This book is about the Assamese poetry of last hundred and twenty years (1846-1966). Its aim is to enhance the accessibility of Assamese poetry to the reading public. To that end it examines the rise and growth and the forms and contents of modern Assamese poetry. The already existing histories of Assamese literature could spare only a limited space for Modern Poetry and hence the necessity and scope for a more comprehensive critical treatment independently. Modernity came to Assamese poetry in the mid-nineteenth century, in the form of Romantic poetry. Prior to that, the theatre of Assamese poetry was dominated mostly by classical Vaishnavite poetry. The period from 1889 to 1939 was the most flourishing period for Assamese Romantic poetry. During the forties of the present century new trends and techniques attracted the Assamese poets and the second phase of modernity began. This book covers the whole field of Assamese poetry, of the last hundred and twenty years. Hence the present work is a critical study of the Romantic as well as the Recent Assamese poetry. I have mainly analyzed the poems from thematic variations—such as
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poems of Love, poems of Nature, poems with Patriotic fervour, poems of Satire and Humour etc. But I have not denied the historical perspective also. For, for the understanding of the literature of the past the historical sense is very much important. The taste and enjoyment of critical studies increase when viewed with the historical discipline. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren have pointed out: "..... literary history is also highly important for literary criticism as soon as the latter goes beyond the most subjective pronouncement of likes and dislikes. A critic who is content to be ignorant of all historical relationships would constantly go astray in his judgements. He would not know which work is original and which derivative; and through his ignorance of historical conditions, he would constantly blunder in his understanding of specific works of art. The critic possessed of little or no history is inclined to make slipshod guesses, or to indulge in autobiographical 'adventures among masterpieces', and in the whole, will avoid concern with the more remote past, content to hand that over to the antiquarian and the 'Philologist'." (Rene Wellek and Austin Warren: Theory of Literature, Jonathan Cape, 1966, pp. 46-46).

I have tried therefore, to unite both the senses, historical and critical, in evaluation of the poetical pieces.
Modern studies in poetry is, in fact, a tripartite business, of the theorist, the historian and the critic. But in Assamese, as in most of the modern Indian languages, there never grew, any school of literary theory or Poetics. Till now, modern Assamese poetry is assessed only in the light of English Romanticism and allied trends, and the critical estimate of individual poets was mostly limited to the extent of a mere comparison with some English counterpart. Our investigation shows that nothing has ever been done towards assessing modern Assamese poetry in the light of Sanskrit poetics and Indian aesthetics. I have, therefore, preferred to follow the eastern and western poetics as the measures of evaluation. Generally, in judging the techniques of construction and structure the measuring norms, here accepted, are those of Sanskrit poetics; and in deciding trends, accomplishments and influences, I have often measured them with the tenets of western poetics. Assamese poetry, though received a lot from the west, beginning with Romanticism, yet for linguistic and constructional methods, had to depend on its classical genre, which in turn, was but the product of classical Sanskrit poetry. I have made, for the first time, an assessment of the Assamese epics in the light of both the western concept of epic and the Sanskrit poetical principles of Kavya. I have tried to make
due evaluation of the elegies, poetry of the dramas and of the songs; which have been hitherto un-noticed by the historians of Assamese literature. Due discussions have been made on the rhetoric and metrics embodied in the poems. A thorough and comprehensive assessment of the contemporary (New) poetry, in the light of eastern and western poetics, is made for the first time. I have done a systematic study of the lost and forgotten minor poets who contributed their mite to the cause of Assamese poetry; at the same time the pioneering practitioners are affectionately recorded. As every poet is the child of his age and the heir of a particular tradition, so, the prevailing trends and traditions of the poets' contemporary society are often discussed. It has been my sincere endeavour to see, as far as permitted by space, all the different aspects of the subject.

To make a clear perspective of modern Assamese poetry, the comparative study of all Indian and western poetry, have often been felt necessary. The most modern (recent) Assamese poetry, is based on a broad intellectual context and hence in the study of this poetry, one has to run often to the western world to discover the trends and influences. For the inspiration and guidance
in preparing this work, I had to actively associate myself with the critical writings of Aristotle, Longinus, Dandin, Viswanatha Kaviraja, Bhoja, Rajasekhara, Mamma, Arnold, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, M.H. Abrams, Rene Wellek, Cleanth Brooks, Dr. V. Raghavan, Dr. Sukumar Sen and others. I was much profited by the critico-historical writings of the eminent Assamese critics, Dr. B.K. Kakati, Dr. B.K. Barua, Dr. Maheswar Neog, Dr. S.N. Sharma, Sri Hem Barua and Dimbeswar Neog. Dr. Neog's kind suggestions from time to time have guided my steps in the right direction.

Difficulties were many, which I had to overcome in writing this dissertation. First, the collection of material was not easy. In Assam, there is no preservation centre for books and manuscripts. I had, therefore, to run frequently to the poets' families, which in itself was a very arduous task. The absence of a big library in the state with preservation of the rare publications and mss. still remains a long felt need. Secondly, the Assamese poets generally do not take care to inscribe the year of publication and the number of the edition of the book. In some poetry books, even the place of publication is not mentioned. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century publications mostly lack the above-mentioned informations. In spite of my best
efforts, I could not collect the dates of birth and death of some poets; because the absence of descendants in some cases left little clue to their dates of birth and death. Thirdly, most of the Assamese poets saw the births and deaths of their poetry in the periodical magazines; a collected work of their poems was rare in many cases. The want of personal collections of the poets' works is a great hindrance in the path of critical estimation. It gives me pain to record here that the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Detective Department, Calcutta, on my insistence made a search to recover the lost manuscripts of the late poet Amulya Barua. But their long and strenuous search proved futile. Incidentally, it may be said here, that I have intentionally recorded some petty informations like the availability of a particular ms. in a particular family etc., as I feel that these little informations would help the future workers in the field. Another big but interesting problem was the problem of translation. Every language has some idiomatic expressions which baffle every attempt of a free translation. The peculiar Assamese idiomatic expressions like, Sṛṣṭi cechor pamṭi khedi, or Kukura theṇśia eie ākhar kiṭit yi amiya ghāha ache aru kato nāi are really difficult to express through the medium of
a different language. As a recourse to free and better translation of the poetic pieces quoted in the Thesis, I have occasionally adopted the translations made by some eminent authorities like Dr. B.K.Barua, Dr. Maheswar Neog and Sri Hem Barua.

To Dr. Makunda Madhava Sharma, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., Kāvyatīrtha, Professor in Sanskrit, Gauhati University, I bow in reverential gratitude. He was the supervisor of the whole programme.

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