

Classic Poetry Series

Nabakanta Barua
- poems -

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Nabakanta Barua(26 December 1926 – 14 July 2002)

Navakanta Barua (Assamese: নবকান্ত বৰুৱা) also known as Ekhud Kokaideu, was a prominent Assamese novelist and poet.

 Early Life and Education

Nabakanta Barua was born December 29, 1926 in Guwahati to Nilakanta Barua, a school inspector and later teacher, and Swarnalata Baruani. He had three brothers: Devakanta, Jivakanta, and Sivakanta. (Devakanta Barua also became a well-known Assamese poet, best known for poem collection Sagor dekhisa.) At first the family lived in upper Assam, then moved to Puranigudam and lastly lived in Nagaon town.

He started his education at a nearby school, then joined govt Mojolia school. In 1933 he was admitted to Nagaon govt boys in class 3, from there he completed his matriculation in 1941. After that he got admitted to Cotton College, but he lost two years due to illness. In 1943, he went to Shantinikaton (West Bengal). In 1947 he completed his B.A. with English honors and in 1953 M. A. from Aligarh Muslim University.

 Career

He worked in Uttar Pradesh at Shikohabad at A.K collage , but the same year he had joined Jorhat's Jagannath Barooah College. In 1954 he joined Cotton College and worked there until 1964. From 1964 to 1967 he worked at Assam Madhyamik Shiksha Parisod as an officer of English education . He again joined Cotton College, retiring as a vice principal in 1984.

He served as president of Asam Sahitya Sabha's Dhing Adhibashan in 1968 and presided over Asom Sahitya Sabha's Bishwanath Chariali convention in 1990.

 Published Works

Barua wrote most criticized and recited poems like "Polokh", "Monot porne Arundhati", "Norokot DonJuan", and "Crussot DonJuan".

Barua's contribution to Assamese art and literature includes 39 books in all: 11 poem collections, 5 novels, essays, short stories for children (Xeali palegoi ratanpur) and lyrics. Some of his works have been translated to different Indian languages.

In 1984, he published the Assamese magazine Sirolu, later republished as Natun Sirolu.

 Awards

1974: Assam Prakashan Parisod Award, Mur aru Prithibir

1975: Sahitya Akademi Award to Assamese Writers, Kokadeutar Har

1976: Padma Bhushan, Literature & Education

1993: Assam Valley Literary Award

Cloistered

The fossil heaved its stony sigh

Moaning:

God's failures have caused,

All his tears to helpless man.

Nabakanta Barua

Eta Premar Padya

Nabakanta Barua

God Gave Gray Cells

God gave man brains
To achieve lunacy therewith.
With his body plenished with blood
The heart took on the task of mistrust.
Speech he had
Wherewith cunningly to obscure truth.

The only truth left to Man
Is the work-moist hands of his own woman
Clasped in his weary hands of an evening
And the smile of this his child.

[Translated by Pradip Acharya]

Nabakanta Barua

God Gave Man Intellect

God gave man intellect.
He could go insane with it.
His heart full of blood
could not be trustful.
With speech he could
cunningly hide the truth.

The only truth left to man,
in his weary hands in the evening,
is his working woman sweating
in her hands, and the smile of his child.

Nabakanta Barua

Iyat Nadi Aachil

Nabakanta Barua

Kramaxa

Nabakanta Barua

Measurements

It is afternoon now.

Let's go to the tailor's; to get measured.
Measurements of neck chest hands and arms
Measurements of the palm and the heart
We shall give measurements of the entrails
And the kidney and the liver,
Give measurements of hormones and affections

Let us give measurements of life,
Of this that and several things.
Give only the measurements.
We shall think of the stitching later on.
For the time being let's just give the measurements
We can only give measurements.

We can only take reckonings
We shall record that suicides have
Swelled considerably.
We shall give count of the number
Of letters in a speech.
Give count of the Christians in Arabia.
Just give measurements.

We shall think of the stitching later on.
Merely think.

Someone after us will measure anew
Saying that our measurements have gone awry.
Fresh new measurements they'll take.
Just take measurements.

When will someone stitch the garment to fit man?

[Translated by Pradip Acharya]

Nabakanta Barua

Palestine

We housed them in prisons
For they wanted a home,
We killed them for they wanted eternal life
Then bulldozed their prisons into fields of corn

What's that hand sticking out from the earth?
Other hands will sprout from it ...
And tickle us to death.

[Translated by Pradip Acharya]

Nabakanta Barua

Polox

Nabakanta Barua

Ratnakara

Within this dark shell
All emptiness is substantial
The sky and the earth reach me
In all elastic opacity.
Severely sensuous is this mystic opacity
A self-indulging hermaphrodite god
The earthworm told me; the leech confided.

Self-indulgence begets nightmares
Bonny civilizations end in paederasty
Even in the salty water of the dead sea
They do not surface, the corpses of dead dreams.

The earthworm told me; the leech confided.

The coital simultaneity of the earth and sky
Half male and half female
I have seen the male sky
Reach for the depth of the furrows
The female sky in a cloudy grace
Receive the hills of the earth
Through the eyes of the leech, with the
Blind vision of the earthworm.

When the shell sheds its dark prison
My nerves will string the stars of the milky way
Emptiness will spread in the vacuitous pores of mass,
Like sweaty vapours of coital exertion,
Corn, the male sky will bestow on earth,
The male earth will give god to the sky,
Corn, too, will be truth like god, and
God will be food, like corn.
Flesh will follow the chemistry of dead corn
Corn will germinate in the warmth of dead flesh.

Below, in the bowels of the earth
Earth's primal womanhood is shaken cruelly
For a strange construct
Uninseminated by god.

Hephaestus rose from Ionian myths
And a voice arose of gleeful unconcern:
I am he, not born of a father's lust
I am born of my mother's insatiety and deprivation
Your creation is but the fruition
Of the orgy called sex.
I announce a new creation:
"Construct! "
The one that is not born is mere matter
And all wealth is incapable of growth
You'll snatch in lumps
The unfertilized jewels from the earth's bowels
Non-growing, never-waning, bright.
I shall reveal to you
The secrets of power that lies within matter
Capable, conscious, efficient—
Whose growth is but change alone
Which is valued but in exchange
Where to create is to construct.

=No,sonny, you can't hatch them table eggs
Not if you brood over them till the end of you! =

In this dark hollow of mine
In the core of corn and god
I can feel the animate vibration of matter

It seems
My voice is matter metamorphosed.
Will it not be impregnated by god?

The totality towards which
I am moving at this motionless speed
—that desire rebirth—
Is it my growth or my change?

What shall I chose—
The unfading gleam of minerals?
The eternal transcendence of corn?
Who shall I vote for—
Creation or construction?

Nabakanta Barua

Samratar Para

Nabakanta Barua

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, Diyu
Grandfather's bones.
The wild lily sprouts through
Grandmother'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 our silt fertilize 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.

[Translated by Pradip Acharya]

Nabakanta Barua

Sketches

Once we went aboating
On the Ganges.....
The pale winter moon rose above the old cemetery
We remember we talked
We could not hear each other
Though the wind was not disturbing.
I do not remember what the sky looked like,
But
There was a sky...sure
*
Time is short.

I have no time and have too many problems to solve
I sip in a problem with every sip of tea
I inhale a problem with every puff at my cigarette
Put on a new problem every time
I change my coat...
When shall I love
And write you poems?
Dearest ,
Give me a God
Give me a God to think of
Give me a God to escape.
*

Ah,it is pleasant
We are sitting ,simply sitting
Sitting silently.
I have so many things to tell
Which I know I cannot ,shall not tell

Last night I talked with me
Of too many this and that....
I was in an anguish to tell

But now
This is enough...we are sitting .
The sun above is throwing little pebbles of its rays
Through the leaves of the tree,
They are falling on your nose,lips and arms

Not on mine
We are sitting ,sitting.....
We have had our talk

Nabakanta Barua

Tete-A-Tete

Ah, it is pleasant
We are sitting ,simply sitting
Sitting silently.
I have so many things to tell
Which I know I cannot, shall not tell

Last night I talked with me
Of too many this and that--
I was in an anguish to tell

But now
This is enough--we are sitting.
The sun above is throwing little pebbles of its rays
Through the leaves of the tree,
They are falling on your nose, lips and arms
Not on mine
We are sitting, sitting --
And we have had our talk.

Nabakanta Barua

The Belt Of The Spinning Wheel

The corded belt of my mother's spinning wheel
was a mystery to me
spool after spool is used up
the distended bobbins pile up in the basket
the empty reel takes a spin or two and stops

But the belt of the spinning wheel is unending
I don't see its ends, just see it move
spelling it out carefully, I write on my slate
Eternal.

One day the cord of the spinning wheel
became quite another thing
I saw a bare string lying on the cement floor
And, after that
We bore mother to the grounds and burnt her

Now the spinning wheel turns
but the bobbins won't,
In the reel a knotted skein of thread ...
Sitting in the dark of my mind
gingerly, in Rabindric character
entered in the ledger:
Terminal,
in the morning light,
the stammering poet, me, read
et-term-inal.

[Translated by Pradip Acharya]

Nabakanta Barua

The First Code Of Life

Offerings to the mother have been washed
with brother's blood;
To satisfy the mother earth
Offering's flesh has been cooked in her breast's milk!
Please, no more
Distribute those horrible offerings!

I am a poet, my shelter made of only words
Words only form my bridge
Through the incisive bridge of words I have crossed
The dark caves of disbelief
What is the use of calling the word as The Brahma
Thinking of it as The God Incarnate
When men wants to protect its dignity
With men's blood?

I don't believe in any electrifying power of words
Which originates from
Falls running on brother's blood

Only a few accused, condemned words -
(so easily can one juggle with words!)
From which erupts deadly hatred,
Suicidal, fratricidal smoke; and
From which originates rivers of blood
Of the confused poor!

O ye my people, the incarnations of the Great Ashoka,
With your tears of repentance
Have your hands washed of
The stains of your brother's blood.
Purify yourselves, Not with the spoilt incarnations
But with the stable unity of
Thought, Love and Sweat.
O Ashoka the Terrible, transform yourself
To Ashoka the Just.

[Translated by Rituraj Kalita]

The Gloom

Last night
Someone poured ink into Umiam
How the streetlights emitted darkness!
The whole day the sky blotted
It with the clouds.

And now, just now
Mixing the gulmar and
The golden cassia hues
The sun prepared
A tiny speck of an orange light.

(First published in 1970)

Nabakanta Barua

Valmiki In Bhopal

Once
At the bank of river Tamasa
Someone killed a karchana separating it from its mate

Those who used to make a living
To them was uttered
A hot blast of condemnation
And this blast gave birth to
The first culture of humankind
From the furrows of the plough was germinated
A far-reaching revolution...

Seeta
The child of my fields
Seeta
The mother of my green crops
Seeta
The future of my golden harvest...
And was written
The Ramayana: The odyssey of the Lord Rama

Today
At the bank of a lake
By the wind carrying Death within it
Were killed
So many fathers, so many sons
So many beloveds, so many mothers

Today
Won't there be any more transformed robber
Whose
Poetic voice would announce
An inevitable anathema
To that way of life
Which, bewitching with the will-o-wisp of development
Dries up the foundations of future existence
Won't there be written
With union of crops and steel

A new epic
Whose name would be
Manavayana: The odyssey of the humankind?

Nabakanta Barua