CHAPTER - VII

SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOM IN RAJANIKANTA BORDOLOI'S LITERARY WORKS.

The division or sub-grouping, as sketched by Dorson as 'social folk custom' is a distinct characteristic of Bordoloi's writings specially of his novels. This division as has been mentioned earlier, is all inclusive of community and family observances connected with customs and rituals. Bordoloi has incorporated into his themes many folkloristic elements of these customs and rituals. Outwardly his novels are based on the historical-political atmosphere of different times. But the incorporation of these elements, specifically, those relating to the social-customs, superstitions, religious ethics and social behaviour, added extra amount of vastness to the otherwise stero-typed themes of his novel-works. These are of different varieties and types; treatment of which are found in abundance in his writings. The list is an elongated one — but now can be summarised by selected references of a few of these from his major work-pieces.
A) Description of fairs and festivals in his novels: Bihu in Rangili Naraciga bihu in Miri Jiyari, Daul in Manomati and others.

B) Description of Morong-puja (Morang-worshipping) in Miri Jiyari.

C) Description of Durga-puja in Dandua Droh.

D) Description of beliefs, superstitions, religions and other elements of the Mishing society in Miri Jiyari.

E) Worshipping of Copper deity in Tamreswarir Mandir and the practice of human-sacrifice in it.

F) Tantric rituals as depicted in Rahdai Ligiri.

G) Description of social system in Khamba Thoibir Sadhu.

Besides these, there are innumerable examples, either in the form of reference or in elaborate description which befittingly has added surplus weightage to his novels, so far when its folkloristic elements are taken into account. Through these elements, featuring in his novels, Bordoloi has projected his creativity from different angles. These descriptions are true and habitual reflections of different socialistic behaviour pattern of the societies, concerned. These elements bespeak of themselves, of different folkloristic character of the writings. Literature, as the
popular opinion goes about it, is the reflector of the nation. Therefore, to project the nationalistic life in literature, there should remain in its deliberation all socialistic elements in its totality and completeness. Fortunately Bordoloi's novels are well conceived with these elements.

Descriptions of all these elements clustered under sub-grouping social-folk-custom are given below.

**Fairs and festivals**:

Culture is a matter of revolution and festivals also take the pattern that way. Nothing can solidly be said regarding the origin of Hindu festivals. It is also impossible to venture any general theory as to the origin of a particular festival. Because a particular origin differs in its principle form from the origin of others. It is by no means clear that every festival had had its origin in the earlier stages of Hindu society. Some are very old, but others are extremely modern.

Description of fairs and festivals is one of the most predominant salient features of Bordoloi's novels. Mostly all his novels are well adorned with the pictoral features of different fairs and festivals of greater Assamese cultural set-up. It has been noted earlier that
in composing novels Rajanikanta always was influenced by two legendary figures - Sir Walter Scott and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Both these two novelists, more occasionally, Bankimchandra incorporated into the theme of his novels a sense of novelty, by infusing in extra-dimension in the form of local elements. His historical-plot-structure, being interwoven with the traditional elements and native society, evolved an alternative ideological phenomenon in the mind of elite readership. Specially in Bengal alone, Bankimchandra's novels, historical in class but endowed with socio-cultural elements in character, helped in bringing in a nationalistic upsurge.

It is a common practice that people like to recollect the past because it helps them to survive in the crisis. Folklore is rightly defined — "Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present." Taking this sentiment of the people in mind and stepping in the foot-holds of Bankimchandra, Rajanikanta, too, loaded his novels with folklores elements. He noticed with keen interest the reaction of emotion that may be roused in the mind of the people by the references of their ceremonial functions of their own. He, therefore,

1. Sokolov, Y.M.: Russian Folklore, p. 15
opted for the description of all these in his literary works. His first aim in such reference, was to give top priority to the description of native fairs and festivals of the people concerned. Because he, as a novelist knew it well that in spite of political and economic changes and natural calamities and disasters the popular fairs and festivals have remained unchanged as occasion of social enjoyment and individual enthusiasm and merry-making.

The German word for a fair is 'messe'—meaning the ceremony of the mass.²

The following descriptions of Assamese fairs and festivals are found in Bordoloi's novels.

Bihu:

Bihu is a commonly described feature of Bordoloi's novels. Almost all his novels has a reference or fragments of this dearest festival of Assam. But one can easily notice the vivid and solid description of bihu-observance in three or four of his novels viz. Miri Jiyari, Rangili, Rahdai Ligiri etc. These novels are well-adorned with elaborate description of bihu festival with its linkage to the corresponding courses of events of the plot-structure of the same. Critically speaking, occasional reference of

bihu in his novels are more or less irrelevant in the light of its plot-development. Yet the importance of the same, particularly in bringing the added dimension to the different angles of the novels cannot be undermined at all. Bordoloi laid utmost importance in establishing bihu as a national festival of Assam. For this reason perhaps he voluminously described bihu in his novels in an essay like phenomenon. In doing so, literally speaking, he ignored all the fundamental requirements of novel-writing. Critics of Rajanikanta Bordoloi are aware of the fact that reference of bihu and its wide descriptions in more occasions are nonetheless the major fault of Bordoloi's literary career. But whatsoever, Bordoloi played a pivotal role by establishing this traditional festival in the pages of elite brand of literary outfit. It was he, who first described bihu with the attribution that it happened to be the only and one national festival of Assam and the Assamese. His message in one of such descriptions reads like this — bihu asamiyar jatiya utsav - bapati sahon.3

Meaning - bihu is the national festival of the Assamese - it is their patrimonial ancestral property.

This proclamation of Rajanikanta still stands and will stand like an immortal maxim in Assamese society. So popular this sentence of Rajanikanta is and so dearly an association the Assamese people has established with this saying that—every Assamese people, be a gentlefolk in a bihu congregation or an urban people in a conversation or, nay, a student in answering in examination hall would not help quoting this conventional dictum in corresponding references, unknowingly enough, who, the first maker of this message is.

Bihu, the traditional festival of Assam is mainly the festival of joy and merriment. Bordoloi, depicted in his novels this festival with the sole purpose of giving filip to the plot-development a nationalistic flavour and sense. Assamese bihu festival is the festival of cultural syncretism. The entire cultural net-work of north-east India is a composite one. It has some gives and takes in its constitution. As such tribal elements of this region are clearly noticed in the folk-cultural patterns of the plain's people. Bihu, being the major festival of Assamese people is being observed by all tribal communities. Of course, they have their own names and styles of observing these.
As for example, the Rabhas perform the **baikhu** festival which synchronises with the **Bahag bihu**. It is also known as **Khokchi** festival. **Ali-ai-Ligung** is a spring-time festival of the Mishing community. Deuri-Chutias of Assam celebrate a festival called **bisu**, a word that sounds like **bihu**. It is also of three different festivals (1) **bahag bisu**, (2) **kati-bisu** and (3) **maghiya**. The Tiwas, erstwhile known as Lalungs also perform an identical festival, which gets under on a certain Wednesday, after three days of observance by their plain people counterpart. The Dimasas, observe **Sanjora** as a spring and pre-harvesting festival. The Bodo-kacharis celebrates **baisagu** with identical traditional way of the Assamese people's **bihu**.

Having perhaps noticed it, Bordoloi described along with the native plain Assamese **bihu** observance, an identical festival of one of the tribal communities of Assam. It is the **narachiga bihu** - the **porag** of the Mishing.

**Bihu**: three different and distinct varieties;

Assamese **bihu** festival is observed in three different and distinct varieties — the **Bahag bihu**, the **Kati bihu** and the **Magh bihu**.
The first festival of the bihu is the Bahag bihu. It is observed in the month of Bahag, synochronising with the advent of the Assamese new calendar year. It is the spring time festival. It befalls in the middle of the April month of the English calendar year. The festival is popularly known in Assamese society as the rangali bihu, because it is the festival of joy and merriment. The word rangali is derived from the word rang meaning merriment. This festival is observed all through the state with vigorous zeal and enthusiasm. People dance and sing all through the new month of bahag. Virgins and youths assemble in the open fields under the shade of trees and make all sorts of merriment in the form of dancing and singing bihu songs. These songs are the total expressions of their ecstasy, joy, happiness and utter fulfillment of their hopes and aspirations. These songs cover almost all the contextual themes as its form-contents. Bihu songs are accompanied with musical instruments, like the dhols, khols takas, gagonas, pepas and tals. While performing these dances people dress themselves with their traditional costume. People take, gamochas - the traditional loom-woven towels as a mark of their cultural entity. These are woven in all Assamese families without any caste and
creed by the womenfolk in their native looms, which mark their textile expertise. Moreover, people present it to their nearest and dearest ones as the mark of gift of respect, love and affection. Giving of gamochas is a common phenomenon in every Assamese family during the days of the bihu.

The impact of this festival in Assamese cultural world is of so magnitude that people ordinarily mean this festival as the sole bihu. Though the entire new month experiences the merriment of this festival, the main observance centres round the first six or seven days of the month. That is why the observance is popularly known as sat bihu. The first day is observed as garu-bihu (garu means cattle). Cow and bullock are the main agricultural elements of Assamese society. They therefore regard the animal as a sacred one. During the day of the observance cows are beaten with two species of herbs found in Assam-makhiati and diqhalati. They are offered cut-pieces of gaurds and brinzals. Oil is smeared on their horns. In the evening a fire is lit to drive away the mosquitos. All these are done to seek a longer life of the animal. Furthermore, a new rope popularly known as pagha is given to each of the animals to change the existing old one.
The day following the garu bihu is the manuh-bihu. It is the day of primary importance, ceremonial observance takes place in this day with the taking of jal pan and pithas—the symbol of traditional folk-recipes of Assam.

Huchari singing is the corelated ceremonial observance of the Bahag bihu. Youths of the village assemble together and go to each family-houses. There they sing hucharis which are a bit akin to the devotional nam songs current in Assam. With the singing of the hucharis they bless the members of the family for their prosperity and attainment. In return the group is offered with some 'givings' by the family heads. With these 'givings' the groups later in the month arrange community feasts, where they invite all the villagers. Thus the function is completed in all sorts of joyousness and merriment.

Kati bihu

The second one is known as Kati bihu. It is observed on the Sankranti day of the two Assamese months—the Ahin and the Kati. This festival is popularly known as the kangali bihu. It is so termed because it is observed in a simple and austere manner. In Assamese the word kangal means the poor. During the observance of the festival nothing is found in abundance and hence there lies no merriment and joy. Plantation of a sacred tulasi sapling
in the courtyard of every Assamese family, offering of naibadyas and burning an earthly lamp at the foot of the tulasi are the common features of this festival. P. Goswami observes "Tulasi worship is rather a domestic affair; this domestic aspect of Kati Bihu is seen in the lighting of lamps in the paddy fields and the performance of certain rituals meant for paddy welfare. The malefolk plant a small bamboo in the field and put a light at its foot. To protect the maturing paddy from pests they take recourse to certain rituals and magical practices".4

Though the Assamese people are observing this custom in mere traditional way, yet the belief behind this to pray more and more harvest in the coming agricultural season, cannot be set aside. Moreover it inflicts the idea of inducing sacredness and heavenliness on the entire agricultural phenomenon.5

Magh bihu:

The Magh bihu or bhogali bihu as is popularly known, is observed in the day of Magha sankranti. Bhogali is the festival of festival. People gets free from their cultivation prior to it. They do collect the least avail-

4. Goswami, P.: Bohag Bihu of Assam and Bihu Songs, P.8
5. Gogoi, L.: Bihu Eti Samiksha, p. 15
-able particle of their harvest from the paddy fields and store in their bharal ghar - the grannary. With the coming of the bihu every Assamese family becomes ready with various traditional food materials. These are the best specimens of Assamese food - habit. On the day of the uruka, which befalls one day ahead of the sankranti day, womenfolk of Assam become busy with preparing various varieties of pithas - traditional Assamese cakes. The names of these pithas vary from place to place. But the most common varieties are - cunqa pitha, til pitha, pheni pitha, khola chapari pitha, ghila pitha, bar pitha, hejari pitha etc. Laskaras or laddus (coconut prickles) are also prepared as the accompaniment of the pithas in typical bihu food-dish. Preparations are also made to make ready the jalpan one day ahead. Cira and sandah with curd and gur prepare this ideal traditional dish. Sometimes komal caul (soft rice) also serves the purpose in lieu of cira and sandah.

Magh Bihu "has many parallels among agricultural people. In Assam it core is fire ceremony observed on the Bihu or sankranti day, not on the full moon of phalgun as in other parts of India, but the Bihu eve or uruka has its particular importance."^6

6. Goswami, P.: Bhag Bihu of Assam and Bihu Songs, p.8
With the bihu in the anvil, youths and young children keep themselves busy in building a temporary hut called meji. In some places it is named as bhelaghar and bhelapuja. It is made of bamboo, stubble of paddy and dried leaves of banana trees. On uruka day community feasts take place in and around the mejis. The arrangement of feasts in Magh bihu has its own affinity with world wide phenomenon. "It is generally conceded that the word fair is derived from the Latin 'feriae' meaning feasts. This derivation has its basis in the fact that many of the earliest fairs were held during the festivals of the warm season or at the beginning of the harvest". These feasts are arranged with the subscriptions of the villagers. On the latter day, i.e. on the bihu day these mejis are burnt with the chanting of the famous fire-worshipping hymn. This is accomplished with a view to worshipping Agni - the God of fire and light.

Kindling of bonfire is seen all over the world. Observes G. Frazer - "All over Europe the peasants have been accustomed from time immemorial to kindle bonfire on certain days of the year, and to dance round or leap over them........ The seasons of the year when those bonfires are most commonly lit are spring and midsummer; but in some places they are kindled also at the end of the autumn or during the course of the winter, ........"8

Assamese culture is a composite one. Tribal elements play a major role in the greater Assamese cultural setting. All the tribal societies of Assam observe this festival like their plain Assamese brethren do in a similar trend. Only the difference lies in its process and product. The Mishings, the Bodos, the Ravas, the Adis, the Tiwas, the Karbis - all the major tribes of Assam have their own bihu festivals. Though these festivals are observed in their own typical and traditional manners, yet the affinity and likeness of these with Assamese bihu can easily be noticed.

Bordoloi has given a description of such a festival of the Mishings in his first-ever literary-piece, Miri Jiyari. The description of the narachiga bihu in chapter four of the novel is in fact a description of this greatest Mishing folk-culture. The pen-picture of this festival in the novel is somewhat irrelevant in the development of the plot as it does not demand that much necessity of the same. But Bordoloi has dexterously connected the description with the theme and material of the novel. Before starting the description a working knowledge of the community of the Mishings will serve the purpose.

The Mishings:

The Miris now call themselves as Mishing in preference to the former name. There are a lot of controversies regarding the identity and original homeland of the tribe. Even the European writers like Dalton, Dunbar, Lorrain, Needhan et al did not make elaborate statement as to the origins of them. But the Miris and other like - tribes once played a pivotal role in the formation of the greater Assamese society. There are confusions even with the term miri. Even the assumed meaning of the word could do nothing with the origin of the tribes. Nurturing a vague meaning of the term as 'go between' E.A. Gait evolved an idea on the foot-hold of A. Mackenzie.

"The Abors and Miris coming originally from the same habitat are still so alike in all material respect as to warrant us in calling their earlier and late migration of the same tribe, the Abors as the last comers retaining of their prestige savagery and hardihood, while the Miris have been to some extent influenced by free association with the plains and the settled habits of civilization. Under the Assam Government, the Miris acted as go between of the Abors and traders of Assam". 10

10. As quoted in The Mishings by N.C. Pegu, p. 3
Following the heel of Mackenzie other scholars like Dalton, Gait tried to trace the history of origin of this tribe. But accuracy is a distant term in searching it. The Mishings do believe that they migrated from hill side. To prove it they refer to many legends current in their age-old tribe-tradition. But whatsoever, it can be ascertained that they are runaway families of upper hills and they show distinct features of Tibeto-Mongoloid stock of people. They live in that strip of alluvial land along the northern bank of the mighty Brahmaputra centring the largest river island Majuli and bounded on the north by hilly country of the Arunachal Pradesh. As such according to their habitat the Mishings can be grouped under two distinct divisions - (i) the Mishings of the Brahmaputra valley or the Plain-mishing (ii) the Mishings of the adjacent hill areas or the Mishings of the hills.

What nara ciga bihu is:

The description of the festival of the Mishings, as depicted in *Miri Jiyari* is termed as nara ciga bihu. Its Mishing equivalent is porag. The festival is observed in the month of Ahin-Bhada or in the month of Magh and Phagun. This is observed when the agricultural activities are over and when the paddy fields are free, and
trespassable. It is called naraclga bihu by the Assamese people because in the months mentioned above the paddy fields are barren - the harvest is off and the stubbles of ahu paddy are torn by fair amount of movement of people. In Assamese the word nara means the stubbles of the paddy-plant and ciga stands for to tear off. The Mishings observe this festival when their ahu harvesting is over and when there is enough time to start with the cultivation of rabi crops.

Porag is the community festival of the Mishing culture. It is mostly a festival of the virgins and the youths. Therefore the meimbor-yame - the organisation of these virgins and youths shoulders all the responsibility of making the festival a success. It is an institution primarily of the virgins and youngmen - either married or unmarried in the age group fifteen to twenty five years. Elderly persons are also included in it - so that they can guide and teach the young generation the required norms of their tribal social setting. Though it is a festival of the youths and girls, yet all the Mishings, irrespective of the age and sex takes part in the joyous moment of celebration. To all the Mishings Porag is their most intimate festival.
The Mishings build a house, called morong - for this occasion. For each occasion a new morong is constructed. This is a public hall - a community centre from where the celebration of porag is officiated and executed. But this term is now-a-days being widely used to denote the dormitories of Mishing community. It is known by the Assamese as deka-cang. Construction of such public houses is a common feature of tribal societies of the entire north-east. Probably basic aim, in distant past, was to help in hunting. Hunting happens to be a hobby with the tribal people. So it may be believed to be the relic of hunting stage of tribal traditional life. The morong and deka-cang, what may be called, has got almost identical existences in other tribal societies too. The Miyongs construct dere - the Padams have their moshup. The Nagas, the Adis, the Karbis, the Manipuris too have their dormitories of this nature. Prior to observance the Mishings assemble in the morong to discuss the matters relating to the festival. Officials are selected from the assemble to conduct the festival smoothly. Migam or migam bara is the head of the officials. In Mishing language migam means king. In some places he is known as sodhar bara. Migam is the supreme power; if according to the opinion of the him someone is guilty, he can convict and punish the man.
Deka-bara executes the power of conducting the youths (deka meaning youth). The responsibility of conducting the women is given on tiri-bara (tiri means the women). Cat bara helps deka-bara in his responsibility and barani helps tiri-bara. Under these officials, there are again some sub-ordinates. A pair of youth is selected for helping in the judgement. They are called sodharu (udaru) and sodhani (udani). Besides these a minam bara is selected to receive the guests. Barik serves as an emissary to send messages. Tekelas are appointed to summon the officials who neglect their duties. He is even entitled to exert physical punishment to any convict. In some places there is the provision of appointing aringow or lady-tekelas. Dhuliya baras are appointed to look after the dhuliyas in the festival.

After the officials are selected, the day of this festival is fixed. Generally the festival starts on a wedness day and concludes on the Friday. To get the festival underway on a certain wednessday is perhaps based on some traditional beliefs of the Mishings. The practice is also in current among the Lalungs, another plan tribal community of the state. They also observe an identical festival which gets started on a wedness day.\[11\]

\[11\] Hazarika, A.C. (ed): Uchhabar Rangchora, p. 43.
Generally the festival runs for three days. But in some villages, particularly in the big villages, the festival runs for five consecutive days.

After all these preparations are completed, invitations are sent through minam bara to the selected group of youths and virgins of a nearby village.

On the very first day of the festival deka-bara and tiri bara are given an warm welcome to the morong ghar. According to the social system, prevalent in the society, these two official are to offer apang- the traditional drinking beverage of the Mishings to the festival. There is again an another system of inaugurating the ceremony. Pouring of holy water through pobor takes place amidst chanting of prayers, beating of drums and dancing and singing of folksongs encircling the morong. The minoms also take part in this. The Pobor is a conical bamboo cage of almost 6 feet length and about 3 to 4 feet in diametre. The middle post part of this bamboo-cage is the widest part and is capable of containing huge quantity of fermented aponq of black variety. Selected persons are entrusted with the task of preparing these pobors. These are kept hanging in the ceiling of the morongs centrally on a big bamboo post. The pales of fresh water are conventionally fetched by village girls, selected for the
purpose. Along with the pouring of the water, chanting of hymns takes place. These are meant for their god - Ul-rawaranqm and the collective prayer is known as rebatla-panam. 12

The second day of the festival:

On the second day reception takes place to the respected guests. The moment the guests arrive at, the hosts accord them the traditional welcome. They plant several numbers of banana trees throughout the entire passage and welcome the guests through this passage by dancing and singing and playing on drums and cymbals. Thereafter the day's festival gets underway. A pig is offered for the purpose. Sacrificing a pig for the welfare of the people and successful completion of the festival as well, is the primary custom of the society. 13

The custom of sacrificing the animal is popularly known as the matniknam. The pig to be offered should be a tasked one, healthy and sound. There is a customary way of killing the animal. First a bamboo piece, shaped sword-like, is thrusted into the animal via an incision


13. "Apanq and pork are essential items for this festival, At least 4/5 pigs are sacrificed and a grand feast is arranged where all the villagers participate" Tribes of Assam Part-I, p. 117 by Bordoloi, B.N. etc.
made by a sharp knife in the uppermost part of the abdomen. While killing the animal in such a way, people pray their different gods namely Karsing, Kartak, Guminsol etc. for the welfare of their cultivation and country folk. They pray to keep their farms free from pestilence, to protect them from severe illness and guide them all through the year. The Mishings are superstitions enough. Whenever their yields of the paddy fields were of lesser gains they believed it to be the dissatisfaction of any of these gods. Therefore they pray to protect their farms for such odd situation. Belief is also in current among the Mishings that a faultless pig is a cause of bliss to the village and the society itself. Offering of a good swine, they believe, is also a cause of the satisfaction of the guests. So the youths of the village moves five times round the sacrificed animal dancing with cymbals and drums and pray to the gods so that the guests are pleased with the pork. They believe even that satisfaction of the guests in the festival pleases the deceased forefathers of them.

The moment the guests are accorded welcome to the arena of the festival, it turns to be a happy haunt for the exuberant mishing youths. They dance and sing

untiringly. The young people play on the drums and cymbals up to their fullest satisfaction. The joy and pleasure continue through out the entire day and night. But even during such extreme mood of joy and pleasing utmost care is taken for the guests. Precautions are taken so that they are not suffered for any sort of lapse of reception. The guest dancing-party would also pay attention so that their host-villagers are all pleased with their performances. In this way the Porag is the festival of give and take and the exchanging dias of simple tribal pleasantries of the Mishing people.

The night's celebration starts off with the prayer-dance called miboo-sumnam. This is led by the priest miboo. All the members follow the priests. It has been mentioned earlier that the meaning of these songs are not intelligible to the learned Mishings, not to speak of the non-Mishing people.

The third day of the festival:

On the third day village-feasts take place. Thus after three days of mirthful moments and extreme jubilation the ceremony concludes with a happy note.

The Porag festival has many other elements which are in conformity with the traditional social system of the Mishings. The villagers accord invitation to their
village girls who are given marriage to other villages. They attend this festival with their husbands and other family members. It is almost a customary to bring a pack of apong by these women. Sometimes they join the festival with two virgins and two youths of their villages. After the villagers constitute the meimbor-yame to conduct the festival, the Mishings are not allowed to arrange marriage of their daughters. However in case of any urgency, the body permits sometimes as special case. Basically meimbor yame is a constitution of villagers' cultural body - but its functioning is akin of panchayat system, prevalent in the tribal communities. Obedience to this august body shows the highest sense of regard of the Mishings to the organization of their own.

The officers of the organisation are not paid for their services either in cash or in kind. They are to render free services. On the other hand they are to subscribe apong, rice, chicken and any other things to the festival more than the share allotted to the commoners. According to the conventional custom of the society, the deka-bara is entitled to get the prime-share of apong and pork as a mark of respect and recognition of his service. 15

There is religious attachment of the Mishings, with this festival. As earlier referred to, the miboos, who conduct the worshipping explain the mystery of the universe to the common people and simplify the logics behind each and every superstition. Though in an unintelligible terms the process is executed, the entire worshipping system reflects the clear picture of the Mishing folk-religion.

The Mishings are required to put on their native dress in this festival. Like all other tribes, the Mishings have their own traditional gear. The typical multicoloured dresses of the tribal communities of this region are adding colourful contribution to the fancied cultural demography of the same.

According to N.C. Pegu the dress materials of the Mishings can be divided into two broad heads:

(1) Essential clothings and (2) Ornamental or decorative clothings.

The essential clothings includes all costumes used primarily for covering the body. The decorative clothings are used for intensifying the nativeness and as well as for increasing the physical beauty.16 Dresses for the women include the ribi gaseng, a sheet of divers-

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sified colour, adorned with figures of flowers and decorated with attractive designs. Yellow is the favourite colour of all the tribal girls of the Brahmaputra valley - but they prefer to black, different strips of red, azure blue and bottle green in their clothes. The Mishing women have their own colour scheme and bossing plan - which are excellent examples of their artistry and craft womenship. They are born weaver and born artist. Perhaps there won't be a single Mishing girl who cannot weave and prepare their own clothes.

The main dress of the menfolk of the Mishings is known as miboo-galuk. It is a shirt to be so called with its front open and unbuttoned. Short-sleeved miboo-galans are adorned with coloured stripes on its back and waist. Ugon or a dhuti is an another male garment. There are other dress materials too which are very common in their dress-habit. They are dumer, jinrek, gero, sekrek etc. All these materials are loomwoven by the Mishing womenfolk in their loin-loomos. These are almost similar to those of the Adis. It is the most striking factor of the cultural-syncretism of these two important tribal communities.

Mishing women are fond of wearing ornaments of various designs. Like all women they are also fond of wearing ornaments made of gold or silver. But sometimes
they are seen to wear some decoratives made of bamboo, wood and other such material. Galpata, madali, sondrong, doksiri, bartap, konge, onsarmara etc. are some of the ornaments generally seen in Mishing society.

The description of bihu as it stands in Bordoloi's novels:

In the above pages we have come across the first hand knowledge of a great festival of Assamese people - the bihu we have also furnished a note on the porag festival of the Mishing community. Mention of these two festivals is made only for the fact that our novelist has narrated elaborately these two festivities in course of the plot-structure of his novels. But his narration is not at all the true description of these two festivals. These have been incorporated in the thematic illustrations with a view to infusing the extra-needed element in his writings.

Now, an attempt has been made to look into the description of the novelist - what he has written in the form of these two great observances of two different communities of Assam.
There are two vivid descriptions of bihu festivals in Miri Jiyari. Bearing in mind that this novel is the early specimen of his youthful exuberance, one can easily come to a conclusion that Bordoloi, instead of interweaving the narrative part of the festival with the plot structure of the novel incorporated the descriptions in an in-orderly manner. Precisely speaking, the description are non-existents in the novel, in-so-far as the theme is taken into account. The basic plot of the novel does not claim the same for the development of its own course of action. The poor linkage of the descriptions, whatever it may have had with the course of events, could have been clearly avoided. But the sole and primary aim of the novelist is to establish bihu - in the pages of written literature. Therefore, in all probabilities perhaps, the novelist has paid a good deal of treatment of the festivals in a chapterised manner. Miri-Jiyari is well adorned with the descriptions of the same.

The first description of the bihu observance has been given in the second chapter of the novel. The chapter has been named as - Lakhimpur nagarar oparat (In

17. Bordoloi, R.: Miri Jiyari, pp. 6-10
the township of Lakhimpur). Lakhimpur is a small township of upper Assam. It is bordering the habitat of the Mishing people of Assam. Janki and Panei—the hero and the heroine of the novel hail from this community. The community constitutes a major part in the composite cultural scenario of greater Assamese traditional set-up. Incidentally this cultural scenario also constitutes the description of the bihu festival.

The description centres round the activities relating to the performances of the day long observances of the bar bihu (main bihu) in a sub-urban locality, nearing the tiny township of Lakhimpur. The day of the bar bihu is the primary day of observing. The observance is also solemnized as the day of manuh-bihu. As the day befalls, people of the locality, irrespective of being poor and rich, become enthusiastic enough with extreme joy and merriment. There are all sorts of gaiety everywhere. People become busy with traditional observances, like bihu-dancing, bihu-singing and playing. Friendly mixing of people along with the conventional offering of bihu goodwishes and saluting the elderly folk by the younger one are in full swing. The young ones are busy with playing paci, a traditional pastime. Even the women-folk are not exceptional. They are also playing like their
male ones. Another group is playing cards in the courtyard. This group consists of the gentle folk of the area. While they are playing cards, a group of by-standards is seen watching the progress of the game. In short all the people of the locality are busy with all sorts of merriment and extreme joyousness.

While all these are going on among the people of the urbanite society, groups of bihu-makers, mostly of youths and virgins are pouring into the township from adjacent Mishing villages. They have come to make bihu dances in the town and entertain the urbanites with their traditional performances. They use to visit the residences of selective persons of the area whom they think to be rich. They make bihu performance in the courtyard of these people. In turn they are rewarded with money. This forms an extremely merrimental traditional mingling of the people. Out of these groups, a particular group, consisting of Janki and Panei is drawing special attention from the people. This group is having a good number of dancers. The group is well-equipped with traditional instruments - with at least four or five dhols two to three pairs of tals and and two pepas.
The group enters the premises of courtyard of a well-to-do family. The people assemble there to play cards. The bihu-making of the group starts with the drumming of the dhols. With the beating of the dhols and playing the tals, the dancers start dancing exuberantly to the tune of accompanying music. The drummers too, begin to dance moving round the dancing arena. Once the drumming is over known as dholor ceon, the girls are asked by the assemblage to make dances. At this, the men, accompanying the group with instruments set themselves aside in a place with a view to facilitating the girl-dancers to make dance. The virgins make a row of themselves in a traditional way. The namati then sings a refrain of a bihu song with the simultaneous clapping of hands.

With this refrain completely sung, the girls make dance. Then again sharply comes another piece. Thus the singing goes on in the form of reply and counter reply. The author has furnished meaning of the local terms and words used in the songs recited as well as rites and rituals mentioned in these songs in the novel.

With this the bihu-making is completed and then the people have subscribed money to the group. Thus ends the observance.
This is in short all about the performance depicted in this chapter. But the novelist, in order to entangle the narration with the main course of events of the novel has added another episode of bihu-dance wherein the two main characters have taken part. As it has been enticed with a view to supplementing the plot structure only, the description of the same has been alluded with;

Besides these description in Miri Jiyari, the novelist has given a wide illustration of bihu in many an occasion in other novels. Amongst these special mention may be made of Rangili, a historical novel. In fact the entire plot and sub-plot of this novel is constructed on the superstructure of this festival. The description of this festival is clear in all the pages of Rangili. The courses of events are well tied with the sequences of bihu scenes of this novel. They are so closely tied that one cannot have a clear development of one in absence of the other. In fact the entire novel is loaded with manifold descriptions of three bihu festivals of Assam. The sixth chapter of the novel is an elongated description of these festivals. In this chapter, named as Asamiyar bihu ki? the novelist has vividly described the observances of the festival.

The thirteenth chapter of the novel is a description of nisa bihu of cat month of Assamese calendar year. The nisa bihu is observed throughout the entire month. This month is the last month of Assamese Calendar year. With the advent of another new calendar year, the youths and virgins of Assam become almost restless with the observances.

Again in 15th chapter there is the description of the observances of seven day bihu festival in Rangpur town, the erstwhile, capital of the Ahom Kingdom. The description centres round the observances of bihu festival in royal patronage of Ahom dynasty. During Ahom rule, bihu observances were made on the premises of the Ranghar bakari the centre of pastime and amusement of Ahom monarchs. This description made in Rangharat bahagar sat-bihu utsav is an another specimen of the novelist's deep inclination to this national festival of Assam.

The description of this bihu is typical of royal days of Assam. Groups of dancers, singers and instrumentalists are accommodated there and asked to demonstrate their performances according to the demand of the king, who conveys his wishes through his close associates.

20. Ibid. pp. 60-67
Various forms of dances viz. gabharu bihu, miri bihu, deka bihu are all displayed infront of the king and his officials. Gabharu bihu is the bihu-performance of village virgins performed throughout the month of cat. This bihu is performed during night time only. The youths cannot take part in it and it is the performance of the maids, who, go out of the their residence to assemble in a high plot of land. The performance takes place under a big tree and that is why it is also known as gac talar gabharu bihu (the bihu of the virgins performed under a tree). Some scholars have admixed this bihu performing form with jeng-bihu. In all probabilities, this term has come into currency from the conception that this form of bihu is performed in a forest or in a place of thorny jungle (the word jeng means leafless twig, thorns etc.). This particular conception has its association with the description of bihus in the novels of Rajanikanta Bordoloi. Bordoloi has made mention of gabharu bihu only. After completion of all these dances various games and sports mainly of traditional character, viz. mahjuj, maljuj, senjuj, and ghora daur etc. are displayed. All these games and pastimes were earlier patronised by the Ahom monarchs. Observes B.K. Barua - "The Deodhai Asam Buranji presents an interesting account of the various pastimes of
the Ahom monarchs, such as hawk-fights, elephant fights, buffalo fights, tiger-bear contests etc. The Ahom Kings maintained regular avaries for the training of hawks. They were known as carai-cong and there was a well organised khel or guild connected with this royal pastime with the usual gradation of officers". 21

The description mentioned above relates to the Ahom time and therefore bears contextual importance.
Narahari sensowa, father of Rangili belonged to the guild to oversee the hawk and train it for Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha. But as he could not satisfy the King by his skill in training up the hawk, he was to be punished. The king however acquitted him later on at the request of Rangili.
The incident is described in the novel". 22

Description of naraciga bihu:

In the third chapter of Miri Jiyari 23 there is a description of naraciga bihu of the Mishings. A description of the festival is made here before. But the description of naraciga bihu, as found in the novel is somewhat different. The novelist has placed the sequence of

23. Bordoloi, R.: Miri Jiyari, pp. 11-18
events of this novel on the perspective of this festival. As such, though he has tried to give a clear description of the observance, he has overlooked many things. According to the description of the novel itself — the Mishing start the observance on the seventh day of Assamese Calendar month — Kati. The youths and virgins assemble on the morong ghar with the subscriptions of villagers. This is a social system, current in traditional Assamese society and tribal societies as well. In most occasions the system is popularly known as paca tola pratha (the system of collection of subscription). The system is prevalent for all community feasts and observances. In naraciga bihu festival the youths and virgins are given blessings by their deodhai. The recognized priest of the community. Deodhai is the most revered person of Mishing society. Bordoloi has given reference to Dalton and Hunter, who earlier attempted to trace out the originality of deodhai in the Mishing society. Their findings are somewhat amazing. The man presumed to be a deodhai bears a rather different sign in his body and mind. When he comes of age the Mishing impose priestliness upon him. But he flees to the forest. There he becomes frenzied. It is believed that there he meets with the gods and then returns. From that day he attains priestliness and is known as deodhai or mibua.24

The deodhai then offers blessing to all bhakats mostly comprising of old people. Almost a good percent of old Mishing people are devotees of a secret religion current in Assam. This is known as rati sewa. Rati sewa is an occult folk-religion. The bhakats of this religion is known as paka-bhakat. The community of paka bhakat consists of men from all caste, creed and religion. None can say what actually the religion is. The devotion starts in night and is completed within the night itself. It is learnt from reliable sources that many rituals are performed in the process. Some of these rituals are gopidhara, naga kirtan, phul kirtan, digambari.25.

Gopidhara is the ritual of this form of religion in which the paka bhakatanis are made nude. They are called gopis. After being nude they offer devotion to their gods secretly with panchamakar.26

Naga kirtan and phul kirtan, perhaps, are the rituals associated with the copulation of illegal nature. So is the digambari - because the very word means a naked woman. According to Bordoloi, mostly all countries have such secret form of religion. He refers to a secret religion kishori bhajan by name current at that time in

25. Bordoloi, R. J. Miri Jiyari, p. 12 (footnote)
26. Pancamakar - mad (wine), mac (fish), mangsa (meat), mudra (fried grams) and maithun (copulation)
Shillong of Jaintia Hills of present state of Meghalaya. Even in the civilized world of western Europe, he remarks, there is an occult rite, known as lodge or cremation. Nothing can be known about this even after long 2000 years have elapsed since its inception. The man who once becomes a votary of this, never divulges anything of this secret religion. It is a mystery that they do not say anything about it.  

There is a reference of Sangdop rituals performed in naraciga bihu. It is a complete ritualistic process in which singing, dancing and all other activities take place. Actually it is a process to foresee the future by practising divination. This system is current in almost all the tribes of North-East. It is almost similar to state of frenziness. The Mishings calls it deodop also.

In course of offering blessings to common folk the deodhai or the mibua asks the people to worship their different gods. They are Karsing Kartan, Muglang Mirama, Mattabe, Sinex, Dadmukh, Danqkong etc.

The Mishings also perform jarar puja after sangdupi is over. This form of worshipping is a community congregational ceremony of the community. It is performed with

27. Bordoloi, R.: Miri Jiyari, p. 12 (foot note)
the voluntary contribution of common people. This worshipping is done at the time of attack of epidemics also. Offerings of wine, cock and swine are made.  

Holi:

Among the festivals, that have found place in Bordoloi's novel, holi or phakua is worth mentioning. Bordoloi has given a vivid account of this festival in his famous historical novel Manomati. In the first chapter of the first part of this novel the novelist has described the holi observance in Barpeta Kirtan ghar. The description centres round the events occurred in observing this festival. The festival is observed in the month of Phagun. The people of Assam observes this festival in a very colourful and pleasant way. The festival is best known for its colossal solemnization in Barpeta Kirtan ghar - rich heritage of Sankarite religious tradition. According to the description of the novel on the day of holi observance people of the locality use to gather in the premises of the Kirtan ghar. The religious ceremony starts with the coming of qayan bayan dhuliya and dogoriya and their playing of respective roles. With the religious chanting of hymns and chorus of blissful utterances, the Brahmins and the bhakats take away the deity.

of Kaliya thakur from the daul. He is placed in a wood
piece. The women give uruli. The uruli giving is asso-
ciated with the well-being of any religious and social
institutions in Assam. Then the deity is carried on a
dola to another place. It is known to the people of
Barpeta as the deity's journey to mother Lakshmi from the
residence of Ghunusa. The conception is based on a famous
religious myth.

With the journey is on, the youths begin to throw
the colour-sand amongst themselves. It is popularly known
a phakua-guri. Soon the scene becomes colourful with the
throwing of kumkun and phakua. Some use phiskari, an
instrument for spraying watery colour. This happens all
throughout the journey of the deity to Dakshin Pathar.
There assembles another procession from nearby places like
Baradi and Patbausi. At once the place becomes an assembles
of a sea of human. Then the deities are kept on the earth.
The people starts singing the holi ritualistic songs. Thus
the deities are again returned to their own places after
the completion of the religious procession.

On the entrance of the kirtan-ghar a hollow bamboo
is placed as a barricade to the Kaliya thakur preventing
to enter the temple. This institution is accomplished on
popular mythical faith which refers as follows. The mother
Lakshmi is very much annoyed with the Mahaprabhu because he has left the place without the permission from her. She can not tolerate the thakur going to another woman Ghunusa. In fact she has followed the procession to make the deity return. But she is not capable of and as such she does not allow him to re-enter.

The moment the Mahaprabhu arrives at the gate of the Kirtanghar the processionists ask the bhakats of the mother Lakshmi to give way to enter the deity. But they will not allow him to re-enter. Then there starts the arguing and counter arguing. At length they destine to start maha sangram of the holi by throwing kumkum and abir - the colour. Then starts the acting of obstruction with sticks, known as bahbhangya or breaking of bamboo, by both the groups. The party to the deity overpowers the other group. They break the bamboo. The deity is then taken inside the Kirtanghar. The group consisting of dhuliya, kaliya, gayan and bayan also enters and starts performing centring round the deity. They also make dances with various actions. The beating of khol also goes on and with all these religious performances the deity is moved seven rounds.
After all these performances are over the deity is brought into the gateway of the kirtan ghar. As soon as he is brought, one member of the mother Lakshmi's group starts alleging the deity. Sharp comes the counter from the other group. The process continues till the moment comes when a selected group of old women starts singing a song — a traditional one. The song depicts the outrage of the elderly women.

This is in short the description of the holi festival of Barpeta area. The very scene of this novel is placed as a perspective of the love affairs of the hero and heroine of the novel. Here in the observance of the festival the love at first sight of these two lovers took place which latter got developed.

There are various opinions regarding the basic conception of this festival.

Holi as celebrated in the northern and eastern most part of India, is a version of fire festival. It has a religious cover and is held in phalguni purmima of the February-March month. Many scholars are of the opinion that originally this festival must have been a fertility festival where vulgar songs were sung openly.
"The Daulotsava festival commonly known as Holi is enjoyed wide prevalence throughout India. The Holi is basically a fertility charm. The original purpose of the festival is to promote the fertility of men, animals and crops".  

The abir or the phakua of red colour used in the festival stands for menstrual blood and the act of douching red powder, it is believed, enhances the fertility of the earth.

Holi is celebrated in different places in different manners. Legends centre round the originality of this festival. "The name Holi", according to C.H. Buck "is a corruption of the sanskrit word Holaka meaning 'half-ripe corn', and seems to have originally been the Vasanta-utsava, or spring festival when ceremonies were performed in honour of the crops and to ward off disease from the fields". He further points out to a legend as to its origin which states that Holaka, a femal demon was accustomed to make her daily meal with men and women. The people then appealed the demon king to save them. The king abused her with foul language. Later she was subjugated and bonfire was made on her mortal remains.  

32. Ibid. p. 86.
In some places, on the previous day of holi, holika is burnt to ashes. This holika, according to some symbolizes a ram or a goat. But beliefs are current in some places that it is an aunt of Prahlada, the god-fearing son of Hiranyakashipu. Prahlada, was an ardent follower of Vishnu. In his fanatical attempt to kill Prahlada, Hiranyakashipu and his sister Holika thought it otherwise. Holika seized Prahlada and entered the fire, lit for Prahlada’s burning. But by grace of Vishnu, the votary came out unburnt but in the process Holika was burnt to ashes.  

Affinities of holi with bihu:

Some scholars have established affinities, though not doubtless of holi festival with bihu. Both the festivals are fertility observance. But above all, the establishment of both the celebrations as fire festival opens a new light of discussion. Observes S.S. Gupta —

"It is only in Magh or Bhogali Bihu bonfire is a necessary part. In Kati Bihu also little clay lamps are lighted at the foot of the tulsi, on a banana plant, especially planted in the yard, at grannary in the compound and in the fields. But in Magha Bihu, burirghar-

33. Gupta, S.S. : Fire Festival of India, p. 78 and Krishnaswamy, K.
type makeshift cottage of Holi is built, which is called bhelaghar along with meji for bonfire. It is the most important and popular fire festival of Assam". 34

Again he draws attention thus - "In Bengal it is held on Suklachaturdashi day (fourteenth day of bright half Falgun). The previous evening of the Holi, it starts with chanehar or nera porano or burirghar porano that is to say, burning of newly constructed hut meant for the purpose. The hut is made of straw, bamboo, coconut leaf, etc. and inside the hut an idol of a man or a ram made of rice paste is placed. 35

The bonfire of bhelaghar of Magh bihu festival and burirghar of holi celebration cannot be placed side by side. All types of fire rites and festivals cannot be defined through a single theory. Even within the bihu observance in the Kati Bihu earthen lamps are lit and akashbanti lighted — these are lighted to war off darkness and to show ways to those powers which are welcomed. In this context, perhaps the tendency of simplicity and elegance of the festivals are the more powerful elements of the continuity of rites than to put some complexities in theory.

34. Gupta, S.S. and I Fire Festival of India, p. 82
35. Ibid, p. 77
Durga puja festival:

A long description of Durga puja festival is in *Dandua Droh*. The fourteenth chapter under nomenclature *Jikerit* (at Jukeri) covers a vivid narration of Durga puja observance of Hardatta. The Durga puja festival is also known as *Saradiya durgotsav*. The festival is known as the national festival of the province of west Bengal - but is a common feature of greater Indian religious network. It is the early specimen of Great Tradition the originality of this festival is drawn the ages of the Ramayana. The Durga puja festival is observed with a five-day long programme. On the first i.e. the Swasthi day the image of mother goddess Durga is placed along with the *Nabapatrika*. Then the worshipping takes place for three consecutive days i.e. *Saptami*, *Astami* and *Navami*. On the last day i.e. on *Vijaya Dasami* the image is emersed. Synchronizes with this day the famous *Dosera*, festival of national outlook. On this day the effigy of Ravana, considered to be a symbol of ill-power is burnt.

Durga is the goddess of power. Hence involvement of general people in this festival is a common phenomenon. Fairs are associated with this festival. Different dramatic

functions are accomplished along with the celebrations. All sorts of gaiety and merriment prevail all through these five days.

But worshipping of goddess Durga is all these days with rites and rituals is a path of Sakta doctrine of religion. Though a festival of great tradition the involvement of common folk can be ascertained as numerous beliefs, superstitions and rites etc. are associated with it.  

Bordoloi has dexterously illustrated this primary calendaric festival with native colour and admixture. Description of this festival with local performing art form dhuliya and ojapali is a special feature of this novel. The important point to be noticed in Durga puja is the arti offering. Scholars have opined this to be a part of fire festival. Observes S.S. Gupta —

"There has never been any dearth of festivals in India. There is hardly a month without a festival. But arati is held throughout the year. It is waving of lighted lamps, which, it is believed, is potent with magical context. Arati is held in front of any object of worship. In any welcome baran, arati is performed".  

Bar sabah:

Mention of barsabah, a socio-religious institution is found in Radha Rukminir Ran\textsuperscript{39} and Manomati\textsuperscript{40}. The first reference covers a wide deliberation of the festival in the event of Mayamariya revolt. Ramakanta, the hero of the novel and his two other accomplices of the rebellion namely Nahar Khora and Bargayan Gosain arranged this festival with a view to mobilising hundreds of disciples of their religious faith against the ruler who every new and then humiliated them in the name of religion.

The description of the novel owes very much to the contextual importance. Social institutions besides its general implications, invokes collectiveness in the face of any socio-political disaster of a particular society. The Mayamariyas were in the brink of downfall unless there were the sense of integrity and togetherness among themselves. This was an occasion where they could have reciprocated opinions and masterminded their plan. As such the description of the novel, though is a slight variation from the genuine form of it, is befitting to the situation and context.

\textsuperscript{39} Sarma H.K. (ed): Rajani Bordoloi Racenamala, pp.14-16

\textsuperscript{40} Bordoloi, R.: Manomati, pp. 170-171
Barsabah, mainly observed in the middle and upper Assam is a community festival arranged in the premises of a nam-ghar. The festival is a day long observance and inherits vaisnavite rites in all sorts of its functions. People subscribe voluntarily for the festival and subscriptions come both in the form of cash and kind. Generally the day of observance is fixed on an auspicious day after the rangali bihu gets over.

On the day of the festival nam-prasanga is held and verses from holy scriptures namely the Kirtan-ghosa and the Bhagavata purana are recited. The villagers do community prayers more commonly known as sabahuwa nam and diha nam. After it the villagers propitiate the Almighty for the peace and prosperity of the people and the society. Then the community feast takes place and people take their respective shares of prasad and paka mithai. All these items are prepared one day ahead of the day of observance. Thus after the day long observance, bhaona performance is held in the evening - which is regarded as an indispensable part of the festival.

Barsabah is an excellent example of fusion of social and religious festivals as traditional elements of social life are clearly seen in its observance. Social ritual like pani tola, or collecting sacred water from the
river is also performed in some places. Like all other festivals, current in Assam, barsabah too has its variants. Even there are differences of opinions as regards to its origin. The people of the Mongoloid stock claim to have its originality from the rituals of their own. Though the festival is now-a-days observed as a social ones. Yet its antiquity can well be traced in its observance in the royal houses of Ahom rulers. Moreover any rich and prosperous man can also hold this exclusively upon his personal entrepreneurship. Whatever it may be, this institution has its own place in the Assamese society. Traditionality and heritages are adhered to in this festival which besides reflecting the social life, associate itself with the spiritual upheaval of the mass. In some places observances like gopinisabah and garakhiya sabah are observed after this festival.

The kind of barsabah proper as found in eastern Assam is not prevalent in any locality of the western part though some festivals like it with different names may be found in this part also.

The second reference of the festival in Manomati does not cover any elaborate description.

42. P. Saikia: Barsabah in Prantik 14th issue 12th year,1993.
In Manomati mention has been made of deo-puja. It is the religious festival of the Burmese people. In the XIV chapter of the novel, a brief description of the worshipping has been given. It is a festival of worshipping Lord Buddha, in which the idol of him is placed and prayed for his blessing - to win the battle by Mingimahar. Jarar Puja (Miri Jiyari) is another folk-worshipping system of the Mishing. Beliefs and superstitions etc. are associated with it.

Religion in Bordoloi's writings:

Before going deep into the study it is worth mentioning a remark from Dorson. He writes - "The religious aspect of social folk custom cover the modes of worship that lie outside the established church". On the context of this remarks the religious aspects of Bordoloi's writings can be best justified. Bordoloi had great reliance on tradition. So when he found any unjust and unreligious aspects in his literary discourse he moulded his characters to meet this end. He wanted to promote idealism, spiritualism and patriotism. Nirmal of Nirmal Bhakat and Krishna Da of Rahdai Liqiri are the symbol of its kind.

44. Dorson, R.M. (ed): Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, p. 4
These characters are spokesmen of nobleness, credibility and spiritualism. In some cases again one could find novelist's attempt at establishing the greatness of Krishna bhakti and Tantricism.

In his novels Bordoloi has reflected his views on morality, religious insight and lifestyle. Barring Mirijiya an undercurrent of religiosity is prevalent in all his other novels. In his own confession - it was at Barpeta where his religious life got its beginning. To him Barpeta was a great place that inclined him to the noble ideals of Vaisnavism. Bordoloi witnessed the Vaisnavism in its decaying stage which began to occur after the Burmese invasion. The ethics of Vaisnavism was a far way then. The reality of humanism faded away and man's eternal enemies of his own-self began to react. A careful observation of the events of his novels namely Radha Rukminir Ran and Manomati brings forth a clear view. In Manomati the two rivals Halakanta and Chandi Barua are made to be stood as symbols of the waning human qualities. Halakanta helped the Burmese in their invasion only as a tirade against Chandi Barua, his personal betenoir of domestic and family affairs. After the war was over on the mediator's work (mediator being a Sanyasi - a monk) Halakanta

45. Sarma, H. K. (ed); Rajani Bordoloi Rucanamala, p. 121
had nothing but to repent. Lakshmikanta and Manomati's marriage was cleared setting aside the family clash. Then Halakanta's outburst was that he was a traitor. a Hell! he had no punishment - the praichitta. This self realisation or atmapolabdhi is in the tune with the traditional Indian philosophy. Sanyas - is the last resort of a repent - therefore Halakanta Barua resorted to that path. Santiram, another character of this novel also wanted to become a Sanyasi but he was forbidden on the plea that none should go out of the materialistic world for attaining of God. Real devotion on the part of a man could bring to him the solace even in the midst of materialistic hazards. He visited Kashi and then returned to Barpeta. There are a good number of religious songs in the novels which are the specimens of Bordoloi's deep inclination to Vaishnavism.

In Rahdai Ligiri Santiram took religious path to ward off the sorrows and sufferings of this world. Attaining of Vaishnavism is a common feature with the characters of Nirmal Bhakat, Rangili and Rahdai Ligiri. The religiosity of the novelist which led him to the path of self attainment have had its serious impact on the portrayal of the character of Nirmal. Nirmal, after his long eventful life, though found out his beloved Rupahi, did not like
to give his acquittance before her. But instead he wanted her to be happy with Holiram. This sort of sacrifice lent himself on the consolation that the proposition of Krishna was only the cause of all these. So he wanted to escape this worldly suffering. As such he came to the Dakshinpat Satra, where he undertook in-depth religious discourse. The conversation between Nirmal and the dangariya is a good example of Bordoloi's deep inclination to the religion. Several religious rituals are also discussed in this context.  

Bordoloi's Tamreswari Mandir is based on the theme of an obscure religious trend of Assam. Human sacrifice was made to this copper-deity popularly called tamar mai. It was presumed that a supernatural power was behind it. However, there is a description in the later part of the novel that the system is abolished and people have realised its ills. The novelist has propounded the preachings Vaishnavism i.e. not to offer worshipping at the cost of lives of human and animal. To him the Krishnabhakti is the ultimate path of reaching salvation.  

It is established from the above facts that Bordoloi was influenced much by the religion of the common mass. His deep association with Vaisnavism, persuaded him to refer these elements in his literary works. Therefore perhaps,

46. Bordoloi, R.; Nirmal Bhakat, pp. 53-57
he did not hesitate to envisage long and elaborate religious rituals in some of his novels like Nirmal Bhakat, Rahdai Ligidri, Tamreswarir Mandir, Miri Jiyari and Khamba Thoibir Sadhu etc.

Marriage:

Marriage forms an integral part of social folk-custom. It is the most rejoicing ceremony in the life of men and women. A marriage is also a ritual which "is the prescribed order for performing a series of rites".  

Descriptions of marriage are enormously found in different aspects in Bordoloi's works. In Miri Jiyari the novelist has given an outlined idea of marriage system of the Mishings in course of conversation between Tamed and Nirama. According to the description we can assume the prevalence of dowry system in Mishing society. People used to demand money amounting from Rs. 60/- to Rs. 300/-. The dowry is more commonly known as qa-dhan. Besides the dowry, the novelist has mentioned the existence of jowal khata system in Mishing society when he described the assurance of Kamud to do the practice in Tamed's house.

47. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. XIX p. 35

"An unmarried girl is regarded by her parents or guardians as an article of trade, and when any one seeks her in marriage they assess a value upon her according to her age, beauty and accomplishments, much in the same manner as a trader values his good. Money so paid is called Ga-dhan (literally, person-money)"

The system is prevalent in tribal societies where the would-be groom is required to serve in his would-be father's-in-laws house for a considerable period.

Bordoloi's ga-dhan, a short-story covers a detailed account of marriage system of western Assam. In this short-story the writer has pointed out the differences of customs of upper and lower Assam. According to him in lower Assam a custom is prevalent which is known as telar bhar diya. It is almost similar to the jorondiya custom which is a sort of betrothel and the term means coupling.49 The difference is that in lower Assam sufficient quantity of oil and vermilion is offered to the womenfolk of bride's party in the joron. In upper Assam the high standard of a marriage depends on the gravity of the joron - i.e. betelnut, gur and milk etc. while in lower Assam the standard is measured on the quantity of oil and vermilion.50

Observes S.N. Sarma about this custom thus, ".... in western Assam the same is called tel-bhardiya. On an auspicious day, two or three days previous to the marriage ceremony, the guardians of the bridegroom send to the

49. Goswami, P.: Essays on the Folklore and Culture Of North Eastern India, p. 110
bride's house silken and other clothes, ornaments, oil, parched paddy, cinnabar, gur and two pots of curd, a big fish, a packet of vermilion. These are generally carried by a few women related to the groom. One or two male relatives also accompany the party."  

Mention of the custom joron diya has occurred almost in all the descriptions of marriage in his novels namely Dandua-Droh (p-82), Tamreswarir Mandir (p. 79), Rangili (p.103), Khamba Thoibir Sadhu katha (p. 59).

In Dandua-Droh the entire 31st Chapter revolves round the description of the marriage of Mahiram and Padma kumari. The description is a clear representation of a traditional Assamese marriage in which several practices are performed in different stages. Some of these practices, found in the description are dara agaca, caul chatiowa, dara adara and angathl lukuowa. The first practice is also known as hengar dhara. It is perhaps "a relic of the primitive custom when girls of a community were forcibly abducted by another. Here we notice the young men of the bride's party putting up a barricade against the bridegroom's

51. Sarma, S.N.: A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, p. 223

52. Bordoloi, R.: Dandua-Droh, pp. 82-83
party when they arrive near the bride's house." However, details of this institution would be discussed later in the discourse of performing folk-art. The practice of throwing rice is another popular ritual known as caul chatiowa. With the arrival of the groom, the womenfolk of bride's party throw handfuls of rice to the groom and also to the bride in different stages of the marriage. Even the bride throws rice to the groom at her first arrival to the groom's dide for the marriage giving institution (Sampradan). In some areas, before this, she is escorted to the grannary where she throws rice so as to retain the 'Lakshmi' in her father's house. It is believed that with the marriage of a daughter the 'Lakshmi' or fortune of the house also departs away from the father's house. The practice of welcoming the groom by the people of the bride is called dara adara which covers a good deal of rituals. Angathi lukuowa is a funny type of play in which a ring is kept concealed in a heap of rice and the couple is required to find out in a given time in their respective turns.

53. Sarma, S.N.: A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, p. 226

54. Informant: Jinu Bhuyan, Age 35 years, Village: Molankata, Raha, Date 15-3-92
The tenth division of the short story, gadhan also, covers a short description of brahma type of marriage mentioned in the smritis. Practices like caul chatiowa, hengar dhara, described above are mentioned here also in the context of marriage of Keteki and Bhabananda. Besides these, the practices of offering garakhiya bhar and suwaguri tola are mentioned here. The first one is a custom mostly current in lower Assam. The groom's party is to appease the group of youth of bride's side with a stock of eatables like curd, molasses, banana and sweets. The custom suwaguri tola is not uniform in all places. In upper Assam it is held before the bridegroom arrives at bride's house. The mother accompanied by female relatives proceeds to a nearby tank or river. One of the women carries on her head a dala containing seven earthen lamps and another carries a kula which contains a few coins fastened in a piece of cloth and a stick. With this stick she frequently strikes the kula and creates mirth. The mother draws water in the process and carries a mouthful of water which she sprays in the dining room. But in Kamrup the custom is a little different. The groom is made to seat under a plaintain tree planted for the purpose


and by that time the mother and the relatives go to the tank or river to draw water. They take with them some rice, earthen lamps, myrabolans, jars, a bell-metal cup with a silver coin etc. The groom's mother dips into the water for five or seven times and brings some soil from under water level. With this soil some small pyramids are made. Then the mother dips in the water for several times and each time she is required to answer some questions. She also brings some soil in each dipping which she distributes in the pyramids and the data. After final bathing the mother returns with a mouthful of water. After returning home the mother circumambulates the groom five or seven times with the dala on her head. She drops the rupee or coin on a piece of cloth held slantwise over the head of the groom. Then everything carried on the dala is dropped there on the cloth. The groom then salutes his mother with the offering of betels and betel leaves. The mother obliges the groom with affection and finally she throws out the water which she is retaining all along in her mouth. At the house of bride everything is done in the same manner but pyramids etc. are not made.  

57. Goswami, p. Essays On the Folklore and Culture of North Eastern India, pp. 115-116
In addition to the descriptions of socially permitted marriages, there are other narrations of events which cover unrecognized types of conjugal union, when the boy and his lady-love take recourse to elopement. One such description is found in the event of Bichitri and Manai in Rangili.58 As their guardians did not agree to their marriage, Bichitri and Manai one day eloped. But they were latter apprehended and given marriage in formalised nature after obtaining recognition from the society. In the description of their marriage, the novelist has mentioned processes like temi katari salowa and angathi salowa. Much has been said of the latter; the former is a custom, current in caklang system of marriage, in which temi, a pot of holding lime and a knife (katari) are exchanged. The former symbolises the house hold duties while the latter means defence and valour. Another such unrecognized union took place between Aniram and Rupahi in Nirmal Bhakat.59 Aniram loved Rupahi, but Rupahi's parents were proposing her marriage to another boy. At such the two lovers eloped one night and took resort in an aunt's house of Aniram where they later formalised their union in presence of

58. Bordoloi, R.: Rangili, p. 83
some well wishers. **Caklang**, the marriage form of the Ahom is also mentioned in **Tamreswarir Mandir**\(^6^0\) in course of the marriage description of Kamaleswar and Phuleswari. The Ahoms in later years accepted Hinduism and subsequently they adopted Hindu form of marriage rites prescribed by the **smritie**. But a section of them stuck to their original form which "is conducted by their tribal priests well-versed in the genealogy of the bridegroom and the bride and the heroic exploits of the fore fathers and advise the couple to have the mutual confidence and respect. A bundle of cowries tied in a piece of cloth is tinkled six times, thrice by the groom and thrice by the bride. Finally they exchange knife and temi".\(^6^1\)

**Other rites:**

In the marriage description of the Bhabananda and keteki in the story **ga-dhan**\(^6^2\) the writer has mentioned the performance of **sraddha** of nine-generations in both the houses of bride and the groom. It is a process of sacramental rite, prescribed by Brahminic form in which offerings are made to nine-generations in the form of **pinda**.

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60. Bordoloi, R. : **Tamreswarir Mandir**, p. 79
61. Sarma, S.N. : **A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam**, p. 229
A reference of puberty rite is mentioned in *Rahdai Ligiri* when Rahdai is said to have first menstruation in her early period in the King's house. According to the description Rahdai was kept secluded in an isolated room for seven days and subjected to vows (*vrata*). The description is in conformity with the rites of puberty endorsed by Hinduism. After seven days the girl is given ceremonial bath. Many rituals are performed in the process which culminate in an auspicious function called *tolani biya*.

Mention of *candrayan* vows are also found in Bordoloi's novels. It is a measure of expiation of sin in which the person concerned is required to observe fasting from the first day of the lunar fortnight to the day of the dark fortnight.

Besides this, reference of post mortuary Hindu rites is also mentioned in *Dandua Droh* in which Dekabarua is described to have observed month-long impurity for his father's death.

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Games and pastimes:

Games and Sports form an important part of a social life. Observes Robert, A. Georges - "play is a form of expressive behaviour common among all human beings and manifested overtly in all cultures". Again remarks S.N. Sarma, "Sports and pastimes are integral parts of a vibrant social life. A nation or a community devoid of these life-sustaining activities is physically and mentally retarded and is devoid of gusto for life".

Bordoloi's mastery in meticulous observation of the readers' mind and taste for this rejoicing factor of games and pastimes is easily discernible in all his literary works. His depiction of medieval Assamese social life, vibrant and vivacious with amusements, sports and festivals is the clear indication of his understanding of human nature. The human mind can not concentrate on or bear the taxed narration or discussions for a long time; it requires re-vitalization and for this Bordoloi creates occasional references of some games and pastimes in his descriptions in a very befitting manner. We have already mentioned that Bordoloi's novels are loaded with descriptions of fairs and

67. Sarma, S.N. : A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, p. 319
festivals. In the amusement of fairs and festivals games and sports primarily correspond with contextual bearings. On such occasions Bordoloi has mentioned varieties of games and pastimes in his creative works.

Mention of kari khel is made in Miri Jiyari in the course of description of bihu. Karis (cowrie) were formerly used as currency in different parts of the world. In Assam also it was used as money units. On the other hand the use of karis as a sports material has its long tradition in this region. The game of kari has its long association with the amusement of rangali bihu. The game is played with several number of cowries on a temporary board drawn either on ground or a hard board paper. It is played in between two teams of two participants each. Whoever wins the maximum number of deals in the course of play wins the game. It requires tremendous skill to make the deal, popularly known as dhal and sometimes foul play is also adopted to win the tricks. A good deal of humour and amusement occurs when detected in such foul playing. Such a scene of humour of amusement is provided in the description in Miri Jiyari. The game is also called sometimes dah paci khel. The kari has its own place of significance in Assamese folklore, particularly in bihugit and

68. Bordoloi, R.: Miri Jiyari, p. 6
and bangit. It is also used to examine the hardness of eggs in egg-fighting in bihu festival. The sports is also linked with the fertility cult as cowries are regarded as the symbol of female genital organs. In the same context of the novel, Bordoloi has mentioned about tac khel. The tac khel or card playing is relatively a modern phenomenon and the same has come from the western part of the country. With the coming of modernity in festival phenomenon, such modern games have also intruded into the cultural scenario. Mentions of dah paci, pasa and daba are found in both Rangili and Rahdai Ligiri. In the former, mentions are made in the description of bihu performance and in the latter case, the games are shown to be played by the royal personages. It does not perhaps require more clarification that although these popular sports and pastimes were played by all sections of people, yet there were some amusements which were mainly patronised by royal courts. The pasa or dice and daba or chess playing have its long and celebrated tradition from early time.

69. Buragohain, H. : Jan Samskritir Rismirekha, pp. 64-65
70. Bordoloi, R. : Rangili, pp. 14, 21, 35
71. Bordoloi, R. : Rahdai Ligiri, pp. 35/39
As regards, the outdoor games the description of bihu in *Rangili* is a repository of some folk games. The games mentioned here are *dhop*, *hau-gudu-nugudu*, *qac kaptai* and *mati kaptai*. According to the novelist these games are played in lower Assam. A *dhop* is "a ball made of cotton cloth played by two teams of boys or young men separated by a demarcating line by throwing the ball to the opposite party. If one of the teams cannot catch the ball in the air or the player who catches the ball in the air can strike the ball on the body of a member of the opposite party the boy thus goes to the other party. In this process, all the members of a party are taken captives that team is declared defeated". *Hau-gudu-nugudu* is played between two teams. They stand facing each other separated by a line. Every member of the team tries in respective turns to touch on catch any member of the defending side. He is to do this without changing his breath. The members of the defending side try to catch the chaser in their territory. If he is caught or is compelled to change his breath he is considered as dead. In this way when all the members of a particular team are treated as dead then the team is regarded to be defeated. To determine

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73. Sarma, S.N. : *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam*, p. 321
the non-changing of breath an invader is to recite like this -

haugudu magur jali
ghorar nakat dilo jari
ghora gel uttare, sal mace gujore

In Kamrup district three major types of hau khel are found. One is dhara hau. In it the invaders are caught hold of. The second one is baha hau. In this variety the invader is required to sit at the apprehension of changing breath. If he is touched before sitting then the invader is considered dead. In namata hau, the third variety the invader attacks silently (namata = without sound). He is forced to make sound by the defending members and if they succeed then the invader is treated as dead.74 Gac kapati is played between two sides. One side comprises of a single participant and the other side comprises as many. It is played centring round a bushy tree (gac = tree) the lowermost part of which is considered as a mark. The singular player starts the game from this work. The defending team tries to touch the mark guarded by the opposite one team player. The players of the opposite team take position a top the tree and come down in

74. Informant: Ramani Mohan Deka - Age 32 yrs.
Village Agdala - Date: 20-11-90
respective turns to touch the mark. If in this process the player of the one-man team touches any one of the opposite team then he is considered as dead. As a consequence he is to guard the mark as the next one-man team, while his predecessor becomes a member of the other team. Thus the game continues.\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Mati kapati} is almost similar to \textit{gac kapati} but it does not require a tree as a mark. Rather the mark is temporarily arranged with a piece of bamboo or wood or a like for demarcation. This traditional game is more popular in Bajali area of present Barpeta district.\textsuperscript{76}

Among the popular pastimes \textit{doura douri}, \textit{satora-saturi} etc. are mentioned in \textit{Rangili}.\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Doura-douri} is a run-race played in traditional way. Like it \textit{satora saturi} is also a amusing pastime of indigenous nature. The cock fight\textsuperscript{78} shown as an associated performance of \textit{bihu} observance was a favourite pastime of the Ahoms. Some times knives of small size are also attached to the legs of cocks. In the same context again we find the reference of \textit{kanowa} fight and \textit{sen} fight.\textsuperscript{79} These two pastimes were important amusement for the royal persons during the Ahom rule. "Felcons(sen) trained for the

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\textit{Informant - Ramani Mohan Deka - Age 32 yrs. Village Agdala dt. 20-11-90}
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\textit{Informant - Prof. Jiban Sarma - Lecturer Pub Kamrup College- Age 35 yrs. dt. 29-11-90}
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\textit{Bordoloi, R. : Rangili, p. 8}
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pursuit of games were let loose by their trainers. Generally a species of fish eating birds called konowa (a class of the crane) have had to be frightened away before the trained felcons were released. Felcons in hot pursuit of the frightened cranes ultimately succeed in killing the cranes and come back with their preys to the ground. The trainers of the successful felcons were rewarded by the king. The context in the novel is befitting as it depicts the tragic story of Narahari Sensowa.

Another favourite pastime is buffalo fight. Interested owners of buffalo train the animal to fight which takes place in an open vast field. The winners are awarded with prize money. This buffalo fight usually takes place in Magh bihu. This type of amusement was introduced by the Ahoms. Among other pastimes maljuj or wrestling is mentioned in Rangili.

In addition to these mention should be made of house and elephant racing in Dandua Droh and boat racing in Khamba Thoibir Sadhukatha. All these were very popular with common people and still survive in some or other parts of the country.

80. Sarma, S.N. : A Socio Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, p. 319
82. Bordoloi, R. : Rangili, p. 62
83. Bordoloi, R. : Dandua Droh, p. 5 & Rangili, p. 62