

Indigenous Performing and Visual Arts of the Mising Community of Assam: Tradition and Cultural Identity.

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Abstract

The Mising community of Assam constitutes one of the major indigenous communities of the Brahmaputra Valley and possesses a rich cultural heritage expressed through performing arts, visual arts, material culture, festivals, oral traditions, architecture, and traditional knowledge. Historically associated with the riverine environment of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, the Mising community has developed distinctive cultural practices through continuous interaction with agriculture, ecology, social institutions, and changing historical circumstances. Performing arts such as Gumrag dance, OiNitom songs, traditional music, and festival performances are closely associated with agricultural cycles, community life, courtship, celebration, and collective memory. Visual and material arts, particularly handloom weaving, traditional dress, textile motifs, bamboo and cane crafts, ornaments, woodwork, and stilt architecture, represent important expressions of Mising aesthetic values and indigenous knowledge. These practices are particularly significant because they are not isolated artistic activities; rather, they are embedded within everyday life and function as mechanisms for transmitting cultural values, historical memory, ecological knowledge, gender roles, and collective identity. Mising women have traditionally played a particularly important role in weaving and the preservation of textile knowledge. At the same time, processes of modernisation, urbanisation, migration, formal education, commercialisation, and digitalisation have transformed the conditions under which these traditions are practised. Some traditional forms have declined, while others have been revitalised through festivals, cultural organisations, educational initiatives, and digital media. This article examines the major performing and visual arts of the Mising community and explores their contribution to cultural identity. It argues that Mising arts should not be treated merely as folklore or museum objects but as living indigenous knowledge systems through which the community negotiates continuity, change, and contemporary identity...

Keywords: Mising community, Assam, indigenous art, performing arts, visual arts, Gumrag.

Introduction

Assam is characterised by considerable ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Among the indigenous communities of the state, the Mising occupy an important position, particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley. The community is a Tibeto-Burman-speaking indigenous group whose social and cultural history is closely associated with the riverine environment of Assam and neighbouring areas. Older administrative and ethnographic literature frequently used the term “Miri” for the community, whereas “Mising” is the contemporary community-preferred designation. The historical record and ethnographic literature document the Mising as an important indigenous community of Assam with distinctive social, economic, and cultural traditions (Bordoloi et al., 1987; Medhi & Laskar, 2017).

Mising culture has developed through a close relationship with agriculture, rivers, forests, village institutions, family life, and community festivals. This relationship is particularly visible in the community's artistic traditions. Music, dance, weaving, clothing, architecture, bamboo and cane work, oral traditions, and festival practices are not separate from ordinary social life. Instead, they are integrated into the economic, social, ecological, and spiritual experiences of the community.

The importance of these artistic traditions extends beyond their aesthetic value. A handwoven textile, for example, is simultaneously a garment, a product of women's knowledge, an economic resource, a marker of community identity, and a repository of visual motifs. Similarly, a traditional dance is not simply entertainment; it can express agricultural activity, social relationships, collective celebration, and cultural memory. Recent scholarship argues

that Mising visual and performing arts operate as living systems through which identity, cosmological ideas, and environmental knowledge are transmitted between generations (Narah et al., 2026).

The study of indigenous art therefore requires an approach that moves beyond the conventional division between “fine art” and “folk art.” In the Mising context, artistic creativity is embedded in everyday life. The loom, musical instrument, traditional house, festival ground, song, dance, and costume all become sites of cultural expression. This article examines the major forms of indigenous performing and visual arts of the Mising community of Assam and explores their contribution to cultural identity. It also considers the challenges facing these traditions in the contemporary period and discusses possible approaches to preservation and revitalisation.

Historical and Cultural Context of the Mising Community

The Mising community's cultural history is strongly connected with the riverine landscape of Assam. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have shaped settlement patterns, agricultural practices, architecture, food systems, and social life. The Mising have historically adapted to an environment in which seasonal flooding, river erosion, fertile agricultural land, and water resources form significant parts of everyday existence.

The community is predominantly associated with agricultural life. Rice cultivation has historically occupied an important place in the economic and cultural system. Agricultural cycles have consequently influenced the calendar of festivals and ceremonies. Ali-Aye-Ligang, for example, is associated with the beginning of agricultural activities, while Porag is associated with post-harvest celebration. Such festivals demonstrate the close relationship between economy and culture.

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes' monograph on the Mising community emphasises the importance of agriculture, riverine settlement, traditional weaving, costumes, and women's expertise in the cultural life of the community (Medhi & Laskar, 2017). The monograph is particularly important for understanding weaving as a major area of Mising cultural creativity.

Historically, Mising cultural knowledge was transmitted largely through oral and practical forms rather than through formal written institutions. Songs, stories, rituals, festivals, dances, weaving techniques, architectural knowledge, and community participation allowed younger generations to learn from elders. This form of transmission created a strong connection between artistic practice and social life.

Consequently, Mising culture should be understood as a dynamic system rather than a fixed collection of traditional objects. Recent scholarship similarly describes Mising art as adaptive and argues that its forms continue to negotiate globalisation, government cultural policy, market forces, and digital media (Narah et al., 2026).

3. Performing Arts of the Mising Community

Performing arts constitute one of the most visible expressions of Mising cultural identity. They include dance, folk music, songs, instrumental music, ritual performances, and festival-based performances. Their social significance lies in their ability to bring people together and transform individual artistic expression into collective experience.

3.1 Gumrag Dance

Among the most widely recognised Mising performing arts is *Gumrag*, often associated with the Ali-Aye-Ligang festival. It is a group dance performed to traditional musical accompaniment and is especially important in contemporary representations of Mising culture. *Gumrag* is significant because it combines music, movement, costume, social interaction, and agricultural symbolism. Contemporary research describes the dance as a central performance associated with Ali-Aye-Ligang and notes its movement through village households as part of the festival context (Narah et al., 2026). The dance can be interpreted in relation to agricultural life. Rhythmic bodily movements may evoke agricultural labour and the cyclical nature of cultivation. The performance therefore connects the human body with the agricultural environment.

At the same time, *Gumrag* creates a collective cultural space. Men and women participate together, and the performance provides opportunities for younger generations to observe and learn traditional movements, music, clothing, and social conventions. *Gumrag* has consequently become more than a village performance. In the contemporary period it is also performed on public stages, at cultural festivals, educational institutions, government events, and community programmes. This wider circulation has increased the visibility of Mising culture while simultaneously creating questions about how much of the original social and ritual context is retained when the dance becomes a stage performance.

3.2 Ali-Aye-Ligang and the Performance of Agricultural Culture

Ali-Aye-Ligang is one of the most important cultural festivals of the Mising community. The festival is associated with the beginning of the agricultural cycle and represents a close relationship between livelihood and cultural expression. The festival provides a setting in which several forms of art come together. Traditional dress, music, dance, songs, food, community gatherings, and ritual practices are combined into a comprehensive cultural performance. This is important from the perspective of cultural identity because festivals provide an opportunity for the community to represent itself publicly. A Mising person living in an urban environment may not participate

in all aspects of traditional village life, but festival participation can reconnect the individual with community heritage. Ali-Aye-Ligang therefore functions as a form of cultural memory. The agricultural significance of the festival reminds the community of its historical relationship with land and cultivation, while the associated artistic practices provide visible and audible expressions of this relationship. The festival also contributes to intergenerational transmission. Children and young adults can learn dances, songs, clothing styles, food practices, and social customs through participation rather than through abstract instruction.

3.3 OiNitom and Mising Folk Songs

Music and oral tradition occupy an important place in Mising cultural life. Among the best-known forms of Mising folk expression is *OiNitom*, a category of songs associated with social, emotional, and cultural experience. *OiNitom* songs can express love, youth, longing, nature, social relationships, agricultural life, and everyday experiences. Their significance lies partly in their ability to transform ordinary experience into poetic expression. The natural environment frequently provides imagery for indigenous songs. Rivers, fields, plants, seasons, birds, agricultural activities, and village life become elements of the poetic landscape. In this sense, the songs contain both aesthetic and ecological knowledge. Oral songs also preserve collective memory. In societies where oral transmission has historically been important, songs can perform functions that written archives perform elsewhere. They preserve vocabulary, narratives, emotions, social values, and historical consciousness. The transmission of folk songs is consequently a form of cultural education. Young people learn not only musical patterns but also ways of understanding relationships, nature, work, community, and identity.

3.4 Traditional Musical Instruments

Mising performing traditions are supported by a range of traditional musical instruments. Drums, cymbals, gongs, and wind instruments contribute to the distinctive soundscape of community festivals and dances. The instruments used in Mising performances include traditional drums and percussion instruments as well as wind instruments. Their exact combination can differ depending on the performance and locality. Traditional instruments are significant from both musical and material perspectives. Their construction often depends on knowledge of locally available materials, including wood, bamboo, cane, and other natural resources. Thus, instrumental traditions demonstrate the connection between performing arts and environmental knowledge. Music also has an important social function. During festivals, the sound of traditional instruments signals collective participation and creates a shared atmosphere. Music transforms the village or community space into a cultural performance environment.

3.5 Other Traditional Dance Forms

Although Gumrag has become the most widely recognised Mising dance form, the community's performance traditions are more diverse. The study on Mising cultural communication has documented several dance traditions, including forms such as *Lata Soman*, *Pipal Soman*, *Selloya*, and *Lareli*. Some of these forms have become less common as social conditions have changed, while others have been maintained or revived through community activities. The uneven survival of different dance forms illustrates the dynamic character of cultural heritage. A tradition survives most effectively when its original social context remains meaningful. When a particular ritual or community practice declines, the artistic form associated with it may also decline. Therefore, preservation should not focus only on the most popular dance. Documentation of lesser-known forms is equally important because these forms may contain local variations, historical information, and distinctive aesthetic knowledge.

4. Visual Arts, Weaving, Traditional Dress, and Indigenous Design

Among the visual and material arts of the Mising community, weaving occupies a central position. It is particularly significant because Mising women have traditionally been the principal custodians and practitioners of textile production. The *Mising Tribe of Assam: A Monograph* describes weaving as an important area of Mising women's creativity and expertise and emphasises the cultural significance of handloom products (Medhi & Laskar, 2017). Weaving combines technical knowledge with artistic creativity, requiring knowledge of yarn, colour, loom operation, pattern formation, proportion, and finishing techniques. At the same time, it provides individual weavers with opportunities for aesthetic expression. Traditional textiles therefore function simultaneously as clothing, economic resources, artistic objects, and markers of cultural identity.

Traditional dress provides one of the most immediate visual expressions of Mising identity. Women's garments include textiles such as the *Ribi-Gaseng* and *Ege*, while men use distinctive traditional garments for every day, ceremonial, and festive occasions. Variations can occur according to locality, age, gender, occasion, and individual preference. During festivals such as Ali-Aye-Ligang and Porag, traditional clothing becomes particularly important because it allows community members to publicly express their cultural affiliation. Dress is also closely connected with performing arts, particularly Gumrag dance, in which handwoven garments, jewellery, movement, and music combine to create a distinctive visual and cultural performance.

The aesthetic value of Mising textiles is further expressed through geometric patterns, repeated designs, contrasting colours, and culturally significant motifs. These designs constitute a form of indigenous knowledge because they embody accumulated knowledge of weaving techniques, colour combinations, pattern construction, and cultural aesthetics. Recent research identifies textile design as an important dimension of Mising indigenous

knowledge and argues that visual motifs function as part of a broader system through which cultural identity and knowledge are transmitted (Narah et al., 2026). A textile motif can therefore be regarded as a form of cultural memory. Its continued reproduction connects contemporary generations with earlier generations of weavers, even when the original interpretation of a particular design may have changed over time.

The gender dimension of weaving is particularly significant. Women have traditionally learned weaving through observation and practical participation within the household and community. The loom thus becomes not only a site of production but also a site of informal education. Through weaving, younger women learn technical skills, patterns, terminology, aesthetic preferences, and aspects of cultural identity. Handloom production can also contribute to household income and provide women with an important form of economic activity. However, traditional weaving faces challenges from industrial textiles, changing clothing preferences, limited time, commercial competition, and declining interest among some younger people. Supporting Mising women weavers is therefore essential for preserving both the artistic and social dimensions of textile culture (Medhi & Laskar, 2017).

4.1 Bamboo, Cane, Architecture, and Material Culture

Bamboo and cane are also important components of Mising material culture. These locally available resources have traditionally been used to produce baskets, mats, household implements, agricultural tools, furniture, storage objects, fencing, and architectural components. Such objects demonstrate the principle of functional aesthetics: an object can be useful while simultaneously reflecting craftsmanship, proportion, pattern, and visual creativity. The production of bamboo and cane objects also represents environmental knowledge because artisans must understand the characteristics of different materials, including their flexibility, strength, durability, harvesting requirements, and methods of processing.

Traditional architecture provides another significant expression of Mising visual culture. The *chang-ghar*, or raised house, reflects the community's historical adaptation to the flood-prone environment of the Brahmaputra Valley. The elevated structure protects living spaces from floodwater and damp conditions, while bamboo, wood, cane, and other locally available materials have traditionally been incorporated into construction. Recent scholarship identifies Mising stilt architecture as an important component of the community's visual heritage and interprets it as a form of indigenous environmental knowledge (Narah et al., 2026). The *chang-ghar* is consequently more than a physical structure; it embodies generations of knowledge about flooding, climate, ventilation, local materials, household organisation, and settlement.

Community spaces such as the *MurongOkum* further demonstrate the relationship between architecture and social life. Traditionally associated with community interaction, youth activities, cultural learning, and social organisation, the *MurongOkum* provides an example of how physical space can support cultural transmission. Such spaces allow young people to interact with elders, participate in songs and dances, learn social values, and develop a sense of collective belonging. This demonstrates that Mising visual culture cannot be separated from the social institutions within which it operates.

Jewellery and personal adornment constitute another dimension of this material culture. Beads, metal ornaments, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and other accessories contribute to the visual representation of Mising identity. Their use during festivals and ceremonial occasions, particularly in combination with traditional clothing, creates a distinctive cultural appearance. Personal adornment therefore functions not merely as decoration but also as a means of communicating gender, age, social occasion, and cultural affiliation.

5. Art, Nature, and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Mising artistic expression is its close relationship with the natural environment. The community's historical dependence on agriculture, rivers, forests, and seasonal cycles has shaped its artistic and material culture. Agricultural activities are reflected in festival traditions and dance; natural imagery appears in folk songs; locally available materials are used in houses and crafts; and seasonal rhythms influence the cultural calendar. The environment is therefore not simply a background against which Mising culture exists; it forms an essential part of the community's lived experience and cultural worldview.

This relationship between art and nature provides an important basis for understanding Mising artistic traditions as systems of indigenous ecological knowledge. A bamboo basket, for example, is not simply a household object. Its production requires knowledge of bamboo varieties, harvesting, preparation, splitting, weaving, and maintenance. Similarly, the *chang-ghar* represents knowledge of flooding, ventilation, materials, and adaptation to the riverine environment. Traditional songs may preserve observations and emotional relationships associated with rivers, agricultural fields, plants, animals, and seasonal change. Recent scholarship consequently argues that Mising visual and performing arts should be understood as indigenous epistemological systems rather than merely as aesthetic or folkloric forms (Narah et al., 2026).

The connection between art and environment is particularly visible in festivals. Agricultural festivals such as Ali-Aye-Ligang transform the agricultural cycle into a cultural performance through music, dance, dress, food, and

community participation. Art therefore becomes a means through which environmental experience is remembered and collectively reproduced.

6. Festivals, Collective Memory, and Cultural Identity

Festivals constitute some of the most important spaces for the performance and reproduction of Mising cultural identity. Ali-Aye-Ligang and Porag bring together music, dance, traditional dress, food, ritual, social gathering, and community participation. Their importance lies not only in their ceremonial functions but also in their ability to create occasions for cultural learning and public expression.

Ali-Aye-Ligang is closely associated with the beginning of agricultural activities and is particularly important for the performance of Gumrag and traditional songs. The festival allows different generations to participate in a shared cultural environment. Children and young people can learn songs, dances, clothing practices, food traditions, and social customs through direct participation. Porag, associated with the post-harvest period, similarly provides a setting for community celebration and cultural interaction.

Festivals are consequently important mechanisms of collective memory. Cultural memory is not preserved only in written records; it is also preserved through repeated performance. When people sing traditional songs, perform dances, wear traditional textiles, prepare traditional food, or gather in community spaces, they reproduce memories and cultural meanings. These practices create continuity between the past and the present. The arts therefore play a central role in Mising cultural identity. A person participating in Gumrag, wearing traditional handwoven clothing, singing OiNitom, or using traditional cultural objects is not simply participating in an artistic activity. They are participating in a system of cultural belonging. The arts provide visible, audible, and embodied expressions of community identity.

7. Modernisation, Commercialisation, Digital Media, and Cultural Transformation

Mising artistic traditions are not static. They have continuously changed in response to education, migration, urbanisation, economic transformation, interaction with wider Assamese society, state cultural policies, commercial markets, and digital technology. Modernisation has produced both opportunities and challenges for cultural preservation.

Urbanisation and migration can reduce young people's direct contact with traditional community institutions. As younger generations spend more time in schools, colleges, workplaces, and urban environments, they may have fewer opportunities to learn traditional songs, dances, weaving techniques, or craft practices from elders. Some specialised knowledge may consequently decline. Research on changing Mising cultural communication has noted that certain traditional performance forms have become less common, while more widely recognised forms such as Gumrag have remained comparatively strong because of their continued association with major festivals (Narah et al., 2026).

Commercialisation also has contradictory effects. The growing demand for Mising textiles, handicrafts, cultural performances, and traditional designs can provide economic opportunities for artists and artisans and may encourage younger people to continue traditional skills. However, commercialisation can also lead to standardisation and simplification. Traditional designs may be reproduced without knowledge of their cultural context, while handmade textiles may have difficulty competing with cheaper machine-made products. Cultural forms originally associated with ritual, agriculture, social relationships, or community life may also be transformed into short stage performances intended primarily for entertainment.

Digital media has created another important space for cultural adaptation. Traditional songs and dances can now be recorded, archived, and shared with audiences far beyond Assam. Photographs of textiles and crafts can circulate through social media, while community organisations can use digital platforms to promote festivals and cultural programmes. Recent research identifies digital media as an increasingly important environment for the representation and adaptation of Mising cultural forms (Narah et al., 2026). Digital technology can therefore contribute significantly to documentation and revival.

Nevertheless, digital circulation also creates challenges. A song, dance, textile design, or traditional costume may be separated from its cultural context and presented merely as a commercial or aesthetic object. Unauthorised reproduction of indigenous designs can also occur. Digital preservation should therefore be accompanied by proper attribution, community participation, informed consent, and respect for cultural ownership.

The preservation of Mising arts consequently requires a balanced approach. Documentation, education, digital archiving, support for artisans, cultural festivals, and community-based research can help maintain traditional knowledge. At the same time, Mising artists and communities should retain the authority to decide how their cultural expressions are represented, transformed, and circulated.

8. Strategies for Preservation and Revitalisation of Mising Arts

The preservation and revitalisation of Mising performing and visual arts require a comprehensive, community-centred approach that recognises cultural heritage as a living and evolving system rather than as a collection of

traditional objects. The continuity of Mising artistic traditions depends largely on the ability of the community to transmit knowledge from one generation to another while simultaneously adapting to contemporary social, economic, and technological conditions. Preservation should therefore focus not only on documenting existing cultural forms but also on creating opportunities for their continued practice within everyday community life.

One of the most important strategies is the systematic documentation of traditional knowledge. Many songs, dances, musical practices, textile motifs, weaving techniques, oral histories, architectural traditions, and craft skills are transmitted informally through elders and experienced practitioners. Such knowledge can become vulnerable when younger generations have fewer opportunities to learn directly from them. Audio-visual documentation, oral-history projects, photographic records, digital archives, and ethnographic studies can help preserve this knowledge for future generations. However, documentation should be undertaken with the participation and consent of community members so that cultural knowledge is not extracted from its social context.

Intergenerational transmission is equally important. Traditional knowledge cannot be preserved simply by placing photographs, recordings, textiles, or artefacts in museums and archives. Young people need opportunities to learn through direct participation. Community-based workshops, cultural schools, village-level training programmes, and educational initiatives can bring experienced dancers, musicians, weavers, artisans, and elders into direct contact with younger learners. Such programmes would allow traditional knowledge to remain embodied and practical rather than becoming merely theoretical information.

The preservation of Mising handloom traditions requires particular attention because weaving represents both artistic heritage and an important form of women's knowledge. Mising women have traditionally played a central role in producing and transmitting textiles, and therefore support for women weavers should form an important part of cultural preservation. Access to quality raw materials, improved marketing opportunities, fair prices, artisan cooperatives, exhibitions, and direct digital markets can strengthen the economic sustainability of handloom production. At the same time, traditional designs and techniques should be documented and promoted in ways that protect the cultural ownership and creative rights of the artisans.

Educational institutions can also contribute significantly to the preservation of Mising arts. Schools and colleges in Mising-inhabited areas can incorporate local cultural heritage into extracurricular activities, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and research projects. Students can be encouraged to document oral traditions, interview elders, learn traditional musical instruments, study textile motifs, and participate in cultural festivals. Such initiatives would help bridge the gap between formal education and indigenous knowledge and could encourage younger generations to view traditional culture as a valuable intellectual and creative resource rather than as something belonging only to the past.

Digital technology offers further possibilities for cultural preservation. Digital archives can bring together recordings of songs and dances, photographs of traditional costumes and textiles, documentation of architectural forms, oral histories, and information about traditional crafts. Social media and online platforms can also provide Mising artists with opportunities to reach wider audiences. Nevertheless, digital preservation should be guided by ethical principles, particularly with regard to cultural ownership, attribution, consent, and commercial use. The community should have a meaningful role in determining which cultural materials are documented, how they are interpreted, and where they are made publicly accessible.

Cultural festivals such as Ali-Aye-Ligang and Porag can serve as important platforms for revitalisation. Their significance should extend beyond ceremonial celebration to include opportunities for traditional artists, artisans, musicians, dancers, and young learners to interact. Festivals can provide spaces for exhibitions of handloom products, demonstrations of traditional crafts, performances by senior practitioners, and educational activities for children. Such community-centred festivals can strengthen cultural participation while allowing traditions to evolve naturally within contemporary society.

Academic institutions and government organisations also have an important role in supporting preservation. Research institutions can undertake interdisciplinary studies of Mising language, literature, music, dance, architecture, textile traditions, oral history, and ecological knowledge. Government cultural and tribal research institutions can support documentation, artist training, exhibitions, publications, and financial assistance. However, institutional interventions should be developed in consultation with Mising cultural practitioners so that preservation policies reflect community priorities rather than external interpretations of indigenous culture.

Finally, the preservation of Mising arts must recognise the importance of cultural ownership. Indigenous artistic traditions should not be treated simply as commercial resources or public-domain folklore. Traditional textile designs, songs, dances, architectural knowledge, and other cultural expressions are connected with the history and identity of the community. Their commercial or digital use should therefore involve proper acknowledgement and, where appropriate, benefit-sharing with the artists and communities concerned. A community-centred model of preservation can ensure that Mising cultural heritage remains both economically viable and culturally meaningful.

Thus, the future of Mising performing and visual arts depends on a balance between preservation and innovation, traditional knowledge and modern technology, community ownership and wider cultural visibility. The objective should not be to preserve Mising culture as a frozen representation of the past but to create conditions in which the community itself can continue to practise, reinterpret, and transmit its artistic traditions. In this sense, revitalisation is not simply the recovery of lost forms; it is the creation of a sustainable cultural environment in which Mising artistic knowledge can continue to develop across generations.

9. Youth, Tradition, Innovation, and the Future of Mising Arts

Young people occupy a central position in determining the future of Mising cultural heritage. The continuity of any artistic tradition ultimately depends on whether younger generations consider it meaningful and relevant to their contemporary lives. In the past, much of Mising cultural knowledge was transmitted informally through families, village institutions, festivals, and direct interaction with elders. Today, however, education, migration, urbanisation, professional employment, digital media, and changing lifestyles have altered these patterns of transmission. As a result, young Mising people may have fewer opportunities to learn traditional songs, dances, weaving techniques, musical instruments, crafts, and oral traditions through everyday participation. At the same time, young people are not merely passive recipients of tradition; they can become important agents of cultural preservation and transformation. Their involvement in cultural organisations, festivals, academic research, digital documentation, traditional dance and music programmes, handloom promotion, and community-based cultural activities can create new pathways for maintaining Mising heritage.

The role of youth is particularly important because cultural preservation cannot depend exclusively on reproducing the past. Young people can contribute by documenting the knowledge of elders, recording traditional songs and performances, learning traditional musical instruments and weaving practices, creating digital archives, producing documentaries, promoting handwoven textiles through online platforms, and developing contemporary artistic works inspired by Mising cultural traditions. Digital technology can therefore become a bridge between generations. A traditional song recorded by an elderly performer, for example, can be preserved and made accessible to younger listeners, while photographs and videos of weaving techniques can provide resources for learners who may not have regular access to experienced artisans. In this way, technology can strengthen rather than necessarily weaken cultural transmission.

The relationship between tradition and innovation should consequently not be understood as a conflict. Indigenous artistic traditions have historically adapted to changing social and environmental circumstances, and Mising culture is no exception. Traditional textile motifs can be incorporated into contemporary clothing and design; traditional musical forms can be recorded and creatively rearranged; traditional dances can be presented in new performance environments; and architectural principles derived from the *chang-ghar* can inform contemporary approaches to flood-resilient and environmentally responsive housing. Such adaptations can allow cultural traditions to remain relevant while retaining their distinctive characteristics. Recent research on Mising visual and performing arts similarly emphasises the community's continuing negotiation between cultural heritage, design, media, and contemporary forms of representation (Narah et al., 2026).

The crucial issue, therefore, is not whether Mising artistic traditions should change, but who controls and guides that change. When innovation is led by Mising artists, artisans, musicians, dancers, researchers, and community organisations, it can become a means of strengthening cultural identity. Creative adaptation can provide new opportunities for artists while introducing traditional knowledge to audiences that may not otherwise encounter it. However, when cultural forms are transformed primarily for external commercial interests, there is a risk that their historical and social meanings may be simplified or lost. Cultural preservation should therefore encourage innovation while maintaining community ownership, cultural context, and respect for indigenous knowledge.

In this context, the future of Mising arts depends on creating a productive relationship between youth participation, traditional knowledge, technological change, and artistic innovation. The younger generation should be encouraged not simply to imitate inherited forms but to understand their meanings and develop new creative possibilities from them. Such an approach can transform cultural heritage from a symbol of the past into a resource for the future. The continued vitality of Mising performing and visual arts will ultimately depend on whether young people are given the knowledge, opportunities, institutional support, and creative freedom necessary to carry these traditions forward while defining their own contemporary cultural identity.

10. Conclusion

The indigenous performing and visual arts of the Mising community of Assam represent a complex and living cultural system. They include dance, music, folk songs, traditional instruments, handloom weaving, textile motifs, clothing, bamboo and cane crafts, architecture, jewellery, festivals, and community institutions. These artistic forms are deeply connected with the Mising community's agricultural history, riverine environment, social organisation, gender relations, oral traditions, and collective memory. Gumrag dance expresses collective movement and agricultural symbolism. OiNitom songs preserve emotional, social, and ecological experiences.

Traditional instruments create the soundscape of community festivals. Handloom weaving represents both artistic creativity and the specialised knowledge of Mising women. Traditional clothing and ornaments make cultural identity visible, while bamboo crafts and the chang-gar demonstrate environmental adaptation.

The central significance of these traditions lies in their role as systems of cultural knowledge. They teach younger generations about the community's relationship with nature, social values, history, aesthetics, and identity. At the same time, these traditions face significant pressures from modernisation, urbanisation, migration, commercialisation, changing consumption patterns, and digital transformation. Some artistic forms have weakened, while others have been revitalised through festivals, cultural organisations, institutional support, and new media. The appropriate response is therefore neither to reject modernity nor to freeze Mising culture in an imagined traditional past. Instead, cultural preservation should create conditions in which Mising artists, artisans, musicians, dancers, elders, women, and youth can determine how their traditions are transmitted and transformed. The future of Mising cultural heritage depends on community ownership, intergenerational transmission, documentation, economic support for artisans, educational initiatives, responsible digital representation, and respect for indigenous knowledge. Ultimately, the performing and visual arts of the Mising community demonstrate that indigenous art is not simply a collection of old customs. It is a living expression of identity and a continuing system of knowledge through which people understand their history, environment, community, and place in a changing world...

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