

Bihu workshop at Garbhanga Reserve Forest



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Very soon the atmosphere of "Rongali Bihu" will be on the air, and hundreds of participants will be flocking in various Bihu dance workshops in the state. However, in a unique development, the dull reserve forest of Garbhanga, in Assam-Meghalaya border has also echoed with the beats of Bihu "Dhol" for the first time, however not enough to bring back the lives of hundreds of trees felled like Michael Jackson's video song "EARTH".

What legs of strength and heart of passion does one needs to repeat and repeat the same Bihu dance steps for more than 6 hours at a stretch? Yes, this is more about passion and grabbing the opportunity that has knocked the village of Jalukpaham, in Garbhanga reserve forest for the first, and the girls know it for sure. For these village teenage girls who have so long spent their time in jhoom cultivation, fetching waters from streams, cooking, washing but hardly know about the outside world and its developing pace. The only fault of these girls is that they were born in Jalukpaham village, in the bordering Assam-Meghalaya border in Garbhanga reserve forest, a place though literally not far from Guwahati city, but the backwardness of this place reminds of the dark days of history.

It's for the first time these few girls of the karbi community have encountered with a Bihu Dance Trainer, Riju Talukdar, who had with all her heart stayed for a week in the village to teach Bihu dance. "It was difficult to teach them because they are too shy and now after a week things are getting better. Says Riju. By next year they will better, I believe, adds the young trainer.

Reema, saily, champa,rita,kaberi have little education and cultural knowledge, however they are very passionate of Bihu dance, thanks to the cheap Chinese mobiles and its video recording and storage functions that have reached the remote village where TV is out of reach because of non electrification. Mobile without SIM cards is the only source of entertainment for many young village folks. Luckily on other side of the border electricity is available for charging Mobiles. However for the fresh bihu dancers twisting their tongues with fluent bihu songs has become a big headache, apart from understanding the rollins and cuts of the Dhol. Yet, the relentless effort put on by a group of few young people from Guwhati, has yielded an average result within limited time. After a gap of a week the fresh dancers were at ease bending their bodies and other postures though at times they get puzzle with the Dhol beats. Make it easy more easier, keeps saying Sanjib Deori to Dhurva Buragohain as both concentrates at the dancers timing and the Dhol beats and the rollings while reharsing Bihu dance steps.

“O JAN Oi, ASOMIYAR RAIJOR UTSAV TINITI,
TINIURE TINITI NAAM, ETI NAM KONGALI,
ETI NAM BHOGALI ARU EITI RONGALI.”

Here goes the introduction as the girls pose singing the tune in a mild and sweet voice, And if everything goes fine they will be performing at a Bihu stage in Kalilipara during Bihu celebration. A very small step towards a new beginning, but will be a big dream for these village girls to perform in Guwahati. "We will dance this time for sure, but we don't know what will happen next year", says Reema. "May be I will get married", she adds. "Amar eyat sowali bilak hunkale biya hoi jai" (our girls gets married at early age). And this is so common in the village where education is almost at a nil stage in comparison to any town. My daughter got married last year, she was just 12 years old, says , a father who looks still young but his rough skins tells all about his toiling life and helplessness. The same story may very soon reflect the young Bihu dancer's life, thus a news beginning of their life may soon end with dejection. But, for the timing their happiness, enthusiasm and smile is all that matters.

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BY PETER ALEX TODD

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