MODERNITY IN THE POETRY OF NAVA KANTA BARUA
AND NILOMANI PHUKAN

Nava Kanta Barua:

Nava Kanta Barua, the most powerful poet of modern Assamese literature is noted for intensity and sensitivity of expression, contributed immensely to the modern poetic movement by successfully experimenting with a variety of forms and techniques. Nava Kanta Barua (b 1926), a younger brother of the celebrated Romantic poet Deva Kanta Barua, joined the New Community of poets with the poem of *He Aranya He Mahanagar* (O forest, O metropolis, 1951), which is a product of anguish caused by the city life. The budding of his poetic genius was seen in his early poems of *Pachowa* and *Jayanti*. This great literary figure was born at Nowgaon which was the seat of his early schooling. He had a brilliant academic career. He studied at the Universities of Calcutta, Visva Bharati and Aligarh. From Aligarh Muslim University he got his M.A. degree in English literature. He served as a lecturer in the A.K. College, Sikohabad, J.B. College, Jorhat and finally in the Cotton College, Guwahati for about two decade. Being a teacher he had

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sufficient leisure to cultivate poetry. His published works are *He Aranya*, *He Mahanagar* (O forest, O metropolis) *Mor Aru Prithivir* (of mine and the Earth's, 1973), *Eti Duti Egharati Tara* (counting up one two, eleven stars, 1958), *yati Aru keitaman sketch*, (yati and a few sketches, 1961) *Ravan and Samrat* (the emperor, 1961). Besides a famous poet, he was also known as well-known novelist. His *Kapil pariya Sadhu* (The story on the bank of the river Kapili) and *Kaka Deutar Hardh* (Backbone of Grandfather) was the famous novel which enriched to promote the new trend of modern literature especially in the field of novel writings.

Nava Kanta's stay at Calcutta though brief was of great moment. Here he could see for himself the hard realities of a city life. The variety and complexity of the Calcutta life appealed to him most. Moreover, the industrial unrest, the economic strain and the corrupt world of bankrupt politicians taking refuge behind the people were also points of interest for him. He deeply sympathized with the oppressed and the exploited. Nava Kanta's *Pran Ganga Vandar* (Harbour on the Ganges of life) is a mighty picture of the disquieting city life. He mentions:

*The mid-day moments rest here*

*As silent as death*

*On the harbour of life's Ganges,*

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2 Ibid p. 453
O Bhagirathi!

The crane wheels of Jagat Seth
reflects the war at Boxer, Plassey and Yandabu.
The steel — Vessel sails on the sea of sweats
...It now moves not
Death is its only merchandise.
The life shudders unsuccessfully.
The blue-sky rests on her death bed;
Don't make awake, if it is sleepy
This dock at Khidirupur.
The sands of the seas carry the last remains
of many of Sailor,
The kites of Dollar and sterling hover
over the sky;
And my vision runs at a snail-pace.  

The poet's sense of resentment and rejection over the city life assumes the form of stoic bitterness. In the harbour attached to the city the kites of dollar and sterling hover over and the poor labourers grease the crane wheels of the capitalist exploiter Jagat Seth. The poet is ever alive to the evils of the mechanical civilization of the city. The man-eating wicked city had made the poet sick of himself, neurotic and

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Barua, Navakanta: He Arnya He Mahanagar, Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Guwahati-1, 1951, p. 3.
morose. The fear of death often haunts him. Even the sounds of the heavy
vehicles bring an anxiety to him:

The road and the terminus,
The gully (lane) and the avenue
Groan under a dumb darkness,
The slippery death's snake passes under the toe,
(Light, O where is light)
The distant tremor,
Caused by the heavy vehicles
Bring an anxiety of life and death
(In the forest the eyes of the tiger and the wild-cat dazzle).
Life lives ever after
Still it lives
And the complex puzzle of life in the Gullys live too.
We are the sons of deathlessness
Oh, the decaying city.4

Nava Kanta Barua, no doubt, was the undisputed Samrat (king) of
modern Assamese poetry. For over five decades he reigned over the
realm of Assamese poetry through a good number of his poetic
collections. The first published book of verse by Barua was “He Aryana
He Mahanagar”. It consists of 16 poems. This book of verse had left a
remarkable influence in the history of modern Assamese poetry. No other

4 Ibid p.5
poetic collection like that could influence Assamese poetry to such a large extent. This book opened a new horizon of modern Assamese poetry.5

Starting on his poetic career during the forties in association with the *Jayanti*, Nava Kanta Barua continued to express himself through the *Pachowa* and the *Ramdhenu* the two magazines that became pivots of the modernist movement in Assamese poetry during the late forties and fifties respectively. Essentially a romantic lyricist, Barua’s early poems carry the influence of Tagore. One notes in them a pervasive mood of Nostalgia, a romantic, wistful longing for those values for which poet Barua’s familiar symbols are the far-off, limitless sky and green earth. This romantic lyricist was also very sincere for the coming days. Through the poem "*Measurement*" it can be imagined. The poem runs as follows:

*It is afternoon now*
*Let's go to the tailors; to get measured*
*Measurement of Neck chest hands and arms*
*Measurements of the palm and the heart*
*We shall give measurements of the entrails*
*And the kidney and the liver,*
*Give measurements of hormones and affections.*
*Let's give measurements of life*

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Of this that and several things
Give only the measurements
We shall think of the stitching later on,
For the time being let’s give the measurements
We can give only measurement.  

The modernist flavour that Barua brought to Assamese poetry was the result of his treatment of Urban subjects and his Eliotic use of symbols and images, blending the serious with the light, applying the language of conversation and prose rhythms and introducing a wide variety of rhythmic patterns. The language used by Barua during the time of conservation was marked by the following lines:

Bappa,\textsuperscript{7} tumi banduk loi sikar kari furba
Khudsa fura. Aamar kobak lagi Aako nai.
Aami holo kheti khola kori khuwa manuh.
Botor manboi lagboo.\textsuperscript{8}

(O dear! You wish to move to hunt through gun. We have nothing to say.
We are rustic by profession and should go according to season.)

His modernist attitude to life is also characterized by his non-committal attitude towards all matters of conventionally accepted faith. It is to be noted however, that his kinship to T.S. Eliot was only peripheral

\textsuperscript{6} Ask wikipedia.
\textsuperscript{7} A term of endearment used in addressing a boy or young man.
\textsuperscript{8} Ahmed, M. Kamaluddin: \textit{Aadhunik Asomia Kabita}, Banlata, Panbazar, Guwahati -1, 1\textsuperscript{st} Edition-December 2005, p. 33.
and external; the ambivalence and complexity, the intellectual depth and subtlety and the blending of the ironical and the satirical in Eliot’s poetry are missing in Barua’s romantic sensibility. In more sense than one, he prepared the stage for the emergence of the major poets of the sixties by introducing varied modes of poetic expression in modern Assamese poetry with a remarkable sophistication. That is why he serves as the bridge between the earlier period of romantic effusion and the later phase of greater condensation and suggestive richness that we find in the poetry of the sixties.9

The vagaries of modern life, its hollowness and the idiosyncrasies are painted more closely in the poem “Sandhyar Chilang” (Shillong by evening). In a dejected evening in Shillong the poet has made a search for love and poetry in the snobberies of Shillong life:

*The morose evening drops*

*The tired clerk readies himself*

*for a call of the libido.*

*In the eyes of the city painted*

*The static dullness of a sleepless nurse*

*In a night hospital*

*The sun has gone distant*

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9 Nath, Dr. Birendra; Choudhury, Dr. Amarjyoti: *Modern Assamese life and culture*, Assam Academy for Cultural Relation, Chandmari, Guwahati-3, pp. 27-28.
From the branchless naked pines;
Only the image of the sun lingers
In the sick-black blue sky
The cloud writes message, meaningless.
The puzzles of the zig-zag street of Laban
Is closed now under a spell of fog.
With betel-spits, smokes and whistles
This Shillong banters at itself in the dusk.
The sharp eyes of a foreign-patient
Dazzles in a dazzling corner of the pine-wood hotel;
Her eyes go dreamy.
The fur-coat of Kashmere – wool
Covers the suggestions of her fragile body;
Mind ... oh this mind suffers in starvations,
The reminiscences of the valley to suffers
(The Khasi Girls awake the hills,
And in their eyes the strawberries bloom).
This sky has lost its colour,
It lost the love-songs;
The pretty rainbow is quashed by the fog;
The heart-burn of a tigress captivated in a circus party,
Reflects in the evening at Shillong.\(^{10}\)

The sense of snobbery, boredom and a desolate disillusioned city
life get further reflections in his poem *Abelir Alibator Gan* (the songs of

\(^{10}\) Barua, Navakanta: *He Aryna He Mahanagar*, pp. 20-22.
the street in the evening). The poet passes through an over-crowed street and still he finds that a sense of loneliness and dejection overpowers his mind.\footnote{Ibid. pp. 27-29} Though he feels loneliness, it still has deep faith in the future of man and the poem \textit{Palas} (silt) may be quoted:

\begin{center}
\textit{Palasar jui numal atia! Sal aru Satian}
\textit{Banat manor dinor otit bohagor dhumuhar|}
\textit{kiman sapon sari gol tar kone rakhe khotian}
\textit{Kolong kopilee dizur partot kakadewtar har|}
\textit{Buri aaitar kalizare goze bon nahrur phol}
\textit{Dawree ki kole; dia aru dia nises koi dia}
\textit{Alir kanot gospuli rua – ati haigh skoll khola}
\textit{Urukha paniei utai niok mora mokarar khola}
\textit{Amarar palase sarua korok kolongar dueu kul.}\footnote{Phookan, Nilomoni: \textit{Kuri Satikar Asomiya kabita}, Asom Prakashan Parishad, p. 231.}
\end{center}

(The fire of the palas is now out
In the forest’s of Sal and Satiyian
How many dreams of past storm and invasion
Have fallen........
Of them who keep account?
The bone of my Grandfather lie

\footnote{Ibid. pp. 27-29}
\footnote{Phookan, Tirtha: \textit{Surya Mukhir Angikar}, Navakanta Baruar Aroikuri Basak Bania Kabita, Nirbasan Sankolon Edition, p. 75.}
\footnote{Phookan, Nilomoni: \textit{Kuri Satikar Asomiya kabita}, Asom Prakashan Parishad, p. 231.}
On the banks of Kolong, Kopili and Diju
The wild lily grows out of my grandmother’s heart
What has the cloud said?
Give, give a little more.
Give till all is given
Plant a sapling by the road, start a school
My beloved is way farer forever on the road
Heave a sigh for him
Let water seeping from the roof
Wash away the sheds of dead spiders
Let our silt make furtile the banks of Kolong.\textsuperscript{14}

Navakanta also produced some successful poems in the impressionistic mood. The following extract from "Trisankur Atmajivani"\textsuperscript{15} (Trisankus Autobiography) conveys the poet’s cool and silent expeditions to the flowery kingdom of love and beauty:

\textit{Could}

\textit{This lamp of beauty}

\textit{Awaken, a festival of light, a bignal in my mind.}

\textit{After deeper meditation}

\textit{Of lacs and lacs of year}

\textit{These lilacs are coming to bloom}

\textit{The jinia-petals are soft and warm}

\textsuperscript{15} Barua, Navakanta: Yati Aru Keitaman Sketch, 1961, pp. 8-10.
Like the breast-cloth of an Eskimo girl.
In the light radiated from ice
My eyes close
In the unbecoming cowardice sleep
My nerves get sleepy and sleep of dejection silent.\textsuperscript{16}

Navakanta Barua, \textit{the Samrat of modern Assamese poetry} always wishes to lead a simple life and his intention in this regard was remarkable:

\textit{If there is peace for us}
\textit{And hope}
\textit{In the stupidity of great ever-child people}
\textit{The juice of betel nut of mother’s untidy kiss.}\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushright}
(Bodhidrumor Khori)
\end{flushright}

Navakanta made experiments in the imaginary and symbolic poetry too. His \textit{Budhidrumar Khorin}\textsuperscript{18} (fire woods from the true of knowledge) and \textit{Kauri}\textsuperscript{19} (The Crow) are example of rare symbolic gift. The crow comes as the poet’s messenger from the distant unknown. The crow is the symbol of the poet sojourn between heaven and earth: The black atoms radiated from the wings of the crow stand as the radiated human beings

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid p.8
\textsuperscript{17} Ahmed, M. Kamaluddin: \textit{Aadhunik Asomia Kabita, Banlata}, Guwahati-1, 1\textsuperscript{st} Edition, Dec. 2005, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{18} Navakanta Barua: \textit{Eti Duti Egharati Tara}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{19} Das, Phani: \textit{Akas}, 1969, p. 1.
from the Almighty God. The crow makes his flight towards the high blues to discover his missing link with the great universal. An image which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. And occasionally we have such an emotional and intellectual complex in the lines of Navakanta Barua. His imagery gift is too high. The fine imagery picture made in the poems like Vaisisthat piknik (A picnic in Basistha), Edin Aami Nawere (One day we travelled in boat) Eti Duti Egharati Tara (counting up eleven stars) Eta Premar Paddya (A love-song) are the unparalleled beauty and craftsmanship. For example –

\begin{quote}
Ecapara akasor son
Khahi pari ray dubarit
Jonakir duta jilmil
Nimat junuka dubharit
Inginar tandralu talat
Mane mane sahari janay
Sandhiya ahi relar alire
Pacharor sipare lukay.
\end{quote}

(A flesh of Gold from the sky
Falls below on the tiny durva grass
The glow-worms gleam wearing
Silent ding-dong bells;
Responding silently too,

\footnote{Barua, Navakanta: \textit{Bacharor Kabita}, Paresh Mala Barua Prakashan, , 1965, p. 35.}
The drowsy whisper of the railway engine
Dusk stealthily comes
Through the railway tracks
And hide herself behind the hills)

The image of the dusk coming stealthily over the railway track and hiding herself behind the hills is unique. One who has been the railway line running parallelly to the Saraniya hills at Gauhati cannot escape the permanent stamp of loveliness of this image.

Navakanta Barua has derived materials for his poetry even from the epic sources. His *Ravan* and *Samrat* are built on his knowledge of epic narratives. In the right of his own intellectual philosophy, he re-discovers the personalities of these two great heroes. He has made *Ravana* more of a pursuer of beauty than a condemned villain. Likewise his estimate of *Dhritarastra* is based on sympathy. *Dhritarastra* is the poet’s symbol for a political cowardice a sort of diplomatic inertia. Following the Marxian ideal of state he wants to emphasis that the basis of political institutions is the past and whoever has the keenness to review the future, he should be able to see man above political institutions. Navakanta has uniquely interpreted the life and philosophy of the blind king. He is warmly alive to the defects of the cowardice king *Dhritarastra*. Whenever *Dhritarastra* as the head of the state tried to take certain measures granted by the
magnanimity of law and order, the father of Dhritarastra stood in confrontation with him. And the head of state submitted to the head of the family. This conflict of ideal is the real tragedy of Dhritarastra’s life.

Dhritarastra now laments:

"I could not become the father of the people
But sitting in the royal throne,
I become the father of my own sons.
When there was the finest moment
For the emperor, to earn
The greatest glory of fatherhood
At that hour the emperor has misguided the father.
By whispering at his ears,
A state has no decorum
Courtes[y is an weakness of the state;
The state is an eunuch
The Nackedness of the fields and of women is same.
The state is the father; and for the father.
The Nackdeness of the daughter is nothing.
The disgrace of humanity is the eunuch’s sole ambition.
In the name of law I played with the faith of people;
Everything ended in a chaos.
What is true? The eunuch laws of the state
Or the bondage of the heart?21

21 Barua, Navakanta: Samrat, 1961, p.3.
These reflections of Dhritarastra over himself arouse the sympathy of the reader for him. These confessions show that under the cover of his blind eyes, he had a noble heart, with which he could realise his past mistakes.

Navakanta Barua was very confident of his own poetic talent. That is why he could say without least hesitation, “I am a born poet.” Besides his own poem Navakanta enriched the poetic horizon by translating poems from other language. He translated into Assamese the Nazrul Islams poems, Sumitra Nandan’s poems, Rabindra Naths poems and one hundred poem of Whitman. He also translated some poems of Yugoslavian poets. Some children poems by Keroni Sukavaski were also translated by Navakanta Barua. Some Assamese and tribal lullabies were translated to English by this great figure of modern Assamese literature. The first part of Faust is a milestone of translated works by Navakanta.

Navakanta Barua was a great multifaced personality of modern literature. He showed his excellency as a Novelist. His first novel Kapiliparia Sadhu (the story of Kapiliparia) was written on the background of the valley of Kapili of Nowgaon. Kakadeutar Haar is another famous novel which brought for him the Sahitya Akademy award.

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and this novel was translated into Hindi, Uriya and Malayalam language. He also wrote a novel “Garama Knowari. However, both Garama Knowari and Kakadeutar Haar (Bones of forefather)\textsuperscript{23} set a new trend in the domain of historical novel in Assamese literature. Besides these some another novel from Navakanta’s pen were “Manuh Aatibur Dewdeep”, “Aahi Ataibur Dweep” and more. That Navakanta had a great lust for knowledge is exhibited by his another novel based on scientific idea namely “Apadartha” (worthless).\textsuperscript{24}

Navakanta Barua was very popular as a writer of children literature too. He was known as “Akhud Kokaideu” among the children of Assam for his unparalleled contribution to children literature. So promote the children literature Barua wrote mainly novels, poems and lyrical plays. “Mohua phool”\textsuperscript{25} is a collection of ten poems for children. The milestones of his children literature were two novels namely “Shialee palegoi Ratanpur” and “Akharar jakhala.”

Besides, his proficiency as an editor is also well-known. The books edited by Barua are “Bharatiya charukalar Bhumika”, “Garo English Assamese Dictionary, Indian Poetry Today (4\textsuperscript{th} Vol. Assamese). He edited two children magazine namely “Jonbai” and “Pohor”. He also

\textsuperscript{23} George, K.M.: Modern Indian Literature An Anthology, Vol. one, Surveys & Poem, p. 453
\textsuperscript{24} Baishya, Dipali Hazarika: Pioneer Assamese Poet & Literature, 2009, pp. 41-42.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid
edited a literacy cultural magazine namely “Shiral”. Two important books authored by Navakanta are “Asomiya Chanda Silpor Bhumika” and “Kabitar Deh Bisar”. These two books exhibit his mastery of explaining the technique of writing poetry in lucid style.26

Mention has already been made that Navakanta Barua made experiments both in imagery and symbolic poetry too. He has been much influenced by the imagery especially his “Keitaman skeech” bear the imprints of the imagist technique. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
Gachar patborar magedi Belitowe \\
Muthi muthi poharar silguti daliyai \\
aacheMor gat pora nai
\end{align*}
\]

(Khub Dhunia Lagiche)

(Through the midst of tree’s leaf the sun has been throwing out the bundle of stones but has not touched my body).

The symbolical significance of Navakanta Barua’s are seen in the poetry of “He Aryna”, “Mahakavyar pandulipi”, and “Buddhidrumor khorī”. His symbols are ambiguous and instead of conveying a single idea they convey of “spectrum of idea.”27 His symbols are personal, evocative, suggestive and to some extent mystic in aroma and colour. His

26 Ibid
27 History of Assamese Literature, 1951, p. 145.
"Parthana", "Akashar parti" and "Mahakavyar pandulipi" connect the conscious with the subconscious aspect of life:

\[\text{Atmar caraikhana sihator} \]
\[\text{Taraka aru curator dhowari dhuwali} \]  
(Mahakavyar Pandulipi)

\[\text{Jivan jwalali gala mambati sikar majot} \]
(Thy burn life amidst the vertex candle)

(Bodhidrumor Khori)

The mystical symbolism of the French poets sometimes makes itself felt in the Navakanta’s poetry:

\[\text{Asamkhya mrityur setu} \]
\[\text{Tar Oparedi} \]
\[\text{Jivanor Sarisrip ahiche bagai} \]  
(Kramash)

(The unparallel death of dam, above him, the reptile of life has come in crawl).

The new poetry is the reflection of the social realities, not its outward forms but its soul.\textsuperscript{28} Disillusionment born of scepticism has been the prevailing note of modern poetry. It betrays sceptical attitudes towards all established values such as love, beauty, patriotism, religion

\textsuperscript{28} Preface, Balichanda
and justice. Navakanta Barua’s “Mahakavya Pandulipi” is an attempt to escape from the world of romantic luxury and imagination.\(^{29}\) He even revolted against Rabindra Nath and his idealism:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mor kabitat nai anubhuti Viswamanavor} \\
\text{Yugar sihar pepa baja mor kabitat}
\end{align*}
\]

(Prelude-yati)

(There is but no perception of humanism in my poetry, there is flute but the sound of age is in my poetry.)

He ridicules romantic fantasy of John Keats and P.B. Shelly in his “Amar prithivi”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Samratar tajor sapon} \\
\text{Natun prithivi shristi pramethiucar} \\
\text{Keatsar taral ucchavs dekhi jirna phuldani grik bhaskarår} \\
\text{Amito sunilo tat} \\
\text{Rahasyar swapna gadha prakanda prolap.}
\end{align*}
\]

(The dream of the crown of the emperor, the king is the creation of New World witnessing the light festival of Keats, Weak flower-vase of the Greek artists we have heard there; there lies the great dialogue of secret of stream).

Despite Rabindra Nath’s influence in matter of music and melody, Navakanta Barua remains faithful to T.S. Eliot in his poetic technique,

\(^{29}\) Vimsa Satabdir Asomiya Sahitya, p. 51.
images and symbols. Eliot’s Phoenician Sailor peeps in Navakanta Barua’s poetry;

Pardesi Navikok

_Ucit mulyat dio eratir priyar khabor_

_(Sakalo Nagar Aru Saklo Manuh Aru)_

(We provide information of beloved of one night to the alien sailor for proper price)

Like Eliot Navakanta Barua sees no creative pulse of life in the mechanical urban civilization.

_Amritor putra ami_

_Mrityu-snata he mahanagar_

_(He Aryna He Mahanagar)_

(We are offspring of nectar, taken bath by death O metropolis)

Navakanta Barua’s “He aryna he mahanagar” reflects Eliot’s techniques in juxtaposing contradictory ideas in a dramating setting with deep satirical undertones:

_Mahanagari olami thaka_

_Dawarar cipjorit_

_Cepa khai sauhadar gambuj_

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Sarasayat dinakar jarjar
(The city is hanging, in the cloud of slipknot, Squeezing around the tower, Trembling under the shadow).

Navakanta Barua’s imaginary gift is too high. His imagery usage is one of the best characteristics of his poetry and can be imagined throughout the following extracts:31

Sulir meghot lahee aangulir bohoton jon
(Jwvaror babe sagor Nasil)
Borofor dore checha vorosoto
Se je ki santi!
Arundhooti32

(Ata Premor Padya)
(In the sky of hair there is soft finger but many moon (sea was not for tide). As to feel as cold ice, what a solace he is! Arundhooti!”

Navakanta Barua has been the conscious poet of our urban life and especially the successful artist to give a life size portrait of self centredness and pangs of middle class consciousness.33 The following extract may be taken for example:

Jiban jiae Thake! Tothape jiae Thake!
Aru Thake jibikar golir sathor
Amritor putra ami

32 Barua, Navakanta: Ata premar padya.
33 Tyagavir Hembaruar Smritigrantha, pp. 162-163.
(He Aryanya He Mahanagar)

(Life continues yet survives, and remains alive the secret of the lane of livelihood, we are son of Nectre, taken bath by death, O city).

Besides, death and birth has reached a high watermark in the poems of Navakanta Barua. He is convinced how birth and death involve each other:

\[
\text{Antoror jyotir gaurov moi nokoro} \\
\text{Bahiror andhareu mok voi nukhuai} \\
\text{Moi janu} \\
\text{Mor doinondin mritu.}^{34}
\]

(Huitmenor Sakulu: Mor Aru Prithivir)

(I am not proud of hearts gleam, obscure of outside too do not make me fear, I know, my death is eternal).

To Dylan Thomas life and death are parts of a natural process that links man with what surrounds him inner with outer, high with low. That there are correspondence between Nacrocosm and microcosm is not new at all; nor it is new that time and eternity rule apparent contraries and parallel that creation and destruction are our kissing poles.\(^{35}\) To Thomas love and death are identical and women is an agent of death.\(^{36}\) Side by

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35 Readers guide to Dhylan Thomas, p. 48.

36 Ibid. p. 65 — “poetry and love, the instrument of creation serve death.” Homen Borgohain’s “Prem aru mritur karane” a short story explains the philosophy of D. Thomas, Rayit, drunkard and Madhavi, the hero and heroin of this love story, after being resolved to commit suicides met each other at the dead of night. They failed to carry on their resolution and the story is T.N. Goswami speaks of Satres influence on the above story. But in reality it is Thomas who is working behind. If death can be achieved through love why should we commit suicide?

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side with Dylan Thomas Rilke also proved to be a leaving influence of our poets like Navakanta Barua, who repeats Rilke’s philosophy here and there. Rilke, who occupied with the subject of death, believed that death was an enlargement of life and return of its sources. To him deads pass into the earth and became a part of the life giving process which comes from it.\(^{37}\) Navakanta Barua uses Rilke’s idea:

\[
\text{Ami heno ahi acho yuge yuge rupe rupe rupe}
\]
\[
\text{Salanir setur bukure}
\]
\[
\text{Prithivir ahe ahe pake pake vijo rita}
\]
\[
\text{amar sthitir sipa.}^{38}\]

(Endhar Ratir Eliji)

(Perhaps we are coming age after age and shape to shape, over the turn of breast of bridge, there is root of mixture of us at every turn of pangs in the universe).

Modern scientifical idea has also been reflected in Navakanta Barua’s poetry. The influence of space time especially the relativity of Einstein and the Psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung did not only effect the twentieth century ideas but also adversely made an impact of the linguistic structure of poetry. Einstein’s time “was a sort of time which

\(^{37}\) The Heritage of Symbolism, p. 169.

contained all time in every movement of time.” The influence of these revolutionary ideas has touched our modern poetry both in form and spirit. Navakanta Barua has manifested some concepts of modern science in the following lines:

**Hejar yatiye praman kariba jibanat yati nai**

(Yati)

(There is no sage in life to be proved in thousand time).

That Navakanta Barua had acquaintance with the Einstein’s Relativity has been disclosed by his poem “Ainstain Samipesu”:

**Anantak gheri thala buddhit Opaja**

**Tomar buddhit eti saman cinare**.40

(Nourshing with intellect thy cover the indecisive, an equal picture upon thy intellect).

During the fifties of the twentieth centuries the internationalism idea has also been felt in Navakanta Barua’s poetry. In the opposition of dramatical aspects Africa has been illuminated as follows:

**Jar snaiut mritur rong**

**Fool aru tez aru sukan ratir tandra**

**He Africa, He Sristi samvaba**

**Dhumuhar bate bate**

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39. Twentieth Century English Literature, p. 192.
Amar pakhir dhoni
(pohar, pohar kot)

Hai Etihas!

(The black girl in search of God
-Navakanta Baruar Kabitawali)

(Whose, there is colour of death muscle
Flower, blood and drowsing of dry night
O Africa, O probable creator
Through the way of tempest
The sound of our wings
(Where is light, light)
Alas! History).

Of course, prior to that Devakanta Barua had painted the picture
internationalism in a romantic mood:

Bhromilo bohut bat;

Perut inkar sate son-rup khotua palkit

(Ami Duar Mukoli koro, “Sagar Dekisa)
(Wandered a vast way at Peru there is mixture of gold-silver)

T.S. Eliot’s “new art of cheapest emotion” has been perceived in
Navakanta Barua’s poetry. The factories that has been growth under the
patronage of communism and its expansion and retaliation has highly
been highlighted throughout the following stanzas:41

[41 Devgoswami, Ranjit Kr.: Asomia Kabita, pp. 261-273.]

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Boxer aru Palasir aru Yandabur Etihas
Jagat sethor kranor sakat ghure
(Prangangar Bandar, He Aryana He Mahanagar)
(The history of Boxer, Plassy and Yandabu, moves around the wish of the universe).

His attention towards the love for motherland is a matter of praiseworthy:

_Ami palo prithivir Antim dinor khuda aru_  
_Anagata usar sapon._

(Amar Prithivi)
(We got last days appetite of the universe and dream next to usha).

Notwithstanding, history, contemporary politics and philosophy all these things have found depiction in Navakanta Barua’s poetry and his poems are full of intellectual references. From style and atmosphere of some of his lines we have forced to believe that Navakanta was a great admires of Rabindra Nath Tagore, T.S. Eliot the Russian poet Mayakovasky and the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran; but over all such impressions has originally glittered like pure gold. Navakanta’s diction is full of variety. Sometimes his words maintain a strong musicality and sometimes they run wild and hard. Sometimes under pressure of Indian

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Ahmed, M. Kamaluddin: Aadhunik Asomia Kabita, Banalata, 2005, Guwahati, Panbazar-1, p.17
and foreign allusions phrases and quotation his poetry turns unintelligible to the common readers.

**Nilomani Phukan:**

Nilomani Phukan will ever be immortal in Assamese literary history for attributing a new trend to Assamese poetry by his everlasting creations. Along with Navakanta Barua, Nilomani Phukan was instrumental in giving Assamese poetry a distinctly modern form and voice.\(^4^3\) Nilomani Phukan is perhaps the most outstanding poet. He got initiated into new poetry with his impressionistic poems of romantic sensibility. "*Suryya heno Nami ahe ai Nadeiyedi*"\(^4^4\) (It is said that the sun comes down through this river) is the first collected work of his poems. His poetical collections are mainly impressionistic and romantic. He has later changed to symbolic poetry and at present his poems betray a high sense of symbolism with symbols, myths and archetypes of high excellence. All his three recent collected works *Nirjanantar Sabda*\(^4^5\) (sounds of solitude), *Aru ki Naisabda*\(^4^6\) (And what a silence!) and *Phuli*

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\(^{45}\) Ibid. p. 130
\(^{46}\) Ibid. p. 130

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thoka suryya mukhi phultar phale⁴⁷ (Towards the blooming sun flower) carry a new idiom into modern Assamese poetry.

This great literary figure was born at Dergaon of Golaghat district. He was the son of Kirthinath Phookan. After completing his school education from his birth place he went to Guwahati to get himself admitted at Cotton College from where he passed B.A. Examination. From Gauhati University he passed M.A. in History. He served as a Lecturer of History at Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati in 1961.⁴⁸

Phukan has a special capacity of handing words. Great poets increases the resources of language less coining new words than by revealing the full powers of old ones. Phukan has aptly done the latter. He has successfully extended the meaning of the words beyond their literal meanings. Phukan creates a new atmosphere in return enhances the power of vision of the words. In the poem Sei Rahasya Nil Dhatura (That mysterious blue dhatura) the poet has extended the meaning of the words to a wonderful extent. Such power of presentation is really an act of mastery. All the poems of Nirjanantar Sabda (Sound of solitude) and Aru Ri Nai Sabda (And, what a silence!) represent the poet’s magic with words.

Phukan is a major influence on the whole generation of modern Assamese poets. ‘Make it new’ has been the mantra of the literary modernism. It led to amazing experimentations in poetry and a new attitude towards a changing world. The influence of this change is noticeable in Phukan’s poetry. Though the modernist poets are the children of modernity, most of them treat modernity in a cold critical light and themselves turn into ironists in their response. Phukan in his mood, however remains mostly a sensitive observer in meditation like many of his romantic predecessors. From this mood, he is a keen observer of the world around him discovering a symbolic correspondence between his inner world and the outer world and traces that correspondence on the metaphoric, vertical axis of language and not on the horizontal axis as was done by many of his predecessors. Images from nature abound in his poetry but his mental connection with this natural world is unlike that of the romantics. The romantics appear to feel a separation from the natural world and try to bridge the gap through their inner visions and often recreate this natural world as a world kept under tension in unstated comparison. Nature usually enters into Phukan’s images metaphorically in symbolic dimension, defamiliarised in order to restructure the other of reality in the imaginative plane. In a superb poem on sexual ecstasy, the evocation of ecstatic response is in terms of natural images suggesting a
correspondence between the sexual and the natural. The poem runs as follows:

Aranyat, aranyar vitorot
Sareng Sarair mat
Meli dia duti bahu
Mar jak thupitara bah
Tomar sulir gondhot
Padumoni pukhurit mondrít botah
Denot, tomar dehor vitorot
Etia apah ranga ful
Thor mela tal pattot
Dharasar boruson jak
Tomar stonar rokta tomar othot
Etia tomar dithok
Andhoror aroktim mukh,
Pahorot meghor gorzon.

(In the forest, inside the forest call of a crane
Open your arms
Let the clustered stars die down
In your hair’s fragrance
The wind rumbles in the lotus pond
In the body, in your body
A red flower

50 Ibid p. 114
On the budding palm leave
Incessant rain
The blood from your breasts on your lips
Now your day is
The blushing face of the night
Cloud bursts on the hill).

Phukan is a significant representative of the symbolist off-shot of Assamese poetry, influenced by French symbolism. His early poems were more concerned with form than with the symbols and images. His later poetry shows a deeper understanding of life. An intense pre-occupation with life and death is seen in some of his best poems. The poem “Topanit teo mok khedi phurichil” (She pursued me even in my sleep) is a powerful piece which expresses the pain of love against the background of the alienation and anxiety of modern life.51

Toponit teo mok khedi phurishil

Teo baru atia kot ase
Asene baru teur mukhot
Sei uvalipara ajopa gos
Uth dukhonot asene boi
Pani ranga hua dukhon noi
Asene baru teur dusokut

(She pursued me even in my sleep
Where is she now
Does her face still bear
That uprooted tree?
Do the two reddened rivers
Still lave her two lips?
Do her two eyes still leave
The two pacing black steeds
Even today every night
She pauses trampling my heart).

The French symbolists sought to give a peculiar intensity to their poems through symbolism. Phukan too has used his symbols with the same purpose. His symbols are the product of his delicate concentration of vision. The poems aim at reproducing scenes from the visible world of beauty and pleasure viewed against a background of transcendental experience. His poems therefore, have the power to suggest and to evoke, rather than giving information. The poem \textit{Tez} (blood) is symbolic picture of the poet’s life cycle. The poet feels that his wife is linked with the life eternal. Day after day, month after month and year after year the poet

passes his life through consciousness and silence, through experiences and emotions. The truly deep intellectual symbols make a final appeal to the serious reader who is ready to think and discover:

*The wintry night passes*

*Through the cactus – tree;*

*My blood runs in a vacuum,*

*A heavy wheel passes*

*Through my blood.*

*The trees full down*

*Seven big elephants*

*Carry it*

*A heavy wheel passes*

*Through my blood.*

Undoubtedly, these lines have a large amount of suggestiveness in them. The symbolic representation is equally great in his own poem *Dohjon Deka Manuhar Pratyabartan*[^54] (The return of the ten young men). In this poem the whole progress of human civilization is nicely recorded. A long list of symbols work in this poem; the black stone, the ox, the coffins, the five dead assess the ocean, the broken temple and a mad woman. He was well co-ordinated all these symbols into an effective balance. But this poem is obscure to certain extent. Phukan is not very

much careful in selecting the symbols. His symbols are rather private symbols and such they create an atmosphere of deep obscurity. In the last mentioned poem Phukan exhibits, like W.B. Yeats (In his poem the double vision of Michael Robertes) a mind torn between vision and reality.

Nilomani Phukan's poems are marked with complexity. In order to understand his poems we must have some idea about Japanese and French poetry. The richness of his meaning is achieved through the economy of language, and not through an overflowing of emotion in descriptive abundance. His poems are not as simple as they look. It can be inference through the following poem:

*The hand gestures of some*

*Never sounded word.*

*You, the moment of rosy Jamun*

*At the hearts broken branch*

*A sea bird flying over*

*A slowly dying finger*

*A stream slowly freezing*

*The dark, mad river of molten lava*

*Eroding the hearts inside*

*Neck-deep in the sea*

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A song of length
You, the moment of rosy Jamun
At hearts broken branch.56

Phukan often appears to have been exploring an area of solitude, turning his poetic gaze inward, discovering the longed for solitude within his self and not outside. The familiar world gets defamiliarized in that region, this defamiliarisation achieved through a metaphorical exploration of language that acquire symbolic suggestiveness. A reader is jolted out of his habitual response and finds his familiar objects light up in new suggestiveness. This region of inner solitude has an ambience of pregnant silence where even sound is often metamorphosed into sight. A poem on raga “Hamsadhwani” is an example. Listening to the music in rage “Hamsadhwani”, the poetic persona is within himself, ‘I hear a call from my inside’ and here the music no longer remains simply melodic sounds, there the senses fuse, and they image forth in metaphorical implosion in silence. In another poem, when the poetic person hears someone calling, that call does not come as sound but comes rolling over the leaves and then flows in innumerable channels in the heart, where another metamorphosis take place:

A frog jumped infront of me

With a fire
On his lighting scorched back.\(^57\)

Phukan sometimes gets intoxicated in his visions and such visions carry the hundred images of formless beauty to him. In such images he serializes his spiritualistic experiences and auto-inspired ecstasies. And to the matching of these images comes fine sense of music. Here a few specimens from his imagistic word picture are given below:

\[\text{Moror oparar suryyalai mukh kare} \]

\[\text{thiya di ache} \]

\[\text{ejon nisanga manuh}.\(^58\)\]

(A lonely man stands with his face raised towards the sun above his head)

\[\text{Okha okha ejar gachor chat} \]

\[\text{Murccha goi pore ache} \]

\[\text{mor soisob}.\(^59\)\]

(My adolescence is lying senseless under the shades of the tall ejar trees).

Phukan’s latest collection “\text{Alo agate ami ki kotha pati asilu}”\(^60\)

(what we were talking about a little while ago) has able to earn a great

\(^{57}\) Ibid. pp. 102-103

\(^{58}\) Phukan, Nilomani: \text{Nirjanantar Sabda}, p. 40.


reputation throughout the modern Assamese literature. The mastery of his language, rhythm and matter along with the multi-dimensional complexity of his idea is a matter of praiseworthy.\textsuperscript{61} With his distinctive poetic qualities Phukan enjoys a remarkable position in Assamese literary history. As a poet he is known for his poetic sensibilities and language, metaphor that he has drawn from rural life. Though as a poet he deals with a wide range of themes he succeeds in integrating himself with the power and event of nature and thereby attenuates the loneliness of his heart. His spirit is enlivened by benignity of nature. Nilomani Phukan is of the view that poetry is the voice of humanity and since time immortal poetry has been reverberating with its sounds in the deep recesses of mortal human.\textsuperscript{62} His faith in humanity is also his faith in poetry, its ability to speak for the humanity. It speaks for those humans who do not read. It provides healing touch to the suffering mankind. In a poem addressed to a young poet Rofiqul Hussain, Phukan movingly says:

\textit{A poet said}

\textit{Poems are for those}

\textit{Who never read poetry.}

\textit{For their hearts wounds}

\textit{And for their thorn afflicted fingers}


For the agonized cries of
The dead and the living.
For the never-ending shriek
Traveling the street.
For death's meaning and
Life's emptiness
For the mothers of five billion
Starved and ailing children.
For the fear of the moon
turning red like blood.
For every still moment.

By addressing a younger poet, Phukan perhaps sends a message to the younger generation that poetry is ultimately not only a form of language but also an act to shoulder social responsibility.63

Images are used in large school in Phukan poetry.64 After the publication of "Phuli thaka suryamukhi fultar fale" it is seen in Phukan's poetry a greater concern for the mysteries of death and sadness and agony of human existence.65 The use of image during the time of conversation is accountable in Phukan’s poetry:

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65 Dutta, Dr. Birendra Nath, Choudhury, Dr. Amarjyoti: Modern Assamese Life & Culture, p. 33.
He has been ailing  
Pain at the abdomen  
One night from hospital  
He has been missing  
Who was he?  
What was his appearance?\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{(Teour Asukh Hoisil)}

Here, Krishnakanta, the sole character who has been missing from the hospital has mentioned in the light of daily conversation. So there is no direct speech for employing an image in terms of Krishnakanta.

Phukan has been very sincere even to the street hawker. He has broadly observed an accident of a banana seller who finally met his death on his way back.

\textit{Protito Muhortoi adonga tez}  
\textit{Protito Muhortoi apache senduriya kol.}\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{(Hothat Sei Artonad Ahe Got Mare)}

(Each moment is a puddle of blood, each moment is a basketful of red banana).

\textsuperscript{66} Ahmed, M. Kamaluddin: \textit{Aadhunik Asomia Kabita, Banlata}, Panbazar, Guwahati-1, 1\textsuperscript{st} Edition-Dec. 2005, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid. p. 54
And also expressed the deplorable condition of that lady who used to sell green leaf and had no permanent house to live:

*Muthi muthi koi kati tor dhekiar anguli*

*Ajoror andhorot toie bes*

*Majrati beror jolongere*

*Somai ne nodi.*

(Cutting the bundle of green leaf of thy finger
Sell thy in the night of sorrow
In the midnight through the beam
Do the rivers come in?)

Besides, in magnificent poem on the "*Nrityrota Prithivi*" in which the earth epitomises wholeness absorbing the dead and living, destruction and creation, Phukan expresses his faith in the humanity in the midst of death and madness and asks:

*Even then won't you plant a*

*Sapling of fragrant banana?*

The poem is a magnificent expression of the poet's humanism, which is essentially a compassion for fellow beings and belief in a wholeness of human existence. The Earth’s dance is ultimately a dance of creation that absorbs the destructive energy in its motion. In one image,

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68 Asomiya Kabitar Alosona, p. 175.
we find Siva drinking poison inconised in Nandalal’s painting and in another there is a hint of Christ drinking from a cup in the last supper, both events signifying the survival of humanity after its actions threaten to bring its own destruction. At one place in the poem we find a reference to Chidambaram, a reference suggesting the dance of Nataraja, epitomizing creative, destructive and regenerative principles. At the end of the poem, this image is replaced by the image of the dancing earth. The earth is a female and she is a fecund mother. The earth’s dance is an agony and in anger, but ultimately it is of joy. That is way the poetic persona asks no not to respond to the phenomenal world in a negative manner:

Never say you don’t have any
That you would never reach there
That the river is without water
That the water do not have fire.

Water and fire are both essential elements for the survival of humanity and their destructive energies are ultimately life giving. Throughout the poem, we find a negative image alternating with positive images, but finally the positive supplements the negative.70

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Mention has already been made about that to understand Phukan's poetry one must have some idea about Japanese and French poetry. Phukan has been acquainted with Western ideas and its meanings and has translated a large number of foreign poems. His translation of Chinese poem is also a matter of noteworthy:

_O young boy._

_The time of each thy moment make engage_

_Days are like flying bird, going_

_Many days ago, thy will be turn old._

However, Phukan has a distinctive voice of his own rooted in humanism. His poetry is a conscious arrangement and composition of perceptions trimmed to the core. Freshness of imagery, simplicity and restrain of diction, compactness of frames and designs, permeation of music and suggestive excellence are unique traits of his poetry that can stir any generation of aesthetes. In certain aspects Nilomani Phukan matches nicely with the Russian poet Alexander Bloch. Like Bloch Phukan experiences a despair and a numbing gloom around him and the poems of Phukan and of Alexander Bloch are equally personal. C.M. Bowra writing about Alexander Bloch says that his deep gloom is the result of disillusionment and we can perhaps explain the deep gloom of

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this poet. Nilomani Phukan also to be due to his disillusionment with the world around him, yet Phukan’s poetical achievement is his own. A vastly read man Phukan has a nice acquaintance with all the modern poetry of the current time.