



Research Article

Universalist Dimensions of Assamese Lyrical Literature: Intersections with Constitutional Ideals, International Law, And Satra Traditions

(With Special Reference to Majuli's Kamalabari, Uttar Kamalabari, and Auniati Satras)

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Abstract

This study explores the evolution and significance of Assamese national lyrical literature within the broader paradigms of universalism, constitutional principles, and international law. Rooted in Assam's distinct cultural and geographical identity, Assamese lyrical literature has historically served as a medium for expressing territorial philosophy, cultural cohesion, and the collective aspirations of its people. From its earliest manifestations, it has engaged not only with regional traditions but also with universal human concerns, including human rights, sustainable development, and the role of mass communication—particularly the religious communication propagated through the Neo-Vaishnavite movement.

The intellectual and philosophical foundations of Assamese literature were established by Srimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568), the eminent saint, philosopher, and social reformer, who reshaped cultural expression through universal ideals of equality, harmony, and devotion. This enduring legacy persists in contemporary artistic contributions, exemplified by figures such as Zubeen Garg, whose works reflect modern Assamese cultural identity while attaining global resonance (1972–2025).

By examining the historical trajectory and contemporary relevance of Assamese national lyrical literature, this paper underscores its alignment with constitutional values of democracy, equality, and freedom of expression, as well as its resonance with international legal frameworks that safeguard cultural rights and human dignity. The study highlights Assamese lyrical literature's capacity to transcend regional boundaries and contribute meaningfully to global discourses on humanity, culture, and universal values.

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KEYWORDS: Assamese Lyrical Literature, National Literature of Assam, Universalism, Indian Constitution, Constitutional Law, International Law, Human Rights, Cultural Identity, Mass Communication, Religious Communication, Neo-Vaishnavism, Satra Institutions (Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Auniati Satra), Cultural Legislation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of Assamese Literature:

Assamese literature, with its origins in the cultural and spiritual traditions of Assam, reflects the state's rich historical and philosophical legacy. Rooted in the works of luminaries such as Srimanta Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, and subsequent literary pioneers, Assamese literature has evolved as a medium for expressing identity, resistance, spirituality, and collective aspirations. It has served as a repository of cultural memory, preserving linguistic heritage while simultaneously engaging with broader currents of Indian and world literature.

Importance of Literature in Nation-Building.

Literature plays a crucial role in shaping national identity and consciousness. It not only reflects social realities but also inspires transformative change by instilling values of unity, resilience, and cultural pride. Assamese national literature has significantly contributed to the process of nation-building by nurturing a sense of belonging, promoting linguistic and cultural integrity, and echoing the aspirations of the people. By addressing themes of justice, equality, and collective harmony, literature strengthens democratic ideals and enhances social cohesion.

Concept of Universalism in Literature.

Universalism in literature emphasizes the transcendence of regional or national boundaries to embrace values that belong to all humanity. Assamese national literature, while deeply rooted in regional identity, also carries the potential to embody universal ideals such as human dignity, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. In the age of globalization and intercultural dialogue, universalism ensures that Assamese literature does not remain confined to territorial limits but participates in the broader discourse of humanity, thereby fostering mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation across cultures.

Research Problem, Objectives, and Significance of Study.

The research problem centers on understanding how Assamese national literature can embody and promote universal human values while maintaining its cultural specificity. The challenge lies in exploring the intersection between regional identity and global ideals within the context of constitutional and international frameworks.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY INCLUDE

1. To trace the evolution of Assamese national literature within cultural and historical contexts.
2. To examine its role in nation-building and cultural integration.
3. To analyze the concept of universalism as reflected in Assamese literary traditions.
4. To assess the alignment of Assamese literature with constitutional values and international human rights principles.

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- To explore universalist values in Assamese national literature.
- To analyse literature in the context of the Indian Constitution.
- To examine Assamese literature's connection with international law and human rights.
- To establish its relevance in global literary discourse.

Significance of the study:

This research is significant as it bridges literature, constitutional philosophy, and international law, providing a multidisciplinary perspective. By situating Assamese literature within the framework of universal norms, the study not only enriches literary scholarship but also contributes to the understanding of literature as a vehicle of human rights, justice, and global cultural cooperation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. This review situates Assamese national and lyrical literature within the wider discourse on literary universalism and the intersections between literature and law. It synthesizes four strands of scholarship:

- (a) The evolution of Assamese national and lyrical literature since the time of Srimanta Sankardev, Madhavdev, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Zubeen Garg, and others;
- (b) The idea of universalism in Indian and Assamese lyrical traditions;
- (c) legal perspectives, constitutional and international — that shape literary culture;
- (d) The role of satra institutions such as Kamalabari,

Uttar Kamalabari, Chamuguri (Mukha art), and Auniati in preserving and globalizing Assamese cultural identity. Borgeet, recognized worldwide as classical music, has been popularized by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Zubeen Garg, and Angaraag Papon Mahanta. On the international stage, Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami represents Assamese lyrical literature with distinction.

2. Assamese National Lyrical Literature: Evolution and Concerns

Scholarship traces Assamese lyrical literature from devotional and satra-based writings to modern poetry, drama (Bhaona and Ankia Naat), and prose. Two major strands emerge: Religious and cultural foundations, shaped by the Vaishnavite reformers Sankardev and Madhavdev, with strong links to religious mass communication and customary law. Colonial and modern transformations, marked by the growth of print culture, social reform, and the rise of modern genres in the 19th and 20th centuries.

3. Universalism in Indian and Assamese Literature

The idea of universalism in Assamese lyrical literature is debated within cosmopolitan and postcolonial frameworks. Translation studies, literary summits, and cross-cultural exchanges highlight how Assamese literature engages with

universal norms while reflecting local identity. Literature here is also viewed as a medium for sustaining cultural rights and human dignity.

4. Literature and Law: Constitutional and International Perspectives

Scholarship in law and literature emphasizes:

- Freedom of expression, censorship, and the role of constitutional protections.
- Cultural rights and identity, including the preservation of language and heritage as recognized under Indian constitutional provisions and international law.
- Human rights and representation, where literature documents rights violations and advocates for justice.
- Global instruments, such as the UNESCO conventions, the UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR, which affirm literature's role in protecting cultural diversity.

5. Thematic Synthesis-

Three convergent themes emerge:

1. Local particularity and universal claims, especially in Assamese texts that balance regional identity with universal human values.
2. Language, identity, and law, including debates on linguistic rights and minority protection.
3. Literature as constitutional conversation, influencing dignity, rights, and cultural imagination, particularly in contexts such as the Majuli cultural landscape.

6. Methodological Approaches

The reviewed works employ:

- Historical-cultural research on institutions and print culture.
- Comparative and translation studies connecting Assamese to Indian and world literatures.
- Legal and socio-legal analysis linking literature to constitutional and human-rights frameworks.
- Interdisciplinary case studies that situate Assamese literature within nation-building and cultural legislation.

7. Gaps and Opportunities

Three major gaps remain:

1. A cross-disciplinary reading of Assamese literature within constitutional and international legal frameworks.
 2. Case studies showing how Assamese texts intersect with jurisprudence and cultural rights.
 3. A model of "situated universalism" that respects Assamese particularities while engaging universal values.
- 8 Existing scholarship offers strong insights into Assamese literary history, universalism, and law, but rarely in dialogue with one another. This study contributes an interdisciplinary perspective, showing how Assamese national and lyrical literature negotiate universal human values, cultural rights, and constitutional protections.

C. Area and Scope of Study: Majuli's

1. Kamalabari Satra (Established 1673)

Founded under the guidance of Shrimanta Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy, Kamalabari Satra embodies secular roots and universal values. It has contributed significantly to cultural preservation, nation-building, and the spread of universal norms through lyrical traditions.

2. Uttar Kamalabari Satra (Established 1673, by Bodola Padma Ata)

Rooted in Sankardeva's philosophy, Uttar Kamalabari Satra emphasizes cultural diversity, constitutional ideals, and universal human rights. Its lyrical and cultural practices extend to global dialogues, reinforcing secular and humanist values.

3. Auniati Satra (Established 1653)

Auniati Satra has been central to Assamese cultural and spiritual life. It upholds human rights, constitutional principles, and universalist traditions, while promoting intercultural exchange through lyrical and philosophical practices.

D. Sources of Data

The research draws upon primary Assamese texts, constitutional provisions, UN declarations, and scholarly writings. Additional data has been collected and verified through field practices observed at Kamalabari Satra and Uttar Kamalabari Satra, particularly focusing on devotional and cultural traditions.

Religious lyrical literature and cultural practices have also been examined through the contributions of eminent Assamese artists such as Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Zubeen Garg, Angaraag Papon Mahanta, and Kalpana Patowary. Their works encompass and are associated with Borgeet, Torkari Geet, folk songs, Prarthana, Naam-Goosha, and songs performed during Lord Krishna's Raas festival, among others.

E. Universalism and Assamese Lyrical Literature-Historical Roots

The origins of Assamese lyrical literature are closely associated with Srimanta Sankardeva and the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Sankardeva, along with his foremost disciple Madhavdeva, was not merely a religious reformer but also a cultural visionary whose works reflected universalist ideals. Through Borgeet (devotional songs), spiritual dance, fine arts, and performing arts, they established a devotional legacy centered on Lord Krishna. Institutions such as the Chamuguri Satra preserved these traditions and embodied practices that align with universal norms of classical music and dance. Their contributions positioned Assamese culture within the broader global framework of artistic and spiritual heritage.

Universalist Themes

The lyrical tradition of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva emphasizes values of brotherhood, peace, justice, and harmony—principles that resonate with universal human rights and cultural rights. These include:

- a) The right to worship,
- b) The right to religious mass communication, and
- c) The promotion of social peace, unity, and intercultural dialogue.

Such themes situate Assamese lyrical literature within discourses of universalism, reflecting both its regional identity and its contribution to global cultural values.

Modern Contributions

In the modern era, Assamese lyrical literature has been advanced by prominent cultural practitioners. Among them, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika stands out as an internationally acclaimed figure who endeavored to place Borgeet and Sattriya dance within the canon of world classical traditions. His lyrical expressions and musical philosophy highlighted the universal human condition and expanded the global recognition of Assamese culture. Contemporary artists such as Angarag “Papon” Mahanta, Zubeen Garg, and Kalpana Patowary continue this legacy by incorporating elements of Borgeet and Assamese lyrical traditions into modern artistic practices, thereby sustaining and globalizing the cultural journey initiated by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva.

F. Constitutional Perspectives in Assamese Lyrical Literature:

This paper examines Assamese lyrical literature through the lens of constitutional perspectives, focusing on the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Cultural Rights. It highlights how Assamese literature preserves identity while promoting inclusivity, and emphasizes the role of the Satras and the Majuli Cultural Landscape Act in sustaining Assamese cultural heritage on a global scale.

Assamese literature, enriched by spiritual and cultural legacies, has played a vital role in shaping both regional identity and national consciousness. The lyrical tradition, particularly the Borgeet composed by Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, reflects a synthesis of devotion, philosophy, and universality. These works embody constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, making Assamese lyrical literature not merely a cultural expression but also a constitutional mirror.

Constitutional Dimensions

1. Preamble and Fundamental Rights

The Indian Constitution, through its Preamble, envisions justice—social, economic, and political—along with liberty, equality, and fraternity. Assamese lyrical literature echoes these principles by emphasizing human dignity, devotion beyond caste boundaries, and spiritual democracy inspired by neo-Vaishnavism.

2. Cultural and Educational Rights

Articles 29 and 30 safeguard cultural and linguistic identities while promoting inclusivity. Assamese lyrical traditions, particularly Borgeet and Satra literature, serve as living embodiments of these rights. They ensure that indigenous

heritage is protected while engaging with universal human values.

3. Identity and Inclusivity

Assamese literature demonstrates the constitutional balance between preserving local identity and embracing cultural pluralism. The inclusiveness of lyrical traditions reflects India’s broader principle of “unity in diversity.”

Role of Satras and Legislative Support:

The Satras of Majuli—notably Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Auniati Satra, and Samaguri Satra—have been central in preserving Assamese lyrical traditions, art, and philosophy. These institutions not only foster devotion but also strengthen social cohesion, cultural education, and ethical values.

The Majuli Cultural Landscape Act provides a legal framework for sustaining this heritage, ensuring that Majuli’s cultural ecosystem remains protected while projecting Assamese lyrical literature to the global stage.

Viewed through constitutional perspectives, Assamese lyrical literature is both a guardian of cultural identity and a promoter of universal human values. By reflecting constitutional principles, safeguarding cultural rights, and receiving institutional and legislative support, it continues to enrich Assam’s national identity and strengthen its presence in world literature.

G. International Law and Human Rights Dimension:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), particularly Article 27, upholds the right of every person to freely participate in cultural life. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Article 19) guarantees freedom of expression, while the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Article 15) protects cultural participation and the preservation of traditions. These instruments recognize culture not only as heritage but also as a fundamental human right linked to dignity, identity, and dialogue.

In this light, Assamese literature serves as a vibrant channel of global cultural expression. The lyrical traditions of Assam—especially Borgeet and devotional performances preserved in the Majuli Satra institutions—illustrate the exercise of cultural rights in practice. The Satras function as both spiritual and cultural guardians, sustaining regional identity while opening space for universal engagement.

Importantly, the Majuli Cultural Landscape Act provides a legal framework for safeguarding these traditions, aligning local protection with international human rights commitments. This Act recognizes Satras, arts, and literature as part of the world’s cultural heritage, ensuring their survival against modern pressures.

Thus, Assamese national lyrical literature, shaped by Srimanta Sankardeva’s legacy and nurtured through Majuli’s institutions, reflects the harmony of local cultural preservation with universal principles of freedom, participation, and human

dignity. It demonstrates how regional voices, when legally and culturally sustained, contribute to a worldwide comprehension of cultural rights and literary universalism.

H. Universalism, Assamese Lyrical Literature, and the Global Contributions of Majuli's Satra Institutions (DISCUSSION):

The origins of Assamese lyrical literature are deeply rooted in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement led by Srimanta Sankardeva and his foremost disciple Madhavdeva. Their creative vision extended far beyond religious reform; they built a cultural philosophy that reflected universalist ideals. Through Borgeet (devotional songs), Sattriya dance, performing arts, and fine arts, they established a devotional legacy centered on Lord Krishna, emphasizing peace, justice, and harmony.

Institutions such as the Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Chamuguri Satra, and Auniati Satra have preserved and nurtured these traditions for centuries. These satras not only serve as custodians of Assamese cultural identity but also embody universal values, aligning Assamese lyrical traditions with global practices in music, dance, spirituality, and intercultural dialogue.

Universalist Themes in Assamese Lyrical Literature-

The lyrical tradition of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva resonates strongly with the principles of universalism. Their works emphasize:

1. The right to worship – ensuring inclusivity and respect for spiritual diversity.
2. The right to religious mass communication – using lyrical and artistic forms to reach communities.
3. The promotion of peace, brotherhood, and unity – reinforcing values that mirror modern human rights and cultural rights frameworks.

By embedding such ideals, Assamese lyrical literature transcends regional boundaries and contributes meaningfully to the global discourse on human rights, constitutional values, and cultural identity.

The Role of Majuli's Satras:

Majuli, the largest river island in the world, has been the spiritual and cultural nucleus of Neo-Vaishnavism. Its satra institutions have made enduring contributions to Assamese culture and to world heritage:

Kamalabari Satra (est. 1673) – founded by Badala Padma Ata, it became a hub for lyrical, musical, and spiritual practice, later gaining recognition across India and abroad.

Uttar Kamalabari Satra – under the guidance of visionary satradhakars like Janardev Goswami, it promoted Sankardeva's philosophy globally, blending ritual, literature, and secular values of Neo-Vaishnavism.

Chamuguri Satra – a center of Mukha art (mask-making) that integrates visual artistry with lyrical performance, extending

Assamese cultural expression into a recognized world heritage practice.

Auniati Satra – under leaders such as Dr. Pitambar Dev Goswami, it became an institution of international cultural diplomacy, actively showcasing Assamese lyrical and spiritual practices abroad.

These satras stand as living testaments to the continuity of Assamese lyrical literature and its integration with universal artistic and spiritual values.

Modern Contributions to Global Cultural Dialogue-

In the modern era, Assamese lyrical traditions found global advocates through music and performance.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the "Bard of Brahmaputra," carried Assamese music to world stages, weaving universalist messages of human dignity, justice, and peace into his lyrics.

Contemporary artists such as Zubeen Garg, Angarag "Papon" Mahanta, and Kalpana Patowary have sustained this tradition, innovatively blending classical Assamese roots with global musical forms.

Legendary singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Udit Narayan, Kumar Sanu, Shreya Ghoshal, and Usha Uthup have also lent their voices to Assamese songs, expanding their reach to wider audiences and reinforcing their worldwide lyrical significance.

Recognition and Formal Status-

With Borgeet and Sattriya dance officially recognized as classical traditions of India, Assamese lyrical literature now stands within the canon of world classical art forms. This recognition affirms its role not only as a cultural expression but also as a matter of constitutional rights, international cultural rights, and human rights, safeguarding both identity and diversity in the global context.

Assamese lyrical literature, rooted in the vision of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva and nurtured by the satras of Majuli, has grown into a global cultural force. Through its universal themes of brotherhood, peace, and justice, and with contributions from both traditional institutions and modern practitioners, it has established a bridge between local identity and global universalism.

By integrating law, human rights, and lyrical language identity, Assamese lyrical traditions continue to uphold their relevance in world literature, offering lessons of harmony, inclusivity, and cultural dignity to the international community.

I. Research Findings (MAJOR):

1. Universalist Values in Assamese Lyrical Literature

The study reveals that Assamese lyrical literature inherently embodies universalist values that transcend regional and cultural boundaries. Rooted in the philosophy of Shrimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568), the founder of Neo-Vaishnavism, along with his disciples Madhav Deva and Badala Padma Aata, this tradition emphasizes inclusivity, equality, fraternity, and devotion expressed through literature, art, and music.

Institutions such as the Satra organizations of Majuli—including Kamalabari Satra, Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Auniati Satra, and Samaguri Satra—have institutionalized these values, preserving them as part of Assam's cultural and spiritual legacy. Through Borgeet (devotional songs), bhaona (drama), dance, and lyrical compositions, Assamese literature projects ideals of peace, human dignity, and universal harmony. These practices align closely with the philosophy of universalism found in Indian thought while simultaneously resonating with global human aspirations.

2. Constitutional and Legal Dimensions-

A second major finding is the profound alignment of Assamese lyrical literature with constitutional ideals. The philosophy of Neo-Vaishnavism resonates with the values enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India: Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

Right to Worship & Cultural Rights:

- Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice, and propagate religion.
- Article 26 protects the right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs.
- Article 29 ensures the right of citizens to conserve their culture.
- Article 51A(f) makes it a fundamental duty to value and preserve the rich heritage of India's composite culture.

Thus, Assamese lyrical traditions—beginning with Sankardeva and continuing through modern cultural icons such as Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Zubeen Garg—reflect and strengthen the constitutional ethos of cultural diversity, equality, and inclusivity.

In addition, state legislations, such as the Majuli Cultural Landscape Act, and other protective measures provide statutory recognition to Assamese cultural institutions, ensuring that lyrical literature and traditions remain safeguarded as part of national identity.

3. Global Relevance: Human Rights and Peace-

The third finding highlights the contribution of Assamese lyrical literature to global discourses on human rights and peace. Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy emphasizes non-violence, inclusivity, fraternity, and human dignity, principles that align with international legal frameworks:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948):

- Article 18: Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
- Article 19: Freedom of expression.
- Article 27: Right to freely participate in cultural life.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966):

- Article 18: Right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
- Article 19: Right to freedom of expression.

- Article 27: Rights of minorities to enjoy their own culture.

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966):

Article 15: Right to take part in cultural life.

By sustaining and institutionalizing these values, Satras act as guardians of Assamese cultural identity while contributing to international human rights principles. Recognition of these traditions by international organizations and world record institutions further validates their global significance.

j. Conclusion of Findings-

From Sankardeva and Madhav Deva to modern Assamese lyrical icons, this tradition demonstrates continuity and universal relevance. The research identifies three key findings:

1. **Institutional Continuity:** The Satras of Majuli have preserved and globalized the Neo-Vaishnavite lyrical heritage since the 15th century.
2. **Legal and Constitutional Alignment:** Assamese lyrical literature is strongly aligned with constitutional protections and legislative measures, ensuring the preservation of cultural rights.
3. **Global Recognition and Peace Contribution:** Assamese lyrical literature contributes to universal discourses on human rights, cultural harmony, and peace, establishing itself as a bridge between local traditions and global values.

Thus, Assamese lyrical literature stands as both a national cultural treasure and a universal heritage, rooted in Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy, safeguarded by constitutional and international law, and celebrated globally as a vehicle of peace and human dignity.

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