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**LULLABIES OF ASSAM: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO MISING AND DIMASA LULLABIES**

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Keywords	Abstract
Lullabies, Assam, Mising, Dimasa, Folk Culture.	<p>Lullabies are a significant component of oral folk tradition, representing the emotional, cultural, and social life of communities. In Assam, lullabies, commonly known as <i>nichukani geet</i>, are practiced among various indigenous groups and play a crucial role in early childhood care and cultural transmission. This study focuses on lullabies of Assam with special reference to the Mising and Dimasa communities. It aims to analyze their thematic elements, linguistic features, and cultural significance.</p> <p>Mising lullabies are closely linked to the natural environment and reflect riverine life, often portraying nature, motherhood, and daily activities. On the other hand, Dimasa lullabies are shaped by tonal linguistic structures and emphasize social values, beliefs, and traditional practices. These lullabies not only soothe children but also serve as mediums of informal education and cultural continuity.</p> <p>The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary data such as books, journals, and reports, along with limited field insights. The findings reveal that lullabies function as important tools of emotional bonding between mother and child, early learning, and preservation of</p>



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	<p>cultural identity among these communities. However, increasing modernization, urbanization, and technological influences are contributing to the gradual decline of this oral tradition. Therefore, the study highlights the urgent need for proper documentation, preservation, and promotion of lullabies as an essential part of Assam's rich intangible cultural heritage.</p>
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Introduction

Lullabies represent one of the most ancient and universal forms of human expression, transcending geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. These soothing songs, typically sung by mothers or caregivers, are primarily intended to calm infants and induce sleep. However, their significance extends far beyond this functional role. Lullabies serve as important cultural artifacts that reflect the emotional, social, and cultural realities of the communities in which they are created. They embody collective memory, preserve traditions, and provide insight into the everyday lives of people.

In the context of folklore studies, lullabies are regarded as an integral part of oral tradition. Unlike written literature, they are transmitted orally from generation to generation, often undergoing subtle changes over time. This dynamic nature enables lullabies to adapt to changing social conditions while retaining their core elements. Scholars have emphasized that lullabies are closely associated with women's voices, particularly mothers, and thus offer a unique perspective on gender roles, emotional expression, and domestic life.

Assam, a culturally rich and diverse state in Northeast India, provides a fertile ground for the study of lullabies. The region is home to numerous indigenous communities, each possessing distinct languages, customs, and traditions. Among these, the Mising and Dimasa communities are notable for their vibrant cultural heritage and rich tradition of folk songs. Lullabies, locally known as *nichukani geet*, form an important component of their oral literature and are deeply embedded in everyday life, especially in childcare practices.

The Mising community, traditionally inhabiting the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra valley, maintains a close relationship with nature. This connection is vividly reflected in their lullabies, which frequently incorporate imagery of rivers, birds, forests, and agricultural activities. These songs not only soothe children but also introduce them to their natural and cultural environment. The narrative style of Mising lullabies, combined with rich descriptive elements, enhances both their aesthetic and cultural value.

In contrast, the Dimasa community, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, possesses a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. Dimasa lullabies are characterized by their tonal structure, which lends a unique musical quality to the songs. These lullabies often emphasize social relationships, cultural values, and traditional beliefs. While Mising lullabies tend to foreground environmental imagery, Dimasa lullabies place greater emphasis on social and cultural themes.



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The study of lullabies in these communities offers valuable insights into their cultural identity and social organization. It helps in understanding how traditions are preserved and transmitted through oral forms. Furthermore, lullabies play a significant role in early childhood development by contributing to emotional bonding, language acquisition, and cognitive growth.

In the contemporary context, however, the practice of singing lullabies is gradually declining due to the influence of digital media, changing lifestyles, and urbanization. This situation underscores the urgent need to document and analyze lullabies as an important aspect of intangible cultural heritage.

This study aims to explore the lullabies of Assam with special reference to the Mising and Dimasa communities. It seeks to analyze their thematic patterns, stylistic features, and cultural significance while also providing a comparative perspective.

Objectives

1. To analyze the thematic and stylistic features of **Mising** and Dimasa lullabies.
2. To compare the similarities and differences between the two traditions.
3. To examine the cultural significance of lullabies in preserving indigenous identity.

Literature Review

The study of lullabies has attracted interdisciplinary attention from folklore, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and developmental psychology. Across these fields, lullabies are widely recognized as a core component of oral tradition and a rich source for understanding cultural identity, social structure, and early childhood experience.

In folklore studies, scholars have conceptualized lullabies as integral elements of folk literature that embody the collective memory and values of a community. Orally transmitted genres like lullabies persist because they are embedded in everyday practices—particularly caregiving—allowing them to survive even in the absence of written records. Ethnographic works on Northeast Indian tribal songs also highlight lullabies for their emotional depth and cultural specificity, demonstrating how maternal voices encode affection, anxiety, and social norms within simple melodic structures.

From a comparative ethnomusicological perspective, researchers have argued that song styles, including lullabies, correlate with broader cultural patterns such as social organization and gender roles. Lullabies typically exhibit softer dynamics, repetitive phrasing, and narrower pitch ranges—features that align with their soothing function while reflecting intimate domestic contexts. This approach is particularly relevant in the study of indigenous communities where music is closely tied to social life and environmental settings.

Psychological research further emphasizes the developmental significance of lullabies. Studies show that lullabies contribute to emotional regulation, attention, and early language acquisition. The



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predictable rhythm and melodic contours help infants process auditory stimuli, while the caregiver's voice fosters attachment and a sense of security. Lullabies are also distinguished from play songs by their slower tempo and calming intent, reinforcing their universal role in caregiving practices.

Within the Assamese context, scholars have highlighted the importance of folk traditions in preserving regional identity. Oral genres such as lullabies serve as repositories of cultural knowledge, reflecting social life, beliefs, and environmental interactions. Studies on Assamese folk literature underline the diversity of these traditions, noting that lullabies are among the most intimate forms of expression—often confined to domestic spaces yet rich in cultural meaning.

Research specific to the **Mising** community reveals a strong connection between lullabies and the natural environment. Mising folk songs, particularly *Ni:tom*, are deeply rooted in ecological and social contexts. Their lullabies frequently incorporate imagery of rivers, birds, and agricultural activities, reflecting a riverine lifestyle. These songs often take a narrative form, blending storytelling with soothing rhythms, thereby serving both emotional and educational functions.

In contrast, studies on the Dimasa community, though relatively limited, point to distinctive linguistic and cultural features. Dimasa songs, including lullabies, are influenced by the tonal structure of the language, which contributes to their musical quality and aesthetic expression. Thematically, they emphasize social relationships, cultural values, and moral instruction rather than detailed environmental imagery.

Recent scholarship also addresses the impact of modernization on lullaby traditions. Researchers observe that the practice of singing lullabies is gradually declining due to urbanization, nuclear family structures, and the growing influence of digital media. Despite this trend, lullabies continue to play a vital role in emotional bonding and cultural transmission, especially in rural contexts.

Globally, studies affirm the universality of lullabies, noting that despite cultural variations, they share common features such as repetition, soft melody, and emotional expression. This universality highlights their fundamental role in human societies while allowing for diverse cultural expressions.

In summary, existing literature establishes lullabies as multidimensional cultural forms that integrate emotional, social, and educational functions. While substantial research exists on lullabies and Assamese folk traditions, there remains a noticeable gap in comparative studies focusing specifically on **Mising** and Dimasa lullabies. The present study seeks to address this gap through a focused comparative analysis within the broader framework of folklore and cultural studies.

Sample Universe and Sample Selection

The sample universe of the present study consists of the indigenous communities of Assam, with specific focus on the **Mising** and Dimasa groups. These communities were selected due to their rich cultural heritage and strong tradition of oral literature, particularly lullabies. The selection enables a



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comparative analysis of two distinct cultural and linguistic traditions within the same geographical region.

The **Mising** community primarily inhabits the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra valley, where their lifestyle is closely associated with agriculture and fishing. This ecological setting significantly influences their cultural expressions. In contrast, the Dimasa community is largely concentrated in the hill districts of Assam and neighboring regions, where their cultural practices are shaped by their geographical environment and social organization.

The sample selection for this study is purposive rather than random. Given the qualitative nature of the research, the emphasis is on depth of understanding rather than statistical representation. Selected lullabies from both communities, as documented in secondary sources, constitute the primary data for analysis. These include examples drawn from books, research articles, and cultural studies.

In addition to documented sources, informal insights from individuals familiar with these traditions have been considered to provide practical perspectives on the use of lullabies in everyday life. However, due to limitations of time and resources, extensive fieldwork could not be undertaken.

The sample is not intended to be statistically representative but to offer a meaningful understanding of the thematic and cultural aspects of lullabies. The focus is on capturing the essence of these traditions rather than generalizing findings.

This approach aligns with qualitative research methodology, which prioritizes detailed interpretation and contextual analysis. By focusing on selected examples, the study highlights the distinctive features of **Mising** and Dimasa lullabies while also identifying shared patterns and cultural continuities.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology to examine lullabies as cultural texts. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as the research focuses on interpreting meanings, themes, and cultural significance rather than measuring numerical variables. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of lullabies as expressions of social and cultural life.

The study is primarily based on secondary data collected from books, academic journals, research articles, and other scholarly sources. These materials provide the theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing lullabies and understanding their role in cultural transmission. In addition, limited field-based insights have been incorporated to enhance contextual understanding, although extensive primary data collection was not undertaken due to time and resource constraints.

The research design combines thematic analysis and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring motifs and patterns in lullabies, such as nature imagery, emotional expression,



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and representations of cultural values. Comparative analysis is employed to examine similarities and differences between Mising and Dimasa lullabies, enabling a clearer understanding of their distinctive features and shared characteristics.

The research procedure follows a systematic sequence. Initially, relevant literature is reviewed to establish the theoretical background and identify existing research gaps. Subsequently, selected lullabies from both communities are collected from secondary sources and examined for their thematic and stylistic elements. Finally, the findings are interpreted in relation to the broader cultural, linguistic, and social contexts of the respective communities.

Ethical considerations form an important part of the study. Care has been taken to respect the cultural sensitivity of indigenous communities and to avoid misrepresentation of their traditions. All sources of information have been properly acknowledged to maintain academic integrity.

Overall, the methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive, context-sensitive, and analytically rigorous understanding of lullabies as cultural expressions within the Mising and Dimasa communities.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of lullabies from the **Mising** and Dimasa communities reveals a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and emotional elements. Although the data for this study is primarily derived from secondary sources and interpretative observations, clear thematic patterns and stylistic features emerge, enabling a meaningful comparative understanding of the two traditions.

Thematic Patterns

A prominent feature of **Mising lullabies** is their strong association with the natural environment. These lullabies frequently incorporate imagery of rivers, birds, forests, rain, and agricultural life, reflecting the ecological setting of the Brahmaputra valley. The Mising community's close relationship with nature is vividly expressed through these songs, which often create a calm and serene atmosphere for the child. Such imagery suggests that lullabies function not only as soothing mechanisms but also as early tools for environmental familiarization and cultural orientation.

In contrast, **Dimasa lullabies** exhibit a thematic focus on social relationships, cultural values, and traditional beliefs. Rather than emphasizing natural surroundings, these lullabies highlight kinship ties, moral instruction, blessings, and expressions of care and protection. This indicates a more socially oriented thematic framework, where lullabies serve as a medium for introducing children to societal norms and values.



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Linguistic and Stylistic Features

Mising lullabies are generally narrative and descriptive in nature. They often incorporate storytelling elements, with simple and repetitive language that enhances rhythm and memorability. The repetition of phrases contributes to their soothing quality and facilitates oral transmission across generations.

Dimasa lullabies, on the other hand, are shaped by the tonal characteristics of the Dimasa language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Variations in pitch and tone create a distinctive musical quality, giving these lullabies a melodious and rhythmic flow. Even with relatively simple lyrics, tonal modulation adds emotional depth and aesthetic richness.

Functional Aspects

Both Mising and Dimasa lullabies perform multiple functions beyond inducing sleep. Firstly, they act as instruments of emotional bonding between caregiver and child, fostering a sense of comfort, attachment, and security. Secondly, they function as informal educational tools, helping children acquire language patterns, rhythm, and cultural knowledge through repeated exposure.

Furthermore, lullabies play a crucial role in cultural transmission. They introduce children to the values, beliefs, and traditions of their community, thereby preserving cultural identity across generations. In this sense, lullabies act as carriers of collective memory and social continuity.

Comparative Interpretation

The comparative analysis reveals both similarities and differences between the two traditions. Common features include simplicity, repetition, and emotional expression—elements essential for their primary function of soothing children.

However, the differences lie in thematic emphasis and stylistic expression. Mising lullabies foreground environmental imagery and narrative elements, reflecting an ecological worldview. In contrast, Dimasa lullabies emphasize tonal variation and social values, reflecting linguistic and cultural structures.

Interpretative Insights

The findings indicate that lullabies are deeply shaped by the cultural contexts in which they are produced. They reflect both the physical environment and the social organization of the community. The variation between Mising and Dimasa lullabies demonstrates how cultural diversity influences oral traditions, while their similarities highlight the universal functions of lullabies as tools of comfort, communication, and continuity.

Conclusion of Analysis

Overall, the data analysis confirms that lullabies are multifaceted cultural expressions that integrate emotional, linguistic, and social dimensions. They serve both practical and symbolic purposes,



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contributing to early childhood development as well as cultural preservation. The study of **Mising** and Dimasa lullabies thus offers valuable insights into the broader role of oral traditions in sustaining cultural identity and heritage.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the present study reveal that lullabies among the **Mising** and Dimasa communities of Assam are deeply embedded in their cultural, linguistic, and social frameworks. While both traditions share the fundamental purpose of soothing infants and fostering emotional bonding, they exhibit distinct thematic orientations, stylistic features, and cultural implications.

Results

The analysis shows that **Mising lullabies** are predominantly nature-oriented and narrative in structure. These songs frequently incorporate imagery from the surrounding environment, such as rivers, birds, forests, and agricultural activities. This reflects the close relationship between the Mising community and their ecological setting in the Brahmaputra valley. Their narrative style often includes imaginative storytelling, which not only calms the child but also introduces them to their natural and social environment. The use of repetition and simple rhythmic patterns enhances their soothing effect and facilitates oral transmission.

In contrast, **Dimasa lullabies** are characterized by their tonal and rhythmic qualities, shaped by the linguistic structure of the Dimasa language. These lullabies emphasize social relationships, cultural values, and traditional beliefs rather than environmental imagery. Common themes include family bonds, moral guidance, blessings, and protection. The tonal variation of the language contributes to a melodious and expressive musical quality, even when the lyrics are relatively simple.

Another key finding is that both traditions share universal features such as simplicity of language, repetition, and gentle melodic patterns. These features are essential for their primary function of soothing and comforting the child. Additionally, both Mising and Dimasa lullabies serve as important tools of emotional bonding, strengthening the connection between caregiver and child.

The study further reveals that lullabies function as informal educational tools. Through repeated exposure, children become familiar with linguistic patterns, cultural symbols, and social values. Thus, lullabies contribute to early cognitive and linguistic development while also preserving cultural knowledge.

Discussion

The findings support the broader theoretical understanding that lullabies are shaped by cultural and environmental contexts. The nature-oriented themes of Mising lullabies align with the community's ecological lifestyle, highlighting the influence of environment on cultural expression. This



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observation is consistent with folklore studies that emphasize the close relationship between oral traditions and natural surroundings.

Similarly, the tonal and value-oriented characteristics of Dimasa lullabies reflect the linguistic and social structure of the community. The emphasis on family relationships and moral values indicates that lullabies function as instruments of socialization, introducing children to societal norms and expectations. This reinforces the idea that lullabies are not merely functional songs but also carry symbolic and educational meanings.

The similarities observed between the two traditions further reinforce the universality of lullabies. Features such as repetition, simplicity, and emotional expression are common across cultures and are crucial for their effectiveness. These shared characteristics point to the psychological and biological foundations of lullabies, particularly their role in emotional regulation and bonding.

However, the study also identifies a significant challenge—the gradual decline of lullaby traditions due to modernization. The increasing influence of digital media, changing family structures, and urbanization has reduced the practice of singing traditional lullabies. As a result, younger generations are becoming less familiar with these cultural forms, leading to a potential loss of intangible heritage.

This situation highlights the urgent need for cultural preservation. Documentation, audio-visual recording, archiving, and integration of lullabies into educational and cultural programs can play a crucial role in safeguarding these traditions.

Conclusion of Discussion

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that lullabies of the **Mising** and Dimasa communities are rich cultural expressions that reflect their unique identities while sharing universal functions. They serve as tools of emotional bonding, cultural transmission, and early learning. Despite the challenges posed by modernization, lullabies remain valuable cultural resources that require preservation and further scholarly attention.

Scope for Future Research

The present study provides a qualitative understanding of lullabies among the **Mising** and Dimasa communities; however, it also opens several avenues for future research.

One important area is **extensive fieldwork-based documentation**. Since lullabies are primarily oral in nature, many remain undocumented and are at risk of disappearing. Future researchers can undertake ethnographic studies involving direct interaction with caregivers, elders, and community members to collect authentic lullaby texts, audio recordings, and performance contexts.

Another area is **comparative research across different indigenous communities** of Assam and Northeast India. While this study focuses on Mising and Dimasa lullabies, similar traditions exist



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among Bodo, Karbi, Rabha, and other groups. A broader comparative framework would help identify regional variations as well as shared cultural patterns.

Further research can also focus on **linguistic and musical analysis**. Detailed study of phonetics, tonal structures, rhythm, and melody can provide deeper insights into how language and music interact in shaping lullabies—particularly in tonal languages like Dimasa.

An additional area of interest is the **psychological and developmental impact** of lullabies. Interdisciplinary research combining folklore with developmental psychology can explore how lullabies influence emotional regulation, cognitive growth, and language acquisition in early childhood.

The **role of digital technology** in preservation and dissemination is another promising field. Digital archives, mobile applications, and online platforms can help document and share lullabies, ensuring their accessibility for future generations.

Finally, future studies may examine the **impact of modernization and changing family structures** on lullaby practices. Understanding how urbanization, migration, and media influence traditional childcare practices can offer valuable insights into the transformation of oral traditions.

Overall, future research holds significant potential to expand both academic understanding and practical preservation of lullabies as an essential component of Assam's cultural heritage.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several practical suggestions can be proposed to preserve and promote lullabies among the **Mising** and Dimasa communities. As lullabies form an important part of oral tradition and are gradually declining due to modernization, timely and systematic efforts are necessary to safeguard this valuable cultural heritage.

Firstly, there is a strong need for **systematic documentation** of lullabies. Researchers, cultural organizations, and government bodies should initiate projects to record lullabies in audio and video formats. Such documentation should capture not only the lyrics but also pronunciation, performance context, and musical elements. This will help preserve authentic versions for future generations.

Secondly, lullabies should be **integrated into educational and cultural programs**. Schools and local institutions can include folk songs and lullabies in curricula or extracurricular activities, encouraging children to learn and appreciate their cultural heritage from an early age. Cultural festivals and community events can also serve as platforms for showcasing traditional lullabies.

Thirdly, efforts should be made to **promote community participation**. Elders and traditional knowledge holders should be encouraged to transmit their knowledge to younger generations. Community-based workshops, storytelling sessions, and informal gatherings can help revive interest in lullaby traditions.



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Another important suggestion is the **use of digital technology** for preservation and dissemination. Digital archives, mobile applications, and online platforms can make lullabies accessible to a wider audience, particularly younger generations who are more engaged with digital media.

Additionally, **government and academic institutions** should actively support research and preservation initiatives by providing funding, infrastructure, and policy support. Collaboration among scholars, cultural practitioners, and local communities can lead to more sustainable preservation strategies.

Finally, **awareness programs** should be conducted to highlight the cultural, emotional, and educational significance of lullabies. Greater public recognition of their value can encourage collective efforts to sustain these traditions.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the cultural, emotional, and social significance of lullabies among the **Mising** and Dimasa communities of Assam. As an integral part of oral tradition, lullabies serve not only as soothing songs for infants but also as important carriers of cultural identity, values, and collective memory. Through a qualitative and comparative analysis, the study demonstrates that while both communities share the universal function of lullabies—comforting children and fostering emotional bonding—their thematic and stylistic features vary according to their cultural and linguistic contexts.

Mising lullabies are deeply rooted in the natural environment, reflecting the riverine and agrarian lifestyle of the community. Their use of vivid imagery, narrative elements, and references to nature introduces children to their surroundings while creating a calming atmosphere. In contrast, Dimasa lullabies are shaped by the tonal structure of their language and emphasize social relationships, moral values, and cultural traditions. These differences illustrate how lullabies are influenced by environmental, linguistic, and social factors.

At the same time, the study identifies important similarities between the two traditions. Both employ simplicity, repetition, and gentle rhythm, making them effective tools for soothing children. They also function as informal educational mediums, contributing to early language acquisition, emotional development, and cultural transmission.

However, the study also draws attention to a significant concern—the gradual decline of lullaby traditions due to modernization, urbanization, and the growing influence of digital media. This shift has reduced the practice of singing traditional lullabies, particularly among younger generations.

In conclusion, lullabies represent a vital component of Assam’s intangible cultural heritage. Their preservation is essential for maintaining cultural continuity and diversity. Efforts such as systematic documentation, community participation, and integration into educational and digital platforms are



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necessary to ensure their survival. Future research and policy initiatives should prioritize the safeguarding of lullabies as living cultural expressions.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and or publication of this article.

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