CHAPTER V

AURORA OF BIHU AND CHRISTMAS
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Bihu is the prime festival of Assam. In India, almost all the prime festivals observed in different states are integral to religion, but Bihu is not primarily related to religion and therefore it is observed by all the autochthonous communities of Assam irrespective of caste and creed. In due course although Bihu has acquired some of the religious traits by different religious groups of Assam adorned Bihu festival with their own religion. Bihu is the most popular festival of Assam and it is present in different forms among both tribal and non tribal communities of the state.

There are three principal Bihus in Assam

(i) Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu

(ii) Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu

(iii) Kati Bihu or Kangali Bihu

Christmas is one of a most important festival of Christians. In commemoration of nativity of Jesus Christ, Christmas is celebrated on 25th December every year. It is a festival of peace, generosity and goodwill. Christmas is purely a religious festival. All the customs, rituals, stories of Christmas move around Jesus Christ. But now, almost all people belong to different religion celebrated Christmas with great joy and merriment. So, Christmas is undoubtly a
secular festival also. Christmas is locally known as Noël in France. As it is celebrated with twelve days duration, Christmas is also known as Twelve days. Feasting, singing, dancing, decorations are the important features of Christmas in France. In this Chapter, an attempt has been made to focus on the aurora of Bihu and Christmas with different perspective.

A. Aurora of Bihu

Bihu is seasonal as well as agricultural festival. Celebrations of Bihu festival are associated with different stages of cultivation, production and harvesting of crops. Astronomically Bihu is synchronizes with different seasons. Bohag Bihu celebrated at vernal equinox (mid-April), Magh Bihu at winter solstice (mid-January) and Kati Bihu celebrated at autumnal equinox (October-November). ‘The Bohag or Rongali Bihu has great attraction to the youths. In fact, the Bihu festival, its associate songs and dances are remnants of Austro Asiatic civilization. The common people devised the Bihu songs and music to entertain the young women who are considered nothing but the counterpart of Mother Earth. Care and restraint to Kati Bihu is the symbol of attention to a pregnant woman. The festivities of Magh Bihu are symbolic to the birth of a child, when the Bohag Bihu, the most important of the three Bihu, is a procreative urge’ (Sen Gupta, 1984:10). According to Das (2005: 155) ‘Bihu festival has some distinguishing features. First, they embody a kind of synthesis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan culture. Secondly, the Bihu festivals include both pre harvesting and post harvesting ceremonies. Thirdly, they may rightly be looked as festivals of fertility magic’. Lakshminath Bezbaroa took up cudgels on behalf of this great festival. As Bezbaroa wrote. ‘Bihu does not give
hurt to anyone, it gives joy to everyone, therefore it is that people laugh at and condemn Bihu. Bihu does not up God’s garden by spreading soft tints on leaves of trees and thus heightening their glow; increases the attractiveness of orchids by hanging on them attractive wreaths; makes the Asoka tree lovely by putting on it bouquets of blossoms; makes the area palms graceful by releasing their new spathes; brings out blossoms on mango trees; put vermilion on puthi fishes and makes them dance on newly rising water; turns the entire area fragrant by making kadam trees put forth round hairy flowers and mixing their pollen with the wind; makes you youthful, so that you can act youthfully, by giving you new rice, chira, sandah and sesame balls to eat; this Bihu is condemned by your people’ (Goswami, 1966:35).

5.1 Origin of Bihu

Bihu is a secular festival of Assam observed by almost all the communities. If we go to trace the origin of Bihu, it will found to be a predominantly natural and seasonal festival. Goswami, (1966:35) says, ‘Bihu was observed by the farmers of ancient time in a faith that by celebrating Bihu in open field the people can satisfy god of raining and save their crops from drought. They also believed that, dancing and singing in the agricultural field, river bank, beel (wet land) etc. increases the fertility of the land. They imagined the Earth as mother and Sun as father. When they dance and sing then the attraction of Sun and the Earth become high and they become more fertile which results good crops’. ‘The primitive man regarded fertility as a blessing. ‘Within the bestowal of the gods’, as Ruth Benedict says. The nature festivals, that thus mark the advent of autumn and spring, remind one of the primitive men of agriculture, who created both rituals and magic out of art, as Jane
Harrison says, when he used to see visions of golden corn smiling in the field of his labour. Joseph Sachs says that ancient art was 'communal' in nature and the man in the community sought to celebrate his common collective experiences through dance and song. The Aryans who subsequently came to this land introduced a religious and spiritual motif into the Bihu festivals and associated them with certain items of worship. They are, on the other hand, a festival of popular joy without any sectarian bias to colour or dissipate the life in them' (Baruah et al., 1956:12).

According to Goswami (1966:30-31) 'The oldest description that we have of the Spring time Bihu is from a Muslim historian of the seventeenth century. In an unpublished history preserved at Aligarh University one Jamili, perhaps a pseudonym, describes the people of this land in this vein: The people are industrious, hospitable and jovial by nature. They have songs on their lips and dance in their gait. In the spring season they hold a festival in every village and in the capital of their king. The festival continues for a month or so. In the morning of a particular day-perhaps on the Naoroz day—all men and women of the village put on new cloths. They have in their hands a kind of long bamboo split perpendicularly into two pieces and giving a kind of clattering sound when played upon. From the time of mid Sun the boys and girls gather in the open fields in various groups and sing and dance to their heart’s content, with the music of drums and pipes. The elders of the village also gather to see their young ones and very often participate in the dance. There are exchange of hearts and elopements. In the evening they take rice and liquor made from rice and sugarcane and some pigs or fowl are killed for the purpose. Echoes of songs come from various directions of the village and the forest even at midnight, day after day, night after night'. It is believed that Xorgodeu
(King) Rudra Singha was the first king to celebrate Bihu in the palace courtyard and to organize varied performances for full seven days including competition for different kinds of sports, games and cultural shows. ‘Kaviraj Chakraborti, the court poet of Ahom kingdom wrote a book on Bihu: ‘Ali Gan’, it was probably the first book on Bihu’ (Borah, 2005:26-27).

5.2 Bohag Bihu

Among the three Bihus, Bohag Bihu is the most popular festival in Assam. It is observed in the month of Bohag (Baisakh/ mid-April) and therefore this Bihu is known as Bohag Bihu. Feasting and merriment are the main characteristics of Bohag Bihu. In Assamese, the equivalent term for merriment is rang or ranga and from this term acquires the name Rongali Bihu. Bohag Bihu is associated with vernal equinox; it marks the advent of the seed time (around mid-April). Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu may aptly be called either a Spring festival or Assamese New Year festival. Throughout Assam, Bohag Bihu is observed at least for seven days in the month of Bohag. It starts from the last day of Chot (Chaitra/ mid-march to mid-April) with the principal performances like worshipping of the cattle and presenting hand weaven towel ‘gamocha’ and feasting. However in upper Assam, Bohag Bihu is indispensingly related to singing and dancing. Till to the recent past, singing and dancing were not associated to Rongali Bihu in lower Assam. It should be noted here that hand weaven Assamese towel is the epitome of Assamese culture. Such towels are specially prepared before Bohag Bihu to present the near and dear ones. The hand weaven Assamese cloth presented during the Bohag Bihu is known as Bihuwan.
Three main aspects of Bohag Bihu are—Devotional and ritualism, socializing and a joyful celebration of youth (Borah, 2005:13). Besides caste peoples, Bohag Bihu is also celebrated by different tribal communities of Assam with great merriment. Bohag Bihu is known as 'Baisagu' among the Boro Kachari. It is the most cherished festival of the Boro tribe, celebrated as Spring time festival at the advent of New Year. Baisagu means start of the New Year. ‘According to Basumatari, the word bihu is of Boro origin. Bi means to beg something like alms, and Hu means to give or to donate. Hence Bi+Hu=Bihu or to give begged one. According to Kamini Narzari, Baisagu is a Boro word which originated from the word ‘Baisa’ means year or age and “Agu” means start or starting. Hence Baisa+Agu= ‘Baisagu’, the starting time of the year or age’ (Brahma, 2009:136).

Rabha is a colorful tribe in Assam. They celebrate Bohag Bihu as ‘Baikhu’ to propitiate the goddess of wealth Baykho. The Mishings called Bihu as ‘Biu’. Deuris also celebrated the Bihu festival. They called Bihu as ‘Bisu’. Bi means extreme and Su means rejoicing. They observe Bisu for seven days with great rejoicing. Deuri Bisu starts on Wednesday. Bihu festival observed by the Lalungs or Tiwas as ‘Bisu’. Baisak Bisu is the major Spring dance festival of Tiwa people. But the date of observance varies from area to area. The Lalungs living in the foothill celebrate Bihu on Tuesday and Wednesday and in some areas in Saturday and Sunday. Bohag Bihu is known as ‘Budhbaria Bihu’ among the Marann, among the Karbi it is known as ‘Domahi’, ‘Baisagi Saijora’ among the Dimasa.

Though Bohag Bihu goes for a month, the main celebration held at first three days. First day of Bohag Bihu begin with cattle worship and the day is called
Garu Bihu. Second day is known as Manuh Bihu or Bor Bihu means day for man and the third day is dedicated to Gods and the day is known as Gosain Bihu. The Assamese New Year begins on the day of Manuh Bihu. In some areas of Assam, Gosai Bihu is celebrated on the first day of Bohag. On the day of Garu Bihu, cattle are given bath. Paste of *haldi* (turmeric), and mustered oil rubbed on the horns and bodies of cows and driven to the nearby river and pond. Then put a garland of cut vegetables like-bringal, turmeric, bitter gourd, and gamboz fruit around the neck of the cattle. With *dighlati* and *makhiyati* plants, boys strike cows and sing this traditional song.

*Lau kha, bengena kha, bochore bochore barhi ja*

*mar saru baper saru, tai habi bar garu*

The meaning of this: Eat gourd, eat brinjal, grow from year to year

Your mother is small, your father is small, but you must be a big cow.

After bath, the old ropes of cows removed and tied with new ropes. But before that, the ropes sanctified with sprinkle of tulsi-soaked water. Cast off the old rope indicating the removal of all the evil that may have proved harmful to them. In the evening, when the cattle return, they are ceremonially received by the householders, wash their feet, vermillion and sometimes sandal paste are smeared on their horns and forehead. Then they fed *chira* (flat rice made out of parched half-boiled paddy) and *pitha* (traditional cake of the Assamese) and tied up in the cattle shed. Boro Kachari people celebrate Garu Bihu as Makhau or Mashau Bihu. On the very first day of Baikho, Rabha people purify their houses with cow dung and clean cloths and utensils. After sunset, the priest visits every household and throws rice powder on
the roof of the houses by singing ceremonial songs. In exchange, villagers serve him rice beer. This ceremony is known as Nok-Jumkey. After this ceremony, they gather at chief priest’s house and sing ‘Haymaru’ song. These are the memorial songs of past heroes and their respective war of Rabha. No one can sleep at night after beginning of Haymaru songs. People drink, sing and dance until sun rise. The first day function of Baikho festival is called ‘Nok-Khitharkay’, means ‘purification of house’. Deoris begin first day of Bisu with a ‘Than Puja’. Sacrificing of goat is compulsory in Bisu puja. Once in every four years, a white buffalo is sacrificed in this puja. In the morning of puja, ceremonial bathing of the cattle takes place. Cows and buffaloes are bathed ceremonially by the male members of the village.

‘In respect of rites performed for cattle welfare, people in Assam may find parallels in Middle India. As Professor E.O. James observe, ‘The first prohibition of cow killing occurs in the late Atharva-Veda, which betrays signs of contact and admixture with non-Indo-European influences. The Atharva- Veda describes Vak, the mother, as a cow giving various kinds of food to different creatures. The Harivamsa describes Vishnu as a cowherd and when Vishnu ad Krishna came to be identified, cow worship took on a new significance. Krishna himself prescribed cow worship. Further, in an agricultural land, when the horse was not easily available, the cow naturally came to claim some amount of special consideration. There was, of course, no cow goddess as such. When plough cultivation began to oust the primitive hoe cultivation the cow and the bullock (the bull being also the mount of Mahadeva) came to be appreciated and revered in their own right. Aryan showed respects to the plough, which was almost defined, though Indra was considered its lord’ (Goswami, 1966:67-68).
The second day is celebrated as Manuh Bihu or Bor Bihu, meant for human beings. On this day, the main festivity begins and people pay respect to the elders, visit village Namghar (prayer house) and exchange Bihuwan (bihu gift), usually home woven red bordered gamocha (a piece of cloth, a napkin). People visit friends and relative’s house for wishing them well for the new year and are entertained to refreshment. ‘A practice observed on this day is the writing of a Sanskrit prayer to Mahadeva on leaves of the nahar or ironwood tree as a protection against storms, lighting and fire. The leaves are kept under the rafters of the house. In rural areas a Brahmin or an astrologer consults an almanac and tells the members of a family how they are going to fare in the coming year. Some of the other practices of this day and the days following are games played with cowrie shells and eggs. Some of the chees type games played with shells has been traditionally handed down. Playing with shells is supposed to cause rain, while the egg may be a symbol of reproduction’ (Goswami, 1995:14).

Third day is known as Gosai Bihu, meant for god. On this day, people visit temples, Namghar and offer prayer to god and seek blessings for the welfare of the family. The first seven days of Bohag Bihu are called Xat Bihu (seven bihu). From Gosai Bihu to Sat Bihu or seventh day of Bihu, there is no special function assigned to them. On the seventh day, Assamese people customarily eat seven kinds of herbs, which are locally called sat-sak. In Barpeta district of Assam, elderly ladies perform some kind of rituals on the Sat Bihu. They gather in an open waste-land where they dance, sing and pick seven types of herbs. Male folk cannot participate in this function. Upper Assam and lower Assam is slightly different in observance of Bihu. In upper Assam, eating one hundred and one kinds of herb is a traditional custom.
They give a ceremonial parting of Bihu which is called *Bihu uruwa* (flying Bihu away).

The hill Lalungs concluded their Bisu festival with *Boka-Nas*. It is a dance performs over mud. After getting elders permission, the youth make preparations with drummers and pipers and start singing from one end of the village to the other. This continues for seven days, Wednesday to Tuesday. The villagers welcome them in courtyard and offer betel nuts and some rupees. On Wednesday, all come together in an ankle deep muddy place where the elderly villager offer a short prayer. After that, the youngsters sing and dance over that muddy place. Then they come back and participate in a feast. The plain Lalungs culminated the Bihu festival with '*Gosain Uluwa Utsav*'. In this festival, both Lalungs and non-Lalungs are participating. For this ceremony, two big panddles are constructed in an open field. One for the Raja and other for the keeping the image of the lord. On that day, the image carried seven times around the *Namghar* (prayer house). The devotees followed the image carriers and sing song with musical instruments. After that, image brought to the panddle and prayers offer before the image. In the evening, the image of Lord Vishnu brought to the *Namghar* and festival comes to an end.

### 5.3 Dance and Songs associated with Bohag Bihu

Dance and songs are the integral part of Bohag Bihu. ‘The Bihu dances invariably precede the rains and the season of cultivation; in April when the festival is held, nature becomes bright and buoyant. It appears as though the ‘procreant urge’, to use the words of Walt Whitman, courses through the young earth of spring and is wrought in her youthful vivacity with a passion to create and be fruitful.
There is the onset of monsoons in May; with it the epoch of nature's procreation begins. The ploughshare tears the earth and the seed is planted; the earth produces. It is a biological truth. This whole process is enacted in the Bihu dances; though it is reflected the ancient instinct for magic enacted in art' (Baruah, 2010: 181).

_Huchari_ and _Banghosas_ are the two aspects of Bihu songs known as _bihugeet_ or _bihunam_. 'Banghoshas or Bangeets literally means wild songs, probably because of their erotic element of wild abandon. _Banghoshas_ may be sung at any time of the year: the young man on buffalo back in the wide, lonely, marshy field or collecting firewood in the wilderness or driving cattle home in the evening sings his 'sad bosom empty' as Shakespeare would have it. Illiterate men compose them orally and so they are unpretentious. They may appear vulgar to the sophisticated for free expression of the sex theme, but in fact, they are only outbursts of unfettered hearts feelings their own unknown depths' (Das, 2005: 102). Though the root of Bihu and _Huchari_ are same, these two are different in nature. _Huchari_ songs are ritualistic, social and gentle. Though Bihu songs are songs of nature, various moods like love, meeting, mating, separation, erotism, union are reflected in Bihu songs.

### 5.3.1 Huchari

_Huchari_ is a community singing performs during Bohag Bihu. It is a kind of carol singing. It is a symbol of community and to secure their blessing is a kind of social recognition. 'The term Huchori remains unexplained, though there have been suggestion as regards its derivation. Some says it is _Hari Ucchari_, after taking the name of Hari (crying Hari), while Dimasa Kacharis of northern Cacher use the term Huchori and explain it to mean moving over land: ha, land, char, to move. This may
be what is known as folk etymology’ (Goswami, 1966:52). Huchari is a mixed performance of dancing and singing. It consists of a group of male person belongs to different age group. Women generally do not take part in Huchari. On the Manuah Bihu, Huchari singing is ceremonially begin from village Namghar (prayer house) then at the houses of respectable persons of that area. During Bohag Bihu, Huchari band visit household of the village and give blessings to family members. The wishes and blessings of Huchari believed as auspicious. Huchari performance is obligatory in every household. But if there has been an incident of any disease, birth or death, Huchari is not practiced. Therefore, huchari band beats drum before entering the courtyard of the host family. The Huchari party sings Huchari songs with religious theme and dance in a circle with the beat of drums, cymbals and taka (bamboo clappers). The leader of the party stand at center with elegant languid nod. One person of the group sing the song and others accompanied him with musical instruments. 'Performance begin with a ghoxa, then followed by a pad.

Ghoxa

Aie bowa gamocha, murat mari loi
Huchari gabaloi jao oi samania

The meaning: The gamocha woven by my mother
I am wearing on my head
Oh dear friends, lets go and sing Huchari

Pad

Tetelir talate, karo tat bati
Pahari ahilu kuchi oi samania

The meaning: Under the tamarind tree, we prepare the warp of weaving
I forgot the kuchi and came my friend’ (Borah, 2005: 37-38)
With the beat of drum, cymbals, taka, *Huchari* party visit households from one corner of the village to the other. The host family entertained the group with refreshment and offer money, cloth, betel nuts on a *bota* or *sorai* (a plate on stand made of wood or metal), behind which all members of the family knowl down to the party whereupon the party ceremonially wishes them well and then leave.

The member of the *huchari* always performed with traditional attire. They wore dhoti (a long broad waist cloth, a lain cloth), tied a *gamocha*, a red bordered woven towel with red motifs, as headgear waistcoat made of *muga* (a kind of Assam silk) and cotton *gamocha* on the neck and *tangali*, a red woven towel around the waist. The leader additionally wears a *celeng* (a shawl) on his shoulder. He always comes with an umbrella, a kerosene lamp and sometimes with a stick. Body outfit of *huchari* band is slightly differ from place to place. *Huchari* singing and dancing continues for seven days of Bohag Bihu and ends with ceremony called *Bihu urawa* or *Bihu thowa* (sending away Bihus).

### 5.4 Musical Instrument of Bihu

Bihu is the festival of music. Musical instrument of Bihu always carry the folk identity of Assamese culture. *Dhol* (drum), *Pepa, Gagana, Tal, Banhee, Sutuli* are the key musical instruments of Bihu. Bamboo is the highly used making material of these instruments. Besides bamboo, the horn of buffalo and bell metal are the traditional raw material of Assam used in preparing these instruments.
5.4.1 Dhol (drum)

Among all the instruments, *Dhol* is the most important instrument of Bihu. The rhythm of *Dhol* leads the melody of songs and postures of dance with other assisting instruments. ‘Dhol is a barrel shaped drum hollowed out of single piece of wood. The right head is smaller and has a higher pitch than the left one. Both the faces are covered with thin leather and tied with the help of gajara like ring and inter-laced to the shell and the hoop, at the other end by thin and thick leather straps. It is slung horizontally from the neck and played with a stick and right hand fingers’ (Borah, 2005: 103). *Dhol* are available in different shape, magnitude and panache. It is used by different communities for different purpose. *Bihu dhol*, *ója dhol*, *khram*, *kham*, *madal*, *dhepa dhol*, *joy dhol*, *bar dhol*, *kavi dhol* are some of popular form of drums of Assam.

*Bihu dhol* is trivial sized drum used in the Bihu festival. It is played to accompany the performance of Bihu and *huchari*. *Ója dhol* are comparatively bigger than *Bihu dhol*. Besides Bihu, this type of drum is mostly used in special occasions like marriage. *Bar dhol* is the biggest drum of Assam. ‘Bar’ means ‘big’ or ‘large’. This drum is played by hand in one side and with a bent stick in another side. *Bar dhols* are used to play in different social functions. *Khram* is the drum of Dimasa and Tiwa tribes. This long drum played in religious ceremonies. On the other hand, this drum is popularly known as *kham* among the Boro and Rabha tribe. Among the Tea Workers of Assam, drum is known as *madal* and it used in their traditional dance Jhumur. *Dhepa dhol* is found in Mangaldai areas of Darrang district of Assam. A drummer of this drum is called *dhepa dhuliya*. *Joy dhol* is another type of drum found in Mangaldai region of Assam. It is a big sized drum generally used in
Deodhani Dance. This type of drum is also played in religious festivals, specially in the worship of goddess Manasa (goddess of serpent). In the folk songs and dances, \textit{kavi dhol} is widely used. This drum is wide faced and played with a drum stick.

5.4.2 \textit{Pepa} (aerophone)

\textit{Pepa}, made of buffalo horn, is another customarily used folk instrument of Bihu festival. History says that \textit{pepa} has been using in Assamese society since Ahom period. Ahom solders used ‘\textit{Rong xinga}’ (happy pipe) as a sign of good news and ‘\textit{Khang xinga}’ (alarm pipe) to warn the masses. ‘\textit{Pepa}’ is made out of a 20-30 centimeter long swamp buffalo horn. To make a \textit{pepa}, first the horn of dead buffalo is kept immersed in warm cow-dung for at least one month for softening. Then it trimmed to a smooth surface and cut with a knife or by hollowing it with the broken glass. \textit{Pepa} is played by holding with both hands, placing finger tips on the holes of \textit{garbanala} or buffalo tube. When blow the breath flows across it to make birations and thus produce sound’ (Borah, 2005:112-113).

Like \textit{dhol}, \textit{pepa} is also an essential musical instrument of Bihu and it is known by various names and terms among the different tribal communities. \textit{Pepa} is known as \textit{Pempa} among Mishing, Dimasa and Rabha call it \textit{xuri} and \textit{singra}, Tea Garden Workers termed it as \textit{pepati}. Earlier, apart from Bihu, \textit{pepa} was used to play by the cow or buffalo keepers. But now this practice is almost vanished.

5.4.3 \textit{Gagana} (jaw harp)

\textit{Gagana} is another predominantly used musical instrument of Bihu. It is a type of harp, normally played by mouth. So, it is also called jaw harp. Female Bihu
dancers generally play this instrument. There are different types of gagana but among these, lahari gagana, ramdhan gagana and saliki gagana are mostly used. Lahari gagana is played by female and ramdhan gagana is played by male Bihu dancer. Gagana is a compulsory item for bihuwati (female dancer). It is so popular that, Bihu songs are also composed on the use of gagana.

\[ Agali bahare lahari gagana \]

\[ Bahi tatar patat bao \]

\[ Ahe ki nahe oi more dhan chenai oi \]

\[ Chiri pati mangal khan sao \]

The broad meaning of the song is:

I sit by my loom
And play the soft and slim gagana
Made of narrow end of a bamboo shoot
Is my beloved coming or not
What do the stars foretell (Borah, 2005:111).

5.4.4 Taka (bamboo clapper)

Taka is a bamboo made simple instrument used in Bihu instead of hand clapping. Taka is an essential musical instrument for Gabharu Bihu. Gabharu Bihu is, therefore, also known as Taka Bihu.
5.4.5 *Banhee* (flute)

*Banhee* is the principal instrument of Bihu. But it is not traditional instrument of Assam. The Vaishnavite society of Assam primarily uses banhee in Vaishnavite music programmes like Bhaona, Rasa, etc.

5.4.6 *Sutuli* (aerophone)

*Sutuli* is a round or half-moon shaped musical instrument of Bihu. Sutuli is the compulsory instrument for Jeng Bihu, i.e., Bihu performed by married women only. Though this instrument is predominantly played by girls, sometime male dancers also played sutuli. There is a believe in Assamese society that, the sound of sutuli can invite rain. ‘It is a hollow semi –lunar earthen wind instrument, a kind of earthen whistle. It is made out of special clay, from the crab hotes. The instrument is swoll at the middle gradually tapering towards both ends, bearing a mouth hole at the middle and two finger holes towards either end. It is played holding the instrument by one or both hands and the player holds his/her lips so that a thin stream of air is directed against the lower edge of the mouth hole to produce a whistling sound’ (Borah 2005:113-114).

5.4.7 *Tal* (ideophone)

*Tal* is a bell metal musical instrument used to play in Bihu to keep the rhythm. It is a percussion instrument played in pair. Bhor tal, pati tal, Bihu tal, khuti tal, manjir etc. are some of the varieties of tal. Bihu tal is mainly used in Bihu along with the oja dhol and dancers-singers of Bihu huchari. Among Boro, Karbi and Mishing, tal is known as jotha, sengso and lupi, respectively.
5.5 Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu

Besides Bohag Bihu, there are two more Bihu celebrated by Assamese. These are- Kangali or Kati Bihu and Bhogali or Magh Bihu. Kati Bihu is associated with autumnal equinox; it marks the completion of sowing and transplantation of seed (around mid-October) and Magh Bihu with winter solstice. Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu is the post harvesting Winter festival celebrated in the month of Magh (January-February). It is a festival of feast. Magh Bihu is also known as Bhogali Bihu. ‘Bhogali’ means feasting. In lower Assam, Magh Bihu is called Maghar Domahi and its popularity is more in lower Assam than upper Assam. Like Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu is also celebrated by tribal communities of Assam. The Boros observed Magh Bihu as ‘Mago’, Mishing as ‘Mag’, Garo as ‘Wangala’, Rabha as ‘Dumsi’, Dimasa as ‘Magh Sanjora’, Hajong as ‘Pusnou Purba’, Karbi as ‘Hacha Kekan’, Khamti as ‘Maiphung’, the Tea Garden Workers celebrate Magh Bihu as ‘Pausa Parab’ or ‘Tusu Parab’. The eve of Bhogali Bihu is called uruka. It is a feast enjoyed by the people with kith and kin.

Fish and meat are the customary items for uruka feast. From the early morning, everybody busy in brisk preparation. Village menfolk catch fish in nearby river, big ponds or lakes for the evening feast. Women also get prepared for the feast and also for the next day’s celebration. Bhogali Bihu is the festival of food. Women folk prepare various delicious traditional food items like- mah karai (dried fried rice with black pulses, rice, sesame, ginger etc), pitha (rice cake), laru (sweet roll), chira (rice flicks) etc. Young boys are also become busy. They construct meji, a conical structure made of dried banana leaf, firewood, etc. Near the meji, they construct bhelaghar, a makeshift cottage in an open field. ‘The term bhelaghar may
be from Sanskrit, mesa-griha (mesa=bhera/ bhela=sheep) in which some hairs of a sheep or goat are burnt on the eve of Daul Utsava associated with Krishnaiism. The term used in upper Assam is meji and it may be from Sanskrit medh or yajna. Thus certain ancient associations seem to have been carried over to the institution of bhelaghar burning. The idea of Holika burning is not found in Assam; and Holi or Phakua as such has no connection with Magh Bihu’ (Goswami, 1966:13).

Plate 9: Traditional snacks prepared for Bhogali Bihu
(source: about festivals of India.com)

Youngsters spend the whole night of uruka at bhelaghar. Next day at the crack of dawn, people takes bath and gather near the bhelaghar. After giving sacred offering to the God, people utter loudly the name of the God and set fire on meji and bhelaghar. Devotees prayed to the god of fire for the welfare of the society. Elderly persons offer blessing everyone present there by putting marks of ash of burnt meji on their forehead. After that people hold a session of hymn singing accompaniment of kettledrum and large cymbals. People sometime bring half burnt bamboo stick and keep those near the fruit bearing trees. It is believed that it creates the fertility of the trees. Early morning of that day, family members ties around the trunk of the
fruit bearing trees with the stripe of jute or straw and strike the trees to make them more fertile and productive. ‘The Magh Bihu is celebrated with bonfires, social gathering and feasts. It is often described by English writers as the ‘harvest home’. During the Magh Bihu, the bonfire is a conspicuous feature in the rural landscape. After the harvest is collected, the earth is empty and baron and the bonfires end colour to this black landscape. On the other hand, it announces a lesson of fulfillment in the life of the peasant, who collect his harvest, end by new, ends his season of labour in the fields. The later Aryan migrants added elements of devotional ritualism to this non-rhyme festival of innocent joy and nature with the thin mists of winter leaving a network across its brown face’ (Das, 2009:48-49).

On the day of Magh Bihu, women clean their household and throw-out all the used earthen utensils. Magh is a sacred month for the Hindus. On the first day of Magh Bihu, people visit temple to get the blessings of God. The whole month is spent in nam-prasanga or hymn singing. After performing all the rituals, people eat traditional foods. Eating of non-vegetarian diet fish or meat is strictly prohibited on this day. People visit their relatives’ houses and also served guests with specially prepared traditional food.

Though generally singing or dancing is not performed in Magh Bihu, holding various sports competitions is a significant feature of this festival. Various traditional games like buffalo fight, egg fighting, nightingale fighting etc. are traditional games played in Magh Bihu. The buffalo fight of Ahatguri of Nagaon district, nightingale fighting held at Hajo of Kamrup district attracts a good number of people. But the State government has banned bull fighting and nightingale
fighting in the year 2015. Besides these, wrestling, jumping, racing, tag of war etc. are some of the sports played during Magh Bihu.

### 5.6 Kati Bihu or Kangali Bihu

Kati Bihu is an Autumn festival. At the time of this ritual, all the activities of cultivation become completed and new crops just begin to grow. This one day event celebrated on the last day of *Ahin* (mid-October). It is a leisure period but time of hardship also. The paddy just begin to grow and so there is nothing much to eat at this time. So this Bihu is also called Kangali, means ‘beggar’s Bihu’. Kati Bihu is associated with the worship of Tulasi (sacred basil). In the evening time, people give sacred offering consisting of uncooked rice, soaked gram and green grain, ginger, coconut, banana, betel nut etc. at the box of the base of the newly planted sacred basil plant in a corner of the courtyard over an earthen plinth and lit earthen lamp there, in the paddy field, household garden, etc. The people in group sing religious songs in praise of god like:

*Tulasire tale tale mriga pahu chare*

*Take dekhi Ramchandrai haradhanu dhare*

The meaning of this song is:

- The deer grazes under the sacred basil
- Ramchandra sees it, srings his bow.

Meaning of another such song is:

*Tulasi o mother Tulasi*

You are Govindas favorite

Which way has Krishna gone do tell us

Mother, tell us quickly.

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For the welfare of the paddy, farmers perform certain rites. They light clay lamps at the paddy field and utter prayer to protect the paddy from insects, birds, rodents, etc. Lamps are also lighted at the granary and worshipping place. Lighting akash banti (areal lamp) is an important features of Kati Bhu. Areal lamps are hang in the top of a tall bamboo. It is believed that this type of light helps the soul of dead to find out the way to heaven. This custom has also a scientific reason. The earthen lamps help to driven away the insects. The Boro Kacharis also put lamps at the base of the euphoria plant.

5.7 Some Paralles of Bihu

There are different types of Bihu like festivals celebrated by different groups of people of India and outside the country. These festivals have lots of similarity with Bohag Bihu and Magh Bihu celebrated by the Assamese. The festivals similar to Bohag Bihu are- Maghe festival of Chotanagpur, Vishu festival of Malayalis, Chaiti Parab of Gonds, Bishu of Khasas of Himachal Pradesh, and so on. The New Year festival of Nepal, Sohrae festival of Santal, Chinese New Year festival, Thai festival, Baisakhi of Punjab, etc. also have close similarity to Bihu. Malayalis celebrate Vishu festival at the middle of April where elders give cash presents to the youngsters. The Maghe harvest festival of Chotanagpur tribal is akin to Bohag Bihu of Assam. Maghe festival is lasts for three to seven days. These days are dedicated to cattle, boundary deities, deceased, ancestors, etc. Dancing, feasting, ceremonial hunt, etc. are special features of Chaiti Parab of Gonds. These activities are performed throughout the Chot (April) month. Though the Khasas of Himalaya also performed Bishu festival but their festival is held in temple grounds on any convenient day.
The celebrations of the New Year festival of Nepal have similarity with Assamese Bohag Bihu. From the last day of outgoing year, they perform the festival with five days duration. On the first day, crow worship (feeding) is observed, second day is for dog worship, third day for cow worship, fourth day celebrated for men and last day is dedicated for brothers and sisters. On this day, the sisters pay their respect and love to their brothers. Like Bohag Bihu, in Sohrae festival of the Santals, cattle worship is an indispensible custom. 'It includes the blessing and baiting of the cattle, a fishing expediction and a village hunt. Married daughters come home and during the seven days of the festival, there is general dancing and relaxation. The Mundas wash the hoofs of buffaloes, oxen, cows, sprinkle rice beer on the hoof and sacrifice a fowl at the door of the cattle shed during this festival. They also offer prayer desiring welfare of their cattle. As recorded by S.C. Roy, after the winter harvest the Oraon girls go from house to house dancing the angan dance and from each house get the one sup or so of paddy' (cited in Goswami, 1966:69). Chinese New Year is also celebrated with seven days committed to cocks, dogs, swine, public bathing, visiting and receiving, birthday of man, etc. Thai festival Songkran has resemblance to Assamese Bihu. Songkran means Sankranti and this festival is performed from 13-15th April every year. Water squirting and fish releasing are the important activities of Songkran. Besides these dancing, singing, playing games are associated to Spring seasons are important features of this festival. In Burma, Songkran festival is celebrated as Thingyan. Baisakhi or Vaisakhi is the harvest festival of North India. Though Baisakhi celebration is held in South India, Manipur and Assam, it is celebrated with great fervour in Punjab. According to the solar calendar, Baisakhi is observed on the thirteenth April every year.
Magh Bihu of Assam is commonly known as Makar Sankranti. It is a solar event and because of that, this festival is performed always on 14th January (Magha) every year. ‘Makar means Capricorn and Sankranti is transition. Transition of the Sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn, during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere is known as Makar Sankranti’ (Sarma, 2007:155). After Makar Sankranti, the days become longer, warmer and winter in on decline. The festival of Maker Sankranti is celebrated as harvest festival in coastal regions of India. Because at this time, the harvest gathered and granaries become full of crops.

Festival of Sankranti is known as Sakarat in Bundelkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Makar Sankranti is popular as Khichiri in Uttar Pradesh. Lohri is the Sankranti ceremony of Punjab. In Lohri, people gather and throw sweets, sugarcane, rice, to the bonfire. Tamils perform Pongal in Maker Sankranti. It is a very popular festival among the farmers. In Gujrat, Makar Sankranti is known as Sankranta. People offer thousands of colourful kites all over the sky as their colourful obligation to Sun god in Makar Sankranti. This kite festival is one of the important festivals of India. Thousands of people from different place come to Gujrat every year to participate in this festival. Makar Sankranti is celebrated as four days harvest festival in Andhra Pradesh. It is known as Pedda Panduga, means ‘big festival’. The first day of this festival is Bhogi, second day is Sankranti, third day is known as Knnuma and fourth day is celebrates as Mukkanuma. This festival is known as Aathari in Rajasthan, Daduri in Nepal, Aaran Salong by Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, Akhtiy in Maharashtra, Bishu in Kerala, Ugadi in Madhya Pradesh and so on. Bonfire and eating of sesame is almost common practice in all the places during this festival. Besides caste people,
many tribes celebrate Sankranti as an important festival. They start their new year from Sankranti day.

5.8 Bihu and Nature

Bihu and nature is complementary to each other. The origin of the source of Bihu can be traced from nature. Among the three Bihus, Bohag Bihu is performed at the mid of April when Sun cross the equador of Earth. According to the scholars, *Bishub* means equador, which means middle day or Sankranti. ‘According to the Indian astronomy the first ten days of ‘Baisakh’ month creates highest relation with Sun and Earth and Earth gets most enlightened rays from Sun. This natural attraction and relation is reflected in the natural scenario of Earth, the trees newly green and a scene of beauty and the natural happiness spread all over the Earth. At this time man also become very happy and natural happiness encourage them to sing and dance and they automatically started to sing and dance in open field. Thus the farmers of Assam express their great relation with nature and they feel to be a part of the nature’ (Das, 2009: 28-29). Bhogali or Magh Bihu observed at Magh Sankranti, when Sun cross Capricorn. This time is believed as sacred time for offering worship to deities. It is a time of transition of Sun’s northward journey (*uttarayan*) from the sign Sagittarius to *Makar* (Capricorn). Use of sesame (*til*) in Magh Bihu is a significant feature. People eat and offer sesame at the burning of *meji*. Sesame contains a lot of oil and its use is good for health. On the other hand, it is believed that offering sesame obliged in *meji* purify the environment. Kati Bihu is celebrated all over India as Kartik Sangkranti.
Gach (tree) Bihu is a form of Bihu celebrated by the Assamese people from time immemorial. Gach Bihu is performed for the plants. A good number of rites and rituals are associated with Gach Bihu. This Bihu is generally performed at any time during the mid-April. People plant trees in their gardens because they believe that trees planted at this time grow well. It should be noted here that April-May is the rainy season and prime time for plantation. The celebration of Gach Bihu shows the indispensable relation of nature and men. Bihuwan, specially woven towel to offer in Bohag Bihu is an integral part of this festival. The farmers and other people offer bihuwan to the trees also. By offering bihuwan, people express their love and respect for the trees. During the time of offering bihuwan, to the trees they sing:

_Gachare dalate bihuwan arilo, pichaloi nachalo ghuri_

_Habi dangaria dai nadhariba gai jao namare guri_

The meaning of the song is:

_Bihuwan_ is hanged on the branch of the tree
Without looking back, o the god of forest
Please forgive us for the faults' (Das, 2009:43).

Dance and songs are also performed in Gach Bihu. People perform dance under the big trees. It is believed that trees can feel vibration and dancing and singing pleased the trees which make them more productive. Boka nach or mad dance is another interesting custom of Bihu. People, specially in Lakhimpur and Majuli, perform this tradition on the first day of the Assamese New Year. Boka nach is a tradition of Bihu which provide an opportunity to intimate men with mother Earth. It is believe that,
playing with mud can prevent from skin diseases. The impact of nature is also seen in Bihu instruments. Assam is one of a largest bamboo producing state. Most of the musical instruments of Bihu like *gagana* (jaw herp), *taka* (bamboo clapper), etc. are made from bamboo. On the other hand, *pepa* (aerophone) is made from buffalo horn. So, it is seen that Assamese society, its culture and tradition are intimately related to nature reflected through the Bihu festival.

5.9 Changing Trend of Bihu

Bihu festival is agrarian in nature. In ancient time, Bihu dance was just a dance form which was performed to appease mother Earth for increase the fertility of soil. But involvement of people transformed Bihu dance in a celebration then in a festival. In course of time, especially during the reign of Ahom (1228-1826), Bihu, particularly Bohag Bihu, moves from open field to courtyard. According to history, Ahom rulers brought Bohag Bihu from paddy field to public places and gave the status as prime festival of Assam. *Swargadeo* (king) Rudra Singha took special initiative in this regard. During Ahom period, Bihu received immense popularity. With the arrival of the Neo-Vaishnavism in sixteenth century, Bihu festival shaded with Vaishnavite element. Music, specially *huchari* singing is immensly influenced by the Vaishnavite music and Bihu turned into Hindu Vaishnavite ritual. Visiting *namghar* (prayer house), singing *ghosa-kirtana* (Vaishnavite religious songs) during Bohag Bihu are the elements of this movement. It can be easily understood by following lyrics use in *huchari* singing.
‘Gobinda Gobinda Gobinda Ramo Hari a hey

Krishna rupe Doivakita bhaila avotara Hari a hey

Sankha chakra gada padma karata tomara Hari a hey

Meaning:
‘Hail, Lord Govinda with conch isc, club and lotus

In the hands, thou art incarnated in Daivaki’

Impact of colonialism also brings changes in Bihu culture. After the establishment of British rule in 1826, the state came through various development and social changes which directly influenced Bihu festival. The development of education and impact of urbanization detached Bihu from its rural roots. To promote this ethnic culture in front of the urban masses, a few loyalists named Radha Govinda Baruah, Prabin Phukan, Dr. Bhubaneswar Baruah et al. brought Bihu to stage in 1952 for the first time in Guwahati. The first performance was held at Latasil Bihutali Subhra Chandra Baruah, an Assamese film actor introduced Bihu Kwnwari (Bihu princes) competition in 1972. After that, Bihu Rani (Bihu queen) and Bihu Samragee (Bihu empress) also introduced. Due course of time, Bihu festival become commercialized. It lost its rural flavour and become limited within stage performances. Now it is seen that, the Bihu competitions are sponsored by various companies to popularized their brand and give cash prizes, T.V, various costly items even four wheeler car to the winners.
B. Aurora of Christmas

Christmas is one of a widely celebrated festival of the world. The word 'Christmas' is a combination of two words 'Christ' and 'Mass'. The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek word 'Christos' meaning 'anointed' and the word 'Mass' comes originally from the Hebrew 'Mas' meaning 'a tribute'. Later 'mas' became confused by mass, a rite of the Roman Catholic church, meaning 'the festival to the memory of Christ' (Longchar, 2002:115). According to the author, 'During the last 1500 years, it has been recognized on 135 different days of the year. December 25th, January 6th, March 28th, April 19th and 20th and November 17th were the days being observed frequently. It was in the year A.D 361 that pope Julius proclaimed December 25th as the birthday of Jesus and by the year A.D 500 it had become generally recognized by most churches' (Longchar, 2002: 114). Different writers and scholars have defined Christmas in different ways. In *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, definitions of Christmas have been given by persons eminent in different fields. According to Francis C. Farley, 'Instead of being a time of unusual behavior, Christmas is perhaps the only time in the year when people can obey their natural impulses and express their true sentiments without feeling self-conscious and perhaps foolish. Christmas in short is about the only chance a man has to be himself'. William Parks says 'Christmas is not just a day, an event to be observed and speedily forgotten. It is a spirit which should permeate every part of our lives. To believe that the spirit of Christmas does change lives and to labor for the realization of its coming to all men is the essence of our faith in Christ'. As mentioned by Frank Mckibben, 'This is Christmas, not the tinsel, not the giving and
receiving, not even the carols, but the humble heart that receives anew the wondrous gift, the Christ’. Herbert Leslie Steward says, ‘The antiquarians have disputed much about whether the event which Christmas commemorates can have taken place late in the month we call December. We have been told that this is the very height of the rainy season in Palestine, when it would be mostly unlikely to find either flocks or shepherds at night in the fields near Bathlehem. But it makes no difference to the solemn suggestiveness of the season, whether the exact date is right or wrong’.

5.10 Birth of Jesus

As Christmas festival is chastely related with Jesus Christ, here a glimpse of Jesus’s has been put. Jesus was the son of Virgin Mary. ‘Although the Christians claims that their religion has come directly out of the revelations and insights of Jesus, it can hardly be disputed that Christianity owes much for its origin to Judaism. Jesus himself was a Jew and he never thought of founding a new religion. He was only trying to cleanse Judaism of the rubbish which clustered around it in course of time’ (Tiwari, 2012:163). In the Gospel of Luke Jesus’ birth story has been described. ‘In Luke, Mary learns from an angel that the Holy spirit has caused her to be with child. Mary points out that she is a virgin and the angel responds that, ‘with God nothing shall be impossible’ (Bharadwaj et al., 2011:210). Bethlehem was the native place of Joseph, husband of Mary. Mary and her husband travelled to Bethlehem to register in the census ordered by Augustus, the Roman emperor. But they did not get any room in the town and stayed at a stable. Mary gives birth to Jesus there. Jesus get the prophecy of Isaiah by His birth at Bethlehem. After the
birth of Jesus, three wise men called Magi presented Jesus with treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh and declared Jesus as the future king. Herod, the king of Judea becomes afraid of Magi’s words and as a result, in search of Jesus, Herod ordered to kill all male children of Bethlehem under the age of 2. But before that, Mary and Joseph with child Jesus left the place.

5.11 Christmas in France

Christmas is a festival of joy for the people of France. Christmas is celebrated as Nöel in France. Preparation for Christmas celebration begins almost one month before and this pre-Christmas period is called Advent. Lighting of candles is one of important features of Advent. During Advent, means four weeks prior to Christmas, orthodox Christian families use wreath to lit the candles. They place four candles on the wreath and lighted one candle in one Sunday and all four candles are burned till Christmas day. The first candle is preferably lighted by a child. ‘The wreath has two significant symbolic meaning; the form of a circle which symbolizes the eternal nature of God and the candles which symbolizes Christ- the light that ‘shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it’ (Longchar, 2002: 117). Christmas festival is lasts for twelve days. Each day is known by different names. Twelve days of Christmas are - Boxing day or St. Stephen’s day. Mother night or St. John’s day, Holy Innocent’s day or Childremas, Feast of fools, bringing on the Boar, New year’s Eve or Hogmany, The Kalendas of Journey, 8th day of Christmas, 9th day of Christmas, 10th day of Christmas, Eve of Epiphany or festival of the three kings and Epiphany. Though the celebration of Christmas lasts for 12 days, the actual celebration held on 25th December.
5.12 Christmas Decorations in France

Christmas is a colourful festival. French people follow unique and delightful Christmas tradition. During Christmas, the streets, homes, shops of France are decorated with lights, candles, balloons etc. Christmas is celebrated as a festival of light by the Christians. So, candles are the most important decorative item for Christmas. Besides home and street, churches are also illuminated with candles. Devotees visit churches and pay their homage to Christ by lighting candles.

It is said that, there are various probabilities of use of candles in Christmas. Christmas is a winter time festival and it is believed that, candles were used in ancient winter solstice to remember that spring would come soon. In middle ages, large size candles were used in Christmas as a symbol to star of Bethlehem. Besides Christmas, some winter time festivals like Hanukkah of Jewish, Kwanzoa of African Americans also celebrated. Candles of Hanukkah called ‘Hanukkiyah’. There are seven candles used in Kwanza, an African-American festival and those are called Mishumaa Saba. Black, red and green coloured candles are used in this festival. In Ireland, Yule candles are lit instead of yul log. In Germany and Sweden also five, seven and twelve branched candles are used during Christmas.

Mistletoe is one of a widely used Christmas decorative item of France. Mistletoe is locally known as Le Gui in France. Mistletoe considered as holy greenery by French people. They believe that hanging mistletoe above the door protected the house from evil spirits, witches, and different diseases and bring good fortune for the family. This is why French people use mistletoe in Christmas decoration and also hang dried mistletoe above the door throughout the year. In the
pre-Christian period, mistletoe was used to celebrate Winter festivals and also to ward off evil spirits. Mistletoe was used by ancient Celtics as magical healing power, as an antidote for poison and infertility. Mistletoe was the symbol of peace for the Romans.

'The Christmas tree was introduced into France 1840, when Princess Helene of Mecklenburg brought it to Paris. In 1890, between thirty five thousand of the trees are said to have been sold in Paris' (Miles, 1912: 121). It is said that, Christmas tree was a pagan symbol of fertility which was transformed by the Germans into the Christian symbol of rebirth. Legends say that, Martin Luthar began the tradition of Christmas Tree in Germany. Exchange of Christmas card is widespread custom of Christmas. English illustrator John Horsley in 1843, created the first modern Christmas card. Christmas card is a beautiful way of convey good wishes. People write 'Merry Christmas and Happy New Year' on the cards and send to their near and dear ones. Santa Clause or Père Nôel is another important feature of Christmas.

Plate 10: Père Nôel (source: tipsininsurance.tk)

In France, the Christmas log or Souche de Nôel is common in the less modernized places, particularly in the South. 'On Christmas Eve in Provence, the
whole family goes solemnly out to bring in the log. A carol meanwhile is sung praying for blessing on the house, that the women may bear children, the nanny goats kids and the ewes lambs, that corn and flour may abound, and the cask be full of wine. Then the youngest child in the family pours wine on the log in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The log is then thrown upon the fire, and the charcoal is kept all the year and used as a remedy of various ill’ (Miles, 1912: 117).

5.13 Christmas Meal in France

French people are very fond of delicious food. Christmas is a festival of feasting and merriment for them. Foie Gras (fat liver) is the most popular French Christmas food. It is prepared from goose or duck liver. Crêps is a thin

![Plate 11: Traditional French food of Christmas (Source: traveltofranceandmore.com)](image)

pancake made from wheat flour. It is a common food item of French Christmas. La buche de Nôel, Le pain calendal, Treize desserts, La Gallette des Rois, Calissons (fruit flavored candis), Quince chese (a sweet thick jelly), Roasted goose or Turkey are essential food items for Christmas in France. Chees and wine is also common in
French meal. La buche de Nöel is a chocolate and chestnuts made long shaped cake. Le pain calendal is a popular food item of Southern France. It is a Christmas loaf. In France, main feast of Christmas begin on Christmas Eve. Christmas feast is called Le Reveillon in France.

5.14 Winter Festivals in other Countries

Most of the countries of the world celebrate their important major festivals during Winter seasons. Winter season is the relaxed time. In Winter seasons people freed from there agricultural works and preferred to spend the time with celebration. Christmas is also a Winter time and one of a mostly celebrated festival throughout the world. Early Europeans were the Sun worshippers. They were superstitious and believer of evil spirits and ghosts. At the winter solstice when nights were longer and days were shorter, they feared that Sun would not return. So, they performed special rituals to welcome back the Sun. Like Christmas, there are some festivals celebrated by different countries during Winter season. Some of these are discussed here.

Saturnalia is the Winter festival of Romans celebrated in honor of Saturn, God of agriculture. Saturnalia was originally begun in the middle of December and ends on 1st January. It was Winter holidays where drinking, feasting, gambling, singing were essential topographies. After influx of Christianity, this practice was transferred to the twelve days of Christmas. The name of the festival was also changed to Mass of Christ to Christ Mass. North Europe was extremely influenced by pagan culture and the Christian festivals even Christmas came under the impact of that pagan celebration. ‘The Germanic tribe of Northern Europe held a festival on
25th December. The Sun was believed to stand still on 21st December, making it the shortest day of the year and four days later the Sun seemed to be gaining strength and with it came great rejoicing. There were also great festivals in Northern Europe. The Anglo-Saxon called it Zool or yule’. After the event of Christianity the name Yule was applied to the Christmas celebration. The Hebrew celebrates their festival of light called ‘Hanukkah’ on 25th December (Longchar, 2002.115).

5.15 Some Facts about Christmas from around the Globe

There are some beliefs, facts, oral traditions are associated with Christmas celebration throughout the world. Some of these are

(i) In the Ukraine, if anybody fined a spider web in the house on Christmas morning, it is believed to be a harbinger of good luck. An artificial spider and web are often included in the decorations on Ukraine Christmas tree.

(ii) At Christmas, it is traditional to exchange kisses beneath the mistletoe tree. In ancient Scandinavia, mistletoe was associated with peace and friendship. That may account for the custom of ‘kissing beneath and mistletoe’.

(iii) In many households, part of the fun of eating Christmas pudding and finding a trinket which predicts fortune for the coming year. For instance, finding a coin mean he or she will become wealthy. A ring means get married, while a button predicts bachelorhood.

(iv) In Greek legend, malicious creatures called kallikantzaroi sometimes play troublesome pranks at Christmas time. In order to get rid of them salt
or an old shoe is burnt. The pungent burning stench drives off or at least helps discourage it.

(v) The poinsettia is a traditional Christmas flower. In Mexico, the poinsettia is known as the ‘Flower of Holy Night’.

(vi) Louis Prang, a Bavarian born lithographer, who came to USA from Germany in the 19th century popularized the sending of printed Christmas cards. He invented a way of reproducing colour oil paintings, the ‘Chromolithograph technique’ and created a card with the message ‘Marry Christmas’ as a way of showing it off.

(vii) The ‘Urn of Fate’ is a part of Christmas celebration in many Italian households. The Urn of Fate is brought out on Christmas eve. It hold a wrapper present for everyone. The mother tries her luck first, then the others in turn.

(viii) In Sweden, a common Christmas decoration is the Julbukk, small figurine of a goat. It is usually made of straw’ (Mélange, 2010:4)

5.16 Twelve Days of Christmas

Twelve Days of Christmas is a cycle of time during which various rituals are performed and fests are organized. In France, these twelve days are time of enjoy and merriment.

(i) Boxing Day or St. Stephen’s Day (26th December)

The origin of the name ‘Boxing Day’ is the old British custom of giving gifts and money, in boxes to servants on the December 26th. According to legend, St. Stephen served King Harold until he saw the
Christmas star on learning of the Holy child he vowed to serve him as the new king.

(ii) Mother Night or St. Johns Day (27th December)

In the Christian tradition, the 27th December is dedicated to the disciple John and the church wine for the year would be blessed on this day in Germany and Austria. Legends of beautiful mother figures were associated with this day in Northern Europe.

(iii) Holy Innocent’s Day or Childremas (28th December)

A day dedicated to children. Holy innocent’s Day is associated with the children slaughtered by King Herod. A curious custom was for parents to bite their children this day, believing that they would then be spared from further suffering in the year to come.

(iv) Feast of Fools (29th December)

The Feast of Fools was a time when ordinary people escaped from the constraints of everyday life and could behave in an abandoned manner, carrying out parodies of church services and reversing the order of hierarchy for a day. The data of the Feast of Fools varied according to country and region but was always close to December 29th.

(v) Bringing of the Boar (30th December)

The boar was sacred to the Celts and was associated with gods and mysteries in many parts of Northern Europe. Parading a boar or boar’s head was associated with this day.
(vi) New Year’s Eve or Hogmanay (31st December)

New Years Eve remain an important day of celebration and tradition. A custom with an ancient origin was to fumigate the house with the smoke of juniper as the herb has a magical association with gifts and good fortune.

(vii) New Years Day or Kalendas of January (1st January)

New Years Day is a day of beginning and optimism. The ancient custom of wassailing was a blessing of apple trees for a good harvest in the year to come. The largest tree in an orchard would receive an offering of cider poured over its roots and bread or cake dipped in cider would be placed in its branches. Shouting and banging metal objects around the tree would further drive out evil spirits.

(viii) Eighth Day of Christmas (2nd January)

In Christianity, the eight maids milking in the song are meant to symbolize the eight beatitudes, the blessings that Jesus recorded in the Sermon on the mount.

(ix) Ninth Day of Christmas (3rd January)

The, day represents the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

(x) Tenth Day of Christmas (4th January)

On this day, it was believed in ancient Roman time that corn would grow as high as the men leaped. In Britain, the lords a-leaping in
the song are thought to be a reference to costumed dancers that would perform at Christmas feasts. In Christianity then, ten lords symbolize the ten commandments.

(xi) Eve of Epiphany and Epiphany (5th and 6th January)

Two days associated with the three wise men, tidying away Christmas decoration and the sharing of a cake that contained a bean. This custom continues to be very popular in France where 'La Gallette de Rois' or cake of the kings is served by the youngest person present. He or she who finds 'la feve' or 'broad bean' become king or queen and wears a paper crown' (Mélange, The Sentinel, 26th December, 2010:9).
References


Mélange, *The Sentinel*, 26th December, 2010:4

