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## Note of Eco-Mysticism in the Selected Poems of Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mamang Dai

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### Abstract:

Eco-mystical elements abound in the poetry of Rabindra Nath Tagore and the contemporary poets of North-East India writing in English like Mamang Dai. The present study is attempted taking the most towering poet of the Indian sub-continent of the colonial and postcolonial era, Rabindranath Tagore, who created his own idiom of poetry rendering the Vedic and upanisadic sagas in the English language and thereby establishing the superiority of the Indian thought to the entire Western world. During the colonial period, of late, though the North East India constituted a separate Commission, it was an extended region of Bengal and as such in the national anthem the major part of the Eastern/ North Eastern India was considered as Banga (Bengal). Rabindranath Tagore being the first Indian Nobel Laureate and representative Indian poet was the representative poet of Eastern and North Eastern Indian. As such I have ventured to compare the budding poet of Northeast India, Mamang Dai with Rabindranath Tagore considering the eco-mystical elements as a major presence in their works. Joy A. Palmer in his *Fifty Key Thinkers on the Environment* has included four Indians like Lord Buddha (5<sup>th</sup> century BC), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Vandana Shiva (1952-). So Rabindranath Tagore, being a canonical ecological thinker, has made his poetry the doctrine of truth, philosophy and mysticism with a pantheist flavor of thought. Though it seems incompatible to compare Mamang Dai with Tagore, yet my attempt is not unjustified as Tagore had close relations with North-east.

**Keywords : Ecology, Eco-mysticism, Identity, Supreme, Spiritual.**

Before analyzing the poetry of the respective poets from eco-mystical perspective, my paper deals with the theories of ecology with a brief presentation of concepts.

Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship and interdependence between each and every life form of the environment. The word 'Ecology' has been derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos* meaning 'household' and 'knowledge' respectively. The term 'Ecology' was coined by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1869, when he defined it as the science of the relationship of the organisms to the environment. It has developed as a reaction against the practice of isolating creatures and studying them in laboratories. Ecology, in its

present connotation, is an umbrella term that is open to the common, everyday discourse of species, ecology ranged freely across many fields, dipping into evolution, behavior, and physiology... (Howarth1996:73).

Ecological thinking has been there for a long time, but ecology as a principle has developed gradually. The word 'Ecology' is very often used in connection with the 'green' movement. There are a number of philosophical concepts based on ecological principles. "These philosophies use the word 'ecology' in a much looser sense than the scientific. This practice—somewhere between seeing culture as manifestation of ecology and using ecology as metaphor for culture—is common in eco-criticism" (Kerridge 2006: 536).

Eco-mysticism may be defined as ecological mysticism or living ecologically like a mystic's way of life. Mysticism "is the art and science of living perfectly; it is the self-knowledge that subsumes the knowledge of the world. It is the quest for and the union with the absolute" (Paranjape1989: 1). Further, "it is the concern with the nature of the ultimate reality. It includes both means and ends, both the goal and the way" (ibidem). The major terms in the aforesaid definition like "Absolute", "ultimate reality" are the parts of the cosmos/ecology. So ecological mysticism implies the art/science of living perfectly ecologically and earning the self-knowledge required for the said purpose. The spiritual ecology/creation spirituality is same as Eco-mysticism.

Eco-mysticism/Spiritual ecology has four aspects or it is of four types like: *Via Positiva*, *Via Negativa*, *Via Creativa* and *Via Transformativa*. *Via Positiva* is the experience of the Divine in terms of delight, awe, and wonder at being present in the world; it involves the institution that creation is a blessing, and response of gratitude. *Via Negativa* is the experience of the darkness, deprivation, suffering, and pain. These two kinds of experiences lead to a rebirth of creativity and it is the *Via Creativa* that involves identifying new ecological virtues for living such as vegetarianism, recycling, relearning the sacredness of nature, redefining creation through political action, and making new rituals to celebrate sacred places, times, and being in nature. *Via Transformativa* is the transformation to a more compassionate society in which all beings love one another. (Fox 1998:228).

The theoretical concepts discussed above have been applied in the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Mamang Dai. Tagore's works enshrine the Indian values and the sympathy to nature. The basic Indian ethos teaches us to be compassionate to nature and to be in harmony with it. In Indian culture there has been a tradition of living with nature in a relationship of mutual dependence. Tagore's poetry is not static, but it is evolutionary. There seems to be conspicuous development of thought and diversity in his whole poetic career. The development of Tagore's poetry can be traced at the various stages of life. In Pre-

*Gitanjali* period, poems like *The Awakening of the Waterfall and Evening Songs* are quite significant. Both the poems shun gloom and despondency and a sense of joy prevails. Tagore was twenty-one years of age when he composed the poem, *Evening Songs*. The next two poems, *Picture and Songs* and *sharps and flats* deal with the theme of the newly awakened consciousness of reality. Some poems of Tagore deal with the social problems of the day.

'Basundhare' is one of his nature poems of this period. It is not a mere remembrance of communion with nature, but also fills longing to dwell amidst nature. Though Tagore appreciated the calmness and tranquility of nature, some poems also depict the destructive aspect of nature. "Barsha-Shesh" and 'Sea-Waves' which appeared in the book entitled in the book entitled *Kalpana* and *Manasi* respectively, treat the terrible aspect of nature.

Tagore has depicted nature in all aspects. The first stage of his poetic career abounds in natural phenomena with all its ingredients. The initial period is followed by the most eventful period of Tagore's life. Whatever he wrote during this time was overshadowed by the magnum opus *Gitanjali*. His poetic talent and exposure reached new heights as he was acclaimed all over the world. *Gitanjali* is a collection of 103 poems in which the poet has blended art and morality. The poems in *Gitanjali* are rich with invaluable thoughts in scripture and Holy books and they deal with bhakti in great Indian tradition. Tagore, drank deep from the wells of rich heritage particularly from the teachings of the Christian Missionaries and Brahmo Samaj. The title *Gitanjali* is composed from Gita means song and anjali which means offering and thus title means- "an offering songs", But the word anjali has a strong devotional connotation, so the title may also be interpreted as "pray offering of songs". Music is one of the key notes of *Gitanjali*. But the term music does not mean the earthly music or the heard melody, but the unheard melody of the soul, only through which God can be felt. Images of nature abound in the poems of *Gitanjali*, turning a religious and philosophical poem into a great nature poem like Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. Most of the images, symbols, metaphors used in the poems of *Gitanjali* diffuse the aroma of Indian tradition, myth, legends. Eco-mystical images abound in these poems. But the images are not complex and far-fetched like images of the metaphysical poets. They are simple and lucid like the images used by Romantic poets. eg. the image of vessel, flute, lyre, music, flower, dress, garment, door, fire, dust, etc. are very appropriate and suggestive of Indian rites and rituals, myth, legends and customs and arises a sense of eco-mysticism. Ecology, landscape, abounds in the poems included in *Gitanjali*, which develop the theme of religious journey. Tagore's poetry is inspired by the largeness of nature which is chiefly derived from his faith in the vastness of nature. He wants to merge himself into this larger, unbound life of nature. The whole book is endowed with rich poetry of great signification. It lives the readers in a fit of contemplation. Lines like the following from *Gitanjali* seem to create a palpable influence on the reader's heart.

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 (Tagore 1-5)

Tagore prays God to pluck the flower of life in time in the service of God otherwise it will droop and drop in the dust.

Pluck this little flowers and take it, delay not ! I fear lest it  
droop and drop into dust.

It may not find place in thy garland, but honour it with a  
touch of paint from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end  
before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use  
This flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time. [ibidem 1-7]

Many of the natural, eco-mystical images depicted in *Gitanjali* are often picturesque portrayals of the Indian landscape specially those of Bengal as is seen in the following lines,

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of birds 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. [ibidem 1-4]

The varied coloured flowers, different species of birds, the morning sea, the clouds are mentioned in the aforesaid lines. Along with the human beings, they are also integral part of the ecological web. Mutual love, respect and dependents is must in order to maintain the ecological balance. This is what eco-mysticism says.

The pictorial description of trees and the shepherd boy captures the essence of rural life and brings life to the following poetic lines which are also manifestation of the ecological spirit,

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. [ibidem 9-13]

The aforesaid lines brings a charming enchanting pen-picture of landscape that soothes the mind. The natural cycle of the fluctuating seasons seems to play an imperative role in Tagore's poetry, each standing as a pivotal motif throughout the collection.

The spring has done its flowering and taken leave.  
and now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger.  
The waves have become clamorous, and upon the bank in the  
shady lane  
the yellow leaves flutter and fall [ibidem 3-7]

There is musical tone in some poetic lines of *Gitanjali*. But the music is not the heard earthly music, rather unheard music of the soul through which God could be felt. Such a unique combination of music and nature is very rare in literature that lends an eco-mystical sense to the poetic lines as is seen in the following lines,

Do you feel a thrill passing through the air  
with the notes of the far away song  
floating from the other shore? (ibidem 8-10)

Eco-mysticism advocates the growth of an ethical sense that enables human beings feel an empathy with nature. It is this eco-mystical sense that enables Tagore to feel the breeze and smell the air,

Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies, greet me  
and speed along the road. My heart is glad within, and the  
breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I  
know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I  
shall see.

In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone. In the  
meanwhile the air is fill with the perfume of promise. (ibidem 1-8)

There is a quest for identity in Tagore's poetry like Mamang Dai. But where as in Mamang Dai's poetry the quest is search of roots, in Tagore's poetry quest is spiritual. It is religious. Tagore's quest as is reflected through his poems in *Gitanjali* is the realization of the absolute whose abode is in the inner chamber of the immortal soul. Tagore feels realization of the absolute is possible only after abandoning the identification with the limited role one is playing in the world. This is the Highest Goal or the Supreme Goal which the poet wants to achieve. The ecological, eco-mystical images are the wings with which Tagore fly for the spiritual quest throughout *Gitanjali*. In the following poetic lines Tagore identifies himself with the homesick cranes flying for their mountain nest.

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. (ibidem 9-10)

This is also a eco of eco-mysticism that human beings can peacefully survive on this earth by identifying themselves with nature.

Tagore reaches his final stage of spiritual journey in patraput where he shows that religious 'I' belief must be expressed through concerned for fellowman. Tagore feels God could not be found in the lifeless statues and temples. One cannot please God by hypocritical and superficial chanting and singing. God lives in one's own soul. God is there with the common people working hard with their garments covered with dust.

Leave this chanting and singing telling of beads!  
whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple  
with doors all shut?  
Open thine eyes and see god is not before thee !

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and  
where the path maker is breaking stones. (ibidem 1-6)

The theme of *Gitanjali* has the flavor of great epics and scripture like vedas and Upanishads. The eco-mystical images serve to introduce the theme of realization of the essence of divinity within the *self*. The development this and related other themes can be traced through out Tagore's *Gitanjali*.

All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my love ever  
flowed towards thee in the path of secrecy. One final glance from  
thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own.

The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom . After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her Lord alone in the solitude of night. [ibidem 5-10]

Echoes of eco-mysticism is well heard there in the following lines which express the poet's realization of the mysteries of nature,

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bad in the forest at midnight!

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world, that the inscrutable without name or form had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother. [ibidem 3-8 ]

The mystical world of nature is recreated in the following lines with the help of some touching ecological, eco-mystical images. Here the poet feels oneness with nature,

Light, my light, the world-filling light,  
the eye-kissing light, heart- sweetening light !

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the center 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 haven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad. (ibidem 1-13)

Note of eco-mysticism runs through the following lines,

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. (ibidem 13-17)

It is the eco-mystical sense of Tagore which enables him to hear the silent steps of 'the king' in the rainy gloom of July night. The eco-mystical symbols used in the following lines emphasizes Tagore's adroitness in embodying such assorted aspects of nature as imagery and motifs in his poetry. These eco-mystical motifs irrefutably portray Tagore's beliefs of nature as a path to the almighty. The poet aesthetically merges the nature imagery with the lives and actions of the persona. This is appreciated through the lines like the following,

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July night on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes. [ibidem 8-11].

In *Gitanjali*, the collections of poems are “the song” that Tagore wants to sing, but “remains unsung to this day”. Tagore’s wants to be get united with the Absolute Truth which he has not achieved yet.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

(ibidem 13-14)

The natural motifs, symbols, images used throughout *Gitanjali* aesthetically portray the Vedantic conception of the oneness of man with nature. In his poems there is a minute observation of the components of nature with individual involvement in it. Through his writing he elevated the trivial to the eternal. This is the exceptional exquisiteness of his poetry. The simplicity and mystical qualities of the poems in *Gitanjali* enamor and spell bound the readers,

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. [ibidem 1-5]

Mamang Dai is a representative North-eastern poet from Arunachal Pradesh who resigned herself as an IAS Officer to become a full time ecological activist. Nature finds an important place in her poetry. Her poetry is showcase of the ecological glory of Arunachal Pradesh. Dai believes ecology, regional myth and legends, rites and rituals are the powerful ingredients which asserts to them an identity of their own. The search for roots is a basic feature of the post-colonial writings from north east India. Her poetry teaches us the basic Indian ethos to live in harmony with nature and to be compassionate to it. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih rightly observes that Mamang Dai acts as “Non-objective Chronicler” of the human experience within the confines of nature.

Eco-mystical elements are in abundance in the works of Dai. Nature has a mystical presence in her works and there has been an attempt to explore through the mysteries of nature. This reaffirms the understanding that nature is not merely a passive object, but is a dynamic force that plays a pivotal role in shaping an ecological consciousness. Such a consciousness is the need of the hour when ecology is under threat primarily due to man-made disasters in the environment. Such an eco-mystical consciousness can develop a new ethics in human beings that teaches to live in a perfectly ecological way by respecting and preserving each and every creature of nature. This concept of Creation Spirituality is present in the poetry of Arunachal Pradesh like in the poetry of the Northeastern states in general. The poetic world of Mamang Dai is full of eco-mystical images,

The yellow mustard is a field of gold.  
The slanting sun promises to return  
tilting the day like a temptation....

... ..

Then ask the fences of love

About this enigma. (Dai 56)



An eco-mystical sense enables the human voice even to think about the birds, which have a different entity but a similar self with human beings:

I thought you loved me.  
 How sad it is,  
 this spring sky,  
 the caresses of  
 mist and vapour  
 Why do wild birds cry? (ibidem 54)

Dai's attitude to nature as is reflected through her poetry opposes the anthropocentric view of ecology which considers the humans as superior to the other forms of life. Dai's attitude to nature supports the views of the Deep Ecologists who want to give due importance to each and every object of nature. Dai also supports the views of the Human Ecologists that put deep inside in the interaction between the people and the environment. Human ecology is based on the premise that human population has to negotiate and share space with the other species in order to maintain the ecological equilibrium. It studies and analyzes the influence of human on the environment on one hand, and the influence of the environment on human behavior on the other. These views of ecology are reflected through Dai's collections of poems like *Midsummer Survival Lyrics*. Her poem 'the deification of nature' is a good example of Dai's support of the views of Deep Ecologists and Human Ecologists. What is vital for survival is interdependence. As a part of the intricate web of the entire of the ecosystem, the development of humanity is possible only through a peaceful co-existence with each and every organism. Dai's message for survival is expressed in the following lines of her prosaic poem "other lives".

The land is a being just like us. We live weather, share food, rice, water, salt. We go to war, kill each other with our weapons and are killed by a drowning river or an avalanche of rocks. It is a bond both cruel and kind; like brothers claiming territory since both are equal to the other it is state of mutual regard, a state of kinship. (Dai 44)

Dai vehemently opposes human being's act of cutting trees mercilessly. Trees and plants provide shelter and food to human beings. Again destroying the forests may bring catastrophic results like excessive heat and alteration of the path of breeze. These views of Dai find expression in her poem "Be careful how you cut that tree". Human journey is inseparable from nature for aesthetic, economic and moral reasons.

Traditional values and recent ecological principles like Spiritual Ecology or Creation Spirituality teaches us for harmonious co-existence with the world of nature. Traditional tribal societies have been living with nature with a sense of awe and wonder mystifying its overall entity. The following lines from a poem by Dai are reflective of this spirit and have an ecomystical perspective:

Without speech  
 we practiced a craft,  
 eaving imprints on sky walla  
 coding the trailing mist,  
 in silent messages

across the vast landscape (ibidem 13)

Tribal folklores, myths and legends have also been explored that heightens the effect of ecomysticism in the poetic world of Mamang Dai. Many of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh believe that human beings and tigers are born brothers, so the killing of a tiger is regarded as equivalent to that of killing a human being. This exhibits the age – old eco-consciousness among the tribal communities and this has been explored in one of Dai's poems, where there is an appeal to tiger to have mercy on its brother, i.e. human beings:

My brother, Oh! My brother!

Have mercy for our destiny. (ibidem 51)

This may well be treated as an appeal for mercy to the animal world on behalf of human race for the injustice done to them by human civilization having an anthropocentric world view. The use of this myth to express an ecological concern is also seen in YumlamTana (1976- ), another important poet from Arunachal Pradesh. In Tana's poem entitled "The men and the Tiger" this tribal myth is again comes to life. (Tana 2003: 14-15).

In Dai's poetry 'river' becomes a 'life force'- a 'metaphor of life', an 'eternal entity' that bestows an identity to the people around it. Here she resembles with Langston Hughes, the African American poet. In Hughes' poetry the very existence and identity of the African American people becomes synonymous to that of the river.

I've known rivers;

Ancient, dusky rivers

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (Hughes 2001:143)

Mamang Dai too explores through the river with the same purpose. This is also seen in the poems of the other poets of North-east India as 'river' is central image in Indian poetry in English in general. Mostly the Indian English poets are 'river poets'. There is eco-mystical sense in the following lines of Dai's poem 'The Missing Link',

The river was the green and white vein of own lives

linking new terrain,

in a lust for land brother and brother

claiming the sunrise and the sun set,

in a dispute settled by the rocks

engraved in a vanished land (ibidem 11)

Again she speaks of the river,

The river of dreams

penance and pilgrimage,

linking life's designs

... ..

Will you remember

the golden chain

that linked us

in a dream? (ibidem 65)

Dai as a poet seems to be unhappy with the present life-style of her people. In contrast, she, in the following lines tries to present a picture of the ancient way of living. Although apparently these lines seem to be a romantic construct, a way to escape to the 'lost' world, a close reading suggests the poet's conscious journey in quest of her roots by

recreating the past, the traditional world. This can also be seen as a tool for identity formation:

I know, from the faces that I meet  
in these lives that have crumbled,  
that the past lives in the eyes  
that the jungle shows, sometimes....

The mountain knows  
how we pressed our hearts against its earth.  
We placed the shadows where they are,  
in the leisure of dreams  
the sky wind knows  
how we grew flowers in fields of stone (ibidem 57)

This sentiment is further reiterated in these lines:

We left the tall trees standing.  
We left the children playing.  
We left the women talking  
and men were predicting  
good harvests or bad,  
that winged summer we left,  
racing with the leopards of morning. (ibidem 22)

The eco-mystical elements add a power-full dimension to the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Mamang Dai. The analysis of their poetry shows that Tagore depicts the world of mysteries where as Mamang Dai is not fully mystical though she is aware of the heights of mysticism. She is more concerned about the present state of affairs, and have explored the past and ecological crises of the recent years.

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