

An Ecocritical Study of Assamese Modern Poetry

B.D. Nisha

Cotton University, Guwahati, India

Abstract

Ecocriticism is a new critical method available to critics to analyze the literature. It is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. It deals with ecological problems like pollution, global warming, climate change deforestation and other ecological exploitations. It is associated with the desire to investigate and remedy the current environmental problems. Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze and possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental problems. The Modern Assamese poet ecocentric vision is described in their poems. The poems of Navakanta Baruah, Ram Gogoi, Harekrishna Deka, Hiren Bhattacharyya, the discussion of environmental consciousness is noticeable. In the poem Kramaxa Eti Xathukotha and Eyat Nadi Asil, Navakanta Baruah describe about a gradually died river and destroyed environment. In Pothar, Ram Gogoi described the sorrowful description of after flood. Another poet Harekrishna Deka, describe nature as subject for the base of the reflection of psychological corner in his poem Bhoi, Guwahati-1 etc. In the poem of Hiren Bhattacharyya named Paniye Mora Mon Mati, Xoisar Xudixya barnamala, poet attempt to keep evergreen the World.

Introduction

Ecocriticism, one of the significant theories of literary criticism was came into exist during twentieth century in the western world. Nowadays in every part of the world nature becomes the one of the prime subjects of literature as a part of environmental awareness. Critical study of this nature-centric literature is known as ecocriticism. Some environmental literary critics have come up to find out a solution to the environment damaging situation, thus they talk in favor of this literary theory.

The word ecocriticism was coined by William Rueckert in 1978. He used this word in his writing named 'Literature and Ecology; An Experiment in Ecocriticism' (Goltfetty, 1996(a)). The word Ecocriticism was derived from two Greek words: okio and kritis. The meaning of this word is 'housejudge'; Okios is nature, a place Edward Hoagland calls "our widest home", and the kritis is an arbitor of taste who wants the house kept in good order, no boots or dishes strewn about to ruin the original décor (Howarth, 1996).

Although the word Ecocriticism was coined in the year of 1978, yet this literary theory will be indebted forever to an environmentalist named Rachel Carson. He was the man who first ever tried to depict the environmental aspects in his book titled 'Silent Spring' (1962). After reading this book William Rueckert was inspired to think that how one could study environmental aspects in literature and then he came up with the write-up which we mentioned earlier. Although from the later part of 1960 to 1970 so many people had written so many articles regarding ecological literary criticism, yet they had not taken any organized step about how to study the ecological aspects in literature. The actual trend of ecological theory has been seen since 1990. In this year Sheryll Goltfelty was appointed as Professor of Literature and environment at University of Nevada. It could be said that his appointment at that post created a broad way for the Ecocriticism. In 1992 Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was founded at the annual convention of Western Literature and Environment and in 1993 a research journal named 'ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environmental' (Goltfelty, 1966(b)) was first published as an annual mouthpiece of ASLE. Now the discussion and deliberation regarding Ecocriticism has been expanded in various part of this world under the aegis of ASLE and ISLE.

Primarily the circumference of Ecocriticism was confined within the literature only. It was mainly studied in the context of romantic poetry, nature writing, wilderness, narrative etc. (Garrad, 2007). Nowadays the field of Ecocriticism has been expanded and subjects like shopping mall, zoo, park,

architecture and cinema are included in this field. Ecocriticism is not only a study about role of nature, it also studies that how this world considers nature, how this world enchanted by nature, how the nature is evaluated in the social context, means how nature is being created and destructed. At the same time Ecocriticism emphasizes on subjects like people's ethical stand towards nature, liability to nature, create a strong bond between human and nature (Estock, 2001). In a nutshell, Ecocriticism is interested to the study of co-relation between human and nature along with spreading awareness regarding nature and create an enthusiasm to save the nature. By studying these aspects in literature this literary theory includes some concepts within it, such as Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Place based ecocriticism, Ecosphere, Oikopoetics, Ecocide etc (Kerridge, 1998).

Objectives of this Study

1. To present a brief concept about evolution of Modern Assamese Poetry.
2. To unveil the true nature of Modern Assamese poetry in the light of Ecocriticism theory.
3. To study that how the ecological subjects have got importance in Modern Assamese poetry

Methodology

Descriptive and analytical methodologies have been taken to prepare this research paper. Information is collected from primary and secondary sources. Poetry books of Navakanta Barua, Ram Gogoi, Harekrishna Deka, Hiren Bhattacharya are taken as primary source. Theoretical books regarding ecological literary criticism, e-book, e-journal along with books, articles and journals depicting evolution of Modern Assamese poetry are taken as secondary source.

Some rules have been followed to study this subject. In-text citation, End notes and References have been included in this research paper according to the Havarth Referencing Style.

Ecological Theme in Assamese Modern Poetry

Description of nature in literature of every part of this world is worth to be noted. Some way or the other nature has been depicted as a driving force in Indian literature since Vedic period, this phenomenon has been seen in the classic works of Kalidasa, literature of pre and post Kalidasa and in The Ramayana and The Mahabharata as well. Nature is depicted lively in Assamese literature also. It could be seen in the unique oral literature created by Assamese pastoral poets and in the Caryapada, the first instance of written literature in Assamese, and nature had taken a permanent place in the Assamese literature of middle era.

Depiction of nature is very lively in Assamese modern poetry. Environmentally aware poets of modern era are Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Chandra kumar Agarwala, Raghunath Choudhury, Navakanta Barua, Ram Gogoi, Harekrishna Deka, Hiren Bhattacharya, Jiban Naraha, Nelim Kumar, Bijay Shankar Barman, Kushal Dutta etc. Depiction of nature is easily found the works of these poets.

Ecological Theme in Works of Nabakanta Barua

One of the prominent environmentally aware modern Assamese poets is Navakanta Barua. His debut book is 'He Aranya He Mahanagar' (Hey Forest Hey City), his other books are 'Eti Duti Egahrta Tora' (One Two and Eleven Stars), 'Joti Aru Keitaman Sketch' (Punctuation and Some Sketches), 'Ravan', 'Samrat' (Emperor), 'Mor Aru Prithibir' (Mine and World's) etc.

His two environmentally aware poetries are 'Kramasha Eti Xadhukatha' (A Continued Story) and 'Eyat Nodi Asil' (There Was a River over Here).

Nature has been destroyed day by day and its harmful impact has been seen on the living world. This problem is discussed in Ecological Literary Criticism. Navakanta Barua depicted the destruction of the nature around us in his poem 'Iyat Nodi Asil'. Here he depicted that a river is being drying up so the environment:

Eya noir paar / Xamukor khola rodot jiliki sokut piyah lukai / Pani kot pani

Kot xeujia paror dhanoni? / Kagojor puke khai gol neki kobitar xei rong? / Luit xukan- luitot pani nai

(This is the bank of the river. Shell of snail is glittering in the sun and hide its thirst. It is looking for the green pasture. Did the bookworm swallow the color of poem? River is dried up, there is no water).

The river is drying up gradually so the flora and fauna of this river are also dying. Poet says,

Etopa pani / Bilor xukan bokar majot / Xukan masor kaint lagi olai amar luniya tej

(A drop of water. In the mud of dried up river bones of dead fish pricked us and our saline blood has come out).

In this poem poet Navakanta Barua used this phrase, “Where is water? Where is water?” In this way he depicted that the waterbodies around us are drying up gradually. Ever aware poet urged to conserve nature and environment which is being destructed by the ill activities of human being. As the poet was unable to revive the dying nature so he lamented thus:

Sakina, tumar jibhar roxere kimen jiyai rakhiba / Itihax jora Karbala moru prantor

(Sakina, how long you could keep the Karbala desert hail and hearty with your succulent tongue?).

Poet indicated that one day this world will no more exist as the nature is being destructed day by day in these lines,

Xukan haror / Xiju Kaintor dex / Mora prithibir dex

(This world is full of dried bone, throne and death).

Since primitive stage human being had been reared on the blossom of nature, they had been collecting food from this nature and enjoying its beauty, thus they lived a beautiful life. But in the course of time people started destructing this nature for their own interest, thus the nature lost its balance and then the people themselves face the dire consequence. All the living things in this world are facing an intolerable situation as the environment is being dying up day after day. Poet depicted this scenario with a beautiful simile:

*Xukan balit xukan bokat Xinhote usupi kande: / Asilu rojar putai / Topot balit pori kando aji
Aru ba ki biloi / Aru ba ki biloi / Ki hobo biloi?*

(They shed tears in the dried sand and mud. Once I was a prince, but now I am crying on this hot sand, what a misery!).

Another environmentally aware poem of Navakanta Baruah is ‘Iyat Nodi Asil’. He depicted the negative aspect of nature in a symbolic way. How a river could become dangerous and destruct the simple and humble life of farmers, that scenario is presented in this poem:

Dekhisa nodir dhole bolatkar kora potharok / Palaxe kabar diya garbhaboti Xosyar Xontan

(Have you seen how the flow of river raped the green pasture, within a blink it put the offspring of matured crops in the grave).

Temperature of this world has been rising owing to the destruction of nature; thus, the land becomes desert. Poet also depicted this dangerous transformation of nature also:

kintu morubhumi ase / Lahe lahe, mahe mahe, bosore bosore

(But there is desert, it comes into exist gradually month after month and year after year).

In this poem poet depicted the destroyed nature with symbolism by using these phrases, “Tamrongi Akax” (Copper colored sky), “Futsai boronor prithibi” (Ash colored world) etc. In another poem poet depicted with a simile that how nature is drying up everywhere and as a consequence of this nature is not green anymore, it reached the untimely maturity and thus it running towards its demise. Excerpts:

Duroni neel Gaonkhonoloi / Eibeli xonkale aghon ahil- ahinote?

(In that far away village this year autumn comes too early; in the month of spring).

People are not aware of environment therefore the world becomes dirty and the environment is destroyed. Whole world has to face its dire consequence and the process has been started already. It has been depicted in this poem:

Borxun? / Dhanonit nogojil juwar, bojra, amar bonot / Don nakhale khejuri

Kebal phulibo xiju, majnixa torar pohare / Renu tar bali danhi xapok bilabo. Dubori dhoribo sati

Kaintiya bone

(Rain? There is no crop in the field, palm tree of our orchard didn't bend down. There is only cactus. In the midnight only snakes could be seen in the light of stars. There will be no more grass only thorny bush will be there).

‘Iyat Nodi Asil’ (There was a river over here) the name of this poem suggests that poet is very much concerned about environment. In a nutshell it could be said that, the ecological theme became a context in this poetry.

Ecological Theme in Ram Gogoi's Poem

Ram Gogoi also a prominent poet of Modern Assamese period, he was the representative of progressive trend of Assamese poetry. In his poem named ‘Pothar’ (The Paddy Field) he described nature as a soothing element. After seeing the field filled with crops in the rainy season farmers started dreaming about their good fortune, but no sooner the farmers started dreaming then all the crops washed by flood. Poet described the dangerous flood, lamentation of farmers thus:

Krur sparxahfenil tatl tarangaraxi / Bukur xeujiya xapontoko karhi loi jai,

Badha nai Abadhe ahil aru gol. Tetiya / Moi kando, xi aru pothareo inai binai kandi ase.

(Cruel waves are snatching the new dreams, without any obstruction it came and gone. Then I cry, they and the field also cry).

In this stanza of the poem environmental awareness of poet has been expressed. He depicted the cruelty of nature strongly but with frugality of words.

Ecological Theme in Harekrishna Deka's Poem

Harekrishna Deka has taken the theme of nature to express the psychological aspect in his poems (Gogoi, 2017). Poet is always aware of the frivolity of the nature which is going to the path of destruction. It could be said he always aware to be just to the nature after seeing its cruelty. He expressed his environmental awareness in his poem named ‘Bhoy’ (Fear) thus:

Dupar bagori jai ghanhor uporedi, nithor joloraxir uporedi / Tar korkox xobdot jen lahe lahe pandur hoi ahe / Ghanhor Krishna xeuj. Asthir hoi pare jalaraxi. / Protidal ghanhote jen konpi jai ashruo ninad

(The day is passing over the grass, over the water which is stand still. With its noise dark green grass becomes yellow. The water becomes restless and every blade of grass trembled with the unheard sound).

He urged to save the nature, which is on path of destruction, in his poem named 'Atmaja' (Son) thus:

Beejbor rupan kora / Xilor bukuedi phuli uthibo xihontor much

(Plant seeds, they will blossom from the stone).

In his poem named 'Guwahati 1', he reminded the natural beauty of Guwahati, when the city was full of greenery. And on the other hand, he depicted that Guwahati is slowly losing its greenery by covered up by concrete. He expressed distress over the fact that Guwahati, his love losing its beauty gradually. Excerpts:

Tor gendhela dehator / Hejar bosor molir toropbor

Gusale hoitu dekhim / Diplip / Xeujia / Pat kapor ronire

(If I remove thousand years old layer of dirt from your stinking body, then I might see that you are draped with glorious greenery).

Ecological Theme in Hiren Bhattacharya's Poem

Hiren Bhattacharya expressed his environmental awareness in most of his poems. He gave a new dimension to his poems by expressing suitably the ecological aspects. It seems that, he wanted to devote himself to keep this world green forever. It has been seen in his poem named 'Xoisor Xudrishya Bornomala' (Beautiful Myriad Hued Crops). Excerpts:

Mok sohai moihai xoisor guti xisi diya / Sokur panire jip dim xilua bukur mati,

Har himjur xaarot lohphokoi barhi uthibo dhan mah xorioh

(Plant the seeds by tilling and harrowing me. I will wet this stone filled soil with my tears. Paddy, pulse and mustard will be ripened luxuriantly by getting the manure made of my bones and flesh).

Nature is becoming cruel day by day, owing to the negative impact created by human being on it. When the water level rises in the water bodies then it creates a critical situation for the human being. This is the perennial problem of Assam. This cruelty of nature depicted in Hiren Bhattacharya's poem named 'Paniya Mora Mon Mati' (Water's death blow to the heart and soil). Excerpts:

Baane utuai nile gaon bhuin, manuh-dunuh, / Baliye bokai puti pelale pothar xomar,

Athaai panire ujai oha / Bare miholi mas-puthir loylas saonta kenio nai

Gaonbor tenei nimaomao / Nai ji nai ural dhenkire saab etake

Nuxuni, keuphale pani, / Korbat okonman xukonimua, korobat donga bandhi Ase ekokal

(Village is washed out by flood. People are displaced. Fields are covered by sand and mud. Various kinds of fishes are flooded in the abundant water, but there is no one to see their dance. Villages are complete silent. There is no sound of husking pedal or the mortar and pestle. Everywhere only water and water. Somewhere it is about to dry and somewhere it is like shallow pool).

In this poem the poet indicated the intolerable situation created by flood and at the same time the dirtiness as an after effect of flood.

Findings of this Deliberation

1. After studying the subject called Ecological Literary Criticism as whole, we could define it thus, Ecological Literary Criticism is a study regarding nature and human being, it includes some other subjects like Science, Arts, Architecture, literature etc. It analyses the relation between nature and aforesaid subjects and tries to find out a possible way that how human being could develop the nature.
2. Nabakanta Baruah depicted that how people became victim of nature's cruelty and the dilapidated state of nature which is on the verge of destruction. Ecological theme came as a context in his poems. He expressed ecological theme in his poems with symbolism and simile.
3. Ram Gogoi expressed ecological theme by taking an instance of a field and depicted the nature's cruelty. In his poems we could find his environmental awareness. He described the ecological theme by depicting the destructiveness of nature on agrarian society, even he depicted the destruction of green nature.
4. Harekrishna Deka used the nature related theme to depict his own psychological aspect in some of his poems. Similarly, his ever awareness towards ecological theme is depicted in some of his other poems as well. In his poems we could found that, he is creating an enthusiasm in the people thus they could come forward to save the nature, on the other hand he describes nature in the context of environmental change.
5. It is worth to be noted that Hiren Bhattacharya depicted ecological theme in his poems with this attitude that he will devote himself to save the environment. However, he depicted some negative impact of nature in his poems.
6. After studying the ecological theme in Assamese poetry, it seems that, rather worshipping the nature Assamese modern poets are more concerned about the negative impact of nature on the living being of this world. Therefore, most of the environmentally aware poets depicted the ecological theme with an approach to create an awareness towards nature conservation.

Conclusion

In this way ecological theme is reflected in Assamese modern poetry. Poets have been depicting environmental awareness with the help of symbol, simile and context, hence these poems created new trend in Assamese poetry. The subject regarding ecological theme in Assamese poetry is not confined only within this paper. We hope that, the prospect regarding the research of ecological theme in Assamese modern poetry will be expanded more and, in this way, some other new aspects will come out in the days to come.

Endnote

1. Literature from Vedic Era

- a. Nature is depicted in Rigveda's Sukta 10.59.6:
- b. Punarno Asung Prithivi Dadhaatu / Pun rdo Devi Punarantarikshang
- c. Pun rnah somantudam Dadaatu / Punah pusha pathyaam Ya swasti

That means, hey universe, revive us. Let the cosmos revive us. Therefore, give us new body, Let Pushya give us the kingdom again.

2. (a) One of the important elements of Assamese oral literature is 'Bihu Geet', here nature worship and nature's cruelty are depicted simultaneously

i. Nature's beauty:

*Xoundaryar leela bhoomi Axomot / Rituraj baxantar agaman
Prakritir bauli naparaxat / Xojale dharanik natun rupat*

(King of season spring has come to the beautiful land called Assam. Nature with its fresh touch making the whole world anew).

ii. Nature's cruelty:

Eibeli ahudhaan paniye marile / Khaboloi naikia bhaat

(This year flood destroyed all the paddy, so nothing to eat right now).

(b) The first instance of Assamese written literature is 'Caryapada'. It belongs to Bengali and Assamese literatures both. Here some padakarta, means creator of the verses, depicted nature in this way:

Na na tarubar mouli re ga-anat lagile dali (No. 28 Carya)

(Flowers are blooming in the tree; branches are touching the sky).

(c) Mediaeval period of Assamese literature is from fourteenth century CE to eighteenth century CE. During this period Srimanta Sankardeva depicted the ecological theme in his poem thus:

Kukur shrigala gardabhara atmaram / Janiya Xobako pori koriba pronam

(God resides in dog, jackal and donkey, so bow down to pay obeisance in front of all of them).

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