INTRODUCTION

The genesis of the modern Bengali poetry is traced to a literary revolt against the poetry of Rabindranath and his imitators.* Though this literary revolt is the outcome of certain conditions existing in the literary scene of Bengal of the 20’s, the background of the revolt is furnished by the general rebellious condition of Bengal in the first quarter of this century. In 1905 Bengal was partitioned. The partition showed how indifferent the government was to the hopes and inspirations of the people. Moreover, the partition gave rise to the suspicion that the government was bent upon destroying the nationalistic spirit in Bengal, which was according to them a hot bed of politics. To fight against the partition, the Bengalees adopted a positive programme known as the swadisi movement. On the otherhand frustration among a section of congress leaders over its unsuccessful moderate policy, led to the rise of the extremist group in the organisation. During the fateful years of 1906 and 1907, there was another development in the political field of Bengal. This is the growth of terrorism in Bengal. The terrorists were engaged in under ground conspiracy to terrorise the government by killing officials. The terrorist movement acquired such a magnitude that in 1907 a committee of enquiry was appointed under Justice Rowlatt to investigate into and report on the terrorist movement. The situation became more tense when Brigadier general

* Jatindra Mohan Bagchi, Karunamidhan Bondopadya, Kumad Ranjon Mallik, Kalidas Roy are generally mentioned as Rabindra 'imitators'. However, Buddhadeb Basu in 'Sahitya Charoha' mentions Satyendra Nath Datta also as a Rabindra - imitator.
Dyer's men opened fire on a public meeting at Jallianwala Bag and killed hundreds of helpless Indians, including women and children. A storm of protest was raised in Bengal. Terrorism became very popular. The young writers were also influenced by the revolutionary ideas. One possibility was to turn out a torrent of patriotic poems and songs to match the popular movement of the time. But certain factors ruled out the possibility. Firstly, the intelligentsia of Bengal was never very much enthusiastic about the Gandhi mass movement, based on non-violence. Terrorism was near their heart. Yet, they were too much conceited to accept terrorism as the goal of their literary programme. It was too much nationalistic for them; too much narrow and even self-defeating. They were great lovers of the English literature and could never identify the British imperialism with the English literature. The English education, instead of creating in their mind narrow nationalism, directed them to the paths of internationalism. In this, the great poet Rabindranath was their guide. Kaji Abdul Wadud, in his contemporary Indian literature writes:

"He was convinced that the true internationalism was no enemy of genuine national aspirations, rather it was the only basis on which they could take their rightful stand. The strength of his conviction was realised by the world a few years later when he delivered his lectures on the nationalism in Japan and America."\(^1\) There was another reason for the international outlook, though this was a different kind of internationalism. It was the idea of Communist internationalism. By the

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twenties of this century, Marxism had gained some ground in India, and ultimately in 1927 the communist party of India was formed. The new outlook demanded that the division of the world into the two classes - the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is much more important than the nationalistic divisions. The nationalistic division is artificial and a true literary revolution can-not be simply nationalistic. A literary revolution is, therefore, different from a political revolution. Hence, the moderns confined their activities within the frame work of a literary upheaval aimed at the liberation of Bengali poetry from the influence of Rabindranath. Achintya Kumar Sengupta writes in 'Kallal Yuga':

"Let this revolution be in the field of politics or literature; for us, because of our associations or circumstantial condition; it happened to be literature and not politics.\(^2\) The condition which generated the spirit of revolution was, however, much deep seated in the social and economic structure of Bengal. Though Rabindranath was still writing when the modern poets started their poetic career, yet there was a gulf of difference between the world of Rabindranath and that of the young poets of the 20's and 30's\(^*\). The social condition of Bengal was far from one of the peaceful stability of the past century. The 19th century renaissance which aroused the hope for great social changes and liberal reforms failed to live up to its promise, without, however, failing to create new hopes and aspirations in the minds of the people. Various superstitious practices of the people, against which a war was launched,

\(^2\) Achintya Kumar Sengupta: Kallal Yuga, p.66.
\(^*\) "Though I am occupying a stretch of your time, in fact I am not your contemporary." (Rabindranath's letters to Buddhadev Bose: Ananda Bazar, March 19th, 1974).
remained undislodged. For example, widow marriage could not be introduced in the society. Barriog a few city dwellers, the balk of the society remained in the state of the 'Palli Samaj'.

The Brahma Samaj, which started a movement for religious and social reform, also remained confined to an enlightened few. Erosion of the social structure was accelerated by the world war I. The tension in the Political field between the extremists and the moderates, spread out in the society itself. The orthodox and the radicals were pulling apart the society from opposite directions.

In the meantime, the landed aristocracy was experiencing the impact of the flourishing merchantile economy of Bengal. The old system of semi-fudal economy was giving way to the growing merchantilism. The village based agrarian economy was facing a crisis. The result was a shift of importance from village to towns and cities. This was followed by a population shift from villages to towns. About this Prof. N.K. Bose writes:

"Later on, all through the 18th, 19th and the present century, there have been a series of intermittent migration of a selective nature from village to towns. This has not merely been due to the prospect of gain, but also for other reasons. At the end of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th, agriculture in Bengal districts surrounding Calcutta fell to decay; the country side was ravaged by repeated epidemics of malaria until the disease became epidemic and the majority of the population suffered from its effects. The ancient irrigation which Francis

† A book by the novelist Sarat Chandra Chottopadhya.
3. Prof. N.K. Bose: Culture and Society in India, p.66.
Bernier had admired in the middle of the 17th century was completely dislocated; and those who could afford to do so crowded more and more into the growing city of Calcutta in the slender hope that life would perhaps be easier there. In the city life, the ordinary unit of the family included the husband and the wife and their children. This new city dwelling class was much more independent, economically, than their village counterpart and much more advanced in education. Naturally, they demanded more social rights for them. Conscious of their role in the mass politics of the National Congress and in the growing economy of the nation, they demanded a wider role for the (urban educated class) in the society and in literature. This class reminds one of the French Third Estate before the great French revolution. Justice Rowlatt, therefore, writes in his report about this class:

"They are prominent in medicine, in teaching and at the bar. But in spite of these advantages, they have felt the shrinkage of foreign employment, and as the education which they receive is generally literary and ill adapted to incline the youthful mind in industrial, commercial or agricultural pursuits, they have not succeeded in finding fresh outlets for their energies...... Thus, as the 'Bhodrolok' learned in English have become more and more numerous, a growing number have become less and less inclined to accept the condition of life in which they found themselves on reaching the manhood."

5. Prof. N.K. Bose: Culture and Society in India, p.66.
Another revolution, the revolution in the world of science had also considerable impact on the educated classes of the Bengali society. Revolutionary discoveries and hypotheses, in Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Anthropology, Geneology, Psychology etc. created a great commotion throughout the world. It brought hopes and uncertainties in the minds of the people. The scientific world was undoubtedly receiving repeated shocks but it was not particularly hopeless or in the peril of doubts and uncertainties. But to those who were on the fringe of the scientific arena, gloom of an uncertain world or a possible disastrous end of all scientific quests in the maze of spirituality, gave birth to doubts, bewilderment and hopelessness. However, in Bengal, where there were less religious dogmatism, the revolution, only added to the existing revolutionary atmosphere, an urge to know more, understand better and change quickly.

While all these factors contributed to the literary revolution in Bengal, it was actually made inevitable by the irresistible urge to write poetry, different from Rabindranath. Bridges, in the Times literary supplement in 1917 wrote:

"In all art when a great master appears, he so exhausts the material at his disposal as to make it impossible for any succeeding artist to be original unless he can either find a new material or invent some new method of handling the old." ⁵

This can not be more applicable to a poet other than Rabindranath Tagore. Like all great poets of all ages, Rabindranath exhausted all

⁵ Quoted from H. Gardner, the Art of Eliot, p.21.
the material of literature available to him. The 19th century renaissance of Bengal placed at his disposal a vast storage of material of literature and Rabindranath used most of it in his writings. Rabindra imitators used up the residual material. Further, Rabindranath not only utilised the material at his disposal, but in doing so developed his style and method in such a way that in his literary works a new Bengali language was born. Not only in subject matter, but also in style and technique, it was difficult to invent anything new or even develop a new method of handling the old, after what Rabindranath had done to this language and literature.

As a result, the moderns considered Rabindranath and his imitators as their greatest obstacles and a severe attack against them was launched to overcome the obstacles. The modern writers, however, in their attempt to find out the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the poetry of Rabindranath and his imitators found their critical base not in the Bengali criticism (which in those days, was sadly unremarkable), but in the criticism of the English literature of the time, particularly in the criticism of the Imagist—symbolists of England. Though the situation was not typically identical, the modern poets, majority of whom were teachers of English in universities and colleges, found the Imagist—Symbolist criticism of the romanticism, in general, and of the Georgeans, in particular, helpful in explaining their own position vis-a-vis Rabindranath and his imitators.

The Imagist movement in England was launched by T.E. Hulme who organised a systematic poetic movement through the 'poetic club'. Gertrude Patterson, writing about this movement observes:
"Sometimes during the year 1908 T.E. Hulme, then a comparatively unknown student of aesthetics, proposed the formation of a Poets Club and from the moment of its first meeting began the earliest attempts in England to emancipate poetry from the devitalised forms and idioms of a failing Romantic tradition which characterised contemporary poetic efforts".6

Hulme wants to find out for the English poetry new idioms and forms; for the Georgian poetry was not supposed to be suitable for the present age. However, the Georgians considered themselves as moderns. About this Georgian modernity F.R. Leavis writes: "The modernity manifests itself for the most part, in a complacent debility; the robust, full blooded, emotional confidence of the Victorians is lacking; a modest quietness being the Georgian study; and technical liberation, accordingly takes the form of loose, careless, unconvincing craftsmanship."7

Criticism of C.Dey Lewis is not less sharp: "The Georgian poets a sadly pedestrian rabble, flocked along the roads their fathers had built, pointing out to each other beauty spots, and obstensively drinking small beer in a desperate attempt to prove their virility."8

About the Georgian practices two modern critics write: "This school treated personal themes in a romantic manner and often used cliche-ridden imagery to describe beauties of nature, the delights of young love or the quiet peace of old age."9

Though the Imagist - Symbolists did not criticise the Georgians in so many words, their views were not much different from this. T.S. Eliot's

Timing up of the Georgian subject matter as rainbow, cuckoos, daffodils and timid hares, are known to most of the critics and readers of English criticism. In opposition to the georgian practices, the Imagists mainly aimed at two things: to translate the moment's realisation into poetry, in the form of images; and to achieve this through craftsmanship. Hulme observes that the poet should "pierce through here and there accidentally as it were, the veil placed between us and reality, by the imitations of our perceptions engendered by action".  

Besides, "the literature like memory, selects only the vivid patches of life. If literature (realistic) did really resemble life, it would be interminable, dreary, commonplace, eating and dressing, buttoning with here and there a patch of vividness."  

Ezra Pound, another imagist, points out the importance of image in poetry; "The point about imagism is that it does not use as ornaments, the image itself is the speech. The image is the world beyond language."  

In the preface to the 1915 Imagist Anthology, Ezra Pound further writes: "to allow absolute freedom in the choice of subjects, it is not good art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so inspiring nor so old fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

10. T.E. Hulme; Speculation, p.147.
   (Quoted from Gertrude Patterson), p.25.
To present an image (hence the imagist) we are not a school of painters but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason we oppose the cosmic poet who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the essence of poetry. To produce poetry that is hard and clear and never blurred nor indefinite.15

T.S. Eliot, an imagist himself, however, felt that imagism lacked in the suggestiveness of symbolism. It relied too much on clarity and craftsmanship than on suggestiveness and mysticism. Following Laforgue, he brought the imagism closer to the symbolism, in the English poetry.

"Symbolism", Gertrude Patterson writes, "countered parnassian materialism by mysticism which led to a final and complete rejection of the phenomenal world as fit material for poetry. Incidentally the fusion of Imagism and Symbolism has already taken place in the poetry of Laforgue."14

To achieve the fusion of imagism and symbolism what Eliot did was to construct on the image, to connect it with the symbols and myths and show it in complete relation to other images. For the imagist, the image was a unit, and this unit was the poem. For Eliot, this fragment became the unit of poetry, the point from which he began the difficult task of constructing the complex assemblage which were his poems. The

15. Quoted from T.S. Eliot, Poems in the Making by Gertrude Patterson, p.22.
imagists and the imagist - symbolists like Pound and Eliot, arrived at Bengal almost at the same time. "Pound and Eliot reached Bengal along with the decline in the madness over Lawrence. During the Nineteen thirties, books of these two poets passed from hand to hand, words about them moved from lips to lips.... Those two poets were chanting charms to the ears of the young and the ajdelessent poets of Bengal."15

The success of the Imagist - symbolist movement, the leaders of which were not less known than Wordsworth or Coleridge, inspired the modern Bengali poets to fight their way out and for that reason they launched a revolutionary literary movement in Bengal. A sharp attack was launched against Rabindranath and his imitators with a barrage of criticism. About this Dr.Kshudiram Das writes:

"In the literary society of the time, there was on the one hand a great fascination for Rabindranath and on the other a daring attempt to overcome the Himalayan obstacle (i.e. Rabindranath). In this new inspiration running from "Kallal" to "Kabita" the initial effort was materialized. Whatever may be the poetic importance of this, the attempt to surpass the popular Bengali poet Rabindranath, in matter, language and style, will remain unforgetable from the point of a literary expedition; for, in the history of literature example of similar preparation and enthusiasm is rare."16

About this literary revolt Buddhadev Bose writes:

"The major aim of what is called" the Kallal Yaga" is a revolt and the target of this revolt is Rabindranath." Sudhindranath Dutta, in his letters to Rabindranath raised the question regarding form, matter and ideal of poetry and pointed out that there were new thinking in England and Europe in this respect. Sudhindranath, who agrees with Eliot that the poet's personality is like a catalytic agent; and skill and craftsmanship and not inspiration make poetry, writes to Rabindranath that it is intellectualism and not lyricism which is the most important ingredient of poetry. It is the thought and not inspiration which guide the intellect. The form of poetry depends on the quality of thought that makes poetry. In reply to Sudhindranath's letter, Rabindranath writes that he believes the creation of Beauty as the ultimate objective of art and in this the main part is played by emotion. Rabindranath elsewhere writes:

"Wherever we see the good and the true in perfect accord, the beautiful is revealed. Beauty is good in its fulness as fulness of goodness incarnate." 17

17. Buddhadev Bose; Sahitya Charcha, p.147.
* "It was at the time Sudhindranath Dutta started a debate with Rabindranath regarding the form and subject matter of the post war English poetry". (P.Chottopadhya, Duiakal -Dui Kabi, Desh-Literary Issue 1279 B.S.).
** Cf. Introduction to Orchestra and Sangbarta.
*** Sudhindranath's letters to Rabindranath; Desh,Literary Issue, 1379 B.S.
† Cf. Rabindranath's letters to Sudhindranath; Desh,Literary Issue, 1379 B.S.
Again, "The poet has said: Beauty is truth, truth beauty. The Upanishads too tells us: Anandarupamamrtam yadvibhāti, all that is, is manifestation of his joy, His deathlessness. Art and literature seek to realise and communicate this essential joy and ever lastingness of the true." 

To the modern poets the trinity of Truth, Beauty and Joy, is found to be unacceptable, either as the subject matter or as ideal of poetry. Reality of life, to them, is far from this lofty ideal. Life around them is found to be full of suffering, deceit, frustration, boredom etc. How can a poet, whose essential duty is to report, see truth, beauty and joy, in the ugliness of life? Modern poets think that Rabindranath's vision of life is idealistic, it is also incomplete and unrealistic. He lives in a world which does not exist nowadays. He is an escapist like most of the romantic poets and retreats often to a golden past. Hence, Buddhadev Bose writes:

"The whole background of his poetry is taken from the middle and the ancient age. Flute, paddy, lotus, chariots, kings and palaces—these types of things are innumerable in his poetry and are repeated so many times that reading a thousand lines from his poems it may not occur in the mind of a reader that half of the life of the poet was spent in the twentieth century and the greater part of this, in modern cities." 

Elsewhere he writes:

"We thought that his poetry had no connection with the realistic life; it had no sharpness of emotion, no evidence of pain and sufferings of human life. It seemed that in his philosophy of life, he had"

20. Buddhadev Bose; Sahitya Charcha, p.147.
unjustly overlooked the unsurpassable existence of the human body*. 21

Not only that, Buddhadev Bose finds that Rabindranath's language and style are in keeping with his poetic ideal. They have a poetic flavour unsuitable for the poetry of the modern times.

"In his poetry there is no sharpness, neither is there any note of conflict. No line from his poem strikes as a hammer. When he touches the mind most, even then he is sweet on the surface. His language is like Keats' tender night; or that soft breeze of Bengal which is made most famous by Jaidev and the poet himself. To be rude or unyielding is not in his character. When he speaks of the deepest sorrow, it gives a feeling like the smoothness of Velvet". 22

Imitators of Rabindranath are also not spared. The modern poets not only are contemptuous about the imitators but also severely critical of them, because of their obvious failure to find out a new path for Bengali poetry after Rabindranath. The imitators fell victim to the deceptive simplicity of Rabindramath's poetry - its philosophy, ideal and style. Like sparrows collecting corns after the harvest is over, they were dealing with the tit-bits left out by the great poet. About them Buddhadev Bose writes:

"Ideal of Rabindranath's poetry created certain habits among the other poets of the time. Bengali poets, twenty-five years ago, thought it prestigious to be loose and liquid in style. Use of unnecessary adjectives, excessive use of descriptions of nature, show of skill in clever

22. Buddhadev Bose; Kavi Rabindranath, p.32.
rhyme, these had a good market value at that time. Above all, these poets were self-centered as they wrote not with the objects of their writings in view; but with their own selves as their objectives. So the best of their poetry could not go beyond emotional exuberances. Whenever there were traces of some positive thinking, they were killed by suffocation from thousands of meaningless words and expressions."

He observes further:

"Their (imitators) writings are so much similar like one vast plane; so much fatigued, pale and soft; and so little difference is there between one poet and another, that none but Satyendra Dutta can be recognised as a separate entity."

The moderns were thus criticising Rabindranath and his imitators from the standpoint of subject matter, form and style of poetry. As against this, the moderns were trying to find out their own idiom of poetry. They were seriously thinking about the mode of writing poetry in a changing world. In all probability, Ezra Pound and his imagism attracted their notice, for Buddhadev Bose writes:

"My ideal has been the manifesto of Ezra Pound. In the modern times how poetry is to be written, about this also, I have laid down certain principles without hesitation."

So far as the art of writing poetry is concerned, the Imagist emphasis on the language of poetry can be seen clearly in the writings of Pound:

23. Buddhadev Bose: Kalar Putul (quoted from Rabindra Samiksha; by Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyya, pp. 41-42).
24. B.Bose: Sahitya Charahe, p.137.
"Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." Poetry is to be written in language which is used by people in their common speech. "Poetry must be as well written as prose."

Pound further writes: "There must be no cliches, set, phrases, stereotyped journals. The only escape from such is precision, a result of concentrated attention to what is 'writing'... objectivity and again objectivity and expression, no hindsid- beforeness. No stranded adjectives... nothing - nothing that you could not, in some circumstances, in stress of some emotion, actually say".

Eliot is more clear and precise in his view. He points out that the change is warranted not simply by the urge to write poetry in a different fashion, but from a deeper understanding that the poetic sensibilities of the age are different from the previous decades and as such demands a change. Eliot writes:

"Our sensibility is constantly changing as the world about us changes: ours is not the same as that of the Chinese or of the Hindu, but also it is not the same as that of our ancestors several hundred years ago. It is not the same as that of our fathers, and finally, we ourselves are not quite the same persons that we were a year ago."

Joseph Chiari considers this understanding as a significant and important contribution of Eliot to the modern poetry and points out;

"Eliot has not only given our age a new poetic medium, he has also shown the way to an integral artistic sensibility and attitude to life. He has understood that in an age of prose "poetry must be as good and fluent as good prose".  

Chiari further observes: "Living in an age in which the proletariat was assuming greater and greater importance, an age more and more dominated by novel, that is to say by prose, Eliot realised, more actually than more poets the fact that poetic language had to come close to everyday speech and that it was necessary to try to bring forth poetry not only out of specifically poetic themes and objects but out of all the aspects and complexities of everyday life".

Eliot's 'The Waste Land' created a sensation in Europe not because of the fact that it expressed the personal grouse of the poet against the life but because it was based on the sensibility of the post war Europe - an after math of despair, hopelessness and naked cruelties of life.

The sensibility of the 20's in Bengal was different from that of the end of 19th century. The break down of the rural economy and the social structure were much more obvious now. The middle class was now an important factor in the society. Their ideas and their speech must have an expression in contemporary poetry. The impact of such understanding was profound on the modern Bengali poets. In one place Buddhadev Bose, therefore, writes:

"At that time I was thinking about the language of poetry. That was the first time when I thought that it might be as well as a matter of great concern, because, during that period voice was raised from all quarters that the language of poetry must be brought nearer to the language of ordinary speech."  

Sudhindranath also points out that it is intellectualism and not lyricism that makes poetry; and it is thought which is at the bottom of intellectualism. He, therefore, has no hesitation to say that he endorses the view of Mallarmé in this respect:

"Be that as it may, the ideal of poetry laid down by Mallarmé is my ultimate goal. I also admit that most important ingredient of poetry is the world."

He also challenged the view of Rabindranath about the subject matter of poetry and wrote the poem 'Morog' to prove his point. Thus, western views, particularly the Imagist - Symbolist views on poetry, helped the modern Bengali poets to construct a critical review of the poetry of Rabindranath and his imitators. The poetry of the European and English poets, particularly that of Pound and Eliot, came handy in their attempt to write poetry, different from that of Rabindranath and his imitators. But it did not take a long time for the modern poets to realize that all these critical views, even the poetry of the western writers were leading them to the technology or artifact of writing poetry but not so much to the thought or philosophy, which shapes the form or style of poetry. T.S. Eliot in his essay on Dante wrote:

"We must show first in a particular case—our case is Dante—that the philosophy is essential to the structure and the structure is essential to the poetic beauty of the parts;...... The philosophy is an ingredient, it is a part of Dante's world just as it is a part of life; the allegory is the scaffold on which the poem is built."

In the cases of all important poets it can be seen that philosophy is an integral part of their poetry. It is impossible to isolate the philosophy from the structure and the poetic beauty. T.S. Eliot himself has a philosophy. Rabindranath has a philosophy. All the good poets have their own philosophy. It is useless to reject the philosophy and accept the technique or accept the philosophy and reject the technique of an important poet. Modern Bengali poets found Eliot's method very helpful and for a time their thought process found something in common with Eliot's philosophy. But very soon Eliot developed a philosophy which was based on a religious tradition. A modern Bengali poet has by that time reached a point where he has to find out his own philosophy and that too from his own tradition.

Modern Bengali poets, most of them, show an acute consciousness of tradition. In *Swagata* Sudhindranath writes:

"Though no artistic creation is possible without tradition, the imitation of traditional art is not always lifeless. It is inspired by a determination and its objective is imitation. As a result, a particular poetic movement can not be compared with a river; it is rather like an incomplete building, the foundation of which is laid down by man to serve his own purpose. Its development depends on the wish of man and its destruction is also due to his carelessness. The future extension of the building is decided partly by the nature of the foundation and partly by the addition and alteration, which is in harmony with the original structure. As the original parts influence the extension, extensions themselves bring changes to the original parts."

Not only from the sudden concern of the poets of the time about tradition, but also from their tone it can be distinctly felt that they were influenced by Eliot in this respect. Let us compare the above mentioned view of Sudhindranath on tradition, with that of T.S. Eliot. Eliot writes:

"What happens when a work of art is created is something that happened simultaneously to all work of art which preceded it; the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them. The existing order is

complete before the new work arrives; the order to persist after the
supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so
slightly altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work
of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between
the old and the new."\(^\text{36}\)

Eliot further writes that tradition "involves in the first
place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to
any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and
the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of
the past but its presence."\(^\text{37}\)

In Jibananda's writing we hear the echo of what Eliot says
about tradition. In Kabitar Katha he writes:

"A poet should know the society. In the marrow of poetry, there
should be consciousness of history and in its mind a clear sense of time."\(^\text{38}\)

Bishnu Dey, in his introduction to 'Eliot's Kabita' points out
that it is Eliot who has encouraged the modern Bengali poets to search
for the tradition of Bengali poetry and establish a relationship between
the individual and the tradition. Budhadev Bose also writes about tradi­
tion in his essay on Michael and points out that Michael has practically
no contribution towards the poetic tradition of Bengal.\(^\text{39}\)

All these talks on tradition can not be coincidental especially
when Eliot's poetry was being read by the modern poets of Bengal and the
\(^\text{37}\) Ibid., p.49.
\(^\text{38}\) Jibananda Das, Kabitar Katha, p.32.
\(^\text{39}\) Of Bishnu Dey; Eliot's Kabita (introduction), p.10
'Sacred Wood' had just reached their hands. It is probable that what all the criticism of Rabindranath and his imitators failed to do was done by Eliot's doctrine of tradition. Thus, theory of tradition opened a vista before the modern Bengali poets. Firstly, the doctrine of tradition directed the moderns to a search of their own tradition. In guiding them to find out an opening for their poetry the doctrine sent them back to the past ages to retrieve the treasures of their own tradition. It taught them to rediscover, preserve and create; thus uniting the past, present and the future in one creative activity. A major poet, Eliot says, must know the tradition of his language and people; "he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private administrations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period......this change is a development which abandons nothing en-route."40 Eliot again says:

"Tradition is not solely or even primarily the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs has come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all these habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most insignificant religious rites to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent blood kinship of the same people living in the same place."41

Cf. "This attempt to liberate the European literature found its expression in our literature later, towards the far end of Eliot's middle period. Most probably the first discussion took place in that students gathering where Sudhindranath Dutta read but his essay published later on under the title 'Kavyer Muktî'. Eliot entered into the arena of Bengali literature mainly with the poems of 1925, The Sacred Wood and The Criterion" (Bishnu Dey; Elioter Kabita, p.9).
To know the tradition, therefore, one is to go through the history of the people concerned - their culture, manners, art, craft, philosophy and all other aspects of their life. Thus, the modern Bengali poets were, as it were, to look for the tradition of the Bengali poetry, had to go beyond Rabindranath. A great sense of assurance, a great force of release, appeared in the scene of the modern Bengali poetry. Rabindranath is a great poet no doubt but he is not every thing of the Bengali poetry. There are other poets as well; and Rabindranath, in all probability, has left out a considerable portion of literary tradition unexplored. Hence. Bishnu Dey writes:

"I seek the source of literary inspiration in the entire folk tradition that stretches from Charya Padas to the works of Iswar Gupta, Michael, Dinabandhu etc. And on that alone would depend the whole future of the Bengali literature, and there the Bengali people have discovered their minds and temperaments and given shape to their living realism. For, however powerful and vast Tagore’s work influence may have been, he does not represent the main stream of the Bengali tradition."\[42\]

Secondly, it follows that, new interpretation of the tradition is also possible. It implies that those parts of tradition which are already used up by the earlier poets, can also be investigated and interpreted from a new point of view. Eliot says: "Surely the great poet is, among other things, one who not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but one who in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible."\[43\]

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42. Water my roots : Bh. Samir Das Gupta, p.11.
43. T.S. Eliot : Introduction to "The Use of Poetry and Use of Criticism."
This is particularly found useful by the modern Bengali poets, for, Rabindranath, though, has not used up all that is traditional, has left very little untouched. Hence, it is found necessary to re-examine the nature of Rabindranath’s poetry from a new point of view.

Thirdly, and the most useful contribution of the doctrine of tradition is that it approves new additions to the existing tradition as an essential and integral part of the tradition itself.

Eliot writes:

"What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them".¹⁴

Thus, in creating a new work of art a poet contributes to existing tradition and a new arrangement takes place in the pattern of tradition as a whole. It is like a zig-saw puzzle where a new cube added to the old structure, makes a new pattern. It becomes possible, therefore, to create almost any extent of new work of art without a real fear of becoming untraditional. For a modern Bengali poet this was found to be of immense help. Now, after that realisation, he is ready to incorporate a lot more new ideas in his work of art, which ordinarily, he would have avoided as untraditional. A modern Bengali poet now feels that the Bengali poetry is in fact ‘bi-lingual’ in character. The English poetry has become a part of its tradition from the time of Michael Madhusudan Dutta. Poet like

* Cf. A. Bondopadhaya, Bangla Sahityer Sampurna Itibrita, p.727.
Bishnu Dey thinks that the tradition of the Bengali poetry is really wide and one may search for it even in the world-tradition. Lastly, a conscious study of tradition, side by side with poetic creations, assures the poet as well the reader, about the continuity and conformity of the new work of art with the existing tradition; and removes the fear of alienation from the main current of tradition.

Thus, what could not be done by the extensive criticism of Rabindranath and his imitators, or by the experiments in new styles and methods of writing poetry, was now made possible by the application of the doctrine of tradition. At least, it was understood that a revolution was not so much necessary in the Bengali literature. Modern Bengali poetry could progress and thrive in conformity with the existing tradition, provided a modern poet was self-conscious and knew quite well his traditional background. For that, a very careful study of Bengali poetry from the earliest period to Rabindranath was a must. A good poet must labour hard and he must know what is there and that what is not there in the Bengali poetry from the Charjyas to Rabindranath. Only then, he may be sure of his footings as a poet. Besides, the modern Bengali poets had the added advantage of the awareness of European tradition as well. The elements of European tradition which entered in the Bengali poetry, particularly from the time of Madhusudan, had become by this time a part of Bengali poetic tradition. The result is a widening of the scope of writing Bengali poetry. There was now a break through; and the difficulty of writing poetry after Rabindranath was thus largely overcome. This is why Bishnu Dey says:
"Mr. Eliot's influence as a poet and a critic has thus been a
.......releasing force."\(^{45}\)

In the 19th century a political theory, the dialectic materialism of Marx, came as a releasing force to the 'have-nots' of the world and the beginning of 20th century saw the emergence of a literary theory with a releasing force for the bogged down poets. Bishnu Dey had, therefore, no hesitation to say that Eliot had ushered in a spirit of revolution in the field of literature. About Eliot's contribution to the modern literature, Bishnu Dey wrote:

"He widened and at the same time deepened our vision of literature, which is creative work. In an odd way he did in literature what Marx had done in the broader sphere of social and political life."\(^{46}\)

Elsewhere he observes: "Mr. Eliot has taught the Indian writers how to write poetry and how to read not merely the literature of Europe - but that of India and Bengal."\(^{47}\)

Thus, the modern Bengali poets learnt, not only how to write but also to read Bengali as well as western literature. Eliot's teaching makes the moderns conscious that it is essential for a Bengali poet to read, and read properly, Bengali as well as foreign literature. All the major Bengali poets of the time were highly educated and most of them were teachers of English in universities and colleges. Their knowledge of English and Continental poetry, it may be assumed, was quite adequate.\(^*\)

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\(^{45}\) Quoted from "Water my roots", p.55.
\(^{46}\) Bishnu Dey; Mr. Eliot among Arjunaas, T.S. Eliot - a Symposium, Ed. Tambimuttu & Richard March, p.16.
\(^{47}\) Quoted from "Water my Roots" ed. Samir Dasgupta, p.54.
* Translations of poems by the modern Bengali poets include poems of Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Heine, Blake, Shelley, Lermontov, Pasternak, Lorca, Eluard, Aragon, Neruda and others.
Now they employed themselves to the study of Bengali literature and poetry, in a conscious attempt to prepare the ground of their own poetry.

In this connection Jibanamanda writes:

"It is not possible for any one to read all the poems of the world, but it is of prime importance that one should read the best poems of all times of his own country. But in this respect, readers and critics of this country (Bengal) suffer very much. Living poets also suffer; works of important poets of our own country, even their prose writings, are not available in book shops........Yet by all means, poems from Alaol to the modern times must be read, at the earliest opportunity".  


About the importance of being conscious of the whole of one's own tradition, T.S. Eliot writes:

"The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order". 49 Thus, the modern poets took the cue from Eliot and started learning about their own tradition. Buddhadev Bose in his introduction to the collected poems of Sudhindranath, writes: "The minimum one can say about Sudhindranath Dutta is that, no body attempted to write Bengali poetry with such a great preparation."  

50. Buddhadev Bose: Introduction to collected poems of Sudhindranath.

And Buddhadev Bose himself was not a less diligent readers of Bengali poetry. It is not surprising that very soon a panoramic view of a

49. T.S. Eliot; The Sacred Wood, p.49.

50. Buddhadev Bose: Introduction to collected poems of Sudhindranath.
new horizon, including the past, present and future of Bengali poetry, opened before the modern Bengali poets. This conscious attempt to know the tradition started with a review of our great Epics - The Ramayana and the Mahavarata. Eliot made frequent reference to Homer and also laid great stress on the importance of Dante's Divine Comedy, as the centre of European religious tradition. Budhadev Bose reviews the Ramayana in an essay, included in his 'Sahitya Charcha.' He shows us the inherent greatness of the epic. Jibanananda Das in his essay 'Ke Hisabe Saswata' (Kabitar Katha) writes that the world of the Mahavarata is larger and deeper than that of the Divine Comedy. T.S. Eliot criticised Milton. Budhadev Bose found Michael Madhusudan Datta a poet of artificial style and out of the tradition of Bengali poetry. Similarly critical studies on Hajrul, Satyendranath, Mohitlal and others are also taken up by the moderns.

But as expected, it was Rabindranath, who occupied their mind most. Careful studies on Rabindranath convinced the moderns that Rabindranath was truly in the tradition of Bengali poetry. It is useless to deny him his right place in the Bengali poetry. However, the modern poets find that Rabindranath has disregarded or over-looked some of the main currents of the Bengali poetry. Bishnu Dey believes that Rabindranath over-looked the folk tradition of Bengal. Rabindranath himself admitted

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* Budhadev Bose in his old age again took the responsibility of reviewing the Ramayana and the Mahavarata; and a part of his (Study of) Mahavarata is published by the 'Desh'.
** Cf. John Dryden: Selected Essay.
"It is bad to join Dryden and Pope together, but the last absurdity is the contrast of Milton, our great master of artificial style, with Dryden, whose style (vocabulary, Syntax and order of thought) is in a high degree natural".
+ Cf. B. Bose; Sahitya Charcha, pp. 36, 38, 59, 42-45.
in his famous poem *Aikyatan* that his poetry was not without limitation.

It is also found that Rabindranath avoided certain vital human activities as vulgar and ugly. Sex or sexual relations had never found any place of importance in his poetry. Sanskrit erotic poetry had little influence on him. Besides, he is selective in his study of past poets and writers. Only a particular aspect of the Indian history appealed to him i.e. mainly the spiritual and the religious, but not the secular. In this special sense he was not history conscious. Again, his interest in the Indian philosophy is mainly confined to the Upanishadas. Monism of the Brahma Samaj, which has its base in Upanishadas, also considerably influenced him.

His 'Jiban Devta' is a product of a synthesis of his philosophy and religious concepts. His religious thinking is influenced by the spirit of humanism of the renaissance Bengal. We see him, ultimately, believing the 'Humanity of God'. However, in the light of what happened during the two world wars, his philosophy, religiousity and sublimity, appeared to be too idealistic. It is also observed that he did not consider seriously fascism and communism as substitutes for religious convictions of the past.

He, further, considered them as passing phases. To a generation whose experience was otherwise, this view appeared to be unrealistic.

Finally, it may be noted that, he is not much interested in science, the greatest development of the age. He showed little interest in modern phy-

* "My poetry, I know it well, Though it treaded many paths, It could not go every where" (Aikyatan).

** Though his 'Rassiar Chityt' is full of praise for the communist Russia's achievements, there is no reason to believe that he accepted communism as the only ideal system for the human progress.

† In the beginning of the Rebart lectures he declared "The subject matter of my lecture is - Humanity of God." (Panthajener Sakha : Abu Syeed Ayub; Desh Literary Issue 1579).
chology, biology, Genetics or medicine. Thus, in addition to what they received from the modern English or European poetry, these limitations of Rabindranath offered the modern poets considerable scope and material for poetry.

Buddhadev Bose, therefore, in order to retrieve and revive the normal human behaviours in Bengali poetry, went on the one hand to the gay and robust life of the Aryans, prior to the age of the Mahavarata, when the sex taboos were first imposed on the society; and on the other hand to the modern psychiatrists who re-discovered the basic human response to instincts like love, sex etc.*

Sudhindranath accepted classism as his goal. Perhaps, he felt that after Rabindranath little could be done in the way of romanticism. So far as philosophy is concerned, he was attracted by one of the oldest of the Indian philosophies, the philosophy of Lord Buddha. His classism and nihilism made him quite different from Rabindranath.

Jibananda, through time and history-consciousness, wanted to bring the whole history of the mankind within the perview of his poetry. He had perhaps the widest field, among the modern Bengali poets, to explore. His time-consciousness took him to the greatest of the themes of poetry - the man in the universe. There was no necessity for him to by pass or over-look Rabindranath. He used the same subject matter but these looked different because of his treatment, which was different because of his consciousness of history.

* In the episode of the Mahavarata, in which Lord Krishna saved Draupadi from the shame of being stripped of her clothes, before a big gathering of men, Buddhadev finds the presence of the first significant sex taboo of the Indian people (Cf. 'Draupadir Sari' by B. Bose).
Bishnu Dey, found a dialectic in the progress of the civilisation. In between two extreme forces, be it destruction and creation or exploitation and liberation, or good and evil, the life moves steadily onward. To write good poetry, one must have some sort of faith. It gives poetry a character and helps it to progress steadily. Bishnu Dey, found this faith in what we may call his Marxist-Humanism. On the one hand he turned to the folk tradition of Bengal and on the other he adopted the most sophisticated life of the modern age. In such apparent contradiction, he believes, lies the truth about the life.

All these diversities, varieties, modernity, depth and width of the modern Bengali poetry are results of the releasing force that freed the Bengali poetry from the bondage of Rabindra-cult. It may not be incorrect on an exaggeration to say that the key to the door of freedom, in the moment of that confusion and uncertainties, was supplied by Eliot - mainly by means of his poetics (his concept of tradition, and other critical observations like 'self-consciousness', 'depersonalisation', and 'objective correlatives' etc.) and in general by his poetry.