

Ecological Concern and Awareness in the Selected Works of Rabindranath Tagore

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ABSTRACT

An attempt has been made in the present research work to look into some of the artistic works of Rabindranath Tagore focusing primarily on his ecological awareness and to find out such contexts where he lays stress on the interdependence and interrelation with which Man has to sustain a loving and amiable relationship to live blissfully and serenely in this world. This paper is an endeavour to look into some of Rabindranath Tagore's literary works in English through the eco critical approach emerged in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century to distinguish how far Tagore (1861-1941) with perception and wisdom had acknowledged and deliberately recognized in his writings the ideas of inter dependence and inter-connected of all eco systems that help every being to exist without the fear of extinction on the globe. In his prose, fiction, poetry and plays, Tagore's obsession for the eco systems and his vision for a peaceful co-existence are effectively expressed. In fact and spirit, that is specifically the objective and message of his life. This paper also investigates eco-consciousness present in the prose and fiction of Tagore. Since Tagore's output is so voluminous, only a bird's eye view of the selected works is taken up for reference and consideration.

INTRODUCTION

The end of human existence is one of the major threats due to degradation in environment. The entire population of this planet is facing this dilemma since humans have only one Earth to live with and this nightmare can turn into a reality if we deal with the environment irreversibly. Serious complications like poverty, epidemics and extreme stages of natural phenomena like draught, floods, landslides etc. bring to light the reality that we are moving rapidly towards a disaster. This paper highlights the attempt made by Tagore around a century ago to bestow a message to humanity they should carry regarding environmental threats the world is facing today. The first half of the twentieth century is usually known as the age of Tagore in modern Bengali literature. With the publication of a number of poetical works, plays, novels and essays, Rabindranath Tagore started writing in the eighties of the nineteenth century. His versatility and depth of talent can be assessed in the poetical works from Sandhya Sangit (Evening song, 1882) to Caital (1896), plays from Prakrtir Pratisodh (Nature's Revenge, 1884), to Malini (1896), and the novels Bau Thakuranir Hat (Market of Daughter-in-law, 1883) and Rajarsi (King-ascetic, 1887). Tagore was hailed as the Shelley of Bengal for his lyrical fire, idealistic fervour, subjective element, verbal synchronization and undertone of dejection at the beginning of his poetical career. Tagore largely wrote in Bengali and had a mastery of English too. He often changed and transformed the originals and translated many of his poems and plays into English. Tagore's works consist of twenty-eight volumes of poetry, ninety short stories, eleven novels, fifteen plays, 2,500 songs, operas and thirteen volumes of essays.

He also wrote many letters and lectured in English to the audiences all over India. He equally belongs to the Bengali literature, Indo-Anglican literature and to the whole world. He is a legendary poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist, producer, actor, musician, reformer, painter, educationist, a practical idealist, philosopher, prophet, and a critic of life and literature. Tagore owes his creativity, intellect and mannerism both to his birth and to family gene. At that time in Bengal, Tagore was doubtlessly one of the most creative and intellectual celebrities. His whole family made an extraordinary contribution in all of their activities, i.e., from the household work to the charities, from nationalism to literature., His own intellect and impact of the family members and its atmosphere helped to enhance his bright career as Rabi, the Sun.

ROLE OF TAGORE'S FAMILY IN HIS INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7th May 1861 as the fourteenth child of his family. His father Maharishi Debendranath Tagore his grandfather, Prince Dwaraknath Tagore made a deep impact on the enhancement of his character. Many of his brothers and sisters held a high position in the society. They all were intellectual persons and his second brother Satyendranath Tagore was the first Indian to break out the stronghold of the Indian Civil Service

whereas his elder brother Dwijendranath Tagore invented the shorthand in Bengali. His third brother Hamendranath Tagore is chiefly remembered for his perseverance in educating Tagore in their mother tongue. His fifth brother Jyotirindranath was the most accomplished men of his age who played a significant role in the intellectual development of Rabi. His Sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, wife of Jyotirindranath, was the other great soul who inspired him much in his literary works. His sister Swarna kumari is recognised as the first woman novelist of Bengal. Prosperity and noble culture encircled Tagore and he was fanatically alive and awake to the world around him. He had no usual academic cycle, nor did he go through the regular schoolings. He possessed intellect and that was inborn. He listened keenly to the composition and conversation to the elders and read avidly whatever fell on his hand and which made him emerge as a great poet.

The Beginning of Tagore as an Eco-Critic

Tagore began making verse at the age of three and his poems were available in print under the pen name of Bhanusingh before he attained the age of eighteen who lived many hundred years ago. He drew themes from Upanishads, Puranas, Vaisnavism and Buddhism and assimilated them in his own genius. They are always written from a unique, masterly viewpoint, which reflects his creativity. Tagore married Mrinalini Devi in 1883 from whom he had two sons and three daughters. He produced a good number of poetical works during this period and took care of his family estates. He composed many songs and paintings, involved in social welfare activities such as mass education and rural reconstruction, and took part in politics and cooperative movements, got ownership in society and so on. He was in touch with prominent leaders and personalities of his time including Albert Einstein and scientist professor Jagadish Chandra Bose.

He delivered many lectures throughout the different countries worldwide. Rabindranath Tagore established the school Santiniketan in 1901 which was one of his outstanding creations and transformed into Viswa-Bharti later. Music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great importance in Santiniketan as, for Tagore, the aesthetic development of the senses is more important than the intellectual. In his view, education should also develop a student's aesthetic nature and imagination as it was not intellectual development alone. The physical activity and pursuit for knowledge in a suitable environment were fundamental parts of the process. Tagore revived folk dances and brought together different types of Indian dances such as Manipuri, Kathak and Kathakali. With the passage of time, Tagore had won the world and the world in turn had won him.

MYRIAD MINDED TAGORE AS AN ENVIRONMENTALIST

He was an adamant environmentalist and occupied a frontal position in the 20th century. Tagore was an inventive genius who ignited an ocean of ideas and ideals. He generated new thoughts, new ideas, and new approaches, touching on almost every facet that make life beautiful and worth living. Being a child of the Indian Renaissance in the 19th and early 20th century, Tagore's versatility was matched only by his genius. Tagore's achievements as being a clairvoyant poet included notable contributions in the field of literature, music, plays, art and education. His creative lushness was inexhaustible and the endless array of his literary output is so peculiar that the phrase 'myriad minded' can appropriately be applied to him which Mathew Arnold used for Shakespeare. But the basic theme of all his artistic creations and social activities is 'Humanism' in all its multicoloured aspects. The Humanist tradition of Buddha had deeply influenced him. He thought that man must come out of his shell of individual self in order to enter into the greater self of Humanity.

His poems written in the latter part of his life highlights his philosophy of Humanism by emphasizing the divinity in Man. Humanism also lays special stress on men's appreciation of the beauty and majesty of nature. The Humanists keen receptiveness to each and every variety of natural beauty evokes in him, as in Wordsworth, a feeling of philosophical association with nature and its countless forms of life. Environmental issues like deforestation and river erosion may be hot issues today, but Tagore had been expressive about the environmental exploitation even a century ago. He wrote plays, poems and short stories emphasizing the urgency to shield nature. Many people are pointing to his deep sensitivities for the environment while India is beginning a year-long celebration to mark his 156th birth anniversary. This innovative genius has contrived a great deal of poetry which deals with nature as an integral part of human civilization. He persistently explores to remind human civilization through his nature poem about the perils of an unthoughtful exploitation of natural resources. It is significant to point out that human interface with Nature was a persistent apprehension for Rabindranath Tagore from his very early age.

Flavour Of Ecocriticism in Tagore's Gitanjali

In 1912, Tagore translated Bengali Gitanjali into English (Song Offerings), which is deeply subjective and romantic with every tinge of nature, affluent in beauty, which brought him the first Nobel Prize for literature. Tagore's 150th Anniversary was celebrated not only in India, but throughout the world, and this proclaims his fame, his reputation and recognition worldwide. India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were determined to issue dedicatory postage stamps on 7 May 2011 to mark his birth anniversary. In 2013, the 100th year of his having won the Nobel Prize was celebrated all over

India. Rabindranath Tagore's attitude, vision, awareness and message on ecology have been highly informing and quite persuasive. His eco-awareness carries a special meaning and significance. He is very meticulous in re-defining the lost link in our own tradition and culture. Factually, Tagore is far ahead of his time in foretelling Man's need to go back over his journey from absurd course he has planned for himself with utility and utilization as its goal. Man's survival on earth is based on the conservation of Nature and he has to accept that exhaustion of natural resources in the name of modern civilization amounts to sacrilege of Nature. Man has to depend only on this earth until and unless he finds out a suitable planet for survival and it is his duty to save the holiness of this beautiful planet. And this idea alone can convince him to attain a balance in his activities and attitude.

Tagore was a transcendental ecologist. He was gifted to see the sacred implications of ecology. The dark and deep woods of Himalayas, the recurrent rivers that run through them, the countless birds and beasts and their wide-ranging songs and cries did convey to him some fundamental lessons to be learnt. And he conveyed through his poetry, speeches, stories and essays what he had learnt. He urged to mankind to recuperate the holiness of the ecosystem and "take possession of our patrimony" (Sadhana 137) before it is too late. Tagore practised in real life what the great English poet Wordsworth preached in his poetry. The garden campuses of Viswabharti and Santiniketan bear evidence to Tagore's educational values where Nature plays the major role as a teacher and the natural product is intimacy with Nature. In 1928, Tagore promoted planting of tree-saplings well before the world started celebrating the Environmental Day. For him, the world is nature centred.

The ontological aspects of Nature are upheld by Eastern philosophies and beliefs. Tagore firmly believes that Man's approach to nature should be one of meditation. Instead, he began to decide exploiting and conquering Nature. This conceptual shift was affected by the unpleasant impact of westernization which considered Man as the ruler of the world. As a result, brutality and lack of concern to Nature wiped out compassion and love from his heart entirely. Man becomes a lesser being who is not fit to go through the process of mounting into a greater and noble personality after getting against Nature. It does not have sheer topographical and functional significance. Nature would take Man beyond himself if properly understood. Tagore, as a transcendental ecologist, knows this instinctively and thus he always emphasizes on the need to introduce synchronization into the relationship between Nature and society.

The paper highlights the derivation and the past of eco-criticism which is relatively a new way of evaluating and assessing a work of literature. Subsequently, some renowned eco-critics and their views are discussed. Tagore's keen interest in ecology is traced to the impacts of Himalayas, his boathouse and his family estates afterwards. Society keeps on changing, as the change is inevitable. The society's preferences change with every changing state of affairs. The mode of living causes radical changes. Inventions in science and technology, searching of new horizons in the field of knowledge, commercialization at the global level, money-orientated considerations, consumerist culture, problems of race, gender and identity influenced by the economic growth are all the prominent factors that effect change in a society. Literature is like a mirror and it reflects whatever falls on its surface, as Swinburne, an English poet, proclaims 'as is the world on the bank, so is the mind of Man'. Ecological concerns are kept alive globally with the initiation of an organization namely ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment). Eco criticism is renowned by many a names such as Green Cultural Studies, Environment Literary Criticism and Oiko-Poetics.

THEME OF ECOCRTICISM IN 'THE HOME AND THE WORLD' AND 'THE RELIGION OF MAN'

The Home and the World and The Religion of Man are the two works which are relevant for this discussion. In 1930, a lecture was delivered at the Hibbert Lectures at Oxford on The Religion of Man is a far-reaching and commending elucidation of Tagore's understanding of the meaning and connotation of religion in the cultural history of Man. Whereas most people born into religion; Tagore earned his own. Symbols and images are the base of poetry and thus lend themselves to an array of interpretations. They convey the message strongly but still they can only be symbolic and not specific. A writer's attitude is honest and clear in prose and fiction. Besides, it goes to prove that every expression is out of experience and it comes out with complete assurance when a visionary like Tagore speaks from the core of his heart.

He comments in his preface, "The fact that one theme runs through all only proves to me that the Religion of Man has been growing within my mind as a religious experience and not merely as a philosophical subject. In the present volume I offer the evidence of my own personal life brought into a definite focus. To some of my readers this will supply matter of psychological interest; but for others I hope it will carry with it its own ideal value important for such a subject as religion." (RM . vii viii)

Tagore states that 'Relationship is the fundamental truth of this world' in the very first chapter of Religion of Man. Tagore uttered very stoutly in 1930 itself what ecologists speak stridently to the world.

Tagore's novel The Home and the world is also studied eco-critically jointly with the Religion of Man. The story, sited at a crucial point in the history of the freedom struggle, highlights the association that exists between home and the world and how one affects the other. The novel presents the social unrest linked to the liberation of new Indian woman

at the turn of the century. The years 1903-08 represent the age of Swadeshi in Bengal, a phase in Indian nationalism when the integrated requirement for boycott of foreign goods and self-government rocked for sometime the base of colonial administration in India. The figure of the nation is Bimla and the contention between Sandip and Nikhil is a friction over opposite vision of a free India. The mark of social change is Bimla's leaving the isolation of the 'Zenana' for the first time to enter the unrestricted place of her husband's sitting room in order to meet his friend Sandip. In fact, the novel is a study of cultural and socio-political overlapping that influences change in public and also individually.

The poetry of Tagore is scrutinized the third chapter. It is renowned that Tagore is a creative writer and he has written nearly two thousand and five hundred poems. A Bengali writer Ketaki Kushari Dyson, settled in England, translated a collection of poems 'I Won't Let You Go' into English. In this collection, many of the poems have been selected with an idea of a 'representative' selection. However many of the poems are not so accepted and thus not translated by prominent translators of Tagore. This collection is well thought-out and it is suitable for assessing the significance to our days. Moreover, most of the poems are short, apart from a few, and this obviously helped for closer study. Evidently, they speak of human affiliation with his environment. Along with this, two of the popular collections, Gitanjali and Fruit Gathering, are too much assessed, primarily for the relationship of Man with God.

William Radice uttered his view in 'selected poems of Tagore' that songs cannot be translated. A song is made up of melody and words. We can translate the words but the melody cannot be. A native reader alone can enjoy a song's musicality, whereas a non-native scholar can only look for his poetic ideas, ground-breaking innuendos, the visualization and message of the poet. Hence, in evaluating the songs found in this anthology, the significant scale of thoughtfulness is how every being is related with every other being and even non-being for its happiness, endurance and peace. This kind of study helps us to understand not only the inter-dependence and interrelation of the eco-system but the perception and discernment of the poet as well. 'There is God's plenty' in Tagore as there is a treasure house in him too. As expected of one in a Hindu family, he had to obey all his elder brothers and parents since he happened to be the youngest and consequently he was forced to lead a lonely life.

REFLECTION OF PROFOUND ECOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP IN TAGORE'S SPEECH

In his speech of acceptance on the splendid juncture of Nobel Prize he recalls his lonely childhood. "I used to live in at most seclusion in the solitude of an obscure Bengal village by the river Ganesh in a boathouse. The wild ducks which came from the Himalayan lakes were my only living companion and in that solitude I seemed to have drunk in the open space like wine overflowing with sunshine, and the murmur of the river used to speak to me the secrets of nature"(Gj., 84)

Right from his childhood days, Tagore was an outstanding listener and observer of nature. Up in the Himalayas where he had gone with his father, away from his motherland amidst the whites of England, as a spectator of rows of trees and waving grass on the banks of Ganges, as a lonely traveller to his family estates in houseboats, like a candid ornithologist in watching the birds and their different behaviours and as a curious viewer of buffalos, dogs and goats, he proves to be an outstanding human being who could receive from, and respond to his environment. He has expressed his thoughts and feelings in a language that is both poignant and logical. As our environmental affairs are getting grimmer and tending to go beyond control, Tagore is much more applicable today than in his times. As one of the chief values of the Deep Ecology Movement proclaims that "Today the extent of nature of human interference in the various ecosystems is not sustainable and the lack of sustainability is rising", people with overflowing gluttony persistently tend to raise the 'standard of living' instead of 'seeking a better quality of life'. Hence Tagore comes to our rescue as was 'green' to the core.

In this circumstance, it would be appropriate to quote **Ketaki Kushari Dyson**. "Those who are interested in 'deep ecology' movement should find him a very congenial thinker. A 'green' to his core long before the term was coined; he was what is nowadays called a holistic thinker, never forgetting the whole when concentrating on the parts! This Upanishadic background made him constantly aware of the inter connectedness of all things in the cosmos. He saw human beings as part of the universe, not set apart from it and know that the human species must live in harmony with its natural environment."(Dyson).

CONCLUSION

We feel pathetic today since no indication is taken from such great masters. We should awake, rise and restore our ways before it is too late. Since our Gurudev's love for the universe is so insightful and boundless that he never affiliates his infinite creations to any of the slender margins such as caste, creed, animal, nation, human and nature. He encircles everything from the far-flung twinkling stars to the small blade of grass that bears the pearls of water droplets. He asserts that the isolated life is a sorrowful one whereas togetherness is bliss. Loving is the only way of living. Love your neighbour does not only mean the human neighbours alone but also the elements of nature which has enshrouded us from our origin till eternity.

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