

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM : A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*Thesis Submitted to the Dibrugarh University for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(Ph.D.) in History*



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Thesis entitled “**Socio-Religious Festivals of Lakhimpur District of Assam: A Study in Historical Perspective**” which is being submitted by Montu Chetia to the Dibrugarh University, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the Department of History, is an original work carried out by him under my supervision. He has fulfilled all the requirements for submitting the Thesis for the degree under this University. This Thesis has not been submitted to any other University for any degree.

(Dr. Biswajit Baruah)

PREFACE

Lakhimpur district situated in the north bank of Upper Assam is a rural as well as agricultural district having various ethnic groups such as Ahom, Mising, Chutia, Kachari, Deori, Konch, Kalita, Sonowal, Hajong, Khamti etc. The district had a long historical background and formerly it even included Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Dhemaji. With the passage of time, the district had lost its original geographical form and present Lakhimpur district consist of only two sub-divisions-North Lakhimpur and Dhakuakhana. The district has a colourful cultural tradition making it as an ideal place in the whole state. In Lakhimpur, the people have been observing various customs, traditions, festivals and ceremonies since early times. A small part of the district population include non-Hindus who also follow number of traditions as well as customs which contribute a lot to the culture of this region. Significantly, it is found that the different socio-religious festivals of the present Lakhimpur district have greatly enriched the cultural tradition of the district in particular and the whole state in general. The present work mainly focuses the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district-its origin, change, continuity, significance, challenge and prospects.

This work has been divided into five chapters. **Chapter-I** is the introduction of the work. It gives an idea about the concept of festivals. The statement of the problem, scope and significance of the study, objective, methodology and review of literature of the present work are also discussed here. **Chapter-II** deals with the historical background and geographical location of Lakhimpur district. **Chapter-III** describes the celebrations of three Bihus- Bohag, Kati and Magh in the district as seasonal and agricultural festivals and their different rites and rituals. In **Chapter-IV** the origin, continuity, changes and significance of Phato Bihu have been dealt. **Chapter-V** discusses about the observation of Calendaric and other prominent festivals of the

district including some non-Hindu festivals. **Chapter-VI** examines the impact of the socio-religious festivals upon the society, economy, culture as well as environment of the district. It also tries to explain the problems of the festivals in recent times and their future prospect in terms of promoting tourism in the state.

For the present study, I am highly indebted to my research supervisor Prof Biswajit Baruah, Department of History, Dibrugarh University under whose able guidance I have completed my research work. I am also extremely grateful to all my respected teachers of the Department of History, Dibrugarh University for their valuable suggestions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APCC	-	Assam Provincial Congress Committee
CCPB	-	Celebration Committee of Phato Bihu
DCDB	-	Dhakuakhana Community Development Block
DHAS	-	Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies
GCDB	-	Ghilamora Community Development Block
GRB	-	<i>Gaon Rakshi Bahini</i> . (Village Defence Party)
KAS	-	Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti
NLDCC	-	North Lakhimpur District Congress Committee
OBC	-	Other Backward Classes
PBC	-	Phato Bihu Committee
SCB	-	Sub-Committee of <i>Bihuwan</i>
SDO	-	Sub-Divisional Officer
UBI	-	United Bank of India

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GLOSSARY

<i>Ahu dhan</i>	-	A kind of Paddy
<i>Akash-banti</i>	-	The Sky Lamp
<i>Apong</i>	-	A traditional liquor of the Misings
<i>Bachans</i>	-	Dialogue
<i>Banhi</i>	-	A flute
<i>Barghar</i>	-	Main apartment of an Assamese house
<i>Beels</i>	-	Big ponds
<i>Bhakata</i>	-	Followers of the Guru
<i>Bhang</i>	-	Hemp
<i>Bharalghar</i>	-	A granary
<i>Bhasan</i>	-	Immersion of Idols
<i>Bhoj</i>	-	Common feast
<i>Bihuwa</i>	-	Male Bihu Performers
<i>Bihuwan</i>	-	A <i>gamocha</i> presented during <i>Bohag</i> Bihu. Here, it denotes a souvenir published during Phato Bihu celebraion.
<i>Bohuwa nritya</i>	-	A kind of traditional dance
<i>Bora chaul</i>	-	A kind of special rice
<i>Borgeet</i>	-	Classical song composed by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva.
<i>Chanda</i>	-	Donation

<i>Cheewar</i>	-	A dress generally worn by Monk
<i>Churia</i>	-	Chaddar worn over the dhoti.
<i>Dak bungalow</i>	-	A residence of the British Government officials
<i>Dakshina</i>	-	Donation
<i>Dam devata</i>	-	God of forefather
<i>Dhankher</i>	-	Dry straw
<i>Dhol</i>	-	A kind of drum
<i>Dumahi</i>	-	The period between two months
<i>Gagana</i>	-	A small bamboo musical instrument
<i>Gamocha</i>	-	A soft towel woven by the Assamese women on their handlooms
<i>Gosainighar</i>	-	A place where idol of Goddess Durga was kept
<i>Gosainishal</i>	-	A place where worship of God is held
<i>Guhalighar</i>	-	Cow-shed
<i>Habung</i>	-	Fertile land in the North Bank of Brahmaputra where a large part of Lakhimpur district is situated
<i>Haidang geet</i>	-	A special kind of song among the Sonowal Kachari
<i>Hari mandir</i>	-	The temple of Hari
<i>Hartal</i>	-	A strike
<i>Has</i>	-	A traditional liquor prepared from bora rice by the Ahoms
<i>Hosori</i>	-	Community Bihu song and dance
<i>Jalpan</i>	-	Traditional light food in Assamese society

<i>Japi</i>	-	A traditional hat of the Assamese people made of bamboo and Tokou Leaf.
<i>Jak</i>	-	smoke created by burning paddy straw, the husk of paddy, <i>dighloti</i> and <i>makhiloti</i>
<i>Jhawbon</i>	-	A kind of bush
<i>Kakobanh</i>	-	A kind of Bamboo
<i>Kalmou</i>	-	A kind of creeper, which serves as ‘xak’ vegetable
<i>Kalochi</i>	-	An oblong pinnacle on the top of a temple
<i>Kalpotoru</i>	-	A plant of heaven
<i>Kanhuwa</i>	-	A kind of tall grass which bears fluffy cotton
<i>Kath alu</i>	-	A kind of hard yam
<i>Khadi</i>	-	Coarse cotton cloth
<i>Khataniar</i>	-	A Ahom officer in charge of a small plot of land.
<i>Kuber</i>	-	God of wealth
<i>Laupani</i>	-	A traditional liquor made from rice
<i>Lutpat</i>	-	Mass dacoity
<i>Mandop</i>	-	Pandal
<i>Maram</i>	-	Household fireplace of the Misings
<i>Mauza</i>	-	A fiscal unit
<i>Mauzadar</i>	-	A fiscal officer
<i>Muga mekhela</i>	-	Assamese Muga Silk Petticoat

<i>Mukali Bihu</i>	-	Bihu performed in front of the people in natural surroundings.
<i>Murti</i>	-	An image, an idol,
<i>Naibedyas</i>	-	Offerings of a religious worship/ceremony
<i>Narikalor pitha</i>	-	A kind of cake made from coconut
<i>Ou tenga</i>	-	A kind of fruit
<i>Parag</i>	-	A kind of elephant disease
<i>Pathak</i>	-	Narrator of the Bhagawata Gita
<i>Pepa badak</i>	-	A flute player
<i>Pepa</i>	-	A kind of flute made from buffalo horn
<i>Phat</i>	-	A river bank where traders assembled for trade and payment of tax during the Ahom rule
<i>Pokamithoi</i>	-	A special kind of offerings given during Janmastami
<i>Polo</i>	-	A kind of basket for catching fish
<i>Rangpuria Bihu</i>	-	Bihu performed at Rangpur. (Sivasagar)
<i>Riha</i>	-	A <i>muga chaddar</i>
<i>Satola</i>	-	The priestly class of the Misings
<i>Satyagraha</i>	-	Peaceful Non-Cooperation
<i>Sisu</i>	-	A kind of tree
<i>Suti</i>	-	River stream
<i>Swargadeo</i>	-	King of Heaven, (title taken by the Ahom rulers)
<i>Tamal</i>	-	A special kind of rope made from raw bamboo

<i>Than</i>	-	A sacred place.
<i>Thana</i>	-	Police outpost.
<i>Thapana</i>	-	A holy place where the idol is set up as an object of worship
<i>Toka Bihu</i>	-	A Bihu performed by the Assamese women playing a bamboo musical instrument
<i>Uruka</i>	-	Day before the Sankranti
<i>Xak</i>	-	Vegetables

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Fairs and Festivals:

Festivals are the external expression of social behavior and symbolic representations of situations. The tradition of modern festivals emanated from the beliefs and magical rituals of the ancient communities¹. The ancient communities performed those magical rituals to make the days grow longer, to expel severe cold, to appease deities of the fields and forests as well as sky and water. They also performed magical rituals to satisfy the rain God or to appease the deadly deities of diseases and to please the malevolent dead and to appease the village ghosts as well. Even the ancient communities solemnized those magical rituals to promote fertility.² Rightly William H. Hendleson observed:

“Festivals held by the primitive peoples consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers and were held on such occasions as the admission of new members to a tribe, disposal of the dead and preparations of fishermen for the catch, hunters for the chase and warriors for battle. A communal meal was usually a part of the festival. Development of agriculture was accompanied by new festivals, also consisting of magical religious rituals, in connection with the seasons, especially with the vernal equinox and the winter solstice. Planting and harvesting were important festive occasions.”

In plain meaning festival indicate a season of social mirth when series of performances of music, plays, feast or the like honorific celebration of historical events, births or deaths of a hero or

God are enacted by a community. British and continental folklorists found these celebrations as recurring moments of special significance and are called festivals.

Festivals form an essential aspect of all culture of the world. Most of the societies whether primitive or folk or elite or modern, have their own festivals and these are celebrated in one form or the other. The rituals and festivals initially were exclusively religious. In the present context it may be said that most of the festivals are still associated with religious observances. The scope of the festival has been extended particularly in modern times since the term has also been applied to a number of secular commemorations, including celebrations like the Independence Day of India and specific form of entertainment such as drama, dancing and music festivals.³ Festivals like the anniversaries of medieval saints like Sankardeva, Domodardeva, Madhavdeva and Harideva or the birth day of Mahatma Gandhi have no festival behaviour and as such, they have no direct symbolic connection. Although a great number of festivals are performed traditionally, nevertheless their original meaning has already been lost. For example, we may refer to the *Bhatheli* festival current in lower Assam, the original meaning of which has been forgotten. Robert Jerome Smith stated:

“A revealing clue to the persistence of the festival is the fact that great number of festivals centime to flourish maintaining essentially the same form, long after their original meaning has be forgotten.”

Kinds of Festivals:

Festivals are divided into two major kinds: Seasonal or Agricultural festivals and Calendaric festivals. Seasonal or Agricultural festivals are celebrated in periodic time when people escape from their work occupations and enjoy together. Calendaric festivals have been sanctioned institutionally to celebrate by the community on a fixed date. Again the festivals of India may also be classified in the following ways: (a) Sacramental festivals (b) Limited Participation festivals (c) Festivals

belonging to the great tradition or the little tradition (d) Family and Community festivals (e) Voluntary or Non voluntary festivals and (f) Purposive festivals etc. ⁴

It would not be irrelevant if we discuss the demographic pattern of Assam before going into a detailed discussion of the festivals current of this region. Like the Indian society, Assamese society also had emerged as a result of a continuous fusion between Aryans and Non-Aryans. Again the Assamese people may rightly be grouped under two broad groups: (a) Tribal and (b) Non- Tribal. Under the tribal category, ethnic groups like Bodos, Rabhas, Karbis, Misings, Deoris, Dimasas, Tiwas etc may be included. Many tribal people have already entered into the Hindu fold through a process of Sanskritization or Hinduisation. Going one step forward, one may also say that different ethnic groups living in the present state of Assam have emerged into the mainstream of the composite Assamese culture through a process of 'Assamaization'. In the context of Assam, it may be mention that there is not much difference between the tribal and non tribal unlike what one sees in many other parts of India. The tribal and non tribal communities of Assam together set an outstanding example of the process of acculturation, integration and assimilation and this has a tremendous impact in the making of the unique composite culture of Assam. In the context of festivals too, this process of interaction cannot be ignored. Like the Indian society, the Assamese society too is a traditional society and the festivals held in such a traditional society appear to be traditional. And hence, the festivals prevalent in Assam among the tribal and non tribal seem to have been traditional in their form and content.

Functions of Festivals:

Festivals offer scope to the masses to rejoice and interact together in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. Individuals can identify themselves with their own community and

interact with it on the occasions of festival. It is a measure to promote social cohesion when the numbers of the same group share the reinforcing performances and recurring functions.

Side by side festivals incur energy and expenditure of the entire community. Its functions may be positive or disruptive. On the positive side it helps economically through a redistribution of wealth of the society. The ritualistic and ceremonial functions of the festival usher the prosperity of the community.⁵ It can foretell rain, maladies etc at the same time. The negative aspect of the festival is that too much indulgence of the community to the merriment and gaiety may keep them astray from works which will entail retardation of the economy. Moreover, a deviation from spirit of religiosity of the religious festivals is a mark of indulgence to the entertainment aspect of festivals. This may lead to the cultural and moral trauma of the group.

A festival generally provides occasion and form of positive social interaction. Such social interactions are essential for the continued existence of society. A festival, in many respects provides ample facilities for enhancing proper understanding amongst the members of a society. A festival is the most important concrete expression of collective emotions and loyalties. In the same way, it may play an important role in the context of socialization.

Structure of Festivals:

Festivals are the rare occasions of the year when the inhabitants of a region reckon the best scope to wear their traditional favourite dress and ornaments to participate in the series of traditional behaviours. Religious festivals are often the replica of the legendary and mythological miracles. There are festive structure which taken into account decoration and carrying of an image in procession. The celebrants sing and dance, folk music is played on handcrafted instruments. Prescribed social behaviour and norms are also imposed on the observers. Festivals may include feast and drink in a ceremonial way.⁶

In a word, festivals constitute a major domain of social folk customs. It brings the lifespan of folk tradition and syndrome of social cohesion, affects the form and substance of social life. Festival behaviours are always voluntary. Festivals pave the way for interaction of individuals which generates a positive emotional response or expresses a positive emotional condition.⁷ Therefore, folklorists have regarded festivals as one of the important genres of folklore. Merits of festivals may be closely analyzed in the context of its gradual degradation.

Statement of the Problem:

Culture is the soul as well as identity of a society. Culture has a dominant role in the process of transformation of society, polity and economy of a particular region. In most cases culture is spontaneous, changeable and accepted by the common people. Assam, the North Eastern part of India has a colourful cultural tradition having its various ethnic groups. To this cultural tradition of Assam, the Lakhimpur district originally known as '*Kaliapani*' has been contributing significantly along with some other parts of the state. Numbers of ethnic groups of this area including Ahom, Chutia, Kachari, Mising, Konch, Kalita, Kaibartta, Deori, Rabha, Hajongs etc have been observing various customs, traditions and festivals separately and in an organized manner. This has greatly contributed to the culture of the district in particular and the whole north bank of upper Assam in general.

In ancient time Lakhimpur had a rich cultural history and tradition along with different political events. But, there is not enough records available to know the history of Lakhimpur during the pre-Ahom period. Some early remains of the region associated with Hinduism such as *Kesaikhati Gohaini Than*, *Malini Than*, *Padumoni Than*, *Harhi Dewalay* etc. reveals that during the reign of Chutias and Bhuyans the Hindu religion and culture prevailed among the people of the region. During the Ahom period this particular region had got a distinct political and cultural identity

throughout the kingdom. According to some Assamese chronicles for a short period Sukapha, the founder king of Ahom kingdom in Assam established his capital in Lakhimpur originally known as ‘*Habung*’. Sukapha left this place due to the contemporary flood problems. During the Konch invasion of Ahom kingdom in 1562 Gohain Kamal, the brother of Konch king Naranarayana entered the *Gohain Kamal Ali* as far as ‘*Habung*’ and ‘*Bordhali*’ (Modern Bordoloni) near Kumatia river. Thus this place experienced different cultural contracts in different times which started a new kind of cultural growth. The Ahom king Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar was born and brought up in a Brahmin family in this ‘*Habung*’ region. During the Ahom reign Lakhimpur became a well known centre of Basudeva worship at Basudeva Than. King Siva Singha donated 2600 *puras* of land in 1734 A.D. to Basudeva Than (a Vaishnava Monastery) for its maintenance. Moreover, in the period of Neo-Vaishnavism in Lakhimpur the people also found a new way of life on the basis of *Bhakti* influencing the culture of this region like the other parts of the state. Since 1826 A.D. Lakhimpur went under the British administration. During the time of British rule the people of this region had similarly maintained its rich religions and socio-cultural traditions in a greater extent which is also continued in the post independence period. In this way the socio-cultural and religious tradition of the region had maintained a distinct position all over the state from the early period of time where the festivals have been playing a significant role.

Presently as a rural agricultural district as well as a district of various ethnic groups, Lakhimpur is culturally rich and developed making it as an ideal place in the state. In Lakhimpur, the people have been observing their various traditional as well as indigenous festivals as their culture along with the Bihus, which are mainly related to their socio-religious and agricultural life. The *Ali-Aye-Lrigang* is one of such festivals of Lakhimpur district celebrated by the Misings, who form a major part of the district population on the first Wednesday in the month of *Phagun*. It is observed

for five days and during the time of this festival the people perform many songs and dances which are mainly related with their agricultural system. Major attraction of this festival is the famous traditional *Gumrag* dance. Another important festival celebrated by the Deori people of Lakhimpur district during the time of spring season is *Bohagiya Bishu*. The celebration is observed with religious customs and traditions on the first Wednesday in the month of Bohag. The *Baikhu* is another festival celebrated by the Rabha people of Lakhimpur district. The Rabhas generally celebrated this festival to conciliate the Goddess *Baikhu*, who is the Goddess of wealth. Similarly, the *Baishagu* is the chief festival celebrated by the small number of Bodo-Kachari people of Lakhimpur district. They enjoy this spring festival with great spirit and enthusiasm. Number of dances and songs are associated with this festival. Besides, *Baitha Puja* (Sonowal Kachari), *Charul paraba* (Tea Community), *Poi-Chang-Ken* (Khamti) etc are also celebrated by the different tribes and communities in Lakhimpur district. In addition to this in *Naamghar* (Vaishnava prayer hall) and *Satras* (Vaishnava Monastery), the people of Lakhimpur district also observe *Raas utshava*, *Naamkritana*, *Gossainaam*, *Janmastami*, *Doljatra*, *Tithies* etc. Moreover, the Muslim people of the district observe Muharram, Eid-Ul-Zuha, Eid-Al-Fitr etc in a traditional manner. The followers of Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Christianity, which form a small part of the population of this region, also observe their religious festivals such as Ramnavami, Gurupurab, Mahavir Jayanti, Buddha Purnima, Christmas etc in customary and ritualistic manner. Similarly, the '*Phato Bihu*' of Dhakuakhana is an indigenous form of Rongali Bihu of this locality. Originally, the *Phato Bihu* was observed every year, spontaneously after the first week of Bohag. Now-a-days, it is observed in the later part of the month of Bohag at '*Mahghuli Chapori*' in the bank of river 'Charikaria' in an organized manner. It has a number of indigenous characteristics and also differs from other Bihu celebrations of Assam. It is also a symbol of unity among the people of Dhakuakhana Sub-Division as well as Lakhimpur district.

Although these socio-religious festivals are observed in different parts of the state, in Lakhimpur these have developed some regional and indigenous characteristics. So, we find that these characteristics or nature have given to these festivals a peculiarity of their own. With the passage of time, however, a change as well as continuity has also been observed in the socio-religious festivals of this region. But, it is a matter of great concern that no research work has been done on these aspects of the festivals as well as culture of this region till now. Moreover, no comparative study has been done yet between the socio-religious festivals of the Lakhimpur district with other parts of the State as a whole. So, keeping all these aspects in mind the work has been undertaken. This study has brought a clear picture about the characteristics, change and continuity of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district in particular and Assam in general. It has also thrown light on the impact of the festivals upon the society, economy, culture as well as environment of the region and their future prospects.

Methodology:

This study has undertaken following historical method of investigation predominantly on the basis of hitherto unexplored primary source materials in addition to secondary source materials. Primary sources use here are public and private records, letters and correspondences, personal letters and diaries, biographical works, memorandums etc. At the same time due attention has also given to oral sources like songs, legends, myths, ballads etc. The archival materials are used intensively in this study whenever required. In additions to these personal interviews, field works and observations are also taken into account regarding these issues. Secondary sources such as published books, journals and periodicals, souvenirs, newspapers etc are consulted in this work. An analytical approach of examining the source materials and interpreting the facts is followed in this research.

Due attention has also been given on the cultural approach for better understanding the cultural facts and draw a scientific conclusion of the subject.

Scope and significance:

The proposed topic has a larger scope and greater significance in today's context. The socio-religious festivals of the Lakhimpur district have a long historical background. Besides, change and continuity among the festivals have taken place since earliest times. So, there is an ample scope of historical and sociological study and research on the topic. The study has been restricted to the various socio-cultural and religious activities, rites and rituals relating to the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district irrespective of caste, community, religion and ethnicity. The socio-religious condition of the people of Lakhimpur district has been found a place in the study. It also covers the geographical and historical conception of the district.

The study is expected to bring light to the characteristics, change, continuity and integrity of the festivals of Lakhimpur district. It has also examined the impact of these festivals upon the society, economy, culture and environment of the region as well as their future prospects. The successful completion of the research on the topic has surely paved the path for further research on its allied topics.

Objectives of the study:

The objectives which have been followed in this work are:

1. To study the origin and nature of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district.
2. To find out the change and continuity of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district.
3. To explore the impact of these festivals upon the society, economy, culture and environment of Lakhimpur district in particular and Assam in general.

4. To examine the relevance of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district in the present context and their future prospects .

Review of Literature:

A great deal of work has already been done on the socio-religious festivals in the context of Assam. But, as far Lakhimpur district and the north bank of upper Assam is concerned, not much work has been done on this aspect. However, a few works on different festivals of Lakhimpur district have been done by different scholars in recent times. Firstly, '*Asomar Loka Sanskritir Ruprekha*' (2008) written by Umesh Chetia is an important work regarding the festivals of Assam as well as north bank of upper Assam. But, this work suffers some limitations and is not able to give a clear concept of the festivals that have been discussed here. Mention may be made of the book '*Phato Bihur Itihash Aru Oitijya*' (2002) has written by Ismail Hussain especially on the 'Phato Bihu' festival of Dhakuakhana sub-division of Lakhimpur district. Although this book tries to give an idea about origin and development of the Phato Bihu, it is not so well documented. Another book jointly edited by Siva Prasad Gogoi and Ismail Hussain on Phato Bihu is '*Dhukakhanar Phato Bihu*' (2000). But, this book has not given a clear picture about the origin and development of the Phato Bihu in a systematic manner. In his book entitled '*Mishing Samaj Aru Sanskriti*' (2003) Indeswar Pegu has made an attempt to interpret the '*Ali-Aye-Lrigang*' and other Mising festivals of Lakhimpur district in a critical way. But, this work is neither based on proper historical research nor it is analytical. Another book written by Jit Ram Kalita entitled "*Charikariar Pare Pare Sabhyata Sanskritir Bikash*" (2006) has also tried to give an account of the socio-religious festivals and ceremonies of Lakhimpur district specially Dhakuakhana sub-division from historical point of view. But, this book is a collection of certain articles with full of historical sources, but no attempt has been made to interpret them.

Similarly, in his book entitled '*Asomar Jati Gathanot Mishing Janagosthi aru Nadipariya Mishing Samaj*' Khageswar Pegu has attempted to depict the picture of different socio-religious festivals and ceremonies of the Misings along with some other tribes of upper Assam. The books '*Ujonir Loka Utshav*' written by Hem Burhagohain and '*Satriya Utshav Parichoy aru Tapojya*' written by Keshabananda Devagoswami have also given an account about various socio-religious festivals of upper Assam along with the other parts of the states. Another two books entitled '*Ahom Sakalar Paramparagata Utshav Anusthan*' edited by Bhimkanta Boruah and '*Tai Ahomar Dharma*' jointly edited by Pushpa Gogoi and Bogen Gogoi also deal with the different socio-religious festivals and ceremonies of Ahoms in an extensive way. But, the fact is that all these books have a general approach relating to the festivals in Assam. They are not concerned about the changing pattern and prospect of these festivals in present times.

There are a number of articles on different socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district written by different scholars such as Homen Bargohain, Chandradhar Chammah, Jit Ram Kalita, Tukheswar Chetia, Umesh Cheita, Dimbeswar gogoi and Pushpa Gogoi in various magazines, books, souvenirs and dailies. But, these writings are not in detailed form and lack of proper methodology and interpretation.

Notes and references:

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2. Nabin Chandra Sharma, 'Festivals' in Basanta Deka (ed) *Land and People: Assam*, 1st edition, Guwahati, 2009, p.231.
3. Birendranath Datta, Nabinchandra Sarma and Probin Chanda Das, *op. cit.* p.153

4. *ibid*, p.154
5. Diganta Saikia, *Festivals of the Marigaon District and Their Relation with the Indigenous Traditions*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Gauhati University, 2013, p.21
6. *ibid*, p.23.
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CHAPTER - II
LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT: ITS HISTORY AND
GEOGRAPHY

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LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT: ITS HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

The Lakhimpur District, in which present study is carried out, extends along the north bank of the river Brahmaputra in the state of Assam. It is situated between 26.48° and 27.53° Northern Latitude and 93.42° and 94.20° East Longitude. The district is situated in the humid sub-tropical region. The district is bounded on the north by Siang and Papumpara district of Arunachal Pradesh, on the east by Dhemaji district of Assam. The Sivasagar district and Majuli, the largest river island situated at the Jorhat district are on its south, whereas Gahpur sub-division of Sonitpur district is on its west. The district covers an area of 2, 277 sq.k.m. out of which 2.257 sq.k.m. is rural and 20 sq. k.m. is urban. ¹

The district of Lakhimpur consists of a broad plain line on northern side of the river Brahmaputra and is bounded by hills. A large portion of the district on the north of the great river Brahmaputra is somewhat different from the southern portion and is covered with trees and forest. Level of the land is lower and there are more *beels* and Mashas. In the rainy season much of the district is covered with dense masses of grass and reeds ranging from 10-20 feet height. The foreground of the picturesque land is clothed with fields of waving rice of vivid green during the summer and changing to rice golden colour as the harvest time draws near. Round the edges of this fields are avenue of slender palms, broad plantains and feathery bamboos, which conceal the cottages of the cultivators, which further back is often to be seen the dark green line

of the primeval forestry. The view is bounded to the north by the blue hills. In far distance to the east there are ranges of high hills whose peaks are covered with snow and whose rocky sides are spotted with gleaming white. All the seasons of the year the district looks fresh, cool and green. The trees in the forest never lose their leaves while the roads are often carpeted with grass and bordered with ferns. ²

Concept of Present Lakhimpur District:

As per the Lakhimpur District Gazetteer (1876) the district was notified as Lakhimpur District through a proclamation issued by the Governor General on July 1839. It is evident that before 1842 the district headquarters were at North Lakhimpur and were transferred to Dibrugarh for administrative convenience in 1842. From that year Dibrugarh continued as the district headquarters of Lakhimpur district till its bifurcation in October, 1971.³ From its bifurcation the northern part of the river Brahmaputra remained as North Lakhimpur district where Lakhimpur served as one of the sub-divisional headquarters of the newly formed North Lakhimpur district. The southern part is named as Dibrugarh district following the name of the headquarters town Dibrugarh of the district. It is noteworthy to mention that at the time of bifurcation of the Lakhimpur district from Dibrugarh in 1971, the district was recognized with two sub-division- Dhemaji and Lakhimpur. Later, Lakhimpur became separate district in the year 1989 with two sub-divisions viz Dhakuakhana and Lakhimpur leaving Dhemaji as a separate district. Therefore, the present Lakhimpur or North Lakhimpur district is a part of erstwhile Lakhimpur district having Dhakuakhana and Lakhimpur sub-division only.⁴

Administrative Structure of the District:

The district is divided into two sub-divisions viz; Lakhimpur and Dhakuakhana where Lakhimpur is headquarter of the district. Lakhimpur sub-division consists of four police stations

namely North Lakhimpur, Laluk, Bihpuria and Boginodi. There are two police stations under Dhakuakhana sub-divisions viz Dhakuakhana and Ghilamara. The District has seven revenue circles viz. North Lakhimpur, Nowboisa, Bihpuria, Narayanpur, Kadam, Subansiri and Dhakuakhana and nine development blocks viz Narayanpur, Bihpuria, Karmabari, Nowboisa, North Lakhimpur, Telahi, Boginadi, Ghilamara and Dhakukhana.

Origin of the name Lakhimpur :

There are certain historical narratives associated with the origin of the name 'Lakhimpur'. According to one account the Bhuyan who were ruling north bank of the Brahmaputra and east of then Chutia kingdom at the time when Ahom entered Assam, claim to be descendant of 'Samudra'. 'Samudra' was the minister of 'Arimatta', who it is said, seized the throne on the expulsion of the Arimatta's son 'Ratna Sing'. Samudra was succeeded by his son 'Manohor' and daughter 'Laxmi' gain the love of the sun god and she had two son's 'Santanu' and 'Sumanta'. The former became a Vaishmava by sect and later a sakta; they accordingly separated Santanu and his son's going to Rampur in Nawgong, while Sumanta remained at 'Lakhimpur' the place from which the modern district of Lakhimpur takes its name.⁵

There is another description with regard to the origin of the name 'Lakhimpur'. It was stated that during the 14th -13th century, king Lakshminarayan once ruled over an area in the eastern part of the present Lakhimpur district. The king donated a land in the village of 'Bakhana' on the western bank of the river Subansiri. The king Lakshinarayan built a town in his kingdom which was later named as Lakhimpur.⁶

There is also an oral tradition believed to be associated with the origin of the name of 'Lakhimpur' from the word 'Lakshmi' the goddess of prosperity. The population of the district is mainly depended upon its rice agriculture and paddy. Paddy is regarded locally as 'Lakshmi

‘(Goddess of wealth in Assamese). The word ‘pur’ means full (complete) and hence Lakhimpur means full of paddy or the place where the (paddy) paddies are grown abundantly. Besides, the soil of the district is alluvial and fertile for which crops flourish without use of any artificial manner or chemical fertilizers or ever hard. Over the above, fish, meat, vegetables milk were abundant in this district.⁷

Early History of Lakhimpur District:

There is not so much record available to know the history of this place during the pre-Ahom period. In ancient time, this area was known as ‘*Habung*’ or fertile land. According to Bodo language ‘*Ha*’ means wide and ‘*Bung*’ means place.⁸ In his book ‘*Geographical Sketch of Assam*’ Dr. J.P. Wade says that in ancient time ‘*Habung*’ was a state whose breadth was 15 miles and length was 30 miles. According to Hemkosh Dictionary (old edition) ‘*Habung*’ was a place situated in the north bank of Brahmaputra. Archaeologist Rajmohan Nath also mention about ‘*Habung*’ in his book ‘*The Background of Assamese Culture*’ as a similar area in the north eastern part of Assam in the present North Lakhimpur district where county was known ‘*Ha-bung*’ (*Habung*) in the historical period. According to Rajmohan Nath ‘*Habung*’ is a Kachari word. It means a richest paddy growing area.⁹

In pre-historical period, one king ‘Naraka’ founded the old kingdom of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa.¹⁰ When Naraka was ruling in Pragjyotish his friend ‘Bana’ was ruling in Sunitpur which is now identified with modern Tezpur.¹¹ It is believed that kingdom of Bana extended over the whole of the modern district of Darrang and Lakhimpur Sub-division which now forms the district of North Lakhimpur. In that case Lakhimpur originally ‘*Habung*’ was not included within the kingdom of Naraka- Bhagadatta.

The territory was within the kingdom 'Kundil' of traditional king 'Bhismaka'.¹² There are still archaeological remains in Lakhimpur some of which are assigned to 'Bismaka' and his son 'Sisupal'. In the 'Bhagabata' and the 'Bhisnu Puran' the story of the king 'Bhismaka' and his daughter' Rukmini who was married to Lord Krishna is found. The story is also narrated by Sri Sankardeva in his drama 'Rukmini Haran'.

In historical period '*Habung*' presently known as Lakhimpur District had formed a part of the old kingdom of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa during the rule of Varmama dynstry (350-650 A.D.).¹³ The account of Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese Pilgrim who visited the kingdom about 643 A.D. also throws light on this matter. From him account it is known that Kumar Bhashkarvarmana (594-650 A.D.) maintain contract with the tribal domination area of the north east. It also narrate in his account that on the eastern side of Bhashkarvarmana's kingdom there was a rang of hills which stretched to the territory of the barbarians (Tribal people) of the south west China.¹⁴ It may be presented from his account that Bhashkarvarmana's political authority was established or it was attempted to establish over the hilly regions of the north east of present Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Patkai hills. In that case it is sure that Lakhimpur remained a part of kingdom of Kamrupa under Varmana's.

Whether the territory of the state of the time of Bhashkarvarmana remained intact or not till the time of the Salstambhas (650-990 A.D.) and the Palas (990-1142 A.D.) is not known . But it is very probable that their territory extended as far as Lakhimpur. Early remains of the region associated with Hinduism point to this fact.¹⁵

After the fall of early kingdom of Kamrupa about the mid twelfth century A.D. Lakhimpur fall into the hands of the Bhuyans and Chutias. But some of the scholars opine that

before the domination of Bhuyans and Chutias the society, culture and administration was under the influence of Bodo-Kachari. But, no reliable sources are available in this regard.

The Bhuyans were a class of landlord. The word 'Bhuyan' has been come from the Sanskrit word '*Bhamika*' which means a landlord.¹⁶ During the period of early Kamrupa rulers they were offered high position with innumerable landed property. After the down fall of the kingdom, the petty chiefs rose to power and declared themselves as independent chiefs in their own territories.¹⁷ So, the Bhuyans were a class of feudal lord whose rule extended almost over the whole of the middle part of the Brahmaputra Valley. Since they were possessors of lands and any person having extensive land under their control became a Bhuyan. As the Brahmins and the Kayasthas received vast tracts of donated land and workers from the early Kamarupa kings, they constituted the majority of Bhuyans.¹⁸ There were also some muslim Bhuyans, particularly in Bengal. They were independent of each other within their own domain, but joined their forces whenever they were threatened by any common enemy.¹⁹ They had their own treasury, armed forces and judiciary. They had two branches known as 'Bor Bara Bhuyan' and Saru Bara Bhuyan. According to the tradition preserved in the 'Bhuyan Puthi' the elder branch settled in Nagaon and younger are in Lakhimpur.²⁰

According to Ahom chronicles the Ahom king Suhungmung also known as Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) defeated the Bhuyans of north bank in a battle at Dhakuakhana on the mouth of river '*Karha*' in 1525 A.D.²¹ In the Assam Buranji obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta, the Ahom victory over the Bhuyans in this region has been described as follows –“The Bhuyan fortified themselves near 'Dirgha Pukhuri' at Karhamukh' against the Ahom. The Ahom army also garrisoned on the mouth of *Karha*. At that time Karchuchia Laskar, a worshipper of Basudev who was the subject of Bhuyan lord advised that it was impossible to win war against

the Ahom. So, the Bhuyans paid their homage to the Ahom king by offering five horses and two pots full of silver. They agreed to carry out the order of the Ahom king to avoid any wrath. On the demand of Ahom general the Bhuyan sent their leading personalities such as 'Laluma', 'Utaber', 'Khaik', 'Chemdar Uzir', 'Utai', 'Tamai', 'Chepa', 'Chonabor', 'Bhedia' including their family members to Ahom court to serve the king. On their arrival the king asked them about the white elephant used by two Bhuyan brothers 'Utai' and 'Tamai'. They replied that the elephant was not really white, it was painted white with lime to cure from the disease called 'Parag'. The king could not be convinced and killed both of them. Their sons were kept with the 'Khatoniar' an Ahom officer who was in charge over the Zamindars. Thenceforth, the Bhuyan became under the control of the Ahom king.²²

The Chutia also ruled same parts of '*Habung*' long with the Bhuyans. They established their rule in 1223 A.D.²³ It is possible that the territory from which the Bhuyan fought against the Ahom in 1525 A.D. might be outside the Chutia territories. There are records to show that the Chutia ruled the region till they were conquered with the Ahom king Suhungmung also known as 'Dihingia Raja' (1497-1539 A.D.) about the close of the first quarter of the 16th century.²⁴

Recently, a few land grant copper plates were discovered in different parts of Dhakuakhana sub-division of Lakhimpur District. The places where the plates are discovered are 'Phukan gaon', 'Dhenukhana', 'Barmutia' and 'Konwar gaon'. It is known from them two kings named Satyanarayan and Lakshinarayan donated lands to Brahmans by issuing those copper plates within this region. These epigraphic records prove that before the conquest of the Ahom Lakhimpur was under the Chutia rules for a long time. During the reign of the Chutia the Hindu religion and culture prevailed among the people of Lakhimpur. In 1523 A.D. the Ahoms captured the Chutia kingdom by defeating its ruler. The Mising of the region also accepted

supremacy of the Ahom king. After the annexation Suhungmung remove the powerful Chutia clans from the north bank of the kingdom, so that future trouble from them could be avoided. But the lower Chutia such as 'Bebejia', 'Bihia', 'Bahetia' and other were allowed to remain in Dhakuakhana and Lakhimpur.²⁵ There is still a 'Bebejia gaon' in Dhakuakhana sub-division where Chutia people are predominant.

The territory of Lakhimpur as part of the Chutia kingdom came under the Ahom administration after 1523 A.D. But same parts of Lakhimpur were occupied by them before that date. According to E.A. Gait during the reign of Suhungmung (1497-1539) Lakhimpur originally '*Habung*' country was annexed to Ahom realm in 1512 A.D.

According to the Assamese chronicles for a short period Sukapha, the founder king of Ahom kingdom in Assam established his capital in '*Habung*'. Sukapha left this place due to the contemporary flood problem. During the time of Ahom kingdom '*Habung*' was an important place. In the 'Assam Buranji' obtain from the family of Sukumar Mahanta, it is mentioned that during the Koch invasion of the Ahom kingdom in 1562 Gohain Kamal, the brother of Koch king Naranarayan (1540-1587 A.D.) extended the 'Gohain Kamal Ali' as far as '*Habung*' and 'Bordhali' (modern Bordoloni) near the 'Kumatia river'. The Bordoloni is situated at a distance of above 50 k.m. to the east of Lakhimpur township. The river 'Kumatia' now flows through this region. The *Habung* city of the day of Sukapha where he built his capital no longer exists now. It is recorded in history that a deluge took place in Assam in 1750 due to which the Brahmapura changed its course and the city was submerged.

During the region of king 'Tyaokhamthi' (1380-1389 A.D.) there were many Brahmins in '*Habung*' region. In the time of king Suklengmung (1539-1553 A.D.) the hegemony of the Brahmins in this region increased so much that one powerful Brahman proclaimed himself as the

king in 1546 A.D.²⁶ On receiving this news the king sent contingents to subjugate the Brahmins. On the arrival of the Ahom force the Brahmin king fled away to coach Bihar with his family and his supporters in 1546 A.D.²⁷ It has already been mentioned that Gohain Kamal, the brother of Koch king Naranarayan extended the Gohain Kamal Ali in the midst of '*Habung*' to Bardhali' (Bordoloni) near the river Kumatia. For making this road it was necessary to demolish the houses of the Brahmins who were then asked to do it. The Brahmins having refused to do it. Then the king soldiers destroyed the houses.²⁸

In 1553 A.D. the Koch king Naranarayan and his brother 'Chilarai' attacked the Ahom kingdom. The Brahmins of '*Habung*' went to fight against the enemy at the behest of the Ahom king Sukhrampha also known as 'Khora Raja' (1552-1603 A.D.) The Brahmins came out in a body each seated on cow and exposing his sacred thread and customary marks on the forehead.²⁹ The Koch king returned without fighting in fear of killing Brahmins and cows.

The Ahom king Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar (1397-1407 A.D.) was born and brought up in a Brahmin family in this '*Habung*' region.³⁰ During the Ahom rule Dhakuakhana subdivision of Lakhimpur district became a well known centre of Basudeva worship. It is recorded that king Siva Singha donated 2600 *puras* of land in 1734 A.D. to Basudev Satra (a Vaisnava Monastery) for its maintenance.³¹

During the time of the Moamoria rebellion when Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795 A.D.) fled to lower Assam this tract was divested by the Moamoriyas.³² But prime minister Purunnanda Borhagohain continued the fight against the Moamoriyas from Ghilamara (a important place of Dhakuakhan). During the Burmese invasion of Assam they devastated the whole region. It is known that to protect the tract from the Burmese the Ahom fought with them several times in Ghilamara.³³ But the Burmese defeated the Ahoms and tortured and killed them in a cruel

manners. They also damaged some sacred shrines such as 'Harhi Dewalaya', 'Basudeva than' (a sacred place) etc. After that British came to Assam and expelled the Burmese and occupied the region in 1826 by the treaty of Yandaboo.

Since 1826 A.D. Lakhimpur went under the British administration. All the arrangement made by the British government for upper Assam was also applicable in case of Lakhimpur. Colonel Richards was appointed as the Junior Commissioner and was in charge of upper Assam with headquarters at Sivasagar (Rangpur). Devid Scott was placed in charge of Lower Assam with headquarters at Guwahati and was declared as the Senior Commissioner. Although the two Commissioners' had independent jurisdiction Scott was to remain in charge of overall administration in order to maintain uniformity in the pattern of administration.

On the 24th April, 1833 Purandar Singha was restored to the throne in upper Assam except 'Sadiya' and 'Matak'.³⁴ Lakhimpur was thus included within his kingdom. But due to the misgovernment and the dissatisfaction of people Purandar Singha was deposed and pensioned on October, 1838.³⁵ With this the territory of Lakhimpur was also brought under the direct administration of the British.

In July 1839, after the annexation of upper Assam a proclamation was issued by the Governor General in council dividing upper Assam into two districts Sivasagar and Lakhimpur.³⁶ All arrangements were made to administer these in the same manner as the other districts of Lower Assam. Lakhimpur district was divided into two sub-divisions namely Dibrugarh and North Lakhimpur. From 1839 to 1842 the district headquarters of Lakhimpur was at Dhakuakhana, a '*Mouza*' within North Lakhimpur sub-division.³⁷ Then from 1842, Dibrugarh continued as the district headquarters of Lakhimpur District till its bifurcation in October, 1971 as Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh district. It is noteworthy to mention that at the time of bifurcation

of Lakhimpur district from Dibrugarh, the district was recognized with two sub-divisions- Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur. Later North Lakhimpur became separate district in the year 1989 with two sub-division viz Dhakuakhana and North Lakhimpur leaving Dhemaji as a separate district.

From A.J. Moffatt Mills Report it is known that there was a police outpost in Dhakuakhana sub-division of Lakhimpur district during 1848. In 1857 this outpost was upgraded to a '*Thana*'.³⁸ During the 1857 revolt the people of Lakhimpur district along with their brothers in other parts of the state were closely watching the events and extended their support whole heartedly to the rebels in their attempt to liberate the country from British rule. But their attempt failed during this period.³⁹

After the revolt 1857 a series of agrarian revolt took place in Assam. These revolts occurred mainly due to the increasing rate of land revenue and imposition of new taxes. There is no available record to know exactly what role the people of Lakhimpur played during this period. According to Chandra Kanta Sharma people of this area also might have extended support to the 'Asom Riot' of 1893-94.⁴⁰

In 1885 the Indian National Congress was formed and under its influence political consciousness grew among the Assamese intellectuals which was later resulted in the formation of the 'Assam Association' in 1905.⁴¹ Different literary association were also formed during this time which awakened national consciousness among the Assamese people. The partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement (1905-1911) also had an impact on Assam and even the people of Lakhimpur along with others got involved in the national movement.

Before joining in the national movement of India in 1921 the people of Lakhimpur specially Dhakuakhana made an abortive attempt to expel the British from the neighboring area

of 'Gugamukh', 'Ghilamara', 'Machkhowa' and 'Dhakuakhana'. This is locally called as 'Lutpat' (Mass docoity).⁴² Though this attempt failed to expel the British the spirit of freedom of the people of Lakhimpur still remained in their minds. They now began to participate in different phases of the freedom struggle.

Like other parts of Assam, Lakhimpur also participated actively in the freedom movement of India. During the Non-Cooperation Movement Congress units were formed that gave the idea of liberation into the minds of the people of Lakhimpur. After the establishment of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee (APCC) on 5th June 1921, the District Congress Committees (DCC) in each sub-division with Village Committees and Mouza Committee at lower level were formed.⁴³ Following this North Lakhimpur District Congress Committee (NLDCC) was formed in 1921 under the presidentship of Sarbeswar Boruah and the vice presidentship of Chandra Sekhar Das. Keshab Chandra Gohain was the secretary of this committee.⁴⁴ Chandra Sekhar Das was elected as president of the North Lakhimpur District Congress Committee in 1928. Congress organization was also strengthened in 'Machkhowa', 'Gohain Mouza' and 'Dhakuakhana' due to his painstaking efforts. After the formation of District Congress Committee in Lakhimpur district two primary committees were formed at Baligaon of Dhakuakhana and Ghanhi gaon of Ghilamara.⁴⁵

Other prominent leaders of the region were Ghananath Gohain, Purna Bharali, Siva Chandra Goswami, Tileswar Dutta, Sarat Das, Ghanakanta Das, Bilash Roy Khemani, Dhanpur Sut etc. They lunched the nationalist movement with great enthusiasm and vigor spreading the Gandhian message throughout the region. *Satyagraha*, (peaceful non-cooperation) *Hartal* (a strike) *Slogan*, processions, meeting and picketing become the regular features in this region. But tribal people such as Misings of the remote areas were influenced only at a later period.⁴⁶

During the period of 1930-1942 Lakhimpur district played an important role in the National Independent Movement. In response of Gandhiji's call for Civil Disobedience Movement, a few '*Khadi*' training centers were opened at different places of the district. The people took part in processions with traditional dress and cymbals in this movement. The police forcibly took away these instruments and after a few days these were returned to the owners.⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that during this period of time Nehru came to North Lakhimpur which encouraged the common people to a large extent. Similarly, in 1942 the people of Lakhimpur district also joined in the Quit India Movement like other parts of the state. In the beginning this movement was non violent. But later on it became violent when some people burned down the forest office, the bridges and missionary bungalow in different parts of the district. The students and women played a significant role in this regard. During this time in every village there was Gaon Rakshi Bahini' (Village Defense Party) who patrolled the village at night. If police arrived in a village at night with a view to arresting someone the volunteers of the 'Gaon Rakshi Bahini' played a flute called '*singa*' to warn the villagers about the arrival of the police.⁴⁸ Finally, on 15th August, 1947, the people of Lakhimpur district observed the independent day along with the other parts of India.

People and Religion:

(i) Population: According to the 2011 census the total population of the district was 1,040,644 (Male - 5, 29,484 and Female - 5, 11,160). The growth rate of the population over the decade 2001- 2011 was 17. 06 %. The sex ratio of the district is 965 female per 1000 males. The density of population is 457 per sq. k.m. which is again higher than state density. The district is predominately rural. However a part of population inhabits in the urban area.

There are 1,170 revenue villages and 3 towns viz North Lakhimpur, Bihpuria and Dhakuakhana. There are one Zila Parishad (Lakhimpur Zila Parishad), 9 Anchalic Panchayats and 81 Gaon Panchayats in the district. Besides, it has 1 civil hospital, 23 P.H.C., 5 state Dispensaries and 183 medical sub-centers.

(ii) The Linguistic Groups: The people of Lakhimpur district speak various language and dialects among them Assamese is the widely spoken language. The other linguistic groups are Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, Oriya, Marowari, Bodo, Tiwa, Mising, Khamti, Munda, Deuri, Karbi, Kali, Hajong etc.⁴⁹ Thus though rural in character the district presents a composite population structure in terms of population.

(iii) Religion: According to census report of Assam 1991, the people of the district are the followers of three major religions viz Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Buddhists, Sikhs, Persian and Jains are also there but they constitute less than one percent of the total population. Besides, some of the tribal groups who are the inhabitants of the district follow their traditional animistic beliefs and faiths.

(iv) Castes, Communities and Tribes: The district is also a place of residence for various caste, communities and tribal groups. The major caste, communities and tribes inhabiting in the district are Bramin, Kayastha, Kalita, Koch, Rajbanshi, Keot, Boria, Sut, Yugi (Nath), Kaibortta, Ahom, Mising, Bodo-Kachari, Sonowal-Kachari, Thegal-Kachari, Chutia, Deori, Rabha, Khamti, Nepali, Hajong, Karbi, Munda, Urang, Santal, Bhil etc. Besides other groups of the people like Bengali, Bihari, Maruwari, Nepali, Punjabi etc are also inhabitant of the district.

Ecology of the District:

(i) Climate: The Lakhimpur climate is classified as warm and temperate. The summers there have a good deal of rainfall while winters have very little. In Lakhimpur average annual temperature is 25.0° c. The rainfall here average is 1200 mm. The least amount of rainfall occurs in November. The average in this month is 2 mm. Most of the precipitation here falls in August averaging 362 mm. The temperatures are highest on average in May, at around 32.3° c. January is the coldest month, temperatures averaging 15.4° c.⁵⁰

(ii) Forest and flora: The forest cover of the district is mainly tropical rain forest. There are some reserved forest and covered area in the district such as Ranga Reserve, Kakoi Reserve, Dulung Reserve, Pabho Reserve etc. Varieties of tree species grown in the forest area of the district are Hillock (*Terminalia myriocarpa*), Urium (*Bichotia jauvanica*), Nahar (*Mesua ferrea*), Ajhar (*Lagerstroemia speciosa*), Simul (*Bombax Ceiba*), Sum (*Machilus*), Gomari (*Gmelina arborea*), Sisu (*Dalbargia sissoo*), Silikha (*Terminalia chebula*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Sopa (*Mangnolia*) etc.

(iii) Fauna: The species of wild animals existing in the forests are elephants, buffaloes, tigers, different kinds of deer like Samber, swana, deer, the hag deer, barking deer, leopards, hyena, bison, black panther, sloth bear, small goat cat, fishing cat, wild dag, monkey, languor monkey, hillock monkey, porcupine, squirrel, civet cat and different varieties of birds species and reptiles are found in the district. In 1996 Lakhimpur District became home to the 'Bardoibum-Beelmukh' Wildlife Sanctuary which has an area of 11sq k.m.

(iv) Humidity: The air is very humid throughout the year, the relative humidity being usually over 70, 00 percent.

(v) Cloudiness: Skies are heavily clouded to overcast in the south west monsoon season. In the post monsoon and cold seasons skies are lightly to moderately cloud. Moderate to heavy clouded skies particularly during afternoons and evenings are common during March to May.

(vi) Winds: Winds are generally light throughout the year and are mostly from direction between north and west.⁵¹

(vii) Minerals: There is no major exploration of minerals in the district except some minor exploration for petroleum by ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) near Dhakuakhana. The great river Subansiri was once famous for gold washing.

Economy of the District:

The economy of the Lakhimpur District is basically agrarian. The District falls in the upper Brahmaputra valley region and eastern Himalayan zone. The major components of economy of the district can be discussed as under:

(i) Agriculture: Agriculture is the prime occupation of the inhabitants of the district. The district agriculture department looks after agricultural activities with its four agricultural Sub-divisions namely – Lakhimpur, Dhakuakhana, Narayanpur and Laluk. Main crops of the district are paddy which is sown three times in year, known as autumn paddy, winter paddy and summer paddy. Other crops of the district are maize, wheat, tea, mustard oil, sugarcane, small's millets, pulses, oilseeds etc (Bhatt-1998). The available statistics of the district also say that there are total 1, 64,645 cultivators, out of which 1, 35,458 are small and marginal cultivators. The net irrigated area of the district is 5290 hectares.

(ii) Plantations and Horticulture: To increase and stabilize the agricultural income, it becomes essential to switch over from subsistence agriculture to cultivation of perennial fruit crops, plantation crops, tuber crops and spice crops. In Lakhimpur district Pineapples, Banana, Areca nut, jackfruit, potato, papaya etc are the major plantation and horticulture crops.

(iii) Sericulture: The sericulture is the traditional activity in the district with *muga* being predominant and 383 hac of area is under plantations supporting the sericulture activity.

(iv) Animal Husbandry: Dairying and poultry are practiced by most of the small and marginal farmers and landless labourers and to them this activity provides economic security by serving a hedge against crops failure. The district is suitable for poultry farming, particularly commercial broilers and the activity has made fairly good progress, despite the lack of assured marketing supply during the past one year. Sheep, goat and pig rearing are also common among the farmers in the district. There exists good demand for the pork and meat.

(v) Fishery: Though 90% of the district population consumes fish, there is shortage of supply and it is met out of inflow from neighboring district or states. The district has a water spread area of around 10, 708 hac under various form of fishery resources like ponds, tanks, swamps, *beels* etc.

(vi) Industry: The district is not having any major and medium industries and is industrially a backward district. However there are 815 small scale industries in the district which are mostly agro and forest based ones (Rice mills 74, Floor Mills 27, Wooden furniture 194 etc). However different types of industries in the district are resource based, demand based and skill based small scale industries.

(a) Resource based Industries: Rice mills, flaked rice, rice noodles, straw board, processing of pineapple and lemon, betel nut processing, banana chips, cane and bamboo furniture units, beekeeping (honey, wax etc), oil expellers, Mushroom processing, black boards, raw milks, wood furniture etc are some of the major resource based industries of the district.

(b) Demand based Industries: Bread and bakery, steel utensils, TV antennas, bricks, rubber, rolls for rice mills, aluminum utensils, cement blocks, foot wear etc are some of the demand based industries.

(c) Skill based Industries: Oil engine / electrical motor repairing and servicing, welding and general engineering works, tractor/power tiller repairing and servicing, TV tape recorder servicing / repairing etc are some of the demand based industries.

Education of the District:

The district has a number of educational institutions. The premier institutions for higher education are the Colleges of Arts, Science and Commerce streams, Post-Graduation Training Institutions etc. There are 12 Colleges, 1 basic Training College and 2 Post-Graduate Training College in the district. There are 24 Provincialized Higher Secondary Schools, 125 Provincialized High School, 2 Provincialized High Madrassas, 160 recognized High Schools, 309 Middle Schools, 56 Middle Vernacular Schools, 14 Middle Madrassas, 1383 Lower Primary School in the district.

According to 2011 census the literacy rate of the district is 78.39 out of which 84.66 percent are male and 71.91 percent are Female.⁵²

Transport system:

The district of Lakhimpur is connected with the rest of the state by all four modes of communications i.e. road, railway, river and air.

(i) Transport by Road: History says that there was no network of road system in the district during Ahom region. 'Gohain Kamal Ali' an embankment road constructed during the reign of Konch king Naranarayana, connected Narayanpur with Koch Bihar. There was no marked improvement in road communication even during the British administration which laid emphasis only on river communications. Presently, the N.H52 is important road in the North Bank and it enters the district from Sonitpur and touches important places like Howajan, Dhalpur, Narayanpur, Harmonti, Laluk before reaching North Lakhimpur town. The river Subonsiri is the middle point of the Lakhimpur and Dhemaji District. The nineteen miles long the North Lakhimpur-Kamalabari road connects the district with Majuli under Jorhat District. The important road connecting Narayanpur with Laluk via Bihpuria is about 25km. Further the road connecting Gogamukh and Dhakuakhana sub-division via Ghilamara is about 35km.

(ii) Transport by Water: Till recently, the Brahmaputra was the only means of communication between Lakhimpur and the rest of Assam. The river in fact served as the life line of the entire valley. The Subansiri is the another river in the district which is navigable by large boats at all seasons of the year. The Ranganadi is also navigable by boats throughout the year. The inland water transport corporation Ltd. a state government undertaking, now taking over charges of stream navigation in the state has not yet been able to introduce regular steamer services linking upper Assam with rest of the country. But it maintained same ferry services. Besides these, many Private ferry services are auctioned out by the state government. Private boats also play in the rivers to carry goods as well as passengers.

(iii) Transport by Rail: The first rail communication was started in the year 1961-62 when the first meter gauge railway line was opened by the North East frontier Railway in the district. The line enters in the west from Sonitpur and crosses the Subansiri in the east connecting Dhemaji district. The railway stations in the district are – Uttar Kathani, Tatibahar, Tipling, Harmutty, Tunijan, Kathal pukhuri, Silanibari, Uttar Lakhimpur, Lilabari, Sirajuli, Baginadi and Subansiri

(iv) Transport by Air: Development of air communication is also a very recent. However it is older than rail communication. Development of air communication in this region can be attributed to the exigencies of the World war-II which necessitated air link between Calcutta and this remote strategically important corner. Lilabari is the only aerodrome which is situated at the distance of 5 kms from North Lakhimpur town.

Places of Historical importance:

In this context, it will be worth mentioned to name a few places of historical importance located at the district. There are certain places of religious historical and archaeological importance which of late attraction, the attention as places of tourism. There are temple, *than* (pith) and *satras* built on the memory of grant saints of Vaishnavite religion of 15th century Assam. Shri Shri Madhavdeva, a great disciple of Shri Shri Shankardeva was born in a place called ‘Leteku Pukhuri’ at Narayanpur in the year 1489. Thus, the place became famous for religious as well as tourism point of view.

The other places of religious importance are Basudeva *Than* (pith), Badula Padma Atar *than*, Bathawali *than*, Bishnu balikuchi *satra*, Radha pukhuri, Hari *Devalaya*, Maghanowa *Dol*, Petua Goshain *than*, Laupani *Dol* and Muraghoga *Dol* are prominent as places of religious importance. Among all the Basudeva *than* situated at Dhakuakhana sub-division occupies a prominent place.

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CHAPTER-III
THE BIHUS: SEASIONAL AND AGRICULTURAL
FESTIVALS

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The Bihu festivals in Assam at different times by both the tribal and non-tribal communities are basically seasonal and agricultural festivals. The Bihu festival may rightly be termed a festival of acculturation. It is a unique synthesis of the Aryans and non-Aryans culture. Secondly, the Bihu festivals may rightly be regarded both as pre- harvesting and post- harvesting festival. Thirdly, it may rightly be termed as a festival connected with fertility magic. Thus the tradition of the Bihu festivals is being carried on to assist in the promotion of abundant harvest. The Bihu festival is celebrated in three different seasons (a) The *Bohag Bihu* or *Rangali Bihu* is performed in the spring season i.e. in the month of April, (b) The *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu* is celebrated in the winter season i.e. in the month of January and (c) The *Kati Bihu* or *Kongali Bihu* is observed in the Autumn season i.e. in the month of October.

Bohag Bihu of Lakhimpur District in general:

In Lakhimpur district Bohag or Rangali Bihu is the most important spring festival along with the other parts of the state. It may also be called 'New Year festival' in Assamese society. It is observed by all castes, tribes and communities of the district following some particular rites and rituals in the mid-April every year. Generally, Bohag Bihu starts on the last day of *chaitra* or *sot* (mid March to mid April) and goes on for a month. It begins with cattle worship known as *Garu Bihu* (Cow Bihu). The whole day is given to this service. On this day cows are given bath following some rituals. The *matikalai* 'aw *halodhi* pastes with mustard oil are applied on

their bodies and they are taken to nearby river. A garland of sliced vegetables like brinjal, gourd, turmeric, bitter guard, gamboges fruit etc is put around their necks and everyone sings the same hymns.

‘Lau kha begana kha

Bosore bosore barhi ja

Mare xoru baper xoru

Toi hobi bor garu’

Eat gourd, eat brinjal

grow from year to year

your mother is small,

your father is small

but you must be a big cow.

In the evening a Bihu gift in form of new ropes made of *Tora* plant is tied around the neck of the cows. They are also beaten with branches of two wild plants *dighloti* and *makhiloti* to drive away the flies and mosquitoes. It is also mandatory for all the family members to rub the paste of *matikaloi*, *halodhi* and mustard oil on their bodies and take bath and wear new clothes on that day. It is also customary to have certain traditional food like duck and chicken egg fried with *amrolitup*, and *poitabhat*. It is believed that hundred and one varieties of cooked green *xak* should be eaten on the *manuh bihu*.¹ The women folk prepare various traditional sweets made of special kind of sticky rice called *bora chaul*. They are *tilpitha*, *narikalor pitha*, *ghila pitha* various types of *jolpan* like *chira*, *muri*, *akhoi* with yogurt, cream and jaggery.

The second day is called *manuh Bihu* or *bor Bihu*. On this day the main festival begins and people pay respect to elders, visit village *namghar* and exchange *bihuwan* woven at home. The Bihu songs and dances are integral part of Bohag Bihu festival. It begins with '*husori*'- a community singing from the very first day and is followed by Bihu dances and songs. The practice of writing mantras on the leaves of *nahar* tree and keeping them under the rafters is also followed, which means a kind of protection against the storms, lightning and fire. This is a season of heavy storms and rains and a phenomenon popularly known as *bordoichila's* homecoming is taken place like married daughters come to their maternal homes.² The religious rituals are an integral part of Bohag Bihu. People of all age groups visit the *namghar* to pay their homage to God during the time of this celebration.

The *husori* band is entertained by the people in every family with refreshments. It is offered refreshments, some money, *tamul*, *pan* and *gamocha* on a *bota* or *xorai* behind which all members of the family kneel down to bow to the party, whereupon the party blesses them and then departs. The social problems are brought out by singing *husori*. The *husori nam* follows the partly religious, partly ritualistic mode. On the other hand, Bihu songs are of various modes such as love, separation, eroticism and union.

After the long celebration, Bohag Bihu is given a farewell called *Bihu urua* or *Bihu thowa*. The *Bihu uruwa* or *Bihu thowa* is done ceremonially by singing and dancing at a place a little distance from the village or a jungle or a lonely paddy field. All the articles used in the festival are left at this place and this marks the formal end of the festivities.

Bohag Bihu among the different tribes of Lakhimpur district:

Bohag Bihu is known as *baisagu* among the Bodo Kachari of the Lakhimpur district. The Bodo-Kacharis dedicate the seven days differently. The first day is *magon* (cow-Bihu), the

second day *mansoi domahi* (man-Bihu), the third day *saima* (dog-Bihu) the fourth day *ama* (swine-Bihu), the fifth day *daoni* (fowl-Bihu), the sixth day for ducks and birds and the seventh day is kept for receiving the kith and kin.³ They traditionally perform some rituals and customs which are different from the others. On the first day, all the cattle are give paddy to eat and then taken to the nearest river or tank for bath. The horns are smeared with oil and occasionally with oil, ashes and pounded rice-flour are applied in patch to the bodies of the cattle. On the second day the Bodo Kachari observe *bathau puja* in every house along with the worship of their forefathers. The Bodo-Kachari also perform *husori* from house to house during the time of Bohag Bihu.⁴

Among the Deuris of Lakhimpur district Bohag Bihu is known as *bohagiya bisu* or *bisu* along with the other parts of Assam. The *bisu* is closely related with same religious rites and rituals. If the last day of *chaitra* is not Wednesday, they start their bihu on the first Wednesday of Bohag month by sacrificing animals and birds at *gosainishal*. Before commencement of *bisu*, Deoris also conduct *ghardew puja* in every household by giving tribute to their respective Gods.⁵ On the day of *garu Bihu* Deoris wear new clothes and they also teach how to wear *dhoti* among younger boys and *pauga* among the young girls. The Deori people also perform *husori* like other ethnic groups of the district which is started from *gosainishal*. On the next Wednesday after completion of *husori*, they close the celebration of *bisu* by worshipping at *gosainishal*.⁶

On Sunday, just before commencement of the Bohag Bihu the Sonowal Kachari observe *baitha puja* for the well beginning of the Bihu. On Monday they continue the worship by scarifying animals and birds. The bihu is formally started by the people on a Tuesday by singing *haidang geet* among themselves. On the *Sankranti* day, (*chaitra* and *bohag*) and the first day of the Bohag they observe *garu Bihu* and *manuh Bihu* accordingly. They also perform *husori*, by

singing their traditional song *haidang geet* from house to house from the day of *garu Bihu*. They perform *bohuwa nritya* (a special kind of dance) on seventh day of the Bohag Bihu. However, in Lakhimpur district it is worth mentioning that the celebration of the Bohag Bihu among the Sonowal Kachari is influenced by the Vaishnavite culture due to their conversion to the Vaishnavism.⁷

The Mising people of Lakhimpur district also perform Bohag Bihu with great enthusiasm and merriment. This is due to the cultural contact with the non tribal Assamese people. The Mising people do not give much importance on rituals and traditions during the time of Bohag Bihu like the other tribes of Lakhimpur district. They perform '*husori*' from house to house with songs and dances from the day of *garu Bihu*. It is compulsory for all the young girls in Mising society to join in the '*husori*'. Otherwise she will be punished. The whole bihu team is well maintained by *tiree boruah* (leader of the girls) and *deka boruah* (leader of the boys). The householders show high respect to the *husori* team by giving a tray full of betel-nut, leaves and money. They also offer '*apong*' (traditional liquor) to the Bihu team after their performance.⁸ The Bihu ceremony amongst the Mising people is often described as 'Mising Bihu'.

The Rabha people of Lakhimpur district also observe Bohag Bihu in their traditional manner for three days which is known as '*baikhu*'. On the opening day, the Rabha people observe *goru Bihu* with their traditional customs and rituals. On the next day, they observe *manuh Bihu* or *bisuwa* with the worship of their ancestors, Gods and Goddesses. Moreover, on the first day of Bohag, they create an image of *pawara devi* (an imaginary Goddess) and arrange Her worship in the house of every family. They perform Bihu from house to house along with the image of *pawara devi* for seven days.⁹ The Rabha people of Lakhimpur district give much emphasis on fooding during the period of *bisuwa*.

The celebration of Bohag Bihu among the Ahoms also starts from the day of *goru Bihu* (first day of Bohag Bihu) and continues for seven days. They follow their own rites and rituals during this celebration. Besides bathing of cattle, *Koni juj*, they eat hundred and one type of vegetables and plump of reddish brown ant (*amloitup*). Moreover, the Ahoms traditionally eat pork in Bohag Bihu. The *husori*, *ratibihu* and the use of *dhol* (a kind of musical instrument), *pepa* (a kind of musical instrument), *gagana* (a kind of musical instrument) are also part and parcel of the Bohag Bihu of the Ahoms.

Ahoms usually worship their forefathers in Bohag Bihu. According to the myth prevailing among the Ahoms, if they fail to worship and to give offerings to their forefathers, it certainly brings evil to their family.¹⁰ Therefore, they offer *bar pitha* (a kind of cake), *bora handah* (a kind of dish) *gur* (a kind of sugar) *loupuni* (liquid made from rice) piece of *tamul* (betel nut) in the evening for the *dam devata* (God of forefather). In the hymn of this worship, they appeal the *dam devata* to protect them from any kind of evils and to accept these offerings without having any form of displeasure. Significantly, these traditions of the Ahoms during the time of Bohag Bihu have not continued in Lakhimpur like in the past. It has lost its originality to same extent in course of time.

The Morans like the Misings and Deuris of the Lakhimpur district also observe *uruka* on Tuesday, *garu Bihu* on Wednesday and *manuh Bihu* on Thursday. They observed *garu Bihu* following their traditional rites and rituals which are to some extent different from the other tribes. On the day of *manuh Bihu*, the Morans starts *husori* from house to house. They perform their *husori* according to the permission of their elders (*guru-bhakat*). They only use the drum and cymbal in their performance of *husori*. The *Banhi* (a musical instrument) *pepa*, *gagana* are prohibited in the performance of *husori*. They also observe *bormagu* in the midst of the Bohag

Bihu celebration.¹¹ Like the other ethnic group they also eat *pitha* (cake), *rice beer*, hundred and one type of vegetables during the period of *manuh Bihu*.

The Tiwas (Lalungs) also celebrate their spring festivals *baishak bisu* for one or two weeks. Usually, the Bihu festival begins on Wednesday in the Tiwa society. The offerings are made to *bagh-raja* (God of Tiger), *mahadeu* (Siva) and *kuber* (God of paddy and cultivation). Fowls are sacrificed as offering to these Gods. Like other tribes, Tiwas or Lalungs also observe the first day of *bisu* for the cattle. The Tiwas or Lalungs who reside in plains sing *husori* in a general manner, while those who dwell in the foothills dance on a piece of ground made muddy for that purpose. Sometimes, Tiwas or Lalungs organize fairs in this occasion. The chief feature of these fairs is the exhibition of martial art and dances performed with old swords, spears and shields.¹²

The Buddhist groups of Lakhimpur district especially Khamtis observe the Bohag Bihu festival in a particular way which is popularly known as *poi-chanken*. In the beginning of Assamese Bohag month the Khamti people of Lakhimpur district celebrate this festival with religious rites and rituals. During this celebration, Lord Buddha's image is shifted to a place which is known as *kamgpha ghar* made in an artistic manner for bath having some special water mixed with perfume. During the time of bath young boys and girls enjoy by singing and performing dances altogether. After the bath, the people pray by lightening candle in front of the *kamgpha ghar* for the welfare of their family as well as the whole world. They also organize religious assembly and cultural function among themselves. After three days, it is again shifted to its original place.¹³

In Lakhimpur, the people of tea garden community who are scattered in different parts of the district have been observing the Bohag Bihu in a traditional manner known as *chaitra parab*

or *charak puja*. They observe this festival among themselves with religious rites and rituals for two days from the day of *Sankranti*. The people sing and dance from house to house and wishes happy and peaceful life for every family during the time of this festival.¹⁴ They also observe '*charul parab*' in the month of Bohag for two days. In this festival they sacrifice fowls and prepare a traditional curry with nine types of vegetables.

Magh Bihu of Lakhimpur District in general:

The Magh Bihu or *Domahi* is a winter festival celebrated on the day of *makar sankranti* (Mid January) in Lakhimpur district like other places of Assam. The Magh Bihu is significant in a few ways. Firstly, it is celebrated after the harvesting of the winter crops mainly *sali* and *bao*. Secondly, it is observed that all sorts of food items such as milk, curd, cream, rice, fish, pulses, *gur* (jaggery), *doi* (yogurt) and other things are available in plenty. It time for enjoyment and merrymaking. So, this Bihu earns its name as *Bhugali* Bihu. The *agni devata* is worshipped on the *sankranti* day by burning of the *Meji*. The day of *uruka* (the day before of the *sankranti*) has its own importance. On this day of *uruka*, the cowherds and other young boys of the village collect bamboos and field stubble to construct temple like structure known as *Meji*, preferably near a *namghar* or a lake or river. They also construct a big cottage called *bhelaghar* with green bamboos and field stubble as well as dry banana leaves which is meant for passing the night. The whole night is spent feasting, merry making, dancing and singing. The youths collect Bihu *pitha*, rice, fish and other things like firewood, vegetables and arrange a feast there. Fish specially *borali* fish and duck meat are the main item in this feast. In urban areas firewood in the form of furniture, gates of the householders are stolen to burn a fire at night. At dawn of the *sankranti* day of Magh bihu the *Meji* and *bhelaghar* are set on fire uttering God's name and offering *tamul-pan*, *dakshina* (donation of minimum 1.25 rupees), *prasad*, *pitha* etc. The flames warm up the

people who had faced the cold winter season. Brahmans or elderly persons give blessings and put marks of ash on the forehead. The half burnt sticks and bamboos are scattered in the paddy fields by the people that serve as manure. Sometimes those pieces are brought home to be thrown around the fruit-bearing trees. The belief is that the ashes and half-burnt firewood of the *Meji* increase the fertility of the paddy field and the garden. On the same day, the ladies clean the houses and utensils before they take their bath. The female member of the family prepare variety of traditional food items like *korai guri* (dried fried black pulses, rice, sesame, ginger etc), *til* (sesame), *pitha* (kind of powdered rice cake), *laru* (sweet roll) , *chira* (rice flakes), *muri*, *akhoi*, *kumal chaul*, *doi* (yogurt) with *gur* (jaggery) etc and enjoy those food at noon. No meat and fish is allowed on the *sankranti* day. In this Bihu people also maintain the custom by showing respect to the elders and receiving their blessings. Another interesting feature of the Magh Bihu in Lakhimpur district is the holding of various sports competitions like racing, high jump, buffalo fighting, egg striking etc in a big way. The next day people gather at the village *namghar* and perform congregational prayer.¹⁵ In some of the areas people arrange a grand feast on that day specially among the female members of the village.

Magh Bihu among the different tribes of Lakhimpur District:

The rituals of the Magh Bihu celebration vary from tribe to tribe in Lakhimpur district. The Mising people of the district prepare for Magh Bihu from the early part of the previous month known as *Puha*. The young people of the village collect firewood from the jungle altogether from the early part of the *Puha*. Different groups of people among the Misings especially on the basis of age collect different firewood. They usually construct *Meji* (temple like structure of the firewood) on the river bank. During the pre-festive period of Magh Bihu the young people gather at the river bank and heap up the firewood after cutting and splitting

equally. One of them encourages his friends who are busy with their work by singing ‘*Oinitom*’.¹⁶

Mising people generally construct two kind of *Meji*- male and female. The *bhalaghar* is also built beside the *Meji*. According to the traditional beliefs prevailing among the Mising people it is not favourable that the *Meji* is trampled over by any kind of animals like dog, cat, fox etc. Therefore the *Meji* is guarded by the young people for the whole night .¹⁷ In the early morning of the *sankranti* or *dumahi* day, the *Meji* is set fire. Traditionally it is belief that ones will is fulfilled if he sets fire on the *Meji* and by giving betel nut and leaf as well as accepting good wishes from the young boys and girls gathered here. All the young boys and girls bow down in front of the *Meji* and also take ‘*yam*’ and ‘*apong*’ altogether. Elderly person of the house also worship fire at their ‘*maram*’ (household fireplace) after taking bath. The Misings also tie up the trees of their premises like betel-nut, mango, jack fruit, coconut by a rope made by paddy straw during this time. In the evening the Mising people also organize buffalo fighting. Otherwise they believe that buffalo do not become tame.

The Mising people also observe the ‘*Porag*’ or ‘*Nara Singa Bihu*’ in that period of time with great enthusiasm. It is mainly an agricultural celebration and participated by the young boys and girls mostly following some rituals and customs. Due to its expensive nature *Porag* is not observed in every year.¹⁸

The Sonowal Kacharis of the Lakhimpur district also observe the Magh Bihu following their own customs and traditions. From the mid of the month of *Puha* the cowherds and other young lads starts to collect firewood from the nearby forest. They generally construct *Meji* in the open field or bank of the river or lake.¹⁹ They usually do this work three or four days before the *sankranti* day. The young boys also guard the *Meji* during this period of time. They also build a

bhelaghar with green bamboos and field stubble for this purpose. This particular time is one of the most enjoyable parts of the Magh Bihu relating to Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district. They enjoy among themselves by singing and dancing in the rhythm of the *dhol*, *pepa* and *banhi* .

On the *sankranti* day of *Puha* the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur tie up all the fruits trees with *dhankher* (dry straw) and *tara pat* (leaf of tree known as *taragosh*) . They also tie up *barghar* (the main apartment of an Assamese house) *bhoralghor* (a granary) and *guhalighor* (cow-shed). They believe that this kind of act may help in growing fruits on the trees.²⁰ The women prepare different types of delicious food items for the next day. On the other hand, the cowherds collect *chanda* (subscription) and arrange a *bhoj* (a common feast) in the night. The young girls and women also come to the place of feast and offer duck, cock, pigeon betel nut and leaf to the cowherds for the fulfillment of their hopes and aspirations. Because they believe that the cowsheds are real *bhakatas* (priests). On the next day early in the morning one of the cowherds set fire to the *Meji* uttering God's name. Generally, an orphan boy performs this duty among the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district. As soon as the fire is lit, they offer betel nut and leaf, *pitha*, *dakshina* etc to the fire and then eat *alu*, *kasu*, *mah korai* (fried black pulses). Sometimes they arrange *bahibhoj* in the morning with the remaining part of duck, fowl and pigeon offered by the women at night.²¹

Traditionally the Sonowal Kacharies believe that if they fail to eat *alu* in the *Sankranti* day, they will behave like *gahori* (pig). On this particular day no meal is prepared in the house. They eat *chira* (rice flicks) *pitha* (a kind of powdered rice cake), *laru* (sweet roll) *kumal chaul*, *doi* (yagurt) etc. In the noon of the *sankranti* day, elderly persons offer *shorai* containing *mah prashad* in the *namghar* and sing *nam prasanga* altogether. In the evening they worship their

forefathers which are known as *marak diya*. On the *Sankranti* day Sonowal kacharis offer *alu*, *kachu*, *pitha* and *chaul* (rice) with meat and fish split into eleven parts in the name of their forefather at a corner of the compound. Generally these offerings are eaten by dogs and crows within two or three days. Otherwise it is considered as a signal of misfortune for the family. In such situation they again offer this meat in the name of their forefathers in the same way.²² It is worth mentioning that according to the different clans and areas the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur District follows various customs and traditions during the time of Magh Bihu celebration.

In Lakhimpur the Deori people observe Magh Bihu festival on the day of *Magh Sankranti*. Traditionally, they start this celebration organizing worship at *dewalay* or *gohaini shal* and continue it for a week. They end this celebration by holding worship at *dewalay* or *gohaini shal* also. Some sources also reveals that the Deories generally start the Magh Bihu on the first Wednesday of *suklapakshya* (period before the full moon) in the month of Magh.

There are numbers of traditional belief regarding the celebration of Magh Bihu among the Deori people of Lakhimpur district. They consider the fire of *Meji* as the funeral fire of their forefathers. In Mahabharata it has been mentioned that Bhishma died on this particular day according to his will. So, the Deori people also consider the fire of *Meji* as funeral fire of 'Pitamaha Bhishma'.²³ Following this kind of belief the Deoris put a mark on the forehead by using oil and ashes of *Meji* fire and then come back to their house. Earlier, the Deoris believed that the New Year started from this celebration of Magh Bihu. Therefore, they also believe that this *magh sankranti* brings hope of peace, happiness and prosperity to the people.

Before ten or fifteen days of the *magh sankranti*, the young Deuri lads gather at *morang ghar* and discuss about the construction of *Meji* and the arrangement of *Bhojbhat*. Along with

the *Meji* they also build a *bhelaghar* to guard the *Meji* at night. On the *uruka* night (day before the actual Bihu) all the male members of the village participate in the *bhojbhat* at the place of *Meji*. They generally build two *Mejis* jointly in a row. Traditionally, they believed that if the crow had noticed the whole process of *Meji* construction that is not good for them for the whole year. Therefore they try to build these *Mejis* at night beyond the notice of the crow as far as possible.²⁴

In the *sankranti* day the young boy whose mother and father are still alive take bath in the river early in the morning and then offer a *sharai* on behalf of all the people of the society to the *Meji* or *agni devata*. They utter loudly the name of *Hari* (Vishnu/God). Then all the people gathered here turn three times from the left to right around the *Mejis* and set it on fire. The people offer betel-nut and leaf, sesame, (*til*) pulse etc to the *Meji*. The women and girls of the Deoris bow down in front of the *Meji* for the welfare of the family as well as fulfillment of their dreams. It is strongly believed in the Deori society that if the *Meji* falls down on the western side it is deemed to be a good omen. In the noon of *sankranti* day, after taking bath the Deoris tie up all the plants of the premises by the paddy straw for better production. They also polish the forehead of the cattle and buffalo by the ashes of paddy straw mixed with mustard oil for their welfare.

In Bodo-Kachari society, Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu is popularly known as '*Magou*'.²⁵ This festival is observed for three days from the *sankranti* day of *Puha*. In the evening of the *sankranti* day, the young people tie up all the fruit trees of their compound using '*torapat*' which is earlier used in collecting paddy. They believed that this kind of practice has increases the production of fruits of the trees. Sometime the Bodo-Kacharis have the practice of keeping a baby on their lap believing that this will help to product healthy fruits.

Originally, the Bodo-Kachari people did not follow the traditional of *Meji*. Now-a-days the construction of *Meji* and the arrangement of *bhojbhat* are major events of their Magh Bihu. They arrange this *bhojbhat* by using the money which is collected by the cowherds singing *mohohu kheda geet* from house to house.²⁶

The *mahkarai* is an important item in the *magou* festival of Bodo-Kachari people. Just before taking of *mahkarai*, *pitha*, *laru* etc they offer these items to the cows kept in the cowshed. Traditionally they believed that the *pakghor* (kitchen room) and *bhoralghar* (granary) is the place of *Lakshmidēvi* of a family. So, they generally use cow dung in plastering the wall of the *pakghar* and *bhoralghar* for the safety of the *Lakshmidēvi*.

On the first day of *Magau* or Magh Bihu the Bodo-Kacharis, worship their forefathers. They offer all kinds of food items like *mahkoria*, *pitha*, *laru* etc to the forefathers in a ritualistic manner. After that the others members of the family take all these food items along with their neighbours.²⁷

The Rabha people also observe *Dumsi* on the *sankranti* day of *Puha* and *Magh*. On the days of *uruka* the Rabha people construct *Meji* which is popularly known as *bhelanuk* among them. For this purpose before thirty or twenty days of the *sankranti*, the cowherds and young people of the village collect *kakobanh* (a kind of bamboo) from the hills. With the help of the paddy straw collected from every family of the village they construct *bhelanuk* of different sizes. The main *bhelanuk* is 20/30 feet high from the ground which is surrounded by some small *bhelanuks* or *Mejis*. The Rabha people also organize *bhojbhat* (common feast) at night on the day of *uruka*, where cowherds, young men and elderly people also participate. The Rabha people also offer cock along with the other offerings in the name of *bhelanuk* where they worship three Goddess.²⁸

On the day of *uruka* Rabha people also follow a tradition known as '*ghargheroni*'. In the evening all the houses are tied up by a thread. Before doing this, they prepare and store all the necessary festive items at their house as far as possible. Because they do not engage themselves in this kind of work for next three days except eating and dancing from house to house.²⁹ They also take liquor and meat in this festive occasion.

In the morning of the *sankranti* day the young people set on fire the *bhelanuk* or *Meji* uttering the name of God. They also offer liquor to the *bhelanuk* or *Meji* or *agni devata* at the same time. Further other people of the village also join in this process and bring ashes of the *Meji* or *bhelanuk* to their houses considering it as sacred. They also polish oil on the horn of the cow and buffalo and then offer *pitha* to them. After this worship, they leave their cows and buffaloes to the open paddy field. This continues for three months till Bohag.³⁰ They also tie up all the fruit bearing trees of their compound using *tomal* (a special kind of rope made from row bamboo) and *tarapat* (leaf of the tree known as *taragosh*) for the purpose of higher production. Like other tribals of Lakhimpur district, the Rabhas also offer liquor and meat in the name of their forefather on the day of *Magh sankranti*. They respect the *Guru bhakata* and elderly members of the family in a customary manner.

The Tiwas of Lakhimpur district also celebrate Magh Bihu as *Bhogali* festival. They construct numbers of *Mejis* on this occasion where two of them are considered as *Raja-Rani* (King-Queen). These two *Mejis* are constructed higher than the others. The people put paddy straw into the *Mejis* and also put a bamboo in the middle of it. The top part is designed as a *kalochi* (an oblong pinnacle on the top of a temple).³¹ The cowherd and the young boys usually collect the firewood and construction of *Mejis* in the village. Among the cow herd there is a head that is followed by the others. Before going to construct these *Mejis* the cowherds usually bow

down their head offering betel-nut and leaf as well as some money. Those who do not cooperate in this process of *Meji* construction are not allowed to join in this ceremonial occasion.

In the day of *uruka* all the people of the village take part in fishing at noon.³² In the evening all the people including cowherds, young boys and elder people gather at the place where *Mejis* are constructed and set fire on it specially the small *Mejis* with joy and merriment. They enjoy the whole night by dancing and singing and also taking liquor altogether. At late night the *borgorokhia* the head of the cowherds set fire on the main *Mejis* (King-Queen) uttering loudly the name of God. Some gathered people offer liquor and other ceremonial foods to the *Mejis* in the name of God for the fulfillment of their hopes and aspirations.³³

All the Tiwa people take liquor in the day of *sankranti*. Every household prepare liquor from a special kind of rice popularly known as *bora chaul* for their individual need. They also prepare liquor by collecting rice through the cowherds for common need as well. They usually take this liquor adding little amount of water just before a day. At the noon of *sankranti* day, the house wives of each family offer liquor, *pitha* and other ceremonial things in the name of God at *borghor* (the house where the valuable things are kept) and pray for a while for the welfare of whole family. They also follow *nam kirtana* for a period of time and then distribute all the ceremonial foods among the people present there.³⁴ In the evening people lighten earthen lamps at the gateways of their houses in a ritualistic manner. The Tiwas also participate in various games and sports with joy and merriment on this *sankranti* day as well as the next day.

In Lakhimpur District the Khamti people observe *maik chumphai* festival in the month of Magh in a different way.³⁵ This festival is generally observed from the day of *Buddha Purnima* at *Budhha Bihar* or *Bapu Chang* for two days instead of the day of Magh *sankranti*. For this festival they prepare themselves from one month ago. In this festival the Khamti people burn

firewood arranging it layer by layer. The khamti people consider the day of full moon (*Buddha Purnima*) of the month of Magh as sacred day in a large scale. Because on that day, Gautama Buddha took his birth, *buddhatta* (knowledge) and salvation (death). That is why the khamti people of Lakhimpur as well as Assam observe *maik chumphai* festival on the day of *Budhha Purnima* in the month of Magh instead of Magh *sankranti* day.

The Khamtis construct only one *Meji* decorating beautifully known as *Maik Chumphai*. The *Meji* is constructed having three, four, six or eight angles. The whole *Meji* is divided into three parts-*Pallang*, *Maik Chumphai* and *Thi* (the Peak). The *Meji* or *Maik Chumphai* is constructed pointing to the top from the bottom. At the *Thi* (the peak) of the *Meji* or *Maik chumphai* they build a *polo* (a kind of basket for catching fish) by tearing row bamboo in a beautiful manner.³⁶ The Khamti people usually use the sugarcane, plant of banana, plant of bottle gourd and some kind of thread in the process of *Meji* construction. They offer candle, fragrant gum, ceremonial offering on a raised platter to the *Meji*. Then the Khamti people dedicate the *Meji* to Buddhism and *Songha*. They also built a *bhelaghar* in the premises of *bapu chang* where young boys and girls take feast with joy and merriment. In the late night a young lad after taking his bath set fire on the top of the *Meji*. In the morning they take a sacred food which including fish, rice, sesame, yam and various vegetable. On the next day they also arrange a religious gathering at the *bapu chang* in the morning season. They read the sayings of *Gautama Buddha* and the religious book in that gathering.³⁷ However, the *maik champhai* has some religious characteristics, it is purely an agricultural festival where non-Khamti people also participate in a large scale.

The Hajongs usually observe the Magh Bihu on the last day of the month of *Puha* as *Pukhanou Parba*. They observe this festival giving emphasis on labour as the source of power

and also consider this festival as a festival of enjoyment and leisure. For the purpose of *Pukhanou Parba*, the young Hajong lads collect paddy and rice from house to house by singing songs from the date of new moon in the month of *Puha*. The songs which they sing are popularly called '*Thubou-Maga-Geet*'.³⁸ These songs are sung by the singer holding a bamboo stick. They make sound on the ground by the help of this stick while singing these songs.

The young boys and girls of the Hajongs select a field of stubbles for construction of *Meji* and *bhelaghar* for the celebration of Magh Bihu . They construct *bhelaghar* and *Meji* by using the stubble of paddy and firewood collected from the nearby forest. In the last night of the month of *Puha* all the people of the village take a feast together using goods collected by singing *Thubon Maga Geet*. After taking the feast the young lads stay at the *bhelaghar* and enjoy the whole night. On the other hand, young girls are busy in preparing *pitha*, *sandah* and other ceremonial foods for the whole night. In the late night after taking their bath a young boy set fire on the *Meji* following the utterance made by the elderly person simultaneously in the name of *Hari* or *Bishnu*. They also pray in the name of *Hari* or *Bishnu* heating their legs and hand on the fire of *Meji*.

The elders among the Hajongs give blessings to the young people on this festive occasion. The people of same age also greet one another among themselves for the whole year. On the same day the Hajongs people also clean their cowshed and worship the cows with fragrant gum. From that day the cows are made free for grazing for a period of time.³⁹ Similarly the young girls and women also follow a tradition in which they clean their house and yard and light earthen lamps at *Hari mandir* (temple of *Hari*) and at the bottom of the plant of *tulshi*.

Among the Ahoms in Lakhimpur District, Magh Bihu is observed as *Bhogali* as well as '*Mai Jee*' or '*Meji Pura*' festival on the day of *makar sankranti* .⁴⁰ The '*Mai*' means bamboo or

wood and 'Jee' means pile. Thus the Magh Bihu means festival of fire making. Fire is the main source of creation and development. The Ahom burn *Meji* for the purpose of fire, light as well as sound. They also worship the God of agriculture through this process in a large scale.

The Ahoms generally construct two *Mejis* in the open field and also a *bhelaghar* by the stubble of paddy near the *Mejis*. In the evening of *uruka* all the people have a feast in the field where they enjoy singing as well as dancing having *dhol* and *pepa* and thus create an environment of peace and harmony among themselves. On the next day, early in the morning the young boys set fire on the *Mejis* after taking their bath. Then all the people gather here, bow down and kneel in front of the God of fire (*Mejis*) and throw rice, pulse and molasses to it.⁴¹ The Ahoms usually take boiled 'kath Alu' (a kind of hard yam) on the *sankranti* day. Otherwise they believe that one would be born as a pig in the next life. On *sankranti* day the Ahoms dedicate ceremonial offerings such as *juria tamul*, *laopani*, *handah guri* etc to their forefathers. After that worship the family members take all these things as *Prasad*. They also invite their neighbours as well as relatives and offer different food items as far as possible way. In the evening they also take part in some games and sports such as *mah juj* (buffalo fighting) *kukura juj*, (cock fighting) *bagh-bhalukar juj*, (fighting between tiger and bear) *sen juj* (hawk fighting) *hati juj* (elephant fighting) etc. The Buffalo fighting is more popular than the other games and sports among the Ahoms.

Like the Magh Bihu of the other ethnic groups, the tea community people specially the young people also construct *Meji*, *charaghar* (*bhelaghar*) and arrange feast together in the night of *uruka*. In the early morning of the next day, they set fire on the *Meji* and take cake and sweet meals. On this occasion the women of the tea community make some special kind of cakes such as *tilpitha*, *ghilapitha*, *undhipitha*, *chira-doi* etc. The *undhipitha* is most popular among all these

cakes. This cake looks like the half moon prepared by sesames and molasses. When someone dies in a family this particular *undhipitha* is prohibited for one year for the members. On the other hand at *uruka* night the young girls gather in a house and start the worship of the Goddess of '*Tusu*' in the traditional manner.⁴²

Due to the worship of *Tusu* or the Goddess of *Tusu* the Magh Bihu festival among the Tea community in Lakhimpur is popularly known as '*Tusu Parab*' or '*Tusu Puja*'. The goddess of *Tusu* is the most respected and worshipped goddess among the people of this community. Women are mainly associated with this festival.

From the very beginning of the month of *Puha*, they discuss about the arrangement of the *Puja* or *Parab* and finally on the *uruka* night they start it at a house of in the village. The woman owner of the house where the worship of *Tusu* is held is popularly called '*Tusu maa*'. At the house of *Tusu maa* they set up an idol of the goddess of *Tusu* on a *Thapana* (a holy place where the idol is set up as an object of worship) and in the evening of *uruka* they worship her by singing '*Tusu geet*' for a period of time. They also consider the Goddess *Tusu* as *Lakshmi Devi*, daughter of *Siva*, sister of *Manasha*, *Kali*, *Durga*, *Sita*, *Sabitri* etc during their worship.⁴³

After worshipping the idol of the Goddess of *Tusu* at *Thapana* (a holly place where the idol is set up as an object of worship) following various rites and rituals at *uruka* night, they bring it to the courtyard in the morning of *sankranti* day. Then '*Tusu Maa*' takes the *Tusu* idol on the head from house to house. Every householder washes the feet of the Goddess of *Tusu* and worships it with the incense sticks and resin for a while. Then they give farewell to the Goddess offering cakes and meats and money to the gathered people. After this procession, they bring it to the bank of the river by singing and dancing for final ceremonial farewell. This practice is popularly known as '*Tusu bhashan*'. It is believed that those who fail to take bath on the day of

Tusu bhashan, he will take birth as a pig in his next life. Similarly, they traditionally believed that the songs which are associated with the *Tusu parab* should not be sung on other occasion. Otherwise it brings diseases to the people. This festival is generally organized from the common donations given by the people.

Generally, the *Tusu bhashan* takes place in the later part of the *sankranti* day. The Tea community people sing different songs in different phases of the festival. The songs related to this festival are very sweet and melodious. On the day of *Tusu bhashan*, they also organize the cock fighting in a common place which is known as '*Murgi Larai*'. They make calculation of their loss and profit of the whole year following the result of those fighting.

Kati Bihu of the Lakhimpur District in general:

The People of Lakhimpur District observe the Kati Bihu on the *Ahin-Kati sankranti* day. The Kati Bihu is a one day celebration. It is held when the paddy crop has yet to mature and granaries are almost empty. So it is called the *Kangali Bihu* (poor bihu). There is no feasting.

The main part of the celebration is the worship of the *tulasi* plant in the courtyard. The *tulasi* alter is plastered with cow-dug and mud and also a small banana tree is planted near it. In the evening earthen lamps are lit and placed before the *tulasi* and on the trunk of the banana tree. Lamps are also put outside the granary, the backyard and in the rice fields.

The *tulasi* worship is rather a domestic affair, which can be seen in the lighting of lamps in the paddy fields and the performance of certain rituals meant for paddy grow. The cultivator goes to his field, lights the clay lamp, brandishes a stick over paddy plants and utters chants for his field's protection from depredation by birds, rodents, insects and animals. In fact, all these ceremonies and rituals are meant for the growing crops.⁴⁴ Some persons light the *akash-banti* or

the sky lamps which are tied on a tall bamboo. The Kacharis put lamps at the foot of the *Siju* cactus, symbol of their chief God *bathau*, in the garden, at the granary and in the field.⁴⁵

Offering of *sarai* consisting of grain, pulse, uncooked rice, ginger, banana, coconut, betel-nut and leaf etc at the foot of the *tulasi* plant in the courtyard and holding of *Nam prasanga* are other features of the evening. Children sing a special prayer circulating round the *tulasi* plant with the clapping of hands and sounding of cymbals (*tal*)

Tulasir tale tale mriga pahu sore

Take dekhi Ramchandrai hara dhenu dhare.

“The deer grazes under the *tulasi*

Seeing it, Ramchandar prepared to shoot the arrow”

Kati Bihu among the different tribes of the Lakhimpur District:

In Lakhimpur district various tribes observe this Kati Bihu in various forms following different rites and rituals like Bohag and Magh Bihu. The Mising people observe this Bihu lighting earthen lamp in memory of the creator, *Lakshmi devi* and their forefathers and also for the welfare of the people. The Kati Bihu is not considered as *Kongali* Bihu among the missing people. Because, they give their efforts to the cultivation of *ahu* paddy more than the *bau* and *sali* paddy. For this reason their granaries are not empty during this period. At this particular time of Autumn the Mising people also observe ‘*Porag*’ (*Nara Singa Bihu*).⁴⁶ They organize a common feast along with the married daughters and others relatives of the family. The Mising people prepare ‘*apong*’ and collect meat and fish as possible to celebrate this Bihu.

On the day of Kati Bihu the young Mising girls talk about the agricultural activities as well as the weaving of cloths. They also collect various weaving materials during this day and

enjoy this movement by drinking '*apong*'. The young boys also collect '*nol*' (a kind of reed) and '*ou tenga*' (*dillenia indica*) for the purpose of lightening lamps in the evening.⁴⁷ Immediately after the sunset the married women of the family start lightening the lamp at different place of the house besides the paddy field and granary.

In Lakhimpur district the Kati Bihu is not so important like Magh Bihu and Bohag Bihu among the Deori people. Traditionally they offer worship at '*deoshal*' on the day of Kati Bihu (the *sankranti* day). In the morning the Deori people organized '*ghardeu puja*' in every house in a holistic manner. After that worship they go to the *deoshal* and start the *deoshal puja*. The main purpose of the Kati Bihu among the Deoris is to welcome the Goddess of wealth. The Deoris believe that this kind of act satisfies '*Lakshmi*' (Goddess of wealth) and only then the crops grow in abundance which overflows the granary.⁴⁸ Besides, the worship of '*Lakshmi*' (Goddess of wealth) they lit the earthen lamp in the paddy field, granary and cowshed. They also observe the tradition of lighting lamp at the bottom of *tulasi*. Sometime the Deori people sacrifice a pig and four cocks on Kati Bihu specially in '*suwa bhanga*' practices which is a significant custom of the Deori people.

The Bodo-Kachari people call Kati Bihu as '*Khati Gasha*' or '*Gasha Shabanay*' or '*Gasha Hanay*' in Lakhimpur district.⁴⁹ This festival is celebrated on the *sankranti* day of the Assamese month *Ahin* and *Kati* in a ritualistic manner. In the evening the elderly members of the family go to the paddy field with mustard oil and lamp wick. Then they start lighting lamp in peel or rind of '*ou tenga*' on three or four feet long strip of bamboo in the north east corner of the paddy field. They also sing some kind of ritualistic songs at this particular moment. After coming back to the houses they also light lamp in the north eastern corner of the granary as well as both sides of the gateway in the same manner. In this festival Bodo-Kachari people do not

prepared any kind of delicious item like the other two Bihus. They do not enjoy much in this Bihu. Because they believe that this kind of activities are not good for the cultivation.⁵⁰ It seems that although the Bado-Kacharis observe this festival in a simple way, but it has great significance in their society and agricultural life.

The Sonowal Kacharis of the Lakhimpur district also observe the Kati Bihu by following different rites and rituals. On the *sankranti* day of Kati Bihu, they organize the worship of *Vishu* at the bottom of *tulasi* plant. They also light lamp in the paddy field, cowshed, granary etc in the name of Lord *Siva*. Besides, they also light lamp near the tank, water wheel, floor of the house for the welfare of the society. The Sonowal Kacharis also believe that the Kati Bihu is a festival which welcomes the *Lakshmi Devi* (The Goddess of wealth) for the whole year. They sing different songs in this festival which are closely related to the '*Lakshmi Puja*'. The Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur have been observing the tradition of lighting lamps at bottom of *tulasi* plants for the whole Kati month.⁵¹ In some places of the district it is found that *akash banti* is also lit by the Sonowal Kacharis for few days of this month. Some amount of *pitha* and *jalpan* are prepared by the Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district for the celebration of Kati Bihu.

Kati Bihu is known as *Kati Gasha* or *Katidin* or *Katidol* among the Rabha people of Lakhimpur District. The Rabhas like the other ethnic groups also light lamp at the bottom of *tulasi* plant at the courtyard of the house on the *sankranti* day of *Ahin* and *Kati*. This tradition is continued for a month. In the day of *Katidol* the Rabha people also light lamp in the cowshed and granary. They usually light the lamp in the peel of '*ou tenga*' (*Dillenia indica*) by singing some traditional songs. The Rabhas consider '*ou tenga*' as a sacred fruit and so that they use peel of this fruit in lighting the ritualistic lamps. Following this they do not eat *ou tenga* till end of

the *Katidol*.⁵² The Rabhas of Lakhimpur District mainly observe this festival '*Katidol*' as a welcome ceremony of the Goddess of paddy or wealth.

Among the Khamtis of Lakhimpur, the Kati Bihu is very much significant like the Bohag and Magh Bihu. On the *Sankranti* day of Kati Bihu, the Khamtis do not organize worship at the bottom of the *tulasi* plant. They have the tradition of lighting '*akash banti*' for the whole month of Kati following different rites and rituals. On the day of full moon of Kati, they observe the '*poi kathing*' or '*poi chhipsong kathing*' festival with great enthusiasm. In this festival they donate a '*cheewar*' (a dress generally worn by monk) through which they try to achieve virtue as well as blessings of God.⁵³ This *cheewar* has to be woven within a night by all the members of the village. Besides various goods and food items are distributed among the poor on this festive occasion.

On the previous day of the festival the Khamtis also observe a tradition by donating '*kolpotaru*' in the name of God. This *kolpotoru* is prepared by bamboo and coloured paper in a beautiful manner. They believe this *kolpotoru* is a plant of heaven where they hang various goods for fulfillment of their desires.⁵⁴ They organize a procession along with this *kolpotoru* (plant of heaven) around the village. Finally, they offer it to the almighty at *Buddha Bihar* under the supervision of monks. In this month of Kati the Khamtis also offer *dhup-dhona*, *noibadya* etc to the *Lakshmi Devi* in the paddy field for the growth of the crops which is known as '*ahar Puja*'. But, it does not observe any particular day of the month.

In Lakhimpur district people belonging to the Ahom community observe some rites and rituals on the day of Kati Bihu. On the day of *Sankranti*, children of the family plant *tulasi* and construct a *thapona* at eastern side of the courtyard. The young girls and women are busy with the cleaning of their houses, clothes, utensils etc. Then they organize worship of their forefathers

by offering traditional liquor '*Has*'.⁵⁵ After that all the family members usually take *Has*, rice and *jalpan*. In the evening the women of the village go to the paddy field and light lamp in the peel of *ou tenga* or split Papaya. They also light lamp at the main door of the house, gate way, cowshed, granary etc. The children take part in *tulasi puja* which takes place at the bottom of *tulshi* plant of the courtyard in every household. They sing several spiritual songs on this occasion and give best wishes to the householders.⁵⁶ Although this *tulasi puja* is organized mainly by the children, elderly persons also join in this ceremony. It is true that enjoyment of this Bihu is comparatively less than the other two Bihus of the year.

The tea community is closely related with the Tea plantation and gardening. Therefore they observe the *tulasi puja*, *karam Puja* etc with their rites and rituals. In Lakhimpur district a large part of the people belonging to the Tea community is engaged themselves in agriculture works. So like the other tribes of the district, they also observe Kati Bihu in a ritualistic manner. The elderly members of the family generally take the initiative in this celebration. In the day of *sankranti*, they light the earthen lamp at the bottom of *tulasi* plant in the morning. Sometimes they light lamp at the '*tulasi thapona*' for a period of three days.⁵⁷ After this worship at the '*tulasi thapona*', they take their meal. Generally they try to take vegetarian meal on this particular day. They try to avoid meat, fish and wine on that day. Some amount of *pitha*, *jalpan* etc are also made on this occasion by the Tea community. In the evening they also go to the paddy field and light lamps amidst the paddy plants. But, the people who are busy in their gardens are not greatly influenced by the Kati Bihu.

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CHAPTER – IV
PHATO BIHU: UNIQUE FESTIVAL OF LAKHIMPUR
DISTRICT

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PHATO BIHU: UNIQUE FESTIVAL OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

Origin and Development of the Phato Bihu:

The ‘Phato Bihu’ of Dhakuakhana is mainly a spring festival of the region. In Assam, although the Bihu is the national festival, yet it varies in form, from place to place. The Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana is also such regional form of Rongali Bihu of this locality. Like the barechaharia bhauna of Jamugurihat, the nawkhel of Borpeta, the devadashi nritya of Dubi etc. the Phato Bihu is also the identity of the concerned place Dhakuakhana. Earlier the Phato Bihu was observed spontaneously from first week of Bohag month every year. At present, it is observed during the latter part of Bohag month at mahghuli chapari in the bank of river charikaria in an organized manner. The Phato Bihu has its own features and characteristics. The Phato Bihu is not a festival of a particular community or a tribe. It is a common festival of all the ethnic groups or sections of people of the region. It is also a symbol of unity among the people of Dhakuakhana.

The Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana has a rich traditional and cultural history. The people of the region involved themselves spontaneously in this Bihu since the Ahom period. But there is no reliable historical source to know when and how this Bihu originated or why it was termed as ‘Phato Bihu’. However, on the basis of myths, legends, folksongs etc diverse opinions have been given by different scholars regarding the origin, development and term of this Bihu.

According to some scholars during the Ahom rule the people of Dhakuakhana gathered at ‘mahghuli chapori’ on the banks of charikaria spontaneously during the time of Rongali Bihu. While performing this Bihu the performer’s voice, cloths, drums and the ground cracked. (In Assamese cracked means ‘Phat’) Since then this particular Bihu is called Phato Bihu.¹

Some elderly persons also relate this Bihu to an English man named '*Sphatgreen*'. When this British officer visited Dhakuakhana, he was given a warm welcome by the people by performing Bihu dance, But, with the passage of time '*sphat*' was pronounced '*phat*' by the local people. Thus this Bihu came to be known as Phato Bihu.²

According to another opinion the people of Dhakuakhana regularly took part in the Bihu celebration organized outside '*Ranghar*' in Sivasagar during the reign of the Ahom kings. But latter on due to some unknown reasons, they were not allowed to perform their Bihu in that place. Then this disgruntled Bihu team separated from the '*Rangpur Bihu*' team of Sivasagar and organized Bihu on the banks of river *charikaria* and hence the Phato Bihu³. ('*Phat*' also means division or separation).

Others opine that in the Bihu celebration of Dhakuakhana at *mahghuli chapari* on the banks of river *charikaria*, people gathered in large number which is termed in Assamese as '*phatmora*'. From this Assamese word the Bihu was known as Phato Bihu.⁴ (Bihu of a large number of people).

Other group of people relates this Bihu with the '*Harhi Dewalay*' of this region. The local people called this *Dewalay* as *gohainighar* which is five kilometers away from the Dhakuakhana town. During the time of Durga puja Misings and Deoris came from faraway places to the *Dewalay* in large number and sacrificed duck, pigeon, goat, buffalo etc. They also performed Bihu dances along with the local people sharing their joys and sorrows. Later on this Bihu spread to the *charikaria phat* of *Habung* (Dhakuakhana) and thus it was known as Phato Bihu.⁵

Chandradhar Chamuah, an educationist of this locality put forward his opinion in a treatise thus – In the days of Ahoms a kind of business centre was opened at convenient place on

certain river banks which came to be known as '*Phat*'. At Dhakuakhana there was a '*Phat*' on the northern bank of the river *charikaria* and this place was centre of communication of the local people on the one hand and the officers and traders on the other. The people of Dhakuakhana exhibited their '*huchari*' at the time of *Rongali* Bihu at the courtyards of the Ahom officials employed for collection of duties and taxes at the '*Phat*'. It continued at the yards of the merchants and the neighboring houses of the villages for a few days. As '*huchari*' and Bihu dances and music were performed from this '*Phat*', it was called Phato Bihu.⁶

The noted litterateur Homen Borgohain describes Phato Bihu' thus – Phato Bihu is a local festival of Dhakuakhana. From the days of yore, every year in the time of *Rongali* Bihu, the Mising youths both male and female came in groups to the banks of the river *chrikaria* with a view to exhibiting Bihu dances. Later on it is not only the Misings who participated in this cultural festival which continued for seven days, thousands of people from surrounding villages belonging to Ahoms, Chutias, Kaivartras etc joined the same spontaneously.⁷

According to Jit Ram Kalita, a scholar of Dhakuakhana region, in the forty of nineteenth century David Scott, then Chief Commissioner of Assam made an agreement with Purandar Singha that a cash amount of 50,000 rupees should be paid by him to the British for the administrative authority of upper Assam. Following this Dhakuakhana was under the reign of Purandar Singha. The people of Dhakuakhana were very happy to be under their own king instead of British ruler and they greeted the Ahom officials who came to *charikaria phat* to collect revenue with Bihu songs and dances. In this away they greeted the Ahom officials every year and hence the Phato Bihu was originated.⁸

Another litterateur of Dhakuakhana Jagadish Gogoi has opined that the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana is a cultural heritage of the region. It has some special characteristics. The Phato

Bihu is a symbol of peace and unity among the people of the region. It was observed at *charikaria phat* during the time of Ahoms for which it is known as Phato Bihu.⁹

Dimbeswar Gogoi, a scholar of this locality has opined about Phato Bihu thus – There was no written evidence why the Bihu celebration was termed as ‘Phato Bihu’. If we asked some performers of Phato Bihu who are still alive, they do not answer properly. During the Ahom rule their officials established a *Phat* at Dhakuakhana for the collection of taxes and revenue of north banks area which is known as *charikaria phat*. The local people come to the ‘*Phat*’ in large number and performed Bihu dances during the time of *Rongali* Bihu. Therefore the Phato Bihu emerged at Dhakuakhana.¹⁰

Controversy is still going on regarding the period as to when Phato Bihu was first celebrated. No historical evidence as to know when the Phato Bihu commenced at Dhakuakhana. But traditionally it is known that from the time of Ahoms this Bihu was celebrated. According to Jit Ram kalita, a scholar of Dhakuakhan region the history of Phato Bihu began before 16th century.¹¹ Another opinion given by late Khagen Gogoi, a social worker of Dhakuakhana is that the Phato Bihu commenced in the 18th century.¹² (later part of Ahom reign) Likewise, nobody can answer the question whether some organization sponsored it and response to their invitations people assembled here for observing this collective Bihu festival.

According to Surjya Das, Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana was unorganized. There was no organization which sponsored and organized this Bihu festival. It was fully spontaneous and they performed Bihu due to the attraction of natural beauty as well as their spirit of love.¹³ Chanda Kanta Sarmah opines that perhaps some local people sponsored it and invited the neighboring villages to *charkaria phat* for this performances¹⁴. Gradually, the Phato Bihu became the conventional festival in this locality.

Evaluating all these mentioned opinions regarding the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana, it can be opined that although there are number of legends, myths and opinions regarding the origin and the term 'Phato Bihu' these are not historically true. On the other word, there was no historical evidence regarding them. As for example, there was no written record about the visit of '*Sphatgreen*', a British official. According to the report of A.J. Moffatt Mills (Judge of the Sudder Court) another British official E.T. Daltan (Collector of Lakhimpur District) came to Dhakuakhana in 1853 A.D. He was called by the people of the region *Dalkin Chahab*. Therefore it is difficult to tell the term Phato Bihu come from the name '*Sphatgreen*' and what is the actual time of its commencement. Similarly, there was no record in history that Phato Bihu is a separate form of *Rangpuria Bihu* of Sivasagar. Unlike the *Rangpuria Bihu* the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana is spontaneous and natural. Another notable opinion which relates the Phato Bihu with the '*Harhi Dewalay*' of the region is also not reasonable. The Phato Bihu was performed at *charikaria phat* during the time of *Rongali Bihu*. But, the Bihu songs and dances were performed during the time of Durga Puja at *Harhi Dewalay*. The term Phato Bihu also does not come from the Assamese word '*Phat*' (cracked). Because this type of incident generally happened in Bihu celebrations.

However, from this present work it can be opined that during the Ahom period, numbers of '*Phat*' were held by the Ahom kings such as '*Halar Phat*' on the banks of river *Diphalu* of Nogaon, '*Naga Phat*' on the banks of river *Daiyang* of Sivasagar, '*Bhutai Phat*' of Darrang, '*Khitalur Phat*' on the banks of river '*Kakdunga*' etc. The *Phat* is a '*Tai*' word. According to Ahom Lexicon '*Phat*' means a place where traders assemble for trade and for payment of revenue. According to the *Hemkosh* dictionary '*Phat*' also means a place where sailors, traders and others assemble for the purpose of trade and payment of revenue.

It is true that, like the other places there was a ‘*Haat*’ or ‘*Phat*’ on the bank of river *Charikaria* of Dhakuakhana (*Habung*). The report of A.J. Moffatt Mills (Judge of the Sudder Court) also mentioned about this ‘*Haat*’ or ‘*Phat*’ of Dhakuakhana. Actually the *charikoria phat* was used in three senses ‘*Phat*’, ‘*Haat*’ and ‘*Ghat*’. (The ‘*Phat*’ is used in wider sense than the ‘*Haat*’ and ‘*Ghat*’). Besides, the local people *adi*, *misimi*, *apatani*, *bhutia* etc also came to the ‘*charikaria phat*’ through *borboruah duwar*, *sisi duwar* and *kathboruah duwar* of north bank. The hills people brought to the *charikaria phat* various commodities such as ginger, roots of the arum plant, chili, honey, buffalo, wild bull, boar, bock etc for selling and they also bought from the *Phat* like paddy, rice, *muga* thread, *eri* thread, *muga* clothes, *eri* clothes etc. Coming of these hill people is proved by this Bihu song –

“Kenekoi Paharim Tuke oi Lahori,

Kenekoi Paharim Tuk,

Misimi Ahib Barebih Anibo

Take Khai Paharim Tuk”

(How can I forget you belove, how can I forget you,

I will take poison brought by *Misimi*,

In order to forget you)

However, during the time of Bohag Bihu the people of Dhakuakhana specially Mising, Deori, Matak, Koch, Ahom etc. gathered at this *charikaria phat* (Center place of the region) and performed Bihu for these economic as well as emotional purposes. Due to the location of *charikaria phat*, this particular Bihu is known as ‘*Phator Bihu*’ (Bihu of *Phat*), latter on it became the ‘*Phato Bihu*’. The main features of this Bihu were unorganized, spontaneous and natural. The significance of the Phato Bihu celebration is that it was the first Bihu celebration

organized by the common people where all sections of the people performing Bihu following their own culture and tradition. During those days the people also performed ‘*huchari*’ at nearby villages for the purpose of getting food, money and shelter at night. But, the girls did not participate in this custom of *huchari*. This performance of *huchari* is proved by the Bihu song –

“*Gaw oi Gaw Gawburhar Gharate Gaw,
Sikiw Nalage Adhaliw Nalage,
Sandahake Abati Khaw.*”

(We will sing songs in the house of the village Headman,
We do not seek coins, but a bowl of
Sandah rice is what we need)

In the very beginning, the Misings who lived in the banks of Brahmaputra river and Subansiri river gathered for the purpose of celebration of Bihu at *charikaria phat*.¹⁵ The Misings who came from remote areas brought food items and cooking utensil with them. Later on Ahom, Chutia, Deori, Koch, Kalita, Kaivartra etc also performed Bihu along with the Misings. The Bihu teams came from different parts of the region such as *Sisi, Mackhuwa, Dewgharia, Harhi Chapari, Dangdhara, Subansiri, Ratanpur, Ghilamara, Batgharia, Bordoloni, Dhemaaji, Gogamukh* etc.¹⁶ It was observed from the beginning of Bohag month and to the seventh day of the month irrespective of caste and creed amidst the *jhawban* (a kind of bush) *kanhuwa* (a kind of tall grass) *kalmau* (a kind of creeper) on the banks of river *Charikaria*¹⁷.

During the British rule the British officials came to Dhakuakhana from their headquarters at North Lakhimpur on elephant backs through the jungle and enjoyed the performance of the Phato Bihu. Once two British officials ‘*Daltan*’ and ‘*Baruti*’ came to see Phato Bihu from Lakhimpur headquarters. They threw coins in the midst of the performers out of joy as well as giving reward.¹⁸ This tradition of the Phato Bihu also proved by the Bihu song –

*“Telaloi Eik Ana, Lunalai Eik Ana,
Kinu Khai Jabi Bhat ?
Hatire Pithite Sehabani Suwali,
Riha Naikia Gat”.*

(One Anna for oil, one Anna for salt,
How can we eat rice?
The white women without riha, sare coming
On elephant backs to enjoy Bihu)

It is also to know that during the reign of Purandar Singh, one of his officials Maniram Dewan came from capital city *Rangpur* to see the Phato Bihu. He was highly satisfied with the dance of late Japari Das wife of late Moni Das (mother of late Bapiram Das) and gave prize to her¹⁹.

Decline of Phato Bihu:

An important incident took place at Dhakuakhana in 1918 which was popularly known as ‘*Lutpat*’²⁰. Due to the exploitation of imperialist government the material condition of the people got worsened. With the British administration Hindustani businessmen such as *Marwaris*, *Biharis* and *Bengalis* etc came to Assam and such kind of people settle in Ghilamora, Dhakuakhana, Maskhowa, and Gugamukh area permanently. Besides their exploitation the introduction of opium by the British further deteriorate the condition of the people. Foreign clothes and other goods were introduced in this region through these businessmen like other parts of the province. Local industry was demolished and the prize of commodities increased. In such situation a remour spread at Dhakuakhana in 1918 that Germany had defeated the British in First World War and India was no larger under the British.²¹ The villagers of Dhakuakhana specially

the Misings thought that Indian had become independent. Therefore a large number of people came out under the leadership of Mohan Gam, the *Gawburha* of Ukhamati village of Gugamukh region to expel the British as well as *Marwaris*, *Biharis*, *Bengalis* etc who had been branded as foreigners. Thus a much plunder took place throughout these regions which is locally called '*Lutpat*'. The people forcibly took away all the treasures from the non-Assamese shopkeepers. The victim fled and took refuge by hiding themselves in nearby villages. Administration collapsed and the depredation continued for at least a week.²² The account books of the shopkeeper were put to fire. The wealthy local Assamese people were also terrified lest they would be victimized. In fear of the plunder they hid their treasure inside the forests and under the floor.²³ However, with the arrival of the police forces the government was able to tackle the situation. Mohan Gam and his son Cheniram Doley and other leaders were arrested and send to Dibrugarh jail. ²⁴ After trail they were sentence to long term imprisonment. Their treasures were auctioned by the government. After the restoration of peace the shopkeepers returned to their respective shop. From this incident the Mising people of the different parts of the region did not come to the *mahghuli chapari* for the performance of Bihu because of fear and shame and thus the Phato Bihu disappeared from Dhakuakhana for a long time.

Different scholars have interpreted the incident '*Lutpat*' in different ways. According to some old persons this incident happened due to the influence of the First World War and the Revolution of Russia, 1917.²⁵ But, really it was a part of peasant movement which was took place in Assam against the British tax and revenue policy. During this time at Dhakuakhana shortage of necessary goods was also took place. This situation also inspired the Misings to start such a movement. However, due to this historic incident the Phato Bihu ended for a period of time. The Present Phato Bihu is the revival form of the old Phato Bihu.

Re-emergence of Phato Bihu:

The people of Dhakuakhana had made serious efforts to revive the Phato Bihu after 1918 which is a landmark of the history of this culture. Late Indradhar Borgohain, the father of Homen Borgohain was one of the first among those people who attempted to do this. He organized a meeting to revive the Phato Bihu in 1924 where people decided to celebrate Phato Bihu in that year.²⁶ But during this celebration disorder again took place at Dhakuakhana. A group of people started to take away the property from the non-Assamese shopkeepers and consequently the Bihu could not be performed.

It is worth mentioning that during the India's freedom struggle the people of Dhakuakhana got so much involved that they could not pay attention to the cultural activities. Between 1924-1928 A.D. the Phato Bihu was held only twice under the leadership of Chandra Sekhar Das. In 1939 the Second World War broke out and the terrific situation of the war also terrified the people of Dhakuakhana like the other places of world. During this time Phato Bihu could not be organized.²⁷

After India got independence, Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana was revived in an organized manner. In 1948 with the efforts of some enthusiastic people a Bihu celebration was observed at Dhakuakhana in the name of Phato Bihu with a view to revive the old glamorous 'Phato Bihu'.²⁸ The enthusiastic people were Mahendra Gogoi, Jayachandra Gogoi, Dambarudhar Chetia, Lilakanta Das, Khageswar Hazarika, Purna Bharali, Kabin Gogoi etc. It was observed at the playground of Dhakuakhana Government M.V. School for four days. During this time, the playground was surrounded by trees like *Azar*, *Jari*, etc and also river Charikaria follows beside the playground. The Bihu teams from all the villages gathered in the playground and started to perform Bihu. These Bihu performances were not competitive. The young boys and girls did not

perform Bihu together. Only males formed the Bihu teams. The Bihu was also performed by the married women by clapping only at a corner of the playground. The Bihu celebration ended before the sunset. In the end the best of the '*bihuwa*' (male performers of Bihu) were given umbrella, lamp, vests etc as their prize.²⁹

After this celebration, the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana was not held in 1950, 1954, 1956 and 1957 at Dhakuakhana.³⁰ This was mainly due to the Earthquake of 1950, *Barechaharia Sabah* of 1954, *Krikhak Sabha* of 1956, *Kristi Sabha* of 1957 etc. In 1958 due to the endless efforts of late Jayachandra Gogoi, Kehuram Gohain, Lilakanta Das, Jatindra Kumar Boruah, Jagat Chandra Duttabora, Gajen Charmah, Khageswar Hazarika, Padmeswar Dutta, Mukti Phukan, Kamal Chandra Gogoi, Bhulanath Tamuli etc Phato Bihu was held at under the roof made thatch grass and bamboo.³¹ But, due to some contemporary events the Phato Bihu also could not be organized in 1959, 1960, 1962, 1963 and 1964. These events were the Students Conference of North Bank, Language Movement, Floods, India-China Border War, Second Oil Refinery Movement, Indo-Pak War etc. Of course, it is known from '*natun asomiya*' published on 11th May, 1959 a Bihu celebration was observed at Dhakuakhana in 1959 called 'Phato Bihu' festival. It is also come to know that the Celebration Committees of Phato Bihu used sound system in 1960 for the first time under the presidentship of Dimbeswar Das and Mukti Phukan as secretary. However, after the long gap, the Phato Bihu was held at Dhakuakhana in 1965 having three Bihu teams like Bihu team of 'Hujgaon', 'Ghanhigaon', and 'Bantow gaon'. Since the year 1976, the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana has maintained its continuity.³² In 1976 the Phato Bihu was observed at the playground of Dhakuakhana Government M.V. School and president of this Celebration Committee was Nara Borgohain.

During this period of revival although it was mainly observed at the playground of Dhakuakhana Government M.V. School, later on the venue was sifted. Since the beginning of the ninety of the 20th century the Bihu was being observed at the playground of Dhakuakhana Higher Secondary School and the *Muga* farm in front of Dhakuakhana College. However, it is important to note that since 1996 the Phato Bihu is being observed in a permanent stage under the ‘*Sisu*’ trees and the banks of river *charikaria*.

In this period the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana become attractive due to the ‘Wooden Peacock’ dance performed by late Maheswar Sut from Ghanhi gaon, playing of ‘*Dhupchung*’ by late Phanidhar Das from Kasugaon and playing of drum by late Gupa Chetia and Rupeswar Chetia from Khajuwa gaon. Similarly, the jokes made by late Rupen Dutta and Paniram Duwara gave entertainment to the audience. Late Bikul Chetia and Tunu Chetia also danced here wearing women dress (*riha* and *mekhela*) which attracted the people gathered here.³³

The most remarkable aspect of the Phato Bihu was the participation of different tribes and cultural groups. During the Ahom rule different tribes such Mising, Kachari, Deori, Chutia, Koch, Ahom etc came in thousands to celebrate Phato Bihu. This tradition is still intact and is the main attraction of Phato Bihu. Presently, the Bihu teams which participate in the Phato Bihu are – Bihu team of *Bantow gaon, Chetia gaon, Bamun gaon, Kathabari gaon, Malabori gaon, Dighala gaon, Dighala Chapori, Chariali Chapori, Karoiguri gaon, Town Tiniali, Dhulpeta no-2, Bali gaon, Prithial gaon, Hiloidari gaon No-1, Gandhia, Ghamora, Kath Gaon, Huj gaon, Sutimukh, Singia, Murtia gaon, Ghanhi gaon, Dewalia, Mahemari gaon, Jamuguri gaon, Hiloidari gaon no-2, Ujani Kekuri, Udayan Sangha, Diamond Sangha, Srimanta Puthi Bharal, Sangeet Mahabidyalay, Konwar gaon, Manpakhili Bihu Team, Ankur Pratim Natya Gusthi*, (a cultural organization), *Banhpara, Henrik Ibsen Natya Gusthi* (a cultural organization)etc.³⁴

On the other hand, the Mising Bihu teams which are part and parcel of the present Phato Bihu are Bihu team of *Alimur Dangdhara, Dhunaguri Kutum, Amguri Medhisuti, Japanchuk, Naya Bazzar, Mainapara, Oguri Dangdhara etc.* Besides the only Deori village of Dhakuakhana region '*Bali Deuri gaon*', '*Purana Kachari gaon*' of Kekuri and '*Sonuwal Kachari gaon*' of Garukhuti also participate in the Phato Bihu. Similarly, another important part of Assamese society the Tea Community also participate and perform their traditional songs and dances in Phato Bihu.³⁵

At present, those who have greatly contributed to the continuity and popularity of the Phato Bihu are-Jagadish Gogoi, Siva Prasad Gogoi, Keshob Gogoi, Sabilar Jain, Amiya Kumar Handique, Girin Gogoi, Lalitya Das, Mukul Gogoi, Kushal Gogoi, Nanda Chutia, Utam Boruah, Jiban Chamuah, Nara Gogoi, Bakshriram Morang, Indeswar Pegu, Jerina Gogoi etc. Similarly number of prominent littérateurs and artists came to join the Phato Bihu and contributed to the popularity of this Bihu celebration. They are Nagen Saikia, Jayakant Gandhia, Ismial Hussain, Nani Boruah, Surjya Das, Dhrubojyoti Saikia, Kanaksen Deka, Maya Gogoi Boruah etc.³⁶

Organization and Management:

Originally the Phato Bihu was a spontaneous, unorganized and natural celebration of Bihu. Now-a-days it is fully an organized form of Bihu celebration. There is a written constitution of Phato Bihu which contains all the rules and regulations regarding its observation. According to this constitution a permanent committee is to be formed named 'Phato Bihu Committee' for the observation, preservation and development of Phato Bihu. There must be at least two women members in this committee.³⁷ This committee was formed in 1985 for the first time and registered under Assam government in 2005. The numbers of member in this committee were seventeen. Bakshriram Morang and Keshob Gogoi were the first president and

secretary of this Phato Bihu Committee. But this committee was lasted three years only.³⁸ Now, this permanent committee is formed with fifteen members. Among these members Pradip Chamuah (President) Mrs Manju Gogoi (Vice-President), Nara Gogoi (Secretary), Ranjit Handique (Assit. Secretary), Harichandra Boruah, Dilip Kumar Konwar, Binod Gogoi etc are the prominent.³⁹

The Phato Bihu Committee of Dhakuakhana today has its own symbol and flag. The symbol is two '*pepas*' under a flowered '*japi*' where 'Photo Bihu' and 'Dhakuakhana' are written in Assamese. The flag has a flowered '*japi*' in the middle of a flowered '*gamucha*' under which are two '*pepas*' and also 'Phato Bihu' and 'Dhakuakhana' are written in Assamese.⁴⁰

The Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana has its own fund. It is kept at the local bank (U.B.I. Branch of Dhakuakhana) in the name of president and secretary of the Phato Bihu Committee. For any plan and programme they are able to withdraw money from this fund. This fund is formed by the collection of money from service holders, businessmen and other well wishers of the locality as well as donations given by various persons and institutions. Some amount of money is also collected by performing '*huchari*' in different places and institutions of the region. The membership fees and the grants of government also come to this fund.⁴¹

A month before the celebration, a Celebration Committee of 41 members is formed. They enjoy one year term only.⁴² The members of the Celebration Committee are –

1. President (One)
2. Vice-President (Three)
3. Secretary (One)
4. Assistant Secretary (Three)

5. Treasure (One)
6. Publicity Secretary. (Three)
7. Office Secretary (Two)
8. Members nos- 27 (Male/Female)

Besides the Celebration Committee, some Sub-Committees are also formed for some special purposes.⁴³ These are –

1. Sub-Committee of Finance
2. Sub-Committee of *Huchari*
3. Sub-Committee of *Bihuwan*
4. Sub-Committee of Stage
5. Sub-Committee of Reception
6. Sub-Committee of Publicity and Communication
7. Sub-Committee of Public health
8. Sub-Committee of Medical treatment
9. Sub-Committee of Cultural procession
10. Sub-Committee of Food.
11. Sub-Committee of Volunteers
12. Sub-Committee of Sound and Light
13. Sub-Committee of Audit.

At present, '*huchari*' and Bihu competitions of different tribes are held and prizes are distributed among the participants. Another important thing of the present Phato Bihu is the traditional *Mukali Bihu* which is preformed under the *Sisu* trees. The main competitions of this celebration are divided into the following categories.⁴⁴

1. *Huchari* Competition of Children
2. *Huchari* Competition of Adult persons
3. *Huchari* Competition of Mising (Adult person)
4. *Toka Bihu* Completion (Women)
5. *Mukali Bihu* Competition and
6. *Gamocha* Competition.

The prizes are given to the different participations on the basis of their performances from these competitions. Now-a-days the main prizes which are given in Phato Bihu to the best performers' are ⁴⁵-

1. Best Bihu Team (Children)
2. Best Bihu Team (Adult)
3. Best Bihu Team (Mising)
4. Best Bihu Team (*Toka Bihu*)
5. Best Bihu Team (*Mukali Bihu*)
6. Best *Bihuwa* (Child, Adult & Mising)
7. Best *Bihuwati* (Child, Adult & Mising)
8. Best *Dhulia* (Child, Adult & Mising)

9. Best *Pepa Badak* (Child, & Adult)

10. Best *Banhi Badak* (Child & Adult)

11. Best *Gamucha*.

All the prizes are given in three categories such as first, second and third either as trophy or cash. But it is true that the Bihu teams from different parts of the region join in the Phato Bihu not only for the prize and position but also for their love to the Phato Bihu.

Now-a-days, the guests are invited in different occasions to the Phato Bihu from different places of the state. The guests are mainly the artists, littérateur, and intellectual.⁴⁶ Recently, political leaders have been invited to the Phato Bihu celebration as guests.

Running trophies which are given to the best performers of the Phato Bihu are dedicated to some eminent persons of Dhakuakhana. These are given below along with the name and donor and the prize against which it is presented.⁴⁷

Trophy	Donor	Prize
1. Educationist, Social Workers, Late Gandheswar Gogoi Memorial Trophy	Sri Binud Gogoi, Hiloidary Gaon No.1	Best <i>Toka Bihu</i> team
2. Doctor, Social Worker Late Nityananda Das Memorial Trophy.	Mrs. Padma Bora Das, Bali Gaon	Best <i>Huchari Bihu</i> team (Children)
3. Social Worker Late Prahar Chandra Lahan Memorial Trophy	Mr. Nityananda Lahan, Manikpur	Best <i>Bihuwati</i> (Children)
4. Social Worker Late Raman Chandra Gogoi Memorial Trophy	Mr. Bhadra Gogoi, Chaurekia Gaon	Best Bihu team (Mising)
5. Eminent <i>Bihuwati</i> Late Labanya Gogoi Memorial	Mrs. Swarnalata Gogoi Chamuah,	Best Bihu Team

Trophy	Bantow Gaon	(Adult)
6. Women Organizer Late Jyusna Gogoi Memorial Trophy	Mr. Mukul Gogoi, Chaurekia Gaon	Best <i>Bihuwati</i> (Adult)
7. Health Workers Late Kanak Chandra Gogoi Memorial Trophy	Mrs. Bistriti Phukan, Bali Gaon	Adult Best Bihu team (<i>Mukali Bihu</i>)
8. Freedom Fighter Late Purna Kanta Bharali Memorial Trophy	Mr Deva Bharali, Bamun Gaon	Young Best Bihu team (<i>Mukali Bihu</i>)
9. Social Worker Late Titaram Gogoi Memorial Trophy	Mr. Dhiren Phukan, Bantow Gaon.	Mising Best Bihu Team (<i>Mukali Bihu</i>)
10. Educator, Social Worker Late Shatish Chandra Gogoi Memorial Trophy.	Mrs. Bidyawati Gogoi, Hiloidari Gaon no -1	Best <i>Bihuwa</i> (Adult)

Agenda of the Phato Bihu:

At present, the Phato Bihu is being observed at ‘*mahghuli chapori*’ at its permanent stage under the *Sisu* trees. According to Homen Borgohain it is not the actual *mahghuli Chapori* where Phato Bihu was observed earlier and where he spent his childhood. He also says that the original place has disappeared from the topography of Dhakuakhana due to the earthquake of 1950. Therefore the present *mahghuli chapori* is a created one.⁴⁸ However, in the three days celebration of Phato Bihu, different programmes are held. On the first day the programme like flag hosting, reminiscence and stage inaugurations take place in the morning. The *toka* Bihu and Children’s *huchari* competition are also held on the same day. On the second day, transplanting of trees and orchid flowers (*kapouphul*) take place early in the morning. Then the *gamocha* competition and the *huchari* competition of adult person take place. On the same day ‘*Bihuwan*’ the souvenir of Phato Bihu is released in the mid of the programmes.⁴⁹

On the third day, the cultural procession which is an attractive event of the Phato Bihu takes place in the morning. Besides the Bihu different cultural aspects of Dhakuakhana are also shown in the procession. Then the *Mukali Bihu* the most colourful and traditional programme of Phato Bihu is observed. The *Mukali Bihu* is the original identity of the Phato Bihu celebration. During the time of *Mukali Bihu* all the Bihu teams perform Bihu simultaneously for one or a half hour under different trees. Every Bihu team has a serial number and they show their traditional culture while performing Bihu. In the end the concluding ceremony starts. In this ceremony elderly people of this locality are felicitated and prizes are distributed among the best performers. The selected Bihu teams (Children, Adult, Mising and *Toka*) also perform their Bihu on the stage followed by lectures given the invited guests.⁵⁰

The *Bihuwan* (Souvenir of Phato Bihu):

Every year the Celebration Committee of Phato Bihu publishes a souvenir which is popularly known as '*Bihuwan*'. Now, *Bihuwan* is an important part of the Phato Bihu. It was only in 1976 the '*Bihuwan*' was first published under the editorship of Subilal Jain.⁵¹ The main objective of this publication is to preserve the memory of the Phato Bihu celebration every year. Different aspects of the first issue of '*Bihuwan*' are as follows –

Editor: - Sabilal Jain

Members of Editing Board:

Siva Prasad Gogoi

Nava Borgohain

Jagadish Gogoi

Print: - Nava Jivan Printing Press, Dhemaji

Cover Page: - Dark red.

Page No: - 13
Rs: - .50 Paise

Writers of the First Issue of ‘*Bihuwan*’:

Jitram Kalita
Karuna Kanta Kalita
Chandradhar Chamuah
Nava Borgohain
Padmakanta Phukan
Siva Prasad Gogoi
Jiten Chutia

Number of Articles: - 3
Number of Stories: - 1
Number of Poem: - 3
Number of Advertisement: - 3
Number of Printed copies: - 500

Now-a-days ‘*Bihuwan*’ not only commemorates the Phato Bihu but also includes various aspects which are related to the society, geography, history as well as culture of Dhakuakhana. So, it can be considered as a historical journal of the region.⁵² An editorial board is formed for the publication of ‘*Bihuwan*’ every year. The numbers of the membership of his board are seven to nine. Among these a women membership must be there.⁵³ But, one notable thing regarding the ‘*Bihuwan*’ of the Phato Bihu is that it was not published for ten years (From 1989 to 1998) due to lack of sufficient funds of the ‘Phato Bihu Committee’. However, the previous issues of ‘*Bihuwan*’ along with the editors and the years of publication are mentioned below.⁵⁴

Value	Name of the Editor	Year
1 st Volume	Sabilal Jain	1976
2 nd Volume	Siva Prasad Gogoi	1977
3 rd Volume	Tilen Chamuah	1979
4 th Volume	Jayachandra Hazarika	1980
5 th Volume	Bidyaswar Doley	1981
6 th Volume	Bharat Boruah, Tukheswar Chutia	1982
7 th Volume	Pranjal Chamuah	1985
8 th Volume	Bishun Borbora	1986
9 th Volume	Nanda Chutia	1988
10 th Volume	Amiya Kumar Handique	1999
11 th Volume	Bidya Dutta	2000
12 th Volume	Amiya Kumar Handique	2001
13 th Volume	Jagadish Gogoi	2002
14 th Volume	Jit Ram Kalita	2003
15 th Volume	Siva Prasad Gogoi	2004
16 th Volume	Siva Prasad Gogoi	2005
17 th Volume	Purnananda Gogoi	2006
18 th Volume	Jit Ram Kalita	2007
19 th Volume	Mausumi Gogoi Hatiboruah	2008
20 th Volume	Dimbeswar Gogoi	2009
21 st Volume	Siva Prasad Gogoi	2010
22 nd Volume	Jitu kumar Chamuah	2011
23 rd Volume	Kushal Gogoi	2012
24 th volume	Hemanta Kumar Boruah	2013
25 th Volume	Tulan Dutta	2014
26 th Volume	Indibar Burhagohain	2015
27 th Volume	Bipul Gogoi	2016
28 th Volume	Amiya Kumar Handique	2017

Finally, the *Bihuwan* has a great contribution to the literary as well as intellectual development of the region. From the past the area Dhakuakhana is an agricultural and flood affected one. The people are mainly busy with their livelihood most of the time in their day-to-day life. In spite of that the *Bihuwan* able to create a literary environment in the whole area. It has highly inspired the younger generation to do literary activities. Because, it is found that publication of an article, poem, story etc in *Bihuwan* is a matter of pride for them.

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CHAPTER-V
CALENDARIC AND OTHER PROMINENT
FESTIVALS OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

CHAPTER-V

CALENDARIC AND OTHER PROMINENT FESTIVALS OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

Usually the calendaric festivals are those which are celebrated in different months, *sankrantis*, *tithis* and days. Some seasonal worship such as *Durga Puja*, *Lakshmi puja*, *Kali puja*, *Dewali*, *Sivaratri* and other festivals may also be considered to be calendaric festivals. Festivals observed by the Muslims, such as Maharram, Eid-Ul-Zuha, Eid-Al-Fitr etc also may be called calendaric festivals. Similarly, the festivals that belong to Christianity like Good Friday, Christmas etc are also regarded as Calendaric festivals. In the same way, the Buddhists and the Jains also celebrate a few festivals which are directly associated with their religions. The birth and death anniversaries of saints and heroes are also celebrated annually on a fixed date. These celebrations however tend to be organized institutionally. This chapter describes the Calendaric and some other prominent festivals of Lakhimpur District in historical perspective.

Janmastami:

The *Janmastami* or the birth day of Lord Krishna is celebrated with great festivity in all the villages and Satras of Lakhimpur district. Some of the villagers perform it for two days, while others for only one day. The *Janmastami* falls on the eight lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of *Bhadra*. It is marked by puja, holding of the congregational prayer, *Nam Prasanga*, fasting or *brat* and performing of Drama depicting the birth of Lord Krishna. It is believed that fasting on the day of *Janmastami* would bring immense religious merit (*punya*) equal to the offering of *pinda* (oblution) at Gaya on the Ganges. On the contrary, those who do not observe fast shall take their birth : (rakshasa).¹ An interesting belief associated with

the *Janmastami* is that coconut, which is indispensable as an item of offering in all other religious functions is prohibited on *Janmastami*. On the other hand ‘*pokamithoi*’ is a special item of the offerings in the festival.² The *Janmastami* is too held as a puja in some of the Satras or Namghars, although *nam-prasanga* is held over all forms of observance. The people of the village gather at the Namghar early in the evening and continue to sing the *Janmastami geet* till late night. The day is also observed with performance of various forms of dances. The *mah-prasad* along with *pokamithoi* is the normal offering served on that occasion. The *Janmastami* is believed to be a day of thick cloud and heavy shower with much thunderstorm and if the night passes without rain and thunderstorm, people consider the day to be unenjoyable.³

Raas Utshav or Raas Lila:

The *Raas Utshav* is an annual festival being performed on the full moon day (*purnima*) in the month of October-November (*Kati-Aghun*) during the autumn season. It is basically organized by the people of Lakhimpur district at Namghars and the Satras. The *Raas Lila* is a three day affair and a regular annual agenda of the cultural activities of the Namghars and the Satras of the district. The *Raas Lila* is the story of the life Lord Krishna presented in the performing art form. It begins with the birth of Lord Krishna, his upbringing at the house of king Nanda, his tending the cows at *Gokula* along with his fellow cowherds, his childhood activities, his killing of demons like Bakasur, Putana, Kaliya and Kamsa, his maternal uncle at various times of his youth and on various other occasions. Finally his amorous play with the *Gupis* including ‘Radha’ form the kernel of the story of the *Raas Lila* in the district of Lakhimpur.⁴

The *Raas Lila* is epitome of *bhakti* represented through the relationship between *Gopis* and Krishna, but symbolized in the merger of the *atma* (soul) with *paramatma* (the great soul-God). The presentation indicates that our soul will finally take shelter with the great soul, the

Param Brahma in the form of Lord Krishna. Thus, the *Raas Lila* was created to successfully spread the contents of *bhakti* among the commoners.⁵ Shankardeva borrowed the story from the 'Bhagavata Purana' and made it a part of his sacred book the 'Kirtana Ghosha'. The *Raas Lila* is performed with music and dance. It has great impact on the life and culture of the people of Lakhimpur district in particulars and those of the entire state in general. Most of the villages of the district perform *Raas Lila* in the stage which was started by Pitamberdeva Goswami of Garmur Satra in the year 1934. In 1950 he also permitted the girls of the Satra to take roles in the *Raas Lila* and dance.⁶ Following this in most of the centers of the Lakhimpur, women participation is the normal way to carry on the *Raas Lila* performance.

Performance of *Raas Lila* involves various musical instruments, music, dance and also artifacts including mask and painting. The masks are painted in various colours prepared from various indigenous ingredients. The instruments used in musical performance including *khol* (a kind of hollow wooden instrument made of animal skin in both ends), *tal* (symbol), *bahi* (bamboo flute) etc and the songs called *borgeets* (classical songs composed by Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhabdeva). Various classes of artists are engaged in the process such as actors and actress, musicians, instrumentalists, painters and the dressmen of the actors and so forth. In fact, performing *Raas Lila* is a team work involving a whole village.

The *Raas Lila* was earlier presented for the public in Namghar. But, now it has become a stage performance and also commercialized. Increase of expenses, development of techniques and above all professionalizing the art has made it commercial. Now, one has to pay money for enjoying the performance in most of the centers of the district.

Phalgustsav or Dual Yatra or Phakua:

The *Phalgustsav*, *Doul Yatra* or more commonly *Phakuwa* is a festival of colour stated to have played at Lord Krishna's birth place at Gukul between Krishna and the *Gupis*.⁷ In some of the *bargeets* also Sankardeva and Madhavdeva have narrated how Lord Krishna played *rong* and *abira* with his fellow friends. As the festival is observed in the month of 'Phaguna' (February-March) it has been called *Phalgustsav*. The term *Doul Yatra* has been derived from the fact that the image of Lord Krishna is brought out in a temple house (*Doul*) and taken in a procession all round the *Satra* or *Than*. It therefore means travel of the image of Lord Krishna sitting inside a temple called *Doul Yatra*. During the travel of the image of the Lord Krishna villagers of the neighborhood come out to the streets and offer prayer along with some *dakshina* and other articles. It is stated that *Phalgustsav* was first introduced by Sankardeva himself in the 'Bordowa Than', Sankardeva's birth place within present Nagaon district and at then Borpeta satra.⁸

In Lakhimpur district all the villagers of the different villages along with the *Satras* widely celebrate this festival in a ritualistic manner. In 'Basudeva Than' of Dhakuakhana, one important centre of the Basudeva worship, this festival is observed on a ground scale. It has certain interesting agendas in this festive occasion. A *mela* or market of the local products also takes place at Basudeva than during this time of *Doul Yatra* or *Phalgustsav*.

Guru Tithis or Janmautsava:

Although *Guru tithi* initially meant observance of the death anniversaries of the two great saint namely Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, it subsequently included the death anniversaries of all the preceptors of the post Sankardeva time. Accordingly, the *Guru tithi* of the Vaishnava saint are celebrated in the different *Satras* and *Namghas*. They are Damodardeva, Vansigopaldeva, Anirudhadeva etc. The *Guru tithis* are also called *atar tithi* as the preceptors

were also addressed as *ata*, a word which is prakrit from of the Sanskrit *atma* (soul).⁹ The moral procedure is that on the day of the anniversary (*tithi*) the inmates organize *annadan* (gift of cooked food) *nam-kirtan* and performance of various classical dance forms- *natuwa nach*, *ojapali nritra* etc.

The *Janmautsava* or the observance of birth anniversary of the two great saints Sankardeva and Madhavdeva are also celebrated in different Namghar and Satra of Lakhimpur district following Vaishnavite faith and traditions. On this particular day, people organize *nam-kirtan*, *natuwa nach*, *ojapali nach* and performance of other cultural programme like *bhouna*. In some places of the district, people also organize different competitions of the Vaishnavite culture such as competition of *borgeet*, competition of *satriya nritra* etc among the children. Some people also observe this celebration at home individually following Vaishnavite tradition.

Barsik Bhaona Sabah or Bar Sabah:

The *Bhaona Sabah*, the performance of a religious drama and holding of a great congregation prayer, is most universal festival of the villages in Lakhimpur district. In Lakhimpur every non tribal Assamese Hindu village performs an annual congregation, called '*Bor-Sabah*'¹⁰ followed by performance of a religious drama (*bhaona*) where not only the organizing village but also many of the neighboring villages participate. It is the most important festival in a village in Lakhimpur possibly next to the Bihus. The time for organizing a *Barsik Bhaona Sabah* is not the same for all the villages. But the normal time is during the month of May and June, although it may sometimes be held even in the last part of April or first part of July. June-July being the harvesting time of the summer crops –*ahu* rice and it being the season of rain and flood, the chosen and most convenient time for organizing a '*Bhaona Sabah*' is immediately after the Bohag Bihu which falls in mid-April. Among the agenda of the *Basik*

Bhaona Sabah are congregation prayer that includes *uthanam* and *hiyanam*, reading of Bhagavata, distribution of *mah-prasad*, reception of the invited guests in both village and family level and above all, performance of '*bhaona*' at night.

It is said that in Lakhimpur, March and April are the days when one is accustomed to the hearing of the sound of the *dhol*, while May and June is the time for hearing the sound of *khol*. This means that men prepare for the Bohag Bihu in the month of March and April by beating the *dhol* which is the symbol of Bihu, and prepare for the '*Barsik Bhaona Sabah*' by playing on the *khol* which is again the symbol of *bhaona*. The villagers prepare for the *Bhaona Sabah* since at least a month before the actual function.

The drama for a *bhaona* is composed by learned people of the village or they collect one such drama from outside and make a copy of it for the villagers. A drama is normally selected at the elderly level for the performance of a particular year and then someone is given the responsibility to collect it elsewhere if it is not at the villages and write the dialogues called *bachans* in separate sheets of paper. When writing of the *bachans* are finished, a meeting attended by both the young and old is held at the village Namghar to distribute the *bachans* among the possible players. Female roles are given to those young boys who resemble girls, or who are supposed to be suitable for the role. Normally nobody desires to do a female role. After distribution of roles, rehearsal is carried out for about a month almost every evening until it is decided that the practice is perfect. Then a day is final after making due astrological calculations and in consideration of family problem like students' examination and so forth. When the day comes nearer information and invitation are given to the neighboring villages, relatives and so forth. On the day before the day of the *Bhaona Sabah* all sorts of preparation are reviewed, responsibilities are distributed among the male persons and dresses of the role players

(*bhaoriyas*) are collected. In the evening of that day final review of the rehearsal is made. It is called *bar-akhara* (big rehearsal). All role players pray for their welfare, good memory and good health next day. Thus after a long endeavor, aspiration, labour and hope of enjoyment the fixed day comes.

From early in the morning of that day every member of the village engages in their duty fixed by custom or by the society or by the family. By late in the morning guest from the other villages begin to arrive. At noon formal function of the reading, recitation and congregation prayer start. The whole *Sabah* closed in the afternoon with distributed of the *mah-prasad*. Now there is the time for recreation for about three hours. At about 7:00 p.m. every role player comes to the dressing/ green room where appointed artist normally a few experience men from other villages are waiting to do make up. The makeup takes about one hour or two. *bhaona* starts when the Namghar is full of audience one side are female members while on the other side are the male. No person in alcoholic condition is allowed to enter the Namghar.

The *bhaona* started by the dance of the *sutradhar* or *sutradhari* who inaugurates it. The first scene normally states with either by a king or by the appearance to Lord Krishna. In the second case, all in the audience bow down their heads considering the person in guise to be the Lord Krishna Himself. Thus one month long labour and plan finds its reality and thus the *bhaona* start. It last till next day morning and some peasants go to the field directly from the Namghar.¹¹

The *Bhaona Sabah* has great social value. It enhances relationship between different villages and social groups. Today a village Namghar is full of audience coming from all castes and tribes and from various walks of life. In the congregation, member from various communities participate and the *bhakatas* from various castes and communities also participate

in the *Bhouna Sabah* under a single canopy called '*chandratap*' has become a fashion in certain villages.

Ali-Aye-Lrigang:

Among the most widely popular festivals of the Misings having both religious and secular tone is the one called by them as '*Ali-Aye-Lrigang*'. It is an agricultural festival observed on the first Wednesday of the month of *Phagun* at the beginning of the spring season. It is a festival that equated with the Bohag Bihu. The term '*Ali-Aye-Lrigang*' means the festival of sowing seeds. '*Ali*' means 'paddy' or 'seed' or 'root' in Assamese called '*alu*', '*Aye*' means 'fruits' and '*Lrigang*' means the 'day of sowing seeds'. The entire term means 'the day of sowing seeds'.¹² On the very Wednesday, early in the morning the members of the Mising family go to the field under the leadership of mother or the head women of a family who by hoeing certain plot of land sow the seeds.

The festival is performed by consuming and offering fish, meat and cake made of *bora* rice. For that purpose, a fish and meat collecting drive is undertaken collectively by the whole village using knife and other iron and bamboo tools. Nahedra Padun one of the researchers of the community has mentioned that at present hunting is done not by using the old tools, but by using guns and other modern arms. It is to be noted that ever hunting which was once an indispensable part of the festival, has now become obsolete as few jungles, *beels* or rivers are available for hunting and fishing.

Performing music and dance like those in the Bohag Bihu of the Assamese non-Tribal people is a special aspect of the *Ali-Aye-Lrigang*. On that occasion the young men and women would visit the house of a well to do family of the village, preferably the family of the headman or the *satola* and organize the Bihu where every one of the village irrespective of old and young

participates. This merry making continues for five days together and the rich men of the village will supply rice beer, fish and meat by making lavish expenditure. The *Ali-Aye-Lrigang* is popularly called by the non-Mising people as the 'Mising Bihu'. The *gumrag*, the most distinguished dance forms of the Misings dominate the whole festival.

P'orag or Nara Chiga Bihu:

Like '*Ali-Aye-Lrigang*', *P'orag* is an agricultural festival of the Misings. It is observed at the post harvesting seasons during August-September (Assamese *Ahin* month) after the harvesting of the *ahu* crop or during November-December after harvesting the *sali* and *baos* crops.¹³ As it is observed at the close of the harvest when the straw has rotten to pieces, it is popularly called by the non-Misings as '*Nara Chiga Bihu*'. This festival like the *Ali-Aye-Lrigang* involves a very elaborate system and needs year long preparation. Young boys build a common hall in front of the village large enough to accommodate inhabitants of the whole village and the invited guests. It is popularly known as *murang*. It is also called *deka chang*, which mainly for the young boys of the village who used the house in earlier time to sleep together at night as a body of protectors of the village when it is in danger of being attacked by enemies.¹⁴ The *P'orag* is celebrated in the *murang* with singing of songs called '*oi-nitom*' and dance where all people including the invited guests gather and participate. These dances are mimetic suggesting sowing, reaping, weaving etc. The *P'orag* festival is considered by the Misings as a symbol of unity and brotherhood among them in recent times.

Me-Dam-Me-Fie:

The Tai Ahom of Lakhimpur district celebrates this festival '*Me-Dam-Me-Fie*' or ancestor worship. It is a sort of puja with offering of food, fowl and rice beer accompanied by *mantra* and prayers. '*Me*' means worship, '*Dam*' means a particular stage of existence after

death till it attains the '*Fie*' status or the status of a spirit or God living in the middle kingdom between heaven and earth.¹⁵ The Tai belief is that the worthy ancestors are still living in the middle kingdom.

Early in the nineteenth century a few thousand of Tai crossed the *patkai* range and managed to occupy an area in north east Assam. Soon they came into conflict with local tribal and gradually began to extend their hegemony. Though they retained their traditional rites and customs they began to mix with the local people and sometime ever gave up their language. They were good fighters and organizers and in course of the centuries they not only become Hinduised but came to control entire Assam. They were tolerant in religious matters and gradually followed either Saktism or Vaishnavism. These Tai people later known as Ahom, ruled till 1826 when the land passed into the hands of the East India Company. The priestly class of the Ahoms retained their language and to certain extent maintained their traditional religious rites. One of such major rites was ancestor worship popularly known as '*Me-Dam-Me-Fie*'.

The Ahom kings of Assam performed ancestor worship at first at a place called '*charaideo*'. This is still a sacred spot for the Ahoms. The Ahom of Lakhimpur District now-a-day also calls the worship '*bar sabah*' (big prayer) or '*na-purushar saul*' (rice offered to nine generation of ancestors). There is no fixed place for the performance of *Me-Dam-Me-Fie* and it has become a sort of public function recent times. Presently, it is generally observed on 31st January at Lakhimpur District along with the other places of Assam. It is not only a religious but a social gathering with so much of merry making. The non-Ahoms of the district may also attend this festival in a large scale.

Palnaam:

The word ‘*Pal*’ originates from Sanskrit word ‘*paryaya*’ meaning one after another and ‘*Naam*’ for Sanskrit ‘*nama*’ meaning names and epithets of Krishna and description of his forms and activities. The *Palnaan* is a kind of congregational prayer service which continues without any break for a number of days. On this occasion prayer services (*nam-prasanga*) for the three times in a day- morning, noon, evening are regularly held and the chanting of congregational songs along with the accompaniment of musical instruments (cybals, *nagara* etc) is performed throughout every night of the ceremony. Moreover, the recitation from the Holy Scriptures (Bhagawata, Kirtana etc) also continues for the whole period.

The aim of performing *Palnaam* is to attract common people to the path of devotion. Srimanta Sankardeva first introduced *Palnaam* at Dhuwahat with the hope of getting back his disciple Madhavdeva and his son-in-law Hari Bhuyan from the custody of the Ahom monarch Chuhungmug or Dihingia Raja (1479-1539)¹⁶. The devotees believe that one can fulfill none’s desire by offering *naibedyas* at every session of *Palnaam* in a day. The offerings are distributed among the devotees and participants after *prasanga*.

In Lakhimpur district the *Palnaam* is performed in many places and Namghars among the disciples of Neo-Vaishnavism. It is widely performed at Bor-Namghar of Jalbhari gaon in Dhakuakhana sub-division in every year in the month of February-March. The *Palnaam* is also held *Basudeva than* of Lakhimpur district during the same period of time following religious rites and rituals. Observances of these *Palnaam* festivals have increased the attraction of the common people and the new generation towards devotion.

Maha Bhagavata Path:

The *Maha Bhagabata Path* is performed in the Namghars, temples and in a common place of a particular village or area. Offerings and recitations from the Holy Scripture 'Bhagavata' is done in this festive occasion. The programme is arranged for three to seven days where non-stop 'Bhagavata' recitation is performed. Some selected *pathaks* from the nearby area are invited specially to recite the 'Bhagavata'. The host people offer *naibedyas* and sponsor the lunch and dinner to all the gathered devotees. People from different walks of life assemble in the place where the males wear traditional *dhuti-kurta* and *chadar mekhela* by the women. Pure vegetarian food is offered to the devotees and the people of the participating villages also take vegetarian food during this time period. They burn earthen lamps at the gate of every household in every evening of the *Maha Bhagavata Path*.¹⁷ The Assamese Hindus of the Lakhimpur district perform *Bhagavata Path* with a view to securing peace and prosperity of the self as well as society. Now, it has become a common festival of the different tribes and castes performed generally in the month of *chaitra* (March- April).

Dipawali or Diwali :

Dipawali or *Diwali* also known as *Dipandita* is an important festival observed by the people of Lakhimpur district. The term *Dipawali* is compounding of two words 'Dipa' and 'Avail' of Sanskrit where 'Dipa' means light and 'Avail' means a row of light. The *Dipawali* or *Diwali* is observed by all Hindus irrespective of caste and class on the last two days of the dark fortnight of the month of *Kartika* (October-November). Many weeks before the festival people, clean their house, walls are whitewashed, furniture polished and every nook and corner cleaned. New cloths are brought for the children and sweetmeats are ordered to be sent to relative and

friends. In Lakhimpur like other parts of the state *Diwali* is celebrated in honour of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity and it is believed that Lakshmi only enters home that are clean and spotless.

There are some legends associated with *Diwali*. One of them is that it is held in memory of Krishnan's victory over *Narakasura*, the wicked gaint (rakshsa's). Secondly, it was celebrated for the first time in Ayodhya when Shri Ramachandra, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman returned victorious to Ayodhya after defeating 'Ravana' of Lanka.¹⁸ The people of Ayodhya then used to light their lamps and enjoy the whole day and night. Since then people have celebrated *Diwali* to commemorate Ram's victory over 'Ravana' with the same enthusiasm. By converting the darkest night of the year into to brightness symbolizing the triumph of the light of truth over the darkness of falsehood, the victory of knowledge over the ignorance as well as evil and wickedness all achieved by the man's efforts. This is the true message of *Diwali* expressed in the sparkling of millions of light, laughter and gaiety.

Its chief features are the lighting up of the houses with numerous little lamps and bursting of crackers. There is no special temple service or processions at this season. It is merely a time of popular rejoicing. The streets present a very gay appearance at night an account of the numerous lights that are placed in front of the houses. The people of Lakhimpur district light the earthen lamps that are put on the banana plants in the gateway to their houses. The people also arrange different cultural programmes and functions such as performance of dance, song etc on the occasion of *Dewali*.

Maha Sivaratri :

Maha Sivaratri, the great night of Siva, a widely observed festival in many Siva temples located all over Assam and outside the state. On the eve of the new moon in the month of

Magh/Phalguna (February/March), the worshipers of Siva fast all the day and perform special rite to their God. This annual festival is called the great (*Maha*) night of Siva and the worshipers commemorate all the activities of the Lord Siva except those who worship of Bishnu.

In Assam large fairs are held in connection with the festival at the temple Umananda of Guwahati, Mahabhoirav, Singari, Viswanath and Nagsankar of Sonitpur district and Siva Dol of Sivasagar. On the fourteenth night of *Phalguna*, the devotees throng to the temple for the worship of Siva-Mahadeva with leave of bel, flowers, coconuts, curds, honey, ghee and pots of water or milk which they pour over the linga.¹⁹

In Lakhimpur district, *Sivaratri* has been observed in different Siva temples of the district specially the Siva temple of the 'Town Bantow' area. On the day of this festival a huge number of devotees gather here to worship the God. In some places of the district the people arrange *bhaona*, the Assamese theatrical performance on this festive occasion. Womenfolk sometimes arrange *nam-prasanga* or prayer session, offer soaked rice and lentil, sugarcane, banana, coconut and *larus* (laddus) of rice powder. The use of *bhang* (hemp) in different form is an important part of the *Sivaratri* festivals. Now-a-days this tradition is followed by the young generation in a massive way which is not good sign to the society.

Durga Puja:

Durga Puja is an autumnal festival of great joy. It is held in September-October which creates an ideal atmosphere for celebrations. According to myth, Shree Rama hastily performed *Durga Puja* just before he set off for Lanka to rescue Sita from Rawana. According to the *Puranas*, king 'Suratha' used to worship Durga in spring. Thus the *Durga puja* is also known as *Basanti Puja*. But, Rama proposed the puja and worship Durga in autumn and that is why it is also known as *akal bodhan* or untimely worship. It was considered untimely as in the myth puja

was performed when the God and Goddess were awake i.e. *uttarayan* and was not held when the God and Goddesses rested i.e. *dakshinayan*. It was on the day of *mahalaya*, the beginning of the *devipaksha* that the God and Goddesses work up and so the puja is held at that time.²⁰

The story of ‘Mahisasura Mardini’ is captivating. It speaks of the increasing cruelty of the demon king Mahisasura against the Gods. Unable to tolerate his tyranny, the Gods pleaded with Vishnu (Bishnu) to annihilate the demon. The demon Mahisasura signifies the many force of evils and the weapons of Durga signify the innumerable weapons at her disposal to tackle the evils that one faces every day. She is the Goddess with several names: Narayani, Brahmani, Moheswari, Shivaduti, Shaktirupi etc. The weapons were gifted to her by the Gods with the single purpose of slaying the demon. Lord Siva gave her the trident, Vishnu chipped in with His *surdharshan chakra*, Indra chipped in with thunder, Surya, the Sun God gave her the bow and arrow, whilst Viswarkarma gave her the shield and other protective clothing. Brahma contributed the *kamandali kuber*, the multijewelled necklace and ‘Yamraj’ gave the *kaldanda*. In addition, the Himalayas gave her the lion, to carry her into the warfront. After a fierce combat, the *durgati- nashini* is able to slay the *asura* king with her trident when heaven and earth rejoices at her victory.

The worship of Durga in Her ten armed (*dasa bhuja*) image is an accepted ritual of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. The central image of Durga is supported on either side by images of different other deities. They are Ganesha, Kartik, Saraswati and Lakshmi. Besides, there is Mahisasura, the embodiment of the darker forces of life. He is supposed to be the offspring of the buffalo that lies nearby, in order to escape from the wrath of the Goddess, he enters into the body of the buffalo wherefrom he springs into life.

The Durga puja last for ten days. On the seventh day bathing commence. So, people start the pujas in the *mondaps* from the sixth day (*sasthi*) and perform the rituals. On the final day images are carried in procession with great pomp and immersed in the river. During the ceremonies generally goats are sacrificed. In some place buffalos are also sacrificed. But, in the pujas at different areas of Lakhimpur district, the Assamese Hindu sacrifices goat, buffalo, cock, pigeon and other birds. Significantly, in the 'Harhi Dewalaya' of the Dhakuakhana Sub-division the Assamese Hindus offer pumpkin, white gourd melon, bottle gourd etc in a large scale. All the community of Assamese Hindus do not perform puja in the urban area of Lakhimpur , Dhakuakhana, Bihpuri and Narayanpur as well as some villages of the district. The people of Neo-Vaishnavite tradition and the members of the Simanta Sankardeva Sanghar do not visit the *Puja Mondaps*. The Misings who are not the members of Srimanta Sankardeva Sanghar and who have not been converted to the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition participate in the *Durga puja* with great enthusiasm with the Assamese Hindu communities.

In Lakhimpur district, the Bengalis who are very small in terms of population structure observe the *Durga puja* with the other Non-Assamese Hindus in a big way. The new generation waits with great eagerness for the autumn to celebrate the puja, although the people of Vaishnavite tradition and the followers of 'Ek Sarana Naam Dharma' greatly oppose it.

Saraswati Puja:

Saraswati Puja is popular among the Assamese Hindus like other Festivals *Durga Puja*, *Holi* and *Diwali*. Saraswati is considered as the Goddess of knowledge. The *Saraswati Puja* is observed on the fifth bright lunar day of the Assamese month of Magh. The ceremonial functions and puja are arranged in the education institutions, collage, clubs and organization as well as by

some households. Two or three days before the puja, the students arrange the *puja mandaps* and purchase all the paraphernalia necessary to celebrate the auspicious occasion.

As per the folk belief some of the students observed *vrata* (fasting) on the day of puja and take food after offering puja. The young boys and girls and the students wear traditional dresses in the educational institutions on the day of puja. Image of Goddess *Saraswati* are placed in higher educational institutions and colleges of the district. In the rural areas the Assamese Hindus and the tribal people do not install clay status of Goddess *Saraswati*. The *Saraswati Sabah* by performing *nam-prasanga* in Sankarite tradition is observed in the educational institutions of these areas. The disciples of Srimanta Sankardeva Sanghar do not take part in the puja celebration.²¹ However, observance of this festival brings merriment, love and brotherhood among the young as well as old and especially the students' community of different caste and creed.

Biswakarma Puja:

Biswakarma Puja is observed on the Sankranti of the month of *Bhado* (August-September). *Biswakarma Puja* is limited mainly to the occupation groups as craftsmen or fishermen, washmen, potters, blacksmiths, artisans etc. Originally the *Biswakarma Puja* was mostly confined to the artisans.²²

According to Hindu mythology, Lord Biswakarma was the God of all artisans. He was the son 'Prabhasar' and 'Jugasatta'. Lord Biswakarma was the architect and designer of the dresses and vehicle used in *amarawati*, the Kingdom of Lord 'Indra' in the heaven. Biswakarma also built the city *dwaraka* as per directing of Lord Krishna. The status of Lord Bolobhadra, Jaganath and Subhadra of the temple of Jaganath puri, Orissa was built by Lord Biswakarma which is one of holy place of the Hindus.

At present, the importance of the worship of Lord Biswakarma has been increased due to the increase of the industries, machineries and industrial institutions. From the urban to the villages all the industrial and factory workers, carpenters, tailors, workshops and technical instructors etc arrange and worship Lord Biswakarma. Some people worship the image of Lord Biswakarma and offer puja and some Assamese Hindu communities worship by offering *noibedyas* and performing *naam-prasanga* in the Neo-Vaishnavite ritual. They pray to Lord Biswakarma for improvements of their skill and for over all betterment in the coming years. Observing of such puja festivals have increased the work culture and integrity among the workers, technicians and the proprietors irrespective of caste and creed in recent times.

Lakshmi Puja:

According to Hindu mythology ‘Lakshmi’ is the Goddess of prosperity and wealth. In *Vishnu purana* Lakshmi is mentioned as a daughter of priest ‘Maharshi Bhrigu’ and ‘Khyati’ and as the wife of Lord Vishnu or Narayana. Thus, Goddess Lakshmi is also known as ‘Narayani’. On the other hand as per the direction of Lord Bishnu, she was also born as *tulsi* plant at the home of Dharmadhvaj. As a result *tulsi* plant became a holy plant and used in puja and other religious works of Hindus.²³ The Goddess Lakshmi is considered as *Swarga Lakshmi* in heaven, *Raj Lakshmi* in the king’s place and *Griha Lakshmi* at individuals home. The Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped in the name of Iswari, Kamala, Lakshmi, Chala, Pathbhuti, Haripriya, Padma, Padmalaya, Sampada, Padmadharini, Sri and Uchoih. Among the Assamese Hindu Goddesses Lakshmi is also worshipped as Aai Basumati, Sati etc.

Lakshmi puja is performed on the day of full moon night after five days *Durga Puja*. On that particular day the Assamese Hindus of Lakhimpur district celebrate Lakshmi puja along with the people of Assam. Every individual family performs the worship of Lakshmi at their

home offering *naibedyas* and singing *naamkritan*. In the pandals of the pujas, people arrange different competition of *naam*, cultural programmes and *bhaona*. The Brahmin priest performs puja in front of the idol of Goddess Lakshmi. But, the Assamese Hindus of Sankarite traditions do not perform puja. They observed the occasion performing *naam prasanga* according to the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition. Earthen lamps placed at the *tulsi* plants, the gate way of each family, kitchen, granary, in the garden of betel-nut, agricultural field etc to welcome Goddess Lakshmi. Some of the Assamese Hindus keep themselves fasting on the day of Lakshmi puja and take vegetarian food after offering puja.

Kali Puja:

Kali Puja also known as ‘Shyama Puja’ or ‘Mahanisha Puja’ is a festival dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Kali, celebrated on the new moon day of the Assamese month *Kartik* in Lakhimpur district along with the other parts of the state. Like *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja* worshippers honour Goddess Kali in their homes in the form of clay idol at pandals (temporary Shrines or open pavilion). She is worshipped at night with tantric rites and mantras.²⁴ She is offered of red hibiscus flowers, animal blood in a skull, sweet rice and lentils, fish and meal. Animals are ritually sacrificed on *Kali Puja* day and offered to the Goddess. The people from the Bengali community of the district mainly observed this festival along with different temples of Goddess Kali. It is prescribed that a worshiper should meditate throughout the night until dawn. An idol of God Siva, the consort of Kali is also put in the pandals of *Kali Puja*. The important fact is that it coincides with the Pan-Indian *Lakshmi Puja* day of *Diwali* or *Dipawali*. People visit these pandals throughout the night. *Kali Puja* is also the time for magic shows and theatre and fireworks in a large scale.

Chhath Puja:

The *Chhat Puja* is an ancient Hindu festival and the only vedic festival devoted to the Sun God, Surya and *Chathi Maiya*. It is performed to thank Surya for being the primordial force sustaining life on earth. The word '*Chhat*' has its origin in 'Sixth' as it is celebrated on the 6th day or *Shasthi* of the lunar frost night of *Kartik* (October- November) in the Hindu calendar (Six days after *Diwali*, the festival of light). People worship the God Sun very enthusiastically and pray for the well-being, success and progress of their family members, friends and elders. According to the Hinduism, Sun worship is related to the cure of a range of diseases such as leprosy.

The rituals of *Chhath* festival are meticulous and observed over a period of four days. They include holy bathing, fasting and abstaining from drinking water (*Vratta*), standing in water for a long period of time and offering *prasad* (prayer offerings) and *arghya* (commodity offering) to the rising and setting Sun.²⁵

Chhathi Maiya (consort of Lord Surya) is worshipped on *Chhat Puja*. The *Chhathi Maiya* is also known as *Usha* in the Vedas. *Usha* means dawn the first light of the day. People pray to *Chhathi Maiya* to overcome their trouble as well as to get the *Moksha* or liberation.

It is also assumed that the *Chhat Puja* was first started by the Surya putra Karna. He was a great warrior and had ruled over the 'Anga Desh' (Munger district of Bihar) during the Mahabharata period. In Lakhimpur district *Chhath Puja* is mainly celebrated by the 'Bhojppuri' and 'Maithili' speaking community apart from the Nepalese Hindus.

Bathow Puja:

Bathow festival or Bathow Puja is one of the religious festival of Lakhimpur district as well as Assam. This festival of the district is celebrated by the Bodo- Kacharis in a ritualistic way. In this festival people worship the God who has many names like Gili Damra, Khuria, Bwrai, Sri Brai (Shib bwrai) Bathow bwrai etc. Some people identify this God with the Hindu God Lord 'Siva'. This festival is celebrated in different forms such as-Garja, Marai , Kherai etc. Among these different forms of the Bathow Puja the Kherai is the important one. Bathow puja of the Bodos is equivalent to Baitow puja of Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district. But, only time schedule and rituals are different.

In the Kherai Puja, a cactus (*Sizu*) called Bwrai Bathow surrounded by a small bamboo boundary is offered flowers, fruits and some grains. The different leaves like special grass, mango leaves and *tulsi* leaves hipped in a small pot with water is also kept nearby. The incense and *dhuna* (coconut peel burnt in a small holder) kept on burning arousing sweet fragrance. The Kherai puja is always followed by a series of ritual dance called the 'Kherai dance'. The Puja and dance are inseparable, the dance being essential part of the Kherai worship. The purpose of the dance is to appease the Bodos' supreme God Bothow, for whom the *Sizu* thee is a symbol.²⁸

Non-Hindu Festivals:

Eid-Al-Fitr:

Eid-Al-Fitr is a Muslim festival. The festival of Eid or Eid-Al-Fitr is in a way the culmination of the month long fast during the month of 'Ramzan'. The Muslim religious calendar is based on lunar months. The ninth lunar month is known as Ramzan. The Quran prescribe the month of Ramzan as the most suitable for fasting, for it is in this month that the

teaching of the Quran were received by prophet Muhammad. During this month Muslim get up at dawn, take a little food, then remain fasting the entire day till sunset, when they are allowed to eat light food. During the day they cannot even drink a drop of water.²⁷ Prayers and helping the poor (a tenet of Islam) are characteristics of the month. When Ramzan is over and the new moon is seen, the *roza* or fast is broken. There is public *namaz* or prayer by the people on an open ground and then there is Eid-Al-Fitr or the fast in the evening. The Eid is an occasion for wishing well of others and of inviting ever Hindu friends. It is a period of happiness and merriment among the Muslims. In Lakhimpur district the Muslims observe this festival with great enthusiasm. In most areas, people of the other religions join Muslims in celebrating Eid-Al-Fitr.

Eid-UI-Zuha:

The Eid-UI Zuha is also a Muslim festival that is observed about two month and nine day after Eid-Al-Fitr. On this occasion Muslim can go on pilgrimage to Mecca popularly known as 'Haj'. The Muslim offer goats or sheep as sacrifice to 'Allah' on this occasion. This commemorates the attempt sacrifice by the prophet Abraham of his son Ishmael which was commended by God to test the faith of Abraham.²⁸ But, when Abraham was about to kill to his own son, God performed a miracle and substituted a ram in place of Ishmael. The Eid-UI-Zuha celebrates this great act of sacrifice. As in Eid-Al-Fitr, on Eid-UI-Zuha also additional recitations are added to the morning prayers and people embrace each other in offering felicitations. Then they offer whatever animals they can offer by way of sacrifice. The flesh of the sacrificed animal is given to the poor and needy. Eid-UI-Zuha is therefore also known as Eid-UI-Kurban (the Eid of sacrifice). On this Eid also children are given *eidee*, but they are not as excited over this Eid as

they are over Eid-Al-Fitr. The Muslims of Lakhimpur district also observe this festival in traditional and ritualistic manner.

Muharram:

This is observed on the tenth day of the first month of Islamic calendar. On this day of Muharram, Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad and his family and followers (consisting of 72 people including women, children and aged people) were killed by the army of Yazid-I at the battle of Karbala. Surviving members of Hussein's family and that of his followers were taken captive marched to Damascus and imprisoned there. The Shia Muslims observed this festival to replicate the suffering of Hussein ibn Ali on the day of *Ashura*, (tenth day of Muharram).²⁹ It is recorded in the *hadith* that *Musa* (Moses) and his people obtained a victory over the Egyptian Pharaoh on 10th day of Muharram. So, the Sunni Muslims fast on this day commemorating the rescue of people of Israel by *Musa* (Moses) from Pharaoh. The Muslims of Lakhimpur district also observe this holy festival with fasting and mourning the sacrifice of the martyrs. Fasting differs among the Muslim groupings; mainstream Shia Muslim stop eating and drinking during the sunlight hours and do not eat until late afternoon. Sunni Muslims also fast during Muharram for the first ten days of this occasion or just the tenth day or on both the ninth and tenth days, the exact term depends on the individual. Most notable fact is that while Shia Muslims consider Muharram to be a sorrowful occasion, Sunni Muslims observe it as a festival. However, instead of joyous celebration, Muslims mark the beginning of the New Year by taking up the black attire of sorrow and participate in morning gatherings in which the sacrifices of Hussein and his companions are commemorated.

Christmas or Christmas Day:

Christmas or Christmas Day is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ observed most commonly on 25th December, as a religious and cultural celebrating among the Christians. A large number of non-Christian people also observe this festival around the world. The celebratory customs associated in various country with Christmas have a mixture of pre-Christian, Christian and secular themes and origins. Popular modern customs of this festival include giving presents, Christmas music and carols, exchange of Christmas cards, Church celebrations, a special meal, the display of various Christmas decoration including Christmas stars, Christmas trees, nativity scenes, garlands etc. In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas and Saint Nicholas are associated with bringing of gifts for children during the Christmas season.³⁰ In catholic countries, people hold religious processions or parades in the days preceding Christmas. In other countries, secular processions or parades featuring Santa Claus and other seasonal figures are often held.

The traditional colours of Christmas are red, green and gold. Red symbolizes the blood of Jesus, which was shed in his crucifixion, while green symbolizes eternal life and in particular the evergreen tree, which does not lose its leaves in the winter and gold is the first colour associated with Christmas as one of the three gifts of the *Magi*, the three wise men of the east, symbolizing loyalty. The Christians of Lakhimpur district also observe this festival along with some non-Christians people following its rites and rituals and indentifying Jesus Christ as the 'Sun of God'.

Good Friday:

Good Friday is a Christian religious observance commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his death. This is observed during the holy week as part of the 'Paschal Tridunm' and the Friday preceding Easter Sunday and may coincide with the Jewish observance of Passover. It

is also known as 'Holy Friday', 'Great Friday', 'Black Friday' or 'Easter Friday'.³¹ Many Christian churches celebrate Good Friday with a subdued service, usually in the evening when Christ's death is remembered with solemn hymns, 'prayer of thanks giving, a message centered on Christ suffering for our sake and observance of the Lords supper. Many Christians spend this day as a day of fasting. They generally abstain from meat on this day. They hold parades or open air plays to portray the last day or hours of Jesus' life. In Lakhimpur district of Assam the Christians also observe this religious ceremony with great enthusiasm. In many churches of Lakhimpur district Christians prepare a bitter drink made from leaves, vinegar and other ingredients. This drink is for everyone to taste after the service.

Buddha Purnima:

Buddha Punima also known as *Baisakh* is a Buddhist festival that marks Gautama Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. It falls on the day of full moon in May and observed by the Buddhists. Many Buddhists visit monasteries to listen to monks who preach and recite ancient verses. Devout Buddhists may spend all day in one or more monasteries. They pay special attention to Buddhist teachings during *Baisakh*. They wear white robes and eat vegetarian food only during the Buddha Purnima. Many people also give money, food or goods to organization that help the poor, the elderly and those who are sick. Caged animals are brought and set free to display care for all living creatures as preached by Buddha.³² The *Dharmachakra* of dharma wheel is a symbol often seen during *Baisakh*. In Lakhimpur district the Buddhists along with other followers of the Buddha's philosophy also observe this celebration following all customs and tradition of the festival.

Mahavir Jayanti:

Mahavir Jayanti is the most important religious festival of the Jains in Lakhimpur District. It celebrates the birth of 'Vardharmana Mahavira', the last or 24th Tirthankara of Jainism which occurs either in March or April every year. On this day the images of Mahavira are given a ceremonial bath called the *Abhisheka*. During this day many Jains engage in charitable acts in the name of Mahavira while others go to temples to meditate and offer prayers. Lectures are held in temples to preach the path of virtue as defined by the Jain doctrine.³³ Donations are also collected in order to promote charitable missions like saving cows from slaughter and helping to feed poor people. People from Maruwari community of the Lakhimpur district come to pay their respect and join in the celebrations in a massive way.

Gurpurab or Guru Nanak Birthday:

Gurupurab also known as Guru Nanak Prakash utsav is the celebration of the birth of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak. This is one of the most sacred festivals in Sikhism. Apart from the Sikhs, the *Nanakpanthi* Hindus and other followers of Guru Nanak's philosophy also celebrate this festival. Guru Nanak's birthday is celebrated on the day of full moon in the month of *Kartik*. In the Gregorian calendar, the celebration usually falls in the month of November, but its date varies from year to year. During this celebration the Sikhs follow number of rites and ritual such as prayer, singing hymns, taking procession, distribution of lunch etc in the spirit of *seva* (service) and *bhakti* (devotion).³⁴ In Lakhimpur district the Sikhs belonging to mainly Punjabi community observe this celebration with great honour and devotion at their *gurudwars*.

From the above discussion it is found that as a meeting place of different tribes, castes and community, the people of Lakhimpur district celebrate different festivals following various rites and rituals from the early time. In this regard it is worth mentioning that in spite of different

customs, traditions and rituals the main motto of these festivals among the various tribes, caste and community is to create peace as well as unity among the people of the district and to preserve the cultural identity of the district. Another important point is that all the festive traditions of the district which is relating to social as well as agricultural life of the locality have to same extent natural as well as religious nature. Besides, a small part of the district population not belonging to Hinduism have been observing some different celebrations in the different time of the year from the past which have greatly enriched the cultural prosperity of the region in particular and state in general. Significantly, with the passage of time and due to the impact of globalization, change has taken place in some aspects of the festivals of Lakhimpur district like other parts of the state. It is worth mentioning that even then the originality in case of rites and rituals of the festivals have been retained to a great extent.

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4. L. N. Bezboruah, *Bezboruah Rachanawali*, Guwahati, 1988, Vol-I, p.390
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7. Narayan Chandra Devagoswami, *Satriya Sanskritir Samarekha*, Guwahati, 2005, p.115
8. *Guru Charit* by Ram Charan Thakur, VV-1636
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11. This picture has been slowly undergoing changes. Today except on specific occasions, *bhaona* or evening practices (*akhora*) rarely mark a village atmosphere as it did in the past.
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CHAPTER-VI
IMPACT OF THE FESTIVALS UPON THE
SOCIETY, ECONOMY, CULTURE AND
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Thus it has been observed that the people of Lakhimpur district observe numbers of socio-religious festivals including the three Bihus which are considered as secular festival in Assam. Different ethnic groups of this area including Ahom, Mising, Chutia, Kachari, Deori, Koch, Kalita, Kaibartta, etc have been observing various customs, traditions, fairs and festivals separately or in organized manner which have greatly contributed to the Assamese culture in general and the culture of Lakhimpur district in particular. A small part of the district population who are followers of Christianity, Islamism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism observe their socio-religious festivals such as Muharram, Eid-Al-Fitr, Eid-UI-Zuha, Christmas Day, Good Friday, Mahabir Jayanti, Buddha Purnima, Guru Nanak Birthday etc in a religious as well as festive mood. Although a few people are associated with these festivals, these are considered as an important part of the religious and cultural life of the people in Lakhimpur. Along with the festivals mentioned above some other occasions such as Independence Day, Republic Day, Teacher's Day, World Environment Day, Raksha Bandhan etc are also celebrated in the district with great enthusiasm.

The observation of different socio-religious festivals in Lakhimpur district is almost similar to the other places of Assam in terms of its rites as well as rituals. But, the fact is that the observations of these festivals in Lakhimpur are influenced by some indigenous or regional elements which help maintaining its originality as well as peculiarity to a great extent. On the other hand, it is also found that the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism under the great saint

Srimanta Sankardeva had paved a new way on the basis of '*Bhakti*' in the celebrations of these festivals. Simultaneously, the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism had generated some new kinds of socio-religious festivals in the district along with other parts of Assam which have also played an important role in shaping a new society within the district.

It is true that all the festivals have some impacts on society, economy, culture as well as environment of the concerned area. Significantly, the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district have impacted on all these aspects both in a positive and negative way. Some of the impacts of these festivals which contributed towards the social, economic, cultural and environmental life of the district are given as follows:-

Like the other places of the state the celebration of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district has helped in maintaining social peace and harmony among the people of the region. It creates an environment of trust, belief and brotherhood among the people of the district. Consequently, there is no remarkable ethnic violence take place in Lakhimpur district till now. These festivals have also increased the moral values among the young generation and the mutual understanding and cooperation among all communities living in the district. It has also played an important role in recreation, socialization, social control and helping in fighting the social evils.¹

By observing socio-religious festivals, the people of Lakhimpur district express their joy and share their feelings among themselves which is common in other district also. The people also express their different customs and traditions of their day to day life through these festivals in a lucid way. In this regard, the *Bhaona* performances introduced by Srimanta Sankardeva have gone a long way not only bringing unity but also help in preserving the ancient culture as well as traditional beliefs.²

The celebration of socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district has helped in preserving the original form of some festivals as far as possible manner. As for example, the Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana is trying to preserve the original form of Assamese Bihu culture specially Bihu dances, songs, *husori* etc in a big way. As it is known to all that due to commercialization of Bihu dances and songs, these have lost its original character in a large scale. Now-a-days, Bihu dances and songs are not related with agriculture, fertility and nature. Similarly the modern Bihu functions which are sponsored and patronized by the young and urban people have degraded the Assamese Bihu culture and are not in favour of the preservation of Bihu culture in its original form. The Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana however, is different from that tradition. This Bihu of Dhakuakhana has tried to keep the Assamese Bihu culture in its original form. Regarding this it is worth mentioning that the tradition of Bihu celebration under the trees is still maintained in the Phato Bihu which is an important feature of it. Similarly, it has also maintained the traditional Bihu dresses as far as possible manner. The songs that are sung in this Bihu celebration are traditional and related with agriculture, youth, fertility and important local incidents.³

The socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district have some economic impacts on society which also found in other places of the state. Now-a-days these festivals are a source of income to many people in the villages and towns of the district. In the early times, the people were only interested in observing customs as well as rituals of the festivals and seeing performances. But today a class of people earns some money by doing a brisk business i.e. shops, stalls etc on these occasions along with their agricultural works.

In Lakhimpur, the observation of these socio-religious festivals has given birth to a class of artisans who are specialized in the art of preparing costumes, decorations and accessories of performance similar to other district of the state. They make masks and costumes necessary for

the *Bhauna / Raas* performance in addition to their agricultural activities. The experienced and skilled artisans of the locality also make some bamboo idols of different Gods and Goddesses which are a source of their income. Thus, by the celebration of these festivals the of artisans have gained monetary benefit in a significant way.⁴

Recently, tourists have come from various parts of the country as well as abroad to enjoy different socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district which is a common phenomenon in Assam. Especially during the last few years numbers of foreign tourists have come from Israel, France and England to enjoy and study the nature and significance of the Phato Bihu and other festive celebration of the district. Some of them come with their entire family and stay for whole period of these festive celebrations. These national and international contacts have helped in promoting cultural exchange in Lakhimpur district particular and the state in general. This has also helped in generating income for the government as well as the local people to some extent.

Now-a-days it is observed that the younger generation shows no interest to the ancient culture and traditional way of life. They are usually more interested in modern culture as well as western culture which have numbers of bad effects. However, in Lakhimpur district it is found that the observation of the socio-religious festivals has created a consciousness among the young generation about the ancient culture and the traditional way of life of the region. These have also greatly helped in creating cultural mobility and assimilation among the people of the region as well as the whole state.⁵

The socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district are full of songs, dances and merry making. The people of this district enjoy these festivals with immense pleasure and entertainment. Even the Vaishnavite festivals like *Bhaona*, *Raasmahotsava*, *Doljatra*, *Janmastami* etc are important sources of their entertainment. The mythical themes, stories and

dances remove their stress and boredom of day to day life. In spite of the development of the modern technologies, these festivals still play an important role as a source of entertainment among the people of some areas of the district.

The customs and traditions of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district are also closely related to the health care system of human as well as animals. It is found that different types of traditional food items of the Bihus and other religious festivals such as *pitha*, *jalpan*, *mah prasad* etc are very hygienic and beneficial for the health inspite of some unhealthy incidents take place in some parts of the district in this regard. The Bihu dances, *husori* and other physical activities relating to the festivals are also helpful in the growth of body and mind of the young people. Similarly, some other practices like the application of *matikalai* and raw *halodhi* (turmeric) pastes with mustard oil on the body of man and animal, the tradition of bathing the cow in nearby river, the custom of arranging '*jak*' at the house and cowshed in the evening on the first day of Bohag Bihu etc have also some health care perspectives.⁶

Another important impact of the festivals is that the observation of these festivals has created a message among the common people on the conservation of environment which considered as a global issue in recent times. Some events of the festivals performed in the natural surroundings i.e. performance of *Mukali Bihu* under the trees during Bohag Bihu, lightening of lamp in the midst the paddy field during Kati Bihu etc create a relationship between man and environment from the early times. Similarly, different kind of instrumental, worship and food items collected from the nature in the time of different festivals i.e. *toka*, *gagana*, *tulshi gosh*, *torapat*, *dighloti*, *makhiloti*, various kind of vegetables, creepers etc have also contributed a lot in this regard which can also be considered as a very positive and relevant impact of these festivals on society as well as environment.

In this way it is found that the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district have some positive impacts on the social, economic and cultural life of the people as well as the recent environmental issues. Simultaneously, sometimes it is also found that the celebration of these festivals is to some extent harmful for the social, economic, cultural and environmental life of the district which creates some unfavorable situations in the region concerned. The dominant negative impacts of these socio-religious festivals of the district are as follows:-

Although the celebration of socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur has helped in maintaining social peace and harmony among the people of the region, some practices of these festivals have sometimes created unhygienic situation in the society which is a matter of great concern. The traditional use of stolen items in the process of *meji* construction and *uruka bhojbhat* during the time of Magh Bihu (in order to increase fertility), the tradition of taking 'bhang' (hemp) as *prasad* during the celebration of *Shivaratri* among the devotees as well as young people etc are some examples in this concern. These kinds of practices sometimes create law and order situation in the society.

Another negative aspect of the festivals in recent times is the collection of money for their observation. This kind of practice has resulted in displeasure and harassment for the donor because most of the time the organizers misappropriate the money. Interestingly, such kind of practice is going on even after the celebration of the festivals. Sometimes collectors pressurize the people for money which develops an unhealthy situation in the society.

Similarly, inspite of some positive impacts on environment, it is worth mentioning that due to lack of proper planning and strategy some practices of the festivals have contributed a lot in the process of recent environmental degradation. In this regard mention may be made about the ceremonial sacrifice of the idols (*murti*) in the rivers during the time of *Bhasan* of Durga puja

which usually creates problem in the flow of these rivers. Similarly, after the celebration of *Biswakarma*, *Saraswati*, *Kali* puja the respective idols are placed at some nearby and roadside areas especially under the trees which creates some environmental as well as cleanness problems. It is also worth mentioning that during the time of *Dipawali*, the festivals of light and the *Chhat* puja, the heavy use of firecrackers generally create some problems such as sound pollution, air pollution etc in the surrounding areas which are not favorable for men as well as animals.

Impact of Modernism upon the festivals:

Firstly, it is found that due to the high influence of modern education, western cultures as well as scientific and technological developments the festivals have been affected adversely. Only because of these reasons the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district have lost its originality to a great extent.

Secondly, the recent trend of religious change has also affected the festivals of the district in a big way. Presently, number of tribal people has been converted into Christianity and other religions leaving their traditional religious beliefs. As a result they try to observe the celebrations which belong to Christianity and other non-Hindu religion. This has also adversely affected the traditional festivals of the district.

Thirdly, some of the festivals are highly expensive in terms of money and time. It is found that due to this reason people are not able to celebrate these festivals regularly and have thus gradually disappeared from the cultural scenario of the district.

Fourthly, industrialization has also affected the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district. Originally most of the festivals of the district are related with agriculture. But the process industrialization has led to the declined of agriculture in a massive way. As a result the celebrations of these festivals have significantly decreased.

Fifthly, it is observed that numbers of festivals are celebrated only because of enjoyment as well as showmanship in lieu of social and religious significance. Presently, the people specially the new generation have not followed the basic rituals concerning these festivals. So, now-a-days the festivals have lost their traditional religious rituals.

Sixthly, proper consciousness regarding the proper study and preservation relating to the history of socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district has not developed yet. There are no archives and museums that can help to preserve the history of these festivals. Due to this reason, the history of the festivals still remains dark and not so popular as it should have been.

Prospects of the Festivals:

Festivals are the backbone of a culture as well as society. A culture of a particular society survives only when the socio-religious festivals and other cultural aspects are preserved. Culture has taught us how to become disciplined in social life as well as individuals. Change is law of nature. Now the question is that whether changes take place in the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district or not. Recently, it is found that the process of change has affected the socio-religious festivals in Lakhimpur district to a great extent. In this situation, the prime duty is to examine the whole process whether it is positive or negative and take concrete steps that would help in maintaining its glory and continuity. The following measures must be undertaken to preserve the above mentioned festivals of the district.

Firstly, for the maintenance of its glory and future continuity, one has to generate consciousness regarding the tradition of these festivals among the young generation in a large scale. These aspects can be included in the syllabus of the school and college level and assign field work, project work to the student about these festivals.

Secondly, all sections of the people of the society have to participate actively in the celebration of these festivals for their better future. It is generally found that only the rural people as well as farmers have been playing the major role in the celebration or observation of basic rituals of the festivals. Due to the busy work schedule the urban people and the upper section of the society have not played active role in this regard. They celebrate these festivals in symbolic or modified ways on different time scheduled. So, everyone should celebrate all these festivals whole heartedly as well as in a co-operative manner.

Thirdly, development of agriculture can be considered one of the major steps for preservation of socio-religious festivals in modern times. As festivals of nature as well as agriculture, this kind of endeavor can surely link the common people with the festivals and thus enable to preserve it.

Fourthly, in order to maintain its glory and continuity one has to recognize the dignity of all caste and tribes of the district along with their culture. The government should also give emphasis to this aspect. This kind of effort will surely help in raising the status of the festivals in particular and the culture in general.⁷

Fifthly, preventive measures should be undertaken to prevent the unlawful and indecent activities relating to the observation of festivals such as forceful donations, showmanship etc for its glory and continuity. There must be rules and regulations regarding these issues.

Sixthly, to make the festivals more relevant in the society, one has to perform some social work as well as undertake social responsibility through these celebrations. It is usually found that in most of the festivals, the people only devote their time and energy in its celebrations following respective rites and rituals. But, some amount of funds accrued through the celebrations of these

festivals should be spent for poor and needy and other constructive purposes. This kind of efforts will surely give a positive meaning of the festivals.⁸

Lastly, a proper study and preservation system of the different aspects of the festivals will also help to maintain its originality as well as glory. Inclusion of different information regarding the festivals in digital archives and the concerned website will also help to preserve the festivals in a big way. Moreover, documentary shows, workshops, seminars and debates must be organized among the young students so that they can be aware and get a better understanding of our culture and heritage. The government organizations and the NGOs' should put emphasis on further research work about the different aspects of the festivals. This will definitely help in maintaining the continuity and glory of the various festivals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX – A

SOME BIHU SONGS OF PHATO BIHU

1. ***“Charikaria Noi Pare Hai Dhapaliai Ahilu,
Bihure Batari Pai.
Mahaghuli Chaparit Bihukhan Patiche,
Senai Dekha Dekhi Nai. ”***
(Crossing the river Charikaria I came hurriedly,
Getting the news of Bihu.
But I don’t find you my dear,
At the Mahaghuli Chapori where Bihu is held.)
2. ***“Dapunkhan Chale Moi Dekhu Tumar Chabiti,
Hatat loi ebela kandu .
Dinar Dintu Tumak Bhabi Thakute,
Rati Hale Sapunat Dekhu.”***
(When I see the looking glass I see your face,
Taking the glass in my hand I cry,
For the whole day I am thinking about you,
I also dream about you at night.)
3. ***“Parbate Parbate Bagab Paru Moi,
Latat Bogaboloi Tan.
Juria Hatiku Bolab Paru Moi,
Tumak Balaboloi Tan.”***
(From mountain to mountain I can climb,
But it is difficult to climb at creeper.
A couple of elephants I can control,
But it is difficult to control you.)
4. ***“Habiloi Gaichilu Katarikhan Nenilu,
Latai Beri Beri Dhare.,
Tumar Moram Seneh, Guchab Nuwaru,***

Ghuri Ghuri Manate Pare.”

(I went to the forest without taking the knife,
Creepers entangled me again and again.

I cannot remove your love from me,
Because you came to my mind again and again.)

5. ***“Baliye Baliye Ujay Goi Achilu,***

Balire bagari khai .

Balire Apra Ubhati Ahilu,

Bihure Batari Pai.”

(I was going to the East crossing sand after sand,
Eating berries found in the sand.

But I returned the same way as soon as I heard,
About the news of Bihu.)

6. ***“Tokar Saru Saru Mat Samoniya,***

Tokar Saru Saru Mat.

Tokar Mate Suni Raba Moi Nuwaru ,

Eri Jaw Pestore Bhat.”

(Toka's sound is very low, o' my friends,
Toka's sound is very low.

Hearing the sound of the toka, I can not wait any more,
And I am ready to leave the rice which is given to me.)

Appendix – B
Symbol and Flag of Phato Bihu



APPENDIX – C

Questionnaire

1. Do you think that the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur maintain its original form?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
2. The changes which have taken place in the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur are –
(Positive/Negative/No Comment)
3. Do you think that the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur able to express the local cultural of the region?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
4. Do you think that the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur have been maintaining peace and harmony of the region?
Yes/No/ No Comment)
5. Do you think that the people of Lakhimpur district are conscious about the significance of these festivals?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
6. Are there any major problems of these festivals in modern times?(Yes/No/ No Comment)
7. Do you think that the politics scenario has influenced the nature of these festivals recently?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
8. How far has the state government patronized these festivals?
(Positively/Negatively/No Comment)
9. Is there any possibility to attract tourists on the basis of these festivals?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
10. Do you think that the 'Phato Bihu of Dhakuakhana' is the glory of Lakhimpur district as well as Assam?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)
11. Is there any plan for the future continuity / improvement of these festivals in Lakhimpur?
(Yes/No/ No Comment)

APPENDIX – D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is the historical background of Lakhimpur?

Answer:.....
.....

2. What are the basic characteristics of the three Bihus in Lakhimpur?

Answer:.....
.....

3. Is there any differences in terms of rites and rituals of the Bihus among the tribes of the district?

Answer:.....
.....

4. What is the 'Phato Bihu' of Dhakuakhana?

Answer:.....
.....

5. How did the 'Phato Bihu' of Dhakuakhana develop?

Answer:.....
.....

6. What are the basic characteristics of the 'Phato Bihu'?

Answer:.....
.....

7. What are the differences between the 'Phato Bihu' and the other Bihu celebrations of Assam?

Answer:.....
.....

8. What is the contribution of the 'Phato Bihu' in the cultural development of the region?

Answer:.....
.....

9. What is the significance of the socio-religious festivals towards the social unity of the region?

Answer:.....
.....

10. Is there any problems relating to the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur district in recent times?

Answer:.....
.....

11. Is there any possibility of tourism relating to the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur?

Answer:.....
.....

12. From your side is there any suggestion regarding continuity of the socio-religious festivals of Lakhimpur?

Answer:.....
.....

APPENDIX-E

LIST OF SOME INTERVIEWED PERSONS

1. **Mr Jagadish Gogoi**, 70 years, Dhakuakhana
2. **Dr Jit Ram Kalita**, 65 years, Dhakuakhana
3. **Mr Dimbeswar Gogoi**, 58 years, Dhakuakhana
4. **Mr Keshab Gogoi**, 55 years, Dhakuakhana
5. **Mr Jatindra Kumar Boruah**, 80 years, Dhakuakhana
6. **Mr Dhanbar Patir**, 50 years, Dhakuakhana
7. **Mr Bhadra Sonowal**, 52 years, Dhakuakhana
8. **Mr Probin Rabha**, 52 years, Bordoibam
9. **Mr Hemanta Bosumatary**, 35 years, Bogonadi
10. **Mr Bapuram Deori**, 45 years, Dhakuakhana
11. **Mr.Bichinath Doley**, 48 years, Dhakuakhana
12. **Mr Dhanbar Patir**, 55 years, Dhakuakhana
13. **Mr Manikanta Patir**, 60 years, Dhakuakhana
14. **Mr Joyram Sonowal**, 65 years, Dhakuakhana
15. **Mr Padma Sonowal**, 55 years, Dhakuakhana
16. **Mr. Prema Sonowal**, 62 years, Dhakuakhana
17. **Mr Naren Lalung** , 54 years, Boginadi
18. **Mr Mukunda Rabha**, 55 years, Boginadi
19. **Mr Nabin Gohain**, 62 years, Narayanpur
20. **Mr Maneswar Deori**, 58 years, Dhakuakhana
21. **Mr Ratan Tanti**, 56 years, Boginadi
22. **Mr Uakanta Patir**, 65 years, Dhakuakhana
23. **Mr Mahananda Patir**, 65 years, Dhakuakhana

24. Mr Nanda Chutia, 68 years, Dhakuakhana

25. Mr Mitra Gogoi, 65 years, Dhakuakhana

ILLUSTRATIONS



Celebration of *Me-Dam-Me-Fie*



Celebration of *Me-Dam-Me-Fie* with rituals



A Scene of the celebration of *Raas Utshav*



Celebration of *Raas Utshav* with bamboo idol



A Scene of the *Bor Sabah* and *Bhaona* celebration



A Scene of the *Bor Sabah* and *Bhaona* celebration



Bihu Performance of the Deoris



Mising Bihu Performance during Phato Bihu Celebration



Performance of Bihu under the Trees



Performance of Toka Bihu on during Bohag Bihu



A Scene of the Celebration of *Ali-Aye-Lrigang*



Lightening of lamp in the paddy field during Kati Bihu



Construction of *Bhelaghar* and *Meji* during Magh Bihu



Set fire on the *Meji* during Magh Bihu



A Scene of the Celebration of *Durga Puja*



Observation of *Palnaam* at *Naamghar*