AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TAGORE’S FRUIT GATHERING: 
AN INSIGHT INTO THE BOND BETWEEN MAN, NATURE AND GOD

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Abstract:
Nature had a great role to play in the making of Tagore’s personality. Nature, for Tagore’s family, was one of the purest and the most beautiful creations among others in the universe. Tagore was no exception in his appreciation and observation of nature. He was always very sensitive and concerned about the preservation of nature. He thought that nature was something for enjoyment and not for exploitation. He was in favour of the least exploitation of nature. He knew that human beings had a tendency to pluck flowers for offerings to God. But he wanted that only the dry and withered flowers must be used for the sake of worship. This attitude proves the poet as a genuine ecologist who chose poetry as a medium. The main concern of Tagore’s nature poetry was to highlight the imminent danger to nature by some shameless people. Fruit Gathering also mainly deals with the similar concerns. The concerns and worries highlighted by Tagore in the poetic collections almost eighty years back prove very true in today’s context. The huge and untimely fire spreading all over the forests in summers not only destroying the invaluable fauna and flora of our beautiful nature but also making it difficult for the common human being to breathe free. The large scale break-out of the fire in the forests clearly proves the fact that human being has not learnt from Tagore’s lessons of preserving nature. Not only this, but the sudden climatic changes because of global warming, drought, untimely heavy rains, the pattern of darkness in the day time in cloudy conditions, fast drying up of water resources etc., are some of the negative outcomes because of the unnecessary human being’s intervention into nature. Here, the poet in Fruit Gathering comes out with a strong message and warning to establish deep ecology and symbiosis with nature, lest the nature is spoiled beyond repairs.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, Symbiosis, Eco-spiritualism, Anthropocentricism, Nature, Wilderness, environmentalism.

Ecocriticism is watch-word in Tagore’s poetry. Ecocriticism in today’s context has worked wonders in the field of awareness towards nature. No doubt, even the common men seems to have become aware about the vital importance of nature for life, on account of the consistent voice raised by ecocritics such as Greg Garrad, Cheryl Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Glen A Love, Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer etc., in favour of nature. Basically, ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. Greg Garrad, an eminent critic on ecocriticism, defines this term as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human culture history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (Ecocriticism 5). Glen A. Love, in the introduction of Practical Ecocriticism, explicates how ecocriticism is different from other critical theories:

At the beginning of third millennium and of a new century often heralded as “the century of the environment,” a coherent and broadly based movement embracing literary-environmental interconnections, commonly termed “ecocriticism,” is emerging. Environmental and population pressures inevitably and increasingly support the position that any literary criticism which purports to deal with social and physical reality will
encompass ecological considerations.(1)

But, the new discoveries and experiences have distracted the focus and made the human being more anthropocentric. Even, making them believe that they are not only the God’s best creation but are superior to rule over the entire world. This idea replaced the earlier concepts. And, the survival of the human race on earth has become inconceivable because of the anthropocentric approach of human being towards nature. The man has become arrogant and begun to exploit all aspects of nature for his self-glorification. He destroyed the trees for his habitats, and despooled the natural beauty of the landscape with the setting up of industrial establishments.

For this purpose, ecocriticism has become interdisciplinary as it seeks to relate nature and human being through various means and tries to look at the relationship from various aspects like psychological, sociological, philosophical and scientific. Greg Garrard, in his book Ecocriticism, has described the various terms or concerns of ecocriticism as wilderness, pollution, pastoral, deep ecology, anthropocentrism, ecofeminism, apocalypse, animals, earth, and dwelling.

The term Deep Ecology which comes under ecocriticism examines the deeper root question about human interactions with the natural world, rather than the ‘shallow’ issues like pollution and environmental break down. According to Greg Gerred, “Deep Ecology is the most influential beyond academic circles, inspiring many activists in organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Earth First! And Sea Shepherd”(23). The term Deep Ecology is a radical form of environmentalism coined by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher in early 1970. As Garrard remarks, “shallow’ approaches take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for the preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans”(24). Deep Ecology on the other hand “demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature”(24, Ecocriticism).

Talking about Tagore’s Fruit Gathering, it is a collection of poems that presents his deep love for nature, in which he mixes his own feeling with description of various beautiful landscapes, creating delightful juxtapositions. The poet is so much fascinated by the different objects of nature that he has no hesitation in remaining illiterate in his attempt of spending more time in the lap of nature, rather than wasting his time in studying ‘books’, or getting bookish knowledge. For him, the bookish knowledge or the theoretical knowledge has no significance as compared to the knowledge and experience gathered by being in the midst of nature. Relating the experience of a flower-gatherer who is apparently illiterate the poet says that he does not feel humiliated at all on his being illiterate. He very humbly leaves the so-called wise man to his fate are happy that he has been blessed with the bigger book that is nature. In the song 4, the poet speaks out:

I woke and found his letter with the morning.
I don’t know what it says, for I cannot read.
I shall leave the wise man alone with his book.
Shall not trouble him, for who knows if he can read what the letter says.
Let me hold it to my forehead and press it to my heart
When the night grows still and stars come out one by one
I will spread it on my lap and stay silent.
The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky.

The above-quoted lines of the poem unambiguously reflect poet’s deep alignment and attachment to nature. In one word, there could be no better example of ‘deep ecology’ as reflected in the lines, as far as eco-critical angle is concerned.

In the song 5, the poet talks about the mysterious nature of Nature. There was a time when quiet young the poet was unable to understand the mysterious hidden under the cover of nature. As he grows older and wiser, he came to know that the heavenly charm was manifest all around the nature: in the petals
of flowers, the foam of waves and the summit of the hills. In one word, the mystery gets unveiled in all the manifestation of nature.

Apparently, the song reveals the first signals of the poet’s deep sympathy with Nature, which grew deeper as the time went by. In other words, these were the first signs of the attitude of ‘deep ecology’ on the part of the poet with regards to his relationship with Nature. The poet very beautifully says:

It is painted in petals of flowers; waves flash it from their foam; hills hold it high on their summits.
I had my face turned from you, therefore I read the letters sawry and knew not their meaning.

In the song 15, the poet describes about the speech of God which is simple. But, because of our worldly preoccupations we are unable to listen to it. God speaks through the twinkling of the stars, and the silence of the tree. In the same manner, the heavenly songs reach the poet’s heart in the form of the birds that fly from distant places. And, the poet is happy to wait for the songs of the birds which come in the season of April.

Here, the indication is very clear that the real songs are those that have their origin in heavenly life and again by comparing these songs with the flight of the birds show the poet’s concern and love for nature. When the poet talks about the speech of the silent trees are speaking, he seems to approve the saying that ‘speech is great, but silence is greater.’ In other words, all that the stars and the tree speak in their silent language is what God wants to say. For example, the poet says, “I understand the voice of your stars and the silence of your trees.” (12)

In song 18, the poet gives an example of a bud which cannot become a flower by the efforts of human being. He says:

No, it is not yours to open buds into blossoms.
Shake the bud, strike it, it is beyond your power to make it blossom.

Here, the implication is that human being should let the nature grow in its own way. He should not interfere in its growth. If it happens then the naturalness of nature will be lost. Symbolically, it means that human being must remain within his limits, and should not try to interfere in the workings of God (nature). This is exactly known as wilderness in eco-critical studies where the nature grows without the intervention of human beings.

Moreover, the poet wants the human being not to disturb the nature like flowers, bud, plants by trying to make a physical touch with them. If we pluck the flowers, it becomes withered and loses its charm. Here, the poet gives a clear message that nature should be enjoyed from a distance so that its beauty remains intact. The poet here unconsciously warns the anthropocentric approach of human beings. The part of nature must be used in the limited or minimum possible way. So that the worldly progress or the civilization may go further, but at the same time, the purity of nature must not be disturbed. Boundless and mindless growth will ultimately lead towards total destruction. There must be a kind of balance between the worldly progress and sincere wish to maintain the original dimension of nature.

In the song 20, the poet talks about the inherent power of night time in relation to spirituality. The poet like a sage wants to meditate upon eternity in the night time. The night is when the whole universe assumes a complete silence, which provides an appropriate atmosphere for thinking about the mysterious nature of God. The poet is charmed by the beauty of the night. He believes that the overwhelming questions of life, death and eternity can be answered in the complete silent atmosphere of the night.

Here, the power of night is described by the poet with a deep sense of belief. In other words, according to the poet, the God cannot be found in the noise of the day. If at all the God was to be realized, the silence of the night would be the best time for it. The poet says:

Take me up on thy chariot without wheels, running noiselessly from world to world, thou queen

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in the palace of time, thoudarkly beautiful!
Those wakeful souls gaze in the starlight in wonder at the
treasure they have suddenly found.

Here, the poet comes out with a very untraditional description about the night, which is supposed to
be a time for bodily rest. But, here the poet gives a different angel of 'night' which can perhaps provide the
answer to the Unknown by remaining awake through the night. In the song, the poet's description of the
night seems to be influenced by Indian orient point of view when devotees of the 'Durga Maa' observe a fast
for nine days during 'navratras' which culminates in the 'ratri jagran' (awakening through the night). It is
believed that the Goddess Durga gives darshan to Her devotees who undergo the above said observation
and practices. In one word, the poet is talking about the night as the propertime for meditation. He wants to
convey the message that night is symbolic of spiritual life.

In the song 23, the poet imagines his mind to be floating and dancing on the waves of life amidst the
voices of wind and water. Even as the sun goes down into the sea as if for a rest, in the same manner, the
poet's thoughts also go to take a rest. So to say, the poet falls asleep; it is only when the mind is at rest. The
spirit of the soul of the poet awakes to the realization of eternal secret, which belongs to God.

Here, again the poet takes the dependence of natural symbols to describe the supernatural power of
God as against the limited ones of human beings. If one has to experience the supernatural element, the best
way is to have a deep attachment to nature as in the lines in which the poet says, "The poet's mind floats and
dances on the waves of life amidst the voices of wind and water." (19)

In the song 51, the poet talks about the time of his departure from this world for which he is so
eagerly waiting. But, the only thing that he will miss in this world will be the shepherds playing on their
pipes beneath the banyan tree or the cattle grazing on the slope by the river. There are the pictures that come
to his mind as an attachment to this world. He also feels sad about the silence of the night and the daylight
which gave him thoughts like beautiful flowers.

In one word, he has no complaints about his passing away from this world as he is curious to meet
his Creator in heaven. But, the attractive nature and his deep love for it make him sad when he will leave
this world. Here, again the poet says:

Shepherds will play their pipes beneath the banyan trees,
and cattle graze on the slope by the river, while my days will
pass into the dark.
This is my prayer that I may know before I leave why
the earth called me in her arms.

In these lines, we see that how beautifully the poet has described the pastoral imagery. And, again
here also the poet's deep attachment with nature becomes clear even when he prepares to leave the physical
body.

In the song 56, the poet envisages the Almighty with a female figure. The poet sees the female
beauty in every part of nature. For example, when a stream runs, the poet compares it with the dance of a
female. And, the morning light is compared with the singing of the same female figure. The waves of the
sea are also compared with a movement of the same female figure. The Creator in the eyes of the poet
seems to have spread this female figure in all the aspects of the nature. It is a reason why a lover of nature
loves it despite its adverse aspects like thorns, storms, landslide etc. The poet says:

She who is ever returning to God his own out flowing
of sweetness; she is the ever fresh beauty and youth in
nature; she dances in the bubbling streams and sings
in the morning light; she with heaving waves suckles the
thirsty earth; in her the Eternal One breaks into two in
a joy that no longer may contain itself, and overflows

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in the pain of love.

In song 63, the poet wishes for the love of God in the form of rain which blesses the thirsty earth and fills the whole dry ground with water. When the rain comes, not only the human beings, but every part and parcel of nature is cool down after a long spell of heat. If there was no rain then the growing heat would make almost impossible for the whole organism to tolerate it. But, the God knows the troubles of man and powers down the shower of rain in the form of love and blessing. So that, the whole creatures feel relieved and their thirst is quenched.

In the same manner, the poet asks for the love of God in the way it makes the small plants to grow into tall trees with branches, fruits, and flowers. It is because of the power of God that deals lifeless things like trees become lively. In other words, that because of the supernatural element of God, these trees becomes vibrant and lively. Again, the poet also wishes his heart and mind also to be filled with the same celestial spirit. So that, the poet can feel blessed and make his life meaningful. In the lines, “Send me love which is cool and pure like your rain that blesses the thirsty earth and fills the homely earthen jars” (64), the poet establishes a relationship between God and nature. In so far as, he believes that nature is a creation of God, from which human beings can learn how to live a meaningful life.

In the song 71, the poet compares the human life with the sea and the sky-touching waves are symbolic of ambitions and desires of human being to touch the height of their goals. And, a constant struggle of man is also seen in the form of those waves which are scattered all around the beach. So to say, the ambitions of human being howsoever high or low meet with the same end. Ultimately, the man passes away leaving his desires and ambitions unfulfilled. The poet says, “O the waves, the sky-devouring waves, glistening with light/dancing with life, the waves of eddying joy, rushing forever.” (71)

Further, the rise and fall of the sea are compared with the cycle of birth and death, which has a circular moment, but out of the same waves appears a seagull which flies high towards the sky flying with delight. In other words, out of the same circular moment of life, a bird of delight, spiritually inspired person can also have its existence. Here, the poet using the comparison from the sea-waves and seagull, he wants to highlight the distinction between worldliness and spirituality. Again the poet says, “Birth and death rise and fall with their rhythm, and the sea-gull of my heart spreads its wings crying in delight.” (72)

In the song 73, the poet describes about the merging of his being into nature. Here, he feels as if spring flowers and leaves have entered into his body. He listens gladly the humming of the bees and the blowing of the winds. The whole picture fascinates him too much that a sweet spring fountain seems to spring from his heart. He feels his eyes washed with delight as if dew bathed morning. The whole of his body seems to quiver producing a musical sound coming from the late. The poet is amazed to feel his life being driven by some unseen force taking him to eternity. Under the spell of spiritual power, he feels strangely placed thinking about the impact as being real or imaginary.

What the poet is sure about is that the happiness seems to have entered his veins and the gladness seems to dance in his heart, making whole of his being like a restless bird wanting to take a flight into unknown direction. The poet says:

My eyes are washed with delight like the dew-bathed
morning, and life is quivering in all my limbs like the sounding
strings of the lute.
Are you wandering alone by the shore of my life, where
the tide is in flood, O lover of my endless days?
Are my dreams flitting round you like the moths with
their many-coloured wings?

Here, the poet gives an impression of a complete influence, and domination of the power of nature into his being. With this kind of state of mind, he has no hesitation or fear to physically pass away. Rather, he seems eager to join the eternity as soon as possible or he has so deeply made himself attached to nature...
that his thinking has gone beyond the questions of life and death. Obviously, the poet once again shows his deep commitment in the power of nature.

In song 78, the poet once again is all praise for nature. He finds his words insufficient to describe the glory and mystery of nature. Still, he attempts to describe it by saying that it was the Creator who blessed with perfect musical songs. The birds also repaid the debt of the musical power by singing the songs in a way only the birds can sing. The poet regards himself less fortunate than the birds in so far as he was given only the power of speech, but interestingly, he was asked to produce a song out of that voice. As a result, he came out with songs. Likewise, the winds are created so light in weight that they can blow. As a contrast, his hands were made heavy so that they could be made light by using them in the service of God.

The God gave something other to others, but asked the poet to do or say something. As a result, his life has grown like a ripped fruit till he was capable of reaping more than sowed. All in all, whatever the poet was able to create or make in terms of songs or paintings was because of the blessing of the Creator. Here, the poet describes in a very contrasting manner the expectations from his Creator which he had of the poet. Again, nature plays a very strong mediating role in between the poet and the God. The poet beautifully says:

To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs
in return.
You gave me only voice, yet asked for more, and I
sing…
The harvest of my life ripens in the sun and the shower
till I reap more than you sowed, gladness your heart,
O Master of the golden granary.

In song 80, the poet once again describes about his helpless ignorance of the presence of God in each and every moment and object of Nature. Even, the wind seemed to him as a natural phenomenon which ran from one side to the other. Then comes a time of realization that even that wind which blew from one corner to the other for no reason to the poet, carried a hidden message of the presence of God even in that blowing of the wind. The God's presence was felt by the poet in the opening of colourful flowers. The process of life and death and its continuation made the poet feel about the supreme power of God, under whose supervision all the activities of human life were performed. The poet says:

You made me open in many flowers, rooked me in
the cradles of many forms; hid me in death and found
me again in life.
I came and your heart heaved; pain came to you
and joy,
You touched me tingled into love.

Similarly, the repetition of sunrise became symbolic of the bright presence of the Creator and also the hope that the Creator of this beautiful earth is something to look for. Here, again a 'deep ecology' can easily be traced in the poet's description of the presence of God opening in many flowers and of course the reference of sunrise.

Thus, Fruit Gathering has been studied to serve as a reflection on 'eco-spiritualism' and 'deep ecology'. According to this philosophy, the best way to realise God is not only to respect nature but to worship it. Human being must approach nature only as a worshipper. Otherwise, because of his greed and materialistic outlook, nature is bound to be exploited and destroyed. Describing about the invasion of the money-minded people in the society, Tagore thinks that these are the ones who are most dangerous for the preservation of nature as their minds are always fixed on assimilating money and wealth and thus they remain far away from sympathy with nature. As a result, nature faces most danger by the people of such mentality because of their lust for greed and wealth. The poet very rightly says:
But when material possessions become too vast for a people, or when in competition with others the desire for material wealth rouses its ambition, then all its time and mind are occupied with the very weight of his millions to the path of the multitude of millions. Then he has no time for culture, or for the poetry of life; he strictly barricades himself against visitors whom he cannot but suspect to be self-seekers, being selfish in his own outlook upon life. In other words, he becomes professional, and the human in him is banished into the shade (The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore Volume III: A Miscellany, 473).

Thus, the analysis of the poem basically focuses attention on the need of establishing deep harmony between human being and nature, so that the development and the preservation of nature may go together, thereby keeping the original shape of nature intact.

Works Cited