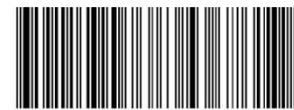




RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN: 2349-9753

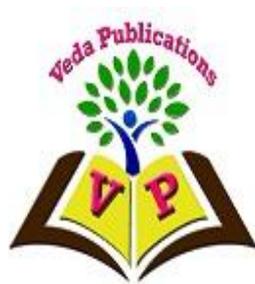
EMANCIPATION OF AESTHETIC VISION IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S NATURE LYRICS

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ioell.64.19.9>

ABSTRACT



The birth of Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate poet on 7th May, 1861 was a new renaissance for India. He was a poet of so high excellence that the world scarcely came across one such, in a millennium. The quality, the quantity, the infinite diversity of his works have made him one of the world's substantial literary artists, perhaps the greatest since Shakespeare. Nature runs as a consistent motif in all Tagore's literary works, particularly in his lyrics. He was an adorer of nature and its beauty; having the closest tie with both these elements, he nearly lived and breathed in them. His lyrics are sweet and distinctive, dazzling and enduring in beauty. He took life as a whole, and in a most spontaneous and inevitable manner experienced it as a whole. The poet believes that nature and human being are integral part of the universe and the purpose of this world is not solely living in it and making use of it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union. The objective of the present study is to bring to light Tagore's inseparable intimacy with nature and to stimulate the readers to fall in love with nature and give our Mother Earth a reason to smile.

Keywords: *Harmony in nature, Empathy with nature, Communion with nature, Fusion of God and nature, Identification with nature.*



INTRODUCTION

Never has a poet drawn more profusely varied pictures of nature's loveliness, of her beauty and her mystery, to arouse his thought, mood or emotion. Tagore's uniqueness and originality lies in his ability to depict in verse the familiar yet elusive charms of the country with a more sensitive imagination: the breath of the wind as it rustles through the parted foliage; the rippling sounds of water in the pitcher tossed by the rhythmic sway of a girl's waist; the soft fragrance of the nameless flowers; the drone of the honey-laden bees; the light trembling on the water in the blazing sun, the deep dark waters of the lake darkened evermore by shady trees around and catching the last rays of the setting sun. They bear testimony not merely to the variety of Tagore's pictorial art but, more significantly, to the profound sensitiveness of an imagination. Tagore, in short, is a great nature-poet, in more ways than one. His love of nature is all inclusive, many-sided and realistic.

Rabindranath Tagore has always been a great lover of nature. His love of nature is second only to his love for humanity. Every poet of nature has felt some kind of harmony with her but none has felt as deeply as he, the inseparableness with nature. No poet has been able to efface his separate identity and blend so completely into the vaster life of nature as Tagore. This feeling of self-effacement and of absolute identity with nature is the distinctive characteristic of Tagore. He is indeed a pure lyricist, and one can feel God's presence in his lyrics. We are yet to know of any other poet who has to his credit such poignantly dazzling lyric poems, and in such profusion. We think of Shakespeare's songs and sonnets, of the fragments of Sappho, of Villon and Pushkin, Shelley and Heine. Excellence is established in all, profusion in some, but this reckless abundance, this scattering of all the world's resources on the wayside for any casual traveler to come along and pick up - this is unique to Tagore.

ONENESS WITH NATURE

Tagore is a great nature-poet, in more ways than one. His intimacy with nature is all inclusive, many sided and practical. He describes nature with great precision, painstaking attention and details. He

regards nature as the primeval storehouse of all life, and hence is constantly identifying himself with nature, and ceaselessly using nature to exemplify the human and the abstract. Throughout his life Tagore revealed a passionate love for nature. It enchanted him more than it delighted Wordsworth or Robert Frost. It will not be wrong to say that nature exercised the most powerful influence in making him a poet. The environment in which Rabindranath grew up as a child helped him to absorb the best of both the East and the West. Nature played the foster-mother to the motherless child and the eager child assimilated the beauty and splendor of nature. What had thus become part of him cried irresistibly for expression - "what a profusion of song and story, of being and bliss of longing and aspiration is in me!" (Ghose, 1987)

The young poet took the supervision of the far-flung landed property of the family in East Bengal in 1894, and came to live in a boat on the river Padma. The dreaming boy, who once peeped hungrily at nature from within barred casements, discovered the flush of a glorious sunrise, the fountains of beauty and joy in the universe after a decade. 'This great awakening' as the poet calls it, was the first significant event in the poet's spiritual life. Nature suddenly threw away her veil and led the enchanted youth to her innermost sanctuary. He first discovered the ravishing beauty and the enthralling majesty of nature with a great sense of excitement. The entranced soul stood all alone in wonderment before the naked loveliness of nature's charm and in the process there stepped out in all her splendor a being of empyreal beauty whom the poet loved as no man loved a woman. It was his sojourn on the river Padma that made Tagore a great lover of nature.

After Kalidasa hardly any Indian poet has portrayed the beauty of nature in such concrete detail as Rabindranath Tagore did. Tagore's works abound with pictures of the infinite play of light and shade under the Indian sky - those of the ceaseless cycle of seasons. The unchangeable mountains and vast plains of India has passed into his poems. Tagore's intense love for nature made his work alluring to humanity. He was primarily a Universalist first and a nationalist after. He found oneness among every



living creature or plant. His empathy with nature was the keynote of all his literary works. The poet himself said emphatically, "The language of harmony in nature is the mother tongue of our own soul". (Bhattacharya, 1987) This indicates not only his hard disciplined literary works, but also a reflection of his deep meditation in quest for truth. Rabindranath is not as a mere poet, but a prophet guiding the destiny of humanity through natural bond of love.

Tagore is nearest to Wordsworth as a poet of nature and both of them believed that there was a natural sympathy between man and nature. Nature and man, both being manifestations of God, are capable of finding themselves in a union of joy. Shelley held a similar philosophy but, his emphasis is not on beauty in nature but on love as the law of the universe. Coleridge took nature to be a sort of picture which has no life unless we breathe life into it. Tagore's love for nature made his work appealing to humanity. There is a profusion of a dancing ring of seasons, the evasive play of lights and shadows, of wind and water, the many-colored wings of unpredictable life. Splendid pictures of nature such as, the sea, the rivers and streams, the meadow, the trees and flowers, the flute, the sky, the sun and the moon, the sunset, the clouds, birds and wings, mountain, life and summits, the morning and the night, the dark and the light, the village women and men, the farmer etc. are scattered all about his poetry.

It is the moonlight of March; the sweet smell of henna is in the air; my flute lies on the earth neglected and your garland of flowers is unfinished.

The jasmine wreath that you wove me thrill to my heart like praise. (The Gardener-16)

The distinguishing feature of Tagore as a nature poet is his complete surrender and identification with nature. His sense of oneness with nature is revealed in the following verses:

How often, great earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each blade that raises its signal

banner in answer to the beckoning blue of the sky!

I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born. (The Fugitive-III-7)

The poem makes it clear that Tagore views nature as the primal storehouse of life out of which the human race has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad at the thought that his birth has cut him off from his vaster life of nature and he wants to join himself once again into the pre-human cosmic existence.

However, this does not mean that Tagore is only a poet of the softer side in nature. His love of nature is realistic, comprehensive and all-inclusive. Like Shelley, he also loves nature in her more dynamic, vaster and wider aspects. He is also aware of all that is harsh, ugly and cruel in Nature. Nature, 'red in tooth and claw' was not unknown to him as it was to Wordsworth. One of Tagore's best nature poems is *Shindhutaranga* (sea-waves). Here nature is depicted as merciless, death dealing, utterly scornful of human feelings. The poem was inspired by the sinking of a ship in May 1887, containing seven hundred and thirty-five pilgrims on their way to the great Jagannath Temple at Puri. The ship was ruthlessly hit by cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. Edward Thompson and other competent critics regarded *Shindhutaranga* as the greatest land-storm and the greatest sea-storm ever depicted by any poet.

Tagore is a practical idealist or a romantic realist in his approach to nature. His attitude towards nature is, however, not restricted to romantic fancy or mysterious feeling of rapport with her. He strongly believed in nature's impact upon the growth of the human mind and his vision did not remain confined within the limits of poetic imagination but was transformed into action in real life. Like Wordsworth, Tagore also feels that when approached in a proper mood and spirit Mother Nature is bound to influence the human soul and she can be the best teacher and guide for men. While Wordsworth believed in nature's education only in theory, Tagore tried to give a practical shape to this concept at Shantiniketan, in his open-air university, where the



whole education system sings the songs of the nature.

ONENESS WITH GOD

Tagore was less concerned with the mere sensuous manifestations in nature than with the spiritual significance underlying this manifestation. In fact, we find in his poetry a gradual expansion from sensuous delight in nature to a spiritual and mystic concern of the inner spirit of nature. To him, nature, man and God are one and the same. Tagore's lyrics are not independent nature poems which are mainly concerned with the glorification of its beauty and charm; they are the fruit of the poet's meditations on God, man and nature. The distinctive feature of his poetry is complete identification with nature and in this respect no other poet can stand a match to him. He writes:

I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world: with what fond and familiar ease it fills my heart, the encounter with the Eternal Stranger.
(The fugitive III-2)

Like Wordsworth, Tagore thinks that there is a harmony between the spirit of nature and the mind of man. Mother Nature converses her own thoughts to man, and when man opens his soul to the influence of nature; a complete harmony is established between them. This harmony gives peace to the soul of man. Nature is a moral teacher and guide to man. She counsels and compels humans to goodness and virtue. Tagore once wrote:

We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites or ceremonies.

What we really want is an Ashram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and human soul meet in union. (The Religion of Man, 1993)

Tagore is also a romantic mystic who loses himself in his meditation of nature and gets into direct communion with the infinite. To him, the whole of the universe is permeated by one life and one soul. In moments of contemplation Tagore

realizes this oneness and loses his consciousness of the material forms under which life appears. The fusion of God and nature is a regular theme in his poetry. Nature is the abode of God and the various aspects of nature are symbols of Eternity:

The light of thy music illumines the world.
The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.
(Gitanjali, 3)

Tagore's concept of nature is many-sided and his imagination transfigures the common objects of nature and worships them as the manifestation of Eternity. The central belief in his poetry is that there is an unbroken chain that binds God, nature, and man, and the spirit of man can commune with God through nature. God dwells in his own creation, and it is expected of man that he also must create his own environment, his own dwelling-place, which is worthy of his soul. For a perfect creation the artist in him must have his freedom, and the only aim is perfection and not profit. Tagore himself states that, 'the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but recognizing our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not isolating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union'. (Estborn, 1949)

The poetry of nature in *Gitanjali* is purposive, existing not only for the beauty of the things as it is, but for its symbolical importance. They are tied to the apron strings of thought. The blissful joy of the mystic, the pangs of the adorer, and the high expectancy of the tryst with the Beloved have been explained through the objects of nature. Though brief, the intense feelings studded in the poem looks fresh in the light of the natural objects. The *Gitanjali* is not essentially a poem composed with the sole object of brightening up the life of nature. It is a harp, which strums upon the different dimensions of life, even beyond it at times. The awesomeness of nature felt by Wordsworth in *The Excursion* and in other poems is one of Tagore's concerns in *Gitanjali*. He is not out to find the 'active principle' present in nature. The poet is in a different



frame of mind. The flow of his poems are the occasional symbols and metaphors drawn from the nature.

CONCLUSION

Both in faculties of mind and heart, Rabindranath was equipped with extraordinary energy and vigor. Even when age restricted his physical movement and activities, his interest in and dedication to life continued to be as earnest and vibrant as ever. He always felt a sense of commitment towards the great world to which he had been born. His sense of responsibility is explicit when he writes, "I have a world given to me which is mine, which depends for its perfection on my own creative soul. It is great because I have the power to make it worthy of its relationship with me, it is great, because by its help I can offer my own hospitality to the God of all the world" (Lectures and Address, 1970). In the morning, the sun comes out beamingly, in the dusk the stars hold up their lights, but these are insufficient for us. Until we light our own little lamps, the world of lights in the sky is futile, and unless we make our own preparations, the riches of the world remains waiting like a lute for our finger touch.

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