

Magh Bihu Or Maghar Domahi

Supplementary Reader : Vistas

Question and Answer :

1. Who is the writer of 'Magh Bihu or Maghar Domahi' ?

Ans : Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami is the writer of 'Magh Bihu or Maghar Domahi'.

2. When and why is the Magh Bihu celebrated ?

Ans : Magh Bihu is a post harvest festival widely celebrated in lower Assam including the tribals. It is a festival and enjoyment.

3. What is meant by Domahi ?

Ans : Domahi means junction of two months. The junction is the last day of the preceding month and the first day of the coming months.

4. Why is Uruka significant ? Or, Give a brief description of Uruka celebrations. Or, Give an elaborate account of the celebration associated with Uruka ,the important part of Magh Bihu.

Ans : The day before the Domahi is called Uruka. It is significant for the womenfolk. They get ready for the next day with chira, pitha, laru, curd etc. In fact Uruka is not a one day affair. Preparation starts for sometimes before the Uruka as fuel for meji and Bhelaghar had to be collected; fish had to be gathered from ponds and streams and if possible some meat had also to be gathered. In the tribal setting women prepare rice-beer. In winter it takes four to five days for the beer to get matured.

Temple like structures called mejis are built with green bamboo, dry banana leaves and hay. Bhelaghars are hut-like structures in which the builder lads spend the night. Family feasting or communal feasting are held in the Uruka night. The mejis and the Bleachers are burnt at the dawn of the Domahi day. People worship Agni in the fire of the mejis.

5. What like are the meji and the Bhelaghar ? How and by whom are they built ?

Ans : Mejis are temple-like structures made of green bamboo, dry banana leaf and straw. The Bhelaghar are hut-like in shape and made of the same materials as the mejis are. The lads build them. Among the Kacharis the cowherds build them.

6. How is the Domahi day celebrated ? Or, Give a brief description of Magh Bihu celebration.

Ans : Celebrations of Magh Bihu or Maghar Domahi commences with the burning of the meiji and the Bhelaghar. People take purifying baths and gather near the meji. Eatables are offered to Agni, the fire God. Brahmins or some elderly person shown blessings and put ash marks on the forehead. Half burnt sticks are taken home and placed in the garden.

It is believed that the ashes and half burnt sticks increase fertility of the soil. After burning the meiji people sing hymns, kettle drums and cymbals accompany of hymn. On the Bihu day rice and curry are not taken in the lunch. Chira, pitha, curd etc are eaten as lunch. Various sports events like wrestling, running, egg fight and buffalo fighting are held on the Domahi day. In the evening people eat rice, black gram and yam fry. On the Domahii day the kacharis feed the birds, fish and the animals like dogs. They take part in the various sports festival.

7. What are the different kinds of food items that people have for lunch on the Domahi or Sankranti day ?

Ans : People do not take the usual rice and curry on the Domahi day. No meat is allowed on the Domahi day. People take chira, pitha, curd, gur and so on in their lunch. Mah-karai a combination of roasted rice, black gram, sesame and pieces of ginger is a special preparation for the Domahi. Tekeli-pitha, sunga-pitha and sunga chaul are the favourite dishes for the Domahi. Tekeli pitha is prepared from salted rice powder steamed on the mouth of a small pitcher or a kettle. It is

something like an idli of large size. Chunga pitha is prepared from moist rice powder. The moist rice powder is put in green bamboo tubes and the roasted in fire. People add either salt or gur to the moist rice powder to get the derived taste. In upper Assam chungas - chaul is a favourite dish. Sticky Bora chaul is steamed in bamboo tube. When prepared the sticky roll is made into pieces and eaten mixed with milk and gur. People of upper Assam prefer fried pithas. Thus the home made delicacies abound in magh Bihu.

8. Describe the manner in which the kacharis celebrate their festivals during the time of Magh Bihu.

Ans : The kacharis are the most numerous tribe of Assam. They have similar customs. But such customs differ in certain aspects. Like the Assamese they too tie cord round the fruit tree. On the Domahi day they feed 'the flying, the sinking and the moving'. They feed the birds, the fish and the animals like dogs and pigs. They make a mark around the granary with water mixed with cow dung.

On the seventh day of Magh Bihu that is one if the sixth day of magh they clean the utensils and sacrifice fowls to Bathou, their God. Then they go out for magan singing carols and collecting eatables. Bhela Ghar (or bilaghar as they pronounce it) making and burning is a prerogative of the kachari cowherd. The Bhelaghar is burnt before the crows fly out of their nest. The leading cowherd prays for the glory of the village. He prays God so that diseases do not visit their village, that the village

remains full with paddy and riches and their cows grow as big and strong as the rhinoceros and elephants. Various sports events like wrestling, running, egg fight, buffalo fight are also held on the occasion.

9. Describe the difference kinds of sports events and martial games associated with Magh Bihu. How did the young people in earlier times prepare themselves for participating in martial art ?

Ans : One interesting feature of the Magh Bihu is the holding of various sports events. Such sports events are wrestling, racing, jumping, buffalo fighting and egg fighting. In earlier it was customary to take part in martial games like sword play and javelin throwing. From weeks before the magh bihu young people used to make camps on dry river banks and exercise themselves in martial art. Practising of martial arts helped in defending to motherland from aggressors.

10. How is Kati Bihu celebrated in Assam ?

Ans : Kati Bihu is celebrated during autumn. It has little public significance. It is generally celebrated within family circle. In the court yard a light is put at the foot of the Tulsi plant. Women and children sing praising Tulsi as lord Govinda's favourite. Tulsi plant is regarded symbolic of vrinda, a devoted of Krishna. Another notable aspects of Kati Bihu is that farmers does certain things for the protection of the crops. He plants a small bamboo in the field and lights an earthen lamp at its foot. He may also whirl a piece of bamboo and chant

certain mantras to protect the maturing paddy from the pests. Some people light akash-banti or the sky lamp hanging from tall bamboo poles. During the Kati Bihu the kacharis put lamps at the foot of siju cactus that is the symbol of the chief God Bathou. They also light lamps in garden and at the granary. As Kati Bihu is celebrated within the family circle, it is called having little public relevance.

11. Why does the writer say that 'the fire rituals have apparently an Indo-European origin' ?

Ans : Fire rituals are these associate with the burning of meji and Bhelaghar. Meji and Bhelaghar are associated with Magh Bihu celebrations. The temple like mejis and hut like Bhelaghar, are built with green bamboo, dry banana leaves and straw. They are burnt on the Bihu day.

They are set to fire before the crack of dawn. Fire God, Agni is worshipped by burning the meji and Bhelaghar. Brahmins or elderly person showers blessing on the gathering near the meji. Ash mark is put on forehead. Half burnt bamboos are strewn in the field and taken from and placed among the fruit bearing trees. Ashes and half burnt bamboos are believed to enhance fertility of the soil.

Europeans too light lantern and Midsummer fire. They too believe in efficacy of ashes and embers as means of fertility. Because it is observed both in Europe and India,

fire worshipping is called culture of Indo-European origin.

12. What is sunga chaul and how is it prepared and eaten ?

Ans : Sunga chaul is a kind of delicacy prepared during the Magh Bihu. It is favourite food in Upper Assam. Sticky Bora chaul is steamed in green bamboo tube. When prepared the sticky roll is made into pieces and eaten with milk and gur.