

Celebrating Rongali Bihu



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It's that time of the year once again..... It's April and Rongali Bihu is there.

According to the Hindu calendar it is the beginning of a new year.

Being a hardcore axomiya(that is how Assamese is pronounced) Rongali Bihu makes me feel so at ease from deep within, that time of the year when promises are made and some broken, the cycle continues.

The Bihu folksong which every shop plays makes the market look so festive.

The dark chocolate red colour of Jetuka(mehendi) and it's smell is so nostalgic to me even today.

My aaita from my maternal side always said we need to apply the fresh paste of the jetuka leaves on the night of Goru Bihu(Where cows are worshipped) the first day of Bihu, on our both thumb nails, and toe nails. It would be applied then covered with a plastic foil followed by a clean white muslin cloth and left overnight. We would get up excited the next day to see the beautiful colour that the jetuka leaves have left behind.

The meaning and essence of Rongali Bihu has evolved since my childhood. Today far from home I have many wonderful memories to rewind back at every stage of my life celebrating Bihu, it has also quite unconsciously been having a different charm and meaning at this stage of my life. The transition and meaning has gradually moved on as I have also moved on from one stage of life to another without me making any conscious effort.

Celebrating Bihu during the 80's as a child. My early memories of celebrating Rongali Bihu goes back to Dikom a small place about 12 kms ahead of Dibrugarh and short of Chabuwa. Bihu meant new clothes to wear, getting ready for the first day of Bihu wherein cows are worshipped.((Goru Assamese word for cow). A paste of maah and halodhi(paste of urad dal and turmeric) is made and a wonderful and loving scrub is given to the cows.

My parents at that time had the privilege to be proud owners of a handful of huge wonderful Jersey(a particular breed of cows)cows. The ritual would follow and I and my sister would also take an active part in it, lovingly we would smear a little paste on their foreheads. The celebration of Goru Bihu would not have been so wonderful had it not been for the passionate, dedicated, and honest helpers like Thaga and Ramchokol. Such human beings are not to be found anymore these days. The species is on the verge of extinction. Many years have passed by. I was a young girl not even in my teens when I last meet them maybe more than two decades. Thaga has grown very old and so has Ramchokol, I take this opportunity to remember them and appreciate their hard work and loyalty towards us. God bless them and their families always. Then would come the trips to Xiboxagor(sivsagar) and Jorhat, home of my maternal and paternal grandparents.

Mamu and Piti my grandparents (piti is no more now) along with Iran mama would wait on the verandah anxiously for us to arrive with huge smiles on their face. Then to Jorhat there again my paternal aaita in her frail and petit figure would be there to welcome us. She would be ready with her special menu of Bihu food, her food was amazingly mouth-watering simple authentic Assamese vegetarian food cooked on firewood.

Celebrating Bihu as a young teenage girl in the 90's. The core essence remained the same, getting new clothes, visiting grandparents. Most of mine and my younger sister's teenage years were spent at Jorhat (I have been mentioning my sister quite often because she was always an integral part of those growing up years and continues to be even now we were and are like soul mates and the closest and only confidants in this world. I have never known life without her.) We were growing up to be big girls we got choosier about the new clothes that we would get, would not like visiting every household with parents apart from grandparent's house, and would love to spend more time with friends. The gradual transition, we now wanted the jetuka to be just not smeared on our palms but wanted patterns and designs. Unlike in other parts of India where mehendi is applied with various designs in Assam during Bihu it just smeared evenly on the palms no designs.

Would look forward for the many husoris(group dancers) who would visit every household blessing each member of the family with good health and prosperity. The Bihu dance which the husori troop would perform at every household in the neighbourhood is so mesmerising even non dancers like me would be tempted to join them such is the rhythm of bihu songs. We did not get to see this much as a child in dikom.

It is similar to the carol singers during Christmas which visits every house blessing each member with, loads of happiness.

Celebrating Bihu as an adult now. With 35 years behind me the flavour of Bihu is very different. When I look back I remember that every Bihu was just a time to be happy, be in the best of attire, and have loads of authentic Assamese food Jolpan, doi, pitha, tilor larur, narikolor laru, luchi bahji..... The list can just be getting bigger and bigger. It was understood that we need to be perpetually happy during April month as Bihu is there. It was taken for granted; honestly enough did not value it much. We tend to value less, moment we take things for granted. But why am I giving an explanation that is how life is designed to be, carefree, and just enjoying life as young growing up individuals as it comes by thinking that life always would be the same every time. I guess this is needed too otherwise when the going gets tough along with age and responsibilities we need those carefree childhood memories to cling on to and to bring a smile on to our face.

Bihu at this stage of my life is more of being thank full to the Almighty for blessing and protecting my dear ones from everything and keeping us all sound. Thank full that the bumpy roads that we all faced while completing our journey from last Rongali Bihu to this were not that rough that we could not get up and move on. Many are not fortunate to see this rongali Bihu like I and my loved ones have been this time. Feel blessed and appreciate that life has been very kind and just. I could have asked for nothing more than this.

On the larger canvass would love to see this planet to be more peaceful, that we respect each other and co exist peace fully. I pray and hope that a few handful of people who have strayed from the most basic understanding that we need to respect each other's life has a self realisation and an enlightenment that the venom of hatred and intolerance that has been spread, is only getting deeper and deeper. We would all be the losers in the long run. We need to begin fresh for there is still hope.

Our time spent on this planet is just a journey our final destination is never this place we all need to go up and be accountable for all our deeds in front of that supreme power. We would definitely not want to cut a sorry figure there. Up there, we are all alone with our good and bad deeds, nobody to pass the blame on too which we are so used to doing on this earth.

Things that have still not changed on this Rongali bihu is that I still feel excited about wearing new clothes, love eating pitha, khurma, tilor laru.

I guess this should never change under any circumstances.

Wishing everyone a very happy Rongali Bihu.

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