Assamese poetry of the forties of this century showed a marked deviation from the Romantic tradition. In place of the romantic treatment of the ideas and emotions of the earlier period a realistic approach in poetry grew up. New trends both in form and content came on and the horizon of the Assamese poetry widened to a considerable extent. New ideas, new experiences and newer outlook on man and society inspired a completely new strain in Assamese poetry, which obviously goes by the name of New Poetry. This new poetry received a direct western influence and imbibed the modern tendencies of poetry prevalent in America and England by that time. The major poets who initiated this modern movement was Amulya Barua, Hem Kanta Barua and Navakanta Barua. Jayanti, Pachowa and Ramdhenu were the magazines to which the credit of introducing the new movement of poetry goes. The trends and accomplishments of the continental modern poets like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Auden, Dylan Thomas, Mayakovsky, Baudelaire and Mallarme found a marked reflection
in the poetry of the new Assamese poets. The chief characteristics of the new poetry, both in form and content, are as follows:

NEWNESS IN CONTENT

(1) A NEO-HUMANISTIC OUTLOOK:

The most important aspect of the new poetry was the rise of a neo-humanistic outlook. The new modern poets discovered the identity of man as man and tried to share their joys and sorrows. The neo-humanitarian outlook gave them the vision to look upon the whole mankind with equal eye. Thus the poets extended their love and sympathy to the oppressed labourers of the coal-mines, the prostitutes, the rickshaw pullers, the widows and the vagrants. Amongst the new poets, Amulya Barua focussed his attention chiefly on the suffering humanity, while the late-comers of the movement like Ram Gagol, Keshav Mahanta and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya followed his ideal to a much greater degree. The down trodden and the suffering humanity, not only of this country but of the whole world, got due representation in this type of new poetry.
(ii) THE INFLUENCE OF MARXIAN PHILOSOPHY:

The teachings of the German philosopher Karl Marx influenced the new poets considerably. His dialectical materialism brought new gospels for the young poets. Karl Marx maintained that the doctrine of surplus value or the unequal distribution of wealth gave rise to all sorts of social discomfort. The capitalist forces of production compelled the working class to groan under poverty and other various sufferings. Marx, therefore, projected a newer social and political engineering. "He pointed out that by organizing and directing the struggle of the working class against the capitalists and their associates, and by interlinking with this struggle in certain quite possible ways the struggle of the poor peasants and tenant-farmers against the landlords, and carrying it forward to a veritable 'dictatorship' of these exploited classes, it would be possible to take possession of the instruments of production and change the system. It would be possible to change it in those ways necessary in order to make reasonable the effort to create a classless society in which men will receive according to need and work according to ability." The new poets had developed easily a softer sentiment for Marx and appreciated his gospels by inserting them in their own poetry. As a result
their poetry too became commensurate with the slogans of the working class and enemical to the capitalists. Amulya Barua, Hem Barua, Keshav Mahanta, Amalendu Guha, Ram Tagoi and a few others portrayed the Marxian feelings in their poetry. It may be incidentally observed here that by the forties of this century the Marxian spirit in poetry echoed and re-echoed throughout the world.

(iii) THE GUIDANCE OF THE PSYCHOLOGISTS:

Like Marx, Freud too had an abounding influence on the modern mind. The explorations of this Austrian Professor in the domains of psychology brought a veritable revolution in human knowledge. The theory of the organisation of the id, the ego and the super-ego for the development of a healthy personality captured the imagination of all men. Likewise, his interpretations of dream and allied psychological phenomena have been received with great admiration all over the world. In the new Assamese poetry also the Freudian concepts came to occupy a very important place. The subtle psychological treatment of the myths and symbols as we have them in the new Assamese poetry, is accountable to an appreciation of the concepts of Freud and the teachings of another celebrated psychologist Jung.
(iv) CONTRIBUTION OF THE PHYSICISTS:

The new poets learned a lot from the modern physicists also. The present century has seen the enormous development of the natural sciences, which has ultimately found a reflection also in the contemporary literature and Arts. The new poetry too, duly exhibit the impact of the work of the physicists. The physicists have widened the scope of human understanding. Maxplank, Bore and Einstein have changed the very concept of the running of the universe. Einstein's theory of relativity has brought new hopes for mankind as far as man's conquest of time and space is concerned. The innovations in other sciences like that of Fraser in Anthropology have changed enormously the concept of human understanding. All these things received due attention of the new poets. And in the sphere of Biology concepts like that of the secretion of the glands, the functioning of the nerves and the genetic basis of inheritance led the new poets to evince a good deal of interest in them.

(v) GROWTH OF AN INDUSTRIAL CLIMATE:

The growth of the industries in Assam, is a thing of recent origin; it began only in the third decade of this century and a complete industrialisation of the state is yet to take place. The industrialisation of the state brought
its own peculiar problems to the people. These problems of the industrial environment were hitherto unknown to the people. The only industry of repute from a long period was the tea-industry; but the industrial climate of the tea-gardens did not find proper representation in poetry. The tea-garden labour folk had to wait for these new poets to see their life portrayed in poetry with sympathy. The growth of the oil-fields in Assam was a thing of maximum importance. People looked at the mechanism of oil exploration with awe, admiration and jealousy. The grabbing of the fertile green fields by the giant structured derricks for drilling operation pained the peasants much. The change from an agrarian easy life to a life of industrial complexity too affected the people. In the cities the growth of the miscellaneous industries made the cities stuffy noisy and restless. The plight of the cities like Gauhati and Calcutta mattered much to the new poets; most of these new poets came in direct contact with Calcutta for various reasons and they were lead to note with concern the restlessness of the city life.

(vi) DISCREDIT TO THE OLD TRADITION:

The new poets not only rebelled against the nineteenth century values (of life, love, religion, society etc.) but they also declared a total discredit to the old tradition.
The traditional values of religion, love, social and moral ethics were questioned and the poets advocated to make man free from his traditional bindings. One poet ventured so much that he openly declared God to be only an algebraian. Disillusionment and doubt played a vital role in the growth of the poetic personality and consequently the poems of the new poets came to communicate a sense of rootlessness and a sense of negation. The loss of faith in the existing order of things and the sense of negation often led these poets to a nihilistic climate of modernity. The revolt against the Capitalistic foundations of society was another aspect of the voice of the new young poets. Most of the young poets, nay all, suffered from the conflict and clamour that was brought forth by their negative approach to the life and the world.

(vii) DISCREDIT TO THE ROMANTIC LOVE:

The Romantic poets voiced relentlessly the glories of love. The new poets totally discarded the romantic sensibility of love and approached love with more realism and a better understanding. The new poets exposed that behind the high-pitched love of the romantic poets, there existed the working of the libido and the secretion of the glands. Love came to be recognised as a biological affair and its success as dependent on economic security. Syed Abdul Malik was the first poet
to decry the romantic sentimentality of love.

(viii) NEO-INTELLECTUAL GROWTH:

The changes in the field of arts and letters and science and psychology gave rise to a new intellectual atmosphere. The neo-intellectual trend landed the new poetry in almost an alien atmosphere. Geoffrey Bullough while describing the trends of modern English poetry has remarked:

"Biology, anthropology, psychology, economic and social struggles, have weakened our faith in the instruments of body and mind. We are organisms ill-adapted to an alien world, unsure of heaven and of our own natures, yet faced with the problem of survival and growth as intelligent civilised beings in an age when our vast new knowledge is used for purely material and even bestial ends, and when the social order is being transformed by economic pressure and inward desire." The remarks of this enlightened critic about the English poetry may be equally applied to the new Assamese poetry. Most of the modern Assamese poets of this new school were highly educated youngmen and as such they gave voice to an intellectual reaction against the conflicts and tyrannies of the modern world.
(ix) WESTERN INFLUENCE:

The forties of this century was the hey-day for the Modern English and American poetry. The great prophets of modern poetry like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Louis Macniece, W.B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas, Sitwells, Baudelaire and Mallarme received wide patronage throughout the world by this time. The influence and reputation of the French symbolists Baudelaire, Mallarme and Paul Vallery were very high in all the poetry loving countries of the world. The new Assamese poets were alive to the poetic movements of the different countries and they read deep into the poetry of the great masters of the age, and naturally their poetry too, could not resist the rich influence of these great masters. Moreover, modern poetry in the west had to face the existentialist philosophy of Jean Paul Satre, the Surrealist philosophy of Louis Aragoue and the imagist philosophy of Ezra Pound and others; modern poetry in the west learnt a lot from these contacts, and transmitted the same to the Indian poetry and hence to Assamese. All these things shaped and fashioned the new modern poetry in Assam. Assamese poets had warm acquaintance with the modern Russian poets like Mayakovsky and Spanish poets like Pablo Neruda. And the close intimacy of the new Assamese poetry with Japanese poetry, as far as the structural pattern is concerned makes a delightful
study. With reference to the new Assamese poetry, Dr. B.K. Barua observes: "In the poetry of Hem Kanta and Navakanta one notices the adoption of images, symbols and music such as one meets with in the poetry of Baudelaire, Paul Vallery, Stephonne Mallarme and Rainer Maria Rilke. *** Navakanta has been influenced more deeply by T.S. Eliot than by others. Like Eliot he also believes that poetry requires a language rich in suggestions both to senses and intellect." ('Assamese poetry to-day' in Hindusthan Standard, Puja Annual, 1959).

(x) MISCELLENOUS TRENDS:

(a) The new poets showed a special love for the common man. The life and activities of the common people became objects of poetry. The poets could not be silent over the suffering humanity. These new poets had certain sense of involvement in respect of the social problems and as such the life of the oppressed could not evade their attention.

(b) The new poets tried to free modern poetry from the rigorous discipline prescribed by the earlier masters and as such novel experiments both in form and content grew up.

(c) The new poets lashed a violent attack on the middle class people and their cheap intellectual pursuits.

(d) Poetry by this time had become more intellectual than emotional.
(e) The new poets had the dream for a new brave world where man’s existence as man would be established once for all.

(f) Assamese poetry by this time had to come to a closer touch of Bengali poetry. The Assamese college youths at Calcutta had the chance of coming into contact with the new movement of Bengali poetry initiated by Buddhadev Bose, Jivanananda Das, Bisnu Dey, Sudhindranath Dutta and Amiya Chakravarty. These celebrated poets of Bengal had an obvious impact on the new Assamese poets and their poetical productions.

NEWNESS IN FORM

(1) CHANGE IN THE METRICAL SKILL:

The new poetry entirely changed the metrical sequence. Romantic poetry mostly thrived on the mixed metre sequence (or yaugic chandas); the new poetry functioned on the free verse and the inflated prose sequence. The classical and romantic grandeur of rhyme and rhythm departed and poetry accepted the much easier way of prose. We quote below two examples where the free verse and the poetic prose respectively function neatly.
(a) Free verse

Bisnu Rabha etiyā kimān rāti,
Tumi sare āchā, sare ācho āmi
aru sare āche prīti.

Bihur talāt ciphun bāhīr karun sur,
Bādo gābharur nāoonar tāl bhāge,
Janatār caku cakur pānīre pur.

Mājnisā kone rāj āliyedi,
ākṣep kari yāy:
"Bishnu Rabha nāi".

(b) Inflated Prose

Āmi anāgata bhaviṣyar din ānguli murat lekho.
Swapnār kāthi-kāmi sājo. Urukā nīsā. Ākāśat tarā jvale,
yen mahānagarir cākir jonākī.
Mor teje moke māte. Yauvane riniyāi : ukā rini.
Jīvan āru bājeṭar mohanā mukhat. (Mājnisā jāhājar uki).

Bihuvati gābharu, tumī janā.

The emotionally heightened prose made the art of narration easy and brought the language of poetry much nearer to the language of common-speech. The prose had become a popular medium of poetry in other countries also. Ezra Pound strongly recommended the use of prose in writing poetry. He said:

"Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must
be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e., simplicity). It must be as simple as De Maupassant's best prose and as hard as Stendhal's."

Though there was a strong protest from the readers as to the use of prose as the medium of communication in poetry, still prose remained to be the successful art of dialogue in the new Assamese poetry.

**(11) CHANGES IN THE DICTION :**

The diction too had undergone vast changes by this time. The conventional words, phrases and epithets were done away with. Words of common people were used frequently. Sometimes foreign words and words of Sanskrit origin dominated the new poetry. The new poets used the words with utmost economy and sometimes this economy was so strong that it led to obscurity. (For a free use of foreign (English) words see example under vi below).

**(iii) POETIC CONVENTIONS CRUSHED :**

The new poets had crushed wholly the poetic conventions of their predecessors. Only certain allusions were freely adapted from the ancient Indian literature. The new modern poetry in Assamese became totally anti-conventional.

**(iv) QUOTATIONS :**

Quotations from other poets were frequently used in the new poetry. These quotations helped to substantiate the thesis of the poems.
NEW FORMS — TANKA AND HUKKU:

In search of their models for new poetry the Assamese poets also explored the Japanese poetry. Two Japanese models, the Tanka and the Hukku became popular models with them. A big number of new poetry were constructed on these types.

NEW IMAGES:

The new modern poets had made certain images of shocking appeal. In their positive attempt at newer interpretation, they have discovered shocking similarities between the things. These images were built on the Upama Alaṅkāra. Let us analyze the point with a specimen from the poetry of Mahendra Bora.

'Dekhā pālo ākāśar duvar dalit pūṁmā rātir ghūraniyā jon, thik yen ematra bāthroomar parā olai ahā, ejāni chovāli.

= In the gateway to the sky I perceived the round full-moon; she appeared exactly like a girl just coming out from the bathroom.

LANGUAGE AND SYMBOLS:

The language of the new poets was a cause of alarm. Dr. B.K. Barua has remarked: "Their language has arrived at the Esperanto stage. Like impressionist poets, their poetry is full of symbols and images, sometimes so contrasted that it is difficult to discover their natural inter-links. Anything of any country or of any time or culture may come up
suddenly and an uneducated reader can never hope to find the full meaning; and references to history and geography are never without symbolism." These things sometimes led to a sense of obscurity in their poetry. And the common reader's greatest allegation against the new modern poetry is that it is 'difficult'.

(viii) REJECTION OF THE EXTRA-POETIC ELEMENTS:

The new poets did not like to make conscious poetic pieces fed with all the poetic embellishments. But they advocated minimum art and rejected all attempts at superfluity. Their vision, rather than their rhetorical utterances, mattered much to them. They tried to establish the logical sequence over the emotional evocativeness. The objective co-relative theory of T.S. Eliot suppressed the emotional exigencies of the time. By rejecting the extra poetic attempts of the older generation, the new poets tried to declare liberty for poetry.

The new-modern Assamese poetry is a post-war affair. The second world war shaked the very soul of British India. The impact of this war was great. India was dragged to the war and Assam had to witness the war from very close quarters and battles were actually fought well within the geographical jurisdiction of the then Assam at Kohima and Dimapur. The heavy troop-mobilisation, the soaring prices, the social and
and moral delinquencies changed the very structure of the social life. The dropping of atom bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed the evils of the deadly weapons. Science and industry came to Assam, at a rapt speed, by this time, but the people's plight grew pitiable. Moreover, there were the repression of the Britishers over the innocent volunteers of the freedom movement of 1942. Modernity came to the life and society in this chaotic hour. This modernity obviously gave rise to the modernity or newness in poetry.

The modernity in poetry was advocated by the three magazines, Jayanti, Pachowa and Ramdhenu. Amulya Barua, Hem Kanta Barua and Navakanta Barua were the three pioneers of this movement. The new poetry was not easily relished by the people. Many were doubtful of the success of this movement. The prose like narration and the obscurity offended the general run of readers. The symbolic and ambiguous representations, the juggling of quotations, phrases, symbols and parentheses made the new poetry obscure and non-appealing. But with the progress of the years the new modern poetry has proved itself capable of extracting sympathy and love from the readers.

It is needless to say that all the trends did not happen singularly in one poet or within a short time. These trends got manifestation in the works of different poets and
and at different times. The new poetry grew up with all its trends and accomplishments over a long span of time. It took not less than 30 years (1938-1968) for a proper shaping of the movement.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Amulya Barua: Acina, Gauhati, 1964; p 69
2. Ibid., p 61
3. In the poems of Bhava Prasad Rajkhowa
4. Ibid.,
5. In the poems of Kamal Gagoi
6. Max Eastman (ed.): Capital and other writings, N.Y., 1932, p xiv
7. Cf. Dr. B.K. Barua: History of Assamese Literature, p 146
There ensued a controversy between the new poets and their audience in the contemporary magazines. Most of the readers disliked to shun the traditional poetry and could not appreciate the moderners. Things, however, came to a state of compromise in the Ramdhenu era.