

Editorial



Role of Bihu Culture in Sustainable Development



Environmental protection can be effectively done by celebration of some folk-cultures. There are enough environmental sense and activities which are performed in such functions as our tradition. The Bihu culture is also such a traditional culture where we get the activities for protection of Bio-diversity, control of pollution, a forestation and so on. Actually Bihu festival is a festival of farmers and they organise these functions relating to their agricultural activities. There are three different Bihu festivals which are celebrated in three different times of the year. The first Bihu is 'Rangali' or 'Bohag-Bihu' which is celebrated in the first week of Bohag (Baishak) month. The first day of Bohag Bihu is celebrated as 'Goru-Bihu'. 'Goru' means cow. At this day, the cows are bathed in the river, the cowsheds are cleaned, they are given gourds and brinjels to eat, bodies are polished by mustard oil and turmeric, neem plants are put in the cowsheds, and they are also smoked by some plants. All these are done to protect the cows or any such domestic animals from various diseases. Actually 'Goru-Bihu', is not only for the cows but for all the domestic animals. Without good health of domestic animals a farmer can not live happily and they also cannot progress in agriculture. The Goru-Bihu is actually such a culture which protect Bio-diversity and thereby help in the sustainable development.

The next function, which is very much important for sustainable development is plantation, is also performed in Rangali Bihu. This function is known as 'Gas-Bihu'. 'Gas' means tree. The 'Gas Bihu' means Bihu for the trees. This Bihu is observed for the trees. The time of Bohag Bihu is right time to plant the trees and the right time to grow the plants. At this time the farmers of Assam put Bio-manures in the gardens. Specially they put Cowdungs to the root of the trees. The bamboo is the most important tree for domestic use of Assam farmers. So they manure the bamboo trees at this time. The battle nut trees, coconut trees are also nurtured at the time of Rangali Bihu. They plant new trees in the gardens at the time of Rangali Bihu not only for fruits but also for fodder and fuels. They use special kinds of plants, flowers and fruits at the time of Rangali Bihu. They use orchids or 'kopow' flowers in the Bihu dance, they take neem plant in the first morning of first day of Bohag, they use herbs to clean the houses and also take some special herbs in their food to protect them from

diseases. As the gratitude to the plant, they offer 'Bihuan' - a fabricated handmade cotton cloth to the trees at last day of Bohag Bihu which reflect their great respect for plants and nature. But unfortunately, these traditions are going to be extinct from the society because of lack of a respectful attitude towards tradition by the so-called modern society. The modern society ignores such traditions of Bihu culture which have great impact on environment or sustainable development or they do not aware of it.

Another function of Bihu, which has a great role in pollution control, pest control or Bio-agriculture, is 'Kati Bihu', Kati Bihu is observed at the last day of 'Aswin' month. In the evening of this day the farmers plant Tulsi plant door to door, light 'Banti' under the Tulsi plant, garden, paddy field and also hang such 'Banti' (Light) on the sky which is known as 'Akash-Banti'.

Tulsi plant controls air pollution. It produces pure oxygen which can prevent the effects of polluted gases like sulphur-di-oxide, carbon-di-oxide, Nitrous oxide and so on. A mature Tulsi plant can control air pollution of 12 cubic meter area, in room temperature. Tulsi plant's leaves, branches, roots, flowers etc. are the ingredients of the medicines of many diseases. The flowers and fruits of Tulsi plant prevent infertility of the creatures including human being. So, tradition of plantation of Tulsi plant in Kati Bihu has tremendous environmental impact on nature or in the sustainable development.

Lighting in the paddy fields, gardens etc. are activities to control pests. Thousands of years ago, when there were no pesticides, the farmers controlled pests by lightening in the agricultural fields. This tradition is still followed by the farmers in the day of Kati Bihu. Without incorporation of any insecticides or pesticides, only by lightening the farmers can control pests in the agriculture. To control the insects of horticultural trees, the 'Banti' or light is lightened on high, which is known as 'Akash Banti', because the insects of horticultural trees live on the flowering areas on the trees.

But at present, such traditions of Bihu festivals are forgotten by the upcoming generation. They think that Bihu means Bihu songs and dances only. They 'enjoy' Bihu in the Bihu functions, in decorated stage but do not observe the traditions like plantation, nursing of animals, lighting in the agricultural fields etc. Aranya Suraksha Samiti, Assam a voluntary organisation has been trying to revive such traditions of Bihu festival which contribute in the sustainable development or environmental protection.

Dr. Hari Charan Das

Chief Editor,

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