

## “Burhi Air Sadhu”

### A Reading within the perspective of Eco-criticism

**Introduction:** Eco-criticism in its simplest form refers to the way of reading a work of art from environmental point of view. There is nothing new about the symbiosis between literature and the environment. For the last few decades, it has been felt that the environment, especially the non-human physical environment that had played the vital role in literary transcreation has now been a tired self being overused or misused and reduced to a degenerated one. The question— whether non-human environment in literature will always be read for the sake of literature or may be used or read for the sake of the environment itself is not at all irrelevant. *Burhi Air Sadhu*, the first anthology of Assamese folktale compiled and edited by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, has been instrumental in making the social, mental, cultural, moral selves of the younger generations of the Assamese community for centuries. Can those tales be retold for the sake of the environment of the land, for the sake of the rivers and forests where our identity lies? Can we narrate those tales to our younger generation with a view to inculcating environmental ethics in them so that they come forward by themselves for understanding, protection and preservation of the environment where they live in? Probably such questions sensitised a new mode of literary interpretation in the later part of the last century popularly known as ‘eco-criticism’. Here is a humble attempt to ask the same questions in terms of ‘*Burhi Air Sadhu*’ and reread the tales from the perspective of eco-criticism. It is, however, not intended to subscribe to the views of those who would like to retell Bezbaroa’s tales to make it more pliable to the psychology of the teenager.

**Major premises of Ecocriticism:** The term ‘eco-criticism’ was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay ‘Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism’. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, known as ASLE established in 1992, has been the major organization for the eco-critics throughout the globe. Cheryll Glotfelty in the first ecological anthology ‘*The Eco-criticism Reader*’ defines the term thus – ‘Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of moods of production and economic class to its readings of the texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.’<sup>1</sup> In the same line it can be said that as the proponents of post-colonialism and subaltern ideology listen to the voice of human ‘others’, eco-critics probe a bit deeper and listens to the non-human ‘others’- the collective call of the environment itself along with the issues associated with. As feminism expects woman to be at the centre of a work of art to be realized through a language of women for the sake of women, similarly an eco-text places the earth at the centre, revolves round the environment in a language of nature with a view to ensuring a sustainable home. According to Glotfelty ‘all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and

culture, specifically the cultural artifacts language and literature. As a cultural stance, it has one foot in literature and the other foot on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human.<sup>2</sup> Eco-criticism evaluates a work of art from the perspective of representation of nature, human-nature relationship, and human accountability to nature, environmental ethics etc. realised in the text. The questions posed to understand a text from the perspective of ecocriticism are of such nature – how nature is represented in the text, what role the non-human physical environment plays in the plot development of the text, how earth appears a new critical category, how environmental issues are dealt with, how the values expressed in the text are in tune with ecological wisdom etc. Lawrence Buell, who was instrumental in establishing ‘ecocriticism’ as an explicit method of reading a literary text, sets out a few criteria to determine how far a work is environmentally oriented, such as – the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that suggests that human history is implicated in natural history, the human interest is not the only legitimate interest, human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation, some sense of the environment as a process is implicit in the text etc.<sup>3</sup> According to Richard Kerridge - ‘Ecocriticism is literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist viewpoint. Texts are evaluated in terms of their environmentally harmful or helpful effects. Beliefs and ideologies are assessed for their environmental implications. Ecocritics analyse the history of concepts such as ‘nature’, in an attempt to understand the cultural developments that have led to the present global ecological crisis. Direct representations of environmental damage or political struggle are of obvious interest to ecocritics, but so is the whole array of cultural and daily life, for what it reveals about implicit attitudes that have environmental consequences.’<sup>4</sup> Thus two different and distinct disciplines, ecology and literary criticism, are combined together in eco-criticism and a piece of literary text is read or reread from the perspective of ecocriticism and ecocentrism with a view to understanding the nature or environment represented in the given text and the issues associated with and developing a sense of eco-consciousness among people and thus extending support to the global fight for survival of earth and human and other beings as well.

**Ecocriticism and Folklore:** The close relation between Folklore and ecocriticism may be easily understood from the fact that both are inseparable from nature. The traditional or folk ways of living a life constitute the folklore of a community. Richard M. Dorson studies folklore and folklife in terms of oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts.<sup>5</sup> Any piece of folklore, whether a part of folk literature or material culture, social custom or performing art, is generally an ecotext. For example -there are Karbi folk songs and tales that present us the views of the Karbi folk on creation of earth, plantation of earth and ensuring a sustainable environment for living beings. In the “Legend of Creation”<sup>6</sup> it is said that the Karbi gods Hemphu and Mukrang after creating the earth decided to let the plants to grow on it and created birds, animals, insects etc. before creating human being which signifies the richness of the tale as an eco-text. Similarly according to the tale narrated in ‘Karbi Keplang’<sup>7</sup> the creator after creating the earth created first the hills and mountains. Then He created green vegetation, lakes, rivers, tributaries, sea, ocean etc. Then God created birds and animals and finally the human beings with thinking ability. The tale too signifies the lofty realization of the Karbi folk in their earliest days ensuring the basic

needs or a sustainable home for a life on earth. The **tale of We Longbi and Har Longbi** <sup>8</sup> narrates how the two friends announced war against a neighbouring village for polluting the river ‘Lang Kumphang’ the source of drinking water, but following the advice of a old woman named ‘Marongpi’ they went to the village ‘Miring Rongchopi’ and watching closely the ritual marriage between Long Mukrang and Rasinja introduced the same to their village. The myth leads the young minds to raise a voice against environmental pollution and to understand the values of discussion, cultural assimilation and ills of war. It is evident from the preface to ‘Burhi Air Sadhu’ that Lakshminath Bezbarua knew that only a scientific study of folktales leads to understanding of the proper meaning of the tales and is proud of the fact that the Assamese community named a folktale ‘Sadhukatha’ understanding the richness of Assamese folktales and the values associated with. Though Bezbaroa speaks nothing in the preface about environmental values of the tales but was concerned with his environment and its indigenous features. Bezbaroa portrays the character of the traditional Assamese landscape with its own river, forest, and hill, varieties of birds, animals, trees, fish, insects, rice, and vegetables and places the environment at the centre. The environment is also seen characterized with inseparable Assamese folklife and nature relationship. Further a good number of folktales included in the collection are ecocentric, loaded with environmental ethics and can be retold to make present generations environmentally oriented. ‘Burhi Air Sadhu’ is not merely reflective of Assamese traditional society, culture and language but a documentary on the land itself and can lead the youngsters of the community to understand its beauty and richness, its unity in diversity, its relation to their life, language and culture. It is realized that a few tales from ‘Burhi Air Sadhu’, if read or told from environmental viewpoints, can undoubtedly reorient the young generations of the community towards its folklife and nature, and can develop a sense of eco-consciousness among them.

**‘Burhi Air Sadhu’ from the perspective of Ecocriticism:** The thirty tales compiled and edited by Bezbaroa in ‘Burhi Air Sadhu’<sup>9</sup> are analysed from the perspective of ecocriticism in the following table -

Sl. No.	Title	Non-Human Characters	Representation of Environment	Environmental Issues	Remarks
1	Mekurir Jiyekar Sadhu	A Cat Water-Spirit	A traditional Assamese landscape with its folk and folklore, indigenous forests, animals, river, fish, vegetable, fruit etc. is projected. It is a world where nature and its objects like forest, river, animals etc are made to be used for the sake of human happiness. So the needy pregnant cat is exploited without hesitation, the tree ‘Tulashi’ dies as a sign of human’s torture towards animal, and the river stands as a means of human living, source of human	Human-Nature conflict and human-nonhuman relation are the prime issues. Poverty, malnutrition, problem with drinking water, polygamy, jealousy, unkind attitudes towards non-human beings are degenerating the environment.	An Eco-centric text with environmental ethics that anthropocentricity is the tragic flaw of human beings. The human are compelled to pay the price for their maltreatment, exploitation of animal and ensured happiness when they listen to the call of the river.

			reconciliation and happiness. Here Animal, River and Water-spirit are at the centre and prescribe the fate of human, their joys and sufferings.		
2	Bandar Aru Shiyal	Monkey Fox	The forest of the traditional Assamese landscape is projected with its the most common animals like fox and monkey, itching vegetable like 'Bejkochu', deadly insects like 'kudu' etc.	Human immigration to forest and animal world and exploitation of forest resources by human for their material benefit are the prime causes of human-animal conflict.	Animal-centric text where human traits like treachery and betrayal, revenge and punishment etc. are owned and played on by animals only to mean metaphorically the disastrous effects of human immigration to forest.
3	Ou-Kuwori	A fruit cum vegetable 'Ou'	The Assamese landscape with its traditional natural dustbin 'Suwapatoni', beauty of village river ghat, fish hooking, paddy dust fire, folk medicine like the mixture of curd, milk and 'Athiya kol' etc. play a vital role in the plot of the tale. Woman giving birth to an object of nature and marriage of a man with that object of nature are to suggest the deeply rooted human-nature relationship inculcated in by the Assamese folk.	Supernatural happenings, folk belief, male-centric human wishes without concern for others affect the total environment.	Introduces 'Ou' fruit, village river ghat, a local variety of banana, a local form of fire etc. and may develop in the younger generation a sense of interest on all objects of nature, love and affection toward those and a conviction that nature and human are complementary to each other.
4	Dhora Kauri Aru Tipochi Charai	Dhora Kauri, Tipochi, Sea, Earth, Buffalo, Dog, Cow, Grass etc.	The landscape projected with land, water, fire a diversity of lives such as human, birds, tree, grass, animals where the voice raised by the powerless against marginalization is reflective of a healthy environment.	Exploitation of the powerless by the powerful is one of the causes of environmental disturbances and brings threat to ecosystem and bio-diversity.	The tale inculcates environmental ethics that no one is meant to be consumed by other if there is no natural demand. No one is important or strong in an ecosystem; whoever tries to disturb another component in due course of time itself gets destroyed. Rather every being of nature is complementary to each other.
5	Ejani Malini Aru Ejopa Phul	A flower tree, Cow, Cloud, Frog.	Nature is depicted through individualistic voices of different objects of nature and a concern for the totality of the nature or the collective voice of nature runs throughout.	Inter-dependence of different objects of nature, and the question of sustenance of healthy environment.	The tale may create in the youngsters a concern for the well-being of the tree or nature, provide them knowledge of the interrelation among the objects of nature and develop a sense of eco-consciousness.
6	Budhiyak Shiyal	Fox Tiger	Nature is represented by forest, animal, birds, trees, river, water-spirits, folk and their folklore items. The fox being chained in	Eco-colonization.	Colonization of the forest leads to unending sufferings of its beings and degeneration of the

			neck in human world appears to the animal world a colonial force meant to exploit, marginalize and threaten the natural living of living beings of nature.		environment. Suppression of nature never lasts for long and as a rule of the nature the suppressor or oppressor is ultimately uprooted.
7	Bagh Aru Kekora	Tiger Crab	The landscape projected with the interrelation and intra-relation among the objects of nature, human and non-human worlds plays a vital role in the development of the plot of the tale.	Sustenance of a healthy intra-relation and inter-relation in and between human and non-human beings.	The tale shows how a healthy give and take relation between human and non-human beings or among the objects of nature may lead to a better environment, a better socio-political order and thus may develop in younger generation a sense of love and affection for the non-human beings.
8	Tejimala	Gourd plant, Pomelo tree, Lotus flower, Shalika bird	The traditional Assamese landscape, projected with Assamese folk and folklife, integrated to nature, plays a vital role in the plot development of the tale.	Human jealousy and cruelty degenerate the environment.	Though anthropocentric, nature with its varieties of objects remains an area of interest and contributes to happiness in human world at its own cost.
9	Burha burhi Aru Shiyal	Fox.	Forest is the prime force in the traditional landscape projected where folklife is enveloped in nature.	Cheating, selfishness and a self-consuming sense of unaccountability to others pollute nature and degenerate the environment.	The prime environmental ethic 'accountability to others' is the message of the tale.
10	Dighal Thengiya	Tigers.	The environment, peculiar to Assamese folklife, is projected with jungle and animals, village and poor old woman, disheveled hut and suffering from rain, cow and economic relief, the interrelation among cowshed, thief and tiger, proverbial expression of objects of nature, folk speech, ego of the powerful and its mockery, moral values etc. Folk speech here plays the vital role in plot development.	Poverty, loneliness, shortage of economic resource, unemployability, shortage of food for animal in the forest, theft, class conscious and racial conflict, superior complexity of the powerful and exploitation of the powerless etc. are the issues responsible for all disturbances.	The tale shows how forest and folklife are integrated in such a way to negate anybody's superiority in the ecosystem and make every component learn a lesson that no one is at the centre but the land.
11	Gangatop	Gangatop or Globe fish, Goroi	The environment portrayed with a local aquatic world and its indigenous fish, the folk and its indigenous fishing equipments,	Crisis or tension in the world of fish or non-human beings caused by human interference.	The tale propagates environmental ethics such as misuse of wetlands or aquatic worlds by the

		fish, Sengeli fish, Gedgedi fish etc.	various ways of cooking fish etc. An eco-centric environment where the human community is projected the biggest enemy of fish and the only the stupid, selfish of all animals who drink other animal's milk and grow strong doing injustice to the calf.		human may threat to the existence of indigenous fish, consumption of cow milk may cause harm to calf etc. Inculcation of such values may develop in the youngsters a sense of love for non-human beings.
12	Numoliya Po	No non-human character.	The landscape is portrayed with village, river, boat, business, agriculture, varieties of human in different walks of life, folk speech, folk belief, agriculture, paddy field etc., but the fact is that land is at the centre and resolves a complicated plot.	Self-centeredness, inability to think for others, superstitions etc. degenerate an environment.	The name lost is found back in terms of land and sowing of paddy seeds is metaphorical of the integrity of non-human and human environment.
13	Sarabjan	No non-human character	The nature based Assamese folklife is well projected with drizzling and cloudy atmosphere of the months of January-February, indigenous paddy seeds, folk cakes, folk cloths, bamboo platter, river, river ghat to fetch water and bath, the homely orchard etc.	Poverty, greed, childlessness and loneliness, cheating, folk speech, question of drinking water etc. affecting the environment.	The tale teaches the lesson that folk speech integrated to nature is one of the strengths to make the earth sustainable for all.
14	Eta Shingara Machar katha	A Shingara fish, A demon.	The landscape is projected with village, forest, river, local shingara fish, fishing, cow, river ghat, demon, folk and their weakness for material gains etc. The conflict between powerful and powerless, human and non-human etc. are also the features of the environment.	Poverty, misuse of forest and non-human beings, human aspiration for material success affecting the environment.	Transformation of the fish into a human is due to anthropocentric nature of the tale. Every item of nature is used for material success of man. The environmental ethics propagated are such as listening to the call of the soul of the non-human beings makes things pleasurable for all, every object of nature has its own importance and may be invaluable for nature and a protest against marginalization of the weak.
15	Eta Boli Manuh (A Strong Man)	Tiger.	The non-human environment is projected with forest, tiger, elephant, river, birds etc.	Inability to read animal's behavior, mental problem, greed for wealth, river's water used as drinking water, cheating, and exploitation of forest and mal-treatment of	It is ironical and anti-environmental to call a mentally disturbed human who kills the elephant by chance and the tiger by cheating for wealth is called the strongest.

				animal affecting the environment.	
16	Chilanir Jiyekar Sadhu (Tale of Kite's Daughter)	A female kite 'Chilani'.	It is an environment where folklife is well integrated to nature and reveals human's dependency on nature and its beings. Kite, the bird of prey, is projected with full of motherly love and affection. The river again appears a source of life for the human.	Patriarchal society and women's plight, polygamy and jealousy, longing for boychild and inhuman treatment to girlchild, injustice to bird etc. are the issues degenerating the environment.	Propagates the wrongs with patriarchal set up and polygamy and the rights of women in an environment and may develop love for girlchild. May develop a sense of love for the birds like kite which will be fruitful for the present environment suffering in the context of extinct of the birds like vulture.
17	Tula Aru Teja	Tortoise, Joba Phul, Jora Tenga, Myna bird, Shalika bird.	The traditional Assamese landscape endowed with the inseparable relationship between nature and folklife is projected with village, jungle, river and water-spirit, big pond, agriculture field, grazing grounds and shepherds, local aquatic lives like Tortoise, kekura, kuchia, angulichepa, varieties of fish like kurhi, cheni, lachon, bhangan, trees like hibiscus, shaddock, pomegranate, banana, insects like ants, phoring, lice, animal like cow, buffalo, birds like myna, shalika local homely items like dola, pera, jopa, tum, borpira, chalpira, bati, weaving set, local fishing instruments like pol, juluki, jal, jakai, folkdish like Poita bhat, pora mach, paraman etc.	Polygamy and jealousy, poverty and unemployment, greed and aspiration for material gains, the ruler's inability to think for the marginalized and to take proper steps at the proper time, intolerance to the wrong doers, no love for the non-human beings etc. affecting the environment.	Introduces diversity of birds, animals, trees, insects, fishes and other aquatic lives. The aquatic lives, trees and birds with their love, affection, caring and sacrifice for human may win the heart of the young children and develop in them a sense of love and oneness for the non-human beings.
18	Kata Jua Nak Kharani Di Dhak	No human character.	The environment is portrayed here with human village, folklife integrated to nature, big forest with the family of a human intruder and colonizer of marginalized self.	Intruder to a forest and colonization of marginalized self harm the environment.	The tale propagates the environmental ethics that the intruders to a forest and the exploiters of the marginalized selves are ultimately uprooted and provided tragic end.
19	Tikhar Aru Chuti Bai		The environment is projected with two worlds – human with life force in folklife and non-human with the same in forest.	Human-nonhuman conflict, compromise with the well being of forest, poverty, cheating of man and animal, mal treatment of animal etc. are the basic environmental issues dealt with.	Cheating of man and animal, doing harm to forest bring risk to the lives of Tikhor and his sister. The tiger who understands well that the forest belongs to non-human beings. That representative of forest being bribed by human compromises with the well

					being of the forest and finally meets its tragic end.
20	Champawati	Python, Demoness	The environment is projected with human life integrated to nature, village and forest, agricultural field, paddy cultivation and bota bird, a hut in the natural dustbin peculiar to Assamese folklife, deep forest and python, traditional dress and ornaments etc.	Polygamy, jealousy, poverty, unemployment, women's wretched condition in patriarchal set up, wishes for easy material gains, women's weakness for ornaments, accountability to promise, human transformation into non-human beings, racial conflict etc. affecting the environment.	The environment sustains life and prosperity to all when human and nonhuman beings in the environment are in alignment as in case of Champawati and her Python husband. Forceful use of nature and non-human beings by the human for their material benefit causes unending sufferings to all.
21	Jaradgab Rajar Upakhyan	No non-human character.	A human environment with a town, King and subjects, tasty and delicious dishes like jaha rice, ghee etc. at a cheap rate and the heaven in imagination is portrayed. The political environment is characterized with a dull ruler and wise subjects.	Politics without knowledge, wit, intellect and love for people, and torture in the name of dispensing justice and exploitation of common people affecting the environment.	Anthropocentric in nature. Propagates the message that the powerful even the ruler can be overthrown by the common people with the help of knowledge, wit, intellect and love for all. Should prepare environmental impact assessment before doing anything.
22	Paneshoi	Different objects of nature such as duck's egg, a piece of wood, duck etc. with human attributive s.	The environment, human and non-human, characterized with magical transformations from duck's egg into a beautiful lady, then the girl hiding herself inside a block of wood and later a small chip of wood and finally transforming herself into a duck etc. metaphorically imply that every object of nature has life and complementary to human lives.	Immoral wishes and illicit relation, male domination, not caring for women's wishes and aspiration etc. affecting the environment.	Every object of nature has life and deserves respect from the human world. Both the human and non-human worlds are complementary to each other. The non-human objects of nature help the human to get rid of incestuous dealings going on in human world. And thus the tale may develop a sense of love towards the objects of nature.
23	Joair Sadhu	No non-human character.	The environment with human and non-human worlds is projected with domestic animals like cow, goat etc., folk natural dustbin 'Suwapatani', folk dress, folk festival, thief, river, disease like	Human relations, disease, poverty, ignorance, theft etc. are the issues.	Anthropocentric in nature. Introduces the traditional Assamese home with domestic animals, suwapatoni, traditional dress, dish etc.

			night-blindness etc.		Teaches the commitment or accountability in relations among the folk.
24	Kukurikana	No non-human character	The environment is seen with tilling of paddy field, night-blinded son-in-law, cow and cowshed, cat, family love and affection etc.	Human relations, disease, poverty, ignorance, needs of other beings especially of domestic animals etc. are the issues.	‘Mother, let it to eat, whether only man should eat? Every animal or living being must eat to live, so the cat should eat, rather we should eat together.’ - What the nyctalopic son-in-law said to hide his night-blindness and to save his face is also reflective of the story-teller’s intention to propagate and inculcate in the young listeners that every animal has right to eat and live and we should be sympathetic towards them.
25	Bhekulir Sadhu	Frog, Animals Insects.	The environment is projected here with conflict between human and non-human worlds, folklife integrated to nature, community fishing, local fishing instruments, tilling of paddy field, folkdishes ‘gutkorai’, deep forest, animals like lion, tiger, bear; insects like honey, kudu, borol etc and a frog as the protagonist of the tale.	Poverty, childlessness, exploitation of non-human beings, marginalization of the weaker sections, and collective voice of the subdued ones raised against the powerful, human-animal conflict and relation etc. affecting the environment.	An Ecocentric text where only the non-human especially the animal world has the legitimate interest. Frog’s colonization of the human world is a protest against the frequent colonization of the non-human natural world by the human beings. A protest against marginalization of the animals and other non-human beings or weaker sections. The tale may be told to propagate and inculcate environmental ethics that every living being however small is not insignificant, not unimportant rather has its own importance in and usefulness to the earth and other beings.
26	Tawoiekar Sadhu	No non-human character	The environment is projected with pond, river, rice, fish, evil spirits, human’s accountability to relation, faith, belief, superstition etc.	Folk mind, folk belief, superstition and its relation to non-human environment.	Anthropocentric in nature.
27	Latkan	No non-	The human environment is	Poverty,	A realistic tale in terms of

		human character	portrayed with people ready to make use of any situation for material success while the non-human environment is projected with forest, pig, horse, fly, grass etc. exploited by the human.	unemployment, material wishes and aspirations, hunger, poaching of wild animal, exploitation of animal and degeneration of values affecting the entire environment.	depicting a real environment with its risks and issues, problems and challenges. Poverty and material wishes and aspirations are the causes of environmental disturbances leading to the tragic death of the pig and cheating of innocent people.
28	Lakhimi Tirota (The Woman of Wealth)	No non-human character	The environment is characterized with traditional Assamese joint family and its culture, the youngest daughter-in-law as the goddess of wealth, importance of any object of nature like decomposed snake and the big fly breeding there and a piece of dried cow dung, bamboo fencing, folk ornaments, river and ghat, kite, bamboo container, folk medicine, magic, shalika bird, supernatural beings like Brahma etc.	Human's magical spell, superstitions and selfish activities are seen degenerating the environment.	Every object of nature has its own importance for the survival of the earth and its components. Understanding the values of dead snake, piece of dung, shalika bird etc. results in sustenance of lives and happiness.
29	Dui Budhiyak	No non-human character	The environment is projected with selfish, poor, unemployed human beings with wit and cleverness, traditional Assamese home with 'Tulashi' and cow, pond and drinking water, trees like ginger, black peeper, 'bhomloti seed' and 'keturi' and destruction of trees etc. it is an environment where men hardly hesitate to disturb the environment to satisfy their zeal, selfish aspirations, but finally become the victim of their own ego.	Poverty, unemployment, drinking water, search for easy material gains, misuse of human wit, human selfishness and jealousy etc. are the environmental issues.	A realistic Assamese folktale depicting a real environment with lots of environmental challenges which are responsible for the destruction of nature and degeneration of entire environment. The tale teaches the lesson that before doing any activity we should concentrate on the environmental impact assessment of that activity, otherwise we will lose our valuable things like the two clever persons of the tale.

30	Kanchani	Crow	The environment is depicted with a traditional Assamese joint family, magic and human transformation into animal, intelligent woman beggar, throne of 'Kutkura' tree and dog, love, affection and accountability towards animal, weaving, river as the source of human happiness, crow informing message, paddy field, sacrifice for love, local trees like chandan, saral, padma, uoi, gandhsoroi, ahot, bor etc.	The human- nature eternal relationship.	The ahot tree and the bor tree growing from the cremation places of Kanchani and her animal turned human husband, meeting each other in the middle of the river and then growing together is metaphorical of the prevailing philosophy of human-nature relationship in Assamese society – love, sacrifice and live together.
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**Burhi Air Sadhu and representation of Environment:** The term 'environment' does not merely imply the nature around us – the plants and animals, water and mountains. Rather it includes the human world with its all components in addition to the bio-physical or natural one where the human history is implicated. Thus to speak about the environment in its totality one needs to understand the aspects associated with the human and the non-human worlds such as natural and built, socio-economic, cultural, political, historical, moral, aesthetic and technological. The above table shows how Burhi Air Sadhu portrays an environment in its totality with its human and non-human, physical and non-physical components. Apart from a good gallery of humans taking representatives from all spectra of its traditional society the tales also include characters belonging to non-human environment such as Cat, Monkey, Fox, Dog, Buffalo, Cow, Tiger, Earth, Grass, Water-Spirit, Sea, Cloud, Demon, Demoness, Python, Crow, Dhora Crow, Tipochi, Shalika, Myna, Duck, Kite, Crab, Tortoise, Globe Fish, Sengeli Fish, Gedgedi Fish, Shingora Fish, Goro Fish, A Flower Tree, Gourd Plant, Pomegranate tree, Lotus flower, Joba Flower (hibiscus), Jora Tenga (shaddock), Ou Fruit etc. Burhi Air Sadhu through these characters reflects the non-human beings of traditional Assamese environment and their meaningful conversation with the human. In the tales of the book the wise words spoken or deeds done by different non-human objects of nature like earth and fire, forest and trees, birds and animal, river and water-spirit etc. guide the humans not merely to adjust themselves and have success but lead them to have a better knowledge and understanding of their total environment and remind them of their role to be played for its betterment.

Nature in Burhi Air Sadhu, with the Assamese traditional landscape as its soul, is a living entity with a voice of its own. A traditional Assamese landscape with indigenous forests, hills, mountains, animals, birds, river, fish, vegetable, fruit etc. is the soul of the nature projected and intertwined with the human world and its folklore – the community's folkmind, folk belief, curse, mythical and supernatural beings, material skills, socio-religious customs, political order, superstitions, attitude towards women, marginalized sections and non-human beings etc. The tales collectively draw the picture of the traditional Assamese landscape which is seen endowed with the inseparable relationship between nature and folklife, projected with village, poor but simple and honest folk, joint family, jungle, river

and water-spirit, big pond, agriculture field, grazing grounds, disheveled hut, 'panoni', 'suwapatoni', 'uluwani', 'ikora', 'dhuachang', 'rohghar', Brahma, king, beggar, cow-house and shepherds; local aquatic lives like tortoise, kekura, frog, kuchia, angulichepa; varieties of indigenous fish like goroi, sengeli, sol, kaoui, puthi, phul-dorikona, gedgedi, gongatop, kurhi, cheni, lachon, bhangon, shingora, rou, ragha barali, bahu etc.; local trees like tuloshi, betel-nut, sugar-cane, hibiscus, shaddock, pomegranate, ginger, keturi, black peeper, bhomloti, chandan, saral, padma, uoi, gandh horoi, ahot, bor etc.; local fern like bihlangani; insects like ants, phoring, lice, kudu borol, honey, fly, louse etc.; animals like cow, buffalo, tiger, elephant, dog, cat, horse, goat, dear, lion, pig, python,; local birds like myna, shalika, bota, ghila duck etc.; local fruits like a type of banana 'athiya kol', mango, jaratenga, pomegranate, papaya, pomelo etc.; local flowers like joba phul, padum; local vegetables like lai, lophu, chuka, paleng, memedhu, babori, binger, chilli, ginger, red gourd, ou tenga, kochu, bez kochu etc.; varieties of indigenous rice such as joha, maniki modhuri, boradhan, komal etc.; local homely items like dola, pera, hatonipera, jopa, tum, borpira, chalpira, khatolipira, bati, weaving set; local fishing instruments like polo, juluki, jal, jakai, pauri, chepa, thuha etc.; folkdish like pitha, 'joha rice and bengengar khar', 'poita bhat and pora mach', paraman, gutkorai etc.; folk ornaments like nepur, har, kharu, moni, thuria, senduror phut and regha etc.; folkdress like gamocha, hasoti, eriya shawl, seleng, riha-mekhela etc.; folkfestival like Bihu, Nakhuwa etc.; folk belief of evil spirits etc.

Richard Kerridge says – 'Anthropocentrism's opposite is ecocentrism. ... Ecocentrism means attempting, at least as an imaginative gesture, to place the ecosystem, rather than humanity, at the centre. ...Landscape in a novel, for example, should not function merely as setting, background, or symbol.'<sup>10</sup> The environment seen on the surface in the tales may appear an anthropocentric one where nature and its objects like forest, river, animals etc are made to be used for the sake of human happiness. So the needy pregnant cat is exploited without hesitation, the tree 'Tulashi' dies as a sign of human's torture towards animal, and the river brings the bifurcated human roads into one.(Tale of a Cat's Daughter) If the tales are told ironically or read from environmental perspective it is seen that the human activities done without a concern for nature or environmental impact only lead to human miseries and affect the total environment and thus motivate the listeners to listen the voice of the environment itself. Immediately the tale 'Tale of a Cat's Daughter' appears an eco-text where the environment is projected with environmental challenges, the human are seen paying the price for their maltreatment of nature and non-human beings, propagates environmental ethics such as anthropocentricity is the tragic flaw of the human community etc. The river projected in the tale as a means of human living, source of human reconciliation and happiness is metaphorically suggestive of the identity provider to the Assamese community taking different people of different parts of the state into one platform and appealing to all in the present day context to make it alive for the sustenance of the community. The tale makes it clear that it is an environment characterized with a human history implicated in natural history where the mimicry of the animals owning and playing with human traits like treachery and betrayal, revenge and punishment metaphorically suggest the disastrous effects of human immigration to forest and its impact on the total environment. (Monkey and Fox) The environment with the incidents of woman giving birth to an object of nature and

marriage of a man with that object of nature (Ou Kuwari) is symbolically suggestive of a deeply-rooted human-nature relationship prevailing in the Assamese folk society and the value inculcated that both human and nature are complementary to each other, but the same motif of inter marital relationship between human and non-human in the tale 'Paneshoi' is suggestive of the fact that the human-nature relationship in the hands of a selfish generation is no longer a healthy, give and take one suggesting the present day reality. The landscape projected with earth at the centre and a voice raised by the powerless against marginalization is reflective of a healthy environment. (Dhora Kauri aru Tipochi Sarai). It is an environment where every object of nature has its own voice and equally concerned for the collective voice of nature (Ejani Malini Aru Ejopa Phul). The environment in 'Budhiyak Shiyal' or 'Kota Jua Nak Kharoni Di Dhak' is characterized with a colonized forest, sufferings of the colonized selves and the tragic end of the oppressor of nature. The tale 'Gongatop' depicts another eco-centric environment where the human community is projected the biggest enemy of fish and the only the stupid, selfish of all animals who drink other animal's milk and grow strong doing injustice to the calf. The tale 'Eta Boli Manuh' depicts an environment where the mentally disturbed person who kills the animals by chance and cheating is ironically called a strong man. The environment projected in the tale 'chilonir Jiyekor Sadhu' is an environment where folklife is well integrated to nature and reveals human's dependency on nature and its beings where as usual the river and even the birds of prey like kite appear the sources of life and happiness for the human. The tale 'Jaradgab Rajar Upakhyan' depicts the political component of an environment where the powerful ruler is overthrown from power by the marginalised for harming innocent people in the name of providing justice and making a mockery of 'Environmental Impact Assessment' of an activity. The landscape projected with the interrelation and intra-relation among the objects of nature, human and non-human worlds plays a vital role in the development of the plots of the tales like 'Mekurir Jiyekor Sadhu', 'Bagh Aru Kekora', 'Burha Burhi Aru Shiyal' 'Tejimola' etc. Folk speech integrated to nature gives unity to the plot of the tales 'Dighal Thengia' and 'Sarabjan'. Similarly land is at the centre and resolves a complicated plot in the tale 'Numoliya Po'. Thus Burhi Air Sadhu helps us to realise Bezbaroa's dream of living in, with and for own land and its indigenous environment by locating and identifying ourselves in our traditional landscape through meaningful conversations between human and non-human, folk and nature, verbal or non-verbal and makes us understand our role within. Through these tales we come to know our interrelations with the living landscape, respect its inherent values and recognize the truth that its health affects the total environment, our survival and prosperity.

**Burhi Air Sadhu and Environmental Issues:** The conflicts between human and nature, human and non-human beings, and also intra-human conflicts, health of the land and its components are the prime environmental issues dealt with in Burhi Air Sadhu. The table shows the causes emerging in the environment projected leading to certain environmental challenges and its consequences. The tales like 'Mekurir Jiyekar Sadhu', 'Dighal Thengiya', 'Sarabjan', 'Eta Shingara Machar katha', 'Tula Aru Teja', 'Champawati', 'Lotkon', 'Dui Budhiok' etc. deals with the issues like poverty, malnutrition, problem with drinking water, selfishness, cruelty, cheating, longing for easy material gains, unemployment, jealousy, misuse and exploitation of non-human beings especially of the animals, exploitation of

natural objects etc. which are considered responsible for degeneration of the total environment. The prime causes of human-nature conflict such as human immigration to forest and animal world, exploitation of forest or natural resources by human for their material benefit, deforestation, undue human interference in non-human world or in one sense eco-colonization are dealt with its consequences in the tales like 'Bandar Aru Shiyal', 'Budhiyak Shiyal', 'Kata Jua Nak Kharani Di Dhak', 'Tikhor Aru Chutibai', 'Gongatop' etc. The tale 'Ejani Malini Aru Ejopa Phul' deals with the question of sustenance of healthy environment while the tales like 'Dhora Kauri Aru Tipochi Charai', 'Dighal Thengiya' etc. show that class conscious and racial conflict, exploitation of the powerless by the powerful are also responsible for environmental disturbances and brings threat to ecosystem and bio-diversity. The tales like 'Ou-Kuwori', 'Paneshoi' deal with folk belief, supernatural happenings, human transformation into other objects of nature, male-centric human wishes without concern for others which are affecting the total environment. Human's magical spell, superstitions and selfish activities degenerating the environment are dealt with in the tales 'Lakhimi Tirota', 'Tawoiekar Sadhu' etc. In the tale 'Chilonir Jiyekar Sadhu' patriarchal society and women's plight, polygamy and jealousy, longing for boy child and inhuman treatment to girl child, injustice to bird etc. are the issues seen degenerating the environment. In the tales like 'Mekurir Jiyekar Sadhu', 'Chilanir Jiyekar Sadhu' 'Tula Aru Teja', 'Champawati' etc. the wretched, disrespectful condition and plight of women caused by patriarchal norms, polygamy, lacking in scope for employability for women, inhuman attitude towards women etc. are the prime factors affecting the environment. The traditional Assamese society depicted in the tales seems to have been biased against women; it has basically been a male chauvinistic society where even the wise or the problem-solving women are marginalized as beggars or witches.<sup>10</sup> The tale 'Paneshoi' shows how immoral wishes and illicit relation, male chauvinism, society's indifference towards women's wishes and aspiration etc. affect the total environment.

**Burhi Air Sadhu and Environmental Ethics:** Burhi Air Sadhu has been in the business for centuries of inculcating social, ethical, moral, political, cultural, environmental values in the younger generations of the community. In the present day context of ecological degradation and doubt of sustenance of life on it the book of folktales in totality becomes more relevant with its environmental ethics and resources of environmental teachings. The values expressed in the tales are in tune with ecological wisdom and reflect the community's commitment and accountability to nature and the total environment. The tales like 'Mekurir Jiyekar Sadhu' inculcates the environmental value that anthropocentricity is the tragic flaw of human beings. The human are compelled to pay the price for their maltreatment, exploitation of animal and ensured happiness when they listen to the call of the river. 'Ejani Malini Aru Ejopa Phul' may create a concern for the well being of the non-human beings and develop a sense of eco-consciousness. In the tale 'Kukurikana' it is said that every animal has right to eat and live and we should be sympathetic towards them. The tales like 'Ou Kuwori', 'Bagh Aru Kekuora' etc. teach the lesson that only a healthy, meaningful, committed and give and take relation between human and non-human beings or among the objects of nature may lead to a better environment. 'Dhora Kauri Aru Tipochi Charai' gives the environmental lesson that no one is meant to be consumed by other if there is no natural demand; no one is important or strong in

an ecosystem, whoever tries to disturb another component in due course of time itself gets destroyed. 'Burha Burhi Aru Shiyal' shows that unaccountability to others leads to degeneration of the environment while the tale 'Champawati' inculcates the value that forceful use of nature and non-human beings by the human for their material benefit causes unending sufferings to all. The tale like 'Gangatop' reveals the danger of human interference in the non-human world and may lead the youngsters to feel the necessity of conservation of the indigenous fish or anything indigenous of the land. 'Bandar Aru Shiyal' carries the value that human immigration to forest results in disastrous effects while 'Budhiyak Shiyal' inculcates in the young generation the truth that colonization of the forest leads to degeneration of the environment and as a rule of the nature the suppressor or oppressor is ultimately uprooted. Similarly the tale 'Tikhar Aru Chuttibai' inculcates in the minds of the youngsters that who compromises with the well being of the forest finally meets its tragic end. The tales 'Eta Shingara Machar Katha', 'Kata Jua Nak Kharani Di Dhak', 'Bhekulir Sadhu' are a protest against marginalization of the weak and the tales 'Dighal Thengiya', 'Numoliya Po' negate anybody's superiority on earth and makes every component learn a lesson that no one is at the centre but the land. The tales like 'Tejimala', 'Chilanir Jiyekar Sadhu', 'Paneshoi' teach the lesson that bigamy or polygamy, marginalization of women, incestuous dealings etc. lead to degeneration of environment. The realistic tales like 'Latkan', 'Dui Budhiyak' make us learn the lesson that the environmental challenges like poverty, unemployment, inequality, gender discrimination, racial conflict, selfishness, material race, unaccountability to others etc. should be properly addressed, otherwise degenerate the environment. The tales 'Jaradgab Rajar Upakhyan' and 'Sarabjan' reflect the environmental ethic that one should be conscious of environmental impact assessment before and after doing an activity. Burhi Air Sadhu ends with the tale 'Kanchani' propagating the philosophy of human-nature relationship in Assamese society, the secret of a healthy environment – love and live together. The book propagates the value that every object of nature has its own importance and is invaluable for nature and for all. Almost all the tales are of the view that nature and human are complementary to each other and develop in the younger generation a sense of interest on and love and affection towards nature and its objects. The tales no doubt may be used as a tool not only for developing a sense of belongingness, commitment and accountability towards nature and its objects but also towards the socio-cultural political components of the environment.

**Conclusion:** The greatest challenge before the human race in the new millennium is to pass on a safe and healthy earth for the generations to come. In the present day context of environmental crisis owing to the issues like scarcity of pure drinking water, global warming, chronic resource shortage, deforestation, destruction of rainforest, loss of bio-diversity and ecological degradation, extinction of species, poverty, unemployment, racial conflict, inequality, threat to culture, language and identity crisis, use of weapons of mass destruction, exploitation of natural resources, marginalization of weaker sections and unsustainable development etc. myriads of physical and mental, socio-cultural, political and biophysical problems are emerging only to disturb the environment and to question the future of earth and its ability to sustain life. An environmental revolution is now going on throughout the globe with a view to identifying the local and global environmental issues and

its effects, creating mass awareness on those deadly issues and preparing the next generation as the caretaker of the environment. Mere formal compulsory environmental education will not work much if the young generations are not made pro-environment or environmentally-oriented before. Here, in the field of environmental education, lies the relevance of folktale in general and 'Burhi Air Sadhu' in particular. In the context of Assam prescription of 'Burhi Air Sadhu' or use of any ethnic folktale will be a handy and effective tool in environmental education for it is not expensive but simple, general, interesting, entertaining, neutral and what is more the story-teller and the listeners can easily adjust to the context of the tales.

Lakshminath Bezbarua, who was deeply rooted in the land and committed to its natural, socio-cultural, linguistic and political identity, was concerned for sustenance of the good health of the total environment of Assam. That accountability of Bezbarua towards his indigenous environment results in 'Burhi Air Sadhu' which since its publication has been socializing, assimilating and identifying the young generations of the community with their own land and its components, own folk and their folklore and the inter and intra relations of the components of the environment of the land. Hence listening to or reading of the tales of 'Burhi Air Sadhu' leads to understanding of nature, human-nature relationship and the aspects associated with the environment of Assam. It is realized from the table and the discussion followed that the tales of Burhi Air Sadhu are one of the best learning processes for children for learning environmental education. The condition is that in changing scenario the story-teller of 'Burhi Air Sadhu' needs to be an environmentalist who listens to the voice of the environment projected and communicate the same to the listeners in a systematic and scientific way with a view to socializing and assimilating them with their own land and its features, their folklore, their socio-cultural, political and linguistic identities, introducing them with the environmental issues and its effects, and bringing about necessary changes in their attitude towards human and non-human aspects of their environment and inculcating in them acceptable behavior and environmental values. These tales can effectively reorient the children to build an emotional bond between human and nature, to understand and get them involved in their environment around and make them learn the skills to act responsibly in and for the environment where they live in. It is believed that if the youngest generation of the community right from their early life either at home or school 'Burhi Air Sadhu' is prescribed in a systematic and scientific way for rereading from environmental viewpoints it will surely make them come forward to feel, understand and preserve and fall in love with their own land, soil, air, river and water, wet lands and agricultural fields, forest and hills, indigenous species and its varieties, the beauty of their own language, culture and folklore and be proud of their own identity. In future they will neither construct building on wet lands nor vote for big dams paving the way for the death of Brahmaputra, our identity. They will never be indifferent to the cries of rhinos, human-elephant conflict, loss of indigenous species, farewell of folk culture, the agonies of marginalized sections, unequal, unsustainable developments. They will not disturb naturalness of our natural objects or our bio-physical environment and act according to the environmental impact assessment prepared before doing anything. If we succeed in creating such a pro-environment generation and develop a sense of eco-consciousness all around our language and culture, folklore and identity, nature

and environment will be safe and thus can contribute to the global objective of keeping the 'earth' a sustainable home for the existing lives and the generations to come.

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