

Ecological Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

Ecocriticism is a recent phenomenon and the present global era can be characterized as an age of ecological crisis. In today's world the environment is extremely polluted and poisoned by man-made disasters. Climate change, the greenhouse effect, a global water crisis, endangered species, nuclear energy, fossil fuels are the results of extreme environmental degeneration. Human activities motivated by unrestrained consumerism and unsustainable patterns of production have never been as inhumane towards the environment as in the technocratic present modern age. Environmental degeneration of the world led the people to think about the new way of eco-centric life that can save the future of the world. Long back, Rabindranath Tagore expressed concern for nature, and in his life, living, and works he presented sustaining ecological life and ecological philosophy. As a modernist, he investigated major environmental concerns from an eco-critical perspective in order to awaken ecological awareness among people. From an eco-critical standpoint, the study sheds light on Rabindranath Tagore's love for nature and attempts to evaluate Tagore's environmental thought and consciousness from his select works.

Key words: Ecocriticism, Consciousness, Realization, Anthropocentric, Urbanization.

Introduction

Nature and the natural world have long been depicted in literary works, but the current environmental catastrophe has brought this problem to the forefront. The term 'Ecocriticism' refers to a green phenomena that deals with men as a part of nature, the impact of nature on human existence, a deeper understanding of literature and the environment, and a concern for current issues such as wildlife extinction and environmental issues. Though nature and the environment have always piqued the interest of writers around the world, William Rueckert coined the term 'Ecocriticism' in his influential article 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' in 1978. Ecocriticism is a new eco-critical theory that examines nature and literature, as well as the human-landscape relationship. Glotfelty writes "Ecocriticism by nature is interdisciplinary; consequently, it concentrates on environmental

studies, natural sciences, and cultural and social studies,". The poets, artists, philosophers, and great thinkers have been emphasizing the close kinship between nature and man from times immemorial. Human life is inconceivable without the presence of wider nature. "(1996: xviii). Ecocriticism is "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell 430). Here he illustrated the interaction of environs in literature intensely. Later, Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm jointly brought out 'The Ecocriticism Reader' in 1960 that turned a broader and vivid perception on it. The present paper is a study to analyze Rabindranath Tagore's select works from eco-critical approach which can be categorized as eco-literature from the green lens in the literature. Tagore articulated his urge for the ecological consciousness among humanity as the urgent need of the time.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a noble laureate in twenty-century, the most prolific literary genius in Bangali literature, created poems, songs, short tales, novels, plays, travelogues, essays, and whatnot. A large number of his poems were also translated by him. Tagore's majority of texts, however, can be evaluated with environmental awareness and concern in today's environmental context. He was concerned about the environmental degradation, hazards of wilderness as the terrible impacts of materialism and consumerism on mankind. The life and works of Tagore universally confirm his eco-consciousness and a deeper understanding of life, literature, and environment and their role in civilization. In Tagore's works, Man and nature coexist peacefully in balanced form and man is portrayed as an integral component of nature rather than a superior one. This realization toward humans and their relationship with nature encourages humanity to be sympathetic and empathetic to all aspects of nature, large and little. Along with increased awareness, he harshly criticized the irrational actions of humanity against the natural world and environment. Long ago he realized the inevitability of saving the earth from the environmental crisis. Tagore looks far ahead of his times and declares that eco-systems of this world are viewed as a manifestation of a larger and deeper reality. The Upanishadic philosophy and Buddhism advocates the mutual co-existence between man and the environment. Following the same Tagore showed his deep affection and love from the heart to nature.

Tagore expresses ecological consciousness in his poems, essays, short stories, dramas, and in his songs. His environmental consciousness finds expression in his rural developmental efforts in Shilaidaha and Patisar villages and in his ecological activities in Santiniketan. Tagore established Santiniketan (abode of peace) which was in an idyllic serene place surrounded by trees and where education was given in a natural ambiance. His essays *Palliprakriti*, *Tapoban*, *Halakarshan* (Tilling Land) and *Aranyadebata* (The Goddess of the forest), are about the environment. *Aranyadebata* (The Goddess of the Forest) is a notable essay in which Tagore describes the ecological issue in a very clear and loud manner. Tagore's introduction of tilling the land or planting numerous trees is commemorated in the essay *Halkarshan* (Tilling the Land). In the article, Tagore emphasises man's unquenchable

desire to seize possession of the forest area in a lavish manner in order to pillage it. Tagore wanted everything about tilling the soil to be environmentally benign. In dance-dramas, *The Waterfall* (Muktadhara, 1922) and *Raktakarabi* (1925) Tagore symbolically portrays the threat of technocratic science and greedy mentality that destroy nature in the name of civilization and development.

For Tagore, trees that are the most integral element of nature, he gladly confesses their gifts. The poems of *Banobani* (*The Message of the Wild*, 1929) were composed on the occasion of *Briksharopana* (the Tree Planting Festival). In *Banobani* the poet criticizes modern technocentric civilization for its greedy exploitation of natural resources.

In Tagore's literary works, nature plays a large and crucial role. His realisation of intimacy with nature is the central point of his discussion of the natural environment. Tagore wrote that "The first stage of my realisation was through my experience of intimacy with nature," This one statement from Tagore is enough to convey the depth of his affinity with nature. Nature's diverse movements had a deep impact on Tagore's psyche. It plays an important function in instilling joy and contentment in his psyche. He believed that "Nature is not just a storehouse of force, but also a dwelling of man's spirit". Nature pulsates with life to him, and he considers it his primary responsibility to be in touch with it. Nature, according to Tagore, is a living entity and divine. From the beginning of his life, he has admired and loved nature. His poetic inspiration comes from nature. Nature serves as the source of Tagore's joy, happiness, and peace of mind. He realised that he and nature shared an instinctive and spiritual relationship. He is a natural part of the world. In the midst of nature's realm, he recognised himself. Nature serves as a friend, philosopher, and guide for him. Nature is a source of aesthetic beauty and natural resources. He never considers nature to be merely a source of our basic necessities. He was a true believer in the value of nature.

Tagore expressed his disgust against greediness and against all swallowing urbanization, and wrote *Sabhyatar Prati*(To Civilization) from *Chaitali*, 1896- "dao phire se aranya lao e nagar" translated by Fakrul Alam as "Give back that wilderness, take away the city". The weariness of modern urban life is so numbing that Tagore directly wants back the green era of innocence for being liberated from all-consuming greedy modern civilization. The poet articulates in *Sabhyatar Prati*(To Civilization)-

Give back the wilderness, take away the city

Embrace if you will your steel, brick and stonewalls

O newfangled civilization! Cruel all-consuming one,

Return all sylvan, secluded, shaded and sacred spots

And traditions of innocence. Come back evenings

When herds returned suffused in evening light,
 Serene hymns were sung, paddy accepted as alms
 And bark-clothes worn. Rapt in devotion,
 One meditated on eternal truths then single-mindedly.
 No more stonehearted security or food fit for kings –
 We'd rather breathe freely and discourse openly!
 We'd rather get back the strength that we had,
 Burst through all barriers that hem us in and feel
 This boundless Universe's pulsating heartbeat! (Tn Fakrul 223)

Tagore paid glowing respect to the trees in his poem "Briksha Bandana" (Tree Worshipping). In fact, all of the poetry in Banabani (1926) praise trees and the natural world. The majority of the poems are named after trees and plants, such as Debbaru (Pine Tree), Nilmanilata (Nilmani Creeper), Amroban (Mango Orchard), Kurchi (Kurchi Plant), Madhumanjari (Madhumanjari Plant), Narikel (Coconut), Sal (Sal Tree), Chamelibitan (Chamelibitan Creeper), and so on. The value of trees and their emotional attachment to humans are frequently highlighted in the poetry in this collection. The poet expresses in the poem, "Briksha Bandana" (Tree Worship).

You heard the call of the sun from inside the dark rock
 In the first wake of life, you tree, the first life;
 High on top you uttered the first hymn of light
 On the chest of rhythmless solid; You bring life
 In the dreary desolate desert.
 ...
 Land or water was once speechless
 The seasons without festive-songs
 Your branch gave song's primitive shelter

 Man who is decorated with your wreaths
 O friend of man! I, a messenger, with these verses
 In tune with Sham's music, a poet enamoured
 Offer you this endowment of mine.

The poem emphasises the fact that trees existed on the planet long before man and other animals came. The poet is a tree worshipper who gives his lyrics as a gift. Obviously, this type of poem evokes a deep affection for trees and the natural environment.

Tagore's earth-realization is really intimate and deep. The poet articulates-

Look at the huge Earth lying over there ever so quietly ! I love her so much that I feel like clasping in my arms her whole immensity with her trees and foliage, rivers and meadows, her clamours and silences, her mornings and evenings. I wonder if ever we could get from heaven the earthly treasures which she has given us in such plentitude.... This dusty mother of ours- this our very own Earth- has tenderly carried over to us in her loving arms, these tear-born treasures of poor, mortal children in her golden cornfields and on the banks of bountiful rivers amidst the loving localities enlivened by human emotions. Wretched as we are, we cannot even preserve them. We can not even save them when cruel, unseen, powerful forces snatch them away, one by one, from her very breast. And still the poor old Earth has tried the very best she can for them. I do love this Earth so dearly!(Bhudeb Chaudhuri 5)

In the poem Mother Earth (Basundhara) Tagore shows his much deepening closeness to nature which is really notable. Amrit Sen writes in his essay "*Our Bond with the World*": "*Basundhara* (Mother Earth, 1893) recognizes the image of the earth as the mother who sustains us at every point."

Earth, take me back,
 Your lap-child back to your lap
 In the shelter of your sari's voluminous end.
 Mother made me of Earth, may I
 Live diffused in your soil; spread
 Myself in every direction like spring's joy;
 Burst this breast-cage, shatter this stone-closed
 Narrow wall, this blind dismal jail
 Of self; swing, hum, shake,
 Flop, radiate, disperse,
 Shudder, be startled by
 Sudden lights and thrills,
 Flow through the whole globe-

The poet is here in great joy, the joy is always endless. (Tn. Sen)

Beautiful earth, as I have looked upon you,
How often has my spirit leapt into song
With huge happiness! How I have craved
To get a firm grip on your ocean-girdled waist
And keep it pressed to my breasts;
To spread myself in every direction, as pervasive
And boundless as the morning sun; to dance
all day long upon forests, upon mountains,
on the undulations of trembling leaves; to kiss
every flower that buds; to embrace
all the tender densely growing greenswards;
to the oscillate as on a swing of delight

on every wave... (Basundhara, Tn by Amrit Sen)

“We find that life around him flows into him and is transformed into art. His life is a continuous essay in experiencing and turning that experience into things of beauty.” (Umashankar Joshi: 115).

With the rays of light I flow in joy
To the far corners of the earth
In joyous play I extend
Language to every wave and direction
I spread myself on the pinnacles
Of the snowy cliffs in silence
O Earth my heart has sung aloud
In joy, aspired to clasp you close to me
To kiss every single bud, to embrace
Every blade of grass
The joy of the world
I wish to feel with all of mankind
Clasp me close to your heart
Where joy evolves in every beat
In Every nook and corner
Do not keep me away. (Basundhara, Tn by Amrit Sen)

Eco-logical and eco-aesthetic thinking is prominent in some of Tagore's dramatic dance-dramas, such as "Muktadhara" or Waterfall and "Raktakarabi" (red oleanders). The Waterfall (Muktadhara), often regarded as Tagore's finest theatrical work, has been viewed as a symbolic play indicating Tagore's denial of the machine in favour of the living forces.

'Muktadhara,' a play by Rabindranath Tagore, features modern machine monsters. The conflict between nature and machine has been shown in this piece. The drama's central theme is how humans construct dams to control natural water flow and do harm to the environment. Muktadhara's songs express the complexity of machinery and technology in relation to the environment and fauna. The monarch of Chitrakoot, Ranjit, ruled the kingdom of Chitrakoot in the drama, and he attempted to control with his financial dominance. He constructed a dam to block the natural waterfall. Bibhuti, the country's royal engineer, built the huge machine despite the objections of Abhijit, the crown prince. 'My purpose was to make Man triumphant over the dunes, water, and stones, which conspired against him,' engineer Bibhuti answered when a courier informed him of the dam's damaging effect on the cascade. 'I didn't have time to think about what would happen to some poor corn fields in some wretched cultivator's field somewhere'

This free-flowing waterfall held a special place in the heart of Crown Prince Abhijit. He understood it was both exploitation of the Shibtarai people and tyranny of nature. He considered this natural waterfall to be the mother of the country. The crown prince then went to demolish or destroy the dam, but he was swept away forever by the waterfall's torrent. Rabindranath has given life to the idea that man has strived to create absolute authority over Nature via his might in Muktadhara. It appears to us to be the voice of Eco-feminists who disseminate the idea that modern development policy, which causes environmental damage, ignores symbioses, natural linkages, and life's sustainability.

Ecocriticism again closely studies nature-culture interaction. 'Ecocriticism also looks closely at the human culture-nature interaction in texts. It assumes that nature and human culture are mutually influential. Texts that explore this mutual influence are supposed to embody an ecological consciousness' (Ganaie 4). Raktakarabi (Red Oleander), a poetic play by Tagore, expresses his concern about unbridled capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, environmental concerns, and extreme materialism in human beings. Rabindranath Tagore's play Red Oleanders (1924) is the translation of his Bengali play Raktakarabi. The play was inspired by a crimson oleander plant crushed by abandoned iron that Tagore saw while wandering in Shillong and was later turned into a play. Tagore said that the theme of the play involves gross capitalism and ecological exploitation. Tagore exemplified that what would happen if men live detached from nature. Yakshapuri, the king, is the protagonist of this drama who made hard metal walls and engaged himself to dig gold and other natural mines destroying nature for his extreme greed for property and treasure. The environment of his kingdom was being ruined for his activities badly. Tagore intensely portrayed the disastrous impact of greed

by men in his play. According to Rabindranath, three elements of human nature namely, pride, greed and power are the root causes of man's separateness from the harmony of the Nature. The nature of that realm was raped by this greedy king aftermath. Raktakabari (Red Oleander) is a warning against man's excessive greed for wealth and over exploitation of nature and labour.

So, Red Oleanders is about the increasing exploitation of natural resources. Tagore was aware of the difficulties concerning workers, mines, and the environment. These are inextricably tied to modern global capitalism and corporate greed. As a result, man is drifting away from human values, morality, spirituality, and the natural world. Alienation is casting a long shadow over a man's life and foreshadowing calamity. As a result, the author emphasises the necessity of man's coexistence with nature.

The palace of the king is the setting for Red Oleander. The protagonist of this drama is Nabdhini, who pushed and motivated everyone in the community, even the monarch, to believe. The play's enemy is the King, who turned the town into a fort and turned the people into gold-digging machines. He was a great man who was also jealous and greedy for riches. The town is named after the Yaks, who are servants of the Hindu God of Wealth, Kuber. As everyone laboured as slaves for the selfish king, Tagore chose it as the town's name. Nandhini instilled courage and faith in the people, allowing them to stand up to the king. She rushed to meet with the King, determined to educate him about the negative consequences of mining gold and destroying and controlling nature. The character of Bishu, who was tied and tortured there, represents the oppression of labour. Tagore also discovers that the primary source of conflict between man and environment, as well as between man and man, is a desire for power. Though Tagore was critical of man-centered society and modern technical achievements, he was not entirely opposed to machine-based civilization. He stated that development will protect the environment from degradation and exploitation. All living and non-living entities, he believed, were part of a single organism that was interrelated. Nature should not be abused in the sake of humanity's bright life. Yaksha town represents an exploited ecosystem and an illusory option in Red Oleander. The king's workers could not have thought that there was another way to live until Nandini arrived on the scene.

At all times, 'Red Oleander' can be seen as a play on environmental awareness. In this drama, both the abuse of nature and the exploitation of man are shown in magnificent form. It's also regarded as one of the best instances of ecofeminism. In this scenario, Nandini and her lover were finally slain. This drama is significant to eco-critics because it violates women and nature. Nandini is also an example of women's power and Tagore's ecofeminism is heavily referenced in this play.

So, the play makes all humans understand about environmental imbalances. Every scene causes the audience to reflect on current environmental challenges. The author urges readers

to recognise the inadequacy of natural resources. On the one hand, beauty, nature, freedom, love, song, sympathy, and happiness are discussed; on the other hand, oppression, ignorance, loss of identity, and grief are examined. Idealistic views are indicated to raise awareness in order to better serve the population.

Rabindranath Tagore exposes the environmental strife and ecological injustice of the present world. Tagore has warned about human beings in modern society harming the environment by mining with modern machinery and the slaughter of innocent animals. Rabindranath Tagore was a rebel and modernist who opposed science but opposed the disastrous human urge to use technology to destroy the environment. Tagore was a vocal opponent of human economic exploitation of natural resources in the name of religion and modernity. The plays 'Muktadhara and Red Oleanders highlight the importance of environmental values in today's world, which is a major concern for humanity. Tagore explores the concept of environmental consciousness in light of tremendous technical breakthroughs and unwanted cultural shifts. Rabindranath Tagore successfully dealt with the concept of human future prospects, as well as a very essential message to humanity about the preservation of the ecology in modern civilization.

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