

# Eco-critical Analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's Poems

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## ABSTRACT

*Literature and art are the elements which can influence the life of human being. It is believed that there is a close affinity between nature and literature. Ecocriticism is a fairly new established literary theory which deals with the relationship between nature and literature. Rabindranath Tagore, Indian poet and writer is one of the epoch-making figures of the twentieth century who composed master pieces of poems about love, life, nature and so forth. The main objective of present research paper was to provide an ecocritical analysis of Rabindranath Tagore poems within the theoretical framework of Greg Garrad (2004) to see that how Tagore has encoded ecocritical factors in his poems.*

**Keywords:** *Ecocriticism, Earth, Pollution, Wilderness, Apocalypse, Dwelling, Animal, Tagore*

## Introduction

Ecocriticism as an earth-centered attitude studies the nature and literature. It pays heed to the relationship between humans and the landscape. According to some researchers Ecocriticism deals with text analysis. These texts usually illustrate environmental concerns and investigate the ways literature treats the nature. This subject area has captured the attention of many scholars over the last three decades (Glotfelty, 1996: xviii).

Ecocriticism by nature is interdisciplinary; therefore focuses on environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies. The Poets, artists, and thinkers have been emphasizing on the close kinship between nature and man from times immemorial. Human life is inconceivable without the presence of wider nature.

Due to the civilization man began to despoil all aspects of nature for his own benefit.

He dug the earth for metal, destroyed the trees for his habitats and industry; he destroyed the natural beauty of landscape with the setting up of industrial establishments, polluting land, water and air.

Analytical studies were also conducted by a number of scholars to examine Ecocriticism. In one of the studies conducted by Fulsawange (2017) the author adopts ecological perspective to study the *Cat in the Rain* and *A Canary for One* by Earnest Hemingway. Based on the finding of this article, in both aforementioned stories the bond between the human world and the non-human world is vividly exhibited. In both the stories the women characters in order to evade from loneliness associate themselves with the non-human world. Yet, the characters are nonviolent in their language and relationships. Therefore, they try to derive solace and happiness from the non-human world.

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In another article by Bhattacharjee (2013) the author studied environmental degradation in Rabindranath Tagore's selected poems. To this end he analyzed Tagore's selected nature poems, written a century back "*The Tame Bird was in a Cage*" and "*I plucked you Flower*" to see what kind of message they convey regarding environmental threats especially the ones which are evident in our world.

Moreover, Chandrasekaran (2015) in his doctoral thesis had taken an ecocritical approach to the works of Rabindranath Tagore with the focus on "*Red oleanders*", "*Mukta dhara*", "*The Home and the World*" and "*The Religion of Man*". As a pioneer of ecology Tagore, with wisdom and perception, looks far ahead of his times and declares that eco-systems of this world are viewed as a manifestation of deeper reality. Based on the finding of his thesis Tagore believes that nature helps man to survive and have a happier life. Therefore, man needs nature to provide him with sustenance for his existence; it is he who gives meaning to the existence of nature. Tagore's *Mukta dhara* successfully displays his deep love for nature and explains the man's relationship with nature.

In addition to above mentioned studies the main objective of present research project is to provide an ecocritical analysis of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. Its main objective is to indicate that how an ecocritical perspective illuminates the poems of Tagore, how he has encoded ecocritical factors in his poems.

### **Methodology and Data Analysis**

A descriptive analytic method was used to analyze the poems of Tagore within the theoretical framework of Garrad (2004). Based on the classification of Garrad elements such as earth and pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals can be considered as ecocritical factors. It should be noted that

Garrad (2004) has placed the earth in a separate category but the present study considers it with the pollution as it is related to earth.

### **Earth and Pollution**

Ecocriticism can define, explore, and even solve ecological problems in wider sense. In recent years, we have become accustomed to see images of a dying planet (Ross, 1991: 171). It is essential for ecocritics to give greater consideration to the earth and phenomena which influence it. Therefore, ecocritics due to their concern regarding environmental issues such as global warming and pollution environmentalists value rural ways of life and are concerned about natural scarcity of nature. Tagore in his sonnet named "*The Gardener Iv: Ah Me*" tries to attract the attention of his addressee to the importance of rural ways of life. Consider the following lines in which the poet describes his tendency toward rural life and invites others to join him:

*AH me, why did they build my house by the road to the market town? ... They moor their laden boats near my trees... I call them and say, "The shade is cool under my trees. Come, friends."*

In the below verse of his another poem "*IT was in May*" Tagore portrays the parched land which dried out, cracked open without water.

*"The dry earth gaped with thirst in the heat."*

In the below verse of his poem "*I Remember*" and "*The fair was on before the temple*" Tagore mentions the natural disaster i.e. flood and its consequences on communities and individuals.

*".... Rills of muddy water rushed and swelled the stream and sunk my boat.*

*Bitterly I thought in my mind that the storm came on purpose to spoil my happiness..."*

“...The road was muddy, the river in flood, and the field under water in ceaseless rain...”

### Wilderness

Ecocritics examine human perception of wilderness in multiple ways. The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity (Clark, 2011). Wilderness is often viewed as a shelter, or even a condition that needs to be challenged. In this category human is almost on the evil side. In the below verse of “*In the morning I cast my net into the sea*” poem, Tagore portrays the evil side of human which harms the nature by tearing the leaves of flower aimlessly.

“When with the day’s burden I went home, my love was sitting in the garden idly tearing the leaves of a flower.”

In the following poem “*Why did the lamp go out?*” Tagore blames himself as a human for failure and misfortune in natural stream of life.

“...Why did the flower fade?  
I pressed it to my heart with anxious love that is why the flower faded.  
Why did the stream dry up?  
I put a dam across it to have it for my use that is why the stream dried up”

In “*None lives forever*”, Tagore emphasize on the action and reaction that if human being is responsible for the death of flowers so he should not feel sad about their death.

“...The flower fades and dies; but he who wears the flower has not to mourn for it forever...”

### Apocalypse

Over-use of natural resources and man’s ignorance of the air, water and soil have given rise to a discussion of Apocalypse in modern literature. According to Bible, Apocalypse is

the final destruction of the world. Rachel Carson’s classic *Silent Spring* (1962) highlights the dangers of pesticide and sets off the great environmental debates of the twentieth century. Nuclear war, tidal waves, bio-engineering, global ecological disaster, man-made or natural, the list is enormously diverse and apparently endless. Lawrence Buell (1995) declared apocalypse is the single most powerful metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal. Tagore in his sonnet “*Maran-Milan (Death-Wedding)*” mentions about the unexpected occurrence of death and its origin from another world.

“Death, approach me with such gentle steps... Death, wrap me, finally, in your cold ... Arms and carry me away while I dream? ...Death, Death, to the sea where the wind rolls Darkness towards me from infinity.”

Or in another verse of his poem “*The Gardener LXVIII: None Lives For Ever, Brother*” Tagore consider our life as a flower and mention’s about the eternity of death.

But earth’s flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by death.

Or in “*Reverend Sir*” he again emphasizes on the vanity of this world and life. He also asserts that, human is only immortal for a few hours which indicates that life span is too short.

“Reverend Sir, forgive this pair of sinners.

Spring winds to-day are blowing in wild eddies, driving dust and dead leaves away, and with them your lessons are all lost.

Do not say, father, that life is a vanity.  
For we have made truce with death for once, and only for a few fragrant hours we two have been made immortal.

Even if the king’s army came and fiercely fell upon us we should sadly shake our heads and say, brothers, you are

*disturbing us. If you must have this noisy game, go and clatter your arms elsewhere.*

*Since only for a few fleeting moments we have been made immortal...*

In the following verse of “*You left me and went on your way*” the same as previous verse the poet again emphasizes on the vanity of this world

*“...But ah, my evil fortune, time is short.*

*Youth wanes year after year; the spring days are fugitive; the frail flowers die”*

In most cases of apocalyptic imagination little hope is considered for the earth. In the following verse of “*Where do you hurry*” the same approach can be seen as poet has little hope for earth as sleep closes the eyes of earth.

*“Sleep has laid her fingers upon the eyes of the earth”*

### **Dwelling**

According to Garrard, dwelling is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory. Dwelling represents a long term association of humans with the landscape (2004:108). Let’s see how Tagore demonstrates dwelling in his poem “*No My Friends*” as poet emphasize on his unwillingness to leave his homeland and dwelling.

*... No, my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron*

*mantle flutters in the wind; if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers...*

In another verse of “*wandering madman*” Tagore describes a madman who has lost his everything and now he is like an uprooted tree.

*“...The madman returned on his footsteps to seek anew the lost treasure, with his strength gone, his body bent, and his heart in the dust, like a tree uprooted...”*

### **Animals**

According to Garrard (2004) in liberationist criticism the moral and legal differences between humans and animals have been weakened, but the difference between wild and domestic animals is available. According to the Tagore domestic animals have upmost importance as in the following verses of his poem “*Gardener Xiii: I Asked Nothing*” and “*The yellow bird*” he portrays the beauty of domestic animals such as cow and honey bees and how human being benefits from them during his daily life.

*“Under the banyan tree you were milking the cow with your hands, tender and fresh as butter...”*

*The mango tree was shedding its flowers upon the village road, and the bees came humming one by one...*

*With the vessel on your lap you were milking the cow. I stood with my empty can.”*

*“...Bees that have hived in our grove go to seek honey in theirs”*

### **Conclusion**

The present article analyzed the poems of Rabindranath Tagore within the theoretical framework of Greg Garrad (2004). The results of the present study indicated that the global poet through his universal vision has registered his thoughts and feelings in his poems. Based on data analysis section, it was revealed that various ecocritical elements such as earth and pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals have been encoded in the poems of Tagore. Without considering the time in which the poem has been composed, it can be easily observed that Tagore’s attitude toward nature is a natural outcome of the influence of the place and people, which he has encountered in his early life. Therefore, his literary works are much more relevant to our time than his own time, as our environmental concerns are getting

beyond the control. All in all, the classification of Garrad (2004) was also a helpful tool to analyze Rabindranath Tagore poems regarding ecocritical approach.

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