



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract

This paper examines how the Bengali poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by nature. He thought that all living things, including human beings, trees, rivers, and animals, share a single life force that he referred to as Jivan Devata, or the “Lord of Life.” This concept was not merely an idea in his poetry; he really put it into reality. He constructed a school at Santiniketan where students learned amid trees rather than in enclosed classrooms. He initiated a rural development initiative at Sriniketan with the goal of improving the lives of the inhabitants as well as the land. His poetry, articles, and stories depict rivers, forests, and seasons as living presences rather than plain scenery. This paper investigates Tagore’s views on nature, his educational and rural endeavours, and his creative work. It then relates his theories to contemporary environmental concepts like deep ecology and ecofeminism. The study contends that Tagore’s vision, based on love, care, and everyday practice, still provides valuable insights for how we think about nature and sustainability today.

Keywords: environmental consciousness, nature philosophy, ecocriticism, deep ecology.

1. Introduction

Today, the world is facing major environmental issues, and many people are searching for older ways of thought that value nature more. Rabindranath Tagore is one of these thinkers. He was a Bengali poet, philosopher, teacher, and social reformer. His love of nature was more than just lyrical embellishment; it affected his entire perspective on life. This emerged from his study of the Upanishads, his experience maintaining his family’s land in rural Bengal, and his personal connection to rivers, trees, and seasons. Tagore lived before the contemporary environmental movement, hence he cannot be considered an “environmentalist” in the modern sense. However, the scholars now believe that his works and life’s work demonstrate a strong and profound concern for nature. This article discusses Tagore’s beliefs about nature, how he applied these ideas in his Santiniketan and rural programs, how nature appears in his poetry and stories, and how his thinking compares to modern environmental ideas.

2. Method

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to explore Rabindranath Tagore's ecological ideas. Primary sources include *Gitanjali* (Tagore, 1913), *Creative Unity* (Tagore, 1922), *The Religion of Man* (Tagore, 1931), and the short stories "Subha" and "Balai." These texts are closely examined to find concerns about nature, spirituality, and environmental ethics. Secondary materials, such as peer-reviewed journal publications and the *Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore* (Hogan & Pandit, 2020), are used to supplement and contextualize the analysis.

3. Tagore's view of nature

Rabindranath Tagore thought that all living things are connected by a single universal life force, which he referred to as *Jivan Devata* or the "Lord of Life." He believes that human beings are an intrinsic part of nature, rather than apart from it. Nature is a living presence that supports both the body and the spirit. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore depicts nature as a means of encountering the divine and comprehending the unity of life. He thought that individuals can only be whole if they live in connection with nature.

Tagore also critiqued modern industrial civilization for prioritizing material advancement over human values. In his book "The Religion of Man," Tagore claimed that human life should be led by love, beauty, and joy rather than profit and mechanical efficiency (1931). He thought that nature had intrinsic value and should not be considered as a simple resource for human use. In his essay "Tapovan," Tagore commended the ancient forest tradition in which people lived in harmony with nature and obtained wisdom through simplicity.

Tagore believed that the relationship between human beings and nature should be based on love, care, and respect rather than dominance. This concept appears in "My Reminiscences" and "Aranyadevata." Recent scholars refer to this approach as Tagore's "eco-ethics of care," which promotes gratitude and responsibility for the natural world. Tagore's ecological vision was grounded in Indian spiritual and cultural traditions, yet it shared similarities with subsequent Western conceptions of environmental ethics.

4. Nature in Practice: Santiniketan and Sriniketan

Tagore used his thoughts about nature through education and rural development. In 1901, he founded a school in Santiniketan based on the old *tapovan* tradition, where students learned in close contact to nature rather than in confined classrooms. Classes were frequently held under trees to assist students form a close connection with the natural world. In 1921, the school was renamed Visva Bharati University. Santiniketan was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2023, in recognition of its unique educational philosophy.

Tagore founded Sriniketan, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, in 1922 with the goal of enhancing village life by sustainable development. He supported improved farming, healthcare, education, and cooperative methods in collaboration with Leonard Elmhirst and Rabindranath Tagore. He thought that environmental health and human well-being were strongly related, and that scientific advancements should help both urban and rural communities.

Tagore also encouraged environmental awareness through cultural festivals such as *Vriksharopan* (tree-planting festival) and *Halakarshan* (ploughing festival). These festivals combined music, community participation, and respect for nature, making environmental care a shared social and cultural practice rather than simply a duty.

5. Nature in Tagore's Poems and Stories

Nature has a key role in Rabindranath Tagore's literary writings. In poetry works such as *Gitanjali*, *Sonar Tori* (The Golden Boat), and *Balaka* (A Flight of Swans), he employs images of rivers, forests, birds, seasons, and the sky to convey spiritual truth and the wholeness of existence. For Tagore, nature is more than just a beautiful environment; it is a living presence through which people might encounter the divine.

Tagore also conveyed his ecological views in works like "Tapovan," "Palli Prakriti," and "Aranyadevata." In these writings, he presents forests as sites of learning and spiritual growth, emphasizing the strong connection between village life and the natural environment. He also critiques colonial standards for damaging this connection.

His short stories, like "Subha" and "Balai," express his passion for nature. In "Subha," the silent protagonist seeks solace and understanding in animals and the natural environment. In "Balai," a little boy's great devotion for a tree exemplifies the emotional connection between human beings and environment. Tagore's stories show that modern society frequently distances individuals from the natural environment and its values.

6. Tagore and Modern Environmental Ideas

Rabindranath Tagore's views about nature are very similar to many modern environmental philosophies. His idea that all living beings share the same universal life force is consistent with deep ecology beliefs, which acknowledge nature's intrinsic value beyond its utility to human beings. Unlike some profound ecologists, Tagore felt that nature and human life should coexist, with village life and agriculture being integral parts of the natural environment.

Tagore's emphasis on love, care, humility, and respect for nature reflects ecofeminism, which contends that the dominance of nature and the oppression of women come from the same mindset of control. Although Tagore derived these ideas from Indian spiritual traditions rather than feminist theory, his ecological philosophy has many of the same ethical principles.

Tagore also thought that ecological problems should be dealt with local knowledge and community engagement. His work at Sriniketan emphasized sustainable rural development and self-reliance over major, imported development models. In this way, his thoughts anticipate the contemporary environmental approach of "think globally, act locally".

7. Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore's deep respect for nature can be seen in his writings and practical activities. He thought that human beings and nature are inseparably connected, referencing *Jivan Devata*'s concept of the interconnectedness of all life. His ideology of love, care, and respect for nature was implemented through Santiniketan, Sriniketan, and environmental festivals like Vriksharopan. Tagore's ecological theory shares many elements with modern environmental theories, such as deep ecology and ecofeminism, while staying grounded in Indian spiritual and cultural traditions. His concept of human-nature harmony remains relevant today, providing essential guidelines for sustainable living and environmental responsibility.

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