

CHAPTER IV

THE BIHU FESTIVAL: ISSUES OF ETHNICITY, REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

The Bihu festival with its nuanced celebration, gives the people partaking in the community events, uniqueness and a stamp of identity. The issue of the representation of ethnicity finds expression through the festival. The Bihu celebration extends across the Brahmaputra Valley among diverse communities, which include ethnic and tribal groups in hills and plains, as has been described in the Chapter II. This spring festival finds multiplicity in form and colour among them and is seen as a representation of their respective life style and cultural traits. So, the issue of ethnicity and representation needs to be addressed in analysing the Bihu. In the context of this discussion, the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘tribal’ are used interchangeably to denominate various communities although there are subtle differences in their meaning. B.K. Roy Burman states:

The term (tribe) refers to stage of social formation in an evolutionary scheme of development of technology, knowledge of and capacity for control of forces of nature method of transmission of the same perception of man’s relation with man and with nature and scale of organization of social groups (1992: 28).

Administratively and politically in India a select group of communities are termed as tribes. They are constitutionally defined as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India (Article 366 (25) who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. The Lokur Committee states the following necessary characteristics for demarcating an ethnic community as scheduled tribe as:

- a. Primitive traits
- b. Distinctive Culture
- c. Geographical Isolation
- d. Shyness of contact with the community at large
- e. Backwardness (L. C. Report 1965: 7)

Keeping the above characteristics in mind the communities of Assam like Bodos, Rabhas, Tiwas, Deoris, Misings, Karbi, Dimasas and such others are termed as

Scheduled Tribes. Therefore, ethnic is used as a cultural specific terminology in the thesis while tribe, a political term, is used to mean the same groups, interchangeably.

4.1 Issues of Ethnicity and Representation

Ethnicity is a theoretical perspective of looking at a particular group of people who identify themselves as having common ancestral lineage, sharing the same language, cultural heritage, commonalities of physical attributes, religious and territorial distinctions. The word ethnicity has been derived from the Greek word ‘ethnos’. Max Weber has explained that “ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memoirs of colonization or migration: this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation: conversely it doesn’t matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership doesn’t constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political space” (Weber 1996:35-40).

“Ethnicity is a cultural concept centered on the sharing of norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices” (Barker, 2008: 249). The preceding statement finds proper validation in examining the ways and procedures by which various ethnic communities of Assam celebrate the spring time and other festivals. The various ethnic communities inhabiting Assam belong to the common origin of the Indo - Mongoloids (*Kiratas*) but are organized into Tribal and family groups. “Kirata indicates the wild non Aryan tribes in the mountains particularly the Himalayas and in the North-Eastern areas of India, who were Mongoloid in origin” (Chatterji, 1951: 13). Many of their traditions and customs are the same but differing from each other in terminology and execution. The ethnic groups also share the following features as outlined by A.D. Smith (cited in Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6-7) :

- a. a common proper name to identify and express the essence of the community
- b. a myth of common ancestry a myth rather than a faith, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place that gives an *ethnie* a series of fictive kinship.
- c. shared historical memoirs, or better shared memories of a common past or pasts, including hero’s events and their commemoration

- d. one or more elements of common culture which need not be specified but normally include religion customs or language.
- e. a link with a homeland not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land as with diaspora peoples: and
- f. a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie*'s population.

The subject of ethnicity may be approached through an analysis of three schools of thought:

- a. The Primordialist school of thought has three arguments - first ethnicity is ascribed identity or assigned status, something inherited from ancestors. Second, the decision of who is a member of an ethnic group is fixed and definite. Third, people sharing same biological and cultural origin belong to a particular ethnic group.
- b. The Constructionist believes that ethnicity is a socially constructed identity and has flexible social boundaries.
- c. The Instrumentalist considers that ethnicity is a tactical tool that can be used for gaining resources. People become ethnic and remain ethnic when they get something significant in return.

In the context of Bihu the arguments of the primordial school of thought appear to be more relevant as each of the communities possess an identity of its own based on its inheritance. Furthermore the way of celebrating the Bihu by the community gives added significance to its identity. The argument put forward by the Instrumentalist school also finds relevance as ethnicity is increasingly becoming a political instrument for resource mobilization under provisions of the Constitution of India which guarantees special privileges to all tribes under the Sixth Schedule. The distinctive nature of celebrating the Bihu gives added significance and power to the community identity. To understand ethnicity better, concepts of representation and identity formation should also be appreciated.

Representational system consists of the actual sounds we make with our vocal chords, the images we make on light sensitive paper with cameras, the marks we make with paint on canvas, the digital impulses we transmit electronically. Representation is a practice, a kind of work, which uses material objects and effects. But the meaning depends not on the material quality of the sign but on its symbolic function. It is

because a particular sound or word stands for, symbolizes or represents a concept that it can function (Hall, 2010: 25-26).

Representation often lends ethnic identity to its members and it refers to the individual level of identification with a culturally defined collectivity, the sense on the part of the individual that he or she belongs to a cultural community. Pramod K Nayar views representation as "...the generation of meaning and constitutes identity. Identity determines the degree of agency one person possesses or does possess. Discourse and representations determine an individual's identity, agency and actions. Discourses are structure of power that generate particular meaning/identities" (Nayar, 2006: 26).

In the context of this study, the representational system includes: the expressive behaviour of the ethnic groups articulated through symbolic action like rituals and the performing arts connected with the Bihu in particular. Through discourse representation of the essence, belief and understanding of the ethnic groups are observed. Eventually an ethnic group is identified through its expressive discourses via these; all the communities are representing their group identity leading to the formation of a larger phenomenon of an ethnic community.

As discussed, ethnicity describes a collective identity and is based on the assumption that it collectively has its roots in common ancestry, religion, various cultural texts tangible and intangible, nationality, language and a territory all of which together constitute heritage of the community and paves the way to germinate a sense of national identity in the community mind. In the contemporary world ethnicity has been enmeshed in the debate and analysis identity and representation in relation to the idea of ethnically homogeneous nation states. Ethnicity is a social construct specific to a social and historical context. However, notwithstanding the contested definition of ethnicity, ethnic identities have a material foundation and exist in contemporary society as social forces.

"Ethnicity has always been experienced as a kinship phenomenon, continuity within the self and within those who share an intergenerational links to common ancestors. Ethnicity is partly experienced as being 'bone of their bone flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood'...we recognize ethnicity as a tangible living reality that makes every human a link in an eternal bond from generation to generation-from past ancestors to those in the future. Ethnicity is experienced as a guarantor of eternity" (Fishman, 1996: 63).

Ethnicity is a social group, as commentators agree and as a cultural legacy it refers to “social elaboration of collective identities whereby individuals see themselves as one among like themselves. Collectively, people whose boundaries may be loosely or tightly defined – distinguish themselves from the other people. Thus ethnicity is about social classifications emerging within relationships” (Fenton, 1999:9). Along with issues of culture, language and other features ancestry also plays a role in mobilizing social transactions in a community characterized as ethnic.

In relation to the social and cultural matrix of Assam which presents a *mélange* of traditions relating to religion, language, food, oral literature, folklore, arts- both visual and performing, rituals and festivals from the ethnic communities like Bodos, Misings, Sonowal Kacharis, Tiwas, Dimasas, Morans, Deoris etc. These ethnic groups are often called politically as the ‘sons of the soil’, have however myths of migration belonging to respective communities. There has always been the process of mutual dialogue and inert cultural communication contributing to the emergence of what Assamese culture is today, which at the same time is integrated substantially to its elements drawn from the Aryan religion, language and other aspects of culture travelling from the other parts of India.

4.2 Bihu as a Cycle of Celebration among Ethnic Communities of Assam

While the Bihu finds its celebration in parallel among almost all the communities of Assam tribal and non-tribal in which the nuances of the life and culture of the respective communities find expression through the series of these celebrations, the nomenclatures of the celebration as well as the dates of ritual commencement however vary from community to community. For instance, the tribal communities mostly commence their spring time celebration on the first Wednesday of the month of *Phagun* month. However, the Bihu festival commences on the *sankranti* of *Chaitra* and *Bohag* months. Notwithstanding the variations there prevails an intrinsic bond of commonality among them. Mention may be made of *garu* Bihu and its rituals which are common among all the tribes. The Bihu festival across the communities is also closely connected with propitiation of Mother Nature and is rooted to agriculture and fertility. Fertility being related to the art of creation, the *rongali* Bihu was originally celebrated in the crop fields to bring fertility and a good harvest. The festival also celebrates youthful vigour, love, union, separation and eroticism. A spirit of joy and cherishment of community well being lie embedded in the celebrations. Therefore, the

youth across the communities sing and dance in gay abandon with spontaneity in all their expressions unrestrained by any written rule however without harbouring on frivolity, permissiveness and breach of social norm. Thus, the Bihu like any other folk tradition brings to fore the representation inherent in customs and such other practices and above all the creative mind of the communities.

During the period under review field work was carried out in Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Dhakuakhana, Jagiroad, Morigaon, Digboi, Tinsukia (Dhola), Sivasagar, Guwahati, Sonitpur, Jorhat (Titabar) districts of Assam among Mising, Tiwa, Bodo, SonowalKachari, Deori, Moran and Dimasa communities in order to understand of the prevailing customs, rituals and performative nature of the dance and music associated with the *rongali* Bihu as practiced by both tribal and non tribal communities inhabiting in the areas.

Following observations on celebration of Bihu prevailing among these groups or tribes spread over different parts of Assam are on the basis of fieldwork conducted in aforementioned places having a concentrated population of respective communities. The author, having a background of training in Bihu dance, and a series of performances on proscenium stage was both a direct and indirect observer participant in the field work across the communities.

In a semi structured interview conducted by the researcher, one of the informants commented that “In Assam the word festival has become synonymous with Bihu, Bihu is not the festival but festival is Bihu”¹. The statement implies two meanings. First the growing popularity of Bihu and second the diminishing status of existing folk festivals other than the Bihu of different ethnic communities of Assam. The informant² also commented on the origin of Bihu and its connecting linkage with South East Asian countries and their culture to study the various rituals and dances performed during the spring time. The reason behind studying the rituals and performances of these ethnic communities is their continual linkage with the Bihu, the level of intercultural communication in respect of their celebrations comprising customs and rituals, music and dance with the non tribal or mainstream communities.

4.2.1 Mising community

Mising, the second largest ethnic community of Assam and one of the branches of the Mongoloids are concentrated in the Upper Assam districts of Dhemaji, North

Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Tinsukia and some parts of Sonitpur. The community celebrates *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng* during the spring time. The festival, rooted in agriculture is celebrated in the first Wednesday of *phāgun* (February-March) in the spring season. *Āli-Ā:yeLí:gāng* stands for ‘sowing of seeds’³. The ritual of the festival starts in the morning of the first Wednesday of *phagun*. An altar is made of cotton (*siupak/kopah*) and *mandala paat (pi:roh)* where the seed is ritually sown and offered to the deity for a good harvest. During the field work it was found that the Mising people prior to 1964-65⁴, used to celebrate *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng* within their own families. But later on they started doing it in a more elaborate and collective way as a community event. The whole village gathers together giving the ritual the shape of a festival. During the festival, at night only girls used to dance inside the house near the *meram* (fire place) moving in circular rounds.

From the Wednesday to Friday they abstain from any agricultural related work in the field. From the next Saturday they get back to their regular activities. The main purpose of celebrating this festival is to seek the blessings of the community deities *do:nyi - po:lo, sedi-melo, gumín soyin* and also their forefathers for a successful harvesting season. However various changes have occurred from the earlier ways of celebration of this festival. Now-a-days every village as a whole celebrates it in one single place and a *mírong ukum* is built for the purpose. Instead of going to their respective field for *líggod* (first sowing) the villagers as a whole practice it in the corner of the place where the ritual takes place. A small area is symbolically tilled for the purpose and the above rituals are observed. Nowadays the celebration is marked by public meeting, cultural competition like *gum:rāg so:mān* (traditional group dance), *kābān kāpnām* (tragic songs), *lí:gang so:mān* (playful dance) following the initial rituals.

The present turn of events in transforming an individualised family ritual into a community festival as a cultural marker of the Misings, is the result of a public meeting (*kabeng*) at Kolajaan (Silapathar) in 1964 where it was proposed that *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng* be announced a state holiday. Though it was not officially announced as a holiday many changes came into the festival. For *instance*, the *gum:rag* dance from the *sang ghar* came down to courtyards of village families. Boys and girls started performing together. Instead of the dance being performed as a part of the ritual it came to be more opened up to large mixed audiences and gatherings. *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng* is also touched by

commercialization like many other festivals, and even the Bihu among other communities.

Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng, though connected with the springtime and agriculture, is not a replication of the *rongali* Bihu celebration. The community also holds Bihu along with other communities with music and dance set to their own traditional melodies and rhythmic feats. Like others, however they are not used to the playing of *pepa* (hornpipe) and *gagana* (bamboo wind instrument). They also have *husori* but it is different and called *lí:gāng* in which the Misings follow their own Bihu dance and *husori* singing tradition. Even amidst wider circulation it is believed that the Mising Bihu has not changed in its essence and exuberance. In recent years the Mising Bihu with its traditional dance and melody has earned popularity among other communities and elements from them are found to be interspersed in other community performances also.

4.2.2 Tiwa Community

The Tiwas, another prominent tribe in Assam, also spread in some parts of the state of Meghalaya, originally resided in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and migrated to plains of Assam. After that they became divided into two sub groups, Hill Tiwas and Plains Tiwas displaying dissimilar cultural features. Being agriculture based community, most of their festivals are related to agrarian work.

The Bihu is one of the main festivals of the Tiwas belonging to the plains. The three Bihus i.e. *rongali* Bihu, *bhogali* Bihu and *kongali* Bihu are observed by the plains Tiwas (also known as *Lalungs*) with great mirth and merriment. They call it as *Bisu*. They observe the *Baisak* Bihu as a major spring dance festival. Unlike the other Assamese the Tiwas do not observe the *Baisak Bisu* on the *sankranti* day, but observe it on the first Wednesday⁶ after the *sankranti*. Wednesday is considered a holy day by them. During the season the Tiwas make necessary arrangement to welcome the spring. The arrangements start from the first week of *Chaitra* month. The deities worshipped during the occasion are *mahadeo*, *mahamai*, *jamkong*, *bhagawati*, *kalika*, *kesaikhaiti*, *ranchali*, *burharamsa*, etc. On the eve of *Boisak* Bihu all the fruit bearing trees are wrapped with ropes of paddy stalks. After that raw turmeric, rice powder and cobweb from kitchen are mixed together and inserted in a *ba-sunga* (bamboo pipe) and

marks are imprinted in the cattles' body. After that they are taken to nearby pond for bathing and adorned with aubergine, gourd and prayers are sung for their luxurious growth.

The *Baishak Bisu* occasion is used for the *joratola* ceremony. The *jora* is a packet of rice, basil leaf and *dubori* grass, wrapped in *kau* leaves which is kept in *barghar*. The ceremony symbolises the welcoming of the new agricultural year. During the day time of that particular wednesday certain other domestic rituals are observed. Homage is paid to the ancestors, gods and goddesses. Animal sacrifice is also prevalent in their customs.

In the evening the cattle are fed with rice cakes and adorned with new ropes. The agricultural implements, along with two hens, are placed in the east corner of the courtyard and worshipped. This ritual is carried out to ensure good harvest. Along with that goddess Lakshmi (*maisisa*) is also worshipped. In the evening, the young boys carrying agricultural tools and implements go for *husoris* singing. They visit all the households in the village singing ballads in Tiwa language.

It is quite evident that, though the nomenclature or the procedure of celebration is different, the ritual observances are similar with the non Tiwa Assamese speaking community. Renewal of agriculture activities aiming at good production is the common root of its celebrations. The Mising community celebrates *Āli-Ā:ye Li:gāng* in the first Wednesday the month of *Phagun* but yet again they organize *Bihu mela* separately. The Tiwas in the plains celebrate *Bihu* in spite of having their own traditional ritual and musical melodies in their own language. They celebrate *Bihu* in a similar manner as *Bohag Bihu* is celebrated. The hills Tiwas on the other hand celebrate *Sogra Mishawa* in a manner quite different from the plains group more or less during the same time.

4.2.3 Bodo Community

The Bodos, another major ethnic community of Assam is spread over various districts of Assam ranging from Dhemaji in Upper Assam to Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon in Lower Assam. Some of the districts with a concentration of Bodo inhabitants such as Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts have been brought under an autonomous administration known as Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). So, like other tribes, the Bodos also celebrate various festivals connected with agricultural cycle. The traditions and customs carried out by the Bodos are in line with the

Assamese *Bohag*, *Magh* and *Kati* Bihu. All the three Bihus are also observed by the Bodos with variation in terms of rituals. The three Bihus are known among the Bodos as *baisagu* or *bwisagu* (*Bohag* Bihu), *magou domasi* (*Magh* Bihu) and *khatrigasa* (*Kati* Bihu).

The main festive occasion among them is the *bwisagu* or the *Bohag* Bihu festival. It is also popularly known as *ranjali bwisagw*. It starts on the last day of the *Chaitra* month i.e. mid-April and the first day is called *mwsuni* Bihu or observing of cattle rites. In Bodo language *mwsu* means cow. Various traditional rituals are observed during the time of *mwsu* Bihu. Early in the morning pieces of bottle gourd, brinjal and turmeric are inserted on a bamboo stick. Before the day of *mwsu* Bihu the men folk or the boys collect leaves of the cane, *dighlati* and *makhieti*. The womenfolk prepare a paste of turmeric and *sobai* pulse and black gram and mustard oil separately, and it is rubbed on foreheads, trunks and horns of the cattle. Then the cattle are taken to the neighbouring river or pond. They strike the cattle with the *makhieti*, *dighlati* and cane leaves before bathing them. This ritual is followed by a collective bath of the cattle and propitiation of cattle by throwing bottle gourd, turmeric and brinjal out of bamboo strip. In course of which a rhyme like the following is recited.

Lao za phanthao za
Bosor bosor er hanza hanza
Bimaya khiter, phiphani khiter
Nongsor zagon halua geder... (Devi, 1994:62)

Eat gourd, eat brinjal,
grow up year to year,
your mother is small, your father is
small, may you be a large one. (Goswami, 1995:13)

After the cattle bath is over, old ropes are cast away from the legs or neck of the cattle and they are set free. The householders return home with left over pieces of bottle gourd, brinjal, turmeric and leaves of cane, *makhieti* and *dighloti* which keep them on the walls and roofs of the cowshed and house and on the fencing of the gate. In the evening after the cattle return home, some green leaves or green grass are set a light with paddy staffs near the cowshed and smoke are fanned with hand fans so that the

mosquito and other insects cannot attack the cattle. The cattle are then tied up with new ropes made from jute. On the days of *rangjali bwisagu*, the bulls are not used for ploughing. They are given rest. It is considered a big sin if somebody beats or harms cattle during the Bihu days.

The second day of the *rangjali bwisagu*, or the first day of the month, is observed as *mansi* Bihu by the Bodos and known as *manuh* Bihu among the Assamese speaking population. The rites and rituals observed on the *mansi* Bihu day are meant for the well-being of the members of an agricultural household for the New Year which commences from this day. The *douri* (village priest) of the village offers worship to the *bathou bwrai* the presiding deity of the community adhering to the indigenous faith and other god and goddesses. In every household of the village, they offer worship to the *bathou* and other deities. Rice-beer is an imperative among the offerings given to the gods which is done at the east of the yard. After that they offer food and drinks to their ancestors and dead relatives, which are placed in the north corner of the yard. It may be that the offering given to the ancestors and dead relatives is done by the left hand. All the people wear new cloths, especially placing new *Phali* (traditional Bodo duppatta) on their neck. On the same day after completing their household duties the head man and woman of the family and the children gather at the *hadungurd's* (village headman) home. Then the people, both men and women consume *jukhai jou* (rice beer) and dance together to the accompaniment of folk songs and folk musical instruments like *kham*, *siphung jotha*, *thorkha* and *serenja*. From the next day or from the third day of the *bwisagu*, people come out from their houses and gather to dance and sing folk songs from house to house for begging alms. People of every household take blessing from them and offer them rice beer, money etc. In some areas it is compulsory to provide eggs. Then the *bwisagu* lasts till the seventh day with merry making and enjoyment. They consume rice beer roaming from house to house. Then they arrange feasts with the articles they receive by singing and dancing. The songs sung by the people are mostly the songs of love and merriment. During these seven days of the *ranjali bwisagu* the Bodo people enjoy themselves very much. The tradition has since changed, and they perform on public platforms organized by the committees, transforming the occasion into a community event.

Kati Bihu is popularly known as *khatri gasa* among the Bodos. On the evening of the *Kati* Bihu day, an earthen lamp fuelled by mustard oil is placed at the foot of the sacred

thulunsior siju tree of the family yard an earthen lamp is also lit at the entrance of the granary, the entrance of home and of cowshed. To light an earthen lamp in the paddy fields, of split bamboo stands are raised known as *sewari* among the Bodo's. This earthen lamp is the symbol of ancient bonfire kindled by the cultivators to destroy pests and insects of the paddy field. We have reason to believe that this ancient fire was reduced to earthen lamp in subsequent ages and got linked up with propitiation of the corn-mother. It is clear that the rites and rituals associated with *khatrigasa* of *ashinsankranti* are exclusively confined to the peasant class.

Magh Bihu is known as *magw domasi* among the Bodos. It is observed on the *sankranti* day, or on the mid-day of the month of *Paush* and *Magh* (mid-day of the month of January). The characteristics of this festival are to enjoy it with different types of food, and drink, singing and dancing. That is why this festival is also known as *bhogali Bihu* among the Assamese people. The Bihu eve or *uruka* has its particular importance. The womenfolk prepare *sourai*, *phitha*, *laru* and *makhrai* at night and get ready for the next day. The male folk go to the lakes and rivers and catch fish. The village people arrange a communal feast on the *uruka* day. In this day it is customary to take fish or meat at both the meals.

The *Magw domasi* as in other communities is a post harvesting festival of the Bodos because it is observed in winter after the harvest of the major crop is gathered. The burning of *bhelagur* is of utmost importance in the *magw domashi*. The *bhelagur* is made with green bamboo, stables of paddy (*nara*) and dried banana leaves. It looks like a temple in its structure. In upper Assam, it is raised by placing stacks of wood vertically one on another. The materials required for its construction are gathered by the young boys and children either from free sources or from every household. The villagers cook meat especially pork, chicken, fish and different types of vegetables and eat together. After feasting the children, women and the elderly leave for home and the young boys spend the whole night together in someone's *jigabphunji*. Next day is the *magw domasi* day, the last day of the month of *paush*. The people wake up early in the morning of this day. Then the men folk and the children have a purifying bath and proceed to the *bhelagur*. Then before sunrise they set fire to the *bhelagur* just pronouncing the name of god. This is followed by enjoyment and merry making in the following days by dancing *bagurumba* dance and singing folk songs.

There has been a palpable change in celebration of the Bihu among Bodos in recent years. The advent of Christianity and its adoption by a considerable number of people from the community has impacted heavily as the Christian Bodos have stopped observing the Bihu with its attendant rituals.

Another section among the Bodos who adopted the Brahma faith have taken a middle path by observing the Bihu in a simpler manner without taking recourse to animal sacrifices and other such rituals. The celebration through music and dance in the traditional way, however, remains the same along with organizing community events in the name of the Bihu.

4.2.4 Sonowal Kachari Community

The Sonowal Kacharis form another tribal community of Assam and have close ethnic ties with the Bodo and Tiwa people. The Sonowal Kacharis also celebrate the spring time festival in line with the Bodos and Assamese. “Like other Assamese people, the sonowals too, consider the Rangali Bihu as their traditional community festival” (Bordoloi and Thakur, 1988: 102). Their *rongali* Bihu celebration also starts with *garu*Bihu. All the rituals that are being carried out by the Bodo and Assamese community are observed by them. However, they use *tara pagha* (a rope made of a plant called tara) to fasten the cattle, replacing the old ones. Next is *manuh* Bihu where the *husori* singing tradition is initiated at the *Baittha namghar*. The Sonowal Kacharis have a legend regarding the origin of *husori* that,

Lord Brahma had a daughter by an *apsara* or celestial maiden. The unrestrained God later set his eyes on his grown up daughter and wanted to enjoy her. King Dharma took up the matter and weighed the scale of justice. He found the girl guilty and drove her out of heaven. She came to earth and roamed about. When spring came there was thrill of new life throughout the universe and the gods remembered this girl who was pinning away in misery and loneliness. They went to Lord Vishnu and spoke to him about her. Vishnu sent them to Bathow or Mahadeva. Sitting under the peepal tree Bathow gave them lessons on Husori dance and music. The Lord then went to each sacred household danced and sang and thus collected various articles. With these they rehabilitated Brahma’s daughter. The girl looked up again in all her youthfulness and sense of joy. She started dancing while the gods accompanied her on their instruments. Her bewitching dance softened the heart of king Dharma and she was recalled to her divine home.

But dance and music remained on earth to be performed by the Kacharis every spring (Goswami, 1983: 2-3, Bordoloi and Thakur, 1988: 104).

Husori is sung in all village households and the whole environment of the village is charged with beating of drums, bamboos and melodious folk song and dances. *Magh Bihu* and *Kati Bihu* are also observed by the Sonowals on the *paush sangkranti* and *ahin sankranti* respectively every year which are quite similar to that of other Assamese ethnic groups.

4.2.5 Moran Community

Morans are a distinct ethnic group (which are however yet to be recognised as a tribe under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India) among all others in Assam. Morans mostly inhabit in Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Dhemaji districts of Assam. Morans also celebrate the springtime Bihu with great vigour and valour. Earlier they termed it as *Pihu*. However, now they call it Bihu. Moran Bihu does not start on the *sankranti* day as is done by other communities. Rather they have a different mechanism to decide upon the date on which to celebrate Bihu. This is done after the *sukla dashmi tithi* of the month of *Bohag*. Another historical reason for celebrating Bihu separately by the Morans, is that, in 1769 after the *Moamaria* rebellion. Ramakanta (a Moran leader and general) ruled over the Ahom kingdom and Ragh Moran became his *barbarua* (one of the ministers). However, the Ahoms were agitated and in the succeeding Bihu they came in the guise of *husori* singers and killed both of them. Therefore, the Morans decided to celebrate Bihu separately. They celebrate the *uruka* on a Tuesday, *garu*Bihu on Wednesday and *manuh*Bihu on Thursday. They have Bihu songs related to these definite days:

hasoti oi chait, bisoti o chait
budhebrihaspotimangaleuruka
bihugoiasilikot... (collected from field)

There is a ritual prevalent among the Morans i.e the Bihu *nomuwa* (welcoming the Bihu), after that for the next six or seven days they gather at common places and celebrate and observe various ritual and also perform Bihu dance and songs. After the celebration they again assemble at the village *namghar* (community prayer hall) and ritually bring the Bihu celebration to an end for that particular year through a ritual called Bihu *uruwa*. Bihu *nomuwa* and Bihu *uruwa* are two significant rituals during

Moran Bihu. A few aphoristic songs connected with Moran Bihu collected from the field are quoted below:

*hasoti oi dhankuwasorai
atiseneharbohagorbihuti
anugoinomai...*

*lailohousaporkalap
bihuthoiahungoi
kankotalat...*

Moran Bihu has several classifications of performance of Moran Bihu such as *gastolor* Bihu, *jeng* Bihu and *dharma husori*. In the *dharma husori* only select people can participate. They mostly sing *phoolkonwar* and *manikonwargeets* (melodic compositions in remembrance of two mythical princes).

4.2.6 Deori Community

The Deoris, another ethnic community of Assam, celebrate *Bohag* Bihu and *Magh* Bihu or *Magiyo* Bihu and call it *Bisu*. The *Bohag* Bihu is often observed on the *sankranti* day of month of *Chaitra* while the *Magh* Bihu is observed on the *sankranti* of *paush*. The *Bohag* Bihu, the most prominent festival among the Deoris, is celebrated with mirth and merriment. However, it must be mentioned that the Deori Bihu might not necessarily start on the *sankranti* day as the initial day has to be a Wednesday according to their ritual calendar. So, there is the provision made for shifting and adjusting the day of its initiation. The ritualistic part on the occasion of Bihu has some religious and cultural significance and arrangements are accordingly done. Sacrificing of goat is a must on the occasion. Ceremonial bathing of the cattle as with the other communities, is also done by the Deoris. Towards noon all the villagers, irrespective of age and sex, gather at the *Than* (religious institution) and celebrate Deori *Bisu*.

In the *magiyo* Bihu or *Magh* Bihu a grand feast is arranged on the *sankranti* day which should compulsorily be the first Wednesday of *Magh* in the *morongghar* (Community dormitory) which is attached to the *than*. The chief priest offers puja to the deities of the Lord Shiva and Pravati (*gira- girachi*) and sacrifice of fowls is also performed.

4.2.7 Dimasa Community

The *busu,rajani gabra* and *harni gabra* are the socio-religious festivals associated with the crop cycle, observed by the Dimasa tribe before the starting of cultivation for the protection and welfare of the people (Bhattacharya, 2004:74). The festival is mainly observed in Dima-Hasao (North-Cachar) district. The Dimasas also celebrate the *busu* festival (Bihu) at the end of the harvest with a view to propitiating both the corn god *brai-sibrai* and the rain goddess *gamadi*. Like the non-tribal Assamese, the Dimasas also regard the three Bihus as among their major festivals. The *basagisanjhora* (*Bohag Bihu*) is regarded as the spring festival and pre-harvesting festival. The *gaddisanjhora* (*Kati Bihu*) is a festival of plantation and the *maghsanjhora* (*Magh Bihu*) is a harvesting festival.

Thus it appears that the Bihu observed on three seasons around the year finds commonality among all the communities as discussed above, with variations in terms of difference in rituals, dates of observance and nomenclatures. All of them are seasonal and associated with agricultural activities forming a festival cycle amidst which the springtime or *Bohag Bihu* is the most prominent abounding in music and dance and such other frolicsome expressions. The notion of ethnicity and collective ethnic identity plays a part in this respect has led more and more collectivization in the celebration of the events, the *Bohag Bihu* or springtime Bihu in particular, signify ethnic solidarity amongst respective communities. As observed during fieldwork, the Bihu rituals particularly in respect to the performance of music and dance have gradually moved from domestic households to community grounds or proscenium platforms as representation of identity. Here other agencies of power also play a role and the sacred is giving way to the secular.

4.3 Performative forms of Bihu among the Ethnic Communities of Assam

4.3.1 Mising Dance and Music

The Misings, have a rich repertoire of music and dance. The folk dance performed by them during *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng* is *gum:rag so:man*. This dance is usually performed by female dancers accompanied by the male musicians. The female dancers usually rotate in a circle of five rounds near the *meram*. While dancing the girls sing a song

lo lole da:boi lole
sisuk chukbo chukbo bodiya,

regam gambo gambo bodiya... (collected from field)⁷

Boys are not allowed to enter the kitchen of the *sang ghar* to witness the dance. Only the boys who play the instruments are allowed to be present. *Sampa* is worn by the Mising ladies wrapping around the waist. Likewise, *galuk* and *kebbung* are upper garments. Another remarkable attire of Mising women folk is *ribi gaseng*. This is a hand-woven loin cloth which is used mainly during any festival or winter season. Usually ladies of this community like to wear black and green clothes. Girls often wear black *agey*, *ribi gaseng* and *gero*. Mising women like to embellish their head with a special kind of cloth which is popularly known as *hura*. The instruments used to play the music are *dhol* (drum), *lupi* (cymbals), *lailong* (big cymbals). The *dhol* often produce a sound called *gumraag gumraag* for which the dance is also called *gum:rag* dance. The girls and their accompanists perform the whole night in different families of the village for which they get money and traditional foods and drink *apong* (rice beer).

The *gum:rag* dance of the Mising community, because of its attractive beauty and distinctive costume worn by the lady dancers and male musicians, has also become a cultural spectacle in cosmopolitan Bihu events amidst large audiences.

4.3.2 Tiwa Dance and Music

Sogra Mishawa is one of most important dances of the Tiwas during the spring time. The dance is related to spring season. *Sogra* means spring and *mishawa* means dance. This dance is performed mainly by the male dancers in the *samad* (bachelor's dormitory) which forms the nucleus for the performance. They wear a set of special traditional attire with headgear called *khumkhati*, *pura* and *moss*. This headgear symbolizes flowers, birds and buffalo respectively. The *khumkhati* head gear is made up of flower and bamboo sticks. The traditional costume worn on this occasion by male dancers are *thana* (a piece of cloth worn at the lower body), *tagla* (special kind of shirt), *thenas* (a valuable long piece of cloth draped in the upper body), *phali* (a small towel kind of cloth, wrapped around the neck), *dhoti* (a cotton long piece of cloth used for covering the lower part of the body). The dance and song performed in *Sogra Mishawa* symbolizes the love for nature, peace and prosperity and struggles of life. Musical instruments that accompany the dance form are *khrams* (traditional drum), *pisu khram* (small khram), *khrambar* (big drum), *taal* (cymbals), *kali* (pipe), *tadrang* (a violin like indigenous instrument), *thogari* (another string instrument) and flute.

4.3.3 Bodo Dance and Music

Dance and music form an integral part in each aspect of Bodo cultural life. The dance performed by Bodos during the *ranjali bwisagu* (*rongali Bihu*) is *bagurumba*, usually performed by young girls is also popularly known as butterfly dance. As the young girls dance they spread and wave stroke both their hands with the *aronai* (*duppatta*) in it, and it looks like a colourful butterfly flying around. The dance is an amalgamation of rhythm and vivacity finding reflection in the cadence and melody of the music. The dancers swing and twist, bend and unbend, at times and give the impression of a cheerful fluttering butterfly. The dance movements are very smooth and unfold in a slow process with outstretched hands. The song to which the dancers dance is

bagurumba hai bagurumba
bagurumba hai aio bagurumba
jat nongabwla kul nongabwla
tabwrwm homnawi babnawi lagow mwnkha
hwi lagow mwnkha... (collected from internet)⁸

The dance is an invocation of Mother Nature with an attractive and solemn depiction of the natural world. The dancers wear colourful, mostly yellow *dokhna*, *aronai* and usually perform this dance with the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments like *serja* (a bowed instrument), *sifung* (flute), and *kham* (elongated drum made of wood and goat skin).

4.3.4. Sonowal Kachari Dance and Music

Sonowal Kacharis of Assam start the *Bohag Bihu* celebration by worshipping their traditional deity, *Baittho* (Lord Shiva). They offer prayers to the lord and start performing *husori* accompanied by *haidang geet*⁹ in the village households. In *haidang geet* or *haidang husori* the songs sung always have a religious strain

hai o ha
hai nomu narayan
habi jungor kachari
haidang de
hai o ha... (Collected from field)¹⁰

In the months prior to the celebration, all the musical instruments are kept aside. On the Bihu day they are taken out and used for performance. In *haidang husori* the primary instrument is a piece of bamboo. Unlike other ethnic or non-ethnic groups *dhol* is not of

prime importance in a Sonowal Kachari Bihu performance¹¹. The instruments used are bamboo, *toka mari*, *taal* and *pepa*. The *husori* is performed only by male members wearing white *tangali*, *chula* and a special kind of head gear. Another form of dance performed by young girls and married women is *leseri Bihu*¹². This, however, is a newly added dance number to the ethnic community and performed mainly with concentration on gestures of the hand and waist part of the female body. They wear *muga reeha*, *muga mekhala*, *chula*, and a yellow *sadar*. There is also another dance *log Bihu* performed by both male and female together during the period of celebration.

4.3.5 Deori Dance and Music

The Deori community has a beautiful tradition of Deori Bihu. Like several other communities their *bisu* starts on a Wednesday of *Chaitra* month. The community arranges two teams of male and female Deori Bihu dancers. Both of them perform in the *than* and then move from household to household. The *husori* party blesses the members of the household for a prosperous year. Many musical instruments like *dhol*, *pepa*, *gagana*, *taka* are at play during the performance. The rhythmic dances are accompanied by melodious songs in Deori language. The female dancers dance in a special manner with hands on their waist and the heels elevated making sound on the floor. The female members wear *muga* or red *mekhala*, *muga reeha*, *muga* or red *blouse* and wrap *gamocha* covering their heads. The *reeha* is worn in a special manner. It is draped around the bosom of the female body.

4.3.6 Moran Dance and Music

Rati Bihu, performed by the Morans during *Bohag Bihu*, is of great significance. In *rati Bihu* separate barricades are made up of *jengu paat* where male and female dancers perform separately. They do not establish any kind of connection between them maintaining decency and decorum. This striking phenomenon has historical importance. Performing *rati Bihu* by the Morans is still prevalent in Setani, Ratani Pathar, Tamuli Bongaon, Nazirating Pathar Gaon, Kordoiguri, Kakopathar, Tingraietc. of the Tinsukia district. The female dancers wear *muga mekhala*, *kaliya reeha* with *dhol*, *taka* and *gagana* as musical instruments during their performance. *Kaliya reeha* (a long piece of handwoven black waist cover) has great significance among the Morans and is prevalent only among them.

4.3.7 Dimasa Dance and Music

The Dimasa Kacharis bare a distinctive trait marked by colour and gaiety which is reflected in their dance and music. The young boys and girls perform dances to welcome distinguished guests to their village. Dances are performed during the celebration of community festivals *busu*, *rajinigabra* and *harnigabra*. Their dances are lively and the expression of gracefulness is visible in all their dances. The dances are performed to the accompaniment of “indigenous musical instruments namely, *khram* (drum), *muri*, *muri wathisa* and *suphin* (flute) and *khram dubeen* (a kind of veena)” (Bordoloi, Thakur, Saikia, 1987: 52). They have a rich tradition of folk songs but usually the dances are not accompanied with songs.

4.4 The Bihu Festival and its Increasing Popularity: Issues of Representation and Power Relations

The concept of discourse representation and power is interlinked. Foucault claims that power is not always negative. “It doesn’t weigh on us as a social force that says no but...it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge produce discourses. It needs to be thought of as a productive network that runs through the whole social body” (Foucault,1980:119). Through discourse an ethnic community is represented and identity is formed. But the level of acceptance and popularity of this discourse and identity varies from community to community. Their power relation is induced and it circulates in a positive manner. The ethnic communities which were viewed with a sense of otherness and condescension for years experienced a feeling of domination and lack of acceptance of their discourse of cultural practices. “Gramsci’s notion was that particular social groups struggle in many different ways, including ideologically to win the consent of the other groups and achieve a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them” (Hall, 2010: 48). They struggle to assert their identity through various positive and pleasurable means. The discourses may be made meaningful only through proper understanding of their own culture which is possible through the subversion of an ideological hegemonic form of power from the top. In that process the ethnic communities also produce meaningful discourses that represent their communities and a new and revived cultural identity is formed.

In the context of the present study the Bihu, as a huge cultural phenomenon within which music and dance form a major part of the discourse of representation and power

relations becomes relevant. As discussed in earlier Chapters (Chapter II and III), the *Bohag Bihu* is becoming more and more popular as a national festival of the greater Assamese community in which a tremendous amount of public enthusiasm and support is aroused. The festival has also gained popularity as a public event organized on erected and decorated stages in which Bihu dance and music performances predominate. Taking a cue from this increasing popularity, Bihu dance and music arranged as spectator oriented innovative and creative performances has travelled across the world achieving great acclaim bringing pride and glory to the state of Assam and the Assamese people through the representation of Assam and Assamese identity. Promotion of music and dance of other ethnic communities is not taking place at the same pace, except select representation on certain occasions from time to time, opening a chasm of hegemonic dominance and otherness. Several practitioners of Bihu dance and music have been approached in order to understand the parameters determining the popularity of Bihu over other folk dance forms in Assam, today.

The Bihu traces its origin from the various ethnic communities of Assam. It is accepted globally because “There is no other festival in the world as popular as Bihu”¹³. Further the informant¹⁴ stated the following reasons:

- Religion is not celebrated in the Bihu Festival. Everybody can participate equally.
- Bihu appeals to the greater brotherhood and universal humanity.
- Love is celebrated in the Bihu songs and dances in a very decent way.
- Everybody can imitate the Bihu dance and song. There is not much complexity in the dance postures. It is full of life and vigour. *Eman pranprasurjya thoka nritya aan kotu nai* (There is no other dance with so much of life and artistry). If we look at the instrument, then it is never out of tune. Every instrument is lively and it pleases everyone irrespective of class, caste, creed, sex.
- It merges the old and new traditions and young and old generations into one. It has crossed all the boundaries, so today Bihu is popular even in Europe and America.

The secularity that is maintained by the Bihu festival is another reason for its greater acceptance. Assam, being a part of India, is secular in nature and is a store house of all religious communities. The Bihu festival is the thread of commonality and integration that binds them all. And for this sacred and secular nature of the Bihu festival,

everybody participates and celebrates it. It is not location, caste, creed, sex, or religion specific. Bihu festival is a spontaneous celebration of nature and its seasonal changes.

Socio political and historical reasons were also found behind the growing popularity of Bihu festival, its dance and music in particular, during the course of the field study. After the Treaty of Yandaboo on February 24, 1826 Assam came under British rule and there came a significant change¹⁵ in the social and political scenario of Assam and in the lifestyle of the people of the region. The British rule introduced a western model of education over ruling the traditional Brahminical *tol* system. This impacted on the ability of common man's to become exposed to education. As a result, the young generation at that time began to concentrate on education rather than practising or acquiring folk art forms¹⁶. However, this was more prevalent among the people in semi-urban areas. The ethnic tribes residing in the remote villages and river banks were both economically and socially lagging behind¹⁷. This was mostly due to locational disadvantage and their inability¹⁸ to cope with rapid changing state of affairs. As a result, ethnic performing art forms in some communities were popularized while others were often neglected.

After Independence the new central government and the individual States introduced more promotional efforts for all ethnic dance and music traditions across the country as a matter of policy avenues such as that of the Republic day cultural parade and such other occasions in the national and the state capitals were provided. For all such occasions under the folk dance and music category only the Bihu dance was selected to perform¹⁹. Bihu teams selected for the purpose used to perform all other ethnic dances of Assam²⁰. It was so because the other ethnic dances were considered only as parts of the Bihu dance, whereas Bihu is actually a composite whole which can represent the state, in all its diverse forms.

Later when the capital of Assam was shifted from Shillong to Dispur a new approach towards the tribal communities came to be adopted which appeared to be more inclusive. Previously many groups were neglected as 'tribal'²¹. It has only been from the last two decades that tribal communities have been given the scope to flourish and grow culturally²². The then ruling party in Assam *Asom Gana Parishad* during the nineties of the last century significantly contributed towards this direction. Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalashetra at Guwahati was established as a multipurpose institution to provide a platform for all cultures and communities, including promotion of music and

dance and material culture of all ethnic groups. It created an impetus and new found vigour among them to take community centric Bihu related music and dances out of ethnic platforms and to represent them to larger cosmopolitan audiences inside and outside the state. Such efforts led to more ethnic representation of the expressive arts parallel to the Bihu dance and music of the non-ethnic Assamese speaking community. Before this only the tribal people considered Bihu as the national culture²³.

There is growing popularity for this rich and unique art form. As has already been mentioned there is no comparison to sound vibes that Bihu *dhols* produce^{27,28,29}. The high pitch sound that Bihu *dhols* produce, can thrill a person, even if they are not acquainted with the folk form. For the audience outside Assam the whole performance may not be fully understandable but the resonance that the *dhol* and Bihu songs create can still excite. They can also imitate the dance moves or the Bihu songs sung during the performance. Since it is a folk art form everybody and anybody can learn it easily. Other ethnic communities also have their musical instrument and tunes but cannot compare with the instruments of Bihu as the sound pitch, style of playing is different. Two informants^{30,31} also emphasized that the female dancers from Assam have that youthful vigour and beauty in terms of their execution of the dance gestures which can attract the onlookers.

The displacement of Bihu from the field to the proscenium stage may also serve as a reason for its wider acceptance and popularity. Since 90's³², Bihu has mainly been celebrated on the stage to a wide audience. Slowly and steadily have been introduced competitions. More and more number of people have become interested and the participation has escalated. The telecast of Bihu dance performances in the television has also added to its increasing popularity. However, the ethnic dance groups at that time could not manage economically to come and perform in an urban area and there was no medium of communication for which very often they were ignored. One informant²⁴ also commented that non-tribal Assamese were larger in number which was instrumental in raising Bihu to its present status, whereas ethnic communities like Mising, Deori, Tiwa, Moran were until recently left to themselves. Moreover Bihu songs in Assamese can be understood much more easily by any sort of audience which is not the same for other tribal communities. Therefore, the ethnic dances are less popular than the Bihu dance.

4.5 Bihu as a Medium of Dialogue and Communication

The Bihu festival as a community festival has always facilitated a process of dialogue among people of various hues. Rituals are a major source of communication, which has been discussed in the previous Chapters. Along with the rituals the performance of Bihu music and dance also serves as a communicator. In earlier times, the periphery of its communication was limited and concentrated among smaller groups as the festival was not celebrated involving large scale of people. However, when it gained more recognition and traversed from the field to the royal amphitheatre, there was a shift. That shift also incorporated a generously proportioned number of audiences. Slowly through the vision and efforts of connoisseurs in the early part of 20th century, Bihu made its transition to the larger public domain. When it took the shape of an annual event in the form Bihu *sanmilanis*, people from all corners began to assemble to enjoy the performances. That led to a constant dialogue among the audiences and also between the performers and the audience. People became more and more attached to this communication. Gradually the stage performances began to include those from ethnic communities. Discussion and workshop sessions along with public orations were organised as a part of Bihu *sanmilanis* with fruitful results. Along with this were appeals for the betterment of the social health and the outcomes have been quite effective and lasting. Performances on proscenium stage Bihu *sanmilanis* also have some *melas* also going on. Those *melas* often known as *Bohagi mela* attract a good number of consumers. There is a constant dialogue between the consumer and producer. The products sold in these *melas* are indigenous in nature and beneficial for preserving the material culture. Those serve the purpose of maintaining the living art and tradition of the state for posterity and passing it to the larger market as well. In addition to the performance on the proscenium stage, the media houses also conduct many Bihu competitions which initiate a dialogue with their audience between audience and participants. These indirect interactions help in making the festival popular and communicative. The publications on Bihu and other festivals, especially during the spring time in the print media, initiate yet another dialogue between the newspaper and its readers. So, it can be summed up that Bihu not only serves as a dialogue among various communities of Assam but also among the larger audience, and this has a positive impact on the Assamese society in general.

When Bihu is assessed through the prism of ethnicity, it is evident that the Bihu has a visible image amongst the spring-time festivals of the ethnic communities. It has become a part and parcel of the ethnic communities, and most of whose festivals are also identified with Bihu. Often the concept of ethnicity is confused with that of a minority and all ethnic groups are seen as minorities. By this, the majority groups become ethnicityless and it becomes difficult to understand what the culture of the 'general' society is all about, or if it is there at all. Consequently the meaning of inter-ethnic relations becomes confusing. Major ethnic groups are those who determine the character of the society's basic institutions, especially the main political, economic, and cultural institutions. The culture of majority becomes the culture of the total society into which the minority ethnic groups assimilate. That is evident in assimilation of the Bihu festival within the different ethnic communities of Assam. The minority groups may preserve their institutions and culture like the *Āli-Ā:ye Lí:gāng*, *Sogra Mishawa*, *Deori Bisu* to larger or smaller degrees or they may influence the character of the dominant institutions to larger or smaller degrees, but usually, the framework for intergroup processes is provided by the institutions of the culture of the majority groups. The majority groups, because of their positions of power, are usually at the top of the ethnic stratification system, and the status of other ethnic groups is assessed in relation to them. The majority National communities are considered to be culturally more aware of their past. Members of national communities are differentiated in social status from the minority groups. Bihu festival is a powerful force of the national community over the other ethnic communities and so its presence and influence is immensely felt in the celebrations of the other ethnic communities. Here, however, mention may be made of the positive aspect of power relations as has been pointed out by Foucault. The ethnic communities have for years suffered by being minority and by being placed in a disadvantaged position economically, educationally or culturally. However, times are changing and the ethnic communities experiencing a resuscitation of their cultural expression, music and dance in particular, with greater public exposure. Therefore, position is now loud and clear. In all Bihu functions, the ethnic dance and music are being presented by the members of that particular community with their own traditional nuances and are being widely accepted by the audience of Assam. Many Assamese modern songs now have excerpts from ethnic songs giving them the flavour of folk music from various communities. So, the power relations within the performance scenario of ethnic and non-ethnic Bihu art practitioners has become more

equal and interactive, productive, promoting mutual understanding. The power relations between ethnic groups and the national culture have become more equalized through the increased dialogue and public performance of the Bihu in all its ethnic and tribal variations. These power relations ‘go right down to the depth of society’ (Foucault, 1977: 27).

WORKS CITED

- Barker, C. (2008). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practices*, Sage Publications, USA.
- Barooah, B. (1998). *The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam*. Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati.
- Bordoloi, B. N. (1991). *Tribes of Assam: Part III*. Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati.
- Bordoloi, B. N., Thakur, G. C. S. (1988). *Tribes of Assam: Part II*. Tribal Research Institute, Assam, Guwahati.
- Bordoloi, B. N., Thakur, G. C. S., Saikia, M. C. (1987). *Tribes of Assam: Part I*. Tribal Research Institute, Assam, Guwahati.
- Brahma, K. (1998). *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Bodos*. Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati.
- Burman Roy, B. K. (1992). Transformation of Tribe and Analogous Social Formation. *Tribal Transformation in India, Ethnopolitics and Identity*. Vol-3: 28-34.
- Chatterji, S. K. (1951). *Kirata-Jana-Krti*. The Asiatic Society, Calcutta.
- Fenton, S. (1999). *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture*. Macmillan, London.
- Fishman, J. (1996). Ethnicity as Being, Doing and Knowing. In Smith, Anthony, D., Hutchinson, J., Editors, *Ethnicity*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton, Harvester.
- Goswami, P. (1995). *Festivals of Assam*. Anundoram Barooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam, Guwahati.
- Goswami, P. (2006). *Bohag Bihu of Assam and Bihu Songs*. Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
- Hall, S. (2010). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE: London, California, New Delhi.
- Lukor Committee Report. (1965). *The Report of the Advisory Committee on the Revision of the Lists of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe*. Department of Social Security, Government of India.

Nayar, P. (2009). *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. Viva Books Private Ltd., New Delhi.

Smith, A. D., Hutchinson, J. (1996). *Ethnicity*. OUP, New York.

END NOTES

1. Informant Dr PuspendharGogoi, M-65, Dhemaji, Personal interaction:04.10.2015
2. Ibid.
3. Informant Mr Naresh Patir, M-58, Dhakuakhana, Personal Interaction: 03.10.2015
4. Informant Mr Pradip Gam, M-67,Dhakuakhana.Personal Interaction: 03.10.2015
5. Ibid.
6. Informant Mr NadiramDeuri, M-55, Jagiroad, Personal interaction: 18.10.2015
7. Ibid.
8. www.bagurumba.blogspot.in/2016/08, Retrieved on 12.02.2016
9. Informant Mr CharkradharSonowal, M-58, KadabKachariGaon, Lakhimpur: 19.07.2016
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Informant Mr Amiya Handique,M- 61,Dhakukhana: Interviewed on 03.10.2015
14. Ibid
15. Informant Mr Pabitra Mohan, M-52, Sapekhati, Sivasagar. Interviewed on 09.07.2016
16. Informant Mr HemoGogoi, M-67, Dhola, Tinisukia. Interviewed on 10.07.2016
17. Informant Mr JaikantaGnadhia, M-72, Digboi. Interviewed on 11.07.2016
18. Ibid
19. Informant Ms. BimalaGogoi, F-62, Dhemaji. Interviewed on 04.10.2015
20. Ibid
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Informant Mr Somnath Bora, M-59, Guwahati. Personal Interaction on 13.09.2016

26. Ibid
27. Ibid
28. Informant Mr DijenGogoi, M-55, Sivasagar, Interviewed on 12.07.2016
29. Informant Mr Jagat Bora, M- 50, Lakhimpur, Interviewed on 18.07.2016
30. Informant Dr PrasannaGogoi, M-53, Guwahati, Personal Interaction on 16.02.2015
31. Informant Mr. Nila Bora. M-63, Guwahati, Interviewed on 21.09.2016
32. Informant Mr HemoGogoi, M-67, Dhola, Tinisukia. Interviewed on 10.07.2016
33. Informant Mr Pradip Gam, M-67, Dhakuakhana. Personal Interaction: 03.10.2015

MISING COMMUNITY



Fig. 37 Mising girls dancing gum: raag dance

Ref: http://www.bordoisila.in/images/16-02-2016-14556225145_web.jpg



Fig. 38 Musical Instruments used by Misings

Ref: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1151030/jsp/northeast/story_50480.jsp

TIWA COMMUNITY



Fig. 39 Tiwa male and female dancers, 02.01.2016



Fig. 40 Tiwa male dancers performing Sogra Mishawa dance
Ref: www.tiwatribe.blogspot.in

BODO COMMUNITY



Fig. 41 Bodo dancers dancing Bagurumba
Ref: <https://pridenstyle.blogspot.in/2014/02/bodo.html>



Fig. 42 Bodo males playing traditional instruments
Ref: <http://udalguri.gov.in/images/bododance2.jpg>



Fig. 43 Bodo traditional musical instrument

Ref: <http://www.nelive.in/assam/art-culture/traditional-musical-instruments-assam>

SONOWAL KACHARI COMMUNITY



Fig. 44 Sonowal Kachari women dancing

<https://promarktravels.com/blog/2016/05/majuli-sonowal-kachari-tribe-culture>

MORAN COMMUNITY



Fig. 45 Moran Bihu by Women

Ref: <https://jungleideas.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/moran-4.jpg>



Fig. 46 Dharma Husori by the Moran Community

Ref: www.youtube.com

DIMASA COMMUNITY



Fig. 47 Dimasa women performing during *Busu*
Ref: <http://www.nelive.in/assam/art-culture/dimasa-dance>



Fig. 48 Traditional instrument of the Dimasas
Ref: <http://heritagefoundation.org.in>

DEORI COMMUNITY



Fig. 49 Dancers of Deori Bihu
Ref: www.myodia.com



Fig. 50 Dancers of Deori Bihu
Ref: www.google.com

MIXING OF ETHNIC DANCES WITH BIHU



Fig. 51 Dancers of various communities performing together, 06.04.2017



Fig. 52 Dancers of various communities with a *japi* in hand, 06.04.2017