

Rabindranath Tagore On Environmentalism

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Rabindranath Tagore was known as the most eminent writer, composer as well as the architect of the institutional set up of Visva Bharati University. He was an incomparable thinker with a practical orientation also. His opinions on environmental questions can be taken as an example of his interest of application of insight. It is well recognized truth that river erosion and deforestation as issues of environment deserve severe attention in contemporary society. Interestingly, Tagore was well conscious of these kinds of environmental problems in his times also. He focused on exploitation of nature and protection of greeneries. Many of his creations are connected with this core issue. He was interested in expressing views on nature and civilization on a holistic way. From his early childhood, he was habituated with interacting with nature. He pointed out the fatal consequences of indiscriminate usage of natural resources in his writings. Influenced by the tradition of Upanishad, Tagore defined the essence of divinity within the forces of nature. The poet believed that all around development of human beings is linked intensely with nature.

His geo-environmental vision was framed on the basis of aesthetic parameter [Pal & Roy: 2011]. This trend is marked in his immortal compositions also. Sensitivity of Tagore was associated to nature. Throughout his poems, songs, dramas, we meet bright sunshine, mellow evening, calm night and many other aspects of nature which reflects the actual and pristine quality of nature [Pal & Roy: 2011]. Tagore is not only concerned with the harmony of social relations, but also with people's harmony with nature (Sengupta, 2005). In Tagore's philosophy environmental ethics emerges from the aesthetic of environment (James, 1999). The notion of surplus becomes a major issue in this discourse. This insistence on surplus gives the clue as to why the environment matters to Rabindranath (Palmer, Cooper, Corcoran, 2001). The relation between aesthetic and literature could be intimate at the same time intricate (Ghosh, 2000). In present age, according to Tagore, is characterized by aesthetic reaction, evident in man's narrowness of perception which result in the division of his aesthetic awareness into beauty and ugliness (Sharma & Sharma, 1988).

Unquestionably Tagore was a follower of beauty cult. Therefore, he was recognized as an admirer of the beauty of nature. Simultaneously he perceived nature as an organic component of human existence. To Tagore summer is an expression of thirst, of loneliness, of abstract pain, of a meditating soul and also of hope as the summer storm brews. The monsoon, his most favourite season, engulfed his awareness like a lover. Seasonal variations were noticed by him with purely poetic gesture. According to Rahman [2011], he rejoiced at its pouring, saw in its varying images and moods a language to express our deepest yearnings and also our intimate pains, our longings to unite our beloved and also with fellows far in the past and in the future riding the chariot of the clouds which belong to all ages past and future. It is also the moment

to overcome our ego and worldly cares and say the unsaid to our beloved that were unable to say, and to unite our anima which beckons us in our dreams. And so on for the other seasons, all the time seeing in nature reflections of the deepest and varying human feelings and moods [Rahman: 2011]

Subhas Dutta, an Environmentalist said, “The literary works of Tagore can be used for raising awareness about the environment” [Bhattacharjee:2013] Pabitra Sarkar, a former Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University and a Tagore expert said, “In his literary works he has said he was born along with the trees and flowers” [Bhattacharjee:2013].

METHODOLOGY: The paper is mainly based on secondary sources like books, journals, newspapers and so on. There are some objectives of the present researcher to clarify the issues. These are – 1] to illustrate practical significance of his thinking and 2] to elucidate some human activity in connection to this concept.

1. PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Tagore was well aware of application of his philosophical ideology of ecological understanding. If the focus is given to travel aspect of Tagore, it is found that there was a deep connection with his ecological consciousness. The poet knew that people want to utilize nature in accordance to their need. They are not at all interested in general welfare of the environment. Tagore was hurt by this tendency for aesthetic orientation also. A tree (Plate 1) was planted by Tagore in Balatonfured (Hungary) during his Europe travels. It was now dedicated as Tagore promenade or Tagore Setany. The core focus of Tagore regarding environmental consciousness was presented as plaque (plate 2) at the foot of the tree planted by Tagore in Balatonfured, the lines are: “When I am no longer / On this earth, my tree /Lel the ever-renewed/ Leaves of thy spring /Murmur to the wayfarer” World is moving to make friendship with urban landscape. To fulfil their achievement, they are engaging to fell the green landscape. Tagore was conscious about the result of the ultimate outlook of that felling and opines: “Dao phire se aranya loho ei nagar” [Tagore,1895.Chaitali :poem Sabhyatar Prati, p.18]

Tagore opined that modern individuals are prone to luxurious life styles. They are usually indulgent to this trend also in the essay “Aranya Devata” (Forest Deity: R. R. edition Vol. 14, p.373). The poet fears that the cordial relation between nature and human individual is destroyed as a consequence of irresponsible human activity. In earlier days people lived around the forest areas. Then the deep relation with forest prevails. This perfect harmony has come to an end when people begin to live in urban areas. From that period of time human individuals become distant from the forest like natural resources. According to Tagore human should retrieve their true love for nature. To prevent larger threat of pollution, the poet was in favour of maintaining the harmonious relation with forest.

Tagore composed many of his poems, songs, stories, plays in the subject of nature. Several seasonal differentiations have got significant focus in his immortal creations. There he expressed his opinion on protection and sustainability of nature. The poet established the institution Santiniketan almost in the lap of nature with unbounded joy of purity. Thus, he gave a message to the world that true education can be linked with overall greenery. Much debated issue of geo environmental awareness was very much present in the writings of Tagore. The poet organized several social festivals in his institution centring on the ecological aspects. Briksharopon, halakarshan and Barshamongol are glaring examples of such festivals. Through these kinds of festive observances Tagore wanted to spread the concepts like environmental

progress as well as preservation. He was a staunch critic of the attitude of modern people regarding disrespect of nature. In such an occasion, Tagore wrote the song - “maruvijaye ketan urao he shunne...” [Tagore,1927.Geetabitan:Lyricno.12(Anusthanic Paryay),p.514][Rise up the flag of the conquest of the desert].

Tagore was annoyed with establishing big dams, huge reservoirs and large-scale canal. Tagore was not in favour of establishing such technical devices for agricultural development. Tagore opined that this kind of activity will ultimately restrict the free flow of river and water body. The poet thought the natural flow of the river should be maintained at any cost because of the environmental reason. He expressed his love to fluvial sphere through: “Keno more gelo nadi /Ami bandhi tare, chai dhoribare. Tai more gelo nadi. ...”(Tagore,1896. Chitra: poem Durakanksha) [Why river died I bound her, wish to restrain ... For this river died.] To Tagore this kind of civilization was known as ‘new-fangled civilization’. This kind of civilization is connected with greed and exploitation. These are the vices of civilization with hindrance of sustainable development for mankind. Tagore loved rural Bengal for the treasure of greenery, sights and sounds and the wilderness. He perceived the process of urbanization and industrialization as the most adverse effect of civilization. Tagore critically discussed the non sensical actions from human beings in the destruction of wilderness. Tagore was immensely attracted by natural beauty with greeneries, trees, plants, the pastoral and crop fields. He abandoned urban life and preferred to live in the lap of nature. His poem “To Civilization” is concerned with the recovery of nature and open atmosphere.

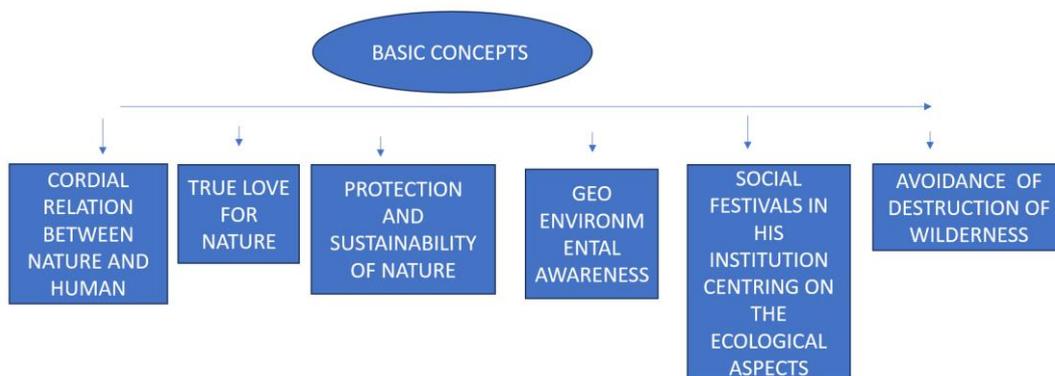


Diagram Is Prepared by The Researcher

2. HUMAN ACTIVITY:

The poet pointed out the existence of ecological disequilibrium in a prominent way in the article “Tapavana” (The forest for meditation, Rabindra Rachanabali. edition, Vol.7, pp.690-704). Tagore analyzed the inner as well as external causes of this kind of imbalance. The poet thought that ripus (the

basic vices like: greed, jealousy, pride, lust etc.) are the causative factor behind the newly evolved qualities among human beings. Commercialization, consumerism, and economic competition can be perceived as direct consequence of these inclinations. In a broader sense these are the recognized forces behind the inner manifestation as the causes of disharmony within nature. Trees are being felled for fuel and are spoiling the ecological balance and human civilization is hurtling towards doom [Pal T. & Roy P: 2011]. Hence Tagore pointed out in ancient society of Tapavana (Tagore, 1909. Prabashi patrica) where he speaks: "...a strange matter has been seen about India. Civilization here takes root not confined for space or packed like sardines. In those places there was abundant opportunity for man to be in close proximity with trees and vegetation, river and lakes". In the article "Bilaser Pha`ns" (The noose or loop of luxurious living: R.R.edition Vol.6.pp.526-530), on the basis of the opinion of Tagore it can be said that Indian society and culture has entered in a newer phase with the focus on consumerism. This trend is actually the influence of western society. Personal consumption in the sphere of all aspects is the root cause of spreading this problem. This focus will not match with the Indian philosophical identity and humanism in macro aspects. People become self centred in a holistic way. Individuals become out and out consumerist in their activities. They start to spend beyond their ability. This will add disequilibrium in mental level which ultimately takes the shape of overall disorganization.

Tagore's views on ecological stability and symbiosis between man and Nature have been elaborated in the article "Tapavan" (R.R. Edition, Vol. 7, pp.690-704). Outward manifestations of the problem are not recognized as the principal focus to Tagore. In the article "Bilases Fans"(The Noose of Luxurious Living: R.R. edition, Vol. 6, pp.526-530), insatiable demands for different amenities and personal consumption become the major reason for this attitude. This is also true that this kind of activity is not in accordance with the basic value of Indian society. This will not good for philanthropic attitude of traditional Indian society only, but also for entire degradation of ecological aspect. To avoid this problem there is a need to transform the main component of character. Meanness and self-centered motives should be abolished. Conspicuous consumption is not a new entry in Indian society. In ancient period of time social activities were associated with consumption patterns. This focus has changed afterwards. In modern situation it is focused on specifically personal consumption in a different manifestation. Consumerism is not only generating pressure on the purse of the rich but also causing unimaginable hardships to the poor who, being enticed by its demonstration effect, are trying to spend beyond their means[Basu:2009] .

"It is a universal problem to save forest resources from man's excessive greed...The creator sent life, he made arrangements for nurturing it all around...but man with his greed has supplied the instruments of death. Human society is cursed for his transgression of God's scheme. Greedy humans have invited their own ruin by destroying the forest. Man has uprooted the very trees and vegetation which purify air, and the falling leaves of which make the land fertile. Callousness on the part of mankind destroyed natures gifts of good...his welfare" (Rabindra Rachanabali, vol.14, p.373). Rabindranath Tagore's views pertaining to eco-ethical human living and sustainable development (scattered in various works, listed at the end of the article) are based on ancient Indian philosophy, especially embedded in the Upanishads. Tagore considers Nature and human life as integral parts of the single entity, the omniscient, omnipresent, ubiquitous (sarbang khallidang), attribute-free (nirguna) Brahman. Paucity of rainfall endangered human life and the rapid spread of deserts started engulfing human habitation in various parts of India [Basu: 2009].

In indirect aspect Tagore also focus on human development in a holistic way with special emphasis on youth and women. ‘Tagore did not expect much from male seniors of his generations, and post Tagore male generations have on the whole not changed much. Apart from women, the other quarter he pinned his hopes on is the youth, because they are free from backward pulls from social responsibilities’ [Rahman: 2011]. In his ‘Chhinnopatro’ [Torn Letters] he wrote about the beauty of life and nature. He also spoke about the uplift of mass for empowering them properly. Tagore was eager to see women in the roles of greater responsibilities. He pointed out that nature given tenderness of women should be taken as the principal force for maintaining the humanity and environment as a whole. According to Rahman [2011], Tagore perceived women folk as agent of nature. Thus, they can contribute positively in saving humanity and social as well as natural ecology. Tagore’s observation in his essay Nari (on women) that it is the male who has ruled and by his brute power aggressing against both nature and the downtrodden classes, is akin to the standpoint of the modern eco feminist movement (Goard: 1998) [as mentioned in Social and Environmental Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore by A. Rahman] that has been formally articulated in the 1970s, and ongoing debate between eco-feminism and deep ecology is visible [Rahman: 2011]. Tagore explained in his composition ‘Raktakarabi’ [Red Oleanders] that the women are recognized as the ultimate liberator of the demon king of the earth.

Tagore was the exceptional thinker in pioneering the discussion on social issues undoubtedly. His most of the contributions were linked with holistic impulse of the people at large. He was the versatile composer of beauty and goodness. He was aware of specific problems which were linked with risks of entire humanity. Environmental issues were recognized by him as significant for particular reasons. On the one hand the poet expressed the immense beauty of nature; on the other he was vocal about the probable damage and destruction of ecology. In his time the issues were unspoken and unpublicized. Actually, he was far ahead of his time. Hence his feelings and thought become recognized now. The environmental issues were the focus directly as well as indirectly in his several writings. These creations are now reconsidered and reanalyzed in the newer light. His analytical capabilities were well known to the whole world through his literary creations along with practical application.

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