CHAPTER IV

Poetry of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson
-An Eco-critical Study

The Environment of the earth has made the existence, growth and development of all living beings possible. The meaning of the word “Environment” is “Surrounding” consists of abiotic and biotic factors such as various types of radiation, air, water, soil, rocks, minerals and some living organism respectively. Environment affects the size, shape, and the colours of plants and animals and the ways in which they grow and live. The environment may even be responsible for the survival of a particular organism. We get our food, clothing, shelter and all necessary substances from the environment. Men are surrounded by a cultural environment because they were surrounded by what they have made.

The existence, survival and progress of mankind in this world are largely dependent on the quality of the environment as a whole. Men’s environment consists of natural as well as manmade i.e. socio-cultural, economic, political, education, psychological etc. Today there is environmental crisis in man’s life due to over consumption of natural resources. It is indeed a fact that the problems of nature in human life are directly or indirectly related to the environment not because people are unaware or have less knowledge about their environment, but because people are developing a careless attitude towards their environment. Since the dawn of civilization, man and environment were so integrally tangled that it was difficult to think of man as something separate from natural environment.

This is a fact that humanity in the present century is faced with the serious threat of environmental degradation. Nature’s precious resources are becoming scarce because of the indiscriminate and unplanned acts of man. At this juncture man has exploited nature almost to the point of no return. The environment is a very fragile system and man has
the biggest effect on it. There is a saying that states the Earth is something we are borrowing from our children. What we do with the environment today affects the environment tomorrow. There are those that think as a whole are doing nothing wrong to the environment and that the pollution and the extinction of animals is all a cycle of life and everything is balanced. This has apparently been seen as an untruth for there were unspoiled places in this earth at many different points in time but this all changed when man thought that he could make it better for himself.

Human-environment relationship has been the focus of attention the world over and is a key factor in determining the future of human life on planet earth. The ways in which humans treat the environment is reflective of their understanding of the environmental system as well as the value they place on the environment. The comprehension of the intricate association between man and his environment is as important on the global scale as it is on the local scale at the grassroots level. The focal theme of the present environmental studies is to find out close relationship between the changing human values and impact of environment. Any environmental changes irrespective of climate, bio-diversity, and water and land surface are all interlink and are mostly influenced by human action. Human values are increasing in the way just opposite to the environment value. Now a day’s people measure their values on the basis of their way of living without caring for the importance of keeping an eye on the environment in which they live. Earlier men are subjected to nature but now nature is subjected to human dominance. The ruthless competitions to satisfy the unlimited materialistic demands with the help of limited resources of nature have endangered the safety of biological survival. Situational necessities of life and social demands have compelled us to change our interest based on ‘values.’ Consequences our activities have started to disturb the nature of Nature and the tendencies to use world properties without judicious outlooks made us guilty of abusing the nature.

The inherent conflict is not between conservation and development but between environment and reckless exploitation of man on earth in the name of efficiency. Historians tell us that the modern age began with the will to freedom of the individual.
And the individual came to believe that they had right with no corresponding objective. All the ‘isms’ in the modern age- never those which in theory disown the private profit principle- assume that man’s cardinal interest is acquired. The profit motive, individual or collectives, seems to overshadow all else. This overriding concern with self and today is the basic cause of the ecological crisis.

The dominant groups in all societies still subscribe to the view that human ingenuity will triumph in the future as it has triumphed in the past. Science and technology will come to man’s help and rescue him from ecological disaster. This group also believes that progress without tears is impossible. Humanity has always paid a price for development and it will continue to pay it. The environmental crisis that looms large today is nothing but the price of progress.

Indian culture and philosophical values have always sustained for all that exist in nature, so much so that it evolved that concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. all that is alive, from plants to human species, belonged to a single family. These have originated from a common source and are interdependent. This cultural dictum was accepted not only by the people of India and of Hindu religion but also by other religious groups like Buddhists, Jains, Christians and Islam. The Indian civilization, as evident from its cultural heritage, treats nature not only as a source of livelihood but also as a source of life. Down the ages Indian culture never thought nature to be a resource for exploitation. It always treated it as a source of not only substance, survival and happiness but also a system of which humans are an inseparable part. The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam still prevails among the indigenous people in other parts of the world. It was also present in the other great civilizations and cultures which gave rise to the great religions of the world.

What we see today in the world is an environment of crises. The environmental crisis has gripped the whole world- rich and poor alike. While the mainstream nations and people still pin their hopes on science and technology, strong voices calling for a new style of life and new paradigm have now become audible. Grassroots level movements,
small to start with, have begun networking themselves to have universal appeal and
global impact.

Environment problem is now-a-days a buzzword in many people’s mind. Unlike
other factors, from politician, a philosopher to war, this is an enormous international
problem affecting any country regardless of boundaries. In unity, global citizens will be
impulse to take a responsible attitude in maintaining the common habitat. There have
been successful natural supports between Japan and Korea, as well as the Commonwealth
of Nations in reducing toxic fumes from factories. It is understandable why they are
enjoying such healthy living environment. On balance, environment problems which do
not place impacts on a particular area but put many other under threat should be
conquered by contributed efforts of any member. It is the only way to avoid a tragic
ending for human beings as a whole.

Degradation of environment at this juncture tops the list of problems the world
faces today. Eco-criticism functions as tools that draw the attention of the world to
crucial environmental issue through the forum of literature. Global climate warming with
its enormous effects, the distraction of Ozone layer, deforestation, the accelerating rate of
extinction of species at the rate of seventy-four species per day, the loss of arable land
and reduction in ground water levels owing to expanding human settlement,
contamination and desertification, the unchecked growth of human population, the threat
of nuclear warfare, industrial accidents and their aftermath poisoning the oceans,
overfishing, garbage disposal- the list seems endless. Here a question may rise in
somebody’s mind that what do these environmental disasters have to do with any literary
studies? The fact is that the relationship is that literature is the reflection of life and this
life entirely depends in nature. Without nature there is no life, without life there is no
literature.

So literature and nature are interrelated. Owing to such tendencies for applying of
ecology and ecological concepts to the studies of literature, eco-criticism, as a literary
genre emerged. Eco-criticism or ‘green-studies’ both terms are used to denote a critical
approach which began in USA during 1980’s and in the UK during 1990’s. The term
“eco-criticism” was first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism.” Eco-criticism, as it now exists in the USA, takes its literary bearings from there major nineteenth-century American writers- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) whose works celebrate nature. Probably the defining work of nature writing and the ecologically oriented work that has been subject of most literary analysis is Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854). In his work Thoreau observes all around him with a keen eye and a philosophical spirit, describing the ordinary but remarkable creatures and happenings he encounters in the natural world and discussing the meaning of living in harmony with nature and one’s soul. Critics have opined that the American tradition of nature writing stems from Thoreau’s master piece. Another landmark American non-fiction work about nature was Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Nature” (1831). In this essay he deals with the principals of the philosophy of Transcendentalism, which he describes as “a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry” (Emerson & Forbes: 2003-04). In his work Emerson talks about the mystical unity of nature and urges his readers to enjoy the rapport with environment.

Eco-criticism thus emerges as a result of celebration of nature in literary texts with a direct vision of nature longing. However being developed as an academic discipline, eco-criticism deals with a study of literature and environment from and interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analysis the environment and brainstorm possible solution for the corrections of the contemporary environmental crises. The word ‘Eco’ and ‘Critic’ derived from Greek word ‘Oikos’ and ‘Kritic.’ Eco-criticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works, both published in 1996. “The Eco-criticism Readers” edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and “The Environmental Imagination” by Lawrence Buell. Glotfelty’s working definition in “The Eco-criticism Reader” is that “Eco-criticism is the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment.”(Glotfelty & Fromm:1998).

It has been made clear that ecological literary criticism or environmental poetics discusses values of the interconnectedness or interdependence among the living things
themselves and also in their relationships with habitats; literary works are interpreted and evaluated as per the values and views of ecological studies and environmental movements. As the topics and frontiers of scientific, spiritual, philosophical and literary ecological studies and those of social, political and legal environmental movements often overlap to each other, ecological literary criticism or environmental poetics cannot remain insular from global and local problems and postulation. Ecology in both, Greek (Oikos, Logos) and Sanskrit (Okastantra), etymologically signifies “House-craft.” In a wider sense, it implies the whole world as our home- the local habitats. Greg Garrard in his “Eco-criticism” observes:

An Eco-criticism demands attention to literal and irreducibly material problems such as Ozone depletion, but it’s also depends upon the insight that scientific problems are never fully separated from cultural and political ones. The Ozone problem is real but it is meditated by a popularizing metaphor, and framed within international political discourses that are not scientific but ideological. Such an insight is congruent with critical realism (Gerrard 168).

The three major postulations of new ecology, namely interconnection interdependence and interanimation- signaling that all living things are related, they depend upon each other and that they animate, energize and make other live- declare the “bio-spherical egalitarianism” the equality among all living things. Man is not the master and lord, the monarch of all he surveys; conservation is no longer a matter of charity but inevitable for further survival of human kind.

Eco-criticism as an academic discipline began in earnest in the 1990’s although its roots go back to the late 1970’s. An eco-criticism reading of literary texts takes into consideration the relationship between culture and nature. It challenges the cultural constructedness of reality and highlights the general physical presence of nature as a fact and not a concept. The nineteenth-century especially saw a number of developments in literature that eco-critics view as significant. American and British Romantic Writers took a particular interest in nature as a subject. Victorian realists wrote about industrialization which was changing the natural landscape; explorers and natural historians began to write about newly encountered places and wildlife. Nineteenth
century American naturalists and explorers are often credited by eco-critics as having initiated the conservation movement; those writers differ from literary author because their work focuses more on scientific descriptions and speculations about nature. However, as many critics have pointed out, their writings are imbued with a poetic spirit that makes their ideas accessible to lay readers. The two great nineteenth-century American naturalists, most critics agree, are John Burroughs and John Muir. Both had produced extensive literary outputs with some environmental concerns.

The British Romantic poets also were not lagging behind as the poets under the leadership of William Wordsworth celebrated beauty and mystery of nature. Wordsworth, in some of his most famous lyrics like “Michael” (1800), “The Prelude” (1850) and “The Excursion” (1814), has shown his philosophical reflection on the relationship of humanity and nature. The poems of other Romantic like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron and Percy Bysssey Shelley also included emotional descriptions of the natural world and the feature of best-known nature verse in English. The Romantic Interest in nature is particularly significant to eco-critics because these poets are revolutionary in their politics, and the preservation of the natural world was one element of their radical thinking. Nineteenth century English writers such as Thomas Hardy, in his novels and Mathew Arnold in his poems, have splendidly described the ‘places’ and the Victorian writers like John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle wrote about nature and lamented the destruction of the environment due to industrialisation.

Such pioneering works reveal that ecologically oriented criticism is not a new phenomenon but, like the literature it analyses, is a response to the urgent issues of the day. As has been realised that eco-criticism continues to grow as a discipline due to the continued global environment crisis. Eco-criticism aims to show how the works of writers conserved about the environment play some part in making people aware of the importance of nature in an extreme situation of eco-crisis. As has been avowed that ecology and poetry could prove to be fruitful combination though earlier these were supposed to be a mismatched pair. Nature poetry had dominated the literary scene till the early nineteenth-century. However, “with environmental degradation growing poets
spoke in a voice they had rarely spoken before” (Byson 3). It has been discernible that eco-poetry differs from the nature poetry in its objectives. While traditional nature poetry celebrates man for his actions, eco-poetry squarely blames man.

Nature runs as a consistent motif in whole of Nirmalprabha’s oeuvre. She sought a harmony between the progress and preservation. Deeply chary of the blinding lure of technology, Nirmalprabha in her poems and papers repeatedly warns of the mindless proliferation of machines and the machinations of Man that it inevitably entails. In the post-war years, the studies of technology were unmatched. Many of the modern modes of communication travel and of course warfare were being tried and tested at that time, often at heavy and unheeded environmental loss. It is striking that awareness for conservation of nature, on the other side, took its course in the works of poets an un-industrialized nation; Nirmalprabha proved prominence on it from her province. As a keen follower, the poet conceded the idea of the festival of the earth concerned and coined by Rabindranath Tagore which was perhaps the first sentient effort in the world to build up mass environmental awareness. This concept of the elder poet has become more effective and relevant to the present because he sought to inculcate this vision not through slogan pamphlets but over a cultural framework. A spirit of redemption left behind the concept that has been making the modern minds concerned and courteous to the harmony inherent in nature.

Like Wordsworth, the poetic personae of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi reject destructive masculine superiority and elevate feminine identities when dealing with the natural world. The poetess struggles to break from patriarchal and imperial attitudes, attempting to promote a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. The woes of the world and the attention to daily details of life have hidden from the souls and minds of men, the great joys and spiritual blessings found in close communication with nature. In one of her poems, “Heartrending,” she bewails having experienced to a loss of the way of life interwoven with culture and natural world:

I, saw him going
away at the time
when the sun was declining.
He was going by the curving alley of the paddy fields.

Following him went away the golden sunshine of the month of “Aghon” (Nov-Dec)

Who knows Whether he will return or not in this birth. (Barua, Ajit 53)

Wordsworth as a critic of industrial culture argues the need for a radical change of heart- a total refutation of utilitarianism that makes economic progress at the expense of the weak and nature. In “Written in London, September, 1802,” the poet addresses his friend S.T Coleridge and describes the condition of England in 1802. After a keen observation, Wordsworth bewails for the moral stagnation of the nineteenth century England. People, for their survival, started to worship wealth; and were away from the nature’s grandeur:

We must run glittering like a brook
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest;
The wealthiest man among us is the best:
No grandeur now in nature or in book
Delights us. (Line 5-9, Palgrave 211)

For Wordsworth, it is the sheer waste of life in pursuit of satisfying earthly desires and vanity. He expresses his anger in “The World is Too Much with Us”:

The World is too much with us, late and soon,
Getting and spending we lay waste out powers,
Little we see in nature that is our;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.
(www.poetryfoundation.org)
Like Wordsworth and other contemporary nature poets, Nirmalaprabha concedes that man has lost his greatest gifts, his ability to respond to nature and to be moved by its simple beauty or awesome power. “The doctrine of nature”, referring to J R Watson’s comment on Wordsworth’s poetry we may avidly state that similar note in terms of Nirmalprabha as her “poetry is an unremitting campaign against the destruction of the individual by material and social pressures.”(Watson: 1985). The poet manifests the necessity of love, humanity and mutuality which sustain the evolving and growing of being bound by the law of nature. The poet expresses humanity’s need for the natural world and argues for being tolerant enough toward nature and its process to attain something in life. In “The Promise of Give and Take,” she realizes:

If there is
A promise and
The labour to give
Before one takes
In the season
Of hemanta¹ (Nov-Dec)
How shall I take
The sickle in hand
Unless in the summer
The sweat of my brow
Does not make
the fields soft? (Barua, Ajit 39)

Seeing the environment and natural world devastated by urbanisation and industrial pollution, Nirmalprabha laments loss of integrity, stability and beauty of nature. The sense of loss gives rise to the problems of dualism between the superior and inferior. The superior deprives the inferior of rights of life, exploiting nature for resources. The former “rule” the society for their own “welfare” at the cost of others rights to life. Viewed from this perspective, the sense of loss should raise people’s awareness of environmental crises, helping people subvert or undermine the oppression of the inferior, women included and the domination over nature. In this sense, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, like
Wordsworth and many eco-feminists, rejects the assumption that humans should dominate everyone as subalterns and exploit the natural world for personal profit.

The consumerist and industrial culture have created the false illusion that humans would be able to control nature, but they forget that human’s unconquerable minds are vitally dependent upon natural systems. Like Wordsworth’s, the poetry of Nirmalprabha express a vision of listening to appreciating, and understanding nature as an animate, equal part of humans. But the poet lived in a world increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster. Like every modern man, she also felt that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind. The modern thinkers suggest that “there is a strong link between poverty and ecological degradation especially in Asia and African countries” (Nayar 248). Nirmalprabha does not withdraw her creative attention from socio-cultural reality of present times. She is much grieved by the issues of poverty, violence, social injunction, and victimization of woman no matter wherever they occur. Her poetry about in these issues diffuses in metaphoric structure of images of nature. Her poetic personae reveal zeal to reckon the newness of the society where there would not be any evils and “worn-out cultures.” She wants to transcend an absolute form of many abstract ideas that convey her wellbeing as existence through “an auspicious consciousness” (Barua, Ajit 46). In the poem, “My Pronouncement,” Nirmalprabha expatiates this consciousness through the following nature images:

To destroy the
horror of this
terrible transition
I am searching
for the blazing
flame of the sun.

I am the terrible
storm of the early summer,
(Barua, Ajit 41)
Eco-socialists argue that class inequalities influence experience of the environment. Here we can think of pollution. The richer class leaves air pollution through the expensive use of air conditioning. The experience of polluted air is, therefore, restricted to the less wealthy classes who cannot afford rarified environments in their homes, vehicle or offices. Hence “eco-socialism suggests that the difference in the distribution of wealth is at the base of such an experience of environments” (Nayar 247).

Throughout history there have been legends describing Earth as a living being, “Mother Earth,” an entity which nurtures and sustains us. All animals and planets, even rocks, mountains and the sky evolved from a single source. Within this system of thinking, people viewed themselves intimately connected to everything around them, from the tiniest insect or pebble to the greatest constellations in heavens. Human life was not separated from other forms; everything was related and everything was kin. Yet man’s relation to the earth had changed since the invention of power machine to “reconstruct” his physical environments. While the industrial Revolution marks the beginning of modern era, the manufacturing cities of England disappeared into a thick haze of photochemical smog. William Blake’s poem “London” exposes the bleak, polluted urban environment that resulted from the unrestricted burning of coal, the discharge of raw sewage into the Thames, and the inexorable spread of contagious disease. The poet’s nightmare depiction of London’s “charter’d streets” lends particular emphasis to the psychologically oppressive aspects of the urban landscape. Through picturing the sickness of a modern city, Blake literally warns the physical environmental degradation:

How the chimney-sweeper’s cry
Every blackening church appalls;
And the hapless soldier’s sign
Runs in blood down palace walls.

(Line 9-12, www.poetryfoundation.org)

Like Blake, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi rallied against such industrializations that accelerate destruction of the natural universe. In this sense her concerns find full
expression while she laments of intoxicating “the golden river.” She like the romantic poets advocates for a harmony between humanity and nature. This ideology is found expression in the following lines extracted from her poem, “On the Death of the Golden River”:

On all sides  
The oppression  
Of endless hunger and thirst  

Intoxication  
Is slowly swallowing  
The Golden River.  

(Barua, Ajit 42)

Like Emily Dickinson, Nirmalprabha seems to suggest that the natural world and the human community exist in a state of mutual alienation. For her, the tasks involved in transforming this state of mutual alienation into mutual co-operation are twofold. First as a modern poet she must explode the illusion that culture can possess nature; we may invade it and occupy it but this does not mean that we know it on its own terms. Getting to know nature on its own terms is the second task, which is carried out through a process of self-reflection; for Nirmalprabha, becoming conscious of nature on its own terms means becoming conscious of self, and this can only be achieved by identifying herself with nature. A paradoxical device in this sense is tried out in her another poem, “The Fire Born Flag”:

I am the one born of the sprout  
Who grow the green  
A sharp eagerness  

I am the fierceness  
Responsible to the after of truth,  
Immersed in hard labours.  

The terrified existence roars  
Like the sea.  

(Barua, Ajit 38)

On the level of the nature-culture relationship in “In Words” Nimarlaprabha’s identification with nature allows her to have more knowledge of nature than the culture as a whole. Having anticipated evils in culture the poet assures that the eradicating power
against those lies in nature only: while she puts a question, “Does the sound of the gun/
Make it morning?,” she herself gives an answer:

It becomes morning
At that bird’s call
Which nibbles at
eats up
slowly
The darkness
of the night. (Barua, Ajit 52)

In a world that views culture and nature as irreconcilably opposed Nirmalprabha’s tasks are more challenging than the traditional female counterparts, for the power of her agency must be exerted in not just one but to supposedly opposing directions. In order to meet this challenge, she extends the limits of language though the use of poetic fictions which bridge the gap between subject and object, self and other. In this way she affects a resolution of the conflict which arises out of opposition and images a new relationship in which culture and nature exist in the cooperation and mutual dependence.

The role of poet-mediator is entirely in keeping with Nirmalprabha’s world view. What a Romantic nature poets spilled so much ink over an attempt to reconnect with- namely, their legacy from Mother Nature- Nirmalprabha accepts as a given. For her, the body, not the intellect, is the ground of being, the source from which all the intellectual, spiritual and emotional experience flows.

Her demonstration of nature is not subject to definitions imposed upon it by human language. As many of her poems assert, we may see and hear the other species in nature, both plant and animal, but we cannot possess them by naming them. Yet to overcome this nature’s inaccessibility to poetic language, Nirmalprabha like other contemporaries, adopted a useful device of expression through paradox. The paradoxical relationship between human language and nature informs her “Bihu.”

The green sun and
The green flute
The smile like raw turmeric
Is in every month
In their midst
The Village is a rainbow
Bedecked with
Ornaments and clothes!! (Barua, Ajit 25)

The nature images Nirmalprabha most frequently uses in the maintenance of her poetic mask are tree and stone. Paradoxically she uses the tree as a personal symbol without imposing her own femaleness on to actual trees and without accepting the trees inarticulateness as her own. Further she can also exploit what we understand as the tree’s qualities—silence, rootedness in space, remoteness from culture—to depict her sense of herself as a woman silenced, trapped in male definitions, banished from the centre of cultural experience. In “Words and Words”, Nirmalprabha uses the tree as a symbol to make a statement about temperamental keenness between nature and poetic personae:

The Scent of the sky
Gives me in a moment-wings
I enter
Into the depth of the
Perfume of the soil
I become tree with trees
River with rivers. (Barua, Ajit 3)

Rabindranath Tegore who took up the agenda of escalating gardens as envoy of love and peace designates a tree as a valiant son of soils who immensely takes part a role in beautifying this earth and sustaining life there on and constantly helping mankind with their varied gifts of peace and prosperity. He writes:

From the realm of man, I come to you, o tree as a messenger I speak, for him-for man who is animated by your breath who rests in your cool loving shade, who wears your flowery garland (Ghose: 1961 p 947).

Again the poet finds his ideals of innermost life like love, peace and delight when he came into contact with nature, trees and flowers of his gardens. He reiterates:

That O tree is why I come and sit in front of you
I want my words to grow easy
I under your deep shade
Today in the twilight hour
Let all thoughts and sorrow
of this life gather close to my consciousness,
and blaze forth like the evening star
the last utterance of this life- ‘I love’ (Ghose: 1989 p 110).

Nirmalaprabha uses the tree as a personal and specifically female symbol in many of her poems. But to interpret the tree narrowly as female is to miss the wider meaning she sometimes attaches to this symbol. Tree can sometimes symbolise man as well as- or instead of woman, depending upon the context of the poem in which it appears and upon the tree’s relationship to other symbols- in the poem. It can sometimes indicate the greater implications of meaning. In “Era after Era,” Nirmalaprabha has expressed the realisation of the emptiness or meaninglessness in terms of aspirations of life:

“A dead tree does
Not give shade.”
Alas you are blind
Looking only at the faces of dead trees
Era after era. (Barua, Ajit 36)

In most of her poems, natural objects become metaphors for human situations. They are used as a touchstone to interpret the social human world. The image of stone in many poems of Nirmalprabha gives us clue to her poetic vision. In “The Melancholy Hour” she writes:

My heart has been eroded
By constant melancholy
Time is flowing
Uprooting, pulling and
Eroding the soil
And roots hundreds
of years old.
Breaking up everything
Into darkness,
I become like a stone image
That cannot bend
That cannot move. (Barua, Ajit 6)
The ‘stony darkness’ has become a sharp indication of the melancholic vision in Hiren Bhattacharyya’s poems like “In Letters of Blood.” Here the poet expresses his deep association with nature at the moment when he gets perturbed as a result of constant failure in any stride of life:

How will it do
if you are perturbed so easily.
The stony darkness told me so.

I was never a poet,
Only the darkness of failure
taught me to take truth in my stride. (Acharya, Pradip 20)

This stony quality is real for the people who live with cultural distortions and subsequently about to lose their heritage and community existence. The poet seems to be restoring the ‘stoniness’ to the stones—to look at stones as stones and not Gods. Nature undergoes complex distortions through cultural production of meanings. When the distortions leads to boost the unethical, the poet is not at ease, this is a strong image of nature that gets heavy with weight of meanings inscribed on it. The imposed meanings change the face of nature. In the poem, “These Words” the poet becomes doubtful on the permanence of stone; symbolically which talks transience of anything—nature and culture:

These words
Who will sculpt them in wood?
Wood will rot

The words who will sculpt them in stone?
Stone will vanish into nothingness. (Barua, Ajit 15)

As a modern poet Nirmalprabha seeks to justify every non-human object from realistic point of view. The stone image can sometimes symbolise the darker sides—pain, and sufferings— and the stern reality of life. In “The Source” she bewails and rebels at her present condition:
My tears
Having become stones
Falling on the dust

True, it cannot
drench
The dust
But
Will be able to
make weapons.  (Barua, Ajit 50)

Again she uses stone image to express her cultural consciousness and existence:

My dream is in the smell
of the ripe fruit
That, falling on the stone,
Had burst
………
Its there land below
Land ?  (Barua, Ajit 62)

The key to understanding of the world lies in nature. The growth imagination was a process away from self-centeredness and towards an intimate interaction with nature. Nirmalprabha, through her nature consciousness, desires for human reciprocity with the natural world. For her, the dichotomy of human and non-human dissipates. The power and working of nature is all pervasive. In “Waiting” she writes:

Water falls all the time. Unmoved the stone hills,
The trees by the side grew and became old,
The tree before that one, the one before that, the tree
Before even that, more than that, more than that.  (Barua, Ajit 60)

Her poetry lends credence to apprehend nature from an organicist viewpoint. Yet her eco-poetics does not place priority on the visionary and transcendental and therefore like John Keats, the dominant spiritual dimension of nature is not like that of the other Romanticists, for it lends to reduce nature primarily within the confines of his aesthetic to quest rather than brood over it fundamentally as a universal force or the basis of her spiritual longings. Her self-conscious use of nature imagery into the fabric of her
aesthetics and to extent her apprehension of natural phenomena as therapeutic to human health. Nirmalprabha privileges external nature against all intellectual and conceptualised views of nature. She knows that the silence, in the process of birth, death and decay, is different language of nature. Trees, flowers, grass grow in silence. Sun, moon, stars move in silence. In a metaphysical move, she in “Midday at Bashistha” splendidly uses the eloquent ‘stone-tree’ metaphors in a way to her soul get merged in the natural world:

My soul became merged with the
    Hollow in the stone, with
    The water of the stream
    With the chirping of the cricket
    With the wild creepers
    With the hands of the tall trees.

Remained as witness the silent midday. (Barua, Ajit 62)

Wordsworth, through his poetry, has professed to end oppression and set up a progressive human society and harmonious human-nature relationship. The poet also urges that humans must practice the discipline of love and equal rights to existence and cultivate a sense of place. Wordsworth is known for “the deep rooted affiliation of his writings with that particular place” (McKuick: 2000). His personae conceive the Lake District as a sacred place humans should respect. The pastoral poems of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi also express deep veneration to her locale eco-systems: call of the cuckoo, the village boys and girls, Keteki flower (Pandamus odoratissimus), Anhat tree (Ficus religiosa), Jetulipaka (A kind of gooseberry), the sound of drums and pipes. Like most contemporary poets, she was also disturbed by the upsetting of traditional practice with natural means in the pretext of modernisation. In one of her “Bihu” poems, she writes:

The young woman of the village
    Till yesterday were weaving
    The sound of the pipe
        In their looms.
    Today on their feet
        The dancing fields
    Have hung the bells of dust. (Baua, Ajit 68)
NirmalaprabhaBordoloi’s poems, discussed here, are implicated in the truth of inaccessibility and mystery of nature. They do not subscribe to the view that non-human world exists for human welfare. The ecological degraded earth by technological intervention is not a triumph of man over nature but a warning of chaos and apocalypse where all human delusion of victory is defeated and demolished. With Nirmalprabha one comes to concede in the chain of eco-criticism that nature is not “reducible to a concept which we conceive as part of our cultural practice” (Barry 252).

II

It has already been mentioned that the poems of Emily Dickinson about nature occupy a rather part in number, over one third of all. Her nature poems have already been interpreted from a variety of critical perspectives, such as the influence from the transcendentalism, Dickinson’s contradictory attitude towards nature. In the context of ecological deterioration today, it is great significance realistically to reread Dickinson’s nature poetry from a new angle, the perspective of eco-criticism, which takes the interest of whole eco-system as its value and whose aim is to explore the relationship between the nature and human being. Through the close reading of Dickinson’s few nature poems, this part of the chapter attempts to explore the ecological consciousness hidden in Dickinson’s nature poetry, which embodies in two aspects, and one is the harmony between nature and man, such as living poetically in harmonious nature, the equality of all the living in nature and awe for nature and the other is Dickinson’s criticism of anthropocentricism such as criticism of human beings’ exploitation of nature, criticism of industrialisation and science as well as criticism of human beings’ desire.

Throughout her poems and letters Emily Dickinson celebrates “The Fact that Earth is Heaven -/ Whether Heaven is Heaven or not” (p 1408). “Her desire”, she wrote, was to “build the dwelling earth-ward whose site is in the skies-” (L 50). When her family, school friend and peers joined in conversion to the Christianity, Dickinson alone refrained, celebrating her attachment to the earth: “the world allured me and in an
unguarded moment I listened to her siren voice. From that moment I seemed to lose my interest in heavenly things by degrees” (L 11). In a letter written to Elizabeth Holland, Dickinson termed God’s paradise as “Superfluous”:

If roses had not faded, and frosts had never come, and one had not fallen here and there who I could not waken, there were no need of other Heaven than the one below—and if God had been here this summer, and seen the things that I have seen— I guess He would think His paradise superfluous. Don’t tell Him, for the world, though, for after all He is said about it, I should like to see what was building for us, with no hammer, no store, and no journey man either. (L 185)

A good deal of Dickinson’s nature poetry is sentimental and unaesthetic; it bluntly appeals to our commonest appreciation for gentle Mother Nature and for all her little creatures. But, Dickenson’s first nature poems and there are many of them- reflect a unique understanding of the relationship between man and nature and express an appreciation for the beauty and variety of nature phenomena which goes beyond the obvious and the trite. “By 1860, nature as a literary subject had been a favorite among poets for more than a hundred years. From James Thomson and William Wordsworth, to William Cullen Bryant and Emerson, nearly every possible idea concerning nature had been expressed. Nature as a moral teacher, as the cure for the ills of civilization, as the analogy for what is divine, as the promise for immortality—all had been stated and so restated that a fresh approach to nature was fast approaching impossibility. Added to this situation was the fact the poets who lacked the vision and the skill of a Wordsworth or an Emerson simply mouthed ideas concerning nature that they had not created or experienced for themselves; and as a result a deluge of mawkish sentimentality replaced genuine feeling” (Ferlazzo, 94-95).

Nature as a subject of literary investigation was soon to slip. But “Dickinson’s general skepticism about the relationship between man and nature, her acute observation and concern for precise detail without becoming scientifically analytical, her interest in natural subject, usually thought of as unsuitable for poetry, and her poetic
experimentations in rendering man’s perception of natural phenomena make her status as a nature poet unquestionable original and important” (Mckuick:2000).

For the ecological perspective, with reference to ecological ethics, some of Emily Dickinson’s representative nature poems relevant to the subject can be analysed considering three general categories of attitude. Firstly, approaching and loving nature with romance and transcendental philosophy that avows a mystical bond between man and nature, and nature reveals to man things about mankind and the universe. The second category is overtly anti-transcendentalist that confirms a separation between man and nature. And the third, contrary to the first and second categories asserts the utter joy and appreciation that the poet undergoes in the diversity and display of nature. Then the rich ideas of ecological ethics that humans should respect and live harmoniously with nature are disclosed, so that people’s ecological awareness of protecting nature can be aroused.

For her, the world of nature is a dwelling place, hauntingly mysterious, peopled with God’s creatures who live amid the phenomena God ordains regulates. Dickinson’s best poem in transcendental ideology is perhaps “Nature is what we see” where she explicitly defines nature in terms of sensation:

“Nature” is, what we see-
The Hill-the afternoon-
Squirrel-Eclipse-the Bumble bee-
Nay –Nature is Heaven-
Nature is what we hear-
The Bobolink-the sea –
Thunder –the Cricket-
Nay –Nature is Harmony-
Nature is what we know-
Yet have no art to say-
So important our wisdom is
To her simplicity.  (p 668)

It is things we see, hear, and feel. It is the harmonious co-existence of all things as we observe them by our senses and our intuition. In the first stanzas, the poet is trying to define nature in terms of externals- what we see and hear of it. In both stanzas she manages to suggest the totality of nature by selecting elements representative of land, sea,
and sky, and of the large and the small. The use of “Heaven” is perhaps meant to suggest that nature is not only beautiful to look at but is also the source of divine inspiration. “Harmony” implies not only orderly and pleasing sound but also unity among its various elements with man. In the last stanza she reaches her most comprehensive definition of nature when she affirms that nature is knowledge itself which surpasses our ability to express. The familiar Emersonian notions of nature as the great teacher and as the source of beauty and moral wisdom are echoed in this poem. However, the poet expresses doubt concerning our actual ability to appreciate nature genuinely or to act upon her lesson. Here no doubt an eco-criticism point is due as she experiences a complete inaccessibility of nature.

Wordsworth finds joy in nature. The pessimistic feeling does not oppress the heart of the poet when he is in the presence of the beautiful and joyful aspects of nature. He is thrilled and enchanted by the sights and sounds of nature. In “Tintern Abbey,” he views nature with a Physical passion with the reference to the boyish delight of the period:

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion, the tall rock
The mountain and the deep gloomy words:
There color and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love.

(Line 76-80, www.bartleby.com)

Dickinson has bluntly stated transcendentalist notion in some of her simple poems with an amateurish ring. The poems reveal that the transcendental doctrines did not satisfy her deepest level of questioning nature. In “The Murmur of a Bee,” we see deep respect for mystery (“Witchcraft,” line 2) of nature. She tells that would be easier to die than to explain why she perceives this mystery. In the line of the transcendental vision, she affirms their belief that wisdom through nature is somehow mystically perceived and is therefore virtually inexpressible in words. Finally, she confirms that contact with nature improves the mind and heart of the individual:

The murmur of a Bee
A Witchcraft-yieldeth me-
If any ask me why-
’Twere easier to die
Than tell

The Red upon the Hill
Taketh away my will-
If anybody sneer-
Take care- for God is here-
That’s all.

The breaking of the Day
Added to my Degree
If any ask me how-
Artist- who drew me so-
Must Tell! (P 155)

With regard to Romantic idealism, there are undoubtedly elements that show Dickenson’s enthusiasm for nature. These three stanzas evince both the physical and metaphysical dimension of nature and can also be argued to demonstrate a transcendental bend. The maturing and philosophical mind benefits immensely from natural landscape more than from institutionalised learning. The psychological relationship between the poet and nature provides creative material. The last stanza is an important clue to the note of eco-psycho-aesthetics.

Though there are a number of characteristic features in Dickinson’s poetry which affiliate with Emerson and Wordsworth, her nature-consciousness will be seen to take a slightly different turn. Such poems reveal a point of view which challenged and contradicted what had become tradition romantic values regarding nature. These poems cannot be made to show a systematic or progressive mode of thinking. Her sharp observation of things as they are, her wit, her courage, and her unquenchable need to experience the truth make these poems unique.

Most of the nature poems evoke modes or describe scenes wherein the creatures or the phenomena of the world about us are central to her thought. Nature as a symbol of process, she does not mean here a correspondence between man and the cosmos or between the creator and creature. God, man and nature she sharply differentiates. Nature
cannot be explained any more easily then God can be explained, but they can be personified:

Nature and God- I neither knew
Yet Both so well knew me
They started, like Executors
Of My identity.

Yet Neither told – the I could learn-
My Secret as secure
As Herschel’s private interest
Or Mercury’s affair- (P 835)

Wordsworth, about the images of nature and women, often feminises nature as a caring mother who practices the “discipline of love.” In “The Prelude,” the poet writes:

Blessed the infant babe-
For with my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our being- blest the babe
Nursed in his mother’s arm, the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother’s breast, who, his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother’s eye. (1805:2: 237-243)

The Earth-Mother image brings the readers into the stereotypical world where the mother nurses the babe with flowing nutrition, sustains her dependents with gusts of energy, soothes her ‘beloved’ with her body refuses her passion in growing beings. Wordsworth expands material love to natural adoption and ideas of water connectedness in the biosphere:

The gravitation and the filial bound
Of nature that connects him with the world. (ibid, 258-264)

In “Nature,” Emerson reveals his kinship with Wordsworth. That the child is in closer affinity with nature than the adult is an idea that Wordsworth treat poetically in “The Immortality Ode.” Emerson expresses the same idea when he says “The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.” This vision has also found expression in Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” when the
poet observes all the qualities of a child which are also seen in the grass. The poet imagines the grass is humble, lovely, tender and carefree like a child. He writes-

Or I guess the grass is itself a child,
the produced babe of the vegetation.
(L.8, www.en.wikisource.org)

Nature is a separate entity and remains as Creator’s secret which is not revealed to any man. Man is directly under the God’s governance. Nature has been deputised to look after all creatures. The welfare of all of them is the sole concern of nature, a spirit which is personified as the gentlest mother. Down the history, the earth has been defined as “Mother Earth” an entity which nurtures and sustains us. All creature even plants, mountains, sky evolved from or single source. Human life was not separated from other forms; everything was related and kin. As Wordsworth, interconnects his “proto-ecological” message with his interest in the dynamic wisdom of the natural world, there has been an obvious ecological point evinced through following Dickinsonian lines:

Nature- the Gentlest mother is,
Impatient of no child-
The feeblest- or the waywardest-
Her Admonition mild.  (P 790)

Nature is personified as a gentle mother- there is no image in the world more benevolent as a gentle mother. Nature as God’s deputy watches over her creations, personified as children. In stanza two, humans represent the interloper, an unwanted guest that frightens nature’s children. It’s like when a mother is walking down the street with her children and some drunken buffoon comes barreling down using foul language and the mother does everything in her power to shield her children’s ears and distract them from the uncleanness of world. That’s what nature does when human travelers come near:

In Forest- and Hill-
By Traveler- be heard-
Restraining Rampant Squirrel-
Or too impetuous Bird-  (P 790)
Dickinson believes that a separation exists between the worlds of nature and that of man, we live outside of nature and are permitted to observe it, experience it, and enjoy it if we can; but we are not privileged to enter into its secret. According to her nature is a spectacle and humans should learn to judge nature not from viewing its outward show but from inward existence. We are like the children who must mistakenly believe the excitement of going to the circus is watching the big tents go up:

We spy the Forests and the Hills
The Tents to Nature’s show
Mistake the outside for the in
And mention what we saw. (P 1097)

Dickinson’s view of nature was neither quiescent nor sentimental. She saw that the operations of nature are largely invisible as well as in different to humanity. She did not choose to close her ears or eyes. In fact she felt awe in looking at so commonplace an object as a well. In poem 1400, she exclaims- “What mystery pervades a well!” A well is a fact of nature, and it serves in this poem also as a symbol for whole mysterious realm of nature. Just as the poet cannot see the bottom of the well, she is thus unable to see the hidden meaning of nature. She writes-

What mystery pervades a well!
That water lives so far-
A neighbour from another world
Breeding in a jar. (p 1400)

Its waters live so far that they seem awesome, like neighbours from another world. The second stanza sharpens the analogy. The well, like nature, appears to have no limit; it can be viewed only on its surface. This stanza also implies a certain fear and awe in her response to the overwhelming remoteness and inaccessibility of nature:

Whose limit none have ever seen,
But just his lid of glass-
Like looking every time you please
In an abyss’s face! (P1400)
Yet, the grass in the third stanza is not afraid of the well. They unlike the poet are part of nature; therefore, they share in its secret with confidence. In the fifth and sixth stanza, the poet suggests that the nature, in spite of our familiarity, remains a stranger. Pondering the relation of things, she concludes:

   But nature is a stranger yet;
   The ones that cite her most
   Have never passed her haunted house,
   Nor simplified her ghost.

   To pity those that know her not
   Is helped by the regret
   That those who know her, know her less
   The nearer her they get. (P 1400)

This is no doubt; an eco-critical reading is possible here while the poet confirms superiority and self-dependent features of the nature and non-human world over human beings. For Dickinson, the real mystery of nature is beyond human reach; and “while an individual becomes a part of nature, when he entered the “haunted house,” he is going to meet his death” (Ferlazzo 102).

Walt Whitman’s contemplation regarding the merge with nature is otherwise as he tends to perceive it in optimistic terms as part of the gentle and orderly process of life. He affirms this relationship between nature and death, and he finds unity and immortality awaiting him. Dickinson, on the other hand, is “unsure of immortality and suspicious of nature, and is unwilling to believe and affirm what she cannot test for certain; she will allow herself, at best, only cool skepticism”(Ferlazzo 102).

In one of her later poems, “The earth has many keys,” Dickinson asserts the notion of nature as an elusive music that remains ultimately beyond human grasp. However, the poet contents herself with those she perceives and asserts the simple observation that “Beauty is nature’s fact” (Line 4). The humble cricket is an emblem of nature’s greatest power and is nature’s utmost offering of remembrance to the poet and to each of us. There is a sense of humanity and awe. The cricket’s song is an elegy that
represents the poet’s principle of transience. Her poems, like cricket’s anthems, are in harmony with nature’s rhythm:

   The earth has many keys.  
   Where melody is not  
   Is the unknown peninsula  
   Beauty is nature’s fact.  
   
   But witness for her land  
   And witness for her sea,  
   The cricket is her utmost  
   of elegy to me. (P 1774)

It has already been seen that Emily Dickenson uses bird image as a metaphor of objective reality. “A Bird came down the walk” depicts the insatiability of nature as well as its beauty and cyclicality. It also focuses on the separation between the worlds of man and nature:

    A Bird lane down the walk-  
    He did not know I saw-  
    He bit an Angleworm in halves  
    And ate the fellow, raw,  
    
    And then he drank a Dew  
    From a convenient Grass-  
    And then hopped sidewise to the wall.  
    To let a Beetle pass- (P 324)

The speaker observes the bird and trees to establish contact with the bird by offering it food. The bird’s morning meal of warm and dew is, of course, quite natural; but the stress placed upon “raw” by setting it off with commas in the rhyming position emphases the unpleasant aspects of the feeding habits of a creature ordinarily seized as harmless. His suddenly courteteous behavior toward the beetle in stanza two conceals the struggle among nature’s creatures for survival that we witnessed in the first stanza. In the following two stanzas, the bird’s mood of fear and danger is increased with intrusion of the poet:

    He glanced with rapid eyes  
    That hurried all around-
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought-
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home- (P 328)

The bird suddenly becomes conscious to possible danger, and looks fast around with wide open eyes. When the poet reveals herself and through a gesture of kindness tries to participate in the life of the bird, she is repulsed; and the bird flies away. The attempt at rapprochement with nature fails.

“The visual drama in the above poem is a clear, concise and precise as are John James Audubon’s drawing and etchings of birds. Audubon’s works were not mere ornithological studies any more than Dickinson’s tropes were imitations of reality. Each in his or her own way revealed a new poetic vision. No longer idealised as friendly, gentle, charming creatures, cut off from their fustian fineries, Dickinson, like Audubon, saw birds as both menacing and enthralling, beauteous and ugly, yielding to others as well as feeding on them to survive” (Knapp 107).

When Dickinson uses the simplest discourse of nature- birds and bees and flowers-the poems evoke an inexorable force that often seems inimical to humans; even the gentlest poem about nature like poem 140 “An altered look about the hills” or poem 318 “I’ll tell you how the sun rose” tell of change and dissolution, transition and process-days ending, season changing, creatures dying. Her nature is a mysterious process, “a noiseless noise in the orchard- that I let persons hear-” (L 271) It is to be found in the murmur of insects, the efflorescence of a sunset, the evanescence of spring, the phosphorescence of decaying things. It is characterised by unceasing motion, things constantly breaking down and reforming in a relentless cycle of dissolution and renewal.

Dickinson’s nature poems make clear that mutability is the principle of nature; it is the human idea of permanence that it fraudulent and severs humanity from the earth. In nature, there is no fraud. Autumn is the fruition of summer; the falling leaf bears witness
to the seed. Through particular seasons end, other seasons come: “Changelessness is nature’s change” (L 948). Summer days are the outward sign of nature’s cyclical grace. In “These are the days when birds come back,” (P 130) a natural rite displaces a Christian one when the “rank of seeds their witness bear”, the speaker seeks to partake in the mystery of seasonal renewal. She embraces a “Sacrament of Summer days”:

They sacred emblems to partake-
They consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!( P 130)

The lowly insects are the first of nature’s creatures to sense the end of summer; the birds are still unaware of the coming change. Like the poet the insects sing in their dying, their own bodies are offering to the dying year and pledge of other lives to come. Sacrifice is the law of nature. Just as summer is sacrificed to autumn, so is the individual life sacrificed to the whole. In poem 1068, the speaker likes the tiny insects, sings the change that ensures nature’s changelessness:

Further in summer than the Birds
Pathetic from the grass
A minor Nation celebrates
Its unobtrusive Mass.

No ordinance be seen
So gradual the grace
A pensive Custom it becomes
Enlarging Loneliness. (P 1068)

In the poem 797, “The pine at my window” is an emblem of immortality. It is one of “God’s introductions- / To be hallowed- accordingly-.” Though it is merely a pine tree to the bird and the farmer, to the speaker, it is sacred.

Of its Voice- top affirm- when the Wind is within-
Can the Dumb- define the Divine?
The Definition of Melody- is –
That Definition is none-

It- suggests to our Faith-
They- Suggest to our Sight-
When the later- is put away
I shall meet with Conviction I somewhere met
That immortality-
Was the Pine at my window a “Fellow
Of the Royal” Infinity?
Apprehensions- are God’s introductions-
To be hallowed – accordingly- (P 797)

Here Dickinson concludes by saying that nature itself is the “Royal Infinity” (p 797). She, reinforcing her belief on divinity, purports that nature surpasses the teachings of science and religion. In poem 1241, the lilac is ‘an ancient shrub,’ suggesting again the idea on continuity, the changelessness that is nature’s change. The daily decline of the sun is a cycle as regular as that which governs the renewal of the seasons. The sunset is “The Flower of Occident” (p 1241). The transfiguration of the earth by the sunset is Revelation enough; like the pine tree it is a door to the infinite. The teachings of science and religion are superfluous. In addition affirming to nature’s autonomy and infinity, she emphasizes the persistent alienation of nature from culture:

The Lilac is an ancient shrub
But ancierner than that
The Firmamental Lilac
Upon the Hill tonight-
The Sun subsiding on his Course
Bequeaths this final plant
To Contemplation- not to Touch-
The Flower of Occident.
Of one Corolla is the West
The Calyx is the Earth-
The Capsules burnished Seeds the Stars
The Scientist of Faith
His research has but just begun-
Above his synthesis
The Flora unimpeachable
To Time’s Analysis-
“Eye hath not seen” may possibly
Be current with the Blind
But these be detained. (P 1241)
For Walt Whitman, lilac is a symbol of love, sympathy and memory. It also symbolises equality and brotherhood, for it grows everywhere. This is an outstanding way of expression of love and honor to the departed hero. The lilac, the drooping star and the spring, are the trinity, which would always remind him of his beloved hero, Lincoln. In his famous poem, “When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloomed,” Whitman heightens the uncontrollable grief by the use of these symbols:

When lilacs last in dooryard bloomed,
And the great star early drooped in the western sky in the right,
I mourned, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And through of him I love. (Line 1-6, www.poetryfoundation.org).

This nature, this earth, as Dickinson affirms again and again, is her heaven and her earth. In the poems and letters she strives for a sense of continuity with all life, with the simple plants and creatures who die in the autumn but come again in the spring. She sustains an ecological consciousness while she sees the fate of human life in the fate of organic life:

“The Career of flowers differs from ours only in audibleness. I feel more reverence as I grow for these mute creatures whose suspense or transport may surpass my own.” (L 388)

For Dickinson, nature is the “eldest mother.” In a letter thanking Mary Bowles for a gift of flowers she wrote:

“Dare I Chill them with the soil? Nature is our eldest mother, she will do no harm. Let the phantom love enrolls the sparrow of shield you softer than a child.” (L 609)

Like the daily cycle of sunrise and sunset, the larger seasonal cycles of the year became the subject for her poetry. Each season is examined for its unique beauty, and often for its mysterious connection with other seasons. In winter, despite the snow and cold, there is the hidden promise of spring and of the full blossoming and warmth of
summer; likewise, in the colourful harvest of autumn is the prospect of returning to the barren frost of winter.

Spring is a favoured season, and it always draws from Dickinson an excitement and a sense of the promise hidden in all things. The light of spring cannot be grasped by science because it effects our intuition, not the rational or pragmatic sides of our nature. In poem 812, the speaker is also troubled by transience. When the first light of spring passes, she is afflicted with a sense of loss. The speaker here mourns the ephemeral light of spring: “It passes and we stay”, there is a resistance to change, and inability to see loss and dissolution as an emblem of renewal:

A Light exists in Spring  
Not Present on the Year  
At any other period-  
When March is scarcely here  
A color stands abroad  
On Solitary Fields  
That Science cannot overtake  
But Human Nature feels.  
It waits upon the Lawn  
It shows the furthest Tree  
Upon the furthest slop you know  
It almost speaks to you.  
Then as Horizons step  
On Noon’s report away  
Without the Formula of sound-  
It passes and we stay-  
A quality of loss  
Affecting our Content  
As Trade has suddenly encroached  
Upon a Sacrament. (P 812)

Trade refers to the exchange of commodities for money or personal gain and suggests the speaker’s desire for an immediate compensation for the loss she has experienced. Harsh reality intrudes upon the illumination of an early spring day just as the impersonal, materialistic concerns of “trade” intrude upon the ceremony and
spirituality sacrament. The poem closes by affirming the spiritual rejuvenation of spring although it be departed before the new season arrives.

Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass” stands unrivalled in the expressions of freedom and richness of being a masterpiece of eco-poetry created in the nineteenth-century. The poet reveres every creature on earth, every life manifestation, and acknowledges there superiority over the artificial human artifacts. The following lines from Section 31 of “Songs of Myself”, may well serve as a hymn to all supporters of deep ecology:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey- work of the starts, And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and an egg of the wren, The tree-load a chief-d’ceuvre for the highest, And the running blackberry wood adorn the parlors of heaven, And a mouse is a miracle enough to the stager sextillions of infidels. (1-7, www.en.wikisource.org)

Emily Dickinson’s most distinctive exploitation of nature’s forms is a novel approach. Turning away from the traditional and the popular in nature poetry, she, like Whitman, focused her attention upon the neglected oddities of nature- upon the life forms usually considered ugly, un-poetic, or unworthy of a writer’s serious attention, such as the rat, fly, snake, worm, frog, spider, caterpillar, mushroom, bat, beetle, cricket, mouse, squirrel, and weeds.

Emily Dickinson seems to challenge the conventional romantic response to nature by finding something like rat which is, to her original and fresh vision, not only a rodent specious but integral part of nature. In poem 1356, she writes-

The Rat is the Concisest Tenant  
He pays no Rent.  
Repudiates the Obligation  
On Schemes intent  
Balking our Wit  
To sound or circumvent-  
Hate cannot Harm
Against the present practice toward the status of a rat as scorned by civilization, Dickinson depicts him as one who scorns civilization because of its reliance upon the laws of property. He is “concisest”, terse, and succinct toward man, occupying little room for which he will not pay rent. Although he is beyond our understanding of usefulness and “Decree” he deserves his part in the scheme of things and remains “Lawful as Equilibrium” (p 1356).

Another nature’s poetically neglected species is snake. In the poem “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass” (P 986) Dickinson evaluates the fascination and fear that a snake can inspire in its onlookers. Initially, the snake is observed for his strange beauty and behavior. His spotted body is given a degree of regal power when he is narrated as “a Whiplash / Unbraiding in the Sun.” Yet the effect the snake’s hidden and unpredictable slithering movement in the grass provokes fright in the narrator’s mind. The biblical associations of the snake with evil are hinted at in the snake’s fondness for empty, unpleasant places- “a Boggy Acre / A Floor too Corn.” Though she had been using words like ‘fellow’, ‘boggy’ etc, given an impression of causality and friendliness, the fact remains that she cannot take him for a friend. The snake is looked upon only as a threat for nature:

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides-
You may have met Him- did you not
His notice sudden is-
The Grass divides as with a Comb-
A spotted shaft is seen-
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on -
He likes a Boggy Acre
A Floor too cool for Corn-
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot-
I more than once at Noon.
Have passed, I thought, a Whiplash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone-
Several of nature’s People-
I know, and they know me-
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality-
But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone. (P 986)

From an interested fascination for the creature, the poem develops the snake’s associations with an evil power that threatens at the last to restrict man’s freedom and dignity. “Some critics, identifying the snake with the phallus, view the explicit metaphor as a paradigm of Dickinson’s fear of sex. Others consider the image an indication of her feelings of aloofness toward nature in general and sexuality in particular. The annual molting of the snake skin implies unending existence, while the fact that it lives on the earth, in touch with its primeval instinctual forces, identifies it as a source of psychic energy” (Knapp 106).

A student of these realms of imagination from eco-critical perspectives evinces some associations to reality. It is a matter of concern that man indulges in indiscriminate killing of snakes without understanding their true nature. “The fact is that out of the 2500 species of snakes on 20% are venomous. They have their own part to play in the ecosystem. Being top level predators, a single snake can consume over a hundred rodents a year. Moreover, all snakes form a part of the diet of other predators such as hawks and foxes and thereby sever to link the higher and lower feeding levels” (Sumathy 36). But with his highhandedness man has been trying to affirm his superiority over his fellow creatures by putting them in danger. And he remains unaware to the fact that ill-effects are sure to retaliate on him.

As has been seen Dickinson’s view on nature was diametrically opposed to Emerson’s and Wordsworth’s. Emerson in his easy “Nature” (1836) asserted
emphatically that “day and night, river and storm, bees and birds, acid and alkali, pre-exist in necessary ideas in the mind of God” (Emerson & Forbes: 2003-04); hence he agreed with those like Wordsworth who seized nature that reveals spiritual and moral truths. The senior poets believe that nature disciplines the human understanding and such a discipline offered by nature leads to idealism. Once we come to accept Idealism, we become able to use reason in place of the sense. This is, according to the transcendentalists like Emerson, the true beginning of culture.

The last word about her poetry can never be said, for with each reading the reader will discover in them new ideas and fresh nuances. Puritanism and Transcendentalism are generally considered the two cornerstones of her poetry. She was also affected greatly by her reading of new sciences. Emily Dickinson believes in developing humanity’s consciousness of its tragic dilemma by a continuous reappraisal and probing of empirical existence. She likes to confront, observe and assault verbally the world of appearances (nature) and to use it as the primal substance of her art with immensely positive and energetic note, through what she yearns for a pattern and order of the world.

It has been seen that the poetry of Nirmalprabha Bordoloi and Emily Dickinson not only glorifies nature through a mystic mode but mediates between human and non-human worlds pitched against an ethical measure. All these poems maintain an eco-centric perspective that recognises the interdependent nature of the world. They also underscore humanity as a prerequisite for man in his relationships with the non-human world. These poems analysed in this pursuit are a composite mix of Indian and American and what brings them close is their concerned for the environment. To Nirmalprabha and Dickinson, human and non-human beings are interdependent in nature and should live in harmony. They, like Wordsworth and Emerson, criticise man’s ruling of nature and non-human beings and expressed their negative opinions of science as they witnessed nature’s destruction by it. They have the eco-system at the centre of their view of nature. This pursuit ventures to conclude that Nirmalprabha and Dickinson are poets with immense ecological awareness and shoulder ecological responsibility.
Notes:

Hemanta is one of six seasons in Assam, falls within the months of November and December. This is a season of promise and possibility. The Assamese people, who depend on cultivation for livelihood, gather their harvest during this season and get prepared to celebrate Bhogali Bihu, third of the three community festivals (Bihu) of Assam.

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