

TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCES OF THE GOALPARA REGION IN ASSAM

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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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by

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy

to the



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AUGUST 2023

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis – “**Traditional Performances of the Goalpara Region in Assam**” – submitted by Jyotirmay Das to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi) for the award of the degree of “**Doctor of Philosophy**” is a record of bona fide research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance, and it is in conformity with the rules and regulations of IIT Delhi.

He has fulfilled all the requirements for the submission of this thesis which has, in my opinion, reached the standard of fulfilling the requirements for the degree.

To the best of my knowledge, the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted, in part or in full, to any other University or Institute for the award of any other degree or diploma.


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Date: 10 October 2022

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ABSTRACT

The Goalpara Region in Assam occupies a strategic geopolitical position with respect to the North East Region and the rest of India. The Region, the gateway to Northeast India, shares international boundaries with two countries. The Region is a hotbed of conflicts for power and autonomy due to much heterogeneity and resource crunch. It houses a plethora of diverse linguistic and religious communities, practising varying cultures and performance arts occupying different spectrums of development. These differences and issues are reasons enough for struggles between communities inhabiting the same geography for resources and authority. Therefore, the Region becomes a crucial site for investigating how different communities negotiate with their respective traditions, cultures, performance arts, and media systems and how they assert their identities in the process. The thesis explores how traditional performances of the Region behave in contemporary times. It highlights the interactions folk performances have with the issues of modernity. It analyses the role of cultural performances in building the contemporary Goalparia society. The thesis also points out how performances are ‘managed’ for political and commercial gain. It questions the inherent politics of language, text, livelihood, religion, gender, caste, tribe, and media, among others, that are engulfed in a performance. It views the performances as cultural products and apparatus of politics and performing artists and organisers as political beings. The most crucial question the thesis answers is, ‘Why organise, perform, and communicate old and traditional art forms in the present times?’ One, they provide a sense of community and belongingness; Two, they create an environment for identity affirmation and advancing sociopolitical ambitions.

सार

असम में गोलपारा क्षेत्र उत्तर पूर्व क्षेत्र और शेष भारत के संबंध में एक रणनीतिक भू-राजनीतिक स्थिति रखता है। यह क्षेत्र, पूर्वोत्तर भारत का प्रवेश द्वार, दो देशों के साथ अंतर्राष्ट्रीय सीमाएँ साझा करता है। यह क्षेत्र अत्यधिक विविधता और संसाधनों की कमी के कारण सत्ता और स्वायत्तता के लिए संघर्षों का केंद्र है। इसमें विविध भाषाई और धार्मिक समुदाय रहते हैं, जो विकास के विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में विभिन्न संस्कृतियों और प्रदर्शन कलाओं का अभ्यास करते हैं। ये मतभेद और मुद्दे संसाधनों और अधिकार के लिए एक ही भूगोल में रहने वाले समुदायों के बीच संघर्ष के लिए पर्याप्त कारण हैं। इसलिए, यह क्षेत्र यह जांचने के लिए एक महत्वपूर्ण स्थल बन जाता है कि विभिन्न समुदाय अपनी-अपनी परंपराओं, संस्कृतियों, प्रदर्शन कलाओं और मीडिया प्रणालियों के साथ कैसे बातचीत करते हैं और इस प्रक्रिया में वे अपनी पहचान कैसे जताते हैं। थीसिस इस बात की पड़ताल करती है कि क्षेत्र के पारंपरिक प्रदर्शन समकालीन समय में कैसे व्यवहार करते हैं। यह आधुनिकता के मुद्दों के साथ लोक प्रदर्शनों की अंतःक्रियाओं पर प्रकाश डालता है। यह समकालीन गोलपारिया समाज के निर्माण में सांस्कृतिक प्रदर्शन की भूमिका का विश्लेषण करता है। थीसिस यह भी बताती है कि राजनीतिक और व्यावसायिक लाभ के लिए प्रदर्शन को कैसे 'प्रबंधित' किया जाता है। यह भाषा, पाठ, आजीविका, धर्म, लिंग, जाति, जनजाति और मीडिया की अंतर्निहित राजनीति पर सवाल उठाता है, जो एक प्रदर्शन में शामिल हैं। यह प्रदर्शन को सांस्कृतिक उत्पाद और राजनीति के उपकरण के रूप में और प्रदर्शन करने वाले कलाकारों और आयोजकों को राजनीतिक प्राणी के रूप में देखता है। थीसिस सबसे महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न का उत्तर देती है, 'वर्तमान समय में पुराने और पारंपरिक कला रूपों को व्यवस्थित, प्रदर्शन और संचार क्यों करें?' एक, वे समुदाय और अपनेपन की भावना प्रदान करते हैं; दो, वे पहचान की पुष्टि और सामाजिक-राजनीतिक महत्वाकांक्षाओं को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए एक माहौल बनाते हैं।

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASU	All Assam Students' Union
AAMSU	All Assam Minority Students' Union
AASAA	All Adivasi Students' Union of Assam
AAHSU	All Assam Hajong Students' Union
AATSA	All Assam Tea Tribes Students' Union
ABMSU	All Bodoland Minority Students' Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
ACF	Adivasi Cobra Force
AKRSU	All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union
ARSU	All Rabha Students' Union
BLT	Bodo Liberation Tiger
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District
BTC	Bodo Territorial Council
BTR	Bodoland Territorial Region
DBHA	Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad
GSU	Garo Students' Union
KLO	Kamatapur Liberation Organisation
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
RHAC	Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom

GLOSSARY (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Sarpanch	Head of village local administrative body
Hookah	Smoking pipe
Jaat/ Jaati	Caste or tribe
Xatra	Vaishnavite monastery
Naam Ghar	Vaishnavite prayer Halls
Mela	Fair
Dharma	Righteousness
Artha	Wealth
Kama	Pleasure
Asura	Demon
Kuhila	An aquatic plant whose cork is used to make idols of Goddess Manasa, scientific name: <i>Aeschynomene aspera</i>
Sijou	Sijou is a form of cactus which has symbolic meaning in the practise of Bathouism, scientific name: <i>Euphorbia splendens</i>
Apsara	Fairy (Supernatural)
Rup	Form
Prasad	An offering made to Gods, which later consumed by devotees after the completion of a rite
Ling	Phallus
Yoni	Womb or female reproductive organs
Guptohotya	Secret killing

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