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## The eternal ethos and appeals of Assamese society propagated by Bihu Folk Songs.

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### Abstract

Bihu folk songs and Bihu dance are the most youthful and fascinating parts of Bihu culture in Assamese nationalism. Bihu culture with its rich and colourful heritage is upholding the customary ethos of Assamese people through the ages. The present form of Bihu music was not as such at the time of its inception. Bihu music is a commonly adopted and practiced folk music of all the ethnic, religious and linguistic sections of the people of Assamese society. Assamese people with its Ostric and Mongoloid origin were spread over the entire Brahmaputra valley in fragments since the medieval age of Indian history. The primitive Bihu music was confined to those indigenous folks, who were exclusively dependent on agriculture and forest resources of Assam. With the advancement of time and growth in population structure, various ethnic groups (hills and plains) with their respective pictorial forms of music and cultural characteristics merged in a common cultural platform of the composite Assamese society. Thus, present shape of Bihu culture with the folk music has taken place as a result of prolonged contributions and concerted mission of various ethnic groups with different caste and creed at different times of history. Bihu music evolved gradually to the present amalgamated shape after it got the royal recognition from mighty Ahom king Rudra Singha in Ronghar Bakori of Sivsagar district of Assam, in thirteenth century. Looking further back to the history of ancient Assam, we find that a group of middle Asian inhabitants crossed the Himalayan ranges and came over to Gangetic Valley, several thousand years ago. They settled on the land where fertility was high, and the productions were plenty. They further intensified their habitations to the Brahmaputra valley of greater Assam. These people were identified to be of Ostric origin at a later stage. These people celebrated the harvest season with great festivity in which feasts were arranged in the corn fields, like the present-day picnic. Accordingly, beginning of the season of sowing paddy grains and plantations therefore is also celebrated with songs and gaiety throughout the state. These two festive seasons were perennially celebrated through centuries in Assam valley which was later named as Bihu to create the spirit of unity, integrity and harmony amongst people of different religious, linguistic and ethnic groups living in the same society. The songs and dances are arranged to depict the unique and colourful characteristics of each race with pomp and glory. A situation is thus created when everyone, young and old, in the society join with equal enthusiasm where their joys know no bounds.

### Introduction

As described above, Bihu festival is observed by the peasants throughout the year in different forms to celebrate the beginning of agricultural works and harvesting the corns as per seasonal schedule. Being the main festival of Assam, it is celebrated in three different forms mainly – Bhogali Bihu, Rongali Bihu and Kongali Bihu, which fall in three different seasons of the year viz. winter, spring and autumn respectively. These three festivals are

enchanted by different folk songs to mark the different type of festivity in the society amongst the people. Bhogali Bihu is celebrated on 14th January onwards, which is also celebrated as “Makar Sankrant” by the rest of the nation. This is the time when harvest season is over, and peasants get rid of their worries. Younger boys gather to enjoy the whole night singing Bihu songs to their heart’s content, in the thatched cottages built in paddy fields. These songs relate to the ways of preparations of different palatable

cakes and food out of the corns from recent harvest. The cottage is consigned to flames before it is dawn. The barrier of caste, creed, and language never takes place on any occasion of Bihu celebrations, which is also depicted in the Bihu songs. On the following day, fireworks are arranged in the corn fields along with elderly people offering Puja to the deity of fire I.e., Agni and sit in a collective prayer. Thereafter, people come back home to enjoy the cakes and sweets prepared by womenfolk. Rongali Bihu is observed in spring season on eve of monsoon I.e., 14th April onwards when the entire valley wears a new lovely look with new leaves and blooming flowers. The nature in bridal attire seems to come out and dance with the help of a mild breeze. Bihu songs sung during this festival comprise of the beauty of nature along with the love filled hearts of young girls and boys who dance together with enthusiasm and joy. The local flowers like Koppow, Keteki, Nahor and Jetuka are abundantly used by the young girls to decorate themselves and enhance their beauty while taking part in Bihu dances. Young boys taking part in dances dress themselves in Dhoti, Gangi (innerwear) and Phulam Gamusa (cotton Assamese traditional towel) around the head. The Bihu songs are of two types, one being Bihu Geet and the other being Bihu Husori. The former is sung with dances by both the boys and girls together, but the latter is sung only by the boys or elderly male to bless the household for their all-round wellbeing in the upcoming year, as Bihu marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year. Bihu songs are mostly confined to expression of feelings for love and affection towards the beloved, in an appealing way. That is why Bihu songs are very exciting and passionate for the youth folk. The Bihu Dhol, the Pepa (Buffalo Horn) with Gogona made of bamboo are the indispensable instruments used in Bihu songs as well as in Bihu Husori. One cannot just imagine the exciting mood of dancers as well as visitors without seeing the same in Bihutoli, during the Bihu days which last several days in an open field. People from all walks of life and ages are attracted to Bihutoli and the Bihu performances continue till late night. This is a youthful festival hence all songs relating to Bihu, are the exposures of physical beauty and love instincts as well. Kongali Bihu is observed in a subdued manner for the simple reason that

the season passes through hardships as the sowing of grains becomes over and the harvesting season is yet to come. This intermediate period is a hard time for the peasants and hence is named as Kongali i.e., poor. The peasants, while celebrating this festival are seen lighting earthen lamps in the paddy fields praying for good growth of plants and plenty of harvest. The songs on this occasion relate to religious and devotional category of Bihu songs with clapping and using folk musical instruments like Tal, Khol etc.

#### **Research Methodology**

Research method used for this research paper is analytical and observational along with a high dependence on the data, collected from various Assamese culture-based books and knowledgeable sources. A thorough analysis and observation has been rendered by the writer with the help of various topic-based books on Bihu festivals and their impact on Bihu music. Also, writer has consulted the veteran and noted personalities of Assamese culture and music, in detail to place some keen observations on the impact of Bihu songs. This study is done with the sole purpose of highlighting the immensely captivating and mesmerizing lyrics of Bihu songs which uphold the rich cultural co-existence of composite Assamese community in the country. The writer has observed that Bihu songs are sung and heard wholeheartedly by Assamese people with great interest and pride. Bihu folk songs have a pivotal role to play in its universal popularity for very many reasons. Apart from its secular significance Bihu speaks in volumes on, ways of living, the food, dresses and costumes, common likes and dislikes of all ethnic groups etc. The harmony and cohesion amongst various sections of people living together with the same type of livelihood are precisely described in Bihu songs. The competitions are held on Bihu songs and Bihu dances amongst people of different age groups to promote and protect the features of Bihu in local as well as state level. Special prizes, viz - Bihu Rani, Bihu husori, Bihu kuwori, and Bihu xomraagi are offered. The innovations and expansion of Bihu culture through songs are a continuous process in this region. Hence the writer has finally concluded that Bihu songs depict the rich cultural heritage of Assam since very ancient days in a very enjoyable manner. The people from every

nook and corner of the nation including abroad, are seen to be showing desperate interest for Bihu music, whenever heard and wherever they be. This is because Bihu songs are meaningful, heart throbbing, appealing and enchanting with youthful excitement.

#### Observations and findings

Bihu owes its origin to those festivals of the Ostric originality that had a huge influence on the native mass of Assam. According to Dr B. S. Guha, an eminent anthropologist, the Alpines came over to Brahmaputra valley after the Ostric. These people were a little more culturally advanced compared to the Ostric. After the Alpines and the Tibeto – Burmese entered the valley and contributed to the growth and development of this culture. These different ethnic groups came close to each other merging with the primitive Bodo group eventually forming a heterogeneous society. The distinctive culture of the Bodos is however maintained as part of the greater Assamese culture even today. After the advent of Ahoms in the thirteenth century, Assamese culture blended with the earlier ones and having a shape of its own, henceforth the festival took a new sowing/harvesting form. Bihu music, however, neither took the name or its form as it is at present. The word BIHU is said to be a distorted form of the word "Pihu" or "Poihu", an Ahom festival. In fact, this very region was known as "Asom" after the word "Ahom". Ahoms brought a radical change to Bihu music by moulding the existing form and elevated it to the present position of grandeur and beauty. The Ahom king Rudra Singha had patronized Bihu music by staging in Ranghar Bakari of Sibsagar district and had given it a royal status. Earlier to that, the Ahom king enjoyed Bihu songs in Bihubor for decades and had given the recognition of national level. On getting the royal status, Bihu music gradually took the present-day shape. People of Assam identify themselves as a part of the nature and join in natural gaiety through the celebration of Rongali Bihu, songs and dances are the main ingredients of this Bihu. Youth of both the genders, dance in merriment accompanied by songs known as "Bihunaam". The colourful Bihu songs and dances with its enchanting ethos of rhythmic motions are the most attractive aspects of Rongali Bihu, which lasts throughout the month of April. The present-day Bihu is popular in the whole of the country and even abroad because of Bihu

music. Young girls and boys in groups, dance on Bihu music using the traditional musical instruments like "dhol", "pepa", "gogona". Bihu songs are basically melodious songs with the gesture of love for each other.

1. "Basantar logote Bihuti ahile.
2. Piritir bolile ba.
3. Kinu jiya juiye hiya mur dohile.
4. Von juiye purile gaa".

A stanza of Bihu song propagating love

The symbolic representation of Bihu songs in terms of natural outlook is thought provoking. Bihu dance is associated with songs and can't be imagined enjoying in separation. The dance postures have a beautiful depiction and explanation. Female hands with ornaments stand for the branches of trees and her fingers stand for the new leaves playing with mild breeze, the smiling faces stand for blooming flowers. Finally, they sing and dance beautifully, creating a mesmerizing effect on the eyes of the beholder. Thus, a natural scene is depicted in the mind while enjoying Bihu songs in open field. Bihu songs are equally interesting to the young as well as the old. Picture of the society with its socio – economic status is expressed in the melody. The dreams and decisions, the social hurdles, the mental egos, the discriminations and disparities of the have's and have nots of this society are vividly articulated through the Bihu songs.

"Na pani ahile gashe pat xolale,  
Noite ujole xihu

Bihuwoti soraiye kore Bihu Bihu  
Palehi bohagor Bihu

A stanza of a Bihu song depicting nature  
"Ujai chalow moi bhatiyai chalow  
moi tomar mon suwani nai.

(Oh, my sweetheart, there is none as as you  
in the valley)

Dehaare bhitore tumi bhumuki maara,  
Sadaaye pori thaake monot.

(You peep in my heart day and night, you are mine)

A stanza depicting love of a youth to his beloved in the form of Bihu.

The gestures and movements in Bihu music and dance has the true perspective which is their respective eagerness of love for each other. Spring is a youthful season which beacons the youthful spirit of the young folk. Sounds of music instruments like Dhola (trumpet), Pepa (buffalo horn) evokes an irresistible vigour that manifest through songs and dances. Husori Bihu is another

form of Bihu dance on Bihu songs, which is restricted to the male folk only. Essence of Husori Bihu is the devotion and admiration of Almighty. Husori Bihu is also an indispensable part of Bihu. The difference between Bihu dance and Bihu Husori is that the latter is a group dance with devotional songs of the young boys only. Husori group moves from door to door with the message of unity and social harmony and gives their blessing to the members of the family for the new Assamese year. They dance and sing Bihu songs of glory, of the nature, of the peasants, the country and pray to God for blessings for all round development. According to eminent educationist Dr. Lila Gogoi, Husori Bihu is to be participated by young boys and old men only. There is no room for girls in the group. Another famous author of Assam Mr. Joykanto Gondhiya has said that Bihu songs and dances are an outdoor performance while Bihu Husori is an indoor one.

### Conclusion

This study is intended to summarize the richness of Bihu folk songs of Assam and its effective impact on the cultural aspect of our country. The society of Assamese people can be branded as a beautiful showcase of the ethos and appeals of several ethnic groups and sections which preserve and propagate the notion of unity and integrity through Bihu folk songs. Reasons behind the growing popularity of Bihu music is the secular nature of it and eternal human instincts latent in Bihu culture and Bihu celebrating Assamese people. The apparent love and commitments enchanted through Bihu songs have a far-reaching impact on the social fabric of the Assamese. Bihu songs has the power to bring one, closer to the other irrespective of caste and creed, leading to a healthy composite society. This is the reason attributable to the present-day Assam being free from ethnic violence. The Bihu culture with its folk songs will therefore spread the message of unity in diversity for the times to come.

### Reference books

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5. The springtime Bihu of Assam by Dr. Praphulladatta Goswami