004). This chapter attempts to discuss the Mishing's concepts of health, disease, etiology and treatment.

The Elements of Health

The concept of health and illness can perhaps be distinguished from one another for a qualitative understanding. However, in common usage, one may be visualizing them with similar reference. Health, according to the constitution of WHO, is 'a state of complete physical, social and mental well being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity'. Human body's interaction with mind is a separate entity which gives rise to emotions, sentiments and feelings, the adjustment of which is crucial for the health of an individual. Disease, on the other hand, refers to a medical concept of pathological abnormality. Illness refers principally to a person's subjective experience of lack of health and is indicated by feeling of pain, discomfort and the like. To say that a person is ill implies that the consequences of such a state transcend not merely the biological and

physical consequences of organic malfunction, but also affect his social life in important ways (Field 1976).

The concept of health may be regarded a situated concept. One may be healthy as 'now' and 'then' and the next moment, the same person may become unhealthy, sick and ill, which is the observance of health. This implies that health is to be viewed in a time framework and in the context of a socio-cultural or physical environment. This does not, however, mean that one cannot conceive health with a consistent pattern of its presence or absence (Mehta 1992). To a layman, health would mean a sound physical body. It is a condition of a body that helps a person to perform his day to day activities to the expectations of others. It is this context that the individual and others constituting a group, of which the individual is part, become two important dimensions in conceptualizing health (Mehta 1992). On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive health without its contrasting concept, that is, disease and illness. Health may be considered as absence of disease which reflects some discontinuity with the everyday state of being of an individual. Thus, health means absence of disease or illness and illness would, logically, mean absence of health. In other words, health is reflected in the normal behaviour of an individual while illness suggests an abnormal state of being of an individual. Dingwall (1976) argues that in view of the unobtrusive nature of normality, it is a background feature of daily living and a person's display of his essential normality. Healthy people are normal and normal people are healthy. Within the functional perspective advanced by Persons (1951), health is related to typical expectations of particular individuals. There are some common health denominators widely shared by the members of the community. These include a high level of physical activity, a well-flushed body and an absence of pain. In a community or societal setting, apart from an individual having access to knowledge of what is normal or healthy as shared by other members of the collectivity, he or she should also have resources adequate enough to realize that knowledge in action. In other words, in the context of developing societies there is a great need to equalize health knowledge and provide services to all strata of groups.

In the tribal societies a person is considered healthy when he is not afflicted by any disease, consumes food as usual and carries out his normal functions without any difficulty. In the concept of health of the tribal people there are two components which are present almost universally. Firstly, the individual may be committing or omitting certain acts which may bring upon the individual or the household some affliction. But this individual's action may also cause some affliction to be harmful for the whole village, clan or larger group. Secondly, the belief in some benevolent and malevolent spirit, ghosts. In some cases, especially among the Buddhists, Hinduised and Christianized tribal groups, there is belief in a supreme being or a hierarchical pantheon of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses. The spirits of the dead ancestors in every culture play an important role in ensuring health, prosperity and protection to the family. When these ancestral spirits are not properly honoured, worshiped or humoured, they invariably inflict some afflictions to the members of the family or cattle or crops. Similarly, these tribal groups also believed in a large number of spirits and some important deities. The deities protect men and are benevolent. Thus, in tribal societies health is threatened not only by the spirits, but also by persons possessing evil touch or witchcraft (Mahapatra 1994). The field of tribal health can be viewed in two main aspects: (i) as cultural complex, i.e., a complex of material objects, tools, techniques, knowledge ideas and values and (ii) part of social structure and organization, i.e. network of relations between groups, classes and categories of persons. Knowledge of these two aspects is necessary in itself and in relation to other fields of social life such as economy, religion, magic and law. When one talks about tribal health and their beliefs and practices, one has to realize the immense heterogeneity in this area. The entire field, however, can be regarded as sub-system of this social system which is continuously changing and adapting itself to changes in the wider society (Sachchidananda 1994).

Among the Mishings health is considered as absence of any disease of physical, mental, spiritual and social nature. A person free from any disease is considered as healthy in their society. Therefore, in their day to day life they traditionally observe certain health practices such as taking food in time, observance of certain religious practices, wearing of talisman, etc. They believe that performance of religious activities

can satisfy the gods and goddesses who are responsible for particular diseases. Similarly, wearing of talisman can escape people from evil spirits. Thus, the Mishings believe in psychosomatic and supernatural determinant of health. In the Mishing society a person is considered healthy when he is usual and carries out his normal functions without any difficulty. When somebody is sick, they will employ all efforts to heal his illness and bring him back to normal condition.

In the Mishing society religion plays an important role in all spheres of their life. Even in health care, rêligious beliefs and practices have their own specific influence. Because of the lack of proper health education they derive the cause of many of the diseases from religious teachings. Thus, the supernatural force plays a direct role in the causation and cure of many of the diseases. The Mishings also believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for the members of the community. So, they perform various ceremonies every year during the annual festivals, to renovate their relationship with the supernaturals, and thus ensure the protection of the community. They also believe that if proper propitiation is not offered to the deities and to ancestral spirits, they will get angry and send diseases and other calamities to the members of the community. In their society health is equally important for both males and females. As the women are equally important in their economic activities, good health is as much necessary for women as for men. Traditionally there are no specific health practices for males and females, rather these are common for both the genders in their society. However, in respect of social taboos which also form a component of health, gender difference is observed. In their society the taboos have originated from the belief in the supernatural forces. Any violation of such taboos invites the wrath of supernatural powers which will inflict diseases and other calamities upon the human beings. Therefore, the Mishings are very particular in following these taboos. If somebody happened to violate a taboo, he/ she will make the necessary offerings at the temple in the village and observe other rituals for the expiation of his/ her sins. Some of the important taboos observed by the villagers in their day to day life are as follows:

(i) Eating of meat of cow, buffalo and elephant is a taboo as they have worshiped them. Cow is considered their mother as it gives milk. Only its milk can be used.

Buffalos are used in agriculture and elephants are considered as spirit so they do not eat their meat.

(ii) Walking over the rope of a cow, especially by a pregnant woman is also a taboo because, as they believe, it reduces the expectancy of life of the mother as well as the child.

(iii) Sexual intercourse of a man with a menstruating woman is a taboo as it is harmful for the woman. Besides, such a man will be considered polluted.

(iv) Entry of a menstruating woman into a crop field is a taboo. Her presence will be harmful to the crops.

Since the diseases caused by violation of taboo are supernatural in origin, no herbal as well as allopathic medicine can cure them. Only the treatment by a *Bej* will give relief to such a patient. Along with performance of some magical rites, a number of offerings will be made in the *Namghar* (prayer hall) to please the deities. In the Mishing society, a person is usually considered to be afflicted with some diseases if he/ she is incapable of doing the routine work which is usually being expected to be carried out by that individual in the society, i.e., incapacitation from work is the index of poor health in their society. Thus, the concept of ill health becomes a functional one and not clinical. Therefore, symptoms such as pains and ache, weakness, scabies, prolonged cough, mild fever, wounds, etc. are not taken seriously as symptoms of disease in the Mishing society.

The Mishings prefer to be tall with well-developed body, i.e., wide chests, broad shoulders and strong muscles and such persons are considered strong and healthy as this type of body help them to work hard. The Mishing people do not have elaborate knowledge about internal structure of the body. They believe that food is going to liver and there it is transformed into blood. Red blood is considered as the sign of healthy body, usually a characteristic feature of young people. It is a common saying in their society that as a person grows old, red blood turns into blackish red and the quantity of blood decreases, thereby, indicating lesser strength and decreased health status. Since the Mishings traditional habitat is hills and forest, this environment seems to have influenced certain health beliefs of the people. Sitting in front of the fire, especially

during the rainy and winter seasons is a common sight of the Mishings. They believe that this practice, although desirable for present comfort, increases the thickness of blood and decreases the fastness of the body. An individual's good health and activity are also linked to the thickness of blood. Young stars are believed to have thin blood, which flows fast in the body and makes an individual healthy and active. Aged people possess thick and blackish-red blood, which makes them less healthy and active. The Mishings believe in greater body movement as they think, it is required for proper blood circulation, which in turn promotes good health. Circulation of blood is believed to stop while one is at sleep. Weakness and illness are attributed to decrease in the quantity of blood. The Mishings consider that green leafy vegetables available in their household garden or in the market are healthy food items. So, these are considered as good items for health. Besides, they consumed these green leafy vegetables without cooking. They take it with their meal as salad. According to them, uncooked vegetables are good for health as these keep their skin afresh and liver as functional. It also helps to strengthen the digestive power of the liver.

Worship of several deities in the forest is also considered necessary to keep one's health in good condition. Another common cause for ill health is considered to be sorcery. Mishings are very suspicious in nature due to the strong belief in sorcery. They hesitate to eat food in the houses of their neighbours and even kinsmen. In any case of illness sorcery may be suspected. The belief in the hot-cold dichotomy of foodstuffs and other items of nature is also quite common among the Mishings. They also believe in the balance of three elements in the body, viz. air, bile and phlegm. Based on the predominant element in the body, human beings are classified into three categories, viz., hot-bodied, cold-bodied and natural-bodied. Hot bodied persons are believed to be lean and strong with faster blood circulation. Such persons are required to curtail the consumption of hot food items during the summer in order to keep the body heat at the required level. People prefer hot-body rather than cold-body because of the fact that the former can work hard without tiring whereas the latter gets easily tired after work. The second best body type is 'neither hot nor cold' as these elements are in balance.

The Mishings think that to be in the 'right condition of body' is to have proper health. But they donot understand where good health ends and bad health begins. According to them as long as they are able to work and be active they think they are in good health. They believe that different type of food is required for people of different age group, or people performing different works, and in some special conditions like pregnancy and lactating mothers. Economically better people have the means to take good quality food according to the requirement of the body. The amount of food that such people consume is also high. This is obviously to maintain good health. But, most of the families in both the villages, i.e., Baghedhara and Namtemera are only able to have food with some vegetables. Milk which is an important part of diet, is not taken by many of the poorer section because whatever their cattle provides for, they sell it but themselves are unable to buy at the market price. Thus, almost all the villagers suffer from under nourishment. Moreover, vices like drinking and smoking have also added to their misery in the form of illness. The Mishings, besides consuming foreign and country liquors, also consume local made drinks known as *Apong*. Smoking of *bidis* is also very popular among the villagers. Of course, they are aware of the fact that excessive smoking of *bidi* is responsible for the high rate of tuberculosis but this has not deterred them from giving up smoking. Rather they believe that smoking keeps them 'active' all day long.

Thus, the concept of health according to the Mishings, by and large, refers to having (i) no disease, (ii) strong and tall body, (iii) good and white teeth, (iv) ability to laugh loudly, (v) ability to plough land, (vi) ability to walk through a distance of at least 2 km at a stretch. In case of a woman the additional parameters are to have (i) long and black hairs and (ii) potentiality to give birth to 5-6 children. Morbidity episodes for one calendar year reveal that the people suffer from around 58 different identifiable diseases/ ailments. The frequently occurring ones include asthama, boils, cough, diarrhoea, dysentery, fever, gastritis, measles, ringworm, scabies, stomachache, etc. However, the concept of health in the Mishing's society has undergone several changes. In their present society the concept of health is not similar to what it was in their traditional society. According to them the traditional concept of health meant absence of any kind

of disease. But in contemporary society, by health the Mishing means a broad concept which includes biological, social, environmental and cultural factors as a determinant of health. In this changing circumstance women are found more conscious in their personal hygiene. So, gender difference is observed in the changing concept of health. The reason for gender inequalities in health includes: emphasis on women's child bearing roles, resulting in early and excessive child bearing; sex performance manifested in discrimination against female children in health and general care; women's work loads which not only expose them to health hazards but also make it difficult for them to take time off for health care; lack of autonomy by women leading to lack of decision making power and access to independent income and early marriage which expose women to the complications of early and excessive child bearing.

The Dimensions of Disease

Disease and ill health have been the fundamental concerns of man since his emergence on the earth. Every known society has developed its own responses and methods for coping up with diseases and ailments and eventually a body of its own medical system. 'Medicine has been practised one way or another since man became a cultural animal. There is even some evidence that a first-aid technique derives from our primate ancestors..... Baboons' (Clune 1976). In almost all tribal ethnographies one finds some material on the concept of disease and its treatment in different societies. The concept of 'disease' as understood by Ethiopian immigrants is different from the one accepted by western society. The sources of diseases are always external, for example, contaminated water, hot air, a chicken or a cow. Illness can also have social origins, such as persons who have an evil eye or supernatural spirits. The symptoms of the diseases are universal but the explanations of the diseases, their causes and subsequent treatment are affected by the cultural factors that may vary between different cultures and societies (Nudelman 1990). Opler (1963) lists seven causes of disease in tribal societies; namely, (i) malfunctioning or imbalance of the three humors, (ii) faulty diet, (iii) lack of harmony with the supernatural world, (iv) activities of ghosts and witches, (v) displeasure of deities, (vi) imbalance of forces which controls health and (vii) inappropriate behaviour in physical, social and economic matters. Sachchidananda

(1994) has mentioned that the Singhphos of Arunachal Pradesh believed in some malignant spirits called *Nats* as the cause of diseases and there are eighteen such *Nats* which are responsible for all kinds of diseases. The Wancho people also thought that diseases are caused by a malignant spirit called *Bau-rang*, i.e., **Earth God**. Similarly, among the Noctes the diseases are attributed to evil spirits.

For the Mishings disease is any perturbation in any physiological system of an organism which changes the function of that system and lead to negative consequences for the organism when compared to a healthy, normal and standard. Thus, where disease is present there is no blame, no recrimination, no guilt and no stigma. In Mishing society the disease pattern can be divided into two types as major and minor illness. Children are more prone to illness, which are seasonal and minor in nature. The women victimized by bodyache, complications related to pregnancy etc. The menfolk are more prone to malaria, diarrhoea as they have to work outside their house. There is no much difference of disease pattern in both the villages. It may be due to the same cultural practices, occupations, food habits and settlement patterns among them. The traditional notion about diseases of the people under study is that there are unknown spirits behind all kinds of diseases suffered by them. On the basis of etiological factors, the Mishings classify diseases into four categories, viz. (i) body linked illness, (ii) deity linked illness, (iii) spirit linked illness and (iv) sorcery linked illness.

The causative factors of the body linked illness are defective diet, bad water, worm infestation and other environmental conditions. Naturalistic causative factors are mainly linked to diet and the qualities of various food items. Illness linked to this causative factors may be roughly translated as stomachache, cough, cold, headache, dysentery, body itching, fever, scabies, etc. Another common causative factor of illness is spirits of the dead. The spirit of any dead person residing in the habitation area may cause illness to a person. Any physical symptom or illness is generally attributed to a spirit if it does not respond to other forms of therapy. For the prevention of spirit-linked diseases they worship their ancestors with *pujas* like *Dobur, Dotgang, Urom Apin,* etc. The thunder and lightening *(Mukling-Taleng)*, earth and water *(Among-Ashi),* air and fire *(Esar-Emi)* alike are believed to be spiritual beings possessing power greater then those

of man. According to the belief of the Mishings, they are benevolent to human beings, protect their farms and families from damages and misfortune, but they have to be kept appeased with occasional offerings called *Taleng-uie* and *Rokpu-done* (eater of white cock). The evil spirits to whom every illness or misfortune is attributed are the spirits looking around the streams, the mountains, the forest etc. To protect themselves from these spirits or *uies* they perform *pujas* for the respective *uies*.

Generally the Mishings do not give much attention to a disease situation. They consider it a shameful thing to lie down somewhere for a minor ailment. Their unfriendly habitat tends them to do hard work for getting food. So, only when somebody is seriously ill, he/she will lie down and take rest. Then, it is the responsibility of his family members to look after him and to provide necessary treatment.

The Conception of Etiology

In tribal communities the concept of etiology of disease can broadly be divided into two: natural causation and supernatural causation. In contrast to the non-tribal societies, where diseases are largely considered as natural phenomena which occur from a physiological malfunctioning of the body, the tribal communities give more importance to the supernatural causes in their notion of etiology. Therefore, cultural factors like religion, social status, relationship with the fellow members of the society, nature of relationship with the supernatural world, etc. play a decisive role in the evolution of a concept of etiology in a tribal society (Jose Boban 1998). The Saora tribe of Orissa believe that the etiology of illness among them is based on supernatural beliefs. According to them all the diseases originated due to the wrath of the gods, dead ancestors and sorcerers. They identify no natural causes for the occurrence of diseases. Offering sacrifice to the supernatural and thus appeasing their anger is the only remedy for illness. The Saora theory of the origin of disease suggests that the gods and the dead ancestors have to make a living somehow and the only way they can do so is by forcing human beings to support them through sacrifices and other offerings (Elwin 1955).

In the tribal society, disease is often perceived to be caused by breach of some taboo or rules of the society, or by the hostile spirits, the ghosts of the dead. There is a belief in both benevolent and malevolent spirits, the former playing a protective role

while the latter are considered to be responsible for causing disease and epidemics. Besides the belief in spirits, different tribe also believe in a number of other causes for various illness like imbalance of the three humours of the body, lack of harmony with the supernatural world, activities of the ghosts, especially the unwanted and aggrieved ghosts, displeasure of deities, faulty diet and immoderation or inappropriate behaviour in physical, social or economic matter (Chadda 2004).

The Mishings have a number of concepts regarding the etiology of illness. These include both natural and supernatural causes of diseases. From the nature of one disease they will diagnose the etiology of the malady. However, beliefs in the supernatural causes of illness are more prevalent among them as natural causes behind the occurrence of a disease are sometimes ignored by them believing that these are the signs of the attack of some supernatural forces. Some categories of illness are assumed to be the exclusive result of supernatural attack while some others are the result of only natural causes.

According to the Mishings change in the nature and quality of diet is the main reason for the occurrence of diseases. In the past the Mishings were eating only the boiled food. But now they have given up the old diet and depend the food items available in the market. They also consume the rice available from the ration shops of the state government. They say that their health has suffered due to the intake of this adulterated and polluted food and due to the deterioration of health, their body is now more vulnerable to diseases. Excessive exposure to sun, rain and cold is another natural cause for the occurrence of diseases. The rigorous climatic conditions adversely affected the health of the body and the person becomes weak and vulnerable to the attack of diseases. Old age and over-work are also held responsible for the affliction of diseases in their society. Excessive work and inadequate intake of food also reasons affecting the health of Mishings. Often, they have to engage in hard work for their survival, particularly the Mishings of the villages. Therefore, excessive work or inadequate food may be a cause of disease. On the other hand, climatic condition of their locality is also a natural cause of disease. As most of Mishing villages are situated on the bank of river, therefore, they are troubled by wind, rain or flood. In that situation the manual labours

do not get any work so that their family members suffer due to lack of food. On the other hand, during summer, while working in the paddy fields, they have to suffer the scorching heat of the sun. All these climatic conditions have a telling effect on their health. Consequently, they are more susceptible to disease, especially during the unfavourable season, when they are very weak due to lack of sufficient food.

The supernatural causes of diseases are more in number in comparison of the natural causes in their society. According to the Mishings wrath of deities and ancestral spirits is one of the main causes of illness. Similarly, possession of evil spirit, soul loss, violation of taboos, and sorcery are some of the other major causes for the occurrence of diseases. The Mishings believe that, for maintaining the general well-being and prosperity of the members of their society, they have to keep good, harmonious relationship with the gods and ancestral spirit. As they believe the god will give a lot of favours to the people if they are propitiated properly. But the lack of worship will incur the wrath of the gods and even benevolent gods will turn into malevolent ones. The anger of a god is the usual reason for the origin of diseases. The god will get angry when the people provoke them by doing something against their interest, or when they harm their neighbours with or without a reason. According to the Mishings if the post-funeral ceremonies of a person are not conducted properly and in due time, one of his children or any one of the close relatives will get sick. Therefore, performance of the post-funeral ceremony is the only remedy for this. According to them, the ancestors *(Urom-posum)* are held responsible for the health and happiness of the family members, and incurring displeasure to them may result in accident or some uncommon occurrence. To keep them pleased at their abode *(Uii-Among)* pig and fowls are sacrificed after the ingathering of their crops. The Mishings believe that the departed souls reside at *Sine-Mobo* (abode of dead) from where they visit their near and dear ones; but their visits instead of being favourable usually result in a catastrophe, most malicious of them being those who met unnatural death. However, they have no clear idea of the rebirth of the soul, but it is often heard that so and so has been reborn when they find some similarity between departed one and a new born baby (Pegu 1956).

The Mishings believe in a number of evil spirits like *Asi Uie, Adi Uie, Umreng Uie, Yumrang Uie, Taleng Uie,* etc. All of them malevolent and cause various hardships like illness, accidents, crop failure, etc. to the people. Each type of spirit is believed to cause particular type of problem and this is detected by the *Miboo* who is the traditional priest and seer of the Mishings. There is always a concept of clan deity prevalent among the Mishings. This is known as *Gumvn So:yin* which is believed to be residing in each house of the families belonging to the same clan and protecting the family from all kinds of diseases, dangers and difficulties that may be caused by the evil spirits which roam around the houses and huts all the times. So, each family performs a ritual for the satisfaction of the *Gumvn So:yin* generally every year (Kuli 1998). The Mishings also believe that, through sorcery a man can bring diseases to people. According to them a sorcerer can cause disease to another person through the manipulation of evil forces. The diseases caused due to sorcery will last for a long time and will not respond to any ordinary treatment. Stomach-aches, lack of appetite, dysentery are some of the symptoms of diseases caused by sorcery. On the other hand, seeking the help of god through prayer is the best method to escape from the harmful effects of sorcery. Similarly, some offerings also must be made in the temple to please the god. The Mishings observe some taboos in their community life. Most of them have originated from the belief in the supernatural forces. So, their violation invites the wrath of supernaturals and they will send diseases and other calamities to the human beings, to teach them a lesson. Therefore, the Mishings are very cautious to following these taboos.

Thus, the Mishing concept of etiology includes both natural and supernatural causes. In their society some illnesses are assumed to be the exclusive result of supernatural attack while some others are the result of only natural causes. According to them, change in the nature and quality of diet, rigorous climatic condition, old age are the main reasons for the occurrence of diseases under the natural causes while wrath of deities and ancestral spirits, possession of evil spirit, soul loss, violation of taboos, and sorcery are some of the supernatural causes of illness.

The Ethnomedicine

Many tribal communities have built up reservoirs of health and medical knowledge over aeons for upkeep and survival. Broadly speaking, the tribal systems depend both on herbal and psychosomatic lines of treatment. It may be true to say that, to some extent, the tribal system is composed of blind belief, but faith-healing may be a part of the treatment (Singh 1995). World of tribal medicine is largely non-classical and traditional. The main body of medical knowledge existing in beliefs and practices is cultural, that is, handed down from one generation to another. In nature it is magico-religious but always including some empirical elements. The tribal medical system does not exist as a separate field of activity, the biomedicines, bringing it to the level of disease and treatment would therefore not be appropriate (Patel 1995). Belief in *mantras* and amulets is another aspect of traditional health care system of tribal societies. According to Shills (1968), in all human groups, small or big, there exists a body of beliefs about the nature, causation and their relation to other aspects of group life. Religion, morality, disease and its cure are frequently interlinked. They believe in transmigration of soul and rebirth. Hence, all kinds of sufferings, both, individual and communal, are associated with dishonesty, immorality or sin committed not only in the existing life but in the previous lives as well. They believe strongly in the invisible supernatural power which helps controlling an epidemic and also curing ailing persons.

In case of health and treatment in tribal societies, important aspect is ethnomedical tradition. This may be the major factor which is discouraging them from going to the hospitals. They believe that their traditional system of medicine or ethnomedicine can cure them from all illness. It is easily available and also economical. They also believe that there is no effective medicine for certain categories of diseases like measles, smallpox and chickenpox which are supposed to be originating from supernatural causes. Generally the term ethnomedicine denotes the medical beliefs and practices found in primitive and folk societies, which is by and large accepted by anthropologists everywhere. It has two components; namely, magic and herbal therapy. Hughes (1968) illustrated that "The term ethnomedicine will be used to refer to those beliefs and practices relating to disease which are the product of indigenous cultural

development and are not explicitly derived from the conceptual framework of modern medicine". Hughes in his well known article 'Ethnomedicine' illustrated the primitive concept of disease classification of elements in which there are five basic categories of events or situations which, in folk etiology, are believed to be responsible for illness; viz., (i) sorcery (ii) breach of taboo (iii) intrusion of a disease object (iv) intrusion of a disease-causing spirit and (v) loss of soul. He further elaborated that not every society recognizes all five categories; indeed many groups are selective in the emphasis placed upon one or a combination of causes.

The knowledge of ethnomedicine is a part of traditional lore of the community. This secret knowledge about medicinal plants and magical rituals is always transferred orally from one generation to another, and there are no written documents to store this knowledge. The followers of this system follow the age old medical combinations and healing techniques which they have inherited from their forefathers. However, this medical system is a closed one and it is neither excremental, nor does it imbibe any systematic way. However, the ethnomedical system of the present age is in a more or less static condition. Because, it often cannot cope with the fast changes occurred in the community. Changes occurred in the habitat, subsistent pattern and dietary habits of the tribes and the close association with non-tribes tilted the balance of their traditional life. Along with these changes acculturation brought forth many new diseases to them. Most of these diseases were not present among them in the past and hence the tribal medicine men are helpless to tackle them. It is quite natural that there is no medicine for maladies like pollution and adulteration in nature. The medicine men are not able to diagnose these causes which are not familiar to them.

Like other factors religion is also an influential factor within the area of treatment of diseases. In all societies, particularly tribal societies, health and treatment are closely interrelated with various religious beliefs and practices. The concept and practices of folk medicine are based upon the practice of mysticism, the concept of supernatural, cosmological speculation and practices, magico-religious rites based on sacrifice, rituals as well as iconography or use of good and evil symbols on places of worship inside the household. This traditional healing system includes oral indigenous

medicines, external application of herbs and potions as well as faith in healing process through sacrifices like rituals or rites for appeasement of gods and destruction of evil spirits. This medicine system has still retained its traditional form in interior tribal areas where traditional medicinemen and the men dealing with magic or supernatural elements jointly conduct the health care system. The knowledge of such medicinal plants and preparation of medicine are still handed down mostly in oral form to the next generation of such practitioners.

The Mishings have a good knowledge of common diseases and their remedial response in the form of herbs, roots and shoots of plants. They are confident to treat patients suffering from fever, cold, cough, headache, body ache, stomach disorder, bronchitis, wounds, injuries, snake bite, dog bite, skin diseases, scabies, termination of pregnancy, etc. From practical experience the Mishings could realize that the naturally caused diseases such as gastrointestinal disorder, worm-infection, typhoid, malaria, diphtheria, bronchial diseases, etc. can be cured easily by allopathic medicine. The natural causes responsible for diseases are supposed to be improper food, inclement weather, dampness of locality, indulgence in sex etc. On the other hand, according to them the diseases like pox, snakebite, etc. are believed to be supernaturally caused and modern medical aid is considered to be futile. Like other tribal communities, the Mishings, particularly the villagers, also have deep faith in the efficacy of *mantras* (magic) or amulets in curing diseases. In their society when somebody falls ill they will first contact the *Bej* for help. He will diagnose the cause of the illness through divination. At the time of divination he will invoke the dead ancestors and gods, through appropriate spells and incantations. They will convey the causes and remedies of illness to the *Bej* and he will treat the patient according to these directions. According to a *Bej* in Baghedhara, there are four major causes of illness; namely, (i) anger of god, (ii) anger of ancestral spirits, (iii) breach of taboo and (iv) possession of evil spirits. During the divination of a *Bej* different methods are used to find out different causes of illness. After divination process the *Bej* will advise the relatives of the patient to make some offerings in *Namghar* (prayer hall) of the village or their locality. He will also give the patient some herbal medicines which are very effective in checking the disease. The

efficacy of herbal medicine will be increased by chanting some spells and treating them with certain magical rituals. Similarly, the traditional *mantras* and amulets still hold an important place in their society. The villagers are using these traditional *mantras* for the treatment of diseases like pain of chest, feet, and other parts of body, snakebite, tonsillitis, piles, bleeding of women, etc.

In the Mishing society, apart from the local medicine men who treat most of the diseases, one comes across other specialists in bone-setting, curing of bite by dog, fox and snake and healing of burn injuries. All of them are known as *Bej* in their society. The *Bejes* are ordinary cultivators or even landless labourers. They are generally males and their posts are not hereditary. The *Bej* accepts remuneration in the form of a feast if the patient gets cured. The bulk of the drugs used by the *Bej* to cure prevalent diseases are of vegetable origin. These drugs are prepared with different parts of the plants in definite proportions. They are mainly administered orally or applied as poultice. Their habitats being in the midst of forests, getting medicinal plants is not a problem for them. Apart from oral consumption of herbals certain other forms of treatment such as bathing, fumigation, fomentation, application of purgative, etc. are in vogue.

On the other hand, pox, hysteria, snake-bite, insomnia, convulsion, delirium, emaciation of children, mental disease and deformity of limb, congenital malformation, blindness, impotency, barrenness and prolonged illness are some of the conditions supposed to be supernaturally caused. Wrath of deities, influence of evil spirits and evil eye, magic of human being, sin committed and breach of taboo, etc. are believed to be the causes. Such diseases are treated through magico-religious therapy which varies with the type of cause identified. It mainly consists of either the propitiation of respective deities or driving away the supernatural bodies. Both magico-religious as well as herbal therapies are sometimes found necessary by the Mishings to cure certain diseases like pox and snake-bite. Various precautionary measures are widely adopted by the Mishings against the attack of supernatural bodies. For this purpose they wear amulets, iron rings, tiger tooth, roots, beads and other sundries. However, incantations are supposed to be most powerful protective measures of body, home and field.

Like other tribal communities, the Mishings believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for the members of their community. So, they perform various ceremonies every year during the annual festivals, to renovate their relationship with the supernatural forces and thus ensure their protection. They also believe that if the deities and ancestral spirits are not satisfied, then, they will get angry and inflict diseases and other calamities upon the members of the community. The Mishings also believe that the supernatural spirits exert great influence in their day to day life. Gods, goddesses, household deities and ancestral spirits, influence their way of life and view of life, and consequently regulate their behaviour, as individuals, and also as members of the community (Mipun 1993).

The traditional religious practices of the Mishings are based on three major belief systems – (i) beliefs about the creator of the Universe, (ii) beliefs existence of the spirits around human habitats and (iii) beliefs about the human soul. The thoughts and beliefs of the Mishings have largely influenced by the Hinduism. But they are also the devout followers of 'Mahapurusia Vaisnav Dharma'. Again, they are the worshippers of different gods and goddesses. However, the present religion of the Mishings is the synthetic product of Animism and Hinduism, known as *Kewalia* or *Kalhanghati* or *Nishamlia.* In spite of the mixture, they are worshippers of *Uie* or spirit. On the other hand, celebration of various festivals to propitiate gods is an integral part of the Mishings. These are occasions for great enjoyment as well as for giving thanks to gods for the favours they have received. Besides, the celebrations provide ample opportunity to escape from the monotony of daily routine. Some of the main pujas-cum-festivals of the Mishings are *Po:rag, Ali-ai-ligang, Taleng Uie, Dabur, Ashi uie, Yumrang uie, and Dodgang, Urom Apin* etc. (Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur & Saikia 1987).

The religious beliefs and practices of the Mishings are functional. They worship their gods, not for the sake of mere worship. Through worship and by making offerings, they gain a rapport with their gods and get a number of things done for their well being. Thus, the relationship between the Mishing and their gods has two different and contradictory aspects. On the one hand, they supplicate themselves to the power of gods and try to please them through propitiation. The gods are considered beyond the reach or

ordinary mortals and the only way to get their favours is through complete surrender to their power. According to this view point, man is a worthless creature whose destiny is in the hands of the most powerful god. On the other hand, man tries to control the power of his gods through special ritual techniques. In the Mishing society, there are certain specialists who are experts in the art of magic and they know the methods to control the supernatural forces. This specialist is known as *Miboo* in the Mishing society. He is functioning as a vehicle of gods and, at the same time, is able to command them by ritual techniques (Kuli 1998).

It is believed in the Mishing society that evil spirits are a group of supernatural entities which are always malevolent. They do a lot of harm to the people even without any provocation. Young children and pregnant women are believed to be more vulnerable to their attack. They may bring diseases to little children and may drink blood of a foetus leading to successive abortions. The Mishings believe that the spirits of people who meet with an unnatural death, like suicide or trampled by a wild elephant, or washed away by a flood or water fall etc. become evil spirits. Their attack can be averted by invoking the help of some powerful jungle gods which are benevolent towards people. Wearing of talisman charged with magical power also will be helpful to prevent their attack. The Mishings worship the spirits underlying thunder and lightning *Mukling Teleng*, earth and water *Among Asi,* air and fire *Esar Emi,*. These spirits have to be kept appeased with occasional offerings called *Teleng Uie* and *Rokpu Done*. There are various other evil spirits such as *Asi Uie, Adi Uie, Umrang Uie* etc. to whom all calamities are attributed. Another important spirit is *Dopum Dorum* who is believed to be a three-head demon. The *Miboo* or the village expert is the only person who can appease these spirits. According to their belief the *Miboo* possesses supernatural powers and from his childhood he observed some rules regarding diet and behaviour. He is informed in a dream that his god-given sword *Yoksa* is kept in a particular place in the forest and one night he goes to that particular forest without anybody's knowledge and brings his prized article. Thus, he becomes a *Miboo* and from that night he can have direct relation with the spirits.

One of the important religious performances of the Mishings in the field of treatment of diseases is the *Dabur puja*. Women are strictly prohibited from attending this performance due to the causes of parturition and menstruation. If there is any menstruating women or girl, she must be removed to another village. Traffic and business transactions with the neighbouring village are withheld completely. No outsiders can enter the village on that day. It is observed at the outskirts of the village concerned so as to keep away the malevolent spirits from the village. A day is fixed (generally Wednesday) for *Dobur* ritual considering all relevant aspects and convenience. In early morning of the *Dobur day* some selected male folks precede to the main entry points of the village. There they erect some structure specially designed braided leaves of *Piro* plant (*Phragmites karka*), a kind of wild reed, its stems and bamboo to indicate prohibition against the entry of the outsiders into the village. After the completion of the prohibitory indicators at the entry points they come back to the village and they form a group consisting of 20 members approximately and start visiting the house holds of the village. Usually the visit starts from the eastern corner of the village. The members of the visiting group carry rods, sticks etc. in their hands and enter the courtyard of the houses. On entering they shout *Ajenge! Ajenge!Bilangka* (pay your fine and penalty) and at the same time they strike the platforms, walls etc. of the house with rods and sticks. On hearing this the house wife comes out with food materials (*Ajenge dues*) like rice, Apong, wild vegetables, chicken, pork, etc. and hand over them and after that the group move to the next households. In this way they visit every household of the village. They believe that beating the platforms or walls of the house will drive away the evil spirits from that house and eventually from the village. They carry the collected materials to the bank of the river or stream. The ritual is performed by the *Miboo*. A temporary altar is prepared on the raised ground with specially designed sticks of *Piro* grass and bamboo and many other sacred plant leaves. First prayer is offered to their deities *Dony-Polo*. Two symbolic idols simulating a snake swallowing an egg are made from 'Ruktak' plant (*Thelypteris angustifolia*) - a type of wild fern, a *Tabong* (*Imperata cylindrica*) - a sharp grass and a split bamboo are placed on the altar facing the rising sun. Then the sacrifices of the animals like pigs and fowls

are done. The heads, wings, legs of the poultries are mounted on specially designed sticks and erected them on the side of altar. Rice, Apong, and other collected eatables are served among the members taking part in the ritual. Here, though the gods belong to both the gender, the priest is male only. The women get polluted by some natural activities in their life and this restricts their participation in the important social activities.

Gumin Uie is considered as a benevolent spirit of a family and in fact *Gumin Uie* is considered as another form of the departed soul. Thus, *Gumin Uies* are worshipped along with *pujas* meant for other spirits. In their society *Gumin Uies* are generally worshipped at an interval of five years. Besides this, the Mishings observe some other religious activities related to health such as *Sarag Puja, Urom Posum, Rati Khowa Sampradan* etc. (Kuli 1998). They observe *Sarag Puja* in the month of *Chaitra* (April) at an interval of five years. Here, also, the family offers oblations to the Sun and the Moon for the welfare of the family. During these days of *puja* family members observed *Genna* (taboo) for five days, i.e., during these periods the members of the family never go to other villages and never accept anything from their neighbours. Annual worshipping of the ancestral spirit (*Urom Posum*) is common feature of the religion of the Mishings. These ancestral spirits belong to both the genders. If the ancestral spirit is worshipped regularly, he brings health and happiness to the family (Kuli 1998).

Like this, the Mishings perform *Borsewa*, the highest form of worship. It may also be called as *Rati Khowa Sampradan* (the sect of nocturnal enjoyment). It is said that during *Borsewa* almighty Siva is worshipped at dead night, but as a matter of fact nobody except the participants know what kind of worship is performed in such close door function (Kuli 1998). Women are not permitted to participate in this ritual as it is observed in the night.

Besides, many more religious beliefs and practices have come into being among the Mishings ever since their settlement in Assam. Now a days, they have also been worshipping *Satjania, Najania, Ekoise janias, Jalkai, PcjabUie. Ghar Dangaria, Aai puja* etc. which are absolutely not traditional for the Mishings. The terms designating these rituals are not of those of the Mishings but were borrowed from non-Mishing

Assamese communities. It is also interesting to observe that these are not a part of Neo-Vaisnavism. It is not known wherefrom these rituals came to Mishing society. Probably, these non-traditional or alien religious functions were the outcome of the Mishing's exposure to the Saivism and other sects of Hinduism that were prevalent in Assam in the past. Under various forces they gradually adopted these practices. In the process of all these changes the traditional religion of the Mishings has lost its original character. It has become more or less a hybrid of different sects of Hinduism. Although they still maintain their traditional beliefs about supernatural beings and other customary practices related to birth and death. The Mishings no longer perform the rituals associated with these beliefs except *Dobur* and *Ali- Ai- Ligang*, which is an annual socio-religious function. In these functions, names of Hindu gods and goddesses are not mentioned at all. But *Dobur* is also no longer performed in every Mishing village. Similarly, *Po:rag* which is a socio-religious festival has become a rare occasion, now a days. The role of *Miboo* in the religious functions has been replaced by *Sadhu, Satula* and *Bhakats. Miboo* has become too rare to find among the Mishings.

From the discussion the following essence is drawn hereunder:

1. In the Mishing society 'health' is considered as absence of any disease of physical, mental, spiritual and social nature. A person free from any disease, when he is usual and carries out his normal functions without any difficulty is considered as healthy in their society. Therefore in their day to day life they traditionally observe certain health practices such as taking food in time, observance of certain religious practices, wearing of talisman, etc. They believe that performance of religious activities can satisfy the gods and goddesses who are responsible for particular diseases. Similarly wearing of talisman can escape people from evil spirits. Thus, the Mishings believe in psychosomatic and supernatural determinant of health.

2. The Mishings believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for the members of the community. So, they perform various ceremonies every year during the annual festivals, to renovate their relationship with the supernaturals, and thus ensure the protection of the community. They also believe that if proper propitiation is not offered to the deities and to ancestral spirits,

then they will get angry and send diseases and other calamities to the members of the community.

3. In the Mishing society, a person is usually considered to be afflicted with some diseases if he/ she is incapable of doing the routine work which is usually being expected to be carried out by that individual in the society, i.e. incapacitation from work is the index of poor health in their society. Thus, the concept of ill health becomes a functional one and not clinical. Therefore, symptoms such as pains and ache, weakness, scabies, prolong cough, mild fever, wounds, etc. are not taken seriously as symptoms of disease in the Mishing society.

4. The Mishings donot have elaborate knowledge about internal structure of the body. They believe that food is going to the liver and there it is transformed into blood. Red blood is considered as the sign of healthy body, usually a characteristic feature of young people. It is a common saying in their society that as the person grows old, red blood turns to blackish red and the quantity of blood decrease thereby indicating lesser strength and decrease health status.

5. In Mishing society, worship of several deities in the forest is also considered necessary to keep one's health in good condition. Another common cause for ill health is considered to be sorcery. Mishings are very suspicious in nature due to the strong belief in sorcery. They hesitate to eat food in the houses of their neighbours and even kinsmen. In any case of illness sorcery may be suspected.

6. The Mishings believe that different food is required for people of different age group, or people performing different works, and in some special conditions like pregnancy and lactating mothers to maintain good health.

7. The Mishings believe that there are all kinds of diseases inflicting them. For them disease is any perturbation in any physiological system of an organism which changes the function of that system and lead to negative consequences for the organism when compared to a healthy, normal and standard. Thus, where disease is present there is no blame, no recrimination, no guilt and no stigma.

8. The patterns of diseases can be divided into two types as major and minor illness in the Mishing society. Children are more prone to illness, which are seasonal and

minor in nature. The women victimized by bodyache, complications related to pregnancy etc. The menfolk are more prone to malaria, diarrhea as they have to work outside their house. There is no much difference of disease pattern in both the villages, i.e., Baghedhara and Namtemera. It may be due to the same cultural practices, occupations, food habits and settlement patterns among them.

9. The traditional notion about diseases of the Mishings is that there are unknown spirits behind all kinds of diseases suffered by them. On the basis of etiological factors, the Mishings classify diseases into four categories; viz., (i) body-linked illness, (ii) deity-linked illness, (iii) spirit-linked illness and (iv) sorcery-linked illness. The causative factors of the body linked illness are defective diet, bad water, worm infestation and other environmental conditions. Naturalistic causative factors are mainly linked to diet and the qualities of various food items. Illness linked to this causative factors may be roughly translated as stomachache, cough, cold, headache, dysentery, body itching, fever, scabies, etc.

10. The Mishings believe that spirit of any dead person residing in the habitation area may cause illness to a person. Any physical symptom or illness is generally attributed to a spirit if it does not respond to other forms of therapy. For the prevention of spirit-linked diseases they worship their ancestors with *pujas* like *Dobur, Dotgang, Urom Apin,* etc. The thunder and lightning *(Mukling-Taleng)*, earth and water *(Among-Ashi),* air and fire *(Esar-Emi)* alike are believed to be spiritual beings possessing power greater than those of man. According to the belief of the Mishings, they are benevolent to human beings, protect their farms and families from damages and misfortune, but they have to be kept appeased with occasional offerings called *Taleng-uie* and *Bokpu-done* (eater of white cock). The evil spirits to whom every illness or misfortune is attributed are the spirits looking around the streams, the mountains, the forest etc. To protect themselves from these spirits or *uies* they perform *pujas* for the respective *uies*.

11. The Mishings have a broad of concept of the etiology of illness. This includes both natural and supernatural causes of diseases. From the nature of one disease they will diagnose the etiology of the malady. However, beliefs in the supernatural causes of illness are more prevalent among them as natural causes behind the occurrence

of a disease are sometimes ignored by them and believe that these are the signs of the attack of some supernatural forces. Thus, some categories of illness are assumed to be the exclusive result of supernatural attack while some others are the result of only natural causes.

12. According to the Mishings change in the nature and quality of diet is the main reason for the occurrence of diseases. In the past the Mishings were eating only the boiled food. But now they have given up the old diet and depend the food items available in the market. They also consume the rice available from the ration shops of the state government. They say that their health has suffered due to the intake of this adulterated and polluted food and due to the deterioration of health their body is now more vulnerable to diseases.

13. The Mishings believe that climatic condition of their locality is also a natural cause of disease. As most of the Mishing villages are situated on the bank of river, therefore, they are troubled by wind, rain or flood. In that situation the manual labours do not get any work so that their family members suffer due to lack of food. On the other hand, during summer, while working in the paddy fields, they have to suffer the scorching heat of the sun. All these climatic conditions have a telling effect on their health. Consequently, they are more susceptible to disease, especially during the lean season, when they are very weak due to lack of sufficient food.

14. In the Mishing society supernatural causes of diseases are more in comparison to the natural causes in their society. According to the Mishings wrath of deities and ancestral spirits is one of the main causes of illness. Similarly, possession of evil spirit, soul loss, violation of taboos, and sorcery are some of the other major causes for the occurrence of diseases.

15. The Mishings believe that, for maintaining the general well-being and prosperity of the members of their society, they have to keep good, harmonious relationship with the gods and ancestral spirit. As they believe the god will give a lot of favours to the people if they are propitiated properly. But the lack of worship will incur the wrath of the gods and even benevolent gods will turn into malevolent ones. The anger of a god is the usual reason for the origin of diseases.

16. According to the Mishings the ancestors *(Urom-posum)* are held responsible for the health and happiness of the family members, and incurring displeasure to them may result in accident or some uncommon occurrence. They believe that the departed souls reside at *Sine-Mobo* (abode of dead) from where they visit their near and dear ones; but their visits instead of being beneficent usually result in a catastrophe, most malicious of them being those who met unnatural death.

17. The Mishings believe in a number of evil spirits like *Asi Uie, Adi Uie, Umreng Uie, Yumrang Uie, Taleng Uie,* etc. All of them malevolent and cause various hardships like illness, accidents, crop failure, etc. to the people. Each type of spirit is believed to cause particular type of problem.

18. The Mishings believe that, through sorcery a man can bring diseases to people. According to them a sorcerer can cause disease to another person through the manipulation of evil forces. The diseases caused due to sorcery will last for a long time and will not respond to any ordinary treatment. Stomachaches, lack of appetite, dysentery are some of the symptoms of diseases caused by sorcery. On the other hand, seeking the help of god through prayer is the best method to escape from the harmful effects of sorcery. Similarly, some offerings also must be made in the temple to please the god.

19. The Mishings believe that the naturally caused diseases such as gastrointestinal disorder, worm-infection, typhoid, malaria, diphtheria, bronchial diseases, etc. can be cured easily by allopathic medicine. The natural causes responsible for diseases are supposed to be improper food, inclement weather, dampness of locality, indulgence in sex etc. On the other hand, according to them the diseases like pox, snakebite, etc. are believed to be supernaturally caused and modern medical aid is considered to be futile.

20. The traditional mantras and amulets hold an important place in their society. The villagers are using these traditional mantras for the treatment of diseases like pain of chest, feet, and other parts of body, snakebite, tonsillitis, piles, bleeding of women, etc.

21. Various precautionary measures are widely adopted by the Mishings against the attack of supernatural bodies. For this purpose they wear amulets, iron rings, tiger

tooth, roots, beads and other sundries. However, incantations are supposed to be most powerful protective measures of body, home and field.

22. The Mishings believe that a cordial relationship with the deities and ancestral spirits will ensure good health for the members of their community. So, they perform various ceremonies every year during the annual festivals, to renovate their relationship with the supernatural forces and thus ensure their protection. They worship the spirits underlying thunder and lightning *Mukling Teleng*, earth and water *Among Asi,* air and fire *Esar Em.* These spirits have to be kept appeased with occasional offerings called *Teleng Uie* and *Rokpu Done*. There are various other evil spirits such as *Asi Uie, Adi Uie, Umrang Uie* etc. to whom all calamities are attributed. Another important spirit is *Dopum Dorum* who is believed to be a three-head demon. They also believe that if the deities and ancestral spirits are not satisfied, then, they will get angry and inflict diseases and other calamities upon the members of the community. The Mishings also believe that the supernatural spirits wield great influence in their day to day life. Gods, goddesses, household deities and ancestral spirits, influence their way of life and view of life, and consequently regulate their behaviour, as individuals, and also as members of the community.

23. In the field of treatment of diseases is the *Dabur puja* is an important religious performances. Women are strictly prohibited from attending this performance due to the causes of parturition and menstruation. If there is any menstruating women or girl, she must be removed to another village. Traffic and business transactions with the neighbouring village are withheld completely. No outsiders can enter the village on that day. In that *puja* prayer is offered to their deities *Dony-Polo.* Two symbolic idols simulating a snake swallowing an egg are made from 'Ruktak' plant (*Thelypteris angustifolia*) - a type of wild fern, a *Tabong* (*Imperata cylindrica*) - a sharp grass and a split bamboo are placed on the altar facing the rising sun. Then the sacrifices of the animals like pigs and fowls are done. The heads, wings, legs of the poultries are mounted on specially designed sticks and erected them on the side of altar. Rice, Apong, and other collected eatables are served among the members taking part in the ritual.

24. The Mishings also perform *Borsewa*, the highest form of worship. It may also be called as *Rati Khowa Sampradan* (the sect of nocturnal enjoyment). It is said that during *Borsewa* almighty Siva is worshipped at dead night, but as a matter of fact nobody except the participants know what kind of worship is performed in such close door function. Women are not permitted to participate in this ritual as it is observed in the night.

In sum, we can say that the Mishings use different methods of treatment for diseases. These systems depend on both herbal and psychosomatic lines of treatment. In other words, they use allopathic treatment for the diseases caused by nature whereas for the diseases caused by supernatural factors they use magico-religious treatment which mainly consists of either the propitiation of respective deities or driving away the supernatural bodies. Besides, ethnomedicine is also used by the Mishings as a method of treatment which has two components, i.e., magic and herbals. On the other hand religious performance is also a method of treatment. The Mishings observe different religious functions to appease the god and goddess of both benevolent and malevolent nature responsible for different kinds of diseases or illnesses.