

## CHAPTER – III

### Matrix of Ecology, Ecofeminism and Mysticism in Poems of Rabindranath Tagore

Spiritually blessed, myriad talented personality poet and prophet, Rabindranath Tagore is a tremendous personality endowed with the unique distinction of being awarded the first ever Nobel Prize among the Indians for literature. For his great aesthetic talent, he also possesses unflinching and undwindling universal acclaim and admiration, which is undoubtedly eternal. As he was blessed with affluent fortune and aristocratic culture, he was also always receptive to the captivating appeal of the world of God, Man and Nature, diversity of interests and priorities prevailed in the lives of his ancestors. Hence Rabindranath naturally inherited the great sense of dignity and penchant for ambition for the search for great aesthetic heights which considered his identity.

In his adulthood he was endowed with grand spiritual values which he acquired from the rich tradition of his family background. Rabindranath was blessed with the privilege of serene atmosphere of Shantiniketan (Abode of Peace). Afterwards his ecstasy for poetry was prominently exposed through his great number of works of poetry and prose which were published in India and abroad.

With all his spiritual and cultural training and exposure, he was powerfully drawn to Indian devotional poetry. His *Sandhya Sangit* (Evening Songs) was received with remarkable appreciation when it was published. The poems of this collection are highly mystical having divine inspiration. As nature poems these poems expose the ecofeminist notes. Though these poems hail nature, without having much about man's recurrent attempt at corrupting and polluting nature, yet these poems expose the deep ecological values in revealing the poet's realization of understanding the greatness of

nature. 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 in enthusing him.

Among other many influences on Tagore, Viharilal Chakravarti is worth mentioning. Although underrated, this man showed to Tagore and his sister-in-law, genuine lyrical inspiration. The other great 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 1992: 100). Tagore was not a voracious reader, but he could create lyrics of astounding quality. In spite of many writings, the seven thousand lines of verse he composed before he was eighteen bear the testimony to that fact. The more remarkable factor in his career is that he maintained that eloquence and proliferation for the greater part of his life.

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. His wife 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.

He was a firm believer in freedom and joy. He equally believed in the harmony and unity of all existence. At the 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. *Smaran* being the sorrowful songs was not devoid of nature elements. There were great evidences of mystical strains, his love for the serene environment and the feminine virtues of nature. Hence in all his writings the virtues of nature are superbly exposed.

During the Swadeshi movement, Tagore had not been mute participant of the National Movement, then he jumped into it. He 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. These writings had wide ecological implications from various eco-critical perspectives. He considered that 'Swaraj' was not a boon to be begged, it was a right to be obtained. During this 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.

In May 1912, 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, Southerstein, 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 1992:9).

His magnum opus *Gitanjali* is the greatest eco-poem. 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.

The Lectures he delivered in America were published as *Sadhana* by Macmillan, along with *Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon* and *Chitra*. All these works bear testimony of greatest ecological and ecomystical values. 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. The Upanishadic messages ingrained in his works bear great ecological significance of upholding the greatness of divine nature.

His love for painting and developmental works were also ecologically significant. 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. The struggle for elimination of poverty is also important and is a significant aspect of ecological movements. Before he took his last breath on 7 August 1941, the poet had composed an apt song for the event which is prophetic:

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 he know in his fearless heart  
 The Great Unknown, (qtd in Iyengar 1987:8-9)

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 songs in *Gitanjali* are mainly poems of Bhakti of the great Indian tradition deliberating on the Indian mystic and ecomystic traditions. 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 1991:1)

*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 and 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.

Some important poems of Tagore like *The Gardener* and *the Crescent Moon* include his intimate moments of life narrating personal sorrows philosophizing the general human sorrows eternally suffered by many. Thus in due course the suppressed grief of Tagore became intenser than expressed grief.

*The Crescent Moon* being a significant children's book presents a strong mysticism in children like Wordsworth and Walter de la Mare. Tagore found in children the beauty, innocence, humour, charity and a kind of ancient wisdom which he celebrated in his songs.

*The Gardener* as very significant work next only to *Gitanjali*. 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.

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*, *Shyamaliand Patraput*. In these poems also his love of nature and various aspects of nature and greatness of nature are depicted. 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 loss even their last elements.

Rabindranath Tagore 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.

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 eventhrilled 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 undwindling love 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 diving 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 upto 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. 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".(1992:116)

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 1987:109)

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.

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 1987:58). *Gitanjali* is magnum opus is a canonical eco-poem. This song offering to the Almighty is ecofeminist, ecomystic and full of multiple ecological concepts. The one hundred three songs exposing myriad moods of the poet are truly revelation of Man’s relationship with nature in various seasons, states of life and the like. The poet says, “I am here to sing thee songs” (9). The poems reveal layers of meanings endlessly glorifying the Nature and her creator, the Almighty Lord.

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