CHAPTER III

Nature as it is Projected in the Major Poems of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson

I

Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, who occupies a significant place in the history of modern Assamese literature with her kind of spiritual orientation, infuses into her poetry a new sense of freedom and newness of style and form. Popularly known as “The Nightingale of Assam,” she has been able to successfully uphold in her poetry, the same consciousness, underscoring some common characteristics of variegated Indian culture and tradition. Despite her poetry discerns an espousal of the English Romantic poetry, she apparently expressed few typical features of the modern Assamese poetry. Born in a village of Assam in 1933 and worked in a regional condition till her death in 2004, she did not have enough privilege to achieve the international reputations overcoming socio-linguistic and cultural barriers because of her belonging to the watertight compartment of the tradition bound backward typical Assamese middle class society. On account of her preference to vernacular language as medium of her poetic expression, she seemed not to receive the kind of treatment globally she rightfully deserves. She carried out a brilliant academic career as she had never slipped to second from the top. She is also a competent researcher who is categorically honoured as the first Assamese woman doctorate in any literary topic. Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, on the other hand, was born in 1830 and brought up in a New England village and hardly moved out of it. Her formal studies did not go beyond the level of Amherst Academy, supplemented by her own private reading of the famous seventeenth-century writers like Thomas Browne, Shakespeare, a few of nineteenth-century poets like Keats, Shelly and Browning, some of the well-known contemporary periodicals and, of course, the Bible. Emily Dickinson was never a systematic critic, nor did she claim to be one, and never formulated a body of principles,
which could become a treatise on, or a theory of poetry. She never wrote any prefaces, apologies and defenses and had apparently no distinct poetic creed of her own following which even her most perceptive and sensitive critics had been indifferent towards making a direct statement that there was a Dickinsonian tradition in modern American poetry. She had the benefit of the legacy of an advanced socio-economical and literary condition. Emily Dickinson, by common consent, is considered the greatest of all American women poets who wrote in English and secured a significant place in the history of American literature and the world literature as well. She confronted simultaneously the American neo-classical genteel tradition, the English Victorian tradition and also the hangover of the English Romantic tradition; yet she opted to write her poetry distinctly different from all the three of them.

Before the realism found its way, America, however had been passing through turbulent changes in socio-economical-religious segments. Intellectuals were at work to express the shifting values and multiple setbacks of social life. Writers of the age steadily moved from Romanticism to realism and from realism to naturalism. But few writers like Longfellow, Lowell, tried to withdraw into a world of imagination reacting sharply to the irreligious materialism, but their private world of imagination did not last long. The current of realism had not been possible to resist. But still the older voices were not unheard. Most of the earlier poets, like Bryant, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, and Emerson continued to appeal to readers and influence their impulses. However the American Society as a whole moved towards an order. Emily Dickinson had been able to keep a significant distance from the troubled thoughts and turbulent minds of the age and remained busy to make constant poetic endeavour in silence and seclusion refining her puritan heritage into delightful lyrical expressions.

It is a mere coincidence that Nirmalprabha Bordoloi was emerging as a poet, when Dickinson was being discovered. Owing to the present status of their poetic outputs, these poets, however, cannot be placed in the same birth. Nirmalprabha seemingly lacks the kind of global acknowledgment Dickinson enjoys unanimously. Several socio-cultural
factors act upon it. The contributions, Nirmalprabha has made to Assamese poetry, cannot also be side-stepped. Author of hundred books including nine collections of poems, her fifth collection entitled *Sudirgha Din Aaru Ritu* fetched her prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983. According to the evaluation of the Akademi, “it is an outstanding contribution to Assamese literature for its rich variety of moods, evocative imagery, its robust optimism and affirmation of human values”(www.bipuljyoti.in). Apart from poetry Nirmalprabha wrote thought provoking essays, plays, juvenile literature and radio skits. She received Asom Sahitya Sobha Award for her outstanding book of poems, *Dinar Pischat Din*. After Nalinibala Devi, she has been privileged to the coveted president’s post of Asom Sahitya Sobha. She further participated in more than forty academic and literary seminars including seven international seminars held in USA, UK, Germany, Japan and China. She registered her name as one of the most esteemed participants in the world poet’s Meet held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1992. Even *Anthology of World Poetry* has given honour to her poetry compiling her four celebrated poems in this book of world repute. Considering her immense involvement with creations to various genres of literature like poetry, lyrics, novel, and musical dramas, there is ample scope for an evaluation of her works in relation to that of the great literary personalities of the world repute. The present endeavour, therefore, springs from the belief that there is ample room for a work to unfurl the latent treasure of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi by means of a comparative study with Emily Dickinson. As a humble attempt in this direction, therefore, this pursuit underlines their poetic quest and contour with prima-facie focus on the treatment of nature as reflected through different parameters such as Death, Love, Life, Pain and Anguish. However, it is quite obvious that these two poets, with an age difference of hundred years, should differ from each other following the subject matter of their poetry in such diverse socio-cultural set ups. In this attempt, effort is also on to pick up common and contrastive elements of their nature poems on the basis of their poetic philosophy from Romantic and modern perspective. Further, the treatment of nature throughout their poems can be justified in the light of self- exploration, spiritual existentialism, mystical speculation, feministic sensibility, eco-feminism and eco-
criticism. It would also be interesting to study about how they differ from each other in their look out on the sense of privation and social responsibility.

It would perhaps be unwise to talk about their poetry without references to their lives. Ever since the time, Nirmalprabha was in the seventh standard, when her father initiated her to the Bhagavat Gita. This great philosophical epic became for Nirmalprabha a lifelong companion, satisfying her need for spirituality even in the midst of the direst upheavals of her life, when darkness and despair would threaten to tear her being asunder. She was a victim of Bal-Bibah for why she had to get married at the age of under eleven with a man whose age was twenty years more than her. Nirmalprabha, eventually, was blessed with a baby girl only at the age of thirteen and had to live in her father’s house for rest of her life. All these came to an immature heart and brain like a dream. As such, her ‘self’ came to be totally devoted to Karma- a philosophy of Bhagavat Gita through which she could obtain Jnana (Wisdom), which is capable of bridging human thought with the whole soul. This spiritual preoccupation became so much an integral part of her poetic creed that she came to be recognised as a poet of spiritual sensibility. Her early poetry have clearly displayed this kind of spiritual doctrine of Vedanta philosophy- “Draupodi,” “Gandhari,” “Sita,” “Rangapowalor Moni,” (Red Gem) and “Mor Ukti” (My Pronouncement).

There is a surprising parallel between Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson in the experiences of their early days of life. Owing to the breach of marital life at a very early age, Nirmalprabha had to withdraw into the private world of solitude and silence where she was mounding her thoughts in the crucible of her rich imagination. The personal experiences of her early days led her to be radical towards male dominance. She expressed sharp remark on her would be husband’s image in her mind: “As soon as I saw the face of the man, an image of an atrocious person had automatically come to my mind” (Bordoloi: 2004 86). The early setback of her conjugal life leads her towards life-long deprivation of love by any man. A sense of isolation and insecurity, hence, prevails over rest of her life. Nirmalprabha, after the incident, has never ever regained faith on
man and remained esthetically hungry of love of someone. In “Etia Sokolo Otit” (All bygone now), she expresses her desire:

I walk in darkness
I hear in darkness
I wave hands in darkness
With a hope of someone
To embrace.  (Trans mine, Goriyoshi: April, 1999)

While her hope is totally shattered, Nirmalprabha yearns at improving her present condition even in a way that might erect some ethical questions. In one of her earlier poems, “Draupodi,” the poet quizzes:

There is no novelty in my desire
The perfume and colour and the mind
Of the woman who was the very first,
Draw designs on the floor oh my mind
Where is my fault? 

…..
In my mind’s canvas
Why another picture comes
And sways again and again
At some opportunity??  (Barua, Ajit 63)

As a girl, Emily Dickinson attended the South Hadley Female Seminary, where she rebelled against the authorities and refused to fast on Christmas. Her defiance was not, however, against only the religious practices, but also against the rigidity and harshness of the Seminary. She came back home to lose herself in the world of books and to give herself to her private avocation of writing poetry. Her gradual seclusion decreased the number of incidents and dismissed the drama her life might otherwise have had. Her seclusion was a way of maintaining in her inner life that precarious hold on sanity and strength of which her poems often articulate. It was a way of existence, an economy of life, within the Dickinson family circle, a way of controlling her relationships with her father, her mother, her sister, her brother, and her sister-in-law. Yet she gave to her seclusion a range of significance beyond her personal and family life.
Emily Dickinson remained a spinster all her life. Her father, a successful lawyer, was a stern authoritarian and a strict puritan moralist. She was not allowed to mix freely with members of the opposite sex in the prime of her life. In a letter, she writes to Austin in 1852: “Father takes care of the doors, and mother of the windows, and Vinnie and I are secure against all outward attacks” (L 1 42). She was inhibited to such an extent that she could not even address the men whom she loved as lovers, but cloaked them under the term of ‘tutors.’ In the years after her formal schooling, she had three tutors: Benjamin Franklin Newton, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, and Colonel Higginson. The legendary love affairs with these tutors were but the brief episodes and soon passed off. Dickinson spent the remainder of her life as a recluse. Although her human associations continued with the most intimate of her friends, who included her childhood friend Helen Hunt Jackson, and her literary mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she withdrew, more and more, as time went on, into the white solitude of a monk. Dressed in the white costumes of a perpetual bride, sheltered in her father’s house, Dickinson was perhaps enacting in her real life, the life of a heroine of any tragic love story. Her unfulfilled emotional life made her comprehend the meaning and significance of love more acutely than any other poet. As she expressed, “Water is taught by thirst” (p 2 135) and “Success is counted sweetest/ By those who ne’er succeed” (p 67).

Like Nirmalprabha, she also clings to the unworldly interior of her “father’s house” (p 613). She arrives as an intellectual and sexual refugee from an age in which she felt she could not speak and could not be heard. She depicts that situation through her words:

As when a girl
They put me in the Closet-
Because they liked me “still”- (p 613)

Through the voice of her poetry, Dickinson intends to escape that strange confinement in the nineteenth-century patriarchal private she calls simply “Prose” or “My Father’s house” (p 613). Nirmalprabha, however, resents for the entire patriarchal ambiance. Both the poets similarly speak of their experience in this closet. While
Dickinson’s poems speak of such experience, they are uncannily modern, as if they were written out of the context of her age and events, attitudes, and perspectives. Dickinson’s poetry, as such, echoes Nirmalprabha’s voices. Like Nirmalprabh’s, “her dominant image as poet is one of passive, patient protest against her helplessness, as a woman, to identify herself” (Mossberg 19). Dickinson seems to define poetic identity in terms of a woman’s dependent role in her culture, an act of man’s initiative. Her feeling of dependencies is addressed in the following lines:

> He found my Being-set it up-
> Adjusted it to place-
> Then carved his name-upon it-
> And bade it to the East

> Be faithful-in his absence-
> And he would come again- (p 603).

The self of Dickinson as a poet, at last, gets identified at the mercy of an omnipotent father or husband figure or “owner” (p 754) as “He found my being” (p 603). In Poem 754, Dickinson narrates the occasion on which she gets identity:

> My Life had stood-a loaded Gun-
> In Corner- till a Day
> The Owner passed- identified-
> And carried Me away- (p 754)

Nirmalprabha uses the same terminology for poetic and sexual identification, revealing that from her point of view, her career as a poet takes the same social configuration as a traditional woman’s life. As woman, Nirmalprabha surmises that her power is concealed and implied and is produced by the male figure that awakens female sexuality. “The Song of Transformation” ends with this idea:

> I have burnt to ashes
> My body
> I am being transformed
> Into an unfailing
> Power of the will
> Inside myself
I have no name now
My name is ‘you’
My name is ‘he.’  (Barua, Ajit 4-5)

The life of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi is the life of a true artist. As a poet she was greatly indebted to the two great Bengali poets, viz., Rabindranath Tagore and Jivanananda Dash. Rabindranath influenced Nirmalprabha greatly, both in terms of language and content. Among the western poets she was greatly struck by Ezra Pound (1885-1972). What attracted Nirmalprabha most was Pound’s individualistic and humanistic approach. Apart from these, Nirmalprabha earned her creative fabric through her contact with the greats of Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, T S Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Rilke and many other English-American poets. Dickinson, on the other hand, did not allow such influences into her poetic exploits. She did not go through the contemporary poetry except Emersion’s. It is from Emersion that she learns the terms of the struggle and what she needs to conquer- to write poems that win from nature the triumph of freedom for the imagination. There is a greater truth in the suggestion that the authority of Dickinson’s own consciousness depends “on the power that lies at the center of her (Dickinson’s) relation to Emersion” (Bloom 145). It is worth mentioning that she did not see eye to eye with Emerson or Coleridge on the transcendent reality of nature and the Romantic belief in the correspondence of mind with nature. She depicted nature as it really is and connected it with some truth of inner life without superimposing any ideological structure of man-nature relationship. She, however, “does not seek correspondence between herself and nature, but her own consciousness must dictate the relationship; the landscape becomes an allegorical projection of her internal drama as her poems present a spectrum of reaction to the amorality of nature- from hope and exultation to despair” (Bloom 148). Scholars have deliberated on the striking similarity between Nirmalprabha’s inclination towards the mystic, transcendental philosophy of India and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s development of a similar theme through his concept of the
‘Over Soul’ and ‘Self Reliance.’ Nirmalprabha, as if, felt as her heart’s words while Emerson had echoed the great saying of Krishna:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. …We see the world piece by piece as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree, but the whole, of which these are shining parts; is the soul. (Samuelson & Vaid 34)

There is a clear indication that Nirmalprabha espouses a close affinity with Emerson while celebrating the ‘self’ in one of her outstanding poems “Mor Ukti” (My Words). Another poem “Ronga Powala Moni” (Red Gem) echoes similar concerns with regard to Emerson’s “Brahma” which overtly reflects the Vedanta philosophy in its form and content. Emerson’s vision of “Brahma” is ubiquitous:

If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again
………..

They reckon ill who leave me out
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter of the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.
(Samuelson 34, 1-4, 9-12)

Nirmalprabha in “Ranga Powalar Moni” allows an adopted impression of the Emersonian notion:

I am the trust
I am the assurance
I am the impulsive smell of dream
I am the alluring zeal of beauty
I am the echo of prayer for the deity.
(Trans mine, Sarma 372)

This apparently echoes further the following lines of the Gita:

I am the ritual action
I am the sacrifice
I am the ancestral ablation  
I am the sacred hymn  
I am also the melted butter…  
I am immortality and also death. (Samuelson 35)

Nirmalprabha Bordoloi is a great lover of nature, and like Wordsworth, she finds the source of such love in the local and the regional. For her nature is primarily owing to her temperament, and secondarily to her background. As she is a country dweller and has been closely associated with rustic life and culture of Assam, nature remains to her constant companion since her childhood. She looks at nature as a realist and classicist. Her attitude towards nature is equally Romantic and realistic. Though she rarely makes her lessons or her philosophy of nature as overt and obvious as Wordsworth, sometimes Nirmalprabha, nevertheless, has Wordworthian simplicity of style. Ever since her first appearance as a poet, she has been demonstrating her vigour and verve as a nature poet through an ingenious depiction of the objects of nature from her motherland, the very soil of Assam. Yet, like Emily Dickinson, her attitude to nature is somewhat different and does not fall into a clear system of philosophy as Wordworth’s pantheistic belief in nature does. Unlike Wordsworth, Nirmalprabha seems to have no faith in nature as a guide for moral behaviour. A discrete study of her nature poems reveals that though her attitude to nature does not fall in any certain ideology, she is always in an effort to discover the relationship between nature and man. In one of her famous poems, “Etar Pischat Etakoi” (One by One) the poet seeks to affirm her camaraderie with nature:

One by one  
All the Stars  
Have gone…  

Leaving  
My dumb heart  
A gate-keeper  
For the dark night. (Barua, Bhaben 250)

As a modern poet with a Romantic inclination Nirmalprabha is much closer to Keats than to Wordsworth. Like Keats, she is a poet of the senses. Her Romantic bent does not lag behind that of Keats’ evocation of ‘autumn’ while eulogising the seasonal
bliss during the month of *Bohaag* (April-May) or the other months of the Assamese calendar. Her senses culminate in a spiritual passion and turn artistically enough, into symbols that often endorse the man-nature reciprocity. In “Basisthat Duparia” (Mid Day at Basistha), for instance, she posits a spiritual conflict that forms the web of a 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)

The poem immediately reminds us of the alluring effect in Wordsworth’s famous lyric, “Lines Written in Early Spring”:

To her fair works did nature link  
The human soul that through me ran.  
(Line 5-6, Palgrave 278)

Nirmalprabha further contemplates the spiritual essence of natural objects as a process to explore herself in nature. When she does identify herself with the objects of nature, it is with the process and not with the object. This spiritual evocation can be realised in the following lines from her poem, “Words and Words”:

I become him  
He turns into I  
The smell of the sky  
Gives me in a moment-wings  
I dive deep into the aroma of soil  
I become tree with trees  
River with rivers.  (Trans mine, Sarma 401)
As is characteristic with all New Englanders, nature in Emily Dickinson is mysteriously conceived as a baffling, alien and hostile force. More than any other American poet, Dickinson dives deep into the character of nature; Dickinson reckons that natural order can hardly be equated with that of the divine. In her early poems, she tends to search for immortality through nature by delighting in her external pageantry. Nature is hardly identified with God. In a blasphemous statement in one of her letters, she compares spring with “paradise”: “If God had been here this summer, and seen the things I have seen- I guess that He would think His paradise superfluous” (L 185). Her primal concern is to show nature’s perennial grace- her butterflies, beautiful colour and red breast of the Robin- as a sharp contrast to man’s doom, immortality. This shows that Dickinson ironically uses nature to mock at the transience of humanity. What is more attractive for her is neither the serene beauty of nature; nor its transcendental qualities, but its destructive power such as- wind, torrential rain, lightening and storms. Unlike Wordsworth, who took nature as his friend, philosopher and guide, Dickinson took nature as an enemy and therefore refuses to employ nature as a guide for moral behaviour. And obviously birds and flowers, insects and other natural creatures are hardly appeal her. The general symbol of nature for her is Death and that is why man-nature relationship in Dickinson’s poetry is grotesquely treated in terms of the frustrating cleaves. God, man and nature she sharply differentiates, “Nature cannot be explained any more easily than God can be explained, but both can be personified” (Johnson 184):

Nature and God- I neither knew  
Yet Both so well knew me 
They Startled, like Executors 
Of My identity.

Yet Neither told- that I could learn-  
My Secret as Secure 
As Herschel’s private interest 
Or, Mercury’s affair- (p. 835)

Dickinson considers this natural-supernatural connection in a letter written to Higginson where she confirms his impression about her as a “cracked-poetess,”: “Abroad
is close tonight and I have but to lift my Hands to touch the ‘Height of Abraham’ ” (L 352). Dickinson also considers nature as a symbolic parallel of human destiny in an earlier letter:

The golden West, and the great, silent Eternity, forever folded there, and bye and bye it will open it’s everlasting, arms, and gather us all- all (L 103).

Nirmalprabha has an eye for all lovely things of nature, great and small. Her keen perception makes her see things that escape the notice of others and narrates them exquisitely. For example the following lines may be quoted:

Like a tender leaf
The whole place is swaying
In the scent of the
Keteki flower. (Barua, Ajit. 66)

And,

In the village
In the roots of the dubari grass
The sorrows got buried
For a day or two. (Barua, Ajit. 67)

Dickinson’s idea: “What shall I do, when the Skies a chirrup/ Drop a Tune on me” (p 956), is reverberated in the Nirmalprabha’s poetic lines- “the call of cuckoo/ Took drop by drop”:

The village boys and girls
Took the call of the cuckoo
Falling drop by drop
Searching for them
In the woods
Now, they are butterflies. (Barua, Ajit. 67-68)

In Dickinson’s poetry too we find frequent references to various natural phenomena. She wrote on flowers, birds, bees, mountains, butterflies and orchards. Again she also gave places to the destructive forces of nature like lighting, volcanoes etc. Nature was almost heaven for her. When Emily Dickinson told Colonel Higginson that “Nature
is a Haunted House- but Art a House that tries to be haunted,” (L 459) she was ostensibly saying that art imitates nature. But the implication of the remark goes further, because it gives a clue to her concept of nature itself. She concedes that “the world of Nature is a dwelling place, hauntingly mysterious, peopled with God’s creatures who live amid the phenomena God ordains and regulates” (Rao:1998 42). The truth of the phenomenal world, Dickinson feels, is beyond sense-perception; we can have some idea of its external qualities through our sense but its reality transcends our sense. In 1863, Dickinson explicitly identifies nature with such poetic move:

Nature is what we see-
The Hill- the Afternoon -
Squirrel- Eclipse- the Bumble Bee-
Nay- Nature is Heaven-
Nature is what we hear-
The Bobolink -the sea
Thunder - the Cricket-
Nay-Nature is Harmony- (p. 668)

The most vital lines in the poem are, “Nature is what we see-”(Line 1), “Nature is Heaven-”(Line 4). “Nature is what we hear-” (Line 5), “Nature is Harmony’’ (Line 8). It is interesting to testify her philosophy of nature blending these apparently unconnected lines, though she did not make any systematic approach on it. Through this attitude to nature, Dickinson becomes closer to great Romantic poet, Wordsworth who evolved pantheistic philosophy of nature. While Wordsworth is recognised as the founder of a new religion of nature, Dickinson can be called the keen observer of nature. These are the objects we see, hear and feel. It is the harmonious co-existence of all things as we observe them by our senses and intuition. She feels that is “Heaven’’ to be alive and dwell in a near so many fascinating creatures, moods and vistas.

Nature is a separate entity mysteriously linked to the creator’s secrets which are not revealed to any man who is directly under creator’s control. God has deputised his authority in dealing with all his other creatures. Nature is a spirit personified as the
gentlest of mothers to whom the welfare of all creatures is made sole concern. Dickinson carried the same note in 1863 in the following poem:

Nature- the Gentlest Mother is
Impatient of no child-
The feeblest- or the waywardness-
Her Admonition mild-

In Forest- and the Hill-
By Traveler- be heard-
Restraining Rampart Squirrel-
Or too impetuous Bird- (p.790)

Again, Dickinson restates the idea of mother in the context: “Nature is our mother, she will do no harm” (L 609); “Mother, to me, is so sacred a Name” (L 789); “Mother’! What a Name!” (L779). Such idea of ironic relationship between smiling though serious mother and her children is contained in a short poem:

If Nature smiles-the Mother must
I’m sure, at many a whim
Of Her eccentric Family-
Is she so must to blame? (p 1085)

Dickinson calls nature the “eldest mother.” In a letter expressing her thankfulness to Mary Bowles for a gift of flower, she writes:

Dare I chill them with the soil? Nature is our eldest mother, she will do no harm. Let the phantom love that enrolls the sparrow shield you softer than a child (L 609).

For Nirmalprabha, nature is an instrument through which she generates her feelings for poetic perfection. For example, in the poem “Khajuraho,” she transmutes the physical nature of objects into a kind of metaphysical sensibility by conjuring up some splendid images and symbols. The result is the poem is not less effective than the sumptuous and spiritual appeal of Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Nirmalprabha, again,
has also succeeded in writing a few poems that tend to assert her consciousness of Indian existentialism. And this existential stance is entrenched in spirituality in a way that it generates her ideology with regard to the emancipation of women. As a woman poet her mental trauma emanating from the prevailing ambience finds reflection in her cynical attitude towards loneliness parallel to her fear to face the crowded place. In “How Long” the poet concedes the fact in her apposite words:

How long shall I keep
Holding up this face
Without its getting ugly
In this crowded place?

How long shall I keep
Holding up this hand
Without it’s falling down
In this crowded place?
How long shall I keep
The light that is waning
In my heart –
A cave
In this place?
Oh my face-about to
Get ugly
Oh my hand-about to
Fall down
Oh my golden light
Waning down
The flag is
Coming down.  (Trans Barua, Bhaben 251)

But, again, Nirmalprabha assumes an optimistic posture in some of her nature lyrics. “Etia Sakolo A’tit” (All bygone now) is a specimen of this category. Here she makes an effort at improving her present condition. She can ‘walk, hear and wave her hands in darkness’ to have the warm touch of someone. While her hope is totally shattered, she makes another attempt at reviving it:

I walk in darkness
I hear in darkness
I wave hands in darkness
With a hope of someone
To embrace.
(Trans mine, Goriyoshi, April, 1999)

It is possible to hear an echo here from Nalinibala Devi who also expresses her tender emotion on darkness that culminates in a mysterious desire to have communion with the Absolute. The poem, “Endhar” (Darkness), illustrates this quite skillfully in the following lines:

O Darkness, embrace me tenderly
O Darkness, envelope me with thy mysterious veil.
My endless quest will be ended in thee;
In thee, I will face the full vision of Him.
(Barua, B K 31)

Emily Dickinson never claims like the Transcendentalists to have understood the deep mystery of the phenomena of nature. Though gifted with the acute power of observation and the deep intuitive mind of a great artist, she does not enter into the inner most sanctuary of nature. This is, of course, not the individual failing of the poet but the inadequacy of human awareness itself. For her, nature and God are the two unknowable entities which are beyond the range of human comprehension. She has composed many poems to emphasise the inviolable mystery which none can understand. In one of her early poems she speaks about the eager look on the landscapes which appear to reveal a secret but the supplication of the Summer and the prank of the winter- snow cover the secret with a veil (Tulle)-

The eager look -on Landscapes-
As if they just repressed
Some secret -that was pushing
Like Chariots - in the vest-
The pleading of the summer
That other prank -of snow-
That Cushions Mystery with Tulle,
For fear the Squirrels- know (p. 627)
Dickinson’s view on nature is neither inert nor over-Romantic. She finds that the operations of nature are largely invisible as well as indifferent to humanity. Poem 1259 sustains a better expression in this regard:

A Wind that rose
Though not a Leaf
In any Forest Stirred
But with itself did cold engage
Beyond the realm of Bird-  (p. 1259)

But to Nirmalprabha, any enjoyment of human does not lead to fulfillment without nature’s presence. Like Robert Browning, she has dealt with love in all its multitudinous complexities; depicting wide spectrum of love situations. Sometimes she deals love with her artificial perceptions deceiving readers to take it as her first hand observations. Sometimes, she deals with equal insight and penetration. Her longing for an environment for lovers in “Prem Aparup Prem” (Love, Beautiful love) too is a case in point:

One cannot go alone
To take the breeze of Spring

How deep
Is the blue of a friend’s eye
That also can be seen
Only under the blue sky.
(Trans mine, Barua, Ajit 66)

Very often, it is seen that Nirmalprabha sustains spiritual relationship with nature. She excels using the natural objects with symbolical significance. She tries to discover herself in a world of sight and smell and taste and touch. This has been well discernable in the following lines from one of her poems, “On the Banks”:

On this bank
of the words
Is a world
variegated through
sight and taste
smell and touch.
On the bank
of the words
is a realisation
There I discover myself.
(Trans Barua, Bhaben 252)

Opposite to it, nature for Emily Dickinson remains “a Haunted House” (p1400). One can get admitted into the world of nature not as a spy but as a child. The external loveliness of the forests and hills are only the outer fringe of the tent and it would be a grave error to mistake the outside for the inside:

We spy the forests and the Hills
The tents to Nature’s show
Mistake the outside for the in
And mention what we saw.   (p. 1097)

Dickinson feels awe in looking at so commonplace and object as a well. “What mystery pervades a well!,” she exclaimed. Its waters live so far that they seem awesome, like neighbours from another world. Yet the grass beside the well shows no fear. Nature thus in spite of our familiarity remains a stranger:

But nature is a stranger yet
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.
To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.   (p. 1400)

When she applies the simplest discourse of nature- birds, bees and flowers- the poems evoke an inexorable force that often seems inimical to humans; even the simplest poems about nature like “An altered look about the hills” (p 140) or “I’ll tell you how the sun rose” (p 318) tell of change and dissolution, transition and process- days ending, seasons changing, creatures dying. In one of the Dickinson’s later poems, the poet asserts the notion of nature as an elusive music that remains ultimately beyond human grasp. The
poem asserts that “The earth has many keys,” that is there are many tones to which tunes may be accommodated. However, humans only discern those in which there is a succession of sounds agreeable to the human ear. Where melody is not is ‘the unknown peninsula’:

The earth has many keys
Where melody is not
Is the unknown peninsula
Beauty is nature’s fact.
But witness for her land,
And witness for her sea,
The cricket is her utmost
Of elegy to me. (p 1775)

That “The earth has many keys” suggests that there are rhythms and principles of organisation that are beyond the human ability to perceive or differentiate. However, the poet contents herself with those she does perceive and asserts the simple observation that “Beauty is nature’s fact.” Even that simple statement highlights the idea that nature’s beauty is inseparable from mutability, transience, process. “A fact, in Dickinson’s dictionary, is defined as anything done, or that comes to pass, an act, a deed, an effect, an event. ‘Beauty’, referring to grace, harmony, order, holiness is something which comes to pass in nature” (Kirkby 132).

Emily Dickinson’s nature poems endorse her keen and minute observation. Her observation is not merely casual one; she looks into nature’s processes and dives deep into the very meaning of them. Her response to nature is fresh and original and extols itself various interpretations. The following poem would serve an illustration of her sharp observation to the nature. Here is a complete picture of the bird and its gestures. This description shows every detail of her fresh vision to the movement of the bird which is typically of Emily Dickinson:

A bird came down the walk
He did not know I saw
He hit the angle worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes,
That hurried all abroad-
They looked like frightened beads, I thought
He stirred his velvet head.

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb-
And he unrolled his features
And sowed him softer home.

Then oars divide the ocean
To silver for a scam,
Or butterflies, off the banks of noon
Leap, splashless, as they swim.  (p 328)

In this poem the poet dramatises the bird’s behaviour using the domestic setting of a garden to suggest the possibility of an understanding between man and nature and then leaving it. Finally the poet fails to establish relations with the bird in her garden which pinpoints the gap between man and the creatures of nature. Man’s spring and his useless offer of a crumb lead to the bird’s final rejection and illuminate another theme: “nature’s superior self-sufficiency over man’s fumbling awkwardness” (Saradhi 114).

Nirmalprabha’s nature longing culminates in her lamentation to see the large void of bliss of nature on life. In the poem, “Heartrending” (Mormantik), she becomes skeptic while she paradoxically bids farewell not only to a man but also to a life process:

I saw him going
away at the time
When the sun was declining.

......
He was going by
the curving alley
Of the paddy fields.
.....
Following him
Went away
The golden sunshine
of the month
of ‘Aghon’
.....
He was going
and
is gone.

Who knows
Whether he will
Return or
Not in this birth.  (Trans  Barua, Ajit 53-54)

This idea underlies Dickinson’s best work. Still there is an undercurrent of her intellectual effort to correlate the mood of nature and mood of the mind. Her affinities with the transcendentalist act as the forces of her poetic endeavour to ruminate over the fact that there is a mysterious link between man and nature. “A Light Exists in Spring” holds a delicate balance between the changes in the moods of nature and the changes in the thoughts of men- a shaft of light in spring and an intuition of despair:

A light exists in Spring
No present on the year
At any other period
When March is scarcely here.
A color stands abroad
On solitary hills
That science cannot overtake,
But human nature feels.

I wait upon the lawn;
It shows the furthest tree
Upon the furthest slope we know;
It almost speaks to me
Then as horizons step,
Or noon’s report away,
Without the formula of spun
It passes and we stay:

A quality of loss
Affecting our content,
A nude had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament. (p. 812)

In this poem the speaker is also troubled by transience. When the first light of spring passes, she is afflicted with a sense of loss “As trade had suddenly encroached/ upon a Sacrament” (p 812). However, it is the human desire for permanence that defiles the score. The speaker in the above poem grieved for the flower that bloomed and dropped a single noon; also he mourns the ephemeral light of spring: “It passes and we stay” (p 812). There is a resistance to change, an inability to see loss and dissolution as an emblem of renewal. Trade refers to the exchange of commodities for money or personal gain and suggests the speaker’s desire for an immediate compensation for the loss she has experienced. “The fact that there is no immediate compensation for the departing light leaves her dissatisfied. Yet spring is the herald of summer and must depart before the new season can come” (Kirkby 122).

The social consciousness of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi is her hallmark. Nature privileges such consciousness. Her active social life is also proved to be the source of inspiration of her many more nature lyrics through which she expresses her deep concern over inflicting social values emerged from the decline in religious faith and spiritual zeal. At this juncture Nirmalprabha kept her social identity above all political prejudices and material considerations. Hence she could not accept this kind of new romanticism idealized by Marxism rather she got perplexed with new found philosophy of life. As a matter of fact, Nirmalprabha obviously keeps moving her poetic philosophy with the prior affiliation to the great modern poets like T.S. Eliot. She, like Eliot, expresses a
feeling of devoutness to the past and apprehension for the future. Here we cannot but to mention two names of her highly celebrated poems, “Karunatam” (The Saddest Thing) and “Mormantik” (Heartrending). In “Karunatam” (The Saddest Thing), the poet writes:

When the smell
Of the fields of Ahin⁴
Somehow touches
my nose
I find again
my lost father.

In the scent of the gamosa⁵
Unfolded in the shop
I find again my mother.

For my children
Where shall I keep it
Where?       (Barua, Ajit 51-52)

Emily Dickinson, in contrast, desists herself from active participation in society. Even her approach to nature is highly individualistic. To her nature is in the mind of the beholder: “Why travel to Nature, when she dwells within us” (Saradhi 44). Dickinson’s nature is a mysterious process, “a noiseless noise in the orchard-that I let persons hear”- (L 271). It is to be found in the murmur of insects, the efflorescence of a sunset, the evanescence of spring, the phosphorescence of decaying things. It is characterised by unceasing motion, things constantly breaking down and reforming in a relentless cycle of dissolution and renewal. In an 1856 letter to the John Graves, Dickinson writes of the intimate relation of renewal and decay in nature’s processes:

It is Sunday –now –John –and all have gone to Church- the wagons have done passing, and I have come out in the new grass to listen to the anthems. Three or four hens have followed me, and we sit side by side- and while they crow and whisper, I’ll tell you what I see today, and what I would that you saw- (L 184).

Like the scenario in many of the poems, Dickinson stays home from Church in order to listen to the anthems of nature in the new grass. To her, truth was in nature. The
speaker in poem 324 stays at home with nature while others go to church. In beauty of nature she realises the presence of God:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church,
I keep it staying at Home,
With a Bobolink for a chorister
And an Orchard for a Dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;
I just wear my wings,
And instead of tolling the bell, for church,
Our little sexton sings.

God preaches, a noted clergyman-
And the sermon is never long;
So instead of getting to heaven, at last,
I’m going to all along! (p 324)

Nirmalprabha is a conscious painter of life. According to the poet there is no bigger poetry than life. To her life is itself an endless poem, a long poem which reflects all human conditions and states of mind. It is not suggested that Dickinson passed through the varied experiences of life described in her poetry, but she either contemplated them or lived them imaginatively. While Dickinson takes poetry as a medium of expression of her inner feelings emerged from her individual life, Nirmalprabha does from both of individual as well as social life. For such poetic pursuit of these poets, nature is in the interior. Nirmalprabha universalises her feelings through skillful delineation of symbols and images from nature. In one of her outstanding poems, “Goponiyo” (Secret), the poet tries to see few reflections of life on the river water:

Dose
River
Dry out ever?
No
River
Dry out never.
Rather
It gets flooded over
In every Bahaag  
With the everlasting  
Whisper of soul  
For whole year.  

(Trans mine, Goriyoshi, April, 1996)

Dickinson sometimes identifies certain objects in nature with human situations and addresses them like friends. Her tendency for personification of natural objects can be seen throughout the following poem where she brings forth a mountain as distinct personality and sees it placed in the deep flow of eternity:

The mountain sat upon the plain  
In his eternal chair,  
His observation manifold,  
His inquest everywhere.

The seasons prayed around his knees,  
Like children like a sire,  
Grandfather of the days is he,  
Of dawn the ancestor.   (p. 975)

By appearance and existence, the mountains acquire the dignity of the manifold observers. The mountains, because of the great height, are able to observe all objects around and pour the judicial look on them showing the magisterial disposal. The mountains have no role to play with the creation of seasons. Seasons come and go and play around with apparently no effect on the grandeur of the mountains. Again the day and the dawn are not the offspring of the mountains but as the mountains are on the east horizon, the sun seems to be born as it emerges above them every morning, bringing dawn and later the day. Thus in the following poem Dickinson elevates the flowers to the level of tender children:

As children bid the guest goodnight,  
And the reluctant turn,  
My flowers raise their pretty lips,  
Then put their nightgown on.
As children caper when they wake,
Merry that it is morn,
My flowers from a hundred cribs
Will peep, and prance along.  (p 133)

This is also of the Wordsworth’s mysticism. Like a true mystic he gave a life to all the objects of nature and made inter-communion possible between them. He entertained the belief that each object of nature had a life of its own, and this belief of the poet found expression in the following lines from “Written in Early Spring”:

And ’tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breaths.  (Palgrave 278, lines 11-12)

And,

The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air,
I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.  (ibid, lines 17-20)

In Dickinson’s poems, bird, orchard, and nature supplant chorister, church and God (p 324). Heaven is ongoing process of living on this earth; it is not an abstract, otherworldly place to be experienced hereafter. It reminds us the idea of the essence of beauty of natural objects advocated by another Romantic poet John Keats. His passion for beauty constitutes his aestheticism. Unlike Wordsworth both Keats and Dickinson have no mystic intercourse with nature and read no moral significance in them. The English Romantic is gifted with a delighted insight into all beauty of woods and fields. He enjoys in every beautiful thing of nature. He, through his aesthetic zeal, identifies beauty with truth. This idea is carried by the famous and often quoted lines occurred in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”:

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (Sharrock 103)
Such Romantic apprehension in Nirmalprbha’s poems takes a frequent mode of expression. The poet, like Keats, sensitises the objects of nature and enjoys the beauty of its phenomena. She expresses her aesthetic emotions on every natural sequence with cultural contour. With Bohaag Bihu or Rongali Bihu the Assamese New Year begins. It is a festival of joy, of love, and of song and dance. It is celebrated in Assam as a part of worldwide spring festival. In Nirmalprabha’s poems, like her songs, Bihu finds the form what it always was-a village festival. Her poems retain that aroma of earth, perfume of soil of the paddy fields and greenery of Assam villages. She has written several poems on Bihu. In the ‘g’ stanza of “Bihu,” Bohaag has been given an ethereal quality:

As if a butterfly  
Flying lightly from  
Woods far away  
On its wings  
In the flower-laden  
Light hour. (Barua, Ajit 24)

Again, in “Bihu,” she reiterates the same idea:

The young women of the village  
Till yesterday were weaving  
The sound of the pipe  
In their looms.  

Today on their feet  
The dancing fields  
Have hung the bells of dust. (Barua, Ajit 68)

Common objects of nature did not escape attention of Dickinson. Even the grotesque and neglected aspects of nature were brought into her poetic periphery, however, with new colours of imagination and incarnation. The rat, the mushroom, the fly, the bat, the snake, the frog, the spider and caterpillar all engage in her creative observation. Such a common object like grass has also been brought forward to her poetic
sensibility that evokes an optimistic note on the images of “butterflies to brood” and “sunshine in its lap”:

The grass so little has to do-
A sphere of simple green,
With only butterflies to brood,
And bees to entertain

And stir all day to petty tunes
The breezes fetch along
And hold the sunshine in its lap
And blow to everything. (p 333)

This poetic vision of an ordinary object like grass can be realised in the undernoted lines of a famous Whitmanian poem- “Leaves of Grass” of “Song of Myself.” Here the poet feels that the grass has the seeds of optimism in its making. The poet is optimistic enough to see the grass has been woven out of hopeful green stuff:

A child said what is the grass? Fetching it to me with full hands
How could I answer the child? I do not know it is any more than he.
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
(allpoetry.com)

In one of her poems, Dickinson confirms that if butterfly is a lady and an aristocrat, the spider is an artist, the “neglected son of genius.”(p1275). In one of her poems, Dickinson depicts the spider as a master weaver of tapestries:

The Spider holds a Silver Ball
In unperceived Hands-
And dancing softly to Himself
His Yarn of Pearl- unwinds- (p. 605)

Dickinson has not been contented with the intimate and delightful side of nature. She knows the darker side as well. But her way of describing the awe of nature takes away half the fearfulness. Unlike Robert Frost who saw a dark design, not of the spider only, in its ostensibly harmless activity in a sequestered and filthy area, she is closer to
Thomas Gray who compared himself to a spider in his creative activity. There are many other creatures which may not be unreceptive or unfavorable as a snake but which are abhorrent enough to make the wonder at their utility in the otherwise benign celestial display. A trapped rat is ridiculed as a creature that has a “brief career of Cheer/ And Fraud and Fear” (p 1340). In poem 1340, the poet asks all to learn from his example that fraud finally meets “Ignominy” and falls a victim to temptation:

Temptation is the Friend
Repugnantly resigned
At last. (p 1340)

Thus, the croaking of frogs was sweet to the poet’s ears. In a letter, writing to Mrs. Samuel Bowles, she remarks—“The Frogs sing sweet today- they have such pretty-lazy-times- how nice to be a Frog” (L 406). In poem 1379 she describes a frog as a statesman and an orator who has been provided a dignified rank by comparing it to the Greek orator Demosthenes. Dickinson identifies the snake with Satan who tempted Eve by assuming the shape of a snake. In poem 1740, the snake is depicted as an embodiment of terror and treason:

A snake is summer’s treason,
And guile is where it goes. (p 1740)

Nirmalprabha’s nature-lyrics are by choice and situation spiritual. When she speaks about pain and pleasure, life and aspirations, Nirmalprabha feels more akin to the nature. The spiritual attachment with nature takes her poetic speculation to a sublimated form of art. Only because of this spiritual relationship with nature she could evoke few outstanding expressions like “I become tree with trees/ River with rivers” (Words and Words), “As if a butterfly flying…in the flower-laden light hour” (Bihu-g), “the entering of the large blue sky on a budding flower” (Sangya Premar), and “the silent noon remains hanging in the leaves of tall-trees” (Bashishhat Duporiya) etc. She never falters to “dive deep into the aroma of the soil” and “become tree with trees, river with rivers” (Sarma 401). Further she reckons nature as the symbol or medium of creative expression through which her creative efforts reach the height of psychoanalytical exuberance. Her spiritual
piety seen throughout her cognitive creations leads one to search for and discover meaning in life, a meaning that goes beyond a material experience, however successful. This is a deeply personal search, which can bring a person to inner peace even in adverse circumstances. Her spirituality, deeply embedded as it is, in the rich Indian spiritual legacy, it offers a sense of connection to life, to nature and to others that go beyond the physical limits of one’s own biological mortality.

Emily Dickinson’s persistent refusal to see nature as a divine analogy or Emersonian “correspondence,” offered her original scope for delineation and speculation. The processes of nature presented to her a carnival of ever-changing amusement which she picked up in enchanting language startled with tidy and classy wit. As Dickinson defines nature from real perspective, she often captures objects to use them as metaphors for unveiling unattained facts. In such creative pursuit, she speculates natural phenomena predominantly in human forms. In her rendering the spring becomes the maid, embarrassed but not afraid, whom she meets in the garden. The woods and hills stand like a regiment of soldiers, the frost is a seducer and a thief, the morning is a queen, sun is a king, the orchard sparkles like a Jew, the day undresses like a lady, the mountain sits upon his tremendous chair, a bird appears like a brigadier, the sky feels insulted at the temerity of the birds, the butterfly is an aristocratic lady, the spider is a weaver and a neglected son of genius, the frog is Greek orator, Demosthenes and so on. This is well discerned that “Dickinson’s attitude of seeing nature in human figures also revives the ancient tradition of the description of nature in Rig Veda” (Khan 62). It also can be said that affinity to the Vedic nature-piety is not the result of her ecstatic religious chants of nature-worship. It was sheer coincidence that she saw natural objects and items in human terms. This approach of her observation confers a sense of kinship and acquaintance which even the Romantics and Transcendentalists were unable to attain. It is more surprising that unlike her predecessors and contemporaries, she evinced that nature and man were separate entities and any superficial fusion of the two would be erroneous. Thus, in spite of all philosophising, the Wordswothian and Emersonian nature remain far from the Dickinsonian nature longing.
Both the poets are the ardent lovers of natural objects like river, sky, hills, forests, trees, flowers, birds, insects, seasons and seasonal changes. They reckon that the changes in the moods of nature bring the changes in the thoughts of men as well. These changes can only be explored through spirituality. Dickinson is often captivated by seasonal bliss. The seasons occupy considerable space in the nature poetry of both the poets. To Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, "Autumn is more love-lorn, more so than the spring" (Barua, Ajit 59). Of all seasons, Dickinson loves spring most as it symbolises rebirth, rejuvenation and remedy. There is always an interaction of nature and human nature in her sensibility: “Spring is a Strange Land when our friends are ill” (L 825). They however romanticise poetic faculties with exception. The Romantics celebrate the self and Dickinson and Nirmalprabha celebrate themselves in their poetry. But Dickinson became skeptic towards Universe since she had discovered herself under the influences of “dark Romanticism” propagated by Lord Byron, Goethe, Melville and Poe (Saradhi 59). Emily’s attitude to nature is something complex hence it is difficult to justify her philosophy as equal to that of Wordsworth. On the other hand, Nirmalprabha as a modern poet with Romantic sensibility is close to John Keats than Wordsworth. Though Emily and Nirmalprabha do not share the idea based on Wordsworth’s pantheistic belief in nature they despite their realistic impulses to destructive aspects and corrupting powers of nature, their eyes were equally open to the natural phenomena like Sunrise, Sunset, beauty of budding flower that they imbibed as sources of sublimed thought and greater poetic emotion. Emily Dickinson’s attitude towards nature was often moved by keen sensibility and puritan’s thorough knowledge of The Bible where Jesus describes nature’s glory in the words, “Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”(Luke 12:27, King James Bible). Dickinson applies such Biblical indication in a poem entitled “How Happy is the Little Stone-”:

How happy is the little stone
That rambles in the road alone,
And does not care about careers,
And exigencies never fears
Whose coat of elemental brown
A passing universe put on;
And independent as the sun,
associates or glows alone,
Fulfilling absolute decree
In casual simplicity.     (p 1510)

Against the Calvinist’s notion that only the ‘saved’ souls can enter the heaven, Dickinson riding on much secular vision, believes that even the little stone that rambles on the road can fulfill the “absolute decree in casual simplicity” (p 1510) and is therefore entitled to happiness. Nirmalprabha has also such secular vision on nature. Her nature philosophy however was straightforwardly coloured by the great expression and imagination of the Sacred Indian Scripture. In some occasions she has been reckoned in a depth of Vedic propagation in nature. In her nature lyrics, these words may seemingly be felt: “The Rigvedic hymns are poems of praise to the beauty of the earth and the powers glimpsed behind the radiant veil of nature rather than ritual hymns strictly” (Bordoloi 3).

As a product of Indian literature she is rooted in the ancient thought on nature. While Dickinson appreciates carefree life of nature, Nirmalprabha pledges on the exigency of deep association between man and nature. In one of her poems entitled “Kabita” (Poetry), Nirmalprabha assures great solace on the lap of nature:

    Keep a patch of the forest in your bosom
    To give you the shade to rest in
    Keep a bit of the sky in your bosom
    Where two birds for once can fly alone.

    (Trans Acharya, Pradip; www.bipuljyoti.in )

Though the object of this part has been to deal only with nature, their other favourite themes like Death, Love, Life, and Pain and Anguish, as in the case of the both poets, intertwine; they, however, will be examined comprehensively in the next part.
Nature has been a great source of Emily Dickinson’s death poems. Dickinson takes nature as a medium of her poetic expression on the death theme. In some of her poems, the philosophy of nature has been reflected in the possession of death. It is a fact that Dickinson’s poetic insight into the nature of death may be regarded as one of her unique contributions to American Literature. Death is the most recurring theme in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The thought of death was her constant preoccupation. While members of her family were busy with the “pretty battles on the pussy question” (L 665), Dickinson was incessantly occupied with serious deliberations like “Extension of Consciousness, after Death” (L 650). As early as 1852 she wrote to Jane Humphrey- “…I think of the grave very often, and how much it has got of mine, and whether I can ever stop it from carrying off what I love; that makes me sometimes speak of it when I don’t intend” (L 197). Her vision of death as reflected in her letters as well as poems is paradoxical. She concedes death both as friend and foe. She fears as well as welcomes it. Consoling Mrs. Joseph A. Sweeter she wrote- “…Death is perhaps an intimate friend, not an enemy” (L 567). But she acknowledges that death is unending source of anxiety: “I can’t stay any longer in a world of death” (L195). Dickinson mingles the idea of journey with the idea of the death as a visiting stranger, a friend and a lover: “we have given our Mr. Bowles- to the deep Stranger-” (L535). In one of her letters she calls it “democratic death” (L 195). “Death is the Common Right/ Of Toads and Men-” (p 583):

Colour- Caste- Denomination-
These- are Time’s Affair-
Death’s diviner Classifying
Does not know they are- (p 970)

For her, death is “Old Suitor Heaven” (L 798); and finally her conceptual coalescence: “Is there more? More than Love and Death? Then tell me it’s name!” (L 873).
Emily Dickinson composed a large number of poems, nearly six hundred, on the subject of death. The poems show a wide spectrum of use of the subject—from a philosophical examination of death’s relation with love to grim consideration of its physical processes. Death holds a “dominating position in the field of her verse” (Wells 91) because she found death “the most resonant and moving of all possible themes” (Chase 172). To Dickinson’s perception death remains the one free agent, greater than nature and second only to God. The poet regards death as the unknown and never ceased to ponder its fascination and mystery. Death may result in despair and terror, then it brings rest and peace and it increases one’s enjoyment of life. Death comes as a cunning courtier, stealthily wooing with a pretended charm. It can also bring multi dimensional sources and symbols based on the objects of nature. It gets its way in her poetry like the mighty presence of a king; a sting like an insect a maneuvering snake etc. She reveals endless images of death that speak about a complete natural history of it.

Biographers and critics have assigned many reasons for her distinct obsession with death. Amongst those the statement of one of her biographers Rebecca Patterson is worth citing which has offered three reasons for her obsession with death. First “she lived in an age of declining faith.” Secondly, she “retained the tremendous impressibility of childhood.” Thirdly, she was frustrated with her life and “the unused life in her avenged itself by confronting her with the image of death” (Patterson 389-390). John Cody, another biographer of her, finds emotional reasons for her preoccupation with death. He remarks that “three psychodynamic patterns- the fear of abandonment, the projection of anger, and the fear of retribution- in addition to the many external influences, are perhaps the major contributors to Emily Dickinson’s fascination with death” (Cody 276). Richard Chase, critic and biographer, comments in this regard as-“she lived in a universe which she regarded as being sundered with cleavages between man, nature and God,” and “death, she seems to say, is the underlying principle of the universe. In her universe, death all but replaces God” (Chase 230-231).
Death and life appear frequently in the poems of Emily Dickinson and Nirmalprabha Bordoloi. It has already been mentioned that so far as the theme of death is concerned Emily Dickinson is more akin to the plot than her Assamese counterpart who otherwise shows poetic excellence delineating spiritual essence of life. Yet these themes have occupied the life-long attention of the poets. In the poems of Dickinson, death and immortality are two sides of a coin. Life exists in the opposite to death. The gap between life and death is unbridgeable. This realisation is felt in a poem of Emily Dickinson:

> Who went to thank Her-
> But she slept-
> ’Twas short –to cross the sea-
> To look upon Her like –alive-
> But turning back.’ taws slow- (p. 363)

To Emily Dickinson death is “an unfrequented road” (p. 10). In Poem 698, Dickinson observes life and death with a sense of reality:

> Life- is what we make it-
> Death- We do not know. (p 698)

Like Emily Dickinson, Nirmalprabha has realised the differences between life and death. In one of her poems, “Sariokash Ronga” (Red all around), she declares -

> Life is not one
> To live
> with death. (Trans mine, Sarma 351)

Again in her “Jiban Kala” (Art of Life), the poet has fixed the position of life:

> Life
> is
> greater
> than
> Death. (Trans mine, Sarma 362)

The most fascinating aspect of Dickinson’s poems on death is the presentation of death as a character. The personification of death in Dickinson’s poems swathes a wide
range. Sometimes death appears as the cultured, gentle and persuasive suitor who escorts his love on a joy-ride. That she could imagine death as lover is a testimony to the fact that she was able to overcome the fear of death. She has personified death as God too. Dickinson takes death as a road to eternity. Again death to her is being considered, as a journey to grave. This journey is a spiritual one. The dead never comes back. It has lost all physical dispositions forever. The poet gains vision of this sequence only to lose for whole life. The experience of death as a suitor is best realized in a poem which has been praised by many lovers of Emily Dickinson’s nature poetry. “Because I could not stop for Death” is remarkable for the restraint which gives poignancy to the last ride of this mortal life. They drive away slowly, they pass the children playing at the school and the ripe harvest in the fields and they finally pass the time and space as we know in this world:

\begin{verbatim}
We passed the school, where children strove
At Recess- in the Ring-
We passed the Fields of Grazing Grain-
We passed the Setting sun –

Or rather –He passed Us-   \hfill (p 712)
\end{verbatim}

In one of her poems, “Heartrending,” Nirmalprabha Bordoloi also becomes skeptic to see the “farewell” to someone. Here she bids farewell not only to a person but also to life process. It proves her social consciousness too. The thought of the following lines resembles the idea of Emily Dickinson. In this poem, though Nirmalprabha has not directly spoken out about a situation where death implies a “journey to grave,” yet the following lines definitely evoke sense of something missed or lost:

\begin{verbatim}
I saw him going
away at the time
When the sun was
Declining

He was going by
the curving alley
of the paddy fields.
\end{verbatim}
On his head
was a cane hat
on his shoulder
two heavily baskets
making as wishing sound.

Following him
went away
the golden sunshine
of the month
of ‘Aghon’

The patch of the thatch
the mud road
of clumps of bamboo
and the flock
of singing birds.

He was going
and
is gone.

Who knows
whether he will
return or
not in this birth.  (Barua, Ajit 53)

Emily Dickinson has a greater vision on death and life. She accepts death as physical fact, as a material truth and falls under this realisation that death can be refrained from our life process that is equally not something to either dreaded or endured. In an exulted mood Dickinson indulges in a series of rhapsodies:

Life is life! And Death, but Death!
Bliss is but Bliss, and Breath is but Breath!
And if needed I fail,
At least, to know the worst, is sweet!
Defeat means nothing but defeat;
No drearier, can befall!  (p 172)
Dickinson describes death in a spiritual stance. In a poem she visualises death in terms of a dialogue between the soul and body:

Death is a Dialogue between  
The Spirit and the Dust,  
“Dissolve” says Death- The Spirit “Sir”  
I have another Trust ( ”)- (p 976)

Emily Dickinson’s paradoxical vision of death is to be marked in Poem 943 also in which she observes that death’s domain is narrowly vast:

A Coffin- is a small Domain,  
Yet able to contain  
A Citizen of Paradise  
In its diminished Plane. (p. 943)

Nirmalprabha, unlike Emily Dickinson, does not glorify death aiming at to escape from the terror of death. For her, death cannot take equal status as life deserves. Life has greater meaning and value than death. She is ready to face the challenge of death. Yet she wants to enjoy the life to the fullest as long as the heart is beating. By quoting from her own words, we can know about what she thinks of the role of poetry in life: “There is no greater poem than life itself. Life is an endless poem? A poem of understanding and non-understanding, of moonlight, of storm, of non-fulfillment, of loss after fulfillment, of softness, of hardness, of darkness, of loveliness, of helplessness, of pronouncement of truth, of promise, of beauty, of dream, of exploitation, of burning, of distress, of cries of ferment and tears” (Introduction to *Sudirgha Din Aaru Ritu*). The following nature image of the poem, “Aparajita” (Unvanquished) rightfully indicates her life consciousness:

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)

To Emily Dickinson death is an unknown visitor, yet he enters the house with “Certain Recognition” (p 390). Death comes as a stranger and yet he is the “postponeless Creature” (p 390). He is bold as an enemy but brief as a friend. Like the enemy he carries one from each house and like a friend he carries his victim to God. In Poem 255, unlike Nirmalprabha, Emily Dickinson tries to belittle the struggle of death:

To die- takes just a little while-
They say it doesn’t hurt-
It’s only fainter-by degrees-
And then- it’s out of sight- (p 255)

Death is portrayed as a callous assassin in Poem 1102. Identifying death with frost she calls it “the blonde assassin” (p 1624) who guillotines any happy flower at its fun, and surprisingly God approves his action. In her imagination death is also an insect who eats away the tree of life:

Death is like the insect
Menacing the tree,
Competent to kill it
But decoyed may be. (p 1716)

But Nirmalprabha thinks of death as an unfrequented road to nothingness. It is with the innumerable deprivations of all willing ones, turned to be the source of terror. This explains why the image of death presented in traditional drawings consists of the striking framework emerging out of enveloping darkness, pillaging about noiselessly and advancing unfailingly towards its victim. Nirmalprabha has also presented death as a sinister ghost, a ghost whose appearance is illusory. In one of her poems, “Era after Era,” she laments:

“A dead tree does
not give shade”
Alas you are blind
Looking only at the faces of dead trees
Era after era. (Barua, Ajit 36)

Like death and life, love is also a recurrent theme of the nature poems of Emily Dickinson and Nirmalprabha Bordoloi. Their love poems indeed deal with many facets of love, from rapture of despair, from the physical to metaphysical, from earth to heaven. Love for them becomes mystic life force. Love is the most recurring emotional theme in Emily Dickinson. Perhaps her unfulfilled emotional life made her comprehend the meaning and significance of love more acutely than any other poet. Dickinson sees the impossibility of a union with the lover on earth: “What if I say I shall not wait” (p 277). Love for her, therefore, becomes a “Fellow of the Resurrection” (p 491). Therefore, the unfulfilled love is sublimated: “it is of Realms unratified that Magic is made” (L 472). Dickinson universalises her personal experience following embarrassments she faced with the most vital human emotion: “Love-/ is the later Thing than Death-/ More previous- than Life-“(L 924). Love for her has a triple dimension: “Love Marine and Love terrene-/ Love celestial too-“(p 1637). Hence, “love will not expire,” (L 484) “To be loved is Heaven,” (L 487) and “love”, she says, “makes us ‘heavenly’ without our trying in the least” (L 601). Like nature, love becomes a mystery to Dickinson. She feels that love’s “Wisdom” is so large and its “Truth” so “manifold” that it is beyond comprehension (p 568). Her metaphysical poet-peer John Donne also confesses his inability to know in “Loves Alchemie” the “hidden mysterie” of love; and he calls the claim of anyone’s knowledge of love’s “centrique happinesse,” clear “imposture” (Honig & Oscar 69). Emily Dickinson in one of her best spiritual love poems “The Soul Selects Her Own Society” announces her dedication in terms of unwavering finality. Here is a soul- an inner self- searching for a companion with regal carefulness. It could be the self of a woman selecting her lover. The ‘One’ may also be God as well. The unfeeling stone- an object of nature- reflects the soul’s attitude towards other claimants for her affection:

I’ve known her- from an ample nation-
Choose One-
Then- close the-Valves of her attention-
Like stone-  (p 303)
Nirmalprabha has also spiritual quest of love though not so complex and comprehensive like that of Dickinson. It is also well discernible that this quest of love is overpowered by a tragic vision. Her probable mystical encounter is assured by her nature longing and she, despite her mental setbacks, becomes more optimistic to have spiritual touch of someone. In one of her poems, “All bygone now,” she writes:

I walk in darkness
I hear in darkness
I wave my hands in darkness
With a hope of someone
to embrace.  (Trans mine, Goriyoshi, April, 1999)

The anticipation of lover’s future visit and possible marriage is one of the principal motifs in the love poems of Emily Dickinson. These deal with erotic desire, employing the bee-flower images frequently to utter her physical longing. In a largely allegorical mode, the poet considered the influence of the male upon the female, emphasised the power of physical attraction, and expressed a mixture of fear and fascination for the mysterious magnetism between the sexes. A Bee, passionately rushes to get the love of its beloved- a Rose. In “A Be his burnished Carriage,” the poet depicts the bee as boldly taking his pleasure of the rose and of then leaving her humbled by the rapture he has caused her to feel. The following lines are evident of metaphysical sensibility imposed to the natural phenomenon:

A Bee his burnished Carriage
Drove boldly to a Rose-
Combinedly alighting-
Himself –his Carriage was-
The Rose received his visit
With frank tranquility
Withholding not a Crescent
To his Cupidity-
Their Moment consummated-
Remained for him- to flee-
Remained for her- of rapture
But the humanity.  (p 1339)
The bee’s interest in the rose is exclusively sexual, as is hers in him. The situation portrayed emphasises the male’s power, his active role as initiator of their union and pleasure, while stationary female remains the passive recipient of his will. However, in another poem about the lover-bee, the poet questions the status of the female she submits and the honour of the male when he achieves his objective:

Did the Harbell loose her girdle  
To the lover Bee  
Would the Bee the Harbell hallow  
Much as formerly?

Did the “Paradise”- persuaded-  
Yield her moat of pearl-  
Would the Eden be an Eden,  
Or the Earl-an Earl?  (p 213)

Like Emily Dickinson, Nirmalprabha also has composed several love lyrics with erotic flavour. She also reveals her physical urge with brilliant blending of natural symbols like sky and flower. The occurrence of entering large blue sky on the budding flower automatically brings to our mind about the sequence of love making of two opposite sexes with a view to fulfill their desire. In “Definition of Love,” she draws a series of natural objects to depict a situation in terms of sensation. Her lighter treatment of this theme appears in this poem which describes lover-sky who symbolically assaults a flower:

Perhaps then enters the large blue sky  
On the budding flower, collapses to the root  
The thunder enters proudly inside the vortex  
Turns into ash  
The abode houses of  
Thigh, breast, body.  (Barua, Ajit 58)
Dickinson, in poem 180, pictures herself as an Arctic Flower which has entered Eden and that was a blessing enough as she describes in the following lines:

As if some little Arctic flower
Upon the Polar hem –
Went wandering down the latitudes
Until it puzzled came  (p 180)

Further Emily Dickinson is disturbed with the misery of separation as well as the realisation of the love’s termination. She is haunted by a haunting sense of anguish. She tries to get rid of the terrible misery that separation causes. Though she gives efforts to discover some amount of religious consolation yet the conventional religion cannot give her any solace. The pain of renunciation and the tensions of the final meeting have come out as an expression of her “sensation of soul” or “thunder” (p 293):

I got so I could take his name –
Without –Tremendous gain –
That Stop –Sensation –on my soul –
And thunder–in the room –  (p 293)

The similar sense of renunciation and uncertainty is also found in the poetry of Nimalprabha Bordoloi. She succeeds to transform her images into the project of perceptions that is being proved while she tries to sketch the setting of a situation recollected from the vantage point of separation of lovers. The beloved concedes her loneliness and helplessness as her lover has gone away leaving her opened for every one’s eyes. She laments:

Your
And my words
Grown like shrubs

Made us hid

Now
You’ve gone away
Leaving me
In every one’s vision
Unconcealed.

(Ttrans mine, Goriyoshi, August, 2004)
Like Nirmalprabha, Emily Dickinson too envisions a situation when the beloved becomes helpless following a separation with her ‘man.’ She further looks into a situation when she is powerless even to die. Hence she has surrendered herself to the man who identified the potentials of her. After the death of her lover, there is no one else who can use her unused power, so he must live longer than her. After renunciation, she will have to live as one abandoned, because she cannot even die to join her mate in immortality:

My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun-
In Corners- till a Day
The Owner passed- identified
And carried Me away-

Though I than He –may longer live
He longer must –than I-
For I have but the power to kill,
Without –the power to die- (p 754)

Besides these apparent similarities, both these poets demonstrate few contrastive elements in love poetry so far as their philosophy of love is concerned. When Emily Dickinson’s poems on the subject matter appear abstract and artificial and love seems to be closely associated with the spiritual aspect of her mystical attitude, Nirmalprabha’s poems, besides, its affinities to spirituality, deal the theme of love with a bit of trace of realistic perspective. Emily Dickinson heightened love from its sordid physical surroundings to the spiritual and imaginative plane. Earthly love, even if it were fulfilled, would have satisfied her craving for spiritual or mystic experience. Anything less than an affair with God would not have satisfied her spiritual longing. So she says:

I could suffice for Him, I knew-
He- could suffice for me-
Yet Hesitating Fraction- Both
Surveyed Infinity- (p 643)

Love, as imagined by Emily Dickinson, is not intelligible to ordinary mortals. The wisdom of love is large and its truth so manifold that they cannot be properly understood
by lovers themselves. Love is heavenly and the pain fraught with it is infinite in dimensions. Man experiences only a fragment of it. The love that is glorified in such terms as in the following poem is not the earthly love of ordinary mortals:

You left me- Sire- two legacies-
A legacy of love
A heavenly Father would content
Had he the offer of-
You left me boundaries of pain-
Capacious as the sea-
Between eternity and time-
Your consciousness and me-  (p 644)

On the other hand, despite her spiritual legacy, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi depicts love with more realistic attitude than that of the American counterpart. In her poem “In Reflection,” the poet asserts her feeling of love through the nature imagery:

Yet I have taken up
The mirror

Your Sun
My Sun-
It is the same Sun.

(Trans Bhaben Barua 250)

A category of Nirmalprabha’s love poems treats of the suffering and frustration love can cause. These poems clearly have their roots in her dissatisfaction and they are intimately associated with her most private feelings. However, some of them lack artistic control, and that sense of the universal in feeling needed for elevating them above the biographical or the personal accounts. Many of them of course, are striking and original expressions depicting the longing for shared moments, the pain of separation, and the futility of finding happiness. In one of her often quoted poems, “Draupodi,” the poet brings out her unhappy feelings in terms of saga of the Mahabharata. The woman persona is well contended with love and affection from the husbands; and “all these pictures were
there/ In the mind’s canvas” still she does not know “why another picture comes/And sways again and again/ At some opportunity??” (“Draupodi”, Line 44-48). She quizzes—

Why do I look for Karna  
Why does this thirst arise  
When I am full up to the neck  
Of nectar.

This is a play of illusion  
Psychology of a special level  
That shakes the still heart  
Of great love.     (Barua, Ajit 64)

In an exuberantly imaginative poem, Emily Dickinson professes in fantastic hyperboles what she is willing to pay in exchange for the sight of the lover. With a sense of immediacy and urgency, the speaker of the poem is willing to give anything right now to have her wish fulfilled. The urgency of her desire is appropriately reflected in the vigorous verbal irregularities of the poem:

What would I give to see his face?  
I’d give- I’d give my life- of course-  
But that is not enough!  
Stop just a minute- let me think!  
I’d give my biggest Bobolink!  
That makes two- Him-and Life!     (p 247)

Dickinson’s definition of love in a four-line poem, there, states love as continuum through life and death. The sequence that emerges is: love-life-death-love, a cycle process resembling that of the seasons in nature. This inference is based on the phrase “Initial of Creation”:

Love- is interior to Life-  
Posterior- to Death-  
Initial of Creation, and  
The Exponent of Earth-     (p 917)

Nirmalprabha defines love as incessant and ubiquitous human emotion that has been inextricably intertwined with natural phenomena. As love grows everywhere, even
“the damp place is now drowned in the scent of the mustard flower” (Barua, Ajit 58) she writes in “Autumn”:

The season of Autumn is in the body.
Autumn is full of love
Even more than Spring. (Barua, Ajit 59).

Emily Dickinson is painfully aware that love, ecstasy and bliss are one side of the coin of life while on the other side is hidden suffering, pain, and anguish. In the best of her poems on the theme of pain and suffering she attempts to sublimate earthly sufferings into passion of spiritual love. She gradually learned how to master the pain of separation and in time analysed the experience with artistic detachment. Dickinson, in one of her early poems, says that the pains of life prepare us for the final peace and tranquility. It means that mental, emotional and physical sufferings of this world make it easy for us to confront death, which is the ultimate reality of life.

The same idea is enshrined in Dickinson’s greatest piece of poetry on the theme of pain and death, “After great pain, a formal feeling comes” (p 341). Where she, with the help of excellent use of images from Nature like ‘wood,’ ‘quartz’, ‘stone’, ‘tombs,’ depicts a situation exhibiting the slow numbing process of freezing to death after the effects of pain:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes--
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs--
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round--
Of ground, or Air, or Ought--
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone – (p 341)

Dickinson feels that what life offers is nothing but pain and suffering. To her, pain and suffering succeed the moments of pleasure and ecstasy. With this tragic awareness of unabated sense of pain Dickinson says, “I lived on dread”: 
For each ecstatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy.

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years-
Bitter contested farthings-
And Coffers heaped with Tears!  (p 125)

Running through the majority of the poems of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, there is a deep feeling of a heart lacerated by the sorrows and sufferings of life. Experiences of pain of all kinds are stream all the way in the life of Man. Even happiest experiences in life become more vivid and picturesque and therefore more memorable when they are seen from the vantage point of suffering and anguish. In the dichotomy of pleasure and pain, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi avows that one cannot exist without the other. For her pain is the rule of life, joy its exception. Hence she believes that the suffering is another name of life:

Another name of life
Is pain,
Even to make a basket
One needs to prepare
A piece of cane, a piece of bamboo
Even to make an idol
One needs to chisel
A piece of stone.  (Barua, Ajit 7)

Pain is a life-long process- very expression of eternity. It has no beginning, no ending. Pain is inseparable from the day to day works of human kind. It pervades all time –it is infinite pain continuum. Emily Dickinson seems to suggest that pain is an essential part of man’s being and without it perhaps, man suffers loneliness. She further accepts pain as a legacy of God. It is in fact a twin-legacy of love and pain:

You left me - Sire- two legacies-
A legacy of love.
A Heavenly father would suffice
Had He the offer of -
You left me boundaries of pain-
Capacious as the sea -
Between Eternity and time--
Your consciousness- and Me-  (p 644)

Nirmalprabha Bordoloi tries to sublimate her individual suffering to the universal human predicament. She envisions surroundings with social consciousness. The images of nature brought out in her poems on the theme of pain and suffering, have penetrated to the subject and therefore, the poems succeed to inculcate a collective philosophy for the human society throughout her realm of such poetry. Hence her misery of life seems to be hidden under the veil of social reality. This is well expounded in the following lines from her poem, “Pain in the Heart”:

To become dust at the end of a broomstick
   It hurts me
If someone becomes dust at the end
   Of a broomstick

   It hurts me
Both our hands
Solute the sun
The mind circumbulates
   The sun

Even then we are poor and sad/miserable
   In this world of men
We are prisoners
   In the prisons
In the prison of circumstances

At birth
   Man is free.  (Barua, Ajit 30)

Emily Dickinson’s poems on pain construct a kind of individualistic philosophy of suffering. These poems do not reflect any social viewpoint. She rather believes that
pain is a consummate experience because it paves the way to heaven. Pain becomes tolerable when one takes it spirituality. It is achieved only by those who reach the top. Man has to attain it only at a cost because pain is a priced, precious, hallowed experience:

The hallowing of pain
Like hallowing of Heaven,
Of obtains at a corporeal cost –
The summit is not given

To Him who strives Severe
At middle of the Hill-
But He who has achieved the top--
All is the price of all-- (p 772)

In human life there is no way to get rid of pain. Nirmalprabha Bordoloi has no such mystical approach regarding pain and suffering as Dickinson shows in the above noted poem. She rather becomes more realistic in one of her famous poems, “In pain.” She, in respect of suffering in life, compares every person with Jesus:

Sleep on pain
Put your head
On wood, in pain,
Your backs
On nails
In pain
In pain
In pain
Sleep
In sleep
Wake yourself up
In pain
In pain
Remember
The two wings of the sun
Do not drop off
In the storm

Every one of you
Is now a Jesus. (Barua, Ajit 42)
In her poems on nature, Emily Dickinson maintains the same philosophic stance—
the same tragic view of life. It has already been made clear that she differs from the
Romantic and the transcendental view that nature has spiritual significance and she is
always kind and compassionate to man. To her, nature is callous, treacherous and hostile.
Whatever brief term of happiness and ecstasy she confers on man, it is sadly short-
lived and fleeting. Whatever message nature has, it has only ambiguous and terrifying
meanings to Emily Dickinson. Man is constantly exposed to the horrors and cruelties of
nature. In one of the poems, Emily Dickinson says:

I could not find privacy
From Nature’s Sentinels
In cave if I presumed to hide
The Walls- begun to till-
Creation seemed a mighty crack
To make me visible. (p 891)

Nirmalprabha with her acute realistic vision sees the truth of life in terms of
nature’s ambiance. She believes that happiness alone is not the legacy of human life; it is
followed by sorrow:

The face of truth
Is reflected
In the lake of sorrow

The sea of happiness
Is full of foam. (Barua, Ajit 71)

As a poet of Romantic tradition, Emily Dickinson was acutely concerned with what
Emerson had called the ‘me’ and ‘not me’ in terms of the relationship between the self
and the self’s external surroundings. In spite of her Romantic tendency, Dickinson, in
some of her finest poems, has precisely depicted the self in its own unique terms. As she
delineates the self, Dickinson tends to divide the human being into three distinct parts:
“in an ascending order of value and importance, they appear in poetry as the physical

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self, the self as *mental* being, and the self as a spiritual entity” (Griffith 186). Of the three parts of self, the spiritual is the only one to be regularly personified. Her fastidiousness is set forth on many occasions, though never with greater elegance than in following:

The Soul selects her own Society-
Then- shuts the Door-
To her divine Majority-
Present no more- (p 303)

The poem has to do, rather, with the spiritualisation of the self, though it has sometimes been supposed to be with love or friendship (Griffith 210).

The difference of personality of both Dickinson and Nirmalprabha greatly lies in their social viewpoint. For Emily Dickinson, it is a closed chapter. She spent her life in seclusion. The ‘hermit of Amherst’ virtually eliminated nearly all-social contact. “Her gradual withdrawal was a reasonable response to a society that had already rejected single, middle class women as redundant. She used her time to develop her genius. Her later reclusiveness was not so much of expression of eccentricity as it was a common life mode for single daughters, despite the fact that single daughters were somewhat of an anomaly, since “natural” women married and had children” (Leder 33). Dickinson is a person who lived much more in her own mind than in life, as if by limiting her actual physical existence she had room and time for more lives. But it was completely opposite practice that Nirmalprabha had been habituated with. She is out and out a social person with the specific ideology. Nirmalprabha sustains deeper sense of social responsibility which is often absent in Dickinson. Though Dickinson herself turned down from all social contacts, she had not totally lost the image of society in her mind. In her life time she felt neglected as unrecognised. Hence, she appeals to her invisible audience to judge her work tenderly and with sympathy as it enshrines the message of nature:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me-
The simple News that Nature told
With tender Majesty. (p 441)
But Nirmalprabha has shown a greater vision of her social life. She becomes skeptic while she goes on to look at her tradition and hierarchy of generation. In her poem, “The Saddest Thing”, the poet’s melancholy reaches the height of existential mysticism while she quizzes:

When the smell
Of the fields of Ahin
Somehow touches
my nose
I find again
my lost father.

In the scent of the gamosa
Unfolded in the shop
I find again my mother.

For my children
Where shall I keep it
Where? (Barua, Ajit 51-52)

In “The Concert,” Niramprabha expresses her social and moral vision while makes the value-based questions:

Who will protest?
Against injustice?

Come let us stand
together.
All of them will
be worn out
Like clothes one day. (Barua, Ajit 39)

This mystical speculation of spiritual existentialism appears in Dickinson too. In Poem 288, the poet has illustrated of her self-exile into the private world. As a matter of fact, she remains insignificant during her life time. She was nobody in the world. But it hardly matters. Two nobodies can become companions. To the poet persona the public life is dreary and cramped. It is like the life of a frog which proudly tells its names all the time to its admiring bog where it lives. But the frog is unknown to those who live outside the marshy bog:
I’m nobody! who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there’s pair of us?
Don’t tell! They’d advertise- you know!

How dreary- to be- Somebody!
How public- like a Frog-
To tell one’s name- the livelong June-
To an admiring Bog! (p. 288)

Emily Dickinson is self-effacing anonymous, and shy. Her eyes, which do not easily focus, appear to indicate that she is on the point of seeking a refuge. There were many elements of passivity and retreat in her reclusive life, responses to panic, insecurity, bereavement, sickness, and the morbidities of shame and shyness. Her seclusion was a way of maintaining in her inner life that precarious hold on sanity and vitality of which her poems often speak. Her antagonist was nothing less than society itself, and the public opinion through which the values of society were forced upon the individual. As the above poem, she was entirely content to be what the world called a “nobody.” “Emily Dickinson’s seclusion- sad as it was and unpropitious for our culture- was yet one of the notable public acts of our history” (Chase 269).

Both Nirmalprabha and Dickinson take nature as the medium through which they try to expose the spiritual self in order to explore their total self. Both the poets are women poets and this fact is integral to their identities which can also be studied in the context of feminist perspective. They in some of their gender poems, discover a split between man and woman. These poems speak about a social order based on the roles of male and female. “Droupadi” of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and “My Life had stood-a loaded Gun-” of Emily Dickinson are such poems where the poets become much concerned about the identity and position of woman in the male dominated environment. Nirmalprabha Bordoloi sometimes becomes more doubtful about her identity and position as woman in the society. Like Emily Dickinson, she also is always in fear about
the danger of her existence. She like, her American counterpart, moves in search of her ‘man’: 

I walk in darkness  
I hear in darkness  
I wave hands in darkness  
With a hope of someone  
To embrace.  

(Trans mine, Goriyoshi: April, 1999)

Likewise, Emily Dickinson has the same feelings regarding the image of her partner. She, in Poem 520, talks of the sea- a conjecture of her discontented reclusive self- searching for a companion:

And He- He followed- close behind-  
I felt His Silver Heel  
Upon my Ankle- Then my shoes  
Would overflow with Pearl-  

Until we met the Solid Town-  
No one- He seemed to know-  
And bowing- with a Mighty look-  
At me- The Sea withdrew- (p.520)

Nirmalprabha is not a feminist poet in the radical sense of the term. Like, Emily Dickinson, she, through her works, has discussed the cultivation of her female self in terms of her search for self-sufficiency and meaningful work and thirst for education. Both the poets pursued autonomy through the development of their imaginative and intellectual faculties. To do this, however, Nirmalprabha carefully broadened her working periphery. She even was surrounded by many people- friends and ‘foes’- which she judged from her sense of generosity and social responsibility. On the other hand, Emily Dickinson, despite her immense intellectual and emotional responses to her family friends and well wishers, had consciously narrowed the numbers of the people whom she had to serve.
In the opinion of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, the process of transformation gets explicated in the various roles of woman as an expedition from one ‘self’ to another identity. But this is to her a process to ignite her mind with “an unfailing power of will” (“The Song of Transformation”, Line 4-5). In the poem, “The Song of Transformation,” she relishes such process of alteration and has been metamorphosed into a new existence:

I am transformed
From bluish white
To green inside myself
To an infinite blue
...............  
I have no name now
My name is ‘you’
My name is ‘he.’ (Barua, Ajit 4-5)

As such in “I have a King, who does not speak-” (p 103) and “My Life had stood-a Loaded Gun-” (p 754), Dickinson performs the acts of transformation of the mysterious figure converting from a lover into a male muse. Amusingly, though the male muse in both these poems is given an impressive designation- the King and the Master respectively- he is strangely inert and quiet in both poems. But his passivity and silence apparently empower the poet’s exultant words:

And if I do- when morning comes-
It is as if a hundred drums
Did round my pillow roll,
And shouts fill all my Childish sky,
And Bell keeps saying “Victory”
From steeples in my soul! (p 103)

Likewise, when the poet envisages herself as a “Loaded Gun” she gets ready for her owner and Master to transport her into a world of ecstasy eg. “Sovereign Woods”:

And now We roam in Sovereign woods-
And now We hunt the Doe-
And every I speak for Him-
The Mountains straight reply-
And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow –
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through- (p. 754)

The poems and letters clearly show that Emily Dickinson was also attracted to masculine forms of power. In a letter, once, she wrote about her father: “The brow is that of Deity- the eyes, those of the lost, but the power lies in the Throat- pleading, sovereign, savage-the the panther and the dove!” (L 948). Her admiration for her father avows her inclination to exciting side of male force. However, we must recollect her description of the face of Judge Lord in these terms in the next year: “Had I not loved it, I had feared it, the Face had such ascension” (L 968). There is precise refutation of her mother’s very existence: “I never had a mother; I always ran Home to Awe when a child, if anything befell me. He was an awful Mother, but I liked him better than none” (L 518). But, interesting of all, even though we see Emily Dickinson complaining about her mother who does not “care for thought” (L 404), she also describes her, paradoxically, as absent. This is an obvious indication that her attempt to deny her mother is nothing but a yearning for her mother. She, soon after her mother’s death, wrote: “To have had a Mother- how mighty!” (L 892).

The psychoanalytical exuberance on feminine entity gives better consciousness to Nirmalpabha’s nature poems. The poet expresses a strong note on her closeness to the nature that utterly needs for realisation of her existence. Like Shelley and Keats, Nirmalprabha also craves for the beauty- might it be either of cognition or of nature. Her self-explorative venture, endorsed by the psychosomatic relation of nature, promotes some pertinent issues of modern mind. In her often quoted poem, “Droupadi,” Nirmalprabha purports the analogy of a woman and nature:

Am I an exception?
No, no
I, I am only the Eternal Woman
Full of perpetual mystery
An easy expression of a spectrum
Of colours.

I am woman in age after age
Thirsty of such beauty

In this my small forest of life and death
If there had been every flower of every colour!

(Barua, Ajit 63- 65)

The self-explorative view of Dickinson makes her closer to moderns. She brings out the idea of transforming sorrow into song in one of her nature poems:

So terrible-had been endured-
I told my Soul to sing- (p. 410)

Emily Dickinson herself refers to her suffering as volcanic, and evolves out of it “A meditative spot” and grows “the Grass” of her poetry (p 1677). She maintains tremendous equanimity under the oddest of circumstances. While brooding over her own life, she is reminded of a “Brave Black Berry”:

We- tell a Hurt- to cool it-
This Mourner- to the sky-
A little further reaches – instead-
Brave black berry- (p.554)

Dickinson is competing against herself; also against time and nature. More fundamentally, however, Dickinson is competing against a world that she insistently defines as a male-dominated sphere. Gender as an aspect of style also manifests itself in Dickinson’s determination to isolate the workings of a composite mind from the specific manifestations of personality. With some justification, she might rightly be called the poet of the countless pleasure. In Poem 211, Dickinson depicts a loss of self-confidence of the female persona, which is beautifully controlled by bee-flower analogy:

Come slowly- Eden!-
Lips unused to Tree-
Bashful- sip they Jessamines-
At the fainting Bee-
Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums-
Counts his nectars-
Enters- and is lost in Balms.  (p 211)

Being confronted with the restraints in patriarchy ambiance, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi has also lost her confidence on survival of her existence. Her apparent will subsequently misses the boon of nature’s compassion. In the following poems, “How Long” and “A Stream,” it gives rise of such tinge while raising questions to the society:

How long, shall I keep
Holding up this face
Without its getting ugly
In this crowded place?  (Barua, Ajit 19)

And,

I ask myself
My name.
I ask myself-
Where am I standing?
Not on earth
Not on Water.   (Trans Barua, Bhaben 253)

Dickinson’s experience of human relationships had engendered in her lack of clarity about the historical uses of her own will- to power. Skitting physical power as male privilege, Dickinson often resists it. The resistance of physical power makes her restrict to the imagination of the historical relationships on physical power. She therefore, could state in 1870: “I find ecstasy in living- the mere sense of living is joy enough” (L 342a). Existence tends to the power of living as she could write in about 1863:

To be alive- is Power-
Existence- in itself-
Without a further function-
Omnipotence- Enough-
Both the poets thus offer enormous scope for deliberations to expatiate their nature orientation that have been contemplated through their poetic endeavour with skillful manipulation of different subject matters such as Death, Love, Life, Pain and Anguish. It has already been seen that unlike Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson and Nimalprabha Bordoloi do not sustain any certain ideology about the clear correspondence among God, Nature and Man. Their love of nature is comprehensive, many sided and all inclusive than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth loved to paint only spring time beauty of nature, but Emily and Nirmalprabha had equally keen eye for the sensuous and beautiful in nature as well as for the harsher and the unpleasant. Both of the poets have deeply understood nature in all its forms and actions. The forms and actions of nature are combining with discipline and a system. Though these poets, unlike Wordsworth, refuse to employ nature as a guide for moral behaviour yet, they, with the advocacy of Emerson, discuss the presence of spirit that is dominant in all the forms of nature as man and the physical universe are parallel creations of the same divine spirits. Natural and moral law is the same and everything in nature, rightly seen, has spiritual significance for man: “no law can be sacred to me but that of my own Nature” (Samuelson 61). In the early days to her poetic career Emily Dickinson unlike Wordsworth, considered man and nature as essentially apart, each having own distinctive and separate life and identity. But as the time passes, she, like Nirmalprabha Bordoloi came to the conclusion that man and nature are not separate altogether; there is a mysterious link between them. For the poets, this association is obviously of spiritual kind. In physical level, nature and man are essentially two separate entities. In reality, nature, for these poets, is no longer a friend but sometimes it makes negative influences on their minds. As a matter of fact, so far as their vision on nature is concerned, Emily Dickinson and Nirmalprabha Bordoloi reveal an attitude of duality with the fact for why they remained skeptic who both admired and
doubted. It is also right to say that Dickinson’s prevailing skepticism on natural objects is rarely found in Nimalprabha Bordoloi. While Emily Dickinson is often found doubtful with nature, her Assamese counterpart contemplates the spiritual essence of it tantamount to human feeling. Nature, for them after all, is a great emotional support to the full flow of their creativity.

Besides their common and contrastive notes on the different parameters analysed, Dickinson and Nimalprabha show very good deal of striking images and symbols which become the medium of the poets’ communicating process. These poets were equally aware of the fact that in order to be a successful poet they must be familiar with intellectual aspects of knowledge. Dickinson acknowledges the fact in one of her poems: “I taught my Heart a hundred times/ Precisely what to say-” (p 1449). Nimalprabha concedes it in the poem, “The Poet”: “By his fingers flows/ The eternal stream/ Of the right” (Barua, Ajit 28). Dickinson’s famous poem, 448, categorically brings out the intention and the process of her poetic technique: “This was a Poet- It is That/ Distills amazing sense/ From ordinary Meanings-.” However, these poets, unlike the metaphysical poets, assign a secondary role to the intellect. The intellect only articulates and construes the emotionally experienced reality. For them the mind lives on the heart like a parasite. That is, the intellect itself has no content of its own to express or to reveal. It only works on the emotional experiences. They give primacy to the emotional over the intellectual factors in the mechanism of unification of sensibility. In the poem, “Bihu,” Nimalprabha achieves the “unification” bringing out some pertinent images:

The village boys and girls
Took the call of the cuckoo
Falling drop by drop  (Barua, Ajit 67)

Again,

Like a tender leaf
The whole place is swaying
In the scent of the
Keteki flower.   (Barua, Ajit 66)
Dickinson’s preoccupation with the unification of sensibility becomes not incidental, but a major mode of perception of the reality itself. Her preference for heart over mind explains partly the intricacy of her experiences: “The Heart is the Capital of Mind” (p 1354). In this poem, Dickinson brings out the integrity of the artistic process through the geographical and political metaphors. Mind and heart together make a single nation. She forces the reader to perceive the impersonal metaphors in the personal context of an individual’s artistic process and the role of the mind and the heart, of the intellect and the emotion.

Nirmalprabha and Dickinson had to discard the “decorative fallacy” (Preminger 366-267) in their use of imagery as they were not writing poetry for entertainment. Like the metaphysical poets, they were basically concerned with their own perception of reality through their respective experiences. Like Dickinson, Nirmalprabha’s imagery is so rich and varied that it defies a systematic classification based on thematic analysis. These poets basically draw the images from different sources like flowers, birds, bee, wars, animals, hills, mountains, sea-life, sky, river, etc. Yet they sometimes make use of few startling images for certain occasions. While Emily Dickinson remains unrivalled to convey varied states of mind through suggestive images drawn from several spheres of life including geometrical and allegorical perspective, Nirmalprabha proves her genius in identifying the images from her common socio-cultural rustic experiences. In one of her poems, “The Fire-Born Flag,” the sea image stands for poet’s “terrified existence”:

I am the one born of the sprout
Who grow the green
-A sharp eagerness
I am the fierceness

.....

The terrified existence roars
Like the sea.     (Barua, Ajit 38)

Emily Dickinson, on the other hand, evokes the image of the sea to symbolise the soul’s ceaseless search of eternity:

Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea-  (p 76)
And here is an image of sea again that stands as the traditional symbol of death:

Until We met the Solid town,
No One He seemed to know
And blowing- with a Mighty look
At me- The Sea withdrew.  (p 520)

Far from being ornamental embellishment, Nirmalprabha’s imagery is a vital part of her poetic art. Few of her famous poems sustain strenuous deal with some startling images emerged from her inclination towards Indian mythology. Her images of religious piety have also been converted to poetic perfection with artistic delineation of spiritual introspection and metaphysical speculation. Unlike Emily Dickinson, Nirmalprabha’s imagery reveals first hand impact of her socio-cultural affinities. As the poet sustains an active and eventful social life and inherits some tradition bound impressions from her family background and social surroundings, images of her poetry are drawn from her common consciousness out of practical possessions. In one of her poems, “Heartrending,” Nirmalprabha accounts sentimental nuances bidding One’s (He) farewell not of a particular individual but of a way of a collective life-process- the system society drives. Here she succeeds in depicting her inner woes with poetic excellence evoking the images of common sight of rustic life like paddy field, sun shine of Aghon, clumps of bamboo, and singing birds etc.

I saw him going
away at the time
When the sun was
Declining

He was going by
the curving alley
of the paddy fields.
.....
Following him
went away
the golden sunshine
of the month of Aghon

The patch of the thatch
the mud road
of clumps of bamboo
and the flock
of singing birds.

He was going
and is gone.

Who knows whether he will return or not in this birth. (Barua, Ajit 53)

Dickinson’s poems are lyrics, generally defined as short poems with a single speaker (not necessarily the poet) who expresses thought and feeling. In poems such as these, the poet subjectivises an objective experience. The speaker in these poems is often identified in the first person, "I." Dickinson reminded a reader that the “I” in her poetry does not necessarily speak for the poet herself: “When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse- it does not mean- me- but a supposed person” (L 268). Following the spirit of her own injunction, we are justified in taking her “I” as a convenient poetic figure- merely an internal viewpoint- a mode of voice. In the poem, “Because I could not stop for Death” (p 712), Dickinson adopts the same internal viewpoint where the narrator of the story becomes one of the actors. It is perhaps beyond the limits of judgment when a poet describes her death and journey to immortality:

We passed the school- where children strove
A recess- in the Ring-
We passed the fields of grazing Grain-
We passed the setting Sun. (p 712)
But the journey is a dramatic objectification of imaginary journey. Death and immortality are not here subjective experiences of the poet but are metaphors suggesting mankind’s longing for eternity. The poet only impersonates the third person- mankind in this case- and presents its experiences as if they were her own.

Nirmalprabha, like Dickinson, has no definite audience or addressee to define her poetic modes, owing to which she was not conscious of any outside pressures on her poetry. In her poems, where the poet subjectivises of objective experience, the grammatical first-person “I” should not be taken to represent the poet. Here the poet persona is the upholder of an internal viewpoint- a poetic voice- narrator of her subjective experience of the objective reality. In the poem, “Sorrow,” Nirmalprabha illustrates her mode of voice on an objective reality of being concerned about the fate of age-old values held in greatest esteem down the ages by the Assamese:

When the smell  
Of the fields of Ahin  
Somehow touches  
my nose  
I find again  
my lost father.

In the scent of the gamosa  
Unfolded in the shop  
I find again my mother.

For my children  
Where shall I keep it  
Where? (Barua, Ajit 51-52)

A large body of their poetry is candidly confessional in tone and theme. In these poems there is no impersonation and no objectivisation. They are the poems where the glimpses of the poet’s mental and emotional life are reflected. Such are the poems like “To Sunil,” “Sri Sri Sankardev” of Nirmalprabha and “I reckon- when I count all” (p 569), “I think To live-may be bliss” (p 646) of Dickinson, where the “I” are the poets themselves. Again, there are poems which are seemingly impersonal in tone. The poet
assumes here an Olympian, omniscient viewpoint. There is no intriguing “I” in these poems, nor is there a complex process of objectivisation or subjectivisation. The poet becomes the narrator and the reader, the listener. Nirmalprabha’s “In Words” (Barua, Ajit 52), “The Moment of the Flower,” (Barua, Ajit 52), “Waiting” (Barua, Ajit 60) are the examples of this group. In “In Words,” the poet quizzes on the situation she lives, and reckons nature’s positivity as elevator of such condition:

Does the sound of the gun  
Make it morning?  
Oh, no!  
It becomes morning  
At the bird’s call  
Which nibbles at  
eats up  
The darkness  
Of the night.  
(Barua, Ajit 52)

Most of the “I”-less poems of Emily Dickinson like “Success is counted Sweetest” (p 67), “There is a certain slant of Light” (258), “The Day came slow” (p 304) etc. fall in this category. Further there is another group of poems, where the poet is neither subjective, nor objective. The poet assumes a phantom voice, a disembodied voice of abstraction. The poet describes the state of mind. Such are the poems like “Taste of the Void,” (Barua, Ajit 33) of Nirmalprabha and “After great pain, a formal feeling comes” (p 341), of Dickinson, where there is nobody as persona. The sense of tension is conveyed by a mysterious voice of the poet, which is neither personal, nor impersonal. These are the devices, rather, the inflexions in the voice structure, that, Nirmalprabha and Dickinson employ. In the absence of definite audience to whom the poems are addressed, the poets keep on shifting their viewpoints. As in most modern poetry, we do not hear in them the voices of the poets speak to us, but we only overhear them speak to themselves.
Notes:

1 L: The references to letters of Emily Dickinson, in this research, have been extracted from The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, 3 vols. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958. Citations from it have been referred to as capital L in short form followed by serial number of the letter in the Johnson’s edition.

2 p: The references to poems of Emily Dickinson, in this research, have been extracted from “The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Including Variant Readings Critically Compared With All Known Manuscripts. ed. Thomas H. Johnson 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963(c 1955). Citations from it have been referred to as small p in short form followed by serial number of the poem in the Johnson’s edition.

3 Bohaag is the first month of Assamese calendar coincides within mid-April and May. Bohaag, in Assamese literature, is a culturally oriented significant metaphor that embodies assurance, existence, integrity, promise and prospect.

4 Ahin is the sixth month of Assamese calendar falls within Sept-Oct that signifies abundance.

5 Gamosa is a white rectangular piece of cloth with red border used by the Assamese for various purposes. It is offered to very respected and dearer one as a symbol of love, promise and protection.

Works Cited:


http://www.bipuljyotisaikia.org//