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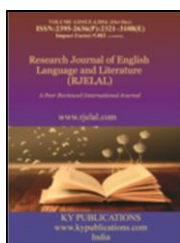
AN ECO CRITICAL STUDY IN TAGORE'S *GITANJALI*

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ABSTRACT

This paper purposes to grow the concern on Eco-critical studies. Tagore was a follower and deep lover of nature; he was deeply influenced by nature; he considered nature as like the God. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is the true expression of environmental literature. We can find eco-spiritualism, deep ecology, anthropocentrism in *Gitanjali*. Tagore says nature is the gift of god for the habitant of this earth, but except all the animals; only human beings are disturbing and misusing the natural resources. Therefore one must try to make mind to adjust with nature not to change and disturb it. Tagore's poetry focuses the need for human beings to live in harmony with nature.

Key Words: Introduction, Ecology & Nature, Eco-criticism, Eco-spiritualism

"Nature is man's teacher. She unfolds her treasures to his search, unseals his eye, illumines his mind, and purifies his heart; an influence breathes from all the sights and sounds of her existence¹." --Alfred Billings Street

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali poet of India. Being a poet, he was also a philosopher and an artist. His name is written as Rabindranath Thakur in Indian languages. He was born on 7th may 1861, Dwarkanath Tagore Lane, Jorsanko Thakur Bari in the city of Kolkata (formerly known as the Calcutta). His nickname was "Rabi" or "Robi". His father name was Debendranath Tagore, who was a leader of the *Brahmo Samaj*, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal and which attempted a revival of the ultimate monistic basis of Hinduism as laid down in the Upanishads and his mother name was Sarada Devi.²

He wrote many stories, novels and dramas, as well as composed music and many songs. His

writings greatly influenced Bengali culture during the late 19th century and early 20th century. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close touch with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school at Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, in his own non-sentimental and visionary way and Gandhi, the political father of modern India, was his devoted friend. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but within a few years he resigned the honour as a protest against British policies in India.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became the voice of



India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution.³

On November 13, 1913, Tagore won the Nobel Prize in literature. The Swedish Academy had selected him for his translated works, and his 1912 work of poems named *Gitanjali: Song offering*.⁴

The British Crown gave him a knighthood in 1915. However, he gave back the title in 1919 as a protest to Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar. The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre was the killing of unarmed people by the troops of the British Raj.⁵

Tagore put the more concerned about the India's *Abnormal Caste Consciousness* and difference based on castes. Eliminating this system he delivered the lecture on the evils of such practices, and he also wrote many poems and drama on these themes. He also appealed to the authorities of Kerala's temple to admit Dalits inside the temple. Dalits people were considered lowest in the social system of India.^{6,7}

Even during the last decade of his life, Tagore remained publicly active. He even criticized Mahatma Gandhi for his comment about an earthquake January 15 1934 in Bihar. Gandhiji had commented that the Earthquake happened an account's of God's will to punish people for practicing castesism. He wrote a poem of one hundred lines about the poverty of Kolkata. Later on Satyajit Ray composed one of his movies on this poem.⁸

Ecology & Nature

The term Ecological writing is not new for the poet it was started during the Chaucer time. Ages to ages writers showed their concern about the nature writing.

In fact Nature is the constant source of happiness for human beings its beauty always increases and never decreases; it always delights the poets; over the period of time we see the changes in writing but not degradation of its importance; poets born and dies, genres change or modify but "The poetry of nature is never dead" it is forever⁹

John Keats who was the pioneer of nature also defines the importance of nature, about the nature Keats says "The Earth has seen ages; the earth has

seen civilizations emerging and dying; the earth has seen bombings; the earth has seen disasters... it still stays. Anytime you feel claimed by the rush of this modern lifestyle, you feel like retiring to your 'farmhouse' and spend some time in the lap of nature (am I right?)".¹⁰

Eco-Criticism

Environmental degradation has been one of the major threats for the human beings for decades. In 1960 and 1970s some writer showed their concern and contributed their writing on focusing the environmental issues.

Eco-Criticism is basically the study of environment and Literature. It is the link which interconnects the Environment and Literature. The term Eco-Criticism was first coined by William Rueckert in his famous essay titled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in the Eco-Criticism* in 1978. It is considered the broad phenomenon in which all the sciences come together to search the environmental problems and its possible solutions.¹¹

Eco-Criticism and Eco-Spiritualism in Gitanjali

Rabindranath Tagore was the great poet, who beautifully defined the beauty of nature and the importance of ecology. He tried to maintain the relationship between human and nature. Tagore had an ardent love for nature that is why he put his entire concern to write about environment.

In fact The *Gitanjali* is a great text which effectively describes the Tagore's treatment of nature and concern for ecology. As in the rest of his poetry water imagery predominates. The stream and the rivers, the sea and the ocean; the clouds and the lightning, the rain and the flood, the boat and the vessel, the traveller and the voyage, pools, rivulets and showers have a pleasing assemblage there. In the opening song of *Gitanjali*, he compared human body to a "frail vessel", which "though in the emptiest form that again and again and filled it ever with fresh life"

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.

This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable. Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill. (Song-I, II).

The closing song has very theme that puts in different words. In Song LX, we have children playing on the beach with "empty shells, "and "withered leaves".

As some eco-critics opine that "everything is connected to everything else" and "an ensemble of elements recycled though every existing thing."^{11, 12}

Tagore asserts that Nature is gift of God for the people and the ecology is the system which maintains the balance among the Human, Animals and Plants & Trees. That produces the joy and ecstasy in human life it is deep calm at her heart. Beginning lines of Gitanjali confirm the belief that the activities of world are maintained by the recycle of same kind of substance. In fact humans are also the part of these substances that is why they cannot distinguish themselves from the substance because they are formed by the substance and pass the same ecological substance to their generation. If man establishes close relationship with Her, he can assimilate "hidden rush of the life-force streaming though Nature; the trembling sprouts of the blade, the mute joy of the blossoms; the frenzied delight of tree, grass and leaves as, spread in the radiant sun, they drink in light and life, and can be happy."¹³

As in Gitanjali Tagore has shown his concern to describe the importance of the ecological substance similarly many eco-critics encourages to the humans to realise their connection to Mother Earth and advised them to maintain their interaction with her. In fact Tagore was the great devotee of nature, he considered the nature as his mother, and he urges that humans should create the holy bond to the Earth he says that God cannot be found through prayer in closed space. He says God is Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent. He urges that God is not in the temple "he is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is not in the

temple with you but he is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down to dusty soil." (Tagore 7-8)

Tagore identifies God with the metabolic interaction between humans and Earth and encourages humans to maintain the unity that can foster ecological principles. Tagore keen observation of nature is highly commendable. He watches Nature closely and propagates learning through observation. He observes that:

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light,

Heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life;

the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light.

Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling, and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad."

By reading Gitanjali, it is easy to understand the importance of human and non-human life. Many of the ecocritics insisted for the non human and other organism life they say "The well being and flourishing of human and non human life on earth have value in themselves. These value are independent of the usefulness of the non human world for human purpose" (Session 60). Ecocritics urge that Humans must remember and understand the importance of other beings and respect them for their individuality. In Gitanjali Tagore also elucidates the power and the value of non human life and some ecocritics urge that as human is having the language similarly there is also the language of birds, the winds, the earthworms, wolves and waterfalls. They opine there are many autonomous speakers in the world. As in *Gitanjali* Tagore defines himself as

the objects of Nature and exemplifies his dependence on them. He considers himself as the beautiful flower of nature and urges that "Pluck this flower and take it. Delay not! I fear lest it should droop and drop into the dust. It may not find a place thy garland, but honour it with touch of a pain from thy hand and pluck it. As a beautiful flower of nature he says I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by" (Tagore 4). In Gitanjali Tagore prayers to God to accept him as an offering and he reveals for the power of non-human others. Throughout the book Tagore gives many examples to define the value and importance of non-human others.¹⁴

It is well known fact that Rabindranath Tagore was an ardent admirer of beauty and often known as a 'high-priest of nature'. Eco-critics define the role of culture in shaping the people opinion regarding the nature and ecology and the influence of culture on Tagore can be understood through the Gitanjali. Tagore love for nature can be understood through the biographical sketches that offer valuable insight into the growth of the poet amidst nature and her bountiful resources. He had been brought up in the culture that taught him to feel united with its environment and environment was given due credit in his Gitanjali. He was the devotee of nature in Gitanjali he expressed his emotions and feelings spontaneously through figure of speech which were taken by him from his own environment, which he held very dear to him. In fact in his entire life he did not sail to any distant ivory tower to gather images and phrases to express his feelings.¹⁵

There is a surprising wealth and abundance of nature imagery and illustration in the *Gitanjali* alone. No poet that ever lived had Tagore's constant and intimate touch with and love for natural beauty. Tagore, to be sure, is seen in using same images and pictures, the oldest ones in the world dozens of times in as many lines, and each tune with freshness and charm. His wealth of Nature-imagery is boundless and it is manifest in prose and verse and in English as in Bengali.

Tagore in his heart of hearts believed that Nature's store of wealth was inexhaustible. Nature in his hands illustrates the human and the abstract,

the temporal and the universal, and reigns supreme in his poetry. We believe that full justice to Tagore as a poet of Nature is yet to be done. We also believe that scholars and researchers have been put on a false track because of his greatness as a mystic and as a philosopher, because of his spiritualism and Indianness, his philanthropist and altruism. There is hardly any thought, or feeling, or concept, emotion that does not come to life with vivid, suggestive and telling images drawn from Nature.

In the companionship with nature that Tagore tries to seek in all his works again and again, the Romantic poets of England influenced him very much. He agrees with Wordsworth and, therefore, he advises us not be too much with the world. He writes about the *Religion of a Poet*: "I remember, when I was a child, that a row of coconut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning the rising sun on the horizon, gave me a companion as living as I was myself"

At the moment when the poet feels the bliss divine, he starts comparing himself with the various objects of nature or at times he merges with her:

"Today the summer has come at my window with its signs and murmurs and the bees are playing their minstrelsy at the court of flowering grove." (Song V, ll7-9).

And again:

"I sit on the grass and gaze upon the sky and dream of the sudden splendour of thy coming - all the lights ablaze, golden pennons flying over thy car, and they at the roadside standing agape, when they see thee come down from thy seat to raise me from the dust, and set at thy side this ragged beggar girl a tremble with shame and pride, like a creeper in a summer breeze"(Song XLI, ll 19-26).¹⁶

In the next poem the blooming of the lotus refer to the appearance of the glory of God that the poet could not have the sight; so he exclaimed with grief (Song XX, ll 2-3)

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas,

my mind was straying, and I knew it not.
My basket was empty and the flower
remained unheeded.
Only now and again a sadness fell upon me,
and I started up from my
dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange
fragrance in the south wind.
That vague sweetness made my heart ache
with longing and it seemed to me
that was the eager breath of the summer
seeking for its completion. I knew not then
that it was so near,
that it was mine, and that this perfect
sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my
own heart.

And again in the second stanza of the poem (LXXXI), we find that God is ever, secretly fulfilling all things with the purpose of imparting meaning and significance. Thus behind the process of budding, growing, and ripening in nature is no other than God who also makes man's efforts successful. The beauty of images of the lines which vividly picture and present the scene our eyes is remarkable:

"Hidden in the heart of things thou art
nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into
blossoms, and ripening flowers into
fruitfulness." (Song LXXXI,)

In the course of his journey towards God, the poet lost himself in his admiration of beauty of the objects of nature. For an instance we can take this poem:

"The morning sea of silence broke into ripples
of bird songs; and the flowers were all merry
by the roadside; and the wealth of gold was
scattered through the rift of the clouds while
we busily went on our way and paid no
heed." (Song LXVII, ll 1-5)

And again,

"The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed
in the shade. Withered leaves danced and
whirled in the hot air of noon. The shepherd
boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of
the banyan tree, and I laid myself down by the
water and stretched my tired limbs on the
grass" (Song LXXVII, ll 10-15).¹⁷

In fact Tagore's keen observation of Nature is highly commendable. In Gitanjali he defines environment

itself acts as a character and makes its presence known by the images contributed by it. In his entire life Tagore gave life to environment and captured the ardent desire of the soul through the images that were taken from his own environment. "There is in him the stillness of nature. Tagore says that environment can be felt through the Gitanjali and through this ruling presence of environment can be noticed. Tagore urges that humans are the part of environment and they should save it and appreciate people to maintain the balance cycle of environment whenever and wherever they find their environment.

Tagore has given some of the principles of eco-critical studies these are (1) Cycles of Nature, (2) Human's connection to Earth, (3) Irrational acts that disturb the ecological balance, (4) Observance of Nature, (5) Culture and Nature, (6) Environment as character.

By capturing the natural cycle of Nature, Tagore presents the interconnections of universe and its human and non-human components. In Gitanjali he shows his concern to express the Human's connection to Earth and environment. Tagore urges that people should maintain the Ecological cycle and avoid contaminating natural resources. Moreover, he points out the merits of nature and encourages humans to observe her. He also defines the importance of culture and its effects on Nature. He gives the direction to the humans to create the healthy relationship to the Nature through their culture. Finally, Tagore attributed his character and his life to his environment, Tagore won the international reputation and accolades after revealing his ardent love for Nature. Through the deep study of Tagore Gitanjali it is clear now the ethical value and environmental representation of a work of art can awake the consciousness of the people. If people are aware of their dependence on their Environment and concern to make the balance of Ecology 'the wounds they have inflicted on the planet Earth' can be healed.

Conclusion

Environment degradation is a serious issue of today's time. Writers had been contributed for writing the nature poetry since the beginning of literary writing. Eco-criticism is the vast

phenomenon it covers several areas as like Literature, Nature, Environment, Green cultural studies, Flora and Fauna which interconnect human being to Environment.

By reading Tagore's poems, it is possible to understand instantaneously the inherent worth of non-human others insisted by the eco-critics. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes. Humans must remember the inherent worth of other beings and respect them for their individuality. Further, ecocritics assert that "in addition to human language, there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls - a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one's peril". Tagore too elucidates the power of non-human others through his Gitanjali. He identifies himself with object of Nature and exemplifies his dependence on them.

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry is concerned with nature and its various facets i.e. The Earth, The Sun, The Moon, The flora and The fauna, etc. Through the analysis of his poetry, it can be inferred there is an ecological consciousness among human, non human, culture and other issues related to ecology. Tagore has a deep love and respect for nature and to a greater extent.

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