

# Challenges Faced by Women Folk Artists in: Lower Assam

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## ABSTRACT:

The research aims to understand and assess the challenges faced by women folk artists in lower Assam. Assam is the land where people are born with the colours of their culture and stay with the aroma of their folk culture. Assamese folk culture holds the beauty of Assamese Dance, Music, Drama and Different cultural Phenomenon. All the cultural practices and performances narrate the original scenario of Assamese society. Geographically Assam is divided into two parts that is: Upper Assam and Lower Assam. All these parts are culturally active and are melting their bonds with the uses and practices of their folk traditions and culture because folk culture represents the whole scenario of Assamese society. In Assam, both male and female artists perform their folk culture and they are the ones who develop their culture and maintain the traditional phenomenon. They carefully protect them as the owner of their culture so, both male and female artists play them very happily. Assam is a patriarchal society where females are always suppressed by their societal phenomenon. Also in the culture female folk artists suffer many social and economic problems. This hampers their skills and affects their socio-cultural life and economic conditions. The objectives of the studies are as follows

- To understand the concept of folk art and folk artists of Assam.
- To analyze the problems of women folk artists in their socio-cultural life.

In this study conclusions and suggestions are formulated based on primary data collected through the interview schedule.

**Keywords:** Culture, Folk culture, Folk artists, Patriarchal society, Suppressed groups, Socio-cultural life

## Introduction

Assam is the home of many ethnic groups and different cultures. Assam is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse population. Assamese culture is the fusion of Indo-Burmese, Mongolian and Aryan influences. The popularity of Assamese culture is very high in the worldwide view. Assam has a rich cultural heritage and is especially known for its vibrant and colourful folk dances, folk music, folk-dramas etc. Assamese folk culture expresses the beauty of Assam and narrates its cultural practices, norms and values through their forms of Dance, Music and Dramas. Assamese folk culture is the root of Assamese society. It highlights the natural forms of cultural phenomena and represents the original views of their society. Its folk culture represents the realistic scenario of their society and holds their culture very smoothly. Folk culture is not a recent concept, it has developed equally from when human settlement began. There is no evidence about when and where the folk culture originated as it was transmitted orally from one generation to another.

Folk culture is specially performed by the folk artists. Folk artists are the person who narrates their culture very beautifully in the way of dance, music and drama. In Assam, both male and female artists perform their folk art forms equally and protect their culture very carefully. Through this, they try to hold their cultural identity. In the field of culture, folk artists faced many social and economic problems.

Assamese society is a patriarchal society, where the male is the main controller of their society and the female are the ones who always follow all the rules and restrictions that their men decided for them. Without the permission of society, women can't do anything so the societal status of women is always low from the earlier period. Today everyone accepts modernity and follows the rules of Westernization, still, women folk artists face lots of challenges based on their occupations, and their socio-cultural and socio-economic life.

### **Review of the Literature**

Lakshmi Priya Daniel's Study on 'Signatures of a collective self: A study of selected contemporary women artists from South India' portrays the scenario of women artists in South India. This study highlights that In the Pre-Independent Period, and post-independent modernist period women artists especially faced lots of barriers in their personal and professional lives. Society ignores the sounds of expression, especially for women artists and the female body is seen as an object of desire and consumption. According to the study, South Indian female artists are significantly less inclined than male artists to take up folk art as a profession because society does not give them support in their socio-cultural life. So still, many women artists are considered as they belong to the minority group. The study reveals that as compared to male artists South Indian female artists the prominence of taking folk art as their profession is less.

Akpan–Obong Patence's study on 'Folk music, tradition and gender stereotypes: A feminist analysis of the work of a Nigerian folk icon' addresses that, women folk artists have faced the problems of socio-political and cultural issues especially women folk singers faced public shaming. and society gives female artists a special margin and some gender stereotypes rules and regulations, which affect their careers and also hamper their socio-cultural life. This study reflects that adopting and practising folk music provides a special occupational platform for women. However, social behaviours affect the lives of women folk artists and make them marginalised.

### **Methodology of the study**

#### **Objectives**

- To understand the concept of folk art and folk artists of Assam.
- To analyze the problems of women folk artists in their socio-cultural life.

#### **Area of the study**

The study area is based in lower Assam. Lower Assam is located in the west of the Brahmaputra River and the lower Assam division contains 12 districts and culturally these regions are very active.

#### **Sampling**

The researcher has collected the data through a simple random sampling method which is a sub-type of probability sampling.

### Data collection

The researcher will collect information from two sources that are Primary data and secondary data.

1. **Primary data:** The data will be collected from the residents of lower Assam's female folk artists with the help of the interview schedule.
2. **Secondary data:** The data will be collected from books, articles, journals, newspapers, authentic websites and resource persons.

### Significance of the study-

- This study will help to understand Assamese folk culture and lower Assamese people's cultural practices.
- This study will help in highlighting the problems of women folk artists in their cultural field and their main causes.
- This study will help to guide the women folk artists to overcome the problems in the socio-cultural life.

### Limitations of the study-

This study is only restricted to the responses given by the respondents and the data collected through various websites, journals etc.

### Data analysis

Assam is the home of many ethnic groups who follow different cultures. Every group represent the beauty of Assam and has followed different rules and regulations that are part of Assamese society. Assamese culture is rich and colourful. However, the folk culture of Assam is the most popular and vibrant. Assam is a patriarchal society but women play an active role in their society. In Assam, there is a lot of folk music, folk dance and folk dramas. The famous folk music of lower Assam is Kamrupiya Lokageet, Goalpariya Lokageet, Bihu Geet, Bihu naam, Tokarigeet, Aainam, Dihanaam, Oja Pali, Naagranaam, Holi Geet, Gorokhiya Naam, Zikir -Zari etc. All this folk music is equally very rich and reflects the outdoor and indoor life of the lower Assam people and doesn't follow any strict rules of composition and performance. However, folk dance and folk drama also reflect the cultural life of the particular region. The famous folk dances of lower Assam are Bihu Dance, Bhortal Nritya, Bag rumba, Putala Nritya etc. The famous folk dramas of Lower Assam are Jatra, Bharigan, Khulia-Bhaoria, Oja Pali etc. All of these dramas are very entertaining and energetic.

Assamese folk culture is especially practiced by folk artists including both male and female folk artists. They equally represent their colourful culture and maintain their culture very beautifully. Folk artists hold their culture very tightly. Because of these folk artists, new generations are becoming aware of their original culture, earlier society and the formation of their society. Thus, folk artists are the person who is the mediator of culture.

This study reflects that in lower Assam folk music, folk dance, and folk drama are very famous. But these folk artists especially women folk artists are facing lots of challenges.

### Challenges of Female Folk artist in Lower Assam

Female folk artists in Lower Assam faced several challenges, including:

**Socio-cultural barriers:**

Traditional gender roles often limit women's participation in public performances, especially in conservative communities. Societal pressure conforms to domestic roles rather than pursuing a career in the arts.

**Limited opportunities:**

Female folk artists have fewer opportunities for exposure and recognition as compared to their male counterparts. They face discrimination in booking gigs, accessing resources, or participating in festivals and events.

**Financial constraints:**

Many female folk artists struggle financially, as folk artistry may not always be lucrative. Lack of financial support or sponsorship can hinder their ability to sustain themselves solely through their art.

**Lack of education and training:**

Lack of formal education or training in their art form can affect their ability to refine their skills or to explore new growth opportunities.

**Health and safety concerns:**

Travelling for performances, especially in remote areas, can pose safety risks for female artists. They also face health challenges due to strenuous performances or lack of access to healthcare facilities.

**Conservation of traditional knowledge:**

There is a risk of fading and dying out of these folk-art forms due to Modernization and globalization. Female folk artists Often play a crucial role in preserving these art forms, but they struggle to pass on their knowledge and skills to future generations.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from both the government and civil society which will provide support, promote gender equality, and preserve the rich cultural heritage of Assam's folk arts.

**Findings**

The women folk artists in Assam are facing various challenges, including societal norms that sometimes restrict their participation in public performances. Lack of financial support, limited access to training and resources and difficulty balancing their artistic pursuits with family responsibilities are some of the important challenges that are limiting their ability to present their folk culture. However, women folk artists often encounter gender bias, and stereotypes response in the male-dominated folk art scene. These situations make them alienated from their society because they start to believe that, they are unwanted and society doesn't respect their talent. As a result, women artists hide their talent and gradually they lose their socio-cultural value or socio-cultural identity. But still, most of the women artists play a crucial role in preserving and enriching the regional cultural heritage and never focus on their socio-cultural and economic issues. They continue in their profession because of their love for the art and culture. And accepted as a sole profession and help people to connect culturally. However, this study proved that in lower Assam women artists are facing lots of problems, Thus, these women artists are losing hope in their cultural field but our society does not support these women artists in the scenario.

**Conclusions**

Assam is the home of culture and the people of Assam are culturally active. Assamese people are still following every cultural phenomenon that has been given by society. Assamese folk culture is very active in shaping and maintaining the regional cultural identity of Assam. Assamese folk culture demonstrates

the power of their art and creates a meaningful connection within their communities. Women folk artists in Assam play a vital role in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of their region. They engage in various forms of folk arts, including music, dance, weaving, drama, pottery, and storytelling etc. These women folk artists face various challenges that have disturbed their socio-cultural and economic status. They hamper their mental status and lose their confidence. But women artists are continuously and significantly contributing to Assam's cultural landscape, enriching it with their talent, creativity and resilience. Their contributions are essential in keeping Assamese folk traditions alive and thriving.

### **Suggestions**

After completing the entire study, the researcher has furnished a few suggestions based on data collection and findings. Some of the suggestions are as follows

- The government should focus on the problems of women folk artists.
- The government should organize and promote various cultural programs to help these women artists to showcase their identity and get recognition.
- NGOs should focus on the problems faced by women artists in their professional lives and should help them in solving these problems.
- Media should be focused on the socio-cultural problems of women artists and should inaugurate some programs where they can exhibit their folk culture and cultural identity.
- Artist should Accept digitalization which helps them to showcase their problems and talent very easily to the mass population.

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