

ISSN-0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

VOL. 15 ISSUE-3 JUNE 2024

15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Multicultural Education in Assam: A Content Analysis of Assamese Textbooks in the 21st Century

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12672009>

Article History: Submitted-10/06/2024, Revised-20/06/2024, Accepted-28/06/2024, Published-30/06/2024.

Abstract:

In the rich cultural tapestry of Assam, nestled in the northeastern region of India, multicultural education is a cornerstone for fostering inclusive learning environments. This study explores how multicultural education is portrayed and included in Assamese textbooks in the twenty-first century. This study closely examines the depiction of various cultures, nationalities, and identities in the textbooks through a thorough qualitative content analysis. Representative selections of Assamese textbooks for primary school were systematically examined for textual passages, illustrations, and supplemental resources. Within the curriculum framework, themes like inclusion, cultural diversity, and cultural awareness are carefully coded and examined to reveal underlying trends and patterns. The research's conclusion aims to provide insightful information about the state of multicultural education in Assam's curriculum. The objective of this study is to aware policymakers, educators, and curriculum creators with information regarding the advantages and disadvantages of present methods in the areas of inclusiveness and cultural awareness. The ultimate goal is to take necessary steps for improvements that give top priority to advancing fairness, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity throughout Assam's educational system.

Keywords: Assamese textbooks, multicultural education, content analysis, cultural representation, inclusivity.

1.1 Introduction

With its multitude of languages, customs, and ethnic groups, Assam, a state in northeastern India, embodies a diversity of cultures. Multiculturalism is becoming more widely acknowledged in modern education as essential to fostering inclusive learning environments. The objective of this study is to analyze selected twenty-first century Assamese textbooks and determine how multicultural education is embedded in them. The study aims to get insights into the extent of inclusiveness and cultural sensitivity in Assam's educational system through an analysis of cultural representations.

Assam is a dynamic mosaic of cultural variety, knitted together by several languages, customs, and ethnic groups, and is tucked away in northeastern India. Assamese landscapes are as varied as their people, ranging from the foggy highlands of Karbi Anglong to the verdant plains of Brahmaputra. Within modern education, diversity has come to be seen as essential to creating inclusive learning environments. This study aims to analyze the twenty-first century Assamese textbooks; with a specific focus on multicultural education.

Through closely examining of these textbooks, we hope to reveal the rich mosaic of Assamese cultural legacy as it is presented to the state's younger students. Examining how different cultures are portrayed in these textbooks provides insight into how deeply Assamese education is rooted in tolerance and cultural sensitivity. We aim to uncover the subtleties of multicultural education as it is portrayed in Assamese textbooks employing thorough research and investigation of the text, images, and supplemental resources.

Content Analysis of Selected Assamese Textbooks:

There are several instances illustrating the rich cultural variety of Assam found within the pages of Assamese textbooks. There are descriptions about Bihu, the traditional festival of Assam in the textbook for elementary school. Also we find descriptions of Assamese traditional attires, celebratory customs, and folk songs. Young learners are educated about the cultural legacy of their state through these kinds of storytelling. Within the Ahom Kingdom chapters of the primary school history textbook; students can study the socio-cultural context, architectural treasures, and governmental framework of the Ahom Kingdom. Students are encouraged to feel proud of and identify with Assam by learning about its rich history and cultural customs through in-depth explanations of historical events and customs.

Moreover, textbook illustrations and pictures that embellish the pages are visual cues of the state's rich cultural legacy. These images enhance students' learning experiences by capturing the spirit of Assamese culture; from lively dance performances at Bihu to serene boat races on the Brahmaputra. Assamese textbooks frequently include issues of fairness and inclusiveness in addition to cultural representations. The literary textbooks also include poems or short tales written by authors from underrepresented groups, highlighting their voices and viewpoints. The achievements of lesser-known individuals like social reformers, tribal leaders, and women pioneers are also highlighted in the history textbooks, guaranteeing a more comprehensive representation of Assam's diverse cultural landscape.

In a nutshell, Assamese textbooks are the rich fabric of Assam's history and highlight the essential archives of the state's cultural legacy. These textbooks are essential in helping students develop cultural awareness and inclusion because of their comprehensive narratives, striking images, and inclusive themes. In order to enable future generations to accept and enjoy the rich variety of the state, Assamese textbooks must continue to prioritize multicultural education in its educational system.

1.2 Objectives of the research

The Objectives of the study are---

- To analyze the extent to which different cultural, ethnic and religious groups are represented in the Assamese textbook.
- To assess whether the content of the textbooks promotes inclusivity and respect for diversity.
- To evaluate how historical and contemporary multicultural issues are portrayed and discussed.
- To study how the textbooks can be improved to support multicultural education.

1.3 Methodology

Primary and secondary Assamese textbooks are analyzed using a qualitative content analysis technique. Selected textbooks from Primary section Class I to Class V representative of various themes are carefully examined. Furthermore, examples of cultural representation and variety, textual passages, pictures, and other materials are analyzed. Themes about multicultural

education are found in the textbooks and examined via a systematic coding process that reveals underlying trends and differences.

2.0 Analysis and Discussion:

2.1 Assamese Textbook Themes (Primary Level-Anuran, Natun Path)

1: Representation of Cultural Diversity

The way different Assamese textbooks depict the region's rich cultural diversity varies. Many textbooks deliberately include stories, images, and examples from different ethnic groups, languages, and customs in an attempt to highlight the richness of Assam's cultural diversity. Textbooks, for example, include tales and poetry emphasizing the customs of groups like the Bodos, Karbis, Mishing, and Ahoms. To further illustrate the linguistic variety, they could also contain details on the many languages in Assam, such as Assamese, Bodo, Karbi, and Mishing. Assamese textbooks use a variety of narratives, pictures, and examples from the state's many ethnic groups, dialects, and customs to attempt to capture the state's rich cultural diversity. A few textbooks attempt extensively to provide readers a thorough understanding of Assam's diverse environment. Here are some particular instances that show how this is accomplished:

◆ Stories and Narratives

Textbooks comprise of poetry and stories that highlights the customs and cultural practices of many cultures, such as the Bodo Stories. In order to provide students with a understanding of Bodo culture and values, Bodo folklore narratives are incorporated, including stories about the mythical hero Gariyoshi and traditional Bodo fables.

Furthermore, in the Karbis Folklores, The Karbi community's rich oral traditions and historical narratives are showcased via stories such as the creation mythology of Karbi Anglong.

Also, Mishing folktales like the Gumraag and Porag festival stories, are integrated to emphasize the Mishing community's agricultural and social customs.

◆ Traditions and Cultural Festivals

Students can better comprehend the many festivities that take place throughout Assam by reading through the following detailed explanations of cultural festivals and traditions:

1. Bihu----The three forms of Bihu—Rongali, Kongali, and Bhogali—are

described in great detail, along with sections on the distinctive rituals, dances, and songs to visualise the spirit of Assamese culture.

**Example- Anukuran-1st Class, *Amar Utshob*, page no-99,
Natun Path-2nd class, *Bonde Matorom*, page no-104**

2. Ali-Ai-Ligang---The Textbooks also comprises of descriptions on Ali-Ai-Ligang, the Mishng Festival emphasizing its importance on agricultural pursuits. Moreover, traditional music along with dancing by the community people during its celebration are also mentioned.

Example- Anukuran-1st Class, *Amar Utshob*, page no-99,

3. Baishagu --- Baishagu, a festival observed by the Bodos, is widely documented in terms of its customs, the Bagurumba dance, and its function in welcoming the New Year are also highlighted in the textbooks.

Example- Anukuran-1st Class, *Amar Utshob*, page no-99,

◆ Linguistic Diversity

In order to showcase the state's linguistic diversity, the Assamese textbooks have incorporated several languages spoken in Assam. Through literary works, poetry, and historical accounts, the state's principal language, Assamese, is examined with a focus on its function in preserving the state's cultural identity. A few of the mentions are as follows

—

1. Bodo

Poems, songs, and stories that showcase the Bodo people's rich cultural legacy are found in sections dedicated to the language.

2. Karbi and Mishng Languages

Additionally, textbooks include examples of Mishng and Karbi languages along with translations and explanations to highlight the linguistic diversity so as to encourage students to learn several languages.

◆ **Illustrations and Visuals**

Illustrations and visuals play a crucial role in depicting the cultural diversity of Assam:

◆ **Traditional Attire**

Textbooks feature pictures of traditional attires from various communities, such as the Assamese Mekhela Chador, the Bodo Dokhona, and the KarbisPator Tado.

Example- Anukuran-4th Class, *Bordoisila*, page no-91-92 (Poem)

◆ **Joyful**

Festivities

Assam's rich cultural life is depicted through images of festivals, dance forms, and community gatherings.

◆ **Historical and Contemporary Contributions**

A thorough understanding of Assam's cultural heritage is facilitated by the inclusion of historical events and the distinct contributions of various communities.

◆ For example, the Ahom dynasty's history, rulers, and cultural and architectural legacy are emphasized to underscore the state's rich historical past.

◆ Tribal Leaders and Freedom Fighters: Teachers also discuss the roles played by freedom fighters and leaders of various communities, including the Naga community's Rani Gaidinliu and Kanaklata Barua, Mulagabharu in order to highlight their contributions to Assam's socio-political landscape.

Example- Anukuran-4th Class, *Birangona Mulagabharu*, page no-71

2. Equity and Inclusivity

There is variation in the level of fairness and inclusion in Assamese textbooks. Specific textbooks offer a more thorough portrayal of various ethnic groups than others. Even when varied viewpoints are included still many marginalized communities are at times either misrepresented or underrepresented. For instance, textbooks showcase stereotype among members of certain ethnic groups or communities or fall short of accurately capturing their cultural contributions.. Furthermore, the language, images, and storylines employed in textbooks can potentially reinforce preconceptions and biases.

Example- Anukuran-5th Class

Natun Path- 2nd Class

3. Promotion of Cultural Awareness

Assamese textbooks, incorporating historical events, customs, and cultural festivals into the curriculum, are significant in helping students develop cultural sensitivity and awareness. For instance, significant Assamese cultural festivals like Bihu, Ali-Ai-Ligang, and Baishagu may have chapters or parts devoted to them in textbooks. In order to enhance students' comprehension of Assam's unique legacy, they could also emphasize historical occurrences and personalities from various cultural backgrounds. By including this kind of material, textbooks help students recognize the diversity of Assamese culture and develop a feeling of cultural pride and understanding.

As an illustration, Assamese textbooks play a crucial role in fostering cultural sensitivity and awareness in students by incorporating aspects of the rich cultural legacy of the state into the curriculum. With the comprehensive coverage of many cultural facets provided by these instructional resources, students are guaranteed a profound awareness and comprehension of Assam's varied traditions. Several instances of how Assamese textbooks accomplish this are as follows:

1. Cultural Festivals

Textbooks frequently provide in-depth narratives and descriptions of Assam's leading cultural events. As an example, Bihu is widely celebrated as the most important festival of Assam. Books have chapters on the three variations of the Bihu, Rongali, Kongali, and Bhogali, describing the music, dances, and rituals that go along with each.

- ◆ Ali-Ai-Ligang

This festival of the Mising community is highlighted in the curriculum, describing the agricultural rituals, traditional dances, and the significance of this spring festival.

- ◆ Baishagu

Celebrated by the Bodos, Baishagu is covered in textbooks in details. The musical traditions, dances like the Bagurumba, and its importance in welcoming the New Year is also mentioned.

2. Traditional Practices and Arts

Assamese textbooks explore a range of customary customs and artistic endeavours, cultivating a more profound bond with the region's cultural legacy:

◆ The Sattriya Dance

With a focus on its historical and cultural relevance, Sattriya dance—which originated in Vaishnavite monasteries—is covered in chapters on Assamese traditional dance styles.

Example- Anukuran-5th Class, *Ojapali*, page no-111

◆ Handicrafts and weaving

The textbooks also incorporate the elaborate designs and skills passed down through the years displayed by the weavers of the renowned Assam silk (Muga, Eri, and Pat) on Assamese handlooms.

Example- Anukuran-5th Class, page no-90

3. Historical Events and Figures

Ahom Dynasty: Textbooks cover the history of the Ahom dynasty, detailing the reigns of notable kings like Sukaphaa, the founder, and Lachit Borphukan, a revered general known for his role in the Battle of Saraighat. These historical events and notable figures from Assam's past enrich students' understanding of their heritage.

Assamese freedom fighters' biographies, including those of Gopinath Bordoloi and Kanaklata Barua, are included to foster a sense of pride and appreciation for those who helped bring about India's independence.

Example- Kuhipath-4th Class, *JoymatiKonwori*, page no-34

4. Diversity of Cultures

Assamese textbooks feature the customs of several groups to commemorate the state's cultural mosaic: Tribal Traditional Textbooks provide a comprehensive knowledge of the people of Assam by including parts on the festivals, rituals, and lifestyles of the numerous tribal populations, including the Bodos, Misings, and Karbis.

5. Folk Tales and Literature

Students are better able to relate to Assamese cultural narratives as folk tales and literary works are included in the curriculum. Moral teachings and cultural values are included through the inclusion of stories from Assamese folklore, such as the adventures of Lakshminath Bezbaroa's inventions and the tale of Tejimola.

Example- Anukuran-4th Class

6. Literary Works

To encourage students and acquaint them with the literary legacy of the state, excerpts from the writings of well-known Assamese authors and poets, including Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bhupen Hazarika, are included in the textbooks. Furthermore, Assamese textbooks are essential in developing a sense of cultural pride and understanding as they incorporate many cultural components in the curriculum. This all-encompassing approach fosters a more culturally sensitive and conscious community by assisting young learners in appreciating the diversity and depth of Assam's cultural environment.

Example- Anukuran-5th Class, page no-03

Anukuran-4th Class, page no-21

Anukuran-2nd Class, page no-18

Overall, Assamese textbooks do an excellent job of illustrating the cultural variety and raising cultural awareness. However, they might do a better job of guaranteeing fairness and equality in the way they depict different ethnic groups. Teachers and curriculum developers may contribute to creating learning environments that highlight Assam's unique past and promote respect for all ethnic identities by taking a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to textbook content.

3.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of multicultural education in Assam's educational landscape. Additionally, it reveals that though significant strides have been made in incorporating diverse cultural content into Assamese textbooks, notable challenges and limitations still persist. Furthermore, policymakers and educators must prioritize inclusiveness and cultural

sensitivity in both instructional materials and teaching methodologies. By embracing the rich cultural heritage of Assam, schools can foster engaging and equitable learning environments that promote the holistic development of all students. This approach will not only enhance educational outcomes but also cultivates a sense of unity and respect among students from varied cultural backgrounds.

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