

Bihu Festival Act As A Medium Of Dialogue And Communication For Ethnic Communities Of Assam

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Abstract: The Bihu festival is often associated with the Visuva Sankranti or Vernal Equinox and in Vedic times certain rituals seem to have been performed at this time of the year for the purpose of influencing the movement of the sun and securing agricultural reproduction. Rongali Bihu or Bohag Bihu is considered as the most colourful and vibrant of all the three Bihus. This Bihu involves a number of ritualistic activities which are an important means of communication and communion amongst the people. People from all sections irrespective of social hierarchy participate in the rituals. Magh bihu also known as bhogali bihu is an occasion of community feasting, celebration and enjoyment. It makes the completion of successful harvesting and merriment, thereafter. The celebration held for 2-3 days, begins with uruka which has its special importance. For this day the preparations start early. The male folk of the village assemble and build a dome –like structure, known as meji, in the fields. Adjacent to the meji a make shift kind of cottage is constructed to stay in at night known as bhelaghar.

Keywords: Rongali Bihu, Magh bihu, Kati bihu, Tulsi and Akash banti.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bihu, a festival of Assam, the origin of which goes back many centuries and recorded history is silent on it. It developed stage by stage to take the position of what it is today. The present study lays emphasis on the stages of the journey that the festival has undertaken, while it was performed in sequestered places in agrarian fields or in forest or jungle areas away from normal lives and in present times being openly performed on the public sphere in the form of a show, with a variety of activities associated with it. In the course of the journey the study will also attempt to identify changes and continuation of practices, belief, rituals and performances culminating in its positioning itself as flag bearer of Assamese community identity webbing into it the cumulative effects of changes in perspectives and actions (Barua, 1969). Bihu, the most colourful and widely celebrated festival of Assam is of three varieties (i) Magh or Bhogali Bihu (ii) Bohag or Rongali Bihu and (iii) Kati or Kongali Bihu. Bihus constitute a sort of pattern, a ritual and a festival complex, covering the annual life cycle of the peasantry (Gowsami, 2003).

II. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BIHU FESTIVAL

Culture is the key concept of cultural anthropology and many definitions for it have been proposed throughout the history of anthropology. Many anthropologists define culture as learned and shared behavior and ideas, whereas others equate culture with ideas alone and exclude behavior as a part of culture. It is easier to understand culture by considering its characteristics. Culture is related to nature but is not the same as nature, it is based on symbols and it is learned, cultures are integrated with themselves and cultures interact with other cultures and change. Four models of cultural interaction involve varying degrees of conflict, blending and resistance. People participate in cultures of different levels including local microcultures shaped by such factors as class, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, age and institutions (Tylor, 1870).

Culture is an association of qualities that could be learned, based on interaction or derived from history. It regulates our lives, shapes our attitudes, values, goals, behavior or personality. From all indication, man is definitely nothing without culture. So Dabaghian (1970) stressed “ the pride of

any society lies in its culture since no society in the world could be considered great without reference to its tradition and culture". Culture is an amalgamation of various institutions devoted to specialized activities. Therefore, the study of culture engages the study of these distinct institutions and the meanings produced by it. In the present context of study culture covers instituted festival as a larger text with subtexts like various traditions, rituals, performances, groups, activities within it which have a historical and representative mode of existence and these are embedded in the socio cultural apparatuses belonging to various groups of people while adhering to identical values, beliefs and practices giving a specific identity and rationality (Mbakogu, 2004).

III. BIHU FESTIVAL AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Bihu is representative of Assamese culture. Bihu dance and songs are the integral element of the Bihu culture. The bihu dance and songs have variations of forms across different regions of Assam which are perceived as folk media forms. The folk songs, folk dance, folk musical instrument, folk tunes give richness to Assamese identity. (Gogoi, 2010) critically analyses on various aspects of Bihu culture, on bihu being the folk-culture with its basic root spreading among the life and living of the rural people of Assam. Accordingly the origins of bihu can be traced back to the ancient days when people started cultivation and did merry making after harvesting. Also, for ensuring productivity of the cultivation, people danced and sang somewhere in the paddy field. Thus, along with cultivation, the seeds of Bihu germinate into the Assamese culture. With the long turn the history several groups of people come to the land and the process of assimilation results into the various contributive elements entering into the bihu culture (Foucault, 1977).

Bihu being the most practiced folk media form in Assam is enrooted in the agriculturalist rural society. People have their participation in the songs and dance of Bihu. The joys, sorrows, love, separation of day to day life are exposed through the bihu dance and songs. The verbal as well as the non-verbal communication in the bihu dance and songs are too powerful to ensure participatory communication. Bihu, as folk media educates and entertains people. The songs and dance of bihu are performance oriented folk media. Therefore, information is cross-transferred among the participants of bihu dance and songs and it gives entertainment through its performance. The local costumes are used in the performance. The cost in the performance of bihu dance and songs is minimal. The communicative approach of bihu songs and dance is direct as well as carrying retorts (Konwar, 2014). In the rural areas of the third world countries, folk media play an important source of entertainment and communication. It has existed for centuries and even today. It serves as the main channel of communication. According to Crawford and Ronny Adhikarya folk media refer to "Indigenous, local tradition forms of entertainment which have existed for centuries and which, to this day continue to serve as the main channels of communication, especially in rural areas.

In Philippines author Valubueña (1986) described the use of folk media for promoting the messages of family planning, good nutrition and environmental conservation. The availability and flexibility in folk media can accommodate new ideas. It can be interacted with people, it can bring about any behavioral change. They are appealing for collective unconsciousness rather than the individual consciousness. The opportunity for active participation by the audience is an important element of this simple media and this aspect is enumerated by the UNESCO report as Folk media are personal forms of entertainment and communication. These forms of art are a part of the way of life of the community and provide an acceptable means of bringing development issues into the community on its own terms. Mukhopadhyaya has very nicely examined the usefulness of traditional and folk media for development purposes. He is of the view that these performing arts participate in changing structures over time, while continuing to be relevant to society. The communicative potential of these folk arts is obvious according to Mukhopadhyaya (2007), Who believes that folk media should be an integral part of any communication program for rural development. Kumar (2006) has very rightly expressed the role of traditional folk media for rural development. Since most of the population of India resides in the Villages and the mass media seems to be very glamorous and so the reach is less, and the traditional folk media could be used for rural development issued.

Lent (1978) has discussed the use of folk media, either in their traditional rural settings or when adapted to mass media to bring about social awareness of national development plans. It also looks at the role of interpersonal communications networks. 4.1 Effect of rituals on society for preserving social well being Rituals by nature are important means of communication and communion.

Rothenbuhler (1998) observes rituals are types of symbolic behavior in social situations. Rituals always accompanies voluntary communication between or among individuals of the society. Edles (2005) notion of rituals as communal means by which the belief and ideals of a culture are communicated to the members of a particular society, can also be taken into accounts while discussing the Bihu festival. Rituals performed in all three bihus can be viewed as means of communication which involve the believers as practitioners as well as the performers. There is a flow of information among people through rituals. Through the acts and prayers chanted while performing the rituals on various occasions of the festival, one finds a sacred communion with the supreme power. 4.2 Bihu songs as a medium for communication The bihu songs can be considered as one of the richest treasures of Assamese oral literature. The songs are normally quatrain in nature. Here, in most of the Bihu songs, the first two lines are related to nature and the second two lines are about human sentiments. But both the second and the fourth lines rhyme. In the bihu folk songs, there are constant reference to, and extensive descriptions of the season in which the festival is held with specific indication of the changes in the host land. Although the songs mainly focus on love and courtship, but there are constant references to, and extensive descriptions of the blossom of different varieties of flowers and wild orchids on that season like Nahar (*Mesua ferra*), Kopou phul

(*Rhynchosstylis retusa*) and Togor phul (*Tabernae montana*). In a similar way, there are also references to the natural landscape and geography, which describe the physical setting of the cultural paradigm. Also, there are constant references to various plants, people daily lives and activities, their experiences of the environment, culture and history. Regular naming of plants and vegetables in the Bihu lyrics is a striking example of cultural form and daily lives of the people. Activities like weaving, harvesting find a place in the songs. Other activities being mentioned in the Bihu songs are about fishing and hunting. Such references to daily life in the bihu songs may seem insignificant, but the entire culture and identity of a person is linked to them. But generally it is seen that Bihu songs are excellent poetry of youthful enthusiasm. An example of a Bihu song in Assamese:

Eibeli bihuti ramak ai jamak ai
Nahar phul phulibar batar
Nahar phular gondh pai laharir tat nai
Gacaki bhangile jatar

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Bihu this year is so colourful,
The flower nahar is in bloom
Its scent makes my sweeties so restless
She steps on her spinning-wheel and breaks it.

In this Bihu song, a lover is expressing his emotions about his beloved. The first two lines are describing about nature by praising the colorful nature of the Bihu festival on that particular year due to the blooming of nahar flower (mesua ferra). Then in the second two lines, he is describing about his beloved, who he thinks would become restless after inducing the scent of the flower diffused in the air and consequently would break her spinning wheel, when she steps on it. He is describing about the spinning-wheel as in the rural Assam, women used to spin and weave clothes at home. Here, in local parlance the spinning wheel is called Jatar (Goswami, 1957).

IV. CONCLUSION

The Bihu festivals are by and large influenced by the cultures of all the ethnic groups. Of course, a few groups of Assam also celebrates similar festivals in names of own ethnic languages and by following specific activities and rituals. The intangible heritages of the bihu-festivals including rituals, music, dance, games, traditional cuisines, typical sweets and

festivities is superbly extensive and wide ranging. Many of these heritages are prototypical. The most alluring and attractive intangible heritage of Bohag bihu are its distinctive dance form, songs and music. The dance form is called as bihunach, the typical songs are called as bihuman or bihugeet, and the typical musical instrument are called as bihubadhya.

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