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An Analytical Study of the Bond between Women and Nature in the Select Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

Aims: This paper examines Rabindranath Tagore's portrayal of women and Nature in his short stories, highlighting the deep and symbolic bond between the two. It aims to explore how Tagore's humanism and ecological consciousness anticipate ecofeminist ideas by presenting women as empathetic and ethically aligned with the natural world.

Methodology and Approaches: The study employs close textual and thematic analysis of selected short stories by Rabindranath Tagore. It adopts an ecofeminist critical framework, drawing upon concepts from ecocriticism and feminist theory to analyse the parallel oppression of women and Nature under patriarchal structures.

Outcomes: The analysis demonstrates that Tagore consistently associates women with care, empathy, and environmental sensitivity, suggesting a shared experience of marginalisation and exploitation. His narratives reveal an early ecological awareness that closely resonates with ecofeminist thought, particularly in critiquing patriarchal domination over both women and the natural world.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The study concludes that Tagore's short stories offer a significant literary articulation of the interconnectedness of women and Nature, predating formal ecofeminist discourse. His work challenges patriarchal values and advocates a harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment. Future research may extend this ecofeminist reading to Tagore's novels, poetry, or comparative studies with contemporary ecological writers.

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Rabindranath Tagore is a remarkable name in the arena of literature. He is a source of inspiration and joy for thousands of people who take interest in Bengali Literature as well as in English Literature. He gave his invaluable contribution in the field of literature by writing various genres of literature such as poetry, short stories, drama, and essays. In 1913 he was awarded by Nobel prize for his most famous and celebrated work *Gitanjali*. Tagore was the first non-European who was conferred this prestigious award in the field of Literature.

This paper attempts to analyze some short stories of Rabindranath Tagore from an eco-feminist approach. Eco-feminism is an interdisciplinary study of eco-criticism and feminism which demonstrates an interconnected relationship between women and natural environment. It was after 1970's when eco-feminism comes forth as new field of study. The eco-feminist thinkers assert that all the environmental problems and women's issues are deeply linked with each other. They believe that the escalating environmental degradation and exploitation of women are the product of a male dominated social system. Vandana Shiva, Ariel Salleh, Vrinda Karart, Bina Agarwal and some other eco-feminist thinkers argue that women are closer to Nature than men. Since women are more connected to the natural environment, therefore, ecological problems create more troubles in their lives in comparison to the lives of men, for instance, in many villages women do a lot of struggle to bring pure water for their family because of the scarcity of water. Anyhow women arrange wood for fuel, and milk for their children. Women have played a prominent role to save nature, Chipko movement in Himalayan region of India, is an instance of that. In that movement many women stuck themselves to the trees to stop the deforestation.

The cardinal assertion of eco-feminism is that patriarchy is solely responsible for the suppression of women and overexploitation of natural resources. This idea is further enhanced by saying that patriarchal social system is based on the idea which says reproduction is the main objective of a woman's life and eco-feminist thinkers relates this idea to Nature. Nature's destruction is also based on the same idea which says that its sole function is to provide food and fuel to human beings. Thus, patriarchy is considered responsible for the plight of women and Nature by eco-feminists.

Tagore being an environmentalist and a feminist thinker, expresses these ideas of eco-feminism in his literary works. Many works of Tagore proved him a lover and a devotee of nature. He tells that how every sight of nature fills his heart with immense joy:

I remember my childhood when the sunrise, like my playfellow, would burst into my bedside with its daily surprise of morning; when the faith in the marvelous bloomed like fresh flowers in my heart every day, looking into the face of the world in simple gladness; when insects, birds and beasts, the common weeds, grass and the clouds had their fullest value of wonder; when the patter of rain at night brought dreams from the fairyland, and mother's voice in the evening gave meaning to the stars. (28, my life in my words)

The time that Tagore spent at Santiniketan and Sriniketan brought him in close proximity to natural environment. His father Debendranath Tagore entrusted the responsibility of zamindari to him that gave him the opportunity to visit the villages like Shilaidaha and many other. He loved the greenery and peaceful environment of these villages. Through these frequent visits to the beautiful countrysides he meticulously observes the life of people living there.

As villages are near to Nature, therefore people here rely on natural resources for their sustenance. He observed that women were more close to Nature than men in these country sides. Many short stories of Tagore exhibit a profound relation and affinity of women with Nature. In *Subha or The Dumb Girl*, Tagore has depicted a deep rapport between a girl and Nature. The character of Subhasini has been portrayed wonderfully. Tagore has given her an ironical name because the meaning of Subhasini is one who speaks sweetly and softly but she is a dumb girl who can't speak anything. Subha is considered a heavy burden on her family because of her being a dumb. She never played with the normal children of her neighborhood rather she considered Nature as her sole playmate. She had two cows and a cat as well. She loves these cows very much and always looks after them. The colors, sounds, and smells of Nature suffuse her heart with exultation and immense delight. She communicates her feelings to Nature silently and soundlessly. As Tagore himself tells in the story, "They became one great wave of

sound which beat upon her restless soul. They were her real language, in which she talked with nature” (34, Pathos in the short stories of Tagore).

Subha can't tell about her agony and pain to an ordinary person, therefore she shares her feelings with the silent Nature and dumb cows. She finds love and solace in the lap of Nature whom she considers a mother and a friend. The relationship between a woman, Nature and animals has been depicted beautifully by Tagore in this story. Some short stories of Tagore demonstrate that how women endure the unbearable pangs of patriarchy. He relates this pain to Nature as well. *Vision* is a short story of Tagore in which we find many elements of eco-feminism. Kumo, a married woman, is the main character in the story. She had given birth to a child who could not survive. It affected her health tremendously and debilitated her body. Gradually, she begins to lose her power of sight. Her husband had been pursuing a medical course, so he tried to treat Kumo's eyes by himself. But when her brother got to know about it, he resisted Kumo's husband and suggested to consult a skilled physician. Kumo's husband and her brother begin to quarrel on this topic. A woman who is already very sad and distressed, these two men, her brother and husband, are making her life more excruciating. Kumo expresses her pain in following words, while they were quarrelling, I was saying to myself that it was always the poor grass that suffered most when two kings went to war. Here was a dispute going on between these two, and I had to bear the brunt of it. (93, selected short stories of Tagore).

Here she connects herself with the grass which is crushed by men in the battlefield, similar thing is happening with Kumo too. Almost all the wars in human history were started by men but women and Nature suffered most for no fault of their own. Women were kidnapped and raped. Natural environment was terribly impacted. Air pollution, deforestation, soil pollution, water pollution, ecological destruction, and biodiversity loss are the repercussions of all these wars. Kumo's husband uses her as an object for his medical practice, consequently she lost her eyesight completely. This story significantly highlights the problems of Nature and women which are caused by a patriarchal thinking.

Tagore's another story, *The Postmaster*, can also be studied from an eco-feminist perspective. This story tells us about an orphan girl Ratan who lives in the village Ulapur. This village is surrounded by greenery, ponds, and various

types of trees. And a river also flows through this village which makes it more beautiful. Ratan lives in such a peaceful environment of the village. One day a man comes to Ulapur from the city. He was transferred from Calcutta to here as postmaster. The postmaster does not know how to adapt himself to the village environment as he was born and brought up in the hustle bustle of the city. The orphan girl Ratan was completely different from the postmaster because she was the daughter of mother earth and she loved the landscapes, rivers and mountains of the village. But there was one thing in common between them which brought them closer and that was their loneliness. The postmaster left behind his family in Calcutta and came here alone. Soon, he came in contact with Ratan, she too was alone due to being an orphan. She calls him dada and prepares food for him many times. Now she feels an affinity with the postmaster and considers him like her own family. He feels the same way about her and teaches her reading alphabets. Once the postmaster suddenly fell ill, Ratan stayed with him the whole night and took care of him like a mother. As soon as he recovers his health, he does not feel good in the atmosphere of the village and thought it unhealthy to live there, so he wrote an application for his transfer. The news of postmaster's transfer hurled the orphan girl again in the abyss of dejection and loneliness. Tagore describes this unbearable situation:

When he got in and the boat was under way, and the rain- swollen river, like a stream of tears welling up from the earth, swirled and sobbed at her bows, then he felt a pain at heart; the grief-stricken face of a village girl seemed to represent for him the great unspoken pervading grief of Mother Earth herself. (37, selected short stories of Tagore).

The pain that the postmaster inflicted upon Ratan was not deliberate, however, he should have maintained a normal relation with her rather than being too attached to her. Here Tagore has linked the pain of Ratan to the agony of Mother Earth. A girl like Ratan feels comfortable in the lap of Mother Nature, but a man who has come from the city, calls it unhealthy place. The postmaster was going back to the city and he was remembering the dejected face of Ratan again and again. Ratan's sad face seems to represent the sadness of Mother Nature to him. She served him like a mother during his illness. A woman and Nature both are considered as mother in this story, but the male character leaves both of them. In this way

Nature has been feminized here and a woman has been naturalized. Thus, the story *The Postmaster* depicts a deeper association of women and the natural environment.

Debits and Credits or The Deal, is another story in which Tagore has portrayed the unfortunate situation of a woman. Through this story, Tagore explains how the dowry system, a very old evil of Indian society, ruins the life of a woman. Nirupama is the main character in the story whose father has fixed her marriage, but Raybahadur, groom's father, is demanding a lot of dowry. Nirupama's father is not able to fulfill all his demands. However, the groom wants to marry her. Somehow they got married, but this marriage subsequently makes her life a tragedy. Her husband has gone to some other place for his work just after their marriage. Raybahadur made it very difficult for Nirupama to live in that house. He always tries to humiliate her along with her family. Anupama's father tries to give the remaining amount of dowry by selling his house, but she doesn't let her father do so. One day she fell severely sick nevertheless, her in laws didn't tell anything about it to her family. Nor they gave her medical treatment on time. They called the doctor when she was counting the last breaths of her life. Ultimately she died because she didn't get timely treatment. This story shows that how a woman becomes the victim of patriarchal thinking, so happens with Mother Nature as well according to the eco-feminists. Women lose their lives because of the dowry system, sati system and many other sinful evils of the society.

Thus, we find the elements of eco-feminism in many short stories of Rabindranath Tagore. His female characters have a special connection with the animals, plants, trees, rivers, landscapes and mountains. They feel more familiar and more comfortable in natural environment. Tagore himself was an environmentalist which reflects in his short stories, dramas and in poetry. He gives a strong voice to the problems of women through his stories. He also put forth the ecological issues in his stories and connects those issues with women's problems. Tagore depicts the plight of women and nature in a poignant way. Tagore's works becomes more relevant in the present context as crimes against women have constantly been increasing and environmental problems are also

mounting. In such times the role of Literature becomes very important because it can influence thousands of people and direct them towards the right path.

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