

# Bihu as Life Skill Education: A Tool for Mental Well-Being in Assam

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## Abstract:

The objective of this research work is to explore Bihu as a life skill education that enables the Assamese community people to cope with different mental health issues of their daily lives. Bihu is the most vibrant cultural festival of Assam which is celebrated three times in a year named Bohag or Rongali Bihu (mid of April), Kati or Kongali Bihu (mid of October) and Magh or Bhogali Bihu (mid of January). Bihu is the life line of Assamese people and all the daily-life activities of Assamese people is reflected on it. Additionally, different life skills are associated with Bihu festival such as self-awareness, creativity, problem-solving, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress, coping with emotion, resilience etc. These are reflected through different cultural activities like Bihu dance, Bihu songs, food, community gathering etc. Against this backdrop, different mental health issues like anxiety, depression, stress etc. are increasing rapidly among the community people of Assam. Therefore, if we incorporate Bihu with life skill education, that will be helpful to aware those regions where mental health awareness is limited and neglected. This festive environment reduces anxiety, isolation and promotes cultural identity which is very helpful for developing positive mental health. In this study, it is reflected that Bihu is not only limited to cultural celebrations; but also, it promotes coping skills naturally which in turn regulates emotions properly and supports mental well-being of the Assamese community people. Moreover, the researchers employed a qualitative research approach for collecting the relevant data from different primary and secondary sources such as participation, observation, different books, research articles, interviews, newspapers, etc.

**Keywords:** Bihu, Assam, life skill education, mental health issues.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Bihu is the popular cultural festival of Assam. It is celebrated three different times in a year on the basis of agricultural cycle. These are known as Rongali or Bohag Bihu (mid of April), Kati or Kongali Bihu (mid of October) and Bhogali or Magh Bihu (mid of January). Culture works like a mirror where it reflects that how people behave in a society. Folk culture has an attractive identity which is carried by local community people through different ways as music, dance, food, costumes etc. Irrespective of any caste, religion, community people celebrate Bihu and that is why it is possible to maintain co-operation, unity, togetherness among people. Bihu is the emotion of Assamese people and they believe that their identity depends on Bihu which reflects in Bihu songs-

“Bihure birina/pate xhomoniya

Bihure birina paat

Bihu thake mane Bihu ke binaba

Bihu gole binaba kaak?”

It reflects the emotional value and cultural identity of Bihu which means without people festival has no meaning and on the other hand without cultural identity human life has no existence.

### 1.1. LIFE SKILL EDUCATION:

Life skills are psychological competencies which plays the significant role for promoting mental health and well-being. Simply, life skills are those skills which is applied in real life situations. The definition of WHO on life skill as - “The abilities for adoptive and positive behavior that enables individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Life skill education is considered a person’s ability to maintain a state of mental well-being and to show those positive and adoptive behaviors while interacting with others.

UNICEF defines life skill education as basically being a behavioural change or development designed to address a balance of three areas- knowledge, attitude and skills. There are 10 core life skills, developed by the World Health Organization (Vij, 2022), are as follows:

1. Self-awareness
2. Empathy
3. Critical thinking
4. Creative thinking
5. Decision making
6. Problem solving
7. Effective communication
8. Interpersonal relationship
9. Coping with stress
10. Coping with emotions.

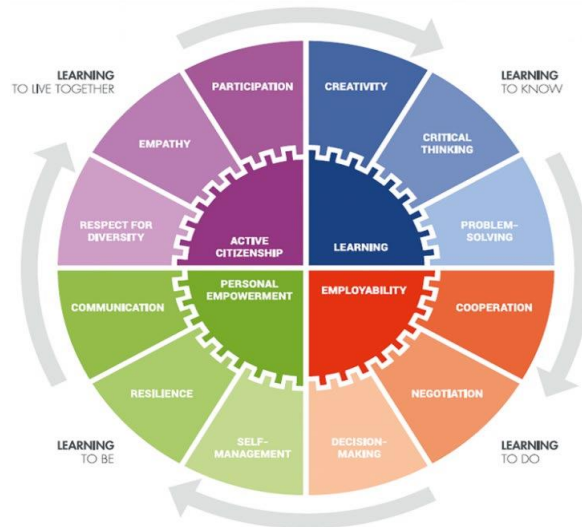
NEP 2020 has also emphasized Life skill education as a core component for transformative vision of Indian education system. NEP 2020 focuses on multidisciplinary, learner centric educational approach which integrates life skill education as a part of curriculum in different stages of education (Mandal, 2025). In every culture there is a scope to learn different skills to cope different situations of life where a child can learn various coping skills automatically from their individual culture.

Life skills are an ability that enables individuals to behave in healthy ways, given the desired to do so and given the scope and opportunity to do so. They are not a panacea. Effective acquisition and application of life skills can influence the way people feel about ourselves and others, as well as shape how they are perceived by others. Life skills contribute to our perceptions of self -confidence and self- esteem. Life skills therefore play an important role in the promotion of mental well-being. The promotion of mental well-being contributes to people’s motivation to look after themselves and others, and it also contributes to the prevention of mental disorders, and the prevention of health and behavioral problems.

The Delor’s commission report “LEARNING THE TREASURE WITHIN” (1996) mentioned about for pillars which supports holistic human education rather than traditional academic education. These four pillars are closely associated with different life skills which are required for personal fulfillment and different social progress which are needed to cope with different challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those four pillars are-

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to be
- Learning to live together

The Delor’s commission report 1995 states that “Education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of personal aims, besides developing the capacity for collective and peaceful living” (Delors, 1996).



Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Core-life-skills-listed-by-UNICEF\\_fig2\\_344956559](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Core-life-skills-listed-by-UNICEF_fig2_344956559)

## 2. OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this research study is to explore whether life skills are involved in Bihu festival and how these skills work for coping mental health issues.

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

This research work is entirely qualitative based research work. The researchers have participated personally to get data from primary level. Different secondary sources are also used in this study such as books, research articles, interviews of different Bihu experts and scholars etc.

## 4. FINDINGS:

The findings of the study have been elaborated below:

### 4.1. Bihu as a living life skill:

“Bohag mathu eti ritu nohoi  
 Nohoi Bohag eti maah  
 Axomiya jatir e ayoxh Rekha  
 Gono jibonor e xaah”

“Bohag is not just a season, Bohag is not only a month, it is the life line of Assamese people, the breath of public life” (Dr. Bhupen Hazarika). In this song Dr. Bhupen Hazarika meant to say that Bihu is very important for Assamese people, specially Bohag Bihu where community life reflects celebration properly. It is very evident that among the three Bihus, Rongali or Bohag Bihu is celebrated for seven days, hence also named as Xaat Bihu, which makes the cultural practices and rituals very vivid to people.

As a cultural human being, people can realize that their whole life is associated with several skills. However, it is difficult to find out the direct relationship between festivals and life skill education. That is why they have to consciously observe certain things which really leads them to find out this reality. By celebrating Bihu, an Assamese really feels special about Assamese community life. Because it reflects Assamese people’s daily life activities: wearing traditional attire, their food habits, their way of talking or communication, way of celebration etc. These practices are considered as life skills. Hence, it proves Bihu itself a life skill for Assamese people.

The renowned scholar Dr. Anil Saikia said in an interview that Bihu mane rong; Bihu mane raag nohoi. Bihu mane korbaat jodi kiba mila nai xheitu mila pritire, sokut soku thoi, kotha pati thik kori luar ek prosesta. Bihu mane ejone xhejonok sampritire akuali loar botor, which simply means Bihu stands for joy and celebration; Bihu is not anger. Bihu means doing things with love even if nothing is gained from it- smiling at each other, talking nicely, and solving matters peacefully. Bihu is a time to bring people closer and build harmony in the community (ND24, 2025).

#### 4.1.1. Emotional Expression and Coping through Bihu song:

Bihu Songs has its own tune, which makes it attractive as different musical instruments are used like Dhool, Pepa, Gogona, Toka, Xhutuli etc. Nature, love, life – everything makes a composition here. No other practice is needed for singing Bihu. Assamese people can easily carry it for expressing joy and enjoyment. Bihu songs embody the essence of Assamese culture by expressing the natural beauty of Assam, the imaginative dynamics of its people, diverse emotions, and heartfelt expressions, reflecting the culture, colour, and abundance of the region (Barua, 2016). The songs are composed of extempore, referring to natural environments and day-to-day life, which are appealing to the softer feelings. These are mostly simple love appeals – often times verging on what may be considered as obscene by modern people (Nath, 1948).

In Bihu songs, dance and different rituals of Bihu celebration, it is very evident that these shows various life skills which Assamese people practices knowingly or unknowingly. If we see different categories of Bihu songs, we can see that how people can convert their sadness, anger, emotions to a creative form.

a. “Hati herualu lihiri bonote

Ghura herulau ronot

Paio herualu xhorogor mukuta

Sutalor dubori bonot”

b. “Kunu ahi sui jai kunu ahi sai jai

Bukur apun buli koru kio bhul

Xhopun atori gole dithoke jonai diye

Bator kaxhor moi bonoriya phool”

These songs have shown the deep pain of losing someone special. These have shown how Assamese people can cope with different stressful situations. This reflects two different skills as coping with stress and coping with emotion. It learns how to be resilient in different challenging situations in one’s life. It also teaches communication should be clear and one should express every feeling. In ancient time Assamese people utilized their leisure times by creating Bihu songs, different postures of Bihu dance etc. in open spaces. Bihu songs were created by those people who had sharp memory power, comparison skill, intellectual ability.

a. “Bukare goroi mas bukate ghrile

Uprot urile bok

Monor kothaxhar monote thakile

Koboloi napalu log”

b. “Bisari bisari esari anilu

Gathi ghone ghone sai

Bihure tolite tumake basilu

Kolkal khamusia pai”

These are example of such songs which prepare an individual naturally to face real life situations and challenges.

Bihu was celebrated at that time when people had time to take rest, and before going to cultivation again they tried to keep their mind with full of positivity and happiness. From the months of Magh to Chot, with adequate food reserves and no immediate scarcity, people were largely free from worry and hardship (Prbachal, 2019). This sense of abundance and ease naturally created an environment in which stress had little room to take hold, even in the face of difficult circumstances.

#### **4.1.2. Food Preparation and Community Cooperation:**

Mostly at the time of Bohag and Magh Bihu different food items are prepared. All the persons of a household have participated to cook and prepare different food items. The elder persons learn from older person how to cook all the food items with proper measurement and ideas. It is identifiable that different life skills such as social participation, co-operation, decision making, problem solving and creativity are precisely a part of the whole cultural process. Traditional food items like Pitha, Laru, Doi, Chira etc. are also made during Bihu by using seasonal and locally sourced ingredients (Aharah Office, 2025).

Additionally, Assamese people eat 101 different plants by cooking in the same festive period which is called “AXHO ETA XHAAK”. They believe that it has some medicinal value which is good for keeping everyone healthy till the next year (Begum & Gogoi, 2007). Additionally, the use of different natural products in different needs makes this festival eco-friendly. They use banana leaves, bamboo, clay, handicraft etc., which teach them how they can protect their mother earth by using biodegradable products or nature friendly products. The traditional attire of Assamese people has been made by beautiful handloom fabrics as Muga, Eri and Pat silk. There is no use of synthetic outfits, chemical dyes and non bio-degradable fibres. Nahor, Kopou phool, Borhomthuri, Jetuka etc. are also an example of using natural products in Bihu celebration. Moreover, at the time of Kati Bihu people lights up earthen lamp to save crops from insects and make Bhela ghor at the time of Magh Bihu, are also examples of problem-solving and ecological awareness rooted in tradition. Collectively, these cultural practices constitute a powerful form of environmental education, demonstrating how life skills- from cooperation and creativity and creativity to critical thinking and environmental stewardship- can be meaningfully cultivated through cultural engagement.

#### **4.1.3. Bihu Dance as Physical and Mental Exercise:**

It is proven that regular physical activity helps to reduce different mental health problems like as anxiety, depression and so on and promotes mental well-being. When these activities become a part of cultural celebration and identity, it automatically fulfils psychological demands for mental wellbeing of community people.

There are three postures in Bihu dance. These are hand postures, the body postures and foot works. There are seven variations of foot works (Purbachal, 2019a). Along with cultural expression we can consider Bihu dance as a natural form of physical and mental exercise. Performing Bihu dance in a group automatically develops self-confidence and a healthy co-operative mood with fellow dancers and other performers. A good amount of energy and stamina is required to perform Bihu dance. Bihu can be considered an excellent cardiovascular workout which promotes different health benefits such as it improves heart health, decreases high blood pressure and reduces the risk of different heart diseases. The energetic and joyfulness nature of Bihu dance helps to reduce different mental health issues like anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness etc. and promotes the feeling of happiness and well-being. Bihu dance also increases body flexibility and balance, which has a positive impact on overall physical health and fitness. Bihu dance is more beneficial because it is not like traditional monotonous and boring workouts, instead it is a fun and engaging activity where people from every age group can participate (Tangella, 2023).

#### 4.1.4. Cultural Identity, Belonging and Resilience:

A strong sense of cultural awareness helps to keep a good mental health. When people feel a strong connection with its culture, history and tradition, they become more resilient and stronger to face any challenges of their daily lives. “*Ji nai Axomiya Bihu naamot xhi nai Axomiya xhanaskritit*”- meaning that Bihu songs have carried everything of Assamese culture- powerfully captures how deeply Bihu is woven into the identity of its people (UNTOLD Podcast by Aboyob Bhuyan, 2025).

This shared cultural identity also fosters a profound sense of belonging, as Bihu is a festival, where people from different caste, creed, religion and economic background come together in celebration. One of the most important pillars among four Pillars of Delor’s Commission “Learning to Live Together” is clearly reflected here. Different forms of celebration like as Husori, Mukoli Bihu, and making Bhela Ghor need mutual cooperation and community support, creating an environment where no one is left behind. These kinds of community practices automatically remove isolation and reduce the risk of anxiety and depression, reinforcing both belonging and emotional resilience among participants.

Bihu has also demonstrated remarkable cultural resilience by adapting socio-political challenges across history. At the time of Assam movement in 1980, Bihu itself turned into a protest platform and that is why Bihu is well-known for promoting “Cultural nationalism” (Bora, 2020). The following song reflects the pain, courage and collective strength of that era:

“Ujaye najabi                      Bhotiai najabi  
Potharot lagise jui  
Xhonor mati mur                      aji naikia  
Lukok khuaisu rui”

These lyrics signify an exemplary extent of Bihu, serving not merely as a cultural celebration, but as a source of collective strength and resilience in the face of adversity. The famous singer Zubeen Garg similarly used Bihu stages as a medium to develop political and cultural awareness, demonstrating how Bihu continues to affirm identity, foster belonging, and build resilience across generations.

#### 4.1.5. Vocational Skills and Economic Self-Sufficiency:

Bihu naturally promotes a range of life skills that extend beyond cultural celebration into the domain of vocational education and economic empowerment. There is a scope of vocational education in Bihu. Bihu can be a medium for imparting vocational education among people so that they will be economically self-sufficient for future. Different traditional arts like weaving Handloom products (Muga, Eri, Paat Silk), making traditional jewelries (Dhool Biri, Jun biri, Muthi kharu, Gam kharu etc.). making traditional instruments (Dhool, Pepa, Gogona, Toka, Xhutuli etc.) represents how vocational education is associated with traditional and cultural practices. In doing so, these practices cultivate essential life skills such as creative thinking, problem-solving, and self-resilience, which are fundamental to personal and economic development.

AHSEC has introduced Bihu as an elective subject for both class 11 and 12<sup>th</sup> students where there is a scope to learn many things associated with Bihu. This subject will help broadly to learn everything in a proper way and develop every skill to promote economic self-sufficiency among students. It may be handicraft, cultural tourism, event management, different traditional cuisine, handloom etc. By integrating these areas into formal education, Bihu becomes a structural medium for developing life skills such as communication, cooperation, entrepreneurial thinking, and self-management- all of which are essential for navigating real-world challenges and achieving economic independence.

#### **4.2. The connection between Bihu, Life skill and Mental Health:**

Life skill education is helpful for a good mental health. The WHO's definition of mental health clearly shows it as the ability to manage emotions, cope with stress, cope with emotions, build relationships and make sound decisions, which are the foundational aspects of psychological well-being. Absence of these skills show the intensity of increasing different mental health issues as anxiety, depression and so on. This is where Bihu becomes significant- as a culturally embedded practice that originally nurtures these very life skills within the Assamese community.

The practical presence of like skills in Bihu is very evident from the above sections. To reiterate the same, an Assamese person who grows with Bihu celebration learns different life skills such as emotional expression through Bihu songs, cooperation through Bihu dance and cooking traditional food items, decision making in Bihu preparations and celebration and resilience at the time of abundance and scarcity- as reflected in Kongali Bihu, the festival of modest means. These learning is more durable and meaningful than classroom learning because they are attached to lived experiences and cultural practices, making them deeply internalized rather than merely theoretical.

Bihu itself has measurable psychological effects. Cultural participation increases cultural identity, community gathering in different celebrations reduces isolation, anxiety, depression, stresses and develops positivity. Bihu song, Bihu dance and different craftwork show creativity and proper emotional expression. Hence, all the aspects as discussed above address the very life skills- emotional regulation, stress management, interpersonal connection and creative expression- that WHO identifies as essential to psychological well-being. In these ways, Bihu reduces multiple risks of poor mental health issues among community people and promotes effective factors to be resilient in any situation.

In Assam, where mental health services are not in a proper position, Bihu offers community level mental health resources that is accessible, non-stigmatizing and already connected with social life. This makes Bihu a uniquely powerful tool- one that bridges life skills education and mental health promotion through the natural flow of cultural celebration. Bihu is not merely considered for cultural entertainment, but it works like a vehicle of developing psychological well-being among community people.

#### **5. CONCLUSION:**

This paper has attempted to explore the multifaceted dimensions of Bihu as a living repository of life skills, demonstrating that cultural practices and life skills are not separate domains but deeply interconnected. Though the researchers had tried to touch different areas to show how Bihu itself a life skill, it is very difficult to distinctly categorize everything within the scope of a single research work. Notably, Bihu is a unique festival with no specific religious or ritualistic boundaries, which makes this folk tradition a powerful force restoring communal harmony as well as national integration in Assam.

How folk culture can provide happiness with song, dance, food is clearly reflected in Bihu. More significantly, Bihu shows how frustration, depression or any mental health challenges can be converted into creative expression, thereby automatically developing coping skills and the ability to solve daily life problems- core components of life skills as defined by WHO.

Bihu further helps in developing communication, and cooperation by involving people in its celebration in different forms. As seen across the sections of this paper, every dimension of Bihu- from food preparation to dance, from song to environmental practices- carries deeply rooted life skills that support the survival, growth and well-being of the Assamese community. In every folk culture, there are different life skills associated with it which help in the survival process, and Bihu provides the same opportunity to Assamese people in a uniquely rich and accessible way.

The introduction of Bihu as an elective subject for classes 11 and 12 by the Assam government is a remarkable step toward formalizing this cultural wisdom within the education system. It will be more beneficial if they will provide a scope to learn Bihu by every student as a compulsory subject as that would ensure a wider reach in imparting life skills through practice rather than theory alone.

Finally, the researchers acknowledge the unexplored option of Bihu as a tool for life skills education. The researchers, therefore, urges all the new researchers to conduct research work on Bihu to a larger extent and touch all the untouched areas of Bihu. As social change is a continuous process, Bihu also faces with different challenges. So, the further scope of different research works is needed here. Hence, further research is not only needed but essential to ensure that this invaluable cultural tradition continues to be recognized as a meaningful contributor to human development and well-being.

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