

Ecological Consciousness in Rabindranath Tagore's Select Works

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Abstract:

Contemporary approach to the study of nature and environment and its influence on literature is the Ecocritical study of literature. Ecological concerns and ecological wisdom is not just a new domain of study, as even the ancient civilization was also thoughtful about the issue. Long ago Rabindranath Tagore expressed concern for nature, and in his life, living, and works he advocated for sustainable ecological life and ecological philosophy. He looked into major environmental concerns from an eco-philosophical context in order to awaken ecological awareness among people. From an eco-critical perspective, the paper highlights Rabindranath Tagore's love and realization for nature and tries to evaluate Tagore's environmental philosophy and consciousness from his select works. Tagore's eco-consciousness, both in his personal life and his writings, presents his critique of environmental degradation and his mission for a harmonious coexistence with the ecosystem. Tagore's relation with Nature and his contribution towards the sustenance of ecological harmony makes him as one of the pioneering environmentalists. His literary works offer a deep ecological consciousness, portraying nature as an integral force that shapes human emotions, relationships, and ethical values. His writings highlight themes such as human-nature interconnectedness, ecological harmony, the impact of urbanization, and the consequences of ecological disruption.

Key words: Ecocriticism, Eco-consciousness, Eco-realization, Nature, Culture, Literature.

Introduction

'Ecocriticism' or ecocritical reading is emerging as an important field in humanities that encompasses systematic study dealing with interactive analysis of man as a part of Nature and its impact on the sustainability of environment. The term 'Ecocriticism' refers to a green phenomena that deals with men as an integral 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 problems. 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 analyzes Tagore's select works from eco-

critical approach which can be categorized as eco-literature from the green lens in the literature. Tagore expressed his urge for the ecological consciousness among humanity as the urgent need of the time.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a noble laureate, the most noted literary genius in Bangali literature, composed poems, songs, short tales, novels, plays, travelogues, essays, and whatnot. He himself translated a huge number of his poems. Tagore's majority of works, however, can be examined with environmental consciousness and concern in present environmental context. He was worried with the environmental degradation, hazards of wilderness as the destructive impacts of materialism and consumerism on mankind. The life and works of Tagore universally articulate 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 harmonious form and man is depicted as an integral part of nature rather than a superior one. This realization toward humans and their relationship with nature urges humanity to be sympathetic to all aspects of nature, big and small. The poet criticized the irresponsible actions of humanity against nature and environment. Long ago he realized the inevitability of saving the earth from the environmental disaster. The Upanishadic philosophy and Buddhism advocate the mutual co-existence between man and the environment. Following the philosophy Tagore developed his eco-philosophy and eco-consciousness. Tagore was ardently attuned to Nature. The attachment remained throughout his life. He appreciated the beauty of Nature. He wished to see everything, every aspect of Nature. Tagore's poetry is infused with every seasonal tune, propelled with the flora and the fauna reflecting all feasible moods. The whole world is sustained by five elements, the fundamental elements of nature and Tagore too believed in the five primordial elements that arrange nature and the natural world.

Rabindranath Tagore expresses ecological consciousness in his poems, essays, short stories, dramas, and in his songs. His environmental plan and program find expression in his rural developmental works in Shilaidaha and Patisar villages and in his ecological works in Santiniketan. Tagore set up Santiniketan (abode of peace) which was in an idyllic place surrounded by trees and where education was given in a natural ambience. His essays *Tapoban*, *Halakarshan* (Tilling Land), *Palliprakriti*, and *Aranyadebata* (The Goddess of the forest), are about the environment. *Aranyadebata* (The Goddess of the Forest) is an important essay in which Tagore depicts the ecological issue. Tagore's inception of tilling the land or planting numerous trees is recollected in the essay *Halkarshan* (Tilling the Land). In the article, Tagore emphasises man's deep desire to occupy 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 depicts the threat of technocratic science and engulfing mentality that destroy nature in the name of civilization and development. 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.

Tagore's realisation of intimacy with nature is the central point of his discussion of the natural environment. He 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. He believed that "Nature is not just a storehouse of force, but also a dwelling

of man's spirit". To Tagore, Nature 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 realized 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 recognized 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.

Tagore expressed his disgust 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 poet expresses in *Sabhyatar Prati*(To Civilization)-

Give back the wilderness, take away the citys
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! (Translation Fakrul 223)

Tagore in his poem Mother Earth (Basundhara) presents his much deep closeness to nature which is really notable. In his essay "Our Bond with the World" Amrit Sen writes: "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, Translation 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, Translation by Amrit Sen)

Rabindranath paid tribute to the trees in his poem "Briksha Bandana" (Tree Worshipping). In fact, all of the poems in Banabani (1926) praise trees and the natural world. The most of the poems are named after trees and plants, such as Nilmanilata (Nilmani Creeper), Debdaru (Pine Tree), Amroban (Mango Orchard), Kurchi (Kurchi Plant), Madhumanjari (Madhumanjari Plant), Narikel (Coconut), Chamelibitan (Chamelibitan Creeper), Sal (Sal Tree), and etc. Trees and their emotional attachment to humans are delineated in the poetry in this collection. Tagore articulates 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

Rabindranath 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.

Rabindranath's earth-consciousness is really deep and intimate. The poet writes-

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)

Eco-consciousness is prominent in some of Tagore's dramatic dance-dramas, such as "Muktadhara" or Waterfall and "Raktakarabi" (red oleanders). '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' features modern machine monsters. The conflict between nature and machine has been shown here. Its 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 looks closely at the human culture-nature interaction in texts. It assumes that nature and human culture are mutually influential. 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. The play was inspired by a crimson oleander plant crushed by abandoned iron that Tagore saw. Tagore said that the theme of the play involves greedy capitalism and ecological exploitation. 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 portrayed the disastrous impact of greed by men in his play. 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 or Red Oleander is a warning against man's excessive greed for wealth and over exploitation of nature and labour.

Red Oleanders is also 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.

Tagore's consciousness for preservation of mother earth is quite astounding and awe-inspiring. A great visionary and an in-born lover of nature, Tagore has made epoch-making contributions in two areas of environmental concerns: one in the field of ideas and the other in the field of actions. In the field of ideas, he has been vocal against unnecessary and harmful interference with nature. Rabindranath Tagore's plays *Muktadhara* and *Raktakarabi* reflect deep ecological consciousness, critiquing industrial greed, the subjugation of nature, and dehumanization through environmental exploitation. They portray a symbiotic relationship between man and nature, advocating for ecological harmony against capitalistic destruction.

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