

Importance of *mohoho* festival in Assam

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The *mohoho* festival is celebrated in Assam. Assam is a land of fair and festivals. Most of the festivals are celebrated in Assam characterized the spirit of accommodation and togetherness in the diverse faith and belief of her inhabitants. This perfect fusion of heritage of her numerous races has made Assam the home of the most colourful festivals reflecting the true spirit, tradition and lifestyle of the people of Assam.

The major festivals celebrated in Assam are *bihu*, *baikho*, *rajini gabra*, *harni gabra*, *bohaggiyo bishu*, and so on. The people of Assam is also celebrated *holi*, *durgāpūjā*, *diwālī*, *Saraswatīpūjā*, *Lakṣmīpūjā*, *Kālīpūjā*, *idd*, *Biśwakarmā pūjā*, *Ganeś-chaturthī*, *muhammad*, *me-dām-me-phi* of the *tais* tribe the birth and the death anniversaries of *Vaiṣṇava* saint *Śrīmanta Śamkardev* and *Mādhavdev*. The tribal of Assam have their own colorful festivals like *Kherai pūjā*, of the *Boḍos*, the *Baikhu* and *Pharleantie* of *Rābhās*, *Āli-āi –ligang* and *Pagar* of the Missing tribes, the *Sagramisawa Wansawa* and *Laghun* of the *Tiwas*, *Dehing Pātākāi* festival, *jonbeal melā*, Brahmaputra beach festival, *Ambubāsī melā*, *Deodhānī* festival, *Rāsleelā*, tea festival, *Chavang kert*, *Kherai* etc. etc.

The *mohoho* festival of Assam is related with the agriculture. It is a folk culture. It is completely differ from the aristocratic culture. It is culture of unknown and unfamous village people. Acting, dancing, and singing all are performed in this festival. It includes songs, a line of poetry, an aphorism (actors speech), a legend dramatically song and drama. This *mohoho* festival is basically very famous in lower Assam than Upper Assam. People, basically in Kāmarūpa District, Goalpārā, Bāskā, Nalbari, and Darrang District. In some parts of Goalpārā district this festival is known as *Euri* or *Ori*, in Darrang District it is known as *mahau khunda* or *maih -kheda*, in Kamarupa District *mahau- hau* or *mahu-khunda*, in Nalbari district *bhāluk- diya* or *bhāl-bhālūkā* and in Barpeta district this

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festival is known as *bhāo –laliyā*. In Baska district this festival is known as *bāmbolpitā*, in Bajalia area it is known as *mahoho*, or *mahoho* or *mahaha*. The Śaraṇīyā-kachārī tribes celebrated this festival as *bhāluk-nachuā*, In North Goalpara this festival is famous as *chenai- hunay*. The hazañ people call this festival as *masmao-khedā* or *mah-kheda* and among the Muslim community it is known as *magan geet*. The worship of *sonāry pūjā* of Goalpara district is similar with this festival.

Famous scholar Pramod Ch. Bhattacharya says that the word *mohoho* is consisting with two words 'moh' and 'ho' where the word 'moh' belongs from Assamese word and 'ho' is belonging as the tribe Boro –kachari. According to some scholars, the word 'mohoho' is mixing of the three words 'mah', 'ho', and 'ho'. The meaning of the word is also controversial. Some scholars identify the word *mah* as buffalo and according to some other it means mosquito. Actually it is not clear, either it may mean mosquito, or the 'common biting gent or the wild buffalo. Some lines of *mohoho* song which means buffalo, are as follows-

Mohor singh hekar kekar

Tate pare māsrokā

Moh – mosquito, *singh* – horn, *hekar-kekar* – not straight, *tāte* –there, *pare* – fall, *māsrokā*- one kind of bird.

It clearly means the four footed wild animal. Another some lines of the *mohoho* song also indicate same meaning-

'o hari mohoho, mah khedibā tokān low'

O – oh, *hari*- lord, *khedibā*- to chase, *tokān*- stick, *low*- bring

It is also clear from the above meaning. Because, it is not necessary to pick fighting stick to chase away the mosquito such an insect. In Bodo language the word 'ho' 'ho' means chase away.

The background of the *mohoho* festival is based on the popular belief. This festival is celebrated on the day at the full moon night (*purṇimā*) of the Assamese month *Āghoṇ* (*agrahāyaṇ*). This festival is celebrated after sun-set upto the mid-night. This festival is related with agriculture. In this season, our crops are going to be ripen and it is the time when wild animals are comedown tour agricultural land to eat the ripen crops. The youth of our society united themselves to chase away the wild animals from our ripen crops and they also take some stricken stick

for that causes. The song *mohoho* relief them from their weariness fatigue. To some extent we may say that song *mohoho* occur at that wearing of time to make relief them.

Another meaning of the word *momoho* is mosquito. It can be elaborate as that after the month of *Āghoṇ* the tyranny of mosquito going to be very little in our village and according to common belief it is the result of *mohoho* song. In this way, in the *mohoho* festival, the rustic poet mix- up two types of song, one is chase away of four footed buffalo or other is the blood drinking mosquito.

The *mohoho* festival has two parts – song and dance. This festival is performed by the group of cowherd boys. There is no role of girls in performing singing and dancing. There is no limitation in the team. The team leader wears *bhāluka* (bear) like dresses. He wears mask as like bear (but it is not compulsory) and some long banana tree leaf or battle leaf in his whole body. The other boys wear Assamese traditional dresses as like *dhuti* and *kurtā* with *gāmosā* (one kind of towel).

Main characteristics of *mohoho* song:-

First of all the team enters into the courtyard of the household and give haridhani (vehement and simultaneous utterance of the name of Hari or Viṣṇu) i.e.- *O' Hari, O' Ram, Jaya Rama bolā, Jaya Hari bolā* etc. for the welfare of the family.

Secondly, the team wanted money or coin from the household throughout the song and not directly. For example-

Bāhar pāt pakā

Āmāk lāge takā

Bāhar pāt cikimiki

Āmāk lāge siki siki

Bāhar – bamboo, *pāt* – leaf, *pakā* – ripen, *Āmāk*- we, *lāge*- want, *takā* – money, *cikimiki* – brighten, *siki* – coin. Another one-

Ghagā ghagā ei māsar ghagā

Āi oi siki nedāh māne

Cotāl karim bagā

Ghagā – one kind of bamboo fish tramp, *ei* – this, *māsar* – catching fish, *nedāh*- don't given, *māne* – upto when, *cotāl*- courtyard, *karim*- will be done, *bagā*- white.

After finishing the festival they prepared a party from the collecting money or other things. This folk party indicates the unity of society. In this party all class and all kinds of people take part. They summon of all in this way –

Thupuri howāre thupuri howā

Kaṇā-kūjā ek- fāle howā

Thupuri howāre – gathered all, *kaṇā*- blind, *kūjā*- humpbacked *ek-fāle* - one side, *howā*- go

Another significant of *mohoho* festival is *bhālukī* dance (bear dance). We have already discussed about the dresses of this type of dancer. Actually the word *bhālukī* symbolized the stupendous power. The whole enjoyment of this festival depended upon this dancer. In the midst of the *mohoho* party an artist as like as *bhāluka* (bear) sings and dances very amazingly. All other artists move around him and singing songs with him with full joy. The song of *bhāl*- *bhālukā* is as like-

Bhāl- bhālukā nāsore higher high

Tumugilā nāsore higher high

Khantāgilā nāsore higher high

Pitāgilā nāsore higher high

Bhāl- bhālukā – the adorned artist, *nāsore*- do dance, *higher high*- explanatory word, *Tumugilā*, *Khantāgilā*, *Pitāgilā*- all these are *mohoho* artist.

At the end of the festival they burnish all the ornaments they wear. Because, the common people of the society belief that the things wear by *bhāl- bhālukā* are prohibited to touch the other people. It may be the cause of misfortune for one.

Fourthly, the *mohoho* artists make jocks with our grandparents through the *mohoho* song. They ridicule them very amazingly and create very enjoyable situation. They taste them in this way-

Āither gharor tuhor bāhā chali kānde ohā ohā

Āither gharor siṅgā kāci, buṛī hāge eko pāci

Āither gharor siṅgā dāo buṛī hāge eko nāo

With the participation of householder the program of *mohoho* song becomes very charming. The participation of the householder helps the artis to make the festival very relevant.

The other very peculiar quality of the *mohoho* song is that the householders are blessed by the *mohoho* team with complete devotion.

E.g.,-

Bhāl (prosperity) *hok* (become), *kuśal* (well being) *hok*; *gohālir* (cowshed) *garu* (cow) *bāḍak* (growing), *bhākherīr* (store -room) *dhān* (paddy) *bāḍak* (increasing), *gr̥hasthak* (householder) *etā* (one) *poicā* (coin) *dibar* (to give) *śaktimanta* (power) *karak* (done).

Another remarkable feature of the *mohoho* song is that, to make it rhythmical, the rustic poet content some unless thing. That is why all lines of *mohoho* song may not be meaningful. It is going to irrelevant. For example-

Ojhā māi halo lāj
Tini bāmuṅar tini kāj
Lāur pāt chakā makā
Āmāk lāge ṭakā ṭakā

This structure of *mohoho* festival is very easy going. It is free from any ritual and classics. It is purely natural and mixed with emotion, belief, and feelings. These songs are come orally or verbally from the mouth of uneducated common people for which grammatical structure is not correct. One artist started the song with special tone and the rest of other sung them like chorus.

Dance is also another important feature of the *mohoho* song. It is done by *bhālukī*. It is very particular that he going to the middle of the youth party through dancing and he is able to show himself as the centre of the party. The whole entertainment of the audience depended upon this team leader or *bhālukī*. The presence of mind of the artist can make audience happy and increase their pleasure very much. The art of the spirited youth encourage the audience to take part of the performance. Dance is performed differently in different places. Sometimes boys and the aged persons also take part in this dance.

The stricken stick is the main musical instrument of this dance. Sometimes they have broken the front part of the stick into small slices to make it musical instrument. The head of the team don't take the stick. In some places he carries on one lamp on his hand. At first the leader starts to singing the song and then the rest of other singing the same tone with digging the courtyard of the householder. They sung very loudly with deep tone and dance rapidly in order to chase away the wild animal. Although, they digging the courtyard heroically, in order to chase away

the mosquito or buffalo, yet, in reality both of these are not gone for that cause. Realistically, it is not appear, it use only as a symbolic dance. The dance represents the main theme.

In concluding *mohoho* festival is very peculiar festival in Assam. It is not like as other dances which are completely depended upon the hard practice. Its rules are purely oral and practical but not theoretical. The way of performing is very easy. The presence of mind of the artist can make audience happy and increases their pleasure very much. The art of the spirited youth encourage the audience to take part of the performance.

There is not any binding for singing the song. Their blessing is very valuable to the common people. Their gratification is very adornable. The householder gives money or husked rice. All artists of the *mohoho* party give them heartiest blessing and hold that honorable things. According to common belief childless pairs are get child and ill people also cure for the blessing of *mohoho* team. It also indicates the united power of the artist and in the people in general. It has similarity between the supervising of the residence of unmarried young men of some hill tribes or the united power of youth. With a view to guiding their crops the rustic people create this festival in primitive age. So this way, it also means the ceremony of the welcome of *Lakhimi* (Goddess of wealth) because it is the time of collecting of crops from the agricultural field. So, the *mohoho* festival takes a vital role in the heart of Assamese society which encourages the youth regarding cultivation.

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