

## Treatment of Nature in Jibanananda Das's Selected Poems: An Ecocritical Study

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**Abstract:** Jibanananda Das is one of the most powerful poets in modern Bangla literature. He gives Bangla modern poetry a new dimension which brings into the realm of Bangla poetry the pain in the life of the urban modern men through his poems. He is widely known as the poet of nature. To him, perhaps, the most attractive thing is the imagery of Bengal's nature. However, in spite of receiving multidimensional criticism on different aspects in adoration for natural beauty, Das's poetry receives critique on nature and nationalism only inadequately. There exists, therefore, the question—whether Das's poetry shows any association between the nature and nationalism of Bengal. Besides, today, the study of Nature has formed an integral part of various academic domains. The focus given to Nature in literature is perceived in the literary theory known as 'ecocriticism'. Ecocriticism, as it is evolved today, is not only an approach to study literature, it is an activism. The paper aims at examining Jibanananda Das's selected poems within the framework of Ecocriticism.

**Keywords**— Jibanananda Das, ecocriticism, nature, environment, biodiversity

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### I. Introduction

As many of the poets and writers of different centuries attributed nature as "Mother Nature", there must be some reasons that came common among the literary minds. This paper intends to put it in a rather simpler way by considering the relationship of a mother of a human child with the earthly green nature. It is universally recognized that a mother is the very first teacher of her children who teaches her children the way of life and the does and don'ts, Nature teaches mankind a great deal of things that work as the base of a person's personality i.e.: the sky teaches us to be generous, hills and mountains teach us to be great, land teaches us to be enduring. (Basu 1). It is a munificent gem of sentiments and spirit. Ecology and environment are some of the indivisible elements of all breathing lives in this ecosphere.

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature (Bawa 1). Ecocriticism investigates the association between literature and the natural earth as we know it. The focus of this particular theory is to examine the endeavor of the poets or literary minds to demonstrate how nature and environment influences the imaginative insight of the poets. And how do they attempt to save Mother Nature who they dearly love.

The matter of ecological equilibrium has risen as the core issue in world literature. Bangla literature is no exception. The modern literary minds have tried to lure the attention of humanity on these subjects. One of the most influential poets of modern age, Jibanananda Das is a great environmentalist who offers a proof to this study through his poems. Most of his poems can be read through the lens of ecocriticism. This paper attempts to analyze the treatment of nature in Jibanananda Das's selected poems such as: "Shagar Balaka" (The Sea Egret), "Banglar Mukh Ami Dekhiyachhi (I Have Seen Bengal's Face)", "Abar Asibo Phire (Beautiful Bengal)", "Buno Hash (Wild Duck)", "At Bochor Ager Ekdin (A Day Eight Years Ago)", "Banalata Sen" in the light of Ecocriticism and it also attempts to illustrate the pastoral art underlying his poems and his fondness for nature which has directed him to witness and understand symbol of man's relation to earth.

### II. Literature Review

A considerable number of articles regarding the subject of nature deals with specific focus on different parts of nature and its relation to a particular poem where a partial view is presented rather than a holistic approach. For instance, "The Inescapable Association between Nature and Bengali Nationalism in Jibanananda Das's Ruposhi Bangla" (2019) is a research article which deals with a specific topic, nature and Bengali nationalism in a particular poem namely, "Abar Asibo Phire" which lacks a general or overall understanding of

Jibanananda and his connection with nature. The chronology of Jibanananda Das's collection of poems reveals the development in a gradual order sometimes with sudden fragmentation. To mend the lacking of other studies of this sort, a complete analysis is a crying need. This paper attempts to mend the research gap and open the gate of a much broader perspective.

### III. Discussion

Jibanananda has so often focused his themes on rural landscape and wildlife that one can hardly deny him to be a nature poet. "Jibanananda is a genuine poet and nature poet" (Bose 27), said Buddhodeb Bose. His nature poetry connects the world of the nature and that of human beings. As quoted by Prodnunmo Mitro in his collection of criticisms on Das, "Jibonanda's acknowledgement of the comment that Buddhodeb Basu made about his earlier works without objection proves his own inclination to nature." (Mitra 55)

One of the optimum dimensions in most of Jibanananda Das's poems is the liberal use of nature for a setting. His way of depicting pastoral life is unique because he not only uses seasons for practical background but also utilizes trees, leaves, deer, grassland, even curlew to transfer human feelings on to them. As a matter of fact, the relation between motherland and surroundings is the exact same between nature and human mind. Considering this, it can be said that all poets are nature poets but what is different in them is the sensation and authenticity they can create through their observation and poetic creation. The first three collection of poetry by Jibonanda namely, *Jhora Palok (Fallen Feathers)*, *Dhushor Pandulipi (Gray Manuscripts)*, and *Banalata Sen* are the universe created by the poet himself when he dwells in the inception, when his emotions are recollected in tranquility. His earlier poems are the essence of the green poetic universe and its unique existence and it is extraordinary that the eventfulness of life hasn't lost him. His natural conscience is enough for his poetic diction.

Jibanananda Das, in the poem "Neelima (The Blue Horizon)" from his maiden collection of poetry, *Jhora Palok* creates an atmosphere of wonder and enchantment by describing the sky as "sunny glitter". The speaker glorifies the vast early morning sky using beautiful and sophisticated adjectives. He enjoys the lovely scene of dawn so dearly. The color sense of the poet is very delicate as he specifies saying, "midnight blue" acknowledging the beauty of the sky. Here it can be easily said that along with "Neelima" the poems like "Pyramid", "Sedin E Dharonir (The Earth on that Day)" stand out to attract more focus. The extensive use of metaphors like "Under the crowd of wings of egret, and the cloudy darkness of twilight" (Das 62), another such imagery comes far away in the end of "pea field". All these pastoral images form the common rural imagery makes the bed for the second collection *Dhushor Pandulipi*. In the poems of *Jhora Palok*, where "Shagor Bolaka" is the ruling entity which dominates the whole atmosphere. Sometimes it is found that the very often use of the bionetwork that Das developed in *Dhushor Pandulipi* such as dahuk-shalik- shankhachil, harial, dove, pigeons, moral and so on, creates a known imagery that is unique in terms of poetic observation and the nature of poetry he produces. These mind soothing images of natural beings and the complex yet so dear landscape mixed with ecosystem and the poetic diction entices the psychology of a reader. The dancing rhyme of the poems unquestionably amuses the readers, the mesmerizing phraseology of the poet makes the readers roam around the poetic sky of nature and suddenly discover themselves sitting on the wings of "Shindhusharosh (The Sea Stork)" The word "Neelima" produces a new ambience of symbolism. Far from "the bloodstained bank of reality", "the never blinking Neelima" breaks the clatters of folks with spear of illusion. "Neelima" becomes a station of dream for the poet. Although some critics think that "Neelima" is the ultimate universe of the subconscious mind of the poet and his subconscious attempt to build a land of dream.

Lines such as "The wet grass called – and fall brings chill, the bush of fireflies/I was called by the read field of Aleya, the boatman of crematorium came." (Das 61) are the energizer of natural sense in the realm of poets in Bengali literature. The poet's own diction, which the readers felt missing in *Jhora Palok* is found in *Dhushor Pandulipi*. The ever Fall imagery that he introduces is the essence of *Dhushor Pandulipi* that can't be found in any other poet's works. In any discussion regarding Das's poetry, *Dhushor Pandulipi* finds its place as the most quotable one. Although there were some poems dealing with the subject matter of love and romance, the poet asserting the names of the man and women goes back to find their surroundings to admire the peaceful environment. What he finds is the gray, timid, soft and cold images, so beautiful yet so finite. It's neither any ceremony nor any choric song of tragic story of the myths. These are the invitations to the cosmos of dream. A little closeness that can be found may relate to is the Victorian English poet, Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) who wrote poems like "The Lotos Eaters" where the natural features are a bit common in Das's *Dhushor Pandulipi*, the never-ending time and the imagery of Fall, and the yellowish dreaminess. As the sailors back from Trojan war got stuck and paused to admire the beauty of the Lotus Island, the same way as Rabrindronth Tagor said, "Realm which is Pictoriality enriched is a treat to look at." (Mahmud 15). This overwhelming, contented, attracted sight falls in solitude in the psyche of the poet all on a sudden. This quality is not very common among the contemporary poets even among the predecessors of the poet.

In the words of the poet himself, "Till date the poems that I wrote, all of those asserts the ever-human society in nature's lap and the timelessness of time a never ending third specialty yet they don't find the emancipation they seek." (Mitra 55). He also said:

There is no self-righteousness in considering anything utmost. It lies in the propensity to create a pure universe which can be called Poetic universe – The very own creation of dream that comes in reality is what they seek. I also consider things utmost for a while for the sake of life and literature. (56)

In explaining Das's poems, these statements are the gems. Considering these statements, it can easily be said that in nature sometimes some specific area becomes utmost. The same happened in the poems of *Dhushor Pandulipi*.

But if the readers think of the construction of the poems, then they may think that the images that he uses and the things that he considers most significant for the sake of life and literature pay off through the poetic creation of a different taste and the evergreen natural landscape of the river banks, the yellow beaked "Shalik", the river "Dhanshiri" or "Shankha Chil" that he mixes himself in. As an instance:

I'll come again to the banks of Dhanshiri – to this land  
Perhaps not as a human- maybe as a white-breasted Shankachil or yellow-beaked shalik;  
Or as a morning crow I'll return to this late autumnal rice- harvest laden land,  
Wafting on the fog's bosom I'll float on day into the jack- fruit tree shade; (Das 51)

If only this poem is to be considered, it will stand as the monument of his pictoriality and the admiration of nature. He loved nature so dearly that he expresses his desire to come back after death and more importantly he desires to be reincarnated not as human but as the very creatures of the forever Bengal, mostly uncelebrated. On a close reading of the poem, there comes a question of his desire to be a part of nature and its existence as the process of urbanization is slowly destroying the ecological wealth on earth. The poems of Das can be seen as one of those powerful tools that holds the potential to help the destroyers of nature to realize the evil done by them. This may contribute to potentially save the nature in this modern era of advancement. His diction is so powerful in this poem that can make any human mind fall in love with nature and her children and the images and imagery are so majestic in itself that attracts all the senses and creates an atmosphere of calmness. He introduces the readers with the fragrance of aquatic "Kalmi" plant, and the "Jalangi". The sense of touch and sight is pleased by the evening breeze with the calling of an owl in the branches of "Shimul", the boatman, the torn white sails. He ends this poem asserting, "Perhaps the white stork will be breasting the barred clouds/As it heads home in the dark; look for me and you'll find me in this throng." (Das 51)

He sees himself everywhere there the child of nature is present. The yellow beaked "Shalik" to the white Stork and that's his power to prevail everywhere because he makes the creatures so dear to him that there is no distinction between him and them. It won't be a lie if it is said that he loves the nature and her children more than humans.

Another of his most famous poems is "Banalata Sen" where it is widely misunderstood by the critics or readers as a love poem but in fact it is more nature poem than it ever was a love poem. The poem starts with a journey of the poet, a journey of a lifetime where he encounters a lot of places from Sinhala's Sea to "Malaya's" in darkness he also visited "Vimbisar" nothing offered him bliss except Banalata Sen of Nator. There are many speculations about the identity of the character but the use of nature images and landscape engraved in the description of Banalata Sen reveals a picture common to all the readers of Das's poems which remind them of the beauty and peacefulness of nature. As the poet asserts:

Her hair was full of the darkness of a distant Vidisha night,  
Her face was filigreed with Sravasti's artwork. As in a far-off sea,  
The ship-wrecked mariner, lonely and no relief in sight,  
Sees in a cinnamon isle signs of a lush grass- green valley,  
Did I see her in darkness; said she, "Where had you been?"  
Raising her eyes, so Birds nest-like, nature's Banalata Sen.  
At the end of the day, with the soft sound of dew,  
Night falls; the kite wipes the sun's smells from its wings;  
The world's colors fade; fireflies light up the world anew;  
Time to wrap up work and get set for the telling of tales;  
All birds home- rivers too- life's mart close again;  
What remains is darkness and facing me- Banalata Sen! (Das 108)

It is easily understandable what the poet wants to say; he as a tired soul finds himself around the foaming ocean where life is turbulent and, in his words, he is exhausted to roam around. All on a sudden he finds ecstasy in seeing an artistic resemblance of nature in a village woman named Banalata Sen. Women are a part of the faithful depiction of serenity and a place of tranquility, which is another image of the evergreen Bengal. The poet describes her beauty using a bit uncommon, yet common artistic imagery such as the way he describes each part of the women's body. Even the picture of fireflies at night is a common picture in the

villages of Bengal where he wants to come back, in the lap of nature. With delight he finds himself again and again in the middle of things he loves the most. He celebrates the happiness by sitting face to face with her to admire more of her beauty which makes him form an inner inclination to stay here forever and he refuses to depart from his so well-known environment. He goes further and promises to come back as it is desired in "Abar Asibo Phire."

#### IV. Conclusion

This paper focusses on the wild and agronomic milieus in Das's poetry, which encounter and retort to the unknowability of 'nature' and the mistreatment of the rural landscape that the poet consciously attempted to save through his gift of poetry. Nevertheless, the urban landscape has not yet been explored in relation to the transformations of human communities influenced by urbanization. For example, 'Owl still awake' in the poem "A Day Eight Years Ago" establishes the poet's inspection of the wild creature and its presence in the rustic environment. The conversant portrayal of the wildlife in Das's poems is replaced by the city dogs. In this light, Das's ecological awareness is not inadequate to his perception of the country but extending to the urban environment, the myth and reality of wilderness as the poem suggests:

How long often have I seen winged insects at play in waves of sunshine!  
As if sky is their element- as if some diffuse life-force grips their minds,  
A grasshopper caught in the clutches of a naughty child  
Still twitches and shudders to evade death; (Das 88)

Das contemplates the imagination of the animal's 'escape' from the rural setting to the habitat where freedom of these creatures awaits the human kindness. In this way, Das's poetic ingenuity is well-defined by his reappraisal of the external environment, well-versed by his development of aesthetic beauty and sorts, and enriched by his reevaluation of human intervention in nature. To explicate the reconfiguration of the awareness of nature by Jibanananda Das, it is exposed through the lens of Ecocriticism. This paper has revealed the power of poetic thoughts, in addressing ecological complexity, environmental diversity, and the superiority of natural history of Bengal, inseparable from human antiquities, that the poet delicately and plainly characterizes in his poetics of the nature.

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