

## A Multifaceted Mosaic: The Folk Culture of Northeast India

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### Abstract :

The folk culture of North-East India, comprising eight states and over 200 ethnic groups, is a treasure trove of traditions, beliefs, and artistic expressions that deserves our attention. Emerging from the region's rich ethnic identities and stunning natural landscape, this culture thrives in its music, dance, festivals, oral traditions, crafts, and spirituality. Celebrations like Assam's Bihu, Nagaland's Hornbill Festival, and Mizoram's Cheraw Dance not only highlight the communal spirit but also underscore a deep connection to the environment. Oral narratives, such as the Abotani myths and Meitei folklore, are vital for preserving our history and heritage. Yet, we face critical challenges, including modernization, migration, and globalization, which threaten to erode these invaluable traditions. This paper delves into the socio-cultural significance of North-East India's folk culture, the challenges it encounters, and effective strategies for its preservation, including community engagement, education, and sustainable tourism initiatives. By actively safeguarding this cultural wealth, we honour our past while ensuring its relevance in crafting a sustainable and inclusive future for generations to come. It is imperative that we recognize and support these efforts now, so we can keep this unique cultural tapestry alive and vibrant.

**Key Words :** Folk Culture, North-East India, Folk Traditions, Cultural Diversity, Music and Dance, Preservation Strategies

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### Objective:

The objective of this research is to explore and document the diverse folk culture of North-East India, encompassing music, dance, festivals, oral traditions, crafts, and spirituality. The study aims to analyse the socio-cultural significance of these traditions in preserving community identity and their symbiotic relationship with nature. It also seeks to evaluate the challenges posed by modernization, globalization, and environmental degradation while identifying sustainable strategies for their preservation and promotion.

### Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative approach, employing ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Field visits were conducted across select communities in Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram to observe festivals and traditional practices. Interviews with community elders, artisans, and performers provided insights into oral histories and cultural significance. Secondary data, including scholarly articles and archival records, were analyzed to supplement findings. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and cultural meanings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the region's folk culture.

## A Multifaceted Mosaic: The Folk Culture of Northeast India

### Full Article

Eight states make up the Northeast region of India, a vibrant hub of diverse cultural traditions and heritage. There are well over two hundred different tribes living in this area, each with its own cultural traditions, creative expressions, and customs. The area is known for its diverse ethnic makeup and beautiful natural surroundings. The folk culture of the area deeply connects the people living here. This culture includes music, dancing, festivals, crafts, oral traditions, and religious practices. These cultural aspects preserve the region's history and identity and show how well it interacts with its natural environment. It has become harder and harder to keep these traditions alive because of development in modernism, migration, and globalization. Investigating and comprehending the folk culture of Northeast India offers vital information about the region's extensive history and emphasizes the value of enduring preservation initiatives to protect its heritage for future generations.

Bascom asserts that folklore endures and flourishes throughout nations and cultures, notwithstanding increasing industrialization and technological progress. Folklore's continued existence shows that it reflects the experiences and values of society, including important aspects like art, customs, philosophy, economics, politics, and social ideas. Keeping folklore alive helps people understand one another better and strengthens community ties in a world that is constantly changing.

*1. Folk Music:* The Northeast region of India is renowned for its many different ethnic groups, each with its distinct musical and cultural traditions. Folk music has a big impact on the spiritual, cultural, and social life of the people who live there. It shows how people are connected to nature, their daily lives, their rituals, and their sense of belonging. Northeast Indians view music as a vital part of celebrations, festivals, and rites of passage. The melodies, instrumentation, and lyrics of the song all come from the area's spiritual beliefs and landscape. The folk music of India's northeastern region is characterized by three prominent features:

- **Community-Centric:** Folk music generally involves whole communities in celebrations, rituals, and social events. Therefore, it helps people feel like they belong and have a shared identity.
- **A Wide Range of Instruments:** The folk music of the area uses a wide range of traditional instruments, including drums (called dhol), string instruments (called dutara), and wind instruments (called pepa).
- **Complicated Rhythm and Melody:** The folk songs from the area have complicated rhythms and melodies that show how close the people are to their environment, especially nature and the changes in the seasons.
- **Spiritual Representations:** Many folk songs come from animistic ideas and a love of nature. People can use music to honor gods, ask for blessings, or celebrate harvests.

Our cultural history places immense importance on the stories that people tell about real things. This includes how tools, clothes, and public spaces are set up and used. On the other hand, the folklore of gestures and games connects real things with abstract ideas. Customs associated with major life events, like birth, marriage, and death, as well as daily milestones,

show the expression of these principles. Folk beliefs also supply us information about traditional medicines, farming methods, and other jobs. Fairy tales, jokes, legends, fables, and stories about how things have come to be are all examples of linguistic folklore, which is just as important. All songs, including ballads, folk songs, children's songs, charms, proverbs, and riddles, help us understand who we are and make us feel more connected to our past. Two .

*2. Traditional dances:* Participating in the region's unique folk dances is a wonderful way to fully appreciate the lively culture of Northeast India. These shows not only feature colorful music and clothing, but they also use complex props and intriguing dance moves. These elements combine to narrate tales from a traditional society that remains largely untouched by modernity or colonization.

Even while the famous Bihu, Sattriya, and Manipuri dances—two of which are considered classical dances in India—are well-known, there are five other folk dances from Northeast India that deserve the same level of attention. This conversation is about the Lion and Peacock dance from Arunachal Pradesh, the Cheraw dance from Mizoram, the Laho dance from Meghalaya, the Melo Phita dance from Nagaland, and the Chu Faat dance from Sikkim.

*3. The Role of Festivals in Cultural Expression:* There are several tribes and sub-tribes in Northeast India, and each has its own customs and beliefs. This area is in the northeastern part of India. The holiday festivities of India's Northeast show how rich the area's culture is. These holidays are important times for people from different tribes to come together, honor their traditions, and work toward unification. They come from farming, Buddhism, and New Year's celebrations. Accepting this difference helps build a stronger feeling of community and shared identity, both of which are important to the culture of the area. The Hornbill Festival, the Saga Dawa Festival, the Losoong Festival, the Bihu Festival, the Cheiraoba Festival, the Kharchi Puja, the Kang Chingba, the Wangala Festival, the Sekrenyi Festival, the Ambubachi Mela, the Lui-Ngai-Ni Festival, the Dree Festival, the Chapchar Kut Festival, the Mopin Festival, the Trogya Festival, the Nankrem Festival, the Moatsu Festival, and the Aoling Festival are all very popular.

These celebrations of Northeast India's many cultures and ethnic groups are a lively way to remember the area's cultural past. These festivals bring people together and provide us a fascinating look at the many tribes' unique traditions and rituals. They come from farming cycles, spirituality, and changes in the seasons. The fascinating festivals of Northeast India allow people to fully experience the location and learn about the stories they tell.

*4. Oral Traditions and Literature:* In this topic, the word "tradition" refers to the passing on of information. This includes both the rich literary tradition and its spoken forms. Some examples of these types of stories are intriguing folktales, captivating stories, memorable songs, thought-provoking riddles, insightful proverbs, and lasting myths. Each part is important for keeping and sharing cultural heritage.

The rise of globalization, along with the impact of modern media and digital platforms, has caused oral traditions to come back, making them more visible. The hill towns are attracting more visitors, photographers, and filmmakers from the US and abroad due to their "authentic," "traditional," and "animist" cultures. This evolution is happening at the same time as the tourism business in Northeast India is booming quickly. Even while this appeal

constantly happens, people sometimes forget about the vast ethnic diversity and complex literary expressions that really constitute these civilizations. These clichéd images generate a false sense of sameness that meets a growing need in both domestic and foreign markets. People want to see "tribal" or "indigenous" people in a simple and natural setting, away from the harsh realities of contemporary life. This perception is what drives this demand.

*5. Handicrafts and Textiles:* The rise of new media and cyberculture has made this trend even stronger, especially among young people in this area, which is quickly becoming a fantastic place for online retailers to do business. People made a big difference in this attempt. There are eight rich states in the northeastern area of India. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim are the states. Before 1947, this area was part of the Assam Province. India took over Manipur and Tripura in 1949, and Sikkim officially joined the North Eastern Council in 2002. About eight percent of India's total land area is in this region, which comprises 262,230 square kilometers. There are 45,587,982 people living there, which exceeds four percent of the national total. The area also contributes about two percent to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This information comes from the census of 2011. If the whole country invests in and recognizes this place, it may unlock many possibilities.

The handicrafts from the Northeastern region show how clever people are at finding and using forest materials and turning them into beautiful things via skilled craftsmanship. The handicrafts from this area have earned a favorable reputation because of their inventiveness, complicated designs, and high-quality craftsmanship. This show has beautiful baskets, cane furniture, colorful mats, one-of-a-kind clay objects, amazing textiles, amazing metalwork, and very detailed embroidery. These wonderful crafts will let you learn about the rich cultural history and the skills of local artists. Cottage-level handicrafts are important because they include a wide range of tribal crafts, including things that are beautiful, useful, and holy. These pieces show how talented and imaginative tribal craftspeople can be. They stress how important it is to keep this important custom alive and protected, which is important to their cultural legacy.

*6. Cuisine as a Cultural Marker:* Most people in the Northeastern region enjoy non-vegetarian meals. The only exceptions are the Vaishnavite Hindu communities in Assam and Manipur, which have rigorous dietary rules. In the past, people relied on hunting and gathering as their main way to make a living before and during the early colonial period. They were often forced to move because of invasions and tensions with nearby tribes and colonial officials. Such conditions made it impossible to farm in one place for a long time, so they switched to shifting cultivation.

Hinduism's strong influence on Assam's plains and Manipur's valley makes it hard for Christians to spread their faith there. In the late 1600s, Shantidas Goshai, a Bengali scholar and Brahmin priest, significantly influenced the conversion of Manipur to Vaishnavism. This change led to a rise in vegetarianism in the area. The Meiteis changed the way they ate because the native religion Sanamahi, which they practiced, did not have strict food rules. This change also changed how they thought about religion. Meitei Brahmins, also known as Bahmons, usually don't consume meat, but they do eat fish, which indicates that they have a complicated view of their eating habits.

*7. Traditional Indigenous Ways of Knowing:* Farmers' ancestral knowledge of their environment, including land, water, trees, plants, and animals, is what makes up agricultural systems based on indigenous knowledge. With this knowledge, people may make smart decisions and use their resources wisely to address problems. Several ancient farming methods are still in use in the northeastern part of India. These cultures include the Apatani tribe growing wetland rice, the Nagaland Zabo technique of Alder agriculture in Nagaland, and the large-scale growing of cardamom plantations in Sikkim. These methods are beneficial for the environment and don't cost too much.

*The Effect of Globalization:* Since the 1990s, India's liberalization and globalization have sparked a major cultural revolution. This process has changed the way people live, making many aspects of life more uniform, such as food, clothing, and customs. Accepting these changes can help create a thriving culture that honors its rich past while also adjusting to the changing world. The proclamation strongly emphasizes that India's social and cultural structures are largely based on various forms of equality. There are several communities in Indian society, and each one has a lot of cultural freedom. The independence of these communities makes them stronger and helps them confront the problems that globalization brings in new and creative ways that reflect their values and identities.

The North-Eastern Region of India (NER) is made up of a mix of different tribal religions and civilizations. This area is more than just a map; it is a dynamic, active, and diverse cultural and linguistic landscape. It has many sides and dimensions; it's more than just a map.

*Final Thoughts:* The people of Northeast India are strong and creative, and their folk culture shows this. It provides us with vital information about the interactions between humans and the environment and is brimming with symbols and diversity. Working together is necessary to protect our cultural treasure so that future generations can understand and value its uniqueness.

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