

Rongali Bihu organised in Wales



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Anne Rainsbury 18 May 2017 Updated 19 May 5968 views

Discover Assam – in Chepstow, a small town on the border of England and south Wales, welcomed members of the [Assamese community](#) from around the [UK](#) on Saturday, who brought with them a vibrant insight into the culture of Assam. Anne Rainsbury, Curator of Chepstow Museum had approached the London Bihu Committee to ask if their members might come to show how Rongali Bihu was [celebrated](#), [as](#) the exhibition of Vrindavani Vastra textiles there had opened to coincide with the festival. The enthusiastic response from the [UK Assamese community](#) brought [over](#) 30 people performing together to create a showcase of [Assamese](#) culture for the people of Chepstow.

The Drill Hall venue was transformed with costumes of [Assamese](#) silk, shimmering and rustling [as](#) the dancers completed their preparations, and a display of artefacts used in celebrations was presented and explained to the audience [as](#) they arrived from local Chepstow [as](#) well [as](#) other parts of Wales. The programme that had been devised by the Cultural Secretary of the London Bihu Committee, Zaved Choudhury, provided a wonderful mix of [dance](#), music and song interspersed with film and presentations that gave an insight into the country and customs of Assam.

Professor Dr Neera Borkakoti introduced the Chepstow audience to Assam, and what makes it a special place, with its world famous tea, and the one-horned rhinoceros, the massive [Brahmaputra](#) river and the world's largest river island of Majuli where monks still celebrate with masked [dance](#) dramas the same stories that are told in the woven Vrindavani Vastra textiles. Dr Jitendralal Borkakoti, [President](#) of the London Bihu Committee, delivered a learned lecture on the luminary Srimanta Sankrader and his pivotal role in the religious and cultural history of Assam, and to whom the textile tradition currently displayed in the Museum exhibition is attributed, [as](#) well [as](#) the dances and dramas which are still so vividly enacted.

Dr Shyam Saikia, [President](#) of the Birmingham Bihu Committee then introduced the first [dance](#) performance, - the Sattriya “Dashavatar” [Dance](#). London’s Luitporia [dance group](#) captivated the audience with a spell binding dramatic performance – even for those unfamiliar with the stories, their movements and facial expressions were compelling. This was followed by a haunting Borgeet, a devotional song also the work of Srimanta [Sankardeva](#), sung by Dr Dwigen Baruah from Swansea, Wales, accompanied by Dr Shyam Saikia (Taal) and Partha Borbora (khol) from Birmingham.

[Assamese](#) musical instruments were helpfully introduced to the audience by Neera Borkakoti, who also spoke about the Bihu festivals and showed how each was [celebrated](#) differently, and in particular about the customs surrounding Rongali Bihu, the food, the giving of gamusas, the songs and dances. This gave an excellent context to the joyous performances of Bihu dances. The men folk from the London Husori team took the stage first with the Husori Bihu [dance](#) with distinctive flinging hand movements, they were later joined by the women swaying their hips and moving lithely across the stage. The ladies also danced with their 'japis' their brightly patterned conical hats which they didn't wear, but moved making patterns together adding another dimension to the choreography of the [dance](#).

The infectious enthusiasm moved the audience sufficiently to respond to the invitation at the end to join in the [dance](#), and many took to the floor, including the mayor of Chepstow and the Chairman of Monmouthshire County who had both come to welcome and applaud the [Assamese](#) performers and guests. The Curator of Chepstow Museum who had introduced the afternoon with the story of how the Gown with its lining of Vrindavani Vastra textile had [found](#) its way to Monmouthshire and is now the centrepiece of the exhibition, also gave sincere thanks for a fantastic afternoon that had brought Assam to Chepstow.

There was an opportunity after the performance for the participants to visit the exhibition at Chepstow Museum 'Hidden in the Lining: [Krishna](#) in the [Garden](#) of Assam - the tale of two textiles' returning to the Drill Hall to a convivial meal, prepared by a local Indian restaurant.

The friendship and generosity shown by the [Assamese community](#) in the [UK](#), coming together, and coming to Chepstow was truly wonderful. It was a real privilege, [as](#) well [as](#) an exciting opportunity, to see this presentation and performance and to be part of the audience on that day.

Anne Rainsbury

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