The Id Festivals:

The two great festivals of the Muslim world Id-Ul-Fitr and Id-Ul-Adha, commonly known in Assam as Id and Baqrid. The Id falls immediately after the close of Ramjan or the month of fasting, that is, on the first of Shawwal the tenth month of Islamic calendar. The Ramjan is spent in fasting and prayer, self denial and restraint and spiritual and moral discipline, for a full lunar month, and therefore, the arrival of Id is eagerly awaited by the followers of the prophet's faith. Naturally, the sighting of the new moon on the twenty ninth day of Ramjan provides an occasion for such an additional joy that the new moon of Id and the crescent of twenty ninth day have become proverbial for overjoyfulness. Every Musalman rich or poor, young or old has his gaze fixed on the sky to spot the silvery bow of the twenty ninth Ramjan. If it is not sighted on that evening, the day following it is again spent in fasting. The crescent moon on the thirtieth day is, however a certainty. As soon as a Muslim sights the new mood of Id, he congratulates everybody around him, happiness is in the air, and all is pleasure and excitement. The young vie with each other to break the news first to their elders and receive their blessings. And those who have spent one whole month in the exhausting but pleasurable prayer thus to God on
sighting the moon. "(O, Moon) my Lord and thy Lord is one. Thou art the moon of guidance and betterment (for me). O Allah. Let this month begin for me with peace and (intact) faith and submission to Thy Will and Pleasure and with (my) ability to follow Thy Commandments."

For weeks before hand, people have been making preparation for the Id but the night preceding it everybody is unusually busy in getting ready his new clothes and making sundry arrangements for the great occasion. The morning of the festival witnesses hectic preparations for the Id prayer. As a token of Divine permission to take food during the day time after a month, sweets or dates are taken early in the morning. Every man then takes a bath and puts on new clothes if he has the means. Perfumes are also used provided one can afford it before setting out for prayers in the Idgah. But all such persons as are liable to offer charity enjoined for the occasion and known as sadqa-i-Fitr, must pay it to the poor in the shape of grains or in cash before leaving for prayers. This is a thanks giving offer for having completed the fast of Ramjan. The measure prescribed by the Shari'ah for this offering is 1.62 kilogrames of wheat or double its weight if it be barley. An amount equivalent to the market price of these grains can also be given in cash to the poor and needy. The measure fixed is for each individual and, therefore, it

1. Charity of Id.
must be paid on behalf of all the dependents including minor children. Now, the prayer of Idd can be performed. It is better to offer this thanks giving prayer as early as possible but, again, the practice of the holy prophet has to be followed in its celebration too. Thus, in emulation of the prophet of Islam the Idd prayer is offered after sunrise. But the time taken in making preparations on this occasion has again to be taken in considerations which means a bit more delay. Never the less the prayer is offered in Assam not later than ten or eleven the forenoon. It is always preferable to offer this prayer in the Idgah, normally located in an open space outside the town. But the increasing distance, rise in population and paucity of time has given rise to the custom of offering the prayer in different localities of the city. Still the congregation in the Idgah is almost everywhere the largest in a city.

The Idd Prayer:

When Muslims take the road for Idgah they chant, in lower tones, the praise and thanks to God. The practice of the prophet, still to be followed by Muslims, was to take one route for the Idgah and return by another one so that all the pathways and sidewalks were filled with the adoration and glorification of the Lord and the devotion of the worshippers'. As the cities have now grown much bigger and
means of transport are easily available, the practice of taking different routes for going and coming back is gradually being given up.

Contrary to the daily and Friday prayers, the namaz of Idd is neither preceded by azan nor by iqamat or any obligatory or voluntary prayer. As soon as the congregation is ready or the time for the prayer arrives, the Imam steps ahead to lead the namaz. The daily prayers have only two takbiras in each ruku, one at the beginning of the prayer and the other to announce the genuflexion, but that of the Id among the Hanafi Sunnis of India is marked by four of these in each ruku. The Imam ascends the pulpit soon after the prayer comes to an end with the final salatun, and delivers the sermon of Idd. Like the preaching of Fridays, it is also divided into two parts, which are separated by a brief respite by the sermoner. The sermon of Idd, however, differs from that of the Friday in as much as the former is delivered after the prayer while the latter is read before the namaz. In India the address is normally read out in Arabic from some book but now at least one of the two parts of it are delivered in Urdu or any other regional language. This practice is being adopted to let the audience know the importance of the occasion, its liturgical rules and the demands of faith and its relevance to the modern times.
Customary Greetings after the Prayers:

As soon as the sermon ends the people begin to congratulating and embracing each other. Indian Muslims alone take resort to embracing as a sign of affection on the occasion of Idd, for the Muslims of other countries simply exchange greetings or shake hands. The practice does not have the sanction of the shariat either, nor of any previous tradition, and it seems to have been adopted by the Muslims of India from the prevalent custom of embracing on the occasion of Hindu festivals, particularly Holi Milan, which is considered to be an occasion of gaity and meriment, festivity and fraternity in India.

On return from Idgah it is customary to pay a visit to the friends and kins where one is entertained with sweetened vermicelli. Unlike other countries where guests are entertained with other sweetmeats and are sprinkled with attar or any other perfume, the vermicelli has become an inevitable must and a symbol of "Idul-Fitr in India."

Id-Ul-Azha:

Idul Adha or Baqrid differs from Idul Fitr in as much as sacrifice is also offered on this occasion. It is celebrated on the tenth day of Zil Hijjah, the last month of Islamic calendar, when, after performing the rites of Hajj, the Meccan pilgrims gather at Mina at a distance of four miles from the holy city for offering sacrifice and worship and
recollection of God. Like Idul Fitr, the Id prayer on this occasion too is recited on the first day of the festival but sacrifices can be offered till the evening of the third day following it. For four days on this occasion that is from the morning of ninth to the afternoon (Asr-prayer) of the fourteenth Zil-Hijjah, praise and glory of God is recited after every prayer. Known as takbirat-i-tashriq, the purport of the words recited is as follows: Allah is Most Great! None is worthy of being worshipped except Allah! Allah is Most Great Allah is Great and All praise is for Allah alone."

The sacrifice offered on the day of "Idul Adha" has been instituted in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to offer up his only son Ismael as sacrifice. The sacrificial offering is divided into three portions, one of it being set apart for the household consumption, another for the friends and relatives and the third for the poor and needy. The distribution of the offering enjoined by the Shariah is designed to provide a healthy meal to the poor on this festive occasion. No fasting is allowed on the day of Idul-Fitr nor on the three sacrificial days of Idul-Adha.

**International Festivals:**

Idul-Fitr and Idul-Adha are the two principal festivals of the Muslim world. There being no dispute about the religious sanctity of the two festivals, these are observed without
any exception, in every country where Muslims reside, raising them to the level of international festive occasions. There is also no marked difference in the manner these are celebrated in different countries: at least the religious rites performed on both these days have been too well defined by the Jurin and the Sunnat of the Holy Prophet to allow any variation in their observance in any country, whether Muslims are in a minority there or form a majority of the land.

The Prophet's Birthday:

The festival of the Prophet's Birthday is celebrated on the 12th of Rabi-Ul-Awwl, the third month of the Muslim lunar year. Of all the festival days excepting the two Ids, the Prophet's Birthday is the most important and widely celebrated festival throughout the world of Islam. The occasion is marked by Mammoth gatherings in which portions are delivering on the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet. In some of the countries like India and Egypt, the principal portion of these lectures is the birth of the Prophet from which it derives its commonly known name, milad or maulood. The custom attending the haranguing of the chief event differs from country to country; in certain places a salutation in honour of the Prophet is sung after describing his birth when everyone present in the milad is expected to stand erect as a mark of

1. Also known as Bara Wafat, it is commonly held that the Prophet was born and also died on the same day.
respect to the Messenger of God. This is known as jiyam'. Elaborate arrangement of lighting and decoration of the place of assembly with buntins and flags are usually made while sweetmeats are also distributed at certain places after the meeting is over. Many educated persons as well as religious organisations designed to reform social evils, are, however, trying to make these meetings more effective and simple in order to acquaint the masses with the life, teaching and achievements of the Prophet of Islam. Now-a-days poetical symposia or Mushairas have became an inevitable part of the public milads which sometimes continue to the whole night.

**Muharram:**

Muharram is the first month of the Muslim lunar year. Before Islam, and after its advent too, Muharram has been regarded as a sacred month entitled to veneration of the faithful. Many important events occurred on the 10th of this month. One of these was the deliverance of Moses and the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh. Moses and his followers had crossed over to Sinai from Egypt on that day and Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea along with his legions. It is related that a few months after his immigration to Madina, the Prophet observed the Jews keeping fast¹ on the 1. Fast of the "Day of Atonement' on the tenth of the of the Tishri, the seventh month of Jewish Calendar.
tenth of Muharram. The Prophet enquired why did they do so? On being informed that it was a memorial of the deliverance of Moses and the children of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh, the Prophet said, "We have a greater right in Moses than they". So he fasted and commanded his followers to fast also. Thus the fast on that day came to be regarded as obligatory before it was made optional with the advent of the Ramadhan fast. Even how many Muslims given to religious observance among the Sunnis keep the fast on the tenth of Muharram.

A Sorrowful Day:

The consecrated and propitious day was, however, to witness a shameful and accursed event which has turned it into a day of mourning for the Muslims. This was the martyrdom of Husain, the second son of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. Hussain refused to take the Oath of fealty to the then Caliph Yazid and left Madina to Kufa with a retinue of his women and children and close relatives. As he approached the plains of Karbala he was intercepted by a vastly numerous and well-armed army of the Caliph under the command of Obeidullah, the governor of Kufa. On the morning of the fatal day (ashra), the tenth of Muharram, 60 A.H. (22nd October), 679 A.D.) Hussain fought bravely till the battle came to an end with the death of the last of his companions. The tragic death of Hussain still awakens the sympathy of the faithful who commemorate the memory of his martyrdom with sorrow and
indignation. The shiahs of Assam take out processions with tazins and alams on this occasion and have special gatherings to mourn the death of Hussain. Their mourning lasts till the fourth day of Hussains' martyrdom, known as chahallum which falls on the 20th of the succeeding month of Safar.

The Muharram celebrations by the Shihs of Iraq and Iran, where they have sizable population, and in Oudh, specially Lucknow, where they ruled for one hundred and thirty-six years, are quite impressive and marked by pomp and pageantry. The customs differ from place to place but they normally consist of a passion performance in the course of which more devout Shiahs beat their bodies and faces until the blood flows, processions with taziahs and tabuts are taken out and assemblages are held to lament the martyrdom of Hussain. These customs have undergone same changes during the course of time or have been reformed to an extent in certain places, but a greater part of the Shia community still celebrate the function in the traditional manner.

The Sunni Muslims normally do not participate in the passion performances and other celebrations of the Shiahs since they hold a bit different view of the sorrowful incident from that of Shiahs. The Sunnis, look up to the martyrdom of Hussain as an ennobling example of indomitable courage and valour, of willingness to lay one's life for truth and justice and hold him to be a victim of tyranny
and injustice but in their view, it is not proper to give vent to one's feeling of sorrow through wailing and lamentations. They consider it un-Islamic to bemoan and cry over past happening and, fruitless too for those whose memory these celebrations seek to preserve. In their view a more befitting way of commemorating the martyrdom of Hussain is to inculcate the qualities he possessed and to stick to the path of righteousness like him in the face of all odds and difficulties. The Sunni Muslims, therefore, by and large, disassociate themselves from Muharram, processions and other rites, preferring to offer solemn invocation of the divine blessings on Hussain and his companions through special prayers and recitations of the Quran. However, in certain places, specially in the rural areas, the Sunnis too keep the tazias and follow some of their own customary rites to celebrate the Muharram.

Shab-I-Barat:

Shab-I-Barat is another festival occupying an important place in the Muslim social life. It falls on the night of the fifteen Shaban, the eighth month of the Muslim year. It is believed that God ordains annually on that night all the actions of mankind which they are to perform during the year, how long shall they live and when shall they die, what shall befall them. It is therefore, enjoined that the night should be spent in prayer and recollection of God. Many persons also keep fast on the fourteenth of Shaban which is warranted as a
commendable act of worship. During the night people keep vigil, recite the Quran, offer benedictions for their own self and the near kins, and visit the cemetery to pray for their dead relatives. The women although forbidden to visit the cemetery also accompany the males to the burial ground. Another custom prevalent is to prepare halwa on the occasion of Shab-I-Barat for distribution.

Alvida:

Alvida or Jumatul Wida is the last Friday of Ramadhan which has assumed the importance of a festive day in India. It is considered propitious to offer the congregational Friday prayer on the day of Alivida in the principal Mosque of the city. The people from the rural and Sub-urban areas specially make it a point to visit the nearest city for the purpose. The Jama Masjid Delhi has one of the largest congregations on the occasions when the gathering is almost as large as in the Id prayer. No trace of any such custom is to be found in early Islam. Nor do we find it mentioned in the Traditions of the Prophet or the writing of early Muslim historians.

Some other festival:

Twenty-seventh of the month of Rajab is commonly regarded as the day on which the Prophet made his celestial journey to Heaven. It relates to the Prophet's heavenly journey in
which he was carried by Archangel Gabriel by night upon a heavenly steed from Meeca to the Temple of Jerusalem whence he was brought up through the seven heaven to the very presence of God. The Shias too celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Caliph Ali on this very day. Another feast day celebrated enthusiastically is Garirahwin Sharif when special prayers are held for the great mystic saint Abdul Jadir Jilani. Feasts are also held by certain people on this occasion.

**Muslim Festival of Indian Origin:**

Apart from the festivals sanctioned by the religious dogma or those celebrated in one form or the other by the Muslims of other countries too, there are certain other festival days of purely Indian origin. These are fairs the fairs held on the first Thursday of each lunar month on the graves of certain saints, the annual Urs of Ghazi Mian held at Bahraich and similar other melas and fairs held every year to celebrate the death anniversary of numerous saints and holymen. The most important and the biggest fair of this type is held at Ajmer in Rajasthan from the first to the sixth of Rajab everywhere to celebrate the Urs of a mystic saint, Sheikh Moinuddin Chisti Ajmeri. The fair is attended by people from far off place within country as well as the pilgrims from abroad. However, orthodox Muslims who demand a religious sanction and a precedent from the practice followed by the precursors of Islam for every observance associated
with religion, do not approve of these fairs and festivals. Nevertheless, most of the customs of Indian Muslims including these tending to observe these fairs and festivals with an air of gaiety and colourfullness be speak of the impact of the rituals and customs followed by their compatriots on similar occasions.

**Bihu:**

Beside all these above mentioned festivals, Bihu is considered to be an important festival for Muslims of Assam. They are Kati Bihu, Bhogali Bihu and Rangali Bihu which are observed in accordance with their different significance.

**The Kati or Kongali Bihu:**

The Kati or Kongali Bihu is the poor Bihu and is held on the last day of Aswin (September-October) coinciding with the autumnal equinox. It is called - Kangali Bihu (poor) because there is not much to eat at this time of the year. The main function associated with this Bihu is the worship of the sacred tulasi plant at the root of which earth oil lamps are placed. Lamps are also put in the granary, the garden and the paddy fields. A sky-lamp, hung from the top of a high bamboo pole, is supposed to show the dead the way to the next world. For a whole month lamps are lighted at the foot of the tulasi plant. Lighting of uncovered earthen oil lamps at this time of the year, which is done on an extensive
scale on the Diwali night when every house is illuminated with thousands of lights, was evidently prescribed originally to draw to their destruction crickets, moths and other insects and pests which infest the country during this season and are a source of danger to the crops and a nuisance to the people.

Magh Bihu or Bhugali Bihu:

Magh Bihu or Bhugali Bihu is celebrated in the mid-January on the last day of the month of Poush and the first day of the Magh which coincides with the winter solstice and with the reaping and storing of the harvest after which rural folk enjoy leisure for some months which they utilise in repairing houses and fencing. On the Uruka day that is the evening preceding the actual Bihu day, the young men build a temporary shelter in the open, collect firewood, often by stealing, which is permissible on this occasion, for a bonfire. A non-vegetarian feast is held at night and at crack of dawn fire is ceremoniously applied to the meji. The Meji is a structure built of logs of wood placed in pairs, tier above tier till they rise to considerable heights and present the appearance of a lofty temple. The male folk of the entire village or locality gathers at the site of the meji and there take place a tea party in which cakes of various kinds made of the newly harvested rice and sesame, sweet potatoes and other roots are served. The feasting is followed throughout the day by sports such as racing, jumping, wrestling, buffalo, egg and cock fights. The half burnt sticks and ashes of the meji
are strewn on the field and at the root of fruit trees as they are believed to increase fertility.

The Bihus are the national festivals of the Assamese people irrespective of caste or creed, especially the Bohag Bihu celebrated during the advent of Spring. No other festivals stirs the common people to their depths or arouses such intense ambitions in their heart as the Bihu of Bohag (mid-April-mid-May).