

A review of the bihu festival in assam.

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Introduction:

This paper seeks to explore the folk aesthetics of the springtime Bihu festival of Assam. This festival has been outlined and illustrated through the Bihu songs, the dancing's, the gestures as well as the overall ethos of the festival. The Bihus are the national festivals of the Assamese people. The Bihus have been celebrated in Assam since ancient times. In the year there are three festivals in Assam. Each Bihu coincides with a distinctive phase in the farming calendar. The most important and colourful of the three Bihu festival is the spring festival 'Bohag Bihu' or Rangali Bihu celebrated in the middle of April. This is also the beginning of the agricultural season. Bihu is celebrated in all parts of Assam and by people belonging to all castes and religions Bihu is a secular festival which brings in humanity, peace and brotherhood among the people of various tribes, castes and religions of the region. There are three such festivals in Assam. The Bohag Bihu marks the New-Year at the advent of seeding time, the Kati Bihu marks the completion of sowing and transplanting of paddies, and the Magh Bihu marks the end of the harvesting period. Bohag Bihu is also called the Rangali Bihu or the festival of merriment, Magh Bihu is also called Bhogli or the festival of food, Kati Bihu is also called Kongali Bihu or the festival of the poor.

Of the three Bihu festivals which are secular and non-religious, the Bohag Bihu ushers in the period of greatest enjoyment and marks the arrival of spring. The folk songs associated with the Bohag Bihu are called Bihu songs. The Bohag Bihu lasts for several days during which the young people in the village may be seen moving about in groups gaily dressed or forming circles in the midst of which the prettiest girls dance". (The History of Human Marriage by Edward western March) singing songs of love and romance. Such gatherings are called. Mukuli Bihus (Open Bihus). The songs are very popular among all sections of people.

Language:

The language of the Bihu songs has changed from generation to generation. The songs are composed in couplets that rhyme (and are almost always accompanied by a distinctive form of dancing), and each couplet depicts a different emotion. The language is simple and suggestive, and all styles neat and clean. Scholars agree that the songs have no influence of Sanskrit, the ancient language of religious text and learned commentaries, After all, the Bihu songs have exercised great influence on literature.

The three Bihu festivals:

In a year there are three Bihu festivals in Assam, in the month of Bohag (Baisakh, the middle of April), Magh (the middle of January) and Kati (Kartik, the middle of October),

Bohag Bihu (Rongali Bihu):

Bohag Bihu the most popular Bihu celebrates the onset of the Assamese New Year (around April 14-15) and the coming of spring. The Bohag Bihu is also popularly known as Rongali Bihu. This signals the Hindu solar calendar's first day and New Year is celebrated in various regions such as Bengal, Kerala, Manipur, Orisa, Nepal, Tamil Nadu and Punjab and called with different names. It is a time of merriment and feasting and continues in general, for seven days. That is why, the Bohag or Rongali Bihu festival is

called as haat (seven) Bihu. The seven days are known as chot Bihu, Goru Bihu, Manuh Bihu, Senehi Bihu, Mela Bihu and chera Bihu. In this time the farmers prepare the fields for cultivation of paddy and there is a feeling of joy around. The women make Pitha, Larus (Traditional food made of rich and coconut) and 'jalpan' which gives the real essence of the season, The first day of the Bihu is called Goru Bihu or Cow Bihu, where the cows are washed and worshipped, which falls on the last day of the previous year, Usually on April 14. This is followed by manuh (Human) Bihu on April 15 the New Year day, This is the day of getting leaned up, wearing new cloths and celebrating and getting ready for the new year with fresh vigor. The third days Gosai (Gods) Bihu, statues of Gods, worshipped in all households are cleaned and worshiped asking for a smooth new year, The folk songs associated with the Bohag Bihu are called Bihu get or Bihu songs. The form of celebration and rites vary among different demographic group. Bohag Bihu (Rongali Bihu) is also a fertility festival where the Bihu dance with its sensuous movement using the hips, arms, etc, by the young women call out to celebrate their fertility. In this aspect, the Bihu dance can also be called a mating ritual by the young men and women. After all during this time, the God's statues are worshipped and are prayed for a smooth and healthy new year

Magh Bihu (Bbhogali Bihu):

Bhogail Bihu (mid January, also called Magh Bihu) comes from the word 'Bhog' that is eating and enjoyment It is a harvest festival and marks the end of harvesting season, Since the granaries are full, there is a lot of feasting and eating during this period. On the eve of the day called Uruka, the last day of Pausa, mefolk, more particularly young men go to the field, preferably near a river, built a makeshift cottage called 'Bheleghar' with the hay of the harvest field and the bonfire or Meji, the most important thing for the night. During the night, they prepare food and there is community fasting everywhere. There is also exchange of sweets and greetings at this time. The entire night (called Uruka) is spent around a Meji with people singing Bihu songs, beating Dhol a typical kind of drums or playing games. Boys roam about in the dark stealing firewood and vegetables for fun. The next morning they take a both and furr the main Meji. People gather around the Meji and thro pitha (rich cakes and betel nuts to it while burning it at the same time They offer their prayers to the God of fire and mark the end of the harvesting year. Thereafter, they come back home carrying pieces of half burnt fire wood for being thrown among fruit trees for favorable results. All the trees in the compound are tied to bamboo strips or paddy stems. Different type of sports like Buffalo fight, Egg-fight, cock fight, Nightingale-fight etc. are held throughout the day.

There are other conventional festivals observed by various ethnic-cultural groups. Me-dam-me-phi, Ali-aye-ligang, Porag, Gorja, Hapsa Hatarnai, Kherai are few among them. The kock celebrates this Bihu as pushna. All assamese people around the word celebrate this tradition on the month of January per English calendar. The Uruka comes on 13 January followed by the Bihu on 14 January Bhogali name is derived from 'Bhog' which means enjoyment and eating. This is known as the harvesting season and marks its end. The granaries are full this time. All the people feast and eat during this time.

Kati Bihu (Kongali Bihu):

Kongli Bihu (mid-October, also called Kati Bihu) has a different flavor as there is less merriment and the atmosphere has a sense of constrain and solemnity. During this time of the year, the paddy in the fields are in the growing stage and the granaries of the farmers are almost empty. On this day, earthen lamps (Sakj) are lit at the foot of the household Tulsi plant, the granary, the garden (Bari) and the paddy fields. To protect the maturing paddy, cultivators whirl a piece of bamboo and recite rowa-khown chants and spells to ward off pests and the evil eye. During the evening, cattle are fed specially made rice items called pitha. The Bodo people light lamps at the food of the Siju (Euphorbia nerifolia) tree. This Bihu is also associated with the lighting of akaxi ganga or akaxbonti, lamps at the tip of a tall bamboo pole, to show the souls of the dead the way to heaven, a practice that is common to many communities in India, as well as Asia and Europe.

The Bihu Culture:

Bihu is the most important non-religious festival of the Assamese people. We know the Bihu is mainly a good culture of the masses. It was looked down upon and regarded as a culture of common masses indulged in eernal activities. It was deemed as perverted culture. But now this attitude has changed and people of all categories accept it as a universal culture in respect of Assam.

We know that society change. The socio-economic necessities compel a society to change itself. Our Assamese society has also been changing. So we cannot expect a Bihu of the by gone days to prevail at present. No culture can be preserved in its original form. It is bound to change. So we should not repent that our Bihu has changed largely. t is surviving because it is changing. Had it not changed it would have not survived. We may apprehend that if the Bihu will not be there the identity of the Assamese as a nation will be lost, because Bihu is the only part on which Assamese society is differentiated from others. After all the Assamese as a nation is different from other nations or communities not so much as due to Sakardeva's culture as due to Bihu. Assamese culture as introduced by sri Sankardeva is a piece of all India culture with an Assamese tinge

Significance of Bihu:

Assam is a fertile land surrounded by Blue Mountains and replenished by the mighty Brahmaputra river. The occupation of the people here is agriculture and the entire society is agrarian in nature. Bihu is basically a celebration of the change of the seasons. Each of the three Bihu celebrations marks an important phase in the farming calendar of Assamese people .

Bihu -How did the name of the Festival come up?

The word Bihu is originall derived from the word known as "bihu" which means that people ask for prosperity from the Gods during important junctures of the harvesting season. Later on, the name some how got distorted and the festival came to be known as Bihu. According to another source, it is commonly believed that the festival received its name from two different words namely 'bi' which means to ask and "hu" which means to give. Both these words combined to form the name Bihu.

Rongali Bihu Traditions and Cultures:

The most important and colorful of the "Bohag Bihu' or Rongali Bihu celebrated in the middle of April. This is also the beginning of the agricultural season. During the Bihu period Assamese people were new and colorful cloths, people visit their neighbors, friends and relatives and distribute sweet as they greet each other a happy Bihu, Many people also organize grand feasts in the house to celebrate the occasion. The women make pitha, larus (traditional food made rice and coconut) and Jolpan which gives the real essence of the season.

Instruments used in Bihu:

The main Bihu festival i grandly celebrated among the Assamese people around mid-April. This festival is celebrated in the spring season with an intention to spread happiness all round. This also marks the arrival of seeding season.

Bihu denotes thre different festivals celebrated in Assam. Even though this festival has ancient significance and practices, it has eventually become a very popular urban festival in recent decades. The people usedifferent instrument during the Bihu festival called as dol (drum),toka, Xutuli,tal, gogona, pepa, (made with buffalo horns) and baanhi (also called as a flute).

At the current time, Mukoli Bihus are not common any more. In towns and cities, there are well organized Bihu fairs where professional or amateur troupes perform Bihu songs on stage with accompanying dancing. Bihu kunwori (The princess of the Bihu) contests are held widely. In these contests, young women compete in dancing to the tune of Bihu songs. The best dancer is given the title of Bihu Kunwori. Now-a-days popular Bihu songs are available in audio cassettes. Every year, new cassettes are published with old and new Bihu songs.

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