The word 'elegy', often taken less care of in use, originally meant a poem written in elegiac couplets sung to the accompaniment of the flute. Its themes included martial and convivial subjects, laments and epitaphs in which the dead spoke in the first person. Now-a-days we use the word in a much-restricted sense and now it means a mournful lyric whose theme is either death in general or the death of a specific person. Poems of this nature grew up in large number in our poetry since the beginning of the Romantic movement. The earliest trace of elegiac poetry is found in Gunabhiram Barua who wrote in the garb of Gurudatta. His 'Isvar Chandra Vidyasagarar Vaikuttha Prayanat Bharat Vilap (Lamentations of mother India on the death of Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar) is a deep emotional outburst of sorrow at the demise of Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar, The poet employs a peculiar technique of expression. Here the narrator is mother
India herself. She had to witness demise of her many noble sons. Mother India now believes that one who tries for her material and moral upliftment is carried away early. She considers herself a great sinner, and she is led to believe that for her sinful acts she is penalised by carrying away her most cherished sons.

Kāndanta Bhārata āi, hiyā mora purī jāy
Vidyāsāgarar viyogat,
Ki pāpe pāpini mai, mohora maran nāi
Jātanehe mor kapālat.
Yijane mohora arthe, dhane prāne yatna kare,
Yāra hante bārhe mor āśā,
Kovā nidārun vidhi, Kiya tāk heruvāo
Kiya mor enuvā durdāsā.
Dante trna tuli lao, tomāk kākuti karo
I durdāsā nidibā āmāka,
Dayā karā Dayāmay, mai hao nirāsray
Krpa karā tumī āmāsāk.

* Mother India lamentingly weeps: "My heart burns at the demise of Vidyāsāgara. I know not, I am the sinner of what sins. I prefer death to these tribulations but only tribulations are allotted to my lot."
Tell me, O cruel Destiny, why one who works for me with heart and soul, who enhances my glory, who can uphold my hopes is carried away, so soon? Why am I to face such circumstances? Catching a straw by the teeth, I appeal to you; kindly never force me to these sad plights. Be kind, O the abode of kindness, I am helpless and deserted, you please bestow your favour on me.”

As a solace to her grief, mother India seeks refuge in Dayāmaya Hari, who is the appeaser of all sorrows. The Vaisnavite belief is easily discernible in the above verse. The custom of catching a straw by the teeth (dānte trṇa tuli lao) as a form of devotional sincerity is purely a Vaisnavite thing. In matters of diction and metre too, Gunābhīram Barua followed the Vaisnavite ideal. The words like Kāndanta (for Kāndiche) mohora (for mor), āmāsaka (for āmāk) and ‘dānte trṇa tuli lao’ are idioms of the older Assamese language of the Vaisnavite poets. In metres too, the elegy runs on the lechāri chanda which is the fittest metre for this type of poems. Incidentally, it may be observed here that the classical songs of mourning (vilāp gīts) were also built on lechāri metre. In this elegy there is an admirable fusion
of admiration for Isvar Chandra, sorrow at his demise and devotion to God.

II. CHANDRA KUMAR AGARWALLA

Chandra Kumar Agarwalla wrote three elegiac poems at the death of his daughter Pratima and sister Yajnesvari. Pratima, and Yugam{ढ}a sok (The permanent sorrow) are the two poems full of pathetic reminiscence of his daughter. Vimukh (The Refused) is the poet's elegiac tribute to his sister Yajnesvari who had committed suicide after a few months of her marriage. In this poem the poet has philosophised her death. The poet observes that as she was very much fond of freedom, so, she arranged for her eternal freedom by hanging herself to death. Death had given her freedom. Another poem Ajeya (The Invincible) records his sad experience of the death of his son Arun Kumar Agarwalla. Arun had a strong determination to go to London for study, but he was not encouraged by his father to go to London. Chandrakumar prevented his son's going to London. Being disappointed Arun Kumar committed suicide. This had greatly shocked the poet but he grew desperate. He knew that the Cruel Destiny is always there to crush the harvest of man's
hard toil. The poet has now turned desperate to fight with Destiny. Chandra Kumar's art of narration, as natural for an elegy, is simple and spontaneous.

III. ANANDA CHANDRA AGARWALLA

Ananda Chandra Agarwalla also composed an elegy embodying his lamentations over the bereavement of his dear sister. The poet's pathos has run wild in the lines like "Prānār Bhanītī tai kalaino gali, sāgarar dhau yen ka't lān halī" (My dear sister, where art thou gone? Like the waves of the sea, where have you mingled with?). In this elegy past love and past sports like swimming in the river with his dear sister are tearfully recorded.

IV. HITESVAR BARBARUA

Hitesvar Barbarua who rose to the Miltonian fame by his elegiac poem Cakulo (The Tears, 1922) is perhaps the most successful of the Assamese elegy-poets. Cakulo is the poet's tearful tributes to his youngest son Bipin who left this earth in his teens. The poet had to witness a large number of bereavements in his life: in his child hood he
lost his father, in adolescence his grandmother, his sister and cousin, in youth his mother, wife and a son and last of all his dearest youngest son Bipin. With Bipin’s death the poet’s life has been grabbed by an incorrigible dejection. Moreover, he has become a bit doubtful of the justice of God. At the same time there arose an intense longing for his own death. At the initial stage, loss of the son made the poet restless. The son’s clothes, books and classmates used to bring very sad reminiscences of the boy to him. (p 157). Sometimes the poet tried to find solace in the teachings of the Gita and to console himself that like a man discarding his old cloth to have a new one, his son Bipin’s soul too had left the present form to have another new one (p 159). But the poet found the real solace as he began to think that Death had opened for Bipin, the gate of heaven.

Samsār pravāś kāl jīvanat samāpan,
Unmuktā tomar āji svargar duvār.
Cirasukh, cirapreme thākibā sonāi tāt
Cirānanda labh āji tomar bhāgyat. (p 162)

= You have finished your sojourn on earth,
For thee, the heaven’s gate is now wide open,
Let you rest there, with eternal love and happiness,
Eternal blessedness has now come to your lot.

And so the poet began to think that with his own death he
would be able to meet his dear-departed: 'Bipin'.

Tumi aji halā āg, mayo kāilai yām,
Cīrasthāyī samsārat nohe kāro prān;
Vīcched nahay tāt, tāt cīrasamīlan,
Pītā putra āmi tāt milim punār. (p 165)

= To-day you left earlier, I too shall go next-day,
None lives eternally in this world,
(In heaven) there is no separation,
There the union is permanent
We the father and the son shall unite there.

The poet's personal reflections are full of intense pathos
and sincere appeal.

This Hites an worthless person had planted
a creeper of high hope;
But no flower bloomed in it;
Two buds simply came (with thy grace)
But untimely the two-buds fell down
13
to the dust.
The poet, with a sorrowful heart, finally bade farewell to his trade of poetry-making. With a sorrowful heart the poet declares:

I Cakulo ses kāvyā, ses karma Hiteśar,
Samāpan āji tār sāhityik jīvanar. (p 175)

= This Cakulo is the last poetry, last work of Hiteś, This very day he closes his career as a poet.

The sorrow for Bipin made Hiteswar Barbarua so sad that with his death he resolved to leave the trade of poetry for ever, and actually it was so. After Cakulo no great work came out from the poet's pen. In search of solace to his sorrows, the poet delved deep into the continental poetry and consequently found inspiration to quote stanzas from Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Long fellow as preamble to Cakulo. Perhaps, Wordsworth taught him the calm submission to God's will while the Gītā taught him the imperishability of the soul.

"Death, life, and sleep, reality and thought,
Assist me, God, their boundaries to know,
O teach me calm submission to thy will."

These noble lines from Wordsworth are given as the preamble to his Cakulo. A dignified intensity of passion and a sense
of calm realization combine in this best composition of Hitesvar Barbarua. Another point of interest in Cakulo is the conflict in the heart of the poet as to the fate of the boy after death. Milton too, in his Lycidas suffered from the same conflict at the death of Edward King. The conflicts in his mind led the poet to seek solace from the teachings of the Gita and the musings of poet Wordsworth.

Hitesvar Barbarua was a master-artist. Even in the hours of sorrow, his mastery over the language has not escaped him. Thus, we find some sincere and pointed expression in his Cakulo.

(i) Prāṇar lāhari buli punu tāk lām kolā, (p 165)
(ii) Unmukta tomār āji svargar duvār (p 162)
(iii) I krandandhvani mor ājī sei vedadhvanī,
    Hiyā khani kari vedi arghya dim cakupāni (p 158),
(iv) Saṁsār atithiśāli tumī adhikārī tār (p 150),
(v) Śunya āśā, śunya hiyā, cārupāle śunya prāy (p 149)

The above expressions are surely capable of exhibiting the poet's passionate eloquence and tragic submission. While the whole of the Cakulo looks like a single poem with a precise unity of theme and emotion; it is divided into so many Sonnets in an interesting way. And regarding the poetic
excellence of these Sonnets Dr. B.K. Barua rightly observes: 'If the test of genuine poetry is to move, there can be no more genuine poetry than these sonnets'.

V. PADMA NATH GOHAIN BARUA

Padmanath Gohain Barua wrote a big number of poems on the loss of his contemporaries and relatives, like Hem Chandra Goswami, Lakhsmnath Bezbarua, Manick Chandra Barua, Rohinikanta Hatibarua, Rabindranath, Narayani Handique, Satyanath Bora, Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya, his sister, mother and his son-in-law Siddhesvar Gohain. But in these poems respectful eulogy overrides the pathetic remembrance and hence these can be safely reckoned as prāsasti kavītā (Poems of eulogy) rather than elegies; only the two poems on Āideu Āikan and Siddhesvar Gohāin exhibit the poet's sorrowful remembrance of his dear ones. In his sister Āikan the poet saw the reflection of his mother whom he lost earlier. Alas, now that sister is also gone. The death of his son-in-law Siddhesvar Gohain disturbed the poet badly and as such in the elegiac tribute to him, the sentiment of sorrow assumes an enormous proportion.
Rangila by Durgesvar Sharma is one of the finest examples of elegiac compositions. The poet has adopted the flash back method in the narration of the theme of the poem. Rangilā, a pretty maid, one day saw her mother sighing and sobbing at the sight of a banana plant. On interrogation, her mother told Rangilā that the banana plant bore testimony to the untimely death of Rangilā's brother. The banana plant grew up on the place, exactly where the burning pyre for her son was made. She told further that her dead brother was very much interested in Rangilā and proposed to give his playing dolls to her. But his desires were not fulfilled. He was taken away. With tearful eyes the mother said:

Lyāte pelāle puri cāi hai gal
Kato tār cin-cāv nāi,
Gajī thakā kalāpuli dekhi āji mor
Cakupānī ahiche olāi.

= He was burnt here, his body changed to ashes,
no human trace of him remains,
Seeing the sprouting banana plant
my tears have come out.
Ranglla was very much pained to learn about her dead brother; his unfailing love for her and his intention to give her his dolls. She wept bitterly; the mother told her so many words of consolation but to no use. Her longing to see her dear-departed brother grew so intense that she even thought of digging out the spot of the banana tree to find him out, if possible.

Kandi kandi Rangila makak sudhile,
cao yadi khahi eie thai,
Pamne cakure dekhyaar maramar
aji aru eko cin nai.

The mother told her that she would find by digging only the burnt ashes and nothing more. Rangila on this information grew more sad and burst forth. Her tears encouraged further tears on the mother's eyes.

Nowhere the pathetic intensity is so great as in Rangila. Such intensity of feeling makes the elegies sincere and passionate. The poem is built simply on narration. There is no philosophy, no scope for any discussion on the problems of human life and death, but in spite of that the poem appeals most. The diction is simple and unembellished. But yet
it succeeds in giving the readers an aesthetic experience of the sentiments of sorrow and sympathy.

VII. SURYYA KUMAR BHUYAN : NALINI BALA DEVI

Suryya Kumar Bhuyan wrote a few epitaphs on the death of some of the noble sons and lovers of Assam like Ananda Ram Barua, Manick Chandra Barua, Padmanath Gohain Barua and George Gordon. These poems are simple and full of the poet's sincere admiration for those noble personalities.

Nalini Bala Devi who excels in writing the Prasasti poems, wrote one beautiful elegy of deep pathos and high philosophy at the death of Putali.

VIII. ATUL CHANDRA HAZARIKA

Atul Chandra Hazarika too wrote few poems with elegiac sentiments and of them the elegiac tributes to Lakshmi Nath Bezbarua, Karmavir Nabin Chandra Bardaloi and Tarun Ram Phookan deserve close attention. Senāpati ranat paril (The General has fallen in the battle) is a neat elegiac tribute to Deshabhakta Tarun Ram Phookan : his leadership
during the national struggle for independence was singular and at the death of this leader the state lost the general to give the lead in the war of liberation. The poet shares the sorrows of mother Assam at the loss of her distinguished son. This unfortunate mother Assam had to witness bereavement of large number of her noble sons, continuously.

Santāpītā putrar śokat kāndiche janani,
Uti yāy áśru plāvanat goṭei medini
Putra śok sahiv kimān janamdukhunī,
Kāk cāy dukh pātalai mātr abhāgini.

IX.

Ratna Kanta Barkakati, Sailadhar Rajkhowa and Sarvesvar Sarma Kataky also made mark as elegy poets. Barkakati's Bhaiti, Sailadhar's dirge on Bhagavati Prasad Barua and Sarvesvar Kataky's reminiscences of Hemchandra Barua are very appealing. Sailadhar's deep and touching remembrance of Bhagavati Prasad Barua received much appreciation. Bhagavati Prasad himself was a poet of repute. He along with his wife and children had a watery grave at the worst boat disaster in the Desang river (in Sibsagar).
The same incident inspired Himala Baruani also to write her elegiac poem Vinani. She was the mother of the two illustrious poets Bhagavati Prasad Barua and Parvati Prasad Barua. The death of Bhagavati Prasad in the boat-tragedy inspired the mother to write the lyrical lamentation Vinani (The Lamentation). The sorrowful heart of the mother is neatly expressed in this elegiac poem. The poetess believes that her son and daughter-in-law are in heaven, beyond the blue curtain of the sky. So, she entreats the blue-sky to keep-off her curtain so that she could have a glimpse of her lost son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

Gucuva akas tomar
nila yavanika khani,
Karo mai ase kakuti;
Vicari cabalai diya
cai jur karo hiya
heroa amulyadhan keiti.

Her touching lines full of sorrowful entreaties have the power to shake the soul.
La Milmi boarl pran putala
Tumi aji mok namata halā,
Āhā ai mor āhā rūpahī,
Mausana mātere kathā koāhī.

= My dear daughter-in-law, my heart's heart,
To-day you refuse to speak to me;
Come my good lady; Come the beautiful one,
With your honeyed voice, pray, utter a word to me.

Such pathetic lamentations are destined to plunge the readers to a sea of sorrow. Her sorrows have turned the poet a fatalist. Sometimes she consoles herself thinking that it is God who has collected back His own people near to Him. But the pain is so unbearable that, she sometimes appeals to God to kill herself too; so that she might be relieved permanently of her sorrows. Lastly, she realises the presence of her son in the nature and gets herself consoled. Her son has now mingled with the Sun, the Moon, the rose and the breeze (p 14). But the realisation of this makes the poetess restless. Like the old mother Margaret of Wordsworth's poem or like Tennyson's Rizpah this mother is also pitiabletormented by the various thoughts about the whereabouts of her son.
Simple in presentation, universal in theme and shaped in various graceful metres, Vinani speaks clearly the Voltairian truth: "Happiness is but a dream and sorrow a reality".

XI. GANESH CHANDRA GAGOI

Ganesh Chandra Gagoi wrote a few elegiac poems, of which, the sorrowful tribute to Karmavir Nabin Chandra Bardaloi ranks supreme. Like his predecessors Ganesh Chandra also accounts the loss to mother Assam and tries to console her, on her bereavement. But at the same time he has made a high estimation of the departing personality. Karmavir Nabin Chandra Bardaloi was a great patriot and his participation, in the India's national struggle for independence earned him the distinction as a great leader of the people. The poet says that with his works and sacrifice Karmavir has built a starlit dome for mother Assam. The deep pathos of mother Assam and the great reverence of Karmavir for his mother land are nicely depicted by the poet. We quote below a few lines from the poem to illustrate the poet's superior gift. Of course, in this poem the sense of eulogy sometimes tries to override the sense of elegy.
Janmabhūmi āi mor bar abhāginī tai
Bhagābuku āru tor novār jorāba,
Navīnār śmaśānāt ākuli vikuli kāndi
Cakur pānīre jāno pārivi ghūrāba?
Mandirar śikharat soñar kalići thāpi
Sonitere pur kari soḍasōpacār,
Āi, Āi, buli tor carān savaṭī dhari
Saṛ kari guci gal pūjā aponar.

XII. JYOTI PRASAD AGARWALLA

The suicidal death of Arun Kumar Agarwalla, son of Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, inspired Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla also to write his long elegiac poem 'Phulivale povā hale' (Had he been given to bloom). Arun Kumar was Jyoti Prasad's brother and not only that he was a keen friend and a close associate of Jyoti. Jyoti was greatly hurt at the death of Arun. The poet gives a passionate and close picture of the departed brother and remembers him with gratitude. The poet's admiration for his lost brother is found in the stanza:
He cira nirava priya,
He cira mauna vandhu
He cira kumar
Cira abhimani mor
maramar bhai.

'Cira abhimani mor maramar bhai' — the very expression expresses the poet's sorrow at its highest. His brother is now eternally abhimani as he no more responds to the calls of the poet. The child-like simplicity of the poet is often marked in this poem. A lovely poetic diction wrought on simpler words enhances the beauty of the poem.

Most of the poets discussed in this chapter, excluding Hitesvar Barbarua and Himala Baruani, could not portray the tragic conflict that an elegy demands. The eternal longing of man to keep his dear ones by his side permanently, collides with God's desire to pull the noble souls to his side more earlier. Hence in the back of every elegy there is this conflict of eternal value. Moreover, intelligent poets oftentimes introduce the questions of life and death, the control of destiny and the permanence of soul within their elegies. And, the appeal of an elegiac piece grows high whenever it is tinged with these questions or conflicts.
XIII. DIMBESVAR NEOG

It was Dimbesvar Neog who could very admirably introduce the tragic conflict into his elegiac poem Śuvanī. The question of death, the rule of destiny and the justice of God over the mortals are discussed here. Śuvanī is a collection of some elegiac poems written at the bereavement of his dear wife Ājalitārī, who herself was a notable writer. The poet brings legendary figures like Orpheus, Euridies and Kamala Kūvarī to share his sorrow. In a true Indian traditional spirit, the poet thinks that he had to witness the demise of his wife due to a curse of God projected against him. The poet compares the justice of God on mortals, with the justice of the tiger over the lamb (p 19). Backed by powerful feelings and wrote on easy non-rhetorical sequence the book Śuvanī has a greater appeal. The very soul of the poet has come out to try a resurrection of his dead wife. The poet curses his strength, his personality and his life as useless as it has failed to revive his dead wife to life.

*** Śuvanī mandir deh erilā yetiya
Kiyano tomār prāṇ tej mañahar
Satotī sīsūr aśrūrubī raktadhāre
Noārile oloṭāi āniba tomāk ?
Tātokai tīrthayātrī mor duṭi òthe,
Dhāli dui adharat sañjīvani sudhā
Noārile kiya bāru jagāba tomāk ?
Āru mor sei ñeṣ gārha ālingan
Gac pāt saruvā ākul krando
Bhukuvāi bukubhaṅgā vilāp vinani
Ekove, ekove bāru kiya novārile
Prān pakhī sajālai sumāb punar ?
Tente mor manoval, mor ātmaval
Mor i jīvan hāy save biramban
Biramban, prthivīr prīti sambodhan.

Death is an earthly illness and there is no remedy against it. The Gita has also said that Death is the natural outcome of birth (Jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyu). But the human mind is too innocent to get convinced of this. Therefore, with every death man discovers death as his permanent enemy. The poets with their softer sentiments are more hurt than anybody else and so is the case with poet Dinbesvar Neog. A profound sense of self-pity heightens the effect of tragic sentiment in this poem.
XIV.

The death of the heroes of the India's struggle for independence also inspired a few people to offer their elegiac tributes. Devika Saikia, in her very teens, wrote an elegiac tribute to Mahatma Gandhi (Smrti Arghya, Jorhat, 1949) in a beautiful verse style. Sanatan Vairagi (Kuśāl Kōvarar Git, 1947) and Sonaram Chutia (Muktivedit, Nalāra, 1946) wrote some elegiac narratives to Kuśāl Kōvar, the martyr of 1942 movement. The death of Kanaklātā, Mukunda Kākati and Bhogesvari Phukanānī too inspired some others to offer their elegiac tributes. Verses were written also on the deaths of Brañjit Borpūjārī, Biśnu Prasād Bābhā, Phanī Sarmā, Jatin Duara and others. Persons of international reputation like John F. Kennedy too inspired the Assamese poets like Hari Barkakati to pay their tributes in elegiac verses. Barkakati says that Death cannot wither the glories of John. The dome of eternal fraternity built by that mighty president of the U.S.A. will endure the tortures of ages and races:

Ka'i'la, mуга, тамварания jак jак манунаr
Antarar hejār aκūtī lai,
Tumi sajā sonōvalī saudh
Rātir timirvōr duhātere dur kari kari
Etiyā jiliki rāl vantighar hai
Bhay āru abisvāse bharpur prthivīr
Etimātho sāhasar vindu.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The earliest trace of elegiac poetry is found in the doleful Bāramāhi and Vilāp songs. These songs recorded the sorrows (especially of woman) at the loss of dear ones. These songs are the product of the folk-poets. Apart from these elegiac songs forming part of the folk-literature, there were a kind of Vilāp gīts sung in the dramas at the death of the heroes or at the loss of a husband by a woman.

2. Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar the noble son of Bengal "was the most outstanding personality in the middle and final decades of the nineteenth century. His deep learning in Sanskrit, his high critical acumen, his wholesome and very
modern outlook on life, his integrity and forcefulness of character and his indomitable fighting spirit that would never compromise with evil or injustice, made him respected by all. *** In human qualities, too, few of his countrymen have surpassed him".

Vide, Sukumar Sen: History of Bengali Literature, pp.187-88

3. Vijuli vol. II, no. 3, pp. 67-68

4. Cf. Wordsworth: "The good die first and they whose hearts are dry as summer dust burn to the socket".


6. Chandrāmrit, p 5
7. Ibid., p 12
8. Ibid., pp. 10-11
9. Ibid., p 126

11. The poet in his poem Ses Bhikṣā (The Last supplication) has said of himself:

"My life was surrounded on all sides by great tragedy; in my heart the great ripples of sorrow burst all along".

Vide, Malac, 1953, Gauhati; p 31
12. Cf. The Gita. II. 22
13. Cakulo, 1963, p 167
15. Dr. B.K. Barua: History of Assamese Literature, p117
17. Ibid., p 57
19. Ibid., p 226
20. Ibid.,
21. Vide, Nirmali, 1951
22. Vide, Sandhiyar Sur
23. Vide, Dipali, 1942
24. Ibid., p 126
25. Vide, Sevali, pp. 5-6
26. Vide, Nijara, pp. 87-89
27. Vide, Asamiya Sahityar Kos, 1932, p 448
28. Bhagavati Prasad Barua, the brother of the illustrious poet Parvati Prasad was a man of distinction. He made his mark as a poet, a prose-writer and an actor. He was a tea-planter by profession. Bhagavati Prasad's tragic end was mourned at national level. Parvati Prasad had
erected a great hall at Gauhati (The Bhagavati Prasad Barua Bhavan) to commemorate the name of his dear brother.

30. Ibid., p 11
31. Tomar dhan tumi nilā / āru mor eko nāi,
Tomār pāvat sapī dīlo / caraṇat dibā thāi. Ibid., p 14
33. Rūp-jyoti, pp. 31-32
34. The life and activities of the Karmavir Nabin Chandra Bardaloi are well told by his daughter Nalini Bala Devi, in the book Smṛti-Tīrtha, Gauhati, 1948
35. Rūp-Jyoti, p 31
36. Luitar Pārar Agnisur, 1971; p 148
37. The life and activities of Ajalitara Neog have been warmly recorded by Suren Dutta in his book Ājalitārā, Jorhat,1953
39. Gitā. II. 27

In fine, we may make this observation that apart from the aesthetic beauty and importance, the elegy also involves a lot of socio-cultural data and some very important informations regarding the personal life of the poet.