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Eco-Spiritualism in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*

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Rabindranath Tagore is a renowned and prominent figure in Indian Writing in English literature. The *Gitanjali*, one of his greatest poetic creations, marked a great transition in his life when Tagore's national longing became merged in the universal. It was this spirit of universality in Tagore that earned him the prestigious and internationally acclaimed prize, the Noble Prize in 1913. He is the first and the last Indian so far who has achieved this feat in the field of literature.

In Tagore's poetry, we find a unique trait and the ecological wisdom. In his poems we see the harmony between human being and nature. After seeing his deep love for nature, a reputed critic, Edward Thompson also remarks, "How little attraction Nature in some of her grander and vaster manifestations has exercised over Rabindranath. No poet has felt more deeply and constantly the fascination of great spaces of earth and sky, the boundless horizon and white lights of evening, the expanse of moonlight. To the way these have touched him with peace and the power of beauty a thousand passages in his work bear witness."(*Rabindranath Tagore poet and Dramatist*, 25).

He loved nature which comes close to the habitations of men. For example, "his rivers are not left for long without a sail on their surfaces; they flow by meadow and pasture. His flowers and bees are in garden and orchard; his 'forest' is at the hamlet's door. His fellow-men were a necessity to him. Even so, it remains noteworthy how little of mountains we hear in his verse, of rains and rivers, trees and clouds and moonlight and dawn, very much is spoken; but of mountains little."(Thomson, Edward. *Rabindranath Tagore Poet and Dramatist*, 25-26).

The present paper does not confine itself to mere presentation of the beautiful aspect of nature but it also brings forth Tagore's deep concerns about the maintenance of its purity. In other words, he was a staunch believer of God as he thought that the best way to continue to have faith in God would be to make an earnest effort to preserve nature or to let the nature be in its natural form. His nature poetry reminds us of Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth. Undoubtedly, with the kind of a rapport that Tagore established with nature, he was able to achieve oneness with it. He had become so engrossed in the activities of nature that the other concerns of the world became subservient to him. As Rabindranath Tagore himself says:

From the first time that I can remember, I was passionately fond of Nature. Oh! It used to make me mad with joy when I saw the clouds come up in the sky one by one. I felt, even in those early days, that I was surrounded with a companionship very intense and very intimate, though I do not know how to name it. I had such an exceeding love for Nature, that I cannot think in what way to describe it to you; but she was a kind of loving companion, always with me, and always revealing to me some fresh beauty. (Gupta, Uma Das. *Rabindranath Tagore My Life in my words*, 328).

Thus, the exploration of nature became the main motto of his life by trying to hear the mystical and mysterious sound of the flowing water, and even the blowing of the wind seems to give him some kind of a message which has the spirit of Godliness in it. For instance, in *Gitanjali*, the poet juxtaposes two contrary situations while talking about the playing on a flute by some villager. He is surprised how Krishna was able to produce a celestial sound by playing on a flute made of a simple 'reed'. One of the noted critics on Tagore, Mohit Chakrabarti also supports the idea and says, "The quest for the endless as Tagore makes through his songs in *Gitanjali* unfolds a new vision of soul-consciousness. The adoration of nature as he makes most poignantly brings forth a new wonder of infinity that becomes a constant partner to unending beauty." (*Rabindranath Tagore A Miscellany*, 47).

As we talk about the eco-spiritualism, it explores the spiritual connection between nature and human being and provides the necessary awakening to our temperament and purpose, and thus brings out the inner power to overcome the materialistic power of those who seek to dominate and destroy nature. In fact, the idea of eco-spirituality has been derived from Deep Ecology. Describing about 'deep ecology' under the subtitle "Positions", a renowned critic on eco-criticism Greg Gerrad states:

Deep ecology is the most influential beyond academic circles, inspiring many activists in organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Earth First! And sea Shepherd... Deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. The shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology... (23-24).

Thus, Tagore's literature advocates a close relationship between nature and human being. In *Gitanjali*, song 80, the poet talks about the futility of human life by referring to a roaming cloud in the sky. The poet says, "I am like a remnant of a cloud uselessly roaming in the sky" (58). He further says, "Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee" (58). Very clearly, here the poet is referring to his separation from his Creator the God and the separation becomes intolerable to him, not finding this worldly life comfortable, he turns to nature.

Moreover, in these lines man has been compared with the cloud that roams about in the sky here and there or without any particular direction. So the poet prays to God to give him strength enough to become purposeful in life, given the belief that God is real and everything else in the life is temporal. The poet is not happy with this world where despite all the progress and advancement man reaches nowhere. So, he passionately wishes to get reunited with his Creator.

But once sent to this world in the form of a human being, the poet wants his worldly life to be colourful and full of joy with the help of spiritual ideas. For this, he needs grace of God. And although because of attachment to this world, while leaving it for a moment he might feel little emotional about it. But once the call comes from the God he will lose no time in accepting the judgment of God. Rather he will be happy when his end comes to be able to meet the Creator for whom his heart has been longing for.

Therefore, what the poet wants to convey is that the best way to feel close to the Creator is to be the admirer of nature. But observing deeply the ultimate purpose of man is not to get stuck with the beauty of nature. Because after all the nature itself is a Creation of

that power which is responsible in the making of the poet himself. So the poet is convinced that the real purpose is not to admire the nature, but to go on to wish for the union with that Creator who must be even more charming or rather most beautiful. So, why not to enjoy the most beautiful rather than only the 'beautiful' (nature), from which the concept of beauty emanates. Thus, in the last lines he says, "I shall melt and vanish away in the dark, or it may be in a smile of the white morning, in a coolness of purity transparent" (58). The poet turns to nature but his ultimate destination is to seek the reunion with God which is what makes him restless here and which is why, he wants to go to the real home, even though the beautiful nature stands in his way. But being a kind of an unconscious ecologist he talks nicely about nature but his ideas go to the Creator of this nature itself who must be even better and more charming than the nature of the world.

There is another example of Tagore's deep ecology in the song no. 103, to quote the poet, "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" (71). The poet visualises the fine rainy clouds, dense and deep, as a manifestation of God's presence. According to the poet God is real but invisible. But the atmosphere created by the rain clouds is the reflection of God's presence. In other word, the nature is the visible aspect of God. So, he regards this nature in the form of clouds, as a manifestation of God. He wishes to salute the nature itself. Again he says, "Like a flock of homesick cranes flying and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee"(72).

Here, the poet visualises the flight of the cranes to their homes as a flight to the eternal home of the God. In short, the poet feels that this human life is like a journey or a voyage which is done through various stages of enchanting nature but the nature is only a medium to reach the real home. The journey is complete only when the man reaches its home. At last, he comes across a colourful and charming nature but his firm belief does not make him stay there and he happily reaches his ultimate home.

In song no. 8, the poet throws light on the naturalness of life by describing about a child's play who is playing the game of a prince, decorated in a princely robes. But while playing a prince with heavy ornaments the child feels quite uncomfortable and uneasy. He is all the time conscious of getting his ornaments stained with dust. The poet describes the child's game in the following simple but powerful manner:

The child who is decked with prince's robes and who has
Jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his
Dress hampers him at every step.
In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps
Himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.

On the one hand, the child wants to play with mud, no matter his clothes get stained with dust. It indirectly means that the child is practising deep ecology without understanding it. But on the other hand, the child has to play a prince with ornamental robes which hang heavy on him, leading to his discomfort. This is a role he is made to play as a part of his worldly life.

Again the poet clearly sends an emphatic message in the above mentioned reference about the futility of materialistic or artificial life and the importance of natural life which makes the basis for spiritual awakening. This can be achieved only when we learn about the pure and natural life by being close to nature. As a matter of fact, a child is symbol of a life which gets its inspiration from the nature around us.

Song no. 42 apparently describes about voyage in the company of God in shoreless ocean. Certainly the shoreless ocean indicates to the limitless ocean which means God. But even in this world the oceans are so large and big in size that their shores are not easily visible. Thus, the shoreless ocean becomes symbolic of the presence of God in this materialistic world. So in order to realize a communion with God all we can do is to establish a close connection with ocean. Once we do that, we are in a position to realize the presence of God. The poet says with a divine joy:

In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my
Songs would swell in melodies, free as waves, free from all
Bondage of words.

The poet feels a real sense of freedom by thinking about a boating in a large ocean. The best place for this kind of a journey can be none other than vast and wide oceans. Hence, the imagery of the ocean in his attempt to think of a journey with God. So the message that comes to the fore is that if one wants to have a feel of Godliness the best thing in this world is to depend on nature.

Again in song no. 11, Tagore asks to stop the mechanical chanting and singing in the temples by the so-called devotees of God because He does not dwell inside the temple. But, He is with those people who are tilling the hard ground and breaking the stones for making a path. While doing the work, they get their clothes covered with dust. Here, the poet wants to say that these people are very close to nature and he condemns the materialistic life and gives message to the mankind to live spiritual life by being close to nature. He emphasises:

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and
Where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun
And in shower, and his garments is covered with dust. Put off thy
Holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

The message is that people should respect those people who work hard for the sake of the mankind in the scorching heat. And he feels that God is also with them in the form of sun and shower, not in the temple. So, the best way to worship the God is to respect these people even as they are engaged in the physical labour. But, at the same time they live their lives amidst the nature or in very natural surroundings against the materialistic life. This is how the poet proved his point about the simple workers and labourers who are generally looked down upon by the so-called rich people of the world. But, the real richness lies with these people who are simple workers because they are at least away from the evil thinking about the people around them.

Based on the above account, it is quite clear that Tagore's *Gitanjali* stands justified from the eco-spiritual point of view. He always pleaded for preservation of nature in its

original form. According to him nature was a creation of God and in order to achieve the Godliness or the perfection one needed to look at the nature and rejoice in it without making any harm to it. He was worried about the man's greed to try to exploit nature for his own small purposes. He was always in favour of the keeping nature intact and pollution-free.

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