

## READING WITH UNDERSTANDING (Losar and Bihu)



*Notes*

Ladakh, often referred to as the “Land of High Passes,” is a region in the northernmost part of India, known for its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant culture. Among its many cultural events, the Losar Festival stands out as a captivating celebration. Losar, meaning “new year” in Tibetan, holds immense significance in Ladakh as it marks the beginning of the Tibetan New Year. This festival, celebrated with great enthusiasm, features the cleansing of homes, colourful decorations, and the mesmerising Cham Dance performed by monks. The entire region comes alive with colourful lights, creating a magical atmosphere during this joyous occasion.

In the northeastern state Assam, the Bihu Festival is a cultural extravaganza deeply rooted in tradition and agriculture. Bihu, celebrated with fervour, signifies the stages of the farming calendar. The most important among the three Bihu festivals is Bohaag Bihu, also known as Rongali Bihu, which heralds the Assamese New Year and the arrival of spring. Farmers bathe their livestock, perform rituals, and engage in merriment marked by music and dance. Kati Bihu observes the middle of the agricultural cycle, while Magh Bihu marks the end of the harvest season, focusing on traditional cuisine, bonfires, and cultural dances like the vibrant Bihu dance.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this lesson, the learner:

- Analyses and evaluates different passages written in English;
- Interprets short theme-based passages by close reading, and answers questions on those passages.

Reading With  
Understanding  
(Losar and Bihu)



Notes

### 21.1 LOSAR

Ladakh, known as the “Land of High Passes,” is indeed a region of mesmerising beauty and charm. Located in the northernmost part of India, Ladakh’s unique landscapes, pristine scenery, and vibrant culture continues to allure thousands of tourists every year. One of the most captivating cultural events in Ladakh is the Losar Festival.

Losar translates to *Lo* meaning year and *Sar* meaning new. The festival holds particular importance in Ladakh, as it marks the beginning of the Tibetan New Year. It is celebrated with much pomp and show and holds a significant place in the hearts of the people of Ladakh as it typically falls during the winter months when the region is often covered in snow. Losar in India is celebrated with all the fervour that the festival sees in Tibet and Ladakh is a fine example of it.

The festivities begin by people cleaning up their homes and starting preparations for the performances that take place in various monasteries. Old items are discarded from homes, and bright and colourful decorations adorn each house. The *gompas*, or Buddhist monasteries, are decorated as part of the celebrations.

An integral feature of the festival is the ‘Cham Dance’, a masked dance usually performed by monks, where the dancers wear colourful and elaborate costumes and masks and perform the ‘devil dance’ signifying the triumph of good over evil. They perform and dance for the entertainment of the gods and followers who visit the monasteries to pray during Losar.

One of the attractive features of Losar is the way Ladakh lights up during this time. The entire region comes alive with colourful lights and prayer lamps adorning buildings, houses, monasteries, and shops. The visual spectacle transforms Ladakh into a magical wonderland, creating a magical atmosphere

Few days before the festival begins, the occasion of ‘khepa’ is observed, when people fetch small branches of a thorny bush and keep at their house doors to seek protection from the evil spirits

Losar isn’t limited to just one day of festivities; rather the celebrations extend for fifteen days as people welcome the New Year and celebrate agricultural prosperity. During this period, the community comes together to engage in various rituals and celebrations. People gather to offer prayers for blessings and good fortune, participate in traditional dances, and sing songs. They decorate the doors, walls of the kitchen and wooden columns with auspicious images of the Ibex deer and other symbols. Some individuals embark on pilgrimages to sacred sites like Mount Kailash as part of their spiritual journey.



The first day of the festival ‘Lama Losar’, meaning ‘the Festival of the Guru’, is marked by processions and grand feasts that are also offered to the gods and ancestors. On the second day people visit their relatives taking with them traditional gifts as the New Year’s greetings. The third day is marked by visits to monasteries with offerings of herbs, animals and demons made from a kind of dough. In the evening of the third day, there is a tradition of sky-gazing, where people look up to spot the first moon of the year, and offer prayers for a prosperous harvest.

During the festival time, the Ladakhis witness ancient ceremonies to represent the between good and evil, one such ceremony is the *Metho* ceremony wherein hundreds of people with flaming torches and chanting prayers parade on the streets to ward away the negative spirits and hungry ghosts.

What makes the Losar Festival even more appealing to tourists is that visitors have the opportunity to witness and participate in the unique rituals, songs, dances, and cultural performances that make this festival so special. It provides an immersive experience into Ladakh’s rich cultural heritage and enriches one’s understanding of the culture of this land.

Losar Festival has deep roots in Ladakh’s history and culture, serving as a unifying force within the community. The celebrations kick off with families coming together to offer prayers and sharing in the festivities. This sense of togetherness and shared traditions strengthens the social bonds among the people of Ladakh

In essence, the Losar Festival in Ladakh can be described as a grand, colourful, and exciting celebration that spans many days. It is a time of illumination, traditional dances, heartfelt prayers, and cherished customs that bring joy and unity to the entire Ladakhi community. It showcases the region’s rich cultural tapestry and offers a unique and memorable experience for both locals and tourists alike.

It’s Also a fascinating fact that Losar festival is not limited only to Ladakhonly bit is also celebrated in Kinnaur, Spiti, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh with fervour and joy, a time when people come together to welcome the New Year with prayers, traditions, and cultural festivities.

Reading With  
Understanding  
(Losar and Bihu)

---

**Notes****INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.1**

Complete the following statements by ticking the correct option from the given choices

1. Losar festival is celebrated to mark
  - a) the snowfall in the winter months
  - b) the season for crossing the high passes
  - c) the beginning of the Tibetan New Year
  - d) the arrival of tourists in Ladakh
2. The word *cham* refers to
  - a) a monastery
  - b) a type of dance
  - c) an elaborate costume
  - d) a mask worn in a dance
3. Which of the following does **NOT** happen before the start of the Losar celebrations?
  - a) people cleaning and decorating their homes
  - b) people getting ready for performing in monasteries
  - c) people keeping thorny bushes outside their doors
  - d) people trying to spot the first moon of the year
4. The *metho* ceremony involves
  - a) visiting monasteries with offerings
  - b) decorating homes with images of the Ibex deer
  - c) holding processions and grand feasts
  - d) parading streets with flaming torches



---

*Notes*

5. Tourists who come to visit Ladakh find the Losar festival very appealing as they can
- experience the rituals and cultural performances
  - go on a pilgrimage to sacred sites like Mount Kailash
  - enjoy visiting gompas and monasteries of Ladakh
  - wear the colourful and unique costumes of Ladakh
6. Which word in Paragraph 1 means *extremely fresh and clean as if new or in a very good condition*?
- mesmerising
  - pristine
  - vibrant
  - captivating
7. Which word in Paragraph 4 means the opposite of *defeat*?
- triumph
  - integral
  - elaborate
  - evil
8. Which word can replace the word *spectacle* in Paragraph 5 without changing the meaning in any way?
- vision
  - wonder
  - performance
  - sight

### 20.2 BIHU

Fairs and festivals are an integral part of Indian life. Many of these celebrations relate to harvest farming being the predominant occupation in India. Most of these festivals have their distinct cuisine, apparel, and festivities. One special festival from Assam, the

Reading With  
Understanding  
(Losar and Bihu)




---

Notes

Bihu festival, is celebrated by all the ethnic (cultural) and religious communities across the state. Bihu celebrations are said to date back to many centuries when people performed fire sacrifices to improve harvest. It is also said that the first Bihu dance was performed in 1694.

The word Bihu has two distinct meanings. The first meaning comes from the Sanskrit word *bishu* that means “to ask blessings and prosperity from the Gods” during harvesting season. The second meaning, as per belief, is by breaking the word Bihu into two, *bi* meaning “ask” and *hu* meaning “give”.

Bihu is the soul of Assamese life and is celebrated across the state with tremendous zeal and fervour to mark important phases in the farming calendar of Assam. There are three Bihu festivals with each of them having their own significance and their special traditions or celebrations.

Bohaag Bihu, also called the *Rongali* Bihu, is the most important of all the Bihu festivals. It heralds the Assamese New Year and the onset of spring. The word *rong* in Rongali denotes happiness and the festival falls at a time in Baisakh (mid April) when there is not much work for the cultivators, and there is a plentiful store to enjoy. Therefore, it is a festival of merriment marked by music and dance. Farmers take their livestock to a pond or river to bathe them, which is regarded as a holy process. They then make a *Mah-Haldi* paste from turmeric powder and pulses, which is applied to the body of the livestock. The animals subsequently fondle the twigs of *Makhiyati* and *Dighalati* plants.

Kati Bihu is celebrated in mid-October, during the middle of the agricultural cycle and marks the completion of sowing and transplanting of paddy (rice). It is a time when the farmers are facing a scarcity of food items and money. They hope the crops will be healthy so that they are able to reap a good harvest. Unlike the other Bihus, Kati Bihu is a modest festival and is a celebration of the poor. That is why it is also known as *Kongaali* Bihu. An earthen lamp is lit near the Tulsi plant which is called *Tulsi Bheti*. Lamps are lit in the paddy fields and prayers are offered to the Goddess for the wellbeing of the family and for a good harvest.

Magh Bihu marks the end of the harvest season. This festival begins with a feast known as *bhoh* (bhoj). Magh Bihu, also called *Bhogali* Bihu, is basically the festival of traditional cuisine. The eve of the Magh Bihu is called the *Uruka*, when family and friends get together and feast around a bonfire by offering special dishes, namely, *Maah Khorai*, a dish made with rice, sesame seeds, gram and peanuts and *Pitha*, a sweet made from rice. Young boys build *meji*, a temple-like structure in a field, with

green bamboo, dried banana leaves, and hay. The cowherds build a hut-like structure known as *bhelaghar* where they pass the night warming themselves by a fire. On the day of Magh Bihu, the breakfast *Jalpaan*, a meal served with *Chira* or flattened rice, *Akhoi* or puffed rice, *Bora Saul*, *Kumol Saul* (forms of native glutinous rice) along with fresh cream or curd and jaggery is shared with friends and family.

The most fascinating feature of the festival is the dance form, Bihu, which is traditionally done on the beats of drum, *taal*, *pepa*, *toka*, *baahni*, *xuluni* and *gogona*. People also sing traditional songs around a bonfire.

Another interesting feature of Bihu celebrations is bullfighting and bird fighting. These animal fights are very strictly guided and are traditionally a symbol of good luck.

Bihu dance has become extremely popular in various regions of the globe. On a memorable occasion for the state, in 2012 trained Bihu dancers presented the Bihu dance at the London Olympics.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.2

1. Based on your understanding of the passage given above, answer the following questions.
  - i. How is Bihu different from most other festivals celebrated in India?
  - ii. How did the celebration of Bihu originate?
  - iii. What is the meaning of Bihu?
  - iv. When is Bahaag Bihu celebrated? What is its significance?
  - v. How is the Kati Bihu celebrated?
  - vi. When is Magh Bihu celebrated? What is the significance of Magh Bihu?
  - vii. What is a *bhelaghar*? What is it used for?
  - viii. What do animal fights signify as part of Bihu festival?
2. Tick the correct option
  - i. Which of the following words from Paragraph 1 means *a style of cooking shared by a group of people*.
    - a) Apparel



Notes

Reading With  
Understanding  
(Losar and Bihu)




---

**Notes**

- b) Cuisine  
c) feast  
d) ethnic
- ii. Which of the following words from Paragraph 3 means *eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something*?
- a) soul  
b) tremendous  
c) zeal  
d) calendar
- iii. Which of the following words from Paragraph 6 is the opposite of *modern*?
- a) harvest  
b) traditional  
c) native  
d) basically
- iv. What is the feast consumed around a bonfire with family and friends on the night before Magh Bihu called?
- a) bhoh  
b) Maah Khorai  
c) Jalpaan  
d) Uruka
3. Complete the following passages with words/ phrases based on the information contained in the passage
- Bihu is basically a celebration of the (i) \_\_\_\_\_. Each of the (ii) \_\_\_\_\_ Bihu celebrations marks an important phase in the (iii) \_\_\_\_\_ calendar of Assam.
- Bihu has two very different meanings. The first meaning is to ask for (iv) \_\_\_\_\_ from God and the second meaning is by breaking the word Bihu into two, bi meaning (v) \_\_\_\_\_ and hu meaning (vi) \_\_\_\_\_. The first meaning is however a modified version of the term (vii) \_\_\_\_\_.



*Notes*

The most fascinating feature of the festival is the dance form, Bihu, which is traditionally done on the beats of (viii)\_\_\_\_\_ taal, (ix)\_\_\_\_\_ toka, (x)\_\_\_\_\_ xuluni and (xi)\_\_\_\_\_. People also sing their traditional songs around this (xii)\_\_\_\_\_.

Bihu dance has become extremely popular in various regions of the globe. It was a memorable occasion for the state in (xiii)\_\_\_\_\_ when trained Bihu dancers represented Bihu dance at the (xiv)\_\_\_\_\_.



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 20.1

1. c) the beginning of the Tibetan New Year
2. b) a type of dance
3. d) people trying to spot the first moon of the year
4. d) parading streets with flaming torches
5. a) experience the rituals and cultural performances
6. b) pristine
7. a) triumph
8. d) sight

#### 20.2

1. i. While most festivals are specific to race, community and religion, the Bihu festival is celebrated by all the ethnic (cultural) and religious communities across the state.
- ii. Bihu originated many centuries ago when people performed fire sacrifices to improve their harvest.
- iii. The word Bihu has two distinct meanings. The first meaning comes from the Sanskrit word bishu that means “to ask blessings and prosperity from the Gods” during harvesting season. The second meaning, as per belief, is by breaking the word Bihu into two, bi meaning “ask” and hu meaning “give”.

Reading With  
Understanding  
(Losar and Bihu)




---

*Notes*

- iv. The Bohag Bihu is celebrated in Baisakh (mid April).  
It marks the onset of spring and brings in the Assamese New Year.
  - v. On Kati Bihu an earthen lamp is lit near the Tulsi plant which is called 'Tulsi Bheti'. Lamps are lit in the paddy fields and prayers are offered to the Goddess for the wellbeing of the family and for a good harvest.
  - vi. Magh Bihu is celebrated in Magh or the middle of January.  
Magh Bihu marks the end of the harvest season.
  - vii. Bhelaghar is a hut-like structure built by the cowherds. They pass the night warming themselves by a fire.
  - viii. Animal fights are traditionally a symbol of good luck.
2.
    - i. b) cuisine
    - ii. c) zeal
    - iii. b) traditional
    - iv. d) *Uruka*
  3.
    - i. change of the seasons
    - ii. Three
    - iii. Farming
    - iv. Prosperity
    - v. ask
    - vi. give
    - vii. bishu
    - viii. drum
    - ix. pepa
    - x. baahni
    - xi. gogona
    - xii. Bon fire.
    - xiii. 201
    - xiv. London Olympics