



Exploring Socio-Cultural Realities: A Comparative Study of *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the socio-cultural aspects in *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua, two novels that encapsulate the struggles of their respective societies during significant transitional periods. Mahfouz's *Zuqâq al-Midaq* explores the urban landscape of Cairo in the 1940s, capturing the tension between tradition and modernity, economic disparity, gender roles, and moral dilemmas. The alley, as a microcosm of Egyptian society, mirrors the larger socio-political challenges faced during British colonial influence. Barua's *Jivanar Batat*, on the other hand, reflects the rural Assamese way of life, emphasizing themes of community cohesion, the impact of modernization, and the resilience of traditional values.

Despite their geographical and cultural differences, both novels share significant thematic parallels, such as the conflict between tradition and modern aspirations, socio-economic struggles, and the roles of women within a patriarchal framework. However, while *Zuqâq al-Midaq* focuses on individual ambition and the personal cost of societal change, *Jivanar Batat* emphasizes collective identity and the preservation of cultural heritage. By juxtaposing these narratives, this research highlights the universal aspects of societal transformation while shedding light on the unique sociocultural dynamics that shape the identity and struggles of the characters. The study ultimately underscores how literature serves as a reflection of society's evolving landscape, offering valuable insights into cultural resilience and adaptation.

Keywords: Socio-cultural transformation, Tradition vs. modernity, colonial influence, Patriarchy and gender roles, Economic disparity, Cultural identity, etc.

Introduction

Literature has long served as a mirror of society, capturing its historical transitions, struggles, and cultural transformations. Through fictional narratives, authors provide deep insights into the socio-political and economic conditions of their time, allowing readers to engage with the lived experiences of people across different historical and geographical contexts. This study focuses on two significant literary works—*Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua—both of which depict societies in the throes of transformation. Although these novels emerge from distinct cultural backgrounds, one from Egypt and the other from Assam, they share common themes of tradition versus modernity, socio-economic disparity, gender roles, and the effects of colonial and post-colonial transitions on everyday life.

Naguib Mahfouz's *Zuqâq al-Midaq* (1947) presents a microcosm of Egyptian society through the setting of a narrow alley in Cairo during the 1940s, a period marked by British colonial influence, political unrest, and economic challenges. The novel portrays a diverse range of characters, each representing different aspects of Egyptian society—those who embrace modernity, those who resist it, and those caught in between. Issues such as poverty, corruption, gender oppression, and class struggle are central to the narrative, making the

novel a rich exploration of the sociocultural tensions of its time. The alley, while geographically limited, symbolically reflects the larger issues facing Egypt during its transition towards independence.

Similarly, Birinchi Kumar Barua's *Jivanar Batat* (1950) offers a compelling portrayal of Assamese rural society, where tradition and modernity clash in the backdrop of India's transition from colonial rule to independence. The novel intricately weaves themes of community bonds, agricultural life, caste structures, and the challenges posed by modernization. Barua's work provides a lens into the Assamese way of life, exploring how external influences—whether economic, political, or social—shape the collective identity of the people. Unlike Mahfouz's urban setting, Barua's narrative is deeply rooted in rural Assam, yet it similarly examines the complexities of social change and the tensions between old and new ways of life.

Despite the geographical and cultural differences between the two novels, both *Zuqâq al-Midaq* and *Jivanar Batat* present striking thematic parallels. They explore how historical and socio-political changes affect their societies' individual and collective psyche. The characters in both novels struggle with their aspirations, limitations, and the harsh realities of their environments. Moreover, both works highlight the role of women in patriarchal societies, illustrating how gender norms and expectations evolve—or remain stagnant—amidst broader societal transformations.

This comparative study aims to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of these two novels by analyzing their treatment of tradition, modernity, social structures, economic conditions, and cultural transitions. By examining the similarities and differences in the portrayal of these aspects, the research seeks to highlight how literature serves as a critical medium for understanding the complex interplay of history, culture, and identity. Through this analysis, the study contributes to a broader discourse on how literature from different regions reflects shared human experiences, even within unique historical and cultural contexts.

Description:

Biography of Naguib Mahfouz:

Naguib Mahfouz, a globally acclaimed Egyptian novelist, is considered the most prominent and influential literary figure in Egypt and the Arab world. He was born in 1911 in the historic district of Al-Jamaliya in central Cairo. His father, Abdulaziz Ibrahim Ahmed Al-Basha, was a government employee who only read the Qur'an and *Hadith Isa Ibn Hisham* due to his close friendship with its author, Muhammad Al-Muwaylihi. Mahfouz was the youngest of his siblings, with a ten-year age gap between him and his nearest brother, which made him feel isolated and deeply influenced by mythological and historical narratives.

In 1930, he enrolled at Cairo University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy. Initially, he planned to pursue a master's degree focusing on aesthetics in Islamic philosophy, but he later shifted his focus entirely to literature. Mahfouz began his professional career as a parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Religious Endowments (1938–1945). He then became director of the Benevolent Loan Foundation in the same ministry until 1954, after which he worked as director of the Minister of Guidance's office. Later, he joined the Ministry of Culture, where he served as director of artistic censorship. In 1960, he became general director of the Cinema Support Organization, followed by a position as advisor to the General Organization for Cinema, Radio, and Television. His final government role was chairman of the General Organization for Cinema (1966–1971), after which he retired and became a writer for Al-Ahram Newspaper.

Mahfouz began writing in the mid-1930s, with his early short stories published in *Al-Risala* magazine in 1939. His first novel, *Abath Al-Aqdâr (The Mockery of Fate)*, was published in the same period. By 1945, he transitioned to realist fiction, producing notable works such as *Al-Qâhira Al-Jadîda (New Cairo)*, *Khân Al-Khalîlî*, and *Zuqâq al-Midaq (Midaq Alley)*.

On September 21, 1950, he began serializing his novel *Awlâd Hâratinâ (Children of the Alley)* in Al-Ahram Newspaper, but the publication was halted on December 25 of the same year due to religious objections, as some clerics accused him of blasphemy. The novel was banned in Egypt, and it wasn't until 1967 that it was fully published by Dar Al-Adab in Beirut. In 2006, it was finally reprinted in Egypt by Dâr Al-Sharûq.

After the 1952 Revolution, Mahfouz took a brief hiatus from writing and got married to Atiya Allah Ibrahim. In October 1995, he was stabbed in the neck by a young extremist who attempted to assassinate him, accusing him of heresy and apostasy due to the controversial themes in *Children of the Alley*. Mahfouz had initially refused to publish the novel in Egypt without Al-Azhar's approval, but copies were smuggled from Lebanon into the country. Despite the assassination attempt, he survived.

Due to his outstanding contributions to literature, Naguib Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988, becoming the only Arab writer to receive this prestigious honour. On August 30, 2006, he passed away due to a bleeding ulcer, twenty days after being admitted to Police Hospital in Agouza, Cairo. The previous month, in July 2006, he had been hospitalized after suffering a serious head injury from a fall in the street. His legacy, however, continues to inspire generations of writers and readers worldwide.¹

Biography of Birinchi Kumar Barua:

Birinchi Kumar Barua was a distinguished scholar, historian, linguist, folklorist, and writer who made remarkable contributions to Assamese literature and cultural studies. Throughout his life, he was deeply committed to preserving and documenting Assam's rich cultural heritage, making him one of the most influential intellectuals of his time.

Born on October 16, 1908, in Puranigudam, Nagaon district, Barua pursued higher education at Presidency College, Kolkata, where he earned the prestigious Ishan Scholarship—the first Assamese student to do so. He later completed his M.A. in Pali language, securing the first position in the first class in 1934. His academic journey took him to London in 1945, where he conducted extensive research on Assamese cultural history at the University of London, earning a Ph.D. in 1948. His doctoral work was later published as “A Cultural History of Assam.”

Professionally, Barua played a pivotal role in Assam’s higher education system. After a brief teaching stint at the University of Calcutta, he joined Cotton College as an Assamese professor. Later, he became instrumental in the establishment of Gauhati University (1948), where he served as Reader in the Assamese Department and later as Head of the Department. His leadership helped shape the university’s academic landscape. Before retiring, he was honoured with the title “Kalaguru” for his outstanding contributions to Assamese arts and culture.

Barua was also actively involved in cultural and governmental institutions, serving as a member of the Indian Film Censor Board and a founding member of the Indian Language Commission. Additionally, he established the Assam Academy for Cultural Relations, promoting linguistic and cultural unity in Northeast India.

A prolific writer, Barua authored numerous works on Assamese literature, folklore, and history. His notable books include *Jivanar Batat*, *Asomar Lok-Sanskriti*, *Purani Asomiya Katha Sahitya*, and *Asomar Sanskritir Itihas*, among others. His literary contributions have played a crucial role in documenting and preserving Assamese folklore, history, and social traditions.

Barua passed away on March 30, 1964, in Guwahati, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire scholars and researchers. His immense contributions to Assamese literature, language, and cultural history have cemented his place as one of Assam’s most revered intellectuals. ²

Summary of the Novel *Zuqâq al-Midaq*

Zuqâq al-Midaq is one of the most famous literary works written by Naguib Mahfouz. The novel is named after a real alley in Egypt, which Mahfouz vividly describes, portraying the daily life, houses, shops, and monotony that characterizes the lives of its residents. This depiction reflects the routine lifestyle common in similar working-class Egyptian neighbourhoods.

The central character of the novel is Hamida, a young woman in the prime of her youth and the focal point of the narrative. She was raised by her mother’s friend, who took her in after her mother’s passing. Hamida grows up feeling trapped in the dark cycle of poverty, resenting the alley’s filth and insignificance. She dreams of a luxurious life, believing that someone like her deserves to live in elegant mansions, wearing fine dresses and dazzling jewellery. She craves wealth and social status, convinced that her beauty entitles her to a better existence.

Hamida sees her way out of this life through Abbas al-Helw, a simple young barber from *Zuqâq al-Midaq*. She seduces him with her beauty, gaining his love and admiration. Abbas, who runs a men’s barbershop, is an honest and hardworking man who earns a modest living. His shop is next to a traditional pastry shop owned by an old man, Uncle Kamil, another character in the novel. Uncle Kamil, weary of life, often dozes off during work, indifferent to the bustling world around him.

Realizing that his barbershop income is insufficient to provide Hamida with the life she desires, Abbas decides to take a job at the British military camp. His goal is to earn more money and secure a future with Hamida. However, despite his sacrifice, Hamida remains unsatisfied. She is unwilling to wait for Abbas and continues searching for a quicker way to escape her humble life.

She eventually catches the attention of a stranger who frequently observes her from a café across her window. Enchanted by her beauty, the stranger returns to the same spot daily, captivated by her presence. As the novel unfolds, Hamida’s relentless pursuit of money, luxurious clothing, and wealth leads her into the hands of Faraj, a manipulative man who exploits her. She ultimately falls into the world of prostitution, serving the foreign soldiers who occupy the country.

Hamida, now renamed “Titi,” achieves the wealth she once dreamed of, but at the cost of her honour. She abandons her former life, which she once despised as filthy and wretched, in exchange for a glamorous yet morally degrading existence. However, she soon realizes the hollowness of her new life, regretting her choices—but it is too late for redemption.³

Analysis of *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz

Studying and analyzing the literary legacy of Naguib Mahfouz requires extensive effort, as his novels and short stories demand in-depth exploration. His novel *Zuqâq al-Midaq* holds a significant place within his literary journey, particularly as he examined Cairo’s aristocratic society and its connection to the petite bourgeoisie in *Khan al-Khalili*. In *Al-Sarab (The Mirage)*, he depicted the life of an isolated individual lost within Cairo’s upper-class society, while in *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, he once again observed the social transformations occurring in Cairo during World War II.

This novel is one of Mahfouz’s greatest works, recognized for its artistic and thematic depth, which is why it was included in the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts at Moroccan universities, alongside his renowned *Trilogy*. The novel’s significance lies in both its structural composition and symbolic meaning, making it worthy of scholarly study at the highest academic levels. Reading *Zuqâq al-Midaq* reveals its rich and diverse

characters, drawn from the depths of Cairo's narrow alleys, where the daily struggles of the working class unfold.

One of the novel's defining features is its strong focus on setting, specifically *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, a narrow alley with only one exit leading to the rest of Cairo. According to literary critic Abdel Mohsen Taha Badr, Mahfouz shifted his focus from broader social narratives to the alley itself, making *Zuqâq al-Midaq* one of his most structurally cohesive works compared to his earlier novels.

The Symbolism of the Alley

In *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, the alley is more than just a setting; it symbolizes a microcosm of Egyptian society, reflecting the contrast between old Cairo and the new urban landscape. Unlike in *Khan al-Khalili*, where Mahfouz divides his attention between different stories, *Zuqâq al-Midaq* maintains a tightly focused narrative.

In his book *Reflections on the World of Naguib Mahfouz*, Mahmoud Amin Al-Alam argues that the alley has only one exit, and how characters leave it represent three distinct paths:

1. Religious pilgrimage – A character like Hajj Al-Hussaini leaves for pilgrimage but returns with renewed faith, reinforcing traditional values within the alley.
2. Seeking work – Characters like Abbas al-Helw and Hussein Ibn Al-Muallim Kersha leave the alley to find employment and improve their social status. Abbas hopes to marry Hamida, the woman he loves, and even brings her a gold necklace upon returning, only to discover that she has left the alley.
3. Defiance and moral downfall – Unlike the others, Hamida leaves the alley not to return but to pursue wealth and luxury, ultimately entering the world of prostitution during World War II.

According to Mahmoud Amin Al-Alam, Hamida's departure is not just a shift in environment but a collision with the reality of war and the moral corruption it brings. This clash between the alley and the war is what gives the novel its powerful moral and existential themes.

Memorable Characters in *Zuqâq al-Midaq*

One of the most striking aspects of the novel is its rich cast of characters, each representing different layers of Egyptian society. Like Mahfouz's other works, these characters reflect real-life struggles, aspirations, and disappointments. Notable figures include:

- i. Dr. Bûshy – A corrupt dentist involved in grave robbing to steal gold teeth.
- ii. Al-Muallim Kersha – The owner of the local café, embodying traditional authority.
- iii. Zaita – A grotesque character who creates deformities in beggars to make them more convincing.
- iv. Hamida – The novel's central female figure, driven by ambition and her desire for wealth, leading to her downfall.
- v. Abbas al-Helw – The kind-hearted barber who loves Hamida, only to meet a tragic end at the hands of British soldiers.
- vi. Sheikh Radwan – A figure of resignation and acceptance, representing contentment with life, much like Hussein in *Bidaya wa Nihaya (The Beginning and the End)*.

Mahfouz frequently revisits these archetypes in his other works, such as climbers of social status, seen in Hamida (*Zuqâq al-Midaq*), Hassanein (*Bidâya wa Nihâya*), Mahgoub Abdel Dayem (*Cairo Modern*), Sarhan Al-Behairi (*Miramar*), and Raouf Alwan (*The Thief and the Dogs*). These characters reflect how social and economic changes create new moral dilemmas in Egyptian society.

Novel's Art and Social Commentary:

Despite claims that *Zuqâq al-Midaq* is merely a social report, it is a work of literary art, following the structure of modern narrative techniques. Mahfouz masterfully constructs his characters with psychological depth, painting an authentic picture of Egypt under British occupation during World War II. The novel's core message is that those who seek social advancement through unethical means are ultimately doomed to failure, as selfishness leads to downfall.

Mahfouz's most "redeemed" characters in his novels are often those who act selflessly, as pointed out by Abdel Mohsen Taha Badr in his book *Vision and Tool in Naguib Mahfouz's Works*.

Final Thoughts

Reading *Zuqâq al-Midaq* allows one to immerse oneself in a vividly crafted world, filled with unforgettable characters and profound social critiques. As one of Naguib Mahfouz's greatest novels, it stands as a masterpiece of storytelling, exploring themes of ambition, moral decay, and societal transformation.

As Moroccan novelist Aisha Al-Alawi Lamrani states, "Naguib Mahfouz built an entire nation of alleys, far removed from political ideologies, creating a world where people struggle to survive on minimal means. *Zuqâq al-Midaq* was a brilliant choice for academic study, as it forces us to confront the realities of working-class life, which we often dismiss as trivial. Mahfouz teaches us that without understanding the depths of society, we cannot hope to reach its heights."

Mahfouz's characters are immortal in the minds of readers. Who can forget the unforgettable figures of *The Trilogy*—Sayyid Ahmad Abdel Jawad, his revolutionary son Fahmy, the intellectual Kamal, Zanuba, and

Amina, the devoted mother? Similarly, the memorable characters of *Zuqâq al-Midaq*—Dr. Booshy, Kersha, Zaita, Abbas al-Helw, and Hamida—remain etched in literary history.

Hamida's tragic journey from ambition to prostitution, Abbas's unfortunate fate, and the moral struggles within the alley all serve as reflections of the larger transformations in Egyptian society.

In the end, Naguib Mahfouz stands as a literary genius, capturing the soul of modern Egypt with unmatched artistic depth. His novels do not just narrate stories; they paint an intricate portrait of human nature, social transformation, and the eternal conflict between dreams and reality.⁴

Summary of the Assamese Novel “Jivanar Batat”:

The novel *Jivanar Batat* was written by Birinchi Kumar Barua, who used the pen name Beena Barua. It is recognized as the first well-structured Assamese novel, marking a significant contribution to Assamese literature. The novel was first published in 1944 and is considered a classic for its literary depth and social themes.

The novel revolves around Kamalakanta, a young college student who visits the house of a Mouzadar (a village head) for a wedding. During this visit, he meets Tagar, a village girl, and a mutual attraction develops between them. However, Kamalakanta later returns to the city for his studies. He secures a prestigious job and marries Suprabha, a girl from a respected urban family, completely disregarding Tagar, to whom he had once shown affection.

Meanwhile, Tagar's father forces her into an arranged marriage with Dharani, a village schoolteacher, in a sudden decision. Tragically, Dharani falls ill and dies, leaving Tagar widowed. At the same time, Kamalakanta faces severe hardships in his life. Eventually, fate brings Kamalakanta and Tagar together again in the city, setting the stage for an emotional and dramatic encounter.

Main Characters

The novel features several key characters, they are brought to mention as follows:

- i. Tagar – The central character whose life struggles form the core of the novel.
- ii. Kamalakanta – A young man who initially falls for Tagar but later abandons her for social and financial reasons.
- iii. Dharani – Tagar's husband, a kind-hearted teacher who dies of illness.
- iv. Suprabha – Komolakanta's wife, representing urban aristocracy.
- v. Bhogdutta Mouzadar, Raybahadur Manik Hazarika, Bapuram Bora, and Madhab Mahanta – Other characters who influence the storyline.

The novel's plot primarily centres on Tagar's journey through love, betrayal, marriage, widowhood, and survival. The other characters enhance the depth of the narrative, highlighting the social structures and emotional complexities of Assamese society at the time.

Jivanar Batat is an emotionally compelling novel that explores themes of love, fate, societal expectations, and personal resilience. Birinchi Kumar Barua masterfully depicts rural Assamese life, and the struggles of individuals caught between tradition and change. The novel remains a landmark in Assamese literature, providing a realistic portrayal of human emotions and social constraints.⁵

A Comparative Study between *Zuqâq al-Midaq* and *Jivanar Batat* :

Literature serves as a reflection of society, capturing the struggles, aspirations, and transformations experienced by individuals within their cultural and historical contexts. *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua are two notable novels that, despite their distinct cultural and geographical backgrounds, explore common themes of social constraints, ambition, love, betrayal, and the impact of modernization on traditional societies. While *Zuqâq al-Midaq* portrays life in mid-20th-century Cairo, *Jivanar Batat* presents a narrative that was set in rural Assam, yet both works delve into the conflicts between tradition and modernity, individual aspirations, and societal expectations.

1. Social Setting and Cultural Context

Both novels are set in societies undergoing socio-political transitions, yet they differ in their geographical and cultural landscapes.

- i. *Zuqâq al-Midaq* takes place in a narrow alley in Cairo during World War II, capturing the everyday struggles of working-class Egyptians. Mahfouz illustrates the clash between tradition and modernity as British colonial influence and economic changes reshape the aspirations of the alley's residents.
- ii. *Jivanar Batat*, on the other hand, is set in a rural Assamese village, depicting the conservative social structure and the struggles of individuals navigating rigid customs. Unlike the urban setting of Mahfouz's novel, Barua focuses on village life, highlighting themes of love, arranged marriage, and social class divisions.

Despite these differences, both novels present a community-centred narrative, where the collective identity plays a crucial role in shaping individual choices.

2. Themes of Love, Betrayal, and Societal Expectations

Both novels explore romantic relationships as a central theme, where love is often constrained by social norms and personal ambitions.

- i. In *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, Hamida is a young woman driven by her desire for wealth and a luxurious lifestyle. She initially attracts Abbas al-Helw, a kind-hearted barber who genuinely loves her, but she ultimately chooses a path of self-destruction by pursuing materialistic ambitions, leading to her moral downfall.
- ii. Similarly, in *Jivanar Batat*, Tagar shares an innocent love with Kamalakanta, but due to social and economic pressures, Kamalakanta abandons her to marry Suprabha, a woman of higher social standing. Tagar is then forced into an arranged marriage with Dharani, only to face widowhood and societal rejection. In both cases, the female protagonists' desires and ambitions clash with societal expectations, leading to suffering, betrayal, and disillusionment.

3. The Role of Female Protagonists: Hamida vs. Tagar

Hamida (*Zuqâq al-Midaq*) and Tagar (*Jivanar Batat*) represent two contrasting yet thematically similar female characters:

- i. Hamida is rebellious, ambitious, and materialistic. She resents her modest life in the alley and dreams of escaping poverty. However, her quest for wealth leads her into prostitution, symbolizing the moral corruption imposed by social and economic circumstances.
- ii. Tagar, on the other hand, embodies innocence, loyalty, and resilience. Unlike Hamida, she does not actively seek to escape her fate but is forced into unfortunate circumstances due to societal norms. While Hamida chooses ambition over morality, leading to her downfall, Tagar's fate is dictated by external forces, making her a tragic victim of social traditions.

4. The Role of Male Protagonists: Abbas vs. Kamalakanta

The male protagonists in both novels—Abbas al-Helw and Kamalakanta—highlight the struggles of men trapped between personal desires and societal pressures.

- i. Abbas al-Helw is a sincere and hardworking man who dreams of marrying Hamida. To provide her with a better life, he joins the British military camp, but upon his return, he discovers that Hamida has betrayed him. His tragic death at the hands of British soldiers reflects his ultimate sacrifice and the injustices of colonial society.
- ii. Kamalakanta is a young, ambitious man who initially loves Tagar but abandons her for a more socially advantageous marriage. However, life later subjects him to severe hardships, and he ultimately crosses paths with Tagar once again, symbolizing the cyclical nature of fate. While Abbas is a victim of betrayal and war, Kamalakanta is a victim of his own choices, making their tragic arcs distinct yet thematically intertwined.

5. The Conflict Between Tradition and Modernity

Both novels depict societies caught between traditional values and modern aspirations.

- i. In *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, modernity is symbolized by British colonial rule, Western influence, and the pursuit of material wealth. Hamida's descent into prostitution and Abbas's involvement in colonial employment highlight the moral and economic struggles of a society in transition.
- ii. In *Jivanar Batat*, tradition is reflected in rigid marital customs, arranged marriages, and social hierarchies, while modernity is seen in urban migration, education, and changing social aspirations. The contrast between village life and city life represents the conflicting forces shaping Assamese society. While Mahfouz portrays the corruption and chaos brought by modernization, Barua focuses on the emotional and societal consequences of breaking away from tradition. ⁶

Findings:

This paper contains a detailed comparative study of *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua, analyzing their sociocultural aspects, thematic similarities and dissimilarities, and their influence on their respective societies. Here are the key findings:

1. Socio-Cultural Aspects in *Zuqâq al-Midaq* by Naguib Mahfouz

- i. The Alley as a Symbol: It represents Egyptian society in the 1940s, showing its struggles, traditions, and transitions.
- ii. Social Stratification and Economic Inequality: Highlights class differences, with lower-class characters striving for better lives.
- iii. Gender Roles and Patriarchy: Examines women's societal constraints through characters like Hamida.
- iv. Religion and Morality: Reflects the tension between religious values and human behaviour.
- v. Critique of Corruption and Morality: Addresses moral compromises and societal hypocrisy.
- vi. Reflection of National Identity: Depicts the influence of modernization and colonialism on Egyptian society.

2. Socio-Cultural Aspects in *Jivanar Batat* by Birinchi Kumar Barua

- i. Reflection on Rural Life: Showcases Assamese village life and its customs and traditions.
- ii. Education and Social Mobility: Emphasizes the role of education in personal and societal transformation.
- iii. Position of Women: Highlights patriarchal limitations and women's struggles for independence.
- iv. Economic Struggles and Class Divide: Explores landlessness, poverty, and exploitation by landlords.

- v. Impact of Modernization: Discusses how urban influences disrupt traditional Assamese lifestyles.
- vi. Cultural Identity and Regional Pride: Advocates for the preservation of Assamese cultural traditions.

3. Thematic Similarities Between *Zuqâq al-Midaq* and *Jivanar Batat*

Both novels deal with the following similarities:

- i. Depict the struggle between tradition and modernity.
- ii. Highlight socio-economic inequality affecting characters' lives.
- iii. Examine women's limited agency in a patriarchal society.
- iv. Use community settings as microcosms of broader societal issues.
- v. Explore the human quest for identity and aspirations.
- vi. Critique the erosion of cultural values due to modernization.

4. Thematic Dissimilarities Between the Novels

- i. Urban vs. Rural Setting: *Zuqâq al-Midaq* is urban, while *Jivanar Batat* is rural.
- ii. Influence of Political Change: Mahfouz integrates national politics, whereas Barua focuses on personal and community life.
- iii. Modernization's Impact: More pronounced in *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, while *Jivanar Batat* emphasizes tradition.
- iv. Romantic Relationships: More transactional in *Zuqâq al-Midaq*, while *Jivanar Batat* emphasizes familial loyalty.
- v. Individual vs. Collective Struggles: *Zuqâq al-Midaq* focuses on personal ambition, *Jivanar Batat* on community stability.
- vi. Role of Nature: *Jivanar Batat* celebrates rural harmony, while *Zuqâq al-Midaq* depicts urban entrapment.

5. Comparative Study Between *Zuqâq al-Midaq* and *Jivanar Batat*

- i. *Zuqâq al-Midaq* is a realistic urban drama reflecting personal and social dilemmas in a city.
- ii. *Jivanar Batat* is a nostalgic rural narrative celebrating tradition and cultural heritage.
- iii. Mahfouz presents individual aspirations vs. societal constraints, while Barua emphasizes community bonds and social harmony.
- iv. Narrative Styles: Mahfouz's novel is deeply psychological, while Barua's storytelling is episodic and communal.

6. Influence of the Novels on Their Societies

- i. Mahfouz's *Zuqâq al-Midaq*: Critiques Egyptian society's corruption, poverty, gender oppression, and colonial influence.
- ii. Barua's *Jivanar Batat*: Highlights the socio-economic struggles of Assamese villages, emphasizing the need for education and cultural preservation.⁷

Both the novels provide a comprehensive literary comparison that showcases how both novels, despite their cultural differences, engage with universal human struggles, making them significant in their respective literary traditions.

Conclusion

Despite their cultural and geographical differences, *Zuqâq al-Midaq* and *Jivanar Batat* share common themes of ambition, betrayal, love, and societal transformation. Both novels explore the impact of social constraints on individual lives, depicting characters whose dreams are shattered by the realities of their environments.

Mahfouz's novel is a critique of colonial-era Cairo, illustrating how war, economic struggles, and moral corruption reshape society. Barua's novel, on the other hand, reflects Assamese village life, emphasizing the emotional suffering caused by rigid traditions and lost love.

Through their compelling narratives, both Mahfouz and Barua offer a profound exploration of human nature, societal pressures, and the timeless conflict between tradition and modernity, making their works valuable not only within their respective literary traditions but also in global literary discourse.

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