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The Assertive Idiom and Folk Narratives: Culture, Folklore and Identity Politics in Assam

Contemporary assertive idioms have co-opted the notion of ethnic cultures in the spawning identity debates in Northeast India. Folklore has always been bound up with the politics of cultural identity and political propaganda. While folk performative forms are often used as expressive and coercive mediums to put across ideological formulations, cultural markers from the realm of folklore as in dress, music and other manifestation of material culture are being increasingly appropriated in assertive ethnic idioms in Assam and elsewhere in the region. The proposed paper would try to analyze the spawning identity debates in Assam where various ethnic groups are vying with each other and the state for carving out distinctive political and cultural spaces, and how traditional expressive forms are being appropriated into the debates as indicative of their distinctiveness. This often leads to the invention of tradition, rather than discovery, as years of syncretic dynamics are being forcibly reversed. Real issues like access to equitable development and grass root political empowerment are bypassed and ephemeral cultural issues are raised that dilutes and diverts.