

Folk performing arts of Lower Assam (Special reference to Goalpara District)

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Introduction: Assam is one of the seven sister state of north-east India. It is considered among the progressive state by its arts and cultures. Geographical location is undoubtedly a very important factor in shaping the culture of a place. The location of Assam is unique in the sense that it is situated at the casp of two great civilization, the Indian and East and South East Asian. Lower Assam is a region situated in western Brahmaputra Valley encompassing undivided Kamrup and Goalpara region. Anyway in this context I am going to explain shortly about the folk performing arts of lower Assam.

The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these evolved through a long assimilative process. The native of the state of Assam are known as "Asomiya" (Assamese) which is also the state language of Assam. (Cultural Affair, Assam Govt.in) This article is about the performing arts of lower Assam specially Goalpara district.

Description: Folk performing arts is a part of Assamese culture and arts.

The culture of Assam is traditionally a hybrid one developed due to cultural assimilation of different ethno-cultural groups under various political economic systems in different periods of history. It is belived that Assamese culture developed its roots over 750 years as the country of Kamarupa during the first millennium AD of Bodo-Kachari people assimilation with Aryan which is debatable as the idea of Assam as an entity. When the Tai-Shan entered the region in 1228 under the leadership of Sukapha to establish Ahom Kingdom in Assam for the next 600 years, again a new chapter of cultural assimilation was written and thus the modern form of Assamese culture developed (Culture of Assam. Wikipedia)

In lower Assam there are many different religious communities. There are many performing arts in the district of lower Assam include Ankia Naat a traditional Vaishnav dance drama (Bhaona). It makes use of large mask of Gods, Goddesses, demon and animals and in between the plays a sutradhar.

Folk performing arts:

Ojapali: A unique performing art form that consists of a perfect blending of narrative singing, dancind and dramatic interludes originally from Darrang district of Assam. This art form is presented by 5 to 6 performance usually men. The main performer is called the Oja and the other members are called Palis. In this performance only one instrument is used i.e Khutitaal (A small sized cymbal)

Jhumur: These songs and dances are from tea garden of Assam. Jhumur is basically performed by the tea tribe people of Assam. This dance is performed by girls and boys together. Sometimes by the girl's alone with precision of foot work while clapping tightly each others waist. Their unique music along with the dance performance really adds to the rhythmic sensation to the music.

Dihanam: A kind of congregational payers sung by women with different instruments like Nagara, Taal along with clapping of hands. These songs are mainly sung in call and response style by women.

Aainam: This traditional devotional folk song specially associated with the illness and health, especially sung during the time of small pox performed by women to praise Sitala Devi (Goddess Sitala) with the hand clappings, Aainam is still there in the rural Assam.

Holi: Performed in the lower Assam basically in the Barpeta district of Assam, these type of song performed by group of man on the occasion of Douljatra or Holi with the instruments called Dhulki (A kind of Drum) and Khunjuri (A kind of cymbal) they perform Holi geets. The main theme of the Holi geet based on lord Sri Krishna.

Bihu Geet: Assam is known for Bihu and Bihu is known for Assam. Poetic lyrics and the celebration of life expressed through Bihu songs are the life line of Assamese culture. Songs sung in Bihu are woven around themes of love and often carry erotic overtones. People adorn traditional attires like Dhoti, Gamocha and Chador Mekhala. Bihu performed by young boy's and girl's characterised by brist stepping, fingering and clapping of hands and swaying of hips represents youthful passion.

Nao Khelor Geet: (The song of the Boat race) Nao khelor geet is a pattern of Assamese folk song at lower Assam especially at Barpeta Sub-division in ancient time the mean of the transportation and the communication was only the boat. When the boatman had gone so tired and fatigue then some of the boatman has song some so beautiful and mind blowing songs which were composed with music by them. Those folk songs are carried out until now, generation by generation. Those most mind blowing fantastic and attractive folk songs are the most important part of the Asamese literature and culture.

Goalparia Lokogeet and Dance: The folk song from Goalpara district of Assam is an integral part of Assamese music with traditional language of goalpara, these songs describe and represent the social life of people with folk dance Pratima Barua Pandey the legendary folk singer popularized the genre of Goalpariya lokageet into the mainstream Assamese music and even to the international arena.

Hudam Puja: It is an interesting exuberance of feeling which got associated with a worship. Hundam is regarded as the God of rain and seems to be possessed with the qualities and attributes of Indra and Varun. Young girls going to a secluded place especially in dense forests dance naked to appeare the God Hundam.

Moreover Goalpara is rich treasure house of folk songs, folk dance. The song and dance of Kartik Puja of Gauripur, Charak Puja, Kusham Gaan, Palagan, Bharigan, the song of the elephant driver (Mahut) and many other song and dance are prevalent in Goalpara.

Conclusion: The folk arts are the products of the folkways and culture of the society. They are inseparable as they form a part of the society that they belong to. It can't be denied that folk art is the most effective way of communication. Our tradition plays an important role in a creative artistic process particularly in the field of folk performing arts, Folk performing art is functional and spontaneous. Every part of its state is full of music, dance or theatre. The folk performing art is changing its structure continuously over centuries modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation making it functionally to the society. Traditional performing arts though nothing can be immune to time and mutability, should be saved from becoming extinct and defunct. In Assam many performing arts are yet a live force especially in rural area and religious circles. It is necessary that folk performing arts of Assam like Nao Khel Geet and many others deserve utmost attention regarding its preservation, promotion and proliferation.

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