

Ecological Concerns in Tagore's Literary Realm

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, one of India's foremost literary figures, envisioned an intrinsic and sacred relationship between human beings and nature, long before ecological awareness became a global concern. This paper explores Tagore's profound ecological consciousness as reflected in his poems, plays, essays, and stories. At a time when economic development often leads to environmental degradation, Tagore's writings offer a spiritual and philosophical counterpoint that emphasizes harmony, sustainability, and reverence for the natural world. Through a close reading of his works such as *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *Fruit Gathering*, *Raktakarabi*, and *The Waterfall*, this study illustrates how Tagore criticized human greed, consumerism, and the destruction of nature. His concept of "spiritual ecology" highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and advocates a non-violent, ethical engagement with the environment. The paper also examines Tagore's insights on rural development, agriculture, and technology within ecological parameters. Tagore's vision remains deeply relevant today, reminding humanity of its responsibility towards nature and the urgent need for ecological balance in an age of climate crisis and unchecked industrial expansion.

Keywords: Tagore; ecology; environmental ethics; sustainable development; spiritual ecology.

The ecological aspects of economic development not only attracted the attention of Western intellectuals but also attracted the ideas of Indian intellectuals for over half a century. Since 1970s, many notable writers and environmentalists highlighted the risk of self-destruction owing to the growth of modern society causing deforestation and other anti-nature activities. This situation led the environmentalists to brood over the concept of sustainable development, which appeared in the Brundt County Report (1987), and received widespread acceptance in the 1992 Rio Conference Agenda No.21. It promotes the concepts of development in a wise way without causing harm to nature and its ecosystem. One of the greatest poets, writers, thinkers, social reformers and environmental planners of the 19th century, Rabindranath Tagore speaks in large numbers about the environmental impacts of economic development providing solutions not only for India's development but for the world. Tagore's visit to the world of literature provides much evidence of his deep concern over the natural and self – destructive activities of humanity, which have negative impacts on environmental health. This paper deals with Tagore's ecological philosophy that expresses the existence of God in all living things. He lays emphasis on his spiritual ecology that teaches the philosophy of paganism. Thus, we conclude that people and environment form a single ecosystem and recognize mutually reinforced relationship with nature.

The paper also seeks to focus on Tagore's environmental thinking and teachings from his writings on the co-existence of progress and conservation of nature. Tagore underlines the significance of agriculture crisis owing to environmental hazards. He says that the modern technology is an integral part of rural development but this must be used with utmost care so as to avoid misuse and exploitation of natural resources. He finds solace in the agility of natural surroundings where rivers and streams are making their way having natural music of their own. Tagore lays emphasis on the personal experience of man to feel the natural beauty, and in this way, Tagore feels nature's blessings in one of his greatest poems, *Gitanjali*:

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses
spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain – cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let
all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee. (*Gitanjali*, Song, CIII)

He finds a great communion with nature and gets immersed in its vast surrounding meditating upon its myriad forms: fauna and flowers, birds, animals and mountains that speak volumes of its everlasting effect on man's psyche.

Tagore believes that there should be awareness at mass level to protect the natural habitat. Abul Bashar, a popular Bengali writer, also explains Tagore's enlightenment for nature while giving interview to INAS that "Rabindranath wrote extensively about nature, about the relationship between human beings and nature." In another short story "*Balai*", Tagore highlights a youthful boy's inclination towards a small and growing tree of simul standing before his house. He further brings out the significance of natural cohabitation between human beings and birds in his poem, *The Tame Bird Was In A Cage*. Here, he describes the sufferings of an enslaved bird that seeks freedom to learn natural music in the company of other bird that is roaming freely in the forest. The caged bird has been kept out of its natural habitat and has forgotten its own natural music that can be learnt only in the company of other birds. He yearns for singing and asks the free bird:

Come closer, my love!

The free bird cries, it cannot be,

I fear the closed doors of the cage,

The cage bird whispers,

Alas, my wings are powerless and dead. (Tagore, *The Gardener*, Poem No. VI, 19-28).

This clearly highlights that human beings want to tame nature and other natural beings like birds, and see nature only from their perspective only. They happen to overlook nature's perspective that involves the entire cosmos. In the second poem, *I Plucked Your Flower*, Tagore again expresses the insensitivity and selfishness of man while picking a flower and causing harm to them:

I plucked your flower, O world!
I pressed it to my heart and the thorn pricked.
When the day waned and it darkened,
I found that the flower had faded,
but the pain remained. (Tagore, *The Gardener*, Poem No. LVII, 1-4)

People think they have the right to pick flowers however, they do not know that nature is not a quiet spectator. It will bounce back one day for the wrongs done to it. It could bring a huge tsunami, not just a drop. People need to be aware of how they have killed nature and its natural surroundings. They have always nourished human centric behavior. The bird in the cage does not respond in the first poem. And the free birds do not know how to respond to people and their greed. In the second poem, the plants rarely respond to greedy people believing that one day they will have to pay a high price for their inhuman attitude as they are plundering natural resources.

In the poem, *Fruit Gathering*, it is clearly determined that Tagore underlines the fact that man should not interfere with nature. He says that humans do not communicate with nature. They, in their greed, feel that they have become the rulers of the entire universe, and they “shake the buds” and “beat” them without thinking the pain nature and natural objects undergo: “...it is beyond your power to make it blossom.

Your touch soils it, you tear its petals to pieces and
Strew them in the dust.” (Tagore, *Fruit Gathering*, Poem No. XVIII, 2-5.)

Tagore’s another notable poem, *Raktakarabi* (Res Oleander) was based on a photograph of a red oleander plant. The central figures of the work are kings who exploit nature in unethical way. His play *Muktadara* (waterfall) tells the history of human’s infinite greed. The plot of the poem refers to a giant machine invented by the king in his effort to stop the natural flow of river. He does not like the things happening their natural course of life. On the other hand, it irritates the prince who mobilizes people to protect nature by rebelling against the king. People tend to destroy something and create something for themselves. He clearly specifies that the unrestrained and boundless greed of people is destroying nature.

Tagore, through the essay, *Aranyadebata* (God of the Forest), shows in what way the relationship between man and nature gets assaulted brutally in the forest. He condemns the search motifs of people’s general greed and profit oriented attitude. The greedy people call their ruins by destroying the forests. They harm plants and vegetation ruthlessly, and eventually, destroy nature and its good gifts – that well exist to make their happy and prosperous. Tagore, thus, highlights their attempt to exploit the natural resources in the name of modern civilization. Woods are cut for fuel, and it disrupts the ecological balance. It shows human civilization is rushing to the destruction of natural habitats rapidly. Consequently, Tagore reminds us:

... a strange matter has been seen about India. Civilization here takes root not in towns but in the woodlands. India's first wonderful flourish is seen where people are not cramped for space or packed like sardines. In those places there was abundant

opportunity for man to be in close proximity with trees and vegetation, rivers and lakes. (*Topobon*, vol. 7, p. 690).

In the midst of the modern time, Tagore brings out the problem of concrete world where human apartments become a recurring problem across the globe. He underlines the significance of severe air and water pollution along with noise and visual pollution which are making the hell of this beautiful planet. All they are the byproduct of man's unbridled desire for wealth in one way or other. Certain other various aspects related to human behavior were also considered, in addition to technical planning. We should emphasize all the very motivated and inspiring words of Tagore, and give people a reason to love nature and smile to Mother Earth. The beauty of his concept lies in the cultural framework, but not in a slogan or pamphlet. Despite the depressing educational structure, we need to protect, preserve and improve biosphere resources. Ecological spiritual values must be the cry of the day. The principles of protection of ecology are very important to continue the survival of man and other beings on the earth. Unlimited consumerism must be stopped immediately to nurture the values of sustainable development. Only the sensitivity towards nature can guide us to make desirable progress in the material world as it transforms our behavior towards nature and introduces an ecological renaissance that sharpens our ecosystems. As a writer, Tagore feels that people should treat nature as the mother of all species, and cultivate a nonviolent attitude towards nature and natural things. He advocates an ethical lifestyle with general responsibility, compassion and empathy as society, in the present scenario, has been suffering considerably from the incurable disease of consumerism.

The purpose of this paper is to remember that we are merely a messenger who has forgotten the message of Almighty. Humans must grow into conscious beings and realize that all creation of the world is headed towards God and striving for a smooth transition. The paper also emphasizes that sincere attempts are necessary to create balance in the disturbed modern ecology. We must protect the rapid fatigue of natural resources and natural wealth as it has been the most important and eternal source of our existence since its creation.

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