
CHAPTER III

FESTIVALS OF ASSAM

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Assam is the sentinel of North East India and gateway to the North Eastern states. People belong to different race, culture; language and religion makes Assam a multi-ethnic state. Besides caste people, a good number of tribal communities reside in Assam from time immemorial. The rich cultural heritage of these people settled Assam as the nerve center of North Eastern region of India. Bihu is the prime festival of Assam. Irrespective of caste and creed all the Assamese people, i.e., people belongs to the different race or culture who live in Assam permanently as their home celebrate Bihu with great pomp and gaiety. Bihu is a harvesting as well as seasonal festival performed by almost all the communities of Assam. Some seasonal festivals are also performed in this state, while some other festivals are observed by different communities in relation to the annual calendar. Community worship of various deities are also celebrated in different time of a year. Calendric festivals of Assam are based on a particular calendar. Each religious group and community of this state has their own calendar and according to that, they celebrate their festivals. Some seasonal festivals like Durga puja, Dewali, Shivaratri etc. of the Hindus and Muharram, Sabe Barat, Ramzan, Eid- uz- Zuha etc. of the Muslim are also considered as calendric festivals. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter of the

Christians, birth and death anniversaries of the saints of different religions, national festivals like Independence Day, Republic Day and some festivals of the Buddhist, Jains and other religions come under this category.

Limited participation festivals are related to a special occupational group. Viswakarma *puja* is one of the limited participation festivals. This ceremony is traditionally confined to the artisans. In Assam, there are a number of festivals associated with the life cycle. The Assamese people celebrate significant stages of life, birth, puberty, marriage, death etc. by performing elaborate rituals. Besides these, some other major and minor festivals are also performed in Assam. In this chapter, some important festivals celebrated by the Assamese Christians, Assamese Hindus, Assamese Muslims, Assamese Sikhs as well as festivals observed by some of the tribal groups of Assam will be discussed.

Table 3.1: Name of the Indian months and corresponding Assamese months with integral festivals

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Baisakh</i>	<i>Bohag</i>	April-May	Rongali Bihu, Bhatheli
2	<i>Jaistha</i>	<i>Jeth</i>	May-Jun	
3	<i>Ashada</i>	<i>Ahar</i>	June-July	Ambubachi
4	<i>Sravana</i>	<i>Saon</i>	July-August	
5	<i>Bhadra</i>	<i>Bhada</i>	August-September	Karam, Pachati
6	<i>Aswina</i>	<i>Ahin</i>	September-October	Pachati
7	<i>Kartika</i>	<i>Kati</i>	October-November	Matheni, Nouka Tana, Kati Bihu

8	<i>Agrahayana</i>	<i>Aghon</i>	November-December	Moho ho, Dewali
9	<i>Pausha</i>	<i>Puh</i>	December-January	Tusu
10	<i>Margashisha</i>	<i>Magh</i>	January-February	Bhogali Bihu Bhatheli, Me-Dam- Me -Fie, Tusu
11	<i>Phalguna</i>	<i>Phagun</i>	February-March	Doulotsava, Holy, Maha Shivaratri
12	<i>Chaitra</i>	<i>Chot</i>	March-April	

In the following paras festivals observed by the autochthones, both tribal and non-tribal, are described.

3.1 Festival of the Ahom

‘The Tai-Ahom religion is based on certain fundamental beliefs in supernatural powers. First, these people believe in an omnipotent god (*Pha-lu-ching*). Secondly, they believe in a hierarchy of gods that owe their origin to the great God. The Ahoms of Assam were not image worshippers in their original religion .They had no idols of gods and goddesses named in their sacred books. But only the Ahom royal family was in exclusive possession of two idols called *Dhum* and *Sheng* as tutelary deities .After they embraced Hinduism, Hindu gods and goddesses made their entry into the Ahom pantheon. The Ahom believe that the ancestors become god in heaven after their death and watch their descendants on earth’ (Datta et al., 1994: 133-134).

3.1.1 Me-Dam Me Fie

Me-Dam Me Fie is an ancestor worship of the Tai Ahom of Assam. They perform this festival every year in the January month. Me-Dam Me Fie means

offering oblation to the dead ancestors and sacrifice to god. '*Me* means worship, *dam* means a particular stage of existence after death till it attain the final status or the status of a spirit or god living in the 'middle kingdom' between heaven and earth' (Goswami , 1996: 76). This ancestor worship was first performed by the Ahom kings. To ward off any imminent danger and to have victory in war, the kings performed this ceremony at a place named Charaideo. Now, there is no particular or fixed place to celebrate this festival. Devotees use to offer traditional food, fowl, rice beer, etc., to God and ask the blessings of the God by reciting incantations and prayers. Me-Dam Me Fie is a socio religious festival. Lots of non Ahom people also celebrate this festival with pomp and gaiety.

3.2 Festivals of the Assamese Christian

Numerically, Christians are the third most important religious community of India. Christians are broadly divided into Catholic and Protestants and in the matter of worship, both are different from each other. Catholic believe that the church is the representative of God on earth and the Protestant say that, man can directly relate to God. The *Bible* is the only source of faith of Christianity. Roman Catholic and Eastern orthodoxy are two divisions of Catholic church. Though, the Christianity made considerable progress in India in the dominions of Portuguese, it get wider platform during the British period. In Assam, a large number of people specially tribal people practice Christianity. Following are some of the important festivals celebrated by the Christians of Assam.

3.2.1 Advent

Advent is the period of preparation for Christmas celebration, begin on the Sunday nearest to November 30 and end on 24th December. Advent is the beginning of Christian worship year. Advent is also called Nativity Fast. During the Advent, the orthodox Christians keep them in fasting. This pre-Christmas period is observed with lighting of advent candles, display of advent wreaths, etc.

3.2.2 Christmas

Christmas is the gayest festival of the Christians. In Commemoration of the birth or Nativity of Jesus Christ, Christmas is celebrated throughout the world on 25th December. Traditionally, it is a time of great rejoicing for Christian people. Wearing new garbs, decorating the houses, preparing special dishes etc. are some important aspects of this festival. Christmas feasts are generally held in each family, but in some places, specially in rural places, common feast are also held. Exchanging gifts and good wishes are also important features of Christmas. Singing carol (songs about the birth of Christ) is common practice of both Catholics and Protestants. On the Christmas day, churches are being decorated with lights and flowers, where people offer their prayer. *Holy Bible* reading is also an integral practice of Christmas. Singing carol, decoration of house with Christmas trees, arrival of Santa Clause, i.e., an old man with white beard, dressed in a long red coat and a hat, who is supposed to go round the world at Christmas time, bringing gifts for children. Construction of crib is generally European custom which are practically practiced by Christians of India also.

3.2.3 Lent

The period of forty days before Easter (Resurrection of Jesus) is known as Lent. Lent is observed in commemoration of forty days when Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan in the desert where Jesus did not eat or drink for that long period. Because of that, some Christians ought to practice self-disciplines during this period. Some people keep themselves in fast, means giving up all food and some give up luxurious food.

3.2.4 Easter

Easter or Easter Sunday is celebrated by the Christians in commemoration of resurrection to Jesus Christ. It celebrates on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox. Easter is the occasion of joy and rejoicing where church buildings are decorated with lights and special prayers are organized. As Jesus resurrection took place early in the morning, the sunrise service hold in open air in some places. In the Easter morning, people gather in the open place and watch the sun rising. People with families come to church for prayers and Bible reading. For Easter occasion, special sweet dishes are prepared and share with relatives and friends. Easter cards are also send to near and dear ones.

3.2.5 Good Friday

Good Friday is observed by the Christian as a day of mourning in memory of Jesus crucifixion. It is the most solemn day for the Christians as Jesus was crucified by the Romans at outside the Jerusalem on this day. God Friday is also called Holy Friday. Prayer services are hold by churches on Good Friday. On that day, bells are

not rung on churches. It is believed that Jesus was died at 3 in the afternoon and in memory of that, special ceremony performs at churches. In some places procession are held where with the image of dead Christ ceremonial buried takes place. Mourners usually come to the procession by wearing black dresses. Decorations of churches are totally avoided on this day. It is the day of mourning, sorrow and fasting. The orthodox Christians spend the day on fasting. In Catholic churches, the story of the crucifixion and death of Christ (Pass over) is also recited.

3.3 Festivals of the Assamese Hindu

3.3.1 Ambubachi

Ambubachi is a seasonal agricultural festival, celebrated once a year in the first part of the *Ahar* (June-July) month. In Sanskrit '*ambu*' means 'water' and '*bachi*' means 'blossom'. Ambubachi is also known as Amati. Ambubachi generally starts on the seventh day of *Ahar* (June-July) and because of that, it is also known as *Sat* or *Sath* (seven). In eastern region of India, heavy rainfall takes place during this festival. This festival is associated with the fertility cult. It is believed that during Ambubachi, mother Earth attains her menstruation. Briffault writes 'The identification of earth with woman pervades the thought of all stages of culture. -The mother and the soil are alike. In ancient India, at the wedding ceremony, the woman was called 'a seed field' and the priests exhorted the bridegroom, saying 'sow her with the seed'. - The mother's womb and the womb of the earth are forms of the same thing' (cited in Datta et al., 1994:164). Ambubachi festival is observed by both tribal and non-tribal of Assam with four days celebration. People believe that

menstruating mother earth prepares her for fertilizing work during Ambubachi. When she is in predicament, the doors of temples remain close and no pilgrim is allowed inside.

Some taboos are rigidly integral to Ambubachi in Assamese society. During these four days, ploughing and digging of earth are prohibited and worship is not allowed and sexual intercourse also strictly prohibited. Widows and women in menstruation rigidly follow some taboos. They keep themselves in fast. Widows and *brahmacharis* (celibate) do not take cooked food, instead take fruits and milk only. It is a common believe that, during Ambubachi, milk taking protects people from snake biting. After four days of restriction, every Hindu household clean their houses and wash their cloths. Ambubachi festival of Kamakhya temple of Assam is very popular. Lakhs of devotees from different parts of India come to join the festival every year. During the festival a big fair is held on the premise of that temple on the festival day. On the fourth day, devotees are allowed to enter temple for worship. They get pieces of red cloths as sacred symbol in return. Baruah writes, 'Red is the most accepted colour- red flowers, red vermilion, red cloth etc. The red colour is not without significance; it synchronies with the nature of the ritual. It symbolizes passion and erotic excitement, and the menstrual flow with which the ritual is associated. On the occasion of the Ambubachi, bites of cloth, red, it is said, with the deity's menstrual blood, are presented to the devotees as sacred symbols' (cited in Das, 2005:92).

3.3.2 Bhatheli

In the first week of *Magh* (January-February), Bhatheli festival is celebrated in some parts of Assam. This festival is also known as Sori or Suwari or Parwa festival. This one day celebration is associated with fertility cult and synchronies with Bohag bihu, the prime festival of Assam. During the *Bohag* month (April-May), Bhatheli festival is held on different time in different places of Assam. 'According to late Bani Kanta Kakati, the term has come from the Sanskrit formation, *nabhasthali* > *bhasthali* > *bhatheli*, because the bamboo flag staffs planted on the occasion are supposed to reach the aerial region (*navasthala*)' (Das et al., 1994:161). In the morning of the festival, youngsters take bath and cut two bamboos and place longitudinally in the nearby field. Before that, they assiduously smoothen, clean and decorate those bamboos with colourful cloths and fly flickers. After that, with the rhythms of drum and cymbals and blowing of conches, bamboos ceremonially fixed at an open field in front of the *Namghar* (village level Vaishnavite prayer house). These two poles are called *Para* (pigeon). One bamboo is longer than the other. The higher one is known as the male *para* or bridegroom and other is bride *para*.

One of a very interesting custom of this festival is that, the village which arranges Bhatheli has the right to plant the higher bamboo. At a little distance, *Bhatheli ghar*, a small hut is being put up with a roofing of banana leaves. In the *Bhatheli ghar*, the idol of Lord Vishnu and Krishna is enthroned and after sometimes, brought out for a procession. Devotees offer eatables and coins to gods. The fair shine with the attraction of bamboos and people bow to the bamboos reverentially. Gathering of people from far and near places, charged the whole

atmosphere with joy and merriment. They come to join the festival in their beautiful dresses and ornaments. They also sing *khicha geets* (teasing songs) on their way. A fair with a number of stalls of sweets, handicrafts, traditional clay toys, locally produced lentils, etc., make the festival more attractive. 'It is suggested that the word *bhatheli* has been derived from *bhasthalika*, the sky; the pole with its high crest may suggest the sky. The *Mahabharata* describes a festival in which Indra's (king of heaven) *dhvaja*(flag) or standard was set up seven days before the *Ahin* full moon when it was pulled down; it was meant to induce Indra to give rains; but Krishna converted it into Govardhana worship. Both *Indradhvaja* and *Govarthana dhari* might have percolated into the popular imagination and so the Kamrup villagers might have come to pray for rains through *Bhatheli*, the much needed rains for ensuring paddy cultivation. In the *Rig-Veda*, Indra the god of water, rain and sky is worshipped in his bird form, this may explain the Assamese imagination of the pole as a pigeon' (Das, 2005:86).

After day long celebration, *Bhatheli* comes to an end in the evening time. The young boys formally dismantled the *bhatheli ghar* with strike and cry '*Bhatheli is over, Bhatheli is over*'. In some areas, the young men from neighboring village come to join this ceremony and take part in a mock fight against the local youths. *Bhatheli* festival has some dissimilarities in observance in different parts of Assam. It is popular as *Suweri* (*Sori*) or *Soweri* in Southern Kamrup, because some people believe that, at this time the advent and departure of Sankaradeva, the founder and principal preacher of Vaishnavism in Assam took place. Devotees of these places taken the thrown of gods in a procession and at the gate of every household, they received offering of rice, gram, money, etc. In Western Guwahati, some villages

observe Dadhi Manthan, symbolic churning of sea to have *amrita* (nectar of heaven). This ceremony is performed by four pairs of little girl (*gopi*) and twelve little boys (*gopalas*). They dressed up as Sri Krishna, the full incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Muslim people of Chamata area of Northern Kamrup also celebrate Bhatheli as Bah biya (marriage of bamboo). In some parts of Kamrup districts, Bhatheli is known as *Pawra*, where the festival held throughout the whole month of *Bohag* (April-may).

Bhatheli is known as Bhaitheli among the Boro Kacharis. Bhaitheli means 'goes down'. Like the non-tribals, they also make a small hut near the erected bamboos, where a black pigeon, a black goat along with other eatables are offered to gods and goddesses and pray to go downstream and remove mishap and diseases from the village. 'Attempts have been made to identify the Bhathel festival with the ceremony of *Sakrotthana*, which originally was a fertility festival like the well-known *May tree* festival. It was later converted into a festival in honour of Indra, the sovereign of the clouds and water, which generate the grain' (Datta, i.e., 1994:161).

3.3.3 Deul

Deul, Doulyatra or Doulotsava is synchronizes with Holi. These terms are identical. 'Deul indicates a pyramid like mound made of earth and several meters high. It has seven stairs up to the top. Four bamboos are planted at the four corners of the pyramid at the base, and at the top, there is a covering of cloth stretched on bamboos posts' (Goswami, 2003: 25). Doulyatra means 'procession from the temple', while Doulotsava indicates 'festival of the temple'. Holi festival of Barpeta

is popularly known as Doul-utsava. It is seen that the Pan Indian Holi festival is Vaishnavised here. 'The Holi festival developed as Doulotsava and Doulyatra during the reigns of the Ahom kings and Vaisnava age. On the other hand, the coming of the Britishers and the tea-garden labors with them, imported two terms of the Holi festival, Holi and Phagua to Assam and thus Holi and Phagua become popular term to mean the modern Holi festival in Assam' (Baruah,2013:245). Doulotsava of Barpeta is associated with the worship of Lord Krishna or Vishnu.

The first day of Deul is known as *gondh*. In the evening time, the full incarnation of Lord Vishnu, god Krishna become ready to visit Ghunucha's (one of the wife of Krishna) place. His followers make a bonfire in front of the *kirtan-ghar* and with the beat of Vaishnavite drums, cymbals, idol of Krishna carried round the firework and then to the doul. During the festival, all the regular religious functions of *kirtan ghar* (prayer house) are performed. On the second day, the traditional Vaishnava theatrical performance, *Bhaona* is performed. People visit Barpeta from far flung areas to watch the theatre. The third day of Deul is also spent in the same manner as that of the second day. The last and the fourth day of Doul festival is called Sueri. On that day, god Krishna is supposed to go back to the house of mother Lakshmi from the house of Ghunucha. Devotees bring down god Krishna to a palanquin (*dola*) and carried in a procession. Participation of people from various regions creates a sea of devotees there. In the rhythm of the Vaishnavite drums, cymbals, conches, etc., Holi songs rend the sky. People throw coloured powders to one another. When the procession arrived at *kirtan ghar*, the gate is block with bamboos by the followers of Mother Lakshmi. It is believed that, Mother Lakshmi

become angry with her husband god Krishna, because He stayed at Ghunucha's place for all these days. The followers of Mother Lakshmi therefore stop the opposite group from entering her house. But at last, the bamboos are broken and Lord Krishna entered the campus and takes seven round of *kirtan ghar*. 'He tires and takes rest for a while. Taking advantage of the peace, a devotee from Lakshmi's side 'reproves' him; one of his devotees returns the reproof. An interesting verbal duel thus ensues. In the end he admits defeat, like a peace loving husband, satisfies her with money and other presents and earns His admittance into the shrine. There ends the great Deul festival' (Das, 1972:89-90).

3.3.4 Dewali

Dewali or Dipandita is a widely celebrated festival of the Assamese Hindus. It is a festival of light; perform in the month of *Kati* (October-November). Dewali is the symbol of victory of good over evil. There are many legends related to the origin of Dewali. This festival is very much associated with goddess Kali. People welcome Dewali festival with a grand preparation. It is believed that goddess Lakshmi descends from heaven and stay at neat, clean, snug and tidy houses of earth during these days. Because of this, people keep their houses clean and decorate attractively during Dewali. They get up early in the morning and clean their houses, plastered with mud and cow dung. All the utensils are cleaned and scrubbed bright. Agricultural tools are also cleaned and repaired. Traditional delicious foods and sweets are prepared in every household. It is the festival of celebration, so people wear new clothes and if possible, purchase something new articles of household use. Traders and businessman close their early accounts and try to clear out their old

stacks. In the evening, people lighten earthen lamps in front of their houses. Some people decorate their houses with electrical lights. In Dewali night, fireworks are displayed and crackers are burst.

3.3.5 Ganesh Chaturthi

Birthday of Lord Ganesha is celebrated as Ganesh Chaturthi in the month of *Bhada* (August-September). ‘This festival was first started by the great Maratha ruler Shivaji’ (Bharadwaj et al., 2011:92). Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated at household as well as community level. Though at the very first time, King Shivaji initialized this festival, the freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak began to organize Ganesh Chaturthi as a socio- religious festival. Ganesha is the Lord of wisdom and power. Ganesha temples are decorated with flowers and lights on this day. Lord Ganesha is very fond of sweet. So, people offer Him coconut, jaggery, sweet, pudding and red or yellow flower.

3.3.6 Holi

Holi or Fakuwa is one of a colorful festival of the Hindus, performed in the month of *Phagun* (March-April). Though various mythological believes are related to Holi, originally it is a festival celebrates for increasing the fertility of land and good harvest. It is in essence and spirit of a spring festival. At the time of Holi, the crops like wheat, grams etc., are ripening. According to the Hindu calendar, Holi falls on the full moon day .It is moment of enjoyment of the farmers for their new harvest. They offer first crop to Agnideva, the god of fire and thereafter, for personal consumption. Holi is the festival of three days celebration. The first day is *Holi*

Purnima. On that day, the eldest male member sprinkling colours on every member of the family and begins the festival. Second day is called *Puno*. The third and final day is known as *Parva*, when all the age groups of people involve fully in enjoyment. They visit each other's home and smeared coloured powder on them. Sweets and homemade dishes are also distributed among them. Holi is celebrated all over India but with different names and manners. In the temples and shrines of Lord Vishnu and Krishna, it is observed with pomp and gaiety.

3.3.7 Maha Shivaratri

Maha Shivaratri is celebrated all over the country in honour of Lord Shiva, in the month of *Phagun* (February-March). Shivaratri means, the night of Shiva. It is believe that, in this night Lord Shiva married Parvati. It is also believed that in this night, Lord Shiva dance *tandava*, a dance form of night and vigor. Various kinds of Shivratri are celebrated in a year. These are Maha Shivaratri, Yoga Shivaratri, Nitya Shivaratri, etc. From the morning of Maha Shivaratri, devotees keep themselves in fast till the end of the worship. The main worship starts from the evening. Shiva temples are decorated with flower and Shiva *lingas* (symbolic phallus of Shiva) are bathed with *panchagavya*, five sacred ingredients of cow. These are-cow milk, sour milk, butter, urine and dung. Devotees offer milk, clarified butter, curd, honey and sugar, to the god. Offering wood apple leaves on *linga* is necessary. Shivaratri is favorite of Lord Shiva. Devotees visit pilgrims on that day to offer their worship. People have a immense belief that if they worship Lord Shiva in Shivaratri night, they can get blessing from Him. Before entering to the temple, devotees take the sacred bath and walk round the temple. It is called *pradakshina*.

By doing so, people confess their sins before the god and ask for His pardon. Priests bathed the Shiva *linga* with milk, water, coconut water, oil and clothed and adorned with sacred thread. After that, they shunt prayers and offer rice, curry, milk, curds fruits, etc. to the god. Performing some other rites, the worshippers take blessings of the god and the priest. After the completion of worship, devotees break their fast and take light meal.

3.3.8 Matheni

Matheni is one of a popular festival of Darrang district of Assam. Every year on the day of Kati Bihu (October-November), Matheni festival is celebrated in Devananda Satra, a Vaishnavite monastery of Darrang district. The nucleus of the ritual represents the symbolic churning of sea. There is an interesting story behind the celebration of this festival. Story tells that, at the curse of sage Durvasa, goddess Lakshmi leave the authority of wealth and took shelter in the sea .Because of that gods have to live in hunger and anxiety, and demons started attacking them. At the plight of the gods, Lord Vishnu instructs both gods and demons to churn the ‘sea of milk’ (Khirood Sagar). When they churn the sea, they got pitchers of *amrita* (nectar of heaven) and the gods, finally drink up the nectar and become immortal. This story is the main base of Matheni, which the people dramatized in musical form. The preparation for Matheni begins several days ahead. Near the *satra* house, a big pandal being raised and there Lord Vishnu is worshipped with traditional religious rites on the festival day. The drama of churning of the sea is enacted at the pandal. In the middle of the pandal, a pit is dug where a pitcher is put and a churning rod is placed in it. Four posts of wood are wrapped with banana sheath and placed at a

distance from the pitcher. Symbolic *amrita* is prepared with *Jaha* rice (a type of scented rice), curd, milk, ghee, honey, sugar and put it in a clay pot. After that, the devotees hung the pot at the top of churning rod to turn it easy. The main drama of churning sea begins at night. A large number of people gather to see the drama .On the occasion of Matheni, a big fair is also held.

3.3.9 Moho ho

Moho ho is a popular seasonal folk festival of lower Assam. Moho ho or Mah kheda means mosquito chasing. It is held in the full moon day of *Aghon* (November-December). ‘The term Moho ho may have come from the Boro Kachari word *Mausaho*, ‘*mausa*’ means ‘tiger’ and ‘*ho*’ means chasing’ (Datta et al.,1994:164).This festival is very simple but enthusiastically observed by the youngsters of lower Assam. Both tribal and non-tribal celebrate Moho ho. Preparation for the festival begins two or three days ahead. In the evening time of the festival day, groups of boys bring sticks in hand and visit every household of the village to ceremonially drive away the mosquitos. In the court yards of the households, they form a circle and in the centre of it, one member perpendicularly holds his stick on the ground. Other members sing folk songs and move circularly beating the central stick with their own. In some places a boy rigged in dried banana leaves or banana barks dances in a shuffling manner as a bear, while the others sing around him. This practice is also prevalent among the Rabha tribe of Southern Goalpara. Each family of the village offers them rice or money and boys showering blessing in return. This Moho ho festival has some similarities with the Sonaray ritual of some areas of Goalpara district, Maih kheda (driving buffalo from paddy

field) festival of Darrang district and the Bhalla bhulla festival of East Bengal. Sonaray festival is associated with the tiger worship.

3.3.10 Nouka Tana Ceremony

In Assam, Nouka Tana (boat pulling) ceremony is prevalent from the time of Ahom kingdom. At that time, this ceremony was mainly for the amusement of the kings. Now, this ceremony is held at different places of Assam, specially in Sualkuchi, Hajo and some parts of Nalbari district on the occasion of some religious ceremonies. *Baramasi* songs are associated with this ceremony. These songs are sung by women on the Navami and Dashami day of Durga puja to pour rain and fill the water sources.

3.3.11 Pachati

Pachati or Pacheti festival is associated to the life of Lord Krishna. It is a household as well as community rite. During Pacheti in household, the elderly lady of the household performs some traditional rituals for the welfare of her son. On the fifth day of the birth of a baby, mother smears some traditional medicated ingredients in the body of the offspring. The name giving ceremony of the baby is also done on that day. The womenfolk gathered there are given salt, fish, oil, betel nut, etc. In some areas, a feast is also arranged to entertain the guests. It is elaborately performed in the *satras* of the Darrang district. It is generally celebrated in the month of *Bhada-Ahin* (August - October). People believe that, king Nanda, foster father of Krishna, performs this festival on the fifth day after Krishna's birth. Therefore, devotees begin to celebrate the festival on the fifth day of Janmastami,

i.e., birthday of Lord Krishna. *Dadhimathana Yatra* is one of an important feature of Pachati. *Dadhimathana Yatra* is a dramatic performance integral to birth of Krishna. This ritual was first introduced by Govinda Atoi, the founder of Khatara Satra. *Dadhimathana* was originally shows at *Sundaridia satra* near Barpeta. This ceremony is performed on the last day of *Bhada* (August-September). Day before the ceremony, people spend their time by listening religious music and watching comical skits and *ojha pali*, i.e., a traditional singing and dancing performance of Assam. On the day of celebration, devotees gather at village prayer house and worshipped in the sanctum sanctorum. Outside the prayer house, a structure being made with wood and bamboo along with the mechanism of churning milk. Males dressed in female attire take part in churning ceremony. *Ojha* or *Sutradhar* along with actors and musicians gather at the prayer house and create a musical atmosphere with the rhythms of Vaishnavite drums and cymbals. The whole ceremony continues for three hours and the *ojha* continuously dance by reciting the relevant Vaishnavite verses of the ceremony. People from far and near areas come to join this festival and pray to Lord Krishna. Fair that grows up with this festival is another attraction for the visitors. Beside the Hindus, people from other religion also participate in this ceremony. Day after the completion of Pacheti, devotees perform rites of *Nandotsava* .It is performed to recalls the rites that the king Nanda, the foster father of Lord Krishna, did after Krishna's birthday.

3.3.12 Janmastami

Lord Krishna born on the eighth day of *Saon-Bhada* (August-September). Krishna is the eighth and full incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who came to earth to

(holy book) as uncreated eternal word of God. Because of that, Islam is also said as the religion of Book. Repetition of faith in the absolute oneness of God, daily prayer, alms giving, fasting and pilgrimage (*Hajj*) are five duties or five pillars of Islam. Sunni and Shiah are two major sects of Islam. Muslims are an indispensable part of the Assamese society. Syed, Goriya, Sheikh and Moriya are four broad caste like groups of Muslim community of Assam. Syed are considered as priestly class and according to their belief, they are descents from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet. Goriya belongs to the Sheikh group. Sheikh denotes venerable leader. The purely Arab descents to Assam are termed as Sheikh. Fourth group of Muslim is Moriya. These people descents from the captured Muslim soldiers during the invasion of Assam by Muslim in 1532. In some areas of Assam, specially in Goalpara, a few Pathan families are also available. But in Assamese socio-cultural context, most of them lost their original identity and assimilated with the local Assamese Muslims. Besides these four major groups, some other sub caste like group present in Muslim society. These are- Uzani, Bhatiya, Chorua, Dathiya, Baramasi or Sandar. These groups of people are generally inhabited in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon districts of Assam. On the other hand, Mymensingiya, Syletiya and Manipuri Muslims are some groups who came from different parts of the country and become scattered in Assam. 'We can roughly divide the entire Muslim population of Assam including the above mentioned caste like group into two main strata – (i) Upper or higher class and (ii) Lower class. The upper stratum includes the Sayed, Goriya and Sheikhs including the Uzanis and Bhatiyas, while the lower stratum incorporates the Moriyas, Dathiyas, Charuas and Baramasis or Sandar group of People' (Ahmed,2010:94). On the basis of socio economic standard of living, this kind of

classification has been made. To some extent, Muslim follow the caste endogamy, but expansion of education gradually decreases the social barriers among these groups. According to the calendar, Muslim people celebrate lots of festivals round the year.

Table 3.2: Festivals of the Assamese Muslims

Serial No	Name of the Festival	Solar Month	Lunar Month	Occasion
1	Fateha-e-Dawaj Daham, Magh Bihu	January	<i>Rabiul Awal</i>	On the Occasion of birth and death of Prophet Hazarat Mohammad, Harvesting festival
2	Urs	January-February	<i>Rabiul Awal</i>	Death ceremony of Saints.
3	Bohag Bihu	April	<i>Rajab</i>	Harvesting festival
4	Shab-e-Barat	June	<i>Saban</i>	Eating of traditional food.
5	Shab-e-Qadr	June-July	<i>Ramzan</i>	To get the blessings of god for good health and prosperity
6	Eid-ul-Fitr	July	<i>Shawal</i>	End of Ramzan month, the month of fasting.
7	Eid-ul-Qurban	October	<i>Zilah</i>	In the memory of Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice for god.
8	Muharram	November	<i>Muharram</i>	Commemoration of the death of Imam Hussain, grandson of Prophet Mohammad.

(Islamic Calender 2014)

'The Islam Lunar calendar (also referred to as Hijri calendar) is a purely lunar calendar. It contains 12 months that are based on the phases of the moon. Each lunar

month is approximately 29.53 solar days. Therefore, the Islamic calendar is shorter than the Gregorian calendar. 12 lunar months is about 10 to 11 days shorter than the solar calendar. Twelve months of Islam calendar are- Muharram, Safar, Rabi' al-awwal, Rabi' al-thani, Jumanda al-awwal, Jumanda al-thani, Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu al-Qi'dah, Dhu-Hijjah (<http://www.ramadan-islam.org>)

3.4.1 Fateha-e-Dawaj Daham

On the occasion of birth and death of Prophet Hazarat Mohammad, Muslim celebrates Fateha-e-Dawaj Daham festival in the *Rabiul Awal*, the third month of Islamic calendar. 'Fateha means the victory or pray to God for the eternal peace of a deceased and the meaning of Dawaj Daham is the twelfth day ceremony' (Ahmed, 2010: 142). The entire Muslim community consider it as most auspicious and celebrate the festival by offering prayer and giving alms to poor. Though this festival is not performed individually, people observe some customs like fasting, cleaning household; wear new cloths at individual level. Public celebration of this festival is very wide. Special arrangements take place in educational institutions, clubs, mosques etc., where the life, philosophy and ideology of Prophet Mohammad are discussed and lectures are delivered. Various competitions are also held among the students.

3.4.2 Urs

Urs is another important festival of the Muslim community of Assam. This festival is associated to the death anniversary of the Muslim saints. From the first day of *Rabiul Awal* (January-February), Urs continues till the April-May month. To

participate in the festival, pilgrims from different areas use to come. Urs at the *dargah* (grave of saint) of Poamakka at Hazo of Kamrup district is very famous and the Urs celebrated there as the commemoration of death anniversary of Sufi saint Ghiyasuddin Auliya. The ceremony begins with the prayer at the tomb of the saint. Devotees follow the words of *mullah* (religious leader) and wish the blessings of the saint. Devotees can make their offerings to *dargah* at any time. *Zikir* (devotional songs) are sung and foods are distributed in this festival. Besides the Muslims, the Hindus also visit *dargah* during this festival.

3.4.3 Shab-e-Barat

Shab-e-Barat is a festival of Muslims, performed on the fifteenth day of *Saban* month, the eighth month of Islamic calendar. '*Shab* means night, *Barat* means luck; the night of record or a writing conferring immunity' (Ahmed, 2010:143). It is an occasion, where. *ruti* (bread), *pitha* (local cake), *halwa* (a kind of sweet dish), etc. are eaten. This custom is known as *Tawa*. During the first fifteenth day of *Saban* month, *Tawa* ceremony is generally performed by every household. But in some areas, the time of celebration is during first seven days. On the fifteenth day, the main functions of the festival observed and this day is called *Akheri*. Preparation starts from the previous day. People busy in cleaning the houses and washing cloth. On the day of festival, women and girls become busy in brisk preparation of dishes. On the other hand, the male members continuously read *Quran*. When the cooking of dishes and reading of *Quran* is over, the guests or invitees are served with *ruti* (bread) and sweet dishes at first. The economically sound family also arrange dinner with these items. In the night, special prayer offer at mosque by every Muslim people. Who are

not able to perform *Tawa* in first fourteen days, they observe it simply on the day of *Akheri* and send prepared food to the mosque before noon. The festival of Shab-e-Barat concluded on the fifteenth day by performing special prayer in mosque at night.

3.4.4 Shab-e-Qadr

In the *Ramzan* month, Shab-e-Qadr or Lailat-ul-Qadr festival celebrated by the Muslims with great merriment. *Ramzan* is the ninth month of Islamic calendar. Literally Shab-e-Qadr means night of power. The Muslims believe that the night of this day is sacred and the persons stay awake the whole night get blessing from God. Shab-e-Qadr is celebrated both publicly and in household level. On the occasion of the festival, the mosque is decorated with colourful papers and framed a gate with the help of banana plants and bamboos. The area where mosque is not so close, people choose a particular house and everybody assembled there to celebrate the festival. Community feast is a common feature in Shab-e-Qadr. Roza Khana is a custom usually performed by the rich families. It is a feast, organized on the occasion of breaking fast, where relatives, friends and neighbours are invited and entertained them with various delicious dishes. Holy *Quran* is also read there. In the evening time, people participate in a special prayer called *Tarabi Namaj* at mosque.

3.4.5 Eid-ul-Fitr

Eid-ul-Fitr is one of an important festival which marks the end of the *Ramzan* month. The word '*eid*' means 'joy' and '*fitr*' is 'breaking the fast' or 'giving alms'. After one month of fasting of *Ramzan*, Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated on the first day of

Shawal, which is the tenth month of Islamic calendar .Eid-ul-Fitr is a symbol of unity, brotherhood and to achieve the enhance piety. The Muslims celebrate this festival with great merriment. Two- three days before the festival, people get busy in preparation. They clean both interior and outside the houses, the whole compound is being cleaned and put new fencing around it. From the morning, women get themselves busy in preparing various dishes. New garments are bought for the family members, relatives, and friends and for the poor also. After seeing the new moon, people express their happiness by burst the crackers and become ready to celebrate the Eid-ul-Fitr. On the day of celebration, everybody wake up early and offer prayers to God. Then they take small quantity of food. It symbolizes the end of month long fasting. Community prayer is one of an important feature of Eid-ul-Fitr. This special congregational prayer held at mosque, *Idgah* (open field), arenas, etc. Before performing the prayer, it is customary to distribute *fitra* (alms) among the poor. The amount of alms prescribed by the *Shariayat* (Muslim Law). ‘At the end of the actual prayer, the *Imam* (leader of the prayer) offers the supplementary extempore prayer (*munajat*) to the almighty Allah for the welfare of their faith and remissions of sins of all Musalmans, for the safety of pilgrims and travelers, for the recovery of the sick, for timely rain, protections from the misfortune, freedom from debt and also for the prosperity of our country and peace for human being’ (Ahmed, 2010: 147). When the prayer become over, people embrace each other, shake their hands and wish healthy and peaceful life. On this day, Muslims abstain from the activities like digging the land, transplantation, etc. Wearing new cloth, apply *surma* (a kind of black cosmetic), to eyes, use of *atar* (perfume) are the common practice of this festival. Sweet dishes are integral to this festival and among those, *sewai*

(vermicelli) has great demand. Women and girls colour their palms, wear ornaments and apply *alta* (red dye) on nails.

3.4.6 Eid-ul-Zoha or Eid-ul-Qurban

Eid-ul-Zoha or Eid-ul-Qurban is a festival of sacrifice, celebrate at the end of the Islamic calendar. It is also known as Bakrid. In commemoration of Prophet Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice, the Muslims sacrifice full grown animals like cow, goat or sheep, free from any disease and two- third of meat given to the poor. This custom is called *qurbani* (sacrifice). It is practiced to commemorate the noble act of Ibrahim. This day is also important because it is believed that on this day, the Holy *Quran* was declared complete. For the peace and prosperity, special '*dua*' (prayer) is recited. On this day the Muslims go to the mosque in the morning and perform religious rites. Community prayers also offer in this ceremony. Friends, relatives and neighbours are invited and celebrate the festival in traditional gaiety and fervour.

3.4.7 Muharram

Muharram is one of the four sanctified months of Islamic calendar. It is the first month of Islamic New Year. 'The word Muharram derived from the word '*haram*' means 'forbidden'. This month is most sacred to the Shiah community and the fast on the first ten days of the month to commemorate the slaying of Hussein, grandson of Mohammad, by the Sunnis. The tenth day is called *Ashura*, meaning 'the tenth' and it is a day of voluntary fasting. The Sunnis also fast on the tenth day because they believe that Adam and Eve, heaven and hell, life and death, fate and pen were

created on this day' (Bhardwaj et al., 2011:153) Muharram is a religious festival of the Muslims. It is celebrated in commemoration of the death of Iman Husain, the grandson of Prophet. This festival is celebrated during the first ten days of the month of Moharram with the feelings of gaiety and mourning .It is a period of mass mourning and the devotees spend it by following some taboos. Fasting is strictly observed and people maintain their daily diet for first nine days. They do not take meat, fish or any non-vegetarian food during these days. Special care takes to maintain the cleanliness. People wash their cloth and keep their houses neat and clean. As it is a period of mass mourning, devotees do not wear fine dresses, ornaments or even do not comb or oil their hair. But now, most of the customs are discontinued for various reasons. During these days, Muslim people use to visit religious places to offer prayer to God and sing a kind of lamenting song named *jari* and *marshiya* those depict the tragic history of saint Hussain.

During these days they do not involve in any major works like ploughing. The tenth day of Muharram is known as Manzil. According to the order of Prophet, Muslims observe some customs on the day of Manzil. *Maulavi* (religious leader) recites the verses from *Quran*. Sometimes competitions of games, recitation of *Quran*, and singing competition of Muslim devotional songs are also held. Making *Taziya* is an important and attractive feature of this festival. *Taziya* is a structure, made of bamboo and embellish with various coloured paper. It is a symbolic tomb of the Prophet. During the last two days of Muharram, devotees taken out the *Taziya* in a procession and carried out through the locality. Followers holding the banners and Parade on the streets. Bare-chested Shiah men enacting the emotional scene from the battle of Karabala. Every participant of the procession chants 'Ya Hussain'

and to depict the suffering of the martyrs. Bare chested Shiah man strike their bodies with sharp metal tied to chain. The procession terminates at symbolic Karabala of the city and the *Taziahs* buried there. Generally, this festival is observed by the Shiah community with greater importance. But in Assam, most of the Muslims are belongs Sunni community and for them Muharram is the auspicious occasion to pay respect to Saint Hussain.

3.5 Festivals of the Assamese Sikh

Sikhism is not a very old religion. Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikh religion. Sikh religion is strictly monotheistic. They believe in one supreme God who is the creator of this world. The Assamese Sikhs of Assam follow Sikhism and their mother tongue is Assamese. They have accepted Assam as their homeland. The following are some of the important festivals of the Assamese Sikh.

3.5.1 Baisakhi

Baisakhi is one of an important seasonal agricultural as well as religious festival of the Sikhs invariably falls on the thirteenth April of every year. It is agricultural because on this month harvesting season begins and rabi crops are harvested. Farmers fill their granaries with crops. Baisakhi is specially celebrated to thank God for good harvest. Baisakhi festival has also religious significance. According to *Nankshahi* or Sikh calendar, 'Since Baisakhi is celebrated as the Birth of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru and founder Khalsa panth, major activities for the festival are centered on *gurdwaras*, the Sikh place of worship' (Bharadwaj et al., 2011:188). Though it is celebrated all over India, it has the special

significant in Punjab. Early in the morning of Baisakhi, people take holy bath and begin the preparation of the ceremony. They visit *gurdwara* (worshipping house) and participate in special prayer. Their Holy book *Guru Granth Sahib* given symbolic bath with milk and water and taken out in a procession, where people of every age group take part with faith and enthusiasm. Special community lunch or *Guru ka langar* also prepared in *gurdwaras*. Baisakhi is a community festival, but its celebration at household level is also very wide. It is an occasion of family together. People invite friends, relatives and spend good time together. Houses are also decorated in a beautiful way. At the time of Baisakhi, the prime festival of the Assamese, the Rongali Bihu, is also observed. In the Baisakhi festival of the Assamese Sikhs, a good number of elements of the Rongali Bihu are conspicuous.

3.5.2 Guru Purb

Guru Purb is an occasion where birth and death anniversaries of Sikh Gurus and the anniversary of *Adi Granth Sahib*'s installation are celebrated. *Akhand Path*, i.e., continuous reading of the scripture *Granth Sahib* begins three days before and culminates on the day of Guru Purb. Then the devotees holding a procession where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is carried on a beautifully decorated float. The procession leads by five armed guard (*panj pyara*). Usually devotees take out *prabhat pheris* (morning procession) few days before the Guru Purb. They take out the procession from *gurdwaras* and with singing *shabad* (a kind of religious hymns), go round their locality. On the day of Guru Purb, special common meal (*langar*) prepared in *gurdwaras*. Irrespective of cast and creed, people attend the *langar*. Some devotees like to offer their service in cooking, cleaning, etc. in the *gurdwaras*. It is called *Kar*

Seva. Along with houses, *gurdwaras* are also illuminated on Guru Purb and people visit those in a large number.

3.5.3 Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti

Guru Gobind Singh is the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs. The birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh is celebrated by the Sikhs with great enthusiasm. 'According to *Nanakshahi* Calendar, the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib falls annually on January 5' (Sarma, 2007:85). He was the son of Guru Teg Bahadur who sacrificed his life to protect the freedom of worship of the Hindus. Guru Gobind Singh created the *Akal Khalsa* (the community of the pure). He was also a good writer and his writings have collected in a volume, called *Dasham Granth*. The celebration of Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti is similar to all Guru Purb. At the *gurdwaras*, the reading of *Granth Sahib* starts two days before the birthday. One day before, a procession is organized where *Guru Granth Sahib* is carried out and the *Panj pyaras* lead the procession. They hold the *Nishan Sahib* (Sikh flag) and a group of people, including singers, brass player, *gatka* team of martial artists display their sword manship and devotees follow the *panj pyaras*. 'The day begins early in the morning with singing of *Asa-de-var* (morning hymns) and hymns from Sikh scripture followed by *Katha* (exposition of the scripture) together with lecture and recitation of poems in the praise of the Gurus. Langar or special community lunch arranged at the Gurudwaras by volunteers. The idea behind the free community lunch is that, people should be offered food in the spirit of *seva* (service) and *bhakti* (devotion)' (Bhardwaj et al., 2011:199).

3.5.4 Guru Nanak Jayanti

Guru Nanak Sahib is the founder of Sikh religion. He was born on the full moon day of *Kati* (October-November) month. Guru Nanak was a poet, philosopher, preacher, saint and social reformer who never believe in caste distinction. Guru Nanak Jayanti is one of the most important festivals of the Sikh religion and it celebrated by the Sikh all over the world including the Assamese Sikhs. Celebration of this occasion is same with the celebration of other Guru Purb.

3.5.5 Birth Anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur

Guru Teg Bahadur is the ninth Guru of the Sikhs. In Assam, the celebration of Guru Teg Bahadur's birth day is wider. When the Mughal invaded Assam in 1669, Guru Teg Bahadur tried to bring peace between Mughal general Raja Ramsingha and the Government of Assam. But after a few years he was killed by Mughal King Aurangazeba. The *gurdwara* Teg Bahadur Sahibji of Dhubri is stand as a witness of Mughal's invasion in Assam. Guru Teg Bahadur's birth day is annually celebrated by the Assamese Sikhs inhabited in different parts of Assam.

3.6 Festivals of the Tea Workers

A good number of Tea Garden Workers have been living in Assam since the British period. They are mainly belongs to Kol, Munda, Kharia, Santhal tribe, etc. and from different caste groups. They have accepted Assam as their mother land. Karam worship and Tusu worship are their main festivals. Besides these, they use to perform Bihu, Holi, Dewali, community worship of goddess Durga, etc.

Table 3.3: Festivals of the Tea Workers in Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Phalguna</i>	<i>Phagun</i>	February-March	Phagua
2	<i>Bhadra</i>	<i>Bhada</i>	August-September	Karam
3	<i>Pausha-Margashisha</i>	<i>Puh-Magh</i>	December-January	Tusu or Magh Bihu

3.6.1 Phagua

In the month of *Phagun* (February-March), Tea Workers observe Phagua or Holi festival. This festival continues for three to five days. Fifteen or twenty days before the full moon day of *Phagun*, people of old and young age group walk through the areas and sing some obscene songs along with the *dhol* and *madal* (two types of drum). People spent awakening the whole night of full moon (*jagaran*). At night, they collect fuel from every household to build *meji* (heap of firewood). Generally *meji* is constructed outside the living area or bank of the river. Ceremony of burning *meji* is called *Samad pura*. In the evening of the full moon night, young people carry firewood in a particular place of bonfire and make a heap out of it. 'On the next day, early in the morning when the cock crows, an old man or the head man of the society, dig a hole in the spot of the bonfire and puts an egg, a copper coin, a betel leaf and an areca nut in the pit. A bamboo pole is erected in the pit and fire wood and bamboos, etc. are piled up around it. The old man prays to God to carry away diseases and other evil things of the people and lights the *meji*'

(Baruah, 2013: 128). With the beating of drums, people enjoying the night. Next day morning, they perform the ceremony call *Boka khel*, i.e, throwing mud on each other, and sing delightful songs. They also put new garbs, in Phagua. Stick dance is an attractive feature of this festival. On the day of Phagua, people used to visit every household and burn incense sticks. They also offer *fagu-guri* (coloured powder) to God and wish that they may free from any quarrels.

3.6.2 Karam Puja

In view to propitiating mother earth, Karam is the most important festival of Tea Workers of Assam. It is an agriculture related festival held in the month of *Bhada* (August-September). To get bumper crops and have peaceful life, people implore god Karam in this festival. There are three genre of Karam. These are –Dirro Karam, Khonso Karam and Rajni Karam. Dirro Karam is principally the ritual of married women and children. For the young maidens, Raji Karam festival is observed and the Khonso Karam is mainly performed for the abundant yield of crop. The whole festival is move around the *Karam* tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*). For the Tea Worker, *Karam* tree is venerated as it bears the name of a legendry king Karma.

Preparation of the festival completed in various steps like planting of maize seedlings, ceremonial cutting of branches of *Karam* tree, planting it in the village courtyard and worshipping etc. The maidens' participation in this festival is very active. For the occasion, they prepare *Jawa* (maize seedling). 'Some maize seeds are planted on a fresh bamboo basket (*tunki*) filled with fine sand and watered with turmeric. The new basket signifies 'verginity', the sand 'softness of femininity', the turmeric water 'sacred stream of marital life' and the care put into prepare reflects

the female character'.(Chittattukalam, 2002:157).The youngsters engaged in the festival, especially young maidens keep them in fasting and along with some boys, fetch the branches of tree. Around the *Karam* tree, the girls at first dance three times and welcome the god thrice as their chief guest. After that, everybody bow towards tree with respect and reverence. Then a boy ties the tree thrice with white thread. This shows the bond of pledge to merit the god Karma's blessing and protection. Then a boy select three branches of the tree and select one for the *dharma* (religion), one in the name of village ancestors and other for the spirits, meant to protect the entire village. The branches should not fall down to the ground. Girls carry those branches on their shoulders and return to village by singing and dancing. The wife of the village priest (*naegin*) receives all the branches and plants them in the courtyard of the village. In the lower part of the branches, vermilion spots are given, which signify the marriage taking place between the recently engaged unmarried girls and the deity live in the *Karam* tree. The priest implore god for good harvest and welfare of the community, 'Then the maidens bring baskets containing *arwa* rice (sign of life sustenance), a tender cucumber (baby boy to be born in future) covered with yellow cloth (signifying sacrifice for the boy), the earthen lamp(signifying faith) and the *jawa* (signifies new life) flower (purity of mind and heart).Then they `sit around the tree in a semi-circle facing the east and listen to an elder narrating the *Karam* story and concluded the ceremony with a prayer' (Chittattukalam,2002: 158).When these rites are over, the youngsters break their fast and spend the whole night at the centre ground of the village by singing and dancing. The girls receive the branches of the *Karam* tree from the priest and carry them in procession and visit every household .Householders offer rice flour, flat

rice, cake etc. to the visitors and smear the lower part of the branches with vermilion and oil. Then the branches are finally immersed in nearby water pool and ceremonially end up the Karam festival.

3.6.3 Tusu

Tusu is one of the important celebrations of the Tea Workers of Assam. They celebrate this festival during the month of *Puh-Magh* (December-January). The Tea Workers consider Tusu as the goddess of crop. The Tea Worker also celebrates Magh Bihu and they call it as Tusu Parab. It is basically a women oriented festival. An adult girl of the village recognized as Tusuma and she performs all the rituals of the ceremony. This ceremony is performing at two stages. At the first stage, rituals are observed at households and remaining rites are completed at the bank of a nearby river. Idol of goddess Tusu made of clay or cow dung and Tusuma, the principal women in the worship, carried the idol on her head and visit house to house. A group of girls follow her and young boys accompany them and beating different type of drums. After the procession, the idol of the goddess Tusu is immersed in river, but that day should not be Saturday or Tuesday. Community feast is also held during the Tusu Parab.

Assam is a land of diversity. Besides caste people, a huge portion of Assam's population designed with various tribal communities. Festivals of some major tribes of Assam are discussed in the following paras.

3.7 Festivals of the Boro

Boro, Bodo or Boro Kachari are one of an ancient and prominent inhabitant of Assam and belong to the Indo Mongoloid ethnic group of Tibeto Burman branch of Sino Tibetan or Indo Tibeto Chinese speech family. Though, they have been living in almost all parts of Assam, their main concentrations are found on the northern bank of Brahmaputra, particularly in Dhubri and Dhemaji. A large number of the Boros also live in Kokrajhar, Nalbari, Barpeta, Darrang, Goalpara and newly formed Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts. They have prominent mongoloid features, like, medium height, broad face with strong cheek bones, slit eyes, scant beard, etc. Boros are patrilineal in nature and father is the head of the family. Clan exogamy is strictly followed in marriage. Widow remarriage is permissible but after marriage she cannot claim the property of her deceased husband. Though they have various type of marriages, marriage by negotiation is widely accepted. Boro are mainly agriculturist. Besides paddy, they rear *eri*, *muga* and mulberry silk. They are basically non-vegetarian and rice is their staple food. Boro women are expert in weaving. They are very much fond of their traditional ornaments. Religiously Boro are *animist* (believe nature as supreme power), but the process of acculturation with the neighboring Hindus, many Boro have already been converted to Hindu fold. The number of Christianized Boro are not so less. Bathou Barai is the supreme deity of Boro community. Bathou Barai is analogues to the Hindu God Shiva. *Siju* plant (*Euphoria splendens*) is believed as the representer of Bathou Barai and, therefore, every household planting *siju* plant in the northern corner of their courtyard. Throughout the year, Boro people celebrate different kinds of festivals. Among these, seasonal and agricultural festivals are mainly observed.

Table 3.4: Festivals of the Boros of Assam

Sl. No	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Pausha-Margashisha</i>	<i>Puh-Magh</i>	January-February	Domashi or Domahi
2	<i>Margashisha-Kartika</i>	<i>Magh-Kati</i>	January- October	Worship of Kherai
3	<i>Baisakh</i>	<i>Bohag</i>	April-May	Putuli Haba or Doll marriage, Baisagu
4	<i>Baisakh-Kartika</i>	<i>Bohag-Kati</i>	May-October	Worship of Garja
5	<i>Kartika</i>	<i>Kati</i>	October- November	Katri Gasa Saonai or Kati Bihu
6	<i>Agrahayana-Pausha</i>	<i>Aghon –Puh</i>	November- December	Moha Honai or Mosquitoes driving ceremony

3.7.1 Domashi or Domahi

Domashi is a seasonal festival celebrated by the Boros. Domashi means the junction of two months. It is observed on Makar Sankranti day. During this festival, Boro women prepare different cakes, and curries, rice beer, etc. and welcome guests by serving food. To tie cord around the fruit bearing trees of the house is a custom of this festival. It is believed that, by doing this, fruit bearing trees bear more fruits. For the welfare of the people, Boro sacrifice fowls to their god Bathou Borai. In Domashi festival, the young boys construct *bilagur* or *bhelghar*. It is a kind of temporary cottage, made of bamboo and thatch. On the day of festival, boys get up early in the morning and put fire on *bilagur*, before crows came out their nest. This

ceremony is known as *laokhar* or *rakhal*. At the time of burning *bilagur*, it prays that, diseases should be getting away from the village and filled with paddy.

3.7.2 Worship of Kherai

One of a greatest religious festival of the Boros is Kherai. This festival is celebrated for the welfare of both individual and common lives and good harvest of crop. The word '*Kher*' means 'flees' and '*ai*' means 'goddesses'. It means offering worship or the chanting formula in front of the chief god Bathou. Kherai worship is not performed regularly or frequently due to its expensiveness. For the welfare of people, Kherai celebrates commonly once or twice in a year. There are mainly four kind of Kherai performed by the Boros. These are-Darshan Kherai, Umrao Kherai, Phalo Kherai and Naoni Kherai. Darshan Kherai is also known as Lakhi Kherai or Sali Kherai. It is celebrated during the first week of September-October. This worship is for Mainao, the goddesses of wealth. Umrao Kherai is celebrated during the month of Jun-July, for the welfare of people and the crop, which is also known as Ashu Kherai (*asu* means summer season crop). Phalo Kherai is performed in the month of January, especially on the day of full moon. Phalo Kherai is known as Danshrang Kherai also. The word Danshrang means 'bright night of the full moon'. Another kind of Kherai is Naoni Kherai. This festival is performed by families for the welfare of family members. Bathou Borai or Kharai Borai is the chief god of Kherai festival. Besides Bathou Borai, there are some other gods and goddesses worshipped during this ritual. These are-Aileng (body guard of Bathou Borai), Agrang (general of Bathou Borai), Khoila (messenger of God in chief), Karji, Rajkhandra (followers of Bura Bathou), Sang Raja (owner of store of food stuff),

Ranchandri or Ran Pagli (goddesses of war), Bulti Buri (owner of fish), Laokhar Gosai (god of cowherds) and Nawab Badsha (Muslin god). Though earlier, the Kherai Puja celebrated for seven days and nights, but now it becomes schedule in three days and nights.

3.7.3 Putuli Haba or Doll Marriage

On the seventh day of *Baisagu* festival, Boro people perform *Putuli Haba* festival. *Putuli Haba* means doll marriage. This festival mainly celebrated by the Boros inhabited in northern parts of the Brahmaputra valley, specially in Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur districts. This doll marriage is observed with the hope of sufficient rain for cultivation. The doll imagine as the *Raona* and *Raoni*, believe to be deities of wind and rain. The Boro people believe that if the deities satisfy, couple who have not child can able to get child after worshipping the deities. They also believe that for bestow fertility on the field, the deities Raona and Raoni send Bordoi Sikhla, (the symbolic girl of the wind) to the earth.

3.7.4 Worship of Garja

It is one kind of purificatory festival, where the villagers purify themselves. The word *garja* means expulsion or discharging. It is believed that by practicing Garja worship, the evil spirits are flown away from village. The ceremony of discharging evil spirits known as Bhasani or Bhasainai, which means floating away in the river or a stream. God Borai Raja has a special position in Garja worship. For worship of deities, one pair of banana fruit and a pair of areca nuts and betel leaf is essential. This festival is generally perform by the *douris* (priest). They are guided by

the *oja* (medicine man). There are two classes of *douris*. One is for Boro God, called *boro douri* and another is for the non Boro gods or Harsa gods called, *harsa douri*. In this ritual, another person is engaged to worship Muslim god, *Peer Sahib* or *nawab badsha*. Boros believe that, due to intermixing with each other in eating, merry making in festivals, they become impure and because of purification they perform this ritual.

Garja worship is generally performed two times in a year. The first one is known as Phojaonai or Bhasanai Garja, perform during the month of May –June. In this ritual, the devotee collect the materials of sacrifice and kept on a *Bhel* (raft) made of plantain trees and let it floating .They believe that, this kind of practice abolished the diseases from the village and evil spirits being expelled. During the month of October –November, the Boros practice Lakhi Garja. This is mainly the welcoming ceremony of goddess of wealth Mainao to the village. The preparation of Garja puja is very simple. One day before the puja, Salmi ceremony observed. For this ceremony, the *douri* (priest) purifies every household of the village with holy water, after sacrificing a chicken before Bura Bathou (supreme god).For the worship, they prefer grazing ground covered with jungles, which is near the bank of a river. This selected place is called *Garja Salli*. At the *Garja Sali*, on alter is constructed. The villagers built some small huts called *dera* and kept inside the huts. The materials like rice beer, grains of rice, a pair of new *dakhna* (Boro female garment) and also ornaments. It is strictly prohibited to enter the camp. The camp house becomes unguarded for the whole night. This practice is called *Salmi*. During this ritual, the Boro villages use to examine whether the people of the village well or not. For that, people place a piece of plantain leaf on the alter and then keep a pair of sacred basil

leaves, nine rice grains on plantain leaf and cover with a bamboo basket. Next morning, people check the materials, if everything is alright; it is believed that village is safe, if the material found scattered or missing, they believe that they are not safe. At that condition villagers suspect or identify some person who may involve in any illegal or immoral activities and that person compelled to apologies before the god Garja .

3.7.5 Katri Gasa Saonai or Kati Bihu

Katri Gasa is another Seasonal festival of the Boro community. Assamese Kati Bihu is known as Katri Gasa among the Boros. It is celebrated in the month of *Kati* (October-November). Katri Gasa is a festival of crisis. The Boros celebrate this festival in a simple manner. In the evening time, they enlighten earthen lamp at the paddy field, granary, in the name of God Batho and at the cowshed. On the day of festival, unmarried girl visit paddy field and touch the paddy plant with *Sewari* i.e., the polished long bamboo stick used in weaving. They believe that, it increases the growth and production of paddy.

3.7.6 Moha Honai or Mosquitoe Driving

The Boros of Kamrup, Darrang, Barpeta, Nalbari and Sonitpur districts observe mosquitoes driving ceremony known as Maha Honai. The Boros, especially young boys, observe Maha Honai at the later part of November or early part of December. On the day of the festival, the young boys of the village visit each household of the village and drive mosquitoes with burning torches. They sing in front of the householders and ask alms. Then they arrange a feast with the collected alms.

3.8 Festivals of the Mishing

The Mishing are the second largest schedule tribe of Assam belongs to Indo Mongoloid group of people. They principally inhabited in the riverine area of Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Jorhat district of Assam. The etymological meaning of the term Mishing is, mi=man, sing=beautiful; i.e., beautiful man (Sarma, 2006:26). Physically they are yellow skinned and have flat nose, prominent cheekbone with scanty beard. The Mishings are patrilineal in nature and daughters cannot claim the property of her father. *Baragam* and *Dahgam* are two divisions of the Mishings. These groups have several clans and the Mishings generally use those clan names as their surnames. Formal and informal, both marriages are prevalent in their society but formal marriages are more expensive than informal. *Kebang* is the organization to make decision on any matter of the village. Agriculture is their mainstay and besides *Ahu* paddy as subsidiary crop, they produce pulse, maize, cotton, sweet potatoe, bananas, etc. *Apong*, the locally brewed rice beer and *Chai apong* are two main important beverages of the Mishings. Animism and Supernaturalism (believe in spirit) are the main characteristics of Mishing religion. Priest is known as *Mibu* and he performs all the religious practices. The Mishing worship Sun (Donyi) and Moon (Polo) together as Donyipolo as their supreme deity. But mix up with neighboring non- Mishings, many of them are become the follower of Hinduism, while some other adhered Christianity. According to the traditional pattern, Mishing observe various festivals round the year. As an agrarian tribe, most of their festivals are related to cultivation.

Table 3.5 Festivals of the Mishings of Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Margashisha</i>	<i>Magh</i>	January- February	Magh Bihu
2	<i>Phalgun</i>	<i>Phagun</i>	March	Ali-Ai-Ligang
3	<i>Aswina</i>	<i>Ahin</i>	September-October	Po-rag

3.8.1 Ali-Aye-Ligang

Ali-Ai-Ligang or Ligang is a Spring time seed sowing festival of the Mishings. Literally ‘*ali*’ means ‘seed’, ‘*aye*’ means ‘fruits’ and ‘*ligang*’ stands for ‘sowing’. This festival is celebrated as the symbolic sowing of handful of *Ahu* seed in the womb of mother earth. Earlier, there was no fixed time for Ligang festival. At present, prior to the Bohag Bihu (April), the festival is commence on the first Wednesday of the month of *Fagun* (March) which continues for five days. The Mishing believe this day as auspicious because, it is associated with the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The ceremony starts from about noon. The head of the each family formally begins the ceremony by sowing handful of seeds in the eastern part of the paddy field. The family head hoed a small patch of land and decorated the area with *peero* (wild reed) and cotton threads. After that, *apong* (rice beer), *purang* (packed boiled rice), *take* (ginger) and *si-pag* (cotton) are placed within that decorated area and sown the seeds over the area by chanting prayers to forefathers, gods and goddesses to make mother earth fertile for abundant grains and promised that, they will provide share of the harvest to the priest and the benefactors and fed the beggars. Only remaining part of the product they will use.

Some rituals are performed at households during this festival. At home, devotees placed *poro apong* (rice beer) and *purang*(boiled rice) in the four corners of the *meram* (fire place) and pray for good harvest. The Mishing believe that they have originated from *Donyipolo* (sun and moon god) and it is necessary to remember god at any auspicious occasion. Guests are invited and served with holy *apong*, *purong* and special dishes prepared with fish. Singing and dancing are most highlighting and important features of this festival. Community dance are performed during the festival known as *Gumrag-soman* or *Pokso-manam* .Wearing traditional colourful dresses, the Mishing youth visit every household of the village starting from the easternmost corner. In the courtyard, they dance encircling and wish the benefit of the host by cry out *Ali-ali-ai*. Householders treat them with food and drink. Moving in a circle depict the eternal circle of days after night and arrival of Spring after Winter. They believe that, by performing *Gumrag soman*, they can appease *Koje-Yango*, the goddess of fertility.

Generally, the festival continuous for five days. During the festival, they observe certain taboos. They do not take any important works specially in the paddy field, catching fish, burning jungles, ploughing field are some activities that strictly prohibited during that time. This period of abstention is known as *yotnam*. *Yotnam* is broken off by a ceremony called *Liga-Liglen*. All the forefathers and gods and goddesses are call upon to say the words that, the self-imposed prohibitions are being lifted. Worship of Bihu god is another important feature of Ligang. The Mishing youth perform the ceremony in a nearby forest where they raise a dais for the deity and plant a sapling of silk-cotton near. Round the dais, they perform dance

at night and end up ceremony by lighting lamp on dais and offering prayer to god. The festival Ali-AI-Ligang comes to end with a community feast known as *Dupan Tipan* .Everybody join the feast gladly and conclude the ceremony.

3.8.2 Po-rag

Like Ali-ai-Ligang, Po-rag or Nara Chiga Bihu is also a harvesting festival of the Mishings held in the month of *Ahin* (September-October).The youth are the main organizer of the festival. When the harvesting of crops become over, the Mishing community celebrate Po-rag festival to appease their forefathers and mother earth to get blessing from them .The arrangements of the festival is very expensive and elaborate and because of that, the festival is celebrated at an interval of five years or more. The term Po-rag conveys the sense of ‘The grand reunion festival’ (Sarma, 2002: 100).The *Murong* (public hall) is an integral part of the festival. In early days, the Mishings had the dormitories for unmarried boys in *Murong* .At the time of Po-rag festival, *Murong* are newly constructed and decorated for this special occasion. ‘*Murong*- a public hall is constructed every time for the purpose with wooden posts and beams and covered by thatch. The post and beams are decorated with primitive wood curving which include invariably an image of a fish with scale and a trunk called ‘birbik’ or mosondori’ (Kuli,1998:39). ‘Special people think it to be the image of goddess of wealth or fertility. However, sun, moon, stars and various other designs like birds, circle, square of assorted kinds are also added and painted yellow, green and white’ (Pegu,2005:85). Young adult organization *mimbiryame*, bear all the responsibilities to make the festival success. Porag festival begins on Wednesday. A conical bamboo cage called *Pobor* is being made and keeps hanging from the ceiling

of *Murong*. On the day of function, people allow to pour the first pale of water through bamboo cage *Pobor*. Everybody pray by shouting in full throat. It is known as *Rebatla Penam*. Swine, full grown pigs are sacrificed in the name of ancestors and arrange a feast for the crowd. The *Mibu* (priest) lead the prayer dance *Mibu-Sumnam* at night where all the members of *mimberyame* take part. Though the presence of *Mibu* was compulsory in early days to conduct the ceremony, now most of the time, the festival is performing without the priest. Second day of Porag festival is spending for the invitees. Special guest are feed with heavy feast and give farewell to them. Then, with the prayer dance *Ponu nunam*, this festival comes to an end.

Besides the above mentioned festivals some other festivals are also celebrated by the Mishings. Some of these are

(i) Dobur Uii

Dobur Uii is another festival of the Mishings, which have three types- Burte Dobur, Arig Dobur and Dolung Dobur. When the paddy begins flowering, Arig Dobur or Mopun Dobur ceremony is perform to protect the paddy from pest and pestilence. It is celebrated by the families for the welfare of their crops. On the other hand, for a healthy and prosperous life Dolung Dobur is performed by the villagers together. Women are not allowed to attend the festival. Business transactions with outsiders of the village are also suspended on the eve of the ceremony. Dobur Uii is a grand celebration of the Mishing and to signify the festival, post of reeds is put in the entrance of the village. In the morning of festival day, the male members visit every household and demanding for contributions. Householders offer rice beer, fowls, and pigs according to their capacity. After getting the contributions, the male

folk brought those collections to an open space in outskirts of the village. There they place an altar of dragon swallowing an egg made from a kind of fern and wild grasses and keep the altar facing the rising sun. It is believed that, Dragon represents earth, and source of productivity and the egg is the symbol of life. The devotees sacrifice fowls in front of the idols by hitting on it with some incantations. This festival is basically performed by the male members of the village for the welfare of the society.

(ii) Urom Posum

Urom Posum is an ancestor worship of the Mishings, who believe that their forefathers (*Urom-posum*) are responsible for the happiness and welfare of the family. They also believe that soul of the deceased reside in the land of spirits for at least five generation and occasionally visit their relatives. They sometime may be malicious and catastrophic. So, to ward off those spirits, they observe some taboos and sacrifices well grown pigs in front of a mass.

3.9 Festivals of the Karbi

The Karbi, popularly known as Mikir, is an important tribe distributed over hills and plains of Assam. This mongoloid group of people is mainly spread in Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Kamrup district of Assam. Physically they are of yellowish complexion, medium height, noses are flat and eyes are small. On the basis of habitation, Karbi are divided into three groups- Chinthong, Ronghang or Nilip Ronghang and Amri or Amri Marlong. Socially they follow patriarchal system of family structure. Father is the supreme of family. Clan exogamy is the compulsory condition of marriage, because they consider same clan members as

relatives. Karbi has five *Kur* or clan and each clan has a number of sub clan. Marriage by negotiation, marriage by capture is found among them. Widow remarriage is allowed by the Karbis. Agriculture is their mainstay and both shifting and wet cultivation are practiced by them. Besides paddy, they cultivate fruits, pulse, areca nut, vegetables, betel leaves, maize, turmeric, yam etc. They also rear animals like cow, goat, buffalo, duck etc. Weaving is the integral part of Karbi culture, which is a female domain. Rice beer is their favorite beverage and they brew it in each household. Rice beer is used in every religious occasion and guests are also entertained with it. By religion, the Karbi are animist. However, due to the close contact with the neighboring Hindu and impact of Christian missionaries, sections of Karbi have adopted Hindu and Christianity.

Table 3.6 Festivals of the Karbis of Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Margashisha</i>	<i>Magh</i>	January-February	Magh Domahi
2	<i>Agrahayana</i>	<i>Aghon</i>	November-December	Ba'la Ketar
3	<i>Phalguna</i>	<i>Phagun</i>	February-March	Dehal
4	<i>Baisakh</i>	<i>Bohag</i>	April-May	Jahang, Domahi
5	<i>Jaistha -Ashada</i>	<i>Jeth -Ahar</i>	June	Rongkher
6	<i>Bhadra</i>	<i>Bhada</i>	August	Kurmi
7	<i>Aswina</i>	<i>Ahin</i>	September	Chomangkan
8	<i>Kartika</i>	<i>Kati</i>	October	Kati Domahi
9	<i>Pausha</i>	<i>Puh</i>	December	Na-Khawa Utsav

3.9.1 Ba'la Keter

To welcome the rainy weather, Karbi celebrate Ba'la Keter festival. In the month of *Aghon* (November- December), a group of Karbi (*pinapa*) worship rain gods Hemphu, Mukrang and goddess Rachingja. This ceremony is performed by the royal priest (*kathar burha*).

3.9.2 Dehal

Dehal means community worshipping place which is the indispensable part of every Karbi village. Dehal is the corrupt version of the word 'Deosal'. The word 'Deosal' is the contribution of two Assamese words, 'deo' and 'sal', 'deo' means 'god' and 'sal' means the 'place'. Dehal is a harvesting festival. In ancient time, the Karbis practiced only jhum cultivation and for good and abounded crops they perform this fertility rite before starting of jhum cultivation. Dehal festival continues for three days. The first Tuesday of the *Phagun* month (February-March), is taken as auspicious day by Karbi society and because of that, this festival is celebrated on that day. Formally the worship begins on Monday and people give the final touch in the preparation, but the main rituals are done on Tuesday. Wednesday is the ending day of the festival. One month before the festival, villagers appoint two men for the posts of *Talukdar*. To collect the contribution and rice from every household of the village and preparation of rice beer are the primary duty of *Talukdar*. Apart from these, look after the whole preparation of the ceremony and help the village girls in marketing and preparing traditional food items are also look after by the *Talukdars*. The main deities of this festival are Shiva (Tamlong or Burhagohain),

Devi Parvati (Jhilimi), and Ganesha (Baliya). The Karbis believed that there are various reasons behind the celebration of this festival. According to them, for the welfare of the people and their domestic animals from the wild animals, this ritual is performed. The Karbi people also believe that, natural calamities are caused by some supernatural powers and to protect them from that plight, the worship was originally practiced.

3.9.3 Jahang

One of important festivals of the plain Karbis is Jahang. Karbi god of war is worshipped in this festival. The Karbi offer prayer to the god at the month of *Bohag* (April-may). They use to worship Jahang before starting a battle in olden days. To drive away the evil forces and welcomes the benign power, the Karbis celebrate the festival with their pristine customs. It is a new year festival starts on the third day of *Bohag* month and continues for two days. There is no fixed day or time for this festival, but traditionally it starts on the day of Garu Bihu (cow worship) and formally ends on Sat Bihu (seventh day of Bohag Bihu). Because it is a very expensive festival, Jahang is not celebrated every year. The festival is celebrated at the house of the Karbi priest (*Bangthai*). On the day of the festival, the villagers gathered at the priest's house for preparation. The whole villagers enjoy the festival in a musical mood. Offering respect to god, the community members perform war dance in the rhythm of flute (*murip*) and drum (*seng*) during that time. The priest is the initiator of the ceremony. Incantation is recited by the priest to satisfy the god of war and he performs all rituals very consciously. After completion of the ceremony,

the male members visit every household of the village and perform traditional songs and dance in the rhythm of musical instruments.

3.9.4 Rongker

Rongker is a pre- harvesting New Year festival, celebrated by the Karbis of Assam. It can also be termed as seasonal as well as agricultural festival. In the month of *Jeth-Ahar* (June) of every year, the Karbis perform Rongker, where different gods and goddesses are propitiated for the welfare of the society. They believe that, benediction of deities could protect their village from natural calamities, diseases, and other unwanted events. The Karbi celebrate Rongker to please god for good harvest also. Generally, elderly male folk of the community take part in this ritual but participation of women is strictly tabooed. On the day of the festival, male folk assembled together and pray to god Arnam Pharau to protect the people from all dangers and evils. After that they sacrifices goat, fowl, pigeons to god and participants eat cooked flesh of sacrificed animals with rice beer. Singing and dancing are not integral to this festival. After every five year, the Karbis perform another kind of Rongker called, Wonfong Rongker. It is also celebrated for the welfare of the society, where the participants come from the neighboring villages also. Village headmen and elderly villagers represent their own villages. But the Rongker is limited within a particular village.

3.9.5 Kurmi

Karbi believe in the power of nature. They believe that, because of supernatural power, natural calamities are happened. They worship different gods and goddesses

to protect themselves from those calamities. For pouring rain, plain Karbi celebrate this Kurmi festival. In drought season, plain Karbi worship the god of rain, i.e., Kurmi. To perform the ceremony, devotees gather in a particular area of the village and do all the necessary preparation. The aged persons of the community offer prayers to Kurmi in a particular manner and other members follow their instructions. When the incantations are chanted, young boys and girls continue their singing and dancing. These songs and dances are related to the prayer and the Karbis believe that, this genre of musical performance is necessary to satisfy the god of rain. Dances are performed on bamboos and the youth spend whole night at the worshipping place by singing and dancing.

3.9.6 Chomangkan

Chomangkan is an important death rite of the Karbis. It is very expensive ceremony and because of that, it is generally performed by the well to do Karbi families only. Etymologically, Chomangkan means 'Khasi-dance'. 'According to Goswami (2003:67). The original name of the funeral ceremony was Arleng Karki; the term was replaced by the term Chomangkan perhaps during the period when the Karbis were compelled by circumstances to live in Jaintiapur, the land of the Khasis and Jaintias'. There are three genres of Chomangkan, these are-Harne, Langtuk and Kanplapha. Harne is more expensive than the others. This kind of Chomangkan is confined to higher status and economically sound Karbis. Langtuk Chomangkan is famous among the middle class Karbis and the Kanplapha is practiced by the common Karbi. Chomangkan is a three days celebration, for which preparation starts one month before. Numbers of invitees become five hundred to one thousand

in these three days and according to that, sufficient country liquor, meat of pig and other animal and black tea are prepared. For special guest and elderly people, camps are erected in a specific area. Dance and songs are essential parts of the Chomangkan. The songs sung by the unmarried Karbi boys are related to fertility cult and, therefore, many people have seen the Chomangkan with harvest rite. This festival has no fixed date or time of celebration and it depends on the convenience of the people. The first day of the Chomangkan is known as Rukehum, second day is Kanas and the third day is known as Kanapi Nad. Chomangkan is generally held outside the village. *Uchepi* (weeper) and *Duihudi* (master drummer) are two most important persons of the festival. They play vital roles in smooth functioning of the festival. *Uchepi* is an elderly lady, who is well in singing of the songs of lamentation. She is a professional weeper and conversant with all the rituals like cooking of special food and the offering manner to the deceased one. Maternal uncle's family members of the departed also play an important role in the festival. Compare to the other musical instruments, the use of drums in the Chomangkan festival is more extensive. The master drummer of the Chomangkan is familiar to every stages of the ceremony and leads drummers' party that accompanies the ceremony.

3.9.7 Na-Khowa

Na-Khowa or new rice eating festival has been percolated to the plain Karbi society from the Assamese culture. After harvest, they first offer the new rice to household deities and after that, they arrange a community feast for the villagers. This ceremony is generally held at night. All the villagers including male and

females are gathered at the feasting area at evening time and become busy for the night feast. Youngsters, especially marriageable boys and girls, take part in singing and dancing. They spend the whole night there. Elderly villagers also participate in this ceremony and they perform all the traditional customs that related to this ceremony.

3.10 Festivals of the Rabha

The Rabha is one of a branch of the Boro group. This tribe belongs to the Tibeto Burman stock of the Sino Tibetan or Tibeto Chinese family. Physically Rabha have all the Mongolian features like round face with flat nose, oblique eyes prominent cheek bones, short stature and scanty body hair. They mostly scattered in undivided districts of Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang. Among these, a huge amount of Rabha population found in Goalpara. Rabha society is a patriarchal society. Marriage by negotiation is traditionally prevalent and clan exogamy is strictly followed. Widow remarriage is practiced, but child marriage is unknown to them. Agriculture is their mainstay. They are mainly agriculturist. Besides paddy, they cultivate jute, tobacco, pulses, mustard, sugar cane etc. Rice is their staple food. Fish, both fresh and dry are taken with rice. Rice beer is integral part of Rabha culture. The womenfolk are expert in spinning, weaving and other household works. Animism is their traditional religion; but now a good number of Rabha abandoned animism and adopted Hinduism. A considerable number of Rabha adhered Christianity also. There are few divisions of Rabha tribe; these are: Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Totla, Bitlia, Dahuri, Changa and Koch. Acceptance of Hinduism has brought numerous changes in the Rabha life and culture. Assimilation with the neighboring Assamese Hindus

influenced the Rabha immensely and for that the Pati Rabhas have lost their language and at present speak Assamese.

Table 3.7: Festivals of the Rabhas of Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Margashisha</i>	<i>Magh</i>	January-February	Magh Bihu
2	<i>Phalguna-Jaistha</i>	<i>Phagun-Jeth</i>	February-June	Mare or Marai
3	<i>Baisakh</i>	<i>Bohag</i>	April-May	Baikho, Hanaghora
4	<i>Baisakh-Jaistha</i>	<i>Bohag-Jeth</i>	April-June	Kechai Khaiti, Langa worship
5	<i>Jaistha</i>	<i>Jeth</i>	May-June	Hasang
6	<i>Kartika</i>	<i>Kati</i>	October-November	Kati Bihu

3.10.1 Mare or Marai Worship

One of an important Spring time ritual of the Rabha is Mare worship, held in the month of *Phagun Jeth* - (February –June). To appease goddess Mare (authority of epidemic and serpent) for protection from disease, distress, serpents bite, peace and prosperity. Earlier, the duration of this celebration was seven days and seven nights. Due to various reasons, now it confined to three days or less. Three day worship of Mare is called Gota Marai and if it completed in one night and one day only it called as Phul Marai and only day long celebration is known as Jagar Diya Marai. Along with goddess Mare, some other deities are also appeased in this festival.

Worshipping of Marai is a community festival but sometime, to fulfill particular desire she is worshipped by a household also. Some particular songs and dances are integral to Mare worship. Along with the traditional songs and dances, Mare is propitiated by scarifying he goat or buffalo.

3.10.2 Baikho Festival

Among the different groups of the Rabhas, the Rangdani and the Maitori groups celebrate this ritual cum festival to appease goddess Baikho, the goddess of crop and war. Every year in the month of *Bohag* (April-May), especially prior to the agricultural activities, Baikho festival is observed by these groups with three to seven days preparation. Earlier it was observed for seven days and night continuously, but now the duration confined to three days and night only. The very first day is dedicated for purificatory rite known as *Nak Khitharkay*. On this day; people purified the houses and wiped their courtyards with clay and cow dung, wash their cloths, cooking utensils etc. After sunset, *oja* (priest) and *pali* (assistant) visit every houses of the village and by throwing rice powder on the roof invites all the villagers to participate in the festival. This practice is called *Nak Junkay*. Householders entertained them with rice beer. After the completion of the ceremony, the priest and his helper visit chief priest's house and begin the signing ceremony of *Haymaru* song. These songs are sung in memory of the Rabha heroes and heroines, who dedicated their life for the welfare of the community. The priest continue the singing for the whole night and nobody can sleep until the ceremony is over.

Worshipping of deity of the wealth and crop, Lakshmi, is also carried on for the abundant crop. On the second day, the main festival begins by worshipping goddess Baykho along with other deities. The Priest with other devotees offers prayer at a particular place and sacrifice pigs, fowls and offer rice beer. After the completion of all rites, they enjoy feast and return to the village by singing and dancing. The villagers who are not going to that worshipping place, planned to stop them entering the village. For that with the branches and sapling of trees, they construct an artificial fort in front of the village and prevent the journey of the returning group. At that time, a mock fight begun, but after a long run the worshippers defeated by the preventers. Failure of worshipper indicates that, the forest spirits are defeated and they are driven back to the forest. This dramatic performance is called *Killa-Dibikay*.

After the performance, both the parties sit there and utter hymns and pray for the blessings of the goddess Baikho. At the public courtyard, a rope pulling is being held between two groups which is called *Leoa-Bikay*. Other traditional games, songs and dances are also performed by the young boys and girls. After those, all of them gather at the chief priest's courtyard where the priest performs necessary rituals to appease the goddess Baykho. At the time of prayer, two other appointed persons (*Sutula-Sutuli*) start singing *Haymaru* songs and others dance to the tune of the songs. *Haymaru* songs are believed as holy and spiritual and because of that, it is forbidden to sing these songs except on the time of Baykho worship. A little distance from the priest's house, the unmarried youths sing and dance (*Baikho-trakkay*). This ceremony continues from the evening to the next morning. Songs of *Baikho-trakkay* are ironical in nature and sung between the groups of boys and girls

in conversational mood but in a musical tune, participation of married or aged person in this function is strictly prohibited. Persons are also appointed to judge this completion. It is a customary to perform marriage between the boys' leader and the leader of the girls.

3.10.3 Hanaghora

Hanaghora is a Spring time cultural festival of the Pati Rabhas, celebrated at the time of Bohag Bihu (April-May). The Rabha community worship Hanaghora as the god of fortune and this festival is observed for the welfare of the entire community. With the help of bamboo and black and white coloured cloth, a horse like structure is being built and the people worship it as Hanaghora. 'The horse is supposed to represent the one used by the companions of 'Mahadeva' during his sojourn after the death of 'Mahasati' at the Daksha-Yajna'(Bordoloi et al., 1987:140). Dances are also performed to appease the god for the welfare of the community. Though it is a Rabha festival, some other tribal people also seen to perform the ceremony as an impact of diffusion.

3.10.4 Kechai-Khaiti Worship

Kechai-Khaiti is a religious festival of the Rabhas which is also known as Hawal Kheda. Kechai Khaiti is presumed to be the goddess who can keep under control the evil power and protect the people from their plight. No sacrifice is performed in this worship. As a symbol of sacrifice, every items of offering are put in a small boat made of plaintain sheath and keep in the flowing river water. After the sacrifice, the devotees never look back to the boat. During the festival, the

youths visit each household of the village and beat on the wall. By doing this, evil spirits are believed to be driven out from their abode. Kechai Khaiti propitiation is also observed during the month of April and June. Sometime the worship holds simultaneously with the appeasement of Langa, one of the principal gods of the Rabhas.

3.10.5 Langa Worship

Langa worship is mainly observed by the Pati Rabhas. To have profuse yield of crop and also to get relief from the influence of evil spirits, propitiation of Langa is done by the Pati Rabhas every year in the month of *Bohag* or *Jeth* (mid-April to mid-June). Along with Langa, some other deities are also appeased in this ritual. The ritual is generally performed in the forest or in the bank of a river. Every deity is represented by different pieces of fine stone. Langa is also worshipped by the Rangdani Rabhas.

3.10.6 Hasang Worship

Hasang is the main deity of the Rangdani group of Rabha. Though the worship procedure of Hasang is different in various regions, the festival is held every year in the month of *Jeth* (May-June) for good health, prosperity and good crop. Devotees who wish to participate in Hasang festival must follow a pure daily life. Prior to the day of the ceremony, the worshipping place is cleaned and decorated by the villagers. Houses are also purified, cloths, and utensils are cleaned on the festival day. In the early morning, *oja* (priest) and his assistant with all the villagers collect all the heams of offering and go to the worshipping place. Compare to the Baykho, worship

of Hasang is simple and less conservative and it comprises of thirteen other deities. Each deity is identified with flat triangular stone and worshipped according to their position. Rice beer and fowl are sacred offering for Hasang festival. A special kind of curry *phok-chak* is offered to all the deities. After the offering, a specially prepared dish is consumed by the attenders. It is believed that, the food is medicated in nature and its consumption can prevent people from many diseases. After performing the rites, the devotees kneel down before the deities and the priest utter hymns for the welfare of the community. Then the assembled persons enjoy a community feast. The atmosphere becomes electric and festive in the rhythm of music and dance. Then the attenders come back to the main priest's house. There they consume rice beer and spend the whole night by enjoying the musical performance.

Khokchi is one of the principal goddess of the Rabhas. The word '*khok*' means 'a long bamboo basket' and '*chi*' means 'blood'. The meaning of Khokchi practically shown when pigs are sacrificed during the worship of the goddess and filled the long bamboo containers with blood and offer to the goddess. Along with the worship of Khokchi and other thirty two deities are also appeased. Every deity is worshipped by different worshippers. The chief worshipper supervises the others. Pig is the essential offering for the ritual. At the south -east corner of the village, the worshipper prepare *phok-chak* at a big furnace. Each man present there consume only rice beer prepared and brought by his wife. Other than worshippers, nobody is allowed to take part in this feast. After the worship, they come out from the place in a backward movement and hold a long poisonous arrow made of iron and a bunch of peacock's feathers. The chief priest shoots an arrow on split bamboos that place on

the trunk of mango tree. The priest must strike on the bamboos, otherwise he will pretend as unpurified and fined by the public. At about midnight, the worshippers go to the nearby field where they built seven storied crematorium. The worshippers then start singing and dancing and make a long row with the burning ashes of crematorium. Everybody must cross the row with bare foot. Some unmarried girls standing at the end of the row wash their feet. If anybody's legs burn, he recognizes as impure and as a punishment he must entertain the villagers with huge quantity of rice beer.

3.11 Festivals of the Dimasa

One of an important branch of great Boro group is Dimasa, they scattered over hills and plains of Assam. Linguistically, they are the members of Tibeto-Burman family and culturally belong to the Indo Mongoloid. Etymologically '*di*' means 'water', '*ma*' means 'big' and '*sa*' is for children, that means 'children of a big river'. They are mainly settled in the Karbi Anglong and Cachher districts of Assam. They are also live in some areas of Meghalaya. Tribe endogamy and clan lineage exogamy are rigidly followed by Dimasas. Marriage by negotiation is the acceptable form. They are monogamous and cross cousin marriage is practiced by them. Basically they are animists, though good number of them has adopted Hinduism and Christianity. Existence of both patrilineal and matrilineal decent are found among them.

Table 3.8: Festivals of the Dimasas of Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Phalguna-Chaitra</i>	<i>Phagun-Chot</i>	February-March	Busu
2	<i>Pausha-Margashisha</i>	<i>Puh-Magh</i>	December-January	Rajni Garba/Harni Garba/Magh Sanjora

3.11.1 Busu

Busu or Basagi Sanjora is the Spring or pre harvesting festival of the Dimasas. There is no fixed time for celebration of Busu, it is generally observe once in every year during the month of *Phagun* (February- March), after harvesting of paddy. The date of celebration is being fixed by the consent of villagers and within the period of thirty days after meeting, Busu is supposed to be celebrated. It is a harvesting as well as New Year festival of Dimasa tribe. There are three types of Busu- Surem, Hangshew and Jidab. Busu celebrate with three to five days duration is known as Surem-Surem. This Busu is observe in abbreviated form and because of that most of the Dimasa prefer to celebrate Surem Bisu compare to Hangshew Busu.

Busu is the most elaborate and expensive festival of the Dimasas and responsibilities of its celebration is shouldered by the youths. During the observance of the festival, the Dimasa observe 'no working' with some rigid taboos (*genma*). In terms of time, Hangshew is the oldest, longest and very expensive form of Busu, which is observed at an interval of five or seven years or a year, when the paddy

field blessed with good harvest. It is mandatory to end the Busu either on Tuesday or Saturday. Busu is a community festival and a big celebration of the Dimasa. To conduct the festival, the youths select two boys and two girls among them as their leader. About a month ahead of the festival, youth select a man (*Gajaibao*) who can guide them to carry out the ceremony systematically. Busu festival is celebrated in the courtyard of *Gajaibao*. Long before the actual celebration, the youth get busy in collection of fund, firewood and other necessary items. For the collection of money, they sometime work as wage worker in paddy field. The young women of the village assist youth in every step. Irrespective of sex and age, the entire village get involved in the festival and the villagers working outside, come to take part in the ceremony.

During Busu, huge quantity of rice beer is consumed which is prepared by the village women for the ceremony. The old men of the village make bamboo mugs for drinking rice beer and bamboo baskets to keep necessary items. According to ability, everybody try to make their contribution for the ceremony. During the festival, the unmarried boys and girls cook food for the participants. On the occasion of Busu, an artistically designed and beautifully decorated gate has been erected at the entrance of the village. First day of Busu festival is known as *Bususataiba*, the day of killing. On this day, animals specially pigs, fowls and buffalos are killed and people consume the meat in a community feast. On that day, at the afternoon the villagers gather at the courtyard of village headman and the middle aged menfolk sing devotional songs. Following them, the youth announce about the formal beginning of Busu and welcome the guests by uttering incantations. After that, the elderly villagers are entertained with rice beer, meat and vegetable curry. The male guests

are usually sit in the open space of the courtyard and the female sit inside the house. When the partaking of food is over, traditional singing and dancing in accompaniment of musical instrument begin and continue till next morning. The most important ritual of this day is *Busugaba*, the paying ceremonial homage to elders with new cloth and *loothai* (rice beer in small gourd pot) at midday. Offering is first made to parents. Next to them, offering are paid to the members of patriclan, matriclan and affinal kin. When the ceremony of *busugaba* is over, the young boys and girls visit every household by wearing traditional dresses and seek the blessings from elders.

On the day of *Busuma* (second day of festival), offerings are paid to the deceased of the previous year and sever the tie with the dead. Community feast is held on the day of *Busuma* also. People close their domestic works on that day but rice beer, meat and vegetables curry make ready to entertain the guests. To enhance the prestige and social status, the rich families entertain lavishly the villagers and guests. For such feast, invitation is not essential. After the completion of the feast, the young boys organize the local games and sports in front of the *Nodrung* (bachelor dormitory). When the game programme is over, young men visit the village headmen's house and demand honorarium for organizing the sport programme. As per the customary rule, the headmen entertained the group of young men with rice beer a lump sum amount. Later, the youth spend the whole night by singing and dancing. Compare to the first two days, remaining days are celebrate in a simple manner. Singing, dancing and feasting are common activities for every day.

Hangshew is another kind of Busu celebrates in the month of *Magh* (January-February). It is the most expensive as well as elaborates form of Busu. During the

seven days of celebration many customs, rites and rituals have to follow and because of that, the preparation of the ceremony starts before one year. Celebration of the festival decided in an informal meeting where all the young boys and girls of the village give their opinion. If everybody agrees, then the decision about the celebration of Hangshew inform to their headman. The youth make a working committee and divided the responsibilities among them. *Gajaibao* is also selected by the village people. The youth who are in charge of a post for Busu, must have parents. They hold their post for one year. Prior to one year, the youth working in the paddy field to earn the money for Busu. It is customary for the youth to work for *Gajaibao* without any remuneration. This Busu continues for seven days and all the young boy and girl workers have to stay at *Gajaibao's* house during this period.

First day of the festival is known as *Nagaraoni Sataiba*. On this day, the unmarried youth kill the animals, specially buffaloes, which are consumed in feast during Busu. The villagers gather at *Gajaibao's* house and take part in community feast with meat and rice beer. Second day is celebrated as *Haingaraoni Sataiba*. The activities of this day are like the previous days. Food provided to *Naga-mla*(young boys and girls) by *Gajaibao* and *Subajiba* (specially prepared food) taken by young girls and boys equally. Third day is called *Busuma* and this is the most important day of this *Busu*. Different sport and game competitions are held on this day and youngsters take *Subajiba* at *Gajaibao's* place along with their parents. Youngers take blessings from elders and offer rice beer. In the evening, people sacrifice two chicks to god and pray for the welfare of the village. After the completion of the ritual, musical session start with the tune of *Khram-muri* (drum-flute) and rhythm of *Baidima* (traditional dance).It is a tradition of Dimasa society to play the *Khram*

(*drum*) *muri* (flute) continuously five days and night without any interruption. On the fourth day, the youth visit village headmen's house to perform *Baisingba* (traditional dance) for collection of money and the headman give them monetary amount in return. On the fifth, sixth and seventh day, villagers perform traditional dance. *Khram-muri* (drum-flute) stops to be played before noon, on the eighth day. After that, the people broke the *Gajaibao's* door and bring the door to river in a dancing mood. In the river, the *Hoja* (priest) keep an egg in a bamboo basket and perform some rites. Everybody go to the river pray the egg and take bath by throwing different leaves. The *Gajaibao's* door immersed in the river. After taking bath, all people return to the village. After that, the girls who have been staying at *Gajaibao's* house during the festival go back to their respective houses.

3.11.2 Rajini Garba and Harni Garba

For the welfare and prosperity of the community and to protect people from natural calamities and diseases, Rajni Garba and Harni Garba are celebrated once in a year, before starting the new cultivation. Rajini Garba is celebrated at day time while, Harni Garba performs at night. *Khunang* (village headman) perform the Rajini Garba ceremony where he worships his family deity. He gets up early in the morning on that day of festival to get himself purified. He at first takes his bath at river or stream and formally closes both the entrance of the village with *thang* (sacrificial sword) and the bamboo sticks on a circle. Before sunrise, *Khunang* complete all these work. When the works are over, *Dilo* (assistant village headman) announces that, nobody can go outside the village and for the whole day, none should engage in any work. After the announcement, the male folk of the village

gather at the village outskirts and after ceremonial sacrifice, a community feast follows. By late afternoon, all the rites of *Rajini Garba* come over and the *Dilo* proclaim the ending of the ceremony.

In Harni Garba, the rites are the same as Rajini Garba, but it is celebrated at night and the deity worshipped in this ceremony is Harni and his associates. The requirements needed for celebration of the festivals are collected from every household at a fixed rate. It is obligatory for householders to pay this contribution. Usually, village elders fixed the rate at a meeting.

3.12 Festivals of the Tiwa

One of the major scheduled tribes of Assam is the Tiwa (Lalung), who belong to the Indo-mongoloid stock. Socially and linguistically they belong to the Boro group. Their main concentrations are found in Morigaon, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat and Kamrup districts of Assam. They are distributed over both in hills and plains. They have medium statured physique with yellow skin, prominent eyes and mesorrhine nose. Physically they are very strong and healthy. Tiwa society is patrilineal in nature and clan exogamy is strictly followed in context of marriage. Cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among them. Though, the monogamy and polygamy marriages are present in Tiwa society, monogamy is well recognized. The Tiwas are agriculturists. In hills, they practice jhum and in plains wet system. Basketry and weaving are household industries of the Tiwa society. Weaving is the domain of Tiwa womenfolk. The plain Tiwas are followers of Hinduism. Lord Shiva is their supreme deity. Compared to plain Tiwa, hill Tiwas are being able to maintain some of their pristine customs.

Table 3.9: Festivals of the Tiwas of Assam

Sl No.	Name of the		Corresponding English month	Festivals observed
	Indian month	Assamese month		
1	<i>Margasisha</i>	<i>Magh</i>	January-February	Jonbil Mela/Magh Bisu
2	<i>Phalguna</i>	<i>Phagun</i>	February-March	Sagra Misawa
3	<i>Baisakh</i>	<i>Bohag</i>	April-May	Bisu
4	<i>Kartika</i>	<i>Kati</i>	October	Kati Bisu
5	<i>Pausha-Margasisha</i>	<i>Puh-Magh</i>	December-January	Barat

3.12.1 Jon Beel Mela

Jon Beel mela is a very famous and traditional fair of the Tiwas held on the eve of Magh Bihu. This fair is generally begins on Friday and continues for two to three days. The fair is held near a big natural water source (*beel*). It is believed that, by the name of the lake, the fair become popular as Jon Beel. A big fair (*mela*) is organized in this festival. The Gobha Raja (Tiwa king) inaugurates the fair and with his permission, people take part in fishing in the lake. Though, the Gobha king has no political or administrative power, they have a social recognition. A traditional mode of trading is maintained in this fair. Besides Tiwa, neighboring Assamese and Jaintias from Meghalaya also use to come to the fair every year. In the fair, locally produced products are exchanged. The hill people deals with plains and procure the products like dried fish, medicinal herbs, and homemade cakes vegetables, betel nuts, etc. by bartering with ginger, turmeric, other vegetable products, etc. Jon Beel mela is a symbol of unity. The colourful dresses and traditional ornaments of the

visitors make it more attractive. Dance and songs of different ethnic groups also exhibit during the fair. Jon Beel mela is one of an important pristine trading fair of North East India and every year, a good number of tourist use to come to see the fair.

3.12.2 Sagra Misawa

To enrich the fertility of the mother earth, the Tiwas celebrate Sagra Misawa dance festival in the month of *Phagun* (February-March). It is a Spring dance festival. 'The Tiwa word '*sagra*' means all, while '*misawa*' means dance. Hence, the Sagra Misawa festival means that, Tiwa must join the festival and dance and sing the same' (Pathak et al., 2008:13). As the duration of the festival is quite long, it needs a huge preparation. It begins on a Wednesday of February month and continuous to second week of March, especially to a Monday. For the ceremony, preparation begins almost four five months ahead. Before the formal performance of Sagra Misawa, Tiwas offer worship to Langkhum and Mahadeo and sacrifice fowls, pigeons, duck and goats to appease the god. The festival songs related to this have sexual impulses. Observing processes of the ceremony vary from area to area. Use of masks is a significant feature of this dance festival. Dancers using masks are called *nartakas*. They also wear *taglas* (shirt) and *dhoti* (a piece of long cloth) having embroidered in the whole body. The performance continues for the whole day and after performing in three household, the party takes rest and spend the night at third household, where they are well entertained by the householders. Like this, the party perform Sagra dance in the residences of twelve respectable persons in three days and night. After that, the party come back to the village and keeps their

dresses and musical instruments in *samadhi* (bachelor dormitory). It is interesting that, the persons take part in the festival have to wear the dresses until the end of the ceremony. Seven days later, the dancers again come out in dancing costumes and walk round the village. On that day, community worships offered to the deities at *than* and the dancing party formally removes their masks and place on the branches of trees. Next day, all the villagers take part in a community feast and ends up the Sagra Misawa festival.

3.12.3 Bihu or Bisu

For the welfare of the human being and good harvest, the Tiwas observe Bihu or Bisu festival with great mirth and merriment; but the time of observance is vary from place to place. They perform three Bihus, among which the Baisak Bisu is special and celebrates with much pomp and fanfare. Baisak Bisu is generally observed on Wednesday in the month of *Bohag* (April-May). The preparation for necessary arrangements of it begin a month ahead. Worship are offered at *than* (prayer place). On the day of the festival, villagers come to the *Barghar* (community hall) early in the morning. There they cut vegetables in pieces and arrange in slices of bamboo to be thrown over cows. The *Gharbura* offers prayer to god and sacrifice a fowl in front of the community hall. During Bisu, offering prayer to deities is a common practice and scarifying fowl is compulsory. During the cow worship, the Tiwa priest sprinkle holy water mixed with rice powder on cowshed, kitchen, granary, etc. and when the worship is over, the bodies of cows are imprinted with paste of mustard oil and charcoal. Cattles are then taken to river or pond for bath. On this day, sport competitions are also held. After completion of all rituals, elderly

villagers are entertained with local dishes with rice beer (*zu*) at *barghar* (community hall).

In the evening, women light earthen lamps and illuminate the surroundings of the village. With the mixture of rice powder and water, agricultural implements are purified and prayers are performed at the courtyard. A white fowl is sacrificed. Womenfolk prepare traditional dishes and serve the guest with rice beer. Tiwas also take indigenous medicine during *Bisu*. They believe that, the consumption of indigenous medicine can prevent themselves from the attack of snake. Singing and dancing continues for seven days. During Baisak Bisu, some other ceremonies like Joratola, Gosain uliwa utsava are also performed by the Tiwas. Joratola festival is observed to welcome the new agricultural year. Goasin uliwa utsava performed by the plain Tiwas. Time of celebration is decided by the elderly villagers and arrangement begins immediately. Two big pandals are being constructed in an open field. The pandal made for Raja (king) and four officers face East- West direction and other Pandals constructed to keep the idols of deities face North- South direction.

On the ceremony day, villagers use to sing religious songs inside the *Namghar* (Vaishnavite prayer house) and in the outside, young boys perform dance by holding shield and sword in hands. After some time, a group of people singing religious songs along with the musical instruments and come out from the prayer house and the images of the god and king carried seven times around the prayer house. Then they keep the images in the pandle. Incantations are chanting before the god and dancing skill display in front the image of the king. In the evening, the image of Lord Vishnu brings back to the prayer house and formally ends up the ceremony.

The plain Tiwas conclude the Bisu festival with *Bheti Karha* ceremony, in which they bring locally produced items for king and his officials and distributed among them. For the remaining product, a mock fight is held between two groups of young boys and a feast is arranged with the articles in the evening.

The hill Tiwas give farewell to Bisu with *Boka Nach* ceremony. It is a kind of dance performed over mud. After getting the formal permission from the elders, the youngsters along with drummers and pipers start singing and dancing from a particular area of the village and continues for seven days. Generally it begins on Wednesday and ends on Tuesday. On the following Wednesday, elderly persons of the village offer prayer near an ankle deep muddy place and young boys and girls start singing and dancing over mud. After completion of *Boka Nach*, they come back to village and take part in common prayer. A community feast is also organize with the villagers. Like the Baisak Bisu, Magh Bisu and Kati Bisu is also performed by the Tiwas. Magh Bihu is a harvesting festival observe in the month of *Magh*(January-February).Construction of *meji* (heap of firewood) and *bhelaghar* i.e., improvised shed of paddy stalks or dry banana leaves are integral feature of this festival.

In hills, *mejis* are constructed separately for the members and officials of kings. Persons in charge for *meji* and *bhelaghar* are known as *mohal*. In some areas young boys construct wooden *meji* and burn it at night. Singing and dancing are an indispensable part of the festival. Worship offer to god at *borghar* with rice cakes and rice beer. Ancestors are also offered sacred food during Bisu. On that day, aged relatives of the deceased gather at prayer house and offer some eatables in banana leaves in the name of ancestors. In the month of *Ahin* (September-October), Kati

Bisu is celebrated by the Tiwa in a simple manner. In the paddy field, bamboo thrones are planted and sheaths of elephant apple are spread early in the morning. In some areas, agricultural implements are purified at prayer houses and a fowl is sacrificed to god for the welfare of the community. Lightening of earthen lamp is essential for the ceremony. Women ignite earthen lamps in the paddy field, cowshed, cooks heed and granaries also. In Kati Bihu, it is customary for the Tiwas to offer new areca nut to the deities.

3.12.4 Barat

Barat is a festival where girls and women keep them in fasting to appease god to protect themselves from wild animals and epidemics. The Tiwas consider the full moon day of the month of *Puh* or *Magh* (December-January) as auspicious day for observing this ceremony. In this ceremony, women undergo a long strict penance and when it over, they perform some rituals. It is a very popular festival of the Tiwas and visitors use to come from neighboring village to observe this festival.. People especially young boys bring two three birds made of bamboo or wood and fixed in long bamboo or wood stick. Then the birds attached with ropes and make the birds dance by pulling ropes. Dance performs in the Barat festival is eye catching. Masks are used by the dancers and torches are thrown to the audience. *Pirajug* i.e., fighting with a wooden stool having small legs is an integral feature performed during the Barat festival in early days. Girls keep them in fasting for the whole day. At night, all the villagers gather at a specific place and make a circle. The *pira* (low wooden stool) place in the centre and the girls keep their hands over the stool. At the same time, the elderly persons sing religious songs and the stool rises up but the girls try

to pull down and after some time, it automatically comes down. After that, prayers offer to god and formally end up the festival.

Some festivals are observed in Assam where the people irrespective of their ethnic identity take part whole heartedly. Such festivals include Republic Day on 26th January, Gandhi Jayanti on 30 January, Independence Day on 15th August, and so on. It is pertinent to note here that Bihu, particularly the Bohag Bihu and Magh Bihu, are observed by almost all the communities of North-East India by different names and in different times. In the bird's view also one can realize that the festivals observed by different communities of North-East India have some similarities due to the common environment, close relation to the Mongolian people, diffusion and cultural contact. Moreover, the common economy of the people, i.e, agriculture, also adorned the festivals of the different communities of this remote part of India with some common ingredients.

Case 3.1

- Mr Biswajit Das, an Assamese gentleman, aged 56 years, a businessman of Guwahati city, said that, in Guwahati, festivals are observed more or less in every day. These are not only the Assamese festivals, but the festivals of different communities also observed with splendor and enthusiasm. He has a joint family and he sometimes takes part in some festivals irrespective of religion or community, observed in Guwahati along with some of his family members. He believes in religion and observes many taboo and rituals in his family. For him worshipping of goddess Durga and Rongali Bihu are the two most popular festivals of Assam. He used to give new garments to the family members and some of his relatives and friends during these two festivals. He

bought 20-30 *bihuwans*, specially woven towels for Rongali Bihu, to present those to the guests and relatives. In his residence, the adult female members prepared different traditional food items during the Rongali and Bhogali Bihu.

Case 3.2

- Mrs Gita Kakati, aged 50 years, a house wife, living in a fringe village of Nalbari town of Assam. She lives in a joint family and her husband is the head of the household. Four brothers are living in the family, three are having their families of procreation and the youngest brother is still unmarried. Their family is composed of ten persons. Because she is a Hindu, she observes many Hindu rituals at her household levels. They observe Durga puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati puja, Sivaratri , Viswakarma puja, etc. in their household observing pristine taboo and rituals. For them, Durga puja, Rasa Yatra , Magh Bihu and Bohag Bihu are the principal festivals observed in both household and community level with pomp and gaiety. During all these festivals, they observe some of the religious taboo and offers sacred food to the integral deity in the household prayer house and also to the nearby community prayer house (Hari Mandir) of the Nalbari town. They prepare a good number of pristine food items during those festivals to relish by the family members and also to entertain the guests. All the family members use to wear new garments in Rongali Bihu and Durga puja. She also offers *bihuwan* to the family members and guests during Rongali Bihu.

Case 3.3

- Mr Anurag Baruah, aged 42 years, an Assamese person is presently living in Guwahati city and works in a government office of the city. For him Rongali Bihu is the only festival of Assam which unites the people of different walks of life irrespective of caste and creed. According to him, due to the commercialization of Bihu, it lost pristine characteristics. However, he believes that due to the performance of Rongali Bihu functions, till to date the non-Assamese people know about some of the elements of Assamese culture. He said that Assamese society is passing through a transitional phase and due to the abandonment of their mainstay, i.e., agriculture, the society is losing a good number of traits of the pristine culture including the food and dress. He likes Rongali Bihu because during this festival the Assamese people particularly the womenfolk use to dress in the eye appealing traditional garbs. During both Rongali and Bhogali Bihu, traditional food items are prepared in most of the Assamese households, and these are also available in markets. In day to day life many Assamese families do not use the traditional food items, but observing both Rongali and Bhogali Bihu these are prepared on large scales, which he relish very much.

Case 3.4

- Mrs Sugandha Saikia, aged 46 years, a mistress in a private high school of Ajara area of Guwahati, has a nuclear family. Her husband is a businessman and she has two children, the eldest one is a son of 14 years and the youngest is a daughter of 11 years. Before her marriage she used to perform *bihu* dance in different competition during Rongali Bihu and she was adorned with a few prizes for such performances. She has an acute interest in the folk musical

instruments, particularly those related to the songs and dances of Rongali Bihu. She said that in the dances of Rongali Bihu different folk instruments are used. These are:

Ghana Vadya, i.e., solid instruments (idiophones) like *gagana, tal* (cymbol), *taka* (bamboo clapper), etc.

Avanaddha Vadya, i.e., percussion instruments (membranophones) like *dhol* (drum)

Susheera Vadya, i.e., wind instruments (aerophones) like *pepa, juria pepa, sutuli* (clay whistle), etc.

According to her it is unfortunate that till today no mentionable systematic study is conducted on the folk musical instruments of Assam.

Case 3.5

- Mr Darbar Singh, aged 64 years, a retired office assistant of the local higher secondary school, has a nuclear family with his wife and a daughter. His wife is a retired mistress of a local L.P. School and his two elder daughters were married away . He is an Assamese Sikh .His mother tongue is Assamese and his house land is Assam. He is an inhabitant of Borkola village, the biggest Assamese Sikh habitat of Assam, near Nagoan town. He has both homestead and cultivable land and his principal crops are paddy and sugarcane. He has close relation to agriculture. In their village there are three gurdwaras, where they observe different Sikh rituals and festivals and the three Bihus. Their staple food is rice and their females are expert in weaving. They relish all the

Assamese food items including the Assamese luncheon. They invite guest generally during the Rongali Bihu, because in those days, every household of the village remain full with food items. They use to wear new clothes in Rongali Bihu, offer food to each guest visited their houses during that time. His wife offers homemade *bihuwan* to each visitor came to their house during the Rongali Bihu.

Case 3.6

- Mr Swapan Saha, aged 38 years, a petty businessman of Mongoldoi town, live in a joint family. He has his widow mother, one elder and one younger brother's family with his family of procreation. He is born and brought up in Mongoldoi, where his forefathers settled just after the independence of India. Although his mother tongue is Bengali, he is bilingual and sometimes in his household also he speaks in Assamese with his family members. He is a B.A. and educated through Assamese languages. He writes letters to different persons in Assamese and also regularly reads Assamese newspapers. Because he is a Bengali Hindu, Durga puja is their prime festival. However he enjoys Rongali Bihu very much and during that period he used to visit the houses of Assamese friends and relish pristine Assamese food there. Many friends offer him *bihuwan* also. During that period some friend also visit there house and he also treats them with tea and snacks. He use to attend cultural functions during Rongali Bihu with his family members.

Case 3.7

- Mrs Amina Begum, aged 64 years, a widow living with her married son in Baihata Chariali of Kamrup district, Assam. She said that today, Bohag Bihu is not like that of the old days. She also said that her unmarried days and also

during the period after her marriage, at least one month before, they used to prepare different snakes from rice which could be preserved for long time. It was more or less customary to visit the relatives' houses during the time of Bohag Bihu. To entertain the guests they stocked house made snakes. They also prepare *bihuwan* to offer the kins and well-wishers. She said that, they are Muslim and they have to observe Eid and other Islamic rituals and festivals with strict restrictions and enthusiasm. However, she added that, she is proud of as an Assamese and she along with her family members observe Rongali and Bhogali Bihu wholeheartedly. She is not happy that at present the core of Bihu has been changed and only the outward glamour coatings are there to represent the lively Bihu festival of Assam. She lamented that now a days most of the households in her area do not prepare *bihuwan* and local snakes for Bihu and entertained the guests with non-traditional snakes bought from market.

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