



ARABIC AND ASSAMESE NOVELS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF WORLD LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra28620>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra28620

ABSTRACT

The novel has emerged as one of the most influential literary genres in both Arabic and Assamese literature, reflecting the social, cultural, political, and historical realities of their respective societies. This paper explores the development of Arabic and Assamese novels and examines their contributions to world literature through a comparative perspective. It traces the historical evolution of the novel in both literary traditions, highlighting major authors, thematic concerns, and narrative innovations. Arabic novels have gained international recognition through the works of writers such as Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih, and Ghassan Kanafani, while Assamese fiction has achieved literary distinction through authors such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Syed Abdul Malik, Indira Goswami, and Homen Borgohain. Despite differences in language, culture, and geographical context, both traditions address universal themes such as identity, social change, human suffering, gender, nationalism, and cultural memory. The study argues that Arabic and Assamese novels have transcended regional boundaries and enriched world literature through their unique artistic expressions and humanistic concerns. By undertaking a comparative inquiry, the paper highlights the global significance of these two literary traditions and their contribution to intercultural literary discourse.

KEYWORDS: Arabic Novel, Assamese Novel, Comparative Literature, World Literature, Cultural Identity, Literary Tradition, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The novel occupies a central position in modern world literature as a powerful medium for representing human experiences, social realities, and cultural transformations. Since it emerged as a major literary genre, the novel has evolved across different linguistic and cultural traditions, reflecting the aspirations, struggles, and intellectual developments of diverse societies. Among the many literary traditions that have contributed to the growth of the novel, Arabic and Assamese literature occupy significant places due to their rich cultural heritage, distinctive narrative styles, and profound engagement with social and historical issues.

The Arabic novel developed relatively late compared to the European novel, gaining momentum during the nineteenth-century Arab Renaissance (*Al-Nahdah*). Influenced by indigenous narrative traditions and encounters with Western literary forms, Arab writers gradually transformed the novel into a vehicle for social criticism, national consciousness, cultural identity, and political expression. Over time, Arabic fiction evolved into a sophisticated literary form that addressed issues of colonialism, modernity, religion, gender, migration, and social transformation. The international recognition of Arabic literature was significantly enhanced when Naguib Mahfouz received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988, bringing global attention to the richness and diversity of Arabic narrative traditions. Today, Arabic novels are translated into numerous languages and occupy an important place in contemporary world literature.

Similarly, the Assamese novel emerged during the colonial period under the influence of modern education, print culture, and interactions with other Indian and European literary traditions. The publication of Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyori* marked an important stage in the development of Assamese fiction. Subsequently, Assamese novelists enriched the genre by portraying Assam's cultural, social, and political realities. Writers such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Syed Abdul Malik, Mamoni Raisom Goswami, Homen Borgohain, and others contributed significantly to the evolution of Assamese narrative literature. Their works explore themes of ethnicity, regional identity, social inequality, gender relations, religious practices, political conflict, and human suffering. Through these themes, Assamese novels have transcended regional concerns and addressed broader human experiences that resonate with readers across cultures.

Although Arabic and Assamese novels originate from distinct linguistic, historical, and geographical contexts, they share several common features. Both traditions emerged during periods of social transformation and cultural awakening. Both employ fiction to document social realities, preserve cultural memory, and question established norms and institutions. Furthermore, they reveal a deep concern for issues of identity, justice, human dignity, and social change. Such similarities make a comparative study of Arabic and Assamese novels both relevant and rewarding.



The concept of world literature has further expanded the significance of comparative literary studies. In an increasingly interconnected world, literary works are no longer confined to national boundaries but participate in a global dialogue of cultures and ideas. Arabic and Assamese novels, despite their regional origins, contribute meaningfully to this dialogue through their exploration of universal human concerns and their distinctive artistic achievements. Their translations, adaptations, and critical reception have enabled them to reach wider audiences and enrich global literary discourse.

This paper seeks to examine the historical development, thematic richness, and literary contributions of Arabic and Assamese novels within the broader framework of world literature. By comparing these two traditions, the study aims to highlight their similarities, differences, and unique contributions to global literary heritage. It also seeks to demonstrate how literature functions as a bridge between cultures, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among diverse peoples and societies.

Arabic Novel: An Introduction

The modern Arabic novel occupies a distinguished position within Arabic literature and has become one of the most influential forms of cultural and intellectual expression in the Arab world. Over the course of its development, it has undergone substantial transformations that have enabled it to reflect social realities, cultural changes, and intellectual debates across different historical periods.

Since its emergence in the nineteenth century, the Arabic novel has evolved through a variety of literary experiments and creative directions. This evolution has been accompanied by a rich diversity of themes, narrative techniques, and artistic approaches shaped by changing literary movements and cultural influences. As a result, the modern Arabic novel has established itself as a dynamic genre capable of addressing the concerns and aspirations of Arab societies.

This study explores the historical development of the modern Arabic novel and examines the contributions of notable novelists whose works have helped define and expand the genre. It also investigates the major themes and issues addressed in contemporary Arabic fiction, as well as the narrative strategies and stylistic devices employed by writers to communicate their ideas and artistic visions. Furthermore, the discussion considers the novel's role in shaping cultural awareness and social discourse within the Arab world, while also addressing the challenges facing contemporary Arabic fiction and its prospects in an increasingly globalized literary landscape.

The Historical Development of the Modern Arabic Novel:

The development of the modern Arabic novel can be traced through several important historical stages. Its origins date back to the nineteenth century and the early modern period, when Arab writers were greatly influenced by Western literature and the translation of European novels. During this formative stage, novelists focused primarily on social and cultural concerns, using fiction as a means of addressing issues related to modernization and societal change.

The twentieth century is often regarded as the golden age of the Arabic novel. This period witnessed a significant cultural and intellectual awakening across the Arab world, leading to the emergence of influential literary works that enriched the genre and expanded its artistic possibilities. Novelists explored a variety of themes and developed innovative narrative forms that contributed to the maturity of Arabic fiction.

In the contemporary era, particularly from the twenty-first century onward, the Arabic novel has continued to evolve through diverse literary experiments and creative approaches. Writers have embraced a broader range of subjects and styles, while increased translation activities and engagement with global literary traditions have fostered greater cultural exchange and enriched the development of the genre.

Western literature has played an important role in shaping the modern Arabic novel. The translation of numerous Western literary works into Arabic introduced new ideas, narrative techniques, and artistic perspectives, encouraging Arab writers to experiment with innovative forms of storytelling and literary expression.

Thematic diversity has become one of the defining characteristics of the modern Arabic novel. Writers have addressed a wide spectrum of issues, including identity, politics, social relationships, cultural transformation, and the challenges of contemporary life. This diversity reflects the novel's capacity to engage with the complexities of Arab societies and their changing realities.

Another notable feature of the modern Arabic novel is its experimentation with literary styles and narrative techniques. Authors have employed new methods of narration, characterization, structure, and plot development, contributing to the richness and dynamism of Arabic fiction.

The growth of the genre has also been shaped by the contributions of prominent novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz, Ghassan Kanafani, and Naguib Al-Kilani, whose works have left a lasting impact on Arabic literature and inspired subsequent generations of writers.

Furthermore, advances in media and communication technologies have transformed the way novels are produced, distributed, and consumed. Digital publishing platforms and social media have expanded access to literary works, enabling a wider audience to engage with Arabic novels and facilitating greater interaction between authors and readers. As a result, the modern Arabic novel continues to thrive as a vibrant and influential form of literary and cultural expression.



2. PROMINENT WRITERS IN MODERN ARABIC NOVELS

The development and success of the modern Arabic novel have been closely associated with the contributions of numerous distinguished writers whose works have enriched Arabic literature and expanded its artistic and intellectual horizons. Through their diverse themes, innovative narrative techniques, and engagement with social, political, and cultural issues, these novelists have played a central role in shaping the evolution of the Arabic novel.

Among the most influential figures is Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006), widely regarded as the father of the modern Arabic novel. His literary career spanned more than six decades, during which he produced a remarkable body of work exploring Egyptian society, history, and politics. In 1988, he became the first Arab writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. His most celebrated achievement is *The Cairo Trilogy*, consisting of *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*, which offers a vivid portrayal of social transformation in twentieth-century Egypt.

Another prominent novelist is Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972), whose works are deeply rooted in the Palestinian experience of displacement, resistance, and national identity. His novels, including *Men in the Sun* and *Returning to Haifa*, are considered landmarks of modern Arabic literature and continue to influence readers and writers across the Arab world.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi (1953–) is one of the most widely read contemporary Arab novelists. Her works combine poetic language with themes of love, memory, exile, and Arab identity. Her novel *Memory in the Flesh* achieved extraordinary success and received several prestigious literary awards, establishing her reputation throughout the Arab world.

Abdul Rahman Munif (1933–2004) occupies a prominent position in modern Arabic fiction. Rather than being primarily a science-fiction writer, he is best known for his realistic and politically engaged novels that examine social change, oil economies, and authoritarianism in the Arab world. His monumental novel cycle *Cities of Salt* is widely regarded as one of the most significant achievements in contemporary Arabic literature.

The Lebanese writer Said 'Aql (1912–2014) also contributed to modern Arabic literary thought through works that emphasized freedom, cultural identity, and national consciousness. Although primarily known as a poet, his influence extended to broader literary and intellectual movements in Lebanon.

The modern Arabic novel has also been enriched by the contributions of many other influential writers. Taha Hussein helped shape modern Arabic prose through works that combined autobiography, fiction, and social criticism. Tayeb Salih gained international recognition through his masterpiece *Season of Migration to the North*, which explores themes of colonialism, cultural conflict, and identity. Similarly, Hanan al-Shaykh addressed issues related to gender, tradition, and social transformation, while Elias Khoury became known for his innovative narrative structures and his treatment of memory, war, and displacement.

Contemporary Arabic fiction has further benefited from writers such as 'Alâ' Al-Aswany, whose novel *The Yacoubian Building* offers a critical portrait of modern Egyptian society, and Jokha Alharthi, whose novel *Celestial Bodies* won the International Booker Prize and brought global attention to contemporary Arabic literature.

Collectively, these writers have transformed the Arabic novel into a powerful literary form capable of addressing complex social realities, preserving cultural memory, and engaging with universal human concerns. Their contributions have not only enriched Arabic literature but have also secured the modern Arabic novel a respected place within world literature.

Prevalent Themes and Topics

The modern Arabic novel is characterized by its thematic richness and diversity, reflecting the social, political, cultural, and intellectual changes that have shaped the Arab world. Arab novelists explore a wide range of issues, including identity and belonging, political conflict, social justice, love, family relationships, and cultural transformation. Contemporary novels also address migration, exile, globalization, religion, and the challenges of modern life.

In recent decades, particular attention has been given to women's experiences and gender-related issues, highlighting questions of equality, freedom, and social change. Through these diverse themes, Arabic fiction examines both individual experiences and collective realities, offering valuable insights into Arab societies.

The thematic variety of the modern Arabic novel demonstrates its ability to engage with local concerns while addressing universal human issues. As a result, it remains an important literary medium for promoting cultural understanding, critical reflection, and intellectual dialogue in the contemporary world.

Literary Styles and Techniques

Modern Arabic novels are characterized by a wide range of literary styles and narrative techniques that enrich storytelling and enhance readers' engagement. Writers employ both first-person and third-person narration to present events from personal or broader perspectives, while symbolism and allegory are often used to convey deeper cultural, historical, and political meanings.



Contemporary Arabic fiction also makes extensive use of non-linear narrative structures, including flashbacks and shifts in time and place, to create suspense and explore complex human experiences. Many novelists adopt a poetic and expressive language style, using vivid imagery and symbolism to strengthen the artistic quality of their works.

In addition, some writers engage readers directly through narrative commentary and dialogue, while others incorporate elements of folklore, myths, legends, and Arab cultural heritage to enrich their narratives and reinforce cultural identity. The combination of these diverse techniques reflects the creativity and adaptability of the modern Arabic novel, making it a dynamic literary form that continues to evolve alongside contemporary Arab society.

Impact of Modern Arabic Novels on Society and Culture

The modern Arabic novel has played a crucial role in shaping cultural awareness, intellectual thought, and social dialogue in the Arab world. By addressing political, social, and cultural issues, it has encouraged critical thinking, strengthened cultural identity, promoted discussions on gender equality and social justice, and contributed to the preservation of Arab heritage. Its influence has extended beyond literature to cinema, theatre, and other artistic fields, while translations have helped introduce Arabic culture and experiences to international audiences.

Despite its achievements, the modern Arabic novel faces several challenges, including limited readership, insufficient translation into world languages, restrictions on freedom of expression in some regions, and the need to balance literary tradition with innovation. Nevertheless, its future remains promising. Advances in digital publishing, social media, and online literary platforms have expanded opportunities for writers to reach wider audiences. Increased global interest in Arabic literature, along with growing translation efforts and literary awards, is expected to strengthen the international presence of Arabic fiction. As a result, the modern Arabic novel continues to evolve as a significant medium for cultural expression, intellectual engagement, and artistic creativity.

Technology and Digital Novels

Technological advancements have created new opportunities for the development and dissemination of modern Arabic novels. Digital publishing platforms, electronic books, and literary applications have transformed the way readers access and engage with literary works, enabling writers to reach broader audiences beyond traditional publishing channels. These innovations are likely to play an increasingly important role in the future of Arabic literature by facilitating greater interaction between authors and readers and expanding access to literary content.

The international presence of modern Arabic literature can also be strengthened through participation in global book fairs, literary festivals, and cultural exchange initiatives. Such platforms provide opportunities for Arab writers to present their works to international audiences and contribute to cross-cultural dialogue. Equally important is the expansion of translation efforts both from Arabic into other languages and from other languages into Arabic. Increased translation not only enhances the visibility of Arabic literature worldwide but also encourages intellectual and cultural exchange between societies.

Supporting emerging writers remains essential for the continued growth of the Arabic novel. Literary prizes, creative writing workshops, publishing initiatives, and cultural festivals provide valuable opportunities for new voices to develop their talents and contribute fresh perspectives to contemporary literature. By nurturing the next generation of writers, the literary community can ensure the continued vitality and innovation of the genre.

Modern Arabic novels are also expected to remain closely connected to contemporary social realities. Themes such as identity, migration, cultural transformation, social justice, gender equality, and globalization continue to occupy a central place in literary discourse. Through the exploration of these issues, Arabic fiction serves as a means of understanding social change and reflecting the experiences of individuals and communities in an evolving world.

More broadly, modern Arabic literature occupies a significant position in shaping cultural awareness and intellectual life both within the Arab world and internationally. Its richness lies in its thematic diversity and its ability to engage with a wide range of social, political, and cultural concerns. Through innovative narrative techniques and artistic expression, Arab novelists offer critical insights into contemporary realities while preserving and reinterpreting cultural traditions.

Although modern Arabic fiction continues to face challenges, including limitations on freedom of expression in certain contexts, insufficient translation, and difficulties in reaching wider readerships, it possesses considerable potential for future growth. Advances in communication technology, digital media, and international cultural exchange have created unprecedented opportunities for Arabic literature to expand its global presence. As these developments continue, the modern Arabic novel is likely to strengthen its role as a powerful vehicle for artistic creativity, cultural dialogue, and intellectual engagement, contributing not only to the advancement of Arabic literature but also to broader discussions within world literature.¹

The origins of the Arabic novel can be traced back to the rich tradition of storytelling that has long been an integral part of Arab culture. Before the emergence of the novel as a distinct literary genre, narratives were primarily transmitted orally through tales, legends,



and anecdotes that circulated across generations, both before and during the early Islamic period. These storytelling traditions laid the foundation for the development of modern Arabic narrative literature.

The Arabic novel began to emerge as an independent literary form during the nineteenth century, particularly from the 1850s onward, influenced by cultural renewal movements, increased contact with foreign literatures, and the growth of translation activities. Since then, the genre has undergone remarkable development, evolving into one of the most influential and widely read forms of literary expression in the Arab world. Today, Arabic fiction enjoys a period of significant creativity and expansion, often regarded as a flourishing era in the history of modern Arabic literature.

One of the defining characteristics of the Arabic novel is its diversity across different regions of the Arab world. Literary production in North Africa, the Levant, Egypt, and the Gulf reflects distinct historical experiences, cultural traditions, and social realities. As a result, each region has developed its own narrative voice and thematic concerns, enriching the overall landscape of Arabic fiction. This diversity stems from the novel's close relationship with society and its ability to portray the transformations, challenges, and aspirations of different communities.

The Arabic novel has exerted a profound influence on both individuals and society by exploring the complexities of human experience. Through its portrayal of personal struggles, hopes, dreams, and suffering, it provides readers with opportunities for reflection, empathy, and self-understanding. At the same time, novels contribute to the development of social awareness by addressing important cultural, ethical, and political issues that affect contemporary life.

Furthermore, the novel serves as a valuable educational and cultural tool, particularly for younger generations. By encouraging critical thinking, fostering imagination, and promoting understanding of diverse perspectives, it helps shape informed and engaged citizens. The Arabic novel also plays a significant role in defending human values, preserving cultural memory, and stimulating dialogue about social progress and justice.

For these reasons, the Arabic novel occupies a prominent position in the history of Arab literature. Its contributions extend beyond artistic achievement to include cultural enrichment, intellectual development, and social engagement. As a literary form capable of reflecting both local realities and universal human concerns, the Arabic novel continues to hold a vital place in the literary and cultural heritage of the Arab world and beyond.

A long story or "a literary experience that depicts in prose the life of a group of characters, who interact together to form the framework of an imagined world, but this imagined world formed by the writer should be close to what is happening in the reality in which he lives; That is, the life of the characters in the novel must be possible to occur in the reality of the writer." ²

It is one of the types of stories that appeared in Egypt since the French campaign against Egypt in 1798 AD, and the foreign intervention and presence in the East led to arousing the spirit of nervousness in the souls of the people. As Arabic literature was influenced by Western literature, some novelists appeared whose goal was to teach Western sciences, such as Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭawī and 'Alī Mubārak, which prompted other pioneers to revive ancient Arabic literature and take care of it. Arabic: The development of the Arabic novel in Egypt is largely due to the attempts of the Egyptians to discover their personality and the elements of their intellectual and literary life, and their hesitation in these attempts between being influenced by their ancient Arab heritage and being influenced by the superior Western civilization. ³

"With the era of the renaissance, the need arose for the necessity of resurrecting the heritage and reviving it, and trying to retrieve the foundations on which the Arab Islamic nation built its glory and history, to establish an independent entity and rebuild a lost identity, so the resurrection resurrected and was a source of inspiration and inspiration for the modern Arabic novel." ⁴ And Maḥmūd Amīn al-Ālam believes that "the novel is an advanced extension of myths, epics, biographies, folk tales, stories and shrines." ⁵ One of the most important works of fiction that was inspired by the heritage at that time and had a social colour in purpose, *maqāma* style, the constructive novelist is "Hadith of Isā bin Hishām" by Muḥammad al-Muwailhi.

The other influence that the novel was affected by was popular taste, as the pioneers noticed the extent of building events and building characters in organizing the novels according to the taste of the people. Therefore, we see that the ancient and popular Arab heritage had far-reaching influences on the genesis of the novel and from it as well. Western influence was indicated, and the role of translation and Arabization can be considered in this circle.

The writers of the novels in that century were influenced in their productions by the narrative heritage and the popular taste in terms of construction, the movement of events, and the drawing of characters. In addition to the romantic themes that permeate a love story that has moral significance and somehow embodies the theme of the struggle between good and evil, which is the favourite topic for the audience. The presence of Syrian immigrants "who made the imitation of Western models a means to trade and satisfy the popular taste." ⁶, and they played an important role, as we find that most of the literary immigrants came to Egypt after the era of Muhammad Ali, and thus they contributed to revitalizing the cultural climate in Egypt, especially by advancing Arabization and authorship.

Here mention may be made that the Egyptian novel "moved from the stage of entertainment to the expression of an Egyptian experience...Muhammad Husayn Haykal was the first to move the Egyptian novel in this direction, and critics agree that the novel *Zaynab*, 1912 AD, is the first artistic novel that appeared in the Egyptian environment." ⁷



Development of Assamese Novel

The Assamese novel began to take shape during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when a small number of writers entered this emerging literary field. Their works often reflected the social and cultural realities of their time, serving as important records of contemporary life. It is widely acknowledged that the rise of the Assamese novel was closely connected to the introduction of Western education under British rule, which also exposed Assamese writers to Western literary traditions and inspired new forms of creative expression.

A significant milestone occurred in 1846 when an Assamese adaptation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* started appearing serially in *Orunodoi*. Published under the title *Jatrikarar Jatra* in 1851, it introduced readers to a new narrative style and contributed to the growth of prose fiction in Assamese literature.

In 1880, Padmavati Devi Phukanani composed *Sudharmar Upakhyan* (1884), a work that gained recognition as the first novel written by an Assamese woman. The novel attracted attention not only because of its pioneering status but also because of its literary qualities and social significance. Nevertheless, the distinction of producing the first modern Assamese novel is generally attributed to Hemchandra Barua, whose *Bahire-rangchang-Bhitare Kowabhaturi* was written in 1876.

Barua's novel was created with a clear social purpose. It sought to expose and challenge the social and religious problems that existed in Assamese society at the time. The work is particularly noteworthy because it introduced a realistic portrayal of life and well-developed characterization, features that marked an important advancement in Assamese literary history.

In *Bahire Rongsong Bhitore Kowan Bhatari*, Barua employed the idea conveyed by the proverb "Empty vessels make the most noise" to satirize social customs and religious hypocrisy. Through characters who appeared respectable on the surface, he revealed the contradictions and pretensions that existed within society. His commitment to social reform was also evident in his personal life. Having become a widower at a young age, he opposed restrictions on widow remarriage and chose not to remarry. His reformist views were further expressed in an article published in *Orunodoi* (9:4, April 1856) entitled *Anek Bia Kora Ajugut* ("It Is Wrong to Marry Many"), written under the name "Shri Sonar Chanda."

Thus, the early Assamese novel emerged not merely as a form of literary entertainment but as a vehicle for social criticism, reform, and cultural awakening, laying the foundation for the later development of Assamese fiction.⁸

The development of the Assamese novel gained momentum with the efforts of A. K. Gurney, a member of the missionary community, who published *Kaminikanta* in 1877. Several other works were produced under missionary influence during this period, largely with the objective of promoting Christian ideals. However, these early narratives did not fully possess the characteristics of a mature novel, as they lacked the depth of human emotion and psychological realism that later became essential features of the genre. The Assamese novel acquired its true literary identity during the Romantic Age through the pioneering contributions of Padmanath Gohain Barua and Lakhminath Bezbaroa. Padmanath Gohain Barua's *Bhanumati* was written in the early 1890s and later published in book form in 1892. Around the same period, Lakhminath Bezbaroa wrote *Padum Kunwari*, which first appeared serially in *Jonaki* under the title *Padmakumari* in 1891 before being published as a book in 1905. Another important work by Padmanath Gohain Barua, *Lahari* (1892), became the first Assamese novel to be published in a complete book form.

These early novels played a crucial role in establishing the Assamese novel as a recognized literary genre. Through their artistic merit and engagement with contemporary society, they laid the foundation for the future growth and development of Assamese fiction.⁹

Although Padmanath Gohain Barua produced only two novels and Lakhminath Bezbaroa contributed a single novel to the genre, their works occupy an important place in the history of Assamese literature. Among these pioneering efforts, Padmanath Gohain Barua's *Bhanumati*, which first appeared in the Assamese periodical *Bijuli* in 1890, is generally regarded as the earliest novel of this literary tradition.¹⁰

Although Rajanikanta Bordoloi made valuable contributions to several branches of literature, he is remembered chiefly as one of the foremost novelists in Assamese literary history. His novels consistently reveal a deep admiration for Assam's history, cultural traditions, and idealistic values. Whether dealing with historical events or social realities, his works bear a distinctive literary identity and seek to cultivate respect for Assam's rich heritage and cultural legacy.

His first novel, *Mirijiyari* (1895), narrates the love story of two young Miri youths and the tragic circumstances that ultimately separate them. The novel holds a special place in Assamese literature as the first work to focus extensively on tribal life and culture. Another of his major achievements, *Manomati* (written between 1896 and 1897 and published in 1900), is set during the decline of Ahom rule and the Burmese invasion of Assam. Against this turbulent historical background, the novel recounts the love between Lakhshmikanta and Manomati, emphasizing the bravery of Lakhshmikanta and the noble character and dignity of Manomati.

His novel *Rangili* (1925) is also rooted in a similar historical setting. The central character, Rangili, represents the ideal woman whose human love gradually transforms into spiritual and divine devotion. Another notable historical novel, *Rahdai Ligiri*, portrays the sincere love between Rahdai, a humble maidservant, and Dayaram, an ordinary young man, amid an atmosphere of oppression and injustice. When Dayaram begins to display tyrannical tendencies, Rahdai turns to the practice of yoga, a path that ultimately brings about the moral transformation of both characters.



In *Nirmal Bhakat* (1925), Bordoloi depicts the experiences of Nirmal, who is taken captive by the Burmese during their second invasion of Assam. After spending many years in exile in Burma, he eventually returns home only to discover that both his homeland and his personal life have changed dramatically. He finds that his wife has remarried and that the world he once knew no longer exists. Disillusioned yet spiritually awakened, Nirmal embraces Vaishnavism and spends the remainder of his life in religious devotion and inner peace.

Through these novels, Rajanikanta Bordoloi combined history, romance, and idealism, making a lasting contribution to the growth and development of the Assamese novel.¹¹

Rajanikanta Bordoloi enriched Assamese literature with several important historical novels. Among them, *Tamreswar Mandir* (written during 1925–26 and published in 1936) presents a moving love story set against a historical background. The novel revolves around the relationship between Dhaneswar and Aghoni, whose lives and romance are shaped by a series of dramatic and compelling circumstances.

Another significant work, *Radha Rukmini Ran* (1925), is based on the Mowamaria uprising against Ahom rule during the eighteenth century. The novel vividly portrays the struggle of the Mowamaria Vaishnavites and places particular emphasis on the courage and sacrifice of two remarkable heroines, Radha and Rukmini, who emerge as central figures in the resistance movement.

In *Dandwa Droha* (1919), Bordoloi depicts the rebellion of the people of Kamrup against the Ahom administration. The uprising was triggered by the oppressive governance of the Ahom Viceroy Badanchandra in Guwahati. Under the leadership of the brave brothers Hardatta and Birdatta, the people rose in protest. The revolt, however, ended tragically: Birdatta lost his life on the battlefield, Hardatta was captured and tried by the authorities, and Hardatta's daughter chose death by leaping into the Brahmaputra River rather than face imprisonment. Through these events, the novel highlights themes of resistance, sacrifice, and the quest for justice.

These novels demonstrate Bordoloi's ability to combine historical events with human emotions, thereby preserving important episodes of Assam's past while creating engaging literary narratives.¹²

Rajanikanta Bordoloi's last literary work, *Khamba Thuibir Sadhukatha* (1932), draws its inspiration from a well-known Manipuri folk legend. Rooted in traditional folklore, the work retells the celebrated tale of Khamba and Thoibi with literary refinement. However, some literary critics have questioned its classification as a novel, arguing that its strong dependence on folk narrative traditions places it outside the conventional framework and structure of the modern novel.¹³

Motivated by a strong commitment to social reform, Dandinath Kalita authored two notable novels, *Sadhana* and *Aviskar*. In these works, the protagonists, Dinabandhu and Madhava, willingly sacrifice their personal interests and happiness for the betterment and moral regeneration of society. Through the characters of Rambha and Pratima, Kalita addresses the plight of marginalized women and explores possible paths toward social justice and rehabilitation. Both novels reflect the author's deep social awareness and his ability to critically examine prejudice, inequality, and restrictive social attitudes.

Kalita's third novel, *Gana-viplava (Revolution of the Masses)*, is set against the backdrop of the Mowamaria uprising during the final phase of Ahom rule in Assam. The work offers a vivid portrayal of a significant historical movement while analyzing its social and political consequences.

Another important contribution to Assamese fiction came from Daibachandra Talukdar through his novel *Apurna (The Unfulfilled)*. The story follows Premadhar, a young villager who struggles against numerous hardships in life. Although he overcomes many obstacles through determination and perseverance, his life ends prematurely, leaving his dreams and ambitions unrealized.

In *Agneya Giri (Volcano)*, Talukdar introduces Kanak, a passionate and rebellious young man who openly challenges established social conventions. His conflict with society forms the central theme of the novel and reflects the tensions between individual aspirations and traditional values.

The story continues in *Bidraho (Rebellion)*, a companion novel in which Kanak defies social norms by marrying Aikon, a widow. Together, they dedicate themselves to the cause of national freedom and social progress. While Aikon works for the welfare and development of rural communities, Kanak remains a symbol of resistance and reform. Their journey, stretching from Sadiya to Lahore, represents a determined struggle against social injustice and outdated customs in pursuit of a larger national and humanitarian ideal.¹⁴

Modern Assamese novelists increasingly turned their attention to individuals belonging to the margins of society, seeking to understand their lives and assess their role within the broader social framework. A notable example of this literary approach is found in Beena Barua's *Jivanar Batat (Highway of Life, 1944)*, a novel widely admired for its authentic representation of rural life. Through a sensitive appreciation of the beauty of the countryside and a compassionate understanding of human nature, Barua presents a vivid picture of Assamese society, capturing both its joys and hardships. His strength as a novelist lies in his ability to portray ordinary situations with realism, drawing readers into the everyday experiences, struggles, and aspirations of common people.

A similar concern for rural life can be observed in the work of Dinnath Sharma, particularly in his novel *Nadai*. The story revolves around Nadai, a farmer whose life is closely connected to the welfare and prosperity of his village. Through this character, Sharma depicts the virtues of honesty, kindness, and dedication, while also highlighting the spirit of generosity and mutual support that exists



among the villagers. The novel offers a thoughtful exploration of village society and emphasizes the strong bonds of cooperation and interdependence that unite members of a rural community.¹⁵

During the 1950s, Hitesh Deka established himself as a prominent figure in Assamese fiction through a series of influential novels, including *Ajir Manuh* (*Man of the Age*, 1954), *Natun Path* (1956), *Bhara Ghar* (1958), *Mati Kaar* (1960), *Ayeto Jiyon* (1961), *Achal Manuh* (1967), and *Jiwan Sanghat* (1970). His literary works are deeply rooted in social concerns and reflect a strong desire for moral and social reform.

Deka's novels critically examine various social evils, including corruption, ignorance, and injustice, while envisioning the possibility of a more equitable and progressive society. Much of his fiction is set against the backdrop of rural Assam, portraying communities shaped by traditional beliefs, superstition, simplicity, and deep religious faith. At the same time, he addresses broader social issues such as class arrogance, the exploitation of weaker sections of society, uncontrolled human desires, and the misuse of wealth and resources for personal gain. Through these themes, Deka presents a realistic picture of society and advocates the values of social responsibility, integrity, and human dignity.¹⁶

Several other Assamese novels have made significant contributions to the study of social life and human relationships. Among them are Adyanath Sarma's *Jivanar Tin Adhya* (*Three Chapters of Life*), Chandrakanta Gogoi's *Sonar Nangal* (*The Golden Plough*), and Govinda Mahanta's *Krishakar Nati* (*The Cultivator's Descendants*), all of which offer insightful portrayals of society and its evolving realities.

Navakanta Barua's *Kapilipariya Sadhu* presents a moving account of the hardships and uncertainties faced by communities living along the banks of the unpredictable Kapili River. Through its realistic depiction of their struggles, the novel captures the intimate relationship between human life and the forces of nature.

Similarly, Jogesh Das's *Dawar Aru Nai* (*Clouds No More*) examines the far-reaching social consequences of the Second World War. The novel highlights how the war disrupted traditional values, altered social behaviour, and weakened established moral and ethical standards, thereby bringing significant changes to the fabric of society.¹⁷

Muhammad Piyar occupies an important place in the development of the Assamese social novel, particularly during the period preceding Indian independence. He was among the pioneering writers who helped establish the social novel as a significant literary form. His debut novel, *Priti Upahar* (*The Gift of Love*), was published in 1948 and was followed by several other works, including *Sangram*, *Mohara Papari*, *Heruwa Svarga*, and *Jiwan Noir Janzi*. These novels are characterized by a strong idealistic outlook and a concern for social values.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who focused on rural settings, Piyar directed his attention primarily toward urban society and the experiences of the middle class. In *Sangram*, he portrays the hardships, aspirations, and struggles of a middle-class young man, highlighting the challenges faced by individuals in a changing social environment. Similarly, *Heruwa Svarga* offers a detailed depiction of the life, traditions, and circumstances of a Muslim family, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the cultural diversity within Assamese society. Through these works, Piyar combined social observation with idealistic themes, making a notable contribution to the growth of Assamese fiction.¹⁸

In recent years, several psychological novels have attracted attention for their insightful and realistic exploration of the human mind. These works focus on the hidden motivations, emotions, and unconscious impulses that shape human behaviour, portraying individuals as complex beings influenced by forces operating beneath the surface of conscious thought.

A notable example is Prafulladatta Goswami's *Kecha Patar Kapani* (*Quivering Foliage*, 1948), which examines the intellectual and emotional conflicts of a young man in search of a more meaningful life. Through his quest for beauty, fulfilment, and inner harmony, the novel explores the psychological struggles associated with self-discovery and personal growth.

Similarly, Radhika Mohan Goswami's *Chaknaiya* (*The Vortex*) presents the story of a disillusioned young man who finds it difficult to adjust to the demands and expectations of contemporary society. The novel offers a penetrating study of frustration, alienation, and the psychological tensions experienced by individuals caught between personal aspirations and social realities.

Together, these novels represent an important development in Assamese fiction by shifting attention from external events to the inner workings of the human psyche, thereby enriching the psychological dimension of the novel.¹⁹

Birendrakumar Bhattacharya emerged as a significant force in Assamese fiction during the mid-twentieth century. His entry into the field of novel writing was marked by *Rajpathe Ringiyay* (1955), a work that traces the journey of a young revolutionary dedicated to challenging social injustices and bringing about positive change. Bhattacharya's novels are distinguished by their intellectual depth and keen psychological insight, reflecting his interest in the inner conflicts and motivations of human beings.

His later works, including *Yaruingam* (1961), *Shatrunghani* (1965), *Mritunjoy* (1970), *Pratipad* (1970), *Qabar Aru Phul* (1972), *Aai*, and *Ballavi* (1973), further demonstrate his ability to explore diverse dimensions of human life. Through these novels, he examines social realities, personal struggles, moral dilemmas, and the complexities of human relationships, establishing himself as one of the most thoughtful and influential novelists in Assamese literature.²⁰



In the post-independence era, Assamese literature developed a strong tradition of novels that reflected the social, political, and economic transformations taking place in modern India. Among the prominent novelists of this period was Syed Abdul Malik, whose writings are distinguished by their exploration of human relationships, everyday experiences, and the universal significance of ordinary lives. His works often examine the emotional and social complexities that shape human existence.

Several of Malik's major novels, including *Adharsheela* (1966), *Rajanigandhar Sokulu* (1972), and *Dr. Arunabhar Asampurna Jivani* (1975), deal with a wide range of themes, such as unconventional relationships, emotional conflicts, and the intensity of human passion. He also displayed a keen interest in social realities. In *Surujmukhir Sapna* (1960), he presents a vivid picture of rural life along a riverbank, while *Aghori Atmar Kahini* (1969) focuses on urban society, offering a critical examination of middle-class life and its associated problems.

Apart from his achievements as a novelist, Malik made valuable contributions to Assamese prose through his biographical works. His two-volume biography of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, *Rupotirtha Jatri* (Vol. I, 1963; Vol. II, 1965), is regarded as an important literary accomplishment. He also authored *Dhanya Nara Tonu Bhala* (1987), a biography of the great Assamese Vaishnavite saint, reformer, and cultural icon Sankardev.

Malik's literary output was extensive and included numerous other novels such as *Rothor Sokori Ghure* (1950), *Banjui* (1956), *Sobighar* (1958), *Matir Saki* (1959), and *Anyak Akash, Anya Tora* (1962). Through these works, he established himself as one of the most versatile and influential figures in modern Assamese literature, contributing significantly to the growth of the Assamese novel.²¹

In the contemporary period, Assamese fiction has witnessed the emergence of several novelists who have explored a broad spectrum of themes, ranging from political realities to the complexities of human existence. Their works reflect changing social conditions and provide valuable insights into both individual and collective experiences.

Among the most influential of these writers is Homen Borgohain (d. 2021), who made a lasting contribution to modern Assamese literature. His first novel, *Suwala* (1963), portrays the tragic journey of a young rural woman who migrates to the city with hopes of improving her life but ultimately becomes a victim of social and economic circumstances that force her into prostitution. The novel offers a powerful critique of social inequality and urban exploitation.

Borgohain's second novel, *Tantrik* (1967), is more philosophical in nature, exploring the conflict between mystical beliefs and modern intellectual currents such as naturalism and existentialism. The influence of Western thought is clearly visible in the novel's themes and character development. Later, in *Antaraag* (1986), Borgohain revisited these philosophical concerns and examined their relevance within the context of contemporary Indian society.

He also earned recognition for his politically oriented novels. Works such as *Kushilav* (1970) and *Timir Tirtha* (1975) present a critical examination of political corruption, moral decline, and the misuse of power in both local and national politics. Through these narratives, Borgohain exposed the weaknesses of political institutions and the consequences of unethical leadership.

In addition, some of his most celebrated novels, including *Halodhiya Soaiye Baudhan Khai* (1973), *Pitaputra* (1975), and *Matsyagandha* (1987), focus on social issues and human relationships. These works highlight enduring problems such as social inequality, injustice, and the struggles of marginalized individuals, reinforcing Borgohain's reputation as a novelist deeply concerned with the realities of contemporary society.²²

Among the leading women novelists of contemporary Assamese literature are Nirupama Borgohain, Nilima Dutta, and Mamoni Raisom Goswami, each of whom made significant contributions through their exploration of social realities, women's experiences, and changing cultural values.

Nirupama Borgohain (born 1932) began her literary career with *Sei Nadi Niravadhi* (1963), a novel set on the banks of a river, where the life and emotions of the female protagonist are closely intertwined with the landscape and culture of the region. Another important work, *Dinor Pisot Dinot* (1968), also centres on a woman's life and experiences. Her later novels, *Anyak Jivan* (1986) and *Champavati* (1990), are widely regarded as feminist works. In particular, *Anyak Jivan* is considered one of the earliest Assamese feminist novels, portraying the struggles of women living within a patriarchal social structure and using a rural setting to reflect broader social realities.

Nilima Dutta (d. 2019) is known for her realistic portrayal of everyday life and ordinary people. While many of her novels focus on social realities, *Dhumuhar Pisot* (1992) stands out for its treatment of the Assam Movement of the 1980s. Through this work, she examines the political upheaval led by students and its wider social and historical consequences.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami (d. 2011), one of the most celebrated figures in Assamese literature, often approached her subjects from a socially conscious and humanitarian perspective. In *Sinabor Sot* (1972), she exposes the exploitation of labourers employed by a bridge-construction company, drawing attention to the inequalities created by economic and social divisions. Her novels *Ahiron* (1976) and *Mamore Dhora Tarowal* (1980) similarly express deep sympathy for marginalized and underprivileged communities.

In *Nilakanthi Braj* (1976), Goswami juxtaposes spiritual ideals with the harsh realities of poverty and social decay, while *Dontal Hatir Uiyé Khowa Howda* (1988) offers a powerful critique of religious hypocrisy within an Assamese *satra* (Vaishnavite monastery). Through these works, she established herself as a novelist deeply concerned with social justice and human suffering.



Contemporary Assamese fiction is marked by remarkable diversity, encompassing both traditional and experimental forms. Lakshminandan Borah (born 1931) vividly portrays rural life and ordinary human experiences in novels such as *Nishar Purobi* (1962) and *Ganga Silonir Pakhi* (1965). His socially and politically aware works, including *Patal Bhairabi* (1965), *Uttar Purush* (1970), and *Dohon Dulori* (1971), address broader social and political concerns.

Jogesh Das (d. 1999) explored the consequences of the Second World War and its impact on Indian society in *Dawor Aru Nai* (1955). Several of his other novels, including *Jonakir Jui* (1959) and *Nirupai, Nirupai* (1963), examine social restrictions and the limitations imposed on women by conventional social norms.

Debendranath Acharya (1937–1981) introduced innovative narrative techniques and surrealistic elements into Assamese fiction. His novels *Kalpurush* (1967), *Anyar Jog Anyar Purush* (1971), and *Jangam* (published posthumously in 1982) creatively reinterpret historical events and periods, blending imagination with history rather than strictly adhering to factual records.

The representation of indigenous and tribal life also occupies an important place in Assamese literature. Karbi writer Rong Bong Terang contributed significantly to this aspect through works such as *Rongmilir Hanhi* (1981), bringing the experiences and perspectives of tribal communities into mainstream literary discourse.

Another notable experimental novelist was Shilabhadra, the pen name of Rebati Mohan Dutta Choudhury (d. 2008). In novels such as *Madhupur* (1971), *Tarangini* (1971), *Gadhuli* (1981), and *Anusandhan* (1987), he explored new narrative forms and diverse thematic concerns. Similarly, Bhabendra Nath Saikia (d. 2003), widely acclaimed for his fiction, drama, and short stories, advanced progressive ideas in works such as *Antarip* (1986), which examines women's agency and resistance within the social context of the 1930s.

Beyond these prominent figures, numerous other writers have enriched Assamese novel literature, including Chandra Prasad Saikia, Medini Choudhury, Lummer Dai of Arunachal Pradesh, Troilokyanath Goswami, Sneha Devi, Hiren Gohain, and Govindaprasad Sharma. Together, their works have broadened the scope of Assamese fiction, contributing a rich variety of themes, styles, and perspectives that continue to shape the evolution of the Assamese novel.²³

Lummer Dai (d. 2002) emerged as an important figure in Assamese literature, a journey that was greatly influenced by his education at Cotton College, Guwahati. He made his literary debut with the novel *Paharor Xile Xile*, which established his reputation as a promising writer. Encouraged by the success of this work, he went on to produce several other significant novels, including *Prithivir Hanhi* (1963), *Mon Aru Mon* (1968), *Kanyar Mulya* (1978), and *Upar Mahal* (2002).

Apart from his achievements as a novelist, Dai also made valuable contributions to the preservation of indigenous culture. In 1959, he compiled and published *Udayachalar Sadhu*, a collection of Adi folktales that helped introduce the rich oral traditions of the Adi community to a wider readership. His literary accomplishments earned him considerable recognition, and in 1978 he received the prestigious Sitanath Brahma Choudhury Award from the Assam Sahitya Sabha for his novel *Kanyar Mulya*.

Although he belonged to Arunachal Pradesh, Dai chose Assamese as the medium of his literary expression and wrote all his works in that language. His dedication to Assamese literature strengthened the cultural ties between Assam and the neighbouring tribal regions. He passed away in April 2002 shortly after completing his final novel, *Upar Mahal*. In recognition of his lasting contribution to literature, the Assam Sahitya Sabha instituted the Lummer Dai Sahitya Bota, an annual literary award established in his memory to honour and preserve his legacy.²⁴

FINDINGS

- (i) The Arabic and Assamese novel traditions emerged during periods of social and cultural transformation and were significantly influenced by Western education, literary models, and translation movements.
- (ii) Both literary traditions evolved from indigenous narrative and storytelling practices into mature forms of modern fiction capable of representing complex social realities and human experiences.
- (iii) The modern Arabic novel developed during the Arab Renaissance (Al-Nahḍah), while the Assamese novel emerged during the colonial period under the influence of modern education and print culture. Despite different historical contexts, both genres became important vehicles for cultural expression and social critique.
- (iv) Prominent Arabic novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz, Ghassan Kanafani, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Abdul Rahman Munif, and Tayeb Salih expanded the scope of Arabic fiction by addressing themes of identity, nationalism, colonialism, migration, and social change. Similarly, Assamese novelists such as Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Syed Abdul Malik, Homen Borgohain, and Mamoni Raisom Goswami enriched Assamese literature through their exploration of history, rural life, social injustice, and human suffering.
- (v) Both Arabic and Assamese novels address universal themes, including identity, social transformation, gender relations, cultural memory, political conflict, human dignity, and the search for justice, thereby transcending regional boundaries and appealing to a broader readership.



- (vi) Narrative experimentation is a significant feature of both traditions. Writers employ diverse literary techniques such as first-person and third-person narration, symbolism, allegory, psychological analysis, historical reconstruction, and non-linear storytelling to enhance artistic expression.
- (vii) Women writers have made substantial contributions to both literary traditions. Their works have brought attention to issues of gender inequality, women's empowerment, and the challenges faced by women within patriarchal societies.
- (viii) The Arabic novel has achieved greater international visibility through extensive translation and global recognition, including the Nobel Prize awarded to Naguib Mahfouz. Assamese novels, although rich in literary value, remain comparatively less known internationally due to limited translation and global dissemination.
- (ix) Both traditions have served as instruments of social awareness, cultural preservation, and intellectual engagement, influencing public discourse and contributing to broader discussions on social reform and cultural identity.
- (x) Contemporary developments in digital publishing, online platforms, and translation initiatives present new opportunities for both Arabic and Assamese novels to reach wider audiences and strengthen their position within world literature.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of Arabic and Assamese novels demonstrates that, despite originating from distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical environments, both traditions share a common commitment to portraying human experiences and responding to social realities. Emerging during periods of significant transformation, the Arabic and Assamese novel evolved into powerful literary forms capable of addressing issues of identity, cultural change, social justice, political conflict, and human dignity.

The study reveals that both traditions have made substantial contributions to world literature through their rich thematic diversity, innovative narrative techniques, and deep engagement with local as well as universal concerns. While Arabic fiction has gained wider international recognition through translation and global literary awards, Assamese novels possess comparable artistic and intellectual value and deserve greater global visibility.

Furthermore, both literary traditions function as important repositories of cultural memory and as vehicles for social critique and reform. Their exploration of human aspirations, suffering, resistance, and resilience enables them to transcend regional boundaries and connect with readers across cultures. The increasing availability of digital platforms and translation initiatives offers promising opportunities for expanding the international reach of these literary traditions.

In conclusion, Arabic and Assamese novels occupy significant positions within their respective literary cultures and contribute meaningfully to the broader landscape of world literature. Their comparative study not only highlights their unique characteristics and shared concerns but also underscores the role of literature as a bridge that promotes intercultural understanding, dialogue, and appreciation among diverse societies.

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SJIF Impact Factor (2026): 8.863 | ISI I.F. Value: 1.241 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)

EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)

Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2026

- Peer Reviewed Journal

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