
The Spring Festivals of Assam: A Brief Discussion

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ABSTRACT

Every society in the world celebrates many traditional festivals. Festivals are an essential part of culture. In ancient times, most people were agriculturalists and depended greatly on nature for agricultural production. Therefore, they celebrated different festivals to appease the forces of nature such as the sun, moon, rain, and other natural elements. The word 'Utsav' signifies a combination of joy, reverence, and collective enthusiasm. Similar to other parts of India, the people of Assam and the North-East region celebrate various life-cycle and seasonal festivals throughout the year.

Introduction:-

Assam is a green and agriculturally rich land where people of different ethnic communities migrated and settled at different times in history. These diverse groups have contributed their customs, traditions, and cultural practices, creating the rich and colourful culture of Assam. The three months of Fagun (Phalgun), Chot (Chaitra), and Bohag (Vaishakh) are generally regarded as the spring season in Assam. The festivals celebrated during this period are commonly known as Basantotsav (Spring Festivals). These festivals are closely connected with agricultural activities, and therefore they are often considered agricultural festivals.

Objective of the study:-

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the spring festivals celebrated by different ethnic communities of Assam, particularly among the Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Mising, Tiwa, and other groups.

**Research Methodology:-**

This study is based on a descriptive method using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through observation and interaction with different ethnic communities of Assam, while secondary data were collected from books, journals, and related literature.

Discussion:-

Among all the spring festivals of Assam, Bohag Bihu (Rangali Bihu) is the most prominent and widely celebrated. It is observed with great enthusiasm by both tribal and non-tribal communities across the state. In Upper Assam, the festival is popularly known as “Bihu,” while in Lower Assam it is also referred to as “Domahi.” The festival marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year and the start of the agricultural season. People celebrate it with traditional dances, songs, feasting, and community gatherings, expressing joy and hope for prosperity in the coming year.

The culture of greater Assam is rich and diverse, shaped by the traditions of various ethnic communities. During festivals, different customs and rituals are performed according to traditional social and religious beliefs. Many of these festivals are closely connected with agriculture and nature. There are different forms of this festival. On the morning of Chaitra Sankranti, cattle are taken to rivers, streams, or ponds and bathed using plants such as The Bodos, the largest tribal community in Assam, belong to the Tibeto–Burman linguistic group and are generally considered to be of Mongoloid origin. The Bodos are mainly settled in districts such as Kokrajhar, Darang, Goalpara, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Kamrup, and Nagaon. The Bodos celebrate the spring festival “Bwisagu” (often pronounced Baichagu) for about seven days, beginning from the Sankranti of the month of Chaitra. beans, garlic, eggplant, and other herbs. During the bathing of cattle, traditional songs are sung. After the ritual bath, people exchange gifts such as carrots and eggplants, believing that it will help their cattle become strong and productive. In the evening, the cattle are tied with new ropes in a clean cowshed. On the day of Bwisagu, the festival begins with the melodious sound of the Sifung (flute). According to Bodo belief, the sound of the instrument can drive away evil influences. People clean their houses, wash their feet, and worship Bathou Bwrai and Goddess Kamakhya at the Bathou altar. Offerings such as rice beer, meat, betel nut, and coconut are made to honour the ancestors. During Manuh Bihu, younger people show respect to their elders, and elders bless the younger members of the family. People wear new gamosas and traditional dresses such as dokhna, and celebrate with music and dance accompanied by instruments like kham (drum), sifung (flute), khamkhram, and gagana. It is believed that when young girls dance during the Bwisagu festival, the earth



becomes green and fertile. Therefore, dancing is an essential part of the celebration, along with the sharing of *jou* (rice beer) and various traditional foods.

The Mising community is another major ethnic group belonging to the Mongoloid origin. Historically, they migrated from the hills of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and later settled along the riverbanks of the plains of Assam. Today, the Misings are mainly found along the rivers in districts such as Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia.

During the night, young men and women perform traditional dances. From the first day of the festival until the appearance of the new moon, certain traditional beliefs are followed, such as not killing animals, not cutting bamboo or wood, and not digging the earth. When Bohag Bihu arrives, the Misings celebrate it with great enthusiasm. They visit houses to seek blessings from elders and celebrate by sharing *Apong* and traditional food. The beautiful folk songs known as “*Ainitam*” are sung during the festival. People wear their traditional costumes and dance to Their important agricultural festival is “*Ali-Aye-Ligang*,” which is celebrated with the arrival of spring. The festival is usually observed on the first Wednesday of the month of *Fagun* (*Phalgun*). On the first day, farmers ceremonially sow seeds in their fields.

The Dimasa-Kachari people living in the Dima Hasao district (formerly North Cachar Hills) and nearby regions are also culturally rich. Their main spring festival is “*Bushu*” (*Bishu*), which is celebrated with great joy during the arrival of spring. The festival generally lasts three, five, or seven days. One special feature of this festival is that the days of celebration are usually observed in pairs. Like many other spring festivals of Assam, this festival is closely related to agriculture. During the festival, young men and women take major responsibility for organising the celebrations. They collect rice and other food items from each household to prepare the community feast and participate actively in traditional music and dance.

On the first day of the festival, *Subchani Puja* is performed in every household. During this ritual, the worshippers visit the temple and offer sacrifices such as goats, ducks, and chickens. Like many other ethnic communities of Assam, the *Tiwas* ethnic group also have the tradition of singing *Huchori* songs during Bohag Bihu. Along with the songs, various traditional dances are performed. During the festival, the *Tiwas* worship sixty-four deities and pray for the welfare and prosperity of the people.

The Bihu festival concludes on the evening of *Uruga* with a collective religious service conducted by *gurus* and devotees in the *Satra*. However, unlike many other communities, they do not perform *Huchori* every year. Another unique feature of Moran Bihu is the “*Barmaga*” ceremony, which is observed during



Bohag Bihu. The person who performs this ritual must continue the practice of seeking blessings for three consecutive years.

The Tai Ahoms, an important community of Mongoloid origin, migrated to Assam by crossing the mountains under the leadership of Sukaphaa (Chukapha). Today, they are widely spread throughout the state. The Tai Ahoms celebrate Rangali Bihu mainly in two forms: Goru Bihu and Manuh Bihu. On the day of Chaitra Sankranti, cattle are taken to rivers, streams, or ponds and bathed with different herbs and vegetables such as eggplant, turmeric, and other plants believed to keep them healthy. In the evening, the cattle are tied in the courtyard and offered bananas, jackfruit, and other foods. There is also a tradition of cooking and eating a large variety of herbs and vegetables during the festival night.

From the second day of Bihu, people begin singing Huchori songs. At the end of the festival, a community Bihu celebration is organised in the village, accompanied by feasts and gatherings. The people celebrate the occasion with great joy.

The tea-tribe communities of Assam, who mainly live in tea garden areas, are also closely connected with agricultural life. They celebrate various festivals during the spring season that are closely associated with nature, agriculture, and community life. Although the tea-tribe communities of Assam celebrate the Bihu festival, their important spring festival is known as “Charul.” This festival is observed on the fifth, seventh, or ninth day of the month of Chaitra. A distinctive feature of this festival is the preparation of a special dish made from nine kinds of spring vegetables. It is traditionally believed that eating this dish helps to prevent or cure various diseases. The first day of the festival is celebrated as “Na-Khwa,” while the second day is known as “Phul Puja.” On the day of Phul Puja, people decorate the entrances of their houses by hanging garlands of flowers and offer prayers to Goddess Lakshmi. The festival is celebrated with songs and dances, reflecting joy and community spirit. This festival is celebrated by communities such as the Oraon, Kharia, Chaotal, and Munda, as well as by many other tea-tribe communities of Assam.

Conclusion:-

The culture of Assam has developed through the cultural integration of numerous ethnic communities. Since Assam is primarily an agricultural state, most of the festivals celebrated by its various ethnic groups are closely related to agricultural activities and nature. Therefore, the spring festivals celebrated by different tribes of Assam are deeply connected with cattle, fields, crops, rivers, and other elements of



rural life. Although the influence of modernity has brought some changes to the folk culture of different communities, the traditional charm and significance of these festivals still remain strong.

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