

ABSTRACT

The Bihu festival, one of the most popular festivals of Assam has been carrying with it centuries of cultural inheritance and emotional involvement of the people of Assam. There are three of its kind, *Magh Bihu*, *Bohag Bihu* and *Kati Bihu*. The three Bihus are celebrated with varied rituals at three different periods of time in a year. Being agrarian in nature and origin, the three Bihus are intrinsically connected with the agricultural cycle. This study shall however concentrate on the *Bohag Bihu*, also known as *rongali Bihu* celebrated in mid-April along with other spring time festivals held across the state. The aspects that have been focussed on in the study are the rituals, material culture, ethnicity, and the impact of cultural industry in the festival, and how these aspects have helped in heritagization of the festival resulting in it being the identifier of Assamese culture. Since the Bihu festival represents socio-cultural and religious life of Assam it is believed that this study will help in understanding the present status of the festival in the rapidly changing Assamese society. Since no tradition remains static the Bihu, with its ancestry drawn from indefinite years of the past, has undergone considerable changes through the passage of history at each level of its execution. The journey of the festival from the agrarian field to the present day proscenium stage has involved a lot of changes and continuity within itself. The present work aims at observing how this festival, in spite of explicit paradigm shift, has managed to survive in an era of commercialisation and globalisation, and also inquires whether it could retain its traditional values under the changing social environment. Apart from the above mentioned aspects the study also emphasizes: the issue of power relations and how it has helped in popularizing the Bihu festival; ways of representation by the ethnic communities, and the impact of cultural industry as a result of commercialisation, mediatisation, hybridity and cultural exchange in respect of the festival. Amalgamating all these aspects the Bihu festival has created an identity of itself and thus has become an intangible heritage of the state to give the state and its people a distinctive cultural identity.

The present work is divided into six chapters together with the introduction and the conclusion. It has however not put emphasis on the art and aesthetics of the Bihu dance

and music, an inherent identifier of the festival. Data and information have been collected from various sources through field investigation, interaction with scholars, artists, practitioners of the Bihu music and dance and also from observing the rituals from close quarters spread over various parts of Assam, mainly from the Upper Assam districts. As such the study involved an informal procedure of interviewing the informants. Both participant and non-participant observation methods have been applied to gather the data and information. The methodology on which the study has been founded in Cultural Studies having a spectrum of wider disciplinary approaches in which folklore, ritual and performance, ethnicity and cultural industry have been approached.

The key terms used in the study are: Bihu, festival, Bihu music and dance, material culture, rituals, ethnicity, representation, power relation, cultural industry, commercialisation, cultural exchange etc.