

2024-25

ANNUAL REPORT

New Age Actors' Theatre Foundation

NEW AGE ACTORS' THEATRE FOUNDATION

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MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON



Dear Friends,

This year has been one of growth, innovation and resilience for New Age Actors' Theatre Foundation. We have continued to use puppetry and theatre as tools for awareness and transformation, addressing urgent social issues while also preserving and innovating Assam's cultural traditions.

From reaching remote border villages with campaigns on education and health, to nurturing adolescent girls through Puppetshala, and pioneering the integration of Sattriya masks with Putola Naas, our journey has been both challenging and rewarding.

I extend heartfelt thanks to our partners, supporters, volunteers and community members who walked with us on this journey. Together, we are proving that art is not just for entertainment, but also for empowerment and change.

Warm regards,

Manash Protim Neog
Co-Founder & Chairperson,
New Age Actors' Theatre Foundation



MESSAGE FROM CO- FOUNDER



Dear Friends,

The past year has been a year of learning, collaboration, and meaningful connections for NAAT Foundation. Every project we undertook reaffirmed our belief that traditional arts can do much more than preserve culture. They can bring people together, spark conversations, and create opportunities for communities to imagine a better future.

Throughout the year, we worked closely with children, young people, women, teachers, folk artists, and village communities across Assam. Whether through awareness campaigns, workshops, or performances, we witnessed how puppetry creates a safe and engaging space to discuss difficult social issues while celebrating our shared cultural heritage.

I am deeply grateful to our team, partners, supporters, and every community that welcomed us with warmth and trust. Your encouragement continues to inspire us to dream bigger and work harder. As we move into the coming year, we look forward to expanding our reach, deepening our impact, and continuing our journey of using art as a catalyst for awareness, empowerment, and positive social change.

In gratitude,

Drishana Kalita
Co-Founder
New Age Actors' Theatre Foundation



ABOUT NAAT FOUNDATION

New Age Actors' Theatre (NAAT) Foundation is dedicated to creating social change through the transformative power of theatre, puppetry and creative arts. Since 2013, we have traveled across Assam, using performance as a tool to spread awareness on crucial social issues, including girls' education, women's right to health and nutrition, prevention of gender-based violence, and the promotion of gender equality and inclusivity. Through our initiatives NAAT Academy of Acting, PuppetPeople_Assam, and NAAT Studio we strive to engage communities, challenge societal norms and inspire meaningful dialogue. Our mission is to make art a catalyst for awareness, empowerment and positive change.

MISSION:

New Age Actors' Theatre (NAAT) is dedicated to preserving and promoting the traditional performance art forms of Assam as powerful tools for social change and awareness. Through theatre, puppetry, and storytelling, we strive to engage communities, address critical social issues, and inspire positive transformation while keeping Assam's rich cultural heritage alive.

VISION:

New Age Actors' Theatre (NAAT) Foundation envisions a society where theatre, puppetry, and creative arts serve as powerful tools for education, empowerment, and social transformation. We strive to create a world where every individual, regardless of gender or background, has access to knowledge, equality, and artistic expression. Through our performances and community-driven initiatives, we aim to foster critical thinking, inclusivity, and lasting social impact, making art a driving force for a more just and compassionate world.

Introduction



The year 2024–25 was a period of growth, innovation, and deep community engagement for NAAT Foundation. Through our initiative PuppetPeople Assam, we combined traditional folk arts with socially relevant storytelling to raise awareness, empower communities, and preserve Assam's cultural heritage.

Our work spanned awareness campaigns in remote villages, skill-building workshops for children and adolescent girls, and pioneering efforts to integrate two centuries-old traditions Putola Naas (Assamese puppetry) and Sattriya Mask-making.





CAMPAIGN ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE, EARLY MARRIAGE, AND GIRLS' EDUCATION

We reached 10 villages along the Assam–Meghalaya border, including Bryrnihat, Sarutandu, Bortandu, Rangsakona, Nongthymmai, Dehalbagan, Lower Ballian, Hograpara, Tamulikuchi, Amjok, and Borbhuin.

Key issues addressed:

- Rising school dropouts due to substance abuse and child labor.
- High prevalence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy among girls.

Through puppet shows in collaboration with local schools, we initiated open discussions with both youth and adults. These engagements created space for communities to reflect on education and social challenges in an approachable way.



Awareness Campaigns





CAMPAIGN ON SANITATION AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE (NORTAP, SONAPUR, ASSAM)

In Nortap village, we conducted awareness shows focused on the lack of toilets in schools and the link between menstrual hygiene and girls' education. The campaign encouraged dialogue on practical solutions and sparked curiosity among youth to learn puppetry as an expressive medium.





STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE – PARTNERSHIP WITH CHILD IN NEED INSTITUTE

In Udalguri district, we conducted 20 puppet shows across 20 villages from 7–23 January 2025.
Themes included:

- Menstrual hygiene
- Early marriage
- Teenage pregnancy

The performances were rooted in local culture and were followed by community dialogues with elders, schoolteachers, and adolescents. Audience feedback highlighted increased awareness on maternal health practices and growing interest in learning puppetry.
Villages covered included: Bhakatpara, Punia, Sapkhaiti, Lowdong, Nalkhamara,Amguri,Chamuapara,Corammore,Khawrang,Ekrabari, Paneri TE, Bengbari, Ambagaon, Jhilkapara (Kalaigaon), Sastrapara, Garo Bazar, Garobasti, Batiamari, Mazkhuti, Pub Nepalpara and others.

MATERNAL HEALTH AND SUPERSTITIONS

In 5 villages of Udalguri, we addressed maternal and newborn health issues, focusing on reluctance around vaccines and ultrasounds due to superstition. Puppet shows and discussions encouraged healthier practices and debunked myths, especially among young couples.

CAMPAIGN THROUGH FOLK STORYTELLING (KAMRUP DISTRICT)

NAAT Foundation celebrated "World Puppetry Day" on 21 March 2025 with traditional string puppet performances of the Assamese folk tales *"Ou Kunwori"* and "*Panesoi"* at Khudradadhi village field.

Around 180–200 people from nearby villages attended. The celebration concluded with a focus group discussion on domestic violence and women's safety involving 30 women aged 18–70 years.









TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS – PUPPETSHALA

Our ***Puppetshala*** initiative continued as a flagship training program aimed at nurturing new voices in puppetry.

Workshops for Children (Borkhat, Kamrup District)

- 23–26 August 2024: Training for 30 children from three villages, focusing on Putola Naas and recycled-material puppetry.
- The workshops fostered creativity among children from economically challenged families.

Adolescent Girls' Theatre & Puppetry Course (Hajo, Kamrup)

- 10 November – 31 December 2024 and continued till January 2025 at Kushal Konwar High School, Pacharia.
- 25 adolescent girls from five villages participated.
  Training covered puppet-making, story writing, body movement and manipulation.

Objectives:

- Empower girls to voice experiences of gender inequality and violence.
- Provide a creative space to address issues like teenage pregnancy, poverty-driven dropout, and trafficking.
- Explore future livelihood opportunities through puppetry performances and tourism-based mementos.

Classes were paused after January due to Board examinations but will resume.





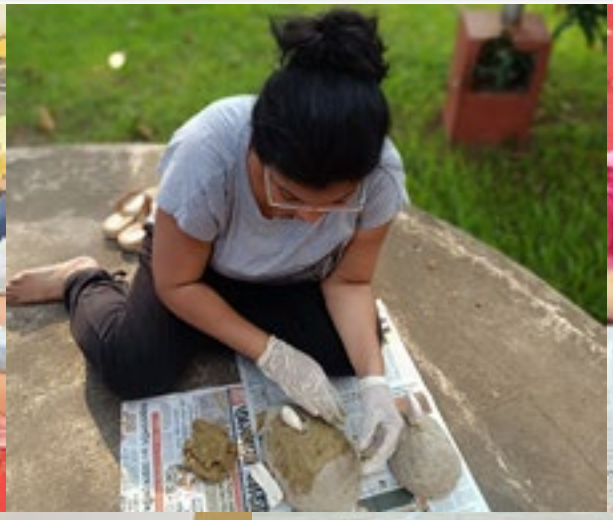
INNOVATION – SATTRIYA MASK PUTOLA NAAS

In a landmark initiative, NAAT Foundation began integrating Assam's Sattriya mask-making tradition (*Sattriya Mukha*) with Putola Naas puppetry.

- Collaboration was initiated with Chamaguri Sattra, Majuli, under the guidance of Padmashri Hem Chandra Goswami and Guru Haren Goswami.
- This effort represents the first-ever attempt to merge these two art forms, both created by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva.
- Another family of independent mask artists, preserving the tradition for three generations, was also included.

Impact:

This experimental innovation aims to elevate both art forms, creating new possibilities for traditional puppetry while conserving heritage crafts for future generations.




CONCLUSION

The year 2024–25 was marked by:

- Wider outreach: Over 40 villages covered across Kamrup, Udalguri, Sonapur, and Assam–Meghalaya border regions.
- Focused impact: Awareness on pressing social issues like early marriage, substance abuse, menstrual hygiene, maternal health, and gender-based violence.
- Capacity building: More than 50 children and adolescents trained under Puppetshala.
- Cultural innovation: Historic step towards merging Sattriya mask-making and Putola Naas.

At NAAT Foundation, we remain committed to using art for change and transformation, ensuring that traditional culture not only survives but thrives as a medium for social empowerment.








LOOKING BACK AT 2024–25

Awareness Campaigns

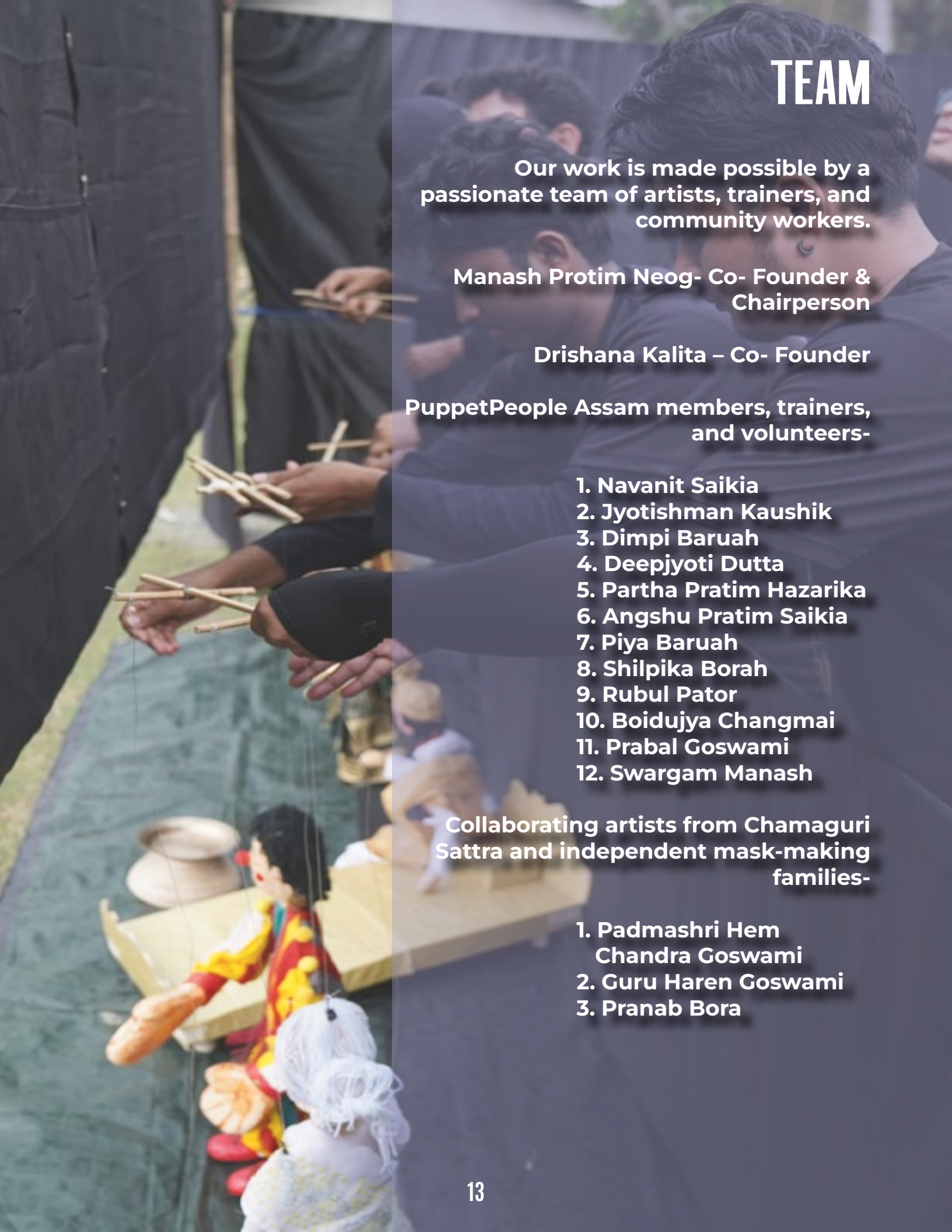
- Assam–Meghalaya Border Villages: Reached 10 villages tackling substance abuse, early marriage, and education.
- Sanitation & Menstrual Hygiene (Sonapur): Campaign highlighting lack of toilets for girls in schools.
- Storytelling for Change (Udalguri, 20 villages): Puppet shows on menstrual hygiene, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy in partnership with Child in Need Institute.
- Maternal Health Awareness (Udalguri, 5 villages): Addressed myths around vaccines, ultrasounds, and maternal care.
- Folk Storytelling Campaign (Kamrup): Retelling Assamese folktales to discuss child marriage, trafficking, and gender violence.

Training & Workshops – Puppetshala

- Workshops for Children (Borkhat, Kamrup): 30 children trained in Putola Naas and recycled-material puppetry.
- Adolescent Girls' Course (Hajo): 25 girls trained in puppetry, story writing, and performance to voice experiences of gender inequality and explore livelihood opportunities.

Cultural Innovation

- Initiated Assam's first effort to merge Sattriya mask-making with Putola Naas in collaboration with Chamaguri Sattra, Majuli.
- Supported both Sattra-based and independent mask-making families to sustain this 500-year-old heritage.



TEAM

Our work is made possible by a passionate team of artists, trainers, and community workers.

Manash Protim Neog- Co- Founder & Chairperson

Drishana Kalita – Co- Founder

PuppetPeople Assam members, trainers, and volunteers-

1. Navanit Saikia
2. Jyotishman Kaushik
3. Dimpi Baruah
4. Deepjyoti Dutta
5. Partha Pratim Hazarika
6. Angshu Pratim Saikia
7. Piya Baruah
8. Shilpika Borah
9. Rubul Pator
10. Boidujya Changmai
11. Prabal Goswami
12. Swargam Manash

Collaborating artists from Chamaguri Sattra and independent mask-making families-

1. Padmashri Hem Chandra Goswami
2. Guru Haren Goswami
3. Pranab Bora

ROAD AHEAD

As we step into 2025–26, NAAT Foundation will continue its dual focus:

1. Social Transformation through Puppetry
    - Expand Puppetshala to more schools and villages.
    - Strengthen campaigns on health, gender rights, and education.
2. Cultural Preservation and Innovation
    - Take forward the Sattriya Mask–Putola Naas integration.
    - Build sustainable livelihood opportunities for folk artists.



Our vision is to reach more than 5,000 women, girls, and children in Assam over the next year, making puppetry not only an art form but also a voice for empowerment and change.



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New Age Actors' Theatre Foundation

CONTACT:
NAAT FOUNDATION
Office address:
House No.16, Dispur Law College Road,
Near GNRC, Rukminigaon, Guwahati, Assam
PIN: 781006

www.naatfoundation.org

instagram.com/puppetpeople_assam

contact@naatfoundation.org

www.facebook.com/PuppetPeopleAssam