CHAPTER-IV

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POETRY OF
NILMANI PHOOKAN

Nilmani Phookan is one of the prominent figure in the Assamese poetic world. The 1960s has often been considered as the golden age in Assamese literature and Nilmani Phookan is one of the luminaries of this period. He is a foremost poet of the present times. This chapter attempts to make a deep analysis of his works published till the year 1985. It is still not the ripe period to make detailed analysis of his works. Here an attempt has been made to throw light on the craftsmanship of the poet, and his growth and development as a matured poet.

Nilmani Phookan is known as a symbolist, imagist poet who enjoys a life of absolute solitude. He created his own poetic world out of his own imagination. The main subject matter of his poems—love of nature, womanhood, fear reality of death, the mystery regarding the origin and existence of mankind. He established himself as a representative poet, whose poetry is a rich storehouse of Assamese language, customs, culture and tradition. He introduces a new style in Assamese
Poetry by his apt use of similes, metaphors and his use of symbols. The rural
rituals and practices, folktales consciousness of history, traditionalism etc. are
some of the important aspects that lends his poetry an extraordinary rank. His
most of the poems have a rural setting, though he is a city dweller. He created in
his poetry a striking picture of the woods and the mountain ranges of Assam, a
true portrait of the rustic life and people, the enchanting portrait of the tea gardens
and also represents a picturesque of the ceaseless flow of the river Brahmaputra.
He builds the framework of his poetry by amalgamating ingredients from various
sources which includes even insignificant elements like the flora and fauna of his
native place, the various birds, the insects and moths. His poetry epitomizes the
folk culture, dance and songs of Assam and reproduces it with a new colour and
interpretation. He delves so deep into the Assamese culture that both are
inseparable. No other poet has got such deep insight into the cultural heritage of
Assam. This is no doubt that he is a genuine poet of the soil.

Nilmani Phookan's poetry contains an innate tone in his poetry. His poetry
originates from the core of his heart and reflects the entire cosmos. The poetry
encompasses the entire range of subjects from the native and to the whole of
universe. Poetry emerges in a definite environment and develops in a specific
geographical area but it has its impact upon the rest of the world. And this is also
true in case of Nilmani Phookan's poetry. Analysing his poems noted critic Kabin
Phukan says:

"He is a poet of youthful exuberance, he is not concerned more with
external reality. His poetry concerns mainly with love, youth, pain of death,
and transitoriness of joy and happiness. He purifies his poetry layer by
layer and his selection is very tough. His selection of words lends a music
note to his poetry and often tend to make his poetry obscure. His poetry intermingles both reality and fantasy and also presents an imaginary world and create a state of euphoria.”

In spite of all these qualities his poetry highlights a love for humanity. When we make a comprehensive study of his poetry the underlying meaning of his poetry becomes apparent. A structural analysis of Nilmani Phookan’s poetry makes us conscious of his passion for humanism, which is a characteristic trait of his poetry. In this regard Hiren Gohain comments –

“He is a poet who is preoccupied with the lives of the common people. He solves much of the mystery relating to the existence of man. From the symbolists point of view it becomes ambiguous but later in his poetry he develops it very well. Glorification of mankind, the enigma of existence and failure of mankind filled his poetry. The poet abstains from using any kind of spiritual sophistication and shocks at the downfall of the humankind as he celebrates its triumph. The centre of attraction of his poetry is this concern for the predicament of man”

This grave concern for the common man is an act of gradual development and does not arise spontaneously. His exposure to the harsh realities of life makes him tough and enables him to see life more closely and later these experiences enters his poetry. The poet gives evidence to this fact in this own words while receiving the ‘Fellow’ prize conferred upon him by the Sahitya Akademi in the year 2002. He comments .

“Poetry is the voice of humanity whenever one tries to listen each person can hear in the quietness of his own mind the flowing cadence of dawn and dusk, of truth and beauty”
His theme of poetry develops in his very early stage of his life and later it reaches its perfection in his works. He makes no compromise with his ideology and values. For the enrichment and publicity of his poetic philosophy he is very particular and determined. Commenting on the initial stages of his career the poet says:

"In much of my poetry some interesting incidents are associated with it. But the impact caused by the incident is more important than the incident itself. The mood created by these experiences prompts me to compose many poems". [4]

Though he started his career as a poet in the year 1949 but his first anthology of poems 'Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Naḍiye di' published in 1963. And winning for himself a strong position in Assamese poetry.

The anthology 'Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Naḍiye di' contains poems which gives evidence of an emerging poet who is very much sensitive and innovative in his style. This is the general tendency of most of the poets of that period. He is a dedicated poet who has been composing poems with great faith and determination and in the course of time he develops his own individualistic style. He later poems often identifies with a sense of sophistication, decorum and exuberance. With this style in mind he modifies and edits some of his earlier poems and later published anthology called 'Golāpī Jāmur Lagna' (1977). Out of the total 53(Fifty three) poems published in the first two volumes of his poetry entitled 'Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ela Naḍiye dī' (1963) and 'Nirjanoṭār Śabda' (1965) he finds faults with 44(Forty four) poems and avoids them. He shuns 5/6th portion of all the poems composed before 1967. He gives reason for his action while he says:

"I have tried to avoid the majority of my compositions published during the 60s within the year 1955-1975. The users cannot be called poetry in the true
sense as it lacks matured thought, loose in structure, moreover there is lack of coherence in ideas." (5)

He selects his best poems and included in his anthology called ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’. Regarding the main motif of this collected poems the poet says:

"All these 65 poems included in the anthology are created within a period of 20 years (from 1955 to 1975). I feel that I am quite successful in expressing myself in these poems, all my feelings and emotions are well represented in these poems – the main objective behind the publication of this book is to gather these various poems within one book." (6)

Most of the poets including Nilmani Phookan have a general tendency to segregate their best compositions in a separate book. Even Rabindranath Tagore and Jibanananda did the same thing and gets applause for it. Regarding improvisation and reformation of their poetic works both Jibanananda Das and Nilmani Phookan is very much subjective regarding the selection of their poems. It is the role of the readers and critics to give recognition to a good poem. In becoming a poet the role played by these ‘non-poems’ is quite significant. In this regard noted poet and critic Bhaben Baruah vehemently speaks:

"......when we analyse the poems the general standards it is quite astonishing to observe that even his rejected poems which are categorized as ‘non-poems’ is of high order." (7)

Most of poems which are not included in Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Nadiedi (1963) and ‘Nirjanatār Šabda’ (1965) are lost with the passage of time and is now a slice of history. Some of these poems which he had preserved well and its analysis reveals his versatile genius. Those five poems of ‘Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Nadiedi’ which are included in ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’ incorporates –
The above mentioned poems give ample evidence of the emergence of a potential poet. In his famous poem ‘Syambaraniya Nabikbor’ he expresses an universal pain. Reminiscing the tragic incident of the lost seaman, the poet is seriously wounded. His mind is always pre-occupied with the thoughts of those seamen. In an attempt to pay tribute to those lost men the poet says:

\[
\text{"Iman dineo ubhati nah\aa
Syambaraniya nabikbor
kathake pati achilo,
nakai melal kalpatkhanar para
niyarar dare topatope}
\]

\[
\text{\textit{andharbor parichil} [Syambaraniya Nabikbor, Suryya Heno Nami Ahe Ei Nadisedi]}
\]

The poet exhibits his excellence as a poet in this poem by his show of extraordinary power of using imagery and symbols. Infact the poem has certain weaknesses, regarding its rhythm and rhyme which is overshadowed by his brilliant use of images. This sense of isolation and feeling of despair, gets enhanced in his poem ‘Buranji’. ‘Buranji’ is the tale of a terrible endless journey. The poet makes a spiritual journey on a boat to the margins of civilization but is unaware of his final destination. This journey is presented in a symbolic manner and the poet speaks:

\[
\text{"Jui jvali thaka\aa ekhon aranyar kasedi am\aa diyo
nave gai\aa\textit{ach\u0102lu ! k\u0102valirdare dhovar sagarat}
sati r\u0131tur\u0131 car\u00e2ibor jake jake uri gaichil,}
\]
In this strange journey the poet spends on entire day in a state of excitement. Now it is approaching dusk and the poet is tired as well as exhausted physically and mentally. Then he notices a lonely cottage but the environment makes him even more miserable. He says:

"gai gai āmi beli pari pari beli kā pari pari
nicai kāsate eti saru ghar dekhi naa sapālu,
ghartut kunu vai nāchil, ecuka pari sio umi umi
jvali utchil, asahāy bhikhārī dare durar pari
bandi ākāśakhone ucupi uthā sūnichilu." [Ibid]

The poet was severely hurt in his futile search and again began his journey across water:

"āmi ākou dhovā āru nisār mājere
dhīre dhīre naa meli āchilu." [Ibid]

The poem is actually an amalgamation of various images. The poem presents a beautiful description from dawn to dusk and that may be the reason for naming this poem "History" which is one of the well know poems of Nilmani Phookan.

His poem "Nīlā Nīlā Sirbor" expresses the strong desire of the poet in his early youth. He is often disturbed by the memory of his beloved. This youthful romance with his beloved is still fresh in the poet's memory:

"tumār rihār sei raṅgā ācal
āru bharir nīlā nīlā Sirbor,
ātiyāo mor manat pare"

[Nīlā Nīlā Sirbor, Ibid]
Another notable poem called ‘Tumi Ye Tilphul Hai’ is also included in his column “Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Nadiyed”. This short poem of only six lines is unsurpassed in its style and presentation and hence a precious gem in Assamese literature. The poem is as follows:

“bhulate tumāk bichanākhanat
khepiyāi phurichilu,
tumi ye parbatur
nāmanit
tilphool hai
hālijāli phuli āchā.”

[Tumi Ye Tilphul Hai, Ibid]

Though the poem is composed of only 14 words but it has indepth probing and deep meaning. The passive tone in the poem is very painful. In this content noted poet and critic Harekrishna Deka writes:

“Even through Phookan’s poem appears to be simple but its mode of presentation is very significant since it has been expressed through precision of words and not through strong emotion. His appropriate use of words is important. The poem often bears the witness of imagist poets and that of Japanese Haiku”. (8)

In the first two lines the poet reveals his agonizing pain of his heart. He wants to regain his lost beloved in close proximity, even in his bed. But towards the later part of the poem the poet finds that his beloved turns into a ‘Til’ flower which is symbolical of death and is beautifully blooming across the mountain range.

Another prominent poem of this period called ‘Ekhani Mukh’ i.e. ‘A face’. The face that the poet loves and adores, which has been haunting him
everywhere. In search of this beautiful face he left no stone unturned. He hunts for it among the birds of the ‘Dipar Bil’ (a lake), the pathway of a rural area during the dusk. He tries to visualise it in the manifestations of nature. This thirst for a lovely face is expressed in a symbolic manner. His feelings is well expressed in these lines:

“eikhani mukh
mukh to nahay
āmār carār gāmlār
Jāpānī pāmar kumal
eti pāt.”

In real sense the poem tries to present a picture of nature as seen by the Chinese and the Japanese artisans and which becomes alike with the beautiful face as imagined by the poet.

Nilmani Phookan’s second volume of poetry called ‘Nirjanatār Šabda’ (1965). This volume gives an indication of the growing intimacy of the poet with nature. Presently, the poet selects only four poems from this volume and included in “Golāpī Jāmur Lagna”. These poems includes – ‘Dhuvār Samay’, ‘Gadhūli Likhā’, ‘Ejan Niḥsanga Mānuh’, and ‘Rātir Nabam Ghantar Apekṣāt’, etc out of these four poems the first two poetry highlights the poets excessive love of nature. In his poem ‘Dhuvār Samay’ the poet feels a kind of union with nature and says:

“sarāpāt pot yāy
hrdayat
marā jilir kholāt
rodar raṅg.”

[ Dhuvār Samay, Nirjanatār Šabda ]
The poet gets incited at this marvelous sight of the sun light and he experiences a special kind of loneliness in his mind:

"bāhar āgat
dhuvāi āre
nirjanatā
kuvalit khahi pare
belir mukh" [Ibid]

His poem "Gadhūli Likhā" also expresses the same theme. But in his other two poems — 'Ejan Nisaṅga Mānuḥ' and 'Rātir Nabam Ghantār Apekṣāt' — echoes his sense of loss and loneliness of the common humanity. This realization of the plight of loneliness of the human kind finds full revelation in his poem 'Ejan Nīṣaṅga Mānuḥ':

"mor sanmukhat etiyā
asaṅkhya kathin jarire bāndh khāi thakā
edāl māstul
uparaḷai mukh kari
thiya di āche yen
ejan nīṣaṅga mānuḥ" [ Ejan Nīṣaṅga Mānuḥ, Nirjanatā Śabda]

This lonely man is waiting for the arrival of the dense night in the 'night of navam lagna':

Etiyā mai thiya di āchū
rātir nabam ghantār apekṣat
andhakār maṅcat
cirakālar bukur uparat [Rātir Nabam Ghantār Upekṣat, Ibid].
In both the volumes – ‘Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Nadiyedi’ and ‘Nirjanatār Šābda’ reveals the same aspect of the poet’s style. Nature, love and his humanism are the three basic aspects that make the basis of his poetry. In his later works entitled ‘Āru Ki Naisābda’ (1968) we find a tremendous growth and development in his art. It was during this period that the poet reached his maturity as a versatile genius which was highlighted in the title of his book. His choice of words and precision in the sentences makes us aware of his meticulousness and his erudition.

Nilmani Phookan’s third anthology of poetry ‘Āru Ki Naisābda’ was published in the year 1968. According to the contents of the book it possesses twenty four poems. From these poem he makes a selection of 11 (Eleven) best poems and form another book called ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’. The notable poems in this volume includes – ‘Tumār Šūnyatat Āmār Dukhbhār’, ‘Dṛṣṭā, ‘Grismyar Kēitāmān Ksudrakāy Dṛṣṭā’, ‘Olamī Thakā Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’, ‘Maithun Saṅgīt’, ‘Brahmaputrat Sūryyāsta’ etc. These poems are unique in creation and is known for its characteristic features; and it played a major role in his growth and development as a poet.

For the convenience of the study the class division of the poems are made on the attitude of the poet’s mind. The theme of pain and a sense of mystery penetrates in his poems called ‘Olami Thakā Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’ and ‘Tumār Šūnyatat Āmār Dukhbhār’. The theme of nature and women combines together and develops into a source of sex, in his poem called ‘Maithun Saṅgīt’. In some of his famous poems like ‘Dṛṣṭā’, ‘Grīṣmyar kāitāmān dṛṣṭā’, ‘Brahmaputrat Sūryyāsta’ etc nature is presented as the manifestation of art.
'Olami Thaka Golapi Jamur Lagna' is another well known poem composed by Nilmani Phookan. This poem can be considered as one of his major milestone of his poetic career as it is quite obvious that this poem is very close to his heart. Moreover he used this phrase 'Golāpī Jāmur Lagna' in three succeeding volumes of his poetry. The poem begins in a somber mood and it creates a mysterious environment:

\[
\text{kāhānio ninādit hai nuthā kichumān sābdar} \\
\text{hātar etā mudrā} \\
\text{he hrdayar bhagā dālat olami thakā} \\
\text{golāpī jāmur lagna.}" \ [Olami Thakā Golāpī Jāmur Lagna, Āru ki naiśabda]
\]

The poet tries to highlight some of the grief in the poet's heart which has been lying suppressed for long. The poet fails to express the grief which is lying dormant in his heart unlike the golapi jamur (a kind of fruits bearing plants) who is preveledge over the condition of the poet. His condition can be compared to that of a sea bird which is flying over a city which has been turned into ashes by the fire. The heart of the poet is burning as if a gush of molten lava flows through it but this effect has been juxtaposed with that of the ceaseless flow of the waters of the river Pagladia across his heart which brings peace and solace to his broken heart. This message of peace and serenity beats inside the poet's heart repeatedly:

\[
\text{"kāhānio ninādīta hai nuthā kichumān sābdar} \\
\text{hātar he prācin sītalāta !" (Ibid)}
\]

The poet consciously uses a variety of images throughout the entire poem As a result of which the reader can make their own interpretation out of it. Analysing the meaning of this poem noted critic Harekrishna Deka says :
“This poem is a storehouse of many statistic devices which enables us to interpret it from different angle. Each image used here is something like a gland – which complicates to comprehend the actual meaning of it.”

There is no doubt about it that, the poem ‘Olami Thāka Golāpī Jāmur Lagna’ is a great composition. In his elaborate discussion ‘Golāpī Jāmur Lagna Rahasya’ Dr. Kabin Phukan makes this point clear.

In the poem ‘Tūmār Śūnyatāt Āmār Dukhbhār’ the poet expresses his painful experiences. The poet is a victim of some tragic incident and he speaks out sorrowfully:

“āmār śūnyatāt

tūmār bihār”

[ Tūmār śūnyatāt āmār dukbhār, Āru ki naisābda]

The poet also identifies himself with the pain of other individual as he says:

“tūmār śūnyatāt

āmār dukbhār” (Ibid)

This love for the common humanity finds expression in his later poems. The bitter reality of mankind has been presented to us in a simple manner:

“pratyekte āmi

naisābdei garhā akotā mamar mūrti.” (Ibid)

‘Maithun Saṅgīt’ is another notable contribution of Nilmani Phookan. The primitive urge for sexual activity has been presented here with an intelligent and subtle way. Moreover he also finds this attraction among the other living
organisms in nature. The poet feels in his heart a sense of companionship between the sexual as well as the natural activity:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{padumani pukharit mandrit batāh} \\
\text{dehat, tōmār dehar bhitarat} \\
\text{udyat epāh raṅgā phul} \\
\text{thor melā tāl pāttut} \\
\text{dhārāsār baraśun jāk} \\
\text{tōmār stanar rakta tomār ēthat."
\end{align*}
\]

[Maithun Saṅgeet, Āru ki Naisābda]

There is a resemblance of this poem with that of Jibanananda’s “Kyāmpe”. There is a close relation between the voice of ‘ghāi’ deer, with that of the ‘sareṅg carair māt’ (voice of the bird ‘sareng’). Even though sex is a biological phenomenon but the pleasure derives out of it has got it own beauty. There is an inter mingling of the physical violence and a sense of beauty and it finds full expression in the poem ‘Maithun Saṅgīt’.

Some of the emerging themes which comes to the forefront in his poems like, ‘Drśya’, ‘Grīṣmyar Kaitāmān Kṣudrakāy Drśya’ and ‘Brahmaputrat Sūryyāśtar’ etc which are deftly treated by the poet in his poems are love for nature and devotion to nature. His intimacy with nature finds expression in his poem called ‘Phuli Thakā Sūryyamukhī Phultor Phāle’ (1963). Every human being is quite aware of the fact that nature has got its own form, life and feeling and finds full expression in his poem. In the famous poem ‘drsyaya’ nature has been presented as a form of beautiful sculpture:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{“nithar gachar pāt,} \\
\text{pānīr uparat}
\end{align*}
\]
The same feelings finds expression in the heat of summer, and he reveals his experiences in the poems grouped under the title 'Gṛiṣmyar Kaitāmān Kṣudrakāy Dṛṣya'. The excessive heat of the sun makes the life passive and the poet says:

"batahe meli dichil
gachar śyāmalimā
dūr-digantar ārcīt
duvali reid

* * *
luitat bih-metekār
calmān dvīp
dūr digantar ārcīt
Bikirṇa prahar." [Gṛiṣmar Kaitāmān Kṣudrakāy Dris'.ya, Āru Ki Naiśabda]

One of his notable poems is 'Brahmaputrat Sūryāsta'. This is a remarkable poem not only in this volume but of this entire corpus. This poem is almost unique in the whole of Assamese literature on its determination of nature. ‘Brahmaputrat Sūryāsta’ is a symbolical poem with the help of symbols he constructs each and every word. He makes use of his craftsmanship as a poet in his use of imagery. The sun has been presented as the source of life and its rising in the eastern horizon lightens up the complete darkness. Elaborating on this image he says:
The sun gradually shifts its position, and reaches the middle of the sky during the noon time and it brightens up the whole atmosphere. In its journey the sun sheds its last light and sets in the western horizon. During the evening time the reflection of the sun rays can be beautifully viewed across the waters of the mighty Brahmaputra. The poet gets entranced at this sight and tries to find a similarity between the nature and man and says:

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marmantud tār ujjvalatā
ujjvalatār jibhāt
mānuhar antim lālasār
ki prajvalan !
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The desire and excitement of youth and the emptiness of the old age is well expressed here. Commenting on this poem Dr. Nil Mohan Roy speaks:

"The poet is successful in bringing about an analogy between the life cycle of man with that of the sun during noon time is compared with the vital youth power. Just like the sun rays of the evening time becomes faint and less intense similarly with the increasing age all the desires, enthusiasm, also decreases and ultimately ceases completely." (11)

From times immemorial there has been a close relationship between man and nature. The sun is the main life-force. The rising and setting of the sun is often compared with life and death respectively. This statement is not made by the poet alone but it has its roots in the great tradition of Indian cultural heritage. The poem
has been well expressed and touches the heart of the readers and gives pleasure and joy.

The study of his volume ‘Āru Ki Naisābdha’ would be, incomplete if the poem ‘Sonali Jvala’ is excluded from our discussion because the main motif is carried by this poem. The poet’s soul gets wounded by the pain and sufferings of the common humanity which compels him to cry in pain. He can even hear the echoes of the pain:

“nisār ghantādhani
bidīma yantraṇā
āru ki naisābdha
āru ki naisābdha
nīl ki rtur stabvat
marmarit śasyakaṇā”

[Sonāli Jvālā, Ibid]

The poet can feel strongly the severe pain and sufferings of his fellow humans. He himself being a victim of this pathetic condition is full of sympathy for them. He has a great love for the common humanity. The quality of Nilmani Phookan greatly helped him in his chronological development as a poet.

Chronological Nilmani Phookan’s fourth volume of poetry called ‘Phuli Thakā Sūryamukhī Phultor Phāle’ which was published in the year 1973. The book has been published five years after the publication of ‘Āru Ki Naisābdha’ (1968). The volume contains 26 (Twenty six) poems. He recollects the various experiences of the last five years of his life in these poems which plays a prime role in his poetic career. The poems often deals with themes like past experiences, values, consciousness of nature, love of humanity, and a conscious effort to revive his
own cultural heritage. The rural setting plays a pivotal role in his poetry. In this regard poet Hiren Gohain comments:

"This introduces us to the poet's parents, and his native place, acquaints us with the rural values and customs, its folktales and fables and makes us feel a kind of nostalgia. These components helped the poet enormously in building up a strong and individual personality and helps in understanding life better. Since, for the poet, truth is always associated with feelings and emotions which adds glory and grandeur to his poetry" (12)

The poet shares a strong bond with the rustic environment as well as its scenic beauty. This trend in Assamese poetry mainly resulted from the translation of the works of the Spanish poet Garcia Lorka into Assamese which meticulously unfolds the close relationship between modern poetry and the folk tradition and culture. Moreover he was also tremendously influenced by Jibanananda's 'Rūpasī Bāṅglā' (1957) The poet admits himself that Jibanananda Das is his favourite poet. This is no doubt about the fact that his volume, 'Phuli Thakā Sūryamukhi Phultor Phāle', plays a major role in his growth and development as a poet. All the twenty four poems included in the volume "Phuli Thaka Suryamukhi Phultor Phale" are exciting. Particularly his poems like – 'Thar Hai Teō Āmār Mukhalai Cāi Āche', 'Topanito Teō Mok Khedi Phurichil', 'Nābālak Eti Sīsur Sate', 'Naikhanar Pārere Bāṯtu', 'Ei Etā Mātra Šābda– Saujī', 'Ei Yen Prathom Sunīlū Sei Māl', 'Iyār Parā Kimān Dūr' etc which greatly enriched the treasure of Assamese poetry in particular and Assamese literature in general.

'Phuli Thakā Sūryamukhi Phultor Phāle' is the first poem included in the volume 'Phuli Thakā Suryamukhi Phultor Phāle'. It is worthmentioning here that the poems are often categorised with numbers as well as with the first line, which
is a unique style in modern poetry. The personal strain is very strong, in the poem 'Thar Hai Teō Āmār Mukhalai Cāi Āche' in which he laments the death of his mother. This is not a subjective poem in the real sense because death is treated here as something pure and serene even though it is the source of pain and terror for men. Sitting beside the dead body the poet feels that it wants to say something secretly to him. Those words of the dead body still reverberates in poet's ear.

"thar hai teō āmār mukhalai cāi āche ! hātdukhan yen
uri yovā bagalitor phāle meli dibalai becārīche
phuli thaka sūryamukhi phultor phāle !"

[Thar Hai Teo Āmār Mukhalai Cāi Āche, Phuli
Thaka Sūryamukhi Phultor Phāle]

The corpse compared to a crane which flew higher pointing towards the sunflower with its wings outstretched giving the message that death is not the end of life but it fulfills life. One pays the last tribute to the departed soul taking this in consideration. The poet shows respect and reverence to the traditional Indian values, Assamese culture and above all to his departed mother:

"lārālarikai āgali kalāpāt ekhanar oprat
agachi sālitā jvalāi dilū. teōr mukhar oprat
tari dilū ekhan bagā candratāp, svaccha, ujjval śubhratā."

In the last stanza the conflict between tradition and modernity appears to be emerging to the forefront as the younger generation seems to be dumbstruck at the attitude of the predecessor towards the dead. Life and death is a prominent theme of Phookan's poetry which often occupies his poems.

Nilmani Phookan's another notable contribution is, his poem 'Tupanito Teō
The poet captures some of the emotional moments with his unique use of pictorial description and poetic diction. The poet has been frequently haunted by some kind of a consciousness which follows him even in his sleep. The reminiscence of this horror experience reminds him of the terrible experience. This supernatural power now has taken the physical shape and haunts him, which raises the curiosity of the poet:

"āchene bāru teōr mūkhat
sei ubhalipara ajopā gach
ōth dukhanat āchene bai
pānī raṅgā hovā dukhan nai
āchene bāru teōr ducakut
sei dutā kālā ghūrā"

Besides having a strong personal element the anthology 'Phuli Thakā Sūryamukhī Phultor Phāle' is rich in store house of his childhood memories, in the visual description of rustic environment and is a self revealing poem which took an active role in becoming a great poet. By now he developed his own unique style as a poet. Through his poetry he wants to propagate his culture and tradition. The rustic setting plays a very major role in his development as a poet and he cultivates a close association with rustic life. The poet recounts the happy days of his childhood and feels elated and says:

"okha okha ejār gachar chāt
mūrccha gai pari āche
mor śaiśāb
mor śaiśāb"
The pictorial description of the rural life is very lively and is still fresh in the poet's memory. The poet is often haunted by some faint memories of the past. He remembers the rustic woman who walks through the meandering path of the village along with her dumb child:

"naikhanar pārere bāttu
ādhāpot gai pari thakā
sāp atār dare bātture
culi meli ghūri āhil
agorākī tīrotā
* * *
āru pice pice
jontolai āṅgulyāī ahā
bobā eti šīsūr
śītal padaśābdā" [Naikhanar Pārere Bāttu, Ibid]

His poetry is often preoccupied by the pictures of the scenic beauty of his motherland, the majestic mountain range, the freshness of the tea gardens, the mysterious path followed by the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries. These are fully revealed in his volume called, 'phuli thakā sūryamūkhī phultor phāle.' The poet draws the portrait of the rustic life of Assam with his perfect use of words. The ninth poem of this volume depicts a stunning picture of a rustic life:

"dīghal ckrame dīghal hai ahā pāhārtor āndhāre
dhāki dharīchil naikhan
dhār nichigā stabdhatār eti dhār"
Again in one of his poems he is tormented by some depressing thoughts. He is reminiscing one of the incidents in his life in which he discovers the secret of nature:

“Sil aru nijarare ei upatyakat yetiya bartushur hai
pathar seujlya kar kar jalatak andharat opahi uthe
dihgilaike dub yuva kamal kuvanir mukh”

This volume is quite significant in the sense that at one end this book presents a beautiful atmosphere of the pastoral life of Assam and on the other his admiration and regard for the rebelliousness of the youth and all these factors contributes making Nilmani Phookan a great poet of all times.

Nilmani Phookan integrates love song with the glorious youth which is rare quality. His poem ‘Tumar Bahupasat Muhurmuhu Siharita’ elucidates this point.

Commenting on this noted critic Hiren Gohain says:

“Each and every stanza of the poem strikes like a wave of emotion with a tremendous force. The poem abounds in with the vigour of free life, perfection, fruit bearing, the bunch of crops dancing in the air and his repressive desire is often compared with a glittering sword drawing in the air”\(^{(13)}\)

“tumar Bahupasat muhurmuhu Siharita
mai andharo nahaya, poharo nahayi”
This poem illustrates the poet’s realization of the perfection of life through the sexual imagery and metaphors. This similar strain is found in two of his other poems – ‘Ei Etā Mātra Sabda – Seuji’ and ‘Hātat Kkholā Tarovāl Lai Āhibā’ etc.

The poet seems to be filled with deep admiration for folk literature. He uses many components of folk literature in the structure of his poems. He has a liking for the traditional myth and agends which is revealed is his poems. Particularly in the twentieth poems this strain is very much prominent. His concern for the oppressed and the persecuted finds revelation in his poem called ‘Tejimalā’ which narrates the tale of the suffering humanity and the cruelty and barbarism associated with it and in a sense tries to make it familiar with the modern civilization. He wishes to become one with the story line and states:

‘ei yen pratham śūnilū sei mát

imān nijān

..... kare nāvariyaı tai

[‘Ei Yen Pratham Śūnilū Sei Mät, Ibid ]

The poem creates a situation of aching loneliness in which the poet has to live. He involves himself with the tragedy of ‘Tejimalā’ and reveals his situation through use of metaphors.

‘ban juye ādāporā

thereju pātat’        [Ibid ]

He is deeply pained by this and expresses his melancholy in these words:

"bhatiyāı galgai caraı nāokhani"
Towards to last stanza of the poem the poet reveals this innermost secret:

"ei yen pratham sūnīlū sei māt
imān ni jān
nijare mātat." [Ibid]

He becomes one with the suffering humanity which is unique in Assamese literature.

This book contains some of the best poems which repletes with fragmented feelings of the poet. Out of this the twelfth poem 'Nābālok eti sisur sate' is a noteworthy poem. The poem narrates the story of a train journey with a teenager (may be more than one). Both are totally oblivious of their past life. The memories of this train journey is still fresh in his mind:

"nābālok eti sisur sate
relere gai thakōte
āndhāre nuryāi niye
eri aha chāyar path
āmār mājedi pār hai yāi
durar māyār udbhid"

[Nābālok Eti Sisur Sate,[Ibid]

This is not a mere description of a nature scenery, but underlying this, lies the hidden truth of the poet's life and is presented through the use of symbols and images. Presently his life is plunged into darkness and remains calm. His life is often compared with the railway tracks which is endless but exactly parallel.
The poet suffers from agonizing pain and says:

"sājar prthivikhan gai thāke
dutā lor cirir uparere
duta cēca cirir uparere
hṛta hṛdayar ghanīta niśvas." [Ibid]

While discussing about the anthologies of Nilmani Phookan the issue of the imagery world definitely comes into discussion. One such poem is the 23rd poem in the volume 'Iyār para kiman dur' which gives evidence of the poet's extraordinary power of using imagery. The four major images in the poem are - the kingfisher flying from a far off land, the bird circling round the lake above the 'Dalgaṅā' (a kind of shrubs) and watching the fishes with a golden tail, the golden fishes jumps for life as the bird tries to catch it and finally the picture of the dead fishes. All these images make the poem come alive to the readers:

"Iyār para kiman dur
kuruvāto
yar para āhiche ur" [Iyār Para Kiman Dur, 'Ibid ]

Where from and how far the kingfisher bird traveled to reach its destination. This bird surrounds the fishes with golden tail. Actually this lake lies in the inner consciousness of the poet and is a figment of his imagination. Symbolically, the fish represents life and the golden fish represents the intelligentia safeguarding whose interest would be the first priority of the poet. The presence of the predatory bird with its enormous speed is a matter of great fear for human beings. The poet is deeply hurt at the idea of killing of the fishes by the hunting bird. Perhaps the poet might have a prenomition of some sombre news and is strongly suggestive of the pain and distress experienced by the poet:
In the year 1975 the fifth volume of his poetry entitled 'Kāint, Golāp Āru Kāint' got published which contained a greater number of poems than the previous volumes. The increase in the number of poems mainly results from his clear sense of perception.

The poetry of this period is often characterised by appropriate use of words, perfect use of imagination, the nerve of traditional Assamese life reverberates in these poems. The poet often seemed to have experimented with various poetic patterns and they realized the importance of folk culture and tradition in Assamese language and it added to its glory. The reflection of folk literature can be seen in these poetry. Hence the Assamese flavour is quite apparent in these poems.

Most of these poems are based on the norms of modern Assamese poetry. The volume raises the reputation of the poet to great heights with its use of symbols and imageries. A large quantity of these poems, finds place in his volume 'Golāpī Jāmur Lagna' (1977) and in terms of volume it is quite large, as it contains 29(Twenty nine) poems. From this, the importance of this book can be examined and our discussion would include whole of its poems. Hence it can be concluded that even though Nilmani Phookan was a popular name before the publication of this volume but after its publication the scenario had undergone a tremendous change, as it enabled him to get a permanent place in the history of Assamese literature.

The poems included in 'Kāint, Golāp Āru Kāint' are his characteristics poems, which helped him tremendously in becoming a great poet. But the main
theme is delineated in the 10th poem of the volume which is its theme music and is reflected in the rest of the poems of this volume.

Behind the title of the volume 'Kaînt, Golâp Āru Kaînt' the role of the 10th poem of the volume is significant. The poet could hear the endless voices of his youth in this poem. He realized that in order to achieve the goal of life, hardwork, struggle, rebellion or bloodshed is indispensable. The primary causes of a revolution is delicately presented here with the use of similes and metaphors:

"gachpātbhore mohārīlī tej uḷāy
atiyā
kaînt āru golāp āru kaînt
juit bhari sumuvāī diyu hāṭ sumuvāī diyu
caku mohārīlī rod nācī uthe tikṣṇā ujval tikṣṇa."[Gaspatbor Mohārīlī Tej Uḷāy", 'Kaînt, Golâp Āru Kāînt']

Leaf shaped human heart which is saturated with enormous power and energy needs to be laboured over for its growth and development. Life is not always a bed of roses but often it is occassioned by thorns. Life is not easy and smooth but is full of struggles. In the battle of life men have to overcome all the obstacles to become a winner. The present moment is of revolution, the fierce cry of the youth forces the young men to burn themselves in the fire so that they can rejuvenate their powers. The poet tries to renew his power with youthful vigour. He raged his battle against the traditional rituals and customs and ageing and aspires for a bright future for himself, in addition to this he wishes for an endless youth and says:

"āḥā, āmi ītumāṭī nārīr bābei bāraṅ kāru basantak"
His desire for everlasting youth as mentioned in this book finds expression in most of his poems. In the 4th poem of the volume this feeling of the poet finds full revelation. He experiences a mixture of joy and sorrow and a painful strain emerges out of his soul and the same pulse emanates from nature. This subjective realization finds expression in these words:

"ki phul phutālā prāṇat
ōthat phātil bāhi
dālbharā tarābore ghop māri dhare caku
batāhjāk kobākubi āhi yen mote lukāy
mai atiyā kat mārū mai atiyā kat mārū
gondha hai gadhūli jvale mor ei dehar dāniī"

[ki phul photala prāṇat, Ibid]

The poet aspires for endless youth. The strain of youthful vigour which is vibrating inside the poet makes him aware of the arrival of a new beginning. He feels this passion not alone in himself but it has also been manifested in the objects of nature. Even the insignificant incident of nature can be a matter of great concern for the poet. The poet is full of praise for the vital forces of natures which enable the tree to survive itself in a very uncongenial environment without proper facility of water and sunlight which appears in the mountaineous terrain. The poet draws inspiration from such activities of nature and says:

"Tumi kon nāri gach hai śipovā
śīlar bukut —
mātī pānī jui teje seyā māte mok"

[ Jīrna Sei Smṛti Āji Juye Porā Māti, Ibid ]

The poet who has great concern for society is greatly affected by
revolutionary activities of the 1970s. The poet has bitter personal experiences which is tragic and heart breaking. Today the social upheaval is no longer in existence but the pain and despair is still fresh in the poet’s memory. Paying great tributes to the rebel leaders who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the revolution the poet says:

"feolok kalai gal
pakā jāmujopār talat thiya di āchil
ekopāt ujjval baršā
* * *
feolok kalai gal
dekā gābharulātar topani bhaṇā rātir duparate
feolok ranāṇganar gān"

[Feolok Kalai Gal, Ibid]

The poet remembers it very well that in the threshold of bidding farewell to the departed soul the seed of revolution is lying embedded in his heart.

"gā dhuichegai neki feoloke
pānī raṇa kari kūntūbā nair"  [Ibid]

He invokes the rebels of the new generation to enthuse themselves with the spirit of freedom and youthful vigour:

‘tumi sainik, tomāreī unmocarar kṣamatā
batāhat meli diyā sariyaha rālādhiyā
nīl soṇāli sandhir tarā
ahā āru gai thakā”

[Tumi Sainik Tomārei Unmocanar Kṣamata, Ibid]
This is a sort of homage which the poet pays to the worshipper of revolution.

In the volume ‘Kāint, Golāp Āru Kāint’ introduces the readers with the love life of the poet. The greatest gift to mankind is the love. The poet experiences the first strain of love. The physical needs intensifies his urge for love. The memory of his youthful love gets intensified and deepens with time. This is clearly evident from his poem ‘Nāṅath Hai Thakā Tumāk Mai Dekhichū’-

“nāṅgath hai thakā tumāk mai dekhichū
cakudutā mudi mai tumāk cumā khāo-
āru bur yāo tal yāo.
★ ★ ★
tumāte mai marō mai jī uthū
sakalo heruvār pichot mai tumāk heruvā nāi”

[Nāṅgath Hai Thakā Tumāk Mai Dekhichū, Ibid]

This intense love does not confine itself to his lady love alone but it spreads to his motherland and also to his own mother who is very dear to him. The poet pays his sincere respect to his own motherland in the poem ‘Gachpāt Borar Mājere Āhi Seujīyāt Jilmīlāy’. The poet is quite successful in creating an extraordinary image of his own motherland which is true to life. He brings about a comparison of his motherland i.e. Assam a land known for its greenery, its forest reserve, its fertile land to a newly bride drenched in rain which is really matchless:

“pratekjāk barsuṇat tumāk mai tītī ahā dekhō
tej sīci karabāt tumy yen bhūi rui ahā
tumār cāvanire uri āhe ekhan rāmdhenu
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
The poet is not preoccupied only with the concern for his motherland. He is still haunted by the memory of the death of his mother who died of cancer. The trails and tribulations of life, its pain and fearsomeness greatly affected the sensitive mind of the poet. The poet feels that he could well see the spirit of his mother in the darkness of the night. Even in love and devotion the poet hears the noises of pain and despair:

“ākāśkhane dhapdāpy cākito khepiyaō
hathāt sō sāre dekhon
mā”

This poem is the result of a real life experience, and it expresses the poet’s emotions and faith. The pain of death pangs, of separation are part of life and nobody can defy this. The game of life and death is manifested even in the day to day objects of nature. The poet is highly enthusiastic about the mystery of life and death as he says:

“covā covā gachbore kenekai
ālingan kare sūryak
pratitu muhūrtai edoṇa tej
pratitu muhūrutai apāci sendūriyā kal”

[Hathāt Sei Ārtanād Āhi Got Māri, ibid]
The vague image of the death is quite mysterious to the poet. The poet harbours deep love for the dead. The continuous flow of vital life force makes the poet trembling with fear in his heart. From his own realization the poet comes to a conclusion regarding the mysteriousness of life and death, that death is not the end of life on the contrary it fulfills life. The poet agonizingly recollects the dead who had been consumed by the evil hands of death and from his imagination tries to recreate the shape of death when he speaks:

"pāhārat jui jvalilei
tumāk sābati labar man yāy
ākau janma lovā ākau janma lovā
tomar citār til phul
atiyāo marahā nāi."

[Pāhārat Jui Jvalilei, ibid]

The tilphool (castor flower) symbolizes death which is still fresh in poet’s memory. This bitter realization of death tremendously influenced the social values of the poet. The sudden death of his near ones makes him grief stricken and he enters into the harsh realities of life:

"tumār mṛtuyar juye sāni thai gal mor mukhat
pradipta ki kathinatā
dhumuhār mukut pindhi thiya hai ralo
deolagā ei prācīn pāhārat,"

[Tumār Mṛtuyar Juye Sāni Thai Gal Mor Mukhat, ibid]

This understanding of life makes him face the life better. Besides his mourning for the dead mother some other aspects of life finds place in this volume. Assam is a land of rivers. The mighty Brahmaputra and the rich natural
resources of Assam adds to the beauty of this region. The river is essential for the sustenance of life and so the role of rivers among the rural folk is quite significant. Many traditional culture and customs emerged are based on these rivers. The river plays a vital role in the lives of the common people. In the rituals of the rural folk of Assam the role of rivers is immense and he dreams a beautiful picture here in this poem:

"ekhan tuluña navāt uthi āhe
mohar śīāt nisāli bajovā mānuhjan
cakcekī mari phut gadhūlite jayāl uruṇa ghāt
pāṇī bharāi eri thai yovā kalahtur mukhat
thar hay jon."

[Ekhan Tuluña Nāvat Uthi Āhe, Ibid]

The enchanting picture of the rural life touches the heart. The memory of the rural life still haunts him and he feels proud about it. A marvelous picture of such a tranquil evening appears before his very eyes:

"rai rai bhāhi āhe dūr kono prāntarar chāyā
dūrar gāvat dekhō ei cākitu jvaloyā
ei cākitu numuvā."

[Ākuśās Aṭasī, Ibid]

The poet has a strong liking for the folk culture. He uses in his poetry the indigenous folk tales, myths and fables, the style of elocution and also native Assamese culture. He tries to include the words which are indigenous and has the colloquial flavour wherever possible. This natural inclination towards folk culture inspires him to complete the book called 'Lokakalpaḍṣṭi' (1987) and demonstrates his remarkable talent.
After the appearance of his volume called ‘Kāint, Golāp Āru Kāint’ (1975) he published another volume of poetry called ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’ (1977) which is actually a compilation of the selected poems published earlier. A detailed discussion about this book has already been included here. The poet is quite selective in his approach and from his works which includes – ‘Sūryya Heno Nāmi Āhe Ei Nādiyedi’ (1963), ‘Nirjanatār Sābdā’ (1965), ‘Āru Ki Naisābdā’ (1968), ‘Phuli Thakā Sūryamukhi Phultor Phāle’ (1973) and ‘Kāint, Golāp Āru Kāint’ (1975) he selected those poems composed, “during the mid sixties, which widened the scope of my subject matter, and enriched its growth and development” and felt an urgency to include those poems in a separate volume as the poet himself admitted this fact, in the preface to the volume ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’. This led to the publication of an anthology called ‘Golāpi Jāmur Lagna’. In the year 1980 after a long gap his fifth volume of poetry named ‘kavitā’ appeared.

Kavitā (1980) is one of the great contribution of Nilmani Phookan towards Assamese poetry. In the chronological history its value is very high. Most of the poem of this volume are composed between the period 1975-1980. And during this period the poet undergoes a tremendous change in all respects regarding his idea of life, its values, his mode of expression, use of symbols and imagery, poetic diction etc. His poetry gets a new dimension as he brings in a new subject matter by incorporating the external world and not confining himself to the inner self. The inclusion of the social life further enhanced his poetic style. The theme of most of his poems are universal and hence it is successful enough to touch the heart of mankind and here lies his success.

From the study of his earlier works, that it becomes apparent that the poet is quite successful in creating an individual world for himself, a lonely place which...
his tranquil and there is no place for pain and suffering, need not have to worry for
death and loneliness. This place which has been created by the consciousness of
the poet overcomes all the trivialities of life and reached the zenith of ethereal
beauty. The poems of this phase are subjective and is pregnant with the serious
themes concerning life and which emerges out of his self realisation. Most of the
poems are highly lyrical and use of elaborate symbols, similes and metaphors.
The poet expresses his similes and metaphors through the use of imagery as a
result of which a tone of perfect tranquility and personal tone dominates his
poetry. Again the poet always seems to be preoccupied with his own self until the
publication of his book ‘kavita’ in which he seems to have interest more towards
the exploration of the social life than his own self. His deep insight into the inner
recesses of mind had helped him greatly in understanding better the harsh
realities of life. Because these various influences lends a new perspectivé to Nilmani
Phookan’s poetry.

‘Kavita’ got published in the year 1980 but most of the poems were
composed during the period 1975-80. During this period the political state of Assam
was in a state of turmoil and he himself witnessed the total breakdown of
socio-economic condition, the atrocities of the ruling class perpetrated on the
common people, the communal clashes and the crisis in the field of culture, deeply
pained the poet which made his life miserable and prompted him to express this in
the poetry of this period. With the help of some related images the poet reveals
the pain he is going through because of the political imbalances. The volume
contains a total of 45(Notify five) poems and each poem is independent with re­
gard to style and tone. In order to retain the universality and its real meaning of
these poems the poet shuns from using punctuation and also did not provide his poems with a heading. This transitions is very well projected in his volume ‘Nrýtaratā Pîthivî’ (1985). There is no doubt about the fact that in each of the poems included in Kavîta the poet is quite successful in highlighting his intentions and purpose with a new approach.

‘Kavītā’ demonstrates poet’s fondness for his own motherland. He has a serious concern for its native culture and is deeply involved with the past, present and future of social life. He is greatly distressed to see the degrading values of the society. With the use of powerful imagery he composed poetry one after the other and hence comes to this realization.

‘Kavītā’ provides evidence to poet’s talent and his maturity as a poet in his use of thought in a uniform way. It undoubtedly provides a boost to his earlier mode of thinking. The result of this can be felt in his later compositions. ‘Kavītā’ opens a new chapter in the poetic career of Nilmani Phookan.

Numerical though the poems holds individuality but from the perspective of thought they are united. In the very first poem of the volume the poet sings for eternal youth and he desires to retain his youth forever. Not only this the whole volume glorifies the youthful vigour:

“ei ye prāñjal nirjharti  
tomār hātat gān gāy  
ativa yauvanar nimantra  
he niravatār devi  
tejat jāge mor sei  
hiranmay ādi dhani
The subject matter of his second poem deals with the definition of life which is a continuous process and man extracts immense pleasure out of it. He devices this pleasure even in the objects of nature and comments:

“āṅuliborar mājate ghāhani ekhan pālū
śui thakā śisū etir mukhar dare gachborar chāyā
ābalītu yuvār bātere ghūri āhiba mar āi teja.”

Life is futile when we consider the fact that it is always opposing. Men always runs after materialistic pleasures but the unfortunate man gets too much pre-occupied with the mysteries of life and they are opposing like the two opposite banks of a river. In the words of the poet:

“Topanir mājate dupariyār nadi ekhan pālo
nadi kalkal ghāt – yat mai bāndhichilū prāṇ
gañā-cilanī etā – dīghe dīghe hiyākhan duphāl
kari yuvā” [Ibid]

In the 11th poem the poet speaks about mankind's precious possession – sterility of youth and the tragic consequence associated with it. The blowing of the conch marks the beginning of a dark age which is dreadful as well as horrifying and annoys everybody. The poet is quite fully confident that the two valuable possession of man – youth and life force should be given the top priority in order to achieve his ultimate goal. He says:

“mṛt kon sei nāri
biṣkanyā sāji”
śūbhra eti śīlar pāṭrat yāce
stan brintar rakta
atṛpta mānuhar
ananta yaubanar bābe"

[Saṅkhar ninād, Kavita]

The ultimate goal of life is the endless journey and should always be dynamic. There is no place for stagnation. This path is not always laden with flowers but often it's a zig-zag path which is notoriously dangerous, afflicted with cruelty and barbarism. One fails to realize the actual significance and the helpless poet says:

"chāyāi ne
āndhārēi ne
batāhei ne
juyeī ne"

[Kramāt Hauli Āhe Pāhārtu, Kavita]

There also arises some kind of conflict in his mind regarding the true nature of a woman:

"kaṅkalsār ejanī tirotā
tumār bagni
tēvār stree
morāi" [10th Poem, ibid]

Inspite of the great obstacle always standing like a mountain, man always moves forward with a crusading zeal. The poet is quite confidant and optimistic beliefs firmly in everlasting youth strongly emphasized:

"bhiṣaṇ sou dṛśābaśīr dīghalīyā seōtāt
murta hātu
mai jvalanta pathik” [Ibid ]

The poet does not seem to be heartbroken by his filthy existence. He dreams of a exuberant life in the powerful flow of time:

“keval jalsrot
keval svapnasrot
āndhārate duhāte bicāri āne
dumuthi seojīya ban”

[Gachar Āgat Dole Dumuhār Mukut, Kavita]

The poet can well perceive this new spirit of life. The poet seems to dislike the autumn period of one’s life because he feels youth is the main source of life which the poet has been following. The rebels or the lovers does not follow any rules nor seems to reform themselves with the traditional way but they want for themselves to create a new world, which would be free of responsibilities. The poet is well aware of his potential and he makes a forward move in the right direction. The poet says:

“tumār bāhupāsāt muhurmūhuḥ śīharita
mai āndolita griṣma
* * * * *
āndhāro nahay poharo nahay
mai prajvalit byākulatā
bidhrohi āru premikar.” [Tūmār Bahupāsāt Muhurmūhuḥ śīharita, Kavītā]

The poet is extremely cynical about those individuals who are cowards,
and in whom the faculty of rebelliousness and love is lacking. The poet expresses freely his inner thoughts regarding his opinions for the rebels and lovers. But these views of the poet do not confine itself to the narrow borders but sprinkle evenly over the whole universe. The hymn sung by the poet valourizing the youthful energy reverberates in the entire world. The essence of life is the youth which symbolizes dynamism. From the very beginning man has been interested in youth. Behind the creation of this whole universe is a passionate spirit of youth. The poet discovers the main source of youth and his joy knew no bounds and he reveals his ecstatic feelings of joy and happiness in the 45th poem. The experience of the poet after this awful realization has been beautifully conveyed to us and dreaming of a promising future he narrates the origin of creation. He says:

"ei etā mātra sābda
seijīyā

. . . . . . . .

tej raṅga karā ei sābdator
mājere
sūryyalai etā bāt āche
sonāli sāṣyar mājalai

hrdayak
prasārito karā sābdato
seijīyā
ei etā mātra sābda
seijīyā

yār bābe hal pāni"
The poet’s deep love for his motherland is very well reflected in the poetry of volume ‘kavita’. Every man loves and respects his own country and the poet is no exception. The genuine love which the poet develops for his own countryman makes him nostalgic. In the 3rd poem the poet reveals his intimate love for his own country and speaks of its glory and his strong liking for the pastoral life is also indicated here. It is a general tendency of every man to develop a kind of special fondness for the place of his/her birth and where he gets his nourishment and in this regard the poet is no exception. The poet remembers his glorious childhood days when he was free like a bird. He says:

“kat āche mor gāvar gandhuvā māti
mok porā ghāt
mai jīyā māti”

[ Caparācapare Khāhe Prāṇ, Kavitā ]

Even though his heart longs for his native soil which is overflowing with love and affection but unfortunately he cannot return back to that land, which no longer remains the same because with the passing of time some destructive force leads to its degeneration. The poet is now facing an acute identity crisis:

“kot āchū mai” [Ibid]

Moreover the poet is lamenting for his lost days which he could never enjoy anymore and this makes him feel sad and he laments painfully

“kalai gal garakhīyā larāhāt
bakul sarā rātipuvā etā” [Ibid].
The poem begins in an elegant way but he could not retain it till the end.

The poem is quite lyrical in the presentation of its emotions but because of its immaturity in thought the poem could not fulfill the norms of a patriotic poem.

A majority of his poems deals with the social problems in Assam and one such problem is flood which occurs every year. Because of this terrible disaster thousands of houses, crops and cattle gets destroyed and hundreds of people lost their lives in the flood of river Brahmaputra. This is a curse which brings miseries to the people of Assam. The poet is very sensitive and describes the devastating effects of flood in his 4th poem. This poem deals with the tragic story of a mad woman who once had a very happy family and performed her duty faithfully both as a wife and a mother. The mad woman is a representative of the wretched condition of the Assamese people who is fighting hard against the evil force of nature. Each line of the poem reveals the poet’s deep love and sympathy for these unfortunate people. The destructive effects of flood has been delineated in a remarkable way in a precise and symbolical language:

`kolai yāv hera unmādini
gharat sōt
bātat sōt
sōtar ki ghilābaranīyā pāṇī`

[ Kalai Yao Hero Unmādini, Kavitā].

The young boys and girls play tricks on the insane woman with cruelty and at this pitiable sight even the sky thunders. The mad woman merges herself with currents of the water:

"bātat sōt
gharat sōt"
But this unfortunate lady harbours in her mind enormous strength and power and consoling her, the poet says:

"Kapālate tor lukāi āche
puvā godhūlir beli" [Ibid]

The poet's social conciousness and his desire to do something better for the society makes the poem easy to understand. His deep love and sympathy for the common people is portrayed in his 25th poem in which the poet's concern for those unfortunate masses is beautifully highlighted. He harbours in his mind a strong sense of adoration for the people of his countrymen and this deep love is reflected here in this poem. The poem reveals the poet's inquistitive mind as the poem is composed in the form of an enquiry:

"mānuhato bāru tor
āhil ne ghūri
māj rāti berar jalañāre
somāy ne nādī

[ Muthi Muthikai Kāti Tor Dhēkiyār Aṅuli, Kavitā ]

The tragic life of a lady is well delineated here by the poet Nilmani Phookan with his extraordinary use of language. The confusion and disorder which emerges in the lives of the destitutes has been expressed here in an easy and simple manner:

"bāi tor ākhalar lāor kholāt
sāc din
ujāgar ducakure jvalāv
In Assamese society "lāor khola" is the shell of a gourd symbolizes extreme poverty. Those who are incapable of buying earthen pots fulfill their needs with shell of gourd. The poet feels that the lady preserves her earlier memories in this empty shell. The tears oozing out of the eyes of these helpless people causes the bower to illuminate. This love and feeling of oneness with the downtrodden people finds revelation in 32nd poem composed in the memory of the folk artiste Durgaram Boragi. The melodious tone coming out of the musical string instrument spreads to every nook and corner of the village life of Assam and fills their heart with renewed enthusiasm which acted as the clarion call:

"dupare ābeliye
jāne – juriye
juye – bātāhe
kānte – bananiye
humuniyāi
sunuriyāi
kirilīyāi
prāne mor prānat
ki yāce"  [Pāchar Parā Bhagā Bīn, Kavītā]

But the instrument itself in broken and the sound delivers by it presents a picture of rural Assam which is dying because of scarcity and pain associated with it:

"poharāi saubor marā mukh
jīyā mukh
ādhā marā mukh"
The melody emits by the string instrument (bina) touches the heart and soul of man and combines both the physical and the spiritual world together by its true Assamese colour:

"āndhare jonāke
rāde baraṣuṇe
yot bhūi cāpā phule
ipurīr māt
sipurīr māt
māt bīṅ māt" [Ibid]

The folk rituals mainly evolves out of struggles, scarcity, and pain. The poet feels a kind of oneness with this tradition and says:

"pot gai āchū mayo ei
mātite
tayo mok bicāri pāv
tāte
bharir taluvāt māti
bukur hārat māti
śirat mātī" [Ibid]

The role of folk culture is tremendous in the poet's works.

During this period two opposing ideologies are working in the mind of the poet Nilmani Phookan and creates a serious conflict. In one hand he tries to solve the mystery of human life by adhering to the symbolist technique while on the other hand getting inspired by few of his leftist friends he composed several
poetry upholding the merits of communism. This confused state of the poet’s mind is beautifully highlighted by his critic friend Hiren Gohain when he said:

“As a poet he was strongly against the idea of making poetry as an instrument for using poetry as a propaganda. But he feels that it would be injustice to separate art from human life. He cannot go against the idea of initiating a movement for the creation of a new society. He is filled with deep admiration and sympathy for the common masses particularly for the people living below the poverty line” (15)

It was during this critical juncture that Assam was burning fiercely. The mass movement made a tremendous impact among the intellectuals of Assam but Nilmani Phookan was successful in distancing himself from it to a great extent. The inhuman torture meted out to the rebels by the paramilitary forces reached its climax subsequently resulting in fraticide. The poet felt deeply distressed and it really pained him to witness the political terror committed on the general people. The degrading of human values gripped the humanist poet with fear which had been beautifully narrated by the poet. In a similar circumstance the poet composed his 40th poem and while narrating the background of the poem the poet in an interview said:

“Reading the clippings from newspapers (Nillei Massacre) and also listening to the first hand experience from my poet friend Harikrishna Deka I have composed the 40th poem which demonstrates the fearsome massacre and is included in the volume Kavita” (16)

The poet laments that there was complete lawlessness, and anarchy prevailed and this used to be a harbour of peace and tranquility few years back. He feels bad for this lack of innocence and say’s:
The dripping social values makes the daily life miserable. In the name of revolution pain and suffering was inflicted upon the common people. The economic crisis of the people deteriorated this situation even to a further extent. The cry of these tormented people makes the poet groan in pain and he speaks:

“lāghonįya būdhijanįye kale
Bopāi āru nakabi
Pānį guci sīl hal
Anna guci bih hal” [Ibid]

The poverty stricken old lady laments that the golden days no longer exists and where there was stream of water flowing has turned into rocks now. Even the food has turned itself into poison. All these crisis in the socio economic fields pushes the nation to the frontiers of terrorism. The national life of the Assamese people during that period was full of fear and insecurity mainly because of the steps under taken by the police, military and the paramilitary forces to control the situation. There was lawlessness everywhere and atrocities were being committed on the innocent lives. The poet himself being on witness says:

“mānuhtu ukhahi gaichil
tej bomi karichil
nārdamāt bāgari parichil”
The poet was greatly pained to see the brutalities committed on the common people by the ruling class and he suffered greatly from acute depression. He even finds it difficult to tolerate the inhuman treatment meted out to the general people during this critical junction of anarchy. All these events happening in the present world deeply wounded the inner soul of the poet and made his life miserable and full of terror. He said:

"ca
ba
nu
vā
rū
si
u
nī
bā
nu
vā
rū
kā
bō
nu
vā
rū
bha
bī
bā
nu
vā
rū
kha
bā
nu
vā
rū
su
bā
nu
vā
rū"

[ Ibid ]

This poet presents a true picture of the unsuccessful national movement of Assam. Several poets wrote poems on this theme but the poem of Nilmani Phookan holds a special significance. The poem is very successful in portraying a true picture of the movement.

The sensitive mind of the poet could foresee some bigger event of greater
significance behind these bloodshed and indiscriminate killings. Experience is the best friend of man. The poet has grown in stature from the pain, sorrow and terror which he himself witnesses, with these experience he acquires some of the rare human values. His poetry reached the height of its perfection not only for its style but also for its profound thought. The poets maturity is fully emphasized in his later works like ‘Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi’ (1985). This anthology is not only a beautiful creation of the poet’s mind but also a great asset to Assamese literary world.

‘Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi’ published in the year 1985 is his last published work. The period of his writings expands from 1981 to 1984. This book is actually a record of all the experiences from the fields of changing trends in society, and its values, the sense of history and its tradition, the cultural heritage of Assam etc finds full revelation in this book. A turning point has come to poet’s life after the publication of his book ‘kavitā’ (1975-80) and one reason for this might be his popularity as a poet. It was because of the unparalleled success that he received the prestigious ‘Sāhitya Akādemii’ award in the year 1981. He became a recognized name among the literary circles of India. Moreover he was also the sole representative from India who participated in a workshop on ‘Struga Poetry’ held at Yugoslavia. His fame crosses to other countries of the world. This journey to the town called Struga changed his life. All these exhilarating experiences are recorded elaborately in his book called ‘Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi’.

In his book ‘Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi’ the poet tried to coalesce various opposite themes. Here the poet not only confined himself to external reality but also explores the inner recesses of human mind. The subject matter of his earlier
poems and his feelings combines together in this volume and this has resulted an excellent product. His better understanding of the mysteries of life force, his inclination towards peace and progress and his sympathetic attitude towards the fall of men—all these led to the richness of his poetry which is well reflected in his verses. All the poems that the poet composes here were written when the society was burning with several crucial problems. As noted poet and critic Harekrishna Deka says:

"During the time of compilation of Nrtyaratā Prthivi the Assamese society was passing through its toughest times – as it was badly affected by uncertainties and conflicts. The real picture of the times is beautifully delineated in the pages of ‘Nrtyaratā Prthivi’ with the use of figurative language. What appears in his poetry is not the harsh realities but his attitude of presenting it in a different light".  

In spite of all these the poet does not seem to escape from it. His love for the common humanity is intense and has not diminished by the pain and sufferings he is undergoing. Even from his very childhood the sensitive soul of the poet could feel the changing movement of this dynamic world. He could experience this spirit even in his life as life is also dynamic. This vibration is realized even in the tiniest particles like atoms and molecules. The poet is conscious of the presence of an supernatural power under whose instructions this dynamic universe makes its move. The poet observes the invisible force which prompts this mortal world to dance. So he called his book ‘Nrtyaratā Prthivi’ (dancing universe). In this regard noted critic Hiren Gohain says:

"The name of the anthology is quite appropriate. The rhythmic sense of this dancing world can be felt in its daily actions like changing seasons. in
day and night, life and death, creation and destruction etc. The poet could accept these happenings like destruction, decay, terror in a normal way. The poetry of this volume contributes greatly to creative faculty and satisfies the urge for beauty which is very important offering, towards the humankind". 

Altogether there are 30(Thirty) poems included here in this volume. Out of these a handful of poems provides evidence of the poet's craftsmanship as a great poet. This theme of 'Nṛtyaratā Prthivi' is beautifully revealed in his 18th poem which is also his longest poem ever composed. This poem is very descriptive like a mini-epic. The poet presents the sense of loss of the modern civilization where things are falling apart and everywhere there are pain and sorrow, but still it fails to eliminate the hidden desire to survive inspite of these chaos and disorder.

The poem starts in this tone -

"ekēkhan ghārate āchilō dughar mānuh
urukhā cālere kāte kāl
kāte rāti kāte pāni
mājhe mājhe parichilhi āhi
saponate etā bālimāhi"

[Ekēkhan Ghārate Āchilō Dughar Mānuh, 'Nṛtyaratā Prthivi']

Here the poet portrays an ideal picture of an Indian joint family which has been afflicted with poverty. Taking help of the imagery of a joint family the poet deftly delineates the endless journey of life. This family guided by the strict principles of the universe and the poet himself is a member of the same family. His life is closely associated with miseries and sufferings. Even amidst this state
of hopelessness he feels a sense of optimism towards his life at the sight of a free bird (balimahi) and his desire to live intensifies:

"tumi hāhile mai kāndu
mai hāhile tumi kānda
salāo enekaiye ijane sijanak
salāo din rāti nidrā anidrā
śaisāv yauvan

bārddhakya hutāś hutāśān [Ibid]"

The picture of these two families is representative of the whole humanity. The poet recollects some of his faint memories. The sense of history and tradition is very important in one's life. Life is confined to the frontiers of this universe. Dream is an essential component of life. The essence of life is deeply embedded in the memories of the past which is often painful. The vital component which adds energy to life is the sense of beauty and sense of tradition:

"keval lara chūvālibore
cakupānī maci
jvalāy sandhyār jonāki
keval phuli thakā phultove
bicāre sugandhat tār
prāṇar bistṛtī" [Ibid]

The poet often gets troubled by his sense of loss and deprivation in his soul. The sense of nothingness is another important feature of his poetry – by the sterility of this life is well portrayed, the alluding to the portrait of Nandalal Basu in which the artist magnificently exhibiting Lord Shiva drinking a cup of poison and other scenes from Mahabharata which provides vitality to his life. Human life
entangles with life and death becomes a mere puppet in the hands of destiny and could not get his desired goal. The poet is tired of his life which is afflicted with ageing, and he contemplates:

"godhūli gopālar pirālit bahi
kakādeutāi bhābichil
ki pālū ki dilū kāk dilū" [Ibid]

The very motto of his life can be summarized in these lines, "ki palu.
'ki dilu, kak dilu. The main principle of Indian spiritualism, regarding the fulfillment of life is coded in this single line. The substance of life lies not in words or in intellect but it is lying hidden in the unsolved mysteries of biological process:

"āndhāratahe dhāne gēr dhare kiya
barṣūn kiya hya kiyo hay
puruṣar bīryya nārīr stanat gākhīr" [Ibid]

The poet himself being a product of biological process and so he think of himself as a separate entity. He also failed to escape from the trap which life imposes on an individual in the form of love and adoration of life. He tries to become one with his soul leaving aside his pride. He wants to elevate himself from other human beings and wishes to realize the whole universe. He harbours genuine love from his fellow human beings. His love exhibits in these lines:

"dekhichilo neki ketīyābā
goteikhan ākāś'
goteikhan jagat
Ātāibor morā jiyā mānuhar mukh" [Ibid]

The rhythmic movement of this earth which often dances to the tune of the motion of the universe is quite similar to the uncertainties of life which is actually a
conflict. This realization of the reality of life is now getting universal. The poet is highly optimistic of life who could clearly comprehend the swaying motion of the universe, in each and every - breath of life. This realization fills the poet’s soul with ecstatic joy as he could view the entire universe infront of him. The ability of the earth to procuate of the dancing universe:

"nakabā ketiyāy nāi nāi
nepāo gai buli
nāit pāni nāi
pānīt jui nāi
māje māje seyā ekotā ciyār māri
si ki jantrāṇāt
si ki krodhat ki ānandat
nrtyaratā prthivi.

This whole concept of 'Nrtyaratā prthivi' is a gradual development and in it he applies his invaluable experience which he had gathered throughout his life. Through the faculty of his mental and intellectual development he could feel both the creative and destructive effects of this dancing universe:

"tetiyarparāi prthivīt
beli mār yuvā nāi
tetiyarparāi prthivīkhan ghūri āche
ghūri āche"

[Konobā Ejane Ciyaři Uthil ,Nrtyaratā prthivi]

The poet finds a close association of his own existence with that of the circular motion of this universe. He wants to taste and feel this entire universe in
the biological process and through the realization of his soul.

He feels the presence of divinity in each and every individual and highly optimistic of this close association:

"mai śil āru mānūh
mai kēcā mātī āru mānūh
etā mahābṛttar kendrat thiya di yen
nirksan karichū
ejū pāṇi bāyu graha nakṣātra"

[Pāhārtorpara Nāmi Āhichu, Ibid]

The basic concept of 'Nṛtyaratā Pṛthīvī' erupts out of these profound thought which preoccupies his mind.

The poet is often conscious of the presence of the vital forces of nature which provides energy and vigour to life for the smooth functioning of its activities. The foundation of this life force is called love. Just like in men he could also perceive the various activities of love in the objects of nature. On the basis of this pleasurable experience he composes the first poem of 'Nṛtyaratā Pṛthīvī'. This poem is universal in the sense that it praises the glory of mankind as being the main source of beauty and truth and so this poem is often considered to be great:

"iṣyār parāi pānī
ipār sipār namani
tumi hāt melilei kalāpātkhan
lare ki care
culi melilei barṣupṭāk
gāṭ āhi pare"

[Iṣyār Parāi Pānī, Ibid]
In the very beginning of the poem it has been said that 'lyar Parai Pani' i.e. water is compared with life. Life is surrounded by boundless water, whose ends cannot be seen. The foundation of life is Love. Taking help from the Assamese fairy tales the poet realizes the presence of his beloved near him. He can feel the soft and tender touch of his beloved and gets excited by it as if he has been hit by the leaves of banana. The touch of her thick and dark hair makes him feel as if he is being dripped by rain. This sense for physical oneness with his lover fills his heart with servere pain and anguish. The poet heart is unlike the common people who often tend to become disloyal to their beloved. He can feel the pulse of life even in the physical love:

"carāi etā uri āhe
thōtat lai edāl dubarī" [Ibid]

The poet gets so much preoccupied with love that he cannot think of the bitter realities of life like the inevitability death:

"kato yen etiyā kono marā nāi
kono śīsū
kono brddha" [Ibid]

The poet's thoughts matured with the passage of time. He can observe the secrets of life even in the dancing movements of the objects of nature

"iyār parāi beli
bur yuvā dekhi
iyār parāi jon ulovā dekhi" [Ibid]

The poet draws aesthetic pleasure out of the swinging motion of the objects of nature and derives sensual pleasure out of his personal life experiences. All these simple pleasures of life which he derives out of his love
affair can be attributed to the happiness and joy in nature:

"duvār melilei dekhi
nitya ābartīta
ekhan premar prthivi" [Ibid]

This poem is engrossed with universal love and is a rare specimen of Assamese literature.

This book is a real proof of the poet’s inclination towards the theme of love as well as his sense of history. The poet himself being a Professor of History and so his eagerness is increasingly high. The fourth poem in this volume narrates the historical fact of Ahom King, Sargodew Gaurinata who was very sensual in nature. This is quite an unusual poem. The helpless woman who has been tormented by the voluptuousness of men screams loudly as a kind of protest and it also acts as an invocation to her fellow women who are capable of procreation. The poem recreates a story associated with the life of Ahom king but from the historical point of view the story is quite insignificant. But the poem has been magnificently created with the use of appropriate words in appropriate places Gaurinath is the epitome of all the ruthless and tyrannical rulers who leads a life of voluptuousness and considers women as an object of sensual pleasure. He derives hisistic pleasures by committing atrocities against woman and the latter had no other alternative but to surrender her body to the king. The destitute and helpless woman had to keep their doors open and no one dared to protest against this rule:

"duyokhan duvār melī thobi
Gaurināth āhiba
duyotā bātit sajāi thabi"
The tormented lady could not express her protest openly as her heart is preoccupied with fear and terror. The poet addresses the woman as mother and says –

'padūllai olāi ciyārtu māribi
māti phātib
pāṇīnilai phutādi śīl phutiba
daliyāi dibī tor hātar
hatiddtar hāt' [Ibid]

The poet has got immense sympathy and admiration for the deprived and suffering lady. He feels pity for the victims whose life has been transformed into hell by ruler like Gaurinath. He asks these women to raise their voice against the men who inflicted pain upon them.

He also encourages the women by addressing them as mothers who has the power to procreate which is the main force or energy in the whole universe. Hence the poet pays homage to these deprived women and says:

"āi tai rahdalā pathārat
ulaṅga hai nācibi
nācibi pṛthivīr nṛtya." [Ibid]

The poet is quite optimistic of the fact that the sacrifices of these suffering women would not go in vain and it would bear fruits one day and that day would be the doomsday for demon like Gaurinath:
The poet is hoping of a bright future where these women would raise their heads under the clear sky.

'Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi' presents a true picture of the contemporary life. During the period of composition of Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi (1981-84) Assam was going through a very critical phase and everywhere there was bloodshed and chaos. The pictures of the brutalities got reflected in the images of Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi but the reflection gets more prominent in the psychology of the poet. The third poem of this volume clearly presents in a dormant stage the uncertainties of the contemporary life:

"ēta bhayaṁkar sābda hal
tār pichat Niravatā
ākau etā bhayaṁkar sābda hal
sitlor bukulai somai gai
pakhilātu"

[Khirikikhanedi Somai Āhil, Ibid]

The violent explosion blows up the shell which snatches away the innocent smile from the child's face and kills the bird of peace. The powerful explosion of the bomb led to the destruction of the beauty and charm of life by burning down its shelter in an attempt to eliminate it:

"Ākou etā bhayaṁkar sābda hal"
The poet tries to represent the anxiety through a fantasy world created in his subconscious mind.

The poet expresses his fear and anxiety at the inhuman atrocities caused to the people in the name of government. There were terror of death and the possibility of getting eliminated led him to rebuke himself and said:

"Cakute herāl phulkōnvarar ghōrā
Āru kavitaṭ Bharasā
bāre bāre nijake diō dhikkār
jiyā marār taphât ki iyāt."

[ Bātankāṣate Pelāi ThaiYāy, Ibid ].

This reign of fear and terror creates a great impact on the sensitive mind of the poet. At time it crosses the limit of tolerance and he often reacts like the common, man and gets frenzied to demonstrate his protest against the oppressor. He reveals his inner thoughts and speaks:

"unmād hai ghartot jui lagāi
diba khujichilū
ghūrānīyā dāponkhan
bhāni pelāba kujichilū
karobāk tētu cepā dī
Māri pelāb kujichilū

[ Kat Kathā Pāharilū Kat Kathā Pāhari Thakū, Ibid ]
The urge to break the mirror is very significant. The poet gets totally absorbed in violence that he even tries to dismantle his own reputation. The society which is afflicted with violence and savagery has been plunged into darkness:

"ḥiṁsā pratiḥiṁsā ghrinār juit
jvale akāl rātī
śiśāl kukurar tanā ājorāt
desār nārī bhūru hād"

[Kono NāǐlYāt – Śisū Nārī Brdha, Ibid]

We tend to get excited when the poet Nilmani Phookan gives way to a deeper speculation about the atrocities and brutalities committed on humankind. He also offers a tragic picture of the fratricidal clashes and makes the situation even more critical. The poet knows very well that the violence and the reign of terror could not last long, as the people would soon realize their own folly. The bond of friendship among the different communities which has been continuing for ages is not so weak. The poet could not solve his dilemma, that how was it possible that the peace loving Assamese people give up their traditional behaviour and comply with the demands of some selfish leaders. The poet harbours a passionate love for his motherland. This deep love and adoration which he feels for his motherland prompts him to make his countrymen recall their own past tradition and wanted them to purge their souls:

"ōh' mor sapōnar sūryyar mānuh
caku meḷi cā
caκu mudi cā
mṛtyur dāpuṇat cā tok ." [Ibid]
The poem invokes his fellow country men to have a glimpse of their inner self. And he also asks them to make a deep probing of their past culture and tradition so that they can critically self-evaluate their actions. For the growth and development of a civilization, peace should be of utmost necessity. Hence everyone should aspire for the attainment of peace and tranquility.

"Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivi" celebrates the poet’s journey to Struga. The influence of this journey is profoundly visible in most of the poems composed during that period. Lyric no 10th provides ample evidences of the poets growing maturity in matters of mental outlook and therefore the field of his poetry spreads wide. He is quite happy in the sense that his poetry crosses the national frontiers and includes within his poetry the beautiful natural environment of metropolis like Struga. His senses of history and sense of time gains full maturity. Regarding this elevation of his thought and subject matter he says:

"catar bihur āndhār nisā
tumi ghararparā olāi yovālaike
kaliṅgarparā viyetnāmalaike

* * *
teō tūmālai etā jirainiyām phul bicāri
Strugā pāichegai."

[ Teō Kāhānio Tomāk Bhul Karā Nāi, ibid ]

During his visit of Struga he met Vasco Pope, and the poem composed elaborately describing his meeting, is an example of good literary work. Vasco Pope plays quite a significant role in the poetic career of Nilmani Phookan. In a poem meant to pay homage to this great figure he says:
He gets totally mesmerized by reading the poetry of this great poet and says:

“tumi mok tumār hāt ekhanake dilā
idrohī mānuhar upastitir cetanā”

His lyric no 11th is based on revolutionary ideas. In a bid to pay tribute to three great martyrs of Yugoslavia he says:

“adini prthivīr sakalo thairparā sakaluvai dekhiba
ei thio ukha pāthartu
āru tetiyā bogā carāitu habagai ēkāś
prthivīr sarbtraī hāba ekhan ēkāś
jai- jayantī.”

The universal tone eulogizing the vitality of life force was missing in his earlier poems and this may be the result of his visit to Struga. The traces of his journey to Struga could also be felt in lyric number 13th which he addressed to a poet called Anna Raizenberg. The poet tries to demonstrate Anna not as a simple human being rather she is presented as a lady having symbolic ramifications – as a symbol of the vital energy residing in nature and in that sense he compares her with Goddess Durga who possess ten hands:

ājio sihāte nejānile
The poet has gained in stature and enhanced his mental strength in his evolution as a poet and this is an internal process. The poet’s faith, his consciousness, sense of realization strengthens his belief in the generosity of mankind. Nilmani Phookan’s ‘Nṛtyaratā Pṛthivī’ sings the greatness of human civilization.

During the last four decades in his poetic career Phookan evolves greatly as a poet and the result of his tireless efforts for the search of truth makes him famous both in Assam as well as outside. This search for truth even makes the readers awfully tired and exhausted. But at the same time they can also feel simultaneously the poet’s firm belief and determination. Throughout his whole poetic career he has strong urge to improve and he always tries to uphold his values which lends him a keen sense of perception into people’s mind and also his feelings gets intensified. It is because of his strong determination and his ability to experience deep emotions that his poetry is making a smooth journey in the passage of time. There is no other alternative but to admit without any hesitation that Nilmani’s Phookan is one of the great Assamese poet. It is not that he raised the status of Assamese literature only with his creative writing besides he also started a new tradition of translated poems. There is no doubt about the fact that with his gallant endeavour he widens the field of Assamese poetry.
Besides being a creative writer who is original in his style, he also translated the best poetry of different languages both national and international into Assamese. This love and respect towards another language and literature developed even when he was a student. He has a strong liking for different literature starting from Bengali, Spanish, English, Japanese, Chinese and others. This love and interest prompts him to select the best poems of various literature and translate them into his mother tongue i.e. Assamese. For doing this he has to put up a lot of effort. The poet has a special kind of attraction towards Bengali literature and this issue would be dealt with later in the discussion. He gets the inspiration towards translation literature from Buddhadeva Basu (1908-74). In this regard the poet says:

"I was, well versed with the poems ‘Bandir Vandana’ and ‘Draupadīr Sāri’, included in ‘Buddhadeva Basu’s Sreṣṭha kavītā’ (1953). But the translated poetry of Rainer Maria, Rilke Baudelire included in the volume greatly attract and interests me. And at that very moment a thought crosses my mind that I also have to translate some poems."

A keen interest towards Japanese poetry was perceptible towards the beginning of the fifties.

In the history of Assamese literature before Nilmani Phookan, two great literateur viz Nabakanta Baruah (1926-2003) and Mahendra Bora (1929-2002) tried their hand in translation of Japanese poetry. But Nilmani Phookan is the first poet who composec the first ever collection of Japanese poetry along with a brief history of Japanese poetry. His translation of Japanese poetry entitled ‘Jāpāni Kavītā’ was published in the year 1971. In the preface of the volume the poet
himself makes it clear that an "unknown desire prompts" him to translate these poetry. Since the poet does not understand Japanese language and his translation is based on the translated English version of Japanese poetry. This is quite surprising that without understanding the language he develops a keen interest in translation. During translation he tries to retain the original meaning and intension of the poet as much as possible. He feels extremely bad about the idea that he does not know the Japanese language and so one should have deep admiration for this poet for his tireless endeavour. It is a well known fact that with the translation of these poems into Assamese language, the scope of Assamese literature enlarges and it could well rise above the evil forces of regionalism.

Ten years, after the publication of 'Jāpāni Kavītā', Nilmani Phookan tried his hand in the translation of the works of Spanish poe: García Lorkar (1898-1936). In the year 1981, he published 'Garcia Lorkar kavītā'. In this project also he got inspiration from the English translation and developed a strong urge to translate into Assamese. In the preface of the book the poet makes it clear about the trouble and the difficulties that he had to come across while translating:

"While translating works of Larka one has to come across a lots of limitation. My knowledge of Spanish language, its nature, history, geography, its socio-economic problems, religion and awareness of the culture of the people is very less. Without having comprehensive study of the tradition and cultures of a race it becomes very difficult to have a deep probing into its poetry".

Nilmani Phookan has a cosmopolitan bent of mind which prompts him to get attracted towards the poetry of Fredico Garthia Larka. In this regard the poet says:
"For quite a number of days I try to realize his depth, feel his voice, physique his volume and to adopt his tone. A lot of time has been consumed in translating a portion or even a single line. I don’t know, to what extent I am successful in retaining the original flavour of the poems but I have been able to derive on aesthetic pleasure out of it" (23)

There is no doubt that in this translation the poet has to put his best efforts so that his poetry become lively. It is the result of his hard work that he could translate complete volume of Garthia Larka’s poetry into Assamese. It is quite obvious that the emergence of this book enhances the popularity of Larka’s poetry among the Assamese masses thus enriching the treasure of Assamese literature.

It is not true that Nilmani Phookan is interested only in classical literature besides he has an enduring fascination for the folk literature. He has been interested for the folk literature of his country, and deep admiration for its rich cultural heritage. This deep sense of love and admiration that he holds for the folk literature not confined to his region only but spreads to the other parts of the country. He has a strong attraction for the rituals, customs, behaviour and habits of the various tribal groups living in different parts of India. This love and admiration that the poet possesses for the tribal literature inspires him to translate their best poetry into Assamese. The poet derives immense pleasure in the exploration of these tribal lyrics and verses and he also reads them out and ultimately he translated them and in the year 1993 published a book entitled ‘Aranyar Gān’. This book comprises of the translation of these tribal folk song into Assamese. The tribals whose works are translated includes – Sautāl, Mundā, Ho,
Orau, Gonda, Parājā, Kandha, Bāigā, Yoyāṅg, Bodo, Kārbi, Misiṅg, Gāro, Kuki, Kanyāk, Aṅgami, Oyāṅchu, Chatrisgǎrī and others. This is an excellent piece of work and this cannot be merely called a translation rather it is an imitation since in most of the cases he is successful in showing his exquisite craftsmanship. The significance of the book has been enhanced by the addition of the introduction by Hiren Gohain along with an introductory note from Kishore Bhattacharyya.

After publication of 'Aranyar Gān' (1993), Nilmani Phookan published his volume on Chinese poetry called 'Cīnā Kavita'. Most of the great poems for hundreds of years from Chinese literature are included here along with a brief history of Chinese poetry is also included here. From olden days China has a close connection with Assam in relation to matters like culture and tradition. Besides both politically and geographically also China and Assam are similar. This may be the one of the reason that attracts Nilmani Phookan towards Chinese poetry. This volume is a result of a great effort from the poet as he has been working on the growth and development of Chinese literature and selects the best poetry out of those and later he translates into his mother tongue. In the preface itself the poet makes it clear that he does not understand the Chinese language. So he had to take help from the English version of Chinese poetry. This successful endeavour of the poet enables the Assamese readers to have the taste of this new literature.

In his entire corpus of writing Nilmani Phookan gives a special preference to his translation because this inturn enriches his creative works and let to his popularity. He also improves the treasure of his knowledge from the study of various literature and this has reflected in his own writings. In an interview he comments:
"Chinese poetry is quite excellent in the simplicity of expression, the exoticism of pastoral life, in its understanding of the nature of this universe and also it is cosmopolitanism — Japanese poetry teaches me to create pictorial imagery. I have learned how to look at nature, how to love birds and beast and insects from Chinese and Japanese poetry. All these knowledge teaches me to store these images inside my mind and this has develop a kind of love for this life."

Nilmani Phookan's lifelong involment with the works of translation helps him to develop a new poetic world and this in turn helps in his creative writing. All the salient features of the poetry of Nilmani Phookan which is apparent to us is actually the result of his exploration of the various literature of the world. He acquires the knowledge of how to use simple and austere language from his reading of Chinese poetry, from Japanese poetry he learns the art of becoming economical in his use of language. From T.S.Eliot he imitates the interplay of conscious and unconscious in poetry. It is to Garcia Lorka that Phookan is primarily indebted in his treatment of love and death. Ritze is responsible for developing a sharp eye in Phookan and teaches him to visualise this world as an artist and to enjoy this beautiful life like the strain of a melody. This is how Nilmani Phookan gets inspiration and motivation in his poetic career from different persons in different times. And it is mainly because of this that he can be called a living legend in Assamese literature and hence wins for himself a permanent seat in the history of Assamese literature.
Notes & References

1. "126 অপরাধ প্রাপ্ত বিদ্রোহি কবি, বিভিন্ন দেশ হতে তার গল্প বিতরণ করেন। এবং তিনি ডাঃ মানী ফালতস্ডু মাসানে সকালের তার কাব্য দৃষ্টির লক্ষণ। তার কবিতার বিতরণ এবং পরিবর্তনের মাধ্যমে তিনি আকর্ষণ করেন। নিপুণ বন্ধুর সহায়তায় ফুকুন্দ স্টুডি সাহিত্য কল্যাণের সাহিত্য সম্পাদক হয়ে যান। ঐতিহাসিক অম্পট্টরের অধিকারী। চিত্রে কবরস্থানে তৃতীয় শিক্ষা বিষয়ে তার সম্পর্কে তার দৃষ্টিতে বলেন যে: সময়ের পথ গেয়ে তের কবিতার।" — Phukan, Kabin : Ṛdhunik Asamīyā Kavitā: Prakriti Āru Patabhūmi composed in Borgohain, Homen (ed) : Asamīyā Sāhityar Būrānī (volume-VI), P-365.

2. "তেরো ছবি তাতে কনিবের বিধান মানীয় কবিকর। তিনি অষ্টাদশ শতাব্দীতে রঙ্গে মানীয় শিক্ষার অধিকরণ করার জন্য প্রচেষ্টা করতে বিজ্ঞানের উপাধিতা আর্কাইন্য়ানে প্রতিষ্ঠান তৈরি করে। তার তমিনার কবিতার মাধ্যমে তার কবরস্থানের উদ্বন্ধনীকরণ। পুনর্নবীকরণ করেন। প্রাণীর সাহিত্যের জন্য নন্দীর নস্তাল তার ব্যাখ্যাতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠান তৈরি করেন। এর।" — Gohain, Hiren (ed) : Sāgartalir Sānkha, P-X.


4. "সহায় ভাষণের বিদ্রোহিকার। হিম্মতের মূল করণ। তিনি পাঠকদের অনেক কাগজে আহ্বান করেন। অনেক সময় নিজের মাধ্যমে কবিতার উত্থিত হয়। সাহিত্যালী প্রতিষ্ঠানের মাধ্যমে তার কল্যাণের সাহিত্য সম্পাদন করে।" — Gohain, Hiren (ed) : Sāgartalir Sānkha, P-214.

5. "নিম্নলিখিত গল্পের জুটি হয়েছে। শিক্ষার সাহিত্য কুটিরে মানীয় কবিতাকে মানীয় কল্যাণে আনন্দিত ভাবে করে।" — Phukan, Nilmani : Golāpī Ṛāmūr Lagna, ekesar (Preface).

6. "সহায় ভাষণের বিদ্রোহিকার। হিম্মতের মূল করণ। তিনি পাঠকদের অনেক কাগজে আহ্বান করেন। অনেক সময় নিজের মাধ্যমে কবিতার উত্থিত হয়। সাহিত্যালী প্রতিষ্ঠানের মাধ্যমে তার কল্যাণের সাহিত্য সম্পাদন করে।" — Ibid.

7. "সহায় ভাষণের আলোচক সাহিত্যীয় কাব্য সাহিত্যের উত্থিত হয়। অনেক কাগজে আহ্বান করেন। অনেক সময় নিজের মাধ্যমে কবিতাকে মানীয় কল্যাণে আনন্দিত ভাবে করে।" — Ibid. P-2.

9. "This book, written in Assamese, is a collection of plays by Assamese playwrights. The book is divided into two parts, each containing plays by different playwrights. The book is a valuable resource for students of Assamese literature."


11. "Sudha 187 the series, which is a collection of plays by various playwrights, is a valuable resource for students of Assamese literature. The series contains plays in various styles and themes, catering to a wide range of interests."

19. "সংকলনখনব নামকলা সার্থক। দিন-বাতি, ভাত পরিবর্তন, জজ্ঞা আক মন্ত্র, সৃষ্টি আক ক্ষয়, মঞ্জল আক অমঞ্জল মাঝে আগুনই হয় পৃথিবী এotes খনিতেই ‘মৃত্যুর তত্তা’। সে তায় ধংস, ক্ষয়, তাওহ, ভীতিভিক কবিতায় আপেক্ষিকভাবে প্রাণাতিতে গৃহণ কবিতার পাদপিঠে। কিন্তু সংকলনখনব কবিতারের শেষ বিচারই জীবন সৃষ্টিশীলতা আক সৌন্দর্য্যাব প্রতি একো একোটা অর্থা !" — Gohain, Hiren (ed) : Sāgartalir Sāṅkha, P-XXIX

20. “রুদ্ধসংস বসুর ভেষ্ট কবিতা”ত (১৯৫৩) থেকে ‘তোহবী বসন্তা’, ‘গোপদী শঙ্কর’ কবিতা দুটি মোহ কঠোর আছিল। কিন্তু বিশেষভাবে আকৃতি আক মাত্র হৃদির সর্বটি ধুমাল মাণিক্যা, বিষে, বড়লেয়ের কবিতা অনুবাদ পাট। আক তেরিয়াই মাত্র কিছু কবিতা অনুবাদ কবিতালি, — এই ভাবটা মনোনিত আছিল।” — Ibid, P-193


22. “লবকাব অনুবাদক হিচাপে আমার সীমাবদ্ধতা বহু। প্রেমী নাজানৌ, প্রেমী প্রকৃতি, ইতিহাস, ভূগোল, সামাজিক, অর্থনৈতিক, ধর্মীয়, সাংস্কৃতিক জীবন সম্পর্কে আমার জীবন নিকটই সামান্য। এটা জাতির সংস্কৃতি নাজানৌরে সেই জাতির ভাষায়, কবিতায় মার্গভুক্তে সেমাক নোয়াধি।” — Phookan, Nilmani : García Lorquín Kavītā, Preface.

23. “ভালেনদিন ধবীলকে লবকাব মাত্রাট, তব শব্দকে, আসন, গমন-হর্ষ-শুভ, গতিবাদ উপলক্ষ্যি কবিতাটে চেষ্টা করিছে। বহ হৃদেকাব পিছে কবিতা এটা বা এভাবে বা শাক এটার অসহ্যে কবিতা। মূলব তাব-বসি কিছুই বাবির পাপিছে। কব ‘নোয়াধি’, কমাটী কিছু এই অনন্তর আমার হাহাকা হুই কবিছে।” — Ibid.

24. “চীনা কবিতার পরা অভিযোজনে সবলতা, নিষর্গায়ে, প্রকৃতি এ উপমা প্রাকৃতিক জননী, প্রায় জীবনে সৌদর্শ্য আক তার বিশ্বাসনীয়তা — জাপানী কবিতাজিনের চতুর্থামায় ভাষা, চতুর্থামায় নির্মাণ কৌশল, নিষর্গায়ে, মিত্রভাবিত, ইতি তমতত, চতুর্থামায় আক বাঙ্গালী মান্তা। চীনা জাপানী কবিতাখৈ মোক শিক্ষিত, — প্রকৃতিক কেন্দ্রে চার লাগে, জীব-জন্ম, চায়ি-চিহ্নিত, পোক-পতঙ্ক কেন্দ্রে ভাল পার্থক্য লাগে, মনুষ্যতর্কশূন্য সৌদর্শ্যে সুমধুর খুব লাগে আক সবচেয়েই জীবনকে কেন্দ্র কবিতা লাগে।” — Gohain, Hiren (ed) : Sāgartalir Sāṅkha, P-220