

## Human Nature Relationship: A Study in Deep Ecology with Reference to the Select Songs of Tagore from *Gitabitan* and *Gitanjali*

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### Abstract

Ecocriticism is a popular theory which studies environmental concern in literature. In the first phase of the movement the approach was rather shallow. But in the second wave, the attention shifts to the deep ecological understanding of nature having an intrinsic value of every natural phenomenon. The present study is an attempt to explore his select songs from *Gitanjali* and *Gitabitan* that celebrate an inevitable bond between man and nature. In nature which is considered to be the whole of the physical environment including the human and the non-human, one thing is connected to another. Deep ecology underlines this equal importance of all organisms in our environment. The selected songs of Tagore taken under critical surveillance, will examine the deep ecological perspectives focussed by the great poet of nature.

**Keywords-** *Man, Nature, Ecocriticism, Deep-ecology*

### Introduction

Ecology has two shades, the shallow, and the deep ecology. Shallow ecology is essentially anthropocentric, which believes that the whole purpose of nature is to serve mankind and humans are the masters of nature; man being the only literary creature thinks himself superior over the others. It also advocates systematic usages of natural resources like coal, gas, forests, oil, etc. for a sustainable future.

But deep ecology challenges this conservation mode and advocates preservation of nature to keep it in its original form without any interference of man as nature has its own right to survive. All organisms on this earth have their own intrinsic values and no one is the master of anybody. This realization will give equal rights to every organism maintaining a balance in the eco-system.

Ecocriticism gives emphasis on this eco-consciousness removing the ego-consciousness man. It strikes at the vanity of human superiority over other elements of nature. In the ecosystem everything

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is connected to everything. So nothing is superior or inferior to other. The present environmental crisis is a bi-product of human culture. It is not caused by how the ecosystem functions; but how our ethical system functions; how we behave with Mother Nature etc. Ecocriticism builds this awareness among man. In view of the present environmental crisis around the globe deep ecology consciousness should be built up for nature consciousness. Thus ecocriticism has undergone a rapid growth during its short span of existence as a literary theory.

The phrase “deep ecology” also coined by Arne Naess, argues that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex but harmonious interrelationships among all organisms irrespective of their instrumental utility. This maintains an ecological balance in the environment. By destructing the natural environment, man is causing a threat not only to himself but also for other organisms constituting the ecological balance. The humans are no superior to other organisms on earth. So, deep ecology advocates a feeling of empathy for the non-human elements.

One of the important aspects of eco-literature is its understanding of deep ecology. This environmental philosophy promotes the inherent worth of all organisms irrespective of their instrumental utility for mankind. The ecological movement argues that in nature there exists a complex interrelationship among organisms to keep up a certain balance within an ecosystem. This relationship is marred by human intervention causing a threat to the natural world including the human as well as the nonhuman. The core principle of deep ecology believes that environment should be regarded as a whole having some legal rights to survive. As every organism is connected to the other, each one should be respected. It is called ‘deep’ as it keeps an insight into the inner reality of humanity’s relationship with the natural world. It also arrives at a more profound philosophical understanding of ecology as opposed to its prevailing views as a branch of biology. This popular ecological movement opposes the anthropocentrism which provides a scope to human exploitation of the environment for the betterment of man only. Deep ecology is based on some philosophic assumptions to take a more holistic approach to the world that humans are no separate to the environment. They are the part of the ecosystem. The deep philosophical understanding of the environment provides a foundation for the green movement. It advocates some environmental ethics like wilderness preservation, population control, and simple living for a healthy environment. Now the exponents of deep ecology movement are of the opinion that our mother earth does not exist as a commodity to be freely exploited by man. The survival of any organism is dependent on the well-being of the whole. Thus the deep ecologists identify the eight-tire platform to prove their claims:

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1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must, therefore, be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes” (Wikipedia “Deep Ecology” 2017 1)

## Pilot Study

Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian Nobel Laureate and a multifaceted genius. He is mostly admired for his ‘myriad-mindedness’. But the dominant theme of his poems is man in relation to nature or god. Nature gets a place in his poetry with her solemnity and grandeur. Tagore wants to unify his soul with nature which he wants to worship as god, the creator of the mighty process of the universe. Today we see little in nature as Wordsworth has stated in his poem *The World IS Too Much With Us*. We use to commodify nature for our luxury. But reading a Tagore poem is a real pleasure to understand the intrinsic value of nature. Tagore’s sensitive mind discovered that there is a pre-ordained harmony between man and nature. As a poet he willingly associated himself with Rousseau’s call of Return to nature. Like William Wordsworth, he believed that nature is the best teacher for mankind. Thus he established Viswabharati at Bolepur, popularly known as Shantiniketan (a land of peace) a place of learning in the open lap of nature “far from madding crowd’s ignoble strife”. He considered nature as a moral guide to man. As a matter of fact the poet merges himself completely with nature and in this respect no other Indian poet is parallel to him. Although his attitude

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to nature is purely romantic like the western poet such as Wordsworth, Keats, Thomas Grey, Shelley etc. and the oriental poets like Kalidas, Valmiki; he mystical perception with nature is unmistakable like William Blake, Coleridge, Mirabai Sri Aurobinda Ghosh etc. There is a marked fondness of seasons and rivers in his poetry. Besides, the birds, the trees, the limitless sky, the floating clouds, the green and yellow rice fields, the vastness of seas, the horizon etc. enriched his imagination. Thus his poems have so many natural images and symbols. The poet finds himself identical with nature. This oneness leads him to understand the deep ecological significance of nature for the benevolence of mankind in general.

## ***Gitabitan* songs**

The Book *Gitabitan* is a collection of 2232 very popular immortal songs by Rabindranath Tagore. The book is the best exploration of the poet's attitude to nature. Due to the vastness of the book, Tagore has divided these songs in six major part including *Puja* (worship), *Prem* (love), *Prakriti* (seasons), *Swadesh* (patriotism), *Aanushthak* (occasion-specific), *Bichitro* (miscellaneous) and *Nrityonatyā* (dance dramas and lyrical plays). The present study focuses on the two select poems embedded with the perspectives of deep ecology. The Song "*My Golden Bengal*" belongs to the category of *Swadesh* part and the song "The Salvation" is included in *Puja* part.

*My Golden Bengal* is a beautiful song of place attachment in which the poet sings the glory of Bengal landscape. The translation goes like this;

I love you dearly, my golden Bengal  
Your skies and your air forever  
Fill my heart with the resonance of a flute  
The wondrous smells  
Of the mango orchards thrill me in spring  
And in the harvest  
I behold the lush paddy fields  
Sway like gentle smiles  
I have witnessed such beauty, depth  
And tenderness in you  
In the shades that you gently spread  
Across the river banks  
And beneath the mighty trees!

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And when you speak,

Your words enchant my being

And when you cry,

I cannot withhold my tears. (Translated by Rumela Sengupta)

Here the poet shows his deep rooted love for the rural Bengal for its beautiful natural environment. The poem shows how the poet's senses are nourished and nurtured by the sights and sounds of Bengal landscape. Tagore compares his heart with a flute which produces music with the help of natural air. The poet shows his great deal of place attachment with rural landscape of Bengal. He compares the unsurpassable beauty of Bengal with the precious metal i.e., gold. Tagore is very much delighted to see the vast canopy of sky which expands his imagination as a poet. The poet also deals with the seasonal flux of Bengal and its deep impact on the physical environment. In spring, the fragrance of sweet buds from the mango groves thrills his heart with joy. The wilderness of the orchard draws him like a passion. The paddy fields swelling gently in breeze make the earth smile in glee.

The rural landscape is as beautiful as a tender lady. The poet here compares his countryside as mother who takes good care of her child. The shade of the big banyan tree is likened to the quilt of a mother who guards her children with all her affection and care. To emphasise his for Mother Nature the poet has deft fully made use of the rhetoric of transferred epithet. The lovely sounds of nature like the murmuring stream, twittering of birds, the easy swift wind etc. are as sweet to ears as nectar is sweet to our tongue. So the sweetness of nectar which is properly applicable to the taste of tongue has been shifted from its proper subject to another, i.e., ears. The poem shows the instances of hypallage as we find in Grey's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. The poet loves nature so much that he cannot bear with the shadow upon her face. In other words, he cannot tolerate the least exploitation of nature. When his motherland is unhappy, his eyes get so full of tears.

The abiding importance of place attachment of this poem is such that Bangladesh, a neighbouring country of India has adopted this song as their national anthem to show love to its motherland.

The song *The Salvation* is an example of the poet's selfless devotion to god. He begs his salvation and joy in the open lap of nature. The translation of the original Bengali poem into English goes like this;

I aspire to be liberated in the glorious lights

Lit up in the skies.

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I aspire to be liberated in the spacks of dusts  
Spread on the grass.  
Far beyond the mind and body  
I tend to lose myself.  
Amongst the strains of melody  
I tend to rise myself.  
My salvation exists in hearts  
Of general pleblan  
Belittling sorrows and perils  
In arduous mission  
In the alter of the world's master  
I light the pyres of self immolation  
My soul is I aspire to offer  
While seeking salvation. (Translated by Deepankar Choudhury)

The poet wants to illumine his soul in the light of nature to find salvation of mind. The glorious sun shine and the moon beams will remove the darkness of his soul. He wants to be liberated treading his feet gently upon the grass and dusts. This brings him close to nature when people have little opportunity to think about our physical environment. The poet wants to free himself from the shackles of material pursuits. He would feel rather happy when in touch with nature. So he wishes to raise his soul above such coarser pleasure that only binds us and makes us slaves. Nature will inspire him to sing the song of salvation. Tagore will never be afraid to face the joys and sorrows of life. He will work hard to meet with the challenges of life. The poet will light the pyre to burn the evils of his body and mind and this will also make him more refined than before. He wants to offer his prayer to the master of this universe to seek salvation.

## ***Gitanjali* Songs**

*Gitanjali* is a book of poems which was originally written in Bengali. The collection included 157 poems published in 2010. But the poet's own translated work of the book English named *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* is a collection of 103 poems (including 53 poems from the original Bengali book and others from a few other books like *Achalayatan*, *Gitimalya*, *Naivedya*, *Kheya* etc. written by

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the poet) published in 1912. The book brought the poet high acclaim in the west and he got prestigious Nobel Prize in literature in 1913. The poems have a spiritual connection with nature.

The song no. 16 though originally written in Bengali, was translated by Tagore himself in the following way,

I have my invitation to this world's festival,  
And thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen  
And my ears have heard.  
It was my part at this feast to play upon  
My instrument, and I have done all I could.  
Now, I ask, has this time come at last?  
When I may go in and see thy face and offer thee  
My silent salvation? (*The Salvation*)

The song keeping in tune of the basic concept of deep ecology, advocates nature to be considered as a whole not as a part including living and the non-living world. The poet feels very happy to be invited here in this earth to live the life of human as designed by the mighty lord, the creator of all things. Tagore has seen the beautiful sights and heard the sounds of nature and feels himself innate with the living and the non-living. In fact nature has activated his senses of eyes and ears. Life is a flute and nature plays on it. The instrument played by the poet here is flute which is hollow. It can be used only when the wind blows through it. Like William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, the poet gets immensely influenced by nature to attain a philosophic attitude of a mystic. He considers himself lucky to be a part of the universal process of creation and not superior to any other organism. Everything has a role to play in the great feast of the world and he is sincerely playing his role as far as possible. Now his heart is very much eager to meet the supreme creator to have spiritual salvation.

The core message of this song is that the humans are the creation of god as stewards to protect the pristine beauty of nature and not to exploit her. It is nature which sustains us in this earth. Thus God has given this responsibility to man to take care of nature and the poet will happily do this till the end of his life. The poet believes that having done his duty at level best god will be pleased to grant him salvation. Thus true salvation is in nature and not in material pursuits which alienates man from the blessings of nature. The poet also hints at dying as natural and such dying can be fruitful only when it mingles with the soul of nature in other words the supreme soul of god himself.

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The following song (Song No. 69) is also a part of English translation of *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*

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.  
It is the same life that is rocked  
In the ocean-cradle of birth and death,  
In ebb and in flow.  
I feel my limbs are made glorious  
By the touch of this world of life.  
And my pride is from the life-throb of ages  
Dancing in my blood this moment. (*Gitanjali: Song Offerings*)

The song beautifully depicts the poet holistic attitude to all life forms. He is merely a part of them having almost the same value. To the poet, every living and the non-living objects of the world are the creation of god. So there is a symbiosis between the human and the non-human world. It is the same life-force that pervades every commonplace thing like plants and herbs, shoots and flowers, birds and animals and many more things. The same tremendous power is behind all the elements of nature and it is the source of all sorts of mobility and movements. The flow of life through birth, growth, death and regeneration is continued by this power. Life is an admixture of joys and sorrows identified with birth and death. Behind the ebb and flow of life, there runs a mysterious force. The poet is vibrant with that life force which runs through the world of life. His nerves are energised and his limbs grow stronger with the realisation of that power which has an ennobling effect upon the all the life forms in general. Like Wordsworth, he sees through the impact of celestial light upon even the commonest object of earth as we see in his famous lyrical poem, *Tintern Abbey*.

## Conclusion

Ecocriticism which was earlier synonymous with American nature writing gets a new dimension with Tagore for his perception of deep ecology. The select songs of Tagore are

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synchronised with nature. Humans have the habit of destroying nature for immediate benefit but this in the long run destroys the inevitable bond between man and nature leading to the ecological imbalance. Tagore's works reconnect the lost relationship with nature. The great poet considers nature as a part of our very existence. His deep ecological insight is too prominent to be overlooked. There ever remains a symbiosis between man and nature. Living in harmony with nature is a blessing of god. Like William Wordsworth, Tagore had a mystical attitude to nature. No where can one get a better place for spiritual salvation. Man should be a steward of nature which should be protected not rejected. This deep ecological understanding is the urgent need of the hour when our mother earth has been suffering from environmental hazards mostly due to the anthropocentric attitude of man. Only a deep ecological perception can preserve nature to lead us to a sustainable future.

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