



# Assamese Nature Writing And Soumyadeep Datta's Contribution

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## ARTICLEINFO ABSTRACT

Nature Conservation, at present, is an extensively discussed topic, because the ecosystem has gone to a newness. This newness has brought drastic changes to the human thoughts, interests, behavior etc. which have impacted upon the ecosystem. The infatuation towards so-called modernism has made the people neutral to the world of other living beings due to which the human being and other animals have to experience an imbalanced ecosystem. This imbalanced ecosystem has not only caused various natural problems, but also impacted the social, cultural, economic, political academic fields and physical environment. In view of this, a literary genre regarding these impacts upon the surrounding world, including the life, works and art forms came into existence in United States of America in the later part of the 7<sup>th</sup> decade of twentieth century, so that people could be sensitized about this restlessness that grew up in a large scale. This literary genre is later categorized as 'ecocriticism'.<sup>1</sup> Ecocriticism is a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment. Ecocriticism originated as an idea called "literary ecology" (Meeker 1972, cited under General Overviews) and was later coined as an "-ism" (Rueckert 1996, cited under General Overviews). In the 9<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the scope of ecocriticism expanded after it had got recognition as an academic subject.<sup>2</sup> In the course of time, it became imperative for the people to be united in order to resolve this environment related global crisis. It should be mentioned here that the factors responsible for the everlasting social and psychological problems of human being is the surrounding world of nature. Under such circumstances, the need of hours to resolve such global issues is to spread some universal ideologies. The one and only medium to spread the universal ideologies is the literature and it will be dedicated for the betterment of the living beings. Keeping this in view, the notable one among the persons who have been writing continuously in the Assamese language is Soumyadeep Datta. Datta has been working relentlessly for the environmental conservation in both—individual and public level. Datta's contribution to the nature writing deserves systematic study at the present backdrop of growing threat to the nature.

**Keywords:** Assam, Assamese, Soumyadeep Datta, environment, Ecocriticism, nature writing.

## Introduction

While studying the history of civilization, it has been observed that there is an unavoidable inter-relationship between human being and nature due to which nature continues to occupy places in the literary practices of different ages. However, nature was mentioned in the ancient literature in a view to fulfilment of human interest and satisfaction. In simple words, the necessity and importance of nature for the human being is limited unto the level of fulfilment of their interest. It can be said that at a time when environmental awareness was discussed widely in the western literature, the sketch of nature in Indian literature in conventional level only. Along with the other Indian languages, nature occupied places in the literary creations of the Assamese language including the *Charyapadas*<sup>3</sup>, *Ramayana*<sup>4</sup> translated by MadhavKandali<sup>5</sup>,

creations of Sankardeva<sup>6</sup>, and applied books<sup>7</sup>written during the rule of the Ahom dynasty<sup>8</sup>, *Arunodaya*<sup>9</sup>, *Jonaki*<sup>10</sup>etc<sup>11</sup>. It is worth mentioning that all the literary creations in which nature is sketched can not be considered as nature conscious literature. There is difference between sketch of nature and nature consciousness. This difference brightens the concept of environmental degradation by upholding the literary creations based on the destruction of nature. Generally, the ecosystem amid which human being lives is called environment. "Environmental Consciousness" refers to the scientific concept about the natural system (Physical and Biotic). The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy by Sir Isaac Newton, published in 1687, gave a sense that nature is completely a subject based on science. Through the books which deals with the concept of "Universal Nature", Newton says that the philosophical interpretations of environmental science can be applied for the betterment of the human being.<sup>12</sup> So, it is seen that though the people in the past could have a sense on the common scientific concepts related to environment, they did not pay heed to the phenomenon. But in the course of time, when people had to face with the environmental problems, the nascent of environmental consciousness started to grow in their mind. As a result of it, ecocriticism started to get recognition as an objective trend of literature. The Assamese writers started to express their thoughts through literary creations by observing the threats to the ecosystem occurred due to the globalization. Among them, the prominent one, who has rendered quantitative and qualitative contributed to the Assamese literature is Soumyadeep Datta<sup>13</sup>. In the course of the development of civilization, people started to use the natural resources for their interest happiness and financial security causing degradation to the environment. Influenced by the experiences he gathered, Soumyadeep Datta, who is involved in the conservation of biodiversity and spreading of the environmental education, started to think about the future of the world separated from the human being. Basically, Datta created a trend of investigating the impacts of these things upon human life, works, culture and ecosystem through his literary practices in the Assamese language.

### **Social, organizational activities of Soumyadeep Datta**

Located in the Northeast Region of India, Assam is a state enriched with natural resources. Due to this reason, various economic, political and social problems, centering round nature, rises in the state very often. Under such circumstances, people living in this territory have to be sensitized the importance of the conservation of the natural resources. In this connection, Soumyadeep Datta, a nature lover and an environmental activist, who hails from the district of Dhubri, has been playing a crucial role in Assam. He has established an unique place in the history of the movement of nature, biodiversity conservation in Assam. Datta became interested in the nature conservation activities from his childhood. Later he engaged himself in the spreading of environmental education. He is an environmental activist, travelogue writer, ardent follower and researcher of Buddhist culture. He pursued training on environmental conservation, international environmental education in the famous Smithsonian Institution of the United States of America. He is also took training successfully on wildlife conservation in addition to studying ornithology in Zoological Survey of India under the Union Government. He excelled in watershed development, camp management and making of environmental education teaching materials. He achieved the international Ashoka Fellowship from the USA based organization- Ashoka Innovators of Public in 1998 in addition to being honoured with the prestigious lifelong membership of the same.<sup>14</sup> Notably, achieving the membership of the Ashoka is a difficult task. Only a determined, highly intellectual person with organizing efficiency can get the chance to achieve the membership of the Ashoka. In addition to working practically for environmental conservation, Datta engaged himself in nature writing too. In 1997, Datta's first book, titled as *Asomor Abhayaranya and Rashtriya Udyan* (Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks of Assam, 1997) was published. Datta has contributed to the Assamese literature with more than two scores of books on nature writing till date. His literary creations clearly sketch the magnums of environmental degradation.

Soumyadeep Datta is also the founder Director of the Nature's Beckon<sup>15</sup>, an environment activist, non-governmental organization. The organization was established in 1982. Since then, the organization, led by Soumyadeep Datta, has been conducting vital works in the field of wildlife conservation, awareness creation, environmental education, scientific research and documentation and socio-economic development of the forest fringe villages.<sup>16</sup>

Datta has availed the opportunity to take stock of the environmental issues at different places of Assam and North-East India. The vivid stories of struggle carried out by the Nature's Beckon relentlessly towards environmental conservation have been incorporated in his books, titled as 'Aranyar Cha-Pohar' (The Light and Shadows of Forest), *Namchangor Anteshpur* (Innermost Part of Naamchang, 2010) and *Aranyatur Bhraman Kotha* (Travelogue of Forest, 2015). So, name of Soumyadeep Datta among the writers, who have contributed to the literature with the knowledge of environmental issues in various places across the globe, can be cited with honour. The small or big things, phenomena of nature, about which people are unaware, which are unnoticed or neglected, but important, are the subject-matters of the literary creations of Soumyadeep Datta. So, while reading his creations, readers get a unique test, separate from that of other conventional literature. Perhaps, the shouldering of the heavy responsibility to take the unexpressed thoughts of the world, which is separated from the human being, by realizing them with cognizance and magnanimity, to the common masses is possible for Soumyadeep Datta only. The people of Assam, from the common

masses to highly designated ones, have noticed this effort of SoumyadeepDatta. Among us there are only a few persons who endeavour for the betterment of the biodiversity by giving up their personal interests. Actually, SoumyadeepDatta has rendered massive contributions to turn the public consciousness on nature into an environmental conservation movement in Assam.

### **Nature writing and SoumyadeepDatta's creations**

William Howarth, an American environmentalist, while paying importance on the natural principles, has noticed the manifestation of four things in nature writings. They are-1. Ecology, 2. Ethics, 3. Language and 4. Criticism.<sup>17</sup>

According to Howarth, the combined form of ecology, ethics, language and criticism expresses the nature of ecocriticism. Its concept of the ecosystem forwards the scientific explanation of each elements of the physical world. SoumyadeepDatta, while putting forward the philosophical interpretation on environment, also pays importance upon the authenticity and correctness of each information, element, and subject-matter. The readers of SoumyadeepDatta can feel that he wants to construct a foundation of relationship between human being and earth through the practical philosophy of ecological ethics. Everyone of the society must shape himself to be a participants of environmental activities to create a suitable ecosystem. Similarly, the subject which the conclusion of language covers, is how the 'words' used by the writer represent the human world and the world separated from the human beings. It reflects the introspection of the writer regarding the knowledge on environment and how the description helps in spreading the nature related thoughts. Moreover, the aesthetic expression of the incorporated literature dominated by language wants to grow the love for the ecosystem in the mind of the readers. In the literary creations of SoumyadeepDatta, such aesthetic expression is noticeable and evident. For example, a narrative of Aranyar Chan-Pohar can be cited- "Bimohitakoraprakritik 2638 parsha 2638 2638 , phoolorsamaroh, pahareagurabhasamantulakhandardoremeghrashi, 2638 parsha 2638 botaharusheetoralinganemordehtothamonok bare bare 2638 parshakorijaboloidhorile (Infatuating natural beauty, assembly of flowers, drifted clouds like flying pieces of cotton, breezy wind and hug of cold started to touch me again and again).<sup>18</sup> The aesthetic expression like this piece of narrative is a remarkable thing.

### **Personal Response to Nature**

Personal response to nature is one of the prominent characteristics of the nature writings of SoumyadeepDatta. Simply, it can be said that a responsible environmental activist as well as an ardent lover of nature came into our view through his literary creations. In the book *NamchangorAnteshpur* (2010), SoumyadeepDatta says, "Aranyarlogotapunarsamparka project naibacareeror. Kintumarlogotaranyarsamparkaantarar." (Your relationship with nature is either of your career or of project. But our relation is of heart).<sup>19</sup>

When any animal falls in danger, Datta leaves no stone unturned to rescue it immediately. Moreover, Datta has been working relentlessly to conserve wild birds and their habitats. In support of this, his books named *AsomorJalasarCharai* (Water Birds of Assam, 2017), *AsomorChikariCharai* (Hunter Birds of Assam, 2018), *Amar BinandiyaCharaiAru Tar Sangrakshan* (Our Beautiful Birds and Their Conservation, 2017) can be cited. In these books, he has incorporated the introductory account of the birds with their colour photographs, English and scientific names. By reading these books, it can be said that Datta has written them after prolonged research and observation. The incorporation of the colour photographs of the birds has increased in the practical values of the books by helping the readers to know them perfectly. These photographs will help the readers to know the elements ecosystem simultaneously at time when they will draw the attention of the illiterate people of the society by helping them to identify the vivid world of the wild fowls and animal. The *Eco tourist* of SoumyadeepDatta highlights the qualities, that a real eco tourist should possess. He says, "An eco-tourists must be alert from all directions and should be enriched with the knowledge of nature. The eco-tourists should be alert all the time and must notice that his tour doesn't pose as a threat to the world that is separated from that of human being."<sup>20</sup>

### **Philosophical interpretation of nature**

Another most prominent characteristics of SoumyadeepDatta's literary creations is the philosophical interpretation of nature. Through them, Datta interprets that the conventional ideologies, faith and lifestyle of people seen in the past centering round the nature had kept it secured the world in most of the time. But the self recognition of man as the most superior species of the earth as well as their pride has created a gape with the nature. As a result of it, the destruction in the nature is increasing alarmingly day after day. Environmentalist SerenellaLovino, keeping this dialectical intertwining of humans and nature, advocates a culture, which is called "non-anthropocentric thinking".<sup>21</sup> Non-anthropocentric ethics grants moral standing to natural objects as animals, plants and landscapes. As per the concept, human being will pay attention to the uniqueness of all elements of nature, be it biotic and abiotic. Such thought is felt in the creations of

SoumyadeepDatta, while reading. In this connection, 'EiPrithivi Akal ManuhoreNohoi' (This earth is not only of Human Being) of his book *BipannaDharitree, SankatatBanyapranee* (2012) is noteworthy.

### Findings and Conclusion

Based on the literary creations by SoumyadeepDatta, and his practical works, some decisions can be deduced-

1. To establish that nature is a scientific phenomenon.
2. Discovery of the mutual relationship between human being and nature
3. To investigate the reasons and factors posing threat to ecosystem
4. To create a mentality for environmental protection etc.

The qualities, which were fixed by William Howarth, Thomas J Leon as characteristics of nature writing is found in creations of SoumyadeepDatta. With these significant activities, Datta has establish himself as a responsible and alert environmental activist.

From this elaborated discussion, it can be said that there is only a few people, not only in Assam, but also in the world, who dedicate themselves to fight relentlessly to resolve the environmental issues. At this backdrop, the sole need is to realize the thoughts, activities of SoumyadeepDatta, reflected through his literary creations, for the betterment of the earth.

### Note and References :

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2. ibid 'Editor's Preface' Page- viii
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4. Written by Valmiki, It's an Indian epic
5. An Assamese writer and translator of 13th-14th Century
6. The most writer and social reformer of Assam in 15th-16th Century
7. These are about domestic animal like elephant and Horse.
8. That was principal dynasty of medieval period of Assam. 1228 - 1826
9. It is first Assamese periodical published from 1846
10. It was a major Assamese magazine of 19th Century, published from 1889
11. Naba Kumar Chamuah, *AsomatSeujSangrakshanSetanaaru Sahitya*, Naksha print & publication, Dhemaji, Assam, First Published-2017, Page - 84
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13. His date of birth is 1967. He is a citizen of India and resident of Dhubri District of Assam
14. Arabinda Rajkhowa (Ed.), *Asomiya Prakriti-Sahitya aaruSoumyadeep Datta*, North Lakhimpur College Publication, Assam, 2021, Page- 207-212
15. Established in 1982
16. Arabinda Rajkhowa (Ed.), ibid, Page - 207 to 212
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18. Soumyadeep Datta, *Aranyar Cha-Puhar*, Banlata, Dibrugarh, Assam, First Published-2015, Page- 33
19. Soumyadeep Datta, *NamchangarAnteshpur*, Banful Publication, Guwahati, Assam, 2012, Page-161
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21. Serenella Lovino's neologism 'non-anthropocentric humanism' advocates a 'culture of copresence' and 'inclusivity' that acknowledges the dialectical intertwining of humans and nature. Scott Slovic(Ed.),ibid, 'Glossary of select terms'; Page-173