

3rd Issue, 18 April 2009

Vic_Assam

Editorial Team: Dushmanta, Sundar and Rukmi

It is a great pleasure for the editorial team to bring the 3rd issue of the Enajori on the occasion of Rongali Bihu 2009 of Vic Assam. This issue includes a number of articles, arts and poems covering many different aspects including Bihu, Assamese Language, Assam and so on. We are very pleased to receive contributions from our Vic Assam community especially from the young generation as well as from a few prominent guest writers. On behalf of the editorial team, I would like to express our sincere thanks to all the contributors for their invaluable contributions. I would also like to highlight the special effort made by Sundar-da in communicating with the community members for their contributions for this issue. His relentless effort has resulted in this issue of Enajori. I have put my best effort to design the layout in the most readable format keeping the tradition started by Anita two years ago. For the first time, Enajori is prepared directly in electronic format. The digital version will be made available to all after Bihu. We hope you will enjoy it.

Wishing you all a very happy Bohang Bihu.

Dushmanta
On Behalf of the Editorial Team

Disclaimer: The Editorial team has included all the articles without any revision of the contents and is not responsible for the comments and/or opinions expressed by the authors.

Bohag Bihu and Vic_assam

by Sundar Sarma

We, the Assamese in Melbourne love Bohag Bihu and have been celebrating Bohag Bihu even when we were only a very few in numbers. As new families from Assam moved to Melbourne, we started to grow and slowly became one happy social group. With growth it became more and more difficult for the group to keep in touch. The internet revolution arrived and Amarendra took the first bold step to initiate the vic_assam group on the internet. He requested everyone to provide him with the name and contact details and compiled the original vic_assam group. Hemanta and others improved that initial vic_assam forum incorporating the recent development in internet technology and made it more functional. But the technology is constantly improving and we have to take advantage of this new technology and endeavour to improve our vic_assam forum as and when we are able to do so to make it a more powerful communication tool.

As the group continues to grow, good communication among the members is vital to avoid any misunderstanding within the group. I realised this year, that even though we are in the 21st century, for some reason most of us are very hesitant to use the internet to communicate with other vic_assam members, even though we are doing this at work and other forums. While trying to get the Enajori organised, I have had to contact each and everyone individually by phone. Some people could not be contacted because I could not get their phone numbers. You can appreciate how difficult a task this has been. When I am ready to speak to an individual member on phone he/she is not available or when he/she is ready to speak to me I am not always available. Using the internet one may write /reply an email at any time when he/she is free and ready to do so.

The growth of vic_assam in the last few years has been very fast and no wonder we are suffering from some growing pain. Our members have to realize that vic_assam is not a baby any more, it has its own mind now and that has to be respected. Some vic_assam members may have made mistakes in the last few years. We are all human being and human do make mistakes. We must try to learn from those mistakes but we cannot afford to dwell on those mistakes and drag vic_assam down with it. Those mistakes have to be ignored and we have to move on to build a healthy and a happy vic_assam group.

Our focus now should be on the future to create a happy and vibrant group. For this to happen we need a forum where everyone feels that they can contribute and exchange their ideas freely without being judged. It is only through free and open discussions that a group like ours can grow and evolve. We would all have different ideas, but only through open discussions can we come to a consensus. I feel that the vic_assam internet communication facility provides the ideal way for this type of free exchange of ideas. I am sure we are all mature enough to realize that when an idea is criticised or alternatives suggested, it is not a personal attack but an opportunity to move forward. All members should communicate freely, exchange their ideas freely using the internet. Any discussion in the internet is open to all the members and that is the only way we can avoid mistrust among the members. Ideas or opinion voiced in the internet should be criticized freely and openly, then only the right idea will evolve. It is the idea/opinion which should be criticised and personal criticism should be avoided at any cost. We must remember that all the vic_assam members have only one goal that is to revitalise our vic_assam group into a happy social group. He or she may have a different idea as to how he/she wants to do that. Our aim is to arrive at the best idea. In the same token an individual should be able to accept frank criticism of his/her idea or opinion and should not consider it as a personal attack on him/her. I have faith in all of us and I am sure vic_assam will be able to overcome this growing pain very soon.

Wishing you all a very happy Bohag Bihu !!

Let us all renew our friendship again on this auspicious day.

NB: The type of problem vic_assam is facing currently may be compared to what is known as growing pain in the industry circles. The growing pain starts when a company expands very fast or it takes over another company. The company gets flooded with a large number of new employees within a very short period of time. These new employees come from different background and with different views from those of the old employees. Chaos overcomes the company and the company management is challenged. The management has to convince both the groups to work in harmony if they want the company to move forward and to ensure their job security.

The most important tool used by the management to achieve this goal is improved communication between the two groups and with the management. The new employees are made to understand that it is the old employees who helped the company to grow. The old employees are made to realise that the company is much bigger now and the old methods require modifications.

~ Rongali Bihu 2009 and a glimpse of hope ~

Dr. Hemanta Doloi

Our beautiful **Rongali Bihu** is one of most significant national events in the state of Assam in the North-Eastern part of India. **Rongali Bihu** has been the source of joy and close intimacy among elders, juniors and juveniles irrespective of castes, religions, creeds, social status etc. from time immemorial. **Bihu** is still the symbol of unity and would remain a permanent inspiration of integration for the people of Assam and the Assamese origin. The word **Bihu** touches the hearts and souls of people associated with the Assamese culture irrespective of their places of residency. The **Rongali Bihu** symbolises the cultural empathy and passion for success among the people of Assam in a much natural way.

Undoubtedly, everyone associated with the Assamese culture including myself can easily relate the cultural sentiments of the **Rongali Bihu** from our days back in Assam. The **Rongali Bihu** not only provides an opportunity of an extended celebration of the Assamese New Year but also brings complete seasonal changes to the Mother Nature. With the start of a new rainy season, the trees change their leaves and flowers bloom across the region. A signatory bird "**Coolee**" welcomes the new session by signing songs on the trees and the seasonal music instruments such as *Dhol* (Dholok or drum), *Penpa* (horn), *Banhi* (flute) and *Gogona* (an instrument made with light bamboo pieces) echo across the nation. The most beautiful seasonal *Kopou phul* (a special kind of orchid found in North-Eastern part of India including Assam) becomes the symbol of celebrations mostly among the female dancers and usually on their *Khupas* (long hair neatly bunched into a knot on the heads).



~ Rongali Bihu in Melbourne- a memorial celebration ~

There are three bihus in Assam, namely, **Bhogali Bihu**, **Rongali Bihu** and **Kongali Bihu**. Among three, **Rongali Bihu** signifies the start of an Assamese new year which is celebrated around mid April. The new season symbolically brings the farmers together for preparing themselves for a new farming year. **Rongali Bihu** begins with the **Garu Bihu** (for cattle), which is reserved for cattle rites and celebrated on the day of **Uruka** (sankranti) of *Chait* according to the Assamese calendar). The cattle are bathed in fresh water streams and in the evening, a new outfit of **Tora Pogha** (a medicinal tree's bark named 'Tora Gosh') is put on to symbolically dress them up. A *Jhaak* (a medicinal smoke) is also used in the evening to comfort the cattle by keeping the flies and insects away for the whole year. Next day is the celebration of the **Manuh Bihu** (for human), where the extended families and relatives get together and exchange loves and respects among each other. Paying homage to elders is customary on this day. The special *Gamosa* (a beautifully woven symbolic cloth with attractive graphic designs) is used to convey respects to the elders by younger.

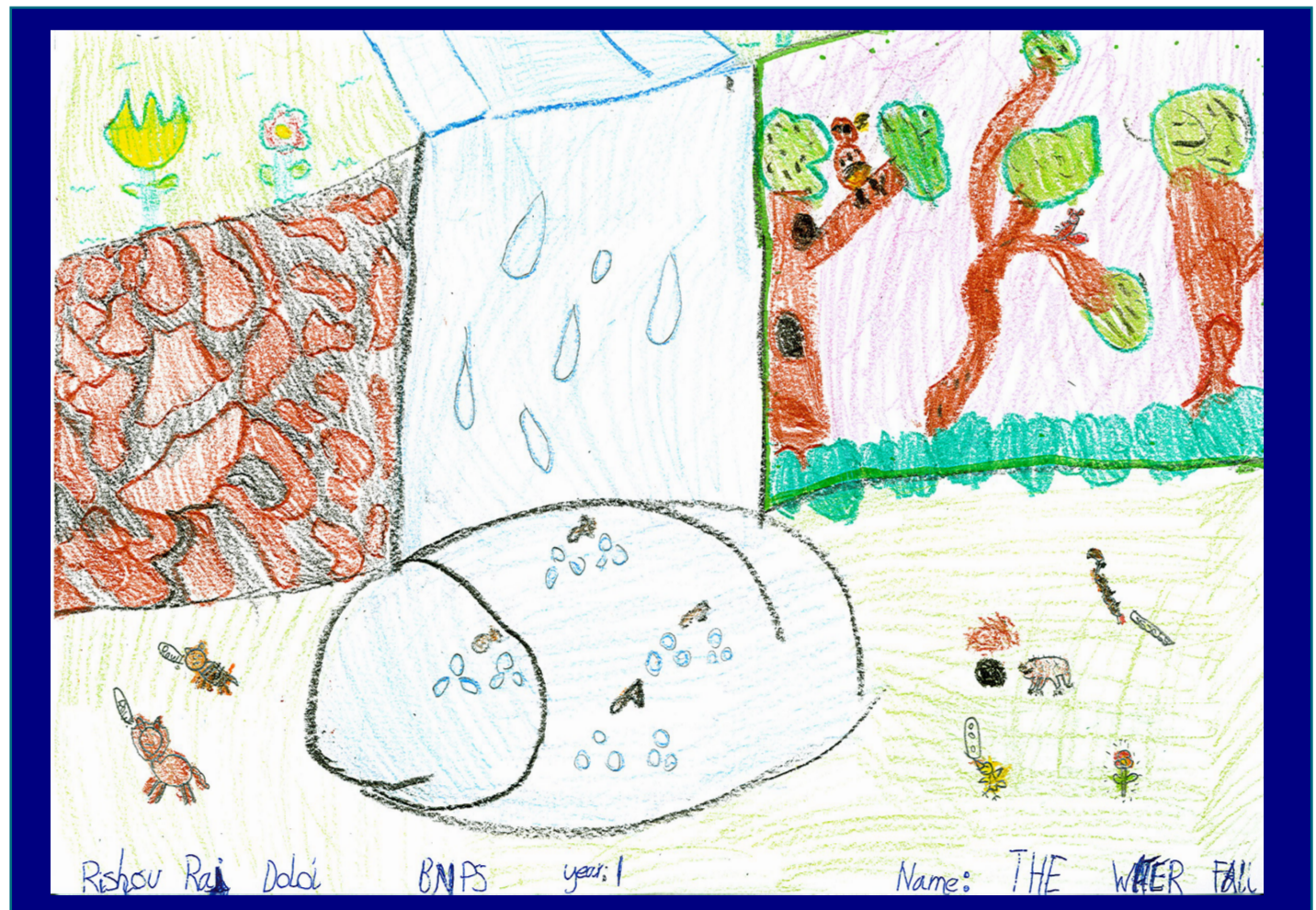
During this grand celebration, a varieties of *Pithas* (kind of rice cakes) and *Jolpans* are the main food for at least a few weeks, if not months. *Hussori* is the usual ways of welcoming the new year, where almost everyone in the community, irrespective of age, caste, religion and status, participates in dancing, signing, playing various traditional music (as mentioned earlier) in groups. The *Hussori* usually goes around the households for conveying blessings for a little monetary donations or gifts, which then traditionally used for hosting the *Bon Bhuj* (feast in a field) towards the end of the festive season. Nowadays, the grand cultural functions at the beginning (known as *Bihu Sammlan*) and towards the end (known as *Bohagi Bida*) of the festive season are also organised with a range of performances throughout the state. The overall sentiment of this **Rongali Bihu** and the spirits of heartfelt enjoyments among the people of Assam are impossible to describe in words. Month long celebrations along with the natural seasonal transition of the Mother Nature provide the farmers with full of hopes and prosperity for the start of the new cultivating season.

The evidence of such a rich and unique nature of cultural festivity of **Rongali Bihu** in Assam is widespread among the people living abroad as well. The emotion and enthusiasm of **Rongali Bihu** celebration not only bring the people together but also provide a clear opportunity for cultural exchange among the broader Assamese community across the globe. Most notably, our effort to symbolic celebration of this **Rongali Bihu** functions abroad abridges the gap between the migratory parents and the new generation kids outside Assam. Such a grand celebration perhaps the only opportunity for our growing children in maintaining their rich cultural heritage and solidarity abroad.

Among many others, our small community in Melbourne is certainly privileged to be able to maintain a replica of cultural significance with our new generation families and friends. As a non-resident Assamese, I have been highly privileged to be part of two small community groups across both Sydney and Melbourne. While we are small communities in both Melbourne and Sydney with limited resources for large scale **Rongali Bihu** celebrations, the relative enthusiasm and passions shown by the Sydney community over last few years is encouragingly notable.

Currently, being a part of the Melbourne community, I strongly believe that we can do much more than what we have been doing over many years to come. For such a success, all we need is a unity with respects and dignity to each other in the community. We must go forward with trust, confidence and courage. With our determination and open communications, I am sure that we will not only enjoy our times abroad but also leave a great legacy of confidence and success to our gifted kids in this extended family. We have talents and we can do it. As a first step, we can certainly be proud of our existing group based online forum (vic_assam@yahoogroups.com) for facilitating open discussions in the community. I sincerely thank all for their contributions over past years and wish to see much more fun to making every minute of our time memorable and enjoyable to the full extent. We should all be passionate towards painting a most colourful picture of our small but great community and become a role model abroad, which may then work as a catalyst to the success of a defying nation back in Assam.

May God bless us all!



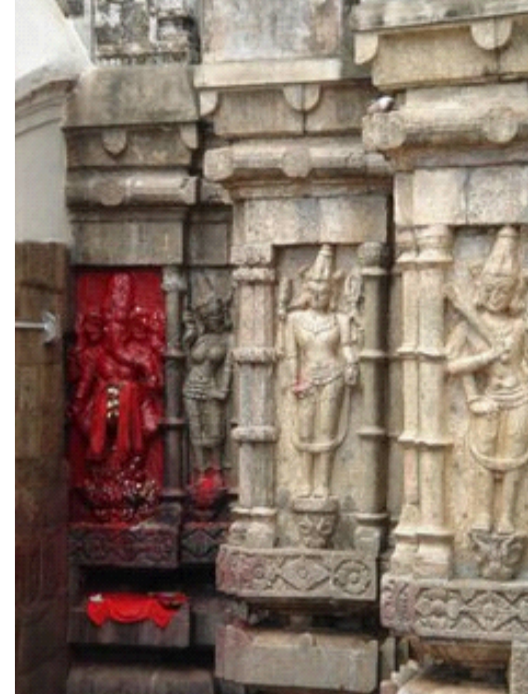
8 Dreams for Your First Bihu

By Aneela and Gaurav Ray

Dear Arhaan,

It is the eve of your first Bihu, and though at this stage life for you seems like a constant flurry of new colours and experiences; however we do hope that one day you grow up to appreciate the particular colours, sights and sounds that your Assamese heritage will bring to your life. So, on your first Bihu your parents have decided to compile a special wish list for you for the coming years:

1) You will grow up looking at photographs of your parents' Shillong escape and listening to their stories of the green hills and singing waterfalls. There will be aunts and uncles who will tell you about their picnics and expeditions to Bara Pani and Police Bazaar. Every generation will tell you about THEIR Shillong and chastise you for not seeing the town at its best...but do not worry, we all feel the same. May you grow up to have your own Shillong story and make your own memories of the beautiful hill town.



2) Every occasion, happy or sad...a day of celebration or a sombre evening to commiserate whether it is a birthday, wedding, or just an occasion to let the tears and wine flow, there will be a Bhupen Hazarika song to mark it. May you make your own play list in life and let the wise man touch your heart.

3) You might grow up to have your own idea of public display of emotion and we realise that you might have your own idea about rhythm and what sounds good. However we do promise you this that when you hear the first strains of the Bihu songs being played out you will shake your little bum to the melody. The Bihu Rhythm Will Get You in the End, there is no fighting it.

4) And finally the Mystical Potion of the East, one day you will be introduced to Assam tea...your mother can bear testimony to the fact that though she may have crinkled her nose to it growing up but one sip and as generations before her have sworn You Go Willingly to The Dark Side...there is no going back to boring coffee mornings. May your mornings begin with a cup of the golden liquid and may you also deliberate whether it is the nectar of the Gods.

5) May you draw pride from knowing a part of the world where the Feminine in the Divine is celebrated. You will know of the power of Kamakhya and the wisdom of Saraswati. You will also learn the tales of the original free spirit creating her own identity, of knowing a city that celebrates Vac Devi (the goddess of speech) in a world where little girls are still taught to be seen not heard, there is a Deity who shuns material wealth and embraces knowledge and cherishes the book ...let this be your legacy.

6) We will also wish you a Brahmaputra evening. Take a long walk by the river, trust us the memory of the evening, the melody of the breeze, the spray of water and the colours of the setting sun will stay with you throughout your life.

7) And like generations of little boys growing up in Guwahati may you also have a day of nothing more than *adda* in front of Feeds and your own culinary adventures with chicken rolls and momos.

8) Though you will be compelled by many to rant and rave at the Assam *bandh*, but a little part of you will acknowledge the *lahe lahe* of the air and you might conclude that there could be some merit to the argument of the mid week break.

All our prayers and then some,

Some Musing Over My Childhood Bihu

Dr. Rukmi Dutta

I grew up at Nagaon which is a small town in the central Assam. Like all the small towns of Assam, Nagaon also celebrates Bihu in its unique way and like most of the town people, I also relate Bihu mostly with the Bihu tali (Public play ground where Bihu is celebrated by the whole town).

My first memory of visit to Nagaon Bihu tali relates with a funny episode. In fact, I remember more of the episode than of the Bihu tali. At that time I was perhaps 6-7 years old and for the first time I was allowed to visit the Bihu tali with some older kids of the neighborhood. It was decided that we would go after lunch and returned back by sunset. Without doubt, my excitement was full to the brim. My father gave me a one rupee note as pocket money. I felt as if I am the richest kid in the world – I can buy anything I want. Wow! What a feeling that was! Anyway, we started our trip as planned, lead by the oldest kid. First thing I noticed in the Bihu tali was sea of people and numerous ice-cream carts. Of course, people did not interest me as much as did the ice cream carts. I can not remember what we did or watched in the Bihu tali except that I bought and ate ice creams to my heart contents with my pocket money of one rupees – the red one, the white one, the orange one, the milk one, the cup one, the cone one and what not. And you can guess what would be the consequence of such gluttonous eating of ice-creams and that too from those algae ridden ice-cream carts. In the evening when we returned home, I had terrible stomach ache. I threw up all the ice-creams I ate and fell sick with fever for next couple of days. By the end of all these, I was so over ice-cream that I was never tempted by those ice-cream carts ever in my whole childhood. In later years, I visited the same Bihu tali so many times to join in the various kid's competitions or to see the Bihu dance competition or to enjoy a cultural nite. But nothing was as memorable as the first one.

Usually, in the first day of Rongali Bihu i.e. the Garu (Cow) Bihu, the village people take their cows and bulls to the river to wash them. But for us, the town people who do not have a cow, any domestic animal or pet substitute the cow. For us it was a goat. We would wash her with the tap water and gave her a new leash. In the washing ritual, the goat was the most unwilling participant. But all her discontent would go away as soon as we gave her various veggies to eat with me and my brother chanting with top of our voices "Lau Kha, Bengena Kha, Boshore Boshore Badri Ja". After this it was our turn to take bath. In the mean time, mother would take out the new 'Gamuchas' (traditional hand woven towels) for all the family members. First of all it would be offered to grand pa. We will touch his feet and ask for his blessing and also of course for his Bihu presents to us. He would give us new dresses. I would collect a few new dresses for the occasion-one from my parents, one from my grand-parents and a few from my various pehi and jethais (aunts). I would wear one of my new dress and get ready to visit neighbors and relatives for wishing them happy Bihu. With this the eating of ladu, pitha, sira –doi i.e. the 'Bihu Khuwa Parba' would start. We would go to their house and then they would come to our place. This ritual would last for next 2 to 3 days till we finish visiting all. At the same time, there would be preparation for impoverished 'Husori team' by the neighborhood kids. None of us were any expert on Bihu song or dance but still it was fun to go to various houses, sang a half Bihu song or dance imperfectly and at the end of performance collect the money which would be spent on a bonfire feast after the Bihu.

The memory of those lost days still brings a smile to me. I hope it will have the same effect on the readers and will bring some fond memory of their childhood.

My trip to Europe

By Sahil Bora

My trip to Europe was a long enjoyable trip. It was a long flight but it was worth it. I went with My Mum and Dad for three weeks. I got a week of school so I had to do my mid year exams early which was the down part. The first country I went to was England. It was small, interesting country with lots of history. I also visited my Sister while I was there. She was enjoying her time there working for a fashion company. I stayed in England for a week and after that we went on a tour around Europe.

The Second Country we went to was France. We went to the capital of France, Paris. It was a beautiful city with lights and beautiful gardens and buildings. We went on the Eiffel tower which was gratifying. There was so many people at the Eiffel tower, we had to squeeze into an elevator with more than 30 people in it. When I was at the ground level, looking up at the Eiffel tower, a gypsy snuck up to me and stole my water bottle and it was a hot day. Also in Paris I went to the Louvre and saw the Mona Lisa painted by Leonardo Da Vinci. I hate art but I was looking forward to seeing the Mona Lisa. The final place we went to in Paris was the Norte Dame, a very big Catholic Church in the heart of Paris. Inside there was a large, loud organ playing which nearly blew out my ears.

The Third Country we went to was Switzerland. I was only there for 2 days but it was great. It was also a tiny country in Europe but it is also one of the richest countries in the world. Some of my tour got up early and went to go see the Swiss mountains. It was a breathtaking view.

The last Country that we went to was Italy. It was a beautiful Country with ancient buildings such as the Colosseum and statues such as the Statue of David. Inside the Colosseum, the middle, the ground part was filled with old, breaking walls. I also went to Vatican city where the Pope lives and where St Peters Square is. It is the smallest country in the world and smallest population.



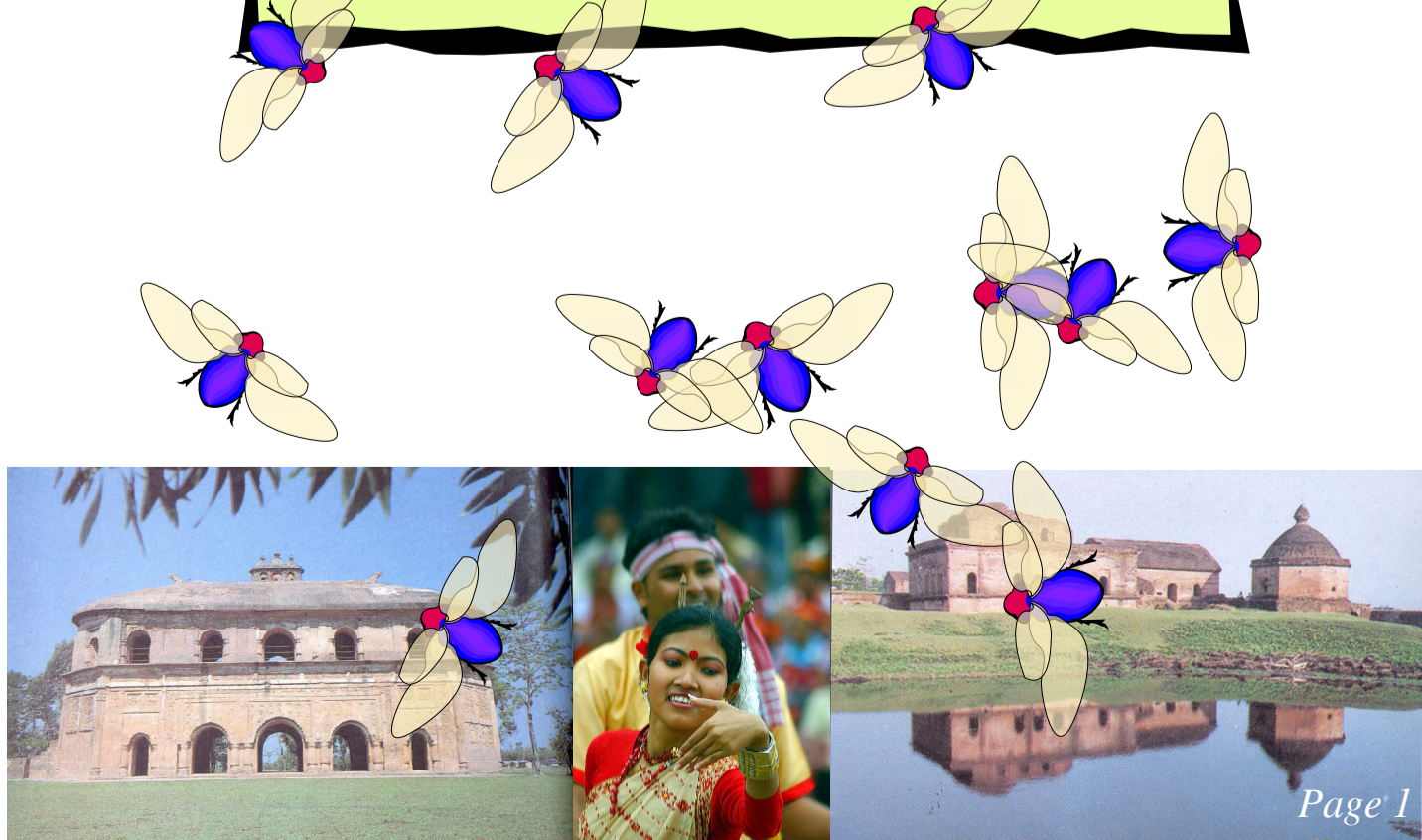
We flew to Singapore to relax and for some retail therapy which was good then we flew back home to Melbourne and drove back home to Geelong. Europe was a great Experience but I don't really want to go back because I don't like long flights and I can't sit on a plane 12 hours straight.



One in a million

By Aemna Changkakoti

Piercing voices penetrate her mind,
pushing, heaving, *weighing* her down,
seeking to capture her every speck of breath,
striving to remove, *breakdown*, the *backbones* of her words,
Time passes, yet eternity lingers in her heart,
A sudden surge of adrenaline rushes by,
Running, *hastening*, burning up inside of her,
The ground shakes yet she feels no movement,
the feeling of potency enfolds her .
Her heart blazes with desire,
Desire, to reach that fire, take herself higher.
She seeks her passion,
All prizes lying within her sight,
Yet it is no ordinary sight,
It is the sight that of an spirited, bold tiger's eye
Nothing can break, nothing can prevent,
her dreams;
Dreams of destiny and hope,
because when you believe,
believe you are *fearless*,
you then are truly
"one in a million."



Melbourne Motor Show 2009

By Lino Miri

The 2009 Melbourne Motor Show was held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

This time at the motor show, I saw the Lamborghini Gallardo,Nissan 370Z & GT-R,Toyota Prius,Volkswagen Golf,Ford Falcon, BMW 335i, Honda City, Shelby Cobra & classic cars,Chevrolet Corvette C6,Audi Q5,BMW 7 Series,HSV W427, Mitsubishi Evo X(10), Kia Soul & Cerato, Porsche Boxter & Cayman, there was also Ford's Fiesta & Focus. Mercedes-Benz wasn't there.

Lexus had it's LF-A Roadster and the Tanti ZR-1 Prototype from Melbourne was there too!



Nissan GT-R



Lamborghini Murcielago LP460



BMW 335i



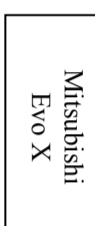
Audi Q5



Ford Falcon GT6 Turbo shown in Ego.



Ford Falcon GT6 Turbo



There was a Dragster and a F1 car. There were also some cars from the 2007 Melbourne Motor Show. It was different in some ways because of wacky new concept cars and gadgets. Ferrari and

Fiat were missing. Buggati, Aston Martin, Jaguar and Chevrolet (except Corvette C6) were also missing but they were also missing last time. Mitsubishi had 2 Evos and connected them to 2 PlayStation 3's. Nissan had 6 PlayStation 3's but didn't connect them to GT-R's. Some cars were on ramps, turntables, and little squares made of metal. All the other cars were on floors. There was also a police car like last time. Right after the motor show, I saw a Lamborghini Murcielago- LP460 and Maserati GranTurismo-S. **My favourite car the Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 is \$455,000!**



Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 (interior)



Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4



There was another car I wanted to see called the Mercedes McLaren SLR but it's not available here and it's \$660,000!

Golden thread of Assam

Rangam Rajkhowa

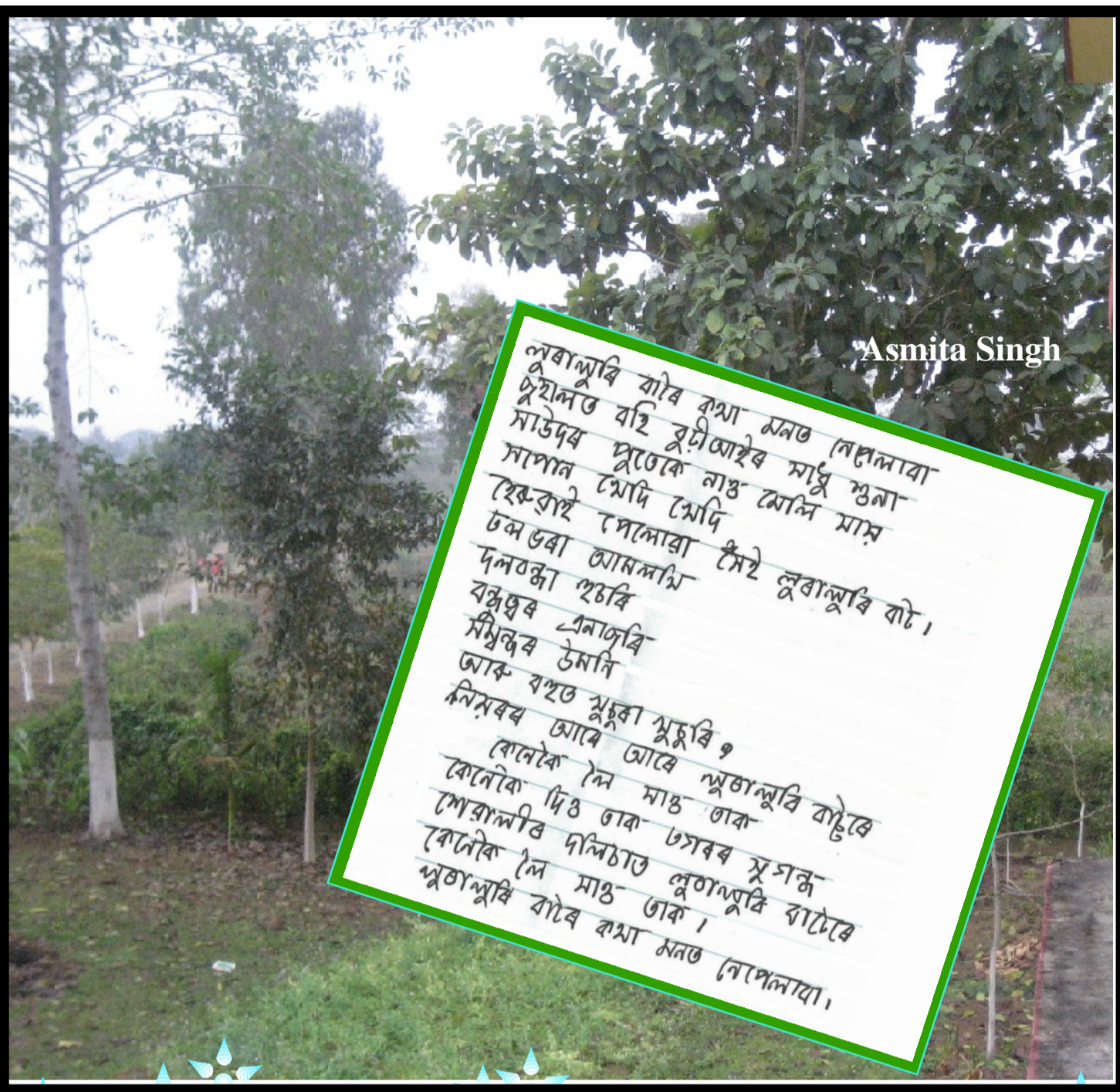
Muga is not only a silk but considered as the lifeline of the Assamese culture. 'Muga Mekhela-Chadar' is a treasured belonging of every Assamese household. The silk is adored for shimmering golden colour and texture which can not be matched by any other silk. The artistic and aesthetic sense of Assamese weavers blend Muga colour with traditional and modern designs in their creation of dream fabric with intense feelings and emotions. Today it is the second most costly fabric after Pashmina.

Muga was adorned only by the royal families from around 11th century for about 600 years because of which it widely came to be known as the Royal Golden silk. It was introduced to the world in 1662 by the French traveler Jean Joseph Tavernier. Kautilya's Arthashastra mentioned the presence of Muga Silk in the Brahmaputra valley since 321 B.C.

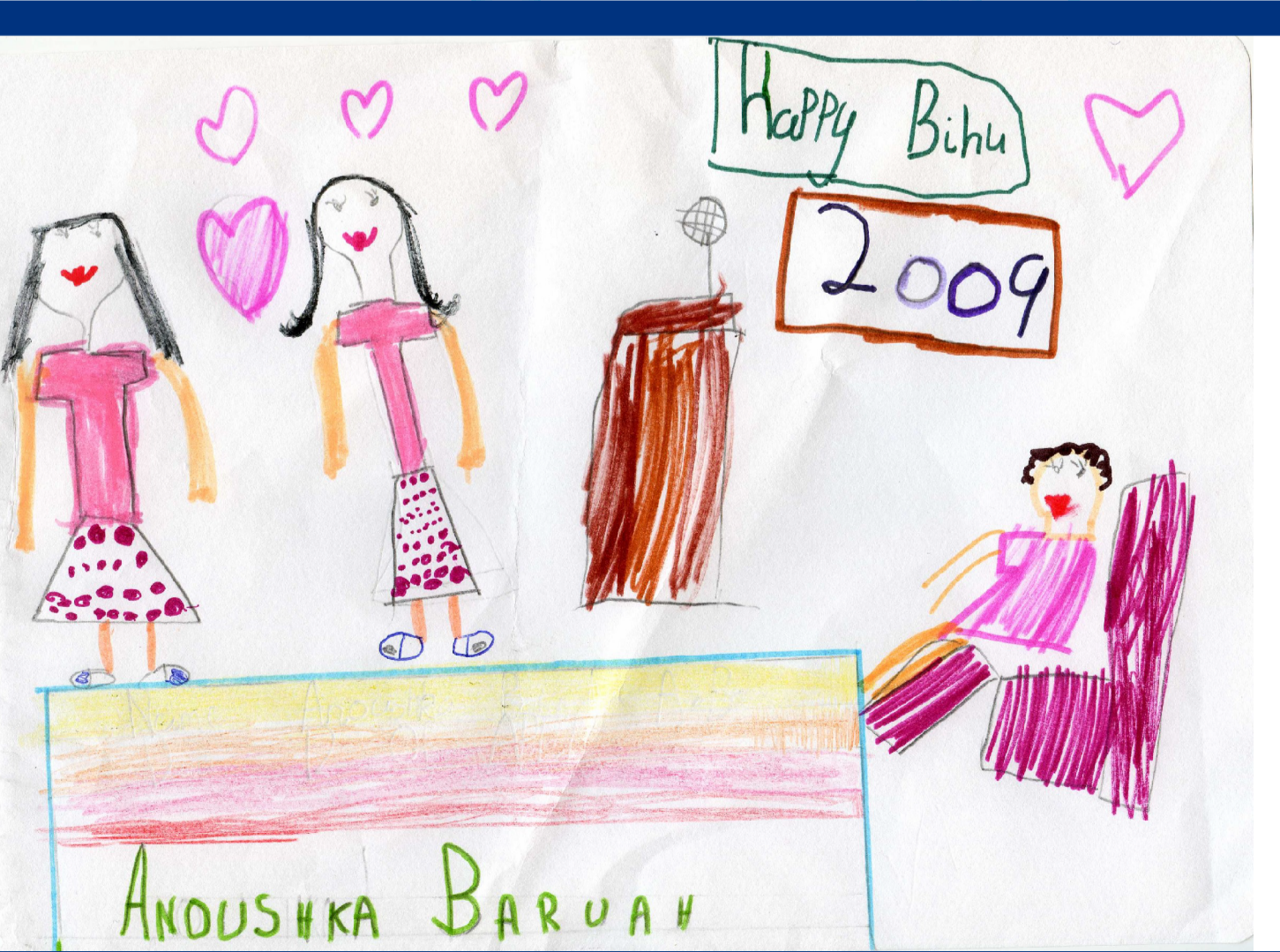
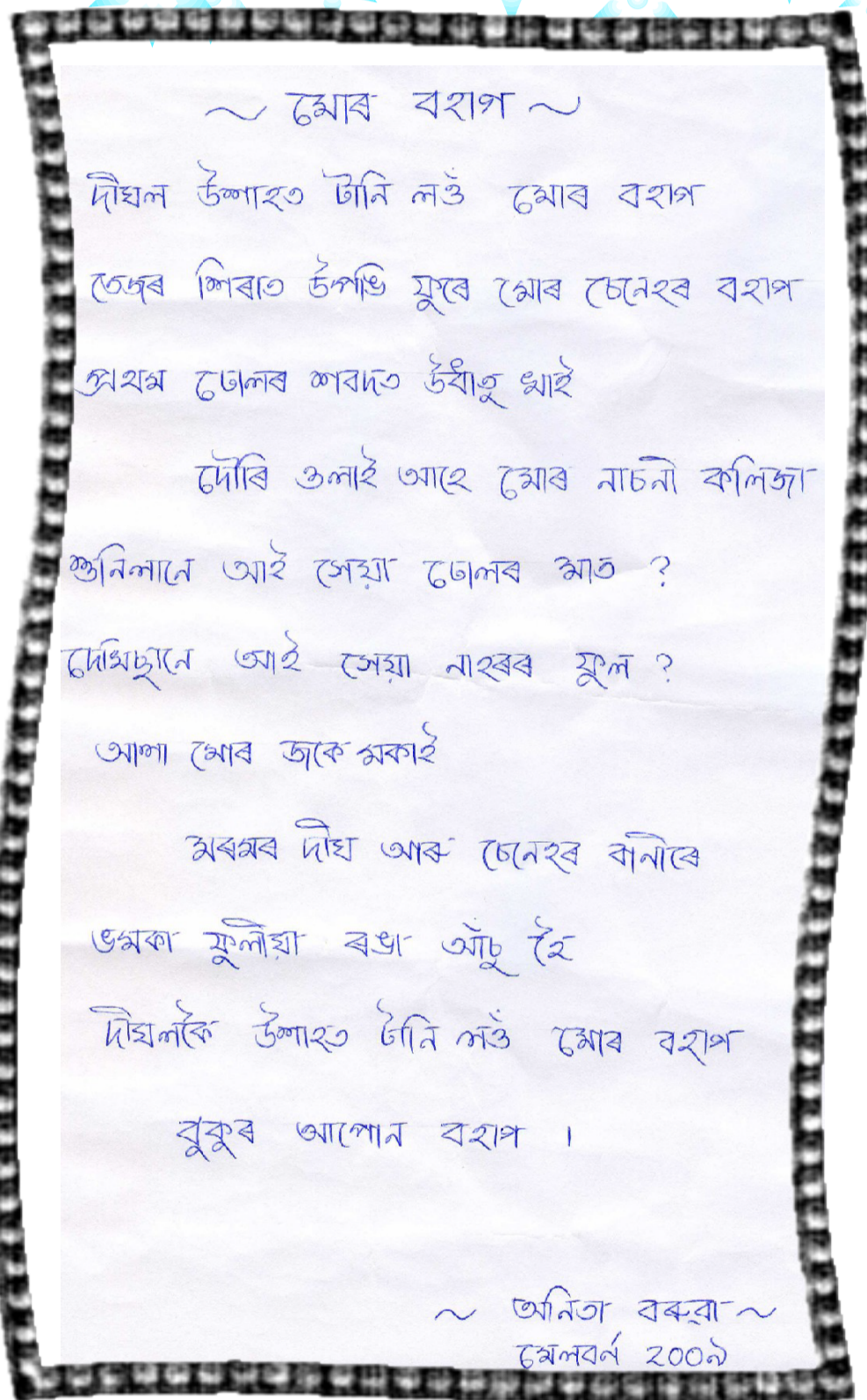
Muga silkworms(Antharea assama) are raised outdoors primarily on two trees - Som (Machilus bombycina) and Soalu (Litsaea Polyantha). Muga culture is highly sensitive to nature which restricts it only to a few upper Assam districts though, some success of commercial rearing in Cooch Bihar district in West Bengal is reported. The painstaking process and value attached is so high that cocoons are sold by count rather than by weight. Attempts to rear silkworms indoor have produced very limited success. So far, all attempts to introduce Muga in overseas countries have failed as characteristic ecological requirements are found only in its natural abode, Assam. Absence of precisely similar environment in traditional silk producing nations such as China and Japan probably did not allow Muga culture to spread in spite of Assam falling in the famous silk route.

Unfortunately, Muga production has dropped over the years due to climate change, pollution and rising pressure on land and other socio-economic factors. Less than 100 MT Muga is produced annually in Assam. To promote the silk as a brand and preserve Muga, it has been granted the protection of geographical indication (GI) in 2008. Muga is the first item from the state to obtain the GI tag, with a variety of Assam tea and Joha- rice are waiting in line for such recognition.

Some efforts are made to attract international buyers through product diversification. Recently Muga Umbrella was displayed at Derby Day in England. Thanks to Dulal Choudhury, an entrepreneur who is trying to add high UV protection functionality of Muga to its aesthetics to design such umbrellas. The novel idea earned Mr Chowdhury young innovator award from the National Innovation Foundation at IIT, Mumbai. Muga industry now stands on the cross road: way to extinction or flourish with new vigour. All round efforts are required to keep Muga thrive and flourish because it is not only silk but the lifeline of Assamese culture.



Asmita Singh



ANOUSKA BARUAH

Bihu Through The Ages

By Sarat Mahanta

Retired professor, Joysagar College, Assam

Member of Human Rights Commission in Guwahati

Bihu, the patrimony of the Assamese people irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, sex, language and social status or position, is celebrated throughout the length and breadth and every nook and cranny of the State of Assam with great pomp and gaiety and feasting and merry-making. It is, therefore, called the national festival of the Assamese people, the Asomiyas. The Assamese people celebrate three Bihus, namely *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*, *Magh Bihu* or *Bhogali Bihu* and *Kati Bihu* or *Kongali Bihu* at three different points of the year synchronizing with the change of seasons. Be that as it may, one of the important features to be noted about all the three Bihus is that they are related to the three different stages in the process of cultivation of rice by the peasantry of the State of Assam. Precisely speaking, *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu* is celebrated as seed- time festival, while *Magh Bihu*, also called *Bhogali Bihu*, is a harvest festival celebrated to mark the occasion of rest and feasting after harvesting of the hard-toiled rice is over and the *Kati Bihu* or *Kongali Bihu* is celebrated in between the *Bohag Bihu* and *Magh Bihu* by lighting earthen lamps in the greenish paddy fields vibrant with pregnant paddy plants by the peasantry. The lighting of the earthen lamps at the paddy fields continues for the whole *Kati* month, the seventh month of the Assamese calendar, for the purpose of wording off or killing the various insects which destroy the growing rice.

But when we talk of Bihu today, we invariably refer to the *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu* which synchronizes with the advent of the spring season, the season of light showers, sprouting leaves and fragrant breeze and which also ushers in the Assamese New year. *Bohag Bihu*, which captivates the heart and mind of the Assamese people beyond measure, is celebrated for seven days beginning from the last day of *Chait* called *Chait Samkranti*, the last day of the last month of the Assamese calendar and ending on the sixth day of *Bohag*, the first month of the Assamese calendar. However, there are some places in the State where Bihu festivities continue for a month or so.

The Bihu which is observed on the *Chait Samkranti* day is traditionally known as *Garu Bihu*. The day is specially devoted to the welfare of the *garus* i.e. cows, oxen and all other domestic cattle which are extremely essential for ploughing the land for cultivation of rice and the remaining six days are devoted to the welfare of men and women and, therefore, known as *Manuh Bihu* or Bihu for men. In the morning of the *Garu Bihu* day, the horns, heads and the bodies of the cattle are smeared with paste prepared from turmeric and *matimah* (a kind of pulse) powder. Thereafter, the cattle are taken to a nearby tank or river by their masters or by the cowherds for a wash. While washing the cattle, pieces of gourd, brinjal, turmeric, *thekera* (a kind of sour fruit) and *kerela* (bitter fruit of a kind of creeper) brought pierced in two, three, four of five- pronged sticks for the purpose are pelted at them. In doing so, the masters and the cowherds recite aloud:

☐☐ Lau kha, bengena kha,
☐☐Bachare bachare barhi ja,
☐☐Mar saru, baper saru,
☐☐Toi sabi bar garu "

☐☐ Eat gourd, eat brinjal,
☐☐Grow from year to year,
☐☐(Your) mother is short, (your) father is short,
☐☐May you be a big bull)

The cattle are also fanned with the twigs of *dighlati* and *makhiyati* shrubs with the traditional belief that if the cattle are so fanned they will remain cool and healthy throughout the year. Not only the cattle, the ploughs are also washed on the occasion.

In the evening, the cows and oxen are fastened with new *tara paghas* (ropes made from the fibres of the wild cardamom plants) in the cowsheds and fed with *piithas* (cakes made from rice powder). A jaag (a kind of fire) is also lighted at the entrance of the cowshed and the smoke of the fire is fanned into the cowshed with a new bamboo fan with the belief that mosquitos and insects which are the enemies of the cattle will be away from the cowsheds in the days to come.

From the first day to the sixth day of the month of *Bohag* is celebrated the *Manuh Bihu* or Bihu for men. On the first *Manuh Bihu* day, all the members of the family bathe in the early morning and wear new clothes. The younger members of the family respectfully bend their knees before the elders seeking their blessings, while the elders hug the younger ones with heartfelt love and affection. On this day, the Assamese people take '*paatabhat*' (boiled rice soaked in water and kept for future use) alongwith fried eggs and green chillies. From the evening of the first *Manuh Bihu* day, the *Huchori* party starts singing of *Huchori* songs from house to house wishing the householders hale and hearty and all - round development and welfare of the family. Before leaving the household after performing the *Huchori*, the members of the family are showered with blessings by reciting the following verse :

"Ata batit naharu, ata batit panaru,
Ata batit khutara sak,
Murar Chuli chingi arshibad karichoo
Grihastha kushale thak."

(There's onion in one cup, garlic in another
And khutara sak is still in another,
By plucking the hair from the head we bless
May be the household all well.)

During the *Manuh Bihu* days the people also start visiting their friends and relatives because once the process of cultivation starts they will have no time to make such visits till the completion of the harvest.

Bihu is so dear to the Assamese people they can't afford to be away from all the festivities connected with the Bihu. This spontaneous and unalloyed feeling of delight of the Assamese people at the approach of the *Rongali Bihu* finds its ample expression in the following Bihu song :

☐☐ Atikoi Chenehar mugar mahura
☐☐Atikoi Chenehar makoo,
☐☐Tatoko Chenehar Bohagar bihuti
☐☐Nepati kenekoi thakoo. "

☐☐(So dear is the muga bobbin
☐☐So dear is the shuttle,
☐☐Dearer than both is the Bohag Bihu
☐☐How can't it be left unobserved.)

But the style of celebration of the Bihu festivities has undergone a tremendous change over the years. During the days before the advent of the great Ahoms to this part of the land, Bihu was celebrated under the canopy of nature. Bihu songs were sung and Bihu dances were performed separately by the young boys and girls under a tree or on the bank of a river. In singing *Bihu nam* (songs) and dancing *Bihu nach* (dances), the musical instruments like *dhol* (grums), *mahar singar pepa* (pipe made of buffalo horns), *gagana* (a small musical instrument made of bamboo, *taka* (a bamboo clapper), *tal* (cymbals), *khuti tal* (a kind of small cymbals), *sutuli* (a whistle made of clay) etc. are played. These are all indigenous Assamese musical instruments.

But the Bihu which was once celebrated under the trees or on the bank of a river came to be celebrated before the public in an organized way under the patronage of the Ahom Swargadeos (monarchs). The historic Rangghar standing majestically at the centre of the far-flung Rupahipathar on the outskirts of the Talatal ghar (a huge house with several over-ground and under-ground storeys), the royal palace of the erstwhile Asom Kings at Rangpur (now Joysagar) still speaks eloquently about the celebration of various activities of the Rongali Bihu during the glorious days of the Ahom Swargadeos. In addition to the performance of Bihu songs and dances by various troupes from different parts of the Ahom kingdom, buffalo-fighting, hawk-fighting, wrestling etc. were also held. The system of singing *Huchori* songs from house to house also began during the days of the Ahoms. Thus Bihu was then no longer a festival of the peasantry or the rural masses.

But with the advent of the twentieth century, the process of celebration of Bihu activities underwent further changes. Consequently, Bihu no longer remained a festival of the peasantry of the rural villages. With the spread of education amongst the peasantry and decline of cultivable land to cope with the need of increasing population, not only the educated and skilled youths but also the uneducated and unskilled youths started rushing to the cities and towns in search of employment and other avenues of livelihood. Thus due largely to economic constraints even the people of the rural villages cannot afford to spare days together at a stretch, as has been done earlier, for celebration of Bihu or in taking active part in various Bihu activities. But on the other hand, the rural people who have already settled down in the cities and towns and other industrial places, have started organising Bihu festivals at their respective localities with various colourful programmes which invariably include Bihu songs, Bihu dances and *Huchori* besides other cultural items. Thus circumstance has so developed that Bihu songs and Bihu dances, which were once held under the trees or on the river banks, have entered the pandals erected for the purpose in the cities and towns. It is gratifying to note that the Assamese residents abroad also celebrate the Bihu festival, more particularly the *Rongali Bihu*, with colourful cultural programmes. This is undoubtedly an occasion which gives the Assamese families abroad to assemble in an atmosphere of feasting and merrymaking. Thus whether at home or abroad, an Assamese feels not only immensely elated but also extremely proud when he or she gets the opportunity to celebrate the Bihu festivals or to participate in performing different Bihu activities. Since all the Assamese people irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, sex, social status etc. involve themselves in celebration of Bihu festival, it is aptly called the national festival of the Assamese people. How can we, the Assamese people, afford to be away from celebrating such a festival which is so near and dear to us?



By Riya Rajkhowa

Wish you

A Very Happy

Rongali Bihu 2009

এমাজৰী

তৃতীয় সংখ্যা ১৮ এপ্রিল ২০০৯

ভিক্ অসম

সম্পাদনা: দুহুত, সুন্দৰ আৰু কৰী

