



FEATURES OF RAM SARASWATI'S LITERARY WORKS

Mr. Jogesh Chandra Lahkar¹, Dr. Madhurjyamondita Baruah²

¹Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi University Meghalaya

²Research Supervisor, Mahatma Gandhi University Meghalaya

ABSTRACT :

The medieval phase of Assamese literature marks a decisive moment in the cultural assimilation of Sanskrit epic traditions into the regional literary imagination. Among the Vaishnavite poets who played a transformative role in this process, Ram Saraswati occupies a singular position for his pioneering engagement with the Mahabharata. This paper undertakes a comprehensive literary and historical analysis of Ram Saraswati's works, with particular emphasis on his Assamese rendering of the Mahabharata and related narrative compositions. The study argues that Ram Saraswati's contribution transcends the boundaries of translation and constitutes an epic transformation shaped by creative imagination, folk traditions, and Vaishnavite ideology. Using a qualitative textual-analytical methodology supported by secondary scholarship, the paper identifies key features of his literary style, including selective adaptation, narrative expansion, incorporation of Badha Kavyas, linguistic innovation, and ideological reinterpretation. The findings demonstrate that Ram Saraswati was instrumental in awakening Mahabharata-based consciousness in Assamese literature and in establishing Assamese as a capable epic language. The paper concludes that Ram Saraswati's works remain foundational to Assamese literary history and occupy an enduring position within the broader tradition of Indian epic literature.

Keywords: Ram Saraswati; Assamese Mahabharata; Epic Translation; Vaishnavism; Medieval Assamese Literature.

I. Introduction:

The interaction between Sanskrit epic traditions and regional vernacular literatures represents one of the most significant cultural processes in Indian literary history. The *Mahabharata*, traditionally attributed to Vedavyasa, has generated a vast corpus of retellings, adaptations, and reinterpretations across the Indian subcontinent. These regional versions are not merely translations but creative reconfigurations shaped by local languages, belief systems, and socio-cultural realities (Gellner, 1983; Pollock, 2006).



In Assam, the emergence of an indigenous epic tradition based on the *Mahabharata* is closely associated with the literary genius of Ram Saraswati. Writing during the medieval period, Ram Saraswati undertook the formidable task of rendering a substantial portion of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* into Assamese. His work represents the earliest and most influential attempt to integrate the epic narrative into Assamese literary culture. Prior to his intervention, Assamese literature lacked a comprehensive engagement with the *Mahabharata*, despite the epic's widespread influence in other regions of India.

Scholars of Assamese literature have consistently emphasized that Ram Saraswati's achievement cannot be assessed in terms of literal translation alone (Kakati, 1962; Goswami, 2003). Instead, his Assamese *Mahabharata* must be understood as a creative reconstitution of the epic tradition, shaped by regional aesthetics, oral storytelling practices, and Vaishnavite devotional ideology. Through imaginative expansions, incorporation of folk narratives, and stylistic innovation, Ram Saraswati transformed the Sanskrit epic into a culturally resonant Assamese text.

This paper seeks to examine the defining features of Ram Saraswati's literary works and to evaluate his contribution to Assamese literature within the broader framework of Indian epic traditions. By analyzing his methods of adaptation, narrative strategies, linguistic style, and ideological orientation, the study aims to demonstrate why Ram Saraswati continues to occupy an indispensable place in Assamese and Indian literary history.

Critical scholarship on Ram Saraswati is embedded within broader studies of medieval Assamese literature and Vaishnavism. Early literary historians such as Kakati (1962) recognized Ram Saraswati as a foundational figure who demonstrated the epic potential of the Assamese language. Later scholars, including Goswami (2003) and Sarma (1989), emphasized his role in integrating Vaishnavite values into epic narration.

Comparative studies of Indian epic translations highlight that regional versions often function as "new epics" rather than derivative texts (Pollock, 2006). This perspective is particularly relevant to Ram Saraswati's *Mahabharata*, which expands narrative scope and incorporates non-canonical episodes. However, despite acknowledgment of his importance,



detailed feature-based analysis of his literary craft remains limited. This paper addresses that gap by offering a systematic examination of his stylistic, thematic, and cultural contributions.

II.Objectives : The objectives in this paper are -

1. To analyze the major literary features of Ram Saraswati's works, particularly his Assamese rendering of the *Mahabharata*.
2. To examine Ram Saraswati's creative strategies of adaptation, expansion, and ideological reinterpretation of the Sanskrit epic.
3. To assess the cultural and literary significance of Ram Saraswati's contribution to the development of Assamese epic and Vaishnavite literature.

III.Methodology:

The study adopts a qualitative literary-analytical methodology. Primary sources include Assamese *Mahabharata* texts attributed to Ram Saraswati and selected narrative compositions traditionally associated with his authorship. Secondary sources consist of literary histories, critical essays, and theoretical works on epic traditions and translation studies.

The analysis employs close textual reading to identify narrative patterns, stylistic features, and thematic concerns. Rather than evaluating fidelity to the Sanskrit source, the study emphasizes creative transformation, viewing translation as a culturally embedded and imaginative act (Bassnett, 2014).

IV.Result and Discussion:

Although Ram Saraswati translated a substantial portion of the *Mahabharata*, his work cannot be classified as a literal translation. He selectively adapted episodes, omitted certain sections, and expanded others through imaginative narration. This selective approach reflects a conscious artistic choice aimed at making the epic accessible and engaging for Assamese audiences.

One of the most distinctive features of Ram Saraswati's work is the composition of *Badha Kavyas*, narratives centered on the slaying of demons. These episodes, absent from the



Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, draw heavily on Assamese folk traditions and oral storytelling practices. While entertaining in form, they function ideologically by reinforcing Vaishnavite notions of divine justice and moral order (Sarma, 1989).

Ram Saraswati's language displays extraordinary versatility. His verses move fluidly between colloquial Assamese expressions rooted in rural life and elevated epic diction suited to grand narrative moments. This stylistic flexibility played a crucial role in establishing Assamese as a language capable of epic expression. Scholars often describe this stylistic synthesis as a "Triveni Sangam"—a confluence of scholarship, imagination, and independent creativity (Goswami, 2003).

Ram Saraswati's works are deeply influenced by Vaishnavite ideology. By emphasizing devotion, moral righteousness, and divine intervention, he subtly reinterpreted the *Mahabharata* through a Vaishnavite lens. This ideological orientation aligned his works with the broader devotional movement that later flourished under Sankardeva, although Ram Saraswati's approach remained distinctly epic rather than purely devotional.

The cultural impact of Ram Saraswati's work extended beyond literary circles. His pioneering effort in popularizing the *Mahabharata* attracted the attention of patrons such as Naranarayana, whose support later facilitated further literary engagement with epic traditions. Without Ram Saraswati's foundational contribution, the assimilation of the *Mahabharata* into Assamese literature would likely have been significantly delayed.

V.Conclusion:

The present study demonstrates that Ram Saraswati's literary works represent a watershed in the history of Assamese literature. His Assamese *Mahabharata* is not merely a translation but an epic transformation shaped by creative imagination, linguistic innovation, and Vaishnavite ideology. By blending Sanskrit epic tradition with Assamese folk culture and expressive richness, Ram Saraswati created a "new edition" of the *Mahabharata* that expanded the narrative scope of the original while preserving its ethical and philosophical core.

Ram Saraswati's contribution awakened a sustained *Mahabharata*-based consciousness in Assamese literature and established Assamese as a robust epic language. His legacy lies in



demonstrating how regional creativity can universalize classical texts, ensuring their relevance across time and culture. Consequently, Ram Saraswati remains an indispensable figure in discussions of the *Mahabharata* tradition in both Indian and world literature.

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