

The Works of Rabindranath Tagore: An Ecocritical Reading

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism has brought a significant dimension in literary criticism. The paper illustrates the major writings of Rabindranath Tagore with Ecocritical analysis as well as the study of physical environment and literature with due references. The recent ecocritical philosophies including Deep ecology, Ecofeminism, Shallow Ecology, Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism, Ecophobia, Cornucopian, Heideggerian Eco-philosophy, etc. are depicted with vivid examples of Tagore's works. The paper draws a connexion between man and nature in different eastern and western ecocritical philosophies analyzing Tagore literature. Eco-consciousness in literature and his personal life are noted here vividly. Literature can be used as a tool to cease environmental disaster and endangerment as well as to promote a healthy ecosystem. The study explores inter-personal relations highlighting an over-exploiting environment by the use of modern technology. The conflict and dualism between civilization and ecosystem are emphasized concerning Tagore's writings. Finally, the eco-consciousness and eco-philosophical views of Tagore are discussed with his literature and paintings. The revolt against natural destruction and exploitation is depicted with due reference along with different eco-philosophies.

KEYWORDS: *Eco-criticism, Deep ecology, Ecofeminism, Shallow Ecology, Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism, Pantheism, Ecophobia, Cornucopian, Heideggerian Eco-philosophy*

INTRODUCTION:

The word 'Ecocriticism' is extensively being experienced in the modern world because human culture is broadly affiliated with the physical world. Furthermore, human culture is infected and relied on the environment. Ecocriticism is a recent phenomenon and it persuades the relevance of the non-human to human and vice-versa in any literary text or works. The present global age can be characterized as an age of ecological concern because of several reasons. First of all, our environment is extremely contaminated by man-made disasters. Besides, the relevance of nature on human life has come to the concern of modern people today. These two things pave the way to the ecocritical interpretation of literature.

We live in a world where issues of ecological awareness have been put forth for discussion in response to a number of important environmental issues. Climate change, the greenhouse effect, overpopulation, a global water crisis, nuclear energy, endangered species, and fossil fuels are part of the discourse of an ordinary 21st-century citizen (Abou-Agag 1).

Rabindranath Tagore¹ (1861-1941) is a noble laureate in twenty-century who was very concerned about the environmental hazard, destruction of wilderness as the terrible impacts of materialism on mankind. The life and works of Tagore universally ascertain his eco-consciousness

¹Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is known by his sobriquets Gurudev, Kabiguru, and Biswakabi, was a polymath, poet, musician, and artist from the Indian subcontinent.

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and a broader understanding of literature and environment and their role in civilization.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The word 'Ecocriticism' is a green phenomenon dealing with men a part of nature, the impact of nature on human existence, a broader understanding of literature and environment along with a concern for the present-day issues of threat to wildlife and environmental issues. Ecocriticism is "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell 430). 'Eco-criticism is an emerging critical theory and it studies the relationship between literature and physical environment. Nature poetry is not new to literature, but eco-criticism allows one to study a poem from a new perspective that is nature's perspective' (Bhattacharjee 3). Though nature and environment drew the attention of writers of the entire world from the very beginning, the term 'Ecocriticism' was first introduced by William Rueckert in 1978 in his noteworthy essay named 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'. Here he illustrated the interaction of environs in literature intensely. Later, Cherryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm jointly brought out 'The Ecocriticism Reader' in 1960 that turned a broader and vivid perception on it.

Ecocriticism is the study of the relation between literature and physical environment, just as a feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts as earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty xx).

It is supposed with Peripatetic school in Greek that man is by nature a social animal (Aristotle, *Politics*²). Confronting this idea on human beings, the eco-critics state that human beings are part and product of nature. Eco-critics defied the idea of 'Man is the measure of all things'³. Furthermore, numerous Greek philosophers also persuaded the relation of nature and human beings with different elements of the earth. Ancient Greek thinkers brilliantly assumed in the relation between life of the men, culture, and nature those they imitated in their writings. Case in point,

Thales believed it was water; Anaximander said it was a substance different from all other known substances, "infinite, eternal and ageless"; and Anaximenes claimed it was air. Atomism began with Leucippus and Democritus. Among the ancient schools, this approach is the closest to modern science: they believed that everything is composed of atoms, which are indestructible and physically indivisible. They were strict determinists, who believed that everything happens in accordance with natural laws and the universe, they said, has no purpose and is nothing more than a mixture of infinite atoms being shuffled and re-shuffled according to the indifferent rules of nature.⁴

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was conscious about the nature in this art and works. In his works, he proved his devotion to nature. "Rabindranath Tagore's engagement with nature was a continuous motif in his poetry" (Majumdar). At the beginning of twenty centuries, he realized the inevitability of saving the earth from endangerment. Ancient Indian philosophy including Upanishadic Pantheism and Buddhism believed in the mutual correlation between man and climate. They also believed the love of animals and plants repercussion. Alike, Tagore also showed his deep affection from the heart to nature as his birth accountability on earth.

Tagore nature presented nature in diverse ways. Sometimes nature has drawn as a challenging entity to mankind, sometimes a dependable source where mankind find shelter, as a safety place to take rest, as a true companion, a nurturer, and as a teacher of lives' lesson so on and so forth. Being the nature poet, we find the lyrical touch in these stories. As a poet of nature he could feel the pulse of nature and it is also reveal in these stories. So, the short stories of Tagore also through a flash of light on nature with a new identity as well a new significance of the worth of existence. (Saharia 86)

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Eco-poets share their views on nature in different literary figures in their writings as well as directly make their readers concern about ecology by their proses. "In India as well, there is a great scope for practicing ecocriticism. Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship between the nature and social world in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in the Indian culture" (Jeetendrasingh 510). Tagore was concern about nature in his writings in great lengths. He pointed the necessity and prominence of every natural element and the way of leading natural life in his writings. For instance, he mentioned 3 plants and flowers 5 times in his two and a half thousand songs. He also wrote the names of four types of plants and

flowers in various poems. "Tagore's poems are mystic, philosophic in establishing relation of mankind with that of nature. He has a spiritual perception of nature in which he tries to locate man in a very mild position in a sweet association with rich ecology" (Mishra 59). Tagore deemed that the earth was very cruel, unruly, and uninhabitable in the very beginning which became habitable by the uppermost contribution of trees. Trees make our earth green and livable. In his poems, he illustrated the involvement of plants from the very beginning to contemporary time. "In the first phase of creation, the earth was rocky, infertile, and no signs of his compassion for the creature were revealed that day. Fire was burning all around, the earth was shaken"⁵ (Translation Google). Another he writes, "O Tree, life-founder, you heard the sun Summon you from the dark womb of earth At your life's first weakening; your height Raised from rhythmless rock the first Hymn to the light; you brought feeling to harsh Impassive desert"⁶. Nature is assuredly linked with beauty. Nature is a symbol of beauty and pleasure. Violation of nature indicates a violation of beauty. Tagore believed that nature is a way of enjoying the beauty.

Deep Ecology: Deep Ecology acknowledges the intrinsic of all living things including plants and animals. The diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of this value. "Deep ecology rejects Enlightenment notions, which separate humans from nature" (Dreesse 5). Human beings have no right to deduce natural diversity. It is an environmental movement and philosophy that refers to human life as one of many equal components and every element of the environment has its intrinsic value. Arne Næss⁷ is considered the pioneer of deep ecology. "Through his writings and speeches, he has spoken about the kinship of man and Nature, the breaking of which, according to him, brings sorrow and misery. He admits the intrinsic value of Nature' (Dasgupta 33). It denotes nature should be well-preserved in its original form. Here, no one is the master of anybody in this ecosystem. It is associated to Gaia Theory projected by James Lovelock (1979) that all living things on earth are designed as one super organism that changes its environment to generate a condition that best meets its needs, with the aptitude to self-regulate critical system needed to sustain life.

"A handful of dust could hide your signal

When I did not know its meaning

Now that I am wiser I read it in all that hid it before

It is painted in the petals of flowers

Waves flash it from their foam

Hills hold it high on their summits.

I had my face turned from you,

Therefore I read the letters awry and knew not their meaning"⁸

⁵ "AranyaDevata", (Forest Deity) by Rabindranath Tagore

⁶ In Praise of Trees (Brikhsa Bandana) -Rabindranath Tagore. 1926 (Translated by Dr. William Radice, 1985)

⁷ Arne DekkeEideNæss (1912 –2009) was a Norwegian philosopher who coined the term "deep ecology" and was an important intellectual and inspirational figure within the environmental movement of the late twentieth century.

⁸ 'Fruit Gathering' by Rabindranath Tagore

²*Politics* (Greek: Πολιτικά, *Politiká*) is a work of political philosophy by Aristotle, a 4th-century BC Greek philosopher.

³Quotation from Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490 - c.420 BCE)

⁴ From : (https://www.ancient.eu/Greek_Philosophy/)

He wrote poems in the eco-acquaintance with nature, "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers" (Ray 38). "Tagore's philosophy of environment corresponds to the ideology of deep ecology. Deep ecology is a philosophical perspective in environmental philosophy" (Saharia, An Analytical Study of R. N. Tagore's Philosophy of Environment 727).

Shallow Ecology: Shallow ecology infers that humans should take care of the natural world because it will benefit society. It indicates the responsibility of mankind to find a solution to diminish global warming, pollutions, and radical changes in surroundings. As it is indispensable anthropocentric, shallow ecology denotes the purpose of nature is to serve human beings. It regards humans as the master of the universe. Here, mankind is only recommended to systemic usage of natural resources.

Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest, not the city. India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man. The culture of the forest has fuelled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life, which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilization.⁹

Tagore conceived the bad impact of global warming and climate change sitting in the first quarter of twenty centuries in India which is still significant in the present day. He understood that the appropriate amount of rain is a must for the atmosphere. Predicting the bad impact of global warming, he worshipped rain and rainy season in his famous play called '*Shrabongatha*' (*The song of Rain*) in 1934. "In Tagore's works, the forest was not only the source of knowledge and freedom: it was the source of beauty and joy, of art and aesthetics, of harmony and perfection" (Roy 762). Tagore provoked the significance of woodland in the ecosystem. He was a man of eco-science. Through his eco-consciousness, he arranged tree plantation programs very often. He did not just restrain himself in his writings but he was an active environment activist. In the poem '*Earth*' (1935), he worshipped earth in his poetry. He asserted and presented earth as a '*mighty*' living element. He called earth addressing '*mother*' too. Different features and faces of earth amused him colorfully. Tagore addressed earth as "Guardian of life, you nurture us in little cages of fragmented time, Boundaries to all our games, limits to all renown" (Tagore, Tagore: Selected Poems 100)

Ecofeminism: Ecofeminism emphasizes the relation between women and nature. It sketches the juncture not only man's domination of nature but also the oppression of women. Both nature and women are controlled, subjugated, and exploited by the same cause – patriarchal hierarchy. Ecofeminism presumes nature as a representation of women. Furthermore, it denotes that nature is devastated

and vandalized by male power as women are raped by misogynists¹⁰. So, it endeavors to generate a comparison between woman and nature. By this point, nature becomes a mark of women and motherhood as well. Though the term 'Ecofeminism' was coined by Francoise d'Eaubonnein 1974, the root of this eco-philosophical movement had already been existent in the British Bengal (Biswas 154). Tagore could have been considered a forerunner of ecofeminism.

Rabindranath's '*Muktadhara*' is a play where the issues of modern machine monsters have come to light. The conflict between nature and machine is presented with a grand literary style. How humans build dams and take control over the water stream of nature and do injustice and unfairness to nature become the main theme of this drama. Rabindranath revealed the complexity of the apparatus and technology over the environment and wildlife by songs of '*Muktadhara*'. Here, king Ranajit ruled the kingdom of Chitrakoot where he tried to control waterfall for his financial might. He built a dam across the waterfall. The royal engineer of the country named Bibhuti constructed that mammoth machine denying the objection of the crown prince Abhijit. When a messenger told the engineer Bibhuti about the bad effect of this dam on the waterfall, engineer Bibhuti replied, 'My object was to make Man triumphant over the sands and water and stones, which conspired against him. I had not the time to trouble my mind about what would happen to some wretched maize fields of some wretched cultivator in some place or other'¹¹. The crown prince nurtured a deep affection and attachment with this free-flowing waterfall. He supposed that it was exploitation to the people of Shibtarai (the name of the country) as well as tyranny on nature. He thought of this natural waterfall as the mother in this country. He said, 'I must pay off the debt of my birthright. The current of the waterfall has been my first nurse and I must set her free'. Then to stop this ascendancy on surroundings, the crown prince went to demolish the dam but unfortunately, he was swept away forever by the force of the waterfall. "In '*Muktadhara*' Rabindranath has given a shape of the idea that man with his power has attempted to establish his absolute power over Nature.... It appears to us as a voice of Eco-feminists, who propagate that modern development policy, which causes the environmental degradation, ignores the symbioses, the interconnections of Nature and sustainability of lives" (Dasgupta 36). In this play, water is presented as a creation of God for common people which has its natural power to flow and it should not be ceased by any artificial power and thus Tagore expressed the man-nature bond. (Saharia, An Analytical Study of R. N. Tagore's Philosophy of Environment 730)

Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism: Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism delineates "systems of domination and exploitation of humans by other humans" as the root cause of environmental issues. Man is a part of nature and a man cannot be exploited by another man. The mutual respect of human beings is also a part of ecoconsciousness. Interpersonal relationships amid man to man can build a world of humanism, free from hegemony and paramountcy among mankind.

He says that it is only when one can detaches from the narrow boundaries of selfishness, can one have a true vision of the beauty, which is omnipresent and realise its

⁹From his essay "Tapovan" ('Forest of Purity').

¹⁰Women-hater

¹¹*Waterfall (Muktadhara)* Translated by, <http://tagoreweb.in>

everlasting relation with truth. This is the ultimate object of our existence, that we must ever know that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty;' we must realise the whole world in love, for loves gives its birth, sustains it, and takes it back to the bosom. (RANI 129)

In Tagore's *Dui Bigha Jomi (Two Bighas of Land)*¹², which was written from the perspective of a farmer named Upen who was expatriated from his land by a landlord by a false allegation. It illustrates the domination and exploitation of man by another man for land. The farmer lost his inherited land due to the mischief of a landlord who filed a false lawsuit against him. Then Upen could not but come out of his home, he became upset and sad. The poem can be considered a picturesque example of social ecology and eco-Marxism. Finally, Upen realized that earth is big enough and kind to all. Nature is the best friend of human time on the earth. Like British Romantic poet William Wordsworth¹³, Tagore also believes that nature is the guide of man. When Upen lost his home and took shelter on road under the open sky. He says,

I said, "O Lord, countless are the plots of land you already own,

But consider--I only have land enough to bury me when I'm gone!" (Alam)

Then Upen passed 15/16 years wandering many places in different countries. After that, he felt nostalgia to visit his seized home. One day he came back to his home but it had been changed. He became sad finding getting changed his house. He felt deep nostalgia. Suddenly he saw his childhood mango tree remained unchanged which reflected his childhood memory. At once, two mangoes fell from that tree automatically. Upen considered and accepted it as a gift from his childhood tree. He thought that the tree acknowledged him after a long time and gifted him these two mangoes. Poet says the views of Upen,

Suddenly a gusting wind shook the branches of the mango tree

And two ripe mangoes fell on the spot where I happened to be.

Surely, I thought, my mother has finally seen her long lost son,

And so I gathered the mangoes she gave me on this occasion! (Alam)

Instantly, the gardener arrested Upen and sent him to the present landlord. The landlord punished him blaming him as a thief and seized these mangoes. Upen begged these two mangoes with crying but failed. The existence of life within trees is depicted in this poem. "Tagore's *Muktadhara* dwells on the principle of identifying how the manipulation of a river-course could change the destiny of two neighboring states and establish the rule of one man over others" (Kar 51).

'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). Rabindranath Tagore's '*Raktakarabi (Red Oleanders)*' is a prodigious and influential

play. It was written in 1925 which depicted the negative aspects of unrest greed and extreme materialism in human beings. "The first English version of *Red Oleanders* was done by Tagore and published by MacMillan, London in 1925. Tagore said that the play's theme involving unethical capitalism, environmental exploitation and the regional influences was not an obscure one" (Marak 1602). As proof, Tagore exemplified that what would happen if men live detached from nature. King Yakshapuri 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. 'Three elements of human nature namely, pride, greed and power, Rabindranath thinks, are the root causes of man's separateness from the harmony of the Nature' (Dasgupta 36). The nature of that realm was raped by this greedy king aftermath. 'On the whole play *Raktakarabi (Red Oleander)* is a warning against man's excessive greed for wealth and over exploitation of nature and labour' (Zafor 12).

Red Oleander is a one-act play and the palace of the king is the setting of this drama. Nandhini is the protagonist of this play who encouraged and motivated all of the people of this town including the king to believe, "the death-wealth of the earth was not giving happy" (RAVINDAR and THIVAGARAN 309). The antagonist of the play is the King who transformed the town into a fort and the humans into digging machines in search of gold. He was very powerful, jealous and greedy for gold. In myth, the name of the town is Yaks has who are servants of Hindu God of riches Kuber. Tagore chose it as the town- name because all the people worked for the greedy king like slaves. Nandhini brought boldness and faith among the people to oppose the king. She rushed and determined to meet with the King to enlighten him about the bad impact of digging gold and destroying and taking control over nature. The oppression over laborers has been depicted by the character of Bishu who was chained and got tortured there. It can be pointed as '*Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism*' which denotes man is exploited by another man. After Bishu is exploited in the king's palace, he said to Nandhini with grief, "They have whipped me, with the whips they use for their dogs. The string of that whip is made with the same thread which goes to the stringing of their Gosain's rosary. When they tell their beads they don't remember that, but probably their God is aware of it"¹⁴. Tagore also finds out that the main cause of conflict between man and nature, man and man is lust for power' (Biswas 156). Though man-centered civilization and modern technological advancements were criticized badly, Tagore was not totally against machine-based civilization. He claimed development avoiding environmental dilapidation and exploitation. He considered all living and non-living beings are a common unit and interconnected. Nature should not be mistreated for the luminous life of mankind. In *Red Oleander*, "Yaksha town symbolizes an exploited ecosystem and illusory choice. Until Nandini appeared on the scene, the king's workers could not have imagined that there was an alternative to the way they lived" (Marak 1601). The town of Yaksha in *Red Oleander* can be compared with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

¹² The poem is translated by Fakrul Alam (My Little Plot of Land (*Dui Bigha Jomi*))

¹³ Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth

¹⁴ Translation from <http://www.tagoreweb.in>

'Red Oleander' can be regarded as a play of eco-consciousness at all times. Both the violation of nature and also the exploitation of man are presented with a grand style in this drama. It can be considered one of the finest examples of eco-feminism too. Nandini and her lover were killed finally in this drama. The violation of females and nature makes this play significant to eco-critics. Nandini is an example of the power of women too. The ecofeminism view of Tagore is cited in this play intensely.

Heideggerian Eco-philosophy: Heideggerian Eco-philosophy is regarded as one of the encouragements for many eco-critics. German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) delivers this idea. It denotes man as a server or guide of the surrounding world of flora and fauna. Human beings should not change the natural flow of these objects rather they should take care of them. Human beings are merely a guide of living and non-living things around them rather be master of nature. It is man's accountability to guide nature not to rule nature as master. Tagore believes in Heideggerian Eco-philosophy which promotes to cease supremacy and dominion over nature. As proof, in Tagore's play 'Muktadhara (The Waterfall)', the conversion between stranger and citizen depicts how a man becomes the master of the word and let not disclose nature in his way.

Stranger: What's the object of the Machine?

Citizen: It has bound up the waterfall of Muktadhara.

Stranger: What a monster! It looks like a dragon's skull with its fleshless jaws hanging down! The constant sight of it would make life within you withered and dead.

Tagore makes awareness to remain unchanged nature. The crown prince of this drama broke the man-made embankment of the waterfall because of his eco-intuition. He sacrificed his life to keep the natural waterfall unchanged. There is a similarity between Tagore and Martin Heidegger about this philosophy. Here in *Muktadhara (The Waterfall)* crown prince Abhijit made a revolt against the king. He believed that no king can control nature. He advocated the King to nurture the natural objects lest nature will be destroyed nakedly.

Pantheism: Pantheism is a doctrine that proclaims that God is everything and everything is God. The term 'pantheism' is a modern one, possibly first appearing in the writing of the Irish freethinker John Toland (1705) and constructed from the Greek roots *pan* (all) and *theos* (God)¹⁵(Mander). "Rabindranath interprets love of devotion as love for every living form which is a part of the divine body of the Creator. According to him, there is no love for God without love for the world which is God's own creation" (Tuczyńska 62). Pantheism is a common feature of British romantic poets. They find the existence of supreme God in the elements of nature. Nature becomes the guide of some romantic poets including William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge. "Tagore is a pantheist. To him, every object of nature pulsates with life. Naturally, personification is his most favorite figure of speech. He gives animation to the abstract ideas" (Rao 265). Tagore believed that God finds himself by creating.¹⁶ In *Muktadhara (The waterfall)*, the crown prince Abhijit speaks, "Every man has the mystery of his inner life somewhere written in the outer world. The secret of my own

life has its symbol in that waterfall of Muktadhara. When I saw its movements shackled, I received a shock at the very root of my being".

Ecophobia: Ecophobia is one of the significant facts of ecocriticism. Lexically, *Eco* means home and *phobia* means fear of something. In ecocritical analysis, ecophobia brought a radical change in our idea of ecocriticism. Ecophobia is all about fear of a loss of agency and control over Nature. It permits 'human beings' unquestioned use of lands and animals in nature (Estok 17). 'Misogyny' is compared with 'ecophobia' whereas misogyny is to rape as ecophobia is to environmental looting and plundering¹⁷. Estok first used this term in 1998 in '*Environmental Implications of the Writing and Policing of the Early Modern Body: Dismemberment and Monstrosity in Shakespearean Drama*'¹⁸. Though the term appeared in 1998, Tagore was very conscious about this reality through his eco-intelligence. Ecophobia is a physiological stage that allows a man to loot and plunder nature. Though it, a man thinks that it is his birthright to take control over nature. "Tagore considered it to be a kind of colonialism. According to him, colonialism is not only the subordination of a weaker nation by a powerful one but the subordination of nature by human being" (Biswas, A Midsummer night's Dream: An Ecocritical Interpretation 373). Observing oil discharge on the seafront when he went to Japan in 1916, he first became concerned about the human impact on the environment¹⁹. As we see, he was constantly pronounced his unfathomable love for nature and the beauty of nature. He revolted against colonization over nature through eco-acquainted literary works. It is observed that many people did not feel guilty destroying nature because they think that it is their birth-rights as a human beings to consume natural objects. 'Man is the measure of all things' – may be connected to ecophobia. Humans think that the earth is just for the benefit of mankind. Tagore reacts,

'My voice is choked today, I have no music in my flute

Black moonless night

Has imprisoned my world, plunged

in into nightmare.

And this is why, With in my eyes I ask;

Those who have poisoned your air, those who have extinguished your light,

Can it be that you have forgotten them ? Can it be that you love them ?' (Translated by W. Radice)

Rabindranath Tagore writes down a poem called "*The Tame Bird was in a Cage*"²⁰ where one bird is in the cage and the other in the forest. Both of them meet and fall in love; they talk together and thus they reveal the universal conflict between nature and civilization. Here, the forest bird is presented as a symbol of nature, and the caged bird is depicted as a representation of man-made civilization efficaciously. When they are attracted by each other, they face difficulties; these problems indicate the generic and

¹⁷ From: Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: an Analysis of "home" and "power" p.18

¹⁸ Shakespeare Review 33 (1998), 13.

¹⁹ Environment and Development: A Visit to the World of Tagore; by, Sreemanta Sarkar and Chaitali Ghosh (2015)

²⁰ (The Gardener, Poem No II) by Rabindranath Tagore.

¹⁵<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pantheism/>

¹⁶Gitanjali 2

holistic dualism between nature and man-made civilization. The speeches of the two birds are portraying the firm reality of civilization and its impression. The present-day civilization based on science, technology, and economic enchain us, make us helpless as well as feeble. To live detach from nature indicates us an artificial life that is worthless and scrawny. Tagore's eco-impression is echoed here,

The free bird cries, "My darling sing the songs of the woodlands"

The cage bird says, "Sit by my side, I'll teach you the speech of the learned".

The forest bird cries, "No, ah no! Songs never be taught"

The cage bird says, "Alas for me, I know not the songs of the woodlands".²¹

Moreover, 'Balai' is another short story by Tagore which can be considered one of the finest examples of ecoconsciousness. Balai was a very sensitive boy who was intensely attached to the plant kingdom. He is the protagonist of the story. He would get upset if anyone plucked a flower. He used to get hurt when someone broke a branch of a tree. He had a strong devoutness towards trees. The love of Balai to plants was very much astonished to his nearest people. Balai is addressed as 'the nephew of the writer' in the story. Although he was a child, he had great concern about nature and fauna. He did often stare at trees and landscape purposelessly that showed and evidenced his eco-intuition. Other children of his age were unlike him in the sense that he seemed to comprehend the birds, animals, trees, and grasses all around him. In this story, Balai loves a *Shimultree* very much. The love of Balai to trees and plants is regarded as a great writer of ecoconsciousness. "Tagore's passion to preserve our dwindling ecosystem and sustain vegetation is embodied within the little boy character - Balai - in one of his short stories. Balai always felt the *shimultree* and the blades of green grasses within the courtyard of his uncle as integral parts of his juvenile soul, just as Tagore regarded the old and shady *chhatimtree* in Shantiniketan" (K. Roy 39).

Tagore's (1926) '*In Praise of Trees (Brikhsa Bandana)*²²' is another finest example of eco-knowledge and eco-intuition. Poet deals with the relevance of trees in the atmosphere. Poet realized that people cut trees and destroy nature for their own sake. Tagore understood it and thus he started to devotion to trees by his writings. The poet here cried through his poem to cease deforestation hereafter. Besides, in real life, Tagore organized the celebration of different ceremonies like *Poushmela*²³, *Barshamangal*²⁴,

*Saradotshaba*²⁵, etc as good examples of his philosophical and environmental consciousness.

"In this respect, Tagore can be compared to the American authors Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) whose works and personal lives celebrate nature, the life force and the wilderness" (Zafar 10). Thus, it is noted that ecocriticism is mostly involved in American literature which deals with the celebration of nature, the life force, and the wilderness of America aftermath. "Emerson's attitude towards nature is that of an idealist and transcendentalist. His association with nature is friendly and genuine for he perceives in it fresh knowledge and insight" (Roy 269). Like Emerson, Tagore also believed that true knowledge comes from nature. Nature is the most beautiful and comfortable source of nature. For example, in '*Choti*²⁶', a village boy named Fotik was a village student. He was nurtured, educated and taken care of in the village. Then he was sent to his uncle for better education in town. Fatik was continuously missing his native village and his nature. The imposed education in town school became a burden on him. Finally, the boy died in town. Before death, he begged to go to his native village. Tagore truly agreed to celebrate nature as a source of knowledge and spirit.

Tagore was grandly influenced by great scientist Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose ((1858-1937) who invented the life of trees and made a remark in history. Tagore and Jagadish Bose was a very close friend in personal life²⁷. They discussed a lot about the existence of trees in nature and the dynamic bond between human life and nature. Bose J wrote '*Responses in the Living and Non-living*²⁸' where he depicted the relation of man and environment. The relation and mutual dependence of living and non-living things were a combined and sharing output of these two great men. "This new discourse of science, that had been formulated by both Bose and Tagore, articulates the ideals and values of the Vedas and the Great Hindu Upanishads, through which the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, the physical and the physiological, the internal and the external, are all dissipated" (Banerjee 475). Trees are regarded as a live element in several Indian rituals which also influenced Tagore very much. Tagore himself penned, "The Jagadish brought the resources of his laboratory to bear on the vegetable world where the existence of life was not in doubt. A difference of kind had been taken for granted" ²⁹(Tagore). Similar to British romantic poets, Tagore was also persuaded by *pantheism* which denotes the existence of God in every natural element including plants and animals. Tagore pens that trees are earlier creation than animals. He believed that the beginning of life on earth happened by trees. Trees are the most ancient creation. Six seasons of the nature of Bengal played a vital role in Tagore's works. Many of his poems are named by flowers, seasons, rivers, fruits, and birds. Personification³⁰ is a common literary feature in Tagore's works. The non-living objects of nature behave as if they were living beings in his works.

²¹ (The Gardener: 11-18, Poem No II) by Rabindranath Tagore.

²² Translated by Dr. William Radice, 1985

²³ PoushMela is an annual fair and festival that takes place in Santiniketan, in Birbhum District in the Indian state of West Bengal, marking the harvest season.

²⁴ BarshaMangalUtsab is a day-long Monsoon salutation festival celebrated on the first day of its third month Asharh, usually falls on 15 June of the Gregorian calendar. This day is marked with colourful celebration included singing performances, drama, poetry recitation, screening of cinemas on rain, puppet show, Hilsha Fest and many other programmes. Traditionally women wear sky blue saris to celebrate the first day of Wet season. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

²⁵ A cultural Bengali festive.

²⁶ A short story written by Rabindranath Tagore

²⁷ The Scientist and the Poet: Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore; by, Biswanath Banerjee; <http://rupkatha.com/V2/n4/08JCBoseandTagore.pdf>

²⁸ It is published in London in 1902.

²⁹ Jagadish Chandra Bose- by Rabindranath Tagore; Translated by Surendranath Tagore

³⁰ Presenting non-living animals as human qualities.

In personal life, Tagore was closely allied with life in nature. Tagore believes that absolute development is not possible without rural progress. He constantly compared life to river flows. He always sought the connection of the life of the people with the characteristics of the flowing river. He thought of Calcutta town as brick on the brick where people and an insect lived together; there is no love and affection in life in the city. Tagore was very often persuaded by nature in the heart to go countryside and to mix up with country people. When Tagore went to Santiniketan,³¹ he arranged many agendas to rejoice different seasons in a festive mood. For example, Tagore also introduced *Halakarshana*³² (tilling the land). It is a clarion call to increase the green cover across the deserts through the plantation. It was the strong sentient move in the world to build up mass environmental awareness (Saharia, An Enquiry Concerning Protection of Environment after Rabindranath 17).

Tagore's concept of man/human personality is finding its fruition through the realization of the feeling of intimacy with nature. From his childhood days, he is fascinated by the splendour of nature—the rising of the sun, the chirping of the birds and the whistling of the wind through the trees. He is of the opinion that nature does not lose herself but reveals its true colour to a person's self, having its own eternal bindings with human nature. Nature is not alien but is essentially related to man. (Sarma 51)

TAGORE'S ECOCONSCIOUSNESS IN PAINTINGS: Painting is a strong medium of art to express views. It is an art that is not written in letters but can be read. Tagore expressed his love for nature with visualization through his paintings. His topics of drawings can be divided into two parts; one is nature and another is humans. Tagore started drawing regularly in 1928 when he was 67 years old, although he painted drawing a few at the beginning of his life. From 1901 to 1940, he had created more than 2,000 paintings and drawings. The first exhibition of his film outside Santiniketan³³ took place in Paris, France in 1930 and the exhibition was organized by Victoria Ocampo³⁴. In paintings, Tagore drew the very reality of nature and the environment vividly. "Tagorean pictures include figures of different shapes and forms, human faces, head study, landscapes, birds, animals, nudes, etc. Every picture has its own childlike imaginary rhythmic speciality" (Ray and Sen 21). The beauty of six seasons with flora and fauna got the places in his drawings. The activities of man and woman were drawn lively. The paintings of him can be compared with British poet William Blake. Both tried to show their messages by paintings to readers.

The Summer painting captures a quiet moment of summer afternoon. As the sun is ablaze at its zenith, pervading the entire sky with light and heat, a fatigued village wife is seeking rest on her mat in the shaded verandah of her thatched hut. She is fanning herself and is lost in daydreams. In the Monsoon painting, as the dark sky is lit by the lightning generated amidst the swirling rain clouds from which are descending torrential showers to drench the dried

³¹A far place outside Kolkata city.

³²A program organized in Shantiniketan.

³³Shantiniketan or Santiniketan is a neighborhood in Bolpur city in Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum district in West Bengal, India, approximately 165 km north of Kolkata. (Wikipedia)

³⁴Victoria Ocampo (1890–1979) was an Argentine writer and intellectual.

up, cracked earth, a couple is running out to welcome the storm. The dual spirit of monsoon – its destructive and reviving aspects – is symbolised in the scarlet-coloured and the green-coloured bodies of the man and the woman respectively. The latter is carrying a palm leaf as an umbrella, also as a symbol of vegetative growth, and the renewed productivity is represented in the foliage embroidered on the man's dhoti and the woman's sari (A. Ray 41-43).

Cornucopian: "A cornucopian is a futurist who believes that continued progress and provision of material items for mankind can be met by similarly continued advances in technology. Fundamentally they believe that there is enough matter and energy on the Earth to provide for the population of the world³⁵" (Wikipedia). The cornucopians conceive environmental dangers as exaggerated and illusory. They promote anti-environmental activities. It denotes an anthropocentric interpretation of earth and ecosystem. "they tout capitalism as an essential feature of human progress and see no moral or practical need for legal controls to protect the natural environment or limit its exploitation" (Arney). For example, in Tagore's *Muktadhara (The Waterfall)*, the speech of royal engineer Bibhuti, "My object was to make Man triumphant over the sands and water and stones, which conspired against him. I had not the time to trouble my mind about what would happen to some wretched maize fields of some wretched cultivator in some place or other". Royal engineer Bibhuti thinks that it is compulsory to control nature for the betterment of human beings. After making a dam across the waterfall, he feels proud of it. So, the character of Bibhuti in this play can be entitled as an example of cornucopian. Bibhuti and king Chitrakoot believe that machines can solve the problem and turn to prosperity in the country. Such as "Cornucopians are confident that technology will meet the demand of individuals and society" (Arney).

Despite the remarkable degree of consensus that exists amongst scientists the environmental threats posed by modern civilisation, there are nevertheless some who argue that most, if not all, such dangers are illusory or exaggerated. This 'cornucopian' position is therefore, in an important sense, not environmentalist at all, and is in some cases financially supported and disseminated by anti-environmentalist industrial pressure groups. Free-market economists and demographers are amongst its most outspoken intellectual proponents, arguing that the dynamism of capitalist economies will generate solutions to environmental problems as they arise, and that increases in population eventually produce the wealth needed to pay for environmental improvements. (Garrard 17)

CONCLUSION: "Tagore was in strict opposition to the self-defeating nature of development activities, which cares little about nature, and the balance between man and the surrounding environment. He was very anxious about the unrestrained destruction of forest resources" (Sarkar and Ghosh 26). Tagore was a man of modern mind as well as eco-intelligence. He acknowledged the advancements of the contemporary world. He advocated development but he was worried about the endangerment or destruction of nature by the name of progress. When he found any exploitation of nature, he revolted against it by his literary works. He

³⁵Retrieved from: Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornucopian>)

expected modern technology should be helpful to both man and nature equally. He provoked readers for maintaining ecological equilibrium. So, Tagore claims the title 'Forefather of modern conscious writers' for his contribution to respective fields. "Gaia theory, which recognizes the earth as a living, conscious organism, introduced an ethical component into colonial and contemporary uses of the environment, calling into question the objectification necessary for abuse of the natural world" (Dreese 6). Tagore thinks that it is not possible to live being isolated from the common flaw of nature. Man-nature relationships and responsive bonds are required for the survival of human beings. To Tagore, man is merely an organ of the universe. "Man cannot be separated from the universe. He is more than a body of flesh and blood and his greatest body is in the universe" (Sarin 51).

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