

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.