

# From Community Feast to Consumer Space: The Emergence of Shopping Mall Culture in Bhogali Bihu Celebrations with Reference to Big Bazaar, Guwahati

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the transformation of Bhogali Bihu from a traditional agrarian, community-based harvest festival into a commercialized urban celebration within shopping malls, with special reference to Big Bazaar, Guwahati. Traditionally marked by communal feasting, Meji burning, and rural participation, Bhogali Bihu is now increasingly performed in consumer spaces. Drawing on theories of folklorism and the culture industry, particularly those of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the study analyzes how festival symbols, cuisine, and performances are commodified within mall culture. Based on field observation and interviews, the study highlights both the commercialization of tradition and the expanding cultural visibility of the festival in urban contexts.

**Keywords:** Bhogali Bihu; Shopping Mall Culture; Consumerism; Folklorism; Cultural Commodification.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term "folklorism" was specifically used in a broad sense to refer to both the ways in which the need for distinctiveness was fulfilled, reinforced, or awakened, as well as the interest in and nostalgia for things folk during a time when mass communication and industrialization seemed to result in a loss of cultural distinctiveness. The performance of folk motifs in different social strata, the deliberate imitation and production of folk-like features outside of any tradition, and the performance of traditionally and functionally determined aspects of folk culture outside of that culture's community context are the three forms of folklorism.

Bhogali Bihu, also known as Magh Bihu, is an Assamese celebration celebrated after harvest. This bihu is also known as bhogali bihu since there is a lot of delicious food created from farm produce during this time. In Assamese, the word "Bhog" refers to food. The name of the celebration, Bhogali Bihu, was derived from the term Bhog. On that day, the significance of the Uruka of Magh Bihu reaches its peak. In the open background, the locals host the communal feast of Uruka night.

On the eve of the day of Bhogali Bihu, young men enter the fields to build Mejis, which are houses composed of hay, fuel, and thatch that are burned the next morning. Bhelaghars, which resemble makeshift huts, are also built around these Mejis. The farming community in particular spends the entire night in these Bhelaghars, protecting the Mejis while enjoying communal games, dining, music, and

dancing to Bihu geets. The entire community gathers for a huge meal that is cooked over the night. People leave Bhelaghars at sunrise, take a bath, and then come back to Mejis to ignite fires. As a way to express gratitude for the harvest that has been gathered, edibles like coconuts and betel nuts are tossed into the fire. In order to get the Agni Devta's blessing for the upcoming crop season, people also pray to him.

In addition to being places to buy, malls can be used for entertainment, socializing, and rejuvenation. We can find everything under one roof in large retail establishments, including groceries, gadgets, shoes, and branded clothing. Malls have unquestionably altered Indians' shopping experiences. In terms of shopping, malls are undoubtedly introducing a new culture to Assam that differs from the traditional culture. A shopping mall is a collection of uniform and diverse stores that are next to a pedestrian walkway or a dedicated pedestrian street, allowing customers to easily move between them without being hampered by passing cars.

For the convenience of customers, malls are equipped with a full bank of escalators and lifts. Every culture in contemporary society is being impacted by the expanding influence of the cultural industry. The phenomenon of the culture industry, which has led to the commercialization and commodification of the festival's performative and material components, has had a significant impact on the Bihu festival during the past few decades. The more the event expands its accessories, the more commercialized it becomes, with corporatization's impact and the consequences of significant financial transactions at all organizational and performance levels. Heated discussions frequently have an impact on the environment, raising grave concerns that corporatization and excessive commercialization are harming the festival's natural splendor and atmosphere. Another increasing aspect of the festival is the reconciliation of the Bihu. The festival in all its colors is exposed to the media due to the growth of private media outlets, both print and television. Media outlets began creating reality shows instead of just supporting festival celebrations at community centers. TV series and other such programs, occasionally escalating the disputes surrounding the Bihu

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's 2002 book *Cultural business: Enlightenment of Mass Deception* emphasizes that the cultural business is a late capitalist development that includes both light and high entertainment. They argue that this is done in order to meet the demands of the mass capitalist consumer. Every cultural product is made with profit in mind. Every work of art is made into a consumer good.

Additionally, the authors claim that the commercialization of human conciseness is a result of the consumption of cultural products. It governs a person's ability to discriminate between good and bad art. People who are unable to critically analyze the culture that is being offered to them are being transformed into passive, subservient objects by the cultural industry. As a result of the dilution of distinctions and novelty, innovation is diminishing and all consumer goods use the same recycled recipe. As a result, people may easily digest stuff. The last point made by Adorno and Horkheimer is that the Enlightenment did not envision persons being reduced to transaction values under capitalism.

In an effort to draw customers, Big Bazaar, which is situated in Bhangagarh, Guwahati, is currently celebrating Bhogali Bihu.

### **Aim and objectives:**

1. How Bhogali bihu celebrate in Big Bazaar
2. To analyses how this celebration lays an impact upon the consumer.

**Methodology:**

The present study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws upon cultural studies, folklore studies, and sociological theories of consumption and urban space. The framework seeks to analyze the transformation of Bhogali Bihu from a community-centred agrarian festival to an urban, mall-mediated cultural practice within the context of emerging shopping mall culture in Guwahati. In order to investigate the research problem in a comprehensive and systematic manner, the present study employs both primary and secondary sources of data. The use of multiple sources enables methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Primary data have been generated through intensive fieldwork using qualitative research methods. The field participant observation method has been adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which Bhogali Bihu is represented, performed, and experienced within shopping mall spaces. This method has allowed the researcher to observe festive practices, consumer behaviour, spatial arrangements, and symbolic expressions in their natural settings, particularly within the selected mall environment. In addition, the interview method has been employed to collect first-hand narratives from selected respondents, including consumers and relevant stakeholders. These interviews have facilitated the exploration of perceptions, meanings, and attitudes associated with the celebration of Bhogali Bihu in a modern retail context, thereby providing rich qualitative insights.

Secondary data have been collected to supplement and contextualize the primary findings within existing scholarly discourse. These sources include research articles published in academic journals, magazines, and newspapers that discuss themes such as shopping mall culture, urbanization, cultural commodification, and festival transformation. Internet-based sources have also been consulted to access contemporary reports, digital archives, and relevant institutional publications. The secondary materials have been critically reviewed to establish the theoretical framework and to situate the study within broader academic debates.

**Analysis and Discussion:**

One big meji was constructed with ornamented jakoi, khalo, sepa which are agricultural materialspecially used in bhogali bihu (Fig-1,2,3)



**Fig-1**



**Fig-2**



**Fig-3**

It was demonstrated for decoration purpose. The concept of bhela ghar was also seen inside the

bigbazaar (Fig-4). Many stalls are seen who sell varieties of food items like laru, pitha etc which are special food items prepared in bhogali bihu (Fig-5). Celebration program schedule was 2<sup>nd</sup> January to 11<sup>th</sup> January. From 2<sup>nd</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> January competition was on children game, cake baking. On 11<sup>th</sup> January they arrange mega cooking competition on traditional bhogali cuisine (Fig-6).



Fig-4



Fig-5



Fig-6

In order to attract customer they have make one video which was released on Big Bazaar website.

Lyrics of the Bihu video was:

Ahil bihu bhogali

Mane kare dhemali

Til pitha narikal pitha laruae karibo mukh mitha

Apuni ahak khaji kasi

ghar hayai khunuwali bihur anandat uti jai

Pratitu usabat big bazaar

(bhoghal bihu has come and our mind become playful. The traditional pitha til ,narikal ,laru make our mouth sweet, you come here with style decorate your home it make you feel happy. In all festival big bazar is with you)

The banner hoarding were seen writing on bihu at the back side of the venue area where food competition was held.



Pratitu usabat

Big bazaar (In all festival big bazaar is with you)

bihur anandat rup hazar

Pratitu usabat big bazaar (bihu bring you enjoyment)

Fig-7

**Impact upon the consumer:** Those people who were seen in the shopping mall on that period saw that they were very excited regarding pre bihu celebration. Ujjal Aditya Barbora, HR of Big Bazaar says that they have got the very positive response from the buyer. Their basic motive was to popularised bhogali

biyu. Main view was that buyer will learn bhogali biyu items through shopping. As per researcher observation seen that mainly teen ager are more attracted towards pre celebration (Fig-8). Indeed big bazaar is success to attract consumer. Many buyers feel very good that their biyu is no more known by them only but outsider of the state also. Researcher seen that non Assamese people also participated in the food competition and made Assamese dishes (Fig-9). This is a very good sign that Assamese cuisine also popular among others. Items prepared by the participated of bhogali biyu cusine were traditional Assamese thali items like tilat dia hah manso, kath aloo bhaji, aloo pitikaa, amita khar, jalukiya murgi anja, amita khar. (Fig-10). Organiser also take the feedback from the customer about the competition. Many elder persons who come for shopping react positively. Customers congratulate big bazaar team for such kind of arrangement. Customers expect that in the days to come hotel menus surely include indigenous Assamese dishes and big bazaar is successful to give such kind of massage as student of hotel management who were non Assamese also participated in the competition. Big bazaar is success to make aware campaign to make Assamese cuisine popular among nationally and internationally.



Fig-8



Fig-9



Fig-10

## Conclusion:

Bhogali Bihu is the last of the Bihus and marks the time when all the hard work of farmers comes to fruition. Farmers work hard all through the year to grow the crops. It is during the month of January that farmers sell their harvest. The granaries filled with harvest bring immense joy to farmers. Apart from its cultural significance, Bhogali Bihu also has a lot of economic significance as farmers get money by selling their harvest. Shopping mall play very important role for commercialized their local product. Due to the advent of globalization and the increase in the share of other sectors of the economy like manufacturing and services, harvest festivals like Bhogali Bihu are losing their significance and mark as a important festival for selling their local product. But it still remains one of the most important festivals celebrated by the people of Assam. Most families have started buying laru, peetha, etc from these shopping mall instead of preparing them at home. But in the process, the traditional idea of preparing the feast and bonding over it is vanishing. This is especially the case in towns. The positive side to this change in tradition is that it saves time for the working class, as they are able to spend more time with the family. Changing of context lead the destruction of authentic way of celebration which was actually celebrate in rural setting when it shifted to urban setting. The growing popularity of pre-Bihu celebrations, especially in urban spaces, reflects a shift from traditional, family-based observances of Bhogali Bihu to more public and community-centered forms of celebration. With the rise of mall culture

in Assam, the festival is no longer confined to household rituals but has expanded into commercial and social spaces.

Today, Bhogali Bihu celebrations often feature stage performances, music, and dance programs organized in malls, attracting urban audiences. This transformation is influenced by changing lifestyles, media exposure, consumer culture, and marketing strategies, which have reshaped the way festivals are experienced and celebrated.

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