ECOLOGICAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND LITERATURE TAGORE: THE ECO-LITERARY ARTIST AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT
With the development of science, technology, industrialism and urbanization, the natural environment that mankind depends for living is being seriously destructed. The grave ecological imbalance is threatening human existence. The litany of present and impending catastrophes is making us aware of the imminent doom of our planetary ecosystem, owing to an array of human-caused environmental catastrophe that have no precedent in the entire history of the Earth. The diversity of the diminishing species upon the planet is warning each of us, to be aware of the gravity of this ecological crisis and bear the responsibility of alleviating and eliminating the crisis. This paper intends to represent Tagore as an eco-literary artist voicing his deep-rooted protest against human aggression and his earnest concern for the preservation and subsequent restoration of the ecological balance. Furthermore, in the context of the present global environmental deterioration or ecological degradation, ecocriticism, as a tide of “green” criticism seeks and believes in a solution for this environmental crisis aiming to protect the integrity of the Earth’s ecological communities and the ecocentric values.

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism, Green Thinking, Symbiotic Co-existence, Tagore’s Notion of ‘Surplus’ & Upanishads

INTRODUCTION
The Planet Earth appears restive. Human activities motivated by an attitude of rampant consumerism and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption have never been as inhumane and callous towards environment as in the modern era of scientific and technological innovations. Man’s greed attacks nature and wounded nature backlashes on the human future. Environment has clearly emerged as one of the vital contemporary issues, we face. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous but not inevitable. Earth’s resources are finite and there may be ecological limits to growth which, unless we alter our ways, will sooner rather than latter be exceeded. The ecologists and environmentalists, the so called ‘shallow’ ones, are primarily concerned with our treatment of the environment in terms of the pragmatic consequences for the humans. They urge that the misuse of nature will affect human beings adversely. The current ecological crisis caused by human arrogance towards the natural world legitimates its exploitation in order to satisfy the insatiable lust of human interests. Human arrogance towards nature rooted in anthropocentrism thus signifies-

A way of thinking that regards humans as the source of all value claiming that human needs and interests are of the highest.

Anthropocentrism regards human beings as having an intrinsic value and rest of the nature endowed with an instrumental value, deserving a moral consideration in so far as it enhances human well-being. Tagore, as a great visionary denounced human aggression on nature. He was certainly not unaware of the alarming
contrary to this anthropocentric human attitude lies the biocentric or ecocentric vision. Ecocentrism or the modern precept of green thinking rejects the human chauvinism of anthropocentrism argues that all of nature has an intrinsic value. Ecocentrics object to human chauvinism, not to humans; rather they inspire the human and the non-human co-existence to blossom and flourish equivocally in the same hemisphere. It promises self-realization through communion with Nature interpreted as a seamless whole. Only by resacralizing our perceptions of the natural world can we put the ecosystem far above the narrow range of human interests and learn to live harmoniously with the natural world, thereby averting ecological catastrophe. Tagore’s primary concern for nature or environment is based on a different and non-utilitarian ground. While one may, of course, seek protection for the environment in the name of the human survival, one may, with equal significance, seek it, as Tagore does, on the grounds that nature and man are ‘adapted’ to one another in the ways that authenticate human beings as inseparably related to the flourishing of the natural world. Tagore’s deep-seated environmental concern can be best interpreted by invoking his idea of surplus, expressed in the following lines:

The most important distinction between the animal and man is this, that the animal is very nearly bound within the limits of its necessities. But there is a vast excess of wealth in man’s life, which gives him the freedom to be useless.

This however does not certify that man is not bound by any necessities. Certainly, he has biological and other needs to be procured. But there still remains a remainder or ‘surplus’ in the human beings, once their desires, needs and the satisfaction of these have been taken into account. All such reflections of human beings arise because they do not live by bread alone; they experience a sense of lack even after all their biological and material needs have been provided by the technology. This feeling of lack or ‘dissatisfaction’ comes from the ‘surplus’ in the human nature, from the excess of ‘wealth’ in a human being’s life which constitutes his or her spiritual make-up. This spiritual component transcends the pragmatic need and the sphere of utility; “it extends beyond the reservation plots of our daily life.” This ‘surplus’ or spiritual wealth indicates an aspect of human being, “a fund of emotional energy” which is ‘useless’ or ‘superfluous’ in the sense that it is not regulated by self interest or practical ends. The question pertaining to such a spiritual aspect of human existence has, of course, been a matter of debate among philosophers. Tagore’s notion of ‘surplus’ and his understanding of human spirituality can be best understood and appreciated without requiring controversial postulates as God or Atman.

Without having to commit ourselves to disputed metaphysical doctrines, we can well concede that we have a need which is something entirely different from our everyday practical needs, one which aims at fulfillment of our creative urge, of our capacity to reflect or appreciate. It is this need that caters to our aesthetic sense development-to compose poems, music and paintings, to enjoy or appreciate, in the words of Tagore, “a beautiful face, a poem, a song, a character, and a harmony of interrelated ideas”. It is therefore in these terms, and not specifically theological ones, that Tagore’s idea of ‘surplus’ may be interpreted.

Elucidating reference from the above context helps to explain why Tagore remained so anxious to defend the natural environment against unnecessary tampering and intrusion. He was drawn towards nature because its harmony evokes our aesthetic appreciation, giving us spiritual joy, and thus fulfilling the demand of the ‘surplus’ or spiritual component in us. This substantiates the main reason for our earnest care for nature and concern for its preservation. Thus, if one is sensitive to the touch of nature and finds delight in it; if one is intent on a non-technological way of relating to it- on what Heidegger terms ‘dwelling’ and Tagore ‘home coming”; if one discovers one’s being ‘outside’ in companionship
with nature; and if one experiences love and sympathy for the natural world, then one cannot but be eager to protect it against onslaught.

Tagore’s love for nature and his ecological consciousness might be regarded as an ‘anthropocentric’ one in the sense, since he thinks that no account of the value of nature can be isolated from all relations to human being. For Tagore, to say that nature has value must involve some reference to human beings, to how they are affected by it. But Tagore vehemently denies anything pernicious in conceding this human reference. It will only appear pernicious, if this human reference is wrongly taken to mean that nature, since it has no absolute or independent value, matters only for its instrumental contribution to our pleasures. Tagore’s ‘anthropocentrism’ does not entail any kind of human-centred ‘imperialism’ or speciesist ‘chauvinism’. Nature, resembles an organism of unlimited benevolence that makes no demands for subsistence and extends generously the products of its life activity, affords protection to all beings and offers shade even to a man restless, crimpled and crushed under the wheels of his mundane existence. Tagore strongly insists on the relation of love, as we enter into the nature in our aesthetic contemplation of it. Tagore claims that it is in this relation of love that we are intensely aware of “nature not as an object either for detached enquiry or practical use, but as belonging to the expanded sphere of our being. Self-realization enables to see ourselves as the part of nature by identifying more closely with it, to the extent that the self becomes part of the other (nature). The continuity of nature and self-highlights the fact that if the individual self is intrinsically valuable then nature must also have to be equally valuable. The holistic analysis of the nature-human relationship tends to develop the kind of non-anthropocentric or eco-centric ethics inspiring us to nurture a higher ecological consciousness towards nature. For our survival, we have to be natural with nature and humane with human society. The injunction lies in developing harmony with nature and not to exploit the resources of nature for one’s selfish purpose.

REFERENCES


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