PGEG S4 04 (B)

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Literature From North-East India (In English and Translation)

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

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SEMESTER 4
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 4: (OPTION B) LITERATURE FROM NORTH EAST INDIA (IN ENGLISH AND TRANSLATION)
BLOCK 1: POETRY

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Literature from North East India (In English and Translation) is a Course, which is offered as an optional Course for MA English programme. In this Course, some pieces are originally written in English and some are translated into English. Translation works in Indian literature is a domain that has been mostly associated with the interpretation of English works into other regional and vernacular languages or vice versa. However, the multiplicity of languages and cultures in India often poses an incredibly difficult challenge to the readers and critics of Indian Writing in English. In the context of the regional literatures from the North East of India, particularly those often projected as 'marginalised' or 'removed' from the mainstream, the experiment being undertaken by the indigenous writers on the 'formal' aspects of literature has provided a re-newed scope to review Literary Studies itself. Seen against such a consideration, when we look at the trends of writing in North East India, it becomes obvious that although the regional literatures of India involve certain linguistic and political issues, they have also created new pathways for cultural communications in a globally competitive world. This realisation further reflects, to a great extent, on a global academic pre-occupation with notions like–'space', 'identity', 'territory' and 'subject position' among the writers from all over the world.

We shall, at the same time, note that there is no single definition of **North East Indian Literature** as the diversity of this region defies any easy definition of this category of literature. Broadly, this phrase refers mostly to English writing but may also include the various language literatures and other writings in the indigenous languages of the different tribal people living in this region. Hence, some writers as well as critics tend to express their discomfit with the term North-East India and North Eastern writers, mainly because they think that the term is colonial and hence, is an artificial construct. There is nothing called a "north-easterner" and the concept is purely geographical. Moreover, it tends to homogenise an extremely heterogeneous cluster of people with individual history and heritage.

Despite all such intrinsic problems, we have undertaken this ambitious attempt to introduce ourselves to the works of some of the important writers from North east India. The purpose has also been to help them have some taste of our own writers along with the literary doyens of World Literature. For example, learners in this course will get an opportunity to read about Navakanta Barua, Nilamoni Phukan, Desmond Kharmawphland, Mamang Dai, Robin S. Ngangom for poetry, Hiren Gohain, Easterine Iralu and Chandrakanta Murasingh for prose writing, Saurav Kumar Chaliha, Temsula Ao, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Indira Goswami and Bina Barua for fiction, and Arn Sarma and Ratan Thiyam for drama.

But, these SLMs should not be considered complete or self sufficient as North East Indian Writing is still an evolving field. Moreover, due to lack of secondary resources, adequate elaborations could not be incorporated into some of the units. Hence, serious attempts will be made to update the contents of the units in subsequent editions of the SLM. Learners are advised to read the books suggested in the Further Reading List at the end of each unit.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with Poetry; **Block 2** shall deal with Fiction; and **Block 3** shall deal with Prose and Drama.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

Block 1 of the Course entitled Literature from North East India (In English and Translation) deals with total five units on poetry by five North East Indian poets. From the units, we shall get to learn how these poets have rendered significant contribution to poetry with their unique themes and style.

Unit 1: This is the first unit of the course. This unit shall deal with the late Assamese poet Navakanta Barua and his poems "Bats" and "Silt" which are the translated versions of his poems "Baduli" and "Polosh" in original Assamese. The poem "Bats" brings to reader's mind the modern spirit perceived through the image of 'Bats', while "Silt" reflects his modern spirit.

Unit 2: This unit shall provide us with a scope of exploring an interesting poem in translation i.e., from Assamese to English language, by the renown and award-winning Assamese poet Nilamoni Phukan. Through his poetical expressions, we shall learn, Phukan brings alive old memories and new reflections, capturing a range of human emotions and experiences.

Unit 3: This unit deals with the Arunachali poet Mamang Dai and two of her well known poems "An Obscure Place" & "Voice of the Mountain". In a poem like "An Obscure Place", the poet reflects her urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her native Arunachal Pradesh, while the poem "The Voice of the Mountain" is a celebration of the mountains, the very spirit of the poet's existence.

Unit 4: This unit deals with the Manipuri poet Robin S. Ngangom and two of his famous poems namely "Poetry" & "Everywhere I go". The poem "Poetry" shows Ngangom as a sensible poet who is working hard to define the very spirit of poetry. While, the other poem "Everywhere I go" talks about going back to one's root as a poet is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes.

Unit 5: This unit shall help us to discuss Desmond Kharmawphland's poems "Letter from Pahambir" & "The Conquest". Desmond is an important contemporary poet and folklorist from Meghalaya. A poem like "The Conquest" is based on his introspective eye to his own identity, while the other poem "Letter from Pahambir" is about a lost culture with the invasion of the British to his land.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: NAVAKANTA BARUA: "BATS" AND "SILT"

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Navakanta Barua: The Poet

1.4 The Poems: "Bats" and "Silt"

- 1.4.1 Texts of the Poems
- 1.4.2 Reading the Poems
- 1.4.3 Major Themes
- 1.4.4 Barua's Poetic Style

1.5 Critical Reception of Barua

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss briefly the life and works of Navakanta Barua one of the most important poets from Assam
- explain how Barua develops his subject and relate it to his own experiences of life and people
- examine and the ways in which he uses language to convey his ideas
- make yourself familiar with the themes that Barua takes up
- appreciate the prescribed poems in totality.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course on North East Literature in English and Translation. In this unit, we shall discuss the prominent Assamese poet and novelist Navakanta Barua (December 29, 1926–July 14, 2002), with reference to two of his poems 'Bats' and 'Silt'. Popularly known among

the reading public as 'Ekhud Kokaideu', he wrote many poems under the pseudonym Sima Dutta in his early life. His contribution to Assamese literature includes 11 collections of poetry, 5 novels, essays, short stories for children and several lyrics. Some of his works have been translated to different Indian languages including English. The poems "Bats" and "Silt" are the translated versions of his poems "Baduli" and "Polosh" originally written in Assamese. The poem "Bats" brings to the reader's mind the modern spirit perceived through the image of 'Bats'. 'Bat' is used in the poem as a metaphor of modern life. On the other hand, the poem "Silt" too reflects his modern spirit. Yet there can be found an underlying grief, which he is bound to feel deeply. Thus, the two poems will help us to understand some of the important concerns of Navakanta Barua as a poet.

1.3 NAVAKANTA BARUA: THE POET

Navakanta Barua was born in Puranigudam, Nagaon, Assam in 1926. He went to Santiniketan and Aligarh Muslim University and he had also visited Yugoslavia, Poland, Italy, U.S.S.R and Greece under cultural exchange programmes. Two of his award-winning books have been translated into several Indian languages. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975 and the Padmabhushan in 1976. He is considered one of the pioneers of modern Assamese poetry. He retired as vice principal of Cotton College Guwahati, Assam.

The total thirty-eight books that he wrote include poetry, fiction, critical works and books for children. Starting with a slender volume of verse, Barua has published, besides poetry, five novels and novelettes, verses for children, a treatise on Indian culture, a volume of belles-letters, a travelogue and many translations from old and modern classics. His honours include the Kabir Samman, Soviet land Nehru Award amongst others. He also translated Dante, Goethe, Pushkin, Whitman, Vasko Popa and Kabir, besides others. He died in 2002.

In the introduction to *One Hundred Years of Assamese Poetry*, Prof. Hirendra Nath Dutta said, "Among the forerunners of modern Assamese poetry, the name of Navakanta Barua stands at the top. Navakanta Barua's

first collection of poems *Hey Aranya, Hey Mohanagar* (Oh Forests Oh Cities) is a poetic commentary on the intricate ways of modern urban culture. His poetic quest starts from this book published in 1951 and the same quest went on moving forward till his death in 2002. Over this long span, one can notice important stages of development of this major poet. An agile sense of history tends to influence his observations of the contemporary reality. Myth, folktales and classical Indian literature written in both Sanskrit and Pali have converged in his rich poetic vision. His later poems show the poet's keen contemplative power. Navakanta Barua is a brilliant poetic craftsman and his poetry fascinates the readers by its wonderful evocative power."

It is true that Navakanta Barua is considered to be the pioneer in connection of modern Assamese poetry. Birinchi Kumar Barua, in 'History of Assamese Literature' is of the view, "Navakanta's three published books of verse are *Hey Aranya, Hey Mahanagar* (O Forest, O Metropolis), *Eti Duti Egharati Tara* (Counting up eleven stars) and Yati. Navakanta Barua was influenced more deeply by T.S. Eliot than by others. Like Eliot, he also believes that poetry requires a language distinct from that of prose, a language rich in suggestions both to the senses and to intellect. Naturally, his poetry tends to become difficult. In this respect, the Assamese poet also holds that poets in our complex civilisation must be difficult. He seems to agree with what T. S. Eliot had stated: "Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing on a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive and more allusive, in order to force language into his thought." Navakanta Barua's stay in Calcutta and at Santiniketan in connection with his higher education brought him also under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore, Jivanananda Das, Amiya Chakravarty and some other modern Bengali poets. The experiences with such stalwarts of Indian literatures had a lasting effect in his poetic mind.

Navakanta Barua is one of the most noteworthy modern poets in Assamese literature. His main Assamese poetry collections are *Hey Aranya, Hey Mahanagar* (O Forest, O Metropolis, 1951), *Eti Duti Egharati Tara*

(Counting up Eleven Stars, 1957) and *Yati and Keitaman Sketch* (1960), *Samrat* (1962), *Ravan* (1963), *Mur Aru Pritivir* (1973), *Ratnakar* (1986), *Ekhon Swasha Mukhare* (1990), *Surjya Mukhir Angikar* (1990), *Navakanta Baruar Kabitavali* (1994), *Rati Jilmil Tara Jilmil* (1999) and *Dalangar Tamighar* (2000).

His poems written with a modern perspective started appearing in prestigious Assamese journals like *Banhi, Jayanti, Ramdhenu, Manideep, Gariashi* and so on, when he was a student. He began writing poetry under the pen name Seema Dutta and subsequently began writing in his own name.

His *Mur Aru Pritivir* (1973) was awarded 'Assam Publication Board Award' in 1974 and this collection contains 113 poems. Almost all poems of this volume focus on the gradual decline of some of the finest feelings of mankind for the sake of rapid changing society. But he was conferred **Sahitya Akademy Award** not for **his poetry, but for his novel *Kokadeutar Haar*** in 1975 and that was followed by **Assam Valley Award** in 1993.

Navakanta Barua's poems, is a blend of the influence of Indian philosophy and the poems of Rabindra Nath Tagore. They reflect the modern men's sense of despair and monotony and draw a parallel with the past time. A few of his poems describe his inability to live at ease with the growing modern life. But, his love for Rabindra Nath Tagore's poems, seen in the poems like, "The Mask behind the face, "—

"I had a past beyond my birth
In the leaves of history, the chanting of Psalms
Or in the cooing of birds
In a slogan by the road
Or in Rabindranath's songs…"

Describing the nature of Navakanta Barua's poems, Prof. Bhaben Barua, the eminent critic and Sahitya Akademi award winner, said, "The three eminent Assamese poets of the early 1940s are Amulaya Barua, Ajit Barua and Navakanta Barua. His poetry profusely displays a sense of sadness and a sense of pervasive death."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the important works of Navakanta Barua.

Q 2: What is common between Navakanta Barua and the English poet T. S. Eliot?

1.4 THE POEMS: "BATS" AND "SILT"

1.4.1 Texts of the Poems [translated by D. N. Bezbaruah]

"Bats"

The inert bats were suspended
Behind the string of grocery shops,
Innocuously blending
With the flaming abundance of yellow cassia—
A multitude of embryonic infants
In the cavernous innards of the sky.
They saw:
The earth strung above the sky,
And the trees that rest on the firmament
Thrusting their roots
Into the hoary darkness of the earth.
Women, their mats pulled over their resilient forms,
Chasing the weary hours of nocturnal ennui,
With a brief midday siesta.
And they saw us boys
Hanging upside down from our kite-strings
Like dubious notes of interrogation…
Then evening.
With the bats' hesitant flight
The perverse trees stand again
On the earth as is their wont;
Women lean on crimsoned portals

Longing anew for the drowsy hour.
And we boys
Inch back our fragile kites
With our reels timidly turning.
Concentration, like a winged missile
Hits them between the eyes:
The sky?
Whence did it rise above our heads?
They kept singing:
Hang on! Cling on!
Hold fast with both feet
To the liquid death that speeds
Through tense electric wires.
And then?
Then the sky will again lie
Recumbent.
The hills will pin it down
Astride in an inverted coital variant;
And under the monstrous mammaries
Of an insatiable with,
Love will die a shattering death.

"Silt"

The fire of the palaash has gone out now.
In the saal and sotiyaan woods
Spring-storms of days past—
Days of the Burmese invasion.
How many dreams fell who keeps count?
On the banks of the Kolong, Kopili, Diju
Grandfather's bones.
The wild lily sprouts through
Grandfather's heart.
What did the clouds say,

Give, give more, give your all,
Plant trees by the road, open a high school,
The dear traveler is always on the road,
Heave a sigh
Let the water speeding through roofs
Flood out the cells of dead spiders
Let the silt fertilise the banks of the Kolong.
In the furrows of our grandson's new farmstead
We shall wake.
In our fossils they will read
Amusing tales
Of those who remember past births.
In the lane where dreams are blind
We stay there. In the gutters
Their future.

1.4.2 Reading the Poems

The poem "Bats" brings to reader's mind the modern spirit perceived through the image of 'Bats'. The Bats, as metaphor is the projection of modern life. The poet brings forth several fragmentary scenes form modern life, which have no similarity at all. The complex modern life is incoherent, where one always has to face a cluster of diverse experiences. In addition, their cumulative effect is to stress the inadequacy and purposelessness of many people's lives in the 20th century. The poetic images like 'the hoary darkness of the earth', 'the evening/with the bats' hesitant flight' are the reflexion of bored aimlessness of the people in the society they live in.

The image of the 'sky' is dominant in Navakanta Barua's poems. In this poem also, we discover how the image of the 'sky' is used throughout the poem like 'In the cavernous innards of the sky', 'they saw/the earth strung above the sky', 'The sky? Whence did it rise above our heads?', then 'the sky will again lie /recumbent' and so on.

It is a fact that Navakanta Barua received his influence from the English poet T. S. Eliot about which he himself admits: "I had mostly limited myself to surface borrowings and to bodily lifting some of the imagery, particularly of the early Eliot." Like Eliot, Barua's language is rich in suggestions to both the senses and the intellect, and he also believes that poetry requires language rich in suggestions. Eliot's poetry shows the spiritual aspect of death, while Barua's 'death' is not always spiritual, when he says, "Let my death die, killed by your kisses."

This is not a land for flourishing love and so he is made to speak about the death of love that 'love will die a shattering death'. This image of death of love is really significant and suggestive of modern life's monotony. Commenting on his concept of death, Bhaben Barua says, "this pervasive nature of death, explicit in most of Navakanta Barua's poems gave a new and unique aspect in modern Assamese poetry. This sense of pervasive and all encompassing death, that began in his early poetry continued till the time of *Hey Aranya, Hey Mahanagar*, has been the prevailing central theme of the poem.

"Silt" is yet another most popular poem of Navakanta Barua. His poems are modern in spirit and this particular poem reflects the same attitude. The title 'silt' refers to fine sand or clay carried by running water and deposited as sediment. The river Kolong is very dear to poet's heart as he spent his childhood on the banks of that river. The image "Let the silt fertilise the banks of the Kolong" evokes in him a sense of hope after a long waiting full of despair.

The poem, though shows a very optimistic picture, yet there is an underlying grief, which he is bound to feel deeply. And, that makes him to say,

"The fire of the Palash is gone out now.
In the Sal and Satiyan woods
Spring-storms of days past—
Days of the Burmese invasion."

The Nature is at stake and all past glory has declined, and the poet urges the modern man to plant trees or to create new hopes for the future—

"the dear traveller is always on the road,
Heave a sigh."

But, not all is lost. As the shells of dead spiders will get washed away, there is every possibility to create hope, as the silt will definitely fertilise the banks of the Kolong. The poet hopes that the glorious past will definitely get an opportunity to emerge and grow into a beautiful world in near future.

Silt is a symbol of hope and describing this beautiful poem of Navakanta Barua, Nalinidhar Bhattacharya, one of the eminent Assamese poet critics opines, "Although the poem appears to be a positive one, yet the underlying sadness for losing the glorious past is more prominent in this poem."

The image "In the lane where dreams are blind", the poet tries to show us the picture of modern life. And for Bhaben Barua, "the modern life is like a blind alley, where people cannot move further."

It is the past, that makes its way to future on the strength of presence, so the poet is hopeful for a flourishing future –

"In the furrows of our grandson's new farmstead
We shall wake.
In our fossils they will read
Amusing tales
Of those who remember past births."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the poem "Bats" all about?

Q 4: What, according to you, is the theme of the poem "Silt"?

Q 5: What does 'Bats' signify in Navakanta Barua's poem by the same name?

1.4.3 Major Themes

Navakanta Barua's poetry can be divided into three groups, the first being his romantic poems, written during 1940 and 1950s, the second group of poems spring from his sensitive heart and, the third group of poems include his long poems like 'Ravana', 'Samrat' and 'Ratnakar', written in the period of 1962-73. The later poems are rhetorical and they reflect his modern perspective more intensely.

Navakanta Barua's poems are **modern** in spirit as well as in style. Regarding the themes of Navakanta Barua's poetry, Birinchi Kumar Barua said, "One can catch, here and there, in Navakanta's poems a music akin to that of Tagore. He is an experimenter in verse-form with a delicate sense of rhythm and symphony of words. He has shown admirable skill in handling metres, rhymed or free or mixed. Like Eliot, he is aware of the monotony and dichotomy of the modern age and the snobbery of the middle class. However, he is never caustic. Acceptance of life is the keynote of his poetry. The poet's feelings and realisations have beautified and ennobled the earth, which is no metaphor to him but a warm reality. Even after departure, the poet will ever seek to return to the earth (The poetry of Return). His love and desire for a fuller and ampler life under the broad blue sky is beautifully expressed in his prayer to the night sky (To the night sky: Prayer through the window)

"Helpless I am, even if mine
Is only the luxury of supplication;
Hear my prayer, O sky,
Tell me what issue falls like an arrow
From the moon's amber-creascent?
Give us a little more room, O sky,
For our sky is too, too narrow."

Navakanta Barua's genius linked the old and the new in Assamese poetry. Two distinctively diverse strains originated from his poetry: **the aggressively celebratory and experimental**, and **the romantic and purely lyrical**. He initiated that exploration of

folkways, which helped evolve the idiom of modern Assamese poetry. The thirst towards intellectual modernism had its beginnings in him and still continues its onward movement.

Navakanta Barua's *Hey Aranya, Hey Mahanagar* (O Forest, O Metropolis) depicts the lifelessness and loneliness of modern urbanity, which is described by Eliot as 'death-in-life." The ugliness associated with modern urbanity is vividly portrayed in his poems. At the same time, **the loneliness and identity crisis of a modern man** is beautifully expressed in his poems. He is very disturbed, when he says, in his poem, "The mask behind the face", "Will you, my brothers/ build a mask of that disturbed emptiness?"

A blend of T. S. Eliot, Rabindra Nath Tagore, a consistent sense of death and Indian Philosophy, Navakanta Barua's poetry gives us a glimpse of **Assamese folk tales** too, particularly the 'Deh-bichar songs', used in modern perspective. In *Folk Literature: An Introductory Survey* (page 8), Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami stated: "Folk literature, which is but folklore narrowed down, is indeed, a means of understanding the folk around us. To illustrate again, it is quite possible than an examination of the Deh-bichar songs would explain more the general apathy of the inhabitants of the country side…The Deh-bichar songs stressed the futility of the deha or body and suggested a course of mystical action, which ended in a negative creed. Even the very tunes to which Deh-bichar songs are sung, suggest a feeling of languor and self-hypnotism." According to Dr Karabi Deka Hazarika, one of the foremost poets and critic, "As a very sensitive poet and a scholar, Navakanta Barua's poetry not only reflects the influence T. S. Eliot, Whitman or Khalil Gibran, but also deeply reflects Assamese culture and folk literature."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the distinct characteristics of Barua's poetry?

Q 7: Which are the three groups of Navakanta Barua's poetry?

1.4.4 Barua's Poetic style

Talking about the poetic style of Navakanta Barua's poetry, Birinchi Kumar Barua said, "Modern poetic diction is marked by a great economy of words. In common with other modern poets, Navakanta also has used a diction where there are semantic disturbances, words of different levels, and the juxtaposition of difficult Sanskrit and English vocabulary, and dialect words, producing contrast images. Phrases, quotations, pictures and symbols of the European and Indian literatures are freely employed by him to convey a complex sensibility. His symbols are ambiguous, as they do not definitely convey one idea, but a spectrum of ideas. Their beauty and circumambience vary in proportion to the cultural and emotional range of the reader." According to Karabi Deka Hazarika, Barua's poetic language is rhetorical with his thought-provoking expressions, sometimes very serious. His treatment of sweet love is explicit in the images of a few of his poems. His poems are the artefacts of heart as well as intellect that make his poems unique and pleasing for the readers.

1.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BARUA

The poetry of Navakanta Barua has dominated the post-Independence poetic scene of Assam with his distinctive style. In her 'Introduction' to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* Dr. Tilottoma Misra stated: "Navakanta Barua's poems bear the marks of a variety of influences from Anglo-American and European modernist poetry, combining these with elements from the classical Indian tradition. Barua delves deep into the world of a modern man, trying to discover logical connections between the shattered images of a modern post war situation and the inner world of a modern man, trying to discover logical connections between the inner and the outer world. Barua's language has great evocative power and his poems as well as novels reflect a deep sense of history. Some of the most memorable images in his poetry spring from this historical sense."

Talking about the style of Navakanta Barua's poetry, Birinchi Kumar Barua said, "One can catch, here and there, in Navakanta Barua's poems, a music akin to that of Tagore. He is an experimenter in verse form with a delicate sense of rhythm and symphony of words. He has shown admirable skill in handling meters. Like Eliot, Navakanta Barua is aware of the monotony and dichotomy of the modern age and the snobbery of the middle class. But, he is never caustic. Acceptance of life is the keynote of his poetry. The poet's feelings and realisation have beautified and ennobled the earth, which is no metaphor to him but a warm reality. Even after departure, the poet will ever seek to return to the earth, as expressed in the poem, 'The Poetry of return'. His love and desire for a fuller and ampler life under the broad blue sky is beautifully expressed in his prayer to the night sky."

It is a fact that Navakanta Barua's poems reflect more of Matthew Arnold than T.S. Eliot, as in one of his interview to Homen Borgohain in *Nilachal*, in 1969; Barua admits, "I love the poetry of Matthew Arnold, especially his sense of sadness and the poetry of Khalil Gibran. But it is beyond my ability to perceive the deep meaning portrayed in *Four Quartets* of T. S. Eliot." His poems like "Cloistered'' honestly reflects this sense of sadness—

"The fossil heaved its stony sigh
Moaning:
God's failures have caused,
All his tears to helpless man."

But the poet in him is not always bereft of hope and that is why he wrote in his poem,

"Bringing up the rear"—

"The man bringing up the rear
Didn't know he was at the head
Of a fresh procession
In the last word of my poems
Glimmers a new beginning."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Mention some of the distinctive features of Navakanta Barua as a modern Assamese poet.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the unit, you have found that Navakanta Barua was a prominent Assamese poet and novelist. Popularly known among the reading public as Ekhud Kokaideu, he wrote many poems under the pseudonym Sima Dutta in his early life. His contribution to Assamese literature includes 11 collections of poetry, 5 novels, essays, short stories for children and several lyrics. Some of his works have been translated to different Indian languages including English. "Bats" and "Silt" are two important poems of Barua. The poem "Bats" brings to reader's mind the modern spirit perceived through the image of 'Bats'. On the other hand, the poem "Silt" too reflects his modern spirit. Yet there can be found an underlying grief, which he is bound to feel deeply.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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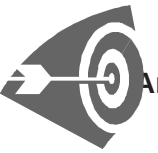
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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Barua is known for around thirty eight books… … they include poetry, fiction, critical works and books for children…. …he wrote five novels and novelettes, verses for children, a treatise on Indian culture, a volume of belles-letters, a travelogue and many translations from old and modern classics… …he also translated Dante, Goethe, Pushkin, Whitman, Vasko Popa and Kabir, besides others.

Ans to Q 2: Like Eliot, Barua also believed that poetry requires a language distinct from that of prose, a language rich in suggestions both to the senses and to intellect… …like Eliot, his poetry too tends to become difficult.



Ans to Q 3: "Bats" is a metaphor that projects modern life… …the poet brings forth several fragmentary scenes form modern life… …images like 'the hoary darkness of the earth', 'the evening/with the bats' hesitant flight' are the reflexion of bored aimlessness of the people in the society they live in.

Ans to Q 4: "silt" refers to fine sand or clay carried by running water and deposited as sediment… …the river Kolong is very dear to poet's heart as he spent his childhood on the banks of that river… …the image "Let the silt fertilise the banks of the Kolong" evokes in him a sense of hope after a long waiting full of despair.

Ans to Q 5: 'Bats' is as metaphor of modern life… …the complex modern life is incoherent, where one always has to face a cluster of diverse experiences… …also refers to the stress, inadequacy and purposelessness of people's lives in the 20th century.

Ans to Q 6: The aggressively celebratory and experimental, and the romantic and purely lyrical… …he initiated that exploration of folk-ways helped

evolve the idiom of modern Assamese poetry… …the thirst towards intellectual modernism had its beginnings in him and still continues its onward movement.

Ans to Q 7: The first group is the romantic poems written during 1940s and 1950s… …the second is those poems springing from his sensitive heart… …and, the third is his long poems like 'Ravana', 'Samrat', and 'Ratnakar', written in the period of 1962-73… …the later poems are rhetorical and they reflect his modern perspective more intensely.

Ans to Q 8: According to Tilottoma Misra, Navakanta Barua's poems bear the marks of a variety of influences from Anglo-American and European modernist poetry, combining these with elements from the classical Indian tradition… …Birinchi Kumar Barua stated that in Navakanta Barua's poems, there is a music akin to that of Tagore… …like Eliot, Navakanta Barua is aware of the monotony and dichotomy of the modern age and the snobbery of the middle class.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In what ways, do the poems "Bats" and "Silt" bring to the reader's mind the modern spirit? Discuss.

Q 2: Navakanta Barua's poetry profusely displays a sense of sadness and a sense of pervasive death. Discuss.

Q 3: Do you think that Navakanta Barua was influenced by the English poet T. S. Eliot? Illustrate your answer with reference to the texts prescribed.

Q 4: In what ways, according to you, have the elements of nature been used by Navakanta Barua in his poetry?

Q 5: In what ways, does Navakanta Barua, dominate the Post-Independence poetic scene of Assam with his distinctive style?

Q 6: Comment on Navakanta Barua's poetic style as reflected in the poems 'Bats' and 'Silt'.

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UNIT 2: NILAMONI PHUKAN: "THE DANCING EARTH"

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Nilamoni Phukan: The Poet

2.4 Reading the Poem

- 2.4.1 Major Themes
- 2.4.2 Phukan's Poetic Style

2.5 Critical Reception of Phukan

2.6 Let us Sum up

2.7 Further Reading

2.8 Answers to Check Our Progress (Hints Only)

2.9 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and literary contributions of the poet Nilamoni Phukan
- explain the text of the poem "The Dancing Earth"
- highlight some of the major themes that emerge from the text of the poem
- discuss the style and language employed by the poet
- gain an idea on the critical reception of the poet's work

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have gone through the introductory unit of the Block. The present unit provides us with a scope of exploring an interesting poem in translation i.e., from Assamese to English language, by the renown and award-winning Assamese poet Nilamoni Phukan. During the time, when poets like Ajit Barua had first begun a modern trend of Assamese poetry, Phukan had already received wide critical acclaim as a

poet and writer. When one explores the anthologies of his poetry, the economy of his words, the depth of his poetical expression and the combination of his personal symbolism is quite hard to miss. Through his poetical expressions, Phukan brings alive old memories and new reflections, capturing a range of human emotions and experiences. It may interest the learner to know that the poet first began jotting down his poetical thoughts as early as the 1950s and the volumes of his poetry is replete with some of his own personal reflections, philosophical speculations and the tussles of his sharp intellect. Today, Nilamoni Phukan is considered one of the leading Assamese poets who like the noted Assamese poets and writers namely, Navakanta Barua, Hiren Bhattacharjya, Shimanta Bhattacharya, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi etc. have enriched the treasures of Assamese literature and particularly Assamese poetry. Let us in this unit, then familiarise ourselves with the life and works of the poet which shall further help in exploring the prescribed poem in details.

2.3 NILAMONI PHUKAN: THE POET

Nilamoni Phukan was born in a small village named Sakiyal in Dergaon district of Assam in the year 1992.His first formal education began at his own native place in Dergaon and he completed his graduation from Cotton College in 1957 with History as his specialised subject following which he began working as a teacher. After completing his post-graduation from Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati in the year 1964, he had joined his *alma mater* and served for a long period, eventually retiring from service in the year 1992. Phukan now lives at his Maligaon residence in Guwahati, post retirement.

The poet has several literary works to his credit, namely-*Surjya Henu Naami Ahe Ei Nadiedi* (1963), *Nirjanatar Xobdho* (1965), *Aaru Kinu Xobdho* (1968), *Phuli Thoka Xurjyamukhi Phooltur Faale* (1972), *Kaait Gulaap Aru Kaait* (1975), *Kobita* (1981), *Nrityarota Prithibi* (1985), and *Olop Agote Aami Ki Kotha Paatiasilu* (2003). His first anthology of poetry was titled *Xurjya Henu Nammi Aahe Ei Nadiedi*(1963). Some of his widely-read anthologies of poetry are namely:*Jaapani Kobita* (1971), *Garcia Lorcar Kobita* (1981),

Lokakalpa Drishti (1987), *Rup Barna* Baak (1988), *Xilpakala Darshan* (1998), *Aranyar Gaan* (1992) and *China Kobita* (1996). His poems have also been included in selected anthologies of poetry titled *Gulaapi Jaamur Logno* compiled by Bhaben Barua, *Xagortolir Xonkho* edited by Hiren Gohain and also (in translation) in the anthology of poetry from the Northeast edited by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Robin Ngagom. He had also received the Padma Shri in the year 1990 and the Sahitya Akademi Award, with the title of "Fellow 2002" the same year.

In his early works, one shall note a range of themes interwoven in his poetry such as his reflections on life and death, nature and culture, the self and society, love and sorrow, longing and loneliness- all touched upon with a sense of maturity, as well as, a certain sensitivity. In addition, his poems reflect a note of optimism together with some interesting glimpses of his eclectic experiences and his remarkable poetical sensibilities. The essence of his poetical writings exudes a humanitarian worldview in which he captures human experiences that hold a universal significance. His is the kind of poetry that captivates and springs from the depths of his soul and the gravity of his thoughts, inspiring not just his avid readers but also the younger generation of Assamese poets today. The learners will find that the poet provides any reader with much food for thought and captures the inner stirrings of the human heart and the unanswered mysteries that life holds out, for each one of us.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the leading poets and writers of Assamese literature.

Q 2: Which was the first anthology of poetry by Nilamoni Phukan?

Q 3: Mention the names of some of Phukan's anthologies of poetry which are widely-read.

Q 4: What were some of the major themes found in Phukan's early poetry?

2.4 READING THE POEM

In this subsection, we shall explore the text of the poem titled-"The Dancing Earth" which highlights some of the pressing concerns of the poet. After a thorough reading of the poem, the learner is also encouraged to add his or her own interpretation of the poem to the given explanation and further exercise his or her own critical or analytical skills. The explanation of the poem is provided in this subsection corresponding with the text of the poem which shall enable the learner to relate to the content of the text and also facilitate one's reading of the poem. The learner may note that the English translation of the poem was done by the eminent Assamese writer, critic and noted intellectual, Hiren Gohain. Let us then make an attempt to grasp the meaning and content of the poem.

The Dancing Earth

Two families we lived
Under leaking roofs
Of the same house
And years passed through them
With nights drenched in rain
And sometimes in dreams
A wagtail settled here a while
When you laughed I
Cried and you
Cried when I laughed
Exchanging each other
Changing
Nights and days and sleep and wakefulness
Childhood and youth
And age old parched with desire

The opening lines of the poem present a vivid imagery of two families huddled under a single, leaky thatched roof due to the heavy rains. The poet in retrospect takes us back to the past when these two families had lived together through hardships and moments of crisis. Their humble

homes in which they had spent years together were in dilapidated condition, yet these were all that they had to call their own and the unbreakable bond among each other. Through the years, they adjusted with their share of difficulties, never giving up on hope, dreaming of better days and happier lives for themselves in the future. Thus, the poet wonders at the yesteryears that pass by quickly almost as if it were in the blink of an eye.

In the next lines, we find the presence of either a friend or a family member who had a share in building similar dreams and also the presence of wagtail bird which unlike them was free to go away wherever it wished to, leaving behind everything. While they laughed and cried through those years and while the years rolled by with nights changing into day, days into weeks, weeks into years- those days also continued to haunt them and their memories. Thus, in a way they could never forget or completely leave behind their difficult past. They had faced far too many hardships of life early in their lives but it had also made them all the more resilient. The poet recalls and contrasts the ways in which some of the nights that they spent were calm and peaceful, while there were times when their nights were filled with sleeplessness and fear for their own lives.

When you laughed I
Cried and you
Cried when I laughed
Exchanging each other
Changing
Nights and days and sleep and wakefulness
Childhood and youth
And old age parched with desire
What dreams and nightmares
Dreams of nightmares
Dreams ever and after
What home and shelter here and abroad and dungeon
Spacious plains
Bamboo groves and wild woods
Past and present

The poet captures the swiftness with which time passes by, constantly bringing in new changes while they had grown up through those years, passing from childhood to youth and then to old age, still filled with desires of the heart, with hopes and expectations that never seemed to be satiated, the undying thirst for the longings of the heart. Here, one finds emotions and experiences that contrast with each other, with dreams and nightmares, hopes and fears all being muddled up at once, almost like a confusion of the senses. Even dreams seem to be captured by nightmares at times. Here, nightmares refer to bad dreams and the feeling that one receives is that of the poet chasing after his dreams or expressing his longing for the fulfilment of dreams and the desperation of realising the heart's desire. The poet at once recalls his home in his native place and in the next moment- his shelter abroad. Then again, he is suddenly reminded of the tall encircling bamboo groves and surrounding wild woods being immediately transported to his past and his childhood. Again, his thoughts bring him back to his immediate present. Doesn't that happen to all of us, almost all the time?

And the children only
Set fire to evening's fireflies
Brushing away tears
And only the blossoming flower
Search in its fragrance
For the soul's expanse
Where have I come where have you gone away
None knows
There are rumours of Arjun's return
Bringing what news of the dead child
Somewhere vin some gallery
Nandalal's Shiva
Consumes cosmic poison
We do not know
Nobody knows

Whose boats was wrecked off Kurua
By westerly winds
Neighing like wild horses
In stampede
And yet will you not plant
Plantain saplings
Again in your backyard

The striking image that the poet presents is that of little children with their inherent innocence that finds expression in their endearing ways of being. Little children have a way of finding little joys to cheer them up, wiping away their tears and bringing smiles on the faces of everyone- simply by enjoying the little things in life like the glowing fireflies in the dark. Therefore, these fireflies may also symbolise hope, joy and optimism against all odds. These are compared to the blossoming of flowers with lovely 'fragrances' that define its inner essence, much as the little children are defined by the expanse of their soul or the inner core of their innocent hearts. The poet then wonders the ways in which times have drastically changed, thinking about the changes in his own life and the life of his dear ones with whom he had grown up with. There is a sense of uncertainty all around him and the poet experiences a loss of words to describe his muddled up thoughts.

Thus, he brings in the image of Arjuna, who is one of the leading figures in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*and also the third brother of the Pandavas. The heroic figure here is presented as probably returning home with some uncertain news related to death, implying the uncertainty of life and the loss of a loved one. And then, again the poet presents the image of the Destroyer the third of Hindu Trinity, Lord Shiva consuming "cosmic poison" as you may probably know that the Lord Shiva is also known as "Neelkantha" (the Blue-throated) for He is believed to have taken in all the poison of the world so that all living beings could be spared from death and destruction, implying the ways in which our fate was saved by the powerful Lord. There is no certainty about our lives; we as mortals come and go from this world of *maya*, mostly unsung and almost always forgotten in the

course of time. Neither we, nor anyone else knows when will death come and take hold of us.

Thus, the poet writes that none can tell when and why the westerly winds may claim the lives of people travelling in a boat and drown it ruthlessly, just as no one can be too sure with any other situation of life. We are continuously faced with the unknown and perhaps are pre-destined to move towards unknown destinies, in mysterious ways. However, the poet questions on whether we will continue with our lives, with our hopes and dreams, wishes and longings, our promises and endeavours, despite unknowing how life can take strange ways and lead to unbelievable futures.

In the waning daylight
And scent of godhuli gopal in the air
Grandfather sat brooding
What he found and gave and to whom
Cold fire of muskets in the old stone bridge
A fistful of mud and water
From the river Niranjana
A splotch of blood on the turf
Copper silver gold diamond bell-metal bronze
Glass and nickel and lead
A rock-crab caught
In the river of his youth
The pearl of life in its eyes
Clashed out of the net
On the night without a dawn
The world burns in poisoned flames
And the thunder of prayers
Chanted from the four quarters

Again, the poet takes up back into time by remembering his old grandfather and the scent of the flowers known as *godhuli gopal* in the twilight hours that makes the poet associate with these special memories-lost in time. The poet remembers his grandfather 'brooding', rather than

simply reflecting- brooding perhaps owing to some sadness that he held at heart, weighing what his heart had achieved, what had he contributed to the lives of others and who were those people in his life. Yet again, we are immediately transported to another context of probably a 'revolution' or may be a 'war', with images muskets or guns, an old stone bridge, a handful of muddy water and blood stains on the fields. These are the fragmented images that are strewn like sad memories in the chapters of history and also symbolical in a sense.

The poet then compares the rock crab that he remembers his grandfather to have caught in the river of his youth, perhaps symbolically denoting the work and contributions that his grandfather had achieved in the days of his youth. Similarly, the rock crab is described to have lost its life being crashed out of the fishing-net perhaps, symbolically representing the long lost hopes and the lack of recognition of his grandfather's achievements in his lifetime. This perhaps explains the image of the dreadful night when he might have passed away, reduced to ashes by the flames of the fire and the chanting of fervent prayers that surrounded the fire. That fateful night is described as one long night that seemed to never end, "the night without a dawn" (225).

And we
What are we searching
Offering whom
What thrill what truth
What freedoms what magic stone
Open and veiled unfading
What sense and nonsense
From what treatise now
Blind the priest of blood sacrifices
And crows and dogs infest
The deserted camp of the Vaishnava preceptor
Many things have now increased decreased
Man's age man particular and universal
Man alienated and whole

Concrete and abstract
Brittle hard dialectical stationary
Violent cunning treacherous
Compassionate
Solitary and sad
Many things rise and fall
Accidents lethal weapons suicide depression
Booms abortion humanist
Cancer agitation Baba comrade
Uncertainty unrest
Plan to change life
Where is the end or where its beginning
Beginning of what where
Who will take the measure
Of what
Whom shall we ask what whom

Then the poet goes on to place the question on who are we all searching for or chasing after and what kind of thrill or truth are we presenting and to whom. Thereby, he questions the ultimate meaning of life bringing in the confusions that entail our entire life till the day we die. This is precisely the reason that he presents the chaotic state of our existence and also the meaninglessness of it all. Everything is in a continued state of flux and many aspects of human life has seen both an increase and a decrease for an instance in the human mortality rate. Then there is aspect of the individual and the universal figure of modern man who feels the contrasting forces of alienation, as well as, a certain commonality of these human experiences. These mixed experiences create loneliness together with a reclaiming sense of sadness that undoubtedly surrounds the existence of man here on earth.

Thus, the poet notes that many things rise and fall with the list that he draws are as follows- "Accidents lethal weapons suicide depression/ Books abortion humanist/ Cancer agitation Baba, comrade/ Uncertainty unrest/ Plan to change life" (226) all mentioned in the same breath without

any punctuation. This indicates the ways in which all of these aspects are chaotically mixed up together. Thereby, he makes these questions that he had paused all the more complex- denoting that there is no end, no beginning, no source of beginning or extent of its limits; these are confusions that entangle human lives and disturb the human mind without any limit. None can measure its complexity and there is no one whom we could turn to for answers, perhaps not even God.

Somewhere if I die waiting
In the darkness of some primeval cave
On a dying pyre
Somewhere if I lie
In the dissecting-ward of some hospital
On some loaded truck
Naked in some rice-field
Somewhere if I wait
On some blind crossroads
In the chorus of spring
At Chidambaram of Nataraj
Whom does one ask and what whom
Why does the rice-plant
Sprout in the dark
Why does rain fall why
Seeds grow in man's loins and
Milk in woman's breasts
wonder if
have ever seen all the earth and
All the sky

In the following lines, the poet imagines himself almost at the brink of death in some unknown corner, or being reduced to ashes on a dying pyre or even finding himself lost in the haunting memories or the darkest hours of his life also symbolically represented by the reigning darkness of a primitive cave. In representing many people like him in the world, he imagines

that his dead body being laid on the dissecting-table of a hospital room for medical purpose; or his corpse being loaded on a truck full of bodies as is seen in times of war; or even imagines himself naked in the paddy fields like the struggling peasants or stripped migrants from different lands. Again, he imagines himself waiting in the confusing crossroads or in the joys of spring waiting at Chidambaram of Nataraj.

The question that however remains is "whom does one ask and what whom" (227). This again sprouts another set of questions on the minute details that surround us, our lives such as- the question on why the rice plant on which we all thrive, the very source of our sustenance, why does it sprout into life in the dark; how and why does the rain fall bringing floods and havoc into our lives yet also bringing everything to life and cleansing the earth. The poet wonders at the boon of fertility and nourishment that both men and women carry in their matured beings and wonders again if he has ever taken in fully the sight of the bountiful earth and the limitless skies.

All the faces of men
Living and dead
Did I ever find one morning
Myself in awakening lacerated face
Have I ever known
An orange
A rosewood tree
Must I do
That which is unending
Truth or love or
Reality
Pomegranate flowers burning in tears
Compassion in the holy grail of blood
And over the cemetery
Harvest moon

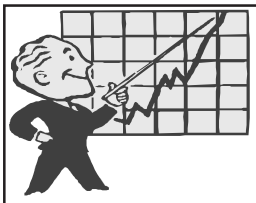
The poet then imagines the faces of all the living and the dead, those who may have been his dear ones and also those whom he may have never known in his lifetime. He then imagines himself on the brink of ruin, imagines himself diseased as suggested by the image of him dreaming of waking up with a lacerated face. He questions himself if he has ever known of the trees that bear fruit that have a life source, a living sap in them. Further, he wonders as to what is the appropriate step to take with regard to the unending aspects of life be it 'Truth', 'Reality' or 'love'.

Followed by the images of the orange tree and the rosewood tree, the image that the poet again reintroduces is that of the pomegranate tree. Here, he presents the imagery of the blooming pomegranate flowers that is drawn into comparison with the intensity of 'Compassion' in the 'search' of the Holy Grail of blood, a search that was undertaken by brave knights in the medieval period as the Holy Grail (that resembles the shape of a stone or metallic cup or goblet), is considered to be related to Christ. The Lord had drunk from this cup during His Last Supper and in which His blood was collected following his crucifixion. The next image is that of the moon shining over the harvest of living and also over the cemetery of the dead, much like the figure of Jesus Christ who shines his Light on humanity- the living and the dead, as well as, draws his Divine Light from 'God the Father' who could well be represented by the sun.

Two families we thus lived
Under leaking roofs
Of the same house
And years passed through them
With nights drenched in rain
No do not tell me
We shall never arrive
No water in the river
No fire in the water
Hark
How she cries sometimes

In what desperate torment
In what indignation and ecstasy
The dancing earth

In the closing lines, the poet again recalls the two families who we were introduced in the opening lines, the families that lived under leaking roofs of a house and the unbelievable ways in which that the years had passed by in them, with many rainy nights that held the difficult experiences of the poet's life. Thus, he refuses from being told by anyone that he shall never arrive, that there is no life around him, no power in the elemental forces or the elements of nature. The poet, thus, calls for the attention of the masses, of those around him to the ways in which the bountiful earth, the dancing earth spinning in its motion also cries out in desperate torment in the opposing forces of "indignation and ecstasy" (228).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What does the poet present in the opening lines of the poem?

Q 6: What does the poet question with regard to the meaning of life?

2.4.1 MAJOR THEMES

After the explanation of the text, we shall now move towards the major themes that emerge from the text of the poems, which have been highlighted in this subsection. The learner is advised to add to the extracted themes from the poem by attempting to read and interpret the text in his or her own way in order to come up with new perspectives to analysing the poem prescribed.

The Challenges of Life:

If the learner carefully re-reads the opening lines of the poem, it is found that the poet presents the struggles and difficulties of two families with limited sources to their avail, so much so that even their basic needs such as their house requires repair. The first image that we thus receive is that of the two families struggling to keep

warm and dry under the leaky roof of their house with the only comfort being the company of each other. The voice of the poet seems to relate it to his own life as he says "two families we lived" (223).

The main challenge of life, of all our life is survival- as Darwin had famously declared; "Survival of the fittest", only the fit and the resilient survive, the rest is bound to perish as determined by the laws of nature. Human life is bound to be continuously entangled with the struggles of survival. Moreover, it is held that from the time we are born, we are all predestined to struggle with the challenges of life, as it is never an easy journey for any living being, here on earth. Another challenge that we as humans continuously face is that of the continuous changes which defines everything in and around us, and human life in itself. While changes present us with the challenges and struggles of keeping up with the pressures or demands that it creates, together with the uncertainties of life, ever pushing us beyond our comfort zones.

Thus, the poet presents several examples of opposite and changing elements and experiences, to cite instances, the ever changing natural phenomenon of dawn and dusk, seasons and environments, the past and the present, hopes and disappointments, dreams and realities, childhood and old age, struggles and celebrations, endings and new beginnings. Changes in fact, define the very nature of human life and therein lies the very essence of life. Moreover, without the element of change, perhaps there would be no progress nor would there be any development in life. Challenges and changes thus have a close interrelation that defines the very core of our survival and survival of everything that the world encapsulates.

Life in a State of Flux:

Many of us are perhaps, very fortunate to have never experienced the struggles and difficulties of life, but there are many who go through tremendous hurdles in life before they can find a life of security and stability. Life has its share of ups and downs which

is why one can say that life exists is in a state of flux, ever shifting and changing in its context. There are joys and sorrows, expectations and disappointments, triumphs and failures, fruition and negation- the list can go on. There are changing seasons, changes in time, changing stages of human growth, changes in human history and changes in our everyday lives by the minute which again validates the saying that 'change is the only thing that is constant'. Change is thus inevitable and perhaps, this is what defines life on earth. As it is also said that-after every high tide, there is a low tide, this is true in the case of our lives as well, everything undergoes changes.

This follows the fact that everyone has a story to share, stories of unending struggles, stories of endurance and strength or perhaps even stories of failures. The poet here similarly shares his own share of hardships and years of crises that he has never been able to forget, long after he has overcome those difficult days of his childhood. The chaotic stream of thought and reflection is well reflected in the poem, which brings out the clash of thoughts and the contrast in experiences of the poet as an individual (as well as, a member of the larger human race). Thus, he takes the reader back and forth in time and provides an interesting glimpse into the inner workings and confusions of his mind.

Life is strange and unravels unpredictable journeys for each of us in ways that we will never really know. Perhaps, the only option that we are left with is to live life to the best of our abilities and leave no space for regrets, as some day, in fact any given day, will certainly be our last. It may be difficult to accept the truth but it is indeed the law of the Universe, the eternal truth and we must all confront it rather than escape it all the while. The message that the poem leaves us with is that trying to extract too much of meaning out of life's mysteries by ruminating on them too much will lead us to nowhere and in fact leave us even more puzzled. However, we must make the best of all that we are blessed with, work towards our endeavours and engage ourselves in making sense of our own purpose in the world.

Activity:

The learner will certainly agree that human life is filled with mysteries of the unknown. Life can be as fun and fulfilling as it can be strange and problematic with its twists and turns. Just as the poet grapples with the problem of uncertainty and confusion that he faces while struggling with the questions that haunt his mind, do you in anyway relate to the poet? Have you ever found yourself reflecting on what is your own view of life? Take a piece of paper and write down your subjective feelings and thoughts on this aspect. Also, you must jot down your 'best blessings' in life which you will find is the major source of your strength and inspiration towards life, for you will certainly agree that the world rests on hope and optimism.

2.4.2 Phukan's Poetic Style

With regard to the style and language employed by Phukan, the poet employs a lot of symbolism and conjures interesting imagery in his poetry. The text of his poems do not make for an easy reading and it takes considerable efforts to extract meaning from these. His poetry significantly contributes to the treasures of Assamese poetry, which now has undergone credible translation works. One of his widely anthologized poems is titled "Brahmaputra Xurjyastha" which in capturing the mesmerising sunset by the mighty Brahmaputra also holds a deeper meaning encircling his personal reflections. Given his academic pursuits, the creative bent of his mind and his love for reading, Phukan was well versed with the works of various national and international poets and writers, which had interestingly inspired his own poetic techniques and his writing style as well.

If we consider the text of the poem "The Dancing Earth", we shall note that the poem is replete with imageries that evoke a pictorial representation of all that the poet wants to convey. The poetical expressions that are noted in the poem are crisp and also reflect the poet's speculative, as well as, philosophical bent of mind. It takes

up some of the common questions that encircle human lifetimes without ever being answered thereby, also reiterating the ways in which human life is greatly riddled with chaos and confusion. The web of confusion is apparent in the text of the poem as the poet puts forth several questions that he is confronted with. These questions also present the common quest of man in arriving at meaningful explanations of human life.

Also, consider the title of the poem "The Dancing Earth", do you think that it is apt given the content of the poem. One way to analyse the relevance or the significance of the poem is the core message that it carries. After having read through the poem and the concise explanation of its content, you may note that the poet rests his entire confusion on the complexities of this world. We are sons and daughters of the earth and our lives begin and end here in this soil itself; and this is the same for all living entities of the world. The earth is personified as a dancing figure symbolising changing rhythms and movement, which characterises everything here on earth.

While on the one hand we have changing seasons, environments, histories, cultures, realities, technologies and growth that characterise human life on earth at the macroscopic or larger level; we also have changing phases of growth, transforming psyche or temperament, actions and experiences to mention a few at the microscopic or the individual level. Both these levels interact and influence the other and therefore, are closely enmeshed into one another often enriching and being enriched, as well as, confusing and make the other all the more complex. Everything tends to be jumbled and chaotic when they interfere with the other, thereby, making it increasingly difficult for one to extract meaning from life itself and from the ways of this world, the dancing of the earth. This reminds one of the 'rudra tandava nritya' of Lord Shiva which at once is held to cause destruction on earth and at the same time is revered for the contrasting elements of its intensity and grace,

creating new life here on earth again. The earth too spins in its axis never for once resting, if it did, there would in all possibility no life here on earth.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Mention some of the examples provided by the poet with regard to the opposite and changing elements and experiences in the poem.

Q 8: 'Life is in a continuous state of flux'. What is meant by this phrase?

Q 9: Write a few words on the poetical expressions found in the poem "The Dancing Earth."

2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF PHUKAN

In an interview with Nilamoni Phukan conducted by poet Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih in December 2004, which is titled- "May All Men Become Poets Rebels and Lovers", he shares many inputs regarding his life and his incredible literary journey. Phukan talks about how the lush green tea gardens and the greenery around him during his childhood years had left an indelible impression on his mind, perhaps also stirring his inherent poetical sensibilities. He has always been deeply influenced by the cultural heritage and the folklore of Assam that had inspired in him, a sense of belongingness to his homeland. Phukan is also an art critic- with his art and artistic representations stemming from a deep influence on his consciousness. It was in the 1940s, the time of the Second World War, when Assamese poetry began to take on a more modern critical approach. The literary style of writing in 'free verse' came as a major change in Assamese poetry, its practitioners being the leading poets Hem Barua, Amulya Barua, Maheswar Neog and Bhabendranath Datta among others.

In the preface to his work entitled *Bichitra Lekha* (2010), Phukan expresses the joy of reading poetry at any given moment and also enjoying certain poems only after multiple readings of the text before arriving at a set of ideas on its possible meaning. While he is steeped in his translation works which he considers as his sincere obligation towards literature,

Phukan also enjoys the creative process of writing poetry that unfurls like the petals of a flower. The poetry of Nilamoni Phukan is very much symbolic, difficult to decode in some sense or in other words cryptic often bringing out the figure of the confused modern man. It is rather difficult to extract meaning from his symbolical representations which mostly represent the chaos and confusion of the modern man. Post-war, he had published six volumes of poetry and two volumes of translations from Japanese and Chinese poetry and a translation of Garcia Lorca's poems who is a renowned Spanish poet. Phukan is much self-critical when it comes to his own poetry. Thus, Phukan with his significant literary contributions has enriched the treasures of Assamese literature, inspiring many with his remarkable poetry and the command over his native language in which he writes- Assamese language.

One of his volumes has Indian tribal love poems and four volumes of essays relating to other vocation as an art critic. He had also worked as the editor of *Sanjaya*, a leading literary and quarterly. Phukan was also made Emeritus Fellow of the HRD Ministry and Fellow of Sahitya Akademi. As far as his literary achievements are concerned, Phukan is much modest saying thus:

"You may think that I have 'tremendous achievements', but personally, I would like to repeat Jaroslav Seifert and say- I have only added a few poems to the several million poems of the world. There is no deeper wisdom in them than the sound of crickets. I know you will forgive me."



2.6 LET US SUM UP

Thus, after having gone through all the finer details of the poem, we are now aware of the life and literary contributions of the poet Nilamoni Phukan to the treasures of Assamese Language and Literature. In addition, a thorough reading of the poem has enabled us to gain an insight into the content of the poem, as well as, identify some of the emerging themes of the text of the poem. Further, the discussions on the style and language employed together with the critical reception of the poet's work must have

enabled us to analyse the nuances of the poetical expressions of Nilamani Phukan and study the same in a critical light. It is hoped that the present unit shall further encourage you to explore more poems by the poet both in original Assamese and English translation.



2.7 FURTHER READING

Ngagom, Robin S. and Kynpham S. Nongkynrih. (Eds.). (2009). *The Dancing Earth.* New Delhi: Penguin House.

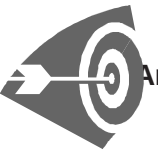
Phookan, Nilamoni. (2010). *Bichitra Lekha.* Guwahati: Banphool.

Web resources:

www, poetryinternationalweb. net>

www. Nezine.com.info. "The Poetry of Nilamoni Phookan"

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK OUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)



Ans to Q 1: Navakanta Barua, Hiren Bhattacharjya, Shimanta Bhattacharya, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, Nilamoni Phukan among others have enriched the treasures of Assamese literature and particularly Assamese poetry

Ans to Q 2: Phukan's first anthology of poetry was titled *Xurjya Henu Nammi Aahe Ei Nadiedi* (1963).

Ans to Q 3: Some of his widely-read anthologies of poetry are namely: *Jaapani Kobita* (1971), *Garcia Lorcar Kobita* (1981), *Lokakalpa Drishti* (1987), *Rup Barna* Baak (1988), *Xilpakala Darshan* (1998), *Aranyar Gaan* (1992) and *China Kobita* (1996).

Ans to Q 4: Some of the major themes found in his early poetry were the aspects of life and death, nature and culture, the self and society, love and sorrow, longing and loneliness- all touched upon with a sense of maturity, as well as, a certain sensitivity.

Ans to Q 5: The opening lines of the poem present a vivid imagery of two families huddled under a single, leaky thatched roof due to the heavy rains. The poet in retrospect, takes us back to the past when these

two families had lived together through hardships and moments of crisis. Their humble homes in which they had spent years together were in dilapidated condition, yet these were all that they had to call their own and the unbreakable bond among each other.

Ans to Q 6: The poet puts forth the question on who are we all searching for or chasing after and what kind of thrill or truth are we presenting and to whom. Thereby, he questions the ultimate meaning of life bringing in the confusions that entail our entire life till the day we die. This is precisely the reason that he presents the chaotic state of our existence and also the meaninglessness of it all.

Ans to Q 7: The poet presents several examples of opposite and changing elements and experiences, to cite instances, the ever changing natural phenomenon of dawn and dusk, seasons and environments, the past and the present, hopes and disappointments, dreams and realities, childhood and old age, struggles and celebrations, endings and new beginnings.

Ans to Q 8: Life has its share of ups and downs which is why one can say that life exists is in a state of flux, ever shifting and changing in its context.

Ans to Q 9: The poetical expressions that are noted in the poem are crisp and also reflect the poet's speculative, as well as, philosophical bent of mind. It takes up some of the common questions that encircle human lifetimes without ever being answered thereby, also reiterating the ways in which human life is greatly riddled with chaos and confusion.



2.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Describe the life and works of the poet Nilamoni Phukan.

Q 2: Explain the content of the poem "The Dancing Earth" in your own words.

Q 3: Discuss some of the emerging themes of the poem "The Dancing Earth".

Q 4: Explain the style and language employed by the poet in "The Dancing Earth".

Q 5: Give a critical reception of the poet Nilamoni Phukan.

Q 6: Explain with reference to context:

a) "Two families we lived
Under leaking roofs
Of the same house
And years passed through them
With nights drenched in rain
And sometimes in dreams"

b) "A wagtail settled here a while
When you laughed I
Cried and you
Cried when I laughed
Exchanging each other
Changing
Nights and days and sleep and wakefulness
Childhood and youth
And age old parched with desire"

c) "A rosewood tree
Must I do
That which is unending
Truth or love or
Reality"

d) "Pomegranate flowers burning in tears
Compassion in the holy grail of blood
And over the cemetery
Harvest moon
Two families we thus lived"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 3: MAMANG DAI: "AN OBSCURE PLACE" & "VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN"

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Mamang Dai: The Poet

3.4 The Poems: "Voice of the Mountain" & "An Obscure Place"

- 3.4.1 Texts of the Poems
- 3.4.2 Reading the Poems
- 3.4.3 Major Themes
- 3.4.4 Dai's Poetic Style

3.5 Critical Reception of Dai

3.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.9 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Mamang Dai one of the most important poets of North East India
- explain how Dai develops her subject and possibly relate it to her own experiences of her life and people
- make yourself familiar with the themes that she has taken up
- examine and analyse her poetic style
- discuss what it is that makes her poetry distinctive

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In the two previous units, we have gained some glimpses of Navakanta Barua and Nilamoni Phukan—the two celebrated Assamese poets from North East India. In this unit, we shall study another North East Indian poet Mamang Dai, who hails from Arunachal Pradesh and who writes

in English. Dai is a poet, story writer and journalist. This unit is based on two of her well-known poems "An Obscure Place" & "Voice of the Mountain". In the poem "An Obscure Place", the poet reflects her urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her native Arunachal Pradesh, which is still considered obscure to the world outside. While, the poem "The Voice of the Mountain" is a celebration of the mountains, the very spirit of the poet's existence. By the time you finish reading the unit, you will be able to locate the importance of Mamang Dai as one of the most celebrated North East Indian poets writing in English.

3.3 MAMANG DAI: THE POET

In the following sections, you will get to read about the life and works of Mamang Dai in brief.

Mamang Dai was born in Pashighat, East Siang District, in 1957. She belongs to the Adi Community of Arunachal Pradesh. She did her schooling at a boarding school in Pine Mount School, Shillong. Subsequently, she completed her BA in English Literature under Gaihati University. She has published her poems in journals such as *Chandrabhaga* and *Indian Literature*. She lives in Itanagar and is a journalist. Previously, she was a reporter for *The Sentinel* and *The Telegraph* newspapers and currently writing for the Hindustan Times and is President, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ). She is also an active radio and TV journalist covering news programmes and interviews for All India Radio and Door Darshan, Itanagar.

A former member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), she left the service to pursue a career in writing and journalism, travelled extensively and has numerous articles, poems and short stories published in various journals. Mamang Dai has authored *Arunachal Pradesh –The Hidden Land* that won her the State's Annual Verrier Elwin Award, 2003, (in the publication in print media) for the book.

She was a Programme officer with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) during the first years of its establishment in the state, and worked with the Bio-diversity Hotspots Conservation Programme in the field of research, survey and protection of the flora and fauna of the eastern

Himalayas. She has also worked as the President, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ); Secretary, Itanagar Press Club; Vice President, North East Writers' Forum—an organisation dedicated to the growth and development of the North eastern states of India.

Mamang Dai has so far written fictional works like *The Sky Queen* (2005), *Once Upon a Moon Time* (2005), *The Legend of Pensam* (2006), *Stupid Cupid* (2009). She has also written non-fictional works like *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land, Sky* (2002). *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal Pradesh* (2005), and so on. Her non-fiction prose narrative *Arunachal Pradesh –The Hidden land* grew out of her travel notes, journeys to her ancestral village and sort of rediscovering the land and people.

Besides such works, she has also composed *River Poems* published by Writers Workshop, Kolkata in 2004, where she has written extensively on the land and rivers of Arunachal Pradesh. Throughout the volume, the river is used as metaphor, and the exquisite flow of the river is like the very spirit of the people of Arunachal Pradesh where men and nature exist in equal proximity.

The first poem of this collection is about the majestic River Siang and she aptly eulogises the splendid flow of the river.

"I will remember then,
The great river that turned, turning
With the fire of the first of the first sun,
Away from the old land of red robed men
And poisonous ritual…"

In the same collection, she tries to redefine her poetic art,

"Without speech
We practiced a craft,
Leaving imprints on sky walls
Linking the seasons
Coding the trailing mist,
In silent messages
Across the vast landscape."

For her, river has a soul and their very existence is blended with it.

"The river has a soul
In the summer, it cuts through the land,
Like a torrent of grief. Sometimes
Sometimes, I think it holds its breath
Seeking the land of fish and stars…"

In an interview, Mamang Dai admits the tribal influence in her works: "I am a tribal, and the geography, landscape, our myths, stories; all this has shaped my thoughts. I feel fortunate that I never forgot my mother tongue– Adi. One could easily have lost it during the years in school, being away as so many tribal children do not speak their mother tongue these days. I have learnt a lot travelling through different parts of the state, from talking with miri shaman healers as mythology and spiritual belief is an area of interest for me. I am particularly influenced by our oral narratives dealing with creation myths. This is like an archaic, intricate, sparkling epic poem that opens up another world like the branches of a living tree."



LET US KNOW

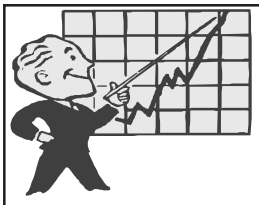
Mamang Dai, In an Interview, states the following regarding how the Oral Tradition of Arunachal Pradesh has influenced her as a writer.

Well, the oral tradition is a way of life that nurtured us through the centuries. All our beliefs, rituals and customary practice have come to us via the oral tradition. About literature, very briefly, the classical literature of the Adi people consists of epic narratives originally transmitted in ritual language by a Miri, the shaman well versed in the different branches of evolutionary history. Collectively this literature is called Aabang. In its simplest meaning, the Aabang is a story or an act of storytelling for an audience. There are stories of fire, flood, lost civilisations, common enough themes, but the stories come down to us with many ramifications. Each branch of the story buds into another story. Today there is a new engagement with oral traditions with research and

documentation. There are many Aabangs and an Aabang can have several parts. There are also categories of Miri: those who are able to communicate with the world of spirits, and those who are pure rhapsodists. Certainly I am influenced by the oral narratives. Knowing the stories gives me a sense of identity. It inspires my writing – after all it is a world of myth, memory, and imagination. Oral narratives are generally perceived as a simple recounting of tales for a young audience but I think their significance lies in the symbols embedded in the stories about the sanctity of life, about what makes us human. My response to myth/stories is akin to a quest. It is a world view I am still exploring.

(In Conversation with Mamang Dai. Jaydeep Sarangi. Writers in Conversation Vol. 4 no. 2, August 2017. https://journals.flinders.edu.au/index.php/wic)

Mamang Dai's **River Poems** contains poetry which one can only describe as old world, neo romantic in essence-"a race of fireflies bargaining with the night." That's what her poems are, engaging with landscape and nature, through a half-animist, half-pantheistic outlook. She has stated, "I know where memory hides/ in the long body of the mountain." "The river has a soul," she says, "it knows the immortality of water." Dai has rendered a fine turn of phrase: "when lightning strikes, we'll dance again/ wearing our skirt of rain." Her love poems almost always end on a sad note, indicating perhaps she hasn't been too lucky in love. However, the fact that the Northeast is a cauldron of politico-ethnic conflicts. But, one hardly gets a hint of all this except in the poem "Remembrance", where she talks of people from the region as "foragers for a destiny" and of "weapons multiplying in the forest."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the works written by Mamang Dai.

Q 2: How does Mamang Dai look at her tribal background?

3.4 THE POEMS: "AN OBSCURE PLACE" AND "VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN"

The following sections will help you to read the two prescribed poems by Mamang Dai in terms of their various aspects.

3.4.1 Texts of the Poems

"An Obscure Place"

The history of our race
begins with the place of stories.
We do not know if the language we speak
belongs to a written past.
Nothing is certain.
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet.
An obscure place haunts the hunter.
The prise slips away.
Yesterday the women hid their faces.
They forbade their children to speak.
Yesterday we gave shelter to men
who climbed over our hills
for glory of a homeland, they said-
those who know what knowing is,
And now the sleeping houses, the men and the villages
have turned to stone.
If there is no death the news is silent.
If there is only silence, we should be disturbed
Listen, the tone of a prayer is hushed:
If a stranger passes this way
let him look up to the sky.
A smoke cloud chases the ants.
See! They have slain the wild cat

and buried the hornbill in her maternal sleep.
The words of strangers have led us
into a mist deeper than the one we left behind
weeping, like the waving grassland
where the bones of our fathers are buried
surrounded by thoughts of beauty.
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet!

"The Voice of the Mountain"

From where I sit on the high platform
I can see the ferry lights crossing
criss-crossing the big river.
I know the towns, the estuary mouth.
There, beyond the last bank
where the colour drains from heaven
I can outline the chapters of the world.
The other day a young man arrived from the village.
Because he could not speak
he brought a gift of fish
from the land of rivers.
It seems such acts are repeated:
We live in territories forever ancient and new,
and as we speak in changing languages.
I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree
and try to make a sign.
I am an old man sipping the breese
that is forever young.
In my life I have lived many lives.
My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks,
In the transfer of symbols
I am the chance syllable that orders the world

Instructed with history and miracles.
I am the desert and the rain.
The wild bird that sits in the west.
The past that recreates itself
and particles of life that clutch and cling
For thousands of years –
I know, I know these things
as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace,
about clouds, and sudden rain;
as I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud,
A cloud is this uncertain pulse
that sits over my heart.
In the end the universe yields nothing
except a dream of permanence.
Peace is a falsity.
A moment of rest comes after long combat:
From the east the warrior returns
with the blood of peonies.
I am the child who died at the edge of the world,
the distance between end and hope.
The star diagram that fell from the sky,
The summer that makes men weep.
I am the woman lost in translation
who survives, with happiness to carry on.
I am the breath that opens the mouth of the canyon,
the sunlight on the tips of trees;
There, where the narrow gorge hastens the wind
I am the place where memory escapes
the myth of time,
I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain.

3.4.2 Reading the Poems

The poem "An Obscure Place" reflects her urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her place called Arunachal Pradesh, which is still considered obscure to the world outside. But, Arunachal Pradesh is rich in culture as well as language. In an interview, Mamang Dai stated: "In Arunachal today, there are very few speakers left of the original literary language used in classical oral literature that is different from the language of current usage." That is exactly why, in his foreword to "Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from North East", the eminent poet Jayanta Mahapatra said: "Undoubtedly, it is poetry that unites us. It is the poets who will not keep us away from one another, who will not separate us. This is the strongest feeling one gets when one reads these poems from the very different regions of the Northeast of our country."

The place around the hills is calm and quiet. However, the poem "An Obscure Place" might refer to the on-going violence, as she says, "If there is no death, the news is silent." Insurgency remains a major concern for the people of the Northeastern states, and that is why, all the sensitive poets fail to escape from that reality. In another anthology of poetry from North East India *Dancing Earth* the editors Robin. S. Ngangom and Kynpham S. Nongkynrih argued: "Much of the uniqueness of North-East poetry is the consequence of contemporary events, violence especially. The writer from the Northeast differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perforce master the art of witness."

It the poetry of the North East, insurgency has occupied a well defined place. Poets as a social human being often fail to escape this blatant reality for the sake of humanity. The poem also praises the hills and rivers, which have been standing with their existence for long. One of the characteristics of Mamang Dai's poetry is her treatment of the local and the personal. Although social and political

aspects of Northeastern poetry cannot be denied, yet the recurrent theme of most of the poets is of myth and tribal folklore. That is what is beautifully explained in the introduction to *Dancing Earth*: "There is certainly more to the use of the myth than mere Romantic escapism as suggested by some critics. As the poets see their people, often themselves included, losing their way completely in the midst of the unsettling cultural changes of the times, there is born a desire in them to interpret the mythic past flourishing in timeless villages and repossess this as high culture."

In such an atmosphere, the poem definitely shows a way out to find peace and repose in the ambience of natural world. Dai so said,

"There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet!"

However, they are not so sure of their victory, as 'the words of strangers' have led them into a mist. This is an interesting revelation on the part of the poem.

The poem "The Voice of the Mountain" is also of mountain, the very spirit of the poet's existence. In this political atmosphere, the only way out is to make oneself fit in the atmosphere in the changing time. Trees, mountains, and rivers only can provide the food for human love as well as mental peace.

"We live in territories forever ancient and new,
and as we speak in changing languages.
I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree
and try to make a sign."

The poetic voice is assimilated to 'sea waves and mountain peaks', and that is why, she said,

"In the transfer of symbols
I am the chance syllable that orders the world
Instructed with history and miracles."

Change is definitely the metaphor of her poem that sweeps through the very roots of her existence as well as her fellow people. Insurgency, rampant in tribal society and where people have an inner yearning for peace, but 'peace is falsity', after a long combat, as the poet clarifies. Their own place is like the land of rivers, where the sunlight is on the tips of trees.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is one of the important characteristics of Mamang Dai's poetry?

Q 4: What does the poem "An Obscure Place" reflect?

Q 5: What is the subject matter of a poem like "The Voice of the Mountain"?

3.4.3 Major Themes

In most of Dai's poems, **hills and rivers** are used as metaphors of the implicit, hidden, and rich culture of Arunachal Pradesh. At the same time, hills and mountains have metaphorical implications at three levels –physical, emotional and as a way of identity. It is around the hills their existence revolves. It is the physical nature of their identity. On the other hand, emotionally, they have been involved with this mountain for a long time. At the same time, hills and mountains are their prime identities and a distinct cultural idiom. Arunachal Pradesh is not only rich in natural beauties, rivers and hills, but also a rich melting pot of different tribes. Her poems often attempt to focus on its **cultural heritage**.

Myth and folklore accompanied by the beautiful natural panorama is an inherent characteristic of Mamang Dai's poetry.

"There, where the narrow gorge hastens the wind
I am the place where memory escapes
the myth of time,
I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain."

The image 'narrow gorge hastens the wind' is symbolic of the flow of outward influences that makes its presence, where the voice of mountain is not at all lost.

Arundhathi Subramaniam in her article on "Mamang Dai" writes that Mamang Dai's poetic world is one of river, forest and mountain, a limpid and lyrical reflection of the terrain of her home state Arunachal Pradesh. Nature, in Dai's poems is mysterious, verdant with myth and dense with sacred memory. But, the paradisiacal landscape is also one of "guns and gulls", punctuated by "the footfall of soldiers". Subramaniam also states, "For all its simplicity, Dai's poetry does not arrive at easy conclusions. There is no dishonest sense of anchor here, no blissful pastoral idyll. The poet describes her people as "foragers for a destiny" and her work is pervaded by a deep unease about erased histories and an uncertain future. And yet, implicit in Dai's poetics is the refusal to divorce protest from love...This seems to translate into a commitment to a poetry of quiet surges and eddies rather than gritty textures and edges. It also translates into a voice that is never raised in rage or indignation; a tone that is hushed, wondering, thoughtful, reflective. The strength of this poetry is its unforced clarity, its ability to steer clear of easy flamboyance. Therefore, when she describes herself as a member of a tribe of "ten thousand messengers/ carrying the whispers of the world", you realise you have a pretty succinct definition of what being a poet means to Mamang Dai. You also realise what makes Dai such an effective messenger."

[Adapted from http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/16974/27/Mamang-Dai]

3.4.4 Dai's Poetic style

Accompanied by a strong feeling for her roots, her vocabularies are lucid and touching. Their appeal is to some extent, universal. The imageries and poetic images are akin to Nature. At the backdrop of Nature, she likes to narrate the history of her race

as well as the changes that continues to take place within the framework of the society. All her imageries, mostly drawn from Nature, help to reveal the strong tradition of that society. Her poems reflect the extensive use of symbols as well as the irony emerging out of a situation. Thus, her poetic world is one of river, forest, and mountain, which lyrically reflect the terrain of her home state. Nature, is thus, used by Dai as mysterious, verdant with myth and dense withy sacred memory.

3.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DAI

As you are already informed, Mamang Dai is a poet and novelist writing in English. She was a correspondent of *The Hindustan Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Sentinel* newspapers and President, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists. She also worked with World Wide Fund for nature in the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspots programme. In 2003, she received the state Verrier Elwin Award for her book *Arunachal Pradesh—The Hidden Land*, featuring the culture, folklore and customs of Arunachal's different communities. She has featured in several national and international forums, and her poems, fiction and articles have been published in numerous journals and anthologies. Her works are widely read. She is one of the most prominent writers of the North East of India who have shaped what we may call North East Indian literature. She received Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel *The Black Hill*.



3.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have perhaps realised that Mamang Dai, who hails from Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most important poets of North East India. The poem "An Obscure Place" reflects her urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her native Arunachal Pradesh, which is still considered to be obscure to the world outside. While, the other poem "The Voice of the Mountain" about which you have read here is a celebration of the mountains, the very spirit of the poet's existence. You have understood that Dai develops

her subject and possibly relates it to her own experiences of life and people around her. Her poetic style and the ways in which she uses language to convey emotions and ideas make her poetry distinctive amongst those written by other North eastern poets of India.



3.7 FURTHER READING

Gupta, Mamnika. (Ed.). (2006). *Indigenous Writers of India: Introduction and Contributions. Volume I: North East India.* New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

Ngangom, Robin S. & Kynpham S. Nongkynrih. (Eds.). (2009). *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-east India.* Penguin Books.

Misra, Tilottoma. (Ed.). (2011). *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-east India*: *Poetry and Essays*. OUP.

Mahapatra, Jayanta. *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from North East*.



Web Resources:

http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/16974/27/Mamang-Dai

https://www.thehindu.com/lr/2004/11/07/stories/2004110700350500.htm

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Fictions like *The Sky Queen* (2005), *Once Upon a Moon Time* (2005), *The Legend of Pensam* (2006), *Stupid Cupid* (2009)… …Non fictional works like *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land, Sky* (2002). *Mountain Harvest: The Food of Arunachal Pradesh* (2005)… …poetry collections like *River Poems.*

Ans to Q 2: In an interview, she states: "I am a tribal, and the geography, landscape, our myths, stories; all this has shaped my thoughts. I feel fortunate that I never forgot my mother tongue – Adi…I have learnt a lot travelling through different parts of the state, from talking with miri shaman healers as mythology and spiritual belief is an area of interest for me. I am particularly influenced by our oral narratives dealing with

creation myths. This is like an archaic, intricate, sparkling epic poem that opens up another world like the branches of a living tree."

Ans to Q 3: Her treatment of the local and the personal… …although social and political aspects of North-eastern poetry cannot be denied, yet the recurrent theme of most of the poets is of myth and tribal folklore.

Ans to Q 4: The poem "An Obscure Place" reflects her urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her place called Arunachal Pradesh, which is still considered to be obscure to the world outside.

Ans to Q 5: The poem "The Voice of the Mountain" is also of mountain, the very spirit of the poet's existence… …in this political atmosphere, the only way out is to make oneself fit in the atmosphere in the changing time…. …trees, mountains, and rivers only can provide the food for human love as well as mental peace.



3.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on the life and works of the poet Mamang Dai. How does her use of river, forest and mountain lyrically reflect the terrain of her home state?

Q 2: How does a poem like "An Obscure Place", reflect Dai's urge to introduce the rich heritage and culture of her native land Arunachal Pradesh? Discuss.

Q 3: The poem "The Voice of the Mountain" is a celebration of the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, the very spirit of the poet's existence. Discuss.

Q 4: Discuss Dai's poetic style as explicit in poems like "An Obscure Place" and "The Voice of the Mountain".

Q 5: Mamang Dai has been received as an exponent of North East Indian literature? Discuss with reference to her poetic works.

Q 6: How, according to Dai, has the oral tradition of Arunachal Pradesh influenced her as a writer? Discuss.

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UNIT 4: ROBIN S. NGANGOM: “POETRY” & “EVERYWHERE I GO”

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Robin S. Ngangom: The Poet

4.4 The Poems: “Poetry” & “Everywhere I go”

- 4.4.1 Texts of the Poems
- 4.4.2 Reading the Poems
- 4.4.3 Major Themes
- 4.4.4 Ngangom’s Poetic Style

4.5 Critical Reception of Ngangom

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.9 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Robin S. Ngangom one of the most important poets from Manipur
- explain how Ngangom develops his subject in poetry
- make yourself familiar with the themes that Ngangom develops in the poems prescribed
- examine his poetic style and the ways in which he uses language to convey emotions and ideas

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the 4th unit on poetry coming out of the North East of India. This unit deals with the Manipuri poet Robin S. Ngangom and two of his famous poems namely “Poetry” & “Everywhere I go.” Ngangom who is a poet, short story writer, editor and translator, is also a faculty in the

department of English, North East Hills University. An important member of "The Shillong Poetry Circle", Ngangom's poetry is one of the major sources of popularity of poetry from the Northeast to the outside world. Ngangom's poetry expresses local identity with a view to get exposure in the world outside. The poem "Poetry" shows Ngangom as a sensible poet who is working hard to define the very spirit of poetry. While, the other poem "Everywhere I go" talks about going back to one's root as a poet is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes. I am sure, by the time you finish reading the unit, you will be able to develop a likeness for Ngangom's poetry.

4.3 ROBIN S. NGANGOM: THE POET

In the following sections, you will read briefly about the life and works of Robin S. Ngangom.

Robin Singh Ngangom was born in 1959, Imphal, Manipur of North Eastern India. He is a bilingual poet who writes in English and Manipuri. He studied literature at St. Edmund's College and the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, where he now teaches. His books of poetry include *Words and the Silence* (1988) published by Writers Workshop, *Time's Crossroads* (1994) and *The Desire of Roots* (2006). His essays include *Poetry in A Time of Terror*, which appeared in *The Other Side Of Terror: An Anthology of Writings on Terrorism in South Asia* published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi (2009). He was conferred with Katha Award for Translation in 1999, and was invited to the UK for the UK Year of Literature and Writing, 1995. He was also awarded the Udaya Bharati National Award for Poetry, 1994.

In Meghalaya, nearly a dosen poets write regularly in English. Some are bilingual poets and a few of them exclusively write in English. Most of them are the members of the "Shillong Poetry Society" and contribute to the journals namely—*Lyric, The New Welsh Review,* and *Voices from Hills & Valleys*. Among them, Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond Lee Kharmawphlang, Kynphang Sing Nongkynrih, Ananya S. Guha, Anjum Hasan, Paul Lyngdoh, Donboklang Ryntathiang, Almond D. Syiem, Esther Syiem and Indari Syiem Warjri are noteworthy.

Robin S. Ngangom is a representative poet of Northeast India. He is a Meitei by birth; but has contributed profusely to Indian English poetry by exploiting the folk-culture and folkloric tradition of Meghalaya. His long association with Shillong-culture has been reflected in his nostalgic matrices of expounding affinity with Meghalaya. In 1986, Robin writes about *Hynniewtrep*, which in Khasi means 'Seven Huts'. The Khasi myth reveals that the ancestors of the Khasis are heavenly beings belonging to sixteen families, who descended to earth from time to time to enjoy earthly pleasures by alighting from a tree. Once, when seven of these families were on earth, one of the beings, succumbing to earthly desires, chopped down the connecting tree. Hence, the seven families were stranded on earth. Since then the Khasis call their hills the "Land of the Seven Huts".

Ngangom's significant publications are *Words and the Silence*, published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1988, *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry*, published by Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 1993, *Time's Crossroads*, published by Disha Books, Orient Longman Ltd., Hyderabad, 1994, *Khasia in Gwalia*, Alun Books, Wales, 1995, A *New Book of Indian Poems in English*, Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 2000, *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*, NEHU Publications, Shillong, 2003, *Confronting Love: Poems*, Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, and so on.

His work has featured in important magazines and journals like *The Telegraph Colour Magazine*, Calcutta; *Debonair*, Bombay; *Chandrabhaga*, Cuttack; *Kavya Bharati*, American College, Madurai; *Poetry Chronicle*, Bombay; *Poesis*, Bombay; *Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi; *The Brown Critique*, Maharashtra; *The New Welsh Review*, Wales; Kunapipi, University of Aarhus, Denmark; *SWAG Magazine*, Swansea, Wales; New Statesman & Society, London; *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist*, Aberystwyth, Wales; Verse, University of Georgia, Athens, US etc.

Robin S. Ngangom perhaps had left his home state and adopted another state Shillong, which he loved and that definitely has given him wider prospect to enrich his poetry. He used Khasi legends and myths in his poetry which he has diligently been trying to read and understand.

However, his homeland Manipur was visibly present in his poetry as he invoked the historical past of this great culture and its ancient kingdom: Kangleipak. The violence that was circumnavigating his home land was also poignantly reflected in his poetry as he mourned the loss of a land, of friends, spoke of a brutalised society and the obliteration of the halcyon days of a mythic past.

This conflict between past and present and their subtending realities were also present in Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang's poetry which was sensitised deeply by his love for folk traditions, the oracle of the past, the folk narrator and spoken oral tradition. This gave to their poetry a strong Romantic element, which mythologised their poetry with an innate charm of the small town, small loves, wishes and desires. However, the violence that was taking place in the town and elsewhere was a means of greater reflection and introspection especially in Robin S. Ngangom's poetry.

Robin S. Ngangom and the Shillong Poetry Circle:

The Shillong Poetry Circle came into existence in 1988-1989. Robin and Desmond in our incessant literary discussion mooted the idea of such a society. Before that, the Telegraph Calcutta had already started publishing the poetry of some poets from Shillong, which of course included Robin and Desmond. The Shillong Poetry Society meets were held every month, courtesy the Late M.C. Gabriel who was the Director of the North Eastern Hill University Publication Cell. This forum gave a platform for free creative expression, discourse and thinking. Soon, Kynpham and Anjum joined, and then they started contemplating on bringing out a poetry journal by the name of *Lyric*. In the first few issues they had poets like Nissim Esekiel contributing as well as regional poets such as Assamese poets like Navakatan Baruah. The members of the circle thus include writers like Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond Lee Kharmawphlang, Kynphang Sing Nongkynrih, Ananya S. Guha, Anjum Hasan, Paul Lyngdoh, Donboklang Ryntathiang, Almond D. Syiem, Esther Syiem and Indari Syiem Warjri are famous.

There was a special issue of *Lyric* dedicated to Welsh poetry in English, after a visit of the Welsh poet Nigel Jenkins to Shillong, to renew the Khasi-Welsh historical and cultural connections. Perhaps, that was the

biggest event in the Society's history and Nigel Jenkins came to Shillong to recapture the Khasi-Welsh connection. *Lyric*, the mouth piece of the Shillong poetry society got very good reviews in Sahitya Akademi's Journal *Indian Literature* as well as newspapers such as *The Indian Express*.

The Shillong Poetry Society had many youthful members from colleges and the University students and due mainly to financial contingencies and is now defunct. But poetry in English from Shillong as well as in Khasi and in Manipuri continues to remain as vibrant, as sensitive and as lyrical as ever. Ngangom makes it clear that modern Manipuri poetry was born amidst the ravages of the World War II, of which Manipur remains a forgotten theatre. And the modern-day literature of Manipur reflects the political events that followed soon after the War–the departure of the British, the disillusionment with the new political arrangement and the emergence of insurgency and so on.

Editing the *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Robin S. Ngangom stated: "The writer from the North eastern region differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics, but must perforce master the art of witness." Robin's second collection of poetry *Time's Crossroads* has been divided into two parts: 'Poems of love and Despair' and 'Poems of Time and Tide.'

Ngangom who came to Shillong to study and subsequently settled in Shillong, vehemently reacted to the striking violence of his society and took the route of 'escapism' by speaking of the natural beauty of their land, the hill-scape, the ravines and gorges cut deep into their psyches. These were recurring motifs in his poetry as also were the legends, myths and folk tales of their societies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who are the poets of Shillong Poetry Circle?

Q 2: What kind of a poet is Robin S. Ngangom?

4.4 THE POEMS: "POETRY"& "EVERYWHERE I GO"

4.4.1 The texts of the Poems

"Poetry"

What they don't need is poetry,
these gnarled men and wrinkled women
who work on slopes,
swaying in the rain like knotted,
weather-beaten pines, breathing
mountain air, these weavers and herdsmen.
What matters if I can't explain to them
the nuance of an ode or a ghazal,
the iron and flint of a Mayakovsky
or a Guillen, how do I impress upon them
their miserable plight
when all they want to do
is smoke and chatter away time.
When he hears poetry
the peasant will lean on his hoe
in exasperation while his fields lie fallow,
the hunter will return empty-handed with
a sad poem, and if the goatherd listens
to poetry's demand cadences
his goats will not give milk.
Let me explain.
Like the great poets
pardoned by time
I wanted to gather words
from arrows knocked in a turquoise sky.
I wanted to catch words in my embroidered bag,
rainy words spattered, thrown about
by the March wind, I wanted to collect

pebbly words from riverbeds, smooth,
geometrical consonants of primary colours.
I wanted to unearth roots and herbs
and compound a word-salve, I wanted
to forge words on an anvil.
I wanted to be a wordsmith.
The sweeper wakes up the morning without irony.
I want him to burn my anxieties and not
sweep them under the mat as I used to.
I want a carpenter
to fashion me a word-chair
to sit me down and calm me,
I want him to nail me down a poem.
The carpenter has learnt his trade and cannot
waste hours chiselling and planning couples.
I wanted the mason to lay
The cornerstones of living for me.
The mason awaits cargoes of sand and bricks
on the shores of afternoon and doesn't need
silken rhetoric or spice adjectives.
All I wanted was to sing
with my mystical sparrows,
but only a murder of crows
nest in my throat at dawn.
I wanted to harvest words
which grow on their own, words
which die without tawdry funerals;
of creepers and vines, stars and stone,
wisdom and folly, flowers and moss.
Top of Form

"Everywhere I go"

Everywhere I go

I carry my homeland with me.
I look for it in protest marches on the streets of the capital,
In dark-maned girls of beauty contests
Forced to waiting now behind windows.
I harbor the wretchedness of those youths
Who do not wish to return
But would rather serve in a city's sordid restaurants
Because devils and thieves rule their home.
I often hear about its future
In conflict resolution symposiums
Where professors and retired generals
analyse the fate of my people and their misery.
But I can see it returning with women
and water in rural evenings.
And I want to tell my poet-friends
of the twelve mothers who stripped themselves
and asked soldiers to rape them.
In fact, I make imaginary journeys
to its little world every day
and wait for the fog of justice to lift
for a murdered 8-year-old girl.
Those who speak the language of progress
call my homeland a mendicant state
not knowing its landlocked misery,
its odd splendour.
And no one knows who picks up its bodies.
I know I must stop agonizing
(Perhaps I am the only one who broods about his land)
Even if people say
Suffering must reach new heights
For a new beginning.
But whenever I touch my homeland's streets
Everyone seems happy and have no grouses.

I must stop agonizing or save what I can
Such as the tunes of my homeland.

4.4.2 Reading the Poems

"Poetry":

Poetry for each poet is a unique experience. In this poem, Robin S. Ngangom, as a sensible poet, works on defining the very spirit of poetry. The attempt to define poetry, by the way, depicts many aspects of a real human being. It is poetry, nothing else, which can console his wounded being. Introspecting on his own being, he finds out the inner substances of his being, which is really authentic. In the process, he emerges to be the representative of his own race. When everything is lost, poetry is never lost, which is an inexplicable inner worth.

The poem also tries to focus on his own problems of culture through a few metaphors like 'empty hands' and 'a lifetime silence.' His cynicism is quite explicit, when he says, 'I saw my self-selected pain, entire history only through memory.' At the same time, his angst is clear the moment he extracts happiness only at the backdrop full of sadness. However, he is in a position, where he can neither live, nor hate. Though everything is lost, the only refuge is that poetry is there to peep into one's inner being.

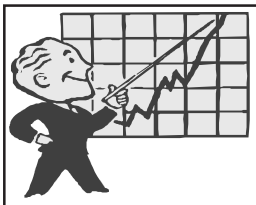
"Everywhere I go"

Going to one's root is definitely a humane concern for everyone. The poet is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes. The poem truly reflects the disturbing state of his homeland, where only devils and thieves rule their home. The people and the youth of his homeland are forced to leave their homeland only to find a secure place outside, and for them, it is better to serve in a city's sordid restaurants. His cynical notion about his own state is reflected when he says, "those who speak the language of progress call my homeland a mendicant state." Love for one's own place and

culture, though explicit in each one of us, is always strongly focused in a sensitive soul and as a poet, he is no different from that.

As a sensitive poet, his only duty is to look into the society and to reflect the abject reality of his society. However, suffering must reach new heights and must create a new future. However, as a poet, belonging to the Northeast, he is bound together by the love for the land. In addition, the seed of patriotism, which he carries with him, has given him the scope to narrate the world outside through his poetry.

His lyrical tone accompanied by the enthralling poetic imageries, is a major source of wide range of appeal throughout his poetry. The images like 'dark-maned girls' of beauty contests and a murdered 8-year-old girl are enough to portray his cynicism and angst directed towards this absurd reality of modern world, where his poetry remains as the only weapon of truth to proceed with.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How does Ngangom consider poetry in his poem "Poetry"?

Q 4: How is the idea of 'roots' or 'rootedness' reflected in the poem "Everywhere I Go"?

4.4.3 Major Themes

In the preface to *Time's Crossroads*, published by Orient Longman, Hyderabad, in 1994, Robin S. Ngangom stated, "Good poetry develops its own feet. The best poems, I have read never failed to please, surprise or haunt me. I cannot say that these poems of mine have evoked a similar response within me…I have been suffering from an extreme poverty of experience and in order to keep the creative pulse in me going, I have become an incurable filcher." This is an important outlet that leads the readers to Ngangom's poetry.

With clean and fresh images, Ngangom paints **elegiac vignettes** of scenes and locals seldom touched upon in Indian poetry, including Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Imphal and the hills and rivers of the northeast. He brings alive the little-known legends and myths of this picturesque region, in poems that range from the quietly contemplative to the violently angry.

Ngangom's poetry reflects expressing local identity with a view to universalise to the world outside. Commenting on his poetry, Prof. Nigamananda Das in an article published in *Dialogue*, Vol III, 1998, stated: "The search for roots or quest for identity, which is introduced into English poetry by Toru Dutt, has proliferated in new poetry after 1960. But, in the Northeast India, it comes with Ngangom. In his poetry, Ngangom has been recurrently confined to the worlds of **myth and legends** of Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

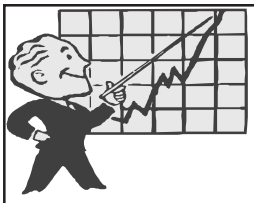
He is much worried about the problems of **insurgency** in Manipur. In many of his poems, he seems to be the spokesman of the grief of Imphal. Being conscious of his inability to do something worthwhile, he sings out:

"Day after day
I have done nothing worthwhile
Only I have chosen to tread
The path of a versifier
My heart still unknown
By many."

But the poet has an inexplicable urge to affirm his patriotic feeling. As one can find in the introduction to *Dancing Earth:* "In their patriotism, the poets are not blind to the fact that their land is also 'The land of the Half-humans'." Ngangom's poetry is not only a projection of reality. And it is also stated, "A few fine poets have moved beyond merely recording events and have internalised the complex conflict between themselves and the milieu. In Manipur, when the reality becomes oppressive, poets frequently seek refuge

in absurdist irony often directed towards oneself, in parody, in farce and in satire." Speaking about the scenario and his concern, the poet is of the opinion that he aired in another book entitled *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast:* "Although a great cultural cauldron, the Northeast of India remains little known and largely misunderstood. The uneasy coexistence of paradoxical worlds, such as the folk and the westernised, virgin forests and car-choked streets, ethnic cleansers and the parasites of democracy, ancestral values and flagrant corruption, resurgent nativism and the sensitive outsiders predicament, make this picturesque region especially vulnerable to tragedy."

Such views throw light on the various aspects steeped in the poetry of Ngangom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Mention some of the important themes in the poetry of Robin S. Ngangom.

Q 6: What is so specific about Ngangom's poetry?

4.4.3 Ngangom's Poetic Style

Ngangom's poetic style is unique because of its innate simplicity. Going through his poems, his readers can perceive sense, though it may not be distinct. His poetic images are very subtle and they sufficiently carry the underlying and intended meanings. The easily understood syntax also adds beauty to his poetry. Any a reader can discern the beauty of his poetry, as Ngangom's poetry is intensely based on his heartfelt love towards his own place and culture.

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF NGANGOM

Unlike the Khasi poets, Ngangom's poetry has a solid chord, imbued from the rich source of literature from Manipur. The poems intensely reflect this rich heritage of the tradition and culture of Manipur. In this connection,

we can refer to Dr. Tilottoma Misra's views. While editing *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, Misra stated: "The history of modern Manipuri literature marks a significant departure from the general pattern that is visible in the emergence of a new literature during the colonial period in the other states of the region. The Christian missionaries could not make such much of an inroad into the Manipur valley where a vibrant Vaishnava culture patronised by the ruling dynasty of the Kingdom was strongly entrenched." Thus, literature of Manipur is strongly rooted to its own land, people and tradition. In addition, the birth of modernism in Manipuri literature is not marked by the missionaries, but by the growing awareness of the indigenous Meitei identity. Dr. Misra also said that "The roots of the present-day militant identity movement in Manipur, therefore, can be traced back to the early part of the twentieth century which was marked by the efforts of the writers to re-invent a glorious Meitei past for Manipur."



4.6 LET US SUM UP

From the reading of this unit, you have learnt that Robin S. Ngangom is one of the most important poets from Manipur. Ngangom, who is a poet, short story writer, editor and translator, is also a faculty in the department of English, North East Hills University. An important member of The Shillong Poetry Circle, Ngangom's poetry is one of the major sources of popularity of poetry from the Northeast to the outside world. The poem "Poetry" shows Ngangom as a sensible poet who is working hard to define the very spirit of poetry. While, the other poem "Everywhere I go" talks about going back to one's root as a poet is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes. I am sure, by this time, you have understood how Ngangom develops his subject in poetry by stressing more on local experience and the way he uses language to convey emotions and ideas.



4.7 FURTHER READING

Gupta, Mamnika. (Ed.). (2006). *Indigenous Writers of India: Introduction and Contributions.* Volume I: North East India. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

Ngangom, Robin S. & Kynpham S. Nongkynrih. (Eds.). (2003). *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*. NEHU: Shillong.

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Misra, Tilottoma. (Ed.). (2011). *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-east India*: *Poetry and Essays*. OUP.

4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The Shillong Poetry Circle came into existence in 1988-1989… …Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Robin S. Ngangom are some of the important poets of the circle.

Ans to Q 2: Robin S. Ngangom is a representative poet of Northeast India… …although he is a Meitei by birth, he has contributed profusely to Indian English poetry… …he has exploited the folk-culture and folkloric tradition of Meghalaya… …his long association with Shillong-culture has been reflected in his nostalgic matrices of expounding affinity with Meghalaya.

Ans to Q 3: Poetry for each poet is a unique experience… …in his attempt to define poetry, he depicts many aspects of a real human being… …it is poetry only which can console his wounded being… …but the poem also tries to focus on his own problems of culture through a few metaphors like 'empty hands' and 'a lifetime silence.'

Ans to Q 4: Ngangom is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes… …the poem truly reflects the disturbing state of his homeland… …the people and the youth of his homeland are forced to leave their

homeland only to find a secure place outside… …as a sensitive poet, his only duty has been to look into the society and to reflect the abject reality of his society.

Ans to Q 5: Elegiac vignettes of scenes and locals of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Imphal, and the hills and rivers of the northeast seldom touched upon in Indian poetry… …use of myth and legends of Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram… …problems of **insurgency** in Manipur etc.

Ans to Q 6: In Ngangom's poetry, there are vibrant portrayals of the current society and of social trends experiencing painful, horrific processes of change and transition… …in most of his poetry, he voices anguish… …there is objective distancing from the subjective reality when the poet finds solace in the self… …poetry for him is the only way to search for self as well as truth.



4.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In what ways, does Ngangom's poetry express local identity that needs to be exposed to the world outside?

Q 2: How does Ngangom talk about going back to one's root, as a poet is bound to carry his homeland, wherever he goes. Discuss with reference to the poem "Everywhere I go".

Q 3: "The writer from the North Eastern region differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way". Discuss this point with reference to Robin S Ngangom as a North East Indian writer.

Q 4: Do you think that Ngangom, in his attempt to define poetry, actually depicts many aspects of a real human being. Justify your answer.

Q 5: Comment on Ngangom's use of myth and legends of Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram in his poetry.

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UNIT 5: DESMOND KHARMAWPHLAND: "LETTER FROM PAHAMBIR" & "THE CONQUEST"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Desmond Kharmawphland: The Poet

5.4 The Poems: "Letter from Pahambir" & "The Conquest"

- 5.4.1 Texts of the Poems
- 5.4.2 Reading the Poems
- 5.4.3 Major Themes
- 5.4.4 Kharmawphland's Poetic Style

5.5 Critical Reception of Kharmawphland

5.6 Let us Sum up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss briefly the life and works of Desmond Kharmawphland one of the most important poets from Meghalaya
- explain how Kharmawphland develops his subject and relate it to his own experiences of life and people
- make yourself familiar with the themes that Kharmawphland takes up
- examine and the ways in which he uses language to convey his ideas

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block. In this unit, we shall be discussing Desmond Kharmawphland's poems "Letter from Pahambir" & "The

Conquest". Desmond is an important contemporary poet and folklorist from Meghalaya. The author of a number of books of poetry and folkloristics pertaining to North East India, he has represented India in numerous conferences outside the country notably in Switzerland, the UK, Ireland, Norway, the US, Finland and Greece. The universal appeal in his poetry has generated tremendous critical attention for their ability to blend localised themes with a universal concern. When you go through the unit, you will find that the poem "The Conquest" is based on his introspective eye to his own identity, while the other poem "Letter from Pahambir" is about a lost culture with the invasion of the British to his land.

5.3 DESMOND KHARMAWPHLAND: THE POET

Desmond Kharmawphlang was born in Shillong, Meghalaya in 1964. A poet and folklorist, he has published two volumes of poetry and a play in Khasi. His poems have appeared in journals and anthologies in the country and abroad. He was brought up in Assam and Meghalaya. Educated at St. Anthony's High School, St. Edmund's College, and the North-Eastern Hill University, he works at present at the Centre for Creative Arts, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. A bilingual writer, he translates from Khasi to English and vice-versa, and has so far published three collections of poems in English – *Touchstone* (1987: Shillong), *Here* (1992: Ranchi) and *Home Coming* (1996). Contemporary socio-cultural concerns of Meghalaya, the cultural past and environmental changes are main subjects in his poetry. In the poem *Letter to a Dear Friend,* the poet writes about hills, rivers and people.

Desmond L Kharmawphlang is Professor in the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, NEHU. He has also published various scholarly articles in national and international journals. He had also participated, on sponsored invitation, in literary programmes in Switzerland, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, and Norway. He lectured at Western Oregon University, Oregon State University and Portland University, USA on a consultancy programme sponsored by the Institute of International Education, New York, USA. He had lectured at the Folklore Department, University of Helsinki,

Finland during July 2002. He was inducted as an Associate Member, Folk Fellows, an Association instituted by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. He has been serving as National Editorial Board member of the *Journal of Indian Folklore Research*, Mysore and is one of the four National Vice Presidents of the Indian Folklore Congress.

In Meghalaya, nearly a dosen poets write regularly in English. Some are bilingual poets and a few of them exclusively write in English. Most of them are the priests of beauty, serenity, solitude and silence. In this world resides the mist of myths and mysteries. The traditional tribal world has been confused by the intrusion of modernism and subsequent decadence. The poets here pine for a lost world dreaming the exotic. Most of them are the members of the Shillong Poetry Society and contribute to the journals namely, *Lyric, The New Welsh Review,* and *Voices from Hills & Valleys*.

So far, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang has published a number of important books namely *Touchstone*, a book of poems, *Here*, a book of poems, *Ki Matti Byrshem* (A collection of essays on Folkloristics) *Narratives of North-East India I & II, Folklore in the Changing Times, Conference, Confluence:* (a collection of essays), *Attributes of Khasi Folklore, Khasi Folksongs and Tales* and so on.

5.4 THE POEMS: "LETTER FROM PAHAMBIR" & "THE CONQUEST"

The following sections will help you to read the prescribed poems in terms of its different important aspects.

5.4.1 Texts of the Poems

"The Conquest"

I never get tired of talking about my
Hometown.
In summer the sky is pregnant,
Swollen with unborn rain.
Winter arrives, with a tepid sun
Touching the frosen hills, the dream-boats on lakes.

Long ago, the men went beyond the
Surma
To trade, to bring home women
To nurture their seed.
Later came the British
With gifts of bullets, blood-money
And religion.
A steady conquest to the sound of
Guns began.
Quite suddenly, the British left.
There was peace, the sweet
smell of wet leaves again.
But in the wavering walk of time
There came those from the sweltering plains,
From everywhere.
You stricken land, how they love
Your teeming soil, your bruised children
One of them told me, "You know
Yours is a metropolitan city."

"Letter from Pahambir"

At sundown we set out in a car,
Past silent, dark huts,
Cicadas buzzing the dusk.
We have left the church far behind,
Glowing strangely in pallid
Arrogance, through the dust kicked up
By our passing.
Village curs turn quarrelsome
As we city men await
The verdict of reception, smoking uneasily
Outside the village Chief's abode.
"We come", I plead, "to learn, not to teach.

We come with longing, we are the
Forgetful generation, our hearts tapping
A rhythm spawned in shame, a shame
That splits our present from our past.
We have suckled for a long
On a wisdom of falsehood _ we are ourselves
Our own worst enemies."
A fire dances crazily, throwing
Shadows on the hard mud floor, and good
Laughter swells like moonlight.
Someone breaks out in song
And hardened feet tap unsteady punctuations
Around the weird tune.
Voices intone, hands fashion leaf plates
To hold food for the men
From the big city. I shove more brushwood
Into the fire.
U Di squats on the floor,
Gnarled hands extended, hooded eyes
Stealing tiny lights from the fire.
"See this diplin, spattered with
Good red mud? Have stored centuries of prayers for harvest, a hunt….
Our bellies understand hunger, our hands
Are shaped by it. It is black, as only
Good smoke can make it, it has told my children stories for c
Countless years now. So wait for the night
To grow, and endure our
Difficult ways."
U Di strips to loincloth, and bares
A hunched back, scarred like
a honing stone, upon which hungry
blades lick like tongues.

With trembling voice, he gases blindly
At the night, tension cording his
Throat, like vines tying everything
Into a knot of one race of skin
And blood, chanting the songs.
The stories burn our memories like
A distant meteor searing
The unnamed gloom; by their light I examine
The great hurt I carry in my soul
For having denied my own.

5.4.2 Reading the Poems

The poem "The Conquest" of Desmond is really appealing, based on his introspective eye to his own identity. He is deeply in love with his own hometown, but his home town tends to lose its identity and becomes a metropolitan city in turn. The basic peaceful nature of his hometown was subjected to change as the British made presence to their land. Looking at the past, he feels past is permeating, yet, the past and the present interface with a sense of longing: the emotional pause created between the past and the present leads to sadness, layered with irony, notwithstanding a touch of sarcasm.

"I never get tired of talking about my
Hometown.
……
……
Long ago, the men went beyond the
Surma
To trade, to bring home women
To nurture their seed.
Later came the British
With gifts of bullets, blood-money
And religion.

A steady conquest to the sound of
Guns began."

The arrival of the British had brought with them nothing significant but only the gifts of bullets, which took over the other things and which ultimately destroyed the inherent peace of the people of his home land.

The poem, at the same time, portrays the poet's treatment of the local as well as his personal view. As Jayanta Mahapatra, in his foreword to *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast* says: "In a number of poems of the Northeast, one is touched by the poet's treatment of the local and the personal, that moves toward an involvement in the collective longing for renewal and the search for a better world…It is true that poetry can reform a society and like P. B. Shelley's unacknowledged legislator or Seamus Heaney's Government of the tongue, these poets of the Northeast are aware of the ills that tend to sweep them over and thereby crushing the very edifice of local culture and heritage."

The poem "Letter from Pahambir", on the other hand, is a story unfolded in a poem and worked upon insightful words. A tale of lost culture with the invasion of the British to his land, the story is like,

"The stories burn our memories like
A distant meteor searing
The unnamed gloom; by their light I examine
The great hurt I carry in my soul
For having denied my own."

They set out in car, a journey symbolic of the coming of new westernised culture. It is true that coming of westernised culture had definitely given them a new lease of life, but at the same time they tended to lose their own identity in the process. They did not have a written script before.

In the Preface to *Dancing Earth,* it is mentioned that "Apart from the Assamese, the Manipuries and the Bengalis of Tripura, who have their own distinct scripts and whose written literatures can be traced back to the fifteenth century or earlier, the literary history of most other communities is fairly new, as recent as the advent of the white missionaries from Wales and America in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the Khasi Hills, in about 1841, Thomas Jones of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' Mission cast the Khasi language in written form using the Roman script."

But the British gave them some other things also. It is undoubtedly a progress subtle in nature.

"We have suckled for a long
On a wisdom of falsehood _ we are ourselves
Our own worst enemies."

Desmond L Kharmawphlang looks at the past in an ambivalent manner with a kind of ferocity. According to him, the past is permeating, yet the past and the present interface with a sense of longing: the emotional pause created between the past and the present leads to sadness layered with irony; notwithstanding a touch of sarcasm. This is best reflected in the following excerpt from the poem "The Conquest"

"I never get tired of talking about my hometown,
In summer the sky is pregnant,
Swollen with unborn rain
Winter arrives, with a tepid sun
Touching the frosen hills, the... boats on lakes.
Long ago, the men went beyond the Surma
To trade, to bring some women...
Later came the British with gifts of bullets,
Blood-money and religion.
A steady conquest to the sound of guns began."

LET US KNOW



Read the following Excerpts from Ananya S. Guha's article "The Poetry of Feeling: The Shillong Poets", dated 27 Feb, 2012 published online for Merinews at: http://www.merinews.com/article/the-poetry-of-feeling-the-shillong-poets/15866408.shtml&cp

North East India also witnessed the emergence of such a younger group of poets in the '80s and early '90s whose poetry, written in feverish moments of societal crisis, attracted the attention of critics and literary journals of India and abroad. Coincidentally these poets all live in Shillong and it was the poetry page of the Telegraph Colour Magazine edited by the celebrated Indo English poet Jayanta Mahapatra which gave them the opportunity to be published and break new grounds in the Indo-English poetry scene. In the mid and late 90's the North East Forum for English studies was established in Guwahati, and formed mainly by some College teachers; and the North East Writers Forum consisting of creative writers in this part of the country devoted much of their energy in encouraging the art of poetry in English in the region. This article will focus on these poets from Shillong as certain binding themes of personal, social and historical concern unified their poetry and gave it a distinct flavour, marked by an astonishing sense of lyricism.

The poets who readily come to the mind are: Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Robin S Ngangom and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, votaries of the poetry of feeling. Their verse immediately attracted critical attention for their universal concerns, kneading these with localised themes. Their poetry was lyrical, imbued with a striking poise, clarity and spontaneity. They empathised with one another in their themes, and their 'influences' were many: Neruda, Arghezi, Gullen, Pessoa, Jayanta Mahapatra to name a few. Yet these 'influences' on their poetry did not stultify their verse, rather they empathetically related experiences of these poets to their own poetic credos cleverly. They believed in encouraging younger poets and helped them to publish their poetry in

their mouthpiece Lyric. Lyric, the poetry journal of the Shillong Poetry Circle subsequently gained reputation as a standard poetry journal acclaimed by critics in Sahitya Akademi's "Indian Literature", "The Times of India", "The Indian Express", "Business Standard" etc. Lyric published the works of poets on a national and international scale, and was scrupulous in its editing and selection. The chief architects of Lyric were the poets mentioned above though much of the pioneering work in publishing it was achieved by Robin Ngangom and Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the subject matters of the poem "The Conquest" and "Letter from Pahambir"?

Q 2: What are the distinctive qualities of the poets from Shillong?

5.4.3 Major Themes

The emergence of a new younger group of poets in the 1980s and early 1990s is an important phenomenon, so far as poetry in North-East of India is concerned. Desmond L. Kharmawphland, in his poems, looks at the **past in an ambivalent manner.** It is an undeniable truth that the Khasis have a rich stock of folk tales, myth and oral tradition, but they did not have a distinct script.

It is an inner urge for poets like Desmond Kharmawphland to dig through his poetry the **hidden resources of the Khasis**. And one of the important aspects of his poetry is his attempt to enrich his poetry based on the Khasi resources. In this connection, we may refer to the Introduction to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*: "The Khasis, says the Welsh Scholar Nigel Jenkins, 'were weaving stories long before the Bible-thumping, hymn-crazy Welsh arrived on the scene." The same story of a colonial 'civilizing' mission persuading a people to abandon their

rich indigenous oral tradition and to adopt an alien way of life which was projected as the only 'universal' civilization model was repeated in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills as elsewhere in the region."

The inner **conflict between the urban and the rural** thematically weaves into his poems. As a critic Ananya S. Guha comments: "The dialogue between the urban and the rural thematically weaves into their poems and much of them are dialogic in the best sense, between the inner contemplated realities and the outside world. At the same time, the modern angst of being and becoming besets their poetry, layered as it is with deep humanistic perspectives, with the 'rural' or 'small town' syndrome. A very positive element in his poem is a finely tuned introspection and the ability to achieve moments of self-criticism."

Since, Desmond writes both in English as well as in Khasi, so his themes were based on **strong local resources**. In an interview, eminent Oriya poet, Sitakant Mahapatra once said, "Unless a poet is rooted in his own milieu, he or she cannot speak to any reader." He also comments that "Poetry is something so intense and emotive that magical experience can be felt and expressed only in a language that is most intimate to you." It is quite advantageous for Desmond as he writes in Khasi and vehemently interested in Khasi folk literature.

To find one's own identity or a cultural idiom in a changing scenario is innate in his poetry. In this connection, the views aired by Niranjan Mahanty in his Preface to his "A House of Rains" needs to be mentioned: "I believe that poetry enables me to connect, ennobles and kindles me to relate myself to a flux that is inescapable to a centre of faith that is interminable."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the themes in Desmond Kharmawphland's poetry?

5.4.4 Kharmawphland's Poetic Style

The lyrical warmth is to be seen in almost all his poems. And his poems are imbued with striking poise, clarity and spontaneity. Moreover, his poems are explicit with the modern angst. "A very positive element in their poems is a finely tuned introspection and the ability to achieve moments of self-criticism," as Ananya S. Guha stated. The images he uses in his poems evoke the intensity of feelings as well as his inner urge. The domination of irony, seen in Desmond's poems makes his poems subtle, and the identity of an individual is also strongly portrayed throughout his poems. It is true that the use of hills as a metaphor in the poetry of the Northeast is a distinct cultural idiom. He is not apart from it.

5.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF KHARMAWPHLAND

Kharmawphland's poetry has universal appeal, as he often writes his poems based on his own folklore and myth. He, like the other fellow poets attracted critical attention for their ability to blend localised themes with a universal concern. As a critic Ananya S. Guha comments, "Their influences were many: Neruda, Arghezi, Gullen, Pessoa, Jayanta Mahapatra and many others." One is amased at the richness of poetry written in a small place like Shillong, especially in the English language. Such a wealth can be attributed to the locale, its natural surroundings, places of scenic beauty in and around Shillong, in Meghalaya in general. Also, what cannot be divested of this fact are the rich oral traditions, myths and folklore of the Khasis and the Garos, the inhabitants of Meghalaya. Such details infuse the poetry of certain poets from Shillong like Kharmawphland, drawing inspiration from the oral narratives and legends. Three poets began this tradition in the mid-eighties and early nineties: Robin S. Ngangom, Desmomd, Leslie Kharmawphlang, and Kynpham Sing Nonkynrih. Although, Robin S. Ngangom is from Manipur, he has been living in Shillong for over three decades. These poets brought a veritable revolution in the world of Indo-English poetry by breaking away from the mainstream tradition of city-

based cultures and urbanised images, which marked poets from Mumbai, or Calcutta.

Of course in the 70s a poet such as Pritish Nandy based in Calcutta then talked about the severe societal crises in Bengal due to violence and the Naxalite movement. A lot of the poetry written by him centred on the city of Calcutta, feelings of hurt caused by death of people perhaps savaged by a policing effect. Pritish Nandy in fact could evoke such passions lyrically as well as in his love poems. However, in the mid eighties Robin S. Ngangom and Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang in their twenties forged distinct voices of their own by writing about the small town axis and a feverish societal crises witnessed by people's agitation as in Assam and Meghalaya over issues such as infiltration of outsiders and foreign nationals.

Moreover, there were repressive police measures to tackle student agitationists, and since the late 1970s a peaceful hub such as Shillong was plunged into the throes of crisis. In neighbouring Assam, there was the people's intervention in the form of the famed Assam agitation over the illegal immigrants' issue, which incidentally still continues today. In the other neighbouring states of North East India such as Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland also, militant forces were at their height asking for independent nation states. In fact, the entire North East India Manipur included was plunged into a veritable war between armed forces of the Indian Government and militants termed variously as extremists or terrorists.

In *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-east India*, Robin S. Ngangom and Kynpham S. Nongkynrih says: "Much of the uniqueness of North-East poetry is the consequence of contemporary events, violence especially." However, at the same time, each of the poets makes his own poetic journey to glorify the lost tradition at a flux apparently inescapable. The conflict of exotic and local, though explicit in their poems, help them for defining their own identity. Their only strength lies in their hidden and enriched culture. Dr. Tilottama Misra, in her foreword to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-east India* makes an important observation when she states "The new generation of Khasi poets, who share a deep sense of cultural loss, which came with the conquest of the

territory and the mind by waves of colonisers of different hues. While they strive to seek out roots that would firmly bind them to the racial memory of the past, at the same time, they also display an eagerness to master the new modernist poetic idioms that can link them with a global audience."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How has Desmond Kharmawphland been received as a poet?



5.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we are able not only to identify Desmond Kharmawphland as one of the most important poets from Meghalaya, but also to discuss some of his contributions to the poetry from North East India. We have learnt that his poetry helps to understand how he develops his subject and relates it to his own experiences of his own people and society. He uses the language so lucidly that it directly hints at the message that he is trying to convey. You have thus, learnt that Desmond is an important contemporary poet and folklorist from Meghalaya. The universal appeal in his poetry, as it is explicit in poems like "Letter from Pahambir" & "The Conquest", has generated tremendous critical attention for their ability to blend localised themes with a universal concern.



5.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

http://www.merinews.com/article/the-poetry-of-feeling-the-shillong-poets/15866408.shtml&cp

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: "The Conquest" is based on the poet's own identity… …he is deeply in love with his own hometown, but his home town tends to lose its identity and becomes a metropolitan city in turn… …"Letter from Pahambir", on the other hand, is a a tale of lost culture with the invasion of the British to his land.

Ans to Q 2: The poets like Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang, Robin S Ngangom and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih are votaries of the poetry of feeling… …their verse exhibit their universal concerns, kneading them with localised themes…. …their poetry is lyrical, imbued with a striking poise, clarity and spontaneity.

Ans to Q 2: Reflection on the past in an ambivalent manner… …digging through the hidden resources of the Khasis like folk tales, myth and oral tradition… …the conflict between the urban and the rural and so on.

Ans to Q 3: Kharmawphland's poetry has universal appeal, as he often writes his poems based on his own folklore and myth… …he has the unique ability to blend localised themes with a universal concern… …he is part of the new generation of Khasi poets, who share a deep sense of cultural loss.



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does Desmond Kharmawphland's poetry reflect the collective longing for renewal and the search for a better world.

Q 2: How does a poem like "The Conquest" represent the poet's introspections regarding his own identity?

Q 3: Do you think that "Letter from Pahambir" is a tale of culture which was lost following the British invasion of the poet's land? Illustrate.

Q 4: There is an inner urge for poets like Desmond Kharmawphland to dig through his poetry the hidden resources of the Khasis. Discuss.

Q 5: Comment on Kharmawphland's poetic style as reflected in poems like "The Conquest" & "Letter from Pahambir".

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www, poetryinternationalweb. net>

Name of the Paper: Course Code:

Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
City Office, Housefed Complex, Guwahati- 06

Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?
