Chapter-III

History and Tradition of Phat Bihu

Festivals have always formed an important part of social and community life. They represent a greater component of the traditional expression within the community and are largely made up of a complex of folkloric phenomena. Festivals are periodic times for people to come together and interact ceremonially and festively in celebration. The celebration may be for the change of one season to another, one stage of life to another, or simply a successful accomplishment.

A traditional folk festival has been defined by Dorson as “a social performing folk art” (Dorson 1976:4). Following the spirit of Dorson’s definition, we find in Smith an extension of the idea of the festival to “a major class of folklore, one that may include within itself almost all the others as subclasses.” He also states that “a festival gives a unified context for the description and definition of the genres that occur within it…” (Smith 1972: 169-70). Similarly, Abrahams speaks of festive celebrations as occasions for the community to ‘boast’ reflecting a common observation, in both historical and contemporary circumstances, that the various economic, social and political elements and materiality of festivals are geared to deliberate display (Abrahams 1982: 173). Thus, taken as a whole, festival is composed of social folk customs, such as rituals and traditional games, and of various aspects of material culture such as crafts, costume, and cookery.
Festivals in India

The civilization of India is predominantly Hindu in character, while the religion described as Hinduism is an assortment of beliefs and customs traceable to many sources---Aryan and non-Aryan, Indian and non-Indian, modern and ancient. It has been characterized as a series of locally or tribally different cults that never integrated or fully harmonised, conscious and tolerant of one another, resting on common assumptions and similar in content, everywhere in accord with tradition and usage, resistive to organization into a larger whole but tied into a certain unity through reflecting a more or less common civilization. Hinduism is thus absorptive and has an outlook which is found expedient in dealing with people with various grades of development---from those believing in a super soul to worshippers of stones and trees (Goswami 1975: 2-10). The Indian way of life has certain features which have deeply penetrated into the culture of the land. Festivals in India are not only means of reprieve from the daily grind, but are imbued with deep inner significance that characterizes a multifaceted celebration. Predominantly an agricultural country, the manners and customs, habits and usage, the religious rites, songs and dances etc. of the rural agrarian populace constitutes the main elements of a traditional celebration in India. The collective life, civilization, culture, and religious traditions are so entwined with the festivals that it reflects the social life of the entire community. And it is beyond any dispute that festivals and celebrations have their birth and growth in the changes in nature, religion, the ever changing circumstances of human life, and the joy of agriculture and production.
According to Srivastava, festivals in India can be grouped under the following heads:

• Those belonging to Great or Little tradition
• Family or Community Festivals
• Voluntary or Non-Voluntary Festivals
• Purposive Festivals

(Srivastava 1974: 187-89)

Great tradition is associated with the elites, literate and reflective few who are capable of analysing, interpreting and reflecting cultural knowledge. It is a body of knowledge drawn from the religious texts which functions as the beacon light of knowledge. In contrast, little tradition comprises of the belief pattern, the institutions, and knowledge, including proverbs, riddles, anecdotes, folk tales, legends, myths and the whole body of folklore of the peasant community who imbibe cultural knowledge from the great tradition. On the other hand, the practices which do not figure in the great texts, but are observed for the happiness, well-being, and prosperity of the family or the community forms a part of the Family or Community festivals. The celebrations of personal desire and choice constitute the voluntary or non-voluntary festivals; while the festivals which are celebrated with a particular objective in view are the purposive festivals. The festivals of Assam too can be grouped under the above mentioned heads.
Bihu Festival in Assam

Assam is situated in the north-eastern part of India. It is largely a hilly territory with plains on either side of the river Brahmaputra, which figures prominently in the folklore and mythology of the region. Historically, the people of the north-east are considered closer in culture to south-east Asia including Thailand and Myanmar, than south Asia including the Indian sub-continent. The culture of Assam is traditionally a hybrid one, developed due to cultural assimilation of different ethno-cultural groups under various politico-economic systems in different periods of history. Like in every society, in Assam also there are different specified time-frames for festivities. The celebrations have been grouped and divided based on many factors; like the changes in seasons, evolution of life cycle, commemoration of historical events or the birth and death of great saints and personalities, socio-cultural tradition, geographical location, populace, lifestyle etc. The state has primarily been an agricultural society known for producing paddy, tea and jute. Though Hinduism is the predominant religion, Hindu and Vedic thought intermixes with tribal ways of living to create the distinctive folk forms of Assam. As in the other parts of the country, folk festivals here too are rooted in agriculture and productivity and are associated with the beginning and the end of the planting season.

The traditional festivals of Assam can be divided into-

- Seasonal Festivals, i.e. those celebrated according to changes in nature
• Calendric Festivals, i.e. those based on particular days, months, position of the stars and planets etc.
• Limited Participation Festivals, i.e. those attended by only a select few people of the community
• Sacramental and Domestic Festivals, i.e. those that are associated with the human life cycle, such as births and deaths, marriages etc.

(Sarma 1989: 333)

The basis of human life is reproduction of the species. For survival, humans are dependent upon food sources. Farming and agriculture has been the principal means of sustenance for men since ancient times. Early people believed that the womb of a woman and that of Mother Earth is similar, and so fertility is essential for all types of reproduction in nature---human or agricultural. Such beliefs gave rise to the fertility practices and the festivals associated with those.

As has already been mentioned above, the Assamese society is primarily an agrarian society. Therefore, the majority of the celebrations are associated with agriculture and the changes of seasons. Fertility cult has been the basis of human civilization and culture; the settled agricultural communities across the world perform religious or magical rites in various ways to ensure good weather, good harvest, and the perpetuity of the tribe. This has been the practice for centuries.

Like many such community festivals, *Bihu* is the main marker of the cultural pattern of Assam and is linked to the annual agricultural cycle of the region. The rituals and traditions of this festival are related to the fertility rites and are
observed either in the pre-harvesting or post-harvesting period. Based on this, *Bihu* is of three types:

- the festival associated with the beginning of the agricultural season in spring is the *Bohag* or *Rongali Bihu,*
- the festival observed during autumn is known as the *Kati* or *Kongali Bihu,* and
- that celebrated at the end of the harvesting season in winter is the *Magh* or *Bhogali Bihu.*

*Bihu* as a folk festival was actually a community celebration created by various agricultural tribes. Under the patronage of the *Ahom* kings and royal officials it became the national festival of Assam. All the three kinds of *Bihu* are associated with agriculture and productivity and each of them recognizes a different agricultural cycle of the paddy crop. The accompanying beliefs and rituals shows the relation of the festivities with the pre-harvesting and post-harvesting times: *Bohag Bihu* with the onset of the harvesting season, *Kati Bihu* for the growth in agricultural production, and *Magh Bihu* at the end of a fruitful harvest. Astronomically, *Bohag Bihu* is associated with Vernal Equinox, *Kati Bihu* with Autumnal Equinox, and *Magh Bihu* with Winter Solstice.

Before going into the details of the festivals, it would be pertinent here to list the twelve Assamese months—

- *Bohag* (mid April-mid May)
- *Jeth* (mid May-mid June)
• **Aahar** (mid June-mid July)

• **Haun** (mid July-mid August)

• **Bhaado** (mid August-mid September)

• **Aahin** (mid September-mid October)

• **Kati** (mid October-mid November)

• **Aaghun** (mid November-mid December)

• **Pooh** (mid December-mid January)

• **Magh** (mid January-mid February)

• **Phagun** (mid February-mid March)

• **Chot** (mid March-mid April)

**Bohag Bihu**

The **Bohag** month ushers in the Assamese New Year. The commencement of the spring season is also the time for the farmers to begin agricultural activities like cultivating the land and preparing it for planting crops. Thus, **Rongali Bihu** celebrates the beginning of the Assamese New Year according to the Hindu calendar and also the sowing season of rice. It starts on the **domahi** (the junction of two months) of the Assamese **Chot** and **Bohag** months, and is celebrated for seven days. Therefore, it is also known as **Saatbihu**. The seven phases of the celebratory rituals are---

• **Chot Bihu**--- This is the second last day of the month of **Chot**. On this day young folks sing Bihu songs and dances in an open field, or a **naamghor bakori** till **uruka**.

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1 **naamghor bakori**

2 **uruka**
• **Raati Bihu**— Raati Bihu is performed on the night of Chot Bihu till uruka night. It has now become obsolete. Only females participated in Raati Bihu. If a male wanted to participate, he could take on his role in the celebration by playing a *pepa*³ and he could do this only from a distance. An essential musical instrument of this Bihu is the *bholuka baahor toka*⁴. Raati Bihu is performed beneath a big tree or in an open field illuminated by burning torches.

• **Goru Bihu**— This is celebrated on the last day of Chot month or the day of Sankranti⁵. This day is dedicated to the livestock, because the rural populace has to depend on the cattle for all agricultural practices, and is called Goru Bihu, that is, Bihu for cattle. That day, early in the morning all cattle of the village are brought to a water source like a pond or a river. They are at first smeared with a mixture of *maah-halodhi*⁶, and then smacked with sprigs of *dighloti*⁷ and *makhiont*⁸. After that, pieces of *laau*⁹ and *bengena*¹⁰ are thrown at them by reciting the following lines:

"**Dighloti dighal paat, maakhi maaru jaat jaat;**

**lau khaa bengena khaa, bosore bosore baarhi jaa,**

**maare haru baapere horu to hobi bor goru”**.

This is roughly translated as:

“With the long leaf of *dighloti*, we kill flies of different types;

eat bottle gourd, eat brinjal, and grow year to year;

your mother is small, father is small, you be the big one.”
After the wash is over, the old ropes are cast away through the legs of the cattle, as if indicating the casting off of all evil that may prove harmful to them. The animals are then let loose in the field. People rub the remaining paste of *maah halodhi* on their bodies before bathing. Then they pray to God in their private chapels or at the *Naamghar*, offer obeisance to the elders and have meals of ethnic delicacies like *chira*, curd, rice cakes etc. Before the cattle are brought back in the evening, a smudge of paddy chaff and certain other kinds of strong smelling green leaves is lighted at the gate of the compound and near the gate of the cowshed. This is meant to drive away mosquitoes and other insects, as also to drive away evil forces. Next morning the ash is mixed with oil and rubbed on the neck of the bullocks either as medicine or as a preventive of the sore resulting from pulling the plough. New ropes are prepared for the cattle. Red threads are tied on their necks and they are sanctified by sprinkling *tulsi* leaves. When the animals return in the evening, their feet are washed; they are served with *pitha* and then tied up in the cowshed. The pieces of gourd, turmeric etc., and the remaining branches of *dighloti-makhtoti* that were brought back in the morning are kept stuck on the roof of the cattle shed. The plough and harrow are also washed and worshipped on this day.

- *Manuh Bihu*--- The day after *Goru Bihu* i.e. the first date of *Bohag* month is *Manuh Bihu*, that is, Bihu for Humans. Early in the morning people bathe with *maah halodhi*, put on new dress and pays respect to their elders. *Bihuwan* and other types of traditional clothes are given to one another as tokens of love and respect. *Husori* or carol singing starts on this day; it is first performed at the *Naamghar* and blessings of the
group, which is considered beneficial, are secured by the community. Visiting of friends and relatives also starts on the Manuh Bihu day.

Some of the other practices of this day and the days following are games played with shells and eggs. Playing with shells is believed to cause rain, while the eggs serve as a symbol of reproduction.

- **Gosain Bihu**--- The third day is Gosain Bihu and meant for God. The chief feature of this day is congregational prayer held at the Naamghar. The Vaishnavite tradition of singing the prayers in accompaniment to large cymbals and kettle-drums is observed in following the rituals. There is no caste restriction within the assembly, but the eatables offered to the deity are not distributed by the so called low castes of the society.

- **Mela Bihu**--- Mela Bihu is open for all. Bihu Husoris are organized in open fields under the big fruit-bearing trees. This again is symbolic of productivity. People assemble in the area and freely mix up with each other. They become a part of the festivities as either spectators or as participants. This seems to be the backdrop of modern day Bihu Melas or Bihu functions.

- **Chera Bihu**---It is the last day of the celebratory practices of Rongali Bihu. On this day it is customary to eat seven kinds of herbs which normally grow after the first showers have fallen. The herbs together are known as sat-saki or the seven herbs. Husori singing gets over and Bihu Husori singing is given a ceremonial parting. It is called Bihu uruwa or Flying Bihu away (or making Bihu fly away).
Husori singing, as well as Bihu dance and music in the fields goes on all these days, characterizing the spirit of the season. This, in brief, is the description of the general practices of Bohag or Rongali Bihu as found in the Assamese society, although there are slight variations that can be perceived at the local regional levels.

The Bihu Dance and Songs

“Spring usually comes after the Ahu cultivation is completed and before the Sali cultivation begins; this period of time is the time for leisure for the peasants. Since, after this there would be a period of hectic agricultural operation, they utilized the time for preparing themselves mentally and physically for the ensuing agricultural activities. So, they observed the pre harvesting song and dance ritual which virtually began with the advent of spring. Having been inspired by a fertility consciousness, people enacted the dramatic design of song and dance to increase fertility in Mother Earth who was believed to possess the same physiological properties as a woman. This was done logically by rousing the sexual urges in the womenfolk indulging in amorous songs and sex appealing dances…”

(Biswas 1964: 30-34).

The dance and drumming have fixed patterns and techniques. The drumming is said to suggest the sound of rain-bearing clouds and it is the function of the dancer to suggest the union of the male fertilizer and the female, fruitful earth. The dance movements include keeping the hands on the hips, and then sway their trunks, gradually opening out the arms and vigorously pushing out the pelvic region as well as the breasts. The male dancer also exhibits a similar form. The dance for all its sexual suggestions is ceremonial or ritualistic in
character. It is rhythmic and invigorating and its sexual basis associates it with the springtime fertility cult of ancient times.

The *Bihu* songs constitute one of the richest treasures of Assamese oral literature. They are normally sung in quatrains with alternate rhymes. The songs are poetic in nature and represent youthful exuberance. They describe beauty, both of nature and of the loved one, speak of frustration and sorrow, but above all they glorify youth and love and express the yearning for union.

“The history of Assamese poetry is replete with the rich folk music of the past. The people of Assam still nurture a sort of pagan devotion to nature, manifested in popular festivals that are associated with the change of seasons. These popular festivals which mark the advent of spring and autumn are known as *Bihu*. Poetry by common consent is the oldest form of literary expression. Long before man wrote down his thoughts, he expressed them in songs, e.g. in rhythmical language. The *Bihu* songs speak of such an origin…”  

(Barua 2003: 25).

The reality of the particular community, their life, customs and culture are all reflected in the songs. The *Husori* songs are more devotional in tone and have influences of Vaishnism in them. They are sober and serious compositions, often approaching hymns, which are sung by groups of men in the courtyards of villagers when the various households are visited to wish good luck for the New Year. Given below are a few examples of the *Bihu* songs along with their rough translations---

*Otikoi senehor mugare mohura*
*otikoi senehor maaku*
*taatukoi senehor bohaagor bihuti*
*nepati kenekoi thaku.*
Translation

So dear is the muga\textsuperscript{18} bobbin
So dear the shuttle,
Dearer still is Bohag Bihu
How can we do without celebrating it?

\textit{Buku bohol kori kokal siyan kori}
\textit{Tumar maan huwoni naai}
\textit{Tumar ei kokalti otikoiye laahi}
\textit{Khujat haali jaali jaai.}

Translation

With the broad bosom and thin waist
None is your equal in beauty
Your waist is so slim
It sways as you walk.

\textit{Haatot dhori dhori Dihing noi paar holu}
\textit{Jirai jaau khagori tolot}
\textit{Maasor soku jen biri gorhai dilu}
\textit{Epheri nedekhu golot.}

Translation

By holding hands did we cross the \textit{Dihing}\textsuperscript{19}
We rested under the reeds
I had made you a fish-eye shaped locket
I do not see it on your neck now.
Tawang Bomdila’t bortup phutile
kaan taal maari jaai
nasonir bukut ogoni jolise
senai dhan gharate naai.

Translation
Bombs have burst at Tawang and Bomdila
one’s ears get deafened
a fire is raging in the heart of the dancer
her dear love is not at home.

Husori Songs
Krishnair murote bokul phool epahi
ninyor paai mukoli hol O
Govindai Ram

Translation
On Krishna’s head is a bakul flower,
Getting wet in dew it opened its petals,
O’ Govinda O’ Ram.

Husori bai ou dolou sorai
aami je aasu husori gaai
husori bai ou dolou sorai
tamul thuka paan gusi rupor horai
ibarir baanh ou hibarir baanh
dui baanhe theka laagi jaai chot maah
laaut dibha hedali jikat dibha jeng
bohaagor bhihute aahibor niyam
eta baanhor terota kaami
bohaagor bhihute aahisu aami
upore borokhun tole buka
husori gowa lorahotor bilai suwa
upore barakhun tole buka
sinaju kei mara aathur jukha
da potharore boha
aamaku husrokha kora
da pothrore pera
grihashthak aakhirbaad kora.

Translation
O sister Husori o dolou bird
we are singing husori songs
o sister husori o dolou bird
a bunch of areca nuts, a sheaf of betel leaves and the silver horai bird
a bamboo of this garden, a bamboo of that garden
both knock against each other this month of Chot
a trellis for the gourd, tree branches for the jika
it is the custom to come in the month of Bohag
thirteen withes from one bamboo
in Boaag Bihu have we come
it is raining above and there’s mud below
look at the plight of the Husori singing boys
it is raining above and there’s mud below
leeches are sucking us up to the knee
houses of the hollow field
do attend to us
a box of the hollow field
let us bless this household.

The translator’s task is a very difficult one, as the songs cannot be explained without constant reference to the broader contexts of verbal utterance. In the songs, hardly anything is put in plain and direct terms. Names of fruits, leaves, trees, references to local rivers and hills and such concrete objects are intertwined with the texture of the songs. The result sometimes becomes incongruous. So, the translator here has offered only a rough equivalent of what is found in the original songs.

Kati Bihu

*Kati Bihu* falls during the autumn season, on the *domahi*²₄ of the Assamese *Aahin* and *Kati* months. There are some rituals associated with this *Bihu*, though feasting and merry-making do not form a part of it. The granaries are almost empty at this time of the year, as people waits for the time of harvest. So this *Bihu* is also known as *Kongali Bihu* or poor *Bihu*. 
*Kati Bihu* is observed at the time when rice grains begin to spout in the paddy plant. The well being of the crop for greater and better production is the chief aim of the celebratory practices, and is a one-day affair. The ceremonious tradition of this *Bihu* is the worship of the *Tulsi* plant, symbolizing Goddess *Lakshmi*, the consort of Lord *Vishnu* in Hindu mythology. On this day small banana trees are planted beside the sacred *Tulsi* in the yard and in the evening earthen lamps are put at the foot of the plant and on the body of the banana---on shelves made of bamboo sticks. Lamps are also put at the granary, in the garden and in the fields, accompanied by singing of hymns. The male folk plant a small bamboo in the field and put a lamp at its foot. In some places, they whirl a bamboo stick and chant *mantras* to ward off pests and rodents. Another feature of *Kati Bihu* is the lighting of *Akashbanti* or sky-lamp hanging from the tip of a tall bamboo. This is done to show the souls of dead persons the way to the other world, or to enable one to attain the abode of *Vishnu*. The purpose of the worship and all the rituals is to protect the seedlings from depredations of mice, insects, birds and animals, and also for a good crop.

*Magh Bihu*

*Magh Bihu* is the harvest festival of Assam and it starts on the *domahi* of the Assamese *Pooh* and *Magh* months. It has many parallels among agrarian people across the country. After a fruitful harvest, the granaries are full and people at this time have no shortfall of grains and foodstuff. It’s time also to bid adieu to the harshness of winter and for some feasting and merrymaking. That is why
this *Bihu* is also called *Bhogali Bihu* (*Bhogali* in Assamese having associations with food and comfort).

In Assam the core of the celebrations is a fire ceremony, observed on the day of *Uruka*, i.e. the Bihu eve, which has its particular importance. On this day the womenfolk gets ready for the next day with preparations of traditional ethnic delicacies like *chira, pitha, muri, aakhoi, laru, hurum* etc., while the men folk go for fishing and prepare for the community feasts in the evening. The young people collect stubble, dried banana leaves and bamboo in a nearby open area and raise high temple-like structures known as *bhelaghars*. In upper Assam, it is known as *meji*. They also construct a makeshift cottage close by and stay there overnight. Feasting and merrymaking goes on till the wee hours.

On the first day of *Magh*, at the crack of dawn, someone in the family ties bands of laths, jute or thatch around fruit-bearing trees, calls out to dogs and offers them rice. Women normally engage in cleaning the house. Then all take a purifying bath and put on washed, clean clothes. After that they move on to the *bhelaghars* or *meji* and make offerings to God. Then, amidst chanting of hymns the structures are set on fire. The elderly people give blessings and put marks of ash on the forehead. The half-burnt sticks and ashes are scattered in the fields; sometimes a few pieces may be brought home to be thrown near fruit-bearing trees. The belief is that the ashes and embers increase fertility of fields and trees. The act of worshipping fire has been an ancient one---the purpose being the protection of fertility and increased production. After the *meji* is burnt, people sing hymns to the accompaniment of kettledrums and large cymbals.
This is done in the *naamghars*, in some places for the entire *magh* month. In this aspect of the festival, the influence of Vaishnavism is clearly seen. Feasting and merrymaking follows thereafter. Different types of games and sports are held like wrestling, racing, egg fight, buffalo fight etc. In earlier times more martial games like sword fighting, javelin throw etc. were customary.

**Parallels of Bohag Bihu in Other Communities**

In the above discussion we have got a general idea of the festival of *Bihu* as celebrated in the greater Assamese society. As we have mentioned earlier, Assam is inhabited by a wide variety of indigenous tribes who have their own distinctive tradition and culture that forms part of their ethnic identities. Our discussion here is chiefly concerned with springtime *Bihu*. In the following section, we shall deal very briefly about the fertility festivals of some select tribes of the land.

**Bodos**

The springtime *Bihu* is termed as *Boishagu* by the *Bodos*. The celebrations follow over several days. The first day is *Magou*, meant for the cattle; the second day is *Mansoi Domahi* meant for men; the third day is *Saima* meant for dogs; the fourth day is *Ama* meant for swine; the fifth day is *Daoni* meant for fowl; the sixth day is meant for ducks and other birds; the seventh day is meant for receiving relatives and friends. On the seventh day they clean the house ceremonially, take a purifying bath and pay obeisance to the elders. Finally they worship the supreme deity *Bathou* or Lord Shiva by offering chicken and *zou*.26
The Bagarumba dance is typically performed during this festival and it is the most attractive dance of the Bodo community. Girls alone, dressed in dokhnas, chaddar and jhumra, perform this dance (also known as Bardwisikhla) accompanied by men playing traditional musical instruments like the serja (a bowed instrument), sifung (flute), tharkha (a piece of split bamboo) and khum (a long drum made of wood and goatskin). Although it is cheerful and creates a festive mood of much gaiety and merriment providing the girls with relief from their normal hardworking village life, it is also serious, and the lyrics that accompany it are a simple description of the world of nature.

The purpose of the dance is to appease the Bodos’ supreme god Bathou, for whom the Siju tree is a symbol. It is also called the Butterfly Dance as the girls look like pretty, flighty butterflies as they dance with their arms outstretched, their shawls creating the impression of wings.

The Boishagu festival is closed with community prayers offered at the garja sali, a place of common worship, located outside the village in the corner of a grazing field.

Sonowal Kacharis

The Sonowal Kacharis are a branch of the Bodo Kacharis and are of Mongoloid origin. Like the Bodos, they too trace their religious lore to Bathou, Khiringraja, Sibrai --- all names of Lord Shiva. On the second day of their Bihu, they worship the Siju plant which stands as the symbol of the deity. The next stage is offering of food and drink to their ancestors and recently dead relatives, the food being placed in a corner of the yard. There is also the
ceremonial eating of fowl cooked with a bitter herb known as \textit{khungkha}. This is also offered to visitors. Feasting follows with local drinks. From the next day onwards dance and music becomes a regular feature, and while young men play in the \textit{siphung} flute, the drum, the four-stringed \textit{serja}, and beat out rhythm with a piece of split bamboo which they call \textit{tharka}, girls dance in bands and play on the Jew’s harp (\textit{gagana}) and small cymbals. Another important feature of the festivity is \textit{magan} or begging, visiting houses and asking for money or its substitutes. The songs that are sung cover such themes as the making of new ropes for cattle, description of female qualities, and personal satire. The dance and music are typical of the season.

\textbf{Deoris}

The \textit{Deoris} start their Bihu which they call \textit{Bisu}, on a Wednesday. They too observe this festival for a period of seven days with unlimited joy and merrymaking. The \textit{Deoris} do not perform \textit{Husori} in every \textit{Bohag Bihu}. This is one noteworthy feature of their culture. They have to seek permission from the village priest for that. If the priest does not foretell any evil or danger, only then the men of the village offer prayers to their God and start the formal performance of \textit{Husori}. This must begin from the houses of the priests and then continue to the houses of the other villagers. Informally though, the dance and music starts much earlier; right from the \textit{Phagun} month young men and women tend to gather at night in the yards of the villagers and enjoy themselves by singing and dancing.
The formal part of *Bihu* starts on the *Bihu* eve with sacrifices of fowls and swine offered at their shrines (*Thaan*) of *Shiva-Parvati*. *Bihu* dance starts at the shrines and continues right through the night. The *Deodhani* dance is an integral part of the *Bihu puja* among the Deoris. The songs recall their former home at Kundil near Sadiya, their four shrines there, and even the sacred waters of the holy shrine of *Parashuram Kunda* in the Lohit division of Arunachal Pradesh. Some of the songs tend to turn into love songs, but they are thoroughly steeped in Hindu mythology.

*Husori* singing and dancing continues on all days and must be completed on a Thursday. They bid adieu to the festival on the day of *Bisu Uruwaba* (the day of formal ending of *Bisu*) and the entire village seeks blessings for well-being and prosperity from the deities.

**Misings**

The *Misings* have their seed-sowing festival known as *Ali-ai-ligang* or *Ligang* in short. They begin their cultivation during the winter, on the fertile river banks thrown up by the rivers, but they observe the *Ligang* festival in the first week of *Phagun*, several weeks before the Assamese *Bihu*. Like the *Deoris*, the *Misings* also start *Ligang* on a Wednesday, the day being associated with the Goddess of Rice.

The festival is associated with the cultivation of *Ahu* rice or autumn rice. The name *Ali-ai-Ligang* is significant; *Ali* means ‘root and seed’, *ai* means ‘fruit’ and *Ligang* means ‘sow’. This is the reason why, the sowing of paddy is started
on this day ritually. The festival is observed for five days. On the day of the ceremony proper, offerings are made to their ancestors and then some ahu paddy seeds are sown in the fields amidst uttering of mantras or chantings. The ceremonial Ligang dance commences from about noon. Young boys and girls dance in a ring at every house starting from the easternmost house in the village. Food and rice beer are served to all and with the increase in gaiety the dance spreads to the fields and riverside. On the fourth day there are taboos regarding cutting trees, fishing, ploughing and burning jungle that must strictly be observed.

The Ligang dance of the Misings known as Gumraag Sohmaan is mimetic, representing sowing of seeds, planting, reaping, threshing of paddy in wooden mortars, weaving with the shuttle etc. Although the object of the performance is to stimulate Mother Earth, the dance is more religious in intent unlike the sexual suggestions that is associated with the Bihu dance. The songs are known as Oinitom which have similarities to Assamese Bihu in beat and tune. The subjects and themes of the songs are varied. They do not remain restricted to the songs of youth alone, and include the sufferings of day to day life of the Mising. Apart from that, the songs also describe the joy and pain associated with matters of individual love and affection. Drums, flutes, gogona and gong are used as accompaniments to the songs.

The last day of festival is called Lilien and it ends with a grand community feast.
**Phat Bihu Festival: Ethnographic Accounts**

The data presented here have been collected through participant observation of the celebrations from 2011-2014, through informal interviews and the analysis of published secondary data. This has facilitated a greater knowledge and significant insights into the dynamics of the festival. The information hereby presented has been divided in two parts:

Firstly starting with a historical account of the festival, and then focussing on a description of the events as they happen in sequence during the festival.

The subsequent chapter then continues with the analysis of the influence of the processes of globalisation on the celebrations, examining the manner in which the festivities challenge, respond and re-create meanings.

**Historical Accounts:**

Phat Bihu festival is a traditional celebration of Dhakuakhana. It is a regionalized form of *Bohag Bihu* which has its own individual characteristics. Like *Bohag Bihu*, Phat Bihu was also celebrated during the first seven days of the Assamese *Bohag* month in earlier times. But nowadays it is normally celebrated towards the end of the *Bohag* month. There are no historical records as to the origin of this festival, but the celebrations are generally traced back to the days of *Ahom* rule. According to local perspectives, the festival got widely propagated during the *Ahom* rule, but it has its origin even before that. As this *Bihu* song says:
Pokhila ura di ur o nasoni

Pokhila ura di ur

Rojaru aagor phatbihukhonit

Nepabi piritir oor.

which means,

“Dance like a gliding butterfly, O my nasoni (female dancer)

Dance like a butterfly

You won’t find an end to love and affection

In Phat Bihu that has its advent even before the king.”

There are numerous opinions offered by the local people as to the etymology of the term Phat. Given below are some of the prevalent views---

- It is said that during the Ahom times, thousands of people gathered on the banks of Charikoriya River to celebrate the Bihu festival. Due to this huge congregation, there used to be cracks (known as phat in the local language) on that land. So, it is known as Phat Bihu.

- Some say that, a section of the people segregated (phat which in Assamese means to separate) themselves from the high-caste society and started celebrating Bihu separately. That is why it is known as Phat Bihu.

- Yet others say that during the merry-making of Bihu, the drums used to crack, the clothes worn by the dancers used to get tattered, and voices of the singers broke due to continuous singing. Hence, the term Phat Bihu, Phat in Assamese also bearing the aforementioned meanings.
• The name of the British official Sphat Green is also associated by some with Phat Bihu. They say that when Green visited Dhakuakhana he was welcomed with Bihu performances. Thereafter, the name Sphat transformed into Phat and from that originated the term Phat Bihu.

• During the Ahom rule, a group of Bihu dancers went to Rang Ghar\textsuperscript{32} in Sibsagar to perform Bihu. But they were barred from performing there, and so this group from the north bank of the Brahmaputra segregated (Phat) from the others and started celebrating Bihu separately. Later on this Bihu came to be known as Phat Bihu.

• It is also contended that once there was a draught in the area. There were cracks (Phat) on the fields and there was no production of crops. So, in order to appease the rain Gods the people from the various communities gathered and together performed their respective songs and dances associated with fertility and production. Subsequently, this came to be known as Phat Bihu.

• Considering the symbolism of fertility and productivity associated with majority of the folk festivals, the implication of sexual connotations also in the word phat cannot be completely ignored.

• The origin of Phat Bihu festival is also linked to the Haarhi temple\textsuperscript{33} near Dhakuakhana. The caste and tribes of all the nearby areas were closely associated with the temple. The people who came from faraway places to visit the temple mingled with the local populace and they used to indulge in dance and merry-making sometimes together and
sometimes apart. In this way the tradition of celebrating Phat Bihu originated according to some local views.

- Another widely accepted view says that the term *Phat* is a *Tai* (language of the Ahoms) word, and according to *Ahom Lexicons* and also the *Hemkosh*, it literally means a place near river banks where people assemble for trade and commerce as well as royal collection of duties. During the olden days, people from all communities assembled on the *Charikoriya* river bank for routine business and payment of royal taxes (as water transport was the only means of communication then), and during *Bohag* or *Rongali Bihu*, they celebrated the festival together. Consequently, it came to be known as *Phat Bihu*, that is, Bihu celebrated on the *phat* or river bank.

Eminent litterateur Homen Borgohain says, “Phat Bihu is a distinctive festival of Dhakuakhana. We heard of Phat Bihu from our father when we were small children. There are numerous *Mising* villages in and around Dhakuakhana. Every year during *Bohag Bihu* the *Miri* (*Mising*) youths came in groups to celebrate *Bihu* on the banks of *Charikoriya*. Thousands of people from nearby villages assembled to watch the performances. This Phat Bihu went on for seven days and seven nights. Not only the *Misings*, but also the other castes and tribes of Dhakuakhana like *Ahom, Chutiya, Koibartta* etc. participated in this community festival…” (Borgohain 1995: 44). Dimbeswar Gogoi, a local college teacher, opines in this connection that during *Rongali Bihu* large groups of young men and women gathered on the *Charikoriya Phat* to celebrate Bihu. And hence it came to be known as *Phator Bihu* (*Bihu of the Phat*). As the rural
illiterate folks have the tendency to simplify things, so in pronunciation the ‘r’ sound got omitted and consequently it came to be known as Phato Bihu among the local populace (Gogoi 1999: 23). Jitram Kalita, another native of Dhakuakhana says in a similar vein that since Dhakuakhana is a low-lying area, inundation by floods has been an annual event from time immemorial. The only means of communication during the early days was the boat. Before the Ahom rule, because of such reasons there was no stable agricultural society there. The flood-affected people, who sought shelter on the raised land by the river bank, were a heterogeneous mix of people from all sections of the society and were mostly refugees. And during Bohag, they celebrated Bihu and indulged in dance and merry-making together forgetting all the sorrows and the individual and collective differences of religion, caste, creed, tradition and language. The Ahoms called this Bihu as Pha-tai Bihu. In Ahom terms Pha meant people from the hills, and it also meant ‘refugees’. Tai on the other hand meant ‘people’. As the people of the region like the Ahoms, Deoris, Chutiyas, Mising, Khamtis, Koibarttas etc. were temporary residents and they participated in Phat Bihu in large numbers, we can assume that the history of the celebrations goes back to the years before the 16th century, but the term Phat Bihu gained coinage in the 16th century A.D. (Kalita 1999: 7-8).

**Evolution of Phat Bihu Festival**

There are no records as to continuity in the celebration of Phat Bihu festival. Nevertheless, it is widely assumed that this festival gained much popularity during the Ahom reign. However, in the course of British rule in India, there was political turmoil in the entire country which affected this small region on
the north bank of the Brahmaputra also. There were intervals in the celebrations during the turbulent times due to many reasons, be it political, social disturbances or natural disasters as floods and earthquakes. The first break came in the year 1917. The burden of tax was too heavy on the poor farmers. Especially the tribal people were affected much as the British government imposed force on them. In Dhakuakhana too, the Mising people who had elephants and bulls were levied with extra tax. Legend has it that to openly revolt against British rule, a meeting was organized by the Mising in a village named Baghmora at the southern part of the Subansiri River. Under the leadership of a local Mising man, Mohan Gaam, they decided to indulge in jingoism. And so they started looting the shops of the Marwari traders as they were the agents through whom the British used to distribute salt in the region. Mohan Gaam and a few of his aides were arrested and sent to jail. The other Mising youths were terrified and went into hiding. The incident occurred around the time of Bohag Bihu; the people who earlier came to the Charikoriya Phat to rejoice in dance and merrymaking were the ones who indulged in plunder. Shame gripped these people and they stopped coming to Phat Bihu festival. There were no celebrations without the participation of the Mising as they were an integral part of it.

In the subsequent years, the struggle for India’s freedom reached its height and people were whole-heartedly engaged in agitation. As such, the celebration of Phat Bihu took a backseat. After India’s independence in 1947 the people were relaxed and felt more at ease to indulge in festivities. In 1948, on the seventh day of Bohag, Phat Bihu festival was organized for a day after a long interval on
the grounds of the Government M.E School, Dhakuakhana. The celebration then was not of a competitive nature and there were no female participants in it. The aged people and the women folk would stand at a distance and view the performances. From among the participant groups some good performers were selected and rewarded with umbrellas, vests, lamps etc. In the years that followed, because of many factors Phat Bihu festival was not held on a regular basis. It was only from 1976 onwards, owing to the efforts of many enthusiastic people, especially with the rise of the new educated middle class, that it is being observed in Dhakuakhana at fixed intervals every year and in due course has taken the present day form.

**Celebratory Features**

In earlier times, Phat Bihu festival was celebrated for seven days and nights as it is just another form of the *Saat Bihu*. The *Mising* people of Dhakuakhana and its nearby areas were the chief participants. With the passage of time, other tribes like the *Deoris* also started taking part in the festivities.

> “After the first three days of *Bohag*, the young men and women of the area would assemble on the banks of *Charikoriya*. They would form groups and revel in festive dance. This would go on for fifteen days. There were no barriers of caste and creed; the tribes from faraway places also joined in the revelry… Another important feature of this Bihu was that it had no organizers.”

(Borgohain 1985: 20).

The present form of this Bihu is a three-day extravaganza where one can be a part of a huge gathering of thousands of people from all sections of the society, in *Mohghuli Chapori* on the banks of *Charikoriya* River. Earlier it used to be
held on the 7th, 9th or 12th day of the month of Bohag, but nowadays the
celebrations normally start on the second Friday of the month of May and
continue till Sunday. On the first two days, there are on stage performances by
the various Bihu groups---children, maidens and married women, men---from
all tribes and communities. These are judged and the best ones are awarded on
the final day. The third day starts with a cultural procession, which is of course
a more recent addition to the festivities. The procession comprises of a portrayal
of the multi-coloured rich Assamese culture. After the procession, there are
performances in open surroundings under the trees, which is known as Mukoli
Bihu.35 Each group performs surrounding a tree each. Before the performance
starts, obeisance is paid to the trees by wrapping a Gamusa around it.
Performances take place in a completely natural environment, and all people
irrespective of caste, creed, and religion wholeheartedly participate in the
celebrations thus obliterating all forms of boundaries. One can see spontaneous,
natural, whole-hearted and harmonious participation of a heterogeneous mass of
population. This is the main attraction of the entire celebratory process and is
the symbolic representation of the original Phat Bihu festival. After that there is
an open meeting, and in it the winners are awarded with prizes. With it, the
three day festivity comes to an end.

Tribes and castes from all walks of life gather on the river bank and display
their respective traditional forms of Bihu dance, and rejoice in the merriment on
all three days thus exhibiting a singular kind of cultural integration.

The festival space has been fenced off and converted by means of various
structures and plantations. It focuses upon a central stage for the performances
of the first two days, the front stage for the audience and the back stage for the
organisers and other groups of people. Rows of Sishu\textsuperscript{36} trees have been planted
inside the premises as also the Kopouphool\textsuperscript{37}, which is representative of Bohag
Bihu, on the branches of these trees. Surrounding the entire site, temporary
structures are set up for the traders who come for business there. The three days
of the festival witnesses the congregation of thousands of people who visit the
grounds to join in the merrymaking, watch the performances, as also for trade
and business. All people don the traditional attire; what is significant is that
none without the traditional Assamese costume are allowed to enter the festival
ground. And only the officials, judges, volunteers, and invitees of Phat Bihu
festival can enter the stage set up for the competitions and the open meeting.
Also it is mandatory for these people to wear only muga costumes in order to
participate in the festival rituals--- muga Riha Mekhela for women, and muga
Churiya and Chapkon (traditional Assamese dresses) for the men. It is worth
mentioning here that Dhakuakhana is renowned for the production of authentic
muga silk and other types of traditional weaving.

Visitors from other places are extended a very warm hospitality, but are referred
to as “outsiders”. For the festival days, physically and metaphorically they take
up their own social space, but they can never partake in the festival rituals or
other decision making processes. In this way, they determine a special social
identity differentiating local inhabitants to visitors.

Another noteworthy feature of the modern day Phat Bihu celebrations is that it
is planned and conducted by a committee of people. There are two groups---the
Permanent Committee and the Organising Committee. Both the groups together
comprise the general council with members who belong to the region as also people from all over the world. The Phat Bihu Constitution declares the aims and objectives as follows---

- To preserve and promote Phat Bihu as a treasure of Assamese tradition and culture.
- To unite all people of Dhakuakhana irrespective of caste and creed and make conditions for them to be more artistically inclined.
- To institute the distinctive culture of the Dhakuakhana, in Assam as well as other places of the country, through the local tribes of the region.
- To take every measure to protect culture from falling into degeneration.
- To promote the Phat Bihu festival premises into a tourism hub.
- To take measures for the socio-economic development of Dhakuakhana along with its culture.
- To take every initiative to prevent the operation of group politics in Phat Bihu, although all cultured people irrespective of caste, creed, religion or class can be associated with it.

The organisers and the members meet periodically during the course of one celebration to the next. The performing groups do the same. In this way, they form a team and each of them becomes responsible for a number of things in the festival. The festival does not concern itself only on the network of the organisers and the local people. Concerted efforts to address a greater public are also made by sending out press releases, and through the electronic media.
Composition of the Committee

As has been stated above, the Phat Bihu festival Committee is composed of two divisions---

- The Permanent Committee, and
- The Organising Committee

The Permanent Committee:

The permanent committee is called Phat Bihu *Samîti* and is formed for a period of three years. Apart from the Advisers, there are twenty-one members in this committee, a minimum of two among which must be women. The composition of the members is as follows---

- Advisers—2
- President---1
- Vice-President---1
- Secretary---1
- Assistant Secretary---1
- Finance Secretary---1
- Coordinating Secretary---1
- Office Secretary and Superintendent---1
- Members---14

In addition to the two Advisors, the Member of Parliament and the Member of Legislative Assembly of the Dhakuakhana Constituency, and the Civil Sub-Divisional Officer are its Chief Advisers.
The Organising Committee:

Known as the Phat Bihu *Udjapon Samiti*, the Organising Committee consists of 41 members which are as follows---

- President---1
- Vice-President---3
- Secretary---1
- Assistant Secretary---3
- Treasurer---1
- Secretary in charge of Publicity---3
- Office Secretary---2
- Members---27

Apart from the above members, the Organising Committee also has many sub-committees formed for the smooth functioning of affairs. Part 3, Section 2 of the Phat Bihu festival *Constitution* states about the composition of the committee as follows---

- The Committees shall be formed by holding a public meeting.
- All secular and culture loving people can participate in the meeting.
- The Secretary with due permission from the President of the *Phat Bihu Committee* shall call for the public meet.
- A senior citizen from among the people present in the meeting will be selected by the Secretary to preside over the meeting.
• For members to be office-bearers, names only of registered life-members can be proposed and supported.

• The Proposer and Supporter should also be registered members of the Committee.

• One permanent member can nominate or support only one member.

• The President shall declare the members elected after following all due procedures.

• The election of members shall be through the process of nomination and support.

• One elected member can nominate/support only one office-bearer.

• In case there is more than one nomination, the process of democratic election shall be followed. The power to vote shall be only among the members.

Part 3, Section 3 speaks of the qualifications, duties and responsibilities of the following---

• Adviser--- The function of the Adviser(s) is only of counsel. He/She shall have no voting right, but can be present in the Executive Meetings.

• President--- The President should be more than 35 years of age.

--- He/she shall have to be a cultured and honest man not involved in any illegal or anti-social activities.

--- Persons with records of fraudulence in other institutions shall not be considered for the post.
---He/she must be a member of the Phat Bihu Committee at least for a year.

**Or**

He/she should be a member of the Organising Committee for three years.

---He/she shall be the chief of the committee.

---He/she shall preside over all meetings.

---Every matter and decision in connection with Phat Bihu shall require his/her approval.

---He/she shall have the right to supervise works of all the members.

---If the Secretary fails to call for meetings, the President can do so by himself or with the help of the Assistant Secretary.

---The President shall preside over all open meetings regarding the celebration of Phat Bihu

---All receipts for donation shall be under his signatory.

- **Vice-President**---The qualifications, duties and responsibilities of the Vice-President are same as the President. In the absence of the President all responsibilities are to be carried out by the Vice-President.

- **Secretary**---The Secretary is the main functionary, policy and decision maker of the committee. All financial affairs are looked after by him. It is interesting to note that the Finance Secretary does not have the power to deal with finances but acts only as an assistant to the Secretary.
Significance of the Phat Bihu Songs

The events in the festivity and the songs, dances, musical instruments, costumes etc. of the performances stir up memories of the past for the audience. The Bihu songs tell the stories of the different life phases---agricultural life, productivity, as well as love and romance, the tales of the history, culture, life, love etc. of the people of Assam, as also the regional people’s sorrow, wants, exploitations, disasters, struggle, harmony et al.

The historical context to the celebrations, the unity, love and passion of the people for Phat Bihu festival can be found in the songs as---

*Pokhila ura di ur o nasoni*

*Pokhila ura di ur*

*Rojaru aagor phatbihukhonit*

*Nepabi piritir oor.*

**Translation**

Dance like a gliding butterfly, O my *nasoni* (female dancer)

Dance like a butterfly

You won’t find an end to love and affection

In Phat Bihu that has its advent even before the king.

*Ahomor phatore senehor bihuti*

*Kinu saba piritir rong*

*Dhulor maate huni roboke nuaru*

*Duwaror katilu daang.*
Translation

The Phat Bihu of *Ahom Phat*

What hues of love would you see

Hearing the sound of *dhol* (drum), I couldn’t stop myself

I broke the bolt of the door.

*Bihute boliya kune homoniya*

*Bihute boliya kun*

*Bihute boliya Dhakuakhoniya*

*Kopalot mohare hoon.*

Translation

Who is passionate about *Bihu* my friends

Who’s passionate about *Bihu*

The people of Dhakuakhana are passionate about *Bihu*

They have gold the size of a coin on their forehead.

*Charikoriyar paarote bohage khelise*

*joubonor piriti khela.*

*Mohghuliloi ahiba, phato bihut nasiba,*

*patiba xompritir mela.*

Translation

On the banks of Charikoriya, *Bohag* is frolicking in

the fun of youthful passion and ardour;

come to *Mohghuli*, dance in Phat Bihu

and revel in the fiesta of harmony.
Mohghuli chaporı ahiba lahorı

Phat bihur botora paai

Missing ahibo deuriu ahibo

Aamar bihu bhaanguta naai.

Translation

Come to Mohghuli chaporı o’ my beloved

Receiving the news of Phat Bihu

The Misings will come, as also the Deoris

There’s none who can interrupt our Bihu.

The symbolic youthfulness of Bihu, are reflected in the dances and songs which are more of an amorous character. The songs are replete with the themes of love and yearning as well as courtship. The love depicted in folksongs is not normally about spiritual exaltation and sublimation; its spontaneity and artlessness are conditioned by the seasonal changes and the physical environments among which the people have their being. More than the joy of consummated love, it is the yearning for companionship caused by separation and frustration that are presented in the songs.

Phatbihur dhulia, dhan toi dhuniya

Koteba asili hui

Bihutolit nedekhi, mone mur namane

Dehat mur jolise jui.
Translation
The *dhulia* (drummer) of Phat Bihu, my beloved you are so attractive

Where have you been asleep

Not spotting you in the Bihu premises, my mind is anxious

There’s a fire burning inside my body.

*Tumar ghar ipare, mur ghar hipare*

*Majot Charikoriya noi*

*Aahun buli bhabileu ahibo nuwaru*

*Sokulu aahe je boi.*

Translation

Your home is on the other bank, mine is on this bank

In between is the *Charikoriya* River

Even though I wish, I can’t come

Tears roll down my cheeks.

*Luitar hipare kohuwani phulile*

*Miriyoni khelile taat*

*Ene phagunmohiya tumar jouban phulile*

*Mone mur khelise taat.*

Translation

On the other bank of the *Luit* the *Kohuwa* has bloomed

*Miri* girls are sporting there

In this month of *Phagun* your breasts have bloomed

My mind is sporting there.
Other songs as the following speak of the rivers, riverbanks, fields, woods etc.,
the beauty and the ambience of the surroundings ---

Mohghuli chaporit abeli oi abeli
Dhane niraaisilu sapori oi sapori
Bohagore duporiya dhol pepar oi gumgumoni
Dhopoliyai ahila moromore nasoni
Haai o’ jun e beli kiyo puhor dili
Mure mon boliya mure mon boliya kori.

Translation

On the banks of Mohghuli in the evening
Stooping I was weeding the paddy
The afternoon of Bohag reverberating with sounds of the dhol and pepa
You came running o’ my nasoni
O’ moon and sun why did you shine
Making my mind, making my mind so passionate.

Hotini bilote kolosi buwalu
Tar majot humale puni
Lori dhapori aahu khore kori
Bihure batori huni.

Translation

I dipped my pot in the waters of Hotini Lake
Water weeds got into it
I rushed, ran, and walked fast
Hearing the news of Bihu.
Haatotu jetuka bhoritu jetuka
Kune dile jetuka tuk
Mohghuli chaporir nasoni keijoni
Hiyi dile jetuka muk.

Translation
You have jetuka (Mehendi, the Indian henna) on your hands, jetuka on your legs
Who gave jetuka to you
The nasonis of Mohghuli Chaporī
They gave jetuka to me.

Tokar horu horu maat homoniya
Tokar horu horu maat
Mohghuli Chaporit tokar maate huni
Eri jaau petore bhat.

Translation
The low sound of the toka₄² my friends
The low sounds of toka
Hearing the sound of toka in Mohghuli chaporī
I left even my nourishment behind.

Mohghulir betgaaj Hapekhatir senimaas
Baligaonor dabori haak
Outenga oi tengesi kinu khai jaba oi
Kole ur nopore taak.
Translation

The betgaaj\textsuperscript{43} of Mohghuli, the seni fish\textsuperscript{44} of Hapekhatt\textsuperscript{45}

The Dabori haak\textsuperscript{46} of Baligaon\textsuperscript{47}

Outenga\textsuperscript{48} and tengesi\textsuperscript{49} what do you want to have

There’s no end to it.

The Bihu songs of the Deoris have many references to the Brahmaputra\textsuperscript{50} and the Disang\textsuperscript{51} Rivers. Here are a couple of Deori Bihu songs in translation---

I shall leave Disang, I shall leave Tengapani\textsuperscript{52}.

I shall leave my parents and siblings

If only you tell me the truth.

The dross floats in the currents of the Luit River

They’ll get stuck somewhere on the sand banks

My life would also float and get stuck somewhere like the dross

And I shall shed tears of estrangement.

The Misings prefer river banks for their habitations and in the Oinitoms (Mising Bihu songs) there are frequent mention of the nearby rivers like the Brahmaputra, Kherkota, Subansiri etc. The rivers for them are a source of trouble as well as a means of emotional support. Some translated Oinitoms are as follows---
The absence of rains has dried up the sands of the *Luit*

Thinking and remembering you all the time

I have also dried up like the sands.

The dry blazing sands of the *Subansiri* can’t be soaked by a single shower

The impure mind of a maiden who doesn’t love whole heartedly

Cannot be rerouted.

The *Kherkota* River has turned into a dry desert

Childhood love has also disappeared.

I can’t swim in the *Subansiri* River

I can’t forget my childhood love.

Thus, the *Bihu* songs that are prevalent in Phat Bihu festival have glorified the entire region of Dhakuakhana. As has already been mentioned in Chapter I, the ancient name of Dhakuakhana was *Habung*. In non-Aryan terms, ‘Ha’ means ‘wide’ and ‘bung’ means ‘place’. In another term ‘habung’ means ‘fertile land’. We get many references to *Habung* in the songs as---

*Rongpuro bepari oi, Dhakuakhanar kotari oi*

*Nekatileu kaatu jen kore*

*Charikoriyar paani oi, Habungore gabhoru oi*

*Nenesileu naasu jen kore.*
Translation

The trader of Rongpur⁵³, the knife of Dhakuakhana

It slashes even if it doesn’t

The water of Charikoriya, the maiden of Habung

They seem to dance even if they really don’t.

The Bihu songs also give us a picture of the community and private life of the people. It narrates the love and life of the peasants; the social and domestic relations, their beliefs, and even petty issues like thankless drudgery, jealousy etc. ---all find pronouncement in the songs:

Maat nohoi muruli, haahi nohoi bijuli
Soku nohoi horogor tora
Tumare nisina, kote paam ejoni
Sokure piriti kora.

Translation

Your voice is like a flute

Your smile like the lightning

Your eyes are like the stars of the sky

Where will I get another one like you

Who makes love with the eyes.

Tumake dekhiulu dehore efali
Tumi je dekhiula beya
Nomori bharostot Jodi jiyai thaku
Tumi kenejoni aana.
**Translation**

I saw a part of your body

But you didn’t find me beautiful

If I remain alive on this earth

I shall see whom do you marry.

*Tirutar jonom di bidhatai srajile*

*Purukhor logote jur*

*Aai’u lukore pitai’u lukore*

*Dhon’oke buli jaau mur.*

**Translation**

God created me as a woman

Pairing me with a man

My mother and my father are not mine

I go to my love as my own.

*Purnimar ratite aaye jonomale*

*Dekhilu pithopir mukh*

*Horute aai muk maari nepelali*

*Jiyori kaalote dukh.*

**Translation**

Mother gave birth to me on a full moon night

I saw the face of the earth

You didn’t kill me in my infancy mother

I suffer so much in my youth.
Another aspect of the songs is that they describe the importance of weaving in the social and cultural life of the communities. The famed *Muga* silk craft of Dhakuakhana, the *Som* trees on which the *Muga* silkworm is reared also finds mention in the *Bihu* songs.
Aami akhomiya gaa’te muga riha
Khupat aamar kopou phool
Aamare sinaki bohag’or bihu’ti
Haat’ote jetuka’r bool.

Translation

We, the Assamese people, wear *muga riha*\(^{55}\)
And put on *kopou phool* on our buns
Our identity is in *Bohag Bihu*
We apply *jetuka* on our palms.

*Sumoni sumoni puli’koi sumoni*
*Muga puhiboloi bhal*
*Nasoni’r aangoli pobali pobali*
*Bihuwan boboloi bhal.*

Translation

The *Som* farm, the *Som* farm, the seedlings of the *Som* trees
Are best for rearing *muga* worm
The long, well formed fingers of the dancers
Are best for weaving *Bihuwan*\(^{56}\).

The nearby areas of Machkhowa, Lakhimpur, the famous Basudev Thaan\(^{57}\), and the Kuwabari\(^{58}\) water body etc. also get referred to in the songs.
Basudew saboloi goisilu lahori
Ghatoi’ye nokore paar
Haator siri-kharu di jaau doli mari
Ghatoi’ye koribo paar.

Translation
I went to visit the Basudev temple
The ferryman didn’t carry me on to the shore
I did away with the bangles from my wrist
So that the ferryman would take me ashore.

Kuwabari doloni sorai huwoni
Senehir mitha loga maat
Phato bihu aahile roboke nuwari
Haabi kaati ulame baat.

Translation
The beautiful birds of the Kuwabari pool
The sweet voice of my beloved
When Phat Bihu comes, I can’t control myself
I make my way clearing through the forest.

Besides the history and geography of the region, the political conditions of the
days find mention too---

Noi’t gumgumale, firingi aahile
Bhangile asomor dekh
Tumak oi lahori, nepabo lagile
Dhorim fakiror bekh.
Translation

The river resounded, the Firangee came

And divided the Assam country

If I don’t get you my love

I’ll become a fakir.

Koi jaau bhoni huni jaba
Bakhostti sonor juddhor kotha
Bholuka baahor guri hokot
Aami holu haalua bhokot
Sin bharator juddho hobo
Jote tote buma pelabo
Matir gaatot humai poriba
Nohoi janu Bogitora
Kelei baru futoni mara
Bogi suwalik Sinai nibo
Koli kolibur hogune khabo
Mugi mugibur aamare hobo.

Translation

I’ll tell you sister, about the war of 1962

Bholuka bamboo has big ends

We are farmer priests

There will be war between China and India

There will be bombarding everywhere

There will be bombarding everywhere
Hide yourself underground
Is’nt it Bogitora
Why are you so haughty
The fair girls will be taken away by the Chinese
The black ones will be eaten by vultures
The brown ones will be ours.

Such rendition of the history and lore of a single place in the folksongs of a single festival is an extremely rare instance.

**Significance of the Phat Bihu Dance**

In Phat Bihu festival one witnesses four forms of *Bihu* performances---

- *Bihu Husori*
- *Toka Bihu*
- *Mising Bihu*; and
- *Deori Bihu*

The *Bihu Husori* is a male group dance performed to the accompaniment of traditional *Bihu* music. The instruments used in this dance are the *dhol* (drum), *pepa* (buffalo horn pipe), *taal* (cymbal), gogona (minstrel’s harp), *toka* (bamboo clappers), *hutuli* (clay whistle), and *baanhi* (flute). Rhythmic hand gestures and body movements accompany the music and the performance is done in circular formations. The dance and the dress pattern follow the tradition of the old times. Unlike the modern forms of *Bihu Husori*, it is strictly a domain of the men folk
like the olden days. However, the performances by the young children have both boys and girls as participants.

Another very important part of the Phat Bihu celebrations is the Toka Bihu. It is a form of female group dance performed in the accompaniment of the Toka or bamboo clappers. In the days of yore, the maidens used to dance and sing under big trees in the woods, where the men were not allowed to participate. This was the general norm during Bihu which was prevalent in other parts of Assam too, and it is known by several names as Gabhoru Bihu, Jeng Bihu Ghar Bihu etc. Toka Bihu, as it is popularly known in Dhakuakhana has a very special place in the Phat Bihu celebrations. The various Toka Bihu groups including the maidens as also the married women have preserved the tradition of the performances in its original form. The various authorities of Bihu from all over Assam has accepted them as ideals. Noted Bihu expert Joykanta Gandhia says,

“The elderly ladies showed us Toka Bihu after the open meet of Phat Bihu...the dance postures were performed in the old form without any artificiality...There was one particular posture which I haven’t seen anywhere. That is, the movement done by stooping forward and swaying the hips, and rhythmically placing the hands backwards and clutching the waist once and then releasing it...this dance posture is very beautiful and meaningful too”

(Gandhia 1997: 42-43.)

The dress pattern includes Muga Mekhela (waist cloth), Riha (breast cloth) and blouse. The elderly ladies tie Gamusa from above the forehead down below the knot on their head while the young women bind their knot with natural flowers. Apart from that traditional Assamese ornaments are worn by all. No artificial
flowers or jewellery are used by the performers. Some of the famous Toka Bihu groups of the region are---*No.1 Bantow Toka Bihu Dal, Ghaheen Gaon Toka Bihu Dal, Chetia Gaon Toka Bihu Dal, Hooj Gaon Toka Bihu Dal, Hiloidari Toka Bihu Dal* etc. The *Toka Bihu* of Dhakuakhana has enriched the tradition of *Bihu*, and particularly in matters of the *Bihu* dress pattern the tradition and culture of the people gets amply reflected as observed by eminent *Bihu* experts like Joykanta Gandhia.

In the section on *Mising* festival, we have already mentioned that the *Ligang* dance or *Gumraag Sohmaan* of the *Mising* people is symbolic. It portrays the agricultural activities in the field like sowing and reaping, threshing of paddy in wooden mortars, weaving with the shuttle etc. This is more of a religious dance and do not have sexual suggestions that is usually associated with *Bihu*. The dance groups are accompanied by elderly men from the village. The girls dance in groups often taking turns. The tunes of the *Oinitoms* sung in *Phat Bihu* are almost similar to the Assamese *Bihu* tunes. They wear their traditional dresses *Ege, Ri Bi Gaseng, Gero* etc. for the women, and *Gonrougon, Mibugaluk, Dumour* etc. for the men. The instruments used are drum, cymbal, flute, harp etc.

The *Deori Bihu Husori* also is religious in nature. Men and women both take part in the performance. Like the *Mising*, an elderly person, who is expert in singing the *Husori* songs, goes with the group. The songs and dance are performed to the accompaniment of instruments like drums, cymbal, flute, *toka* etc. The dresses include *Gathiki, Phuma, Luguru Isa*, etc. for women, and the *mukago gubo bose, Ikho* etc. for the men.
The Cultural Procession

The ceremonial procession is of a more recent addition to the festivities and comprises a part of urban culture. It constitutes of a structured presentation of the variegated culture and tradition of the region in particular and the greater Assamese society in general. People from all communities participate with a performative act of their respective culture on display. A popular public figure of the state is invited as a chief participant of the procession. The procession becomes a theatre of social action where the diversity and richness of the community as a whole is highlighted in ways in which processors are able to articulate a sense of self at a personal, local and national level. The function of the parade is thus varied---the display of power, solidarity, entertainment, but more importantly it enables a large number of collective identities to develop and provide a space in which these identities get negotiated and re-configured.

The Fair in Phat Bihu Festival

Another significant aspect of Phat Bihu celebration is the fair that is organized to sell local products. As has been stated above the festival had its origin in trading practices. In the early days, the Charikoriya Phat was the hub of trade and commerce for the local people as well as the tribes from the nearby hills. And one assumption about the origin of the Phat Bihu festival holds it that when the royal officials visited the place for collection of duties and taxes, the traders from all castes and tribes danced and rejoiced in merrymaking in order to entertain the king and his subjects.
Post-independence Phat Bihu celebrations were arranged on weekly market days. Unlike the celebrations today that is held for three days, the festivities in those days were only for a day. And normally that day used to be the day when the weekly fair was held. Keeping with the traditions, market stalls are put up in the festival grounds as part of the present-day celebrations. Apart from business, the fair has been organized with an aim to exhibit and promote local art and industry, and traders from Dhakuakhana and nearby areas participates in it with a range of ethnic commodities. However, this market has seen considerable growth and in recent years vendors from far off places of Assam also are seen to take part in it. The cultural products are a big attraction for visitors, and the fair reflects how characteristic regional hospitality delivers cultural tourism apart from other economic impacts. We shall deal with this aspect in details in the subsequent chapters.

**Phat Bihu Festival and the Mising Community**

The *Mising* tribe are chiefly agrarian people and that is why they are settled on the fertile land near the river banks. Apart from the river banks of the Siang and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh, they have their settlements on the edges of the rivers *Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Dhansiri, Dikhow, Bhorolee* etc. of Assam. The *Mising* villages in and around the *Charikoriya* River are Alimur Daangdhora, Khamon, Amguri-Medhihunti, Dhunaguri Kutum, Jopunchuk, Nayabazar, Bandala, Ghunahunti, Ouguri-Daangdhora, Bokulguri, Maatmora, Kherkotamukh, Arkep-Baligaon and the rest. The water bodies that pass through these villages are the River *Brahmaputra* and its many tributaries *Subansiri, Kherkota, Charikoriya, Korha, Kumotiya, Laaipuliya* among others.
The *Mising* culture that centres round these rivers has its reflection on Phat Bihu festival too. They are an all important part of the celebrations. The chief attribute of this community festival is the participation of different castes and tribes and especially the *Mising*. 

The *Mising* are culturally a very affluent lot. The lively culture of these people demonstrates youthfulness, love and fellow feeling in the society, and their agrarian ways of life. The *Oinitoms* speak thus---

I hear the sound of flowing water  
But I haven’t seen the river  
I see you with my eyes  
But I haven’t got the chance to say what’s on my mind.  
Even if my beloved is burnt alive on this bank  
And me on the other  
The smoke from our funeral pyres would get united and emancipated  
In the bare bosom of the sky.  

I don’t require the oxen to plough  
Neither do I need the bulls  
If I get to marry you  
I will dig my field with a hoe.

The Phat Bihu is as dear to the *Mising* people of Dhakuakhana as the festival of *Ali Aye Ligang*. It is said that in the past from the second day of *Bohag* onwards groups of people used to throng the *Charikoriya Phat*. The *Mising* people from
distant places would stay for the seven days of Bohag and partake in the festivities. They also performed Husori at the homes of the villagers. They used to bring their own foodstuff for all those days, and the villagers would also feed them, and that was enough for the Bihu dancers. As they sing in this song,

\begin{verbatim}
Gaang oi gaang, gaonburhar gharate gaang
Hikiu nalage, adholiu nalage
Haandoh ke ebati khau.
\end{verbatim}

Translation

Let us sing at the house of the village head
We don’t need coin or rupee
But only a bowlful of Haandoh\textsuperscript{60} would do.

As has already been said, the participation of the Mising people in Phat Bihu festival dropped after the incident of pillage in 1918. Till 1917 they were very closely associated the celebrations. However, in the post independence period, Phat Bihu celebrations were given a new shape. In the ceremonious form of the festival too, the Mising community have continued an active and passionate involvement thus carrying forward the notion of a collective identity.

Phat Bihu and the Deori Community

The Deori community has a notable culture and tradition which has immensely contributed towards the formation of the greater Assamese culture. Primarily Mongoloid in origin, they are divided into four groups---

- **Dibongiya**--- Those residing on the banks of the River Dibong\textsuperscript{61};
• Tengaponiya--- Those residing on the Tengapani river bank;
• Borgonya--- The inhabitants of Bornoi\(^{62}\) riverside;
• Patorgonya--- They were an ancient class of Deori people who assimilated with the Dibongiya group in due course of time.

The Deoris celebrate various religious festivals. They follow the Assamese calendar and like other tribes of the region, they too celebrate Bohag Bihu for seven days. Dhakuakhana has a lone Deori village, the Balideori Gaon, on the banks of the Kherkota River. The river deposited huge quantities of sand in that area during the floods. Hence the word Bali, which in Assamese means sand; and since the inhabitants of the area are Deori people, therefore the name Balideori. The Dibongiya groups of Deoris are its chief inhabitants and they are said to have close ties with Phat Bihu festival right from the early times.

Charikoriyat maari jaau saari’takoi bhekuli

Phato Bihut maari jaau maku

Mising ahise deori’u aahise

Moi’nu roi kenekoi thaku.

Translation

I kill four frogs in Charikoriya

Move the shuttle to and fro in Phat Bihu

The Misings have come, as also the Deoris

How can I stop myself from going.
The participation of the Deori tribe in Phat Bihu festival has no historical specifics. Their association with the festival is based only on lore. But, one thing is clear that unlike the Misings, the connection of the Deoris with the celebrations was not consistent. One can see regularity in their involvement only from the beginning of the twenty first century. Thus they sing in Phat Bihu festival---

The mango trees will bloom, the cuckoo will cry
And herald the coming of Bohag
As you pay obeisance to the elders on Bihu
They will bless you for your well being.

I have come from Balideori my beloved
Together we shall make a couple
When you don’t look at me, I feel so sad
Tears run down my cheeks.

If I don’t get you, do you know what I’ll do
I’ll hang myself on the branch of a tree
And at midnight and noon
I’ll cry like an owl.

The B.A. pass fellow whom my mother has selected for me
Is the cause of all my sorrow
The derelict that I’ve chosen
Is the one who’s my heart’s delight.
The people of Bali Deori Gaon have developed their culture and tradition in their own unique way and have thus whole heartedly contributed towards the making of the larger Dhakuakhana community.

**Other Regional Community Festivals of Assam**

There are a variety of folk festivals observed by the diverse ethnic tribes and castes that are part of the composite culture of Assam. We had stated very briefly about a few of them in the preceding pages. But apart from these individual observances, some specific celebrations of certain areas also mark the cultural solidarity of the inhabitants. We discuss below very briefly, a few of the community celebrations in order to have a comparative notion of Phat Bihu festival in relation to these other collective festivities.

*Baresohoriya Bhaona of Jamugurihat*

This unique *Bhaona* is performed in the Jamugurihat area of Sonitpur district, and has a history of more than two hundred years. It is celebrated every five to six years, and is a cultural marvel wherein around twenty one plays are staged simultaneously and watched by a crowd of more than a hundred thousand drawn from various parts of Assam and beyond. The roots of this typical cultural art form are to be traced to the Vaishnavite tenets as propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva, the great Vaishnavite saint. The term *Baresohoriya* is a combination of ‘Bare’ meaning many and ‘Sahar’ meaning hamlets, which basically reflect the Vaishnavite Sattras. The term essentially means the enacting of several plays at the same time and at the same venue.
For staging the *Bhaonas*, *Robhas* or structures are built in traditional style with hay, straw, bamboo stumps, and wood. The mammoth structures can easily house up to forty thousand spectators. The ingenious workers are not assisted by any architects or engineers. Yet the *Robha* is awe-inspiring and encapsulates architectural brilliance and engineering skill. A *Robha* is locally called a *Khola*. The fourteen pillars of each *Robha* signify the fourteen *Parishads* or Councils of Lord Vishnu. All the *Robhas* finally merge to form a giant lotus shaped *Mandap*\(^64\). The stages and the spaces occupied by the audience signify the petals while the centre houses the *Singhasan* or throne that holds the *Bhagavad Gita*, the holy book of the Hindus. The *Chandrataap* is a white cloth covers the whole *Mandap* and is topped by a *Kolosi* or crown. The influence of *Sanatan*\(^65\) principles and the Vaishnavite faith on the way the *Robhas* are built are profound and the glamour of the *Mandap* has been the subject of awe and appreciation from spectators.

The *Baresohoriya Bhaona* celebrates the Vaishnavite ethos. Elements of the religious teachings of Srimanta Shankardev have overriding influence in the *Bhaona*. Basically, *Ankiya Naat* or the one act plays featuring stories from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the great Hindu epics, are staged. The actors or *Bhaoriyas* also enact scenes and episodes mentioned in the *Kirtana*\(^66\), which contain commentaries and anecdotes on the ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu. *Bhakti Rasa*\(^67\), that reflects the moral beliefs of a community, also find importance in the enacting of the plays. Besides, an element of entertainment is also employed to enhance the festive aura of the event.
The festival offers an example of a rural community’s adherence to simple faith in God and a desire to retain the best of their cultural-religious tradition as also their keenness to accommodate the inevitable changes in the difficult days of globalization and cultural homogenization.

**Bhatheli**

*Bhatheli* is an ancient festival associated with pastoral productivity celebrated in parts of Lower Assam. Although there are many beliefs associated with the origin of the celebrations, they concur in that it is a type of ritual connected with the sky or sky God Indra who is the Hindu God of rain. But Krishna or Vishnu rather than Indra is worshipped in this festival.

Traditionally, on the fixed date after a purifying bath, young men plant two decorated bamboos on the ground amidst ceremonial beatings of drums, cymbals, conch etc. The longer bamboo stands as a symbol for male and the shorter one for female. These two bamboos are considered as bride and bridegroom and a mock marriage ceremony is performed. That this marriage is symbolic of ancient fertility cult is beyond any doubt. Metaphorically, the union of the two bamboos suggests the union of the Heaven and the Earth. A little away from the site a small hut is constructed with banana leaves this hut is called *Bhatheli Ghar* and some amount of foodstuff and money are kept in it.

A large scale fair accompanied with trading of different local commodities is also arranged. The traditional closing of the celebrations involves the demolishing of the *Bhatheli Ghar* (house) by the young boys in the evening. A pseudo fight is organized between the boys where one group tries to demolish
the hut, while the other group resists their efforts. After having dismantled it, the boys announce the closing of the celebrations and divide the food and money kept inside the hut among them.

**Joonbeel Mela**

The *Joonbeel Mela* is a three-day community fair held at the weekend of Magh Bihu at a historic place known as Doyang Belguri, five kilometers from Jagiroad in Marigaon district of Assam. The *mela* or fair is said to have derived its name from the lake next to which it is organized. However, some also opine that the name *Joon Beel* is derived from the founder of Gobha Kingdom, Gobharaja Joon Singha. Though the actual date of its origin is not certain, some historians say it began not later than 15th century AD.

During the occasion a huge market is held. Communities and tribes like *Karbi*, *Khasi*, *Tiwa*, and *Jayantia* come down from the hills with products and exchange their merchandise with the local people in a barter system. The tribal villagers spend these three days in makeshift bamboo huts as a greater family and share their moments with each other. They dine together as a group. The different items that are traded include rice, turmeric, wild potatoes, dry fish, poultry, fruits, traditional costumes, and the like. All these are traded in exchange of commodities—that is, the barter system. In fact, *Joonbeel Mela* is said to be the only fair in India where barter system is still alive.

Before the *mela* begins, an *Agni Puja*--- the worship of Fire which is the symbol of purity and strength--- is performed for the well-being of mankind. Another significant event of the *mela* is community fishing in the Joonbeel wetland,
where all the people participate in a sense of harmony. This has been the
practice since its inception.

The theme of the *mela* is harmony and brotherhood among the tribes and
communities scattered in the Northeast India. The Gobha King along with his
courtiers pays his royal visit at the site and collects token taxes from his
subjects. On the final day the royal court is held where the King addresses his
subjects.

Traditional music and dances also forms an integral part of the colourful
*Joonbeel Mela*. People perform their traditional dance and music, making the
whole atmosphere full of joy and fun. It thus becomes a carnival of unity and
integrity.

In the earlier times, *Joonbeel Mela* facilitated the people of the hills to meet their
families and relatives in the plains and also allowed them to trade once a year.
The tradition is seen to be alive even today. The people call each other *Mama-
Mami* or Uncles and Aunts, which symbolically portrays their unity and
brotherhood. The people from the hills, with their collection of commodities
from the people of the plains return back and celebrate Bihu in their own way.

*Joonbeel Mela* thus celebrates the spirit of friendship and brotherhood among
people. It redefines the economics of paper currency and celebrates the flair of
the traditional and age old barter system. It also portrays the system of
Monarchy which is the oldest system of governance. The festivities appeals for
the conservation of folk culture and traditions of the society and hence is
multifaceted in its own way. It is a celebration of different cultures and their ways and in this manner becomes a celebration of life itself.

Conclusion

Every society sets apart periodic and occasional moments for celebrations and festivals. Celebrations that sustain through collaborative efforts over long periods of time strengthen community feelings. A festival as such becomes a platform for people to come together and interact toward common objectives. Such interactions have symbolic meanings---individual or collective---attached to them; they provide a multi-leveled understanding of the systems that sustain community functions and have special significance in community life. Therefore the folk festivals, community festivals, and various kinds of old-time revivals have become popular events in contemporary culture. Tradition in this way constitutes “an ongoing interpretation of the past...It is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present” (Handler & Linnekin 1984: 273-290.) Through celebrations communities choose to represent themselves and the series of performances and rituals generate social realities which provide ways of exploring and securing being, belonging and meaning in the world. That being so, the tradition of Phat Bihu celebration has always stood as a symbol of cultural harmony. In the present times, this festival might have lost some of its earlier distinction, the reasons for which are many which we shall discuss in the subsequent chapters. Nevertheless the tradition remains unchanged, and till today Phat Bihu festival continues to be close to the hearts of the people of Dhakuakhana.
Notes:

1. Yard of community prayer hall
2. The day before Rongali Bihu.
3. Buffalo hornpipe
4. A split bamboo musical instrument
5. Vernal Equinox
6. Black gram and turmeric paste
7. litsea salicifolia, a plant with long leaf
8. flemingia strobilifera, a plant with flower like soft plastic butterfly
9. Bottle gourd
10. Brinjal
11. Community prayer hall
12. An ethnic delicacy prepared from flattened rice
13. Holy Basil or Ocimum tenuiflorum
14. Rice cakes
15. Traditional Assamese cotton towel offered as a mark of respect
16. Fair
17. Rice varieties; Ahu is a autumn variety, whereas Salī is a winter variety of rice.
18. Muga silk is the product of the silkworm Antheraca assamensis endemic to Assam. The larvae of these moths feed on som (Machilus bombycina) and suolu (Litsaea Polyantha) leaves.
19. Also known as the Burhi Dihing, it is a large tributary of the River Brahmaputra.
20. Mimusops elengi, an evergreen tree found in tropical forests in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northern Australia.
22. A traditional symbol of Assam, it is basically a tray with a stand at the bottom originally made from bell metal.
23. Ridge gourd or Luffa acutangula.
24. The junction between two months.
25. Varieties of ethnic rice delicacies

26. Rice beer

27. Draped skirts

28. Long cloth used as a bodice

29. Shawls

30. Traditional religion of the Bodo community. They worship Bwrai Bathou as their supreme deity and is based on five principles bar (air), san (sun), ha (earth), or (fire) and okhrang (sky).

31. Euphorbia Splendens, considered as the symbol of Bwrai Bathou.

32. Rang Ghar means the house of entertainment. It is a two-storied building which served as the royal sports pavilion for the Ahom kings and nobles. It is situated in the Sivasagar district of Assam, the erstwhile Ahom capital.

33. The Harhi Thaan or Gokhanighar as called by the locals is a historical temple located at Harhi, five kilometres east of Dhakuakhana, and was established during Ahom days

34. Mohghuli Chapori is the present location of the Phat Bihu celebrations. A Chapori is a large belt of alluvium on both sides of the banks of a river.

35. The gathering of young men and women in the open fields during the Rongali Bihu celebrations for performance of Bihu songs and dances.

36. Commonly known as Indian Rosewood tree.

37. Foxtail orchid, an important cultural symbol of Assam.

38. Another name for River Brahmaputra.

39. Saccharum spontaneus, a tall grass that grows on river banks.

40. Female dancer.

41. A legendary water body in Dhakuakhana.

42. Bamboo clappers.

43. Cane shoot.

44. A local fish variety.

45. A small region in the Sibsagar district of Assam.

46. A kind of herb.

47. A village in Dhakuakhana.

48. A kind of acid fruit.
49. A kind of herb.

50. One of the major rivers of Asia, and the most important river of Assam.

51. A tributary of the *Brahmaputra* River in upper Assam.

52. An area located in the Tinsukia district of Assam.

53. The erstwhile capital of the *Ahom* kingdom, established by Swargadeo Rudra Singha in 1707. It is currently a part of the Sibsagar town in Assam.

54. *Machilus Odoratissima*

55. Breast cloth

56. Another name for *Gamusa*, as it is offered as a gift during *Bihu* to elders.

57. Also known as Na Rua Satra, is a very well-known ancient temple located in Dhakuakhana. It was established by Damodar Aata, the grandson of Srimanta Sankardeva during the mid 17th century.

58. A legendary water body situated in 2kms east of Dhakuakhana.

59. Reference to the white foreigners.

60. A local delicacy.

61. A tributary of the River *Brahmaputra*.

62. A river in Assam.

63. Vaishnavite plays.

64. Structure

65. An alternative native name for Hinduism.


67. Spiritual devotion, an element of the *Rasa* of Indian art.

68. One of the major ethnic groups of Assam, linguistically belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group.

69. An indigenous tribe of the state of Meghalaya in India belonging to the Austroasiatic family.

70. An ethnic group, historically known as *Lalungs*, inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya in North-east India.

71. A tribal group of Meghalaya, also known as *Synteng or Pnar*. 
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