



ECOCRITICISM AND TAGORE : A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism is one of the newest theory of postmodern era. Nature and human always treated as inseparable. is literary writing of east and west. As a separate theory it started to cought the attention of the world in 1990. Ecocriticism provide better understanding of the issues and danger on nature caused by humans. It sees texts and its relation with physical environment nature the consistent character is the writing of Tagore. As a humanist all through his life the had been vocal about thoughtless exploitation of Nature. He did something creative to create awareness about the environment by establishing the Shantiniketan. This paper discuss term ecocriticism and the ecological thought of Rabindranath Tagore.

Key words : Ecology, Ecocriticism , literature, Tagore, poem, short stories Shantiniketan.

Ecocriticism is one of the newest literary theory. Literature always acted as a mirror of society as it reflects on temporary trends and issues. Environment degradation is one of such issue which cought the attention of critic and scholars. Ecocriticism plays a significant role in the study of human relation with nature. The term Ecocriticism first used by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology : An experiment in Ecocriticism in 1978. Ecocriticism as an academic study began in the mid 1990 but its roots finds back in 1970.

Ecocriticism is the study of representation of nature in literary work and of relation ship between literature and environment. As it is a new theory Scholars and acadmeccion are still engaged in defining the scope and aim of the theory. The area of Ecocriticism is wide because it is not limited to any literary genre i.e. history, philosophy, science, humanities or business. Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty one of the pioneers in this field defining the Ecocriticism as, "The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." (XVIII) Laurence Buell says that "This study must be conducted in a sprit of commitment to environmentalist praxis." (II) Glan A Love's writing try to establish relation between natural sciences and humanities is closer together. In 19th Century Herary David Thoreu's wolden (1854) is regarded defining work of nature and on ecological concern which caught affention of most literary analysis. Another work of this genre was Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature (1836). In this book Emerson talk about the mystical unity of nature and man and request readers to enjoy this unity with environment.

Ecocriticism is a theory which takes earth Lentred approach to literary studies. Glotfelty XVIII she raises questions like how is nature represented in literature, how has the concept of wilderness changed over time and now how science itself open to literary analysis. She urges that in our postmodern age the profession of English literature must reolraw the boundaries to-remap the repvdly changing contours of English studies. Till now Literary Scholars egnores the environment crisis and no studies no journals no



professional societies and no conferences on Literature and environment. Burgers points out that the English Professor in failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment. Acknowledgement of our place within the natural world and our need to live fully within it at Peril of our very survival (1996 : 226) Glan A love whose effort widen and developed the area of ecocriticism says in introduction of his the book Practical Criticism (2003). At the beginning of the third millennium and of a new century often heralded as- the century of the environment, a coherent and broadly based movement embracing literary environment interconnections commonly termed ecocriticism is emerging..... Ecocriticism unlike all other forms of literary inquiry, encompasses non human as well as human contexts and considerations." (3, 11) According to him ecocritics are trying to read literature with a fresh sensitivity to the emergent voice of nature (5). Lawrence Buell defies ecocriticism in the Future of Environmental criticism (2005) as - the environmentally oriented study of literature and (Bess often) the arts more generally and to the theories that underlie such critical practice (138). The conservation of nature was always been main motive in India since vedic times, but before 1980's Ecocriticism was supposed to be area related to environmentalist but after 1980 its clear that it is not analysing nature in literature but it includes more bio centric study, extension of ethics, widening of man's concept of global community to include nonhuman life and the physical environment. The awareness of ecocriticism has been there since the beginning of civilization. In ancient times man was conscious of strong relationship of human and nature. He protected nurtured and cherished so nature might do the same to humans. This interconnected relationship was described in ancient writing of east and west. David Nazeel points out in The Ecocriticism Reader that ecocriticism is the analysis of literature as though nature mattered. Peter Berry included a chapter titled- Ecocriticism in the second edition of his Beginning Theory : An Introduction to Literary and Cultural theory (2002). The ecocritical study's focus moves away from man centered to earth centered and from inner to outer. It arises an important question that how literature can caught the attention of the world to the issues of depleting greenery and how to restore and preserve the bio environment as a teacher of literature. It is obvious areas of studies like history, philosophy, social ecology cannot do reforming but they can help to understand the issues and problems of environmental crisis (The ecocriticism Read as 1996 : XXI). Association for the study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established in 1992 and Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) in 1996. The aim of ASLE is to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relation between human beings and natural world and to encourage new nature writing traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature and interdisciplinary environment research. Ecocriticism, Green studies and Nature Writings are different name used for studies of human-nature relationship by American English and Victorian scholars according to Peter Berry of world has been since long. It is clear that in ancient times in whole of the world human beings lived as one with nature. Conservation is also encouraged traditionally through different cultural activities such as narratives in the form of myths rituals, customs. As humans grew progressive and modern though aggressive and arrogant also, man started to exploit and destroys nature for various reasons. Ecocriticism provides better understanding to conserve nature. Cheryl Burgess the author of paper titled-Toward an Ecological Literary Criticism, delivered in 1989 at the meaning of Western literature Association (WLA) argues that it is the responsibility of critics and teachers to point out the environmental implications of literary texts to engage in-ecocriticism (60) what Ecocritics do- ecocritics investigate underlying ecological values, meaning of word nature. He asks Questions such as- How is nature represented in the work? What role does the physical setting play in the work? Are the value in the work consistent with ecological wisdom? How the landscape in the work influence the way of treating nature? is there is difference in treatment of nature by man and woman ? is there is change of concept in wilderness from past? How different environmental issues including in literature? What is the effect of



ecology on literary studies. The significance principle of ecology is that every thing is connected. All lives are interwoven. Tagore in this sense stands out as true ecologist and ecocritics. Rabindranath Tagore considered one of the main spokesperson of nature. He celebrated the beauty and mystery of nature in his poems, short, stories, novels, dramas even in his lectures which shows his concern for nature. All element of nature like land , river, air. Plant and animals occupy significant place in his writing. Though he was not a scientist but to protect and preserve the environment was the thought always present in his mind from the beginning to the end of his life .Tagore always accepted the relationship of man and nature as they are one and inseparable. This relation of man with nature is existed from vedic time when ancient philosophers and thinkers felt that energy which is present in the world of nature, the same energy exhibits in the inner consciousness of humans. Since Ancient time Indians have shared love and respect for nature. Nature was the integral part of various activities of people whether economical, social, religious and spiritual. Nature was present everywhere.

Tagore always believed man's life and nature are interlinked and interdependent. There is harmony between physical and human world. But this harmony distributed and poses danger on outer physical world because of men's irresponsible actions and greed. The thoughtless misuse of nature causes irreparable damages to nature. It was first time Tagore concerned for nature and its exploitations exhibited in 1916 after seeing an oil spill at sea on his way to Japan.

Tagore's sensitive mind forced him to wrote about the danger to the physical world by man due to development and progress. Tagore criticizes the western attitude to nature, "In the west the prevalent feeling is that nature belongs exclusively to in animate things and to beast that there is sudden unaccountable break where human nature beings. (Tagore 1972, 26) In one of the stories in his Reminiscences established his strong bond with Nature in his words.

I still remembered a day in my life childhood when I was still modern to struggle across my lesson in a first primer strewn with is olated words smothered under the burden of spelling The morning hour appeared to me like a once illuminated page, grown dusty and faded discoloured into irrelevant marks smudges and gaps, wearisome in its moth eaten meaninglessness. Suddenly I came to rhymed sentenced of combined words which may be translated as It rains, the leaves tremble". At once I came to a world where in I recovered my full meaning. My mind touched the creative real on of expression and at that moment I was no longer a mere student with his mind muffled by spelling lessons enclosed by classroom. (Tagore, 122)

Tagore shares intimate closeness with nature since his childhood he always felt nature as s companion, But in his maturer years his attitude to nature changes as a mystical world He wrote small collection of poem in 1928 on the occasion of the tree planting festivals (Briksharopan) in Shantniketan In these poems he places nature with in frame work of myth to remind human civilization about the danger of an indiscriminate explotations of natural resources. These poems chosen from volume Banodini (The message of the wild 1929) alerting us. He believed that separation from nature brings suffering to humans. The unity of man and nature effectively shown in his short story 'Balai' who is the young boy protagonist felt that he and nature are one and part of nature's black clouds, the rain drops and sun shine. He feels comfort in the lap of grassland and sad when grass is cut by gardener. In another short story Atithi Tarapada the main character feels freedom from the bandage of home try to separate him from nature acting as a hurdle in his way to nature.

Tagore always emphasises compassion ate and ethical attitude to nature for Tagore, "when we become merely man not man in the universe' it creates problems and closed the door for solutions we try all kind of artificial methods each of which brings its own crop of interminable difficulties" (Tagore, 1972, 9- 10). Tagore had concerned over widening boundaries of desert over shrinking green-land and trees He could see the ill effect of deforestation and soil erosion causing great damage to the natural and human



world. In his early collection of poems Chaitali published in 1896 in one of its poem 'Sobhyatar Prati,' he wrote, "dao Phirese ar anya, lao a nagar sobhyata it means give back our positive forest, fastness, take away this city and take away all these scraps of iron, bricks, timber and rocks Another poem Tree Worship shows his concerned and love for nature was constant and his relation with nature was spiritual and essential.

He is the writer who harmonized the man and nature and hold holistic inclusiveness of all life form In his poetic drama Prakritir Pratisodh' (The Ascetic 1884) deals with the ascetic who renounces nature as hurdle to wisdom and Philosophical spiritual knowledge but a small orphan girl made him realises that wisdom is not to renounce the nature even salvation can be attained by uniting with nature. As time passed Tagore concerned for nature preservation increased on the occasion of Tree planting in 1935 he wrote poem "Tree Worship' which shows ecology not only as an dominant motif but he also concerned for natural resources depletion that is taking place. The theme of the poem is that tree are necessary to stop soil erosion which is the main cause of destruction of trees. Deforestation disturbed all creatures great and small many others.

Because Nature is a chain which binds man and nature depend on each other for their comfort and existance Poet Abul Bashir said, "Rabindranath wrote extensively about nature, about the relationship between human being and nature". His play 'Muktadhara' (The Waterfall) and Raktakharabi (Red Oleanders 1925) deals with issues of modernization and industrization. In Muktadhara he points out the side effects of big dams and unthoughtful action and its result on men and on nature leading damage on the ecological system. The theme of the play Muktadhara depicts non king used machine created by him to block the natural flow of the river to create dam. The play "Raktakharabi' inspired by real incident when Tagore was on walk in shilong, Assam, When he saw discarded iron rod crushed red oleander plant.

Tagore crosses international boundaries and show his concern for ecosystem, excessive greed for materialism, for power to control over natural resources. After returning from England he was deeply shocked to see how the greenary of the two sides of Ganges replace by big jute mills. He shared his feelings in Reminiscences 1917. "The broad lesiure streching from the horizon and from the green earth to blue sky: all these have been vitiated by the smoke emitting chimneys of river side jute mills. The result was a high degree of pollution of air, water and land. The natural landscape was disfigured and so was its beauty grace and appeal." PP. 208-9. In same way, starting of commercial aviation had increased his worries which find expression in poem Nav- Jatak. From translated by William Radice.

In brutal roaring of an aeroplane we hear
Incompatibility with sky.
Destruction of atmosphere.

Panic spreads down from the skies
from their growing devastation.

Hear the prayers of an earth that is stricken with pain
In the green woods, O may the birds
sings supreme again. (Tagore selected poems) .P. 112.

Tagore as a humanist never had been against social and economical progress of individuals and society but was careful about the rampant exploitation of nature in the name of development. His views became real in form of Visva- Bharti in Shantineketan where form architecture to activities encourage preservation and sensivity to warts nature. His love for nature exibits in all activities at Shantineketan through gardening, plantation, ploughing and seasonal festivals celebrations etc. Nature is active force



behind construction of houses in Shantineketan as Shyamli, Kenark. Garden at Uttarayan, at Visva – Bharti there is inseparable bond between man – and nature. Amarty Sen said rightly "He wanted more official and un official promises for protecting the environment." (Tagore and India Bharat bichitra, July-December 1997) From the beginning nature is his favorite theme. A mid the deforestation and damage to eco system Tagore's writing and words are motivation and relevant which inspire people to be more sensitive and protecting to nature for themselves and future generations.

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