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# **ISTORICA**

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# ISTORICA

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**Editor:**

Uddipta Talukdar

Geethartha Kakati

Department of History  
LCB College, Guwahati- 781011.

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## Assam: Where culture breathes and Time Dances

There are places where culture lingers in the air, not as echoes of a distant past, but as breath in the present. Assam is one such place. It does not store its legacy in silence or stone. It sings it, stirs it, and serves it at every festival, every hearth, and every stage. To speak of Assam is to speak of motion of dances that remember.

The pulsating energy of Bihu, the floral grace of Bagurumba, the storytelling gestures of Ojapali and the entranced sway of Deodhani these are more than folk traditions; they are living languages that communities speak with their feet. In the Satras, that sacred confluence of spirit and structure, Satriya Sanskriti continues to unfold like a carefully choreographed verse. Here, through Jhumura, Behar Naas, and the resonant Gayan-Bayan, devotion becomes discipline and performance becomes prayer.

Even the art of mask-making: Mukha is not just craft but character, carved in reverence and worn in ritual. Assam's memory does not live in books alone. It moves from voice to voice in the ballads of Nahar, Joymoti, and Pioli Barphukan. These songs, carried on the wind, are fierce and tender telling of exile, love, resistance, and homecoming.

And always, there is food, not plated delicacy but story seasoned with time. From Khar and Masor Tenga, to Pani Hamuk and Haah Joha Kumura, every dish is a quiet act of remembrance. Each community Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa stirs in its own rhythm, yet the meal is shared. When Bihu arrives, it brings not just celebration but the warmth of kitchen fires and the soft aroma of Sunga Pitha. When the Misings ferment their rice into Apong, it is more than a drink it is a dialogue with the land.

Each festival, each feast, is a thread that ties past to present. As students, we inherit not only knowledge but memory, not only tradition but the call to renew it. Our task is not to preserve Assam's culture in glass but to let it breathe through us; reshaped, respected, and retold. For Assam is not merely a state on the map it is a rhythm - slow, sacred and always in the motion.

Editor:

Uddipta Talukdar

Geethartha Kakati

Jahanabi Saikia

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF ASSAM'S ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral traditions are a system of knowledge that are passing from generation to generation which contains a vast reserve of information about the surrounding and human society. The collective memories of the tribe descended from generation to generation took character of myths and stories. The native Americans had a rich history of oral tradition. Their understanding of the world is by telling stories and passing down from generation to generation by spoken language record the history, events and customs of tribes. According to concise Oxford Dictionary, Ballads are short poems or short stories of popular events. They are known as "Malita" in Upper Assam and "Akhya" geet in Lower Assam.

### INTRODUCTION

The word "Ballad" is taken from French word "Ballare", which meant "Dancing Songs". They were originally in Europe Middle Ages. There are oral tradition in Assam which can be classified as Ballads, according to Satyendra Nath Sarma, Ballads are divided into Mythical Ballads , Historical Ballads, Legendary Ballads, Satirical Ballads and Realistic Ballads. The Historical Ballads were, Naharar Geet, Maniram Dewanor Geet , Joymoti Konwarir Geet , Chikon Horihor Geet , Pothorughat Geet, etc.

So now lets discuss about these.

- NAHAROR GEET

Naharor Geet is regarded as the oldest Ballads by scholar like Satyendra Nath Sarma . The poet narrates in Ballads about the activities of Nahar , his trades and his relation with queen of Ahom king Khora Roja (1552-1603).

"Nahar senamua olai ratipua  
Chekure kurura bhar  
Dihingore pani kore tole bole  
Ghatoi e nokore par o  
Senamua kinu bulali muk"

(Nahar , the beloved in the morning seat trade but the load is so heavy that boatman is afraid to cross the river Dihing)

It tells the story of one person name Nahar Chetia, who was adopted son of Kanchani Konwari the 3 rd of Ahom king Siukampha alias Khora Roja . It is said that Nahar had an illegitimate relation with one queen of king for which he conspired

against and sent to a place called Mohongs for trade. However, he was executed and returned from trade by Chowdangs.

The Ballad of Nahar is popular in District of Shivsagar and Dibrugarh. The Ballad is generally sung in same tone as Bihu.

There has been authenticity of Nahar and also many debates on this authenticity of Nahar "Koshinath Tamuli Phukan" in Assam Buranji traces "Koshinath Tamuli Phukan" and the lineage of goldsmith named (Sonarir juke) . However Padmeshwar Gogoi in his "Tai and the Tai kingdom" validates the fact that the daughter of goldsmith called Kanchani was female attendant of queen Bar Mechlow and Haru Mechlow.

- **PIOYOLI BARPHUDKANOR GEET**

Apart from ballads of medieval age there are also some Ballads which describe the colonial struggle like Pioli Barphukan Geet , Jakhala Ghai , Rupachandra Konwar and Gahin Gohain.

"Chik chick soraighor tora baoni mele haat  
Khoj karhibo Nuwara lengera pioli  
Bongal mariboloi jao  
Khamti , nagati , gora , khasiyati  
Rangchila habite barmel bahiche  
Phiringi khediba buli"

Piolyol, the lame , went to fight against the Bengal (foreign men) with the help of the tribes of Khamti , Nagati or we can say the Nagas and also the Khasiya and Dafala Miri . There has been meeting held in the forest of Rangachila to discuss the plane to get rid of foreigners.

In another stanza –  
"Rangachila habite kone singa bojale  
Bholar pata bahi khunu  
Achola habiloi raj dhopolial  
Gamanat sabat boja"

Who has been blown the horn of war in the Rangchila forest. The sound of footstep even heard in the house far away

- **JOYMOTI KONWARIR GEET**

The Ballads of Joymoti Malita was written by Kripanath Phukan of Tingkhong , one the basis of the manuscript preserved in his residence. Later Umanth Phukan collected

Joymoti Malita from Kripanath Phukan and published in Bahit Joymoti Konwaror Geet. It refers to Joymoti as daughter of Madurai Laithpena Borgohain and later Chandradaru wife of Godapani who later became the powerful Ahom king named as Godahar Singha.

“Lechai Borgohain<sup>r</sup> jeik mor aita  
Chandaru sundaru Sundari bor  
Laithpena Borgohain deota hoichile  
Maduri chahrat ghor<sup>u</sup>”

(In this stanza poet gives introduction of Joymoti as the daughter of Laithpena Borgohain and Chandradaru who had lived in town of Maduri. This depicts growth of urban population at medieval period as term Chahar mean town in Assamese.)

Another stanza –  
“Maduri chaharat dangor hoi achilo  
Borgohain achilo ji  
Godapani Konware niye Tingkhole  
Choklong biyake de<sup>u</sup>”

(I was daughter of Borgohain and Maduri place, it was situated and later married to Godapani Konwar of Tungkhula clan. The marriage was according to ritual.)

- SONAMATIR GEET

Sonamati was a village lady of the place. Lan Bakata , Sivsagar in the reign of Ahom King Lora Roja alias Sulikapha. Sonamati helped prince Godapani from clutches of Chodgans of King during exile later on she was executed by the Chaodangs of Lora Roja in the river bank Diroi.

“Konwaror karone chaodange chamlat  
Tor chitikile tej  
Dirore kashote matir deh erile  
Bangohe napale sesh<sup>u</sup>”

(You have to satisfied yourself for the cause of konwar and breathed your last on the bank of river Diroi without knowledge of kins)

Sonamati is popular in village of Baksu and Bakata of Sivsagar district. The village of Bakata once served as capital of Ahom kingdom during the reign of Suklengmung shifted to Goragaon district. However culturally Bakata remain still heart of Ahom kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

One of the chief characteristics of Ballads is that all of them tragic in nature. There are no reference to name the poet or who composed them , except two. They have been traditionally kept alive by village elders whose sayings have been transmitted from generation. The ballad like Phukonor Geet, Mani Konwaror Geet which are mythical in nature. The Ahoms of the Sivsagar district used to sing in various occasion like custom called Howri (Harvesting) and Bihu.

The social and economic condition of middle age in Assam was not very distinct in writing the source called Buranjis in Assam. The Ballads play the role of bringing them into light, the affair of the common people. The Ballads or the Malitas are most tragic in nature and singer sing them in tone.

In Naharor Geet, trade route like Dihing and trading place like Mohong are mentioned. There has been evidence of either urban centre in Chikon Horiohor Geet as well as Joymoti Konwarir Geet. It might have been there was a historical person called Nahar who had been later turned into legend.

Mohong was a place for frontier trade between the Ahom kings and the nearby Naga tribes. The reference of the river "Dihing and Ghatol" show importance on both rivers in both trade and tradition purposes. There also have been extreme discontent against the Royal rule, where there or whether it be of Ahoms or British.

One more important aspect of Ballads is that they help us in the gender perspective of male poet or female poet had been seen , for example , the Naharor Geet , the attitude of male poet towards the female character had been seen.

Though it had been seen that Ballads have been noticed that it is different from the folklore/folk songs as it have not been specifically mentioned in the historical or mythical character.

The Bihu song describes about the beauty of nature and personification of natural objects with human had been seen. Though it is helpful in reconstructing historical or unknown period without absence of other source.

## MUKHA CULTURE OF ASSAM

Dipen Karjee  
Moumita Deka

The art of mask is common to many cultures around the world. Masks are used for various purposes in different cultures such for performance, hunting, rituals, etc. like every other part of the world, Assam has its own tradition of mask making also known as 'Mukha' in Assam and Majuli is one of the important sites where the art is still thriving.

The tradition of mask is primarily related to the performances such as cultural aspects of Assamese Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Sankardeva. Mask are extensively used in performances such as Ankiya Bhaona to portray different mythological characters, on-human characters.

A mask is a full or partial facial covering that is worn to control the human form. Since the dawn of human society, masks have been used. Its origin can be found in the historical sites of many regions in this regard, the 'Caremedu volp' of France, 'attamire care' of Spain and 'kundusi' of Tanzania, sites from Algeria, Libya, Sweden, Siberia, Canada, Peru, Egypt and Bhimbetka. In India masks are used by people for a variety of reasons. Man has made the mask in dance rituals dramas, folk songs, temples and different socio-cultural context, The materials like bamboo, cane, cloth, clay, etc. are used for making masks.

The art and tradition of mask making of Assam can be associated and traced back to the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam led and propagated by Sankardeva, the great saint. This movement brought revolutionary and unprecedented changes in the contemporary society and culture of Assam. This social and religious movement impacted upon every aspect of the contemporary society. The art of Mukha or mask making is related to the cultural aspect of this movement. Sankardeva used Ankiya Bhaona, as a form of dramatic performance, to popularize and educate people about his philosophy along with various other ways. The Mukha or mask were extensively used in Ankiya Bhaona. Sankardeva magnificently added new dimension in mask art of Assam. Ramcharan Thakur has described in 'Charit Puthi' that Sankardeva himself made mask of Gaduda and Brahma for Bhaona.

The art of mask making or Mukha is patronized by the Vaishnavite monasteries of Assam, known as Satra. This tradition flourished under the wings of these Satras. Currently, this tradition is still alive in few Satras like Khat par Satra of Sivsagar, Shamaguri Satra, Bihimpur Satra of Majuli.

Mask making is a traditional craft of Assam and is an integral part of Assamese culture. The artisans associated with this art contributed immensely to the social, culture and economic aspects of Assam. This art form has great potentials for creating employment opportunities and entrepreneurial activities for the youth. The mask making tradition is mainly followed in Samaguri Satra of Majuli.

## THE PROCESS OF MASK MAKING

Previously, the art of making mask was mostly transmitted from one generation to the next. Nowadays, anyone can learn the art of mask making and typically, they receive free training from the master artisan.

Mask –making in Assam is primarily related to the Bhoona – a Vaisnavite theatrical performance. Clay or papier-mache is applied over structures of bamboo and wood to make such mask which are painted with locally-made colours. The masks are traditionally made from naturally sourced materials such as-bamboo, potter's clay, handmade clothes, herbal and mineral colours such as hengul, hiatal,neel,dhol mati and angar. Although bamboo is extensively used due to its availability but wood, clothes, etc. are also used for this purpose. At first, mature bamboo is cut into segments measuring approximately three feet in length by a dao with one or two nodes in between. The Kathi is made from bamboo divided into splints. This piece is divided into four or five sections, with each section being divided into a number of splints. The basic structure for the mask is created of six thin splints that have been placed in a specific order. The base is made according to the characters to be played.i

In the second stage, the bamboo structures are covered with strips of normal cotton cloth soaked in potter's clay.

Once the base is complete, the mud is mixed with cow dung to shape the chins, nose, cheek etc. carefully. In the final stage, different colours are used to give the masks to suit characteristic attributes and other ornaments are also made and added for the complete effect.

## CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

There are many associated with the mask that reflects the society and its belief system. Masks are considered as with magical powers that transforms the performers into another realm. The masks are respected according to the character they portray. The masks are not just object of art but a part of many social and cultural events. Bhoona and Ankiya Bhoona are lyrical dramatic pheromonal in Satras and Namghars of Assam where masks are used. Rasa a dramatic tradition and festival of Assam also uses masks.

The khulia-Bhoorriya prevailing in the Darrang district has retained the element of masks particularly representing the demonic figures like Ravana, sub-human figures like Hanumana and Sugriva etc. Masks are an integral part of these festivals and events. Moreover, it is a continuation of a more than five hundred years old tradition and a cultural heritage.

**ETHNIC FOOD and DISHES In ASSAM**

**Sanjib Musahary  
Mayour Talukdar**

**INTRODUCTION**

Assam, a northeastern state of India, is renowned not only for its breathtaking landscapes but also for its diverse and vibrant culinary tradition. The ethnic food of Assam is a delightful amalgamation of flavors, ingredients, and cooking techniques, deeply rooted in the state's rich cultural heritage. Assam cuisine is characterized by its simplicity and reliance on natural, locally sourced ingredients, which makes it distinct from the cuisine of other Indian states.

Assam cuisine is the traditional food of the Assam. The cuisine is heavily influenced by the region's agrarian and fishing traditions, as well as the cultures such as Bengali and Tibetan. The staple food of Assamese Cuisine is rice, which is often served with a variety of meat, fish and vegetable dishes.

The cuisine is known for its use of locally – sourced ingredients such as fish, vegetables and variety of herbs and spices.

Assamese cuisine is known for its use of fish, which is caught from the many rivers and lakes in the state. It is prepared in different ways like smoked, dried or cooked with different spices and herbs. Some popular Assamese dishes include fish curry, fish fry, bamboo shoots fry, and dail. (a traditional Assamese dish made from fish and vegetables). The food generally mild in flavour and not very spicy. With generous use of ginger, garlic and chili peppers. The cuisine also includes a variety of fermented foods such as fish and vegetables, which adds a unique sourness to the dishes.

Assamese cuisine also features a wide variety of traditional snacks and sweet dishes, such as pitha (rice cakes) and payasam (a sweet pudding).

Additionally, the use of banana flavour and steam in their dishes is very common, it is cooked in various ways like in stews, curries, and even in fritters. Assamese dishes are said to be less spicy than any other Indian states. Assamese are mostly non – vegetarian, and their staple diet is rice. Fish, chicken, duck, pigeon and pork are widely eaten and quite popular. Fish curry which is prepared as a sour dish called Masor Tenga.

## KEY INGREDIENTS AND STAPLES

Assamese cuisine predominantly features rice as a staple food, often paired with fish, meat, and a variety of vegetables. Other significant ingredients include bamboo shoots, green leafy vegetables, mustard seeds, and fermented food. The use of herbs like ginger, garlic, and lemon is widespread.

## **RICE: -**

Rice is eaten as snack in many forms. Roasted and boiled in its husk and flattened (chira) puffed (akhoi). Kumal soul is rice that is pre – cooked, dried and then husked. It can be simply soaked in warm water and eaten as a light meal. Rice is a part of all meals in Assam. Rice is the most important ingredient in this cuisine. The large varieties of rice found in the region has led to speculation that the grain was first domesticated in Assam – Yunna regions. Both the indica as well as the Japonica varieties are grown in Assam. The most popular class of rice is the Joha or scented rice. As a staple, rice is eaten either steam boiled (ukhua) or sundried (aaroi). Some very fine quality of rice namely, karaballam or kauribadam, etc., are available in Assam only.

Rice is the staple food of Assam, served in various forms such as steamed, boiled or fermented. The state is famous for its unique varieties of rice like joha (aromatic rice), bora(sticky rice) and komol chaul (soft rice). A special class of rice preparations, called pithas generally made only on special occasions like the Bihu. They generally served with meat or fish. Sticky rice is also wrapped in leaves, usually plantain leaves or tora pat, and dropped into boiling water to prepare “tupula bhat”.

## **FISH: -**

The next most important ingredient is fish harvested from many rivers, ponds, and lakes in the region. Given Assam's abundant rivers and wetlands, fish is a crucial component of the local diet. Various fish species, both fresh water and dried are used in everyday meals and special dishes. The extremely wet climate and the large numbers of water bodies has ensured that large varieties of fresh water fish are available in abundance in the valley. It is a staple item in the Assamese palate. There is no traditional ethnic community in Assam that does not eat fish. Most traditional rural house have their own ponds for pisciculture. Some of the most popular big fishes are the boralis (freshwater dawk), rou and cital (big) fishes are the Khoris (medium), (chitala chitala), magor xingi, boralis, bhokua or bahu, xaal, xol, etc. The small varieties of fish available and eaten in Assam like puthi (swamp barb), ari (long whiskered catfish) goroi (green snake head/spotted snake head), koior kawoi (climbing perch anabas testudeniuss), kholithona (Indian paradise fish ctenops nobilis) boralis mua, bhangun, tengera, etc. The discerning gourmet can tell which region of Assam is known as which variety of Fish.

**MEAT and POULTRY: -** While fish predominates, meat and poultry are also popular, particularly pork, duck and chicken. Pork in particular holds a special place in the cuisine, often prepared with bamboo shoots and other local ingredients. The Assamese meat and fish dishes are characterized by a low amount of spices and oil. Higher

quantity of ginger, *noroxinghow paat* (curry leaves). Khorisa fermented bamboo shoots and lemon juices, differ completely in taste from the dishes of neighbouring Bengal and are quite similar to the cuisines of nearby south east Asian, and east Asian countries. Squab, mutton, duck and pork is very popular among the indigenous ethnic Assamese communities like Bodo, Rabha, Ahom, Moran Sutiya, etc. Upper caste Assamese Hindus such as Assamese Brahmins and Kayasths of Assam, Kalitas of lower Assam refrain from consumption. Beef is consumed by Assamese Muslim.

#### SPICES OF ASSAM: -

Assamese dishes are less spicy compared to other Indian cuisines. The use of fermented products like bamboo shoots adds depth to the flavors. Among spices there are ginger, garlic, onion, black pepper, coriander seed, white mustard seed, etc. Some herbs peculiar to Assam are dhaniya, ada, bhedailota, manimuni, thekera, etc. An Assamese meal is incomplete without green chillis, many varieties of which are available in the region. Assam is famous for the bhut jolokia or ghost pepper, which was recognized as the hottest chillies in the world. Pach – furran (mixture of 5 spices) is used for adding flavour to Dail. Dail was not originally eaten by indigenous people of Assam.

#### GREEN VEGETABLES: -

Assamese cuisine extensively uses seasonal vegetables and fresh herbs, commonly used greens, include mustard leaves, spinach and Colocasia herbs like cilantro, mint and basil are frequently used to enhance flavor. The environs of Assam are rich vegetation, and green leafy vegetables, called xaak are an important part of the cuisine. Some of them grown while others like the dhanla grows wild. There is a bewildering variety that is eaten and according to custom. One has to have 101 different xaak (greens) during Rongali Bihu. For Rongali Bihu, the Assamese new year, a special dish is traditionally prepared a concoction of “chok – ek bidh xaak or 101 varieties of local leafy greens and herbs, that is believed to be beneficial to health.

#### TRADITIONAL FOOD ITEMS OF ASSAM

Assam is a state known for its natural beauty, exotic fauna and tribal heritage. Every person who loves tea in the authentic form would know how dedicate Assamese tea gardeners are to its preparation. Besides this, the historical sites and wildlife sanctuaries are reasons to make it your next vacation destination. This state is truly special.

- **KHAR: -**

A signature dish of Assam, Khar is made with raw papaya, pulses, and the main ingredient – Khar derived, from filtered water through sun dried banana peel. It is traditionally served at the beginning of a meal and is believed to have digestive benefits. One of the most unique Assamese dishes that the locals love to devour on a regular basis is Khar. It is basically a dark liquid with an astringent aroma that is made from sundried. Bhim Kolor feathers back banana peels. This famous food of assam is best enjoyed with raw papaya, lentils. Different types of spices. Every tribal family has its own version of Khar that is mouth – wateringly delicious. Make sure to try this food item at a traditional street – side joint in assam on your next vacation.

- **MASOR TENGA: -**

A light, tangy fish curry, masor tenga is made with souring agents like tomatoes, lemon. It is refreshing dish, perfect for the hot and humid climate of assam. The people of assam love fish specially Rou and Chital. This is one dish that celebrates the state of this fish in their purest form.

- **PITIKA: -**

A simple yet delightful based potato dish, aloo pitika is prepared with boiled potatoes, mustard oil, and onions. It is often served as a side dish. Pitika is one of the most beloved food items in Assamese cuisine. This is because of pure comfort it gives you in every bite prepared. Using variety of vegetables like potatoes, pumpkin etc. It is flavoured with onion and mustard oil.

- **PAROR MANKHO: -**

Paror Mankho is a curry made with pigeon meat. It might sound too exotic for your liking but if you are a true foodie then eating unique dishes this pigeon meat is cooked with banana flavors and peppercorns. It is believed that the heat in this traditional food item of assam provides a lot of warmth in the cold winter months.

- **OU KHATTA: -**

Another unique Assamese dish is the Ou Khatta. Simply speaking, it is a sweet and sour chutney made from apple and jaggery. Even though it sounds like a fairly simple dish is lip – smackingly amazing in assam. It is one of the most food items served along with curries and rice.

- **PANI HAMUK: -**

Assam is a state that loves to experiment with its food choices. Pani Hamuk is a Tribal dish made of water snails, pumpkin and potatoes.

- **HAAH JOHA KUMURA: - I**

In Assamese, Haah or Haa means duck which is highly popular among the local population.

Haah Joha Kumura is a part of every feast being organized in Assam. Be it a house party or a wedding, this duck curry is a staple food. Since it is a heavily spiced dish with duck meat, you should have it with some Joha Kumura and Joha rice.

- **DOI CHIRA: -**

One of the most famous Assamese New Year festivities or Bihu food items served is Doi Chira. As part of the many mini – meals or Jolpan eaten at breakfast during the winter months, Doi Chira is the epitome of comfort food in this state. Prepared with beaten rice (poha), cream and jaggery. This is one of the sweet dishes you need to gorge on.

- **KHULASAPORI PITHA: -**

When it comes to breakfast items, the Assamese people make no compromises whatsoever. Khulasapori Pitha is yet another morning meal consisting of a rice pancake that is typically served with some red tea. The red tea, however is simply beyond its comparison.

- **BAAHGAJOR LOGOT KUKURA: -**

A refreshing chicken and bamboo preparation. Baahgajor logot Kukura is light, easy to digest. The aroma of bamboo shoots at an eatery serving this dish because it is very distinct and sharp. Just like you enjoy a plateful of chicken and rice, this is just an Assamese version.

- **PATOT DIYA MAAS: -**

If the sound of tiny river fish marinated in a branch of spices wrapped in banana leaves and then steamed makes your water like Niagara Falls. This food item is prepared with freshwater fish, coriander, mustard oil and chopped onions. Patot diya Maas is best enjoyed on its own or with some steamed rice.

- **XAAK AND BHAJI: -**

A medley of green leafy vegetables sauteed with minimal spices. Xaak and Bhaaji is a healthy and nutritious dish reflecting the simplicity of Assamese cuisine.

- **SILKWORM: -**

In some parts of Assam, especially among the Bodo communities. Silkworm are considered a delicacy, cooked with spices they are a rich source of protein.

Traditional Assamese food is known for being mild, flavorful, and minimally spicy, focusing on fresh ingredients, fermented items, and unique cooking methods like using banana leaf; key dishes include Masor Tenga (tangy fish curry), Khaar (alkaline dish), Pitha (rice cakes), Aloo Pitika (mashed potatoes), and the classic breakfast Jolpan (rice with curd/jaggery). An authentic Assamese meal (Thali) features lentils,

greens (xaak), chutney, fish/meat, and rice.

## **ETHNIC COMMUNITIES**

**Anushree Barman**

Assam is home to a multitude of ethnic groups, each contributing to the diversity of its culinary landscape. The Ahoms, Bodos, Mishings, Rabhas and other tribes have unique cooking styles and traditional dishes. For instance, the missing communities' fish and pork dishes are distinct due to their use of special herbs and bamboo shoots.

Assam is northeastern state of India, is known for its diverse and rich heritage, which is deeply influenced by its various ethnic communities. Here are some notable dishes and food practices from different communities in Assam.

### **ASSAMESE CUISINE (AHOM)**

The Ahom or Tai – Ahom is an ethnic group from the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Rice is a staple food. Typical dishes are pork, chicken, duck, slices of beef, frogs, many kinds of fishes.

### **BODO CUISINE**

Bodo food is characterized by a minimal use of spice and yet our meals are full of flavors, drawn from indigenous vegetables, herbs and fruits abundant in the fertile plains of assam.

**ONLA:** - A dish made from rice powder and chicken, with bamboo shoots and green leafy vegetables.

**RICE BEER:** - Locally known as “Zu Mai”, a traditional beer.

### **KARBI CUISINE**

The Karbi, a tribe in Assam, cook without oil or spice, using sesame seed powder and natural herbs like Lapongs leaves. Their dishes are enriched with garlic and tihaso wild turmeric.

### **ARONG (PORK): -**

Pork dishes often cooked with bamboo shoots.

### **RABHA CUISINE**

**SIDAL:** - Fermented fish paste used in various dishes.

**RICE BEER:** - Locally known as “JONGA

### **DIMASA CUISINE**

### **NAPLAM: -**

Fermented fish, similar to the more well-known Naga fermented fish.

### **TEA TRIBE CUISINE**

The cuisine is characterized by the use of local ingredients like rice, fish, meat and vegetables. The tea tribes also have their own indigenous alcoholic beverage, known as Handia, which is made from rice and fermented in earthen pots

**BENGENA KHAR:** -

A dish made with alkali extracted from burnt sundried banana peels.

**FISH COOKED IN BANANA LEAF:** -

A traditional method of cooking fish.

**MISING TRIBE CUISINE**

**APONG:** -Traditional rice beer.

**FISH TENGA:** - A sour fish curry made with indigenous ingredients.

**BEVERAGES**

The human migration waves from varied places over long intervals constitute the ancestors of the present – day ethnic communities of Assam in North – East India. During the course of assimilation people of this region developed the art of fermenting various perishable, inedible raw agricultural commodities into palatable, preserved and organoleptically superior food and beverages. Locally available biological resources such as cereals, legumes, bamboo shoots, milk and vegetables are commonly fermented by most of these communities.

Ethnic fermented foods such as Kharoli, Khorisa, etc. Rice based alcoholic beverages like Xaj – Pani and Sai – mod is unique to assam and carry the signature of rich culture and traditions. Bears the testimony people's knowledge in customary microbiology. Preparation of most of the fermented product is a woman – associated activity that has remind mostly home – based linking with and local market.

**ASSAM TEA:** -

Assam is generally famous for its tea, known for its strong flavor and bright color. Tea gardens in Assam produce some of the finest black teas, enjoyed worldwide. Assam tea is a variety of black tea made from the leaves of the plant *camellia sinensis* plant. Its traditionally grown in the northeastern Indian state of Assam. Assam tea is often describe as having a malty flavor and a rich, savory aroma. These distinct features are typically attributed to the teas unique production process.

**APONG:** -

A traditional rice beer brewed by the Mising community. Apong is an integral part of their cultural festivities. It is made by fermenting rice with medicinal herbs. Apong or Sai – Mod is the exceptionally tasteful traditional alcoholic beverage prepared by the Mising community of North – East India drinking's. It is their best beer from the time immemorial.

## FESTIVAL AND RELATED FOOD IN ASSAM

Assam a state in northeastern India, is known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant festivals. Each festival in Assam is often associated with unique and delicious traditional food. Here are some prominent festivals and related foods enjoyed during this celebration.

### BIHU

#### BHOGALI BIHU (MAGH BIHU) :

Celebrated in January month. It marks the end of harvesting season. Also known as Bhogali Bihu. It marks where a wide array of traditional foods is prepared, including meat, fish, and various sweets.

SUNGA PITHA: - Rice cakes made in bamboo tubes.

ii)MURI LARU: - Puffed rice balls.

#### BOHAG BIHU (RONGALI BIHU) :

Celebrated in April month, it marks the Assamese new year and the arrival of spring. This spring festival sees the preparation of various delicious food items. The first harvest of rice used to make different types of pitha and a special vegetable stew called "boror tenga" is prepared with fritters and souring agents.

PITHA: -

Traditional rice cakes, including till pitha (made with sesame seeds) and Narikal pitha (made with coconut).

LARU: - Sweet coconut or sesame balls.

iii)DOI SIRA: - A mixture of curd and flattened rice. ☺

KONGALI BIHU (KATI BIHU) Celebrated in the month of Kati, it is more solemn festival marked by lighting earthen lamps. Simple traditional meals, often vegetarian.

## **ALI – AI – LIGANG**

A festival of the Mising tribe, celebrating the sowing of paddy. The last day of festival called as “Lilen” is observed with a grand community feast.

## **APONG: -**

Traditional rice beer.

ii) **PORK: -** Pork dishes and other traditional tribal food.

## **iii)PURANG APIN:**

- (packed boiled rice) is cooked in water with special leaves. This is a special dish prepared by Misings which is cooked only during “ALI – AI – LIGANG”

**DURGA PUJA: -** A major Hindu festival celebrated with great enthusiasm. Durga Puja celebration is not completed without gulping down a plate of chillies along with tangy and sweet sauce.

i) **KHICHDI: -** A dish made of rice and lentils, often various served as a part of Bhog. Various sweets such as Gulab Jamun and Sandesh.

**EID: -** Celebrated by the Muslim community in Assam. The holy Ramdan families and friends of Assamese Muslims come together to share special meals and sweets. Various traditional Assamese dishes along with pulao, biriyani, etc.

## **CHRISTMAS: -**

Celebrated by the Christian community Christmas cake – Rich fruit cakes. Roast meats and other festive dishes.

## **MODERN ADAPTATIONS AND PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL CUISINE**

With modern globalization and modernization, traditional Assamese cuisine is undergoing transformations. However, there is a conscious effort to preserve and promote ethnic food through festivals and documentations. Restaurants in urban areas are increasingly offering traditional dishes, allowing people to experience authentic flavours. The ethnic food of Assam is a reflection of cultural diversity and rich natural resources.

## **Different kinds of Oral traditions in Bihar**

**Ansh Kumar Sarma**

Oral tradition is information passed down through the generations by word of mouth that is not written down. This includes historical and cultural tradition, literature and law. Oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature. This special nature derives from the fact that they are unwritten sources couched in a form suitable for oral transmission and that their preservation depends on the power of memory of successive generations of human beings. In many parts of the world inhabited by people without writing, oral tradition forms the main available source for a reconstruction of the past.

With the knowledge of the language and society, the anthropologist and historian can extract or reduce the historical content of oral testimonies. Based on the author's

many years of fieldwork in Africa, this definitive work explores the possibility of reconstructing the history of non-literate peoples from their oral traditions, surveys existing literature, offers a typology of oral traditions, survey existing literatures, and evaluates methods of collection and interpretation.

In short oral tradition is a story, tradition or practice that is shared orally and handed down generation to generation. In many societies, oral traditions have been eventually written down, Such stories can tell us so much about the society and the people who originated them.

By oral traditions we believe that it is about tales and fables, mythology, folk tales, folk songs, legends and epics, proverbs and riddles. But oral tradition can also throw light into subjects like astronomy, medicine and even technology. Knowledge and skills have been transmitted orally in the past. All in all, oral tradition is repository of culture as well as its vehicle. Although oral traditions are to a large extent identified with societies lacking a written tradition but they also exist in highly literate societies. However, oral traditions have played the most important role in documenting those societies without written records. It has helped in studying the historical, social, economic, and cultural development of such societies.

## Oral traditions in Bihar

### The folk tales of Bihar:

The folk tales of different regions represent the thoughts, ideas, mental state, traditions manners and customs and even the wit and wisdom of the people of the region. Apart from their entertainment value, they provide an insight into the present and past traditions and culture of the region from which they originate.

Bihar, one of the most important states of India, has a rich tradition of folk culture. "Panchatantra" the collection of famous Indian folk tales, has its origin in the telling of morality stories to the princes of Pataliputra (Patna – the capital of Bihar). Apart from folk tales, Bihar is rich in numerous ballads and folksongs sung on different occasions either in order to increase the efficiency of human labours or for recreational purposes. Similarly proverbs and riddles indicate a deep insight into worldly matters.

## **Ballad in Assamese literature**

**Minakshi Choudhary**

Every community has its own literature. Both written and oral forms are similar; the Assamese language also has folk songs, folk tales, ritual songs, etc., and folk tales and oral forms in abundance. The folk songs, folk tales, etc., are still continuing amongst people of ritual, generation after generation, in oral forms. In spite of the pressing influence of modern civilization. There are various types of literature in oral form, which have enriched the field of Assamese literature. In Assamese literature, ballads comprised one of the earliest components of Assamese literary works. The study of folklore shows a desire to replenish the urban culture from the source of primal nature. As the urban surrounding corner and the human existence are one, one looks for a retrospective innocence through this ballad. The present age has given to the life of the ordinary man a new valuation and a new significance. Many issues have cropped up, and we are trying to feel a natural kinship with the people of the soil. The oldest extant ballads so far known and discovered in Assamese literature are Phul konwar and Mani konwar. They are conspicuously old; these were not originally written

compositions but were transmitted orally from the bracket to generations thereafter. They are rather long and have novels with plots. The ballads reveal glimpses of Assamese life and society not only of the remote past but also of comparatively later times.

### Ballad in Assamese literature

Ballads in Assamese literature are narrative poems that tell stories and are often set to music. It is sometimes set to music. A ballad is narrative in nature; this means that it tells a story. The earliest ballads were not primarily meant for reading but for recitation. They were performed by travelling minstrels, often for the entertainment of the wealthy. The word "ballad" comes from the Latin word for dance, and it is likely that many of these ballads were danced to. In Assamese literature, ballads are called "Malita or Geet.". Ballads are typically written in an ABAB rhyme scheme, where lines one and three rhyme and lines two and four rhyme. It is often written in iambic verse, which means that every other syllable is stressed. Most ballads are written in quatrains or lines of four.

A ballad is a type of poem that is sometimes set to music. Ballads have a long history and are found in many cultures. Ballad is the Assamese equivalent to "Akhyangeet." To connote Assamese ballad, the word Malita is used. "Malita uses the word Geet" profusely. As for instance, Borphukanor Geet, Maniram Dewanor Geet, etc.

- Ballads are an important part of Assamese folk literature. Which also includes hymns, ritual songs, festival songs, lullabies, sayings, and folk tales.

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### TYPES OF BALLADS:

❖ Assamese Ballads are mainly divided into three broad sections

1. Historical Ballads
2. Mythological Ballads
3. Imaginative Ballads

❖ **HISTORICAL BALLADS:** The historical ballads in Assamese literature like Borphukanor Geet , Maniram Dewanor Geet, Gaurinath Sinhar Geet , Horadatta and Viradattar Geet , Paddo Konwaror Geet , Swarajor Nam. It is a prominent historical ballad in Assam.

❖ **MYTHOLOGICAL BALLADS:** Assamese ballads are often adaptations of Hindu mythological tales. They are characterized by simplicity, concrete Imaginary and dramatic forthrightness. The song of Jana-Gabhoruis considered to be one of the oldest mythological ballads in Assamese literature.

- **IMAGINATIVE BALLADS:** The imaginative ballads in Assamese folk literature are prominent like Phul Konwaror-Geet, Kamala Kunwaror-Geet , Madhumatir Geet etc. All these three types of ballads are narrative in nature.

## LYRICS OF BALLADS

Among the lyrical ballads in Assamese literature, Lilavati's song, Jayadhan Bania's song, Baramahi's song etc, are prominent. These songs were sung in lyrical tune. In these songs, the sad plight of the young woman whose loved one was living away for a long time is expressed beautifully.

## NOTABLE ASSAMESE BALLADS

❖ Some notable Assamese ballads in Assamese literature includes ➤

- BorphukanirGeet
- Maniram DewanorGeet
- Jana GabhoruGeet
- Konwaror Geet
- MadhumatirGeet
- Borgeet
- KamrupiGeet
- DeoriGeet
- GoalpariyaGeet
- TokoriGeet
- Horadattaand Viradatta's Geet

## NOTABLE POETS AND COMPOSERS

❖ Some notable poets and composers in Assamese ballads includes

- Jyoti Prasad Agarwala
- Hiren Bhattacharyya

- Nabakanta Barua
- Madhav Dev
- Sukavi Narayan
- Lakshminath Bezbarua
- Bhupen Hazarika
- Parvati Prasad Barua

**IMPORTANT THEMES OF BALLADS** Some important themes of ballads in Assamese literature

❖ **HEROISM AND VALOR:** Many Assamese ballads celebrate the bravery of historical figures or local heroes.

❖ **LOVE AND ROMANCE:** Love stories, often with tragic elements, are common in Assamese ballads.

❖ **SPIRITUALITY AND DEVOTION:** Devotional ballads emphasize religious teachings and moral values, with influences from both Hinduism and Islam.

❖ **CULTURAL IDENTITY:** Ballads in Assamese literature preserve Assam's rich cultural heritage,

- traditions and rituals through oral narratives.
- These ballads are not only entertainment but also serve as an oral history, preserving Assam's values, history, culture and tradition for future generations.

**FORMS OF ASSAMESE BALLADS** There are two prominent forms of Assamese ballads, they are

❖ **Geet:** Short, lyrical poems with a focus on melody.

❖ **Kabya:** Narrative poems which are longer, storytelling poems that explore themes in depth.

**KEY FEATURES OF ASSAMESE BALLADS**

➤ Ballads in Assamese literature were primarily transmitted orally, from generation to generation and are often accompanied by simple musical compositions.

➤ Assamese ballads explore a range of themes and folkloric themes and oral traditions.

➤ Simple language and rhythmic meter.

➤ Ballads have preserved the oral history of Assam's past, narrating tales and the times of the Ahom dynasty, Mughal invasion and local folklore.

➤ Ballads in Assamese literature were emphasis on storytelling and emotional

expression.

➤ Many Assamese ballads are deeply intertwined with folk culture, often performed in festivals, gathering, ceremony etc

## IMPORTANT TYPES OF BALLADS IN ASSAMESE

### LITERATURE

- ❖ Zikir and Zari : These are devotional songs introduced by Ajan Fakir , an Islamic preacher in Assam during the 17th century.
- ❖ Biya Naam : These are traditional wedding songs that narrate various ceremonies , rituals , emotional moments associated with Assamese weddings.
- ❖ Lokageet: These ballads tell stories from everyday life and many are based on folklore , mythological and rural experiences. They include songs of love , work , farming , rituals etc.
- ❖ Bhaonasongs : In addition to ballads , the Bhaona tradition created by the saint scholar Srimanta Sankardev , includes dramatic performance where songs tells stories of Hindu gods , moral lessons and the values of devotion.
- ❖ Bihu Geet : Though primarily festival songs , Bihu songs also carry elements of balladry as they narrate stories related to love , harvest and rural life during the Bihu festival.
- ❖ Jona Gaan : A category of ballads that talk about the ancient history and heroes of Assam. They are performed as a part of folk dramas and deeply embedded in Assamese rural culture.
- ❖ Deh BisarorGeet : These are ballads of funeral rituals , they narrate the journey of the soul after death making the spiritual and philosophical in Nature

## INFLUENCE AND IMPORTANCE

Ballads in Assamese literature are valuable as they record and keep alive Assam's oral tradition, capturing local beliefs, customs and socio-political events. With influence from Vaishnavism, Sufism and indigenous practices, Assamese ballads represent a fusion of various traditions, making them an essential part of Assamese identity and literature and contributed to cultural, Assamese folklore and traditions, nationalism. Assamese ballads are a vital part of the state's cultural heritage, offering insights into its history, traditions and emotions. The ballads or Malitas on the other hand are tragic in nature and the singer sings them in a mourning tone. This might have been a tradition to respect the deceased hero or heroine. Ballads play the role of bringing into light the affairs of the common people.

## CONCLUSION

Ballads in Assamese literature serve as more than just poetic or musical expressions,

they are crucial for understanding Assam's cultural, historical and social dynamics. These ballads offer insights into Assamese identity, values and traditions, ensuring that these stories and lessons remain relevant across the natural and spontaneous emotions of the people with remarkable vividness. It is the part of Assam's cultural fabric continuing to inspire and connect people with their heritage.

## FOLK DANCES OF ASSAM

Priya Sonar

**INTRODUCTION** Assam is the meeting ground of diverse cultures. The people of the enhancing state of Assam are an intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races evolved through a long assimilative process.

The natives of the state of Assam are known as "Asomiya" (Assamese), which is also the state language of Assam. Folk dances of Assam include the Bihu and the Bagurumba, the Jhumur, the Oja Pall dance. Assam is the home to many groups. Muslim, Indo-Aryan, Rabha, Bodo, Karbi, Mising, etc. These cultures come together to create an Assamese culture.

The state has a large number of tribes, each unique in its tradition, culture, dress, and exotic way of life. Many fairs and festivals are held in Assam. Among all the festivals in Assam, the Bihu is most noteworthy: it brings together all Assamese people, regardless of background.

- **BIHU DANCE: -**

- Bihu dance is the most popular folk dance of Assam and as its very name suggests is related to the Bihu festival, which is celebrated with glory within the state. The festival is mainly a celebration of the different phases of cultivation and is observed by all the Assamese. There are three types of Bihu festivals celebrated in Assam. Bohag Bihu, Kati Bihu and Magh Bihu. Bihu Geet sung during the festival season, accompany Bihu dance and have become almost like a heritage for the people of the state, the lyrics being handed down from one generation to another.

- **JHUMUR NACH (DANCE)**

- This is a typical folk dance performed by the tea community. Jhumur Nach or the Jhumur dance of tea garden. Boys and girls hold each other waist and

dance with exact precision of foot work. Watching them sway to the tunes of the song is indeed a very pleasant experience. The dance gets its name from the cluster of bells worn round the ankles, which makes a changing noise. It is believed that Jhumru was originally a mean of recreation between phases of tedious agricultural work.

- **BAGURUMBA**

Bagurumba is a folk dance of indigenous Bodo tribe in Assam and north east India. It is a traditional dance which is traditionally inherent to one generation to another generation. The Bodo women perform the Bagurumba dance with their colorful dokhona, aronia, and jwmgra. This dance is associated with the end of winter and the coming of spring. Bagurumba is performed as a part of the Bodo festival called Bwisagi, which comes around the Bishuba Sanskriti that in turn falls in the month of April. The Bagurumba plays an important role in the Bathow Puja of the Bodo tribes.

- **BARPETA'S BHORTAL NRITYA:**

Bhortal Nritya is known to have developed by Narahari Burah Bhakat. He was a well-known Satriya artist. This Bhortal Nritya of barpeta district is said to have derived from the classical dance form of the state. This dance is performed in a group of six or seven dancers generally and it can be performed in larger groups as well. It is performed to a very fast beat and beat is known as "Zhiya Nom".

- **ALI AI LIGANG DANCE**

This dance is highly popular among the Mising community of Assam. This festival is interlinked with agriculture and is celebrated during the Ahu Paddy cultivation. They also perform the dance to praise their deity- The Mother Earth. Ai means root or seed, Al means fruit and Ligang means sowing. This festival took place during the months of February and March. Tree cutting is forbidden during this season and certain exotic dishes are cooked. The dance form expresses the ups and downs of the main's life and is aptly portrayed.

- **DEODHANI**

Deodhani dance is a folk dance from the Indian state of Assam. It is a solo or group performance. It essentially comprises three or four women. This dance

form is associated with worship of the Snake Goddess Manasa or Maroi. A deodhani dance is generally performed to the accompaniment of songs sung by an Oja, an Assamese traditional chorus leader, during the dance.

- **ANKIA NAAT** Ankia Naat is a traditional one-act play from Assam, attributed to the 15th century saint and social reformer Srimanta Sankardeva. These plays are part of the Ekasarana Dharma and are performed to disseminate spiritual teachings through artistic expression, Lord Krishna. The term "Ankiya" means one-act in Assamese, while "Naat" means "Play". A particular presentation of an Ankiya Naat is known as a Bhaona, which is a community theatrical performance involving music, dance, and drama.

- **OJAPALI**

The Ojapali is the most distinctive folk dance from Assam, representing the rich tradition and cultural heritage of the state. An ojapali performance combines narrative singing and dancing interspersed with dramatic dialogue and action. Oja and Pali are two different chorus groups of dancers and singers. In this group, the Palis are "Assistants" of Oja means "leaders". Ojapali focuses on the stories from the epics and Puranas. It is associated with goddess Manasa's worship.

- **LANGKHON FUJA MISHAWA**

Langkhon Fuja Mishawa is a traditional dance of the Tiwa tribe of Assam. The people belonging to this tribe were originally known as the Laloongs. The Langkhon Fuja Mishawa is performed during the festivals observed in the months of November, December and January. The theme of the dances is man's relationship with dependence on nature. The dancers wear colorful traditional costumes and carry decorated bamboo.

- **BAIDIMA**

The Baidima dance is a traditional folk dance of Dimasa Kachari tribe, primarily performed during the harvesting festivals like the Busu Dima. The dance is known for its cultural significance and is a way for the Dimasa people to celebrate and express joy. The Bishu Dima Festival in Assam is one such occasion where the Baidima dance is a highlight, bringing together people from Dimasa – dominated regions to participate in this traditional festival.

- **GOALINI DANCE**

Goalini Dance is the most popular form of folk dance among the people of western Assam basically warmed up by the Koch - Rajbongshis. This folk dance

originated at a place Gauripur in Assam, the cultural centre of Koch – Rajbongshis from the myth of a couple of Assam. This traditional dance describes the process of harvesting. The dance which is performed by the wives of the farmers during the harvesting season, begins with a Laxmi Baran or invocation of Goddess Lakshmi.

- **BISUYO JAMA DANCE**

The Deoris of Assam are a riverine tribe that originally belonged to the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. They have preserved and maintained their traditions, religious beliefs and practices. The Bisuyo Jama Dance is one of the most attractive dance forms of the Deori tribe of North East Assam. The most important festival of the Deori community is Bohag Bihu. The young boys and girls spend the evenings dancing to melodious Bihu songs. Through this celebration, the Deoris pray for the peace and prosperity of the village.

- **FARKANTI DANCE**

The Rabhas believe that the souls of the dead are reborn in this world not only as human beings, but also as animals and birds, Tandalenka, Manchelenka and Batiktika represent the souls of the departed. During the performance of the Farkanti Dance, these birds are used as symbols of friendship and trust. This dance is performed after the death of a person, in the presence of the kith and kin of the deceased, his friends and community. Through the dance, prayers are offered to show reverence and respect to the departed soul.

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- **KUSHAN DANCE**

The Kushan Pala and Kushan dance is a folk-art form popular in undivided Goalpara district of western assam, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. This ancient, traditional and religious art form draws its theme from the Ramayana. In the Kushan Pala we find a union of song, dance, narrative and dialogue. The word Kushan is derived from the Sanskrit word "Kushilab". There are two types of Kushan play or dance, based on the musical instruments used - Bena Kushan