

ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN JOHN KEATS AND RAGHUNATH CHOUDHARY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Ecological crisis now needs a way to preserve nature and save it from the selfish purposes of human society. Since nature's autonomous existence is denied, it leads to the bio-centric inequality in the world. For many years the earth has been facing so many ecological problems for the degradation of nature. In Assamese poet Raghunath Choudhary's nature poems, the ecological consciousness has been found. He is known as the "Bihogi Kobi" (The poet of birds) in Assamese literature. His noted works like *Keteki*, *Xadori*, *Kaarbala* are famous for nature poems. In Assamese literature, Choudhary brings a wave among the readers about eco-love and ecological consciousness through his poems. The same sense is found in famous English poet John Keats also. Like Raghunath Choudhary, John Keats also minutely observes the melodious music of birds, the divine scene and highlights the eco-centric beauty of nature. Through his famous works *Ode to Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* Keats shows the personification of nature as well as identification with nature. The romantic poets have explored the love of nature and glorified nature as opposed to materialistic and selfish approach of human civilization. Especially the nature poets seem to be worried about the ecological degradation and extinction of many creatures on the earth. Further, they find that natural beauty provides peace, harmony and spirit to human beings. This paper tries to explore inherent beauty and own identity of natural creatures as well as to show the ecological consciousness in poet John Keats and Raghunath Choudhary. The aim of this paper is also to seek an alternative of human anthropocentric approach.

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Nature is one of the dominant themes in literature. As a primary source of hope and life-giving power, nature has been occupying an integral part in literature. There is an unseen but an unbreakable relationship between nature and human beings. John Keats, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron are some of the exponents in English literature who worship nature and highlight the natural phenomenon in their writings. On the other hand, Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Raghunth Choudhari, Hemchandra Goswami, and Chandra Kumar Agarwala are the prominent figures who have brought a new trend of romanticism to Assamese literature through the magazine *Jonaki*. The *Jonaki* magazine carried a new dawn of romanticism in Assamese poetry. The *Jonaki* era of Assamese literature encompasses romantic sensibility of love and nature, assimilation of self with nature, eulogizing nature in different genres.

The Assamese poet Raghunath Choudhary is considered to be one of the prominent nature poets of Assamese literature whose poems appear as a source of beauty, love and happiness. The beauty and glory of nature are seen thoroughly in Choudhary's poems. Raghunath Choudhary submerges in the natural world for a long time and explores its intrinsic worth. He adores the beauty of nature and realizes the fact that natural beauty is not confined to a particular space or place; rather it is universal. When we speak of nature, a large part of the world is highlighted where human and non-human being like animals, birds, little insects, blade of grass are encompassed. Choudhary has minutely observed the ordinary things of the outer world that are generally not counted to be significant and worthy, Choudhary proves throughout his poetry that every trivial natural creature has a beautiful life and it is livelier.

A reading of Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' nature poems, it is found that both the poets attempt to bring out nature for displaying its own effect and identity. Despite many differences, there are so many similarities that have been noticed both in Western romantic literature and Assamese romantic literature. Love, isolation, nature and such themes are seen to be similar to a great extent in the romantic era of both literatures, which lead to form the related ideas and concepts of that. Love of nature, eulogizing nature, recognition of nature's identity is such similar themes of romantic poets. From the reading of both Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' poetic works on nature, it is apparently seen that both of them bring forth nature to explore the eco-self and the inherent value of the natural world. It is remarkable that the focus of both poets is the richness and diversity of nature and physical environment. Both poets specially concentrate upon nature to show its effects upon the human world as well as show a path for the preservation of nature against the increasing materialistic approach of human being.

From the study of Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' nature poems, it is found that nature plays a dominant role in two different grounds. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats belong to two different periods and literatures; and yet in their poems, nature carries the same significance and importance. Moreover, the ecological personification seems to be similar between the two poets. Against the anthropocentric and materialistic views of human beings, they present nature as an elemental force of life, and recommend the unity of man and nature. The internal connection of man's identity and existence with nature are seen in the poems of both the poets. Nature is the most effective power in human environment and irrespective of all cultures, nature plays the same role.

Though Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' belong to different cultures, their nature poems carry the same ecological consciousness. Both of them carry a deep sense of assimilation with nature and prove that the root of human body and soul belong to nature. The identification with nature and the recognition of nature's intrinsic value are acquired naturally irrespective of all cultures. This sense is found in the comparative study of Raghunath Choudhary's ecological consciousness and that of John Keats. Against all chaos (personal, social, political, cultural), anarchy, pain, sufferings and struggle, nature provides life force to everyone. Nature embraces everything with its soft and nurturing wings and provides relief and shelter. Both in John Keats and Raghunath Choudhary's poems, nature plays an identical role with heavy significance.

Through the poetic works, both Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats tend to enlarge their self by accommodating with nature so deeply and minutely. The 'ego-self' should be left away and 'eco-self' should be broadened gradually for the sake of ecological equality. The inherent identity of nature seemingly ordinary things are brought out by the poets. Both poets explore the hidden and infinite power of nature through their poetry. Both the poets show the strong bond between man and nature which embodies specially the contiguous effect upon each other. From the reading of Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' nature poems we find some resemblances of their thoughts and perspectives.

Nature's tiny things are their focused subject of both poets. Instead of using high images or choosing grand objects, Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats have preferred ordinary or tiny things of nature to explore. Among the ordinary or insignificant things of nature,

that are generally being neglected, they find some extraordinary senses and therefore going into nature, they bring out the significance of the every little creatures of nature. It has already been told that natural world has its own identity and significance. As in Raghunath Choudhary's poem "Keteki", the touching tone of the bird is focused, similarly the Nightingale bird plays the same role in Keats mind and soul. Submerging in the world of Nightingale, Keats feels that the intensity of the bird's song is beyond his comprehension, but simultaneously he feels that the voice of the bird is eternal on contrary to the temporary existence of human life:

Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird!

No hungry generations tread thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard

In ancient days by emperor and clown (Keats, 61-64)

Keats speaks of the eternality of the bird and expresses his peaceful existence amidst the bird's world. The same sense is found in Raghunath Choudhary's poem "Keteki" also. The poet expresses his intense curiosity in the bird's pervasive voice. Choudhary also says that the temporary human existence, which is confined to worldly pain, is unable to comprehend the endless power and joy of the bird. Choudhary says in "Keteki":

The heart of the songstress, as it were'

Is full of passion

How it perches and sings

How moving the music is (Keteki, 111-114)

Both poets speak of two different birds in two different contexts, but the undertone of the poets' expression is

the same. It is seen that only intense song of the two birds snatch their attention and they discover friendly figures in the bird. They show that the melodies of the birds are universal and it is not confined to any particular region and period.

Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats describe the reflection produced by the birds' music in the surroundings and in the life of nature. Furthermore, their minute representations bring out the aesthetic sense that is found in nature. In the second wave of the poem "Keteki", Choudhary has minutely presented mesmerizing pictures of the natural environment with the song of the bird:

It is Spring, the mango blossoms,

The jack-fruit buds

And the sweet-tongued cuckoo to see you

Comes with her hair parted (Keteki, 118-121)

Similarly, in Keats' poem "Ode to the Nightingale" also there is a beautiful description of the night scene of the scent of the season flowers, the quiet sky above the poet's head, the breeze blowing with the melodious song of the bird. The poet gives a keen description of that scene:

Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, the fruit-tree wild;

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;

Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves; (Keats, 54-57)

In the Assamese month *Bohag*, nature changes its old appearance and takes a new shape. Different trees, birds, flowers, insects adorns nature newly in this

month. This is found to be explored in Raghunath Choudhary's poem "Bohagir Biya". The poet acutely draws natural changes and appearance in his poetry. Nature's beauty does not decay; it just takes different shapes in different environment. This diversity of nature is seen in both poets' poems. The natural beauty creates an aesthetic environment all around the earth as well as evokes enthusiasm in human mind. For Keats also, nature's beauty is evergreen and everlasting. His "Ode to the Grecian Urn" speaks of nature's eternity on contrary to man's temporary moments. Therefore Keats says, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Natural beauty lies around the environment, the human beings just need to preserve that. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats poems tend to convey this message.

Personification of nature is a remarkable feature in both poets. As in Raghunath Choudhary's poem, the flower *Golap* becomes a beautiful lady, the birds *Keteki* and *Dohikotora* his friend or the season *Bohag* becomes a beautiful bride, similarly in Keats' poetry nature plays the role of a woman or a lady. Choudhary has seen a beautiful, shy lady within the *Golap* flower whereas Keats sees a matured lady within the spring season; who with the help of sun ripens the fruits. Here sun is also personified as her 'close-bosom friend'. Both poets explore the intrinsic identity of nature by giving human-like qualities into them. Raghunath Choudhary wants to be alive with the soft touch of *Golap*. He desires to be loved by the caring lady, as if the flower in form of a lady could reduce his pain. Similarly, in Keats' "To Autumn" the season gets a human-like figure in poet's sketch. As if the lady takes rest after her works are over, additionally he gives a beautiful description how her hair is 'soft-lifted by the by the winnowing wind' when she is taking rest:

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow around asleep

Drowsed with the fume of poppies (Keats, 14-17)

The field is personified; the bird is personified in Keats' poetry. The poet requests the bird to take him away from the mundane world and shares his feelings and pains with the bird like an intimate friend. This eco-self is also found in Raghunath Choudhary's nature poems. Like John Keats, Raghunath Choudhary also expresses his feelings and emotions with the *Keteki* and *Dohikotora* bird.

Both poets personify nature to show that nature has its own voice. Nature has a reflective voice. Through deep meditation and minute observation, they hear the voice of nature and present in their poetry. Nature's voice should be recognized and take out among the common people. Keats and Choudhary's nature poets indicate that nature itself carries its own identity without human interference.

An eco-friendly term is thus gradually developed between man and nature. Both poets show that man can get assimilated with the natural world with recognition of nature's inner identity and beauty. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats poems prove that nature can be a listener, a healer, a friend to hold man in their bad times. Therefore Raghunath Choudhary addresses the bird as 'my dearest friend' or 'the flower as beloved'. Romantic poets, specially who see nature as a living creature, uphold nature not only just as an object towards which emotions are directed, but also as something having active and effective power that can react and is actively engaged with human world. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats' minute

presentation of nature and its identification show the fact that human beings get life and refreshment in the touch of nature.

Keteki is the Assamese form of the Nightingale bird. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats have the similar tone and same approach towards the two birds in two different contexts. Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats assimilate human's instincts with the natural world. They express their desire of accommodating with natural things. The poet desires to go the bird's world; the poet again wants to be like the steady star. Again on the other hand, poet Choudhary also goes amidst nature to conceive the tranquility.

However, despite so many resemblances, there are some dissimilarities to be seen between the two nature poets. Some differences are found to see in their perceptions. In Raghunath Choudhary's poems, one may find nature as a speaker; nature speaks loud of the human voice. Nature echoes the unsaid emotion of human beings. On the contrary, nature appears as a healing power in Keats' poetry. For Keats' nature is a source of reviving the lost spirit of human beings. If observed minutely, one may find that pessimistic tone in Keats' poetry. There is a sense of escapism and hopelessness in some of his perceptions. But in Raghunath Choudhary's poems readers see the eco-aesthetic sense that brings hope and happiness.

For Keats nature was a healing force. It is as if nature could heal his pain and sufferings. When he hears the melody of the Nightingale, he feels an unknown pain looking at his suffering condition. He is intoxicated in the song of the bird and desires to escape from his existence. He found this world to be a place of suffering:

...where young grows pale, and spectre-thin,
and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despair,

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

(Keats, 26 - 30)

He longs to escape this mundane world in order to get rid of his suffering. In the nightingale he finds the manifestation of eternal joy which he aspires for. Therefore amidst nature he longs for 'easeful death:

... and, for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,

Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,

To take into the air my quiet breath;

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain

(Keats, 51 to 56)

On the contrary to that, the voice of the *Keteki* or *Dohikotora* bird stands for beauty, joy and happiness for Raghunath Choudhary. He sees there the enthusiastic power of life. There is no woes and agonies the bird's world. That's why the birds are singing with spontaneity. From that view, Raghuanth Choudhary is highly inspired and discovers the hope and spirit of life amidst nature. Unlike John Keats, Raghunath Choudhary brings the positive and optimistic aspects of life and speaks that amidst nature, one may get relief and get a new life even after being shattered or destroyed.

Identification of nature's inner worth and beauty and identification of the human self with nature are again another points to be noticed in Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats. For both of the poets, nature sometimes becomes a friend, sometimes beloved and sometimes anonymously someone with only whom they can share their pain or feelings. In fact, nature becomes so close to their heart that they find an ample space amidst nature to vent out all their suppressed emotions. They find the root of their emotions amidst nature. They find that nature also has instincts to feel. The different shades of nature in their poetry prove that there are peculiarities in nature to be identified.

"The best way to enjoy nature is to become part of it" (Dai, 41). Without going into nature, one cannot comprehend its pleasant beauty. To feel the tranquility of the natural world, one must get involved and assimilated with it. Along with this, we can say that for preserving nature also, human beings should aware of its own worth and identity. Nature has its own distinctiveness. Its intrinsic identity itself has a specific position in the world; the human beings need to recognize it rather than using nature for their own benefits. Further, the wonderful site of nature creates a refresh and pleasant environment in the earth. Though both poets of this discussion carry nature of two different lands in their literatures, but their presentation of natural sites give the same pleasure, beauty and peace. The natural site of pastoral, landscape and wilderness is seen in the poems of Raghunath Choudhary and that of John Keats and in fact those sites evoke the creative senses of mind of the poets against the disturbing and chaotic sites of society.

Nature keeps everything in a harmonious order. "Stability, harmony, balance and self-regulation all exist with and within the unity of nature idea"

(Marshall, 41). The interference of man causes instability and environmental chaos. Nature should be kept away from the destructive forces. Condemning anthropocentrism for the current ecological crisis, the eco-critics work for eco-centric egalitarianism. Eco-critics view nature not as 'other', but as 'environment home' of Homo sapiens and all non-human beings. Acknowledgement of the right to live and to blossom of all organisms may provide a ground to take an attitude of respect for nature.

This study explores that the both poets succeed in identifying nature's inner self. The life within human and nature is same. As human beings can feel the pain, nature also does. Just like a wounded self leads to deterioration of his physical or mental health, similarly a fallen tree is bound to cease. "Identification with nature and natural things is the process through which this inclination towards benevolent action is thought to develop. Identification with something elicits empathy" (Milton, 74). This study of both poets' ecological consciousness shows that the process of identifying nature and getting involved into nature is universal.

The ecological consciousness is the focus subject of this study. The ecological consciousness of Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats suggests for giving up the 'ego-self' and for developing and establishing the 'eco-self' for the sake of environmental equality. The eco-love and ecological consciousness in Raghunath Choudhary and John Keats seem to have been a kind of reaction against materialism and capitalism. Furthermore, the ecological concern of them reveals their eco-centric vision and it may provide an alternate to anthropocentrism. Instead of the ecological degradation, this consciousness provides a hope for the betterment of earth's current environmental condition. This study opens up a door to enter a new region where

human and nature can have a harmonious existence equally and nature can live peacefully without human's interference.

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