

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Assam is situated in the north-eastern part of India. The state is surrounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the East, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Bangladesh in the West, Bhutan in the North, and Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura in the South. Except for a narrow corridor running through the foothills of the Himalayas that connects with the state of West Bengal, this region has a chicken neck connection with the rest of India.

Geographically, the total land area of Assam is 78, 438 sq. km (assam.gov.in, Retrieved on 10.03.2017). Administratively, Assam has 34 districts (ibid) and can be divided into three categories i.e. Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley and the two hill districts. The Brahmaputra Valley exists in the northern part of the state and covers 23 districts. The river Brahmaputra flows from the East to the West and is crossed by countless tributaries of various magnitudes flowing from the bordering mountains of either side. The capital city of Assam is Dispur (Guwahati) and its official language is Assamese in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bengali in the Barak Valley, Bodo in the BTAD areas.

The population of the state is heterogeneous. It has been the home of several ethnic groups - Austro-Asiatic, Dravidians, Mongoloids and Aryans which follow different religious faiths such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism while several ethnic groups follow their respective indigenous traditional faith. As a matter of fact, different branches of races, languages and religions are found to co-exist in the region since time immemorial, as a result of which a continuous process of inter-cultural communication is apparent in the life style of the people belonging to the region.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Culture is a term that denotes different meanings to different individuals and even seems to have different meanings in different periods of time. However, every community or institution in an anthropological sense has a culture of its own. Culture, that has wide and diverse fields is importantly about ideals, thought, beliefs, traditions, customs, festivals as well as the normative and expectant behaviour. Culture is intricately allied with society and its people and is the way of life. Everything that one

individual does in work field or leisure reflects that individual's culture. 'Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor ,1870: 1). As cited by Mbakogu, (2004:37) Oyeneye and Shoremi, highlighted certain features of culture as:

- Culture is shared by members of a society;
- Culture is not genetically transmitted;
- It is historically derived and ... transmitted from one generation to another;
- Culture is created... through the process of adjustment to the social setting;
- Culture is universal - found in every human society;
- Culture is dynamic.

In summary, culture is an association of qualities that could be learned, based on interaction or derived from history. It regulates our lives, shapes our attitudes, values, goals, behaviour or personality. From all indication, man is definitely nothing without culture. So Dabaghian (1970: 103) stressed "...the pride of any society lies in its culture since no society in the world could be considered great without reference to its tradition and culture."

Culture is an amalgamation of various institutions devoted to specialized activities. Therefore, the study of culture engages the study of these distinct institutions and the meanings produced by it. In the present context of study culture covers instituted festival as a larger text with subtexts like various traditions, rituals, performances, groups, activities within it which have a historical and representative mode of existence and these are embedded in the socio cultural apparatuses belonging to various groups of people while adhering to identical values, beliefs and practices giving a specific identity and relationality.

Culture is not just a set of symbolic material objects, but is continually in practice through change and continuity. Culture is not static but always flowing in nature and encompassing within it several attributes as it flows. Those attributes eventually produce, or give rise to another culture or a set of traditions.

Every society is endowed with its own set of beliefs, practices, attitudes, traditions, material objects and ways of practicing it. And these are handed down from one

generation to the other which is followed as traditions. The traditions in their ways of transmission also inherit certain changes. In the process culture also reaches a newer height and sometimes even involves controversies.

The present study is about the Bihu, a festival of Assam, the origin of which goes back many centuries and recorded history is silent on it. It developed stage by stage to take the position of what it is today. The present study lays emphasis on the stages of the journey that the festival has undertaken, while it was performed in sequestered places in agrarian fields or in forest or jungle areas away from normal lives and in present times being openly performed on the public sphere in the form of a show, with a variety of activities associated with it. In the course of the journey the study will also attempt to identify changes and continuations of practices, beliefs, rituals and performances culminating in its positioning itself as flag bearer of Assamese community identity webbing into it the cumulative effects of changes in perspectives and actions.

Certain factors inherent in the Bihu festival that helped in its endurance and wider acceptability need to be mentioned in the context of the study:

- (a) Bihu is practiced by people from all hues as a community festival. Binarity of sacred and secular behaviour is an important factor attached to it. The recreation of art is assimilated with the pursuit of rituals, music, dance and narration. The meanings of the rituals are transmitted through the performances. This aspect is giving the festival a pan-Indian element and substance to it.
- (b) Through sustained practices through the ages, the Bihu has come to be looked upon as a part of heritage of Assam allied with the idea of identity attached with the festival with its ever increasing dimensions and growing impact on the society. And the Bihu has served as a thread of communion among various communities and integrated them to a composite whole. The music and dance perennially associated with the festival have together become a popular culture globally appreciated and have assumed a representative character of Assamese culture.
- (c) The notion of ethnicity and concomitant meaning contributed to the enrichment of the festival taking the form of an institutional umbrella under which differing ways of celebrating this spring time festival exist and

different nomenclatures are growing. This acceptance of Bihu by the ethnic communities is a boost to the festival and is enduring for so long. The notion of power relation also comes in here in a positive way. Power is not always regression but works here through a mode of mutual acceptance and resistance as evident in the ways of celebration and performances of the Bihu along the other ethnic groups. It appears that the dichotomous situation of resistance of power by some groups and the subsequent acceptance by others is accelerating with special reference to the Bihu. While the growing popularity of the Bihu is impacting the ethnic ways of celebration, it in turn is supporting in its ever enlarging celebration.

- (d) In the modern society all cultures are being affected by the growing effect of the cultural industry. The Bihu festival too, not being an exception, over the present decades has been seriously affected by the phenomenon of the culture industry resulting in commercialization and commodification of the material and performative aspects connected with the festival. The more the festival grows with its paraphernalia, the more commercialization, with influence of corporatisation, with implications of heavy economic transactions at all levels of the celebration - organizational as well as performance. Heated controversy often impact hitting the environment where serious questions are raised asserting that corporatization and over commercialisation are causing damage to the pristine beauty and essence of the festival. Mediatization of the Bihu is another growing phenomenon of the festival. With the expansion of private media houses, both print and television, the festival with all its colours is subjected to exposure to media. More than providing coverage support to festival celebrations held in community centres, media houses started producing reality Television shows and other such programmes, at times fuelling the controversies in relation to the Bihu.

Apart from the socio-cultural aspects the Bihu festival is also an important component of culture in the present study. The whole of Assamese society is incredibly linked with the Bihu festival. The Bihu festival is drawing elements from social, cultural, economic, political and religious life and history of the Assamese society and in turn is impacting on its social and cultural fabric. For centuries, the cultural history of the state

has been expressed and enriched with its dance, music and material culture. And it is not that these manifestations are confined to the state boundaries alone. Rather Bihu has been performed outside the state and reached out to different parts of the world and brought laurels for the state. It has indeed reached such a stature that many a time the state is being identified by Bihu festival, particularly for its dance and music, by people outside Assam. The Bihu festival has been able to unite the diverse population of Assam culturally.

Since its inception the festival has undergone a lot of changes in terms of its performative ways, performance of the rituals and the involvement from the community and its sustenance. The changing pace often raises questions regarding whether, in the long run with the fast changing time and social environment, this festival will be able to sustain its traditional values. Therefore, the study will also try to understand the perplexity of the situation as it analyses the present state of the festival.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The Bihu, a major festival of Assam is an event and a phenomenon of enduring significance. Celebrated across various sections, including various ethnic groups with gaiety and emotional involvement, the Bihu over the ages has seen stages of transition and transformation and is increasingly getting revalidated as an iconic marker of cultural identity of the people of Assam. Included in the festival calendar of Assam and other parts of India, the Bihu has also been a subject of academic discourse and debate pertaining to its dimensions of social, cultural, historical, economic and ethnographic significance. Quite a number of works have appeared as subjects in academic research as well as in popular parlours - focussing mainly on the rituals, associated with the festival as well as on its dance and music. However, a study in relation to its journey through history on relational aspects of heritage and identity, ethnicity and power relations, changing face of the festival with various interventions. The challenges faced in the changing environment still remain an inviting subject that demands probing into.

Keeping the above perspectives in mind the present study aims at analysing, the *Bohag* or *rongali* Bihu with particular emphasis on the festival as a cultural phenomenon and attempts at probe various dimensions associated with it. In the process, attention is given on the socio- economic and cultural impact of the Bihu on contemporary society keeping the notion of popular culture. In addition, the study also focuses on how Bihu,

the spring time *rongali* Bihu in particular, finds acceptance and sustenance through changes in form, structure and performance amidst diversities in thought and action including its validation as a representation, as an inclusive heritage of Assam and the role it has played in identity formation.

- The primary reason behind trying to study and analyse the festival is to gain insights into the above perspectives and attention is given on the formalization of its socio-economic and cultural impact on the society today. In addition, the study also focuses on how the festival of Bihu will sustain in the long run amidst diversities of thought and action.
- The study attempts to explore this age-old festival as an Intangible Cultural Heritage without government interventions or set regulations or guidelines in this respect.
- The study makes an attempt to explore how ethnicity and power relations act as a means of communication, creating a chord of integration and harmony within the community and among the community.
- The study investigates the change in the dynamics of performativity through examining the change and continuity in the Bihu festival in the urban setting.

With the background stated above, a study of the Bihu festival will enable us to understand the various dynamics involved in it and the historical forces impelling the Bihu to continue to play a distinct role in the Assamese society and culture.

### **1.3 Review of Literature**

With the objective of studying the Bihu festival as an integrated cultural expression of diverse communities inhabiting Assam and looking at it from diverse perspectives a survey of literature relevant to the subject has been conducted which includes both in English and Assamese texts. The survey also includes works that facilitate theoretical understanding of various issues involved in it.

#### **English**

- *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)* (1969) by Birinchi Kumar Barua introduces the state of Assam, its history and its people. The political history with the kingdoms that reigned over Assam and its administration in the state of Assam in the early period are elaborately discussed. Along with the economic aspect that includes the prevailing system in the *grama* (villages), *pura* (cities

and towns), the land system, crafts and industries, trade routes are discussed. The societal structure, classes and functioning of the state has also been stressed. The religious classification and the rich fine arts prevalent at earlier times in the state are mentioned. The book ends with varied pictorial details of sculptures and structures of ancient and medieval Assam. The book is beneficial for understanding the early period of Assam and its history, its available resources and its varied functioning procedures.

- *Ashgate Companion to Heritage and Identity* (2008) edited by Brian Graham and Peter Howard, describes the role of heritage in identity formation. The book emphasises the ideas, and practices that establish the multifaceted interconnection between heritage and identity. Part I of the book traces a particular perspective on the history of heritage focussing on politics. It also provides a detailed overview of the debate on heritage, memory and identity and examines the boundary between person and public, official and unofficial heritage. In Part II the idea of National Landscape with heritage is discussed. The central focus is on nature, national landscape and nationalism. The chapters here focus on race, exclusion, religion, class and gender. Part III describes how the markers of identity and heritage are transformed into material things by a set of interconnected methodologies, practices and institutions. Peter Groote and Tialda Haartsen argue that heritage research needs to pay attention to questions of representation and the politics of the communication of meaning. Paul Gough explores the commemoration of war as a crucial expression of the role of heritage in the shaping of identity. Benjamin Porter explores the intersections of heritage and tourism, identity and conflict. Fiona McLean explains the practices of heritage and identity that also have an institutional context, and are immensely complicated, operating at a variety of scales. So, it can be summed up that the interconnections of heritage and identity are all around us, entwining the local with the regional, national with the global, everyday life with political ideology.
- *Bohag Bihu of Assam and Bihu Songs* (2003) by Prafulladatta Goswami gives an overall view of the *Bohag* Bihu festival and Bihu songs. A detailed description of all the three kinds of Bihu has been given here. The history of the Bihu festival and its changing pattern has also been highlighted in the book. It

also describes a few other seasonal festivals of the land. The themes of social life, love, weaving and spinning in the Bihu songs have been closely examined. It tries to examine the Bihu as a composite festival concerned with general welfare of the society.

- *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1966, Reprint) by Raymond Williams explores the idea of culture as it developed in the west, especially Great Britain, from 18th – 20th centuries. Considered as one of the seminal works of Cultural Studies and the study of culture in contemporary times, Williams has taken a social and historical approach to culture with new social and political underpinnings. The author investigates the notion of culture as it developed post - Industrial Revolution and the social and political transformation that came in its wake.
- *Cultural Industry: Enlightenment of Mass Deception* (2002) by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer stresses that cultural industry is a phenomenon of late capitalism and encompassed within it products of high and light entertainment. They contend that it is done to cater to the popular needs of the mass capitalistic consumers. All the products of culture are designed for profit. Every art is turned into a consumer product. And according to the writers consumerism of cultural products is corporatisation of human consciousness. It rules over a person to distinguish between good and bad art. Cultural industry is turning people into passive and subordinated objects unable to critically analyse the culture presented to them. The differences and newness among things is diluting, as a result of which the innovativeness is becoming less and the same recycled formula is followed in all consumer goods. Therefore, things are effortlessly digested by people. The final argument posed by Adorno and Horkheimer is that people under capitalism are reduced to exchange values and that was not the dream of Enlightenment.
- *Festivals of Assam* (1995) by Praphulladatta Goswami, as the name of the book suggests, is about varied festivals of Assam celebrated during different times of the year. The book starts with a chapter that validates the above statement stating the pan Indian nature of festivals in Assam. Religious events like *Sivaratri* and *Saraswati puja* also finds a place in the book. That is followed by narration about *Bohag Bihu*, *Magh Bihu*, and its relation to the agricultural



cycle. *Deul Utsav* is mostly observed in the lower Assam districts like Darrang, Barpeta, Kokrajhar etc. The rituals attached to these are mentioned. Lesser known festivals like *Bas puja* or *Madan- Kam* that celebrate the Indian God of love *Madan* or *Kamdev*, *Matheni* festival of Darrang district, *Paseti*, spread over various parts of Assam, *Me-dam Me-fie* an exclusive community ritual among the Ahoms or *Nouka-tana* ceremony of Cachar district find a significant space here. Both *Biyah* and *Suknanni Ojapali*, are also elaborately discussed. Again *Ankiya Bhaona* along with *Bareshahariya Bhaona* with pictorial description is described. Towards the end the author describes the spring time festivals of Assam as celebrated by various ethnic communities. The author has however successfully maintained the pan Indian nature by describing the Id festival of the Muslims and commemorating Sankaradeva and Teg Bahadur and a ritualistic fervour that is attached to these great saints.

- *Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches* (2009) edited by Marie Louise Stig Sorenson, and John Caraman describes the parallel relation between heritage and culture. The book provides a brief historical approach to heritage. Heritage as a symbolic representation has been useful in describing culture. The book also mentions techniques, methods and approaches for preservation of both tangible and intangible aspects of culture.
- *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular* (1998) by Stuart Hall provides an account of the historical process of development of the British popular culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Hall states that this period has seen some radical changes in culture of urban working classes in the wake of cultural industries, products and appearances. He questions the inherent relation between corporatized culture and mass culture, and discusses about the word ‘popular’ and its dichotomies of meaning in ‘popular culture’. The first meaning of popular is of wide circulation and commerciality and the second definition is one which views popular culture as all the cultural activities of the people. Towards the end Hall offers another definition of popular which stresses its dynamic nature and constant tension and struggle. Hall understands popular culture as an ongoing process. He is essentially offering a neo-Gramscian view of the power relation between high and popular culture.

- *Performance Theory* (2003) by Richard Schechner challenges the conventional definitions of theatre, ritual and performance. The seminal collection brings out Schechner's approach i.e. drama as not just something that occurs on stage but something that happens in everyday life, full of meaning and on many different levels. He examines the connection between western and non-western cultures-theatres, dance, anthropology, ritual, performance in everyday life, rites of passage, play of psychotherapy and shamanism. In the 1990s, Schechner originated 'rasa aesthetics' which was a combination of Rasa from the *Natyashastra* and the western aesthetics as a technique of emotional training for performers.
- *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988) by Victor Turner, addresses the issues of cultural performance, carnival, film, theatre and performing ethnography in anthropological thinking about event spectacle and audience. One of his essays 'Body Brain and Culture' links cerebral neurology and anthropology studies in a fascinating interface. Richard Schechner's preface to this work provides a relevant background to the importance of the work in today's performance studies arena.
- *Uses of Heritage* (2006) by Laurajane Smith mainly discusses about heritage as a discourse. According to Smith, heritage is a social construction. Here, she challenges the traditional western idea of heritage. She discusses Authorised Heritage Discourse. The book is in three parts: Part I discusses reviews of Critical Discourse Analysis and the development of heritage and also examines heritage as a cultural process. Part II examines the consequences of "authorised" heritage and Part III examines the inferior uses of heritage. Smith lays out two models - one based on discourse analysis and the other is heritage as a cultural practice.

### **Assamese**

- *Asam Buranji* (2012, fifth edition) by Gunaviram Barua describes various phases and traditions of Assam in earlier times. The book is divided into three categories with nineteen chapters. The first part of the book mentions the origin of the name Assam and provides a description about its neighbouring areas and communities residing there like Kachari, Naga, Singpho, Khamti, Misimi, Miri etc. The second part of the book is about the kingdoms that ruled over Assam.

An elaborate discussion about the Ahom kingdom can be found. The Moamoria rebellion and its after effects are also discussed. The third part of the book deals mainly with the socio cultural life of Assam. Chapters thirteen to nineteen describes the period of British rule in Assam, the prevalent caste system that comprises Brahmin, Kayasta, Kalita, Keut etc., the existent language and education system during that time, influence of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva in language and religious life also finds space and that is followed by narrative of the agricultural based economy and marriage system prevalent in Assam at that period of time. The book offers a broad narrative on the history of Assam as its name suggests.

- *Asamar Sanskriti* (2011) by Lila Gogoi describes the concept of culture from a general point of view and highlights the culture of Assam in particular. The book deals with the history of the Assamese culture and presents an elaborate discussion about various groups like Austric, Mongoloid, Aryan and their assimilation which made the greater 'Assamese Culture'. The culture of the Pre-Vaishnavite age and the contribution of the Ahoms to the Assamese culture have been examined in the interim part of the book. Along with that the Vaishnavite cultural trends and its impact on reformation of the Assamese culture are discussed. Modern Assamese culture and the reasons for its growth - namely modern education, urbanisation, and industrialisation in 19<sup>th</sup> century have been emphasised. He also discusses the inevitable changes in the material aspect of Assamese culture. Again special attention has been paid to the Mongoloids and *Mising* culture. The spring time festivals celebrated by *Naga's* and *Arunachali's* is also focussed on. The contribution of Muslims, Tea tribes, Buddhists to the entire gamut of Assamese culture and the growth and development of Assamese culture through an evolutionary process is systematically analysed in the book.
- *Bharatar Uttar Purbanchalar Paribeshya Kala* (2009) by Nabin Chandra Sarma widely discusses the performing arts of the North Eastern region of India. 'Performing arts' in the book includes dance, music and theatre. Every material aspect that comes under these three broad categories has been mentioned. The instruments are classified as solid, wind, percussion in the context of the folk songs and their relation to social life of communities are

discussed. This is followed by the folk or tribal dance that ranges from Bihu to Ojapali, classical dances like Sattriya to Manipuri and also the musical structure involved in the dance forms. Light has also been thrown on theatrical events. The folk and classical theatrical production its similarities and differences are highlighted. Many indigenous folk forms of song, dance, and drama find mention in the book. The book ends with a description of performing arts under the influence of British rule and modernity, describing various changes and innovativeness in performing arts of North East.

- *Bihu Eti Samiksha* (2010) by Lila Gogoi critically analyses various aspects of Bihu and its culture among the lives of the rural people of Assam and its inherent relation with the natural world. The book traces the history of the Bihu festival back to the ancient days where the Austriacs are believed to have started cultivation followed by some festivity with music and dance after the harvesting season. He even states that the origin of the word Bihu was enunciated by the Austriacs. Thus, along with the concept of agriculture, the nub of Bihu festival and its observances relating to agriculture also sprouted in the Assamese culture. In the historical process several ethnic groups came to Assam and with the process of assimilation various contributory elements entered into the Bihu festival. The intrinsic presence of nature in the Bihu songs is elaborately discussed. Several other issues like Bihu and women, Bihu and the mighty river Brahmaputra, the material aspects of Bihu are also mentioned by the author.
- *Bihu: Sangrakshan aru Pratyahban* (2012) by Jaikanta Gandhia addresses various contemporary issues related to *rongali* Bihu and its practices. He discusses the Bihu dance and its present day status. He tries to analyse and make a comparative study of the old and the new forms of Bihu dance and music. He has also added a number of personal memoirs stating the form of Bihu existent earlier and the acceptance it received in various parts of the country. At the same time, he strongly criticizes the commercialisation and modernity that the Bihu dance has imbibed now.
- *Bihur Utsa Aitijya aru Parampara* (2013) by Hemanta Kumar Barua narrates the spring time festival celebrated by various ethnic communities of Assam. The book emphasizes the rituals, performances and material culture of the ethnic communities. It tries to analyse the cultural exchange of the rituals and

performance of Bihu with other communities of Assam. The book is descriptive and narrative in nature and useful for knowing about the traditions of various ethnic communities of Assam.

#### **1.4 Objectives**

The present study has been undertaken with the following broad objectives:

- To analyse the inherent historical process in the evolution of the Bihu from an agricultural origin and its transformation to the state of a huge cultural spectacle.
- To analyse the Bihu as a festival cycle expressed through varied ritualistic and performative texts among various social groups and ethnic communities.
- To analyse Bihu as an expressive symbol of identity and heritage.
- To examine the relational changes found to be reflected in the celebration of Bihu in the context of performance, commodification, economic transactions, and its enhancing impact on culture and society of Assam.

#### **1.5 Methods and Methodology**

A structured methodology is a primary component of valid research. While Cultural Studies, with its interdisciplinary nature of understanding the subject of research, forms the basic paradigm in the present study, along with that, folklore, ritual and performance, concept of heritage and identity, ethnicity, representation and cultural industry have been brought in to supplement the analysis of various issues embedded in the Bihu festival. With regard to methods various primary and secondary methods including field work were adopted to gain authentic data and information.

#### **Primary Sources**

The primary sources of information for the study have been collected through field work from following study areas: Guwahati (Kamrup Metro district), Tezpur (Sonitpur district), Titabor and Jorhat (Jorhat district), Sivasagar and Moran (Sivasagar district),

Tinsukia, Dholai and Digboi (Tinsukia district), Dhemaji district, Lakhimpur and Dhakuakhana (Lakhimpur district), Jagiroad (Morigaon district) through field work, personal conversation, and interaction with Bihu practitioners, interviewing performing artists of Bihu who are in the lime light in the proscenium stage. These places were selected for the purpose of understanding the vastness of the cultural legacy and its paraphernalia. The target group comprises individuals who are directly involved with the practice of Bihu theoretically and practically.

### **1.5.1 Selection of the Field**

The researcher tried to limit the research or data collection to the above mentioned places as the focus areas of the field study for a few reasons like:

- Since earlier ages *Bohag* Bihu has mostly been prevalent in the Upper Assam districts only. It has been found that during the Ahom kingdom it flourished more widely. Later it spread over Lower Assam districts - particularly after India's independence. So the places of its origin are mostly emphasised.
- The practitioners of Bihu dance and music connected with the agrarian set up of the Bihu festival are mostly settled in those districts.
- Performing artists who have their own Bihu teams for performance and have wide array of performing experience in various parts of the country and the world are mostly concentrated in those areas and Guwahati, the capital city of Assam.
- The judges invited for the various popular Bihu competitions hail primarily from the above mentioned areas and Guwahati.

Data collection included like interview method and observation method and recordings. In the first phase of data collection, personal interaction and recording methods were adopted. Eventually in the second phase interviews were conducted- telephonic interviews, face to face interview, with a compact questionnaire to selected people, and multiple interactive interviews with practitioners, resource persons, exponents, judges and scholars were conducted.

The researcher has also tried to verify material found through secondary sources such as books and journals and through interactive interview to verify the authenticity of the available and required materials.

To understand and to gather the required information about the current scenario of the festival the researcher has also used participant and non-participant observation methods in various Bihu programmes, rehearsal sessions and Bihu workshops, by watching TV shows related to Bihu, advertisements (printed or telecast). This helped the researcher to understand and analyse the multifarious functions and role played by the festival today.

There has been a major paradigm shift in the celebration process of the Bihu festival since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the shift is still continuing with multiple interventions and attitudinal changes. Keeping the above as a focus of the study theoretical postulations in relation to the discipline of Cultural Studies have been referred to and frequently cited in understanding and analysing the realities and dynamics involved with the festival.

Secondary sources have been adopted and followed for collecting information about the subject of study from reference materials including books, e-journals, articles, newspaper, magazines and related websites.

## **1.6 Chapterization**

The present work is divided into six chapters, including the conclusion, keeping in view the main objectives of the study. Brief introductions of all the chapters are given below:

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

The first chapter introduces the present work with a brief statement of the problem, review of literature surveyed, objectives of the study, methods and methodologies applied and gist of the chapters in the thesis.

### **Chapter II: The Bihu as a Festival: Theoretical Paradigms**

This chapter deals with the theoretical perspective on festival as a cultural phenomenon, the dynamics of ritual and performance and intangible heritage. The aspect of cultural industry and ethnicity and power relations are also touched upon. The theoretical understanding and criticism by some eminent scholars on the above mentioned issues has been studied and tried to implement in my present study.

### **Chapter III: The Bihu Festival as a Cultural Expression: Sacred - Secular Continuum and Functionality**

This chapter gives a general overview of the Bihu festival and how the festival has been playing a pivotal role in the endurance of the tradition and cultural milieu of Assam. It throws light on the material aspect of the Bihu festival as they hold a significant role in establishing Bihu as an identity. The chapter also dwells upon the ritual and performance of the festival and its sacred and secular continuum. All the information incorporated in the chapter is based on field investigations conducted by the researcher.

### **Chapter IV: The Bihu Festival: Issues of Ethnicity, Representation and Identity**

The fourth chapter throws light on the issues of ethnicity. It describes the various forms of celebration of the spring time festival by various ethnic communities of Assam and draws a relation with the Bihu festival. It has also endeavoured to understand how the ethnic communities represent and establish themselves as distinct entities through their music and dance performances related to agriculture and spring. It has been found that in many platforms the Bihu dancers borrow dance and music from other ethnic communities and represent them with a new identity. However, with advancement the ethnic communities are also working against this hegemonic control of the Bihu festival through power relations and establishing themselves as a unique and separate identity.

### **Chapter V: The Bihu Festival: Dynamics of Performance, Tradition and Transition**

This chapter deals with the change and continuity of the Bihu festival, how rapid modernization and advancement of science and technology, culture is also affected by corporatisation or cultural industry. As a result of that many changes have come into the ways and means of celebrating the festival. Other associated reasons are cultural exchange, role of media, assimilation, hybridization and commoditisation. This has resulted in Bihu being a money oriented festival and a source of income for youths in the state. The issue of Bihu as a heritage event and the need of its preservation as is a topic of controversy, has also been addressed in this chapter.



## **Chapter VI: Conclusions**

Lastly the sixth chapter provides a summary of the whole work and specifies the findings that evolved from the previous chapters.

### **1.7 Referencing System Followed**

In this thesis the referencing system prescribed by Tezpur University for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences has been followed. Apart from that endnotes are used to refer to quotations from informants or authors. In case of repetition of reference in the endnotes the word 'ibid' has been used. If there is a change in page number for the same publication, then the specified page number is mentioned along with 'ibid'.

The Bihu festival involves an equally large register of expressions of Assamese as well as various ethnic languages, concerning rituals, material culture and performative traditions which are in use in celebrating the three varieties of Bihu. Italics are used in respect of all these expressions including the three varieties of Bihu- *Bohag/ Rongali* Bihu, *Magh/ Bhogali* Bihu, *Kati/ Kongali* Bihu. The months in which the festivals are held are also written in italics, like *Bohag*.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The present work of research is not a comprehensive analysis of the entire range of areas associated with the Bihu festival and has to delimit the study on the following counts:

Performativity with music, dance and rituals find a pre-eminent place in the Bihu festival, the spring time *rongali* Bihu in particular. All these are matters of an aesthetic discourse that call for detailed discussion from an aesthetic standpoint. The present study has not taken up such an analysis limiting itself to the historical aspects in the evolution of the Bihu festival and its process of change.

The present study is an investigation into the evolution of the Bihu festival from the agricultural fields to proscenium stage and the changes and continuity that have happened in the process. The Bihu festival is very important and considered to be the cradle of cultural fabric of Assam. It holds a lot of sentiment and emotion for the people of Assam. Any difference or deference causes turmoil among all section of people in Assam signifying the importance of the festival. In view of this only the

*Bohag* Bihu has been taken for analysis consciously and only a descriptive mention of the *Magh* Bihu and *Kati* Bihu has been made.

The Bihu festival is celebrated differently in different areas and among different communities of Assam. And each way of celebration is a subject or topic of studying in itself. This research has mainly emphasised on the evolution of the Bihu festival and aspects of ethnicity, change and continuity. The performance and the ritual aspect of the festival have been touched upon without going into a deeper investigation.

In selecting the informants, the researcher has also faced some serious issues. As everybody and anybody claims to know about Bihu and its significance, a random selection was done for interviewing of the informants based on their knowledge in theoretical and practical aspects of the Bihu festival.

The understanding of the festival has been based on extensive participant observation and personal communication with the informants. But the interviews of all the informants could not be included in the thesis. However, direct quotations from their statements have been used in the course of discussion on various issues, for which due acknowledgement has been given.

In the course of the present study in the chapters that follow, the Bihu festival has been approached from various standpoints. Therefore, repetitiveness may occur in narratives relating to various aspects of the festival by way of my interrogating them again and again while addressing them from different theoretical perspectives.

## **1.9 Conclusions**

This chapter has stated in brief the conclusions drawn on the research problem, based on new understanding of the subject following completion of the work and adherence to the objectives set for it.

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