

TAGORE'S PERCEPTIONS ON PRIMORDIAL COMPONENTS OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: A GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore viewed environment as part of the very existence of human civilisation and always believed in sustainable ecological development. Poet's love of nature was inspired by the awareness that all beings - including animals, trees and plants along with the gross building blocks of nature are endowed with a kind of universal sense of consciousness, where animate and inanimate things are part of the same creative evolution. Survival of human kind is intricately related with protection of nature.

Introduction

The world environmental situation is getting from bad to worse. It is true, that science and technology must have to come forward to rescue us from the eventual collapse of environment. But at the same time, we must have access to the wisdom enshrined in the thoughts of a poet and a thinker like Tagore. To find an effective way out of the impasse and to make ourselves well aware of the importance of environmental protection measures to be taken up on a war footing so as to save the world on a sustainable basis.

If we search the geographical philosophy of Tagore, we get environmental deterministic philosophy. He wrote: Within man the system of mind, life impulse and the body, all these three together help to carry out all activities. Comprising these three factors our speed of action sets up a rhythm. The body and the mind, both adjust themselves according to the prevailing

atmospheric condition. In cold countries the fire has to be roused up within the body, while in a hot country the same heat lies outside. Tagore highlighted the view that if we have to sustain on earth for longer time then we have to nourish our fundamental elements of nature. So he presented the opinion:

*"batas, jal, akash, alo,
sabare kabe basibe bhalo,..."*

So through these lines the laureate urged that when will man be able to love the breeze ("batas"), water ("jal"), the sky ("akash"), and the light ("alo"). Tagore believed five primordial elements that arrange our nature and the natural world.

1. **"Ksiti" or Soil** Addressing the soil as the very first element of nature, the poet urged the young sapling which is being planted be held firmly into the soil. Tagore expressed his respect to earth through:

“*Mati ami tomai nomi*”...(Tagore,1909.)

It means - ‘My greetings to soil.’

The Poet heard the call of earth and which was elaborated in:

“*Chirodin mati amai dekechhe*”...
”(Tagore, 1936.)

It means – ‘Earth has enchanted me.’

Tagore looked at our planet, not just as an inanimate object made of rocks and minerals or formed of mere sands and clays, but as a very tender nursing mother, and as the very foundation of thriving life. Poet in 1922 expressed in a verse written for children “*Tal – gachh*” (palm tree) in ‘*shishu Bholanath*’, where he pictured a vertical palm tree growing higher than other trees, as if inspiring to fly off along with the winds upwards into the heaven flapping its huge leaves, suddenly remembers of its mother lying embedded in the land on which it was born and was anchored. So, then the tree hurries back to its own footing on the earth. This charming visual imagery of Rabindranath conveyed in the poem (palm tree) as has been pointed out by Radice (2003) and translated by him, in this manner:

Palm - tree single - legged giant,

topping the other trees,

peering at the firmament -

*It longs to pierce the black cloud -
ceiling*

and fly away, away

it only it had wings.

.....

.....

*And then as soon as the wind dies down
the fronds subside, subside
the mind of the tree returns*

*To earth, recalls that earth is its mother
and then it likes once more*

its earthly corner. (Radice, 1985, 2003)

The poem emphasizes that the earth is the real mother of everybody. We can never reach for the sky, even if we wish foolishly. We have to come back to the bosom of our mother in the long run.

2. “**Ap**” or Water The water (ap) as an environmental resource is as vital to us as any other element of nature, but it is the very carrier of life in the living beings. That is why, water is synonymous with life as it is the life - giving fluid in our body system and it is found in every part of the environment, even within solid crystals.

Tagore realized the essence of life within the movement of water flow on the Earth. He portrayed the line as:

“Dhora tale chanchhalata

Sab aage nemechhilo jole

*Sabar prothom dhoni uthechhilo
jege....”* (Tagore, 1939)

It means - ‘Motion is within the earth

Was down first in water

Sound or life was awake first.’

The poet had a deep fellow - feeling with the playful little water courses. About the very fundamental environmental function of a flowing stream was correctly identified by the poet when he said - “The river flows, all its water are not used up in our bathing, drinking and in growing our autumnal rice. The largest part of its water is meant to keep the river flowing ever on. Even without carrying out any other task, there is great significance in maintaining its flow” (Tagore, 1907).

This view of the poet is scientifically aspired. In this connection what comes to mind is the devastating remark of Tagore which he made in his lecture, entitled, The Centre of Indian Culture, dealing with higher education in India delivered in 1918 -" Let me say, in a whisper, behind the backs of these irate engineers that natural drainage of the country has been tampered with and the nature is taking its revenge".

This remark, which the poet made against the human resource engineers of higher education in this country, is also equally applicable to the irrigation engineers dealing with water resources of the country today. It may be added that Tagore was terribly against putting up of big dams astride the large perennial rivers. Unfortunately, it has been a world trend to throw mighty dams for constructing huge reservoirs and large scale canal systems in the name of development without paying any attention to the great environmental damage done in that process. With great pains the great poet wrote -

*"Keno more gelo nadi
Ami bandhi tare, chai dhoribare
Pai bare nirabadhi
.....
Tai more gelo nadi. ..."* (Tagore, 1896)

It means - 'Why river died
I bound her, wish to restrain
.....
For this river died.'

The drama "*Muktadhara*" or 'The Water flow', (Tagore, 1922), tells the story of man's limitless greed and backlash from nature. The plot revolves around a

monstrous machine created by the king to block the natural flow of a huge river and how a prince joined the commoners to protect nature by revolting against the king through the destruction of *Muktadhara* dam. The important philosophy that reflects in some lines from this drama:

"Citizens of Shivtarai: Water (River) is an abounded God's creation, nobody can restrain it

Bibhuti (mechanical engineer): God has given water only for the commoners; he gave me the power to restrain the water flow. I have the power of mighty mechanical.

Dhananjai Bairagya (a citizen of Shivtarai): What are you saying! Is this matter normal about to bound the naughty power (river flow), may that is in the outer or inner.

Avijit (Prince): I can hear the mother's note from this flowing water."

So, 89 years back from now Tagore depicted the great bitterness among the local people for putting up iron lock-gates and dykes stopping the natural flow of a hill-stream and eventually the people rebelled against the government, ultimately bringing about demolition of the dam. Tagore was awfully against putting up of big dams, huge reservoirs and large scale canal systems in the name of agricultural development.

3. **"Tejas" or Energy:** Light is the source of energy. Tagore would like to move the way of "jyotir" or light (the consciousness of knowledge) from the darkness of ignorance (lack of knowledge). He has given the enlighten view:

*"Alo amar alo ogo alo bhuban bhora
Alo nayan-dhoa amar, alo hriday
bhora."* (Tagore, 1927)

The light that is scattered all throughout the earth is within me as well and this light has refreshed my eyes which also touches my heart. Here the poet vividly ascribes the light as the knowledge and the knowledge as the light.

4. **“Marut” or the Wind power** He sketched his view in the following lines:

“Batas tomay nami

Amar ghuchuk abosad.....” (Tagore, 1909)

‘O wind, I bow down to you,
may my tiredness be removed.’

From these lines it is clear that Tagore gave his salutation to the wind and he also expressed the application of the wind to reduce the fatigue of body and soul. The poet invokes the soothing quality and the healing power of the soft breeze. Poet accepted the blowing wind in its motion, as a very close friend. The ferocious wind wipes out everything that comes on its way. The poet expresses the fearful form of violent storm in many of his poetic works-

“Jete jete ekla pathe nibhechhe mor bati

Jhar eseche, ore, ebar jharke pelem sathi...” (Tagore, 1927)

‘On a walk with alone, the light is put out

Storm is here and it is a companion me...’

5. **“Vyoma” or Cosmos:** Tagore was conscious about the Space and its importance on the earth. He wrote:

“Akash, tomar sahas udar dristi

Matir gabhire jagay ruper srusti...” (Tagore, 1928)

To Tagore, the bright smiling sky

enlightens the deepest part of the earth which is a bliss in itself.

In the essay *“Aranya Devata”* (Tagore, 1939) Tagore expressed his opinion that modern man indulges too much in luxurious and decadent living. Here he showed how land became uninhibited in his actions and wrote about the matter in which the kinship with the forest was spoiled. As long as he used to live in and around the forest, he had a deep love and respect for the forest and therefore he used to live in perfect harmony with forest and its different organisms. As soon as he became a city dweller, he lost his love for the forest which had been the source of his mental nourishment. Willful destruction of forests, in order to supply timber for city life, brought about a bother on human race. Scarcity of rainfall endangered human life and the swift spread of deserts started engulfing human habitation in various parts of the world. World is moving to make friendship with urban landscape. To fulfill their achievement they are encroaching upon the green landscape. Tagore was conscious about the outcome that might be generated due to the enormous ravaging done to the greeneries all throughout and hence opines:

“Dao phire se aranya loha ei nagar” (Tagore, 1895)

‘Bring back the forest and take this city centric civilization’

So Tagore emphasized we should retrieve our love and respect for the forest and restore symbiosis with the forest in order to prevent threat.

In the article *“Tapavana”* Tagore (1909) analyzed the ecological imbalance and also he investigated the inner causes of this imbalance. He expressed that *ripus* (the basic vices like: greed, jealousy, pride,

lust etc.) are the sources of commercialism, consumerism, and economic competition among human's aspiration; that is the inner manifestation of the causes of ecological instability. Trees are being felled for fuel that is spoiling the ecological balance and human civilization is hurtling towards doom. Hence Tagore pointed out in ancient society of *Tapavana* (Tagore, 1909) where he spoke: "...a strange matter has been seen about India. Civilization here takes root not confined for space or packed like sardines. In those places there was abundant opportunity for man to be in close proximity with trees and vegetation, river and lakes".

Concluding remarks

Rabindranath Tagore always believed in sustainable ecological development. He felt that development could be brought about not from above but by the effort of each individual, dedicated to a national cause. Poet's love of nature was inspired by the awareness that all beings - including animals, trees and plants along with the gross building blocks of nature are endowed with a kind of universal sense of consciousness. At this level of consciousness, human beings are equal with all creatures and plants and even with the other inanimate things. We are all co - creatures of the same creative evolution.

In these days, those concerned with the new theory of 'deep ecology' would certainly appreciate the stand taken by Tagore as regards how one should deal with our living natural environment to make it ecologically sustainable. It tends to emphasize the usefulness of nature and the necessity of a natural environment for the practical survival of mankind.

As a practical deep ecologist, Rabindranath Tagore rightly emphasized upon protection of the plant cover and on the need for adopting adequate measures for conservation of soil cover. As an activist, he thought about all the contemporary problems related to the physical and social environment and took many positive steps to uphold human values and to maintain the natural environment at an even keel. With this view in mind Tagore founded an open - air boarding school under natural ambience in 1901 at Shantiniketan, so that the growing buds of the upcoming society can sense the nerve of the nature and hence act likewise. In Shantiniketan Tagore also developed a project for sustainable agricultural and ecological development of the rural areas around.

Lastly, the poet looks at the specks of dust (*dhuli*) of the earth as highly sacred, which is, full of sweetness and helpfulness. And thus the poet gave his final salutation to the mother earth, imbibed with deep emotion, when he said:

*As I take the last touch of the earth.
I would announce that I have put
on my forehead the mark of thy dust.
And I have seen the light
Of eternal existence,
Hidden behind the
Illusive screen of disasters.
It is on this dust that truth has
Taken the shape of delightfulness,
And having known this, I leave my last
Bow, down on this dust. (Tagore, 1941)*

Basically Tagore believed that man and nature vitally needed one another. The endless variety of forms abounding the

geographical environment was the essential feature of the universe around us, and that sustained the life forms to have an intimate relationship between all the natural elements involved, which formed a cosmic unit, yet each retaining their own distinctive identity.

Rabindranath Tagore was a creative poet to the core of his being. Before his demise on the 7th August 1941, he wrote a poem in which he recalled his poetic vocation in uncompromising terms "I am a poet of the world".

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