Chapter III

FESTIVALS: ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND OF
BIHU FESTIVAL

1. Significance of Festivals:

Festivals are the recurring moments of special significance celebrated with festivities and rejoicings by the members of any society\(^1\). These celebrations involve symbolic interactions displayed by the participants. Thus festivals are a set of external expressions of traditional behaviour of the members of a society; such behaviours symbolize the favourable circumstances desired by the participants.\(^2\)

The origin of festivals is traceable to the beliefs and magico-rituals associated with the religion of the primitive societies. Since life in primitive societies was dependent on nature’s favour, magico-rituals were observed in festivals in order to satisfy the deities of nature\(^3\). Seasons and religions followed by the people determined the nature of festivals\(^4\). In modern times, however, the scope of festival has been extended as compared to that in ancient time. In a changing scenario, so many social

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\(^2\) Ibid, p. 168.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 159.
\(^4\) P. Goswami, *Festivals of Assam*, p.2.
celebrations have now come within the purview of festival although festival behaviour is not seen in most of these celebrations\(^5\).

Festivals, irrespective of their antiquity, create occasions for universal entertainments and thereby promote social integrity and unity among various sections of society\(^6\). Depending on their nature, festivals may be seasonal, Christian calendaric and limited participation festivals\(^7\). However, ceremonies connected with life cycle are also called festivals. Of these, the seasonal festivals connected with agricultural cycle of the year have been getting greater importance in respective societies all over the world. Indigenous people involve themselves in these festivals; the underlying religious myths and symbolic meanings having forgotten, the seasonal festivals have now acquired a secular trend\(^8\). Noticeably, people now observe these festivals because of the tradition and habit and not because of belief\(^9\).

2. The Place of Bihu as Seasonal Festival:

The infinite importance of the Bihu festival in the social life of Assam is evident from the people’s enthusiastic involvement in it. Bihu is a seasonal festival and its celebration is connected with the agricultural cycle of the peasantry of Assam. The three festivals of the agricultural cycle, e.g., Bohag bihu or Rongali bihu, Kati bihu or Kongali bihu and

\(^5\) N.C. Sarma, Utsavanusthan Aru Bharatar Uttar-Purbanchalar Basanta Utsav in Basania Utsav


\(^7\) Ibid, pp.161-166

\(^8\) N.C. Sarma, Op-cit. p.1

\(^9\) P. Goswami, Op-cit,p.2
Magh bihu or Bhogali bihu comprise the Bihu festival. The springtime Bohag bihu is celebrated in mid April after the seeds of Ahu paddy are sown and before the seedlings of Sali paddy are transplanted; the autumnal Kati bihu is celebrated in mid October when the Sali paddy plants grow luxuriantly in the paddy fields and the Magh bihu, a post harvest festival, is celebrated in mid January, after the harvest is gathered. The identity of the people of Assam is inter-woven with the paraphernalia of various rites and rituals observed in these festivals. Since agricultural setting determines the social temper of the people of Assam, the Bihu festivals observed in three different seasons of the agricultural cycle are looked forward to and enjoyed widely in Assamese society.

3. Background of the Bihu Festivals:

It is an accomplished fact that good harvest in primitive agrarian societies depended on nature’s approval. It was, therefore, natural that the primitive agricultural people had to satisfy nature for good harvest. Hence, the relation between nature and agriculture was close-knit. Relics of early Bihu festival point to the fact that simple beliefs associated with the desire for high agricultural produce of the people of ancient Assam constituted the very background for a festival like the Bihu.

We have reasons to believe that all efforts and thinkings of the primitive people were directed towards having sufficient food for

12. A. C. Sarma, *Bihur Utpatti Aru Kramuvikash in Bihur Rup Ras Tarva*, p.61
sustenance of life. The pressure of severe demand for production of food ultimately gave rise to some ritual activities backed by folksy beliefs.\textsuperscript{13} These ritual activities were mostly some dramatic designs enacted with the belief to increase the fertility of land in order to have sufficient food production for livelihood. Experience inspired the people to time these activities in spring season when nature became instinctive for creativity. Enactments of the ritualistic activities naturally gave outlet to hopes and aspirations, happiness and merriments of the primitive agricultural people and \textit{Bihu} had evolved on these ritual activities.\textsuperscript{14}

4. Origin of the Bihu Festivals:

We have already found that pre-historic Assam had been inhabited by people of diverse races; this phenomenon has rendered the origin of \textit{Bihu} mysterious.\textsuperscript{15} However, the subject can be dealt with with the help of the prevailing myths and legends on the origin of \textit{Bihu} and precisely with the help of the available pre-historical and historical sources.

4.1. Myths and Legends on the Origin of Bihu:

The most popular Assamese myth associated with \textit{Bihu} is the myth of \textit{Bordoisila} presumed to be a daughter of Assam who has been married to a bridegroom of some distant land.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Bordoisila} visits her mother's home once a year at the advent of springtime \textit{Bihu} and she is regarded as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} D. Hazarika, 'Gach Talar Bihu', in \textit{Paseka}, ed. A.C. Bhuyan April 1993, p.6
\item \textsuperscript{14} L. Gogol, \textit{Bihu Eli Samiksha}, p. 39
\item \textsuperscript{15} H. Barua, \textit{Red River and the Blue Hill}, p.176
\item \textsuperscript{16} M. C. Bora, 'Rongali Bihu' in \textit{Uchavar Rongsara}, ed. A.C. Hazarika, p.15
\end{itemize}
a female spirit. The people of Assam experience two strong gales caused by Bordoisila just before and after springtime Bihu. The preceding gale of Bihu reminds the people of Assam of the visit of Bordoisila heralding Bihu and the after gale which is often devastating reminds of her return. Bordoisila as a symbol of strong gale and herald of springtime Bihu is also traceable to ‘Boro’ maiden Bar-Doi-Sikhla, a deity of wind and water.

The role of Bordoisila along with her younger sister Sorudoi also feature in another myth associated with the origin of Bihu and is prevailing among some people of Mongoloid origin. These people believe that Brahma was the ultimate creator of this earth. Kolimoti, the daughter of Brahma, along with her two younger sisters Seuti and Malati had a thirst for sucking human blood and requested Siva for his command. Siva refused to accord consent to such a destructive plan and on the contrary, ordered them to move from east to a place of west where there was no human being. Kolimoti with her sisters voyaged downstream in a boat and reached Garuchar Rajya situated at the foot of a hill. This was the dwelling place of various deities. In their voyage along the downstream, Kolimoti and her sisters went on performing songs and dances lasciviously exhibiting nacked bodies. The deities on both sides of the river enjoyed the scene and laughed boisterously. Other female deities joined the team of Kolimoti with same style of merriments after the team had arrived at the Garuchar Rajya. Consequent upon the merriment of songs and dances, spring came into the natural surrounding of the place.

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17. B. Rajkhowa, *Assamese Demonology*, pp.9-10
18. J. Buragohain, 'Doyangar Nilazi Bihu' in *Bihu Akou Ahil*, p. 2
and created the atmosphere for Bihu. Dayang Deou or Dhankolia who happened to be present at the merriment was informed that the Bihu would be an agricultural festival and would be stretched among the peasants; the agricultural produce would be consumed by both deities and human beings. Garuchar Rajya at the foot of Satai Parbat is believed to be the present Kaliabor of middle Assam where Bihu songs and dances were practised at the guidance of Kolimoti\textsuperscript{19}.

Musical instruments like dhol, pepa, toka, and gagana were made available by Dhankolia and the Bihu cheers of Kolimoti reached the climax. An old woman, Kuji by name, met Bordoi and Sarudoi on her way to the Bihu ground; at the request of Kuji, Bordoi and Sarudoi forecast the advent of Bihu among human beings creating strong gales. The mission of Kolimoti succeeded and the places inhabited by human beings became lively with the magical touch of spring. Peasants were gripped with Bihu fever and indulged in singing and dancing. After they had become weary, the peasants bade farewell to Bihu with the prayer for recurring every year at the same time. The Bihu merriments left inspirations for the peasants to engage in agricultural activities\textsuperscript{20}.

Some myths and legends are found to be associated with some particular features of the Bihu festival. The same myth is also found in varied forms among different tribes. The old Hindu myth of Brahma or Prajapati and his incestuous relationship with his own daughter is elaborately found among the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur which

\textsuperscript{19} H. Buragohain, \textit{op.cit,} p.4

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, pp 1-7
explains the origin of the institution of Huchari. God Brahma set his eyes on his beautiful daughter for incest. Dharma, the king of death, while weighed his scale of justice found the girl guilty and drove her out of heaven. She came down to earth and in spring when there was an excitement of new life all over, the girl kept herself away in misery and loneliness. Having seen this, the earthly gods went to Vishnu and spoke about the girl. Vishnu advised them to go to Bathou or Mahadeva who, in turn, imparted them lessons on Huchari dance and music. The gods then went to each divine household and collected various articles performing songs and dances. They rehabilitated Brahma's daughter with the articles so collected; consequently, the girl regained her youthfulness and sense of joy. She started singing and dancing accompanied by the gods; her bewitching performance softened the heart of king Dharma who called back the girl to her divine home. Although the earth became an ivory tower for the girl, the dance and music she performed, remained here which the Kacharis perform in every spring. The dance and music of the Kacharis are traceable to Bathou or Mahadeva in this myth. However, some other tribes of Assam trace their music and dance to a divine origin. For the non-tribal Hindus, dance is traceable to Mahadeva and music to Brahma. A Bihu song goes on saying thus: God gave the seedlings of Nam and Brahma created the Nam.

According to a Hindu myth, Adi Niranjan created Prakriti from his left side and Prakriti gave birth to an egg from which Brahma was born.

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21. P. Goswami, Essays on the Folklore and Culture of N.E. India, pp.3-4
22. Ibid., p.3
23. L. Gogoi, Bihu Git Aru Bona Ghosa, p.3
The Earth was born from the pores of Brahma's hair. After the Satya, Treta and Dwapara yuga were over, the Kali yuga appeared and in this Kali yuga, musical instruments of heaven came down to the earth. Dhol was created by Mahadeva of Kailasha. The hollow wooden body of dhol is preferably made from the trunk of cham tree. Krishna gave the seed of cham tree to Narada who sowed it in the earth. The tree grew up and its trunk became Mahadharma. Biswakarma cut down the tree and carpenter Sukmal gave the shape of the dhol. This myth further gives details as to the procurement of the skin of a particular cow, its process of drying and attaching to the dhol and so on.

Some people of Mongoloid origin believe the bor gac and ahot gac to be the sacred trees and hold auspicious and religious rites in the shadows of these trees. The place-name Bihubor is traceable to the planting of bor gac for the purpose of starting Bihu sport. A beautiful legend goes thus: “in order to set up the altar of Bihu, seedling was transplanted in Pulibor, rejoicings were done in Dhopabor and Bihu was started in Bihubor.”

Another legend associated with Bihu is found in the form of a song and is being sung in Huchari carol singing. This legend tells of the direction from which Bihu appeared in Assam. The English version of the legend in the form of a Bihu song is:

25. H. Buragohain, Op-cit., p. 9
From which direction
Slowly comes the Bihu?
East or west, north or south
From which direction comes the Bihu?
A pair of Myantoras was in Myandesh
And was lying sick,
After having heard the arrival of Bihu,
Came rushing, holding waist clothes26.

These myths and legends are popular folk tales orally transmitted from one generation to another and admittedly their character is imaginary and unrealistic. Although they are important organs of the socio-cultural heritage of the concerned society, they hardly contain any genuine information of truth27. The myths and legends that explain the origin of Bihu are also no exception. The origin of various features of Bihu found in these myths and legends are mostly based on imaginary tales rather than on historical grounds. However, a ray of historical truth is seen in the mention of Myandesh (now Myanmar) in the legend of Myantora since institution akin to Huchari singing is noticed among the shans of North Myanmar28. There is, therefore, every reason to believe that the Ahoms who trace their lineage to Tai-shans, introduced and popularised the present form of Huchari institution in Assam29. In respect of the other placenames found in these myths and legends, it is logical to believe that these placenames have been associated with the origin of Bihu in course of their transition through the ages.

26. Thirtha Phukan, ‘Bihur Udbhawak Kon’ in Bihur Rup Ras Aru Taiva, p.40
27. R.N. Sharma, Social and Cultural Anthropology, pp.256-259
Nevertheless, the emotions, feelings and assumptions of the people at folk level of the Assamese society are guided by these prevailing myths and legends which incited the people to adhere to the age-old beliefs; so, their importance at folk level is taken for granted.

4.1I. Prehistorical and Historical Account On the Origin of Bihu:

We have already come across that nature, agriculture and simple beliefs of the primitive cultivators constituted the background for Bihu festival. Further, close observations of various rites and rituals confirm that Bihu has been an agricultural festival since its inception in pre-historical time.

The fact therefore remains that the antiquity of Bihu is as old as the tradition of agriculture. Whoever adopted the customs of various rituals which subsequently comprised the Bihu festival, must be the race of people who had introduced cultivation and naturally hoped for high agricultural yield for sustenance of life. Hope for and possession of abundant agricultural produce naturally tended these people to indulge in some activities of merriments.

30. L. Gogoi, op-cit, p 41
Bihu is a synthesis of varied cultural elements. It is therefore evident that customs and traditions associated with the present day Bihu festival were not adopted by a single race of people; rather, these evolved on the cultural traits of diverse races who had migrated to this land.

From the aforesaid discussion, the origin of Bihu festival may be shown by leaning back on the pre-historical and historical realities of Assam. The primitive settlers belonging to the Austro-Asiatic stock comprised the first race of people to begin with cultivation of paddy in the Brahmaputra Valley of ancient Assam. These people were initially savage hunters and subsequently acquired the knowledge of cultivation by crude methods. It has already been shown that Bihu was an agricultural festival and was entirely related with the cultivation of paddy. The race of Austro-Asiatic stock migrated to Assam from the South-east and Pacific area. South-east Asia was the homeland of paddy cultivated as a major food crop. The Austric people had transplanted the seeds of agro-based rural civilization in Assam by setting up villages and introducing cultivation of paddy in high lands. The culture cherished by the Austric people in ancient Assam has been identified as neolithic culture. The religion of the Austric people and the connected customs and traditions had evolved on their biological beliefs and ancestral

31. P. Goswami, B.A B S, pp.2-3
34. P.C. Choudhury, 'H C P A' p.82
35. R.M. Nath, op. cit, p.3
worship. The concepts of mother-worship and fertility-cult are believed by some scholars to have been conceived by the ancient Austric people.38

- The Austric people considered women to be best suited for cultivation and therefore left the vocation of cultivation to the womenfolk while the males went on hunting wild animals. The fact that women produce children out of their wombs and vegetation also grows out of the earth, induced them to believe that the fertility of the earth was same as that of women.39 Guided by such belief, the Austric people held the women in high esteem in society. They believed that the ‘Mother-Earth’ also menstruates like the women and gets ready to conceive i.e., becomes fertile to produce crops abundantly.40 On the basis of such beliefs, these primitive cultivators associated women and sex rites with agriculture. Enactment of the sex rites in agriculture by the Austric people was the foundation of the primitive agro-based culture of Assam on which the culture now cherished as ‘Bihu’ had evolved.41 The Austric people, who had shifted to cultivation from savage hunting, were full of joy and gaiety after having abundant agricultural produce for livelihood; this is admittedly a human nature. So, they celebrated the moments with merriments before taking to cultivation and after having the yields therefrom. Since fulfilment of their hopes and aspirations was dependent on nature’s approval, they observed these festivities in keeping with seasonal changes in the agricultural cycle of the year.42 As in to-day,

39. R.M. Nath, Op-cit., p.3
40. S. Biswas, Harvest Festival and the Bihu Songs of Assam, (abbr H F B S A), p 61
41. L. Gogoi, Op-cit., p. 38
42. N. Borpujari, ‘Biwartanar Batai Bihu’ in Bihu Sanskritir Rup Rekha, ed. J. Gandhiya, p. 55
shower was a pre-requisite to render the soil ready for cultivation and to hasten the growth of paddy; the spring was followed by the monsoon which caused heavy shower\textsuperscript{43}. So, the primitive Austric cultivators purposely timed the pre-harvesting festivities in spring. They could also know the effect of spring on creatures from the behaviour of birds and animals during the spring season\textsuperscript{44}. Accordingly, magic was cast and projected and ceremonial techniques were devised to have the favour of ultimate \textit{Nature-spirit}. The change of season and shower are only physical phenomena of nature dependent on the position of the Sun in the sky\textsuperscript{45}. We have therefore reasons to believe that the spring time festivals of the ancient Austric cultivators based on the cult of fertility and sex rites, had some bearings on the \textit{Sun-cult} or \textit{Solar-cult}. They timed the post-harvest festival in winter solstice after the harvest was gathered. This was the season for shivering in severe cold. So, holding of big fire in order to get rid of cold and holding of feasts to celebrate the occasion of having abundant foodstuff were the main features of the post-harvesting festivities\textsuperscript{46}. The primitive fire projected for protection from severe cold, subsequently got associated with \textit{fire-cult}.

Thus the substrata of the pious beliefs, cult of fertility and sex rites the original meanings of which have since been divested but still associated with present day \textit{Bihu}, are traceable to the culture cherished by the ancient Austric people. Precisely therefore, the present day \textit{Bihu} festivals of Assam owe their origin to the harvest festivals of the Austric

\textsuperscript{43} S. Biswas, \textit{Op-cit}, p.61
\textsuperscript{44} A.C. Sarma\textit{Bihur Upatiti Aru Kramavikash'} in \textit{Bihur Rup Ras Aru Tatva}, abbr \textit{BR.RR A.T})
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, S.Biswas, p.61
\textsuperscript{46} L. Gogoi, \textit{Op-cit}, p.42
people observed long before the dawn of history. The tradition of
cultivation of paddy in high lands, areca-nuts and betel-vines and the
prevailing social customs associated therewith are contributions of the
Austric people to the Assamese culture. The Austric belief in egg as the
symbol of fertility, percolated through the Assamese culture and is being
testified in egg-breaking contest current in Bihu festivals. The
consumption of fermented rice-beer in Bihu, spining of cotton and
weaving of clothes therefrom were the customs practised by the ancient
Austric people. With these contributions, the Austric people had laid the
foundation of an agro-based culture wherein bred the offspring of Bihu.

However, Bihu has been a festival of acculturation as evident from
the Aryan and non-Aryan cultural traits absorbed by the festival. We
are, therefore, content to hold that the present status of the ritual
dominated Bihu festival is the outcome of a process of evolution made
possible by the cultural contributions of diverse races who migrated to
this land after the Austric people. According to the chronicle of
migration, the Austric people were followed by the people of Mongoloid
stock who migrated to Assam about 3000-2000 B.C. They formed the
bulk of tribal population in Assam and streamlined the culture, now
known as Bihu, already introduced by the Austric people. The Mongoloid
people tremendously contributed to the existing agro-based culture
introducing paddy cultivation in low land. However, some scholars like

47. N.Borpujari, Op-cit, p.55
48. L. Gogoi, Op-cit., pp.29-32
50. L.Gogoi, Ibid., pp.40-41
51. A.C.Sarma, Op-cit .p.62
B. Guha are of the view that the Alpine people migrated to Assam after the Austric people had settled down. They were the first flow of Aryans who came prior to the people of Mongoloid stock and Vedic Aryans. The Alpines were affectionate towards music. The tradition of *Kati Bihu*, a one day affair, was the creation of the Alpines. The infiltration of the Vedic Aryans into Assam is traceable to 1750-1500 B.C. The major rituals particularly associated with the post-harvest *Bihu* festival were added with religious flavour by the Vedic Aryans. But the most conspicuous contribution to *Bihu* was made by the Ahoms, the *Tai-Shan* branch of the Mongoloid stock of people, who migrated to Assam in medieval period.

It is therefore an established fact that a synthesis of distinct cultural elements made possible by the identical agro-based life styles of various races of people, gave a peculiar form to the *Bihu* festival of Assam. But the weight of pre-historical and historical evidences convince that the seeds of *Bihu* in some form or other, had been sown by the Austric people and paved the way for a synthesis in the subsequent ages of Assam's dynamic history and pre-history.

### 5. The Term *Bihu*: Its Origin and Antiquity:

The origin of the term *Bihu* is obscure. The coinage of the term *Bihu* to name the hoary festival is undoubtedly a development of
medieval Assam since the term is not found to have been mentioned in ancient literatures, epigraphs and ancient history of the land. The earliest mention of the term is found only in late medieval history of Assam\textsuperscript{56}. Dearth of materials has, therefore, rendered the issue difficult to treat in its right perspective. So, our endeavour here will be limited to a logical analysis as to the source of derivation of the term ‘Bihu’ in the light of the socio-cultural and philological aspects of the races who had culturally contributed to the evolution of the festival.

5.1: Opinions of different Schools of Thought:

Although the three Bihus constitute a sort of pattern, a ritual and a festival complex covering the annual life cycle of the peasantry, the springtime Bohag bihu causes the largest amount of stir in the mental and social life of the people of Assam\textsuperscript{57}. We have also arrived at a definite conclusion that Bihu originated in the form of springtime ritual. The myths and legends and opinions found on the origin of Bihu refer to the springtime only. The fact therefore remains that the term Bihu is entangled with spring season.

Regarding the origin of the term Bihu, some scholars try to astronomically associate Bihu with Vernal Equinox, i.e., Sanskrit Visuvan Samkranti\textsuperscript{58}. Visuvan is an important day for performing rites and rituals meant for controlling the movement of the Sun in order to augment

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} P. Goswami, B.B.A.B S., pp. 20-23
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p.5
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.3
\end{itemize}
agricultural production. The day and night are of equal duration on this
day\(^5^9\). The very day of *Visuvan Samkranti* falls during the spring season
which the Assamese *Bohag bihu* or *Rongali bihu* coincides with. And on
this strength, this school of thought holds the term *Bihu* to have been
derived from *Visuvan* i.e., *Visuvan >visu>Bihu*.

Again some scholars think that the term *Bihu* has some non-Aryan
affinities. Three views on non-Aryan sources of the term are found to be
popular. Firstly, the name *Bihu* has been derived from *Baisagu* of the
Boros, i.e., *Baisagu>Baihagu>Bihu*. Secondly, the term *Bihu* is a corrupt
form of the Boro term *Bi-hou* which means *to beg and to give* \(^6^0\). Thirdly,
the term *Bihu* has come from *Poin-hu*, a name given by the Tai-Ahoms to
denote *cow-worship*. The Tai-Ahom immigrants, after they had reached
Soumara, saw the earlier settlers in festivities of cow-worship spraying
fresh water. This ritual looked similar to the ancestral *Poin-Cham-Nyam*
ritual of the Tai-Ahoms. So, they called the existing festival of this land
*Poin-hu*. The term *Bihu* is held by some exponents to be a corruption of
the Tai-Ahom term *Poin-hu*\(^6^1\).

5.11. Evaluation of the opinions on the term ‘Bihu’:

It is indeed evidential that although springtime *Bohag bihu*,
autumnal *Kati bihu* and *Magh bihu* of winter-solstice constitute the *Bihu*
festival complex, the origin of the festival is associated with the
springtime *Bihu*. The coincidence of springtime with *‘Visuvan Samkranti’*

\(^6^0\). N.P.Bordoloi, *Asamar Lokasamskriti*, p.150
\(^6^1\). J.Gandhiya, ‘Jatiya Utsav Bihu’ in *Samskriti Sourav*, ed. A.C.Sarma, p.16
(Vernal Equinox) was possibly unknown to the primitive agrarian society; it was likely that experience helped them to rightly assess the influences on nature and creatures brought about by the spring time. The observance of the Bihu festival was, therefore, not related to a prefixed day. It is still noticed that a few tribes of Mongoloid origin observe the springtime Bihu on some convenient day during the month of Bohag and not on the day of Visuvan Samkranti. The Vedic Aryans came to Assam after the people of Mongoloid origin had given a streamlined form to the Bihu festivities founded by the Austric people. Sex rites associated with fertility cult were the essence of such festivities. Evidently, the Vedic Aryans kept themselves away from sex rites enacted through the medium of amorous songs and dances. On the other hand, the term Visuvan is born of Aryan Sanskrit language and is associated with classical culture. The association of the Sanskrit term Visuvan with a primitive culture having sex rites as an indispensable feature, has therefore little evidence to believe in.

The term Bihu did not find mention in literatures and epigraphs of early Assam. The term Visu derived from Visuvan is found in medieval Assamese literature to indicate the significance of the particular day of Visuvan Samkranti and not the Bihu festival as such. Had the term been derived from Visuvan, the festival would have found mention in literatures of early Assam. Admittedly, the Aryan culture had spread in some other parts of India prior to Assam and so many festivals related to

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63. A. C. Sarma, 'Bihur Utpatti Aru Kramavikash' in Bihur Rup Ras Aru Tatva, ed. A. C. Sarma, p. 60
64. P. Goswami, B.B.A.S. p. 3
Visuvan are current among the Aryans and Aryanised people there. But no festival observed in these places is called Bihu\textsuperscript{65}. The terms Biyu, Bishoo, Bisu sikar etc are associated with some festivals of hoary ancestry prevalent among the tribes in these parts of India. Findings of informal investigation convince that the sources of these identical terms are traceable to the vocabularies of the respective tribes who share a common origin. These terms might have been associated with Visuvan subsequently in order to give them a sanskritized meaning. In Assam also the Deoris, who belong to the Mongoloid stock of people, call their Bohag bihu as Bisu. But the term Bisu prevalent among the Deories is not related to Visuvan in any way. On the contrary, Bisu is originally a Deori term which means excessive joy.

The prefix Bi and suffix hu of the term Bihu cannot be believed as corruptions of Vi and Su of the Sanskrit term Visu since the terms Bi and hu signifying some rituals of Bihu are found in local vocabularies particularly of the tribes belonging to the Indo-Chinese stock widely distributed all over Assam. Evidently for strong tribal pull, Assam had to concede a lot to the tribes in matters of culture\textsuperscript{66}. In Lower Assam region, where inhabitants are mostly Aryans, the Bihu festivals were known as Domahi till the concluding decades of the twentieth century when Domahi came to be replaced with Bihu. But in Upper Assam region where inhabitants are mostly non-Aryans, these festivals have been known as Bihu. The non-existence of the term Bihu in Aryan inhabited areas and prevalence of the term in non-Aryan inhabited areas do not

\textsuperscript{65} N.P. Bordoloi, Op-cit., p. 150
\textsuperscript{66} P. Goswami, Op-cit., pp.2-3
indicate the Sanskrit *Visuvan* to be the source of derivation of the term *Bihu*.

Astronomically, "the equinoxes occur as a result of the precession of the earth’s axis; the intersections of the celestial equator and ecliptic define equinoxes"\(^\text{67}\). We find two equinoxes during a calendric year; one is Vernal or Spring equinox (*Maha Visuv*) and the other is Autumnal equinox (*Visupad*)\(^\text{68}\). The *Bohag bihu* is observed in Spring equinox and the *Kati bihu* is observed in Autumnal equinox. But the *Magh bihu*, enriched with Aryanised rituals, is observed in Winter solstice which has no relation with *Visuvan*\(^\text{69}\).

The fact therefore remains that derivation of the term *Bihu* from Sanskrit *Visuvan* is conflicting and doubtful in authenticity. The term might have come from vocabularies of some non-Aryan settlers and subsequently sanskritized associating it with *Visuvan* probably on the ground that the *Mahavisuvan* occurs on a day which falls during the spring time.

The opinion that the term *Bihu* has been derived from *Baisagu* of the Boros is obscure, although not contemptuous for enormous cultural contributions of the race to the tradition of Bihu festival. But the way of corruption from *Baisagu* to *Bihu* is a long one wherein lies the weakness of this opinion\(^\text{70}\). Further, the Boro term *Bi-hou* which means *to beg and

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68. J.Chakravorty, 'Mah Aru R hinta' in *Purbachal*, 29\(^\text{th}\) July 2001 issue, pp.8-9
69. A.C.Sarraa, *Op-cit.* p.60
to give is associated with Huchari singing of Bohag bihu, a tradition popularised by the Tai-Shans in early medieval age. But, Bi-hou was not the chief motto of Bohag bihu and consequently insignificant for derivation of the term Bihu therefrom. Instead, the opinion that the term Bihu is a corrupt form of Poin-hu appears to be comparatively logical than the ones we have come across. The political and social history of medieval Assam records that the Tai-Shans were an indomitable power and the local tribes called them Ahom. The Ahoms, who were superior to other tribes in power, had also a rich cultural heritage brought with them and their tremendous cultural contributions propelled Bihu festival to a greater height. The ideals of a rich culture is likely to influence the people who cherish comparatively a feeble culture. Submission to the Ahoms by the earlier settlers in some areas of culture is attributable to this phenomenon. The cow-ritual practised by the earlier settlers in Bohag bihu was called Poin-hu by the superior Tai-Ahoms and the indigenous people accustomed to it. The possible linguistic synthesis between the Ahoms and non-Ahoms contributed to the corruption of Bihu from Poin-hu. The prevalence of the term Bihu only in Ahom inhabited Upper Assam, further provides a strong ground in favour of a non-Aryan affinity of the term. The non-existence of the term Bihu in Assamese literature till the late medieval period is due to the fact that the term took a few centuries time to become popular so as to find a room in Assamese literature.

71. Gait, A. *History of Assam*, p.234
The foregoing evaluation of the opinions on the origin of the term *Bihu* does not help us to arrive at a definite conclusion on the issue; these opinions, in most cases, seem to be guided by racial feelings rather than fair judgement based on relevant facts of the history of evolution of the *Bihu* festival. It is an established fact that *Bihu* is a festival of acculturation and synthesis\(^ {73}\). Admixture of Austro-Asiatic and Mongoloid stock of people and assimilation of their identical agricultural and pastoral life styles had given a unique form to the culture attached with the *Bihu* festival of Assam\(^ {74}\). In addition, the Aryan contributions embellished the culture of the non-Aryans with extra colour. Evidently, none of the present ritual forms connected with the *Bihu* festival can be claimed to be the sole contribution of a single race of people. The very name of the festival is also no exception.

We are, therefore, content to say that there was every likelihood of a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan contributions worked towards evolution of the term *Bihu*\(^ {75}\). The Boros were predominant of the Tibeto-Burmans; on the other hand, the Tai-Ahoms were superior to the Boros in respect of power and cultural heritage. It was therefore probable that the indigenous Boro people accepted and used to call the *Poin-hu* of the Tai-Ahoms as *Bai-hu* deriving the prefix *Bai* from Boro *Baisagu*. The term *Bihu* appears to be a corrupt form of *Bai-hu*, a philological corruption from *Poin-hu* i.e., *Poin-hu>Bai-hu>Bihu*. *Poin-hu* was akin to cow-ritual of springtime *Bihu*; hence, the term *Bihu* corrupted therefrom, was

\(^{73}\) N.C.Sarma, *A.L.A*, p.265
\(^{74}\) L. Gogoi, *Bihu Eli Samiksa*, p.41
\(^{75}\) P. Bhattacharya, *Asamar Loka Utsav*, p.6
exclusively associated with the springtime Bihu only. The Aryans, being the pioneers of Astronomy, further associated the term Bihu with the Visuvan day for coincidence of the Bohag bihu with other springtime festivals observed elsewhere in India on this day. Thus the Aryans contributed towards evolution of the term Bihu.