

## Depiction Of Power And Conflict Of Modern Urbanity: A Critique Of Myth In Nabakanta Barua

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### Abstract

The term 'Modernism' denotes the evocation of new ideas and a deliberate transition from the traditional and religious practices resulting in some innovative ways of ideas and expression. It characterizes the depiction of some different traits and trends in regard to society, culture and literature as well. The two great Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are considered to be the greatest sources of literature that shows culture and values of great Indian tradition. Assamese literature has been immensely influenced by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These two epics teach the significance of culture, justice, virtue, love, sacrifice and so on. the prominent poet Nabakanta Barua is considered to be the glorious time of modern Assamese literature as it carries numerous fantastic poetic creations of the age with different trends and styles. This paper will examine the conflict and power of the modern age and how the characters realize the futility of modern life along with the worthlessness of thirst for power through the select poems of Nabakanta Barua. Barua's select poems critique the traditional and conventional presentation of the mythical characters and project them as the representatives of the modern society through the perspective of mythopoeia. This paper attempts to analyse the poems of Barua from the perspective of Archetypal Criticism.

**Keywords:** Modernism, Conflict, Power, Myth, Archetypal Criticism.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the outstanding creations of Sanskrit literature that contribute immensely to the modern lives of people. Assamese poetry conveys the heritage of the varied traditional specialities of India. Further, Assamese poetry is plenary with all the varieties of thought, style, colour of its own and impacted by other literary waves as well. The modernist writers look back to the time of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and its expansion of knowledge upon Indian literature, culture and civilization. The impact of these two epics in Assamese literature as being an integral part of Indian literature is truly undeniable.

Power and conflict are the main adherence to the system of an empire where war is an inseparable part. The modern world is characterized by alienation and lacking interest in humanity and affection in spite of rapid development of science and technology. Rather it creates a separation of mind among one another that makes people self-centred causing jeopardy in the society. The presentation by the poet in the poem "Samrat" depicts the affluence of intelligence and intellect with the growth of time on one hand; and the pathetic deterioration of human bonding on the other. This distinguishing attribute of modernity has caused a crisis of existence of sovereignty, and the blindness to the drawbacks making people thirsty for power and possession. The poem "Samrat" poses a question on the reestablishment of sovereignty. The poet tries to show that individuals are the integral parts of a country, whereas love and affection are the foundation of the relation between the country and people. They believe that the transition of society can be operated by love and admiration. The establishment of humane relation between the sovereignty of the country and its laymen can be taken as a hypothesis of the

significance of the poem “Samrat”. The poet takes a phylum from the great Indian epic the *Mahabharata* to project the picture of the helpless ‘samrat’ Dhritarastra. Dr. Hiren Gohain has offered a statement on Nabakanta Barua’s proposition of the character of Dhritarastra as:

After the weariness of Kurukshetra Dhritarastra of the ‘Shantiparva’ is taken as a metaphor for the lifeless and helpless situation as imagined by Nabakanta Barua (Gohain 80)

The poem relates the character of Dhritarastra to immorality who is an inhuman spectator of the battle of ‘Kurukshetra’, that shows his insight and thoughtfulness. The substance of the poem is being projected through the derision expressed by the character of Dhritarastra in the poem. It can also be said that the projection of Dhritarastra is not a character; rather it is a spectator of demolition of self-accomplishment and glory. Through the presentation of the character of Dhritarastra, Barua attempts to show that sovereignty in the modern nation is non-existent; therefore, gradually the nation has become autocratic. The reference of non-existence of the nation is being highlighted in the first line of the poem,

Moi janu, moi klibo.

Jodiuba prankit aashu angkurito mur

Ramanir pholoda Kukshit. (*Nabakanta Barua Rachanavali* Vol I 79)

These lines posit a reference of the rise of intellect and intelligence at one point of time, but it also refers to the demolition of intelligence. It results in the sterility of nation, and the emperor Dhritarastra is the symbol of this eunuch. Dhritarastra himself has declared that he is akin to be sterile as he no longer possesses any dynamics to rule over the nation. His declaration manifests his crisis for existence in his kingdom. It shows the alienation and lack of confidence of a king even though he is ruling over his kingdom. The king shows his lack of importance by considering himself a eunuch. The presentation of Dhritarastra is characterized by the modern world features as he faces crisis for his existence and his importance. He talks about a nation which is powerful in all aspects; but lacks empathy and affection and that builds the nation powerful in dullness, blindness and confounded. The poet attempts to portray the character of Dhritarastra analysing from the perspectives of the modern man. Accordingly, Nabakanta Barua shows the pessimistic attributes of the modern-day society fitting the character into the framework of modernism. Through the character of Dhritarastra, the poet presents that the modern world is lacking humanity and delicacy, rather it is used as emissary of a so-called powerful harmonious nation which consistently creates universal political offence. It results in gradual increase of tolerance of political and social conflict. And this rule of an emperor can be compared to the world which is darkened due to the absence of illuminating stars. The presence of Dhritarastra has not been recognized as his empire is being compared to the dark universe and he is akin to stars which are truly dim and aestheticism is unattainable for this kind of nation. The modern existence of nation has realized that these sorrowful experiences of an emperor are truly perilous. Nabakanta Barua looks into the decadence of the modern society through the poetic symbol of Dhritarastra whose mental suffering is taken as the subject matter to draw the picture of modern society.

The poem starts with the soliloquy of Dhritarastra of his existence considering himself a sterile king; however, it ends with the same realization. Further, the poet has successfully used metaphors and imageries to connote the modern-day scenario with different shades of expression of Dhritarastra. The poet has used the image of “Sutham Nayak” (hunk hero) to connote love; “Osiondo Sardul” to refer to violence; “Nopungsok Briddha” (sterile old man) to refer to unethical intelligence; “Jontur Sal” (skin of animal) to refer to conspiracy related to human agility etc. The poet has used the mythical character of Dhritarastra as the representative of modern man who manifests his feeling of alienation.

One of the longest poems of Nabakanta Barua written during the 1960s is “Ravan”. This poem is the projection of the character of Ravana shaped in a completely different way by the poet Nabakanta Barua. Barua assimilates the antique perspectives with the modern circumstances drawing the character of Ravana. Barua discovers an artist in the villainous character Ravana who is now in the quest for aesthetic beauty and Barua, with his own artistic sense, gives importance to the insight of the artistic sense of Ravana escaped behind his external being. Barua incredibly projects the boundless thirst of Ravana for searching for elegance. The character of Ravana is differently presented as a character of artistic being of modernity. Here, in this poem, Barua talks about the psychological state of mind of Ravana; however, Ravana is presented as an unrequited lover of Sita which is totally an opposite interpretation than the character of Ravana presented by Valmiki in the *Ramayana*. Nabakanta Barua presents the mental conflict of Ravana for his longing for the love of Sita. Barua makes the character of Ravana as a representative symbol of a leader of the modern age whose mental suffering is evident through the presentation in the poem. Again, in this poem Nabakanta Barua emphasizes on the decadence of the modern society along with signifying the modern situation of being unloved and being alienated from the near or dear ones. The character of Ravana is powerful as well as a vigorous character in the *Ramayana* written by Valmiki. However, according to the great Indian epic, the character of Ravana is known to be devil or *Rakshas*, but

Nabakanta Barua introduces the character of Ravana as a worshiper or devotee of aesthetic beauty. Nabakanta Barua's Ravana is not a cursed devil, rather he is presented as an artist. Ravana's artistry and his creation are taken as the subject matter of the poem and Barua has presented it in a poetic way. In the poem of "Ravan", Barua talks about death consciousness of Ravana and worshipping of beauty on one hand and on the other hand, fiasco of an artist, affinity of fulfilment, pride of an artist are reflected. The poet neither intends to diminish the glory of the king Ravana, nor the poet attempts to portray Ravana as a perturbed lover who forcefully tries to win the love of Sita; rather Barua inscribes Ravana as a kind and delicate lover with a very simple attitude.

Danab nohou moi soktire nokoru bosh kunu narir hriday

Moi j Ravan, mur brahmanotit pragna

Moi j Ravan, mur kshtriatit sourya

Moi j Ravan, moi devatit silpa (*Nabakanta Barua Rachanavali*, Vol I 94)

Moreover, Nabakanta Barua uses the character of Ravana as a metaphor for the medium of expression of the abeyant love and artistic sense of his mind. However, Valmiki projects the character of Ravana as evil but intellectual and wise who captivates Sita. Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami argues:

Ravana like Rama possessed might, courage, a royal bearing and the deep knowledge of Vedas. There is no doubt that Ravana is one of the most colourful villains ever portrayed in Indian literature (Goswami 179)

Ravana is character taken from the Great Indian epic the *Ramayana* who creates a history by kidnapping Sita, the wife of Lord Rama and it leads to the destruction of golden Lanka. However, the poet Nabakanta Barua brings out the character of Ravana from the epical boundary and presents it in a larger context shaping the character with reference to the modern society. Nabakanta Barua uplifts the character of Ravana with a modern cogitation and thought. The projection of Nabakanta Barua makes Ravana powerful by his mental ability rather than his physical strength as projected by Valmiki. Nabakanta Barua has not presented any analysis about Ravana that can diminish his glory; in fact, Barua uplifts the glory of Ravana with humanistic attributes along with the emotional being of an artist in a flawless manner.

The poems of Nabakanta Barua as discussed above manifest the idea of existentialism. In most of his poems, Barua talks about the crisis of existence during the modern period that people face due to the feeling of uncertainty, isolation, alienation, conflict etc caused by the World Wars. Existentialism is a philosophy that opines a person as an isolated being who does not possess any inheritance of human truth, value or meaning. Thus, a human life moves ahead from the point of nothingness to the state of nothingness where it goes to end and it shows the existence of anguish and absurd. According to the philosophical perspectives, the term 'exist' or 'existence' refers to the state of being active rather than the state of being passive or absence of something. "The term existentialism means 'pertaining to existence'; or in logic 'predicating to existence'" (Cuddon 294). Philosophically the term existentialism refers to the state or a condition where a man, his place, his function can be applied as a vision in certain circumstances. Existentialism emphasizes on the ideas of freedom and choice asserting the subjective views or experiences of individuals. It talks about the meaning of life for which individuals are responsible to create and it also searches for the authenticity of life, values of life and purpose of human life. Jean Paul Sartre is the prominent figure of modern existentialism and he becomes widely influential for his views expressed through his creations such as plays, novels and philosophical writings. Sartre emphasizes on freedom, subjective human experiences of life, and their responsibility to create meaning of life. Sartre advocates the idea of 'existence precedes essence' (Cuddon 295).

'Mythopoeia' is a term that refers to the conscious creation of myth by the author. In literature, the writers consciously present the mythical stories by reworking of the mythical material. The created myth by the author from their perspective taking the current circumstances can also be considered as 'private' mythology (Cuddon 527). The modernist writers attempt to build a connection between the past and the present; that is why, they take the ideas from the past stories and make them relevant from the present context. In this process of creating the myth, the writers foreground the historical fact of a certain group of people who are living as a community or a cultural group and how the historical stories bind the people together teaching the moral values as well as what should be done and what should not. Further, somehow the writers create the mythical getting inspiration from the present scenario that deviates the plot of the story from the original one. The writers attempt to create the story to showcase the present scenario through the help of the mythical characters. It is believed that the mythical story or the characters are believed to be the mirror of a society as it holds the sense of morality, norms, ethics and customs that is considered to be the backbone of a society. Using the present circumstances the writers make a clear picture of virtues and vices that is prevailing in the society and to do so the writers create the plot of the myth on their own with their conscious mind which can be termed as 'mythopoeia'. The reconstruction of the narrative is

important in myth making as it shows how the present generations have perceived and understood the myth as well as how they use that mythical story at the changing notions of time. Mythopoeia or mythopoesis refers to the construction of the myth about a given culture in a collective manner or individually by a writer.

The idea of mythmaking or mythopoeia can be analyzed from the literary theory of Archetypal criticism. Firstly, the term 'archetype' refers to a basic style or a model of something that imitated for some other work. It can be said that archetype is the main source from which imitations are made. Generally, archetype is the abstract idea that represents the pattern, characters, themes, motifs etc. in literary recurrences (Cuddon 52). Further, the archetype represents the typical and the essential characteristics shared by a cultural group of people. In literature, the use of archetype refers to the narrative pattern, designs, themes, images etc. which are present in many literary works and also in myth, dreams and social rituals. Such images that are used in the works are result of the mental and the psychological images or the patterns that are carried by people in their mind, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive readers as they share the psychic archetypes expressed by the author (Abrams & Harpham 16). Archetypal critics argue that the recurring patterns of a cultural psyche are used as universal in literature. They believe that all type or categories of literature has a universal pattern and it is fitted into the larger framework that encompasses all kind of literature finding a wholeness (Gijo, George 55).

Nabakanta Barua has recreated the myth by retelling or interpreting the mythical stories as well as the mythical characters that shows a deviation from the inherent cultural narratives. By reinterpreting the characters in many of his poems, he attempts to keep the cultural heritage to be known to his posterity; however, making the modern people aware of the disseminations of the prevailing society portraying the mythical characters as his subject matter. Nabakanta Barua uses myth with new characterization and setting to unveil the current social issues and it reflects the modern sensibilities. Barua's portrayal of the mythical characters explores the modern experiences and emotions in different fields through that he delves into the psychological depth and insights of these narratives. Nabakanta Barua states his characters into a new social and cultural context to address the contemporary themes and issues.

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