

A Green Study of Tagore's Gitanjali

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Abstract: Relation between human race and non-human part of nature is as old as human consciousness. The most recent approach to this relation is depicted through theory of eco-criticism. Nature is represented in literature in many different ways and arguably two important viewpoints are romanticism and transcendentalism. Among them Romanticism was patronized by Wordsworth and transcendentalism was promoted by American think-tank Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's idea of Ecocriticism refers to American part and Wordsworth's idea of Romanticism is a green study of British counterpart. Interestingly both viewpoints are found in Gitanjali. This study highlights the natural aspects reflected in Gitanjali with focus on the idea that Tagore not only floats above the material world in some aesthetic atmosphere, rather, plays a vital part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and idea interact.

Introduction

“What is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Cheryll Glotfelty). All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premises that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnection between nature and culture, specifically the culture artifacts of language and literature (Peter, 2010). In the critical point of view, it has one foot in literature and the other on the land, but theoretical discourse says it negotiates the human and nonhuman. In this sense one of the most striking features of Tagore's Gitanjali is the sublime role that nature plays in it. The poet experiences the living touch of God's love in the beauties of Nature. In Gitanjali the image of light and darkness, fire and cloud, human and nonhuman plays a vital role.

Tagore has a strong fascination for development and urbanization but not at the cost of natural environment and ecosystem. His writings give us a keen vision on environmental awareness. He believes in the harmonious coexistence of man and nature (Cheryll, 1996). However, the present paper depicts a green study of Nobel prize winner literary work *Gitanjali* of Rabindranath Tagore. The writing adopted a content analysis method to reveal the reflection of ecocriticism in Tagore's poetry. Data had been collected from different relevant academic research articles, newspaper, books, research reports, magazines and many more.

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Ecocriticism and its Principles

There is still a controversy on the taxonomic name of eco-criticism. The term ecocriticism was first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." By ecocriticism Rueckert meant the application of ecological concepts to study of literature. Ecocriticism started developing in 1990s as a separate movement or school of literary criticism. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment is reflected in literature. Even in the last decade of the twentieth century it was declared that the greatest problem of the twenty-first century would be the survival of the Earth. Overexploitation of natural resources and man's disregard of the air, water and soil raise the question of survival of both man and the earth. Here ecocriticism is one of the ways in which humanists fight for the world in which they live.

Ecocriticism indicates ecological literacy. Eco and critic both derived from Greek, Oikos and Kritis they mean "house judge" which draws a great attention of green lovers. Howarth indicates four different principals that can be used to 'explore environment literature'. These are Ecology, Language, Ethics and Criticism.

Ecology and Ethics

Among these four principals, ecology and ethics are closely connected. Ecology helps the readers to 'read, interpret, and narrate land history. Ethics has a concern over political, economic and military choices that would affect the health of land. In this way the theory advocates to protect the environment. If the present human behavior towards nature continues, sustainable development will be in a great threat. So, the human behavior towards nature is to be modified. Ecology helps us to understand natural ecosystems and respective regulations and laws, whereas ethics teach us how to define right and wrong behaviors toward the natural environment (Debmalya, 2014).

Language and Criticism

When nature is described through image or words it arises a question of truth in science. Because we do not get the validity of it through data or metaphor. Ecocriticism leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encode streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the message with fidelity. Ecocriticism seeks to redirect humanistic ideology, not spurning the natural sciences but using their ideas to sustain viable reading (B. Devall, 2007). Literature and science trace their roots to hermeneutist of religion and law, the sources for early ideas of time and space, or history and property.

Tagore and his Gitanjali

Tagore's appearance on English literary scene, soon after his arrival in London in 1912, was sensational. Tagore brought with him a manuscript of some songs in prose translation and presented the work to the painter William Rosenstein. Rosenstein was surprised at Tagore's writing and share them with Stopford Brooke, A.C. Bradley and W.B. Yeats, all of whom enthused similarly. Then Yeats and Tagore set to work together to improve English. wrote an introduction and Gitanjali was published in Macmillan, Yeats' publisher. On the other hand, Ezra Pound engaged himself organizing the American campaign: "I'll try to get some of the poems of very great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore", he wrote about the poems to Harriet Monroe, editor of the Chicago Magazine Poetry, "they are going to be the sensation of the winter. "And indeed, they were. The book was reprinted ten times in nine months. When Tagore visited the United States in 1913, Marianne Moore greeted him as "the creator of new age in literature." In November of the same year Tagore won the Nobel Prize, the first non-European to receive the award.

The prose poem of Gitanjali was often been attacked for their boneless dreaminess, but many readers have evidently found them lovely. Pound says in his Fortnightly review that "I have nothing but pity

for the readers who are unable to see that their piety is the poetic piety of Dante, and that it is beautiful. “Relatively Wilfred Owen’s mother also wrote to Tagore to say how moved her son had been by the text that began, “When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable”, she found these lines transcribed in his trench notebook. Radice’s new translation of that:

*Let me pronounce these words the day I go:
Nothing compares
With what I’ve seen,
With what I’ve come to know.*

Tagore’s association with Yeats did as much harm as good at the end. In 1937 Graham Greene wrote about it, “I cannot believe that anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously”. But, however partial the aesthetic lens through which Yeats has originally viewed Tagore, he had not after all entirely mistaken his man.

Tagore is still best known to the English – spoken reader for his Gitanjali; but it is in many ways typical. Some of the verses of Tagore truly depict the power of poetic mind to remark the world

*“My consciousness turns emerald green,
Ruby deep red”*, (Tagore, R, 2003)

Many of Tagore’s best writings are animated by a similar sense, sympathetic but accepting. In his essay “The Problem of the Self” the poet shows his keen awareness to “the surprise of endless variation, the advent of the unaccountable, and the careless procession of individuals.” In another short story “The Postmaster”, an early masterpiece not in *The Essential Tagore*, comes to its end when the protagonist leaves the village and abandon the poor local girl, Raton who has fallen in love with him. Suddenly the postmaster feels “a sharp desire to go back”, there arises a good number of questions like “What point was there in going back? Who belonged to whom in this world?” Tagore was exactly fatalist; rather he was moved by the idea of freedom.

The poems of Gitanjali show a close personal connection between poet and eternal, lover and beloved, wife and husband, servant and master, friend and friend. It was published in English in 1912. It has 104 pages. The English Gitanjali is a collection of 103. Among them 53 poems were collected from the original Gitanjali and rest 50 poems were taken from his other works.

Nature in Gitanjali

One of the most striking features of Tagore’s Gitanjali is the sublime role nature plays in it. The poet experiences the living touch of God’s love in the beauties of Nature. The smiling flowers, the flowering grove, the thick forest and the green grass, “the ever wakeful blue sky,” “the night with starry vigil”, the spring with its flowers, the wood lands, the sea, “the shore of the ink –black river”, “the frowning forest”, the singing birds, the child decked with princes robes, children playing on the sea-shore, the mud stained traveler, the parched earth in summer, the blooming lotus, the drooping lotus, torrential rain, and the “lashes of lighting” – all these are intimations to the poet from immortality, alerting him to Infinite immanent in Nature. Nature also forms the background in which the poet enjoys mystical experiences. His imagination receives stimulation from the “harmony of forms, colors, sounds and movements displayed by Nature.” (Sope, K, 1995)

Poem no 5 reveals how all the creatures of nature offerings of love and devotion to their Maker. The summer comes with its pleasant scenes and sights. Soft breeze blow with a soft sighing sound and there is the sweet music of the streams flowing with a murmuring sound. The bees sing sweetly in the grove of flowering trees. Nature overflows with peace. At such a moment of peace and leisure, the poet longs to dedicate his life to the service of the Divine. (B. Sigurd and H. Eaton, 2011)

The poem no.21 illustrates show the waves of the sea call upon the poet loudly to launch his boat. And the poet assures that he would do so without delay, for he hears the sound of sweet music, coming to him on the wind from the other shore. The sound of music thrills him. The wave calls him. The urge for reunion with nature is very strong for the poet. The river symbolizes the ocean of eternity which the poet has to cross, before he can be united with the Infinity.

The poem 22 illustrate shows “in the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps”, God the beloved walks “silent as night, eluding all watches. The sky is overcast and the night is dark and stormy. The east wind blows loudly and continuously. No bird signs in the woods. There is no light of the day. It looks as though a thick veil were drawn across the sky. All the doors are closed. Nevertheless, the poet recognizes his “only friend” his best beloved” as “the solitary wayfarer in the deserted street.” Nature thus had a profound effect on Rabindranath Tagore’s spiritual life. It fed his soul. He saw the earth and nature in Hindu terms, as a mother goddess. In the company of nature, the poet gets a flavor of divine spirit.

Human and Non-human Relationship

The relationship between human and non-human is vividly presented through images. Tagore’s *Gitanjali* is full of the richness of diction and imagery. The common objects of nature like flowers, rivers, clouds, the sky, the stars, the boatmen, the beggars, travelers on the road, and shepherds find place in his works.

Edward Thompson comments on the art of Tagore, “Rarely was find poetry one thinks, made out of less variety, rain, and cloud, wind and rising river, boatmen, lamps, temples and gongs, flutes and vines, birds flying home at dusk. It is astonishing what range the poet gets out of these few things. They are too naturally and purely used here to be called properties, as they justifiably might be in much of his works.” (Sope, 1995)

Leitmotif images of Tagore are mostly the elementary images. Images of Light and Darkness, Fire and Cloud have taken a great place in Tagore’s *Gitanjali*. The star symbolizes the rhythm of life, the very mystery of life. They shine (life), and then are hidden behind the cloud (death). The constant movement of the stars towards each other is an expression of their love. The darkness of the night symbolizes the mystery of the unknown. The clouds, darkness, rain, thunder all symbolize the dangers and difficulties which lie in the path of spiritualism. On the other hand, the water- fire imagery represents the thirst and gratification. Even the passions of love are referred to as fire, and water is spoken of as one of that quench desires and thirst.

Rhetorical Effect of Nature

I. A. Richard points out in his essay, ‘The Imagination’ that in a poem impulse are organized by a poet in two ways- by exclusion and by inclusion. In the structure of poems where impulses are organized by inclusion one comes across a unique equilibrium of opposed impulses’, a gift of the poetic imagination.

In this respect Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali anthology *Gitanjali* comprises 156 Bengali poems/songs was published in the Bengali year 1317. With the addition of ‘divas yadisamga halo’ the number increased to 157. Most of the poems express different modes and feelings of a devotee whose Lord enchants him as a lover, a singer, a flutist, even as death. This kind of relationship has been depicted from a different point of view, like, pang of separation (Poem 84), preparation for a tryst (Poem 93), waiting for the beloved (Poem 41), failure to recognize (Poem 26), the necessity to do off ornaments impeding perfect union (Poem 7) and so forth. Tagore’s readers are very well known about these themes. But the things which could not draw the notice of critics that the language of the best lyrics of *Gitanjali* is soaked in paradox.

Truly, no devoted reader will miss the importance of the trope in a book that begins with the stroke of a paradox:

*Still thou pourest
 And still there is room to fill (Poem 1)
 And also ends with a paradox-embedded prayer about sound flowing into silence:
 Let all my songs
 Gather together their diverse strains
 Into a single current and flow to a sea of silence
 In one salutation to thee. (Poem 1)*

Paradox or similar type of linguistic obliqueness seems unavoidable where the proposition cannot be grasped without new orientation of outlook. An extra-ordinary fusion of the religious and amorous is observed in many of the poems of the *Gitanjali*. For example, in poem 96 the speaker's heart brims with joy at the taste of the 'hidden honey of this lotus that expands in the ocean of light.' In Poem 29 the paradoxical idea that name does not reveal our identity but conceal our true self has been articulated through an excellent paradox.

Through Tagore's *Gitanjali* we can get a glimpse of the poet's true nature and his spiritual feelings. Embodied in this work is his very soul; it will continue to give out sparks of truth to the world. This pious poet's prayer will continue to kindle in generations of poets the desire to lead a life of humility and self-oblivion and accomplish their task of telling this world that it would not rely otherwise with utmost sincerity. Tagore's own reflection upon his poetry is all about the poet's prayers leading to driven inspiration and complete surrender to the 'master' poet: "When I look at back and consider the long, uninterrupted period of my work as a poet, one thing appears clear to me that it was a matter over which I had hardly any authority. Whenever I wrote a poem, I thought it was I who was responsible for it, but I know well today that this was far from the truth. For in none of those small individual poems was the real purport of my whole poetical work wholly significant. What the real purport is I had no knowledge of previously."

Conclusion

The eco-consciousness of Rabindranath Tagore in *Gitanjali* has been presented in his different world-famous poems of him. Eco criticism plays a vital role in his writings. Tagore considered human race as child of Nature which has deeply an ecological stand. He establishes the relationship between human being and Nature like the relationship between child and parents. So, Tagore is very much clear to illustrate the relations between man and nature which is very focal point of ecocriticism. Nature not only constructs the center of the *Gitanjali*, it shaped the form and added a new dimension to the language and style.

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