

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426591

THE ASSAMESE POEMS OF THE ROMANTIC AGE: AN INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Banajit Sharma^{1*}, Dr. Hirusani Kalita²

¹Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Bongaigaon University, Assam

²Assistant Professor, Department of Assamese, Bhattadev University, Bajali, Assam

Received: 17/07/2025

Accepted: 11/03/2026

Corresponding author: Dr. Banajit Sharma

(banajitsarma3@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Intertextuality, as a theoretical framework for comprehending the interconnected character of literary texts, provides significant insights into the poetic traditions of the Assamese Romantic Age (1889–1940s). This study investigates the intertextual dimensions of Assamese Romantic poetry through systematic analysis of selected works by the *Jonaki* era's pioneering poets—Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Lakshminath Bezbarua, and Hemchandra Goswami, collectively designated the *Trimurti* (Trinity) of Assamese literature. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's theoretical formulations of intertextuality and Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, this research examines how these poets appropriated, transformed, and recontextualized diverse textual sources including Western Romantic poetry, indigenous folk traditions, classical Sanskrit literature, and Assamese Vaishnavite heritage. The analysis reveals that intertextuality in Assamese Romantic poetry functions through multiple channels: direct translations and adaptations of Western poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron; incorporation of *Bihu* songs (spring festival songs), folk narratives, and oral traditions; employment of classical *alankara* (rhetorical figures) and Sanskrit conventions; and dialogic engagement with earlier Assamese literary texts. This study argues that the intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poets constitute not mere imitation but creative transformation, establishing a distinctive literary modernity that negotiated between indigenous traditions and Western influences. The findings contribute to broader scholarly discourses on postcolonial literary production, vernacular modernity, and the global circulation of Romantic aesthetics.

KEYWORDS: intertextuality, Assamese Romantic poetry, *Jonaki* era, Kristeva, Bakhtin, folk literature, Vaishnavite literature

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of intertextuality, fundamentally concerned with the relational nature of texts, has emerged as one of the most significant theoretical frameworks for literary analysis since the late twentieth century. Coined by the Bulgarian-French theorist Julia Kristeva in her seminal essays "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1966) and "The Bounded Text" (1966–67), intertextuality proposes that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" [Kristeva, 1980, p. 66]. This theoretical insight, which fundamentally challenges the Romantic notion of original genius and autonomous creation, offers particularly fertile ground for examining literary traditions emerging from colonial and postcolonial contexts, where cultural encounter and textual appropriation constitute fundamental modes of creative expression [Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002].

The Assamese Romantic Age, inaugurated by the publication of the journal *Jonaki* (Moonlight) in February 1889, represents a pivotal moment in the literary history of Assam, a northeastern state of India with a rich linguistic and cultural heritage extending over centuries [Misra, 2011]. The *Jonaki* era, spanning roughly from 1889 to the 1940s, witnessed an unprecedented flowering of Assamese literature characterized by the adoption and adaptation of Romantic aesthetics from Western literature, particularly the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron [Choudhury, 2019]. However, this adoption was never simply imitative; rather, Assamese poets engaged in complex acts of intertextual negotiation, weaving together Western influences with indigenous folk traditions, classical Sanskrit learning, and the heritage of medieval Assamese Vaishnavite literature [Neog, 1995].

This paper undertakes a comprehensive intertextual analysis of Assamese Romantic poetry, focusing particularly on the works of the *Trimurti* (Trinity) of Assamese literature—Chandra Kumar Agarwala (1867–1938), Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864–1938), and Hemchandra Goswami (1872–1928)—along with other significant poets of the period including Raghunath Choudhary (1879–1968), Jatindra Nath Duwara (1892–1964), and Devakanta Barua (1917–1996). The study addresses three primary research questions: First, how does intertextuality manifest in the poetry of the Assamese Romantic Age? Second, what are the primary sources and forms of intertextual engagement employed by these poets? Third, what does intertextual analysis reveal about the nature of literary modernity in

colonial Assam?

The significance of this study extends beyond the specific domain of Assamese literary studies. By examining how intertextuality operates in a non-Western, vernacular literary tradition during the colonial period, this research contributes to broader theoretical discussions about the global circulation of Romantic aesthetics, the nature of literary influence in postcolonial contexts, and the relationship between indigenous traditions and Western modernity [Bhabha, 1994; Damrosch, 2003]. Furthermore, this investigation responds to the relative scarcity of English-language scholarship on Assamese literature and seeks to introduce this rich literary tradition to a wider academic audience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Intertextuality: Theoretical Foundations and Development*

The theoretical foundations of intertextuality can be traced to two major intellectual currents: the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the dialogic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. Saussure's revolutionary proposition that meaning in language arises not from the relationship between words and things but from the differential relationships between signs within a linguistic system laid the groundwork for understanding language as a self-referential system [Saussure, 1916/1983]. As Culler [1976] argues, "the meaning of a word... depends on its difference from other words which might have been chosen" (p. 50). This insight into the systematic nature of language provided the epistemological basis for understanding texts as sites of intersection between multiple linguistic codes.

Mikhail Bakhtin's contributions to the theory of dialogism and heteroglossia proved equally foundational for intertextual theory. In his studies of the novel, Bakhtin [1981] argued that language is fundamentally dialogic, that every utterance responds to previous utterances and anticipates future responses. The word, according to Bakhtin, "lives in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (p. 294). His concepts of *heteroglossia*—the coexistence of multiple speech types within a single work—and *chronotope*—the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships—provided crucial analytical tools for understanding the multiplicity of voices and contexts within literary texts.

Julia Kristeva, in her seminal readings of Bakhtin, synthesized these linguistic and dialogic insights into the concept of intertextuality. In "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva [1980] proposed that "every text

takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is a product of a new transformation of other texts" (p. 85). Crucially, Kristeva distinguished between two axes of textual production: the horizontal axis connecting author and reader, and the vertical axis connecting the text to other texts. This vertical axis, which she termed intertextuality, designates the presence of one or more other texts within a given text. For Kristeva, intertextuality implied not simply the presence of quotations or allusions but a fundamental condition of textual existence—texts exist only in relation to other texts [Allen, 2000].

G rard Genette [1997] subsequently expanded and systematized the study of intertextual relationships through his theory of transtextuality, which encompasses five types of textual transcendence: *intertextuality* (quotation, allusion, plagiarism); *paratextuality* (titles, prefaces, illustrations); *metatextuality* (critical commentary); *architextuality* (generic classification); and *hypertextuality* (transformation and imitation of earlier texts). Genette's framework, particularly his analysis of hypertextual relationships between texts, provides valuable analytical categories for examining the specific mechanisms through which Assamese Romantic poets engaged with their sources.

2.2. Assamese Romantic Poetry: Historical Context and Critical Reception

The emergence of Romanticism in Assamese literature must be understood within the broader context of colonial modernity in nineteenth-century India. Following the annexation of Assam by the British East India Company in 1826, the region experienced profound social, political, and cultural transformations [Guha, 1977]. The introduction of Western education, the establishment of printing presses, and the activities of American Baptist missionaries created new conditions for literary production. As Misra [2011] observes, "the progressive winds from the west entered Assam through Bengal, thereby enabling the region to emerge from the physical and cultural isolation into which it had lapsed during the long period of Ahom rule" (p. 6).

The publication of *Jonaki* in 1889 marked the beginning of a new era in Assamese literature. Founded by the *Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* (Association for the Promotion of Assamese Language), *Jonaki* became the primary vehicle for the expression of Romantic aesthetics in Assamese literature [Goswami, 2008]. The magazine published the first romantic poem in Assamese, Chandra Kumar Agarwala's *Bon Kunwori* (The Wood Nymph), and the first Assamese sonnet, Hemchandra

Goswami's *Priyotomar Sithi* (Letter from the Beloved). These pioneering works established the formal and thematic parameters within which subsequent Assamese Romantic poetry would develop.

Critical studies of Assamese Romantic poetry have largely focused on its relationship to Western Romanticism and its expression of nationalist sentiment. Tarachand [1967] observes that the romantic poets of the *Jonaki* era were influenced by their counterparts in Bengali literature—"Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Biharilal Chakravorty and Nabin Chandra Sen who were in turn influenced by Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Keats and others, in their approach and attitude, subject and content, and also style and diction" (p. 591). Choudhury [2019] similarly emphasizes the "influence of English Romantic poetry upon Assamese romantic poets," noting how poets like Chandra Kumar Agarwala and Lakshminath Bezbarua "brought the Western romantic philosophy and ideology into Assamese literature" (p. 3).

However, existing scholarship has not adequately addressed the intertextual dimensions of Assamese Romantic poetry. While critics have noted the influence of Western poets and the incorporation of folk elements, there has been no systematic analysis of how intertextuality operates as a generative principle in these works. This gap in scholarship is particularly significant given the theoretical potential of intertextual analysis to illuminate the complex negotiations between tradition and modernity, indigeneity and influence, that characterize Assamese Romantic poetry.

2.3. Folk Traditions and Assamese Literary Modernity

The relationship between folk traditions and modern Assamese literature constitutes another crucial dimension of this study. Assam possesses a rich repository of folk culture expressed through oral traditions, songs, dances, festivals, and rituals [Barkataki, 2010]. As Chutia [2025] argues, "Assamese folk culture, an essential component of the socio-cultural heritage of Assam, has historically played a vital role in shaping the linguistic, literary, and aesthetic dimensions of the Assamese language" (p. 1). The *Bihu* songs (spring festival songs), in particular, represent a significant source of linguistic and cultural material that has been continuously absorbed into literary production.

Neog [1995], in his comprehensive study of Assamese literature, emphasizes the importance of folk elements in the formation of modern Assamese literary identity. The *Xadhukotha* (folk tales) collected and reworked by Lakshminath Bezbarua

demonstrate how folk narratives could be transformed into sophisticated literary texts. This process of folkloric transformation represents a specific form of intertextual practice, where oral traditions are textualized and incorporated into written literature. The *Bihu* tradition, with its distinctive rhythmic patterns and thematic concerns—love, nature, agricultural cycles—provided Romantic poets with an indigenous model for lyric expression that complemented and sometimes contested Western influences.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs intertextual theory as its primary analytical framework, drawing upon the foundational concepts of Kristeva, Bakhtin, and Genette while adapting these theoretical tools to the specific context of Assamese literary production. The theoretical framework integrates four interconnected approaches that together provide a comprehensive methodology for analyzing the intertextual dimensions of Assamese Romantic poetry.

3.1. Kristevan Intertextuality

Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality provides the overarching theoretical orientation for this study. The concept that texts are "mosaics of quotations" offers a fundamental reorientation of literary analysis, shifting attention from the author as origin to the text as intersection [Moi, 1986]. For Kristeva [1980], intertextuality designates "a translinguistic apparatus that redistributes the system of language; it is a passage from one sign system to another, but it also involves an altering of the enunciative process" (p. 69). This understanding is particularly relevant for analyzing Assamese Romantic poetry, which frequently involves the transposition of material from one cultural and linguistic system to another.

The Kristevan framework also highlights the importance of the "subject in process," the idea that the writing subject is not a unified consciousness but is itself constituted through the intertextual play of language. This theoretical insight helps explain how Assamese Romantic poets could simultaneously adopt Western poetic forms and maintain connection to indigenous traditions—their poetic subjectivity is fundamentally hybrid, constituted through the intersection of multiple discursive fields [Barua, 2016].

3.2. Bakhtinian Dialogism

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism complements Kristeva's intertextuality by providing concepts for analyzing the specific ways in which multiple voices and discourses interact within literary texts. The

concept of *heteroglossia*—the presence of multiple speech types within a work—is particularly relevant for analyzing Assamese Romantic poetry, which frequently incorporates folk songs, classical Sanskrit, and English expressions within Assamese verse. As Bakhtin [1981] argues, "The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types" (p. 263). While Assamese Romantic poetry works primarily within lyric rather than novelistic forms, the principle of heteroglossia remains applicable to the incorporation of diverse linguistic and discursive materials.

Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*—time-space—also proves useful for analyzing how Assamese Romantic poets construct temporal and spatial relationships that connect their work to both Western Romantic and indigenous literary traditions. The Romantic chronotope of nature, for instance, operates differently in Assamese poetry than in Wordsworth or Shelley, incorporating specifically Assamese landscapes and cultural practices associated with the Brahmaputra valley.

3.3. Genettian Transtextuality

Genette's [1997] systematic taxonomy of textual relationships provides specific analytical categories for identifying and classifying intertextual phenomena. His five types of transtextuality—*intertextuality*, *paratextuality*, *metatextuality*, *architextuality*, and *hypertextuality*—offer a precise vocabulary for describing the various ways in which Assamese Romantic poetry relates to other texts.

Of particular importance for this study is Genette's concept of *hypertextuality*, which designates "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" [Genette, 1997, p. 5]. This concept precisely describes the relationship between many Assamese Romantic poems and their Western sources—the Assamese poem is a hypertext that transforms the Western hypotext through processes of translation, adaptation, and creative recontextualization.

3.4. Postcolonial Theoretical Dimensions

Finally, this study situates its intertextual analysis within a postcolonial theoretical framework. The concept of *hybridity*, as theorized by Homi Bhabha [1994], provides an important perspective on the intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poets. For Bhabha, hybridity is not simply the mixture of two cultures but a productive, transformative process that creates something new—the "third space" of

cultural production. The intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry exemplify this process of hybridization, where Western Romantic forms and themes are transformed through encounter with indigenous traditions to produce a distinctive vernacular modernity.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, text-based research design grounded in the analytical traditions of literary studies. The methodology combines close textual analysis with intertextual investigation, examining both the internal features of selected poems and their relationships to precursor texts. This dual focus enables a comprehensive understanding of how intertextuality functions as both a formal and thematic principle in Assamese Romantic poetry.

4.2. Corpus Selection

The primary corpus for this study comprises selected poems by the major poets of the Assamese Romantic Age. The selection includes:

Chandra Kumar Agarwala (1867–1938): *Bon Kunwori* (The Wood Nymph, 1889), *Niyor* (Dew-Drops, 1889), *Pratima* (1914), *Bin-Baragi* (The Unworldly One, 1923), *Prakriti* (Nature), *Manab Bandana* (Man-Worship).

Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864–1938): *Padum Kunwori* (The Lotus Queen), *Kadam Kali* (1913), *O Mur Apunar Desh* (My Own Land), *Bin Baragi* (The Unworldly One), *Assam Sangit* (Assam Anthem).

Hemchandra Goswami (1872–1928): *Priyotomar Sithi* (Letter from the Beloved, 1889), *Phular Saki* (The Bunch of Flowers, 1907), *Kaku Aru Hiya Nibilao* (No More of My Heart to Anybody).

Other Significant Poets: Selected works by Raghunath Choudhary—including *Keteki* (Pandanus Flower) and *Dahikatara* (Oleander)—Jatindra Nath Duwara (love lyrics), and Devakanta Barua (*Sagar Dekhisa*, Have You Seen the Sea).

The selection criteria prioritize poems that demonstrate significant intertextual engagement and represent the range of intertextual practices within Assamese Romantic poetry. Works were selected based on their canonical status within Assamese literary history, their explicit engagement with identifiable source texts, and their representation of the major intertextual strategies employed by *Jonaki* era poets.

4.3. Analytical Procedures

The analytical procedures involve three systematic stages:

Stage 1: Close Reading. Each poem is subjected to close reading to identify its formal features, thematic concerns, and linguistic characteristics. Particular attention is paid to elements that suggest intertextual engagement: foreign words, quotations, allusions, translations, and stylistic features associated with particular traditions.

Stage 2: Source Identification. Potential intertextual sources are identified through comparative analysis, consultation of critical scholarship, and examination of the poets' own statements about their influences. Both explicit and implicit sources are considered, recognizing that intertextual relationships may operate at conscious and unconscious levels.

Stage 3: Intertextual Analysis. The relationship between the poem and its sources is analyzed using Genette's typology of transtextual relationships. The analysis examines how the source material is transformed, recontextualized, and given new significance in the Assamese poem, with attention to the cultural and political implications of these transformations.

4.4. Limitations

This study acknowledges certain methodological limitations. First, the analysis is conducted primarily in English translation, with reference to original Assamese texts where possible; this necessarily affects the detection of linguistic intertextuality. Second, the identification of intertextual sources is necessarily interpretive and cannot claim exhaustiveness. Third, the study focuses on a limited corpus of poems and cannot represent the full diversity of Assamese Romantic poetry, including the substantial body of popular verse and the work of lesser-known poets.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Western Romantic Poetry as Hypotext: Hypertextual Transformation

The most visible form of intertextual engagement in Assamese Romantic poetry involves the transformation of Western Romantic texts. This hypertextual relationship operates through various mechanisms: direct translation, adaptive imitation, and creative recontextualization. The phenomenon of Western Romantic influence on Assamese poetry must be understood within the broader context of colonial cultural encounter, where literary transmission occurred through educational institutions, translated texts, and the intermediary influence of Bengali literature, which had already undergone its own engagement with Romantic aesthetics [Choudhury, 2019].

5.1.1. Chandra Kumar Agarwala: Wordsworthian Resonances

Chandra Kumar Agarwala's poetry demonstrates profound engagement with Wordsworthian themes and sensibilities. Like Wordsworth, Agarwala made "friendship with nature" and found "immense beauty in simple things" [Choudhury, 2019, p. 4]. His poem *Prakriti* (Nature) exemplifies this Wordsworthian influence, presenting nature not as mere setting but as living presence worthy of worship and communion. The opening lines establish a relationship with nature that echoes Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey":

"Nature, O mother, I am your child, You have nourished me at your breast, I seek refuge in your lap."

This address to nature as mother carries strong Wordsworthian resonances while simultaneously drawing upon indigenous traditions of nature worship prevalent in Assamese folk culture and Vaishnavite devotional practice. The intertextual relationship here is not one of simple imitation but of creative transformation—Agarwala adopts the Wordsworthian worship of nature but infuses it with specifically Assamese cultural references and linguistic patterns. Furthermore, the conception of nature as divine mother draws upon both the Romantic tendency toward pantheism and the specifically Indian tradition of nature goddesses, creating a syncretic figure that exists at the intersection of multiple cultural traditions.

The natural world in Agarwala's poetry—rivers, forests, hills, flowers—is recognizably the Assamese landscape rather than the Lake District, demonstrating how the Wordsworthian vision is relocalized through substitution of specific geographical and ecological referents. The *Kopili* and *Dihing* rivers, the *Jaapi* (traditional bamboo hat), the *Muga* silk—all function as specifically Assamese signifiers within Romantic frames, creating what might be termed a "glocalized" poetics that mediates between universal Romantic themes and local cultural specificity.

Similarly, Agarwala's *Manab Bandana* (Man-Worship) presents a humanistic philosophy that recalls Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* while drawing upon the Assamese Vaishnavite tradition of human equality propagated by *Sankardev* (1449–1568). The poem declares:

"I bow to humanity, the greatest of all, Higher than gods, higher than scriptures, Humanity is the supreme deity."

This hymn to humanism demonstrates how Assamese Romantic poets could synthesize Western

Romantic ideals with indigenous philosophical traditions. The Shelleyan celebration of human potential merges with the Vaishnavite rejection of caste hierarchy, creating a distinctive articulation of humanism appropriate to the colonial Assamese context where social reform and spiritual equality were pressing concerns.

5.1.2. Lakshminath Bezbarua: Multiple Romantic Encounters

Lakshminath Bezbarua's poetry reveals engagement with multiple Western Romantic sources. His poem *Abasesh* (The Last) is explicitly translated from Shelley's "Music, When Soft Voices Die," demonstrating the direct hypertextual relationship that characterizes much Assamese Romantic poetry. However, even in translation, Bezbarua transforms the source text through rhythmic and phonetic adaptation:

"Shelley's original: Music, when soft voices die, Vibrates in the memory— Odours, when sweet violets sicken, Live within the sense they quicken.

Bezbarua's translation: *Mridu kolar shur Antare antare dure dure Baje baje...*"

Bezbarua's translation is not merely linguistic transposition but cultural adaptation. The Assamese version employs rhythmic patterns and phonetic structures characteristic of Assamese folk songs, creating a hybrid form that is simultaneously Shelleyan and indigenous. The use of reduplication—*antare antare* (within the heart, within the heart), *dure dure* (far, far)—reflects a specifically Assamese poetic convention not present in the original, demonstrating how translation becomes transformation.

Bezbarua's patriotic poems, particularly *O Mur Apunar Desh* (My Own Land), which subsequently became the state anthem of Assam, demonstrate the transformation of Romantic nationalism into an Assamese idiom. The poem combines the Romantic celebration of native land found in poets like Wordsworth and Burns with specifically Assamese cultural references:

"O my beloved land, Where the Brahmaputra flows, Where the hills and plains embrace, My motherland, my pride."

The poem's intertextual complexity lies in its synthesis of multiple sources: the Romantic nationalism of Western poetry, the Sanskrit tradition of *deshabhakti* (devotion to country), and the indigenous tradition of Assamese *buranji* (historical chronicle). The reference to the Brahmaputra—the defining geographical feature of Assam—localizes the Romantic celebration of native landscape while invoking centuries of historical and cultural association.

5.1.3. Hemchandra Goswami: Architextual Innovation

Hemchandra Goswami's *Priyotomar Sithi* (Letter from the Beloved), recognized as the first Assamese sonnet, exemplifies the architextual dimension of intertextuality—the adoption of a Western literary form. The sonnet form, with its Italian or English structure, had no precedent in Assamese literature. Goswami's adoption of this form represents a significant architextual choice, signaling the poet's engagement with Western literary tradition and the expansion of Assamese poetic possibilities.

"My beloved, from afar I send you this letter, Written not in ink but in the tears of longing, Read it with your heart, for words fail me..."

The sonnet form, the epistolary convention, and the expression of romantic longing all suggest Western Romantic influence, while the emotional intensity and specific metaphors reflect indigenous traditions of love poetry, particularly the *shringara rasa* (erotic sentiment) of classical Indian poetics. This dual orientation—toward Western form and indigenous feeling—characterizes much of the architextual innovation of the *Jonaki* era.

5.2. Folk Traditions as Intertextual Source: Folkloric Intertextuality

A second major strand of intertextual engagement in Assamese Romantic poetry involves the incorporation of folk traditions—songs, tales, and oral practices. This folkloric intertextuality operates not through written texts but through the transcription and transformation of oral sources. The incorporation of folk material into literary poetry represents a complex form of cultural negotiation, raising questions about authenticity, appropriation, and the politics of textualization.

5.2.1. Bihu Songs and Lyric Adaptation

The incorporation of *Bihu* songs into Assamese Romantic poetry represents a significant folkloric intertextual practice. *Bihu* songs, associated with the spring festival of *Rongali Bihu*, carry specific rhythmic patterns, thematic concerns (love, nature, agricultural cycles), and linguistic registers. Romantic poets incorporated *Bihu* rhythms and motifs into their verse, creating a hybrid form that merged folk and literary traditions.

The *Bihu* tradition provided Assamese Romantic poets with an indigenous model for the expression of romantic love and natural beauty—themes central to Western Romanticism—grounded in local cultural practice. This convergence of thematic concerns enabled a creative synthesis where Romantic sensibility found expression through folk forms,

demonstrating that the "Romantic" in Assamese literature was not merely imported but emerged through the activation of indigenous resources.

5.2.2. Lakshminath Bezbarua's Folk Tale Collections

Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (Grandmother's Tales, 1911) represents the most systematic collection and literary adaptation of Assamese folk tales. These tales, drawn from oral tradition, were transformed by Bezbarua into sophisticated literary texts that maintain the narrative patterns and linguistic features of folk storytelling while adding literary refinement. The intertextual relationship here is between oral performance and written text—a transformation of ephemeral, performative material into permanent, textual form.

This process of textualization carries significant ideological implications: the folk tale, once communal property transmitted through oral performance, becomes authored text associated with an individual writer. Yet Bezbarua's collection also functions as a work of cultural preservation, documenting tales that might otherwise have been lost in the rapid modernization of Assamese society. The title itself—"Grandmother's Tales"—invokes the oral context of storytelling, the grandmother figure representing the traditional bearer of folk wisdom, while the printed book transforms this oral transmission into a new medium.

5.2.3. Folk Proverbs and Idiomatic Expression

The use of folk proverbs and idioms represents another intertextual practice. Assamese idioms—*bani*, *phokot*, *xadhukotha*—permeate Romantic poetry, grounding literary language in colloquial expression. As Chutia [2025] observes, these proverbs "enrich the semantic diversity of Assamese and are commonly used in contemporary conversation, media, and literature" (p. 4). The incorporation of folk wisdom into Romantic poetry serves multiple functions: it roots the poetry in local culture, provides authority through appeal to collective wisdom, and creates linguistic variety within the literary text.

Agarwala's *Bon Kunwori* (The Wood Nymph), while influenced by Western Romantic conceptions of nature spirits, also draws upon indigenous folk traditions of forest spirits and supernatural beings. The wood nymph of the title exists at the intersection of European fairy traditions and Assamese folk beliefs about *yakshis* (nature spirits) and *baghini* (tiger-spirits), demonstrating the productive hybridity that characterizes Assamese Romantic intertextuality.

5.3. Classical Sanskrit and Vaishnavite

Intertextuality

The third major strand of intertextual engagement involves the classical traditions of Sanskrit literature and medieval Assamese Vaishnavite poetry. This form of intertextuality operates through *alankara* (rhetorical figures), *dhvani* (suggestion), and the adaptation of classical themes and motifs. The relationship to classical traditions presents a particularly complex case of intertextuality, involving not merely the incorporation of specific textual materials but the engagement with an entire aesthetic system—Sanskrit poetics—that provided the theoretical framework for literary production in pre-colonial Assam.

5.3.1. Vaishnavite Literary Heritage

The medieval Assamese Vaishnavite tradition, centered on the works of *Sankardev* (1449–1568) and *Madhavdev* (1489–1596), provided a rich repository of devotional poetry that influenced Romantic poets even as they moved toward secular themes. The *borgeet* (devotional songs) of Sankardev, with their *rag*-based melodies and spiritual themes, established a tradition of lyric poetry that Romantic poets both continued and transformed. The Vaishnavite tradition had already accomplished a significant literary revolution in Assam, democratizing access to spiritual knowledge through vernacular composition and establishing Assamese as a language of serious literary expression [Neog, 1995].

The intertextual relationship between Romantic poetry and Vaishnavite literature operates on multiple levels. At the lexical level, Romantic poetry draws upon the rich vocabulary of Vaishnavite verse, including terms for emotional states (*bhava*), aesthetic categories (*rasa*), and devotional practices. At the formal level, certain Romantic poems adopt meters and song structures derived from Vaishnavite traditions. At the thematic level, the transformation of devotional love (*prema*) into romantic love (*shringara*) represents a significant reorientation of a major Vaishnavite theme.

5.3.2. Classical Rhetorical Figures

The use of Sanskrit-derived *alankara* (ornamentation) represents another classical intertextual practice. Metaphors, similes, and other rhetorical figures drawn from Sanskrit poetics appear throughout Assamese Romantic poetry. The *upama* (simile), *rupaka* (metaphor), and *dhvani* (suggestion) of classical theory are employed alongside Western Romantic imagery, creating a syncretic poetic discourse that mediates between Indian and Western aesthetic traditions.

Hemchandra Goswami, as a scholar of early

Assamese literature, was particularly deeply engaged with classical sources. His scholarly work, including the compilation of *Asamiya Sahityar Chaneki* (Typical Selections from Assamese Literature) and his editorial work on Bhattadev's *Katha Gita*, reflects his intimate knowledge of classical traditions. This scholarly engagement inflects his poetry, which frequently employs classical meters and allusions.

5.4. Linguistic Hybridity: Foreign Words and Colonial Heteroglossia

A final form of intertextual engagement involves the incorporation of foreign words—particularly English, Bengali, and Sanskrit—into Assamese verse. This linguistic intertextuality reflects the multilingual context of colonial Assam and creates a polyglot texture in Romantic poetry that merits careful attention.

5.4.1. English Lexical Borrowing

English words appear frequently in Assamese Romantic poetry, particularly in poems dealing with modern themes or expressing Western concepts for which Assamese equivalents were lacking. The presence of English words creates a distinctive linguistic texture that signals the poem's engagement with colonial modernity. English functioned as the language of administration, higher education, and modern knowledge; its incorporation into Assamese poetry thus associated literary production with these domains.

However, the use of English words also served more subtle functions: it could signal the poet's education and sophistication, create ironic distance through juxtaposition of registers, or introduce concepts that had no Assamese equivalent. The scattered English words in Assamese Romantic verse create what might be termed a "colonial heteroglossia," where multiple linguistic registers coexist within a single utterance.

5.4.2. Bengali Linguistic Influence

Bengali influence, controversial in the context of the language movement that sought to establish Assamese as the official language, appears nonetheless in Assamese Romantic poetry through lexical borrowing and stylistic influence. The poets of the *Jonaki* era were educated in Calcutta and were fluent in Bengali; this linguistic exposure inevitably influenced their Assamese writing [Kakati, 1941].

The period from 1837 to 1873, when Bengali was imposed as the official language of Assam courts, had created a situation where Bengali served as the language of educated discourse for an entire generation. The *Jonaki* poets, while committed to

establishing Assamese as a literary language, could not escape the formative influence of Bengali on their linguistic development. This Bengali influence appears not only in lexical borrowing but in syntactic patterns, idioms, and even meters borrowed from Bengali verse.

5.4.3. Sanskrit and the Classical Register

Sanskrit, as the classical language of learned discourse, provided a third source of lexical borrowing. *Tatsama* (Sanskrit-derived) words appear throughout Romantic poetry, often in contexts requiring elevated register or expressing abstract concepts. The use of Sanskrit-derived vocabulary creates a distinctive register within the poem, one associated with learning, tradition, and cultural authority.

The *tadbhava* (indigenous) and *tatsama* (Sanskritic) words within a single poem create intertextual tension between folk and classical traditions, between local and pan-Indian cultural orientations. This lexical heterogeneity reflects the multiple cultural orientations of Assamese society—rooted in local traditions yet connected to broader Sanskritic civilization, negotiating colonial modernity while maintaining continuity with pre-colonial heritage.

5.5. Translation as Intertextual Practice

Translation occupies a special place in the intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry. Translation is not merely a secondary activity but a fundamental mode of literary production, through which Western texts are transformed into Assamese literary language [Apter, 2006]. The practice of translation in colonial Assam carried implications far beyond the linguistic; it was a means of cultural negotiation, a method of literary education, and a strategy for expanding the expressive possibilities of the Assamese language.

Bezbarua's translations of Shelley represent one example of this practice. Other poets translated works by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, Tennyson, Robert Browning etc. creating an Assamese intertextual field that included Western Romantic poetry. These translations were not transparent transpositions but creative transformations, adapting the source texts to Assamese linguistic patterns, cultural references, and literary conventions.

The importance of translation in Assamese Romantic intertextuality reflects what Apter [2006] calls the "translation zone"—the space where languages and cultures meet in productive tension. Assamese Romantic poetry emerges from precisely such a translation zone, where English Romantic

poetry is transformed through encounter with Assamese language and culture. The translation zone is not a neutral space but one shaped by power relations—colonial hierarchies that positioned English as the language of culture and modernity. Yet the translation practices of Assamese Romantic poets demonstrate that this space could also be one of creative resistance, where the colonized language appropriated and transformed the colonizer's literary heritage.

5.6. Linguistic Resilience and Dialogic Imagination

The history of Assamese literature and language is deeply intertwined with the socio-political conditions of Assam, especially as it bears the marks of colonial interventions and linguistic struggles. During British colonial rule, the Assamese language faced a critical challenge when the British administration replaced Assamese with Bengali as the official language in schools and courts, deeming Assamese to be of a lower standard for official use [Neog, 1995]. This ushered in a period of linguistic crisis for Assamese, threatening its survival and literary identity.

However, a significant revival began with the publication of *Orunodoi* (Sunrise) in 1846, a monthly paper devoted to religion, science, and general knowledge published by the Baptist Missionaries at Sivasagar. *Orunodoi* played a crucial role in affirming the originality and uniqueness of the Assamese language, effectively marking the beginning of a modern age in Assamese literature and cultural expression. This modern resurgence not only restored the Assamese language but also created fertile ground for literary experimentation and cultural introspection, fostering intertextuality as a key feature in Assamese literary production.

Intertextuality—defined as the shaping of a text's meaning by another text—permits a dynamic interrelationship within literature, highlighting how different texts respond to, echo, and transform each other within a given cultural context. In the Assamese literary milieu, this intertextual dialogue extends not only within written texts but also between oral traditions and written narratives, reflecting the sociocultural and historical specificities of Assam [Nicholson, 2013].

6. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The intertextual analysis of Assamese Romantic poetry yields several significant findings that contribute to both Assamese literary studies and broader theoretical discourses on intertextuality and postcolonial literature.

6.1. Primary Findings

Finding 1: Multiple Intertextual Sources. Assamese Romantic poetry draws upon multiple intertextual sources: Western Romantic poetry, indigenous folk traditions, classical Sanskrit literature, and medieval Assamese Vaishnavite poetry. These sources are not merely accumulated but synthesized into a distinctive poetic discourse that reflects the complex cultural positioning of colonial Assam.

Finding 2: Transformation, Not Imitation. The relationship between Assamese Romantic poetry and its sources is not one of passive imitation but of active transformation. Assamese poets adapt Western forms and themes to local contexts, substituting Assamese landscapes, cultural references, and linguistic patterns for European ones. This finding challenges earlier critical characterizations of Assamese Romanticism as derivative.

Finding 3: Folk Literature as Creative Source. Folk traditions function not as primitive material to be refined but as creative sources in their own right. The incorporation of *Bihu* songs, folk tales, and proverbs represents a sophisticated intertextual practice that merges oral and written traditions, demonstrating the continuity between folk and literary expression in Assamese culture.

Finding 4: Hybrid Poetic Subjectivity. The intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry produce a hybrid poetic subjectivity, capable of drawing upon multiple cultural traditions simultaneously. This hybridity anticipates later postcolonial theories of cultural mixture and negotiation, positioning Assamese Romantic poetry as an early instance of postcolonial literary hybridity.

Finding 5: Translation as Creative Production. Translation functions as a creative literary practice in Assamese Romanticism, producing original works that transform source texts rather than merely reproducing them. The translated poem stands in a dual relationship: to its source text, which it transforms, and to its target culture, which it expands.

Finding 6: Intertextuality and Literary Modernity. The intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry are constitutive of literary modernity in Assam, establishing new forms of literary expression that negotiate between tradition and innovation, indigeneity and influence. This finding suggests that modernity in colonial contexts is not simply imported but produced through active engagement with multiple traditions.

Finding 7: The Role of Periodicals in Intertextual Transmission. The magazine *Jonaki* functioned as a crucial medium for intertextual transmission,

publishing translations, adaptations, and original works that demonstrated engagement with multiple literary traditions. The periodical context of Assamese Romanticism facilitated rapid dissemination of new poetic forms and established intertextual norms that shaped subsequent literary production.

Finding 8: Gender and Intertextual Voice. While the major poets of the *Jonaki* era were male, the incorporation of folk traditions—particularly *Biya-naam* (wedding songs) and other women's oral traditions—introduced female voices into the intertextual field. This incorporation of women's oral poetry into male-authored literary texts represents a complex form of ventriloquism that both preserves and transforms gendered vocal traditions.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

These findings have significant implications for intertextual theory. First, they demonstrate that intertextuality in non-Western literary traditions operates through distinctive mechanisms that may not be fully captured by theoretical frameworks developed primarily in relation to European literature. The role of oral tradition as an intertextual source, the significance of translation as creative production, and the importance of colonial linguistic hierarchies in shaping intertextual possibilities all suggest the need for theoretical expansion and cultural contextualization. Second, the Assamese case illuminates the relationship between intertextuality and literary influence. While influence studies typically posit a unidirectional flow from source to recipient, intertextual analysis reveals more complex dynamics of negotiation, resistance, and transformation. Assamese Romantic poets did not passively receive Western influence but actively shaped it through processes of selection, adaptation, and recontextualization. Third, the findings support a reconceptualization of literary modernity in colonial contexts. Rather than understanding modernity as a Western import passively received by colonial subjects, the intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry reveal modernity as a negotiated construct, produced through active engagement with multiple traditions and characterized by creative hybridity rather than derivative imitation.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the intertextual dimensions of Assamese Romantic poetry through comprehensive analysis of selected works by the major poets of the *Jonaki* era. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Kristeva, Bakhtin, and

Genette, the analysis has demonstrated that intertextuality operates as a fundamental principle of literary production in Assamese Romanticism, shaping poetic language, form, and theme. The findings reveal that Assamese Romantic poetry engages in multiple forms of intertextual practice: hypertextual transformation of Western Romantic poetry; folkloric incorporation of indigenous oral traditions; classical adaptation of Sanskrit and Vaishnavite sources; and linguistic hybridization through borrowing from multiple languages. These intertextual practices are not separate or sequential but simultaneous, producing a poetry that draws upon diverse sources to create something distinctly modern and distinctly Assamese. The significance of these findings extends beyond the specific domain of Assamese literary studies. The intertextual practices of Assamese Romantic poetry exemplify processes of cultural negotiation, hybridization, and creative transformation that characterize literary production in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The Assamese case demonstrates that Romanticism, as a global aesthetic movement, was not simply exported from Europe to the colonies but was actively transformed through encounters with local traditions, producing vernacular modernities that challenge simple center-periphery models of cultural transmission.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. The focus on a limited corpus of major poets necessarily excludes the broader field of Assamese Romantic poetry, including the work of lesser-known poets and

the vast domain of popular verse. Additionally, the analysis has been conducted primarily through close reading methods; future research might employ computational approaches to trace intertextual patterns across larger corpora. Several directions for future research emerge from this study. First, comparative studies examining Assamese Romantic poetry alongside other Indian vernacular Romanticisms would illuminate the diverse paths of Romantic transmission and transformation in colonial India. Second, detailed studies of individual poets and their intertextual practices would deepen understanding of specific creative processes. Third, examination of the reception and afterlife of Assamese Romantic poetry in subsequent literary periods would trace the continuing influence of intertextual practices established during the *Jonaki* era. In conclusion, the intertextual analysis of Assamese Romantic poetry reveals a literary tradition of remarkable creativity and complexity, one that negotiates between multiple cultural traditions to produce a distinctive modernity. As Kristeva [1980] reminds us, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations" (p. 66). The Assamese Romantic poets, constructing their mosaics from materials drawn from East and West, tradition and modernity, oral and written sources, have created works of enduring literary significance that deserve wider recognition in the global history of Romanticism and postcolonial literature.

REFERENCES

1. Allen, G. (2000). *Intertextuality*. Routledge.
2. Apter, E. (2006). *The translation zone: A new comparative literature*. Princeton University Press.
3. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
4. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
5. Barkataki, S. (2010). *Assamese literature*. Sahitya Akademi.
6. Barua, H. K. (2016). *A history of Assamese literature*. Sahitya Akademi.
7. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
8. Choudhury, D. (2019). Assamese romantic poets: An overview. *IJRAR International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 6(2), 88–92.
9. Chutia, S. K. (2025). Influence of folk culture on modern Assamese language: An analytical study. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(1), 1–8.
10. Culler, J. (1976). *Saussure*. Fontana.
11. Damrosch, D. (2003). *What is world literature?* Princeton University Press.
12. Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree* (C. Newman & C. Doubinsky, Trans.). University of Nebraska Press.
13. Goswami, G. (2008). Axamiyā poetry: Inception to romanticism. *Muse India*, 17. Retrieved from <http://www.museindia.com>
14. Guha, A. (1977). *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom struggle and electoral politics in Assam 1826–1947*. Indian Council of Historical Research.

15. Kakati, B. (1941). *Assamese: Its formation and development*. Government of Assam.
16. Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art* (T. Gora, A. Jardine, & L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
17. Misra, T. (2011). Renaissance in Assamese literature. In *Medieval and early colonial Assam: Society, polity, economy* (pp. 1-47). Calcutta University Press.
18. Moi, T. (Ed.). (1986). *The Kristeva reader*. Columbia University Press.
19. Neog, M. (1995). *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha* [Outline of Assamese literature]. Chandra Prakash.
20. Nicholson, N. (2013). Cultural studies, oral tradition, and the promise of intertextuality. *American Journal of Philology*, 134(1), 9-21. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajp.2013.0006>
21. Saussure, F. de. (1983). *Course in general linguistics* (C. Harris, Trans.). Duckworth. (Original work published 1916) Tarachand. (1967). *History of the freedom movement in India* (Vol. II). Publications Division, Government of India