

## **Topic : Various local festivals of Northeast India.**

### **1). Bathow Puja**

The largest tribe to reside in Assam are the Bodo's and one of the most important religious festival that the Bodo-Kacharies of Assam celebrate is the Bathow Puja. It was celebrated on 22nd March this year. Over 40 lakh Bodo people from Northeast India region celebrate this festival. The Bathow Puja is celebrated for the good harvest of crops and for welfare of the nature. The ancient ceremony of the festival includes offering puja (act of worship) to ancient deities such as Gila Damra, Khlia Bwrai, Bathow Bwrai, Sri Brai ((Shibbwrai), etc. It is believed that some identify this god with the Hindu god Lord Shiva. There are various forms of this festival namely, Garja, Kherai and Marai, from which Kherai is of utmost importance.

In the Bathow Puja, the Bodo women are suppose to wear the main set of Yellow Maidi Dokhona as without which the Bathow puja is incomplete. The yellow Dokhona to signifies the new sunshine and the green agors are fabricated mark the natural aura. Before the bathow puja festival the religious rites of the Garja are performed and accordingly a date is fixed by the Bodo villagers for performing the Kherai Puja. Bathow is not just a festival but also considered as a religion.

### **2). Karam Puja**

Karam Puja is one of the most important harvest festival celebrated by the Indian states of Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. In Assam, this is a festival of great importance celebrated by the tea tribe communities with the view of appeasing 'Mother of Earth'- The goddesses of creation. The festival is celebrated on the night of 'Bhado Ekadasi' that is, on the 11th day of Purnima or the full moon night of the Hindu month of Bhado (Bhadra), which is generally in the mid August and September. The puja is offered to Karam Devta who is the god of fate, power, youth, and youthfulness.

The karam puja is celebrated for good harvest. The ritual of the puja involves people going to the forest and cutting a branch from the Karam tree and is carried by the dancers accompanied by singing. This branch is then washed with milk and rice beer and raised in the

middle of the dancing arena. After this, everyone offers their prayer followed by a community feast, and the drinking of rice beer with singing and dancing. The next day, the Karam branch is sprinkled with curd of the seas and immersed in the river bed.

### 3). Durga Puja, Barak Valley

Barak valley is a bengali-dominated region of Assam and the biggest festival celebrated here is the durga puja. This festival is celebrated throughout the country with great enthusiasm and it is not only the biggest Hindu festival but also the most important socio-cultural event in Bengali Hindu society. The festival of Durga Puja is generally celebrated in between the months of September to October. The Durga Puja has been celebrated since the medieval period and have evolved overtime. This festival is celebrated to observe the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon king Mahishasura.

The first day is celebrated as Mahalaya which signifies the advent of the goddess. The worshipping of goddess begin on the sixth day i. e, on Sasthi. During the consecutive three days goddess durga is worshipped in various forms such as lakshmi, saraswati and many others. The end day is called as Vijaya Dashami when the idols are carried in huge processions with people dancing and singing and are immersed in the local rivers. The custom symbolises the departure of goddess durga to her husband's home Shiva. The festival begins on the same day as Navratri.

### 4). Falcon Festival, Unrangsu

The Falcon festival is organized every year by the Blue Hill Society and supported by Assam Forest Department, 38 Assam Rifles, Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)- India and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) at Umrangsu town, a hilly place of West Karbi Anglong. It is celebrated between October and November. A list of programmes are scheduled during this festival. Karbi, Dimas and other tribal groups of this region showcase their culture in the festival with the hope of attracting more tourists to the district for the tourism sector to get more exposure. Also, there is another reason for the celebration of this festival. The three days festival also aims at creating awareness among the people about Amur Falcons, the longest traveled migratory birds who roost near the scenic Kopli reservoir in large numbers.

Earlier the amur falcon were killed for consumption but with the successful initiative taken to spread awareness about these birds, the rate of killing the birds have shown significant

decrease and people across various regions come here to attend this festival to enjoy and watch the arrival of these birds. The programmes of the festival includes fashion show, Miss Grand Falcon competition, cultural function as well as exhibition to display various traditional cuisines and Handloom and handicraft products.

5). Kati Bihu

Bihu is the most important and the biggest festival celebrated in Assam. Kati Bihu also known as the Kongali Bihu is one of the three Bihu festivals celebrated in the state. The kati bihu is the festival of the poor and is generally celebrated in the mid of October when the crops are at the growing stage and the granaries of the farmers are exhausted. This bihu is celebrated by lightning candles or lamps or 'Saki' on the tips of bamboo poles in the fields and also under the tulsi plants and in the granaries to welcome Goddess Lakshmi home.

In the paddy fields, a special kind of lamp is lit called the 'akaxh bati' (sky candle) on the tips of tall bamboo. The cultivators/farmers chant spells to ward off any negativity and pests in the field and for the good health of their crops. The locals also celebrate the festival by lightning diyas in their homes and fields and perform cultural dance and organise feasts. The scientific significance of this festival is that, the lamps attract the insects of the paddy field and they fall prey into the fire of these lamps hence letting the crops be insect free.

6). Rass Mahotsav, Majuli

The integral part of the people residing in Majuli are their cultural events and Rass Mahotsav is one of their most important festival. It is celebrated in November every year at Majuli in the name of Lord Krishna with great triumph. In the Island, the various monasteries interpret the life story of Lord Krishna using different artistic and cultural forms such as masks, puppets, folk dances and songs and dramas. Raas is an autumnal festival which is observed on the full moon day of Kartik or Aghon month. This festival attracts a large number of domestic and international tourists. The yearly celebration of Raas Mahotsav also provides scope for many sources of income to its residents.

During this festival, Majuli becomes an authentic place for pilgrimage. In the three-days long festival, the Rass Leela of Lord Krishna is celebrated through the performance of various talented artist. Different segments of Lord Krishna's life is played out including his birth, mischief, His brave acts of killing various demons, His win over King Kansa and His acts

with the Gopis. It is also believed that during these three days the land of majuli becomes the abode of lord krishna and other divinely figures.

7). Rass Mahotsav, Nalbari

The history of Hari Mandir in Nalbari and Rass mohotsav is correlated. Rass festival is the main reason for which the Hari Mandir has earned it's present day reputation. The Raax festival in nalbari is celebrate with much glory and solemnity during the month of November. The festival is interweaved with the socio- cultural aspect of the people of Nalbari. The celebration is related with Rass Leela of Lord Krishna with the 'Gopis'.

The Rass Mahotsav in Nalbari is celebrated in the Hari Mandir. Along with this, a big mela is set up and the local people perform theatres to showcase and tell the stories of Lord Krishna's Rass Leela through their drama. It is also believed that the enchanting autumn moon followed by the gentle breeze made Lord Krishna pick up his flute. Thus, this festival is celebrated with great pomp creating a festive Ambience throughout the town and attracting people from different regions to visit the place to enjoy this authentic festival.

8). Assam Tea Festival, Jorhat

Tea festivals are celebrated around the globe to understand the importance of this beverage in human life. The Assam tea festival is the largest in India and is celebrated in Jorhat, a state of Assam as this place lies in the heart of the tea industry and is known for its extensive tea gardens, with much fun, music, joviality and lots of tea. Tea is the brand identify of Assam being the main tea producing region. The festival is held every year between the winter months of November and January.

This Grand festival attracts the tourists from several regions offering various activities such as stroll to the tea gardens, playing golf, safaris to the jungles in the state, tasting the delicious local food items and different kinds of tea. There are also other sport adventures such as rafting and golfing. Along with this, the locals also prepare some cultural music and dance events to entertain the tourists and make them feel warm. This festival mirrors the culture, beauty and the warm hospitality of the people of Assam.

9). Judima Festival, Haflong

The Judima Festival held every year onmid of December showcases the scenic beauty of the

hill district with the theme of preserving, promoting and nurturing the ethnic culture, music, folk art, dance and crafts of Dimasa tribals living in Dima Hasao district. This festival displays the expertise in brewing rice wine by the people of Dimasa. Apart from this, the festival also focuses to commence the idea of an alternative livelihood to the local brewers and to put Dima Hasao in tourism map of Assam in particular and in India to promote tourism related activities. The name of the festival 'judima' comes from the traditional rice brew of the Dimasa community which is unique in taste and is an important part of the Dimasa social life.

The events of the festival is planned suitably including variety of ethnic delicacies one can taste and fabrics and performances like traditional song, dance and sports, which provide a glimpse of life and lore of the people in the district.

#### 10). Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Dhubri

On the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra River of Assam, Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib is the Gurdwara of Sikhs in the town of Dhubri. Guru Nanak who was the first Sikh Guru visited this place in 1505 and met Srimanta Sankardeva, as the Guru travelled from Dhaka to Assam. Later, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib Ji who was the ninth Guru of Sikh religion stayed in Dhubri between 1662-65 and played a huge role as a pacifist to bring peace to the region that was torn by war between the Mughals and the Ahoms and the Gurdwara has been built on the spot where Guru Tegh Bahadur had stayed and negotiated peace during his time here. There are two shrines in the region Gurudwara Damdama Sahib and Gurudwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib.

Every year in the month of December, Sikh devotees from all over the world assemble in this Gurdwara to mark the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur with due dignity and rituals and participate in the Nagar Kirtan. This festival is also called as Sahidee Guru Parav.

#### 11). Dehing Patkai Festival

Once every year at at LEKHAPANI in the Tinsukia district of Assam the Dehing Patkai festival is celebrated. The festival was first inaugurated in the year 2002 by Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. The festival is organized by the Government of Assam to showcase the natural beauty of the region and to attract tourists into the state at the best time of the year. The festival aims to display the Assamese tribal culture and the name is given after the beautiful PATKAI range and the mesmerizing DEHING river. The celebration includes wide range of activities such as

community fairs, tea tours, adventure sports, and golfing. One of the important parts of the festival also includes a trip to the Tea gardens and the Digboi oil field. The tribal people take part to exhibit their traditional dance and music forms along with games and local fashion.

The festival is culturally rich and colourful, highlighting the lives of people of the region and also provides plenty of activities, live music, dance, and tradition. There are numerous such festivals in northeastern India to pay gratitude to the natural deities and one of those festivals in the Dehing Patkai Festival.

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