The folk traditions of Assam encompass a great variety of occasions and events to celebrate. Farmers and agricultural workers have a dance to welcome practically every seasonal change. They dance with joyous abandon to create for themselves a slow dance, the text sung to the Bihu, the musician play the Kham (drum), Siphung (flute) and the Jotha (cymbals). The visual spectacle produced is one of regular and rhythmic linear movements intersecting at right angles; that the proper ritual is being celebrated or carried out. The dancers mould their bodies into various postures that symbolize a movement in nature or a spirit. The shamanistic dances of the Daudini (shaman dancer) are visual treats of frenzied and vigorous movements. The movement involved here is for the pantheon in the traditional dance arena (sali) of the kherai festival, which is a social and religious occasion of great significance for the Bodos. The body movements communicate primarily to gods, priests, and believers that the proper ritual is being celebrated or carried out. The visual spectacle produced is one of regular and rhythmic linear movements intersecting at right angles; it generates the effect of an essential maze. Around the ritual structure of the Kherai, in a semi-circular pattern, the musicians play the Kham (drum), Siphung (flute) and the Jotha (cymbals).

The Gumrag dance of the Misings is associated with the Ali-ai-licang festival which depicts the various activities of the Misings in their daily life. The movements in this
dance enhance the text they accompany. Repeatedly enacting the same movement can produce different results. The shaping of hands which in some way makes reference to flowers can be moved in such a manner that every change is a new metaphor. Another dancing event, Porag, takes place after the harvest. The neighbouring villages are invited to take part in the celebrations which lead to dancing and beating of drums. Though initially the event looks competitive, it finally ends in harmony.

The Haidang songs of the Sontual Kacharis, another important ethnic group in Assam, are performed by males and have very interesting body movements. Most of the body movements correspond to the Ojapali dance movements, which are performed by men in lower Assam and are an important component of many religious rituals. The bodies are swayed in gentle movements and in the Haidang, unlike the Ojapali which is confined to a particular place, the dancers moves slowly through the narrow lanes of the villages. They walk to the pace of humming bees clustered together. The girls welcome them with a dance that is performed inside a house.

A very colourful festival of the Tiwa community, Sagramasawa, has some beautiful dances reflecting youth, spirit and joy. The dance performed during the rice pounding activity is an exceptional creation which is confined to a particular place, the dancers moves slowly through the narrow lanes of the villages. They walk to the pace of humming bees clustered together. The girls welcome them with a dance that is performed inside a house.

The LOLK College, Dhekiajuli, Sonitpur, Lecturer (Selection Grade), Department of English, Neelakshi Goswami, Contemporary art in Assam is a seamless interface between the modern and the folk. Nowhere is it more pronounced than in the compositions and renditions of the iconic Bhupen Hazarika, Assam’s face to the world. He celebrates her people, her seasons and her sights as his songs draw their lifeblood from the villages of Assam. Thus, in his composition for the movie Aparoopa, the yearning for a time gone by is presented in terms of the different hues of nature and a desire for a long-lost village:

The folk landscape is perhaps the most enduring of images in Bhupen Hazarika’s songs; be it his serenading the evening of Shillong or celebrating life in the hilly frontiers:

(i) The Shillong evening
The dreamy city’s endearing autumn
And memories golden
Crossing the colourful markets

The delicate grass caressing the bare feet
By the side of the innumerable rivulets
The laughter and the slip
That made you and me almost fall.

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