

***COMPARATIVE READING OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND ROBERT FROST'S POEMS FROM ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE IN POSTMODERN CONTEXT***

**By Dr. Santosh Kumar J. Mishra**

**Abstract**

The growing challenges in contemporary age from environmental perspective at global to regional level attracted my attention to read the poems of two great poets Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost to establish co-relation of nature, man and poetry. The paper is an attempt to explore space and scope of surrounding nature and ecology not only in literary room but also in existential space of our life as a cosmic man to find a mutual existence of both – the nature and man. Though they stand as two different separate entities yet they survive coexistence manner to enlighten, empower and strengthen each other. Both the poets are from different place and culture but both of them represent nature in best form in their poetic creation. This paper is just an effort to develop an understanding of both the poet to read their intent from their cosmic universal and spiritual spirit of association of man and nature as reflected in their poems. Even nature has been the sole presence of god envisioned through the philosophical sight in their poems which too enabled me to feel the strength of their poems. The paper intends to highlight the emerging threats to both –the nature and the mankind and warns the mankind to understand it, respect it and protect and preserve it for betterment of each other rather to manipulate it to cater the greed not the need.

**Keywords:** 1. Ecology- Rich nature in a surrounding, 2. Postmodernism- A school of thought in modern age 3. Kopali & Padma- Rivers in Bengal 4. Barsha Shesh- Remaining rain.

The present paper dives into reading of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost to explore the eco-critical postmodern approach in context of evolving threats to the survival of man and nature (environment) with its variety of lives relying entirely on it. Postmodernism, a kind of movement stats, “that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding through art and literature but is rather constructed as per the individual mind to understand it from personal perspective.”<sup>1</sup> I find myself keen in investigating and revealing the reality created by both the poets in their poems to establish relation between nature and humanity to ensure both of their survival in a very harmonious way so that it would appear pleasing, divine and delighting to the universe. The paper efforts in analyzing and peeling off the multi layers of meanings in the poems of both the poets to receive the message in context of postmodern age’s realistic phenomenon which is constantly on going and changing.

Postmodernism rejects any existing reality as ultimate reality. Therefore it looks in a radical interpretation of things from a new point of view to explain its utility and scope in yielding pleasure and tracing the emerging issues and challenges in a contemporary age. It challenges the modern notion of reality and its enlightenment and intends to question the assumed reality and its representation in literary space in modern context to evaluate the existential provoking of cosmos. In general post modernism involves broad range of artists, academic critics, philosophers, philanthropist and social scientists who try to discover and rediscover the truth of objective existential reality of man and nature.

Poetry is considered as a superior kind of amusement that brings divine enlightenment. The paper has emphasis on reading the poems in postmodern (contemporary) context. This attempts to explore the number of issues like: How do we read poetry today? What place does reading poetry have in academic curricular today? And so on and so forth. I cannot claim expertise in all these areas, and it would be fruitless to talk of so many things in a single piece of innovative and investigating research paper. Hence I intend to concentrate on a few specific things while reading both the poets and their poems in today’s context. Poetry is a superior amusement according to T.S. Eliot who finds it as a vast subject which has a magical influence on the internal and

external life as well. But defining poetry or reading poetry is influenced by our idea of what poetry is. My intention to engage the talk in this way is to find the most fascinating elements in the poetry.

Eco-criticism in literature emerges from environmental perspective and issues highlight the representation of environment in a very realistic way to resist physical manipulations of nature in various forms. Emerging different kinds of environmental crisis and its devastating effect over humanity has led the intellectuals and scholars to feel and read the approaching natural doom and destructions. These sociological philosophers started to raise voice against extreme exploitative attitude of human being towards nature. They started to demand a notion return to monistic primal ecosphere where nature does not appear as a subject but as a language of its own, capable of communicating with humanity. Its natural signs warn us about the natural catastrophe resulting in great calamities. We are a learned community who must act wisely to sustain the value of the present existing eco system.

Nature stands as an image of mother and teacher to the human beings which provides everything we need and it teaches us the secrets of better life. Its each and every activity has certain hidden secrets that human mind and eyes need to read and observe them. It has power to connect and communicate to us and it does do it time to time. It has an unlimited treasure of emotions and feelings. Nature and environment is part and parcel of all living beings in this world. Eco-criticism explores the literary representation of nature and its relation with mankind. It is a new concept that evolved during 1990s. Even an American Eco-critic states that, “Eco-criticism is the study of relationship between literature and the physical environment.”<sup>3</sup> Another Eco-critic Laurence Buell believes that, “this study must be conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.”<sup>3</sup> There are many other critics who insist on interdisciplinary nature of inquiry of ecological issues in context of modern environmental crisis at global level. It is very clear that environment has been turned up a very serious and sensitive issue for us as a human being. We must have to show keen interest and concern with our nature and represent it in literary space.

Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore, two different poets from two different continents, envision nature and its vivid images as form of source, power which is capable to influence the human being at great extent and has creative and destructive forces too. Nature's both the facets are depicted in a very true color – wild and mild. Both of these poets establish a philosophical interpretation and relation between man and nature to ensure everyone's integrity so that both of us can enjoy our existence and survival. Both of the poets see nature from different perspective – Western and Indian but both of them reflect the similarity- protection and preservation of nature to sustain the ecological values. Social perspective may differ but universal applications are almost similar in the poems of both of these poets.

Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whiteman both are world renowned humanist poets. A kind of divine light is blessed to both of these poets who submerge the boundaries of nations to meet humanistic goals to enrich and empower the mankind. For them humanity is universal concern which is not limited to any particular region or any specific boundary. They express their concern with the mankind in their poems. Following lines of Tagore's poem reflect his spirit of philosophic nature;

'I inhale the great droughts of space.

The east and the west are mine,

And the north and south are mine.'<sup>4</sup>

Tagore is essentially a romantic poet and like a romantic poet he looks into the secrets of nature with a child like wonder. Even the common objects of nature appear very colorful, pleasing, fascinating and sensuous which yield him delight. He is very similar to Keats in receiving the sensuous beauty of nature that does not only satisfy his sensory organs but also pleases to his readers' community. He finds the man caught in grip of pain and sufferings therefore he looks the nature to bless humanity with its divinity.

Tagore realizes that nature is the primal store – a house of life; out of which humanity has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad on thinking about the man's narrowed

approach towards the nature. It is nature that gives everything that one needs but in return what one gives is the extreme manipulation and exploitation of nature leading towards ecological imbalances. In such a situation how nature would be silent and tolerate the oppressive approach of mankind against its own existence? The result of such deed turns in to the anger and rage of nature in form of various natural calamities. In his poem addressed to sea, he listens to eternal roar of sea perceiving it as furious one. Even in his another poem he hears the cries of the birds and animals;

‘I peep into the primeval nursery of life,  
Where the mother earth thrills,  
At the first living clutch near her breast’ (116)

He just intends to remind the mankind to listen the call of nature otherwise nature will go against the deed of man which he has done in a very suppressive manner. It is better to be friendly rather than feeling superior to it and dominating it. The boundless beauty of nature should be first protected and then enjoyed by the mankind.

S.B. Mukherji rightly asserts that, “It is Tagore’s vision steeped in to wonder, mystery and boundless joy that fuses the human body, spirit and nature in to a harmony.”<sup>7</sup> For the poet Tagore nature appears as mother who needs to be respected and regarded. Like Wordsworth, he too feels that nature mother inserts deep influences over us. Therefore moral influences from nature flow in to the soul of each of us. But in present context that flow has been disappeared gradually under the influence of commercialism which ultimately has led a kind of degradation in the Indian ecological value system. Nature appears exuberant and inexhaustible source for him but it must be used wisely and judiciously. Edward Thompson too feels the same and views that, “No poet who ever lived, has had more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty than Tagore.”<sup>7</sup> All natural images like flowers, rivers, morning and evening, night, stars, the sun, and the moon, the lighting, the clouds etc, are delicately painted, portrayed and visualized in such a beautiful manner that they are capable to connect and communicate with human beings in a very

emotional and soothing manner. In this context poet remains unsurpassed and unmatched in vivid depiction of natural beauty.

Rabindranath Tagore has always been a great lover of nature. His love for nature represents his love for humanity. Every poet of nature has expressed certain kind of affinity for nature but none of them has so deeply concerned with the nature. He perceives the beauty in simple objects of nature. In one of his poems, poet celebrates the beauty of the river *Kopali* which doesn't hold the dignified position of either Ganga or Padma. But it appears a slender stream without dignity of ancient grace to the poet and he appreciates the slow and zigzag movement of the river Padma which is in tune with its surrounding environment. Poet doesn't only describe the external beauty of nature but also associates himself with the internal affinity of nature that he glorifies in his poem. Nature comes very vibrant and delighting to him in yielding the divine pleasure and blessings the happy moments which calm to the minds of humanity from their unaccountable pain and sufferings;

‘I sit in the tamarind grove,  
Where the cries of dumb life congregate,  
The cattle’s lowing, the sparrow’s chatter,  
The shrill scream of a kite overhead,  
The cricket’s chirp and the splash of a fish in water  
I peep into the primeval nursery of life  
Where the mother earth thrills  
At the first living clutch near her breast’ (Fugitive.iii-10)

If nature is so beautiful; how man can destroy it? This is the prime question that emerges before us. Nature has been depleted by the humanity at the cost of development and growth but would it be stable and sustained? No... never. It cannot be stable and sustainable till we are not

maintaining sustainable growth of nature. Our existence entirely relies on the survival of nature and environment around us. Therefore we must treat it mother like and respect it in the same manner to protect and preserve it. Its need of time to turn up wise by not dominating and damaging nature but adapting its values and enriching it by preserving the serene, blissful beauty of natural surroundings.

What I observe through the reading of his poems is that he too insists on the close tie-up and attachment of mankind with nature. He is not only confined with romantic fancy of nature even he accepts nature's influence upon the growth of the human mind. He incorporates his faith in the power of nature which positively influences us. But in today's context such attitude is seen in a distinct form that does not associate mankind with nature in humanistic manner. Man has turned wild from his mild act. In reaction Tagore too paints the terrible mood of nature in form of thunder and storm. His poem *Barsha Shesh* expresses his concern with the angst mood of nature in which nature tries to communicate its anger to the mankind. His manipulative act has been the cause of various destructive consequences that comes to us in form of natural disaster which is seen and visualized by the poet in his poems;

'Thou comest, New Year,  
Whirling in a frantic dance '  
Amid the stampede of the wind lashed clouds  
And infuriate showers,  
While trampled by the turbulence  
Are scattered away the faded the frail  
In an eddying agony of death.'

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On the breast of the shore less sea

Destruction swings and sweeps,  
In dreadful festival,  
The indomitable wind is roaming,  
Ungovernable in strength,  
Beating it's thousand wings.

Sky and sea in one are reeling together in vast confusion.'(Collected poems of Tagore p.455)

Tagore is capable to read the furious mood of nature as he associates him very close to it and looks with the compassionate feelings which enable him to see the nature with its pain and cry. He envisions the pictorial description of nature but not in soothing state. He finds nature extremely irritated, exhausted and disappointed with the manner man exploits it for his greed and tempts. He reads nature in a very different form to feel the humiliation of nature as expressed in his poems whether it is the image of furious sea waves or the anger of thunder and storm or panic cry of the birds. He does not forget to remind us the doom and destructions that nature can impose at one side and on the other he too, focuses on developing an intimate understanding of nature which would result into the protective and coexistence humanity and nature both. He suggests us to connect ourselves with nature to understand its ideology of survival. Like other romantic poets he too looks at both the facets of nature destroyer and preserver. His message to mankind is to tune with nature to promote a mutual co-existence where both mankind and nature enjoy their healthy and safe survival.

Robert Frost, a very realistic, philosophic person, resembles his deep understanding of nature and associates himself with it in such a way that it becomes guide, teacher and source of delight for him. But he finds man more egoistic due to his pre-occupied notions. His poems create a rich, colorful and memorable impression in presence of rich nature. Mountains stand high than men's head, valleys reflecting enquiring eyes of men, green bushes, crowded trees, tuft of flowers, dense dark woods, snow covered peaks of hills, all of them do appear in Frost's poem which influence not only the environment but also to the lifestyle of humanity at great extent. He

reveals the fact that nature and humanity stand together and exist within the same sphere. John F. Lynen remarks over his view of nature, “that it is Frost’s philosophy that asserts that man cannot find a home in nature, nor he can live outside of it.”<sup>5</sup> His poems remind us that man’s entire survival is based on nature and his almost needs are fulfilled by nature. But our needs are turned into greed; we are not judicious in using the nature for supplying our deeds which have been creating great problems and threat to ecological survival.

Frost appears as lover and worshipper of nature and its beauty. He very skillfully paints the true color of nature to assert it’s both the impressions of preserving and destroying facets. In present scenario we find that man exercises all his power to exploit nature and in return at the same time nature, too, communicates and gives back same to the mankind- doom and devastation to human beings. It appears that nature recovers its ecological imbalances by destroying the human activities from its extreme rich and serene natural beauty which is swiped by none other rather than man him-self. Frost is very clear in asserting that man should allow nature to enjoy its serene beauty. He should not create any kind of wrath to it. Nature and men are two separate entities which exist together in association of each other. His poem ‘To Earthward’ represents his views on it in best possible manner;

‘When Stiff and sore and scarred

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I long for weight and strength

to feel the earth as rough to all my length.’ (150)

In these lines poet realizes the harshness of nature and feels that this natural surrounding witness a kind of struggle between man and nature striving each other for their survival. Nature doesn’t appear hard to him but it also doesn’t seem very soft too. The very first line reflects that nature appears sometimes stiff sore and scared because of human’s destructive activities. Whatever doom and destruction comes to us in form of natural calamities is too less if compared with the damage and devastation that man has given to nature in form of ecological exploitations.

In his poem “Two Tramps in Mud Time” he doesn’t forget to remind the nature’s apathy in form of lurking frost beneath the earth. He uses the metaphor of water to depict the positive and negative images of nature. The same water is stolen from natural water body and reprocessed in form of frost/haze in the presence of night. This water turns into frost which yields negative influence over the humanity. In general he presents the true and great picture of nature in which the same objects holds duel potential. If the nature is used in very concrete and judicious way, things appear yielding positive outcomes to us but if it is going to be used in an imbalanced exploitative manner, it would pose destructive influences over humanity.

‘Be glad of water, but don’t forget  
The lurking frost in the earth beneath  
That will steal forth after the sun is set  
And show on the water its crystal teeth.’ (412)

For him nature appears as a true guide suggesting humanity the right path to lead the life. It appears as a philosopher that teaches the subtle and secret lesions of life to humanity. Remoteness of nature appears as a sort of peace not the hindrances to the mankind. It offers the serenity of nature, not its roughness. Nature must be received gladly in whatever form it does come to us. It is clearly visible that the images of nature are used as metaphors to depict the liveliness of nature by the poet.

Another metaphor used by the poet is snow that reminds him of immortality of nature. Nature was there, it is and it will be forever. For him it appears the very essence of all seasons as it breeds every season in nature and turns the cause for changes that happen in nature. Snow cannot be formulated in absence of winter and water in brooks and rivers cannot be supplied without snow over the mountains. Therefore flood of white snow becomes an essential element for survival of water and water becomes the essential object to ensure the survival of each and every sort of life on the earth. But at the same time it stands for the symbol of life in death without that spring cannot approach and born. The image of ‘Death’ is represented in form of melting snow whereas the image of ‘Birth’ is depicted in form of turning and running water in brooks which collectively represent both the facet of nature- preserver and destroyer.

The image of falling light over the snowy peak is very lively presented by the poet to depict the energy of water that rejuvenate and accelerate lives in the brook and nature both. The following lines from his poem ‘The Pasture’ tell us his concern with the importance of water in our life;

‘I’m going to clean the pasture spring;  
I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away  
And wait to watch the water clear,  
I may I shan’t be gone long – You come too.’

In these lines poet insists on the protection of water as it has degraded, destroyed and contaminated by the activities of people. Frost appears a true environmentalist whose poems concern with the representation of nature and its significance in the life of human being. He does not miss to remind to preserve and protect not only the water but every component of nature which ultimately helps us in various ways to live the life. He reminds the humanity for his oppressive spirit of nature and tells us that it is now inevitable to acknowledge the fact that nature is extremely manipulated and it now needs to be preserved and protected for well being of both the nature and humanity both.

What I observe here is that both of the poets discover and trace the divine beauty of nature in their poem to represent nature in the best form. They reflect the shadow of eternity in the natural images as gliding clouds, blooming flowers, running brook etc. God resides in nature in form of the living spirit as a cosmic force which permeates all the objects of nature-animate and inanimate. If nature is god and god is our creator; how the man can forget his association with his creator? And how he can dare to hurt it even a little bit? What should be done here is to respect the nature and its divine beauty and preserve and protect it. This is the only way to imbibe the humanity with power of survival. Otherwise there would be again a natural upheaval in a very devastating manner that would swipe the mankind from the earth entirely.

Therefore we may sum up the conclusion that Frost’s poems like ‘Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland’ and ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ and Tagore’s poems like Gitanjali, River, and The Great Awakening illustrate pastoral affection of poet for nature. Seasons, sea storms, trees, clouds, brooks and flowers are depicted virtually in the background of their poems

to visualize the great majesty of nature whereas the images of trees, bushes, leaves, snow and other postures of nature exchanges its emotions and feelings to human beings. Woods appear as source of delight and enchantment that satisfies the pleasurable senses of human beings. His nature poetry connects the world of nature and that of human beings. Both of the poets' poems are rooted in landscape beauty of surrounding nature that appreciates the aesthetic richness of nature and ecology. Tagore's poems are mystic, philosophic in establishing relation of mankind with that of nature. He has a spiritual perception of nature in which he tries to locate man in a very mild position in a sweet association with rich ecology. Both of the poets give full representation to nature in their poems with the message to save and protect it. Frost's poem 'Stopping by the Wood' reflects an anthropocentric view that

'My little horse must think it queer'

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'The woods are lovely dark and deep

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep'

So before we sleep we have to keep our hundred and thousands of promises to serve the humanity, to save it and to let it go on in a very smooth and pleasant manner.

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