



Challenges and Constraints in the Preservation of Cultural Practices of North East India, with special reference to Assam.An Analysis.

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1. Introduction

North East India is one of the most culturally diverse regions of the country, characterised by a wide range of ethnic communities, languages, belief systems, artistic expressions, and traditional knowledge practices. Among the eight states of the region, Assam occupies a distinctive position due to its long historical continuity and cultural plurality. The cultural identity of Assam has evolved through indigenous traditions, the influence of the Ahom kingdom, Vaishnavite movements, and continuous interaction between tribal and non-tribal communities.

Cultural practices in Assam are deeply embedded in everyday life and are closely linked with nature, agriculture, and community living. Festivals such as Bihu, traditional weaving, folk music, oral narratives, and ritual practices not only reflect cultural creativity but also serve as mechanisms for social cohesion and inter-generational knowledge transfer. However, these practices are increasingly under pressure due to rapid socio-economic changes.

In recent decades, modernisation, urbanisation, environmental challenges, and changing aspirations of the younger generation have significantly affected the continuity of cultural traditions. The preservation of culture in Assam has therefore emerged as a complex issue involving social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions. This chapter seeks to examine the major challenges and constraints faced in preserving cultural practices in North East India with special reference to Assam.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this chapter are as follows:

a)To examine the nature and significance of cultural practices in Assam within the broader context of North East India.

b)To identify the major challenges and constraints affecting the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

c) To analyse the socio-economic, environmental, and institutional factors influencing cultural change and decline.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach. It is primarily based on secondary sources such as books, research articles, government publications, cultural policy documents, and recent studies related to North East India and Assam. Contemporary developments and cultural trends up to the year 2025 have been considered to maintain relevance.

An interdisciplinary perspective has been employed, drawing insights from sociology, anthropology, history, and cultural studies. The methodology emphasises a narrative and human-centred approach, focusing on lived experiences, community perspectives, and the dynamic nature of cultural practices rather than treating culture as static or isolated phenomena.

4. Discussion

Cultural preservation in Assam must be understood in the context of ongoing social transformation. Culture is not merely a collection of rituals or artefacts; it represents a living system of values, knowledge, and practices transmitted through generations. The challenges faced by cultural traditions in Assam reflect broader tensions between tradition and modernity.

Modern education, market-driven economies, and global cultural influences have altered traditional lifestyles. While these changes have expanded opportunities, they have also reduced dependence on

traditional knowledge systems. Cultural practices once sustained through community participation are increasingly replaced by individualised and commercially oriented activities.

Institutional approaches to cultural preservation often focus on selective monuments or festivals, overlooking everyday cultural expressions and indigenous knowledge. Moreover, preservation efforts that exclude community participation tend to remain ineffective. The lack of integration between cultural preservation and development planning further weakens sustainability.

Environmental degradation and climate change add another layer of complexity. Since many cultural practices in Assam are closely tied to land, rivers, and forests, ecological disruptions directly affect cultural continuity. Thus, preservation efforts must adopt a holistic approach that recognises the interdependence between culture, society, and environment.

5. Findings

The study highlights several key findings:

- a) Rapid modernisation and urbanisation have significantly weakened traditional cultural practices and community-based social structures.
- b) Younger generations show declining engagement with traditional arts, rituals, and indigenous knowledge due to changing aspirations and economic pressures.
- c) Institutional support for cultural preservation remains inadequate in terms of funding, documentation, and professional expertise.
- d) Environmental challenges such as floods, erosion, and climate variability have disrupted culturally significant landscapes and practices.
- e) Intangible cultural heritage, particularly oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems, faces the greatest risk due to poor documentation and limited inter-generational transmission.

These findings indicate that cultural preservation in Assam is constrained by a combination of social, economic, environmental, and governance-related factors.

6. Conclusion

The cultural heritage of Assam and the wider North East represents a living legacy shaped by history, ecology, and community life. However, this heritage is increasingly vulnerable due to the combined impact of modernisation, environmental change, and institutional limitations. Preservation of cultural practices cannot be achieved through isolated efforts or symbolic recognition alone.

A sustainable approach to cultural preservation requires active community participation, stronger institutional frameworks, and integration of cultural knowledge into education and development policies. Supporting cultural practitioners, promoting documentation, and linking cultural preservation with environmental conservation are essential steps.

Finally, preserving cultural practices in Assam is not only about safeguarding the past but also about ensuring cultural continuity, identity, and resilience in a rapidly changing world.

7. References

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- Government of Assam. Department of Cultural Affairs: Policy Documents and Annual Reports.
- UNESCO. Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Academic studies on culture, society, and development in North East India.
- Contemporary research and regional studies on Assam's cultural sustainability.