CHAPTER III
Amusements and Festivals

1. Amusements:

(a). Preliminary Discussion:

The Assamese are mainly agriculturists. The farmers have to remain busy with agricultural work from the month of April to the month of January. Therefore, the bulk of the adult populations cannot make time to spend in sports and games. But they have got some festivals which are directly or indirectly associated with agriculture. They enjoy sports and other amusements generally on the occasion of these festivals. Of course, this does not hold good with reference to children. The children and the teenagers had got a variety of sports and games to play. The pastimes of the people include games, sports, hunting of animals and other sorts of amusements.

About pastimes of the early period nothing can be definitely said because of the dearth of materials. Some of the grants issued by the kings of early Kamarupa and the work called 'Kalika Purana' give us indications of the existence of a very few games and amusements. Discussing on the point Dr. B.K. Barua writes, "The commonest children's game, according to 'Kalika-Purana', was playing with dolls..... Hunting was a favourite pastime. Vallabhdva's plates mention buffalo hunting and the Dobi plates refer to the snaring of deer. The Gaubati grant of Indrapala hints at the method of catching tigers with nets". The historical, biographical and the literary works of the Medieval period supply us ample materials for the study of the pastimes of that time. Gunabhiman Barua in his historical article, 'Agar Din Aru Etitar Din' gives a list of games and sports played by the children. His list includes: 'Chilā-khel', 'Kari-khel', 'Lākā-bhāku' (hide and seek),
(b). Description of some Games and Sports:

Beji siu-siu (sew with the needle) - A number of girls or boys, taking a girl or a boy in the centre, make a circle by holding each others hand. The boy or the girl in the centre of the circle goes to a boy or a girl in the ring and says 'Beji siu-siu' (sew with the needle); while speaking thus, he or she attempts to pass out of the circle below the hands of the boys or girls. But the boys or the girls in the circle go on moving in such a way that he or she cannot pass through. If the encircled boy or the girl can pass through them, then he or she is considered successful.

According to Gunabhiram Barua, the significance of the game is passing the ordeals of life.
Phul—phulati — The game is played by girls only. Three rows of small balls, parallel to each other and at equal distance from each other, are made on the ground. The contest is, one is to pass over the three rows of the balls, making a circle around each of the ball, with the ends of the fore-finger and the middle finger touching none of the balls; the touching of a ball means failure and she loses the chance. Then the next one comes forward to the contest and so on. The intention of the game, according to Gunabhiram, is to make the girls clever and careful.

Ghila—khel — The 'ghilā' is the seed of a creeping plant which is flat and almost round in shape and about two inches in diameter. The children play with it like marbles. Some 'ghilās' are placed in a line in standing position. Then one of the players takes a separate 'ghilā' in his hand and then he sets it in motion like the top in such a way to cause a standing ghilā (of one end) of the line to be in motion. If he succeeds in doing so then he wins that 'ghila'. The player who can earn more 'ghilā' is considered to be the winner.

Hadum — This game is played between two parties of equal numbers. This is like a race within a limited distance. At one end of the distance a sign-post is kept called 'ghāl'. Of the two parties (there must be equal number in each party) while one party runs to touch the sign-post or 'ghāl' the members of the other party try to touch them before they can touch the sign-post.

Bhata—guti or Tang-guti — It is still a common game amongst youngsters. The game is played between two parties of young boys. The play things consisted of a stick of about 1½ cubit in length, which is called 'dāndā', a small wood stick about three to four inches in length, called 'bhata—guti' and a pole called 'ghāl—khuti' about 2½ feet in height.
Bagh-garu - Bagh-garu or held the tiger is a very popular game even to-day played between two boys. Even the adult people are very fond of this game.

Choir-Bagh or Bagh-muni - The game is played by a batch of boys with two small balls or things called 'guti'. One boy of the party secretly throws away one of the balls and then send the others to find it out. When the other boys of the batch go in search of the 'guti', the first boy throws the second ball. One who can find out the ball and bring it first to the custodian, he is considered to be the winner; but there is a risk, any one of the boys may take it by force from him on his way to the custodian and he then becomes the winner.

Khuli or Khali-guti - This is a kind of game played between two boys. There are two rows of drills, altogether ten in number, there being 5 drills in each row. The drills are filled up with small seeds of trees. Each of the drills is generally filled up with five seeds, in which case the total number will be 50. Then the two boys begin to distribute seeds by turns. That is one of the boys first takes five seeds from one of the drills and goes on distributing in the drills one by one. Wherever he finds his hand empty he takes seeds from the next drill, until he finds a completely vacant drill; when he thus finds an empty drill as well as his hands empty then he possesses the seeds accumulated in the one next to the next vacant drill. The rule of possessing seeds is + + etc. If he finds two vacant drills that is - - +, when the seeds exhaust in his hand, then he is unfortunate and gets nothing. At the end of the game he who possesses greater number of seeds is considered to be the winner.

Hadu-gudu - There are two kinds of this game; one is called 'dharu-gudu' and the other is called 'bau-gudu'. Both are mainly outdoor games. The games are simply known as 'gudu' also.
Dhara-gudu - There are two parties with equal number of players in each.

In the centre of the playground between the two parties, a line of demarcation is made, so that the opposite party cannot cross it. Let us for the sake of convenience attribute one party as the 1st party and the other as the 2nd party. The members of one party, say the 1st party repeating the word 'gudu' or other verse with abusive terms to excite the members of the opposite party, that is the 2nd party, tries to enter into the jurisdiction of the 2nd party by surpassing the demarcation line, prepared both with offensive and defensive attitude. A member of the first party, repeating the word 'gudu' or other verse in the same breath attempts to touch a member of the second party; whenever he finds his breath short, he immediately returns to his own circle. The members of the opposite party compels him to change his breath in their jurisdiction by force, in which case he (the member of the 1st party who utters 'gudu') is considered dead. But if the member of the 1st party can return to his jurisdiction by touching a member of the 2nd party by repeating 'gudu' then the very member of the second party is considered dead and retires from the field.

Bau-gudu - In this game also there are two parties with equal number in each. At the two ends of the playing ground two semi-circles are drawn. The members of one of the parties take their position in one of the semi-circles, while each member of the second party takes their position at an equal distance from each other around the whole ground. This second party may be ascribed as the fielding party also. One of the members of the 1st party becomes 'kau' 'bau' and he remains in the semi-circle of the other end of the ground. Along with the commencement of the game one of the members of the first party comes out from the semi-circle repeating the word 'gudu'
or any other verse, in the continuance of which in the same breath he tries
to touch any one of the members of the fielding party, in which case the
member of the fielding party would be considered dead. If meanwhile the
'ban' can come without being touched by any member of the opposite party
to the circle of his own, this party gets a point.

(c) Other Amusements:–

The games played by both adult and boys are 'pāsā' (dice), 'paci'
'pātī' or 'Nogul pātī', 'Chaupat', 'baikunṭha-yātrā' etc. These games are
specially played during the Bihu festival. Among other amusements the
Bihu dance and 'Huchari' party in upper Assam, 'bhameli-bhangā', 'Mohało'
dance and the 'taṅgan yui' in lower Assam are prominent. In the 'Magh-bihü'
festival, the people of upper Assam enjoy buffale fight and in 'Bahag-bihu'
they enjoy 'Kani-yuḷ' which is played between two persons. Chanting of
different kinds of 'Nāma-kirttana' and musical songs with or without musical
instruments was a favourite amusement both among the male persons and female
persons. 'Bhunul', that is, playing the part of a clown was also a favourite
amusement. Some times the people of one or two villages together enjoy
great fun by performing 'Bhekuli-biyā', that is, the marriage of a frog. This
'Bhekuli-biyā' is performed when farmers suffer from draught for a long
time. It is believed that 'bhekuli-biyā' causes rain. Among the students,
the 'śīkṣa-yuddha' i.e. improvising Sanskrit verses orally was a favourite
amusement. Listening to the ṛimāna tales told by elderly people was a
favourite pastime of children. It was a matter of great pleasure among the
boys and girls to give a correct answer of the riddles known as 'sāṭhar'
and 'Phakara'. There is a class of riddles known as 'bhakatiyā phakara' which
is prevalent among the old people. The 'bhakatiyā phakara' are purely
religious.
From the biographical works it is learnt that during his boyhood, Madhavdeva took part in games such as 'dugtop', 'chor-bagh', 'pachi', 'pah', 'ghor-tang' etc. During his boyhood Sankardeva swam across the river Brahmaputra when in full spate in the month of Bhadra with his companions. While playing 'dugdugali' with Sankardeva, one of his companions' leg was broken one day. It is recorded in one of the biographies that Sankardeva enjoyed picnics with his companions. The game of dice and gambling had been quite known to the people. Narayan Thakur, one of the favourite disciples of Sankardeva, was addicted to gambling, while he (Narayan Thakur) was in the village of Kupajar. The historical records refer to the game of dice. One Sundar Gehain of the Ahoms, had to remain as hostage in the court of the Koch king Naranarayan, according to the terms of a treaty signed between the Ahom and the Koch kings. One day king Naranarayan entered into the game of dice with Sundar Gehain, with the condition that if Sundar Gehain could defeat the king in the game of dice then the king would set him free and would allow him to go back to his own country. Surprisingly enough, Sundar Gehain defeated the king and the king also sticking to his words set Sundar Gehain free. In connection with the works of ivory and horn, during the Ahom period, Francis Hamilton writes, "The horns make one set of chess-men, the ivory the other. They make also a kind of tables used in gambling and on which four persons play with men and dice, somewhat like back-gammon." 

The hunting of wild animals and catching of fish were favourite pastimes of the Assamese people. Further it has been said above that even the kings and the nobles themselves were out for the enjoyment of hunting of animals and the catching of fish. The nobles catch fish by various ways
and they used various kinds of nets and instruments which are still existing. Both men and women catch fish; the instruments used by the women-folk are different from those used by the male-folk. Robinson describes the various nets and other traps used in catching fish. Fishing is one of the most favourite hobbies of the people. They go for fishing both individually and collectively. On many occasions of their festivals, specially on the eve of the Magh-Bihu festival, the villagers go together for fishing. From the record of the chronicles, it is gathered that the Ahom kings now and then enjoyed the catching of fish.

The hunting of animals was a favourite sport of the Ahom kings. The Ahom kings not only hunted animals like tiger, elephant, deer etc. but also amused themselves by catching fish, tortoise, birds etc. King Rudra Singha himself enjoyed hunting of deer at Dirgheswari while he was at his royal camp at Gauhati. Hunting of elephants was a great pleasure. The Ahom king Pratap Singha, in order to assume the far-famed epithet 'Gajapati' (the lord of elephants), was making an arrangement for catching one thousand elephants by constructing an earth embankment at Jamirguri. In the chronicles it is recorded, "In Lakmi Dap-shoe (i.e. in 1655 A.D.), in the month of Dinching (Agrahayana), the heavenly king made a 'hatigarh' with earth embankment at Jamirguri to catch elephants. On the day Khutsham, the king raised earth walls surrounding the town of Jamirguri." In Assam, generally elephants are caught by two ways. One by digging big ditches in a certain plot near the forest infested by elephants and then raising walls of earth on all sides, leaving only one side open for the entrance of the elephants. The elephants are chased from the forest and are made to enter into the ditches through the open entrance. When the elephants enter the pit, the entrance is closed. After a few days, when the elephants became weak, they
are chained and domesticated. This device of catching elephants is known as 'Khecha-chikar'. The other process, which is known as 'Melaa-chikar', is very risky but cheaper than the former. In this method attempts are made to catch elephants with the help of trained elephants in the forests without digging any ditch and raising walls of earth. Both these processes are still in vogue. The Ahom kings, besides catching elephants, hunted tigers, deers, pythons, and other birds and animals, including some aquatic animals. The hunting of tiger collectively by the people of two or three villages with the help of big nets prepared for the purpose and weapons was in vogue till very recently among the people, particularly in the district of Darrang and Nowgong. The inhabitants of more than one village first encircled the whole forest with nets. Then the people, equipped with weapons and then making a hue and cry and beating and blowing drums and horns, drive the tiger to a corner of the net where he is beaten to death. Nets were used for the purpose of catching other animals also. There was an officer, known as Jalbhari Phukan, in charge of the nets, under the Ahom Government. He was assisted by a Barua in his work.

For the hunting of animals, bows and arrows were also used by the people. To kill tigers and other animals and birds, they used to set on traps called 'Bagh-denu', 'Siikl-dhenu', 'Kauri-dhenu' etc. Further they catch animals and birds alive by fixing noose or running knot, called 'Khorocha', on the way through which they used to move. Birds are killed by shooting arrows or caught alive by fixing traps called 'Citiika' or 'phund' or by setting nets. Animals are also caught with the help of nets. There were paiks under the Ahom Government to kill birds for the collection
of feathers for the Government. Such paths were under the supervision of an Officer called 'Pâkhi-mariyâ' Barua. 16

The Abems were very fond of enjoying animal fight. They enjoyed cock-fight and the game of falcons. It was under the order of the Abem king that the amphitheatre called Rangghar was constructed at Rangpur to enjoy animal fights. In front of the Rangghar, generally buffale fight, elephant fight, wrestling, fighting of tiger and many other animals were arranged. The games, sports and the amusements were instituted under the order of the Abem kings for the amusement of the people. People were informed by the king to assemble in front of the Rangghar on the appointed day for the enjoyment of the games and the sports.

Descriptions of elephant fight, buffale fight and the fight of many ferocious animals are found in the chronicles. The Abem kings have found it a great pleasure to witness the fight of many ferocious animals. It is stated in a chronicle that once in a certain elevated arena having strong fence all around, animals such as buffale, tiger, bear, crocodile were put in together when each of the animals began to attack each other making a tumultuous noise. During the reign of Shusingpha (Nailya Raja) it is recorded, "in the month of Dinha (Chaitra) the king ordered his men to capture some tigers. The king ordered two men to bring a good elephant to fight with a tiger in the arena. The tiger bite the elephant but the latter did not die. Then the king left a good crocodile to fight with the tiger. The crocodile bite the feet of the tiger and the tiger set excrement and made water with pain". There is another record at the time of Jayadhvaja Singha which states, "On the day Khutnit the king engaged a tiger, a crocodile and a wild bear fighting in the arena for public exhibition. The king witnessed the fighting mounting on an elephant. The wild bear got
victory over the tiger and the crocodile". The game of cocks was also a popular amusement during the Ahom period. According to the rules of the cock fight, the owner of a victorious cock owned the defeated or the dead cock. According to Shihabuddin, the game cocks were very large. As is evident from the chronicles, the kings and the princes themselves enjoyed the cock fight.

The game of falcon (Sen-yuj) - The game of falcon or 'Sen-yuj' as it is called in Assamese, was an interesting one, which is nothing but a fight between falcon and kanuā (baz), a large bird who is very fond of small fries. Under the management of the Ahom Government there were falconers (falcon breeders) to train hawk and also paiks to rear 'kanuās' by supplying small fries in a particular place which is known as 'Charāi-chong' (place where birds are reared by supplying food to them). The people in-charge of the 'Charāi-chong' at first keep two or three 'kanuās' fettered in the 'Charāi-chong' so that other 'kanuās' might come over there. On the other hand, supplying of small fries would continue all the time. In this way large number of 'kanuās' were allowed to come to the 'Charāi-chong' every day. There were many such charāi-chongs in different places of the country. On the other side, the falconers also remain busy in training their falcons for the game. Before instituting the game the falcons were tested in the months of 'Puh' and 'Magh'. The testing of the falcon is called 'bāuli-diya'. The process of 'bāuli-diya' is as follows: At a little distance from the falcon a pigeon is kept tied and then tied to a rope, the falconer let loose the falcon towards the pigeon by removing the cover of the eyes of the falcon (the eyes of the falcon is kept covered by a little bag of cloth). If the falcon returns after killing the pigeon, the falcon is considered to have passed the test and fit for the game. Before they are taken out to the game,
such tests are done for three or four times. If they pass all these tests
then only they are taken out to the game. When the falcon is thus considered
fit for the game, the officer in-charge of the falconers known as 'Senchowa
Barna' informed the nobles and the king. Sometimes the king himself or
his nobles personally witnessed the 'bāuli-diya' or the test.

For the game of the falcon a 'chong' where a large number of 'kanuās'
gather is selected. Then the king, the nobles and other people along with
the falconer (Senchowa in Assamese) and the falcon and the officer-in-charge
of the falconers go to the 'chong'. They first encircling the 'chong' drive
away the 'kanuās', but they (people) encircle the 'chong' in such a way
that the 'kanuās' cannot go away in different directions, but fly high into
the sky. When the 'Kanuās' would be almost invisible, the falconer first
removes the cover from the eyes of the falcon, later on the rope from his
leg. Then the falcon for a moment looks at the sky and then flies towards
the 'kanuās' in the sky. The people also begin to look at the sky. In the
sky the 'kanuās' look like tiny birds and the falcon cannot be distinguished.
After an hour or so, if the flock of the 'kanuās' is observed to be scattered
and fly in different directions then it is inferred that the falcon is
chasing the 'kanuās' and a best trained falcon kills one or more 'kanuās'
in the sky which dropped on the ground and the joy of the people knows no bound. In case, the falcon is not an expert one, then it comes
down by catching only the 'kanuā' and eating the flesh from his heart. When
the falcon with the 'kanuā' is seen coming down, then two falconers spread
over a cloth, on which the falcon with the dead (sometimes alive) 'kanuā'
falls. If the 'Kanuās' in the sky fly away in different directions from the
place of the game, then the falcon drive them back to the proper place
and attacks them in the sky like for the enjoyment of the people below.
If the falcon, to the pleasure of the king, the nobles and the people, kills more 'kamus' then the 'ojah' (head) of the 'Senchowas' and since the 'Senchowas' are rewarded and those whose falcons fail to kill 'kamus' and fly away are awarded punishments. The falconer tries to bring back a fled-away falcon by calling as 'sen-ooh' (oh, falcon) in the fields and forests. Some times they come back and some times not. 22 The game of the large variety of falcon, known as 'bahari-sen' was introduced by Sandikai Barphukan, during the reign of king Rudra Singha. 25

We have also discussed that both in the capital as well as the villages, the 'Bhaona' performance, that is the theatrical performance, of the dramas called 'Ankiya-nat' were very favourite amusements. References to magical performance, display of fire works and feats of physical strength are also found in the biographical and historical works, mentioned above in different connections. 24

2. Festivals :-

Of all the festivals observed by the people the 'Bihu' festival was the most universal and it can alone claim the status of the national festival of the Assamese people. As the Assamese people are mainly agriculturists, the Bihu festival has the closest relation with agriculture. In many respects it has its relation with Hindu religion, rites and rituals. Besides, the influence of the non-Aryan elements in the Bihu songs, dance and other customs observed by the people in connection with the Bihu festivals is very prominent. All people living in Assam, observe this festival irrespective of caste, creed or faith. There are three Bihu festivals during the course of a year and the three are connected with agricultural works. They are also connected with the changing of nature. These festivals are observed with great enthusiasm and mirth.
with great enthusiasm and mirth, but the rites and rituals and other customs observed in connection with the festivals sometimes differ from community to community. The three 'Bihu' festivals are the 'Bahag Bihu', the 'Kati Bihu' and the 'Magh Bihu'. These festivals including many rites and rituals have gone a great way to strengthen the bond of unity and friendship among different races and tribes which constituted the Assamese people.

**Bahag-Bihu** - The Bahag Bihu festival commences from the day of 'Samkranti' of the months of 'Chat' (Chaitra) and 'Bahag' (Baisakh) and continues uninterruptedly at least for seven days. The tribal people observe this festival almost for the whole month of 'Bahag'. This is the main 'Bihu' festival as the new year of the Assamese calendar begins from this 'Samkranti'. The 'Bahag-Bihu' festival is also known as 'Chat-Bihu' or 'Rangali-Bihu'. The first day of the festival is called 'guru-Bihu' that is Bihu for the cows. On this day people anoint their cows with 'halad' (turmeric) and take them in a procession to a nearby stream for bath. Many other customs and rites are observed on this day for the well-being and progress of the cows. The second is called 'manuh-Bihu', i.e., Bihu for the men. All the customs and rites observed on this day are connected with men. The third day is called 'Chera-Bihu'; in some places this is called 'Gosai-Bihu' i.e., Bihu for god. In all these days, worship of idol and the recital of 'Nama-kirttana', both in the domestic chapels and in the village Namghars, are carried on by the people. Enjoyment of different palatable dishes by the family members, and offering of palatable dishes to the invitees, the guests and other kith and kin who visit the family during this 'Bihu' festival, is an integral part of the observance of this festival. The 'Bihu' songs and Bihu dance, mostly done by the youths and girls of the tribes, is
an integral part of the Bihu festival. The 'Huchari gowa' party, i.e. a party of singers and dancers, goes on singing and dancing from house to house, praying for the well-being of the families during this 'Bahag-Bihu' festival. Every family honoured this 'Huchari gowa' party by offering an honorarium of money and if possible a 'Bihu influenced by the non-Aryan elements of the country. After this Bihu festival the farmers join the agricultural works. In the Mangaldai Subdivision, at the time of this 'Bahag-Bihu' festival, people observe a festival called 'Baisakhi-Daul-Utsav' by installing an image of lord 'Visnu'. Along with it a great 'melā' (fair) is held, where large number of people assemble to take part in the 'Visnu-puja' and to witness the 'melā'. At the temple of 'Hayagriva-Madhava' at Hajo and at Shairav-thān of Goalpara such fairs are held at the time of 'Bahag-Bihu'. Different games sports and various sorts of amusements had been held in fornt of the Rangghar at Rangpur during the Ahom period at the time of the 'Bahag Bihu'.

Kati-Bihu - On the Samkrānti day of the months of 'Āhin' (Aswina) and 'Kati' (Karttika), the 'Kati-Bihu' is observed. This festival is also connected with agriculture. In this Bihu festival they perform some customs and rites for the happy growth of crops in the field. Every Hindu family worship the holy plant 'Tulasi' on this day by offering a lamp and 'Māh-prasād' (sacred offerings consisted of pulses, uncooked rice and fruits including banana) and reciting 'Nama-kirttana'. Eating of sweet
patato, yam, the fruit of the water lily and its root called 'Seluk' in Assamese, are some of the customs observed in this festival. Lamps are lighted in front of the granary and in the paddy field. In some places in the district of Kamrup, young girls, not attaining puberty, chant the holy names of Lord Jagannatha in front of banana trees planted at the gate, for the happy growth of crops. The banana trees planted for the purpose are not removed from the place and let them grow and develop there. The first cluster of the banana produced from these banana trees is offered in a 'Nama-kirttana' function. Dr. B.K. Barua finds similarity of the 'Kati-Bihu' festival with that of the 'Karam' festival of the Orangs.

Magh-Bihu - The third as well as the last is the 'Magh-Bihu' festival which commences from the 'Samkranti' day of the months of 'Puh' (Pausa) and 'Magh' (Magha). This festival is observed at a time when the farmers have brought their harvest to their homesteads. In other words this festival may be ascribed as the harvest festival. In this 'Bihu' festival the farmers greatly enjoy the taking of cakes and other delicious dishes prepared from their paddy; of course, this is done almost in all the festivals. Among the Hindu people, the worship of fire by setting fire to a huge stack of wood called 'Meji' in Assamese, just before the break of the day on the 'Samkranti-day', is the main rite observed in this festival. They offer dishes prepared from the new-harvest to the Meji-fire. This festival continues for three or four days. In the evening, on the eve of the Samkranti-day, in each village, the village men people collectively enjoys a feast with fish which they collect by fishing. In upper Assam, during this 'Magh-Bihu' festival, people enjoy buffalo fight.
Among other festivals the 'Lakhimi Sabāh', the 'Mahoho', the 'Bhatheli' are worth mention. The 'Lakhimi Sabāh' is performed in the month of 'Āhin' (Āswina). The women of one or two villages collectively perform this festival by chanting the holy names of goddess 'Laksmi' and offering 'Māh-prasād' to Her. The Ahoms perform this 'Lakhimi Sabāh' especially by performing many rites and customs. In lower Assam, in the evening of the full moon day, in the month of 'Āghon' (Agrahāyana), the 'Mahoho' festival is observed. In this festival, the young people go from house to house to drive away mosquitoes by singing songs connected with the festival. Another festival observed in lower Assam in the month of Bahag with great mirth and pleasure, is the 'Bhatheli' festival. A long bamboo decorated with pieces of cloths of various colours and adorned with garlands is planted. This bamboo is called 'Pāra' and considered as the brahmin bride-groom. Few other bamboos decorated, like a bride, are planted by the side of the 'Pāra'. Then people begin to dance round the bamboos, each one taking a mace in his hand. Formerly this festival continued for many days. There are scholars who are of opinion that this festival has much similarity with the vedic 'Indradhvaja' or 'Sakrothāhan' festival.

Some of the religious functions of the Vaiṣṇavas, the Sāktas and the Saivas are observed like festival. For example, we can point out to the 'Rāsot-sava', 'Phalgot-sava', 'Durgot-sava', 'Siva-chatraddari', 'Asakastami', 'Janmāstami' etc. These religious functions have two sides; one is the religious side and the other is the social side. On the social side, these functions give opportunity to all people, irrespective of caste, creed or sect, to take part. The birth and death anniversaries of the religious preceptors viz., Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, Damodardeva etc. are observed extensively as festivals. Some of the ceremonies and rites and rituals in
in the individual families are performed almost like a festival; e.g., the marriage ceremony, Upanayana ceremony and sometimes the first 'Srāddha ceremony of a deceased person etc.

Among the festivals observed under the management of the Ahom Govt. the coronation ceremony of the king and the 'Rikkhvan' festival were the most important. Rai Ṣunabhiram Barua gives an elaborate description of the coronation ceremony of the Ahom king in his historical article entitled 'Agar din aru etiyar din' published in the journal 'Assam Bandhu' edited by him. E.Gait also gives description of the coronation ceremony and the Rikkhvan festival in his work 'A History of Assam'. The description of the coronation ceremony given by Rai Gunabhiram Barua is an elaborate one which was performed both in Hindu and in Ahom manner. E.Gait neglects to describe the Hindu manners; however, we preferred to quote in verbatim the description given by E.Gait as regards the coronation ceremony of the Ahom king and the Rikkhvan festival. About the ceremony of installation, Edward Gait writes: "The ceremony of installation was a very elaborate one. The king, wearing the 'Somdeo' or image of his tutelary deity, and carried in his hand the 'Hangdan' or ancestral sword, proceeded on a male elephant to Charaideo where he planted a 'pipal' tree (ficus religosa). The next entered the Patghar, where the presiding priest poured a libation of water over him and his chief queen, after which the royal couple took their seats in the 'Solongghar' on a bamboo planform under which were placed a man (according to Gunabhiram a couple of men, a male and a female) and a specimen of every procurable animal. Consecrated water was poured over the royal couple and fell on the animals below. Then, having been bathed, they entered the 'Singarighar' and took their seat on a throne of gold, and leading nobles came up and offered their presents. New money was coined, and gratuities were given to principal officers of State and to religious mendicants. In the evening there was a splendid entertainment at which the king presided. During the next thirty days various tributary Rajas and State officials who had not been
present at the installation were expected to come in and do homage and tender their presents to the new king. Before the reign of Rudra Singha, it had been the custom for the new king, before entering the 'Singarighar' to kill a man with his ancestral sword, but that monarch caused a buffalo to be substituted and the example thus set was followed by all his successors'.

The 'Rikkhvan' ceremony is also observed as a festival but occasionally and not regularly. "This is an Ahom ceremony for obtaining long life (from rik, revive and khvan, 'life'). It was generally performed at the installation of a new king, or in time of danger, or after a victory. The procedure was as follows. The king set in full dress on a platform, and the 'Deodhai', 'Mohan' or 'Bailung' pandits, i.e., the tribal priests and astrologers, poured holy water, purified by the recitation of sacred texts, over his head, whence it ran down his body through a hole in the platform on to the chief 'Bailung' or Astrologer, who was standing below. The king then changed his clothes, giving those which he had been wearing and all his ornaments to the chief 'Bailung.' The same ceremony, on a smaller scale, was also frequently performed by the common people, and still is, on certain occasions, e.g., when a child is drowned".

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