CHAPTER I

Evolution of Themes and Techniques in the Select Poems of Major Assamese and American Women Poets

I

Sixteenth century is considered as the golden era of Assamese culture and literature when the new Vaisnavite Revolution reached its height and became instrumental to usher few changes to the social system of Assam. Among other the most striking feature of this age was to see the face of the first woman poet in the Assamese literary history. Padmapriya, daughter of Gopal Ata of Bhabanipur (Barpeta) happened to be the first Assamese woman poet whose songs have been properly authenticated in the literary history. It is a global phenomenon that there is great silence of woman in every literary history. Regarding the absence of woman writer in the earlier English Literature, Virginia Woolf finds reasons to claim the popular folk songs and ballads marked as ‘anonymous’ may have been the works of women (Mahanta 148). These days the creativity of women had to cope with oral transmission. In early days in Assam the women had no scope for education and hardly had to see the religious books (puthis) which were usually kept on the dhowa changs (smoke platforms hanging over the fireplaces). In such a situation the emergence of Padmapriya, the first Assamese woman poet is an epoch-making incident on the literary history of Assam. The songs of Padmapriya were apparently religious in tone and content as she was deeply accustomed to the Vaishnavite canon inherited from her father Gopal Ata who was also one of the prominent lyricists after Sankardev and Madhavdev.

Since there has been no written literature in Assamese signed by any woman writer, Padmapriya’s effort is considered to be the beginning for the cause though there is no trace of literary pursuit by any woman after Padmapriya till the modern age.

The history of modern Assamese literature started with the political change initiated by the Britishers in the form of Yandabu treaty in 1826. “The Yandabu pact
ended the *ancien regime* politically; western education ended it intellectually” (Barua, Hem 91). This is also quite obvious that the Britishers did not set their feet on the Assamese soil with a view to make an epoch in the field of literature and education. They came to the region riding on aspirations based on these policies and diplomacies. But the American Baptist Missionaries arrived in Assam carrying along a printing press with a printer that is enough to know their business apart from their religious motifs. In this age of struggle for Assamese literature, the missionaries, though unconsciously, performed a great task to bring about a revolution in Assamese language and literature. They realised that the word of God could only be communicated through mother tongue. Hence they, with the help of local people made efforts to bring back Assamese as official language in courts and schools. They set up schools and published books and journals. They also started a monthly periodical called *Orunodoi* in 1846. Dr Nathan Brown was the founder editor of this first Assamese journal and had been working as such till 1854. This paper made invaluable contribution in the spread of new ideas and enrichment of literature. *Orunodoi*, along with many other printed books, brought literature to the average people and helped the language to set a certain standard in modern sense.

It is evidently seen that though few local male writers came into focus in the pages of *Orunodoi*, but no woman writer from the province was found to be involved in this venture. On the other hand, the wives of the missionaries traced their footprints as the first women writers in Assamese language. They were Eliza Whitney Brown, Harriet B Cutter, Susan M Ward. These women from alien region learned the local language and made effort to compose text books, word-books and story books as well. They also translated several books written in English into Assamese language and contributed with valuable articles in editing the missionary journal *Orunodoi*. The literary merit of their writings, however, evoked a question mark; there were few articles of certain qualities even when these women had not been facilitated with an academia. Similarly *Orunodoi* played an essential role in producing few female writers in Assamese language who were Christian converts. In this context the reference of
three women may well be made. The contributions of these women writers like Subhadri, Numali Safford, and Kunti Carolyn Simon may not be undermined as well. Their literary efforts, however, were not to reveal highly intellectual stance but these small pieces broke the local taboo against female literary works and set examples to make the similar attempts by the native women writers. Thus, the contributions of missionary women were in a small way to the tradition of women writing in Assamese must be acknowledged.

The year of 1873 is considered to be the milestone in the history of Assamese literature and language. Assamese language was reintroduced as medium of instruction on the courts and schools in Assam. The period from 1873 to 1888 is recorded as one of the important phases of Assamese literature. The period, known as Pre-Jonaki age, brought some inevitable changes to the Assamese literature. During this period the Assamese language and literature witnessed modernism in its context and expression. *Orunodoi* lost its glimpses and *Assam Bandhu* (1885-86) under the editorship of Gunabhiram Barua played a vital role to introduce new western thoughts to the Assamese literature. Assamese Romanticism found its ground in the pages of *Assam Bandhu*, eventually which, in the Jonaki age, achieved its completeness (Saikia 39). The most significant achievement of this period undoubtedly was the appearance of Assamese women writers in the literature.

In the pre-Jonaki age four women, namely Tarini Devi, daughter of Haliram Dhekiyal Phookan, Padmavati Devi Phukunani, daughter of illustrious Anandaram Dhekiyal Phookan, Bishnupriya Devi wife of Gunabhiram Barua and Swarnalata Barua, daughter of Gunabhiram Barua succeeded with few literary outputs supported by strong intellectual background of their family they were blessed of. Tarini Devi (1829-1892) became famous composing some religious songs similar to the coveted *Borgits* (Celestial songs) in tone and context. Her songs also bear some acquaintance with Assamese folk songs. Bishnupriya Devi (1839-1892), one of the pre-Jonaki Assamese women writers, however, did not show much strength in the field of poetry. She was basically a conventional story teller who published a collection of moral tales entitled
Nitikatha in 1883. Besides she earned reputations as a social activist who, as the first local woman, had initiated few vital social issues like woman emancipation and woman empowerment through education. Swarnalata Barua (1871-1932) also made herself known in the pre-Jonaki (also Jonaki) age through her outstanding prose writings on some ideal female characters with the Vanshnavite principles. “Koremoti Baii,” published in Assam Bandhu in 1855, is such a prose piece to reflect her literary ideology. Aarhi Tirotu (Model woman) is only published book to her credit. She contributed regularly to Jonaki and made her presence felt who inspired the other women writers of her time and succeeding periods.

Padmavati Devi Phukanani (1853-1927) emerged as a prolific poet in the post-Jonaki literary journal Banhi published under the editorship of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Her poems were mostly written on the theme of nature praising beauty and pageantry of it. Three of her poems - “Phul-Rani” (Queen of Flowers), “Prakritir Sobha” (The Beauty of Nature), “Prarthana” (Prayer), published in Banhi, had held this feature. She was keenly interested in telling of the ancient tales based on Vaishavite doctrines and consciously discarded western Romantic values. In one of her poems “Prarthana” (Prayer) published in Banhi in 1910, she expresses her deep reverence to the Almighty. In “Prakritir Sobha” (Beauty of Nature) published in Banhi in 1914, Padmavati advocates the same thought- God is great and is playing with the Universe. In “Basanta” (The Spring), she narrates the seasonal changes in nature and the influence of it in the minds of men brought by the spring season. The form and content of this poem evoke ancient Indian poetry rather than twentieth-century Romanticism in Assamese literature. Padmavati was embedded with the national poetic impulse, and never ever lost the hold of it in her imagination. It was thus with the very sure investment that Padmavati sought in these early Assamese modern poems the suitable way for the expression of her own maturing poetic power.

There is no denying the fact that the Jonaki age was the period of male writers. Illustrious poets, authors Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Chandrakumar Agarwala, Hemchandra Goswami among others were prominent men of literature who dominated
the entire age. By the early twentieth-century, women’s education in Assam was seen somewhat progressed. The Assamese girls studying in Calcutta schools and newly established girls’ schools in Assam started reading magazines like *Jonaki* (1889), *Usha* (1907-1916), *Alochoni* (1910) and *Banhi* (1909-1933) and subsequently became occasional contributors of them writing mostly the poems, also few prose pieces. In the first decade of twentieth-century, Barada Kumari Bora was the only known woman poet who published a poem entitled “Bancha” in the third issue (1909) of *Usha*, an Assamese journal edited by Padmanath Gohainbarua. This was one of the earlier Romantic poems written by a woman in the ‘post-Jonaki age.’

Besides, few women poets with the real claim of poetic genius came into focus in the second decade of twentieth-century. Among them Dharmeswari Devi Baruani (1892-1960), Jamuneswary Khataniyar (1899-1924) and Nalinlbala Devi (1898-1977) were the most remarkable names who appeared in the Assamese literature of the period with ingenuous commitment chiefly in poetry. All of them were born in the 1890s. Unlike Padmavati Devi Phuknani, the trio had substantially shown their inclination to the west-inspired Romantic ideology. Of them, Nalinibala Devi was most successful.

Nalinibala Devi (1889-1960) is daughter of “Karmabeer” Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, poet and frontline leader of the Indian Freedom Movement. Born into a privileged literary family the life of Nalinibala Devi was enlightened with the father’s wisdom and foresight. Owing to her father’s enlightened vision; she had bravely faced off all hurdles she met in her life. Despite her life stricken with one misfortune after another she had not totally lost the passion for life. She was married before puberty and lost her husband very early. She came back to her father’s house with her five children. Her father’s moral stand was her strength to bear grief with grace and dignity. He initiated her to the *Bhagavat Gita* and the *Upanisads* and the verses of these epics brought great solace to her mind and the need of her spirituality thus accomplished. She made up her mind with this reawakened spirit which found expression in numerous poems with noble proportion. As has been noticed, “in her search for consolation and
light, she delved deep into Indian philosophy, more particularly the *Bhagavat Gita* and the *Upinisads* and the Assamese Vaisanavite literature and these studies fostered in her as serene meditative mood and deep faith and hope in God” (Barua 30). Further, Nalinibala got attracted by the poetic philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore whose influences could overtly be felt throughout her poetic diction and thought. As a mystic poet, Nalinibala had always been moved by an unknown and undefined restlessness of mind. Her poems are the gift of anguished heart which has bloomed like lotus in deep squelching mud of dark pessimism and transformed the pangs of her earthly loss into sublime sorrow. This same central theme has been instilled all her three collections of poetry– *Sandhiyar Sur* (Evening Melody), *Saponor Sur* (Melody of Dreams) and *Parasmani* (The Touchstone). The source of melody of her poetry was her personal tragedy she experienced in life, a lonely life which she offers solely at the lap of the Almighty. Her belonging to the Indian philosophy gleaned from *Bhagavat Gita* and *Upinisads* in her early age, molded her poetic ideology and made her different from the frontrunners of English Romanticism.

The Indian mystics, despite the pervasiveness of the idea of mysticism, are conspicuously maneuvered to the anticipation of a life beyond this earth which often results in the rejection of the sensuous world. But the poets, like Wordsworth, experience the sublime feeling of a mystic in total absorption in this world. The fact is that mysticism becomes a prominent force of Romanticism. Nalinibala’s mysticism sounds Upanisodic philosophy; it is very like Wordsworth’s. Nalinibala Devi suffers from the divine discontent which inspires in all Romantic poets their curiosity, inquisitiveness, their restlessness and their extreme individual exertion. Nalinibala Devi is gratified by the image of infinity in everything worldly. She never becomes pessimistic to experience the world being material and life being short. She eludes everything to the all pervading power that creates and controls all events of nature and human life and is present in everything. The poet becomes oblivious to everything in her pursuit of the supreme and experience a divine restlessness in this process.
Mysticism is based on the concept of a spiritual and transcendental world. While Transcendentalism in its true sense was first realised in Assamese Romantic poetry through the poetry of Candrakumar Agarlwa; spiritualism found its perfect expression in Nalinibala Devi. Sandhiar Sur (Evening Melody), Nalinibala’s first book of verse has disposed the fact. “Param Trishna” (Supreme Thirst), a poem published in the book, may be considered with little exaggeration to be the epitome of her philosophy of life. Through this poem, she has asserted the universally insatiable hunger of human soul and also has established the solution of all queries of insatiety. Being a devotee of the Indian mysticism, Nalinibala believes in the fruits of Karma and envisages that man is reborn. In “Param Trishna,” she concedes this note:

Many a time I was born on your lap
And many a time went back
With the load of Karma unfulfilled
Come back many a time to thee.

(Trans. N C Bordoloi, Barua Preeti 13)

She has realised that man’s inherent yearning for peace and beauty is not worldly; it is but an attempt to consign oneself to Eternal Beauty:

The endless thirst for beauty in mortal eyes
In not in short lived, but
They are the desire for eternal happiness
And eternal thirst for the beauty
of the ever beautiful. (Ibid 13-14)

Like Wordsworth, every beautiful object of nature reminds Nalanibala Devi of the beauty of God and makes her to perceive it as trajectory of the Eternal Beauty. The recognition of eternal beauty reflected in the object of nature has moved the poet to surrender to God and the creation of Beauty. Like John Keats, she is also haunted by the principle of beauty; while Keats’ concept of beauty was based on sense, hers is on the spirit. She attains the sublime feeling of eternal beauty in all the objects of nature. “The seasons and the ever changing beauty of external nature are but the manifestation of the
Universal spirit between whom and the poet nature herself acts as the point of contact and the medium of manifestation” (Barua, B K 30).

The Romantic poets believed that man’s spiritual and intellectual life would have turned lifeless as a desert if he is not possessed with an all pervasive thirst. Nalinabala tries to know him, who inspires the thirst. She also believes that the human soul, particularly of poets, bears an eternal thirst which creates restlessness of mind although he is surrounded by a nature’s bounty. Her unstable heart finally realises that the mystery of God and its creations are endless and human being is not an exception. This perennial spirit is essential to the relationship between nature and man. Among the natural things Nalinabala Devi finds true order of life. In one of her poems, “Param Trishna,” the poet expresses-

Eyes that wander for unbound beauties of earth,  
Heart that pines for sweet pleasures of senses,  
These are not trivial, meaningless in our momentary life;  
They are steps upwards,  
For realisation of the self and the Absolute.  

(Trans. Barua B K 32)

Nalinabala Devi’s poetry reveals two trends, spiritual and patriotic. Patriotic to her is habitation of humanity. In her is never felt any sense of conflict between nationalism and patriotism. Both through out of her poetry have merged in the sense of universalism. Her “patriotic poems are any political overtone, and may mean Assam as well as India,” (Sarma 13) and these undergo a process of elevation from patriotism to universalism and from universalism to transcendentalism. The “Bharati” (Indiana), “Oti Maramar Mor Eikhan Desh” (Very Dear is this Land of Mine), “Amar Opoja Thai” (The Land of our Birth), “Mahanadar Atma Kahini” (Autobiography of the Great River), “Janambhumi” (The Motherland) are some such poems with spiritual flavour. Besides Sandhiar Sur (1928), Saponor Sur (1948) and Parasmoni (1945), Nalinibala Devi published four other books- Jugadevata (The God of the Age, 1958), Jagrīti
(1962), *Alakananda* (1964) and *Antim Sur* (The Last Music, 1977). These later poems ride on the same belief based on her spiritual longing nurtured in her earlier poems.

Born and brought up in a religiously enlightened atmosphere, Nalinibala, like her woman peer of succeeding age, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, did not allow to have attached any orthodoxy and bigotry to her creative faculty. She is a mystic not by religious association, but by temperament and ultimate wisdom. “No poems of mystic thought have ever been freer than hers of creative emotions. She has drunk deep into perennial spring of Eastern philosophy and Vaishnavite mysticism” (Barua, Preeti 11).

As a modern poet with a Romantic inclination Nirmalprabha Bordoloi reveals a kind of tone and approach of her poetry that is much closer to Nalinibala Devi’s. Her Romantic bent does not lag behind that of Nalinibala’s evocation of different symbols which endorse the man-nature reciprocity. Nirmalprahba, in one of her poems, “Noon at Basistha,” posits a spiritual conflict to form a web of mysterious link between the human and the non-human world:

My soul submerged  
In the wheeze of the forest  
In the cavern of the rocks  
In the wild-creepers

In the leaves of the tall-trees  
As substantiation  
The silent noon remains lynching.  
(Trans mine, Sarma 332)

Dharmeswari Devi Baruani is one among three venerable women poets in the Romantic age of Assamese literature. She has to her credit four books of poems—*Phular Sarai* (Basket of Flowers, 1929), *Pranar Praras* (Touch of the Soul, 1952), *Ashrudhar* (Streams of Tears, 1963) and *Jivantori* (Raft of Life). The latter two were published collectively. The poems of these collections “are expressions of a profound faith in Pantheism and the desire of the individual soul to get merged into the universal soul. The poet does not believe that God lives in Heaven, which to her a creation of man’s
imagination. He is present in all things, both great and small, that we behold around us” (Barua, B K 33).

Though limited in range, Dharmaswari Devi wrote on some basic human problems. Her subjects are few and are constantly repeated- love and loneliness, pain and pleasure, God and religion- but these are apparently linked to the rich Indian mystical heritage.

She, like other mystic poets also yearns for God, to feel His presence within herself. The poet, in a way to get rid of earthly sorrows, resigns all her experiences to Almighty and through a process of sublimation, has elevated them from the mundane to spiritual. The basic condition of attaining the truth “is the complete elevation of the moral life, including the absolute control of all passions and desires, abandonment of worldly ambitions and hopes and attainment of an unruffled pace of mind”(Dasgupta 61). The dreary intercourse of daily life cannot penetrate into the mystic’s soul, at all times, gets it vanished in the reverence of the ultimate soul. Dharmeswari Devi avows the all pervading spirit in all nature that is found everywhere and in all object of universe. This Indian thought based on Uponisodic Philosophy, is sustained throughout the poetry of contemporary Indian Romantic poets and is also explored by Assamese Romantic poets like Dharmeswari Devi. In “Viswa Sur” (Melody of the Universe) the Assamese counterpart writes-

The lyre of Providence has tunes
Which pervade the whole universe.
That tune charms the world,
And the mind of man.
Pervading the Infinite Universe,
There is but one melody.
And that reflects the Supreme Truth.
(Trans. Barua B K 34)

Unlike Nalinibala’s recurring depictions of successive personal losses and mental traumas, Dharmeswari Devi sustains none of such melancholy in her poetry.
She, with robust optimism anticipates of the Supreme Union. In “Milan Prayasa,” she writes-

On that day,
Anxiously with the beloved
Pick thee up and embrace. (Trans. Barua, B K 34)

Nature for Dhameswari Devi is a great source of solace for the tormented souls. She adores every object of nature with a reverence to the Eternal Beauty which alleviates her mental and corporal suffering. She never endeavours to impose personal pangs and agonies in her poetry. For her, nature like human life is also a creation of One Creator whom she considers omnipotent and offered completely herself to His feet. In “Argho,” the poet attunes the same note:

Come my dear
master of heart
to the broken house of olagi²
Give me place in your feet
I am waiting eternally. (Trans. mine, Bora 64)

Again in “Kon Tumi,” she expresses her sense of supplication to the Almighty:

You are mine and I am yours
Let me absorb inside you.
(Trans mine, Bora 64)

Dharmeswari Devi’s poems are mostly based on simple and clear notions of the Indian spiritual convention. There are neither obtrusive deliberations nor complicacy of logics but a linear explanation of Indian Philosophy. Hence, her poetry imbibes with deep human passion surrogated by a silent womanly tender and devotional heart.

Jamuneswari (Saikia) Khataniar (1898-1924), one of the few women poets of the Assamese Romanticism, is also a direct heiress to the Indian spiritual tradition and Assamese Vaishnavite mysticism. She, a self-taught lady, like Nalinibala Devi, delves deep into the Indian philosophy adopted from various Hindu scriptures such as Puranas and Upanisads. She finds poetic expression much earlier than Nalinibala Devi and has
in her credit the first Assamese book of poems published by a woman poet. She was hardly twenties while published *Arun* in 1919 which consisted twenty four poems. “Her output is small, but she has a quality which sets her apart from her two counterparts Nalinibala Devi and Dharmeswari Devi Baruani who with their emphasis on the spiritual and metaphysical conform more to the conventional notion of the feminine” (Mahanta 170-171).

Jamuneswari is virtually a poet of love and exploration of life. She yearns to discover a larger meaning of life but not at the cost of eternal bliss and spiritual joy. Poetry for her is an expression of joy of love that gives rise of the same meaning often when the poet is caught by despair and unaccomplished desire. Unlike Nalinibala Devi and Dharmeswari Devi, she does not consider poetry as a way of transformation of personal grief and earthly sorrows to sublime feeling and spiritual enlightenment. She nevertheless seems to evoke the sense of Romantic melancholy found in all poets of the period. Regarding melancholy and restlessness of mind, Jamuneswari, unlike the Romantics, does not take nature as healer and soother of the tormented souls. As felt in the poem, “Kiba Zen Nai Nai” (As if something is missing) though beauty of nature is well cherished glorifying its series of rhapsodies, none of these can refrain the poet’s mind from the feeling of void and restlessness:

The balmy morning breezes  
Slowly lull the feverish souls asleep  
Then why does this ever restless mind of mine  
Feel all the day and night that something is missing.  
(Trans. Mahanta, Aparna171)

Almost similar note is heard in the following lines of Nalinibala Devi’s famous poem, “Param Trishna” (Thirst Eternal):

We have received all, but it seems that  
Something is missing  
Words fail; the soul loses the feeling. (ibid)
But, unlike Nalinibala Devi and Nirmalprabha, the contemplation of spiritual restlessness was in the context of soul’s eternal quest finds no place in Januneswari Khataniyar’s poetry. “Her anguish is not the pain of actual suffering, but the romantic pain at the transitory nature of love, beauty and youth reflecting the Keatsian view of life as a place where but to think is to be full of sorrow” (Mahanta 172). One of her poems, “Bishadar Mala” (Garland of Sorrow) is evidently of the similar explanation. In “Mrityu Sandhya” (Evening of Death), she contemplates an echo of Keats’ philosophy of death:

As I lie on the lap of death
I see the many radiant worlds
Even as I shut these two eyes of mine.
(Trans. Mahanta, Aparna172)

In “Ode to a Nightingale” Keats envisages-

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain-
To thy high requiem become a sod. (Lall 155)

Nirmalprabha Bordoloi avows her spiritual quest for life and also never hesitates to acknowledge death as a premonition. In “Unvanquished,” she expresses-

I shall die tomorrow
Let me remain alive today
O my swift-flowing sorrow
Keep flowing
Through the narrow-crested forest
I am not weary. (Trans. Dutta, The Telegraph)

Since the end of World War II, “there has been a visible stir everywhere- partly the result of a new hope, and partly the stutter of a new despair. A new generation comes up with striking individuality of its own, sharpness in its feature, an angularity in its gestures, a tone of defiance (or at least of nonconformity) in its speech, a glean of hope in its eyes, -a new ardour perhaps and even new rhythms and nuances and acerbities of speech. There is ‘new’ poetry in England, in France, in the states, -and, not
least in India” (Iyenger 641). The poets delve deep into the changing circumstances and started reconstructing poetry with new themes and techniques. The Assamese younger poets imported new subjects to their poetry and to have predisposed to the socialist and Marxist theories. These younger poets influenced by the theory and technique of European symbolists among whom T.S. Eliot is the significant. These new poets freed themselves from the bondage of traditional themes, verse patterns, techniques and taboos who also entrusted their poetry with new techniques utilising new rhymes, stress on unfamiliar and unusual similes, sudden contrasts, oblique implications, obscurity and literary allusions. In this post-war phase, Assamese poetry like other regional literature started witnessing a departure from delight in beauty of nature and human love of the Romantic poetry. It instead strikes a different ideology on life and society.

Here it needs mention that by that time all the Assamese journals ceased to publish. Some of the great personalities like Bhawananda Dutta, Kamalnarayan Dev, Chakreswar Bhattacharyya made efforts to publish another Assamese literary journal called *Jayanti*, which owing to the privilege circumstances brought about the changes of literary ideologies as well as subjects and technical niceties inculcating them in the ways of thinking of younger poets. At this juncture the stream of older literary philosophy is inundated in the waves of robust newer thoughts and modernism emerged in literary evolution gets gradually divorced from the spiritual exuberance of Romanticism. This is observed with the awe that in this transitional stage of Assamese literature the older poets become hesitant to leave the existing taboos and tradition and practically ceased to write. The new poets on the other hand, were yet to have new intellectual trajectory. “This age is called an age of decadence for Assamese literature. But then, it is also true to say that often decadentism contains in its womb, germs of many future growths” (Barua, Hem 112). Because of that perhaps Assamese poetry too obtained its momentum slowly but surely in the succeeding ages.

The modern poetry is very difficult to define as it stands against Romanticism and finds the fact that “all modern Indian poetry is sustained by the living waters of our
racial tradition (*the Vedas, the Upanisads*, the two great epics, the stream of Vaishnava or Saiva devotional poetry, the adoration of Himavant and Kumari, of the Ganga and Godabari- the treasure house of Indian myth and legend, the memories of our racial or local history and by the containing breezes from the west” (Iyenger 642). This is the poetry of protest and problems, of hopes and desperations, obscurity and illusion, and there is also a return of romances; there are the sensual symbolic and realistic explorations and there is the guidance of spirit as well.

Assamese modern poetry began to glean the requirements for maturing and started obliterating the rampant of tradition. The poets like Hem Barua, Navakanta Barua, during the first phase of post-war Assamese poetry, may claim the credit of taking initiative in the intellectual and symbolic poetry. No name of woman poet had been traced with remarkable contributions to the poetry of this period. But the next two decades, regarding contributions of women to Assamese literature, proved to be much prolific with the emergence of three women poets namely Nilima Dutta (1925-2002), Lakshahira Das (1933-) and Nirmalprabha Bordoloi (1933-2004). All of them are university professors with brilliant academic profiles whose poetry has given the shape of the contemporary Assamese poetry since World War II.

Nilima Dutta has four collections of poems to her credit- *Sesh Nai* (1967), *Andhakup* (1970), *Prabhakar* (1977), and *Surar Chhabi Aru Pranar Sur* (1988). Like other contemporary women poets of her time, Nilima Dutta’s creation was equally characterised by Romantic and modern traits. Some of her poems claim her worth of skillful delineation of nature symbols. Nature, in her poetry, pays the healing touch to the ever anguished hearts though which she tries to blot out her sense of skepticism from life. She has better study of modern minds consequently which she efficiently delves deep into the new social order on the basis of progressive doctrines and humanitarian cause. Though not overtly initiates the theory of dark-Romanticism, Nilima Dutta, throughout her works, ensures poetic eloquence issuing notes of inner agonies of modern minds that recognises her as a social philosopher. The poems of her
last collection, “Surar Chabi aru Pranar Sur” like “Bodhon” (Intuition), “Abhab” (Poverty), “Kshudha” (Hunger), “Sramar Dan” (Price of Labour), “Sitor Nadi” (River of Winter), “Matir Sipa” (Root of the Earth) etc. reflect the social viewpoint promoting an urge for reformation. But she earned popularity as a modern poet through her handful of poems composed with neo-Romantic considerations- “Nistabdha Jalukbari” (Silent Jalukbari), “Joubon” (Adolescence), “Nursery School,” “Barshar Chhabi” (Picture of Rainy Season), “Kishori” (Young Lady) etc. are the specimens of this category.

Lakshahira Das, another frontline woman poet of post-war Assamese poetry, is a poet by choice and situation. She is the most significant woman lyric poet in Assamese poetry after Nirmalprabha Bordoloi. Lakshahira Das published the first book of poems in 1957 entitled Pran Ganga which was followed by another two collections - Bhaswar Lagna (1974) and Abagahan Muhurto. Besides, she also has to her credit of seven books of lyrics- Prathama (1952), Sursetu (1956), Geetargha (19560), Mayurpankhi (1968), Antargata Nadi (1979), O’ Mor chikuni Desh (1982), Lakshahirar Geet (1989).

Lakshahira basically is a lyric poet with Romantic inclination. In most of her poems and songs there has been a feeling of void and a sense of restlessness of heart. This romantic gesture resembles her with Nalinibala Devi. Her aesthetic consideration and mystical approach have found customs with clear vision throughout her poems included in “Pran Ganga.” The poems in this regard well cited are “Upasana” (Prayer), “Dristipat” (Vision), “Rupsetu” (Bridge of Beauty), “Niruttar” (Answerless) etc. The poems of her second collection, “Baswar Lagna” (1974), take her closer to the modern sensibility and these poems intertwine the labyrinth of different social philosophies of the contemporary society. The poetry of Lakshahira Das bears a cumulative posture with ambivalence of variegated poetic gestures that makes her a poet of different philosophies. Hence she has not been categorised to any specific school. But with the engrossing faculties, she could turn herself from a simple Romantic upholder to a buoyant neo-Romantic advocator. The poems included in her third collection entitled Abogahon Muhurto (1978) deal with a few basics of modern construe on the intricacies
of the subconscious minds, tensions, allergies, dogmas and constricted sensibilities. As a modern poet she often carries a grief stricken heart that keeps insisting the poet for elevating her earthly emptiness towards an esthetic entirety. Few poems like “Samakal,” “Tejimola,” reflect her empathy to the contemporary feministic impulses.

Like Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, both Nilima Dutta and Lakshahira Das are the poets of soft feelings who with their cosmopolitan expressions could satisfy the poetry lovers of their time and later. In exercising such volatile modern sensibility these poets conform new rhyme style and enhance their expressions through evocative though simple paradoxes, imageries and symbols. They, during the whole gamut of creations, remain free from imposing any obscurity of feelings.

Living in the modern era, the trio has been quixotically susceptible in using the subjects and style in their poetry. It suggests their Romantic hangover; they could never escape in entire their creative life. These poets contemplate their spiritual essence of natural objects as a substitute of human feelings. They, as modern poets with Romantic sensibility, have precisely been socially concerned and such consciousness is deeply embedded in the rich Indian spiritual legacy. Like Nirmalprbha Bordoloi, Nilima Dutta and Lakshahira Das express their deep concern over the crumbling social values as a result of turn down in religious and spiritual considerations. Nilima Dutta’s “Gorakhahaniya” (Erosion), Lakshahira’s “Abrito Nagna Samay” (The Veiled-Naked Time) and Nirmalprabha’s “Karunatam” (Sorrow), “Mormantik” (Heartrending) are few poems of such idealistic bent. In “Mormantik” (Sorrow), Nirmalprabha evinces her social commitment bemoaning the parting of a social system:

I saw him going
Away at the time
When the sun was
Declining
.....

Following him
Went away
The golden sunshine
Of the month of Aghon (Barua, Ajit 53)
Lakshahira, in one of her poems, “Antargata Nadi,” (The Cherished River) expresses similar note:

Time and again
that music keeps my sleep away,
my heart covered with feeling of void
as if something is missing.
(Trans. mine, Bora 141)

In “Sesh Nai” (Endless), Nilima Dutta contemplates the meaning of life while she, like Nirmalprabha, traverses all along the nature’s agents but to see the end of the flight:

Where is the end
Of this way- the hills, desert
Of trouble-burdened journey!
(Trans. mine, Bora 139)

Nirmalprabha, on the other hand, negotiates a state of consciousness of mind that unveils the truth of the reality of life. Her flight, in this regard, is endless which finds expression in one of her philosophical poems, “Ceaseless Journey”:

It seems, in endless life
I am going, going
Going just like this
My body of golden colour
Is turning into ashes
......
I have not got the answer
To my search
I keep on going
I want to see the truth. (Barua, Ajit 70).
As has been discussed the literary output in the colonial period in America was below the level of expectation. Obviously there were certain socio-political factors acted behind this cause. The question of survival seemed to be urgent and vital for these pioneer settlers than to put their mind for literary compositions. Notwithstanding the hardships of their life, some of them did find the production of poetry. Amongst these poets of this time Anne Bradstreet was the most important name. She emerged as the New World’s first female poet. She immigrated to America as a young woman of eighteen and kept her sensitive mind open to the sights and impressions around her in a new land of infinite variety.

Women of this time were considered intellectual inferiors, even outside the Puritan religion. Puritan Law dictated love between spouses must also be repressed, so as not to be distracted from their devotion to God. Bradstreet’s first book, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprang up in America* was published without her knowledge by her brother-in-law in 1650. Critics of the time accused her stealing her ideas for poems from men and thought she was neglecting her duties as a Puritan woman by writing. The fact that amid her manifold work as the wife of an important official and the mother of eight children, she managed to write poetry, is evident enough of the genuineness of her poetic potential. The book consisted of poems- “The Four Seasons,” “The Four Elements,” “The Four Constitutions,” and “Four Monarchies.” These poems written in tedious heroic couplets contain an amazing erudition. The “Four Monarchies” overtly traces the influences the Bible, Plutarch, Usher and Walter Raleigh. The poem “Contemplations” written in seven-line stanza with an Alexandrine reveals the impact of Spenser. Through this poem, Bradstreet proves her susceptibility to the majesty of the beauty of nature as the poet sustains an amazing sense of glory for the creator (Sun):

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How full of glory then must their Creator be,
Who gave this bright light luster unto thee!
Admired, Adored forever be that Majesty. (www. bratleby.com)
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The poem ends with a bold assertion and an ardent faith in man’s immortality. Her shorter poems draw more interest which basically imbibes the religious note. “Weary Pilgrim,” sounds a religious note with an idea that the earth is not the permanent resort for man. Another religious poem, “Flesh and the Spirit” finds expression of the puritan concept of the dichotomy between spirit and the flesh. The poet wishes to be turned loose the ties to Flesh, but because they are the same person her wishes cannot be granted. If they are one in the same person, how can Spirit be sent to Heaven and Flesh takes the world and all that will? In the last two stanzas Bradstreet is talking about the afterlife, the only place where Spirit can be absolutely free from Flesh:

If I of heaven may have my fill
Take thou the World and all that will.

(www.writework.com)

Anne Bradstreet did not fear to show her emotions though it was condoned in her religion. She as a Puritan woman was imposed of certain limitations regarding the subjects of her poetic pursuit such as her husband, her children and the God. Her exquisite and tender love poem, “To My Dear and Loving Husband” reveals her style quite well:

If ever two were one, then surely we,
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women; if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
or all. (www. anne badstreet. com)

The expression of love in this poem is very much in the traditional manner and lack of originality. This is different from Elizabethan love poem because of its free play of their mutual love gratifying them here on the earth and may linger long after this life:

Then while we live in love let’s persevere
That when we live no more we may love ever. (ibid)
Emily Dickinson is sensitive to the words “wife” and “husband,” and often found ways to avoid them. She lets us know that she is not to be identified with the role of wife or woman. For her marriage or maturity is a kind of death for a woman:

I’m “wife”-I’ve finished that-
That other state-
I’m Czar-I’m “Woman” now— (p 199)

Bradstreet’s another important poem, “Upon the Burning of our Home” explicitly found a poetic expression on real event of her life. She lost many books of her total collection in personal library after her house was set ablaze and this even itself expires a poem entitled as above. Bradstreet rejects the anger and grief that this worldly tragedy has caused and despite a sense of deep loss she envisages the assurance of heaven as consolation:

And when I could no longer look,
I blest his grace that gave and took
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so ’twas just.
It was his own, it was not mine
Far be it that I should repine.
(http://en.Wikipedia.org/anne.bradstreet)

Like Emily Dickinson, much of her poetry is based on observation of the world of her with the prima facie focus on domestic and religious themes. Despite the traditional attitude towards women of her time, she precisely valued the knowledge and intellect. She was a free thinker and some deemed her an early feminist. It is her insight and wisdom on women and politics that has been pertinent to the interest of present literary community. Bradstreet taking advantage of her education delved into many areas previously untouched by most women writers of her time and her works endured radical changes in American culture and political views and continues to inspire and unveil truths which had hardly invoked Dickinson’s cannons.
Phillis Wheatley, an outstanding woman poet of eighteenth century, was the first published African-American poet and African-American woman who published a book called *Poems on Various Subjects*. She was born in Africa (probably Senegal) in 1753 and made a slave at age seven. She was purchased by the Wheatley family of Boston and as was the custom of the time, she was given the Wheatley family’s surname. Here she was taught English and Christianity and impressed by her rapid learning the Wheatley family also taught her some Latin, ancient history, mythology, and classical literature. Being influenced heavily by the works of Alexander Pope, John Milton, Homer, Horace and Virgil, Phillis Wheatley’s studies started to gravitate towards the realm of poetry.

In 1770, Wheatley wrote a poetic tribute to George Whitfield that received widespread acclaim. Her poetry overwhelmingly resolves around Christian themes with many poems dedicated to famous personalities. Almost one third of her poems consist of elegies, the rest being on various affiliations as religious classical and abstract themes. Though very little in number, Wheatley is not reluctant to account her own situation in poems like “On being brought from Africa to America.” There is special mention of inheritance of slavery that no longer remains as a sense of isolation and however finds way for better living in the world:

'’Twas merely brought one from my Pagan land
Taught my benighted soul to understand.
That there is a god, that there is a saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew
“Some view our sable race with scornful eye
There colour is a diabolic dye.”
Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Coin,
May be refin’d, and join th’ angelic train.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillis_Wheatley)

Phillis Wheatley, like Dickinson, believed that power of poems is immeasurable. She wrote about what she knew and experienced. Her poetry is not the outcome of an experience undergone superficially through reading a novel but bears significance of
her personal ideas and consideration. “Wheatley had more in mind than simple conformity. It will be shown later that her allusion to the sun god and to the goddess of the moon, always appearing as they do here in close association with her quest for poetic inspiration, are of central importance to her” (Shields 100). One of her poems, “Ode to Neptune” signifies her life in many ways. The language of the poem starts out shaky and chaotic but the mood is adventurous yet scary (reflecting much of her life experiences). The language and attitude, by the end of the poem seem to generate an emotion of a calm and peaceful journey. The poem is written in three stanzas of four lines in iambic tetrameter followed by a concluding couplet in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme of the poem is ababce.

It has been clearly observed that with the view to make her poetry meaningful she recurrently uses three different elements: Christianity, classicism and hierophantic solar worship. The used of classicism and Christianity do not only combine to make the structure of Wheatley’s work completely pagan or Christian due to the third element of her poetry, i.e. hierophantic solar worship. Through this African culture she, like her forefathers, indicates her inclination toward the worship of Sun gods. To this end she refers to the different words for sun several times as such “Aurora appears eight times, Apollo seven, Phoebus twelve, and Sol twice” (Shields 103). This is in fact a clear indication that the word light is of high importance for her because it marks her history alluding to her past which she had left behind. Further she uses the word son instead of Sun inflicting a pun on the son of Christ that also bears evidence of her biblical connotations. Other biblical references include the references to muses. Wheatley uses the phrase ‘heavily muse’ in two of her poems: “To a Clergy Man on the Death of his Lady” and “Isaiah LXIII” signifying her idea of the Christian of deity and the biblical effects that inspire her work. Further the use of classicalism distinguished her poetry as original and unique and evokes special attention. Being the first Afro-American poet Wheatley earned accomplishment in her and for her to find out the writing style outside the norms was courageous. It is also right to speak on her poetry as contemplative and reflective rather than brilliant and sparkling.
New England after the Revolution passed through “a period of intellectual stagnation, chiefly because its dominant classes fell into a state of panic about radicalism if the French Revolution and the religious infidelity associated with it” (David & Varshney 12). During this period these classes resolutely opposed any introduction of new or alien ideas. But in such an age of turbulent changes, it was not possible for them to be restrained from the shifting values and multiple complexities of life. The seeds of Romanticism transplanted from Europe and germinating in a soil fertilized by the Puritan intelligentsia eventually flowered into the so-called New England Renaissance. As a matter of the fact, with the view to resist the irreligious materialism writers like Longfellow, Lowell tried to withdraw into a world of Romantic imagination. But this kind of isolation of the thinkers into an ivory tower of their private world of imagination could not last long. The swift current toward realism could not be resisted. “Realism implies a scientific outlook upon life, sociological and psychological, instead of the artistic and poetic outlook of Romanticism; it implies cool impersonality, self-effacement, instead of warm personal feelings, confidences and confessions. Other characteristics are patient observation instead of flashes, intuition and insight; facts, detailed documentary and verifiable, instead of guesses, dreams, visions, a materialistic instead of idealistic interpretation of life” (Rao 3). This kind of realism found expression in various forms of literature mainly contributed by Mark Twain, Howell and James. Despite the growing popularity of this new trend, earlier poets like Bryant, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, and Emerson continued to appeal to readers and influence their tastes. The fact of the matter is that poetry had lost its vitality and become a dead art looking for rebirth in the hands of greater poets. The nineteenth-century American poetry primarily was dominated by the males. With the appellation ‘nineteenth-century female poets’ that generally comes to mind is Emily Dickinson who was not even published during her life time except a small handful of poems. There were dozens of other American women poets in this period who were writing and being widely read, and forgotten shortly soon after their deaths.
The history of the nineteenth-century American poetry was a record of constant experiments in verse. American poets including women poets made serious and concerned efforts to give it a new sense of direction. They tried to explore the possibilities of the American verse and to provide a new face-lift its fast dwindling image. American poetry consolidated its own position by the end of the nineteenth-century. The dominant aspect of the nineteenth-century American poetry was the Romantic fervent, which was imbied by the poets to react against the spirit of eighteenth-century. The American women poets like Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), Lucy Larcom (1824-1893), Rose Terry Cooke (1832-1892), Helen Hunt Jackson (1831-1885), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), Harriet Prescott Spofford (1835-1921), Sarah Piatt (1836-1919), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911), Eliza Earle etc. took poetry not for its rational appeal, but for its spontaneous emotional flow. They valued their own experience to a degree that fed new poetry. The entire gamut of human emotion- joy, love, fear, regret, hope, faith etc. all these were richly reflected in their poetry. Opposite to the neo-classicist’s abiding faith in society, the nineteenth-century American women poets along with the frontline male poets, ceased to speak on behalf of a whole community. They often spoke only for themselves. They were confirmed individualists. These poets desired above all else the free exercise of his individual powers, whether of thought or action or imagination. They emphasised the dignity of the individual soul in its immediate relationship with God. They demanded respect for the individual soul and looked man with humanitarian sympathy. Besides, the spirit of nationalism and transcendentalism put deep impact on the erstwhile American women poets. These poets also showed great interest in the ideal realism. It is interesting to notice that a strange blend of Romantic impulse and realistic technique was effectively enforced in their school. This is overtly reflected in many of the women poets who give interpretation of the life of an area, its dialect and its folk expression. The women poets like Lydia Sigourney, Watkins Harper, Emma Lazarus wrote against the evils of slavery. Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865) frequently engaged the Native American and anti-slavery concerns within a religious
context and often took the form of elegy. On this surface her poems include “Funeral of Mazeen,” “Indian Girl’s Burial,” “Indian Names” etc. she also put social viewpoints on the current events flavouring lyrical sense that result in such poems- “On Administration of Michigan into the Union,” “The Western Immigrant” and “Mother of Washington.” Sigourney, in one of her famous poems “Indian Names,” gives a respectful, poignant adieu to the diminishing Native American:

Ye shall say they all have passed away
That noble race and brave,
That their light canoes have vanished
From of the crested wave.

The mid the forests where they roam’d
There rings no hunter’s shout;
But their name is on your waters,
Ye may not wash it out.  (Bennet: 1998 12)

To Dickinson as to Sigourney, the loved dead were astral guides and spiritual mediums to a better world. The asterisk customarily added to a list of names in order to indicate the dead became a concrete emblem of their starry destiny as in Poem 1616 Emily Dickinson sent to the son of her cherished friend Samuel Bowles:

Who abdicated Ambush
And went the way of Dusk,
And now against his subtle Name
There stands an Asterisk
As confident of him as we-
Impregnable we are-
The whole of Immortality
Secreted in a Star.  (p 1616)

Rather than lasting memorials to human grief, in Dickinson, tombstones themselves became pathetic testaments to the inconstancy of affection, mute emblems without expression:

She laid her docile Crescent down
And this confiding Stone
Still states to Dates that have forgot
The News that she is gone-
....... It shames the Constancy that fled
Before it’s emblem flew- (p 1396)

Dickinson’s focus on the shameful flight of human constancy from its void mortuary can be grasped in the concluding passages of Sigourney’s “Tomb of a Young Friend at Mount Auburn”:

The granite obelisk and the pale flower
Reveal thy couch. Fit emblems of frail
And the immortal.
But the bitter grief
Which holds stern vigil o’er the mouldering clay,
Keeping long night watch with its sullen lamp
Had fled thy tomb, and faith did lift its eye
Full of sweet tears; (Armand 49)

The American women poets of nineteenth century have proved dexterity in use of rustic dialect. The poetry in their hands took new drift in prosody. These women poets like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Julia Ward Howe, Lucy Larcom, Rose Terry Cooke etc. were able to create a blend of poetry and music. Helen Hunt Jackson, Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Sarah Piatt, E S Phelps preferred lyrical form to fixed metrical form. They along with their male counterparts, were not restricted to a single poetic measure, but exhibited a broad command of various meters, line lengths and stanza types. These poets came directly under the Emersonian poetic technique of free verse which tends to release poetry from restrictions of meter and language. It also discerns that some of these women poets today have been recognised as the significant forerunners to the modernist poetry that emerged in the early twentieth century.

These women did not hide themselves away in attics, nor did they necessarily give up marriage or children. To read their poems is like getting a poetic and distinctly female glimpse of nineteenth century America. As for instance, while many poets wrote about the evils of slavery, Francis Watkins Harper (1825-1911), an African-American
poet chose to write such a poem focusing on the relationship between a slave mother and her child in the poem called, “The Slave Mother”:

    They tear him from circling arm
    Her last and fond embrace
    Oh! Never more may her sad eyes
    Dwell on his mournful face.

(www.poets.org/viewmedia.php)

Watkins as a black woman poet shows the social and political significance in a great extent throughout her poems. She was fiercely patriotic, a strong supporter of woman’s rights and fighter for equality for the ‘Negro.’ Another of her poems “Aunt Chloe” which tells of a slave woman’s children being sold away composed in simple and strong language:

    I remember well remember
    That dark and dreadful day
    When they whispered to me “chloe”
    Your children sold away.
    It seemed as if a bullet
    Had shot me through and through
    And I felt as if why heart strings
    Was breaking right in two.

    (Bennet:1998 137).

Emma Lazarus, through her strong historical and Jewish sense earned ‘Statue of Liberty’ fame. Her famous poem, “New Colossus” advocates that America should be a safe haven for Jews and other immigrants escaping persecution or seeking a better life. It was to be reprinted everywhere and written on pedestal of the ‘Statue of Liberty’ itself. As the Lazarus’ poem gave new meaning to the statue, the statue emitted a new ideal for the United States. Through this poem the ‘Statue of Liberty’ gained a new name “Mother of Exiles” who would lead her new children to American success and happiness. Liberty for Lazarus is freedom that creates new life without religious and ethnic persecution. To this end her lines are one of the most powerful presentations of one of American’s founding ideals:
“Keep ancient lands your Storied pomp” Cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest lost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”  (Bennet: 1998  287)

Julia Ward Howe one of the mainstream American women poets, worked throughout her life for justice. Her work is believed at present the national anthem for freedom. She wrote not only favouring women’s rights but to protest against the slavery. Howe’s poem, “The Battle Hymn” turned to be the inspiration to Union Soldiers fighting against slavery. The following lines from the poem clearly show her susceptibility to this cause:

Mine eyes have seen glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of with are stored.
He hath loosed the fatal lighting of his terrible swift sword:
His Truth is marching on.  (Bennet:1998  85)

This is a specific example of American poetry which reveals the common characters of the genre of the country. This is an epitome of the poetic genre followed by the frontline 19th  century women poets of America. Julia Ward Howe’s theme and technique anticipate the common practice of the succeeding American poets. She made very good use of meter or verse expressing various emotions which are scintillatingly explored through variety of techniques-metaphors, similes and onomatopoeia. Running through her poems, it is observed that Howe’s poems often make heavy use of imagery and the word association to convey emotions quickly. This can be seen in the following lines quoted from Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic”:

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
White God is marching on.  (Bennet:1998  85)

It is observed that till the last decades of the century the women poets had to struggle for a position of status though some big hands began to outshine men in some
prestigious venues like renowned journals and magazines. These poets and writers were keenly aware of the social and economic impediments confronting them where as few of them made effort to exhibit their common-faced gender anxiety that found real expression in Emily Dickinson’s poetry. These post-war female poets including Lucy Larcom, Helent Hunt Jackson, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Eliza Earle, Rose Terry Cooke, and Elizabeth Stowe had taken “poetry as a means to serve social activity, a kind of ‘making’ or quasi-material craft” (Bennet 215) emphasised on economic considerations not on desire for reputation. These poets were identified with textile workers such as weavers, knitters, seam stresses and tried to view their products in comparison to the other forms of makings. In this surface a relationship between their two fold works- as women’s traditional role as textile workers and makers of poems- is compounded in the way to make the readers realise that they are not only producing poems but art crafts of material culture comprising clothing, shrouds, lace etc. These analogues artistically evoke some decorative as well as aesthetic meanings in their poems. They used images drawn from textile work to speak of women’s political concern, their labor in wartime, their delight in craft, their confinement within the home, the sacrifices they made for families, their relation to God and their bonds to other women.

Lucy Larcom, a former Lowell mill girl, develops textile metaphors in relation to social service. In the poem “Weaving”, women’s association with manufacture of textile becomes an encompassing central figure not just for women’s literary agency but for the ties that bind them to the national and social responsibility. The speaker as weaver realises that she cannot separate from the outside world, yet she is bound to bear responsibility for what occurs within it even she is not directly involved. Tied to her loom by deep familial obligations Larcom’s speaker is haunted by the same sense of present responsibility shared by other women who live in divisions not in union:

I weave, and weave, the livelong day:
The woof is strong the warp is good:
I weave, to be my mother’s stay;
I weave, to win my daily food;
But ever as I weave, saith she,
“The world of women haunteth me”

(Bennet:1998 115)

Lucy Larcom rising over drudgery and machinery became a poet of social and political bent. It is well discernible that the poetry she wrote can be categorized as Christian verse and this makes her a mystic poet. Her mystical approach finds expressions in different ways especially while she deals with nature themes. Like Dickinson’s “Soil of Flint” (p 681), the granite of New England was she titled. And from it she drew a vision of life as paradoxically hopeful and beautiful as that to which Cape Ann gives rise in her poem “Wild Roses of Cape Ann”:

Wild roses of Cape Ann! A rose is sweet,
No matter where it grows; and roses grow,
Nursed by the pure heavens and the strengthening earth,
Wherever men will let them.

......
Their sweetness penetrated the true heart
That waited in Old England, when he wrote
“My love, this is an earthly Paradise!

(Bennet:1998 118)

Like Larcom, Rose Terry Cooke’s poems are also regarded as sentimental and derivative. As a realist, Cooke throughout her poetry depicts bitter spinsters longing for the honour of their communities and oppressed farm women suffering at the hands of their brutal husbands. Despite her such apathy to the downtrodden women, Cooke remained a strident into formals who believed on women’s improvement not by suffrage but by piety and devotion to duty. There is also Romantic restlessness in Cooke’s poetry that is just as difficult to pinpoint, as in “The Suttee,” which comes perilously close to embracing the Indian funeral practice of sati (“widow-burning”) as means of ascension to God:

I am a widow, and shall I
Linger a living death away?
Here on the dead, I, too, will die,
Quick! lest the flesh refuse to stay.

……

Slowly these eager tongues aspire;
I shudder, though they set me free.
Go, coward senses, to the fire-
But the wing’d soul, oh God! To Thee!

(Bennet: 1998 156)

On the other hand, Dickinson is conceptualised as an enthusiastic, grateful killer, perhaps because she has projected onto her persona venomous impulses of revenge that can only safely discharged through the word. This indicates that as a woman, Dickinson is not supposed to be fed up or even potentially dangerous. She must not be a real woman after all, if she writes poetry and thereby expresses power and anger. Thus, in her poem, a persona is created who speaks, but who speaks helplessly, and “for him.” She expresses his will, not her own, although she is in full accord with “his wishes.” A kind of psychological damage a woman incurs who insists on being a poet seen in the first stanza of poem 1737:

Rearrange a “Wife’s” affection!
When they dislocate my Brain!
Ampulate my freckled Bosom!
Make me bearded like a man! (p 1737)

Eliza Earle, a twenty-nine years old Massachusetts poet uses weaving as a figure for an emerging female literary tradition of socially engaged writing influenced by the anti-slavery tract of the period Earle adopts new political possibilities for herself as well:

Well hast thou toiled in Mercy’s sacred cause;
And thus another strong and lasting thread
Is added to the woof our sex is weaving,
With skill and industry, for freedom’s garbs.

(Bennet, 2002:222)

Earle’s understanding of writing as a form of power was no less than that of Emily Dickinson. While Dickinson lodged writing’s power in the sensational power of language itself, it was principles that made Earle feel “physically as if the top of [her]
head was taken off” (L 342a). For Eliza Earle, the socially engaged works of the writers like Maria Weston Chapman, Elizabeth Chandler, Lydia Maria Child, and Angelina Grimke opened the way for women to exercise political agency without violating gender and class norms:

The pen is ours to wield,
The heart to will, and hands to execute.
(Bennet: 1998 406)

One of the successful poets of the period, Helen Hunt Jackson was a prolific and popular writer-poet at a time when women writers faced hostility and disrespect. Her handling of the major themes of life, death and love frequently interpreted as too sentimental. Yet she could earn immense popularity. Like other nineteenth-century poets she individuated the style by handling of a set of images around weaving and knitting. Further she expresses slave concern through some brilliant pieces of poetry.

While Earle and Larcom were primarily concerned with using their poetry as an open space in which to exercise social and political agency, other women writers like Elizabeth Stoddard and Harriet Prescott Spofford, were directly engaged in issues of literature itself, using their weaver-seamstress figures more as Dickinson used her ‘spider’ to explore the limits of their art. Dickinson opted to see the spider not as an “Insect Teacher” (quoted from Lydia Sigourney’s poem of same title, Armand 32) but as an insect artist, a metaphor of the poet’s self:

The Spider as an Artist
Has never been employed-
Though his surpassing Merit
Is freely certified

By every Broom and Bridget
Throughout a Christian Land-
Neglected Son of Genius
I take thee by Hand- (P 1275)
Stoddard seems close to Dickinson as in “Before the Mirror” (1860) her protagonist comes within confinement of a room cuts off from direct experiences and starts filling the loom with images of her life she leads:

Nothing bright
Is woven here: the shadows grow
Still darker in the mirror’s light!
And as my web grows darker too,
Accursed as this empty room;
I know I must forever weave
These phantoms by this hateful loom.
(Bennet:1998 435)

Stoddard’s description about emptiness and lack of connection reveals sense of isolation that kills her weaver. Stoddard’s woman artist is destroyed by this very isolation while in Dickinson it stimulated her wealth of imagination. It is also clearly observed that Stoddard writes to protest women’s sequestration; Dickinson thrives on it.

Unlike Stoddard, Harriet Prescott Spofford in “Pomegranate-Flowers” (1861) has few things about isolation. Stoddard’s weaver, as a seamstress figure presented in her poem, does not mourn for such situation rather is able to redeem her solitude with other means. Running through her works it is realized that Spofford’s protagonist experiences her makings as a source of abundant and overflowing joy but by immersing herself in the material world, not by attempting to transcend it. From this world’s sights, sounds and smells, the seamstress makes her own kind of poetry, a poetry epitomised in her imaginative response the pomegranate-flower image. In a way that curiously anticipates the relationship between speaker and nature in Wallace Stevens’ flower poems-Spofford’s protagonist rejects transcendence in favour of the orgasmically experienced “real”:

Now, said she, in the heart of the woods
The sweet south-winds assert their power,
And blow apart the snowy snoods
Of trilliums in their thrice green bower
Far lost in fern of fragrant stir
Her fancies roam, for unto her
All Nature came in this one flower. (Bennet:1998 218)

Spofford differs profoundly from both Stevens and Dickinson by simultaneously insisting on her seamstress’s location in a social “real.” Dickinson’s speakers are women of leisure free to meditate in Sunday morning, or at other times in the week, on their responses to nature and to God. Spofford’s protagonist, on the other hand, is not just identified as a woman but as a working class woman- and she is the essence of materiality herself- and as most nineteenth-century American women poets ex-Dickinson were- subject to “Disgrace of Price” (p 709).

Unlike Earle, and Larcom, Spofford and Stoddard had not engaged any political issues directly in their poems although the trio had been deeply vested in the causes related to women’s social positioning as well as the disparity on them in system. They, for better or worse, dealt with their makings as art immanence belonged to social and physical bodies.

Dickinson was a genius and her poetry is the single richest body of lyric verse produced by a woman in the English language. While her women peers have been ignored, Dickinson enjoys “the unique status of the United States’ one unequivocal canonical woman writer” (Bennet:1998 177). She is newly relevant to our contemporary experience. “Her sense of the anguish of personal existence and of the precariousness of human life recommends her to a time in which new philosophies of existence have come forcefully to our attention. Her vigour, her curious and reconnoitering mind appeal to a period which has been given too much to apathy and suspicion of spirited imagination. As her entire literary life is preoccupied with certain attitudes like rigorous psychology, intellectual severity, and hostility of the universe to man, Dickinson has been recommended “to an age which is seeking secular modes of thought more severe,
more realistic, and more durable than the easier optimisms which have sometimes characterised American life” (Chase 5).

Dickinson once wrote to a friend, “you know how I hate to be a common” (L 5). Her deliberate separation from the common makes her enigmatic even a century after her death. Because Dickinson was a woman, and largely removed from an artistic or poetic community, it has taken readers some time to realise that her departures from conventional form resulted “not from technical ineptitude but from deliberate art” (Small 1-2). It cannot be denied that technically, the range of Emily Dickinson’s poetry is limited and modest. The common metre she mostly used is eight syllabled iambic line followed by a six syllable one. She also used eight syllabled iambic line known as Long Metre, two six syllable lines followed by one eight syllables, known as Short Metre. In some occasion she used the line consisting of trochaic and dactylic metres. Dickinson loads her words with more than their meanings. The poems of Dickinson, indicate that “she regarded words as organic- separate little entities with a being, growth, and immortality of their own” (Sewall 54):

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.  (p 139)

The style of Emily Dickinson is uniquely her own. She discarded most of the conventional rhetoric. Her unpredictable use of dashes and capitals, her ways of punctuation and her elliptical expressions and such other odd features make her style precisely individual that refuses the kind of treatment made by the nineteenth-century American women poets. “Her refusal to identify with other American women poets of her day was undoubtedly over determined, a product of her unique response to the internal and external forces informing her life and art” (Bennet: 2002 217). But the presentation of Dickinson and the other women poets endorses the fact that though “Dickinson’s treatment is far briefer, more pungent, and linguistically abrasive, yet the
tone and even the approach can at times be surprisingly similar”(Bennet:1998 177). This apparently implies that “she cannot be fairly read apart from them” (ibid).

The woman poet was almost non-existent in pre-modern Assam and New England as well. Certain socio-cultural factors acted upon it. The way how the pioneers of the Assamese and American poetry marked their genius with very affirmative means has been made clear in the above study. Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson, two representative poets of the respective literatures of the modern period affixed certain style and variety, qualities and characters in the genres through their imaginative faculties as well as intellectual approaches. The survey of the lives of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson is enough to reveal their poetic philosophy contemplated through different themes like Nature, Death, Love, Life, Pain and Anguish. These poets, in many of their poems, express their concern with the effect of death, the dilemma of life, the mystery of the love, the problem of the immortality. As Dickinson does in American poetry, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi displays a unique mode through a remarkable play of ideas and images, and dramatic portrayal of casual scenes and situations. Constantly provoked by the enchanting scenes of nature of Assam, Nirmalprabha was conditioned to a style that resulted in evocative images, meaningful metaphors, paradoxical expressions and psychological evaluations. Both the poets seem to have cultivated a kind of receptivity which has a striking similarity with that of their women poet peers.
Notes:

1**Basistha** is one of the oldest temples of ancient Kamrup situated in Sandhyachal Hill twelve kilometer away from present Guwahati city. According to the *Kalika Purana*, the temple was established by *rishi Basistha*. It is a sacred place for Hindu and believed to have purged of all sins after taking bath in the water of *Basistha-Ganga*, composite water body comprised of three rivers- *Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta* during solar and lunar eclipses.

2**Olagi** signifies a woman being redundant. According to the custom of Assamese society, widows were not allowed to be involved in the acts of public cause or religion. They were considered neither to be fit to serve the society nor be eligible for the grace of God.

3**Aghon** is the eighth month of Assamese calendar, ie November-December during which *Hemanta*, one of the six seasons in Assam occurs. This month of Assamese calendar has immense significance in socio-cultural context of Assam which implies hope and aspirations, ambition and abundance, possibility and productivity.

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