

## **An Analytical Study of R. N. Tagore's Philosophy of Environment**

**Ms. Bhabani Saharia**

Associate Professor, Department Of Philosophy, Moridhal College, Dhemaji, Under Dibrugarh University, Assam, India.

### **\*Corresponding Authors:**

Ms. Bhabani Saharia

Email: [sbhabani.philo@gmail.com](mailto:sbhabani.philo@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract:** In the proposed research work attempt has been made to analyze Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of environment. In spite of not having any formal knowledge on philosophy on environment he had a keen philosophical view on environment. Man- nature relationship is the key point of his philosophy of environment. He realized the intuitive and mutual bond between him and nature. He could feel the pulse of nature; could feel the pain of nature. He had immense love and respect for nature. He valued nature intrinsically. He considered himself as a part and parcel of the entire environment. Here discussion is carry on concentrating on the three main aspects; his perception of homely and natural environment, his attitude to development and the measures taken by him to protect and preserve the natural environment. The central aim of this research work is to meet the challenging situation of natural environment through the help of some of his significant writing from philosophical perspective. This is completely an analytical study; collected data from both the sources, primary and secondary and analyze accordingly. Side by side compare the collected data according to the demand of the situation.

**Keywords:** environmental philosophy, natural environment, intrinsic and extrinsic value, preservation, conservation, sustainable development.

---

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The first Asian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore occupied a central position in the galaxy of contemporary Indian thinkers for his manifold writings. His ocean of thoughts and ideas had significant impact in every aspects of society; especially in the field of environment, education, politics, and reform movements. In this research work the full concentration is given to his concern about environment from philosophical perspective. We all have awareness about the present degrading environmental condition. In such a challenging situation it is much more important to rethink the issue. Through this research work attempt has been made to tackle the natural environment related problems by the help of Tagore's some of significant writings having the philosophic vision. Rabindranath Tagore neither has any scientific and systematic knowledge on environment nor had propounded any environmentalism. Rather he is out and out a poet. So, it is very common to raise controversy regarding the issues; does a poet be treated as a philosopher; or does philosophy has any impact on the environmental issues? Logically it is possible to term a poet as a philosopher. Philosophy is not a separate branch of study. It is not a mere business of philosophy to formulate some abstract ideas and then analyze those ideas. It is beyond that. Philosophy helps us to realize each and every aspects of entire universe. Again it is also logically proved that

philosophy has immense impact on the environmental issues. The proof was advanced by Simon P. James while discussing about the three challenges of environmental philosophy that philosophy has immense impact on the environmental issues. Tagore's philosophy on the environment is related with sustainable rural development which is closely correlated between nature and human being. He imagined an interrelated approach of sustainable development through revival of rural industry and increasing agricultural growth with community development. He realized that human being's greedy actions are responsible for degrading environment. Tagore could perceive the ill effects of the natural environment by the intensive use of machine by the modern civilization. He sought development in a sustainable way where not any damage of nature could occur. So, he tried to make aware people regarding the mutual relationship between animate and inanimate creatures on earth and human being's responsibility towards nature and natural things. The establishment of Santiniketan, Sriniketan amidst the nature, the play Muktheadhara, Raktakarabi, and the entire programs initiated by him like plantation, Halakarshana, nature related celebration of different ceremonies like Poushmela, Barshamangal, Saradotshaba etc. are good examples of his philosophic mind. Finally taking consideration of all these activities he can be termed as

an environmental philosopher in the true sense of the term. So, Tagore has an insightful vision regarding environment. His philosophy of environment has some similarities with Upanishadic view and the deep ecological movement of Naess. So his philosophy of environment can be treated neither as occidental nor as oriental; rather his philosophy of environment is the synthesis of both. Tagore's philosophy of environment is considered as the meeting point of the present environmental crisis the world is facing. In this regard he can be termed as an environmental philosopher to some extent.

#### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

To shape the whole work we studied different poems, short stories, songs, memoirs, essays and dramas of Rabindranath Tagore and also various books related to his philosophy. The lists of Tagore's writing those have been reviewed here are:

1. Tagore, Rabindranath: Sadhana the Realization of Life
2. Ibid: Reminiscences
3. The Crescent Moon
4. Poem no. 6 from The Gardener
5. Poem no. 8 (Prakriti), lyric no. 94 (Prem-paryay), lyric no. 12, (Anusthanic Paryay) from Geetabitan
6. Short story Atithi from Galpagucha
7. Chithi- patra from Vol. 15
8. Creative Unity
9. Waterfall
10. Red Oleander
11. Letter from Rabindra Rachanavali, Vol. no. 7

To feel the Tagore's philosophical visions about environment we visited Santiniketan and Sriniketan complex and observed different festivals related to natural environment celebrated in the Santiniketan.

#### Objective of the Study:

The central aim and objectives of this research work is to analyze Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of environment through some of his significant writings. Through this study an attempt is made to make aware the masses regarding the significance of natural environment. This study also has aim to find out the relationship between development and sustainability of environment. Finally through this study an attempt is made to point out Tagore's vision of environment as a meeting point of the present degrading natural environment.

#### DISCUSSION:

At the very dawn of discussion it is must essential to clarify the two significant issues; whether a poet can be treated as a philosopher and does philosophy has any role in environmental issues. It is

considered to be essential as because the most familiar and appropriate identity of Rabindranath is as a poet. Usually it happens that a poet can never be viewed as a philosopher. So, it is not an easy task to treat a poet as a philosopher and to draw the philosophical vision scattered within mind. It is because of the false idea about philosophy that philosophers are guided by reason only and have nothing to do with intuition. On the other hand poets are guided by intuitive feelings only not by the reason or intellect. So, both are completely different from each other. But it is not the fact. Both philosopher and poet have the same end in view, though they start their journey from diverse standpoint. They approach reality from different angles. Both have aims at to realize the reality which is apart from our appearance. Radhakrishnan in his book *Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* stated that philosophy is an attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought[3]. It aims at a theory of the universe; and if this theory is held with a certain intensity and depth of feeling, if it captures the whole consciousness instead of being merely intellectually assented to, then the philosophic vision becomes creative and poetic (P. 164). So, poets are not different from philosophers. He concluded by saying that a poet is nothing if he is not a philosopher.

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) also states that poetry is the most philosophic of all writings, as its object is truth. The true poet is he who sees the whole in every part and makes his poetry to express his whole vision[10]. English poet and philosopher Coleridge [1] also opined that no man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time, a profound philosopher. According to Tennyson, the poet Laureate of Great Britain (1809- 1892), *poetry must embody an ideal vision or a true philosophy*[9]. A true poet will be a philosopher, a true philosopher a poet. (165). So, Rabindranath Tagore can be regarded as a philosopher in this sense. In his poetry we find the real picture of every aspects of world. Radhakrishnan also remarked that though poetry is not philosophy, it is possible to derive the philosophical mind of Rabindranath Tagore through his poetry.

Again it is also logically proved that philosophy has immense impact on the environmental issues. The proof was advanced by Simon P. James while discussing about the three challenges of environmental philosophy that philosophy has immense impact on the environmental issues. The three aspects that he determines are applied, practical and a tool to make aware the people regarding prevailing problems that mankind has faced. All these triangle aspects of philosophy are explicitly and implicitly contained in many of his writings and activities that are sufficient to termed him as an environmental philosopher. For example, his realization of man- nature communion, his awareness of possessing souls by all the animate and

inanimate beings, his perception of the law of unification, his sentiment of love and the different initiations taken by him to protect and preserve the entire natural environment. Behind his poetic mind there lies a true picture of an environmental philosopher. His philosophical thinking regarding environment is not confined only to a limited boundary of observing and analyzing his surrounding but also remains a good example to mould the attitude of the masses towards environment in a right direction so that our environment will be a sustainable one.

In Tagore's poetry the synthesis of intellect and intuition is revealed in an organized way. Through the help of the poetry he tried to realize the absolute truth lying besides appearances. Behind his familiar identity there lies a true picture of a philosopher in spite of not having any institutional philosophical knowledge or training. S. Radhakrishnan while discussing about Tagore's philosophy in his book *Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1919) also opined that we do not find any systematic exposition of his philosophy of life in Tagore's writings[3]. He gave the reference of Tagore's book *Sadhana* which cannot demand as a system of philosophy; rather it is an atmosphere that charged with a particular vision of reality. Still we consider him as a philosopher because he has a good realization of each and every aspects of the entire universe. So, his writings itself reveal his philosophic mind.

All these triangle aspects of philosophy are explicitly and implicitly contained in many of his writings and activities that are sufficient to termed him as an environmental philosopher. For example, his realization of man- nature communion, his awareness of possessing souls by all the animate and inanimate beings, his perception of the law of unification, his sentiment of love and the different initiations taken by him to protect and preserve the entire natural environment. Behind his poetic mind there lies a true picture of an environmental philosopher. His philosophical thinking regarding environment is not confined only to a limited boundary of observing and analyzing his surrounding but also remains a good example to mould the attitude of the masses towards environment in a right direction so that our environment will be a sustainable one.

Within the domain of Tagore's philosophy of environment we find the two phases of his perception of environment; his homely surrounding or homely environment and the natural environment. His perception of homely environment is quite different from his perception of natural environment. The homely environment is the surrounding environment within a limited boundary and the natural surrounding having no boundary. It is limitless and infinite. Tagore felt that for the proper growth and development of a child is quite

necessary to come close to nature. He realized the rational bond between man and nature.

He later realized that though his homely atmosphere was quite convenient for the growth and development, still he thought that that was not sufficient. Because they solemnly found opportunity to go outside and come close to nature. Whenever he found opportunity he enjoyed the moment fully. He expressed his feelings in many of his writings like, *The Tame Bird was in a Cage* (The Gardener, poem no. VI. P. 19-28) is the best to reveal it. He opined that the homely environment is the foundation stone of his spiritual vision. It is due to the fact that they have to meditate daily by chanting the verse from Vedas i.e. Gayatri. He later realized that the spiritual environment he found at home enriched his ability to perceive the underlying truth of unification of all creatures. He said that they had to meditate daily with a verse of the Vedas i.e. Gayatri and trying to realize the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man. He states in *Sadhana* thus:

The text of our everyday meditation is the Gayatri, By its help we try to realize essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one eternal spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky and the stars. (*Sadhana*, P. 13)

The second phase of Tagore's perception of environment is natural environment which is boundless. His perception of natural environment is rational and intuitive. Man- nature bond is the most dominating part of this domain. He confessed that the first realization of his life is the intimacy with nature. To him all the biotic and abiotic creatures on earth are intuitively connected to each other. The changes in one aspect make the changes in the others as well. To him the bond is due to the underlying law of nature. He treated all the creatures on earth having the same worth of existence. According to him, all living beings, including animals, trees and plants were endowed with a soul. Due to this human beings are occupying the same position with other creatures and plants. Or in other words we are the co- creatures in the world of creation. He said that the simple blade of grass, the sunbeams and the stars of midnight sit on the same carpet of world's audience hall (*Gardener*, poem 74). It is the uniformity of law of nature through which the unity could be established. If the uniformity of law in nature could not be established then our world will no more be familiar to us. He states in *Sadhana* thus:

The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason which is of the soul of man and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realizes

himself in his surroundings (Sadhana, p.25). The realization of togetherness tends to emphasize the useful of nature and the necessity of a natural environment for the practical survival of mankind.

Tagore realized the man- nature relationship in the true sense of the term. He said that it is the responsibility of mankind to keep the environment sustainable. Tagore could perceive the degrading condition of natural environment. According to him it is the outcome of man's intellectual ability to conquer nature. He said that modern intellectual mind develop modern scientific technologies to carry on a comfortable life. He realized that as long as their intellectual skills develop, their greedy sentiments also increased gradually. As a result of their excessive greediness they treat natural environment to fulfill their individual physical needs only. They completely ignore about the damage of the environment for their greedy actions. He expressed it in his essay *Aranya Devta* (Forest Deity, R.R. edition Vol. 14, p. 373) that modern man indulges too much in luxurious living. He pointed out the distinction between city dwellers and the forest dwellers that as soon as they lived in forest, they have love and respect towards nature. After becoming the city dweller they forget to show love and respect towards nature. We are all aware about the result of it i.e. the degradation of environment, like the pollution of water, land, air as well as the erosion of landscape etc. So, Tagore calls the city dweller to restore love and respect to natural environment as the realized that for the sustainable environment love and respect to nature is most essential.

He very well expressed the exploitation of natural environment even a century ago. Tagore's first concentration on man's impact on the environment was on his way to Japan in 1916. In this journey, he saw an oil spill at sea and was annoyed. He expressed it in his lectures in Japan. This experience provoked him to write at length about the modern man who was failing to respect nature. Years before the scientific environmental concerns had developed; Tagore could perceive the ecological imbalance of environment. In the article *Tapavana* (R. R. edition, Vol. 7, Pp. 690- 704) has analyzed about it. He also pointed out about the root causes of ecological imbalance. According to him the basic vices of mankind like greed, pride, lust, jealousy etc. are the sources of consumerism, commercialism and economic competition among human's aspirations. He pointed out how the cutting down of trees for fulfilling mankind's needs spoil the ecological imbalance of environment.

So, Tagore emphasized upon the preservation and conservation of natural environment that is reveals in many of his writings like the drama *Muktadhara*, *Raktakarabi*, story *Bolai*, poems from *Prakriti- paryay* etc. In the drama *Muktadhara* (Waterfall, 1922), Tagore

expressed how the environment exploited by the limitless greed of man. The plot revolves around a monstrous machine created by Bibhuti, an engineer, to block the natural flow of a huge river by constructing dam on the river with the help of the king of Shivatarai. But the prince Abhijit joined the commoners to protect nature by revolting against the king through the destruction of the dam. Through this drama he tried to express that water is the creation of God for the common people. It has its own natural power to flow. Not any artificial power could stop this natural power. He also expressed the man- nature bond through this drama. In the drama *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleanders, 1925), Tagore expressed how the mechanized bureaucracy exploits the nature and man. In this drama the king, central character of the drama, cruelly exploited nature and man to develop an almost bureaucracy.

Along with this the establishment of Santiniketan and Sriniketan amidst the nature is the good example of his attitude towards preservation of environment. He organized different festivals like *Brikharopan*, *Halakarshan* at Santiniketan to make the world people aware regarding the man- nature bond and the significance of natural environment for sustaining lives on earth. Tagore started *Halakarshan* (tilling the land) festival at 1927. On such occasion he wrote the song *maruvijaye ketan urao he shunye ...*(Geetabitan, p. 514). The aim of this festival is to protect the land from erosion. He also started *Briksharopan* (planting of trees) festival by planting a *bokul* sapling at Santiniketan on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1928, where students read and sing his poem. Before that Tagore planted five trees or the famous *Panchabati* on his very birthday on 25<sup>th</sup> Baisakh, 1332 (Bengali month and year). The *Panchabati*, namely *Amloki*, *Asoke*, *Asathya*, *Batobriksha* and *Bel* is a concept that originated from the Upanishad. Tagore planted those five plants with a whole ceremony conceived in consonance with the unique style of Santiniketan.

Tagore wanted to bring development sustainably without causing any damage to the natural environment. He realized that ecological crisis and environmental degradation are the outcome of human interference as well the disturbances of natural conditions. He again and again wanted to show that no organism can alone live in this world. All organisms live together in a common community called the biological community. The success of this community depends upon its interrelations with the physical environment e.g. air, water, light, heat and soil. So, it is man who can control and influence the atmosphere according to his own needs. Tagore pointed out clearly how we should treat environment. Tagore considered natural things as an eternal gift to mankind. So, it is most important to be conscious while using natural things. Tagore had a broad outlook regarding the use of

natural things. He said that we should use nature not in the sense that it fulfills the needs of particular individual being. Rather we should use it only to fulfill the basic needs of the entire mankind. We should not consider nature as a mere supplier of resources. It is the shelter of all the creatures. Nature is not exit for the mankind only. It is for the whole community. So, Tagore never treats nature as a tool to spend a luxurious life of mankind.

Though Tagore has criticized modern man and the modern technological advancements, yet he realized that for the proper development of society the use of modern technologies are essential. He was not against the machine- civilization. He wanted to bring development sustainably without causing any damage to the natural environment. He realized that ecological crisis and environmental degradation are the outcome of human interference as well the disturbances of natural conditions. He again and again wanted to show that no organism can alone live in this world. All organisms live together in a common community called the biological community. The success of this community depends upon its interrelations with the physical environment e.g. air, water, light, heat and soil. So, it is man who can control and influence the atmosphere according to his own needs. Tagore pointed out clearly how we should treat environment. Tagore considered natural things as an eternal gift to mankind. So, it is most important to be conscious while using natural things. Tagore had a broad outlook regarding the use of natural things. He said that we should use nature not in the sense that it fulfills the needs of particular individual being. Rather we should use it only to fulfill the basic needs of the entire mankind. We should not consider nature as a mere supplier of resources. It is the shelter of all the creatures. Nature is not exit for the mankind only. It is for the whole community. So, Tagore never treats nature as a tool to spend a luxurious life of mankind.

Tagore's philosophy of environment corresponds to the ideology of deep ecology. Deep ecology is a philosophical perspective in environmental philosophy. According to deep ecologists to save our planet it is necessary to have an ecological consciousness which forms the basis of environmental ethics. Their first focus was on conservation of resource, preservation of wilderness and moral extensionism which have instrumental values for human beings. After that they stressed on ecological sensibility which appreciates the inherent values of the natural world. Tagore has also given importance to preservation and conservation of natural entities as well as valuing them in his philosophy of environment. He has recognized many inherent values of nature; like economic value, cultural and religious value and moral value. Regarding her economic value, he said that the

mother earth fulfills all our needs. For him, natural resources are the most valuable wealth of humanity. He supported resource conservation and wildlife preservation by heart. He used to express his deep love and sympathy towards wild animals in his later life at Santiniketan. Regarding the cultural and religious values of nature, he appreciated traditional people's worship of nature and their observance of various socio-cultural and religious ceremonies related to different elements of nature. While explaining significance of his mystic-religious philosophy, he described about the moments he received spiritual consciousness when he was in close communion with the nature. The poet also extended moral values to natural objects as well as to various elements of nature.

The principle of unity in diversity and synthetic approach to life emphasized by Tagore corresponds to the principle of biotic equality as advocated by Naess. To Tagore, every entity whether biotic or abiotic has value in itself that contributes to the well being of humanity at large. All of these entities have right to live and flourish; even the elements of natural environment i.e. rivers, mountains, creatures etc. Tagore also said that though human beings possessed excessive greed and passion, still they should not exploit them. They should treat natural things reasonably by minimizing their needs. Human being can use them only for fulfilling their vital needs by avoiding the needs of luxurious living. Tagore gave much importance to the traditional Hindu culture and philosophy which equally respected and involved every element of life and non-life in the whole universe and planets. It maintained a perfect balance and unity in diversity. Still Tagore did not fully undermined modern culture, philosophy and ways of life. He valued some positive aspects of them. He not only condemned the traditional orthodox religious blind beliefs and rituals, but also condemned excessive growing greed, passion, individualism and materialism of modern industrial societies which leads to the exploitation and destruction of all the life systems of earth.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

So, it is seen that Tagore's philosophy of environment is a transition from the narrower to the broader outlook of environment. The cardinal point of his philosophy of environment is to establish the mutual relationship among the entire kingdom through realizing the underlying law of love and respect to all being. The man-nature bond is due to this underlying principle of love for all the creatures. This sense of love emerges from the divinity of nature. To him nature is divine and so it creates the sense of joy and happiness in us. We should preserve and protect the environment as a source of joy and happiness of mind as well as a means to give us shelter by providing food, clothes etc. He also gives stress on the sustainability of natural

things. Sustainability of nature consists in the sense of love, respect, unity, sympathy to the entire community. His philosophy of environment cannot be criticized as extremely anthropocentric or non- anthropocentric or andocentric because he considered every aspect of life and non- life not only in the context of particular community or situation but also in the whole universe. So, ultimately he is considered as an environmental philosopher in the true sense of the term.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Palmer JCDE, Corcoran PB. (Eds): *Fifty Key Thinkers on The Environment*, Washington, D.C, Routelged Key Guide Trailer and Frances Group. 2001.
2. Nayak KB. *Sustainable Development (An Alternative Approach in Rabindranath Tagore's Vision)*, Serials Publication, New Delhi. 2008.
3. Radhakrishnan S. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Kessinger Legacy Reprints, Macmillan and Co. Limited, London. 1918.
4. Sengupta K. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England. 2005.
5. Tagore, Rabindranath: *Sadhana*, 1972, The Macmillan & Co. India Limited
6. Tagore, Rabindranath (1420), *Geetabitan*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, S. B. S. Publication, Kolkata.
7. Tagore, Rabindranath : *Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. 3, 7, 8, 12, Visva Bharati Granthan Vibhag, Calcutta.
8. Tagore, Rabindranath: *Galpa Samagra*, [www.banglabookpdf.blogspot.com](http://www.banglabookpdf.blogspot.com)
9. Walters JC. Tennyson: Poet, Philosopher, Idealist: Studies of the Life, Work, and Teaching of the Poet Laureate. K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Company, Limited; 1893.
10. Dunn PM. Aristotle (384–322 BC): philosopher and scientist of ancient Greece. Archives of Disease in Childhood-Fetal and Neonatal Edition. 2006 Jan 1;91(1):F75-7.