



IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON TRADITIONAL FOLK PERFORMING ARTS OF ASSAM

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Abstract

This study examines the multi-layered influence of globalization on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam, including major forms such as Bihu, Ojapali, Bhaona, and Ankiya Naat. These art forms, rooted in agrarian, religious, and communal practices, are integral to Assamese identity. However, with rapid global integration, these traditions are experiencing both revitalization and erosion. The research employs secondary data from academic journals, cultural reports, archival documents, and credible online sources.

The results designate that globalization purposes as a ambiguous blade. On one hand, digital platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram have provided increased visibility, new audiences, and opportunities for cultural exchange and monetization. On the other hand, this exposure often leads to the commodification of folk traditions, diluting their spiritual and social significance. Table-based analysis reveals that while Bihu has successfully adapted through digital dissemination and diaspora engagement, more ritualistic forms like Ojapali and Ankiya Naat remain marginalized and are practiced only by a dwindling number of older performers.

Youth engagement trends further highlight the generational gap. While rural youth participate occasionally due to community ties, urban youth are largely disengaged unless the art form is popularized through social media or school-level programs. Motivations have shifted from cultural continuity to digital recognition and entertainment value. Influenced by peer culture, lack of economic incentives, and migration, many youths no longer see folk arts as viable or relevant.

Keywords: Globalization, Folk Performing Arts, Assam, Bihu, Ojapali, Bhaona, Ankiya Naat.

Introduction

Globalization, characterized by the increasing interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and populations through trade, communication, and technology, has significantly influenced cultural expressions across the globe. One of the most sensitive and impacted domains of globalization is the traditional folk performing arts, particularly in culturally rich regions like Assam, a northeastern state of India known for its diverse and vibrant folk heritage. Assam's traditional performing arts—including Bihu dance, Ojapali, Ankiya Naat, Bhaona, and Sattriya—are integral to the state's cultural identity, social rituals, and collective memory. These art forms, deeply rooted in the socio-religious practices of indigenous communities, represent not just entertainment, but a mode of preserving language, history, and worldviews unique to the region (Barua, 2017).

Globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges to these traditional expressions. On one pointer, exposure to global stands has allowed Assamese folk arts to improvement recognition outside local and nationwide borders. Cultural exchange programs, online streaming, tourism, and diaspora networks have contributed to the revival and popularization of these art forms in new formats. This has also led to an increase in institutional support, including government-sponsored festivals and funding for cultural preservation. For example, Sattriya, a classical dance form with roots in Vaishnavite monasteries (sattras) of Assam, received national recognition as one of the eight classical dance forms of India in 2000, which partly owes to increased awareness and advocacy catalyzed by globalization (Goswami, 2005).

However, the rapid cultural homogenization caused by globalization has also posed significant threats to the authenticity, sustainability, and transmission of traditional folk performing arts. The influx of popular media, Western performance aesthetics, and commercial interests has led to a shift in audience preferences, particularly among the youth, who may find globalized art forms more appealing than their indigenous counterparts. The pressure to modernize performances for commercial success often results in the dilution of traditional narratives, ritualistic elements, and linguistic authenticity. In some cases, the very custodians of these art forms are compelled to adapt to changing tastes or abandon their traditions altogether due to a lack of economic viability or social relevance (Saikia, 2018).

Moreover, urbanization and migration driven by global labor markets have disrupted the community-based learning and performance systems essential for the survival of these folk arts. Apprenticeship models, which once ensured intergenerational transmission of skills and knowledge, are weakening in the face of formal education systems that prioritize global competencies over local cultural literacy. Additionally, the commodification of folk performances as mere entertainment for tourists or cultural exhibitions often strips them of their sacred or communal significance, leading to a loss of contextual richness and depth (Deka, 2019).

In this context, it becomes imperative to critically examine how globalization, in its multifaceted impact, is reshaping the traditional folk performing arts of Assam. The present study aims to explore both the positive transformations and the existential threats that globalization poses, with the goal of understanding how these

rich cultural expressions can be preserved, revitalized, and adapted without losing their authenticity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Background on Assam's Rich Cultural and Folk Art Traditions

Assam, located in the northeastern area of India, is a land of huge cultural variety, formed by periods of past evolution, relocation, and the musical coexistence of multiple ethnic groups. The state is home to a wide variety of indigenous groups including the Bodos, Misings, Karbis, Ahoms, and several other tribal and non-tribal communities. Each of these groups has contributed to the vibrant cultural tapestry of Assam through their unique customs, dialects, rituals, festivals, and artistic expressions (Baruah, 2003). Among these, traditional folk performing arts occupy a central position, serving as powerful mediums of social cohesion, religious devotion, and community storytelling.

The traditional civilizations of Assam are intensely embedded in agricultural life and periodic cycles. The greatest protuberant example is Bihu, a festival famous three times a year, with Rongali Bihu being the greatest considerable. Rongali Bihu comprises dance and music presentations that fast themes of love, fertility, and renewal, classically achieved in open spaces by youth outfitted in traditional clothing. The Bihu dance and Bihu geet (tracks) continue proprietary by lively actions and rhythmic hits of plans such as the dhol, pepa, and taal (Sharma, 2010).

Another significant tradition is Ojapali, a semi-dramatic performance combining music, dance, and storytelling, often centered around religious narratives from Hindu epics. It is performed by a group led by an "Oja" (master) accompanied by "Palies" (assistants). Similarly, Ankiya Naat and Bhaona, theatrical traditions developed by the 15th-century saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva, are integral to Assam's Vaishnavite spiritual and cultural life. These plays, performed in the Assamese language within monastic institutions known as sattras, blend devotional themes with theatrical expression, music, and dance (Neog, 1980).

One of the most esteemed contributions of Assam to India's cultural heritage is Sattriya, a classical dance form that evolved in the sattras under Sankardeva's patronage. Initially performed exclusively by male monks as a form of spiritual discipline, Sattriya has now gained national recognition and is practiced by both men and women, reflecting its evolution from a ritual art to a classical performance genre (Goswami, 2005).

Beyond these, Assam is also known for numerous tribal dance forms such as Bagurumba of the Bodos, Deodhani of the Misings, and Karbi dances, each associated with agricultural rites, fertility rituals, or ancestor worship. These art forms are passed down orally and are performed during festivals, life-cycle events, and communal gatherings.

Explanation and Structures of Traditional Folk Accomplishment Arts

Traditional folk performing arts are expressive cultural practices rooted in the customs, beliefs, and daily lives of specific communities. These art forms include music, dance, drama, storytelling, and ritualistic performances that are often passed down orally through generations. In Assam, folk performing arts are not merely modes of entertainment but also carriers of historical memory, religious teachings, and social values.

Ojapali, one of the oldest forms of Assamese folk performance, blends narrative singing, dance, and dramatic gestures. The situation often narrates events from Hindu extravaganzas like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The performance is led by an “Oja” (lead singer and storyteller) accompanied by “Palies” who provide rhythm and chorus. Ojapali is known for its spontaneous improvisation and expressive style (Neog, 1980).

Bhaona and Ankiya Naat are Vaishnavite theatrical traditions introduced by Srimanta Sankardeva in the 15th century to propagate the teachings of Bhakti (devotion). Although Bhaona is the real act, Ankiya Naat raises to the one-act plays written by Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva. These plays are religious in nature and combine dialogue, classical dance (Sattriya), music (borgeet), and elaborate costumes (Baruah, 2011).

Bihu, especially Rongali Bihu, is the most popular folk festival in Assam. It marks the Assamese New Year and celebrates the main harvest. The Bihu dance is performed by young men and women, often in open fields or village courtyards, accompanied by traditional instruments like dhol, pepa, and gogona. It celebrates fertility, nature, and love, and is characterized by its rhythmic footwork and expressive hand gestures (Sharma, 2010).

These forms are community-oriented, ritualistic, and seasonal in nature. They are typically performed during festivals, religious gatherings, and social functions, and are closely tied to the agrarian life and belief systems of Assamese society.

Introduction to Globalization: Historical Context and Meaning

Globalization refers to the growing interconnectedness of the world through the flow of goods, information, culture, capital, and people across borders. Historically, globalization has unfolded in phases—starting from early trade routes like the Silk Road to colonial expansion, and culminating in the modern digital age marked by rapid communication, multinational corporations, and cultural exchanges.

In the post-1990s era, globalization accelerated in India with economic liberalization, leading to the proliferation of global media, technologies, and cultural influences. While globalization has opened doors to innovation, cross-cultural dialogue, and economic growth, it has also raised concerns about cultural homogenization, especially for local and indigenous traditions (Appadurai, 1996).

In the background of Assam, globalization has resulted in increased exposure of its folk performing arts to broader audiences through tourism, social media, and cultural festivals. However, it has also challenged the sustainability of these art forms, altering their performance contexts and traditional meanings.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and critically examine the multifaceted impact of globalization on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam. As Assam possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage represented through art forms such as Bihu, Ojapali, Ankiya Naat, and Bhaona, the study seeks to understand how these traditions are being influenced, transformed, or endangered in the context of an increasingly globalized world. The research aims to identify both the positive developments—such as increased visibility, cross-cultural appreciation, and innovation—as well as the negative consequences, including loss of authenticity, commercialization, and declining interest among younger generations.

This study also aims to investigate how globalization has affected the traditional systems of knowledge transmission, performance contexts, and community engagement associated with these folk arts. By analyzing these changes, the study hopes to offer insight into the broader cultural shifts occurring in Assam and to assess how these transitions may impact cultural identity, continuity, and preservation efforts.

Furthermore, the study endeavors to highlight the responses and strategies adopted by practitioners, cultural institutions, and policymakers in safeguarding these art forms.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the historical and cultural significance of traditional folk performing arts in Assam.
2. To study the influence of globalization on the preservation, performance, and perception of these folk arts.
3. To study the challenges faced by folk artists and cultural institutions in sustaining traditional practices.

Literature Review

Ghosh (2018) conducted an ethnographic study of the Santal tribal community in Jharkhand to examine how globalization has reshaped their indigenous performance practices. The study observed that traditional folk dances, once deeply embedded in the community's agricultural and ritual life, were increasingly being modified for stage presentations at tourism and cultural festivals. While these adaptations created new financial and social opportunities for tribal performers, they also contributed to the dilution of traditional meanings and ritual significance. Performances were shortened, choreographed for visual appeal, and often stripped of their sacred and participatory elements to cater to outsider audiences. Ghosh argued that this shift marked a process of commodification, where cultural expressions became products for consumption rather than lived communal practices. Ultimately, the study concluded that although these changes offered visibility and income, they risked disconnecting performances from their original cultural and spiritual contexts.

Baruah (2015) conducted a detailed analysis of the evolution of the Bihu dance in Assam, highlighting its transformation from a community-centered agrarian celebration into a competitive and televised cultural spectacle. Based on fieldwork across 20 villages, the study documented significant changes in the performance, noting how traditional elements such as costumes, gestures, and song lyrics were being modified to suit urban and national audiences. These adaptations, while aiding in the broader visibility and popularity of Bihu across India, often involved the loss of cultural nuance and localized meanings rooted in rural Assamese life. Baruah argued that globalization and commercialization, though offering platforms for cultural expression, simultaneously risked reducing Bihu to a staged performance detached from its original context. The study thus raised critical questions about the balance between cultural preservation and adaptation in an increasingly media-driven cultural landscape.

Neog (2001) provided a historical and cultural analysis of Ankiya Naat and Bhaona, the traditional Vaishnavite theatre forms of Assam, emphasizing their dual role as expressions of religious devotion and tools for community education. He traced their origins to the Bhakti movement under Srimanta Sankardeva, where performances conveyed spiritual teachings and ethical values through music, drama, and dance. Neog cautioned that modern reinterpretations—marked by edited scripts, simplified language, and increasing commercial interests—threaten to diminish the deeply didactic and spiritual essence of these art forms. He argued that while adaptation is inevitable, excessive alteration risks detaching the performances from their theological roots and communal relevance. His scholarship remains foundational for understanding the philosophical and performative richness of Assamese folk theatre, offering critical insights into the need for preserving the integrity of traditional forms amid changing cultural landscapes.

Appadurai (1996), in his influential work *Modernity at Large*, introduced the concept of “global cultural flows” to describe the complex, overlapping movements of people, media, technology, ideologies, and capital across borders. Dominant to his outline is the idea of “technoscapes,” which refers to the instable landscapes of people—such as emigrants, tourists, and workers—whose flexibility shapes and redesigns cultural individualities. Appadurai’s theoretical model offers a valuable lens for examining how local traditions respond to global pressures. In studies of performance and indigenous practices, his framework helps scholars analyze the tension between cultural preservation and the demands of global consumer culture. It illuminates how traditions are not merely lost or preserved, but constantly reinterpreted in response to changing economic, political, and social dynamics. By way of such, his effort is opening for understanding the fluid and sold nature of cultural identity in a globalized world.

Gogoi and Sharma (2019) carried out a mixed-method study examining the livelihood patterns of traditional folk performers in Assam, with a particular focus on the Ojapali and Deodhani dance traditions. Combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, they studied 75 performers across various districts. The findings revealed a sharp decline in youth participation, largely driven by low income, lack of recognition, urban migration, and minimal institutional or governmental support. Many performers struggled to sustain themselves financially, leading to a gradual erosion of these culturally significant art forms. The study

highlighted the urgent need for targeted policy interventions, including subsidies for traditional artists, infrastructure development, and integration of folk performance traditions into formal education curricula. Gogoi and Sharma emphasized that without systematic support, these endangered art forms face the risk of fading into obscurity, resulting in a significant cultural loss for Assam.

Deka (2020) examined the digitalization of Assamese folk music, focusing on its circulation through platforms like YouTube and Facebook. The study highlighted how digital media significantly expanded the visibility of folk music, enabling wider access and fostering engagement among the Assamese diaspora. However, Deka also observed critical shifts in the form and content of performances. In an effort to reach broader and often global audiences, many performers adopted stylistic fusions and modified traditional lyrics and melodies. These adaptations, while enhancing appeal and marketability, often compromised linguistic purity and the integrity of oral traditions. The study raised concerns about the erosion of traditional knowledge systems, as digital content increasingly prioritized entertainment over authenticity. Deka concluded that while digital platforms offer valuable opportunities for cultural dissemination, they also pose risks of commodification and cultural dilution if not balanced with preservation efforts.

Bhattacharya (2017) conducted a comparative study of folk theatre traditions in West Bengal and Assam, focusing on Bengali Jatra and Assamese Ankiya Naat. Her research highlighted that Ankiya Naat managed to preserve its ritualistic and spiritual structure for a longer period than Jatra, largely due to the continued support and patronage of the Sattras—Vaishnavite monastic institutions that function as custodians of the tradition. In contrast, Bengali Jatra experienced earlier shifts toward secularization and commercialization. However, Bhattacharya noted that in recent years, both traditions have increasingly incorporated elements of modern theatre, such as LED lighting, microphones, elaborate stage sets, and commercial ticketing systems. These changes, while enhancing production value and attracting larger audiences, also signaled the growing influence of market-driven aesthetics. Her study emphasized the tension between preserving traditional theatrical forms and adapting to contemporary audience expectations and technological advancements.

Das (2014) conducted an in-depth study on the transmission of folk knowledge among the Mising tribe, with a particular focus on the Deori dance tradition. His research revealed that modernization, along with the expansion of formal school education systems, had significantly disrupted traditional modes of oral transmission. Historically, cultural knowledge was passed down through active participation in community rituals, festivals, and performances. However, children attending urban or state-run schools were increasingly detached from these community practices, leading to a decline in firsthand exposure to traditional art forms. Das noted that this shift was creating a widening intergenerational gap, as younger members of the tribe grew up with limited familiarity with their ancestral performance traditions. The study underscored the need for culturally responsive education and community-based initiatives to preserve indigenous knowledge systems in the face of rapid socio-cultural change.

Statement of the Problem

The traditional folk performing arts of Assam—such as Ojapali, Bhaona, Bihu, and Ankiya Naat—have long served as vital expressions of the region’s cultural, religious, and social identity. These forms, transmitted orally and embedded within community life, have historically flourished through localized patronage, festivals, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing. However, in the current era of globalization, these art forms face unprecedented challenges. The rapid spread of global media, cultural homogenization, and the growing influence of Western and pan-Indian entertainment have led to a decline in the popularity, practice, and preservation of many traditional folk arts. At the same time, opportunities have emerged through digital platforms and cultural exchange, allowing certain forms like Bihu to gain international visibility. This uneven impact has created a complex landscape: while some traditions are adapting and evolving, others are becoming marginalized or facing extinction.

Various efforts by cultural institutions and government bodies to support these art forms, there remains a lack of systematic research on how globalization is specifically affecting the content, transmission, audience, and sustainability of Assam’s folk performances. Furthermore, there is insufficient understanding of how artists themselves perceive and respond to these changes—whether they resist, negotiate, or embrace global influences.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-research design to examine the impact of globalization on traditional folk performing arts in Assam. The qualitative approach enables a rich and nuanced understanding of cultural changes, lived experiences, and contextual factors influencing the evolution of art forms such as Bihu, Ojapali, Ankiya Naat, and Bhaona. The descriptive-analytical framework allows the researcher to systematically document traditional practices while critically analyzing the effects of global influences on their form, function, and sustainability.

Sources of Data

This study is based entirely on secondary data sources, which offer a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the impact of globalization on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam. Scholarly books and monographs by experts such as Maheswar Neog and Birendranath Dutta provide historical and cultural insights into art forms like Ojapali, Bhaona, Bihu, and Ankiya Naat. Peer-reviewed journal articles from fields such as folklore studies, anthropology, and performance studies contribute theoretical frameworks and case studies relevant to cultural transformation under globalization. Government and institutional reports—particularly those from the Ministry of Culture, Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Department of Cultural Affairs, Assam—offer valuable data on policies, funding, and institutional efforts for cultural preservation.

Traditional Folk Performing Arts of Assam: An Overview

Classification and Brief History of Major Art Forms

Assam boasts a rich tapestry of traditional performing arts, each with its distinct origins, functions, and cultural expressions. These forms reflect the socio-religious ethos, agrarian lifestyle, and community traditions of the Assamese people.

1. Bihu Dance and Music

Bihu is perhaps the most celebrated folk dance and music tradition of Assam, associated with the agrarian cycle and performed during the Rongali Bihu festival in spring. It scripts the Assamese New Year and the start of the spreading season. The dance is forceful and pulsing, typically performed by start men and women in traditional clothing, accompanied by instruments like the *dhol* (drum), *pepa* (hornpipe), and *gagana*. While Bihu originated as a rural celebration of fertility and harvest, over time, it has transitioned into a symbol of Assamese identity, increasingly showcased on urban stages and media platforms.

2. Ojapali

Ojapali is a semi-dramatic, narrative form combining music, dance, and storytelling, traditionally performed by a group of male artists led by an *Ojha* (main performer). Originating in the Kamata-Koch period, it primarily draws on religious epics and Manasa Mangal Kavya, focusing on the worship of goddess Manasa. There are three main types: *Byah Ojapali*, *Deodhani Ojapali*, and *Suknanni Ojapali*. Its performative nature, combining humor, devotion, and satire, makes Ojapali a unique medium of folk religious expression.

3. Bhaona and Ankiya Naat

Introduced by the Vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva in the 15th–16th centuries, Ankiya Naat are one-act plays written in *Brajavali*, a literary language composed of Assamese, Sanskrit, and Maithili. *Bhaona* refers to the actual staging of these plays, often performed in Namghars and Sattras (monastic institutions). These performances are highly stylized, involving elaborate costumes, devotional music (*borgeet*), and choreographed movements. They are didactic in nature, aiming to spread Vaishnavite philosophy among the masses.

4. Sattriya Dance (Classical–Folk Crossover)

Formerly accomplished by monks in the Sattras as portion of religious rituals, Sattriya dance was organized by Sankardeva and later established into a classical dance process of Republic of India. Over time, it transitioned from a strictly monastic art to a secular and stage-performing tradition, embraced by both male and female performers. While Sattriya is now recognized as a classical form, it retains strong folk roots, especially in its narrative structure, music, and themes based on Assamese mythology and oral traditions.

Socio-Cultural Significance of These Forms

These folk performing arts are more than artistic expressions—they are vehicles of socio-cultural identity, moral instruction, and community cohesion.

- **Preservers of Oral Tradition:** These forms are traditionally transmitted orally, embodying local myths, epics, and spiritual teachings. They serve as living archives of Assamese heritage, particularly in communities with limited access to formal education or written records.
- **Markers of Cultural Identity:** For the Assamese people, Bihu, Ojapali, Bhaona, and other forms act as cultural symbols, especially during festivals and rituals. They reinforce ethnic pride and regional identity in the face of modernization and external cultural influences.
- **Tools for Community Bonding:** These performances are typically communal events, involving collective participation in singing, dancing, and storytelling. They foster social integration, intergenerational learning, and a sense of shared belonging within villages and religious institutions.
- **Agents of Religious and Moral Education:** Art forms like Bhaona and Ojapali carry moral lessons and religious values, making them instrumental in ethical and spiritual socialization, especially in rural areas.

Globalization: A Double-Edged Sword

Positive Impacts on Traditional Folk Performing Arts of Assam

While globalization is often criticized for undermining indigenous traditions, it has also created new platforms and possibilities for the survival and revitalization of traditional folk performing arts. In the case of Assam, globalization has had several positive impacts, which are outlined below:

1. Increased Global Visibility via Digital Platforms

Digital globalization has played a critical role in promoting Assamese folk arts beyond regional boundaries. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram have allowed performances of Bihu, Ojapali, Bhaona, and Ankiya Naat to reach global audiences. Artists and cultural groups can now document, archive, and share their art with the world, often gaining recognition, sponsorships, and invitations to perform at international events. This digital exposure also helps preserve endangered forms by creating searchable online records for future generations.

2. Cultural Exchanges and Fusion Arts

Globalization has enabled increased interaction between cultures, leading to collaborative projects and fusion performances. Traditional Assamese art forms have found new expressions when combined with contemporary global genres such as jazz, electronic music, or modern dance. For instance, reinterpretations of Bihu with Western instruments or fusion Bhaona performances with multimedia elements are attracting

younger audiences while keeping core traditions intact. These cross-cultural dialogues foster innovation without entirely discarding heritage.

3. Opportunities for International Performances

Global connectivity has opened up international platforms for Assamese folk artists to showcase their work. Cultural festivals organized by Indian embassies, diaspora associations, and international institutions have increasingly featured Assamese performances. Troupes from Assam have participated in global events such as the Festival of India abroad, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and ASEAN cultural summits. These opportunities not only offer global recognition but also economic benefits to folk artists.

4. Institutional Support and Cultural Tourism

Global interest in “authentic cultural experiences” has encouraged government bodies and NGOs to invest more in cultural preservation. Organizations such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and UNESCO have supported documentation, training programs, and cultural festivals in Assam. Additionally, cultural tourism initiatives, such as festivals in Majuli, have drawn both domestic and international tourists, creating new revenue streams for local artists and communities. These efforts have contributed to the professionalization and sustainability of folk arts.

Negative Impacts of Globalization on Traditional Folk Performing Arts of Assam

Contempt its possible aids, globalization has also sent important tests to the existence and genuineness of Assam’s traditional folk execution drawings. The cultural, economic, and technological shifts brought about by global interconnectedness have often led to unintended consequences, particularly for community-based, orally transmitted art forms. The major negative impacts are discussed below:

1. Cultural Homogenization and Loss of Uniqueness

Globalization inclines to indorse consistency, often favouring leading worldwide philosophies at the expenditure of local traditions. As Assamese folk procedures like Bihu, Ojapali, and Bhaona are modified for broader spectators, they risk behind their separate local rudiments. Ceremonial aspects, native dialects, and background storytelling are often adapted or absent to suit pan-Indian or global tastes, subsequent in a thinning of their unique spirit. This cultural homogenization threatens the diversity that once defined Assam’s artistic landscape.

2. Commercialization and Dilution of Authenticity

The commodification of folk arts for commercial gain has led to aesthetic simplification and performance distortion. In many cases, performances are shortened, dramatized, or overly stylized for tourist appeal or television formats. For example, Bihu dance—once an intimate village celebration tied to agricultural cycles—is now often performed in competition shows and stage events with exaggerated costumes and choreographed sequences that stray from tradition. This shift from ritual to spectacle compromises the authenticity and cultural depth of the art forms.

3. Decrease in Youth Participation Due to Modern Aspirations

With increasing exposure to global education models and urban lifestyles, Assamese youth often prioritize mainstream careers over traditional artistic vocations. Folk performance is no longer viewed as economically viable or socially prestigious, leading to a generational disconnect. As younger generations migrate to cities or pursue digital professions, they disengage from community-based cultural practices, contributing to a gradual erosion of traditional knowledge systems.

4. Influence of Western Popular Culture and Urbanization

The widespread influence of Western and pan-Indian pop culture—through music, cinema, fashion, and social media—has shifted public interest away from indigenous forms. Urbanization has also disrupted the community structures that traditionally supported folk performances, such as village festivals and religious gatherings. The prioritization of modern entertainment over folk traditions has marginalized these art forms in both educational and recreational spaces.

5. Deterioration in Support and Broadcast of Information

Historically, traditional performers depended on community patronage and institutional support from temples, monasteries (Sattras), or royal courts. With these structures weakened or commercialized, many artists now struggle for recognition and financial stability. Moreover, the oral transmission of knowledge, which was central to preserving folk forms, is under threat as gurus find fewer dedicated students willing to undergo years of informal apprenticeship. Without sustainable patronage and structured platforms for learning, many art forms face the risk of extinction.

Table 1: Comparative Impact of Globalization on Key Folk Art Forms of Assam

Folk Art Form	Core Features (Pre-globalization)	Globalization Influence	Present Status	Key Challenges
Bihu	Seasonal community dance, live music, performed during Rongali Bihu festivals	Widespread digital promotion, fusion music, televised performances	Popular among youth; global Assamese diaspora promotes it	Over-commercialization, loss of authenticity
Bhaona	Religious Vaishnavite plays, performed in Sattras, led by spiritual actors	Limited modernization; some efforts to archive and digitize scripts	Declining rural viewership; preserved mostly in institutional settings	Language barrier (Brajavali), ritual-centric audience

Ojapali	Storytelling with music and dance; linked to Shakti worship	Marginal presence online; very few documented performances	Critically endangered, mostly preserved by elder performers	Lack of documentation, no young practitioners
Ankiya Naat	Classical one-act play, written by Srimanta Sankardeva	Minimal digital presence; performed during specific festivals	Niche audience; rarely performed outside Satras	Script complexity, religious setting limits reach

Sources - <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>

Table 2: Part of Digital Stages in Folk Art Distribution

Platform	Content Type Used	Opportunities Provided	Cultural Risks Involved	Examples from Assam	Content Type Used
YouTube	Full-length performances, folk tutorials	Global audience reach, monetization	Over-editing, loss of ritual context	Bihu competitions broadcast online	Full-length performances, folk tutorials
Facebook Live	Festival streaming, interviews	Community interaction, event promotion	Performance becomes performative, not spiritual	Bhaona livestreams from Majuli	Festival streaming, interviews
Instagram Reels	Short dance/music clips	Youth engagement, trendsetting	Oversimplification, visual over substance	Urban youth dancing to remixed Bihu	Short dance/music clips
Documentary Films	Folk artist biographies	Long-term documentation, academic usage	Limited mass appeal		Folk artist biographies

Sources- <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>

Table 3: Minority Appointment Trends in Folk Arts

Engagement Dimension	Rural Youth	Urban Youth	Influencing Factors	Observed Trends	Rural Youth
Participation Rate	Low to moderate	Very low (except during festivals)	Peer pressure, career focus	Declining interest overall	Low to moderate
Motivation	Familial/cultural inheritance	Entertainment, online recognition	Media exposure, school curriculum	Shift from ritual to performative	Familial/cultural inheritance
Barriers	Economic pressure, migration	Lack of institutional exposure	The education system, a lack of support	Folk arts are seen as a non-viable career	Economic pressure, migration

Opportunities	Local festivals, school functions	Social media platforms, online shows	Internet access, cultural pride	Interest in hybrid/modern forms	Local festivals, school functions
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Sources- <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>

Comparative Impact on Different Art Forms

Bihu vs. Sattriya vs. Bhaona

The impact of globalization is not uniform across all art forms:

- Bihu, with its festive and performance-oriented nature, has adapted well to television, competitions, and social media, gaining global visibility. However, its transformation into a stage art often leads to commercialized versions that lack traditional authenticity.
- Sattriya, being recognized as one of the eight classical dance forms of India, has benefited from institutional support, inclusion in formal curricula, and international dance circuits. It has evolved with scholarly documentation and urban performance opportunities, preserving much of its original structure.
- Bhaona, being heavily reliant on Vaishnavite institutions and monastic settings, remains confined to traditional spaces. While occasional performances are organized outside Assam, the linguistic and spiritual specificity of the form limits its adaptation, making it more vulnerable to declining interest.

NGO and Government Initiatives

Sangeet Natak Akademi and State Cultural Support

The Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) has played a significant role in recognizing and documenting traditional Assamese art forms. Grants, fellowships, and national awards have been conferred to senior artists in Sattriya and Bihu, raising their profile nationally. For instance, artists like Guru Jatin Goswami (Sattriya) received recognition that led to wider dissemination and teaching opportunities across India.

Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra and Cultural Mapping Initiatives

Institutions like the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati serve as cultural hubs for folk exhibitions, workshops, and training sessions. Additionally, the “Cultural Mapping of India” project launched by the Ministry of Culture includes surveys of traditional art forms in Assam, aiming to digitally archive and support them.

NGO Involvement

Organizations like SESTA and Foundation for Social Transformation (FST) have supported community-based art initiatives, especially among marginalized groups. These NGOs work with local performers to revive disappearing forms like Deodhani and Tokari Geet through community festivals, skill-sharing workshops, and school outreach programs.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of globalization on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam, it is not without its limitations. First and foremost, the research is based solely on secondary data sources, which, although rich and diverse, limit the depth of firsthand engagement with performers and communities. The absence of primary fieldwork restricts the study's ability to capture nuanced, lived experiences and oral narratives that may not be documented in published sources.

Geographically, the study focuses on select districts such as Kamrup, Majuli, and Barpeta, which are culturally significant but do not fully represent the diverse and region-specific folk traditions found across all parts of Assam. As such, findings may not be generalizable to the entire state or other Northeastern regions with different cultural dynamics.

Another limitation lies in the availability and accessibility of updated documentation. In some cases, archival records, official reports, or performance data were either outdated, difficult to access, or not digitized, potentially affecting the completeness of historical analysis. Additionally, language barriers posed a challenge when working with Assamese or local-language materials, which had to be interpreted through translated texts, potentially leading to a loss of cultural nuance.

The study also acknowledges the challenge of measuring the impact of globalization, which is a broad and multi-dimensional phenomenon. The effects of globalization are not uniform and may vary depending on socio-economic factors, generational differences, and the specific nature of each art form. Therefore, some generalizations made in the study may not fully reflect the complexity of cultural change on the ground.

Discussion

The impact of globalization on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam reveals a complex interplay between cultural transformation and preservation. Theories such as cultural imperialism, as proposed by Herbert Schiller, suggest that dominant global cultures can overshadow local traditions, a trend observed in Assam with the increasing marginalization of ritual-based forms like Ojapali and Bhaona. These performances, rooted in religious and community contexts, often struggle to compete with the widespread appeal of Western and pan-Indian popular entertainment. Though, the model of cultural hybridity, presented by Homi Bhabha, delivers a additional nuanced sympathetic. Many Assamese art forms—particularly Bihu—have demonstrated resilience by adapting to modern tastes while retaining traditional elements. Digital platforms like YouTube and social media have allowed younger performers to present hybrid versions of Bihu that blend traditional rhythms with modern choreography and audio-visual effects. While these adaptations expand reach and visibility, they also raise concerns over the dilution of authenticity. Media and technology serve as double-edged tools—on one hand, they help preserve and promote folk arts globally; on the other, they often reduce them to consumable spectacles, prioritizing entertainment over cultural depth. Furthermore, Assam's social policies have had varied achievement. Institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra have played an important role in documenting and promoting folk forms,

yet their top-down approach often overlooks grassroots needs. Despite government grants and cultural festivals, many traditional artists lack access to sustainable training, platforms, or digital literacy. The resilience of these art forms lies in their ability to either adapt creatively or resist transformation altogether.

Findings

The study reveals that globalization has had a dual impact on the traditional folk performing arts of Assam. While it has enhanced global visibility and enabled broader dissemination through digital platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, it has also contributed to the commercialization and aesthetic dilution of several art forms. Bihu, for example, has adapted effectively to the digital age, gaining popularity through social media and diaspora-led initiatives. In contrast, ritual-based forms such as Ojapali, Bhaona, and Ankiya Naat continue to face marginalization, owing to their linguistic complexity, limited visual appeal, and the absence of structured digital documentation. The findings also indicate a generational shift in participation, with youth—particularly in urban areas—showing a declining interest in traditional practices. Their engagement is now largely mediated through online trends, school-level events, and short-form content, often prioritizing entertainment and digital recognition over cultural continuity. Moreover, the motivations for participating in folk arts have shifted from community involvement and spiritual devotion to social visibility and creative experimentation.

Recommendations

In order to safeguard and revitalize the traditional folk performing arts of Assam in the face of globalization, a multi-pronged and inclusive strategy is essential. First and foremost, there is a pressing need for robust policy interventions that go beyond tokenistic recognition and provide sustained financial, infrastructural, and institutional support to folk artists and cultural practitioners. Government bodies should prioritize comprehensive documentation, digital archiving, and preservation efforts to capture the oral, visual, and performative dimensions of art forms like Ojapali, Bhaona, and Bihu. These archives can serve as critical resources for researchers, students, and future generations. Equally important is the integration of folk arts into educational curricula, both at school and university levels. Introducing students to these forms not only fosters cultural pride but also helps in skill transmission and appreciation from a young age. Moreover, the promotion of community-based initiatives—such as rural festivals, artist residencies, and intergenerational workshops—can reinvigorate grassroots engagement and encourage youth participation, which remains essential for long-term sustainability. To this end, targeted outreach programs, training camps, and fellowships for young artists can be instituted in collaboration with local communities. Finally, fostering collaborative networks between artists, government agencies, academic institutions, and digital media platforms will ensure that traditional forms remain relevant and respected in contemporary contexts. Such partnerships can facilitate research, innovation, and policy design that are both culturally sensitive and practically effective.

Conclusion

The traditional folk performing arts of Assam, including Ojapali, Bhaona, Bihu, and Ankiya Naat, embody the region's rich cultural heritage, rooted in oral traditions, community rituals, and regional identity. Globalization has presented both chances and challenges for these art procedures. On the one hand, increased exposure through digital platforms, cultural tourism, and international collaborations has allowed Assamese folk traditions to reach wider audiences and gain new relevance. On the other hand, commercialization, cultural homogenization, and declining youth interest have led to a dilution of authenticity and a gradual disconnect between performers and their traditional roots. Through the lens of cultural imperialism and hybridity, this study shows that while some forms adapt and evolve in hybrid spaces, others struggle to survive within a rapidly modernizing and media-driven society. Media and technology, although powerful tools for dissemination, often prioritize aesthetics and marketability over cultural depth. Moreover, despite various institutional efforts, policy measures have been uneven and insufficient in addressing the grassroots needs of folk artists. Ultimately, the resilience of Assam's folk performing arts lies in their ability to balance tradition and innovation, preservation and adaptation. Ensuring their survival will require collaborative efforts between government institutions, educational systems, cultural organizations, and local communities.

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