

# Origin and Background of Bihu Festival (Spicial Emphasis on Ronagali Bihu)

Rupam Gogoi

Bihpuria, Lakhimpur, Assam-784161

Email address: rupamgogoi7311@gmail.com

**Abstract**— Bihu is the national festival of Assam and celebrated to honour the significance of agriculture in rural assamese life. The festival is celebrated thrice in a year which marks three distinct phases in cultivation of paddy, the native crop of Assam. The festival is celebrated over several days and is a period of great fun and enjoyment. Traditional folk song and dances are the main attraction of this festivals. The Bihu festival celebrated thrice in the pousha samkranti, chaitra samkranti and ashina samkranti. It is the indication of three different stage of agricultural life and the nature alike. There are many myths and legends which are related with the origin of Bihu. Nobody can definitely say how and when this Bihu festival originates. The tribal people of Assam termed it in different names such as Bihu, Bi-hau, Bisu, Pisu etc. whatever be its name bihu is expression of joy and merriment.

**Keywords**— Festival, Bihu, Myth, Samkranti, Rongali etc.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bihu is the harvest festival of Assam. The most important festival of Assam is the Bihu, celebrated with fun and abundance by all assamese people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, faith and belief. Bihu festival has been inextricably linked with the agricultural people of Assam since time immemorial. The festival observed in three parts and each part synchronizes with the time of one particular stage of cultivation of paddy during an agricultural year. The tradition of the Bihu festival has been surviving the changing trends of time since inception. Despite this, the past still vibrates in various rites and rituals observed by the agricultural people in autumnal Kati Bihu, post harvesting Magh Bihu of winter solistice and springtime Bohag Bihu. The springtime Bohag Bihu is celebrated in mid April after the seeds of 'Ahu' paddy are sown and before the seddling of 'Sali' paddy are transplanted, the atumnal Kati Bihu is celebrated in mid October and the Magh Bihu celebrated in mid January. The relics of the springtime Bihu songs and dances, where in lies the aesthetic significance of Bihu, are now displayed in publicly organized Bihu festivals. This new tradition of the festival has assumed immense importance in recent times.

## II. DISCUSSION

It is an accomplished fact that good harvest in primitive agrarian societies depended on nature's approval. It was, therefore natural that the primitive agricultural people had to satisfy nature for good harvest. There are many aspect which are related with the people of ancient Assam constituted the very background for a festival like Bihu. We have reasons to believe that all efforts and thinkins of the primitive people

were directed towards having sufficient food for sustenance life. The pressure of severe demand for production of food ultimately gave rise to same ritual activities backed by folksy beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

We know that the pre-historic Assam had been inhabited by people of diverse races. This phenomenon has rendered the origin of Bihu mysterious. However, the subject can be dealt with the help of prevailing myths and legends on the origin of Bihu and precisely with the help of the available pre-historical and historical sources.

The most popular Assamese myth associated with Bihu is the myth of Bordoisila presumed to be a daughter of Assam who has been married a bridegroom. Bordoisila visits her mother's home once a year at the advent of springtime Bihu and she is regarded as a female spirit. The people of Assam experience strong gale at the period which marks the beginning of Bihu and another strong gale after her departure which is devastating. The Word Bordoisilaa is actually derives from the Bodo word Bordoisikhla which mean girl of Storm. Sikhla meaning girl and Bordo meaning storm.

According to Hindu myth the Earth was born from the pores of Brahma's hair. After the Satya, Treta and Dwapara yuga were over, the Kali yuga appeared and in this Kali yuga, musical instruments of heaven came down to the earth. Dhol was created by Mahadeva of kailasha. The hollow wooden body of dhol is preferable made from the trunk of Cham tree. Krishna gave the seed of Cham tree to Narada who sowed it in the earth. After grew up the tree Biswakarma cut down the tree and carpenter Sukmal gave the shape of Dhol.

The myths and legends are popular folk tales orally transmitted from one generation to another and admittedly their character is imaginary and unrealistic. The origin of various features of Bihu found in these myths and legends are mostly based on imaginary talks rather than on historical grounds.

The emotions, feelings and assumptions of the people at folk level of the Assamese socity are guided by these prevailing myths and legends which incited the people to adhere to the age old beliefs; so their importances at folk level is taken for granted.

We have already came across that nature, agriculture and simple beliefs of the primitive cultivators constituted the background for Bihu festival. Further close observations of various rites and rituals confirm that Bihu has been on agricultural festival since its inception in prehistorical time.

The origin of the term Bihu is unclear. Although the three Bihus constitute a sort of pattern, a ritual and a festival

complex covering the annual life cycle of the peasantry, the springtime Bohag Bihu causes the largest amount of stir in the mental and social life of the people of Assam.<sup>2</sup> We have also arrived at a definite conclusion that Bihu originates in the form of spring time ritual. The fact therefore remains that the term Bihu is entangled with spring season.

Regarding the origin of the term Bihu, some scholars try to astronomically associate Bihu with vernal Equinox, i.e-Sanskriti Visuvan Sankranti. The day of Visuvan Sankranti falls during the spring season which the Assamese Bohag Bihu or Rangali Bihu coincides with. And on this strength, this school of thought holds the term Bihu to have been derived from Visuvan, ie. Visuvan-Visu-Bihu.

Again some scholars think that the term Bihu has some non-Aryan affinities. Some views on non- Aryan sources of the term are found to be popular. The name Bihu has been derived from Boisagu of the Bodos,ie-Boisagu-Boihagu-Bihu. Moreover someone believed that the term Bihu is corrupt from the Bodo term 'Bi-hou' means to beg and to give.<sup>3</sup>

There are many criticism about the term of Bihu. The prefix Bi and suffix hu of the term Bihu cannot be believed as corruptions of Vi and Su of Sanskriti term Visu since the terms Bi and Hu signifying some rituals of Bihu are found in local vocabularies particularly of the tribes belonging to the Indo-Chinese stock widely distributed all over Assam. In lower Assam region, where most of the people are Aryans, the Bihu festivals were known as Domahi till the concluding decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Domahi come to be replaced with Bihu. But in upper Assam region where most of people are non-Aryans, these festivals are known as Bihu.

Someone express their opinion that the term Bihu has been derived from Boisagu of Bodos in obscure, although not contemptuous for enormous cultural contributions of the race to the tradition of Bihu festival. But the way of corruption from Boisagu to Bihu is a long one where in lies the weakness of this opinion.<sup>4</sup> Further, the Bodo term Bi-hou which means to beg and to give is associated with Huchari singing of Bohag bihu, a tradition popularized by the Tai- shans in early medieval period. But Bi-hou was not the chief motto of Bohag bihu and consequently insignificant for derivation of term Bihu therefrom.

The foregoing evaluation of the opinion on the origin of the term Bihu does not help us to arrive at a definite conclusion on the issue; these opinions in most cases, seem to be guided by racial feelings rather than fair judgment based on relevant facts of the history of evolution of the Bihu festival. It is an established fact that Bihu is a festival of acculturation and synthesis.<sup>5</sup> Admixture of Austro-Asiatic and Mongoloid stock of people and assimilation of their identical agricultural and pastoral life styles had given a unique form to the culture attached with the Bihu festival of Assam.<sup>6</sup>

We are, therefore content to say that there was every likelihood of a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan contribution worked towards evolution of the term Bihu.<sup>7</sup> The Bodos were predominant of the Tibeto-Burmese, on the other hand the Tai Ahom were superior to the Bodos in respect of power and cultural heritage.

The term Bihu corrupted there form, was exclusively associated with the springtime Bihu only. The Aryans being the pioneers of Astronomy they further associated the term Bihu with the Visuvan day for coincidence of the Bohag Bihu with other springtime festivals observed elsewhere in India on this day and adopt the festivals of the native. Thus the Aryan contributed evolution of the term Bihu.

### III. CONCLUSION

Bihu is one of the main features of Assamese cultures. The Assamese diaspora around the world celebrates Bohag Bihu as it is touted as the most important festival of the state. Bihu is also seen to be celebrated abroad. Many Bihu associations or committees exist elsewhere. Where this festival is celebrated with enthusiasm. Although the traditional song and dance may not always be performed in all corners of the globe but greeting each other and sharing fellowship meals is a common feature. Bihu unites the people forgetting all jealousy, ill-feeling and previous misdeeds done to others.

### REFERENCES

- [1] D.Hazarika, Gach talar Bihu, In paseka, ed. A.C Bhuyan April 1993
- [2] P. Goswami, ed. Samskritiki, Guwahati, 1990
- [3] N.P. Bordoloi, Asamar lokasamskriti, Guwahati, 1987
- [4] J.Gandhiya, Jatiya Utsav Bihu
- [5] L.Gogoi, Bihu eti samiksa, Guwahati, 1987
- [6] P.Bhattacharya, Asamar Loka Utsav