

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore occupies the most coveted and aspired throne in the realm of Indian literature. A man endowed with the unique distinction of being awarded the first ever Nobel Prize among the Indians for literature, he possesses unflinching and undwindling universal acclaim and admiration, which is undoubtedly eternal. This embodiment of wisdom and perfection was born on 6th May 1861 in the family of the Tagore's of Jarasanko in the heart of Calcutta. While he was blessed with affluent fortune and aristocratic culture, he was always receptive to the captivating appeal of the world of man and Nature, diversity of interests and priorities prevailed in the lives of the ancestors of Rabindranath Tagore. His great grandfather Jayaram Thakur and grandfather Prince Dwarkanath used to dwell in a world of pomp and splendour. But his father Devendranath Tagore was acknowledged for his passion for saintly attributes. So Rabindranath naturally inherited great sense of dignity and penchant for ambition. He was the youngest of the seven sons among fourteen children. He was not allowed to move out of the house like other boys. So when he saw the servants going out to explore the outside world, a sense of envy crept into his heart. The distinct sound of the carriages dashing along the Chitpora Road appealed to him. He regarded this period of life as an unhappy one like the Slave Dynasty in Indian history. He has narrated the story of his early life in two books entitled *MyReminiscences* and *My Boyhood Days*.

Rabindranath was blessed with the privilege of serene atmosphere when his father Devendranath had a house erected at some distance from Bolpur. It was subsequently transformed into Shantiniketan (Abode of Peace). From there he went to Amritsar, where he saw the renowned Sikh temple. He learnt Sanskrit and English from his peerless father. Kalidasa's play *Meghdoot* left an indelible impression on him (Deva 38). Soon his ecstasy in poetry came to the fore.

The story regarding Tagore's education is quite amusing. He had no regular schooling, nor did he go through the usual academic grind. He rated his school life as his “Andamans” (the penal colony for the transportation of life for the convicts) (ibidem 3). The school he attended created a sense of repulsion and exasperation in his heart where pupils had to toil hard for a long time. He did not gain anything in his early school life. So at the age of seventeen, he was sent to London and there, under Professor Henry Morley, he studied for a while in the University of London (ibidem). Rabindranath Tagore had intense disgust for the schools in Calcutta, but one man whom he appreciated and admired highly was Henry Morley of London. He had preserved a very elevated position for Morley in his heart who was interestingly, one of his early teachers. Rabindranath's elder brother Hemendranath made adequate arrangements for the instruction and training of Rabindranath. He was compelled to study science, literature, music and painting even though he was not inclined to do that. Hemendranath was not in favour of teaching advanced courses in History, Geography, Mathematics and Science through the medium of English. Instead he emphasized the need to follow the medium of Bengali. It proved to be a decisive step in Rabindranath's life as he acquired his mother tongue, paid rich dividends later on as he emerged in the elite group of Bengali poets of great magnitude and literary aptitude. Perhaps he would not have scaled the peaks of poetic excellence and greatness, if he was deprived of the wisdom of his mother tongue. The awareness of self-respect, which is one of the characteristic traits of his disposition, was ingrained in him by his brother's insistence of learning Bengali. Rabindranath's forerunners in literature, Michael Madhusudan, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra had given modern Bengali poetry, prose and fiction an enviable position. So the stage was set for him to add new dimensions to Bengali literature. He did not disappoint the anticipation of people as he further enriched it to unimaginable proportions. Rabindranath went to England in 1878 and came back in 1880. He again went to England in 1881 to study law, but changed his intention and came back. No deliberate attempt was made to educate him further. In the meantime, he had showed great promise as a writer. By 1875, at a very young age, his first endeavours in prose and verse began to appear in print. He was powerfully drawn to Indian devotional poetry. His *Sandhya Sangit (Evening Songs)* was received with remarkable appreciation when it was published. He was acclaimed by Bankim Chandra as a potential great. His brother Jyotirindranath and his wife influenced him tremendously at that moment. Rabindranath was fortunate to have a sister-in-law who

was a mother like figure to him. She was not only his companion, but a discerning critic. After the death of Rabindranath's mother in 1875, she took care of him and rescued him from the incorrigible fault of budding writer's vanity and lack of self-criticism. Her death in 1884 left Rabindranath stunned as he confronted death for the first time. His brother's wife reappears in some of the best stories and poems in the poet's imagination. After the demise of Jyotirindranath and his wife, Rabindranath got the opportunity to compare verses in his style. It delineates that the inherent talent of a poet is more important than the restraining influence of a discerning critic to rise into prominence. Among other influences, Viharilal Chakravarti is worth mentioning. Although underrated, this man showed to Tagore and his sister-in-law, genuine lyrical inspiration. Another influence on him was the Vaishnava lyrical poetry, which gave to the poet resilience to follow a virgin path in the field of art and poetry. Rabindranath Tagore was undeniably influenced by the English romanticists Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Victorian masters, Tennyson and Browning. He also treasured profound admiration for Shakespeare, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne and Pope. (Iyengar 100). Tagore was not a voracious reader, but he could create lyrics of astounding quality. The 7000 lines of verse composed before he was eighteen bear the testimony to that fact. What is even more remarkable is that he maintained that eloquence and proliferation for the greater part of his life.

Tagore's life took a new direction in 1883 when he married Mrinalini, a girl of ten years of age in Calcutta. It is quite ironical that a romantic like Tagore tied the matrimonial bond in such an unromantic and desolate manner. But the queer nuptial knot soon yielded success. Mrinalini's presence created a congenial atmosphere for Tagore to explore new heights in literature. Tagore was all incorrigible romantic who did not need any romantic stimulus, what he needed was an antidote and his wife provided just that to him. So, lyrics, plays, stories, novels, and essays ceaselessly flowed from his pen. As his reputation spread to every nook and corner, he also developed diversity in interest. His courage and adaptability were constantly put under the scanner. When he was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the family estates, he did it quite successfully. But his success was not devoid of criticism, as his methods were deemed unorthodox at the time. During that period of time, he constantly had to visit the villages. He wrote numerous verses and works of prose during that

period and also shared intimate and cordial contact with the people of Bengal who inhabited the villages. He witnessed their joy and sorrow and acquainted himself with their lifestyle by trying to understand them. He derived the theme of many of his poems and short stories from what he learnt amongst them. Tagore brought innovations in the field of education in 1901. He used to pay an occasional visit to Bolpur in the district of Birbhum, where his father in 1863 purchased a vast tract of land. Subsequently, it was named Santiniketan (abode of peace). Here he established Bolpur Brahmacharya Ashram after getting the approval of his father. Ultimately it grew into Viswa Bharati (Deva 7). Tagore shared the same vices with George Bernard Shaw that schools were nothing but prison and days passed at school is penal servitude. Tagore intended to eliminate harassment from education so that the children could be introduced to a pleasant teaching atmosphere where the inherent joy and freedom of art would be in full play. Tagore was a firm believer in freedom and joy. He equally believed in the harmony and unity of all existence. At this time the tragic demise of his wife left him deconsolate with his five children. A series of touching lyrics ensued to commemorate her death and Tagore named his compositions as *Smaran (Remembrance)*. His wife's death was followed by the premature death of his second daughter, Renuka. But despite these setbacks and overwhelming grief, Tagore's invulnerability never dwindled and these unfortunate incidents failed to undermine his spirit.

Tagore's father Maharsi Devendranath Tagore expired in 1905 at the age of eighty seven. In that year Bengal was amidst great social and political turmoil due to the proposed partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. It led to the Swadeshi Movement and nationwide rage and protest tried to defy the wicked policy of the British Government. Tagore had been mute participant of the National Movement, but now he jumped into it. Tagore was in the frontline of the movement; he delivered lectures in congregations, organized processions and composed a large number of songs, which were sung all over Bengal. Soon it was perceived that difference of opinions existed between Tagore and other politicians. So Tagore alienated himself from the movement and retired to Santiniketan. He considered that 'Swaraj' was not a boon to be begged, it was a right to be obtained. He encouraged his countrymen to leave the British Government to concentrate on nation building work. During that period mystical works like *The King of the Dark Chamber*, *Gitanjali* and *The Post Office* followed from his creative mind.

All these works signify the transition in his life. His youngest child, Samindra died in 1907 and in 1911 the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Tagore's birthday with great enthusiasm.

Tagore decided to travel Europe to acquaint people with the ideals of his school at Santiniketan and to learn cooperative farming in Denmark. His friends and acquaintances exhorted him to meet men like Rothenstein who treasured great inclination and admiration for his literary work. In 1912, he had a momentary ailment leading to the postponement of his visit to Europe. In May, nevertheless he gained complete recovery and went to England. During this period, he was greeted there as a seer with a universal message. Tagore showed his translations of Bengali compositions to Rothenstein during his visit to England and Rothenstein gave them to W.B. Yeats and many others. He received great acclaim for the charm and originality of his works. The best minds of the day, Southey, the greatest painter of England, W.B. Yeats, the greatest poet of England, A.C. Bradley, the greatest critic of England, *The Times Literary Supplement*, the greatest English journal and a number of other admirers and enthusiasts of poetry expressed genuine appreciation of his poetry (Deva 9). Tagore met C.F. Andrews at the House of Rothenstein and invited him to visit Santiniketan. Subsequently he became Tagore's lifelong friend.

The publication of *Gitanjali* (1912) in English left the English readers bewildered. They were enamoured by the profundity of thought and also by the use of delectable and intoxicating language. The incredible success of *Gitanjali* led to thirteen reprints between March and December 1913. It ensured the publication of other volumes of translation also poetry, drama, fiction, non-fictional prose followed in quick succession and an assorted edition of poems and plays appeared in 1930. In the meantime, he had founded the Viswa Bharati University at Santiniketan in 1920. During his visit to America in 1913 to deliver some address, he got acquainted with Rudolf Eucken, the famous German scholar and a great admirer of Tagore's *Gitanjali*. In June 1913, he came back to England and returned to India in October. The Lectures he delivered in America were published as *Sadhana* by Macmillan, along with *Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon* and *Chitra*. In November, 1913 Tagore received the

information that he had been chosen for the award of Nobel Prize. He was no longer a poet of Bengal alone, but he was acknowledged as a laureate of India and Asia.

As the years went by he became more and more a legendary figure. His flowing beard and delicate white robes gave him a distinct look. He looked more like a monk of the Upanishadic time than a great modern poet. One of the most important incidents in Tagore's life occurred when he met M.K. Gandhi for the first time in 1915. The students and staff of Phoenix school, established by M. K. Gandhi in Transvaal came to visit Santiniketan. Tagore conferred the title 'Mahatma' on M.K. Gandhi and he himself became a Knight in 1915. Tagore visited Japan in 1916, but the wild wake of nationalism there grieved him. His condemnation of the cult of nationalism at the Imperial University, Tokyo and Keio Gijyuga University derived immense criticism from the Japanese people. So the enthusiasm of people at his arrival vanished soon.

Tagore's visit to Japan was followed by his second visit to America. In his lectures he vehemently condemned Western nationalism and British rule in India. His condemnation was received with mixed response and reaction. He returned to India in March 1917, visiting Japan on the way back. On return to India, Tagore associated himself with contemporary politics, but soon he left the arena of power game. In May 1918, he was filled with surprise and indignation when he was informed that some Indian revolutionaries wanted to kill him during his stay in America and that his anti-British lectures were sponsored by Germany. In the same month, he suffered another jolt and setback as he lost his eldest daughter. In 1919, Mahatma Gandhi launched his *Satyagraha* Movement against the approval of the Rowlatt Act. Soon unrest and disturbances took place in Punjab. The measures, taken by the British government to suppress disturbances irked Tagore. When General Dyer's order of indiscriminate firing caused a heinous massacre in Jalianawala Bagh in Amritsar, Tagore's heart was filled with shock and disgust. That despicable act of inhumanity ultimately led Tagore to renounce his knighthood. In June 1920, Tagore was greeted by men like Bernard Shaw, Gilbert Murray and Roerich, the Russian painter on his arrival in England. Then he went to France, Belgium and Holland. After receiving warm welcome in these countries, he went to America. On return to Europe, he visited Germany, Sweden and

many other countries. In Germany, his sixtieth birthday was celebrated with great enthusiasm. After his return to India, he delivered a thought-provoking lecture on the confluence of Eastern and Western cultures. On 22nd December 1921, Viswa Bharati was formally inaugurated and this prestigious institution was further honoured by the visit of first visiting Professor Sylvan Levi (Deva 13). Arrangements were made for Tagore to join the nationwide agitation against the British. But he boldly refused it creating a lot of displeasure among people.

In March, 1924, he went to China and Japan and delivered lectures there. After a brief stay of two months in India, he went to South America to attend the centenary celebrations of independence at Peru. But his trip to Beunos Aiares was cancelled due to ill-health. In January 1925, he went to Italy. He delivered lectures in Milan and also visited Venice. He was given a warm welcome and received by the king. He had interviews with Mussolini. He praised Mussolini's personality. But when he went to Switzerland from Italy, he met Romain Rolland and some other friends. From their intimation, he realized that he was victimized as a representative of Fascism in Italy. Tagore still liked Mussolini's personality, but he discarded Fascism which was responsible for many atrocities. From Switzerland he went to many places like England, Norway, Germany, the Balkans, Greece and Egypt. In April, 1927 he returned to Santiniketan, but soon departed to Malaya, Java, Bali and Siam and was away from India for four months. Tagore was acknowledged as a singer and literary artist, but he was also a painter. In May, 1932, he inaugurated an exhibition of pictures in Paris, followed by exhibitions in Copenhagen, Moscow and other places. Tagore's tour of Soviet Russia is significant where he received a warm welcome. He applauded the struggle of Russian people to eradicate ignorance and poverty. But the methods of force and lack of criticism to achieve their purpose were criticized by him.

He returned to India in February 1931. Enthusiasm and arrangements were in their peak to celebrate his seventieth birthday. They are known as Rabindra Jayanti Celebrations and were held in December 1931 and January 1932. Except Shaw, all the greatest men of letters attended this celebration. But Gandhi's arrest marred the event, as it had to be stopped abruptly. The furore caused by Ramsay Macdonald's communal

award compelled Tagore to intervene. He raised his voice in protest and went to Poona where Mahatma Gandhi was fasting in jail. Mahatma broke his fast on signing the Poona Pact. Tagore presided over the inaugural meeting of the centenary celebrations of the death of Raja Ram Mohan Ray whom he always held in reverence.

Tagore visited many places in India in the last few years of his life. He avoided foreign tours due to declining health. The universities of Dacca, Benaras and Hyderabad conferred on him the Doctorate Degrees. His deteriorating health could not perturb him as he continued with his literary creations. On 7th August 1940, the University of Oxford arranged a special convocation where Rabindranath Tagore was honoured as Doctorate of Literature. The poet fell ill in September 1940, but recovered after an anxious period. Again he had an attack of illness in June 1941 and it turned out to be a fatal one. He had to be moved to Calcutta for an operation and it was there he took his last breath on 7 August 1941. The poet had composed an apt song for the event.

In front lies ocean of peace,
 Launch the bat, Helmsman,
 You will be the comrade ever
 May the mortal bonds perish,
 May the vast universe take him in its arms,
 And may fie know in his fearless heart
 The Great Unknown, (qtd in Iyengar 8-9)

His Aesthetic World

Rabindranath Tagore stands out as the most versatile great of his time. His prolific and wide range of writing left no genre of literature unattempted. Poems, novels, plays, short stories, various kinds of prose and miscellaneous writings followed

ceaselessly from his fertile heart and mind. Although he left no genre of literature untouched, he is mostly acclaimed for his achievement as a poet.

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' in *Sonar Pari* is one of his nature poems of this period. It is not its 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 *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 lyrics on God, Man and Nature undefined by his romantic longing for a communion with the divine. The word *Gitanjali* means an offering of songs. Its central theme is the realization of the divine through self-purgation and service to humanity.

The *Gitanjali* songs are mainly poems of Bhakti in the great Indian tradition. Tagore's poems own their inspiration to the Upanishadic doctrine, which envisages the world and entire creation as having been born out of joy, residing in joy and returning

to joy at last. The whole book is endowed with rich poetry of great significance. It leaves readers in a fit of contemplation. Even the opening lines seem to create a palpable influence on people:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy
pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest
again and again, and fillest it ever with
fresh life.(Tagore,*Gitanjali* 1)

Gitanjali is a collection of hundred and three poems. It is ornamented with simplicity and sublimity. Lofty ideas and noble sentiments are mingled with striking images to provide solidity to the work. *Gitanjali* was originally composed in Bengali, but Tagore transcreated his original poems into English. So the English *Gitanjali* is not a literal and comprehensive translation of Bengali *Gitanjali*. The English poems are true translations, expressing the main ideas of the Bengali poems, which may be regarded as fresh compositions.

When *Gitanjali* was published in 1912, the whole world including the Westerners was struck with wonder. This collection of innovative poems rendered them speechless in admiration. That is why aptly in 1913 Tagore received the Nobel Prize for this laudable and peerless work. It compelled all the greatest men of letters to marvel and contemplate of his new set of ideas and sentiments. Besides *Gitanjali*, the other poetic works of Tagore also are full of powerful romantic and spiritual expressions, and enthusiasm. Though the glory and mystery of nature are abundantly exposed in his lines, he brings new experiences to the readers with his words deftly crafted endowed with divinity.

The Crescent Moon is a book for children and those adults who call still leap in joy and wonderlike an innocent child. Like Wordsworth and Walter de la Mare, Tagore too found in children a mystic quality. He found in them beauty, innocence, humour, charity and a kind of ancient wisdom and he celebrated these qualities in song.

The Gardener stands next only to *Gitanjali*. It is one of the most wonderful collections ever produced in English. Almost all the poems deal with sheer love, which is worldly as well as divine, though it is hard to distinguish in Tagore's poetry. All the emotions of love like agony, despair, delight, and fulfilment are woven together into a garland of memorable songs. Quite a few of the poems and songs in *The Gardener* are seen to be as good as the best in *Gitanjali*. Yet the collection as a whole is devoid of intensity and organic unity which is reminiscent of the great work.

Fruit Gathering (1916), *Lover's Gift*, *Crossing*, and *the Fugitive and other poems* (1921) also include some of Tagore's best lyrics. Some of the poems in *Crossing* seem to have been derived from *Gitanjali* volume. Tagore's greatest single poem *Urvashi* made an appearance in a curtailed version in the *Fugitive* volume. There is a reference to *Urvashi* in one of the poems of *Lover's Gift* as the dancer at the court of paradise. To Tagore, *Urvashi* is a beautiful woman who is goddess and seductress.

The Child (1931) is unique among Tagore's poems because it was first written in English and later translated into Bengali as *Sishutirtha*. When Mahatma Gandhi started his Dandi March and firmly stated that he would not come back to Sabarmati again, Christ's 'passion' coalesced in the poet's imagination. Tagore composed *The Child* in the course of a single night. The poem is in ten sections and it expresses the view that man in himself holds the key to his own redemption. This is really an audacious and innovative poem, which needs an elevated position. During the last decade of his life, Tagore still tried to experiment and explore new concepts and new forms of verse. He published the books of prose poems, *Punascha*, *Sesh-Saptak*, *Shyamali and Patraput*. In these autobiographical writings, realistic comments get intermingled. Towards the end of his life, Tagore again became a singer, though a sad music of humanity loomed large

on the poems. He composed *Prantik* (*Borderline*, 1938), *Rogsajya* (*On the Sick-Bed*, 1940), *Arogya* (*Recovery*, 1941) and the posthumous *Sesh Lekha* (*Last Poems* 1942). These poems of last stage in Tagore's life are underrated because of their declining poetic appeal. They are prone to bitter criticism from various critics. Here, Tagore's fecundity and creativity seem to have lost even their last elements.

Rabindranath Tagore is recognized worldwide as the author of his immortal creation, *Gitanjali*. He remains one of the greatest ever poets to explore the genre of poetry. But the immense bulk of prose writing he has left behind also epitomizes his excellence and achievement as a successful writer of prose. There are the novels, the short stories and plays which are in a different category altogether.

His creative craft

Rabindranath Tagore's image bears a close resemblance to a luminary in the literary firmament. He stands out conspicuously as a spontaneous poet, an accomplished playwright, a delightful novelist and a precise writer of short stories. But all these attributes of his literature are endowed with the supremacy of his art. Tagore's various forms of art are perceived in his depiction of love imagery. With immaculate concept of beauty he had close affinity with Nature. One of the major forms of art in Tagore's poetry is the depiction of love. The theme of love exists everywhere; it is ornamented with authenticity because of the poet's personal experiences. Love provides him joy and fills his entire being with admiration for beauty. In his poems, Tagore is found to have been associated with various forms of love. The love of a mother for her child, the love of a husband for his wife, love of a lover for his beloved and love of a devotee for his God- all find expression in Tagore's works. Tagore's early volumes of verse *Kadi O Kamal* and *Manasi* contain his bold proclamation of personal love on a real physical plane which even thrilled his critics. His *Gitanjali* celebrates the victory of divine love over worldly love and attraction. Due to Tagore's concern for Victorian ethical bias, the profound influence of his father, the restrictions imposed by his brother,

he was always in ascetic recoil. The theme of love and womanhood invariably got transformed into a desire of communion with the divine.

In *Gitanjali*, Tagore gives full vent to his artistic and lyrical genius in portraying the undwindingleve for God through amorous imagery. Tagore is a firm believer that even the forms of Love are the instances of the most glorious love, that is, love for God. Tagore's magnum opus, *Gitanjali* comprises a series of abundant imagery which reveals his divine love. In the very first poem of his peerless creation, we have the image of a flute. The poet compares himself to a little flute and he sings in the company of the Almighty who is the great musician. The poet is like a living flute which feels ecstatic at the touch of its lord:

The little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and
dales, and breathed through it melodies eternally new.
(Ibid.)

Tagore's obsession for divine love runs up to the last poem of *Gitanjali*. In this poem he even surrenders everything in pursuit of divine love. Like *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *FruitGathering*, *Lover's Gift* also contain instances of Tagore's passion for love. The *Gardener* is an epitome of outstanding sentiments of love. Commenting on it K. R.S Iyengar says, "It is in the main a feast of love poetry —with a human rather than of divine slant, though with a poet like Tagore the borderline between the two is apt to be tantalizingly indistinct".(IWE 116)

Tagore's poetry is not only a depiction of sacred love, but also is also presented as a warm human passion which thrives in physical attraction. It is not a feeble sensation, but a mighty emotion which determines the outcome of various human relations. Like his treatment of love, the concept of beauty and affinity with nature are also the keynotes of Tagore's art. All sorts of beauties and charms of earth and the sky,

moon, and the stars, the sun and the sunrise, trees and hills, birds and flowers attracted his poetic Imagination. (Abidi 109)

Tagore's concept of beauty is largely attached to his affinity with nature. Apart from physical and divine beauty, his works are blessed with natural beauty. In his passionate and profound love of nature, Tagore can be put alongside the great Romantic poet, William Wordsworth. His collection, *The Gardener* contains some notable nature poems. In these poems, he depicts beautiful images of flowers, honey bees, the chirping of the birds, filling of the pitcher at the fountain, the green and yellow rice fields and various other elements of nature.

To sum up Tagore was an artist par excellence. Without his excellent skills he would not have been the great literary genius as he is acknowledged today. He enriched the modern Indian life in several ways by instilling modern outlook in the Indian minds. As such Mahatma Gandhi rightly hailed him as "the Great Sentinel" (Naik 58). Rabindranath is basically a mystic, patriotic, romantic and spiritual poet. The poets of Northeast India are basically romantic and some of them are mystics and spiritual. Northeast is a region of natural bounty and most of the poets are nature poets and during the postcolonial times they are emotional about their region and are all busy in showcasing their region and its glory to the rest of the World. As Rabindranath during the colonial era showcased the greatness of India to the World and his *Gitanjali* genuinely exposed the greatness of India to the Western World. Romantic and mystical strains of Rabindranath and the poets of Northeast India though diverse, yet are amply similar to be compared.

Northeast India and Poets of Northeast India Writing in English

Comprising of eight provinces namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, with huge cultural, linguistic,

ethnic, or religious diversities among them, the North East part of India, known as 'the Northeast' has a geographical area of 2.55 lakh square kilometers. This region which is 7.8 per cent of the country's total area is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor and it shares two per cent only of its boundary with India, and the remaining ninety eight per cent is shared with the international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Nepal. The region is as an anthropological museum is a melting pot where the brown and the yellow races meet, where the tradition and culture of different tribes and ethnic groups mingle, and where there is a rich storehouse of different languages and dialects of these multi-ethnic people. The tribes here are still following the traditional animistic faith even though religions like Hinduism (particularly in the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim), Christianity (in the hills of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland in large scale and other provinces in small scale), Buddhism (mostly in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) and Islam (particularly in the state of Assam and other parts of the region) have made a dominant presence in the region.

Quite rich in biodiversity as an immensely rich archive of some rare species of flora and fauna, the Northeast India is a biodiversity hotspot mingling two major biodiversity hotspot of the world. The region contains more than one-third of the country's total biodiversity.

This region as a rich faunal diversity with estimated 3624 species of insects, 50 molluscs, 236 fishes, 64 amphibians, 137 reptiles, 541 birds and 160 mammalian species is a major one of the 34 biodiversity hotspots of the world with about 8000 varieties of flowering plants, 700 varieties of orchids, 58 bamboos, 64 citrus, 28 conifers, 500 mosses, 700 ferns and 728 lichen species (Barik et al, 200). The other biodiversity significance of the region are that (i) more than 60% of their geographical area under forest cover (ii) broadly classified into six major forest types namely, tropical wet evergreen forests, subtropical forests, temperate forests, tropical moist deciduous forests, tropical semi evergreen forests, and alpine forests there are fifty one types of forests, (iii) six types of important vegetations out of all India nine types are available in this region, (iv) Of the 1500 endangered floral species, 800 are reported

from NE India (Hegde 2), (v) a part of the great tropical rainforest that spreads out from the foothills of the Himalayas to the tip of the Malayasian Peninsula and the mouth of the Mekong River. (vi)The region with its mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, people, myths, legends, rites and rituals is blessed with a unique ecology.(Das 2) Whereas four hundred fifty tribes live in the whole of the country in North East only two hundred twenty five reside. (Myers 853). All these tribes have rich oral and cultural traditions. The oral history of these tribes “tells of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors” (Hazarika xviii). Besides having rich oral literatures, some states like Assam and Manipur in particular, have literary histories that date back to past centuries to several ruling dynasties. Writing in English from Northeast as a new literature and discourse of self-expression took shape casually in the eighties and the nineties of the twentieth century. The writers writing in English from this region at present are the first generation of writers. They already have attained a legitimate as well as a powerful voice by articulating their senses and sentiments and by focusing on some of the core issues of the region. The ethos and milieu of their respective communities are some of the dominant preoccupations of these multi-ethnic writers. Tilottama Misra in her *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays* says about the nature of Writing in English from India’s Northeast that an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with other cultures is a recurrent feature of the seven North-Eastern states. Each small community or linguistic group has responded through its oral or written communication to the encounters with the majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside the borders of the country, in its own distinctive manner. (Misra 3). Since the eight states of the region hugely vary from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion, it might seem to be an injustice to homogenize literatures from this region. But in spite of this diversity, it is possible to locate some common grounds, some shared values and concerns of these writers. Identity crisis and a sense of alienation are some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. Racial autonomy, cultural and linguistic conflicts and the problem of insurgency have been ravaging the region. These are some of the recurrent themes in these writers that bind them in one single thread. Besides issues like identity crisis, search for roots, self-assertion, or claims for a political space, it is the ecology of the region, and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic

writers in a common platform. The works of the writers in English from India's Northeast have many different aspects of the entire ecosystem of the region. The writers celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness. Although ethnicity is their chief concern as they hail from various ethnic groups, mountains, hills, valleys, people, myths legends, tribal rites, mystic as well aesthetic sensibilities, communal violence, insurgency are also some of the dominant and recurring themes in their works. They seem to use ecology, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity - an identity which is unique, legitimate and a powerful one. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping an aesthetic sensibility of these writers.

Mamang Dai, Yumlam Tana (Arunachal Pradesh), Bhupati Das, Lakshahira Das, Dayananda Pathak, Umakanta Sarma, Rupanjali Baruah, Pradip Kumar Patra (Assam), Robin S Ngangom, R. K. Madhubir, R. K. Bhubonsana, Kunjarani Longjam Chanu, Yumlembam Ibomcha, Thangjam Ibopishak, Raghu Leishangthem, Memchoubi, Saratchand Thiyam, Ilabanta Yumnam (Manipur), Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Tarun Bhartiya, Pijush Dhar, Ananya S Guha, Anjum Hasan, Paul Lyngdoh, Donboklang Ryntathiang, Almond D Syiem, Esther Siyem, Bevan L Swer, Indari Siyem Warjri ((Meghalaya), Mona Zote, H. Ramdinthari (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Iralu, Nini Lungalang (Nagaland), Rajendra Bhandari (Sikkim), Bhaskar Roy Barman, Niranjana Chakma, Kalyanbrata Chakraborti, Kritibas Chakraborty, Sefali Debbarma, Chandra Kanta Murasingh, Pijush Routh and Gambhini Sorokkhaibam (Tripura) are some of the representative poets who have been contributing to the multi-ethnic Indian Poetry in English from Northeast.

Writing in English from Northeast has attained a remarkable stature and in spite of all critical works done in this field, there is scarcity of necessary criticism. Historians like K. R. S. Iyengar and M. K. Naik have not focused much on this region. Though K. R. S. Iyengar mentions only Praphulladutta Goswami's *Bihu Songs of Assam* (Iyengar *IWE* 642), M. K. Naik in his *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) has not mentioned of any work by a writer from Northeast India. Another book by him (with

Shyamala A. Narayan) entitled *Indian English Literature: 1980-2000* (2001) mentions only two writers from India's Northeast. The present work is planned to critically examine writing in English from this region and to make an attempt to determine the position of the writers in the sphere of Indian writing in English and their attempt in search for identity along with the great poet Rabindranath Tagore's exploration of Indian ethos and bounty of nature proving his great talent and love for nature and the mystical overtones in his works. Rabindranath Tagore and the poets of Northeast are basically nature poets and awareness of environmental degeneration is visible in their works. Hence their works are discussed through the lens of ecological perspectives and the said poets are found to search for their identity through their exploration of nature sympathizing nature through the ecological perspectives as the selected poets have exposed strong sentiments against the exploitation of nature.

It is felt that abundant ecological resources have been pivotal in shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of these writers. So it is hoped that studying their writing from an ecological perspective may even help in understanding this colourful, mesmerizing land called the Northeast India— a land, which is a great geographical as well as a cultural entity with abundant ecological resources.

The work has examined the aspects of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism, ecofeminism and the like in the works of select writers are the most representative ones among those writers who write in English, or whose works have been translated into English. A close reading reveals that varied aspects of ecopolitics are available in the works of these writers. This is mainly a text-based reading by application of the various principles of ecopolitics, ecomysticism and ecofeminism.

ASPECTS OF ECOPOLITICS: Ecology and Ecocriticism

Ecology

The word 'Ecology' derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos* meaning 'household' and 'knowledge' respectively is a very significant domain of critical idiom and theory in current usage. The term coined by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, is defined as the science of the relationship of the organisms to the environment. Ecology in literary criticism is the critical study of the relationship and interdependence between each and every life form of the environment and related concepts and sympathy on the environment invading man's oppression of the nature and the ways to thwart the the oppression.

There are a number of philosophical concepts based on ecological principles. Ecological thinking has been there for millenniums, but ecology as a critical and cultural principle has developed gradually. The theory of Ecology and ecological movements are very often used in connection with the 'green' movement. These theories or 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 ecocriticism (Kerridge 536). A look into some of the ecological philosophies brings to light this ecology-culture relationship.

Deep Ecology

Realizing the intrinsic value of nature is basic principle of Deep Ecology. The basic tenet of Deep Ecology advocates the same right for the living environment as enjoyed by humanity to live, grow, flourish and develop. The global ecological crises

have led to the concept of emergence of the sense of Deep Ecology which calls for a profound transformation in the traditional ecological paradigm entailing new metaphysical, epistemological, religious, psychological, sociopolitical and ethical principles. The theory and concept call for a new ontology (science of being/becoming), a new epistemology (way of knowing), a new psychology (idea of self), and a new metaphysics (assumptions about the world) (Merchant 92). Deep Ecology opposes the anthropocentric idea of development at the cost of environmental degradation. Such developments have already posed a great threat to the ecology of our planet. To present a critique of the anthropocentric concept of development, which is primarily a European concept; Deep Ecologists refer to the spiritual and philosophical values imbibed in the Native American, Buddhist, Jain or Hindu traditions. As a part of the intricate web of the entire ecosystem, the development of humanity is possible only through a peaceful co-existence with each and every organism (Naess 187). Deep Ecology opposes the attitude of human beings of treating the earth as a resource to be exploited for their welfare and so called development. As human beings are just a part of the ecological web like any other creature, and not masters, they cannot claim superiority to any other object in the ecosystem. Arne Naess has set the principles for Deep Ecology philosophizing man's relationship with nature.

The four tenets of Deep Ecology as proposed by Ramachandra Guha are (i) Deep Ecology argues that the environmental movement must shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric perspective (ii) it focuses on the preservation of wilderness, (iii) it has a universal significance as it was practiced also in the ancient non-Western spiritual traditions, and (iv) it sees itself as the spiritual, philosophical and political vanguard of world environmentalism. (Guha 282)

Shallow Ecology

To preserve and protect nature against further depletion fearing the worst consequence and start working towards reviving the past status and restoring the loss is named as Shallow Ecology. The Shallow Ecology movement tends to talk only about resources for humans, whereas Deep Ecology talks about resources for each species. Shallow Ecology fights against pollution and resource depletion. Its central concern is the health and affluence of the people in the developed countries. Practitioners of Shallow Ecology look at the narrower problems of population growth, environmental pollution, and resource depletion from the viewpoint of science and human affairs. Such views may seem to be limited as the basis of such views is anthropocentric assumptions that seem to fail to infuse nature with an intrinsic value of its own.

It advocates preservation of environment for the benefit of people, especially the people of the developed countries. Unlike Deep Ecology it places human beings at the centre of any ecological discourse and hence it puts utmost importance on their wellbeing. Shallow Ecology believes that saving the world is necessary only because of the reason that it sustains human life. Any object in the ecosystem is to be preserved only if it is of obvious value to humans. For example, preservation of wilderness is necessary as it is a resource for the human world, or the rainforests are to be preserved as they provide much needed oxygen to human beings. Considering these notions it seems that Shallow Ecology is self-centered in comparison to Deep Ecology and can be labelled as anthropocentric.

Social Ecology

Social Ecology is the science that deals with the social and natural relationship in an ecosystem. It focuses on the relations of production and the hegemony of the state in reproducing those relations. It has primarily an anthropocentric ethic which is

modified by ecological and dialectical science. It envisages a world in which the fundamental human needs are fulfilled through an environmentally sustainable economic restructuring. It advocates a science with social values. It seeks a total transformation on the economic basis. It supports an ecologically-based development policy that uses resources in a sustainable way.

Developed by Murray Bookchin in the 1960s this philosophy holds the view that the present ecological crisis originates from the hierarchical political and social systems which are essentially dominating in nature. Social Ecology argues that it should be kept in mind that the present ecological crisis is not only due to natural calamities, and catastrophes created by human beings, but also has other important aspects like political, economic, social, cultural, ethnic or gender conflicts. In the framework of Social Ecology “the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (Bookchin 65). This pace of this domination, which is the product of the society, accelerates under capitalism.

Radical Ecology

Radical Ecology empowers people to make changes for a new ecological ethic. It can be termed as the cutting edge of social ecology. It emerges from human beings’ profound sense of crisis in the urbanized world. It puts domination of nature and domination of human beings in the name of race, sex, class, etc. in an equal level. This movement pushes social and ecological systems toward new patterns of production, reproduction and consciousness that will improve the quality of human life and the natural environment. (Merchant, *Radical Ecology 2*)

Spiritual Ecology

Propounded by a priest and professor of Religious Education, Matthew T. Fox, Spiritual Ecology has four paths 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 228).

Rational Ecology

Rational Ecology is the theoretical framework of ecological rationality that emphasizes on the role of human beings' rationality in preserving the environment and maintaining ecological sustainability. Ecological rationality ascertains "the capability of ecosystems consistently and effectively to provide the good of human life support." (Dryzek 36)

According to the principles of Rational Ecology, human beings are to find out a mechanism to preserve the ecosystem, and it is their rationality that would determine the nature and scope of this mechanism. There have been a number of social choices as adopted by human civilization for its survival. But Rational Ecologists are of the opinion that these social choices have their limitations in attaining ecological rationality.

Eco-criticism

Eco-criticism is a major critical praxis of the current in the domain of literary criticism. Prominent US eco-critic William Rueckert used the term ‘eco-criticism’ for the first time by in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. The theory is otherwise being called as ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, or green cultural studies. These titles for ecocriticism are assigned because of the various objectives of critical studies on the debilitating environment of the modern and post-industrial times. Ecocriticism as a portmanteau term is a blend of ecological and criticism and is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). It is based on the connection between human culture and the entire ecosphere.

Taking an earth-centered approach to literary studies ecocriticism is based on the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world having a strong and meaningful interaction between them. The premise of ecocriticism is motivated with an awareness that the actions of human civilization has brought the environment of the planet to a point of no return, where there is a constant threat of an ecocide.

Feminist criticism has been a major influence in the growth and development of ecocriticism. Feminist theorist Elaine Showalter shows three stages in the development of feminist criticism (Showalter 10-12). Cheryll Glotfelty proposes three stages in ecocriticism: The first stage in feminist criticism, as shown by Showalter, is the “image of women” stage. It is concerned with the representation of women in canonical literature. Similarly, the first stage of ecocriticism studies the representation of nature. The second stage of feminist criticism deals with the function of consciousness where literature is rediscovered, reissued, reconsidered and restudied. Likewise, the second stage of ecocriticism is a kind of a re-evaluation, where a given literary text is restudied in order to find out the place of nature as well as the nature of place in it. The third

stage of feminist criticism, as identified by Showalter, is the theoretical phase; and in ecocriticism also the third stage tries to theorize different power-relations in terms race, ethnicity, gender etc. (Glotfelty xvii). Recent developments in the field of ecocriticism show that it is not at all an ‘interdisciplinary study’, or it is not merely a study on ‘nature writing’, but it is an essential component of literary studies.

Eco-mysticism

The words of the poets are bold and as passionate beings the poets explore realities of great mystical heights. Sympathizing nature through the ages the poets have mystified the role of nature. Hence the term ‘eco-mysticism’ is very significant. Eco-mysticism may be defined as ecological mysticism or living ecologically like a mystic’s way of life. Mysticism as a belief is the union with and absorption into the Almighty/ Deity / the Absolute. It is a spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect which can be attained through contemplation and self-surrender. It is also a vague or ill-defined religion or spiritual belief, especially associated with a belief in the occult. 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” (Paranjape 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 can be considered as 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* which have been discussed earlier in spiritual ecology.

The concept of Eco-mysticism has been there since ancient times. Mystifying nature and man’s relationship with nature is divine. Since time immemorial human

civilization has been in deep attachment with nature. It has been worshipping and nurturing nature and has been living with inter-dependence. But due to the increase of human population, industrialization and rapid urbanization there seems to arise some loop-holes in this age-old bond. In order to meet the challenges posed by these modern phenomena human beings started to exploit and dominate nature. Spiritual Ecology opposes this very concept of dominance.

Creation Spirituality is a way of living with nature with partnership and reverence to nature instead of exploitation and dominance. It is a concept that unifies body and spirit, arts and science; that inspires people, irrespective of class, caste, creed, community, religion, race and sex, to see themselves in terms of the entire cosmology; that emphasizes on eco-centrism instead of anthropocentrism. (Fox 229)

Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism is one of the significant ecological and feminist movements emerged in the 1970s. An increasing consciousness of the relationship between women and nature primarily resulted in the advent of this movement. It draws a parallel between the domination of women and the domination of nature by the patriarchal society. Arising out of the struggle of women to sustain themselves, their families and their communities this movement advocates for environmental protection as well as protection of women, preservation of indigenous cultures, traditional values, sustainable development and other such issues that can bring a social change. It views that racism, classism, and sexism are interconnected and liberation of women cannot be fully achieved without the liberation of nature and vice versa. It begins with the assumption that cultural texts construct particular notions of 'nature', and, therefore, literary, visual and other representations of nature are reflections of an age's views and treatment of nature. It links between literary studies and environmental discourse and observes the effects of such discourses on culture.

Ecofeminism challenges these dualities and seeks to acknowledge value and honour women's biological particularity and affirms women as subjects and makers of history. This understanding is crucial in the transformation of feminism. Ecofeminism believes that there is a deep-rooted connection between women and nature.

Eco-politics

Eco-politics includes various aspects of ecology, biodiversity, eco-mysticism, ecofeminism and eco-sophy. Checking destruction and degeneration of ecology, mystifying its existence and providing its role in upholding the peace and prosperity of humanity are the subjects covered in Eco-politics. Human beings are an integral part of the world. The planet we live in is full of wonder, mystery and exquisite beauty. It is the responsibility of human beings to maintain the unique ecology of our planet. But owing to various destructive practices by human beings in the name of development and technological advancement, the ecology of the earth is presently under a tremendous threat. The present ecological crisis is leading to political, economic, and social crisis for human civilization. Known as also Green Politics, it is playing a vital role in the global ecological scenario through various Green Movements.

Illegal Immigration, Population Explosion and Economic Imbalance

Since time immemorial North East India has been rich in everything. As a biodiversity hotspot has nature's bounty. It is rich in minerals, water resources, agricultural produces and several other aspects. As the statistics given before shows, its climate is healthy, populace mild and loving by nature and they have been in plenty from time immemorial being protected by nature. Of late after the political turmoil of the main land India, North East region has also badly affected after 1947 and again after the creation of Bangladesh. Illegal migration of refugees from Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries have posed threat to the identity of various provinces of the

region. The population explosion in this region has mainly been due to illegal migration and this has caused economic imbalance also. These threats to the identity of the ethnic diversity of the region has aroused awe and anguish in the general public and the same has been diversely reflected in the writings of the poets of the region.

Regionalism and Secessionism

Identity crisis being an anguish of the mass the region has profusely been faced with narrow mindsets of regionalism and separatism. This is desperate move of the public that being separated from the larger province they will have their better identity and cultural and economic well-being. Hence demands for separate homelands, autonomous councils and ideas of self-determination have come up profusely disturbing the political stability of the region and the same has been reflected in the poetry of the poets of the various provinces.

Insurgency

Insurgency has been a chronic malady of the region. There are so many insurgent outfits with so many demands and much loss to life and property of so many has been caused. Though identity is one of the causes, there are innumerable desperate issues and region is very badly obsessed to address the issues which have remained unsolved so far.

The aforementioned discussion on ecological, eco-mystic and ecofeminist principles will be used as the basic tools for analyzing the works of Rabindranath Tagore and the chosen authors from various provinces of Northeast India. Rabindranath Tagore is a foremost Indian mystic and romantic and he spent several years of his life in Tripura and most of the poets of Northeast India have also drawn inspiration from his

works. In his mystic and romantic quest of the worldly realities he has contributed profusely to the making of Indian ecological literatures. The Northeasterners are eco-conscious by nature from time immemorial. The travelers from abroad in various ages have appreciated the ecology of the region. Huen Tsang's account of Kamrup is a strong proof of it and even the Western missionaries and travelers have made profuse appreciation of the ecological glory and mysteriousness of Northeast India.

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