To the readers of modern Bengali poetry, Sudhindranath Dutta is known as a classicist, a traditionalist, a realist, a symbolist, an existentialist; and a writer of hard, crystalline and difficult poems in Bengali. Sudhindranath's poetry is the product of conscious and deliberate labour. It is rather the product of a disciplined and trained intellect and not of sudden or momentary inspiration. He takes the art of writing poetry as a serious affair. Poet must be a person who knows his job quite adequately. Sudhindranath is also a poet of urban civilisation, the type of urbanisation India was experiencing during the 20's and 30's of the present century. Eliot had little interest in the country side. Sudhindranath shows no enthusiasm about rural Bengal and hardly makes any attempt to sing about the country side or green vales or flowers or innocent village damsels. Besides, he stands for precision, economy and concreteness in poetry. To do away with all sorts of lyrical abandons and to restore to poetry its classical grandeur is one of his sincerest endeavours in poetry. He is a realist poet who wants to know the rude and naked truth about life. He is not a seeker of simple pleasure in poetry. Life is not composed of pleasing experiences only; there are experiences which are distasteful and even terrible or shocking. Life is full of stress and strain, of hollowness, boredom and barrenness. Moreover, the modern man in his search for new knowledge and experience has unearthed for himself more pain than pleasure. As a result, he has made his exis-
tsnce extremely miserable. He has little joy and little hope; and almost no faith in anything good. Finally Sudhindranath is a profound thinker; he is also a man of vast knowledge. He is not only aware of the tragedy of his own generation but is also burdened with the age old human tragedy—the tragedy of man's failure to conquer happiness and defeat death.

Naturally, the highly complex subtlety of his intellectual poetry has produced little interest among the general reading public. His readers are, therefore, few in number; much less even for a poet who is not interested in having a lot of unappreciative readers.

All these—his classicism, his pessimism, realism, esoterism etc. make him very Eliotesque as a poet and prompts one to investigate his relationship with Eliot as a poet. Apparently; these two poets have so much in common that it is difficult to wave hands in casual gesture and say that all these are mere co-incidence.

II

Eliot once called himself a classicist and critics of Bengali poetry generally take Sudhindranath for a classicist among the Bengali poets. It is said that he is an anti-romantic and the creator of a style which is classical (Dhrupadi) in character. But as Eliot is taken to be in the romantic tradition of England Sudhindranath is found to be a poet in the romantic tradition of Bengal. Poet-critique Buddhadev Bose holds that Sudhindranath is out and out a romantic poet;
"About him it is said that he is the creator of the classical style in Bengal. Against this view I should like to say, now at this moment, that in his heart of hearts he is a romantic poet and a romantic per excellence."\(^1\)

Dipti Tripathi makes a compromise saying that the age to which Sudhindranath belonged made it impossible for him to be a classicist, admitting, however, that he was anti-romantic.\(^2\) She compared him with the French Peranassians and symbolists who were highly influenced by the classicists yet were actually nowhere near them. However, it is difficult to place romanticism, classicism or realism in different air-tight compartments; for, a romantic is often found to be a classicist and vice-versa. What is said about Sudhindranath is also said about Eliot himself:

"For Eliot's own poetry was surely romantic was not it? And how could a poet who had obviously derived so much from the French Symbolists of the 19th century maintain with a straight face that he honored classicism?"\(^2\)

Yet, it is generally accepted that Eliot is a classicist. It is because of the fact that he developed for himself a new classical style, different in a way from the established notions about classicism. It may of course be said "Eliot's classicism, in short, was not classical enough." Yet, he passes for something of a real classicist. Eliot's classicism is seen by the critics in his attempt to see poetry as an organic whole;

\(^1\) Buddhabdev Bose; Introduction to Sudhindranath Sangraha”, p.3.
\(^2\) William K. Wimsatt Jnr & Cleanth Brooks; op.cit., p.58.
\(^3\) Ibid., p.669.
poetry as having a life of its own and like a classical work standing independently to offer an observer views from all possible angles. Besides, his poetry is realistic and is the product of conscious labour. It depends more on the architectonic and design than on emotion and inspiration. This gives his poetry a concreteness and independence akin to the classicism of the middle age.

The same is true of Sudhindranath. He is also a romantic. His poetry is often soaked in romantic agony and pessimism. There is also influence of the French Symbolists on his poetry; and above all, he has accepted Rabindranath, a lyric poet of the romantic tradition, as the major source of his poetry. Yet, we see that he denies the role of inspiration in poetry. Echoing Eliot he says that he believes in the earnest and conscious labour and not in inspiration, as primary creative force in poetry. He says that inspiration has in it the suggestion of the supernatural; and he tries his best not to accept it as a prerequisite for literary creation. Instead, he clings firmly to experience. He also believes that one should not let loose his emotion in poetry:

"Eliot calls a poet a catalytic agent and I also think that the greatest success for a poet lies in expressing the national mind through individual intellect." 4

We see that Sudhindranath's poems are carefully planned and constructed. They are free from clichés and all unnecessary sentimental

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4. Sudhindranath Dutta; Introduction to Orchestra, p.ii.

Cf. Sudhindranath Dutta: Introduction to Orchestra.

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Cf. "So although Eliot's view of literature is classical; his classicism regards Latin mediaeval culture and Dante in particular, as the culmination of classical achievement." (Northrop Frye; op.cit., p.18).

4. Sudhindranath Dutta; Introduction to Orchestra, p.ii.
expressions. A sense of strict discipline or restraint is obvious in his poetry. He uses minimum words to express maximum ideas. The economy of words and expressions are remarkable in his poetry. Besides, we also notice the presence of the idea or providence of the Greek tragedy, in his poetry.** In fact, Sushindranath's view of life is essentially tragic; it is an all comprehensive tragedy without a ray of hope for ultimate salvation of the human soul. Embodied in all these lies the classicism of Sudhindranath, though we may say also that classicism of Sudhindranath is not classical enough. Finally to quote Eliot himself:

"It must not be forgotten that a poet in a romantic age can not be a 'classical' poet except in tendency." 5

III

Sudhindranath Dutta also accepts as a principle the concept of tradition in poetry as enunciated by Eliot. There is good reason to believe that recent tradition-consciousness in Bengali poetry is an out come of the serious consideration given by the modern Bengali poets to Eliot's doctrine of tradition. For, never in the past so much discussion about tradition took place in the poetic circles of Bengal. We have seen what Jibanananda wrote about tradition in poetry.** We have also seen the role of tradition in Bishnu Dey's poetry.*** Buddhadev Bose writes about tradition in his essay on Michael Madhusudan.† Nothing else can explain this

** Cf. "In Sudhindranath's time-consciousness there can be seen the presence of 'Fate' from Greek tragedy" (D.Tripathi, op.cit., p.260).
*** See Chapter (I), pp.2-4 & 66-76.
sudden upsurge of thinking on tradition in the Bengali poetry. About
Sudhindranath, Bishnu Dey told this writer in an interview that when he
was groping with the literary theories of Eliot, he came to know that
Sudhindranath had already been studying Eliot for some time past with a
missionary zeal and claimed to have considerable success in understan­
dings the controversial poet. Bishnu Dey, then established contact with
Sudhindranath Dutta and that was the beginning of an unbroken friendship
between the two, though they agreed to differ on many points. This obser­
vation of Bishnu Dey is important because it shows that Sudhindranath
Dutta was one of those, if not the first among them, to take up the study
of Eliot seriously in Bengal. Dr. Arun Kr. Mukhopadhyya says :

"Sudhindranath Dutta, the leader of formalism in Bengali poetry,
took the responsibility of explaining Eliot's poetics in Bengali." Study
of Eliot convinced Sudhindranath that a poet, in order to be a good poet,
must be in the poetic tradition of the people of whom he writes. A scholar
himself, he was impressed by Eliot's profound knowledge of the English and
European Literature and his sincerest endeavour to understand the tradi­
tion of Europe and England. Sudhindranath endorsed the view that to be an
important poet one must study extensively and labour hard with a view to
developing the power of understanding the role of tradition in his own
poetry. We have already seen that Sudhindranath shared the idea of Eliot
in respect of individual poet's role in the literary tradition. In other
observations also we can see his idea of tradition in literature. For
example he writes :

6. Dr. Arun Kr. Mukhapadhaya; Bangla Somalochanar Itihas, p.294.
7. See ante Chap. II. ref. 4, p.5.
"Though no artistic creation is possible without tradition, yet, imitation of traditional art is not always lifeless. It is inspired by a determination and its objective is innovation. As a result, a particular poetic movement cannot be compared with the river; it is rather like an incomplete building, foundation of which is laid down by men for their own purpose. Its development depends on the wishes of men and its destruction is also due to their carelessness. Not only that, the future extension of the building is decided partly by the nature of the foundation and partly by every additions and alterations introduced to bring harmony in the structure. As the original part influences the extensions, the extensions themselves influence the original part."  

Let us compare this idea of Sudhindranath with Eliot's view of a new work of art in literary tradition: "What happens when a work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all work of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form and 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; for 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 toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new." 

The similarity is obvious. However, it appears that Sudhindranath has not given much thought to the involvement of time in the con-

cept of tradition. But in Eliot, we see that time and history are integrated with the concept of tradition. This we see in Jibanananda’s poetry also. Both these poets (Eliot and Jibanananda) are conscious of time and there is a similarity in their thought process. In Sudhindranath tradition is a latent force that enters the poetry of a poet who is self conscious and works hard to attain perfection as a craftsman of poetry. The study of history or the development of a sense of time is some thing that may follow traditionalism in poetry but are not pre-requisites for a poet who wants to follow tradition. In other words, the search for tradition is a search in the sphere of sensibility and even in the unconscious growths like racial memory or in the subterranean flow of culture from generation to generation. A study of his poetry shows that it is possible that tradition can be inherited by a poet, a view quite opposite to that of Eliot in this respect.

Sudhindranath believes that the tradition of Bengali poetry can be found in a comprehensive form in the poetry of Rabindranath. He, therefore, has given a new life to the phrase: "Rabindra-Aitijya" (Rabindra Tradition). He also admits his indebtedness to Rabindranath in unequivocal language, on many occasions. His confession that he takes from Rabindranath whenever necessary leads us to believe that he has done it on purpose. As Eliot admitted his indebtedness to Dante, Donne, Webster, Dryden and others, Sudhindranath also felt that there was no weakness in declaring that he borrowed from Rabindranath. For the "Immature poets

* Cf. Dr. Arun Kr. Mukhopadhyaya; Bangla Somalochanar Itihas, p.264.  
+ Cf. Preface to *Tannvi* By Sudhindranath Dutta.
imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different". Sudhindranath takes Rabindranath as the embodiment of the Bengali poetic tradition, from whom one is to take consciously. It can be seen, therefore, that many of his allusions to Rabindranath are made with an intention to point out that he was doing so consciously. Eliot quotes from Dante, Shakespeare and many other poets in his poems without a footnote to point out from where he quotes and with what purpose. That never diminishes the value of Eliot's poetry as an original work. This also is the case with Sudhindranath. He understands clearly that there should not be a tradition-gap in literature. There is no use in denying a particular period of literature its right place in the history of literary tradition, because a poet or a group of poets finds it difficult to reconcile themselves with the ideals and thoughts of that period. One shall have to make every thing into consideration that he comes across enroute. Hence, we do not see Sudhindranath the violent reaction against Tagore or the Tagore-cult which we see in cases of some other modern Bengali poets. Here-in lies the importance of his understanding of the tradition of the Bengali poetry. Sudhindranath feels it more than any other modern Bengali poet that Rabindranath has created new poetic sensibility in the minds of the readers of Bengali poetry; and this is taking the form of a newly created tradition. It is true that other modern Bengali poets are equally indebted to Rabindranath; the difference is that Sudhindranath admits it openly when others do not. It is needless to quote lines or poems to show the influence of Rabindranath.

nath on Sudhindranath or to point out allusions to Rabindranath's poems or lines from his own poems, because they are everywhere in his poetry. What is important to note is that whereas most of the moderns were critical of Tagore for his 19th century ideas of truth, Beauty and Goodness or his conventionalism in the uses of words and expressions, Sudhindranath adopted a lot from him as a part of the tradition of Bengali poetry, consciously and willingly.

Another side of his traditionalism is found in his extensive use of allusions pertaining to the Indian religious and literary traditions and also from the myths and legends. For example:

"Take my soul to the icy bed
Beyond the infinite vacancy
Standing on the principle of which
The unperturbed 'Nachiketa'
Viewed the abyss."

(Narak; Krandasi)

Or, "Again the pious 'Nahus' will find his place
In the seventh heaven".

(Parabata; Krandasi)

Or, "Where 'Trisanku' dozes
Suspended and alone in the void
And 'Nachiketa' deceived by death
Listens to the music of silence."

(Prarthana; Krandasi)

* Rabindranath himself says that Sudhindranath's poetry has grown out of his own poetry, though it has a character of its own. Cf. Rabindranath's letters to Sudhindranath; DESH (Lit) Issue 1974, p.12).
Or, "With the sound of 'Omkar' unsoundable
Awakened 'Pururoba' the immortal
With a new life".
(Babadhan; Do)

Or, The 'Nandan Ban' will open its gates before us
At our foot will flow the 'Alakananda'.....
(Pratidan; Uttar Falgungi)

A lot more allusions or references of this kind can be cited. There are also references to the Puranas and the Epics which are parts of our tradition. However, mere reference to tradition does not make a poet traditional. Sudhindranath's poetry does not touch the Indian tradition on the surface only; it makes an attempt to go deep into the philosophy and religious heritage of India. In his poetry we see his great concern with the philosophy of Vedanta and Buddhism and theories of Karma and Re-birth. The first two will be discussed later. For the present let us see how much he is concerned with the age-old idea of rebirth - a traditional belief in India.

Beside, giving two of his poems titles like 'Punarjanma' and 'Jatismar', he deals with the subject in many of his poems. His concept of rebirth is connected with the idea of the reincarnation of the mind. This looks like Jung's theory of racial memory, though it is more likely that Sudhindranath has adopted the idea from the concept of rebirth of the Bhagavad Gita where Sreekrishna says:

"O son of Kunti, Whatever state of being one dwells upon in the end, at the time of living the body, that alone attains because of
his constant thought of that state of being. The process of rebirth carries the memory from life to life. It is a mysterious process; and the mystery of it appeals Sudhindranath more than the validity of the idea as a religious faith. The insight into the mysterious process is our inheritance and Sudhindranath adopts this in his poetry. However, one need not totally accept an idea in order to use it in his poetry; he may borrow a single dimension of it for his use. Eliot himself has borrowed a few ideas from the Bhagavad Gita without becoming a believer in Hinduism. Sudhindranath takes this as a vehicle for his journey to the heart of time. In the poem 'Jatismar' the poet finds himself alone in a desolate pass at Nathu-La. There in a primitive surroundings, he feels that the memories of his past lives are returning to his mind. He finds himself a primitive man mating with a primitive woman, who offered herself to him apparently as an instinctive response to her memories of the past life. Sudhindranath believes that we have primitive passions within us because the passions of the past lives are stored in our brain in an unknown chamber. Elsewhere he writes:

"My intoxicated youth
A gift of the primitive life
Searches in the darkness of ages
Not you My dear charitable soul
But that un-bridled spirit."

(Kasmai Debaya; Orchestra)

Or, "I do not know why your soul
Awakened - that day vibrating
With the memories of love of all lives
of the past...........
And in the burning depth of my heart was
Raised the naked cave man".

(Puraskar; Parisista, Kavya Sangraha)

Or, "My nameless love of this life
And all lives past
Has cast her shadow-in-play over your eyes
Blue and wide as sea".

(Murti-puja; Orchestra)

In another poem he says that within him there resides a soul which is immortal and will return to this earth after ages.

"You shall not look at my poor appearance
And deny my inner soul its own place
You shall know the immortal from the mortal
Which from behind the curtain of death will Salute the earth for ages".

(Pratik; Krandasi)

Again, "This Grand way, I think
I know through many births
The change that is inherent in dust
Is handed over to me, as a right mutable
By my ancestors".

(Path; Praktani)
Here, it is clear that Sudhindranath believes that the basic instincts can be inherited by man. Thus, one may presume that certain human qualities also can be inherited. But he seems to be positively against any idea which says that poetic qualities can be inherited or the idea that there can be a born poet. It shows that on the one hand he believes in a racial memory relayed from age to age by a mysterious biological process and on the other he believes in a hard earned experience in life through an actual struggle to grope with the realities of our existence. If this be the case, then, the secret behind the creative activity cannot solely be confined to the actual labour a poet makes but should naturally extend to his past experiences including the experience and memory he inherits from the past lives. As this paradox is never offered for a debate in his literary works supported by sound reasoning, as is characteristic with Sudhindranath, this definitely testifies to the existence of a mystery loving Hindu mind behind his intellectualism. Perhaps the traditionalism in Sudhindranath is not truly Eliotian. Eliot with his European heritage would not have approved of such a contradiction in a poet. He would have rather stressed that the whole process should depend on the poet's capability together with experiences from the store house of human knowledge that can be found in the recorded history. * This contradiction brings a new dimension in the idea of tradition in Sudhindranath. Such awareness enabled him to draw a distinct line between what one automatically inherits and what one should learn in his life time, to be a poet. For example, a philosophical bent is there in the mind of an Indian which he inherits

* Eliot however, admits that some element of tradition may be unconscious. Cf. *After Strange Gods*, p.29.
almost automatically from his tradition. What he is to learn, therefore, is the technique of writing poetry and not philosophy. For a Bengali poet it is of more importance that he should learn the techniques of writing poetry than to go out in search of a philosophy for his poetry. That is why when Sudhindranath writes about Rabindranath, he is silent about the most attractive side of the poetry of the maestro—his philosophy—and discusses only the art and technique of his poetry. Eliotism, therefore, means to him essentially a particular kind of worship of the art of writing poetry. He is not even willing to give Eliot what is due to him as a post-thinker. He noticed Eliot as a thinker behind the mastery over the art of poetry. He accepts its importance but holds that in poetry philosophy and architectonic are two different qualities and may be taken apart from the other. His real interest has always been in the technique of a literary work and it appears that he does not so much subscribe to the view that philosophy is also an essential ingredient of poetry. Perhaps he made a little or no difference between theorisation and philosophy. About Eliot he writes:

"Eliot's principles of poetry has not yet attained the highest of the perfection beyond all criticism, but I honour its sense of values. Eliot is rich in philosophy which without being an ingredient of poetry is the greatest asset of a poet. Besides, he is a profound scholar and possesses a fearless intellect."12

Yet, Eliot does not think that philosophy can be dispensed with in all cases. Speaking about Philosophy in Dante's poetry he says:

+Cf. Dr. Arun Makhopadhaya: Bangla Somalochanar Itihas, p.264.
"In the first place, it suggests that the conditions have changed, that 'philosophical' poetry may once have been permissible, but that (perhaps owing to the greater specialisation of the modern world) it is now intolerable. We are forced to assume that what we do not like in our time was never good art and that appears to us good was always so. If any ancient philosophical poetry retains its value, a value which we fail to find in modern poetry of the same type, we investigate on the assumption that we shall find some difference to which the mere difference of date is irrelevant." 15

Sudhindranath has not taken it into consideration that in an age of faithlessness the proportion of faith, in form of philosophy, may be greater in poetry than in an age in which there is no such crisis in faith. Besides, poetry can have philosophy in it without becoming distinctly philosophical. We find that Sudindranath's poetry is not free from the infiltration of philosophy both Indian and European.

Sudhindranath also uses traditional Bengali and Sanskrit poetical expressions and idioms, specially to illustrate physical beauty or quality of woman. For example:

"O my momentary love!
You have given me the right
Over the twine heavens of your breast
For a few moments though;
I am not going to-day
For the vain search of the Eternal".

(Haimanti; Orchestra)

Here, expressions like 'Slath Nabi' or 'Baksher Yugal Sarga' etc. are typically Bengali poetic expressions derived from the Sanskrit Kavya. We also see in his poetry traditional similies comparing the colour of the skin with ripe grapes or grapewine. The use of words like 'Uras' given an antique taste to his poetry, taking a reader back to the golden age of the Sanskrit Kavya. For example:

"Fullness of the autumn evening
That is what is your hair
Your complexion is like wine
From ripe grapes; Your breasts are
Objects of all mortal quests
And the earth is beautiful because
You are here".

(Orchestra; Orchestra)

One may also hear many echoes of the Sanskrit erotic poetry which had been a great influence on the early Bengali poetry. Expression like 'Kadali Uru', 'Prithul Sroni'? 'Moral Gaman' etc. are found to be in frequent use on his poetry.

"She does not move in swan-fashion
With mekhola round her flashi bottom".

(Sansays; Uttar Falguni)

Or,

"Does the path full of pollens from Kadam flower
Move from her beautiful navel
Towards the coveted heaven adorned by the gates of
Banana tree thighs".

(Do)
He also frequently uses conventional expressions like 'Open window', 'Soft breeze', 'moon light', 'cresent-moon' etc. in his poetry. For example:

"I did not notice that
The warm breeze murmuring soft
Was touching me through the open window.....
When the charm was broken, in tears I ran
Out of the cottage-breathless
And saw the cresent moon
On the shore of the slow moving time
Looking hopefully and waiting".

(Bisvaran; Orchestra)

Or, "The full moon enters your room
Through the open window and touch
Your creaper like body sleeping
On the flowary bed."

(Orchestra; Orchestra)

Or, "The full moon kisses your hair
Through the open window
And the stars far way sings
Lullaby to thy ears."

(Do)

Sudhindranath also often used the traditional Bengali 'Payar' in his poetry (not confining the number of alphabet to fourteen in a line, in all cases though). In his poetry, especially in his early poetry, a keenness
to conform with the tradition of the Bengali poetry is clearly evident. About this he himself says in the introduction to Orchestra:

"Besides, the desire to have the same sound repeated at the end of the line for the sake of rhyming, words are distorted. Use of verbs in the unrefined form to make up the meters or for the contraction or expansion of letters, repeated use of the 'do' or the 'be' verbs, unnecessary use of addresses etc. and all other waywardness of the Bengali poetry can be seen anywhere in the 'Orchestra'. Again, though the heroine is a twentieth century young girl she has all the ancient ornaments on her person and the words used to relate her are full of Sanskrit rhetorics."

Yet, it can hardly escape one's notice that the attempt to fill in the tradition gap, if any, with the help of allusions or references must appear superficial unless supported by a method to unify the disintegrated sensibility. One method, which is used by Eliot in his poetry, is to point out the difference rather than the similarity that exists in the sensibility of different ages. It draws a more quick and effective response from the readers, particularly if this is accompanied by a critical commentary to account for the difference. Sudhindranath's poetry does not show a definite method of this kind to relate his poetry with the poetry of the past.
Sudhindranath's poetry is esoteric in character. He had no desire to write for the general public and even if he had, he was rather not in a position to do so. He took the responsibility of speaking to the limited few who may care to understand the problems of life in general and the age in particular. He believed that limited hearing was unavoidable for one who was to say something new and important. Esotericism does not invariably jeopardise the achievement of a poet. The quality of Eliot's poetry has not suffered for the reason of limited response he received at the beginning and there is no reason to believe that another poet in the same position should suffer as a poet due to the esoteric nature of his poetry. So, he decided to write poetry to suit his own taste and belief rather than to serve the taste and belief of others. His esotericism makes him very Eliotsque as a poet. Speaking about esotericism Maxwell says that this develops generally from two sources: a) uselessness of appeal to an audience incapable of full appreciation of poetry; and b) demand of a civilization infinitely more complex than any in previous era. 14

Poets of the modern times are becoming increasingly anxious to achieve maximum level of appreciation of poetry from the readers. Importance is shifted from the position of any amount of appreciation with maximum of readers to maximum of appreciation with, if necessary, any number of readers. Facilities demanded by the reading public are now considered inconsequential to the future of poetry. Poetry should try to

attain its own goal without bothering much about the incapability of its readers to follow it. A compromise from the side of poetry is thought to be detrimental to the interest of this art. Readers must, therefore, equip themselves with qualifications necessary to understand poetry, if they so desire. Poetry may demand some sort of training for the readers as well. Besides, all ages are not equally capable of understanding poetry. In certain ages there is found a keen interest in poetry and as a result greater capability to appreciate poetry; in others, there can be seen only utter indifference and blunt reaction to poetry though the readers may be, in fact, more equipped. But poetry can hardly afford to wait for a favourable time even if it involves a risk of esotericism. The second point of Maxwell is perhaps more important. Compared with the earlier periods, the modern period of our civilization is much more complex in nature. It is very difficult to sort out things and place them in their right position to obtain a correct picture of the age. In the field of literature also, the growth is so rapid and so many forces and counter forces are acting and reacting that it is difficult for a writer or a poet to gather a comprehensive view of the age. Eliot, in his essay on the Metaphysical poets (selected essays) says that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be deficient. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity and this variety and complexity playing upon a refined sensibility must produce various complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more direct in order to force to dislocate if necessary, language into its meaning.*

* Of. Metaphysical poets; Selected Essays.
We see that Sudhindranath in one place says: "I have such a
deep rooted disregard for the taste of the common reading public that I am
equally indifferent to their abuse and praise." In the same place he
writes: "In the days of special knowledge, I, on behalf of poetry, beg the
readers of that intense attention which generally is given to other arts."

In his poetry also we see the same distaste for the people and
popular appreciation:

"People are afraid of me
And I am afraid of them."

(Pratik: Krandasi)

Or, "I shall never remain
In the company of the greedy, dissatisfied Dwarfs".

(Mrityu: Krandasi).

Buddhadev Bose, however, does not quite accept the view that Sudhindra-
nath's poetry is esoteric or written for the intellectuals and highly
educated people. In his introduction to the collected poems of Sudhindra-
nath he points out that the difficulty in understanding Sudhindranath's
poetry lies in the problem of deciphering the uncommon words and expre-
sions used by the poet. Once the difficulty is over, presumably, with
the help of a dictionary, the obscurity is at once removed and the labour
is rewarded by the pleasure derived from hard but fruit-ful work. This
observation appears to evaluate the poetry of Sudhindranath correctly.
A reader is often surprised when he finds that under the hard crust of
difficult words and expressions the poetry of Sudhindranath is simple and

15. Sudhindranath's letters to Rabindranath; Desh, Lit. Issue, 1579 B.S.
16. Ibid.

"Whether the writer should go down to the level of the reader or the
reader should climb up to the level of the writer?" (S.Batta- Sangata).
straight; often very common place and ordinary in its ideas. However, a
closer look gives rise to doubts as to the so called simplicity of his
poetry. The more a reader tries to analyse the poetry, the more he becomes
convinced that there is hidden somewhere in his poetry a meaning deeper
than that appears on the first layer under the surface. It appears that
his poetry has three tiers in it. First comes the obscurity of difficult
words and expressions. The second is a deceptive simplicity of ideas and
thought. The third is a complex of intricate concepts and philosophies
connected with an obscure world where meaning and memory telescope into
one another. Perhaps this is the world of symbol he refers to in his
letter to Rabindranath.* There is a difference between the esotericism of
Eliot and Sudhindranath. Eliot believes that one of the characteristics
of good poetry is that it communicates before it is understood. Most of
the Eliot's poems justify his belief in this respect. But in case of
Sudhindranath the approach is reverse; his poetry communicates only when
it is understood. Eliot creates initial interest in the mind of a reader
urging him to toil hard to understand his poetry. Sudhindranath demands
hard labour before the interest to understand his poetry is actually
created. This difference shows that Eliot's poetry is not really as eso-
teric as that of Sudhindranath. In fact, Eliot's later poetry has estab-
lished its relation with the traditional poetic sensibility of Europe. But
Sudhindranath's pen is silenced by the hands of fate before it could esta-
blast a closer link with the poetic sensibility of Bengal. The result is
that his poetry remained more esoteric than that of Eliot.

* Cf. Sudhindranath's letters to Rabindranath; Desh Lit. Issue, 1379 B.S.
pp. 155-56.
III

Poets are called 'Moderns' not only for the age to which they belong but also for the quality that is called 'modernity'. There is, however, no general agreement about the meaning of the term modernity. For simplicity's sake, modernity may be equated with a rational, scientific and secular view of life. This view had been dominant in the west from the middle of the 19th century on. It was most clearly expressed by those whom Carlton Hayes categorized as the 'generation of materialism'.

Man was certain that reason was the arbiter of all questions. He was confident that he could solve all his problems and bring about a millennium. He strictly limited reality to those data which were subject to verification by the senses and he considered a transcendental view of life fanciful and outmoded. Towards the turn of the century, however, man's self-assuredness began to dwindle. The more the frontier of science advanced, the less certain were the scientists that they could fathom the mystery of the universe. The cosmos seemed no longer a limited mass of matter; it began to look like an infinite universe of energy. As a matter of fact, one of the great astronomers, Sir James Jeans, concluded that the universe was more akin to a thought than a machine.

Loss of scientific certitude naturally affected the world view of modern western man. It is not by chance that the historian Franklin Lemans Banmer in his book 'Main Currents of Western thought' refers to our age as the 'Age of anxiety'. He argues that in the 20th century man

19. Cf. Franklin de Van Banmer; Main Currents of Western Thought; (New York 1964, pp.587-94.)
feels insecure because he has no acceptable values to guide him. Although technological advance continues, people are becoming aware of the fact that the increase in man's ability to produce gadgets does not necessarily make his life more meaningful. It, moreover, has become apparent that a wholly secularised life is devoid of ultimate purposefulness. The distinguished Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung, diagnosed the ailment of the present age as being due to man's alienation from his creator:

"It is easy enough to drive the spirit out of the doors, but when we have done so that salt of life grows flat it loses its savour". 20

Modernism in the 20th century, therefore, means a realisation of the contradictions in our existence. Modernism reveals the senseless pursuit of materialism resulting in the hollowness and spiritual sterility of the modern society. Among the European poets of this century Eliot is one in whose poetry the modernism has found its best expression. In his early poems pictures of modern life is depicted with power and clarity revealing the real state of affairs at the heart of it:

"And indeed there will be time
To wonder Do I dare? And Do I dare?
Time to turn back and descend the stair
With bald spot in th' middle of my hair
(They will say: how his hair is growing thin!)

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin
(They will say: but how his arms and legs are growing thin!)

20. Cf. C.G. Jung; Modern man in search of a Soul: (New York 1959, p.142)
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a Peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers and walk upon the beach'.

(The Love song of J. Alfred Prufork).

Such picture of modern life is surely interesting and attractive. It has an oblique reference to the meaninglessness of the modern life. In Subhijanath's poetry we see similar pictures of modern life. The protagonist of his 'Sangbarta' is a man of middle age - a man of this world, only bulky and not thin like Prufrock:

"I am above forty now:
When I look at the mirror with expectation
I only see my double chin occupying the whole of the glass,
If by chance I look down, the pot-belly obstructs the views of the toe from my sight,
The forehead exchanges place with the bald spot on the top
When the wind displaces the carefully groomed hair"

(Sangbarta : Sangbarta).

Eliot gives us a vivid picture of the modern life full of care and monotony:

"What shall we ever do?
The hot water at ten
And if it rains, a closed car at four
And we shall play a game of chess
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door".

(The Waste Land)
Similarly Sudhindranath writes:

"I know, life is nothing but insurances
But the monthly premium
Makes the budget imbalanced;
Yet the doctor says: waste of the tissues
Is inevitable in the old age,
Nutrition is a must therefore"

(Sangbarta, Do)

Eliot gives us a picture of mechanical and matter of fact relation between man and woman and man and man in the present century.

"He the young man carbuncular, arrives

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Exploring hands encounter no defence" etc.

(The Waste Land)

Sudhindranath writes almost in the same vein:

"It is past twelve now
But what about the telephone call from her?
Yet she is not so dazzling and fickle like Dipti
At least she knows that the society
Never goes to sleep and walls have ears
A secret meet is a chance in a million
The enjoyment is marred by the thought of the outcome
Is it possible that Pramatha has returned untimely
Convinced by the scandal-mogers?
Or that talkative young man, whose business is to
Spoil the reputation of the highly placed people
Has become successful at last?"   
(Sangbarta; Sangbarta)  

Here the young man, whose profession is to destroy the reputation of the high ups in the society through contacts with their wives is not much different from the seducer of the Waste Land. These are the aspects of life once considered to be the truly realistic side of the life. Spender, therefore writes:

"The Waste Land was existing in the first place because it was concerned with the life which we felt to be the real".  


This realism turns a searching beam of light on the heart of the civilisation and finds it full of inconsistencies. It is leading a life in death or rather a death in life. In the 'Hollow man', Eliot mentions the dead land - the cactus land which is the present state of our civilisation:

"This is the dead land
This is the cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's land
Under the twinkle of a fading star".

Sudhindranath is also aware of the presence of death in life. He is conscious of the desert that creeps into our soul day by day turning it to a barren, waste space. We see the use of same cactus symbol in his poetry:

"I know more than this O Falguni!
You are not here and the fiery hunger of the
Kirats are going unbridled on this earth
The paradise promised is nothing but a
unreal mirrage of the cactus land

(Anusanga; Orchestra).

But his cactus land is not always as sterile and devoid of life as we see in Eliot's poetry. Here, the poet can do something with the cactus: he can grow a shoot or two which may not ultimately develop into flowers or fruits though:

"My cactus in the unknown corner
Of the desert, have borne ears
Without flowers;
But your greed extends even to that
Desolate forsaken land"

(Kal, Krandasi)

Though it gives him pain, he is not afraid of the desert or the dead land. Death may be unbearable but life is meaningless and momentary. There is no consolation in life. The cactus land has at least a negative appeal which may remind us of the positive side of life if there is any.

"Covered with the heated sands
And thorny cactus - gray poisonous sterile
The desert is much more preferable
There is the abandoned kingdom of the fisher king
Folded in waves without water,
The vast senseless vacant space
Indifferent in all seasons"

(Pratipad, Uttar Falguni).
It is clear that while Eliot discovers the cactus land in the barren and sterile society, Sudhindranath's cactus land is a poet's world where he suffers his romantic agony and pain in total isolation of the desert. However, he has no faith in the myth of the nightingale who raised red rose by pressing her breast into the thorn and sang melancholy songs. It is desert alright. There is no use denying the fact. But one is to go through the cactus land as and when required, because it is a reality of the life.

"As a result we go never to return,
And flowers are left dead or forgotten in the Cactus land"

(Tirtha Parikrama, Dasami)

The same with the autumn symbol. The autumn is barren - almost devoid of life. But it is also not without a negative charm:

"Desolate fields are full of smokes
Foot hills are autumn-red,
Bowers are covered with fallen leaves
Lovers have rejected them.
Covered by moss the lake is dead
The gloomy flight of birds looks mournful,
But my deadened senses are made suddenly conscious of the charm in it".

(Haimanti, Orchestra)

As we have noted, the twentieth century realism is not confined to the external or the visible world only. It goes deeper in search for the basic reality of the human existence. It appeared that inspite of man's endeavor
to create an integrated world of his own, in spite of his desire to live in a society, he is often a lone creature, alienated from all. This loneliness of a modern man is different from the romantic loneliness. This is not the loneliness of a man who discovers certain secrets of the elements or nature and cannot share it with others because of the lack of communication, but this a loneliness born out of the lack of interest, of a tired and bored generation, who does not even care to know the cause of their loneliness. Pictures of such lonely persons are drawn vividly by Eliot in his poetry. For example:

"Shall I say I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that raises from the pipes
Of lonely man in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of window".

(Prufrock)

Here is a graphic picture a lonely man in shirt-sleeves leaning out of the window, and the image creates in the mind of the reader a sense of meaninglessness of the human existence. The poet does not say whether the man is afflicted with the suffering caused by some remote painful memory or not. He does not make any attempt to know it in the manner a romantic poet would have tried it. Yet the statement is not without its effect; for, the picture of the lonely man is very suggestive and the poet is successful to draw the attention of the reader to it. In another image we see the utter loneliness of man in the modern times:

"Here I am an old man in dry mouth
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain."

(Gerontion).
Leaving apart the spiritual dryness of the scene, here we see a lonely man. Indeed he is not alone; he is 'being read to by a boy'. But in spite of the presence of the boy, he is lonely and waiting for the rain i.e. for the sign of life. The image is continued:

"The goat coughs at night in the field over head
Rock, moss, stonecrop, iron, words
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea
Sneezes at evening, poking the accused gutter
I am an old man"

(Gerontion)

In the 'Portrait of a Lady' the line "I shall sit here, serving tea to friends", which is repeated many times, shows the pathetic loneliness of a woman lost in the meaningless routine of the every day life. When one thinks of Sudhindranath, what strikes him most is the utter loneliness of the poet. Yet, he was born in an affluent, educated and cultured family. He himself was well placed in life. He had, as Buddhadev Bose said, the potentiality to become successful in every walk of life. But he remained a poet lonely, isolated and suffering apparently for no known reason. Eliot wrote The Waste Land in a moment of great depression in his life. The aftermath of the first world war, his wife's illness, his own mental depression contributed to the state of mind which produced the poem that which described as his grouse against life. Sudhindranath had apparently no such personal or circumstantial reasons. The life in Bengal was not totally devoid of charm or meaning at that time. The cactus land, the sterile

* Cf. Introduction to Kavya Sangaaha (collected poems) of Sudhindranath Ed. by B. Bose.

** Cf. In fact, I have not found among the Bengali poets any one so positively a man of faith like Sudhindranath, who does, know that one who loves life most also suffers most from the awareness of time? The basic cause of Sudhindranath's pessimism is his faith in
society of his poetry probably existed more in his mind than in reality. India as a whole or Bengal in particular was not lacking in faith or spirituality to make one feel that the people of the land were damned. We also can not say that experience of life made him a sceptic and insular poet. His poetry does not show the varied experience of life that we see in Shakespeare or Goethe or Tagore and even with all those experiences they were not sceptics. Where from then comes his pessimism, his despair, his loneliness? Is it for the reason that he looked at the face of death to understand the meaning of life? Was he wise enough to feel the "fear in a handfull of dust? Through instincts rather than to know it from experience?

Be that as it may, we see in Sudhindranath's poetry many images of loneliness. He is keenly aware of the loneliness of man in the busy, bustling world. He sees a world whirling around him without touching him so much. He belongs to none:

"I am alone, I know:
I am like an abandoned house
Where the house-wife has left behind her
Cosmetics. (Ahaituki, Uttar Falguni)

But he is not totally indifferent to his loneliness. He feels a romantic pain for his isolated status in the society.

"That burning pain uncalled for
Did not come to any one's good,
Only I made myself lonely
Within a narrow, dry encircling-ditch"

(Pratarka; Krandasi)
He can not allow himself to be enslaved by the easy going life of this world: he referred to follow the dictation of his conscience to any conformity to the so-called peace of an ordinary life.

"Yet in the depth of her charm
I could not drown myself;
In the shadow of her black eye lashes
I could not see the burns from the salty sea-water.
As a result I am alone without any support.
Childless and poor to the extreme now"

(Akhan Sangbarja)

He believes that a pleasant world can be built in the dreams only. The world of reality shatters it into pieces:

"The divine appearance of the mind
Is only possible in dreams.
In reality we are alone"

(Narak; Krandasi)

The world of reality is too much for us. In the 'Burnt Norton' Eliot writes:

"Go, go, go says the bird: human kind
Can not bear very much reality"

We can stand neither the hell nor the rose garden. Reality in life makes us conscious of death, the unavoidable end of the mortals. Man finds himself always standing on the brink of the gaping mouth of death. In the 'Choruses from the Rock' Eliot writes:

*
"Life you may evade, but death you shall not
You shall not deny the stranger"

And in the 'Portrait of a Lady'
"Now that we talk of dying
Should I have the right to smile?"

Sudhindranath writes:
"Death, only death is the certainty
My dear friend,
Pain, only pain is the companion of our life."

(Narak, Krandasi)

He is also conscious of the hell in life:
"The world unbound
Is flooded by my own hell
Flowing out of the broken dam"

(Do)

IV

Sudhindranath is considered to be a symbolist poet and for that reason he is compared with the modern symbolist and symbolist-Imagist poets. The poet himself says that his ideal of poetry is identical to that of Mallarmé, the French symbolist poet.22 Dipti Tripathi takes him to be a symbolist poet.23 She compares Mallarmé and Sudhindranath, quoting lines from both the poets.24 She mentions the use of 'Swan' as a symbol by both the poets:

22. Cf. Introduction to Sangbarta "Be that as it may, the poetic ideal of Mallarmé is my goal
"Let the migrating swan leave the dry pond
And fly for a blissful nest"

(Sarbari, Uttarfalguni)

And

"A swan of past days recalls it he is
Magnificent but without hope who is freed
For not having sung the realm where to live
While sterile winter's ennui has alone forth"

(Swan : Mallarmé)

We also see the use of cactus symbol in his poetry. But apart from these examples there are little evidence of symbolic use of words and expressions in his poetry. Besides, so far as his mental make up is concerned he does not seem to be cut out for a purely symbolist poet. Dipti Tripathi herself finds quite a good number of differences between Sudhindranath and Mallarmé and if these are taken into consideration than one wonders how far Sudhindranath's declaration can be taken as a guide line in this respect. Sudhindranath is a firm believer in reasoning, clarify and objectivity in poetry, which could not be quite acceptable to Mallarmé or any symbolist poet who believes rather in suggestiveness or even some sort of vagueness as the secret of successful poetry. Secondly, abstract thinking of Mallarmé is totally disregarded by Sudhindranath. Thirdly, Mallarmé wants to see poetry as a musical whole, where as Sudhindranath wants to make it logical and clearly stated. Fourthly, the difficulty in understanding Mallarmé arises from the intricacy of his thought and not from the use of uncommon or foreign words. Sudhindranaths poetry has more difficult words than ideas. The poet critic Buddhadev Bose, therefore, observes:
"His poetry is in no way similar to that of Mallarmé and I am not at all unhappy for that. It is wrong to take him as a symbolist poet. His identity with Mallarmé can only be seen in the rejection of fate and a strong desire to control the self."25

For his logic and clarity of thought he is more nearer to the Imagist than the Symbolist. However, his difference with the imagist-symbolist like Eliot is also evident. He has very few personal symbols i.e. symbols deriving their meaning from the world of the personal experience of the poet. Though there are symbols like 'Mahusa', 'Yajati', 'Utpakhi' etc. with some sort of personal meaning in them, they are not developed to that extent where they can express poets experiences of the inner world, to the fullest. From the universal meaning of these symbols one can derive the meaning the poet imbued them with. He never uses symbols in the manner of T.S. Eliot: for "he (Eliot) does so by placing next to his first symbol a second symbol which will have connotation in common with those of the first; to these he will add more and more symbols, each defining and declin-ate the boundaries of the others until his articulation is complete."26

So far as Sudhindranath is concerned, he goes on expanding the same symbol throughout the particular poem. He goes on elaborating the same symbol in such a manner that it becomes difficult to distinguish the highly stretched out symbol from an allegory. Many of Sudhindranath's poems, specially those with the appearance of love poems, have a different and deeper meaning in them. For example, 'Kasmai Devaya' tells us how he rejected inspiration as a basic need for good poetry and accepted in its place hard labour and

25. B. Bose Introduction to Sudhindranath's Kavya Sangraha, p.x.
training. It is not that he is not aware of the difference between a symbol and an allegory for he says:

"On the other hand Mallarmé is the pioneer of the symbolist movement; and the difference between a symbol and an allegory is more than that of the heaven and hell. Symbol is the expression of reality where as allegory is a crow decorated with peacocks feather". (Notes on translations of Mallarmé's poems, Kavya-Sangraha).

But it appears that he has his own idea about the meaning of symbol. Perhaps this can be explained by his lack of alertness to differentiate between symbol and allegory or even a conscious preference for the latter. In a letter to Rabindranath he writes:

"To see truth in the new light, it is possible, new allegory is necessary. For this allegory a poet may be required to search the whole of the universe. The poet who is satisfied watching the symbols around him is a lazy poet." 27 One can not but mark the importance he attaches to allegory, though he knows the difference between the two. Thus, it can be seen that Sudhindranath is not a symbolist in the fashion of Mallarmé or even Eliot. If he is a symbolist poet at all, then he is a symbolist in his own sense of the term. But it is clear that he understands the importance of symbols in poetry. Symbols connect memory with imagination, myths and even with primitive instincts of man. It helps to mix reality with abstract thinking and ideas. Sudhindranath could not ignore such facility offered by the symbols to a realist-poet. However, the fact remains that his place as a modern bengali symbolist poet is not above question.

27. Sudhindranath's letter to Rabindranath, Desh Lit. Issue, 1379 B.S.
Towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th startling discoveries and inventions in various branches of science and para-scientific fields, once more brought in the history of the man kind a crisis in faith. At that critical hour of civilisation, the quest for a 'granite shore' of true faith, brought quite a good number of people to the thresh-hold of mysterious Eastern philosophies. One of the result was the rediscovery of the Buddhism in Europe as one of the logical religious philosophies. Besides considering the question of religion, Buddhism also considers the questions of life and death, of existence, of nature of matter of reality etc. most meticulously and intelligently. Further, it does not believe in the independent and separate existence of a particular soul though it believes in 'Karma': and is silent about the existence of God. Most important is that, it reached the stage of Nirvana after a long and detailed study of life. The urge for Nirvana in human mind is placed on a universal and objective basis and not on individual or subjective plane. It is clear that Eliot was deeply influenced by Buddhism very early in his life. "His interest in Buddha was of long standing. As a boy he came across a poem for which he has preserved a warm affection. The 'light of Asia' by Edwin Arnold, a long epic on the life of Gautam Buddha; 'I must have had a latent sympathy for the subject matter, for I read it through with gusto and more than once' he tells us".26

In 'The Waste Land' the fire sermon, again shows his deep involvement in Buddhism. In his notes on the Waste Land he writes; "The complete

text of Buddha's sermon (which corresponds in importance to the sermon on the mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in late Henry Clarke Warren's Buddhism in translation (Harvard Oriental series). Mr. Warren was one of the greatest pioneer of Buddhist studies in the occident". 27 The next note in the same place says : "From St. Augustine's confession again. The collection of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident". 28 We understand that Eliot believes that there is much in common between these two religions - Christianity and Buddhism. Hence are these lines:

"Burning burning burning burning
O Lord thou pluckest me out
O Lord thou pluckest burning."

(The Waste Land)

Elsewhere in the same note he says : "To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean the Golden Bough." 29 And what Sir James Fraser writes in his famous work is this:

"In this respect an instructive parallel might be drawn between the history of Christianity and history of Buddhism. Both system are in their origin essentially ethical reforms born of the generous ardour, the lofty aspiration, the tender compassion of their noble founder, two of these beautiful spirits who appear at rare intervals on earth, like beings coming

28. Ibid., p.49.
29. The Waste Land and Other poems, T.S. Eliot, p.44.
from a better world to support and guide our weak and erring nature. Both preached moral virtue as the means of accomplishing what they regarded as the supreme object of life, the eternal salvation of the individual soul, though by a curious antithesis the one sought that salvation in a blissful eternity, the other in a final release from suffering, in annihilation.

Stephan Spender in an article on T.S. Eliot writes: "I.A. Richard's view (put forward in 1926) that it was a poetry seceded from all belief should be taken into account just as much as the view of some one today who using hind sight sees 'The Waste Land' almost as a Christian poem. . . . I once heard him say to the Chilean poet Gabriel Mistrel that at the time when he was writing The Waste Land, he seriously considered becoming a Buddhist. A Buddhist is as immanent as a Christian in the Waste Land."

In The Waste Land, Eliot saw through the flesh and blood barrier, the reality of human existence and expressed his terrible experience to his readers. The reading of The Waste Land convinced Williamson that it was Buddhism which played a decisive role in this poem:

"There is some reason for thinking that Eliot (like Laforgue) was close to Buddhism at this stage, because the note on 'Shanti' says 'The peace which passeth understanding' is a feeble translation of the content of this word. "After his conversion this remark became" is our equivalent to this word."

But his reasons were more complex. In 'After Strange Gods' he tells us that his study of Sanskrit left him in a state of 'enlightened mystification'. And I come to the conclusion - seeing also that the influence of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe as on Schopenhauer, Hartmann and

51. Stephan Spender, Remembering Eliot, T.S. Eliot Ed. Allen Tate, p.44.
Danasen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding - that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European, which for practical as well as sentimental reasons I did not wish to do. 32

Besides this fire image, which is taken from the fire sermon, there are lotus and bone images which have close link with Buddhist thought. We have seen the Lotus image in the Burnt Norton (And the lotos rose quietly). So far as the bone image is concerned it is used by Eliot frequently in his early poems. In The Waste Land the bone image is repeatedly used:

"I think we are in rats alley
Where the dead man lost his bones"

Or
"White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret
Rattled by the rats foot only, year to year"

Or
"A current under sea
Picked his bones in wispers"

The bone image appears again in The Ash Wednesday:

"And God said
Shall these bones live? Shall these Bones live? and that which had been contained,
In Bones (which were already dry)"

Or
"And the bones sang chirping
With the burden of the grasshoper"

Or
"Upon the Juniper tree the bones sang...."

The reality of life expressed by the bone image - the fleshless and sexless
death waiting for man and woman on the door-step will be more clear if we
see the Buddhist view of flesh and blood life:

"Revered sir, have you seen a woman
pass this way?
And the elder said:

"Was it a woman or a man
That passed this way? I cannot tell
But this I know, a set of bones
Is travelling upon this road".

Visuddhi Magga ch. 1. 55.

One of the important features of Buddhism is that it considers everything
as momentary. Everything in this world is in a process of becoming. The
most inert of the things are also undergoing continuous changes. Existence
is like a flame composed of flickers rapidly repeating. Though the act of
transformation is often imperceptible, it is there all the time. Only
Nirvana can save the individual from the process of becoming. This concept
of momentary existence of all things appealed most of the intelligensia
of the age of relativity. Eliot, who professed his interest in Buddhism is
found impressed by such idea as can be seen in these lines:

"Because I know that time is always time
And place is always only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place." (Ash Wednesday)

55. Quoted from "Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism by Ananda K.Coomraswami,
1916 (London)
Or "For what is done, not to be done again" (Do)

About existence Buddhism says: "Strictly speaking the duration of a living being is exceedingly brief, lasting only while a thought lasts. Just as a chariotwheel in rolling rolls at one point, of the tire and in resting, rests only at one point, in exactly the same way the life of a living being lasts only for the period of one thought. As soon as that thought is ceased, the living being is said to have ceased" (Visuddhi Magga Ch. viii).

Buddha holds that life is not only momentary but also painful. It is full of suffering which springs from our un-ending desire and hope. In Eliot's poetry one finds that the share of suffering and pain is woefully heavier than that of joy. He is intensely conscious of the agony of the human soul:

"Not the intense moment
Isolated with no before and after,
But a life time burning in every moment
And not the life time of one man only
But old stones that can not deciphered"
(East Coker)

And like a Buddhist he denounces desire:

"Desire itself is a movement
Not in itself desirable"
(Burnt Norton)

* Adopted from Ananda K. Coomaraswami, Buddha and the gospels of Buddha.
Almost like a true Buddhist he sings out:

"And right action is freedom
From past and future also"

(Dry Salvages)

Christianity and Buddhism are again fused in the end when he says:

"When the tongues of flame are infolded
Into the crown knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one"

(Little Gidding)

Here, the Christian image of 'rose' is combined with the Buddhist image of fire. But these do not carry the same meaning as they did in his early poems. For life has a spiral-like movement and does not actually touch the point of beginning though goes past the same in its forward movement. Though in a sense it is true that "In my beginning is my end", Eliot himself shows us that we do not exactly arrive at the same starting point. The fire of The Waste Land and the fire of The Little Gidding are not the same; life has undergone a great transformation during the journey. There is always a linear movement accompanied with that spiral movement and that shifts the point of meeting slightly onward. So Eliot writes:

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploration
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time"

(Little Gidding)

The same transformation affects the 'Rose' symbol and the 'Fire' symbol.
"They are not either Fire of lust, resentment, glamour etc. or Rose of beauty, growth, the body sex etc. but the fire of love and rose of love to ensure a perfect resolution." 34 Admitting that it is pure Christian faith in which Eliot ends his 'Four Quartets', it can be said that Buddhist ideas have never been completely out of his mind. Speaking about the 'Little Gidding' Williamson says:

"If we remember the burning of the 'Fire sermon' we can now understand into what it might have been resolved." 35

We have seen how his disappointment with human inter-course in the present-day civilization urged Eliot to turn towards Buddhism. Kristian Smidt says:

"Thus, the poet's despondency from being a disappointment with human intercourse and modern civilization, broadens into an all embracing pessimism which certainly owes something to Indian, especially Buddhist philosophy". 36

Similar disappointment leads Sudhindranath to the despondency from where he also looks at the present-day civilization with pessimism. Just like Eliot, he too had a chance to come into contact with the Buddhist philosophy through the Upanisads. The excess of monistic thought prevailing in his family has turned him first to materialism and then to Buddhism. About this the poet says:

"My father was a confirmed Vedantist. It is difficult to say whether the power of independent judgement has come to me at all, though piqued by the excess of Advaitism through my boy-hood I took refuge in

34. Elizabeth Sewell : T.S. Eliot Ed. by Hugh Kenner, p.70.
some sort of materialism."  

But materialism, could not give him any satisfaction, he was torn between the two extreme thoughts - one accepting the world as such and the other rejecting it outright. In a poem, written in the early part of his career as a poet, he discussed the question.

"Show yourself ancient father
Or from the unseen land answer me - your
own descendant:

Had not a mistake been done there -
When in an evening debate the meeting divided,
One group going to the horizon
Where the sky is lowered by the earth's gravity
And others believing the young earth a bait of death
Searched for salvation through morning and evening prayers -
In the east.

Which is the way of fulfilment in life?"

(Path; Praktani).

He could see that life is momentary; and the fulfilment of our desire is an absurd proposition. There is no hope of a blissful salvation but an unromantic struggle to save the individual soul from utter destruction in the hands of fate or time. Yet, the chance of success is very slender. So he writes:

37. Sudhindranath Dutta: Introduction to Orchestra.
"The philosophy in which I have arrived to-day, from my personal experiences and exercise of mind to the utmost, is nothing but a recent edition of ancient Indian philosophy of momentariness. When this is admitted, then there is no way but to accept that my writings are also of momentary existence." 33

There can be nothing eternal; we shall have to compromise with the reality of our momentary existence. So he writes:

"My momentary love! the formless memory you
Leave behind, is not eternal"

(Murti Puja; Orchestra)

Or

"No, dearest no!
No memory is eternal
Love eternal is Unattainable"

(Mahasatya, Orchestra)

This conviction of the poet continued till the end of his career. In a poem written in 1956 he restates his conviction:

"I am a believer of momentariness
That is, to me the world we perceive
Dies every moment and so does the world
Of appearance,
For it depends on our senses".

(Upasthapan, Dasami)

33. '*Ksanikabad' or the doctrine of momentariness is a development of later Buddhism. The doctrine of impermanence, held in common by Upanishad and early Buddhism, is developed by later Buddhism into the view of momentariness". (Radhakrishnan; Indian Philosophy, Vol.I, p.372).

38. Introduction to Sangbarta, p.II.
Another development of this philosophy of life is the realisation that life is essentially tragic, it is full of sufferings. Eliot once wrote:

"I had seen birth and death
But thought they were different, this birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death
Our Death".

(Journey of the Magi)

Or "I am tired with life and the Lives of those after me I am dying in my own death and the death of those after me."

(A song for Simeon).

And Sudhindranath writes:

"Pain is the only reality of life So the soul's journey to the world unknown Is only successions of moments"

(Narak; Krandasi)

Or "Death, only death is sure, my friend Pain only pain is the companion of our life"

(Do)

Or "There is nothing to offer but the wails of agony"

(Ujjiban; Sangbarta).

Even in death he does not find a solution of the problems of life because the death is not the end of life. Like a Buddhist he believes that we go
to the next world with all our desires and hence our pain and sufferings:

"The last hope is vanished in a moment
Where is the endless darkness?
It is twilight pale, troubled by the mirage
of uncertain hope
Full of murmur from diseased souls
Every moment every hour
Departed souls clutching small pieces of desires
Like ants enter this unending tunnel
The blowing wind brings from time to time
The sounds of laughter and sighs of tears".

(Mrityu; Krandaai).

A true Buddhist, however, finds solution in the 'Nirvana'. But Sudhindranath was too much of a sceptic to trust his faith totally in the hands of Buddhism:

"No, there is no silence anywhere
The world is full of sounds
'Nirvana' is an intellectual dream
Man with his immortal burning heart may die
But his works remains
From one birth to another it is preserved
Like ancient relics"

(Sristi Rahasya; Krandaai)

He finds the theory of 'Karma' and 'Nirvana' contradictory. If the 'Karma' exists how can there be Nirvana? And so long as the Karma exists we shall
be always anxious of the next life, no matter our actions bring us good or not in the next life, because that will remain always a matter of speculation. Besides, he can not wait life after life for the Karma to be spent up. So, the agony of this life never leaves him. He finds no resolution and ends without hope of Nirvana.

"Krisnachura refuses shelter, but the 'Suka' needs a nest.

Pricked in the bones by the summer heat
The sun goes down.
Yet the wind murmurs the fate of the unknown
The great void unmoved shakes off the evening light
Krishna-Chura chases and out flies the 'Suka'."

(Nasta Nira; Pasami).

VI

The time element, which we see in the poetry of Eliot so often, is present in the poetry of Sudhindranath. His translation of Eliot's poetry starts with "The Burnt Norton".

"Burnt Norton" starts with this:

"The time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past".
Sudhindranath's preoccupation with the problem of life and death leads him invariably to the question of time. The eternal enquiry into the secrets of the beginning of the creation and its possible end and the life and death of an individual takes one to the premise of the speculative question of time, eternity etc. Sudhindranath saw time fleeting away every moment. It is not an unending continuous process but is composed of single moments, complete in themselves.

"Handful of ultimate moments
Slips out of time's hold in succession
And vanishes in the resounding hell of forgetfulness"

(Punar Janma; Orchestra).

He finds time indifferent to the good or bad of this world. Without caring for anything it goes on its own way, never to be stopped by any thing:

"It is no use to beg for reprieve
From the utter destruction in your hands
There will be no response from you
Only on the silence of the void
Moves your Christ with a Jarring sound
With an indifferent loud laughter it moves on
Trailing clouds of dust
To the horizon where every thing ends".

(Kal; Krandasi).

Even the great force of love can not stop or retard its speed.
"When you said 'don't be afraid' I thought the force of time will change its course
In embarrassment and the net of death cast around me will be lifted,
Allowing me to be free from the curse of egoism."

(Dusamaya; Uttar falguni).

Time is not only indifferent but it is cruel and hostile to the creation. Sudhindranath only saw the destructive side of time and not the creative. He had apparently no faith in the dual role of time - one role complementing the other. He saw these two forces fighting each other for ultimate victory:

So he writes:

"Now I understand -
No cruel man is my enemy, no scheming God
Not failure, not even the inevitable pain
My enemy is indifferent time -
Eternal time
Unlimited and fierce".

(Vagya Ganana; Krandasi)

He considered time unending in a sense because it moves in a cycle. It arrives at the same spot from where it starts. In the same way one returns to the same place from where he starts.

In a letter to Rabindranath, Sudhindranath writes:

"Like the thing circling in the four dimensional space, thought also travels in a cycle i.e. whatever movement it may make in this way or
that, it will have to come back to the starting point ultimately."\(^{39}\)

Here, the fourth dimension is supposed to be time and as time moves in a cycle the thought also has to follow the pattern.

That reminds us of Eliot:

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time".

*(Little Gidding).*

That time moves in a cycle he confirms on more than one occasion:

"But time moves in a cycle"

*(Tirtha Parikrama : Dasami)*

Or

"At least there is no doubt that this life
Which is a cycle of fire
Brings back the eternal 'I' in our view.
Clusters of human bubbles, momentary in the stream of life
Gathers in affection here and there, on the sand banks"

*(pratikshya : Dasami)*

In the eternal stream of time existence of an individual is only momentary.

This reminds us again of Eliot, who saw the presence of two different times in the river and the sea:

"The river is within us, the sea is all about us,

. . . . . . . . . . . . .

It tosses up our losses, the torn sieve

\(^{39}\) Sudhindranath's letters to Rabindranath; Desh Lit. Issue, 1379, B.S.
The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar
And gear of foreign dead man

(Dry Salvages)

Because time moves in a cycle, in case of Eliot in almost a spiral like way, there is little difference between the past, present and future. Like Eliot he considers that time past and time future are telescoped into the time present and the time present is there in the time past and future:

"Expanded in the unlimited void
The unattached is now unlimited
And the present is lost in the past and future"

(Pratiksha; Dasami).

And we see in Eliot:

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past"

These lines from the Burnt Norton were quoted in the beginning of this chapter to show Sudhindranath's interest in time. Now we see that he comes to the same conclusion at what Eliot arrived in the 'Dry Salvages':

"And the way up is the way down
the way forward is the way back"

(Dry Salvages)

And Sudhindranath writes:
"In this particular way -
Attraction and repulsion are the same
Nearness and distance are meaningless
No difference is there between
Heaven and hell"

(Pramabarta, Kavya Sangraha).

Also we remember the still point where:

"At the still point of the turning world
Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point
there the dance
is
But neither arrest nor movement
And not call it fixity
Where past and future are gathered
Neither movement
from nor towards
Neither ascent nor decline"

(Burnt Norton).

This concept of time, that it is a continuous process, though composed of moments only, helps him to see that there can be in fact, no beginning or end of a thing. As nothing can be created, nothing can be destroyed either.

In his otherwise pessimistic and nihilist view of life we now see a glimpse of the light of hope. Though he was always convinced about the
inevitable destruction of the individual soul; he could not be reconciled with the idea that there would be nothing left of the individual after his death. In fact, he was an individualist, and the fall of the individual during the twentieth century was one of the causes of his pessimism and despondency. There was also the realisation that though time was unlimited itself, for individual it was extremely limited. So he wrote:

"Remember then, he knew that there was no boat to cross.
The boat of death crashes on the shore of the desolate island.
In the reincarnation of life he searched for immortality, therefore;
He could not place his trust in an unsupported perishable soul."

(Bilaya, Uttar Falguni).

The pattern of time now gives him some sort of assurance that there cannot be total annihilation of life, because:

"Time is a destroyer no doubt
Yet it believes in its own nature
In its cave drawings, the earthen lamps with flames
Burning steadily remain so for ever."

(Sarbari Uttar Falguni)

There flickers a ray of light when he writes:

"Though man is mortal, his works exists after his death"
From one birth to another it is preserved
Like an ancient relic
(Sristi Rahasya : Krandaai)
Or
"Yet I know Omar's philosophy is useless
Though man's life is short his work lives
for ever".
(Senkram, Sangbarta).

This is the only hope he could derive from the rude reality of life. The understanding of the double role of time could not help him to come out of his despondency. Time could not take him to the place where, like Eliot, he could see that time itself was redeemed. He could not also arrive at a religious conviction where there was a guarantee of a blissful eternity. Here, he differed from Eliot in as much as the Buddha differed from Christ. Moreover, he had no faith in Nirvana and there was nothing to save him from the iron grip of the eternal human tragedy.

So he writes:

"The sky is split by lightning
Water spout travels broken
The doves shake their wings in the morning,
Violet colour bloody sun is a hideous symbol
of lost mystery;
Hot sea water boils the whales
The 'Sesh Nag' is now old and pray of insects...
I saw all these and never thought these were illusions
Or never denied what I saw" (Yajati, Sangbarta).
He thought that the individual is responsible for his existence and in no way he can deny the realities of life or can delegate his responsibility to any one, not even to God and be free and relieved. So, towards the end of his poetic career he writes:

"May be there is no creator; the creation itself
Is an orphan from the beginning
The silent span of time finds its expression—
In the dwindling discipline of the universe."

(Biralavda; Sangbarta).

Where the creation itself is an orphan, the lot of man can not be better. He is not only an orphan but is disowned by the society. He is to be alone in his life, as he is to be alone in death. Thus, the poet is still a non-conformist, so far as any belief is concerned and he remains so till his life is cut short by the providence, leaving a reader speculating where he could have ended as a poet if he was allowed a longer life.