

Ecocentrism in Sankardev

By Ananda Bormudoi



Sankardev

The influence of a living organism and its environment is mutual. The organism influences the environment and it gets influenced by the environment. The environment includes both living and non-living things. Ecology refers to such quality of the environment that keeps ecological balance. The dumping of wastes, for example, may destroy ecological balance to kill a river. An environment is an organism's surroundings. Environment also includes other plants and animals and non-living constituents like water, air, light, soil and temperature. Eco-criticism is criticism of literature and culture from the point of view of ecology and environment. A work of literature is assessed on the basis of its ideals and beliefs which might help or harm an environment. Ecocriticism is concerned with the causes of global ecological crisis. This crisis is created mostly by industrial development.

Can there be industrial growth and development without destroying environment and nature? This is a question that experts can answer. For creating an environmental awareness, however, we can have a look at the non-industrial cultures of our past. In this context, the thing that matters most is man's attitude to nature. If nature is seen in contrast with what is mechanized, industrialized and man made and preference is towns, cities and industries, destruction of the natural environment will continue. But things were different in non-industrial ages. As ecocritics have pointed out, dualism of man and nature was central to man's hostility towards his environment. Man was one with his environment but dualism separated him from it.

Many popular passages in the works of Sankardev can be read from an environmentalist's point of view. Monism dominates these passages. Man is one with nature and his environment. Religious philosophy and beliefs do not allow the individual to separate himself from the rest of the living and non-living things of the universe. The person feels the presence of the creator in all phenomena of nature. Sankardev was keenly aware of the man-nature relationship that the ecocritics and environmentalists have been discussing now. His description of autumn in *Dasama* is an example. Compared to the spring season, the autumn is less celebrated in Assamese poetry and no Assamese poet so far has surpassed Sankardev in celebrating the autumn. The poet has described all the characteristic features of the season from an aesthetics point of view but that is not everything. The most striking feature of the description is that this is not ethnocentric. At the end of summer, the features of autumn begin to show themselves. Autumn comes at the end of the terrible heat of the sun, flood water, disrupted communication, continuous rain, pestering insects and slush. The autumn is described in terms of the blue sky, patches of white clouds floating in the sky, fair weather, quiet nature, lotus blooming in the lakes, birds coming from afar and the stars shining at night. The animals pestered by mosquitoes during summer feel greatly relieved during autumn. The poet compares clouds to sages and philosophers who have given up all attachment to earthly life. The fishes in small ponds unaware of impending death as water dries up are compared to people engrossed in earthly cares. The description is ecocentric where man is a part of the environment.

According to the environmentalists, separation of man from the living and the nonliving things of his environment is the cause of man's indifference to nature. In *Kirtan*, Sankardeva's attitude to nature is different. In different chapters and episodes the poet is animistic. God expresses Himself through all living and non-living beings. If a religion passes on such a message to its followers, it is unlikely that they will unnecessarily do harm to the environment. Animism, from that point of view, is helpful in keeping ecological balance. In the chapter 'Haramohan' in *Kirtan*, the poet says, "You are one God, the Lord of the Universe/ Nothing exists outside You/ You are birds and animals, gods and demons, the trees and the grass/ They see you differentiated due to ignorance." This belief that God is one and He is not differentiated from the created world leads a person to be respectful and sympathetic to all other beings. This religious attitude goes with the attitude of the environmentalists and ecocritics.

In the third section of 'Haramohan' man-nature relationship is nicely illustrated. Vishnu, in disguise of Mohini, roused the desire of Shiva to the extent of humiliation. But besides the temptations of the enchantress, there was also the impact of the spring season on the greatest yogi Shiva. Therefore, the poet describes a lot of flowers at the beginning. Another situation in the fifth section is also quite striking. Shiva is roused to such an extent that each tree in the woods appears to him as a beautiful woman. In a feat of excitement he clasps and kisses each tree before him. The scene is humorous but it does not belittle certain things. To hug and kiss a tree a man need not necessarily be sexually roused to the point of madness. Whatever might be the cause, a man hugging and kissing a tree points at man-nature relationship.

In 'Shishu-Leela' one day Yashoda accuses baby Krishna of eating mud and asks him to open his mouth. The baby obeyed and Yashoda saw inside the mouth the whole universe in motion. The existence of the universe inside the creator's mouth speaks for the indivisibility of the creator

from the created. When the created world is taken as manifestations of the creator, the question of indiscriminately destroying the environment does not arise.

Man-nature relationship is a theme in 'Rasakrira'. As an impact of the autumn full moon, Krishna feels like playing with the Gopies. When Krishna suddenly disappears in the middle of dancing and singing, the disappointed Gopies desperately look, for him and ask trees and creepers where Krishna might have gone. An ecocentric reading of this episode is possible. Sankardev can perhaps be read from an ecocentric point of view.