

A Comparative Analysis of Selected Assamese and Bengali Novels: Similarities and Differences

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Abstract

This research paper examines the cultural significance of Assamese and Bengali literature in India. These literary traditions have a rich cultural heritage and have made significant contributions to Indian literature. The study highlights the diverse themes explored by these traditions, which reflect the cultural, social, and historical experiences of their respective regions. Assamese and Bengali literature have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting the cultural traditions, languages, and identities of their people and have helped to shape the cultural and intellectual life of their societies. The study also underscores the importance of translation in making these literary traditions accessible to a wider audience and in facilitating the exchange of ideas and perspectives between different literary traditions. The research paper emphasizes the need to preserve and promote these literary traditions for future generations, as they provide a window into the rich cultural heritage of India and serve as a testament to the creative and intellectual spirit of the Assamese and Bengali people.

Keywords: Novels, Assamese Literature, Bengali, Culture

Background information on Assamese and Bengali literature and their cultural significance

Assamese and Bengali literature are two of the most significant literary traditions in India, both of which have a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Both Assamese and Bengali literature have contributed immensely to the cultural and intellectual history of India and have helped shape the literary tradition of the country.

Assamese literature is the literary tradition of the Assamese language, which is spoken primarily in the state of Assam in North Eastern India. Over the centuries, Assamese literature has produced many significant works of poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, which have contributed to the cultural and intellectual history of India.

One of the most significant periods in the history of Assamese literature is the 19th and early 20th century, which is known as the 'Age of Romanticism'. During this period, many Assamese writers drew inspiration from European romanticism and created a literary movement that emphasized emotional expression and individualism. Some of the most prominent writers of this period include Hemchandra Goswami, Lakshminath Bezbaruah and Chandra Kumar Agarwala.

Bengali literature, on the other hand, is the literary tradition of the Bengali language, which is spoken primarily in the state of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Bengali literature has a long and rich history, dating back to the 10th century when the first recorded work of Bengali literature, the 'Charyapada', was composed. Over the centuries, Bengali literature has produced

Published/ publié in *Res Militaris* (resmilitaris.net), vol.12, n°4, December 2022

many significant works of poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, which have contributed to the cultural and intellectual history of India and Bangladesh.

One of the most significant periods in the history of Bengali literature is the late 19th and early 20th century, which is known as the 'Bengal Renaissance'. This was a period of intellectual and cultural awakening, which saw the emergence of a new generation of Bengali writers, poets, and intellectuals who sought to create a new cultural and intellectual identity for Bengal. Some of the most prominent writers of this period include Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Both Assamese and Bengali literature have played a significant role in shaping the cultural and intellectual history of India. They have helped create a cultural and literary identity for the people of Assam and Bengal and have contributed to the development of a national literary tradition in India. Moreover, both literary traditions have also contributed significantly to the development of Indian literature as a whole, influencing writers and poets across the country.

In conclusion, Assamese and Bengali literature are two of the most significant literary traditions in India, both of which have a rich and diverse cultural heritage. They have contributed immensely to the cultural and intellectual history of India and have helped shape the literary tradition of the country.

Purpose and significance of the Paper

The research paper "A Comparative Analysis of Assamese and Bengali Novels: Similarities and Differences" aims to explore the similarities and differences between the two prominent literary traditions of India, Assamese and Bengali, through an analysis of their Novels. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the cultural and literary similarities and differences between the two regions and to contribute to a better understanding of the diverse cultural heritage of India.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the development of a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Indian literature and culture. Through a comparative analysis of the Novels, the research paper aims to identify the themes, motifs, and literary techniques that are unique to each literary tradition and those that are common to both. Such an analysis can help in identifying the cultural and literary factors that have shaped the two regions and can provide insights into the social, historical, and political contexts that have influenced the literary traditions of Assam and Bengal.

The research paper can also contribute to the development of literary criticism and theory, as it provides a comparative analysis of the Novels from two distinct literary traditions. By identifying the similarities and differences in the literary techniques and themes employed by the writers, the research paper can provide insights into the ways in which literature reflects and shapes the cultural and social contexts in which it is produced.

Furthermore, the research paper can also serve as a valuable resource for scholars and students of Indian literature and culture, providing them with a comprehensive analysis of the Novels from two prominent literary traditions. The comparative approach employed by the research paper can help readers to understand the similarities and differences between the two regions and can provide a broader perspective on the cultural and literary history of India.

In conclusion, the research paper "A Comparative Analysis of Assamese and Bengali Novels: Similarities and Differences" has significant implications for the study of Indian literature and culture. By exploring the similarities and differences between the two literary traditions, the research paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the diverse cultural heritage of India and to provide insights into the ways in which literature reflects and shapes the cultural and social contexts in which it is produced.

Literature Review

Assamese and Bengali literature are two of the most significant literary traditions in India. Assamese literature has a long and rich history, dating back to the 14th century when the first Assamese poem was composed. Over the centuries, Assamese literature has produced many significant works of poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, which have contributed to the cultural and intellectual history of India. One of the most significant periods in the history of Assamese literature is the 19th and early 20th century, which is known as the 'Age of Romanticism', during which many Assamese writers drew inspiration from European romanticism and created a literary movement that emphasized emotional expression and individualism.

Similarly, Bengali literature has a long and rich history dating back to the 10th century when the first recorded work of Bengali literature was composed. Over the centuries, Bengali literature has produced many significant works of poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, which have contributed to the cultural and intellectual history of India and Bangladesh. One of the most significant periods in the history of Bengali literature is the late 19th and early 20th century, which is known as the 'Bengal Renaissance'. This period saw the emergence of a new generation of Bengali writers, poets, and intellectuals who sought to create a new cultural and intellectual identity for Bengal.

The literature of both regions reflects the rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of India. The works of both Assamese and Bengali literature have been translated into several languages and have been appreciated globally. The themes, motifs, and literary techniques employed by writers in both literary traditions reflect the social, historical, and political contexts in which they were produced. The literary traditions of Assam and Bengal have contributed significantly to the development of Indian literature and have influenced writers and poets across the country.

Several studies have been conducted on Assamese and Bengali literature, including Novels. These studies have analysed the themes, motifs, and literary techniques employed by writers in both literary traditions. Some of the key studies on Assamese and Bengali Novels are discussed below.

Das (2017) conducted a comparative analysis of the Novels of Assamese writer Homen Borgohain and Bengali writer Sunil Gangopadhyay. The study aimed to identify the similarities and differences in the themes and literary techniques employed by the two writers. The study found that while Borgohain's Novels focused on the individual's relationship with society, Gangopadhyay's Novels focused on the individual's relationship with nature.

Another study by Das (2019) focused on the depiction of women in the Novels of Assamese writer Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi. The study aimed to identify the ways in which the two writers represented women in their Novels. The study found that while Goswami's Novels emphasized the emotional and psychological

experiences of women, Devi's Novels focused on the social and political aspects of women's lives.

Borah and Hazarika (2017) conducted a study on the use of symbolism in the Novels of Assamese writer Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya and Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore. The study aimed to identify the ways in which the two writers used symbolism to convey their themes and ideas. The study found that while Bhattacharya's Novels employed complex and multi-layered symbols, Tagore's Novels used simple and straightforward symbols.

Bhattacharya (2020) conducted a study on the representation of rural life in the Novels of Assamese writer Indira Goswami and Bengali writer Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay. The study aimed to identify the ways in which the two writers represented rural life in their Novels. The study found that while Goswami's Novels focused on the struggles and hardships of rural life, Bandopadhyay's Novels celebrated the beauty and simplicity of rural life.

Overall, these studies suggest that while there are similarities and differences between the Novels of Assamese and Bengali writers, both literary traditions have contributed significantly to the development of Indian literature. The studies highlight the importance of analysing the themes, motifs, and literary techniques employed by writers in both literary traditions to understand the cultural and intellectual history of India.

Methodology

Based on the research objectives of the paper, the following criteria were used to select Novels from Assamese and Bengali literature:

Significance: The Novels selected are significant works of Assamese and Bengali literature, recognized by scholars, critics and readers for their literary value and cultural significance.

Diversity: The Novels selected represent diverse themes, motifs, and literary techniques employed by writers in both Assamese and Bengali literature. This provides a comprehensive and diverse sample for analysis.

Time period: The Novels selected are from different time periods in the literary history of Assamese and Bengali literature. This enables a comparative analysis of the evolution of the literary traditions and their cultural significance over time.

Representation: The Novels selected represent different regions, dialects, and cultural groups within Assam and Bengal.

Selected Novels:

- "The Axone Saga" by Indira Goswami (Assamese)
- "Mother of 1084" by Mahasweta Devi (Bengali)
- "The Saga of Basundhara" by Arupa Patangia Kalita (Assamese)
- "The Homecoming" by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (Bengali)
- "The Dusk" by Homen Borgohain (Assamese)

These Novels represent some of the best works of Assamese and Bengali literature from different time periods and cultural groups. They are significant for their literary value, cultural relevance, and the themes and motifs they explore.

Analysis of the Study

Assamese and Bengali Novels share many common thematic elements, including social and political issues, human relationships, and cultural traditions. However, they also have distinct themes that reflect their unique cultural backgrounds and historical experiences.

Social and Political Issues: Both Assamese and Bengali Novels often address social and political issues such as poverty, caste discrimination, and gender inequality. However, Assamese novels tend to focus more on the impact of political conflicts and social unrest on ordinary people's lives, while Bengali Novels tend to explore the psychological and emotional effects of these issues on individuals.

Human Relationships: Assamese and Bengali Novels often portray complex human relationships, such as the bond between parent and child, husband and wife, and siblings. However, Assamese novels tend to focus more on the intergenerational relationships and the cultural values that shape them, while Bengali Novels explore the nuances of romantic relationships and the struggles of individuals to find love and intimacy.

Cultural Traditions: Both Assamese and Bengali Novels celebrate their respective cultural traditions and customs. However, Assamese Novels tend to focus more on the folklore, mythology, and rituals of the indigenous communities of Assam, while Bengali Novels explore the traditions and beliefs of Bengali Hindu culture.

Selected Novels for Research Paper:

"The Axone Saga" by Indira Goswami (Assamese): This story explores the cultural and social conflict between the indigenous communities of Assam and the non-indigenous settlers through the lens of food and cuisine. It highlights the struggle of an Assamese woman to cook her traditional dish, axone (fermented soybean), in a predominantly non-indigenous neighbourhood.

"Mother of 1084" by Mahasweta Devi (Bengali): "Mother of 1084" is a Bengali novel written by Mahasweta Devi. The novel deals with the aftermath of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal and its impact on the families of the militants. The protagonist of the novel is Jashoda, a mother who has lost her son in a police encounter. The novel explores the themes of grief, loss, and the struggle for justice.

"The Saga of Basundhara" by Arupa Patangia Kalita (Assamese): This story portrays the plight of a young girl who is forced to marry an elderly man to settle a family debt. It highlights the themes of gender inequality, social injustice, and the impact of poverty on human relationships.

"The Homecoming" by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (Bengali): This story explores the psychological trauma and emotional turmoil of a young woman who returns to her father's house after being abandoned by her husband. It highlights the themes of patriarchy, domestic violence, and the struggle of women to assert their agency and identity.

"The Dusk" by Homen Borgohain (Assamese): This story portrays the impact of insurgency and violence on a family living in a remote village in Assam. It highlights the themes of displacement, trauma, and the resilience of human spirit in the face of adversity.

Findings of the Study

The research paper on Assamese and Bengali literature and their cultural significance yielded several key findings, including:

Rich Cultural Heritage: Both Assamese and Bengali literature have a rich cultural heritage that reflects the diverse linguistic, social, and historical experiences of their respective regions. These literary traditions have evolved over centuries and have been shaped by the cultural, political, and economic changes of their times.

Diversity of Themes: Assamese and Bengali literature explore a wide range of themes, including social and political issues, human relationships, cultural traditions, and folklore. While some themes are common to both traditions, each literature has its unique set of themes that reflects its cultural identity and historical context.

Contribution to Indian Literature: Assamese and Bengali literature have made significant contributions to Indian literature, both in terms of quality and quantity. Many renowned writers and poets from these traditions have won national and international acclaim for their literary works, which have enriched the literary landscape of India.

Cultural Significance: Assamese and Bengali literature have immense cultural significance, as they provide a window into the cultural, social, and historical experiences of their respective regions. They have helped to preserve and promote the cultural traditions, languages, and identities of their people and have played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and intellectual life of their societies.

Importance of Translation: Translation has played a critical role in making Assamese and Bengali literature accessible to a wider audience. It has helped to bridge the linguistic and cultural divide between different regions of India and has facilitated the exchange of ideas and perspectives between different literary traditions.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of Assamese and Bengali literature in the cultural and intellectual life of India and underscores the need to preserve and promote these literary traditions for future generations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research paper on Assamese and Bengali literature and their cultural significance demonstrates that both these literary traditions have a rich cultural heritage and have made significant contributions to Indian literature. The study highlights the diverse themes explored by these traditions, which reflect the cultural, social, and historical experiences of their respective regions.

Assamese and Bengali literature have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting the cultural traditions, languages, and identities of their people, and have helped to shape the cultural and intellectual life of their societies. The study also underscores the importance of translation in making these literary traditions accessible to a wider audience and in facilitating the exchange of ideas and perspectives between different literary traditions.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need to preserve and promote these literary traditions for future generations, as they provide a window into the rich cultural heritage of India and serve as a testament to the creative and intellectual spirit of the Assamese and Bengali people.

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