

Eco-Criticism in Rabindranath Tagore's Novels

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Eco criticism focuses on earth oriented approach to literary studies other than human – based approach. This study advocates a thorough and deep understanding of eco-critical practice through major global issues like ozone depletion and environmental pollution. This paper throws light on how the human beings and the Nature are intertwined and inseparable as depicted by Tagore in his novels. Eco-feminism and eco-criticism are the positive impacts of Post-Colonialism. It includes human beings, both animate and inanimate things. A piece of literary work gets eternity if it deals with the beauty of Nature. Writers get their position unmoved because of their treatment of Nature at its height.

Rabindranath Tagore as an Eco-feminist

Tagore describes in his novel *Binodini*, the heroine Asha's attaining womanhood. "As when the rains descend after a drought and the dry wilted stalks of grain suddenly turn green and shoot up vigorously, confidently almost defiantly as though eager to make up for the long bleak days of fast — so Asha blossomed into womanhood" (B 16). Tagore compares the young widow Binodini's life in the remote village to a lone garden — "creeper in jungle, a pathetic glory in a joyous wilderness" (B 24), Binodini who leads a lone life in the village, while reading the letter of Mahendra, "Her eyes gleamed like sands in the midday sun, her breath hissed like hot wind in the desert." (B 27). Mahendra's infatuation for Asha and Binodini is "like the waters of the Ganges and the Jamuna the two women had mingled their charms into one overwhelming situation" (B 34) Asha and Binodini revolve around Mahendra like "two luminous planetary satellites"(B 129).

Tagore compares young men and women to rivers, creepers and mountains and old people to the broken trees. In *The Wreck* he says, "Young lovers are like the mountain" (TW 34). Mahendra's mother Rajlakshmi is "like a fallen branch from a tree resting her back on the bed" (B 158). Hemnalini's father Annada Babu is found collapsed in the chair "Like a tree felled by a hurricane" (TW 63). Urmimala's infatuation for Sasanka is described as "the madhavi creeper thrilled with pain in the creative agony of its sap to burst into flower" (TS 77). Gora is called a "snow Mountain" by his professor. Sucharita's gaze affects Gora's nature as a "marble palace

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trembles in an earthquake” (G 314). Harimohini in *Gora* is compared to “tigress” while defending her own rights (G 363). In *The Home and the World*, Nikhil doubts whether Bimala's love was to “come from the deep spring of her heart’... or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam - engine of society?” (HW 43), Tagore compares passion's purity to the flower lily in the novel *'The Home and the World'* “Passion is beautiful and pure — pure as the lily that comes out of the slimy soil. It rises to its defilement and needs no Pears' soap to wash it clean” (HW 102). Tagore compares the stunted lives of clerks in Calcutta to the “fish gasping for breath in the slimy bottom of a pond sucked almost dry by the summer drought”(B 162).

Tagore differentiates the sound of the train according to the moods of the characters. During Kamala's sleepless night in Nalinaksha's house ‘Trains' roar was like the bellowing of a mad elephant bent on destruction" and it frightens Kamala (TW 341). He compares Binodini's lovely, inspiring eyes to 'gleaming sands in the midday sun'. ‘But in the looks of Indranath, the terrorist head "there was a polished urbanity like a sharpened knife" (FC 8). The contrast in the descriptions has a powerful impact on the readers. The fingers of Ela, the heroine of this novel are "Flowerlike fingers” (FC 57). Atindra in utter disgust for the terrorist agenda observes “Patriotism is like a crocodile's backing used as a ferry to cross the river” (FC 63).

In the novel *Binodini*, her love is a “lotus sprouting from the slime of desire” (B13). Tagore uses metaphor to denote the nobility of Anandamoyi in *Gora*. After knowing his real identity Gora says “It is in you who are India" (G 407). Sandip calls Bimala “Shakti”, “Mother Goddess” and “Queen Bee” (HW 31) to praise her. Nikhil denigrates himself in self — flagellation: “I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. That is what the story of my life shows my row of lamps has remained unlit" (HW 13). There are many smart comments in the novels. Youths like Bihari make witty observations on society and marriage. On marriage Bihari says”.....it is better to lose by not marrying than to lose by marrying wrongly” (B 25)

Binodini comments on love: "Love unrelieved by jealous anger is insipid - like a vegetable dish without chilli and spice" (B 37). In the novel *Gora* Annapurna's advice to Asha is "our real and ultimate commerce is not with each other but with Him who is the supreme giver and the supreme taker". Binodini sarcastically tells Mahendra "You will protect me from yourself" (B 210). The senior citizens in the novels make thoughtful and meaningful remarks. In *The Wreck* Ramesh's father says “you may judge a flower or a butterfly by its looks but not a human being" (TW 5). In *Gora*, Binoy says "If love is unable to acknowledge differences then why are there differences anywhere in the world?”(G 306). Gora says “Not to obey, the society is to destroy it"

(G 42) Binoy remarks, "I will admit the claims of society upon me only so long as society admits my claims upon it. If it refuses to regard me as a man I will regard it as a machine of iron" (G 321). Nikhil in *The Home and the World* says, "Art is a creation - so we should humbly be content to receive our lessons about art from the work of the artist" (HW 89). He tells Sandip "Women are not the deities of the house hold fire, but the flame of the soul itself" (HW 29) Tagore's genuine appreciation of women is evident in his comment "woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape" (HW 57). Sandip motivates Bimala to plunder her own treasury thus: "Theft becomes necessary only because of miserliness, so its sin must be divided between the miser and the thief" (HW 75). In the same novel, Tagore ironically comments, "The real tragedy is, that man does not know himself for what he really is"(HW 105).

Nature as a transforming power

In Tagore's view, nature has a transforming power in relation to human beings of sensitive nature. Bimala says in the novel *Binodini* "I had been like a small river at the border of a village. But the tide came up from the sea and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drum - - beats of the sea were echoed in my mad current". Anita Desai remarks "Tagore's feeling nature is so deep and intense that it is more than a literary device. It is entirely natural for him to use it continually as a metaphor for human action and emotions" (HW Introduction by Anita Desai, Penguin Book 13).

Mahendra, the zamindari youth with extramarital love welcomes the dawn of the day in the novel *Binodini*: "the day dawned sweet as honey. The gathering dins of the awakened city sounded like music to his ears" (B 118). On the contrary the ascetic Sachis stands on the sea shore and observes as he watches the dusk: "That evening the sound of the distant sea borne on the south breeze went up to the stars like a moon from the bosom of the earth" (C 197).

Nature- The indicator of human psyche

Gora's contact with Nature is described by Tagore artistically, "All this time Gora had been living aloof in his own world of thought and action. What was it that had now happened? He had been brought up against some point of contact with Nature and upon there, the deep dark water of the river, the dense banks, and the illimitable dark sky overhead had offered him welcome. Gora felt that to-night he had surrendered himself to Nature's overtures" (G 107).

Like Thomas Hardy, Tagore beautifully describes the rural side of Bengal with his aesthetic taste in the novel *The Home and the world* as "A group of starlings beneath the trees were noisily chattering away. In the distance an empty bullock cart, with its nose on the ground, held up its tail aloft one of its unharnessed bullocks grazing to other resting on the grass, its eyes

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dropping for very comfort, while a crow on its back was pecking away at the insects on its body”(HW 143).

Tagore uses many symbols in the novels. River is used as a symbol of peace. In *Gora*, he says “The river used then to bring its message of peace from the stainless peaks of the distant Himalayas into the midst of Calcutta's dusty bustle” (G 106). T. Padma observes in her initial analysis of ‘*Two sisters*’, Sasanka's wife Sarmila is the “mother kind” who represents reality; and Urmimala is the ‘beloved kind’ who stands for illusion (T. Padma, 83). T. Vijayalakshmi in her critical appraisal of ‘the Heroines of Tagore’s talks of two types of women - ‘Lakshmi’ and ‘Urvashi’ which symbolized the “mother kind” and the “beloved kind”. As in G.V. Raj's works “the garden is a symbolic representation of happiness and plenty. It traditionally suggests peace and harmony..... Aditya whose name significantly means the sun, the source of all life and light” (G.V. Raj, 89). In *Chaturanga*, Tagore uses caves and the sea as the symbols of isolation and spiritual abundance respectively.

Tagore's literary creations are rounded or wavelike, like his handwriting, reminding one of roses and moons and female faces (FMF 9). In the novel *Farewell my friend*, Amit's poetic description of Labanya:

Lovely one, thou art the morning star,
On the far — away mountain crest,
When the night has run its course
Be thou visible still to the vagrant
gone astray (FMF 75)

*He compares Labanya to lovely star of dawn'

Swiftly come, O lovely star of dawn
Ere the night has run its course,
Let me take my full in wakefulness
Of the music lost in dreams. (FMF 75)

Amit's melancholic mood is depicted on his departure from Labanya as

Dark was life when I discovered in the hearts shrine
The lighted lamp you had left as your parting gift (FMF 110)

Thus Tagore proves himself as an eminent eco-feminist and a writer of eco-criticism. He is the pioneer of the literary analysis rooted in a culture of ecological thinking which paves way for

moral and social commitment. Tagore's characters grow with Nature, mature with Nature and eventually swinging in the arms of the Mother Nature.

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