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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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## **1.1 MODERNIZATION OF ASSAMESE POETRY**

The advent of modernity in Assamese literature emerged notably after World War II. This era, particularly during the Second World War, is often regarded as a period of dormancy in Assamese literary history. During this time, the intellectual community predominantly shifted their focus towards material gains, rather than cultural or literary endeavors. Contemporary Assamese poets have shown a tendency to embrace realistic themes, employing a diverse range of diction and moving away from traditional rhymed verse. A common thread in much of this poetry is a rebellion against established norms - be it divine, societal, romantic love, or fanciful daydreams.

In the realm of modern Assamese poetry, two distinct movements can be identified: the pro-Marxist and the non-Marxist. Poets like Hem Barua, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Bhabananda Dutta, and Keshab Mahanta are notable figures in the Marxist sphere. On the other hand, the non-Marxist group, including Homen Borgohain, Mohim Borah, and Nabakanta Barua often critique modern capitalist society from a humanitarian and middle-class perspective.

While contemporary Assamese poets generally eschew romanticism, it's not to say that they completely evade romantic intensity or fall into the trap of idyllic indulgence. This nuanced approach marks a significant shift in the literary landscape of Assam, reflecting a complex interplay of historical, social, and ideological influences.

The modern era in Assamese literature can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. It is marked by the region's first encounters with English literature. Before this, Assamese literature was undeveloped until the emergence of "Jonaki," a monthly literary publication that began in Calcutta in 1889. From the "Jonaki" period up to the 1940s, English Romantic writers significantly influenced Assamese literature.

The early nineteenth century saw a transformation in the national atmosphere, fueled by the infusion of Western thoughts and ideas into daily life and literature. This era brought socio-economic changes that gave rise to a new middle class. This class, with its progressive outlook and skills, soon became the leading social force. Key figures in fostering these changes included the government, educators, liberal thinkers, and evangelicals. Educational institutions and print media became vital channels for disseminating new literary ideas.

During this time, the traditional aristocracy, once patrons of literature, lost their influence, leading to the natural decline of their favored literary styles. Ancient literature, while becoming part of the cultural heritage, was reevaluated under a new critical lens and could no longer satisfy the secular and humanist tastes of the middle class. English-educated writers, inspired by European science and arts, sought to blend the best elements of Eastern and Western worlds, a path pioneered by figures like Ram Mohan Roy. However, this was met with resistance from religious conservatives who opposed such innovation.

As English education spread, so did Western ideas, profoundly impacting the literary domain. This period saw a burst of diverse creative activity in Assamese literature. The press and newspapers, especially the Baptist Mission Press in Sibsagar and its periodical, *The Arunoday* (*The Sunrise*), played a crucial role in this literary evolution. Many Assamese books in the mid-nineteenth century were published through this press. The availability of printed books and newspapers brought literature to the local mass by promoting its advancement and fostering the development of a standardized language accessible to all.

A pivotal figure in the advancement of Assamese language and literature is Gunabhiram Baruah (1837-95), a contemporary of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. Baruah's significant contributions include his works 'Biography of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan' (1880) and 'Assam Buranji' (1884), which are exemplary for their modern scientific approach in biography and history, respectively. Baruah excelled in meticulously organizing details to vividly portray his subjects and the eras they influenced. His 'Assam Buranji' is particularly notable as the first comprehensive modern history of Assam, encompassing political, religious, social, and cultural dimensions. His writing style, free from excessive ornamentation, is celebrated for its elegant simplicity and charm.

In 1885, Baruah took a significant step in promoting Assamese literature by editing the monthly journal 'Asom-Bandhu' (Friend of Assam) from Calcutta. This publication, which reached its sixteenth edition under his stewardship, featured numerous insightful articles on Assamese history penned by Baruah himself.

Gunabhiram Baruah played a crucial role in elevating Assamese prose to a level of artistic and literary excellence previously unseen. While his predecessors had made Assamese prose versatile enough to convey diverse ideas, and Christian missionaries had utilized it for theological and secular education, it was Baruah who transformed it into a fully-fledged

artistic medium. He was instrumental in nurturing a literary culture among his peers, encouraging them to write and thus becoming a central figure in a fertile period of literary creation. His influential literary persona and extensive career earned him the respect and admiration of his contemporaries, who often viewed him as the literary authority of his time.

Hemchandra Barua (1835-96), often hailed as the father of modern Assamese language and literature, was a standout literary figure of the nineteenth century. His dedication and methodical approach to his work, marked by organization, diligence, and assiduity, significantly influenced the development of the Assamese language. His groundbreaking works, the 'Grammar of the Assamese Language' (1856) and 'Hemkos' (Dictionary), were pioneering efforts in lexicography, laying a solid foundation for the language's future growth. The 'Hemkos' became a seminal lexicon, offering etymologies, English equivalents, and precise meanings of Assamese words. His grammar and dictionary are still regarded as standard texts in the field.

A prolific contributor to the 'Arunoday', Hemchandra Barua began his literary journey authoring school texts, among which the 'Adipath' and 'Pathmala' are celebrated for their exceptional Assamese prose style. His novella, 'Bahire Rang Cang Bhitare Kova Bhaturi' (All That Glitters is Not Gold), marked a novel introduction of satirical and critical elements into Assamese literature. This work, critiquing religious hypocrisy and blind faith's role in degrading Assamese social life, represents the earliest semblance of fiction in Assamese literature.

However, the real evolution of modern Assamese literature began with the publication of the monthly journal 'Jonaki' (Moonlight), initiated by a group of young enthusiasts. This journal heralded the Romantic Movement in Assamese literature, signifying the onset of a new, dynamic, and brilliant era of literary expression. Drawing inspiration from English Romanticism, this period's literature showcased key traits of Western romantic literature: the elevation of imagination, nature worship, beauty adoration, expression of personal love, renewed interest in folk literature, reimagining medieval lores and legends, deep love for the motherland, experimentation with new verse forms, and utilization of everyday language.

This era introduced several new literary forms to Assamese literature, including lyrics, sonnets, ballads, novels, short stories, and essays. The influence of Western thoughts and

feelings inspired a new kind of writing, rich in liberal and humanistic values. 'Jonaki' was instrumental in ushering in this new age, fostering a liberal humanistic outlook and transforming the Assamese literary landscape.

The true history of Assamese literature can be traced back to the fourteenth century, under the reign of King Durlabh Narayan in the Kamata kingdom. This era, extending to the arrival of Sankardev, the esteemed fifteenth-sixteenth century poet, musician, and social reformer (1449-1568), marked a promising inception for Assamese literature. The period was characterized by translations and adaptations from the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Early poets like Harivara Vipra and Hem Sarasvati, who enjoyed the patronage of Durlabh Narayan, are known for their panegyric verses in works such as 'Lava-Kusar Yuddha' and 'Vabruvahanar Yuddha'. Harivara Vipra's extensive kavyas (poetic works) reflect his deep knowledge, poetic prowess, and intimate understanding of Assamese life and customs.

The subsequent phase of Assamese literature's evolution commenced in the sixteenth century and continued through the seventeenth century. This period, marked by the Vaishnavite revival, witnessed a flourishing of literature across various genres. The Vaishnavite movement, spearheaded by the multifaceted genius Sankardev, played a pivotal role in this literary renaissance. The extensive body of literature from this era of Vaishnavite influence can be broadly categorized into two main groups:

1. The first group includes:
  - Translations from epics and Puranas.
  - Devotional romances.
  - Dramas.
  - Songs with sublime themes set to classical melodies.
  - Devotional verse compendiums.
2. The second group encompasses:
  - Prose translations and summaries of Puranas.
  - Prose biographies.

This period was a defining moment in Assamese literature, marked by a surge in creative output and the establishment of literary traditions that would influence future generations.

The works from this era not only enriched the literary landscape of Assam but also played a crucial role in preserving and promoting the region's cultural and religious heritage.

The third phase of Assamese literary history commenced with the rise of the Ahom dynasty as the predominant political force in Assam, concluding with the British conquest in the early nineteenth century. Modern Assamese literature began to take shape following the British occupation of Assam in 1826. The establishment of British rule introduced Western influences into Assamese literature, catalyzing a significant social and intellectual awakening and heralding a new literary era.

However, the early years of British administration saw a decline in Assamese literature, which had flourished during the Vaishnavite Movement in the sixteenth century. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were marred by civil unrest and foreign invasions, particularly repeated Burmese incursions, which left Assam in a state of turmoil, unfavorable for artistic and literary pursuits.

The initial British policy compounded these challenges. Lacking understanding of local languages and contexts, the British authorities made Bengali the medium of administration and education, which hindered Assamese students from learning in their mother tongue. This policy sparked strong protests from the Assamese community, who fought tirelessly for the recognition of their cultural and linguistic identity. The situation improved in 1873 when Assamese was reinstated as the language of instruction and administration.

American Baptist missionaries played a crucial role in the revival of the Assamese language. They, alongside local talents like Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, a civil assistant under the British and a multifaceted personality, championed the cause of Assamese. Phukan, in his "A few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam" (1855), made a compelling case for the language's restoration. Following Phukan's untimely death, the missionaries continued this advocacy, contributing to Assamese literature by writing, translating, and publishing various works, including the Bible and John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress."

The publication of 'Orunodoi' in 1846, the first Assamese monthly journal under the Baptist Society's auspices, marked a significant milestone. This journal disseminated new ideas on vital social aspects, laying the groundwork for a new phase in both life and literature in Assam. The missionaries' efforts thus paved the way for a resurgence in

Assamese literature, setting the stage for the emergence of new literary forms such as the Assamese novel.

The transformation of Assamese literature, particularly during its modern phase, was significantly shaped by the influence of Bengali culture and the introduction of Western literary traditions. This interaction, although complex, ultimately led to a rejuvenation of Assamese literature, with the publication of "Jonaki" in Calcutta marking a pivotal moment in embracing new literary trends. The latter part of the nineteenth century emerged as an era of unprecedented enthusiasm and inspiration for Assam, invigorated by the influx of Western ideas that endowed its literature with a new evolutionary stamina and standard.

In this modern era, Assamese literature is predominantly characterized by its poetic expression. No other form of literature has garnered as much interest or undergone as much analysis as poetry, both in technique and subject matter. The influence of the West is profoundly evident in this domain. The history of modern Assamese literature, like that of other Indian literatures, is not merely a gradual indigenous evolution but rather a rapid shift influenced by Western education and aesthetic impact. One of the most notable outcomes of this transformation is the emergence of lyrics as a distinct genre. Lyrics, broadly defined as poetry capable of being sung with musical accompaniment, have experienced significant development in this period.

The Romantic Movement, a dominant force in this era, is marked by several key characteristics: a return to nature, exploration of personal love, interest in the supernatural and medieval legends, sympathetic treatment of the commonplace, rebellion against conventions, and experimentation with new meters. This romantic inspiration significantly expanded the role of personal themes in poetry, leading to a surge in lyric confessions and love poems. Inspired particularly by the works of Shelley and other Western literary figures, romantic love became an idealized subject in modern Assamese literature. Additionally, the theme of unrequited love, as suggested by Alexis Carrel, found a resonant expression in the works of poets like Jatin Duara and Ganesh Gogoi, further enriching the poetic landscape of the region.

The development of Assamese literature represents not a gradual, indigenous evolution but a rapid transformation propelled by Western influences and aesthetics. This Westernization acted as a conduit for modernization, affecting not just Assamese literature but also other Indian literary traditions. The advent of Western education systems and the

ensuing infusion of Western ideas catalyzed profound changes in Assamese poetry, both in form and content, particularly noticeable in the late nineteenth century.

Assamese literature, influenced by the Romantic Revival in England, witnessed a period of unprecedented growth, marked by richness, variety, vitality, and vigor. This era saw a departure from old, constrained viewpoints to more universal and open perspectives. There was a marked shift from formalism to a plethora of new, captivating patterns in literature. Innovations in declension, rhythm, and imagery became significant tools in poetic expression, leading to the emergence of fresh, invigorating, and potent literary works.

This period in Assamese poetry is characterized by romantic visions, encompassing grand dreams of utopias and mythical El Dorados, along with bold hopes and soaring aspirations. The new wave of poetry resonated with themes of freedom from political subjugation, social injustice, and religious intolerance. It celebrated the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation, reflecting a broader, more liberal viewpoint. This phase in Assamese literature marked a significant leap, influenced heavily by Western thought, yet uniquely adapted to the Assamese context and culture.

To fully appreciate modern Assamese poetry, one must also delve into modern English and Bengali poetry, as these have significantly influenced contemporary Assamese poets. Hem Barua stands as a seminal figure in this context, particularly active in the 1940s and 1950s. Although modern Assamese poetry traces its origins to the publication "Jayanti," edited by Ramathamayan Dev and Chakreswar Bhattacharya, it is often said that its true modern form emerged through the pages of "Ramdhenu," with Hem Barua at the forefront of this transformation.

Barua, distinct from his predecessors, showed little inclination towards romanticism. Instead, he established himself as a progressive poet, introducing and developing various modern trends in his poetry. He was instrumental in initiating and shaping this movement, inspiring many young poets to embrace modernistic ideals. Beginning his poetic journey in the early forties of the nineteenth century, his poem "Bandar"(The Monkey) marked a clear departure from the Romantic tradition, signaling his entry as a socially conscious poet. Other notable works include "Puja"(The Worship), Gauhati 1944 and "Daul Purnima"(The Holy Festival).

Publications like "Jayanti," "Pachowa," and "Ramdhenu" played a critical role in Barua's career, introducing his fresh perspectives to the poetry-reading public. His collected works,



"Balichanda" (Sand Hopper, 1959) and "Manmayuri" (The Mind - A Peacock, 1965), along with an anthology of Assamese poetry he edited in 1960, encapsulate his contributions to the genre.

Hem Barua's poetry brought a new message to Assamese literature, one brimming with fresh dreams, hopes, and promises, born from a progressive and neo-humanistic outlook. This perspective resonated with the people's yearning for freedom in all aspects of life. Barua, with a sympathetic heart, captured and expressed the public's consciousness in his poetry, making him a pivotal figure in the evolution of modern Assamese poetry.

*In the high —fluttering tide of time,  
We will also cross the floodwaters,  
We will swim, swim and arrive at the other shore  
Or will perish, not only us, but thousand*

The poet, with profound empathy and warmth, vividly portrays the struggles, sorrows, and hardships faced by the working class, particularly laborers, farmers, and soldiers. Through his verses, he captures the essence of their daily toil and the relentless burden of poverty they endure. The poet's work reflects a deep understanding of how capitalist exploitation has stripped these hardworking individuals of life's simple joys and dignities. His sympathetic voice resonates in his passionate call to put an end to the oppressive forces symbolized as "blood-sucking lizards." This metaphor powerfully conveys his appeal to halt the exploitation and suffering inflicted upon the poor by unjust economic systems. The poet's work not only highlights the plight of the working class but also serves as a clarion call for change and social justice.

*There is the battle dance of the blood-sucking  
Lizard on the harvest heap  
How many days are left  
For the lizards to extinguish?  
O') And how many.*

Hem Barua's poetry uniquely blends themes of socialist revival with reflections on the past, visions of the future, and the vibrancy of youth and revolution, while also exploring a myriad of personal emotions. He introduced significant technical advancements in poetry, particularly in diction, language, and imagery. His choice of words is notably simple, mirroring everyday speech. Notably, he chose to express his ideas through an elevated yet balanced prose style. This approach aligns with the historical context where

poetry, as in many other languages, served as an early form of expression. His work also embodies a new wave of romanticism.

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya's poetry often reflects a belief in a hopeful future. This is especially evident in his 1919 poem "Himalayar Prati Sambodhan" (An Address to the Himalayas), where he concludes on an optimistic note:

*A new earth will now be slowly born  
And envy and hatred with yield to lore  
O! And peace will possess the world.*

Bezbarua may not have been renowned for his poetry, but together with his friend Chandra Kumar Agarwala, he significantly transformed Assamese poetry. They innovatively merged Assamese folk song styles with the lyrical qualities of Western romantic poetry. This collaboration led to the creation of exquisite lyrics, including "Dhankar Aru Rataini," which is celebrated as the first literary ballad in the Assamese language. These ballads are unique in their structure, often beginning with a question and at other times with an answer, each standing distinct and without direct correlation to one another. An example of this is:

*O where have you been, my long-lost love  
This long seven years and more?  
O I come again to seek you love  
And the lows that you did swear.*

He released two poetry collections: "Pratima" (Image, 1914) and "Bin Bairagi" (The Roving Minstrel, 1923). Many of his poems initially found expressions in verse form. Reflecting on the impact of poetry, a modern poet noted, "In our complex lives, burdened with superficial concerns, entangled in worries and fears, and often drifting into lukewarm thoughts and feelings, we might overlook what poetry offers. Yet, under its influence, tranquility revisits our troubled minds. The mundane world fades away, revealing beauty as resplendent as flowers after rain, recharging reality with a sense of mystery." This love for beauty helped Assamese poets gain a deeper appreciation for the scenic magnificence of their homeland. Similarly, their interest in antiquity led to a profound respect and affection for their national heritage.

A prominent figure in this new wave of Assamese literature was Kamala Kanta Bhattacharya, who notably introduced a progressive form of patriotism in Assamese literature. His patriotism was not just about awakening a nation, rich in history yet dormant, to its ancient cultural glories. He also advocated for progress, urging the nation

to keep pace with Western methods and ideas. Bhattacharya drew inspiration from figures like Garibaldi and Mazzini.

*Then will be born hundreds of Mazzinis  
Out of neglect stones,  
And hundreds of Garibaldis too  
To shed luster on the soil of India.*

Hemchandra Goswami, an author known for experimenting with various literary forms, published just one poetry volume, "Phular Chaki" (The Bunch of Flowers, 1907). This collection is significant for containing the first sonnet in Assamese, "Priyatmar Cithi" (A Letter from the Beloved). A fine example of the Petrarchan sonnet, "Priyatmar Cithi" demonstrates Goswami's skill in formal meter. Following him, the most notable poet in the realm of sonnets was Hiteswar Barbarua (1876-1939), who released two collections, "Malac" (The Garden, 1918) and "Sokulu" (Tears, 1922). Barua's work, however, is more renowned for its depiction of grand historical events from Assamese history.

During the Jonaki era, prominent poets like Raghunath Choudhury (1879-1966), Ambikagiri Raichoudhury (1885-1967), Nalinibala Devi (1898-1978), and Jatindra Nath Dowerah (1892-1964) made significant contributions to Assamese literature. Each brought a unique perspective within the broad romantic consciousness of the time. Raghunath Choudhury, known as the 'Bihagi Kavi' (Bird Poet), is celebrated for his exquisite poems on birds and flowers, with works like "Golap" (The Rose), "Phulsajya," and "Keteki" (The Nightingale), notable for their innovative use of dramatic monologue and the energized use of everyday language.

Modern Assamese poetry, particularly in the 1940s, marked a departure from Romanticism, adopting a more realistic approach. This shift brought new forms and themes, broadening the scope of Assamese poetry. Influences from contemporary Western poetry, particularly from America and England, were evident. Leading this modern movement were poets like Amulya Barua, Hem Kanta Barua, and Nabakanta Barua. Magazines like "Jayanti", "Pachowa", and "Ramdhenu" played pivotal roles in fostering this new movement, reflecting influences from Western poets like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Auden, Dylan Thomas, Kovasky, Baudelaire, and Mallarme.

Ambika Giri Raichoudhury, a natural rebel, skillfully blended mysticism and patriotism in his Romantic poetry. His work "Tumi" (1913), a seven-canto poem, begins with a vivid portrayal of his beloved's physical beauty, then ascends to mystical realms. A fervent

nationalist, he was actively involved in the freedom movement, enduring imprisonment, during which he composed many patriotic poems, later included in "Songs of the Cell" (1942) and "Bedonar Ulka" (A Meteor of Pain, 1964).

Prasannalal Choudhury (1902-79) is another poet renowned for his passionate patriotic expression, comparable to Raichoudhury. Other significant patriotic poets include Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Binanda Chanda Bama, Dimbeswar Neog, and Sailadhar Rajkhowa. Nalinibala Devi, though known for patriotic poems, primarily focused on mysticism, often exploring the soul's yearning for the infinite in collections like "Sandhiyar Sur" (The Melodies of the Evening, 1928), "Saponar Sur" (The Melodies of Dream), and "Parasmani" (Touchstone, 1954).

The 1930s saw the emergence of younger poets influenced by the romantic surge, including Devakanta Barooh, whose work resonates with the new trends in Assamese poetry, characterized by its form and content.

1. Neo-Humanistic Outlook: A key feature of new poetry is the emergence of a neo-humanistic perspective. Modern poets began to recognize and empathize with the universal identity and experiences of humanity, sharing in their joys and sorrows. This humanitarian approach led them to extend their compassion to marginalized groups such as coal miners, rickshaw pullers, widows, and vagrants. Poets like Amulya Barua particularly focused on the plight of suffering humanity, a theme echoed by Ram Gogoi, Keshav Mahanta, and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, emphasizing the struggles of not just their country but the entire world.
2. Influence of Marxist Philosophy: The teachings of German philosopher Karl Marx significantly influenced these poets. Marx's concept of dialectical materialism, the doctrine of surplus value, and his critique of the unequal distribution of wealth resonated with them. Marx's vision of a new social and political structure, aiming for a classless society where people work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs, inspired the poets. Their work began to reflect Marxist sentiments, aligning with the struggles of the working class and opposing capitalist exploitation. Poets like Amulya Barua, Hem Barua, Kesav Mahanta, and Amalenda Guha infused their poetry with these themes, echoing the global Marxian spirit in literature of that era.

3. **Guidance of Psychologists:** Just as Marx, Sigmund Freud's contributions to psychology had a profound impact on modern thinking. Freud's theories on the id, ego, and super-ego, along with his interpretations of dreams and related psychological phenomena, were highly regarded worldwide. These Freudian concepts, along with the teachings of Carl Jung, found significant expression in new Assamese poetry, especially in the nuanced treatment of myths and symbols.
4. **Contributions of Physicists:** Modern poets also drew insights from contemporary physicists. The significant advancements in natural sciences in the twentieth century, including the works of Max Planck, Niels Bohr, and Albert Einstein, especially Einstein's theory of relativity, influenced contemporary literature and arts. The new poetry reflects these scientific impacts, showing an interest in concepts like the role of glands, neural functions, and genetic inheritance in biology. These scientific advancements provided fresh perspectives and inspiration to the poets, broadening their understanding of the universe and human existence.
5. **Growth of an Industrial Climate:** Assam's industrial development, particularly beginning in the 1920s, was a relatively recent phenomenon. This shift towards industrialization brought unique challenges and experiences previously unfamiliar to the people. While the tea industry had long been established, its industrial nuances were not significantly reflected in poetry. The new poets began to address the lives of tea garden laborers with empathy. The expansion of oil fields in Assam also attracted attention, with people viewing oil exploration mechanisms with a mix of awe, admiration, and envy. The transformation of fertile lands into industrial sites by drilling operations evoked distress among the peasants. The urban challenges in cities like Guwahati and Calcutta also caught the new poets' attention, many of whom had direct experiences in Calcutta, noting the city's restlessness.
6. **Discrediting Old Traditions:** The new poets not only rejected nineteenth-century values in life, love, religion, and society, but they also completely discredited old traditions. They questioned conventional values and advocated for liberating individuals from traditional constraints. A bold statement from one poet equated God to an algebraic figure, symbolizing the growing disillusionment and skepticism. This sense of rootlessness and negation, often leading to nihilism, was

a prominent theme in their poetry, reflecting a revolt against the capitalist foundation of society.

7. **Discrediting Romantic Love:** While romantic poets glorified love, new poets dismissed this romantic sentimentality, approaching love with realism and deeper understanding. They exposed the underlying biological drives behind romantic love, emphasizing the role of libido and glandular secretions. Love was seen as a biological process, with its success linked to economic stability. Poet Syed Abdul Malik was among the first to challenge the romanticized view of love.
8. **Neo-Intellectual Growth:** Advancements in arts, science, and psychology fostered a new intellectual environment. Geoffrey Bullough's comments on modern English poetry — highlighting the impact of biology, anthropology, psychology, and socio-economic struggles on diminishing faith in human capabilities — were equally applicable to the new Assamese poetry. Educated young poets voiced intellectual responses to the conflicts and oppressions of the modern world.
9. **Western Influence:** The 1940s were pivotal for modern English and American poetry, with poets like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Louis MacNeice, W.B. Yeats, Dylan Thomas, the Sitwells, and Mallarme gaining global recognition. The French Symbolists like Baudelaire, Mallarme, and Paul Valéry also had a significant influence. The new Assamese poets, aware of global poetic movements, deeply engaged with the works of these masters, integrating their influences into their own poetry. They also encountered Western philosophical movements like existentialism, surrealism, and imagism, learning from these and shaping modern poetry in Assam. Assamese poets were familiar with Russian poets like Mayakovsky and Spanish poets like Pablo Neruda, and their poetry also reflected structural similarities with Japanese poetry. Dr. B.K. Barua noted the influences of Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, Stephen Mallarme, and Rainer Maria Rilke in the works of Hem Kanta and Nabakanta Barua, with Nabakanta particularly influenced by T.S. Eliot's belief in a language rich in suggestions for both senses and intellect.

The newer generation of Assamese poets displayed a profound empathy for the common man, making the lives and struggles of ordinary people a central theme in their poetry. They could not remain indifferent to human suffering, and their poems often reflected a deep engagement with social issues, particularly the plight of the oppressed. These poets

sought to liberate modern poetry from the strict conventions set by earlier poets, leading to innovative experiments in both form and content. They also critically examined middle-class intellectualism, moving poetry towards a more intellectual realm, albeit not completely devoid of emotion.

These poets aspired for a bold new world that would firmly establish the dignity of human existence. During this period, Assamese poetry became increasingly influenced by Bengali poetry, particularly through interactions with the Bengali poetic movement led by figures like Buddhadev Bose, Jivanana Das, Bishnu Dey, and Amiya Chakravarty in Calcutta. The influence of these celebrated Bengali poets was evident in the political themes of new Assamese poetry.

Modern Assamese poetry, while intellectual in nature, still maintains a connection with emotion. Techniques like surrealism, symbolism, imagism, free verse, and rhythmic prose have been adeptly used to express new poetic sensibilities. Notable poets of the post-independence era, contributing significantly to the field, include Hem Barua, Navakanta Barua, Nilamoni Phookon, Mahendra Bora, Hari Borkakoti, Bireshwar Barua, and Hiren Bhattacharya. Contemporary literature has also been shaped by diverse influences such as stream of consciousness, Marxist philosophy, existentialism, Freudian psychology, the absurd, and the Brechtian epic style in drama.

Modern Assamese poetry, emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War, reflects the profound impact of the conflict on British India, particularly Assam. The war's closeness to Assam, with battles fought in areas like Kohima and Dimapur, deeply affected the region. The war led to significant troop mobilization, economic upheavals, and societal changes, altering the fabric of social life. The devastating use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki highlighted the horrors of advanced weaponry, marking a dark chapter in human history.

During this turbulent period, Assam experienced rapid industrial and scientific growth, yet this progress was contrasted with the suffering of its people. The British repression of Indian freedom movement volunteers in 1942 further intensified these challenges. This backdrop of chaos and transformation was the catalyst for the modernity seen in Assamese poetry.

The evolution of this modern poetry didn't occur suddenly or within a single poet's work. Instead, it manifested gradually across various poets and periods, developing its diverse

trends and accomplishments over time. Modern Assamese poets have strived to capture and contemplate the human condition, delving into the dark, tense aspects of modern life and consciousness. Yet, amidst these challenges, poetry often finds a spring of purpose, affirmation, and a glimpse of potential harmony.

This introspective and exploratory quality allowed modern Assamese poetry to break free from its romantic confines, engaging more directly with the stark realities of life. This new poetry reflects a broader, more profound understanding of the world and the human experience within it.

## **1.2. AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of my research is to conduct a comprehensive study of the conceptual metaphors of life and love in modern Assamese poetry. This study is situated within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, a discipline that understands language as an integral part of our cognitive processes. My focus is on the works of prominent Assamese poets, including Amulya Barua, Hem Barua, Bishnu Prasad Rava, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Hiren Bhattacharjya, Nilomoni Phukan, Nabakanta Barua, Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, and Bhupen Hazarika.

## **1.3. OBJECTIVES**

### **1) To study the conceptual metaphors of life and love in modern Assamese poetry-**

The primary aim here is to delve into the rich landscape of modern Assamese poetry to uncover and understand the underlying conceptual metaphors pertaining to life and love. This involves a detailed examination of how these abstract concepts are expressed, represented, and conceptualized through metaphorical language. The focus will be on identifying the specific metaphors used, understanding their semantic and cultural underpinnings, and interpreting their significance within the broader context of Assamese literary tradition and societal norms. This objective is critical for appreciating not just the linguistic aspects of these metaphors but also their cognitive and cultural dimensions.

### **2) To study the creative use of these metaphors-**

Beyond merely identifying and cataloging the metaphors, this objective seeks to analyze the innovative and creative ways in which Assamese poets employ these metaphorical expressions. This includes exploring how poets manipulate traditional metaphors, invent new ones, or blend



various metaphorical concepts to convey complex emotions, ideas, or to challenge conventional perceptions. This aspect of the study will highlight the poets' ingenuity in using metaphors as a tool for artistic expression and will shed light on the evolution of metaphorical usage in modern Assamese poetry. It will also consider the impact of these creative metaphorical expressions on the reader's understanding and interpretation of the themes of life and love.

#### **1.4. NEED OF THE STUDY**

The necessity of this study is underscored by the current gap in academic literature concerning the exploration of modern Assamese poetry, especially from the perspective of metaphorical analysis. Despite the rich cultural and literary heritage of Assam, there is a notable absence of comprehensive studies examining modern Assamese poetry through the lens of Cognitive Linguistics. This field, which intersects language and cognition, offers a profound understanding of how metaphors shape and reflect our thought processes, yet its application to Assamese poetry remains largely unexplored.

The proposed research, therefore, stands as a pioneering endeavor - it will be the first of its kind to conduct an in-depth study of conceptual metaphors in modern Assamese poetry from a cognitive standpoint. By venturing into this uncharted territory, the study aims to not only fill a significant void in linguistic and literary scholarship but also to illuminate the intricate ways in which cognitive processes manifest in the poetic expressions of life and love. This research has the potential to redefine our understanding of Assamese poetry and contribute valuable insights to the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

#### **1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

My approach is twofold, encompassing both a profound theoretical exploration and an exhaustive empirical investigation.

In the first facet of my methodology, I commit to an extensive and thorough collection and critical analysis of all pertinent literature on Conceptual Metaphor. This in-depth literature review is essential to acquire a multifaceted understanding of the theoretical framework. It serves not only as a means to ground my research in existing academic discourse but also as a springboard for innovative application of these theories to my specific dataset. By engaging deeply with the existing literature, I am poised to infuse my analysis with insights that are both intellectually robust and creatively nuanced.

The second aspect of my methodology centers around the collection and analysis of primary data, which constitutes the empirical core of my research. This involves a painstaking process of gathering original texts from authentic sources. Acknowledging the critical need for accessibility and clarity, I will meticulously translate all source material from Assamese into English. This translation process is executed with the utmost fidelity to the original texts, striving not only for linguistic accuracy but also for the preservation of the inherent cultural and poetic nuances. Such careful translation is pivotal to presenting the data in a manner that is both comprehensible and faithful to the original works.

## **1.6. CHAPTERIZATION**

The structure of my PhD thesis is laid out in five chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of this study:

**Chapter 1: Introduction-** This chapter sets the stage for my research, outlining the objectives, scope, and significance of my study. It also includes an introduction to Assamese literature, poetry and modernization of Assamese Poetry.

**Chapter 2: Conceptual Metaphor from a Cognitive Perspective-** Here, I'll delve into the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics, specifically focusing on the concept of metaphor. This chapter will explore how metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but deeply rooted in our cognitive processes and how they shape our understanding of abstract concepts like life and love.

**Chapter 3: Conceptual Metaphors in the Poetry of Select Assamese Poets-** This chapter forms the core of my analysis. I will examine the works of the selected poets, identifying and interpreting the conceptual metaphors used in their poetry. This analysis will reveal how these poets conceptualize life and love, and how their cultural and individual perspectives are reflected in their metaphors.

**Chapter 4: Creative Use of Conceptual Metaphors-** In this chapter, I will explore the innovative ways in which these poets employ metaphors. This will include how they blend or extend conventional metaphors, create new ones, and use metaphors to convey complex emotions and ideas.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion-** The final chapter will summarize my findings, highlighting how my research contributes to the understanding of conceptual metaphors in Assamese poetry

and Cognitive Linguistics. It will also suggest areas for future research and reflect on the implications of my study.