

Lesson-7

Culture of Assam



People set up societies in different places and stay there. Each place of habitation has an individual environment. In a country, people of different caste and religion stay together. They also follow some common rules, regulations and law. The caste, religion, language, education, ritual, customs, art, literature, etc. are the identity of the society and culture of a particular region. It creates a cultural environment in the society.



Festivals of various tribes and communities

Assam is the meeting ground of different castes and communities. Various castes and communities such as Bodo, Mising, Rabha, Karbi, Adivasi, Garo, Tiwa, Dimasa, Deuri etc. have been staying here since a long time. Besides, many people speaking Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, etc. are the inhabitants of Assam. The Assamese culture is formed by including all of them.

Each community in Assam has its own language, tradition, custom, culture, literature, festivals, cuisines, dresses and ornaments. It is to be noted that Assamese culture evolved out of all these diversities. In this way everyone together has formed the bond of unity. For this reason our culture is diverse.

Know from your teacher and parents and write-

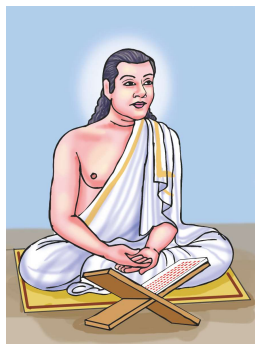
➤ Which are the tribes living in your locality?

People speaking different languages live in Assam. Each community mentioned above has its own language. Among these tribal languages, Bodo, Karbi, Mising, Rabha, Tiwa, Garo, Dimasa, Hmar, etc. are prime. Among the non-tribals, people speaking Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, etc. are the most.

➤ How many students are there in your class who speak other languages?

The word ‘culture’ is very wide and broad. Culture includes the civilization, literature, religion, language, food, dress, ornaments, conduct, ritual, principles, festivals, etc. When we speak of the Assamese culture, we understand all these aspects. The Assamese culture has also grown out of the unity of all the culture of the communities living in Assam which individually has its own identity.

Contributions of Srimanta Shankar Deva on the culture of Assam–



Srimanta Shankar Deva

Mahapurush Srimanta Shankar Deva has made notable contributions to Assamese culture. He propagated the Vaishnava Dharma in the Assamese society which has tied up everyone in a bond of unity. We cannot imagine about the Assamese culture without thinking about Shankar Deva. He had written and composed poems, plays and books and also created various musical instruments too. Kirtan, Dasham, Bhaona, Sabah, Namghar, Khol-Tal, etc. are a few of them. He has strengthened the cultural pillar of Assam.

The Namghar created by Mahapurusha Shankar Deva is known as ‘Jatia Natshala’ where in addition to Bhaona-Sabah, discussion is also made for the progress of the society. The Satriya Nritya created by him is at par with other dance forms of India. It has acclaimed National dignity and honour like other dance such as Kathakali of Kerala, Odissi of Odisha etc. This dance form has won name all over India. Shankar Deva and his favourite disciple Madhav Deva have given a new definition to the culture of Assam.



Satriya Nritya

➤ Another contemporary saint during Shankar Deva’s times made contributions in the field of Assamese culture. Do you know who he is? Know from your teacher and mention his contributions.

Let us learn about some elements that have contributed towards the growth of the Assamese culture–



The age old traditions and customs of Assamese society have kept the society in a systematic way. Offering betel nut and tea to the guests, respecting the elders of the family, taking blessings of the guru etc. are our social traditions. Lighting of earthen lamps near Tulsi plant during Kati Bihu, offering ‘Bihuwan’ to the honoured one as a mark of respect, praying in the prayer hall are some age old traditions and customs of our society. These traditions and customs have tied our society in a bond of unity.

Discuss in groups and write–

➤ How do you treat and respect the guests when they visit your home?

Language-

Assamese is the regional language of Assam. Language strengthens the foundation of culture and unites everyone to form a big and broad society. Language has two forms- one is spoken and another is written. Before Assamese language got its written form, it was used in various forms of songs and poems such as 'Bihu Naam', 'Aai Naam', 'Biya Naam'(marriage song), 'Nisukoni Geet' (lullaby) etc. Now all these are available in written form too. Similarly riddles, stories, phrases and idioms etc. are also prevalent. All these have kept the arena of Assamese culture vibrant.

➤ Write two riddles you know along with the answers.

Dresses-

The dresses of the people identify their community. The different castes and communities have their own dresses. Normally, the Assamese women wear Riha, Mekhela Chadar etc and men wear Dhoti, Cheleng-Chadar, Kurta etc.

With change of time, along with other changes, there have also been

changes in the aspect of dresses. People have started dressing up to adapt themselves with the changing time. The men have started wearing trousers, shirt, pyjama etc after the arrival of the British. The woman have also started to wear saree, churidar, pants, shirts etc. to adapt with the changing times.

Let us know the names of some tribal dresses-

| Tribes | Dresses of females | Dress of males |
|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bodo | Dakhana, phali | Gamocha, Aronai |
| Mising | Age gasor, Ribi Gaseng, Ger | Mibu Galuk, Gonru Ugom, Tongali |
| Tiwa | Saski, Phaskai | Thana, Tagla, Phaga |
| Dimasa | Rigu-Rijamphai, Rikhaosa, Jisu | Richa, Rimsao, Gainthao, Pagri |
| Karbi | Pini, Pekok, Vamkok, Seleng | Choi hongthor, Seleng, Poho |

Ornaments-

Along with dresses, ornaments are also of high importance in our society. From time immemorable people have loved to embellish them. Some traditional ornaments have been used in our society since a long time. Specially, women are seen to wear various types of ornaments during wedding ceremonies.



The traditional jewellery used in our Assamese society are- 'Keru', 'Thuriya', 'Jangphai', 'Lokaparo' etc. in the ears, 'Muthikharu', 'Gaam Kharu', 'Gotakharu' etc. on the hands, 'Dugdugi', 'Saatsari', 'Madoli', 'Galpata', 'Jonbiri' etc. on the neck, Noserling in the nose, 'Kapali' on the forehead, ring on the fingers etc. These ornaments have also been mentioned in the folk songs. Nowadays various types of modern ornaments have come into use.



Traditional ornaments

Learn from your teacher and guardian–

- Write the names of some dresses and ornaments used by different communities living in your area.

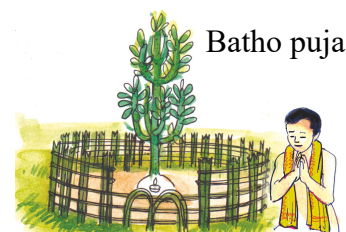
Festivals– Each caste and community has its own traditional festival, which is celebrated by every one from the community. The Bihu is the chief regional festival of Assam. It is celebrated by everyone irrespective of caste and religion. Bihu is an agriculture based festival. About 75 percent of the total population of Assam are involved in agriculture. Hence, all the Assamese people irrespective of caste and creed celebrate Bihu. There are three Bihus- Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu is celebrated in the Assamese month of Bohag, Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu is celebrated in the Assamese month of Magh and Kati Bihu or Kongali Bihu is celebrated in the Assamese month of Kati. The farmers sow seeds in the fields during the month of Bohag and reap the crops during the month of Magh. They pray for a green field and light earthen lamps to protect the crops from insects in the month of Kati.



Hacha-Kekan of Karbi Community
the culture of their communities.

Since the festivals are related with agriculture, thus every community of Assam celebrate Bihu in their own respective traditional ways. The Bodos observe 'Baishagu', the Misings observe 'Ali Ai Ligang', the Karbis observe Hacha-kekan. The Dimasas observe Busu Dima the Rabhas observe Baikho, the Deuris observe Baishagi etc. All these festivals reflect

There are some other festivals which are related with religion. The Kherai puja and Bathou puja observed by the Bodo, Chomanghan puja observed by the Karbi, Karam puja observed by the Adivasi are worth mentioning.



Bathou puja

Assam is inhabited by people of different caste- community and religion. The Muslims celebrate Eid. Christmas is celebrated by the Christians. The Sikh observe the birthday of Guru Nanak as Guru Nanak Jayanti. The Buddhists celebrate the day of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death as the Buddha Purnima. In this way some religious and social festival are celebrated in Assam.

Song, Dance, Musical Instruments–

The song and dance forms of Assam has also helped strengthen the foundation of Assamese culture. Besides 'Borgeet', 'Bihugeet', 'Bongeet', 'Husori', 'Mohkheda geet', 'Naokhel geet', Zikir, Jhumur dance, Kherai dance, Deodhani dance, Sattriya dance, Bhortaal dance etc. there are many other song and dance forms prevalent in our state. Along with the dance and song, various musical instruments such as 'Dhol', 'Khol', 'Pepa', 'Gagana', 'Taka', 'Sutuli', 'Taal', 'Bhortaal', 'Dotora', Bahi (flute), 'Tokari', 'Sifung' etc. are used which gives them rhythm. All these musical instruments are made indigenously.



Various local musical instruments

Look at the pictures and write-

- In what type of dance and songs are the musical instruments mentioned below used?
- Write the names of two musical instruments that you know. In what forms of dance are they used?



Putala Nach

Apart from narrating the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, stories of Manasa are also enacted in the Ojapali dance forms, where the 'Ojaha' explains them and he is accompanied by the 'Palis'.

Two other forms of dance forms prevalent from time are very popular now. Those two are '**Putala Nach**' (Puppet dance) and '**Ojapali**', The puppets are made to dance with the help of Sutradhar. The stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata are enacted through the 'Putala Nach'.



Ojapali

- Have you ever been to any social event? If yes, then write their names.
- What are the different festivals celebrated socially in your locality

Food–

Food is an integral part of culture. The people of Assam have some individual characteristic regarding food habit. The principal food of the people of Assam is rice. It is because the soil, air and water of Assam are suitable for agriculture. Rice is extracted from the grains. Besides, people make different kinds of delicacies from rice such as ‘Til Pitha’, ‘Ghila Pitha’, etc. along with ‘Chira’, ‘Muri’, ‘Sandah’, ‘Komol Chawal’, ‘Aakhai’, ‘Hurum’, etc.



Pitha, laru

The people of Assam also eat a variety of seasonal vegetables and fruits.

The culture of a society forms with the ways of behaviour, the way of speaking, addressing, greeting, dance, song, drawing, sports, etc. along with art and craft, tools and equipments, utensils, food, dress, customs and traditions, festivals, etc. which are all summed up together.

Let's discuss in groups-(take the help of your teacher)

- What are the customs and traditions followed to celebrate any one festival of your locality?

Let's learn–

Many people from different clans and communities came to Assam in ancient times. According to scholars, due to the facility of transportation people from China, Tibet etc. had come to India. Among them, the Austric were the most ancient. Moreover, the Tai and Mongolians had also come and settled in Assam. The influence of their cultures have also influenced the culture of the Assamese as per the language scholars.

Group Activity–

- Collect pictures of different community, dresses, ornaments, musical instruments, etc. and make an album (Teacher will help the learners).
- Make Rangoli with the help of your teacher or guardian using local and readily available materials (rice powder, flour, dry leaves powder, flower petals etc.)

The people of different clans and communities had established some monuments in Assam. These monuments are the representation and expression of their cultural taste as well as architecture. Let's learn about some of such monuments of Assam-

Some of the monuments of Assam–



Ranghar



Agnigarh

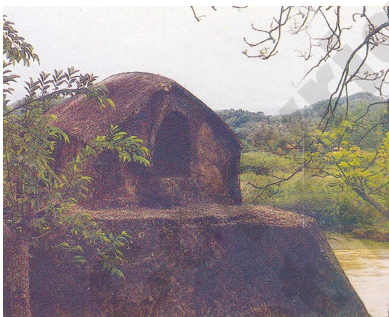
Suryapahar of Goalpara, Agnigarh of Tezpur, Maibong of Dima-Hasao and the Kachari have their monuments at Khaspur of Cachar. There is Rang Ghar, Talatal ghar, Kareng ghar and Charaideo Maidam at Sivasagar. Kamrup district has Madan-Kamdeva, Chandika Temple and Mer Ghar. All these are the symbol of our history.



Surya Pahar



Madan Kamdev



Stone temple/house at Maibang



Khaspur monument



Kareng Ghar

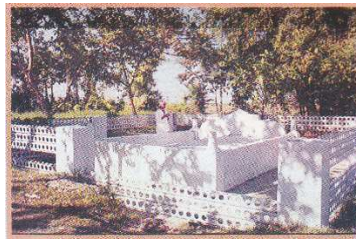
- Collect the pictures of different ancient monuments and make a wall magazine or album.

For the teachers–

- Plan a field visit to show your students the different monuments present in your area/district.



Umananda



Ajan Pir Dargah



Poa Mecca



Shiva Dol

There are different temples, dols, devalayas, satras, masjids in different places of Assam. These are Nabagraha, Kamakhya, Umananda, Poa Mecca, Haigrib Madhav Mandir of Kamrup, Shiva Dol, Joy Dol of Sivasagar, Auniati, Dakshinpat and Kamalabari of Majuli, Mir Jumla Masjid of Panbari, Ajan Pir Dargah of Dikhounukh, Temple in Bhuvan Hill of Cachar. These monuments are the symbol of our rich heritage.



Gurudwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur



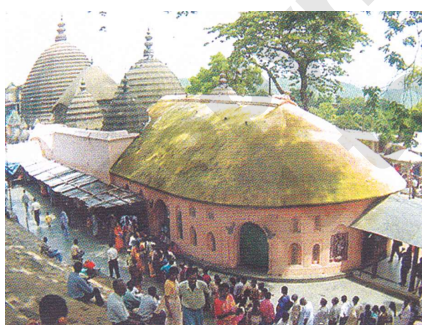
Mir Jumla's Mosque



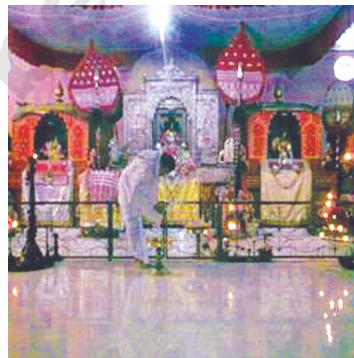
Haigrib-Madhav Temple



Bhuvan Pahar Temple



Kamakhya Temple



Auniati Satra



Kamalabari Satra

The ancient monuments, temples, dargahs, etc. bear the signature of our ancient history. We should know about all these. Thus, proper utilization and preservation of all these monuments is our responsibility. All of you have to be vigilant about all these monuments and if possible try to visit them.

Exercise

1. Write the answers-

- a) Write about two contributions made by Mahapurush Shankar Deva in the field of Assamese culture.
- b) Write the names of four Assamese jewellerys worn on the neck.
- c) Write the names of three dance forms of Assamese culture and three musical instruments associated with it.
- d) Write the names of four food items prepared from rice powder.
- e) Write the names of two monuments of Sivasagar.
- f) Write the names of two temples, two dols and two Satras of Assam.

2. Fill in the blanks-

- (a) -----is celebrated in Bohag.
- (b) Kherai Puja is celebrated by the-----
- (c) Bihu is the regional festival of-----
- (d) The Mising celebrate-----
- (e) Karam Puja is celebrated by the -----

3. Write ten lines about the contribution of Mahapurush Shankar Deva to Assamese culture.

4. Write short notes on-

- (a) Bihu (b) Puppet dance (c) Assamese Language (d) Sattriya Dance
- (e) Festivals

5. Match part A with part B

| A | B |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Tezpur | Temple of Bhuvan Hill |
| Kamrup | Gurudwara of Tegh Bahadur |
| Goalpara | Agnigarh |
| Dhubri | Poa Mecca |
| Cachar | Surya Pahar |

6. Draw a picture of a 'Xorai'.

