



ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN ENGLISH AND BODO ROMANTIC POETRY: AN ANALYSIS

DHANANJOY BRAHMA

Assistant Professor in English,
Bengtol College, Bengtol, Assam, India

&

Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Guwahati



ABSTRACT

The ecological consciousness has been prevalent in the English and Bodo romantic poetry before the emergence of modern environmental awakenings. These romantic poets' love for the beauty and harmony in nature is the basis of their ecological consciousness. They believed that there is a bond of harmony and affinity among all the elements of nature. They also acknowledged the interdependence of various natural elements and their mutual influence on one another. This realization of the interdependence and equal significance of the diverse elements of nature inspired the English and the Bodo romantic poets to love the harmony in nature. The modern environmental activists are indebted to those romantic poets because they paved the way for the environmental movement.

Key Words: Nature, Ecology, Ecocriticism, Environment, Bodo

Introduction

The ecological consciousness in literature received critical attention with the emergence of ecocriticism in the Western literary studies towards the last decade of the 1970. The increasing environmental problems caused by massive industrialization, transport and communication, discharge of chemicals and pollutants, population explosion and related factors have made the modern man aware of the harms that man has been causing to the environment. This realization has let people to reassess their attitude towards nature and literature has also become an area where man's attitude towards nature and ecology is analyzed. Ecocriticism is the technical term that refers to such literary study. It is "the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities"(Abrams: 2005).

The Bodos are the indigenous community of Assam, North-East India. Being a tribal community they live in proximity with nature. The Bodo literature is one of the fast developing tribal literatures in India.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the ecological consciousness in English and Bodo romantic poetry.

The Harmony in Nature

The English romantic poet Wordsworth and the Bodo romantic poet Pramod Ch. Brahma present the harmony of nature in their poems *Lines written in early Spring* and *HayenniSuphin* (The Music of the Valley) respectively. In his poem Wordsworth presents how the diverse elements of nature co-exist harmoniously. His lament at man's detachment with that harmony reflects his desire to be a part of that harmony. This is illustrated through the following lines:

"Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And it is my faith that every flower



Enjoy the air it breathes.
 The birds around me hoped and played,
 Their thoughts I cannot measure-
 But the least motion which they made
 It seemed a thrill of pleasure.
 The budding twigs spread out their fan,
 To catch the breezy air;
 And I must think, do all I can,
 That there was pleasure there.
 If this belief from heaven be sent,
 If such be Nature's holy plan,
 Have I not reason to lament
 What man has made of man?"

(Lines Written in Early Spring)

The similar feeling is expressed in Pramad Ch. Brahma's poem *HayenniSuphin*. Though man tries to disintegrate himself from the harmony of nature due to his materialistic concerns, he is essentially a part of that this harmony. He must integrate into it. Therefore, the poet expresses his unconscious integration with other elements of nature. Here is a translated version of the poem from original Bodo:

"The dispersed cattle are grazing
 In the field producing audible sounds.
 The cows are mooing from the edge of the herd,
 The playful calves are following them.
 The grasshoppers are singing, the doves are chirping
 Here and there.
 The crows are often
 Talking to themselves,

.....

Oh they have melted my heart
 Tears along with desire
 Have appeared in my eyes.
 Oh! why my heart has integrated
 Unknowingly with these different creatures
 Of different sizes!"

(Translated from *HayenniSuphin*)

The quoted lines from the English and the Bodo romantic poetry thus illustrate the concerned poets' glorification of the harmony of nature and such harmony is essential to preserve our ecology.

Fertility and Nourishing Power of Nature

Nature is the source of fertility which is essential for the growth and nourishment of biotic as well as abiotic elements of ecosystem such as humans, animals, plants and other elements. In fact, the various elements of our ecosystem are interdependent on one another. This is beautifully depicted in the English romantic poet John Keats' poem *Ode to Autumn* and the Bodo romantic poet IshanMushahary's poem *Hajw* (The Hill)

In *Ode to Autumn*, Keats demonstrates how the climatic condition of the season Autumn is helpful in bearing, maturing and ripening the fruits in the plants, crops and vegetation. It also helpful in the flowering



and seedlings processes of the plants and vegetation. The blossoming of flowers in turn helps the bees to collect nectar and produce honey. This is beautifully expressed through the following lines:

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core,
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'rbrimmed their clammy cells."

(*Ode to Autumn*)

The maturation of crops, fruits and vegetation enable the farmers to harvest their crops and fruits. As a result of this the farmers' storehouses are filled with plenty of harvest. This is beautifully expressed in the following lines:

"Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on the granary floor,"
Thy hairs soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with fumes of poppies, while thy hook
Spare the next swath and all its twined flowers;
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours."

(*Ode to Autumn*)

The quoted lines also show the dependencies of human and other living organisms on nature.

The fertility and nourishing power of nature is glorified by the Bodo romantic poet IshanMushahary in his poem *Hajw* (The Hill). According to the poet the hill provides the fertile and nutrition for the growth of the surrounding flora and fauna. Therefore, the poet says:

"The trees, plants and birds
Grow on your foot without difficulty."

(Translated from *Hajw*)

Like John Keats who praises the season Autumn in his poem, another Bodo romantic poet Manaranjan Lahary also hails the Summer season in his poem *Be LamajwngDwijlangFwiyw* (*The Summer comes this Way*). In this poem, the poet depicts how the arrival of Summer i.e. the summer rains affect human activities and the growth of plants and animals. The summer rains provide new hope to the farmers and the vegetation too gets new life and vitality. Here is a quote:

"The Summer comes this way;
The warm, watery Summer.
The incessant rains
Bring the message of Summer to the farmers."



The rain formed bubbles
And the playful raindrops dance.
It brings new hope to the plants and woods.
And the hardworking farmers; male and female
Come out together for their work."

(Translated from *Be Lamajwng Dwijlang Fwiw*)

In the poem *He Jwmwi (Oh! the Cloud)* also, the poet Lahary hails the cloud as the source of life and growth for humans, animals and vegetation. Here is a quote from the poem.

"But I know you are also kind hearted:
You sustain the lives of humans, animals, birds and woods
By supplying them water."

(English translation from *He Jwmwi*)

In both the poems Lahary acknowledges the importance of water for the sustenance of lives on the earth.

Continuity and Regenerative power of Nature:

Nature has continuity and regenerative power. This is expressed in some English and Bodo romantic poetry.

The English romantic poet Shelley presents the continuity of nature in his poem *The Cloud*. The cloud which is an element of nature is shown as endless and generative in the poem:

"I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but not die.
For after the rain when with never a stain
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again."

(*The Cloud*)

John Keats also highlights the permanence and continuity of nature in his poems. His *Ode to Nightingale*, and *On the Grasshopper and the Cricket* celebrate the permanence and continuity of nature.

In his celebrated poem *Ode to Nightingale* Keats glorifies the continuity of the Nightingale's song thereby indicating the permanence of the sounds and music of nature. The sound and music of nature produced by different elements of nature are never ending. It is a continuous process; it never ends until a major disruption takes place in natural order. It is symbolized by the song of the Nightingale which has been heard and appreciated by people of different times and places. Here is a quote from the poem:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient day, by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the self same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,



She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

(*Ode to a Nightingale*)

In the poem *On the Grasshopper and Cricket* also the poet celebrates the continuity in nature and natural forms. Nature and natural forms are everlasting and each and every element of nature contributes to maintain this continuity. The poet cites the case of Grasshopper and the Cricket. The Grasshopper sings his endless song throughout the summer and when he gets tired, he takes rest beneath the pleasant grasses. While the Grasshopper ceases to sing, the Cricket takes his place. It sings its beautiful song throughout the winter evening when other creatures are silenced by chilling frost. Thus, the song of nature never ceases and natural forms ever continue. Here is a quote from the sonnet:

"The poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are faint with the hot
 Sun,

And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
 From hedge to hedge about the new-mown
 Mead;

That is the Grasshopper's- he takes the lead
 In summer luxury, - he has never done
 With his delights; for when tired out with fun
 He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never:

On a lone winter evening, when the frost
 Has wrought a silence, from the stove there
 Shrills

The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
 And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
 The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills."

(*On the Grasshopper and Cricket*)

The sonnet *On the Grasshopper and Cricket* is thus, a song of the continuity in nature and natural forms. This continuity is formed by the diverse elements of nature which are inseparable parts of our ecosystem. The poem is therefore, a song of the continuity of nature as well as an acknowledgement of the importance of tiny creatures that constitute the everlasting natural forms.

Like the English romantic poets Shelley and Keats the Bodo Romantic poets Manaranjan Lahary and Brajendra Kr. Brahma also glorify the permanence and continuity of nature. Monoranjan Lahary hails the permanence and continuity of nature in many of his poems like *Mithinga (Nature)*, *Fwisali (The Horizon)*, *PhungRoje (The Beloved Morning)* and *Dwima(The River)*. In many of his poems Lahary compares his own life with nature and concludes that while his life transient, lasting only for a while, nature is permanent and everlasting. She creates and recreates. The poet describes the permanence of nature against the temporality of his (human) life in the poem *Fwisali*:

" Oh Horizon, what a difference between you and me!

I am a mere pinch of dust which diminish in a single blow.

My life is a drop of water

On colocasiaesculenta leave.



My life is temporal
 But you will remain young forever
 As the company of endless time."
 (Translated from *Fwisali*)

In the poem *Dwima*, he glorifies the constructive and regenerative powers of the river and its endless flow. Many civilizations are built and rebuild on the bank of the river but the river flows in the same way for ever. The poet does not know where it ends. Thus, the river, here symbolizes the permanence of nature.

"Many civilizations are buried in the sands of your (river) bank
 And many civilizations have reemerged from this sand.
 Still you flow indifferently as if you know nothing.
 The rivulets and streams find permanent shelter in you.
 I do not know where you will end."
 (Translated from *Dwima*)

Brajendra Kr. Brahma also hails the permanence and continuity of nature in his poem *DubriBilai* (The Carpet Grass). Though the poet uses the carpet grass as the symbol of the regeneration of the suppressed and oppressed people, it also represents the continuity of nature. The carpet grass can revitalize itself from its skeleton- like leafless and dying condition to a fresh and vital grass by acquiring new green leaves. It never dies easily. This revitalizing and regenerative power of the carpet grass is a part of the procreative process of nature. Therefore, he says:

"I am the carpet grass
 Who has raised his head
 Piercing through your feet
 After being shrunken in the scorching heat of the sun."
 (Translated from *DubriBilai*)

Nature and Rural Life as the Better Alternative to the Crowded City Life:

In nature, the English and Bodo romantic poets find a better alternative to the uncomfortable existence in crowded towns and cities. In his poem *Tintern Abbey*, William Wordsworth expresses how he feels refreshed by the very thought of nature when he is fed up by the urban existence. Brooding on Nature, or experiencing the serene beauty of nature is a better alternative to the boring and noisy urban existence. Therefore the poet says:

"But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
 In hours of wariness, sensations sweet.
 Felt in the blood, felt into my pure mind,
 With tranquil restoration."
 (*Tintern Abbey*)

In *To one who has been long in city pent* also Keats glorifies the rural life, landscape and nature. The simplicity and contentment of rural life and the redemptive power of nature are the principal subject matter of this beautiful sonnet. According to the poet, one can breathe fresh air of the open sky in the village which is not possible in congested existence in cities. The contented, leisurely and natural life of the village is thus, glorified in the poem *To one who has been long in city pent*:

"To one who has been long in city pent
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
 And open face of heaven,-to breathe a prayer
 Full in the smile of the blue firmament.



Who is more happy, when with heart's content,
 Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
 Of wavy grass, and reads a de bonair

Of gentle tale of love and languishment?"
 (To One Who has been long in City Pent)

The renowned Bodo poet Brajendra Kr. Brahma also glorifies the rural life in his poem *Abwi* (*Grandmother*). In the poem, the poet who lives in the midst of the congested environment of the town recollects an old rural lady whom he affectionately calls 'AbwiKhuji' and through his memory he depicts the picture of her lifestyle characterized by simplicity, humility and genuineness. She is not influenced by the individualistic, complex and artificial nature of the so called civilized urban life. The poet is very much fond of the old woman and her way of livelihood. Besides depicting the humble life of the old woman, the poet also gives us a picture of her village surrounded by dense trees and plants bearing diverse fruits and vegetables in contrast to the crowded, barren and polluted cities and metropolis. Here is a translated quote from the original poem:

"Living in the midst of a hot urban atmosphere
 Of languid civilization,
 I am remembering grandmother Khuji
 Who lives in a remote down-trodden village.
 Sitting on the floor of her tiny hut
 Situated under the shadow
 Of betel nut, jackfruit and bamboo plants
 That is approached by a tiny road
 Through grasses and ferns,
 The grandmother was chewing betel nut-betel leaves
 Along with a pinch of tobacco."
 (Translated from *Abwi*)

Voice Against Wanton Destruction of Wild/Aquatic Creatures

The wild and aquatic creatures are integral part of the natural resource. Their existence is important for maintaining the ecological balance. But such wild or aquatic creatures are being wantonly killed by humans in large scale. In English romantic poetry Coleridge makes a bold statement against the wanton killing of the sea bird Albatross by the mariners. He urges us to love every living creatures both large and small because they are created by the same God and assures that one who loves all can only pray well. Therefore he says:

"He prayeth well, who loveth well
 Both man and bird and beast."
 (The Rime of Ancient Mariner)

In Bodo romantic poetry also Manaranjan Lahary mourns at the cruel killing of a songbird cuckoo by a wanton boy. He feels sad by reflecting the fact that somebody's death is a merriment for some other. Like Coleridge's *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, Lahary's *Dao* (*The Bird*) is a poetic statement against the killing of wild creatures. The poet laments that:

"Some rejoice
 At some others' death."
 (Translated from *Dao*)



Conclusion

The above discussion shows the presence of ecological consciousness in the English and the Bodo romantic poetry. These romantic poets' love and glorification of the beauty, harmony and diversity of nature is significant from ecological point of view. Their acknowledgement to the fertility, continuity, and regenerative power of nature also bears ecological significance. They are very much aware of the interdependence of the various elements of nature and how these elements affect one another. This interdependence and mutual influence are the primary characteristic of our ecosystem. Therefore, the damage done to this natural harmony causes ecological imbalance. Being nature lovers, the English and the Bodo romantic poets are very much concerned to maintain the natural harmony and diversity intact.

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