



# A Study On Assamese Folk Lore, Traditions And Customs In Assam

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## Abstract

Assam is a land of rich cultural diversity, where folklore, traditions, and customs play a vital role in shaping the social and cultural identity of its people. This study explores the various forms of Assamese folklore including oral narratives, folk songs, dances and examines the traditional customs practiced by different ethnic communities across the state. Using qualitative methods such as field visits, interviews, and literature review, the research highlights the significance of these cultural elements in preserving Assamese heritage amid modern challenges. The study also identifies the threats posed by globalization and urbanization to traditional practices and recommends strategies for their preservation and promotion. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Assam's intangible cultural heritage and emphasizes the importance of safeguarding it for future generations.

**Keywords :** Assamese Folklore, Traditions of Assam, Cultural Customs, Oral Literature, Folk Songs and Dances, Bihu, Assam Festivals.

## Introduction

Assam, one of the most culturally vibrant states in Northeast India, boasts a rich and diverse heritage shaped by various ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. Its folklore, customs, and traditional practices form an integral part of the Assamese identity, offering a window into the collective wisdom, history, and artistic expressions of its people. Folklore in Assam is predominantly oral, passed down from one generation to another through stories, songs, dances, proverbs, and rituals that embody the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of different communities.

The traditional customs and practices of Assam are deeply rooted in its agrarian society and are closely linked to nature, seasonal cycles, and social occasions such as birth, marriage, and death. Major festivals like Bihu not only celebrate agricultural prosperity but also bring people together across caste, creed, and community.

In the modern era, many of these traditions face challenges due to rapid urbanization, globalization, and changing lifestyles. Yet, they continue to survive and evolve, thanks to the efforts of cultural organizations, scholars, and communities determined to preserve their heritage.

This study aims to explore the various aspects of Assamese folklore, traditions, and customs, highlighting their cultural significance and examining their role in shaping the identity and social fabric of Assam.

## Significance of the Present Study

The present study holds great significance as it aims to preserve, document, and analyze the rich cultural heritage of Assam, which is embedded in its folklore, traditions, and customs. In a time when modernization and globalization are rapidly transforming societies, many traditional practices and oral narratives are at risk of being forgotten or lost.

This study contributes to the understanding of Assam's diverse cultural identity by:

- Highlighting the **importance of folklore and customs** in shaping the social values, beliefs, and way of life of the Assamese people.
- Providing **academic and cultural insights** into the traditions of various ethnic and tribal communities of Assam.
- Serving as a **resource for future researchers, educators, and cultural activists** who seek to promote and preserve Assam's intangible cultural heritage.
- Creating awareness among the younger generation about the **need to protect and value their traditional knowledge and practices**.

By exploring and interpreting these cultural elements, the study plays a vital role in promoting cultural continuity, strengthening regional identity, and supporting efforts in heritage conservation.

## Objectives

1. To explore and document the various forms of Assamese folklore including folk tales, songs, dances, and oral traditions that reflect the cultural and social life of the people of Assam.
2. To examine the traditional customs and rituals practiced by different ethnic communities in Assam, and analyze their significance in religious, social, and seasonal contexts.
3. To assess the role of folklore and customs in preserving Assamese cultural identity, and understand the challenges faced in their transmission and survival in the modern era.

## Review of Related Literature

Several scholars and researchers have contributed valuable insights into the study of Assamese folklore, traditions, and customs. Their works have laid a strong foundation for understanding the cultural richness and diversity of Assam. This section briefly reviews some of the key literature relevant to the present study:

1. **Praphulladatta Goswami (1960), *Folk Literature of Assam***  
Goswami's work is one of the earliest comprehensive studies of Assamese folk literature. He categorized various forms such as folktales, riddles, proverbs, and songs, and emphasized their social and cultural functions.
2. **Birendranath Dutta (1995), *Studies in Assamese Folk Culture***  
Dutta's book explores the folk traditions of different communities in Assam, including their rituals, beliefs, and oral literature. He also discusses the role of folklore in cultural integration and community identity.
3. **Nabakanta Barua (1998), *Asomiya Sanskritir Ruprekha***  
Barua highlights the evolution of Assamese culture and discusses how customs and traditions have been shaped by historical and regional influences.
4. **UNESCO Reports on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Northeast India**  
These reports provide documentation and preservation strategies for oral traditions and folk practices across the Northeast, including Assam. They emphasize the need for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

#### 5. **Maheswar Neog (1974), *Religious Faith and Bhakti Movement in Assam***

Neog's study connects religious customs with folk traditions, especially how the Vaishnavite movement influenced Assamese society and its rituals.

#### 6. **Sanjib Baruah (2005), *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality***

While primarily political, this book sheds light on how identity and cultural practices are interlinked, providing context to the preservation of traditional customs in a changing socio-political landscape.

#### 7. **Academic Journals and Regional Publications**

Various articles in journals like *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, *Assamese Cultural Studies*, and local publications have contributed region-specific studies on Bihu, Zikir, tribal customs, marriage rituals, and more.

## Methodology

The study is based on a **qualitative and descriptive research approach**, aimed at understanding and interpreting the rich cultural elements of Assamese folklore, traditions, and customs.

### 1. **Primary Data Collection:**

- **Fieldwork** was carried out in selected regions of Assam, especially rural and tribal areas known for strong traditional practices.
- **Interviews** were conducted with knowledgeable individuals such as village elders, folk artists, cultural activists, and local historians to gather oral narratives and firsthand information.
- **Participant Observation** was used during traditional festivals, rituals, and community gatherings to observe and document living traditions in their natural settings.

### 2. **Secondary Data Collection:**

- A comprehensive **review of literature** was conducted, including books, journal articles, research papers, and theses related to Assamese culture and folklore.
- Relevant materials from **libraries, cultural institutions, and digital archives** were also consulted to support and cross-check primary data.

## Major Findings

1. **Diverse and Rich Folklore Traditions:** Assam has a vast and diverse range of folklore, including folktales, ballads, proverbs, and songs, which vary across different ethnic and tribal communities. These oral traditions play a crucial role in preserving historical memory, values, and moral teachings.
2. **Customs Deeply Rooted in Nature and Agriculture:** Most traditional customs and festivals, especially Bihu, are closely tied to the agricultural calendar, seasonal changes, and reverence for nature, reflecting the agrarian lifestyle of Assamese society.
3. **Strong Community and Religious Influence:** Rituals related to birth, marriage, and death are strongly influenced by religion (Hinduism, Islam, Vaishnavism, etc.) and are practiced collectively, reinforcing social bonds and cultural continuity.
4. **Regional and Ethnic Variations:** Each ethnic group such as the Bodos, Misings, Karbis, and others—has unique customs and folklore, yet there are common cultural threads that promote unity in diversity within Assamese society.
5. **Threats to Cultural Continuity:** The study found that modernization, urban migration, and lack of interest among the younger generation are leading to the gradual disappearance of many traditional practices and folk art forms.

6. **Need for Preservation and Documentation:** There is an urgent need for systematic documentation and promotion of folklore and customs through education, digital archiving, and community-based initiatives.

## Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested to help preserve and promote Assamese folklore, traditions, and customs:

1. **Documentation and Archiving:** Systematic recording and digital archiving of folk tales, songs, rituals, and customs should be undertaken to safeguard them for future generations.
2. **Inclusion in Curriculum:** Elements of Assamese folklore and traditions should be introduced into school and college curricula to create awareness and interest among students.
3. **Support to Folk Practitioners:** The government and cultural organizations should provide financial and institutional support to folk artists, storytellers, and community elders who are the custodians of traditional knowledge.
4. **Community-Based Cultural Programs:** Organizing local festivals, exhibitions, and workshops can help revive traditional practices and encourage community participation in cultural preservation.
5. **Use of Digital Media:** Modern technology and social media platforms should be used creatively to showcase and promote Assamese folk culture to a wider audience, especially the youth.
6. **Research and Field Studies:** More academic research and fieldwork should be encouraged, especially in remote areas, to uncover lesser-known traditions and customs.
7. **Policy Initiatives:** Cultural policies at the state and national levels should prioritize the protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, particularly that of marginalized communities.

## Conclusion

Assamese folklore, traditions, and customs are vibrant expressions of the state's rich cultural heritage and diverse ethnic identities. These living traditions not only preserve the collective memory and values of the Assamese people but also foster a strong sense of community and continuity. Through folk tales, songs, dances, rituals, and customs, the people of Assam have maintained their unique cultural fabric despite the challenges posed by modernization and globalization.

The study reveals that while many traditional practices continue to thrive, others face threats of fading away due to urbanization, changing lifestyles, and lack of proper documentation. It highlights the urgent need for systematic preservation efforts, community engagement, and integration of traditional knowledge within modern educational and cultural frameworks.

By understanding and appreciating Assamese folklore and customs, both scholars and the general public can contribute to the safeguarding of this invaluable intangible heritage. Ultimately, the continued relevance and revival of these cultural elements will enrich Assam's identity and ensure that future generations inherit the wisdom and beauty embedded in their ancestral traditions.

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