

**ASSAM AGITATION (1979–85) AND LITERARY RESPONSES IN ASSAMESE  
LITERATURE: YOUTH, GENRE, AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES**

**Dr Bhupen Chutia<sup>1</sup>**

Principal, Sadiya College Assam  
email:bhupenchutia75@gmail.com

**Dr Anita Deka Bora<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Lakhimpur Girls College, North Lakhimpur,  
Assam

email:rintinlp@gmail.com

**Abstract:**

The agitation, spanning six tumultuous years, significantly influenced political discourse, social consciousness, and cultural expressions in Assam, culminating in the historic Assam Accord of 1985. The study aims to examine the representation of youth perspectives in Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85). Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85) reflects complex socio-political realities, capturing youth perspectives, emotional trauma, and moral dilemmas. Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85) reflects complex socio-political realities, capturing youth perspectives, emotional trauma, and moral dilemmas. Prose and poetry together illustrate both narrative depth and emotional intensity, providing a holistic understanding of the era. One of the very familiar faces during Assam agitation was dismissed IPS (India Police Service-1958 direct recruit batch) officer Hironyo Kumar Bhattacharya who was acting as DIG (border) in Assam police when Assam agitation started.

**Keywords:** agitation, socio-political realities, trauma, and moral

**Introduction:**

The agitation, spanning six tumultuous years, significantly influenced political discourse, social consciousness, and cultural expressions in Assam, culminating in the historic Assam Accord of 1985. The repercussions of this 6 years movement still reverberates in almost all aspects of Assam be it economics, politics, academics. The study aims to examine the representation of youth perspectives in Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85). Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85) reflects complex socio-political realities, capturing youth perspectives, emotional trauma, and moral dilemmas. Prose and poetry together illustrate both narrative depth and emotional intensity, providing a holistic understanding of the era. One of the very familiar faces during Assam agitation was dismissed IPS (India Police Service-1958 direct recruit batch) officer Hironyo Kumar Bhattacharya who was acting as DIG (border) in Assam police when Assam agitation started. understanding of the era. One of the very familiar faces during Assam agitation was dismissed IPS (India Police

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The Assam Agitation (1979–85) represents a watershed moment in Assam's socio-political history. Initiated by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and supported by various civil society organizations, the movement aimed to address the perceived influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and safeguard Assamese cultural and political identity. The agitation, spanning six tumultuous years, significantly influenced political discourse, social consciousness, and cultural expressions in Assam, culminating in the historic Assam Accord of 1985. The repercussions of this 6 years movement still reverberates in almost all aspects of Assam be it economics, politics, academics. Many student leaders who took active part in that agitation are still part of various important political parties including ruling coalition and opposition. Even present Assam chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sharma took active part in that agitation though he was barely 14/15 years old then. A viral photo of young Himanta Biswa Sharma along with main agitation leaders like two time former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, late home minister Bhriгу Phukon and many other important agitation leaders is quite familiar in Assam. Even former prime minister of India, Atul Bihari Vajpayee and many senior RSS, BJP leaders from outside Assam had to briefly face jail term in Assam when they came here in support of student agitators. The core issue of mass illegal migration from Bangladesh is still a burning and unresolved issue in Assam and forms part of almost every political party's core election campaign. Hence this 6 years long Assam movement still preoccupies a large section of the society in Assam in different formats including literature. Beyond political ramifications, the movement left an indelible mark on Assamese literature. Writers and critics responded with literary works that captured the psychosocial dimensions of unrest, youth activism, and the moral dilemmas faced by ordinary citizens. Literature became both a repository of memory and a medium for critical engagement, reflecting societal anxieties, aspirations, and disillusionments.

Notably, the youth emerged as central figures, both as participants in the agitation and as protagonists in literary works. Their experiences, emotions, and ideological struggles were recorded in prose, poetry, and critical essays, providing a nuanced lens to examine the human consequences of political upheaval. This study explores how Assamese literature during this period captures youth perspectives, compares genre-specific representations (prose vs. poetry), and evaluates the contributions of prominent authors and critics, including Homen Borgohain, Dr. Hiren Gohain, Kanaksen Deka, Anuradha Sharma Pujari, and Silvadra. Applying trauma studies, subaltern theory, and feminist criticism, this paper seeks to understand how literature functions as both artistic expression and socio-political testimony. Keywords: Assam Agitation (1979–85), Assamese Literature, Youth Perspectives, Prose and Poetry, Socio-Political Unrest, Trauma Studies, Subaltern Theory, Feminist Criticism, Literary Response.

The study aims to examine the representation of youth perspectives in Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85). Conduct a comparative analysis of prose and poetry, evaluating how each genre conveys the themes of unrest, trauma, and societal change. Investigate the critical and literary contributions of key Assamese authors and scholars, including Homen Borgohain, Dr. Hiren Gohain, Kanaksen Deka, Anuradha Sharma Pujari, and Silvadra. Apply trauma studies, subaltern theory, and feminist criticism to interpret literary texts as historical, cultural, and ethical artifacts. Highlight the originality and significance of literacy response to a pivotal socio-political movement in Assam. This research employs a qualitative literary analysis approach, integrating historical contextualization, textual security and political frameworks.

**Textual Analysis:** Selected works of prose, short stories, and poetry were examined. Notable texts include Homen Borgohain's *Pita Putra* and *Aghat*, Arupa Patangia Kalita's; the *Loneliness of Hira Barua*, and poetry by Silvadra. Literary devices, narrative strategies, and thematic concerns-particularly relating to youth and unrest were analyzed.

**Genre Comparison:** The study contrasts prose narratives, which provide expansive characterization and social context, with poetic expressions, which encapsulate emotional intensity, symbolism, and aesthetic representation of socio-political realities.

### **Theoretical Frameworks:**

**Trauma Studies:** To analyze how literature encodes individual and collective trauma.  
**Subaltern Theory:** To examine marginalized voices-especially youth and women-and their experiences of unrest.

**Feminist Criticism:** To explore gendered experiences and the intersection of political turmoil  
**Secondary Literature Review:** UGC-approved journal articles, critical essays, and historical sources were reviewed to situate literary works in socio-political context. This included *Granthaalayah*, *Cahiers Magellanes*, and other peer-reviewed publications with patriarchal structures.

### **Results and Discussion:**

1. **Youth Perspectives in Assamese Literature-**Youth participation was central to the Assam Agitation, both on the streets and in literary imagination. Texts of the period often depict young characters grappling with moral dilemmas, political consciousness and social responsibility. Homen Borgohain's novels, *Pita Putra* and *Aghat*, portray youth negotiating between traditional Assamese norms and the call for political activism. Borogohian's characters reflect a society in transition, capturing both idealism and the anxieties associated with socio-political turbulence. Anuradha Sharma Pujari highlights student activism and emotional conflicts in her narratives. Her protagonists often navigate ethical and societal pressures, revealing the human cost of political engagement. Dr.

Hiren Gohain emphasizes youth as symbolic witnesses, whose experiences reflect broader societal change. He argues that literary narratives foreground the subaltern voice, representing perspectives often omitted in historical accounts. Kanaksen Deka focuses on everyday struggles of young individuals, illustrating how political unrest intersects with personal and familial life. These portrayals collectively demonstrate that Assamese literature for grounded youth as both active agents and recipients of socio-political trauma, offering insight into generational engagement during the agitation.

## **2. Genre Comparison: Poetry vs Prose**

**Prose:** Prose narratives, such as Arupa Patangia Kalita's *The Loneliness of Hira Barua*, offer detailed social panoramas. Kalita's stories illuminate the psychological impact of violence, displacement, and social fragmentation on youth and communities. Kanaksen Deka's realistic narratives depict moral and ethical challenges faced by individuals amid political unrest, blending social realism with political commentary.

**Poetry:** Poetry, exemplified by Silvadra and selected works of Borgohain, captures the emotional and symbolic dimensions of unrest. Poetic devices—metaphor, imagery, and rhythm—evoke the collective anxiety, hope, and resilience of Assamese society. Silvadra's use of riverine metaphors links natural landscapes to social flux, highlighting the interplay between environments, politics, and human experience.

**Comparative Insights:** Prose offers narrative depth, character development, and societal context. Poetry distills emotional essence, using metaphor and symbolic resonance. Together, the two genres provide a comprehensive lens to understand Assamese literary responses to the agitation.

## **3. Critical Perspectives and Authorial Contributions:**

**Homen Borgohain:** Explores moral dilemmas, youth disillusionment, and societal transformation through fiction and critical essays.

**Dr. Hiren Gohain:** Provides theoretical insights, highlighting subaltern experiences and socio-political critique.

**Kanaksen Deka:** Realist short stories foreground youth navigating socio-political and familial pressures.

Anuradha Sharma Pujari: Emphasizes gendered and emotional perspectives of students and young protagonists.

**Silvadra:** Poetry evokes symbolic and environmental metaphors, linking societal unrest to broader human experiences. These authors collectively contribute to a rich tapestry of literary discourse, bridging historical experience, individual narrative and socio-political reflection.

## **4. Theoretical Application:**

**Trauma Studies:** Literature encodes the psychological and societal trauma of unrest, revealing its impact on youth and communities.

**Subaltern Theory:** Works highlight marginalized voices often excluded from official histories, for grounding lived experiences.

**Feminist Criticism:** Literature portrays the intersection of political unrest with gendered

### **Conclusions:**

Assamese literature during the Assam Agitation (1979–85) reflects complex socio-political realities, capturing youth perspectives, emotional trauma, and moral dilemmas. Prose and poetry together illustrate both narrative depth and emotional intensity, providing a holistic understanding of the era. One of the very familiar faces during Assam agitation was dismissed IPS (India Police Service-1958 direct recruit batch) officer Hironyo Kumar Bhattacharya who was acting as DIG (border) in Assam police when Assam agitation started. He had to face numerous legal hurdles apart from service dismissal for his explicit support to Assam agitation. Incidentally he wrote many books on the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh with his first hand experience as DIG (border) which specifically dealt with Bangladeshi migration through numerous porous Assam -Bangladesh border points. Notable writings of Hironyo Kumar Bhattacharya include “Axom ditiyo Lebanon” (Assam on the way to become second Lebanon) which was a best seller in that period. “Kararuddha Jibanar Baakruddha Kahini”(translated title: “The Story of a Life Under Arrest”) was written by him regarding his prison experience under NSA ( National Security Act) after his dismissal and subsequent arrest. “Betrayal of North East: The Arrested Voice” and “Operation Lebensraum – Illegal Migration from Bangladesh” were written in English by this once decorated and later dismissed/ imprisoned IPS officer. Both these English works by him are still regarded highly for their objective analysis and likely solutions of the vexed Bangladeshi migration issue. Authors such as Homen Borgohain, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Anuradha Sharma Pujari, Kanaksen Deka, and Silvadra demonstrate the power of literature as a historical and socio-cultural document, while critical insights from Dr. Hiren Gohain contextualize these narratives theoretically. In this context, Dr Hiren Gohain was perceived as not so supportive of Assam agitation as most of his writings in that era pointed out the weakness of the methods being advocated and used by student agitators and their supporters to identify illegal Bangladeshi migrants and take next course of action as per law. Many of his warnings through various writings ultimately proved prophetic in course of time. Homen Borgohain highlighted the communal discord during the course of the 6 years long agitation with several stories including “Ismail Sekhor Hondhanot”(In search of Ismail Sheikh when translated into English). In this particular story of Homen Borgohain, Ismail Sheikh is a destitute farmer whose forefathers migrated to then undivided Assam during British rule from present day Moimon singh district of Bangladesh. These migrants from Moimonsingh district of present day Bangladesh are referred as Mia who is more or less regarded as derogatory word in Assam. The word Mia has become an integral part of Assamese vocabulary in last 50 years. Words like 'Mia politics', ' Mia patronage', ' Mia migration ', ' Mia dominated areas', ' Mia threat' etc are part of

animated socio-political discussion in Assam till today. Scores of literary works revolving around these words have been written in various forms of literature in Assam and they are very unlikely to take backseat or fade into oblivion in near future in Assam.

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