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TAGORE ON NATURE: INTEGRATING NON-DUALISM WITH THE NATURAL WORLD

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Introduction:

We have seen many times the love of nature with having the idea of nature as the source of the objects, fulfilled human own wants. But in Tagore's case, it is different; his love to nature is the manifestation of the unfulfilled childhood desires to nature. Though he was not allowed to go outside, but the world have reached to him through a heightening of imagination. From the childhood age, human and non-human both were the integral part of the life in Tagore memory. He himself said that, he was controlled by the servant of his family who imprison him within a chalk circle drawn the floor of his mansion. But this initiative did not stop Tagore play with the world through his imagination. The history of India is deeply intertwined with its forests, which have shaped the way of life, connecting individuals to a larger, universal existence. The forests have provided all the essential resources, but these, too, have emerged from the supreme life. It is said that when people recognize that everything—food, air, fire, water—originates from this supreme life, rather than from the sky or trees alone, their relationship with nature takes on a new, more profound meaning. When humanity views nature as separate or alien, they often adopt a mechanical approach to it, focusing solely on material gain. However, in tradition, reality is accepted with its three fundamental aspects—Sat, Chit, Ananda—which bind us to everything through love and unity. (Das, 1996, p. 386)

From the ancient Indian culture, nature has been taken as the living personality. Every natural object has two functions, one in the external world and other one is in the human world. Tagore himself said in his book *Sadhana* regarding a famous story that, “a flower has not its only function in nature, but has another great function to exercise in the mind of man. And what is that function? In nature its work is that of a servant who has to make his appearance at appointed times, but in the heart of man it comes like a messenger from the king.” (Tagore, 1915, p. 56) Tagore believed that nature was not merely a physical resource for survival, but a profound source of inspiration and energy for humanity's spiritual and intellectual growth. According to his philosophy, everything in nature—whether earth, water, air, fire, fruits, or flowers—held both physical and spiritual significance. Nature, in Tagore's view, was not just something to be utilized for practical needs, but a medium through which one could attain higher

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spiritual ideals. For him, these elements were essential in helping humans reach their ultimate potential and perfection. Nature, therefore, was intertwined with the human experience, influencing both thought and action on a deeper, spiritual level. To support that statement he said, "The great fact is that we are in harmony with nature; that man can think because his thoughts are in harmony with things; that he can use the forces of nature for his own purpose only because his power is in harmony with the power which is universal, and that in the long run his purpose never can knock against the purpose which works through nature." (Tagore, 1915, p. 8) In *Creative Unity*, Tagore emphasized that the true value of each natural element lies not merely in its existence as a separate fact, but in the harmony that connects all things. He often spoke of this harmony, which serves as a medium of communication not only for people, who express themselves through language, but also for all natural elements, which communicate with living beings through this very harmony. Tagore's profound love for the changing seasons is evident in his writings, where he describes the world as a "dancing ring of seasons," with the interplay of light and darkness, wind and water, life and death. He believed that life cannot exist even for a moment without the support of nature and its elements. In this context, we find his poignant reflection in the book:

*"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting as spending, we lay waste our powers.*

Little we see in Nature that is ours." (Tagore, 1922a, pp. 6 & 7)

Non-Dualism in Tagore's Philosophy:

In his writings, Tagore clearly conveys that nature is a divine creation, through which individuals can connect with the infinite spirit. He asserts that man is born from nature's womb and moves into the realm of spirit, where true freedom of creation exists—where he becomes one with the infinite, and where his own creations align with the divine in perfect harmony. This perspective underscores the direct connection between the natural world and the spiritual realm. Through the world and its objects, the individual can attain a spiritual state and ultimately achieve union with the Infinite. In this way, nature plays a vital role in helping man realize the ultimate purpose of his life. The infinite truth manifest itself through the finite thing in the world. So, all surroundings are nothing but the way of manifestation of infinity. *Isha Upanishad* says that 'all the moves in this moving world are held by the infinity of God; and enjoy by that which he renounces. Desire not after other possessions.' There who sees himself in all things and the soul in the all things is never more hidden. Therefore, the truth is revealed when we realised that this One in us is the One in all. Regarding this manifestation of Infinite through all of the worlds, we have the song which is like;

"The earth is His joy; His joy is the sky;

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His joy is the flashing of the sun and the moon;

His joy is the beginning, the middle, and the end;

His joy is eyes, darkness and light.

Oceans and waves are His joy

His joy the Saraswati, the Jumana and the Ganges.

The Master is One: and life and death,

Union and separation are all His plays of joy.” (Tagore, 1917, pp. 78 & 86)

Rabindranath Tagore was fully aware of nature as the source of all material necessities required for human survival. He acknowledged that nature serves as a mother, providing us with everything essential. However, Tagore's deeper concern lay in the unity between man and nature. He recognized that we depend on nature for our basic needs—cultivating the soil, gathering food, clothing ourselves, and acquiring resources from the natural world. Our constant interaction with nature arises from our physical needs, and through hunger and thirst, we remain closely connected to the world. However, Tagore distinguished between two aspects of man: the physical man and the personal man. While the physical man seeks to fulfil immediate needs, the personal man seeks a deeper unity with the world, driven by love for all. This unity transcends mere physical and mental desires and fulfils a higher spiritual need through connection with nature. Both aspects of man maintain a strong relationship with the world, but while the physical man is concerned with daily necessities, the personal man is focused on realizing a deeper unity. Tagore emphasized that no one can truly succeed or fulfil their purpose by remaining separate from nature. (Tagore, 1915, pp. 11 & 12) Tagore repeatedly stated that nature leads us to true freedom. When a person becomes close to nature, they feel liberated from the constraints imposed by the body and the senses. This is one of the reasons he loved living in the village, as it allowed him to remain close to nature. According to him, village people are freer from self-centred desires. They focus primarily on earning just enough for their survival. To illustrate this, there is an incident Tagore shared when he was traveling through a village about a hundred miles from Calcutta. He recounted that they asked a man for help in finding water, a difficult task for him at the time. However, when they offered him a reward, the man refused to accept it. Tagore noted that the same situation occurred in fifteen different villages. The villagers considered it their duty to provide water to those in need, even though they could have easily profited from it. This example demonstrates how people who live in close harmony with nature are free from individualistic desires, and how nature helps them transcend such wants. (Tagore, 1922b, p. 149) Non-dualism in Tagore's philosophy refers to the idea that the ultimate reality is indivisible and that the distinction between the self and the universe is an illusion. Tagore, influenced by Advaita Vedanta, emphasized the unity of all existence, asserting that everything in the

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universe, including human beings, nature, and the divine, is interconnected and part of a singular, unifying consciousness. For Tagore, the individual self (Atman) is not separate from the universal soul (Brahman); rather, they are expressions of the same underlying reality. He believed that true freedom and spiritual enlightenment come from realizing this unity, transcending the illusion of separation, and understanding the interconnectedness of all beings. Tagore's non-dualism is not only metaphysical but also ethical. He believed that recognizing this oneness fosters compassion and love for all, as every being is a manifestation of the same divine essence. In his works, he often explores how love, unity, and selflessness lead to spiritual liberation, highlighting that the path to God involves seeing beyond the apparent distinctions between self and other. This perspective invites individuals to live harmoniously with nature and humanity, embracing a holistic, inclusive view of existence.

Nature and the Self: A Spiritual Connection:

In his writings, Tagore consistently highlighted the profound connection between nature and spirituality. He believed that human spirituality is deeply rooted in nature, and when man becomes detached from nature, he is confined within a prison of alien walls. Tagore asserted that one can only truly understand the significance of the physical world when they recognize their eternal spirit within all things. Through harmony with nature, man is able to discover the ultimate truth. This disconnects from nature not only affects our spiritual life but also the challenges we face in the material world. According to Tagore, when man is separated from nature, he ceases to be *man-in-the-universe* and becomes merely *man*. The difficulties and problems of the mundane world arise because of this separation, and as a result, we often resort to artificial methods to resolve these issues—methods that only bring about more persistent difficulties. As Tagore wrote: “Man becomes merely man, not man-in-the-universe... The difficulties in the mundane world arise from this estrangement from nature, and we resort to artificial methods to overcome them; each of which brings its own crop of interminable difficulties.” (Tagore, 1915, p. 9) Tagore established a profound connection between nature, spirituality, and freedom. According to him, every object embodies two opposing aspects: the physical and the spiritual. While humans typically perceive objects from a physical standpoint, Tagore believed that their true spiritual significance is revealed when one looks beyond the physical and perceives them with a deeper, spiritual understanding. In order to the connection of spirituality with worldly objects he talked about a Baul poet's poetry;

“Eyes can see only dust and earth,

But feel it with your heart, it is pure joy.

The flowers of delight blossom on all sides, in every form,

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but where is your heart's thread to weave them in a garland?" (Tagore, 1922a, p. 86)

Tagore believed that when man reconnects with nature, it dissolves all boundaries and allows him to experience true freedom. He argued that freedom should be understood as an inner concept, rather than merely a physical or external condition. Physical freedom, he asserted, is not the true form of freedom; instead, it leads to new limitations. As Tagore expressed: "When freedom is not an inner idea which imparts strength to our activities and breath to our creations, when it is merely a thing of external circumstance, it is like an open space to one who is blindfolded." (Tagore, 1922a, pp. 133 & 134)

Tagore emphasized that when people live their lives without acknowledging nature as an integral part of their existence, they become trapped in a cycle of individual desires. This focus on personal wants creates a prison of unreality, separating them from the deeper truths of life. We can see the moral aspect in Tagore's concept of "love for all." He stated that, apart from the appetites of the senses, humans also have a moral side, which represents a duty that everyone should fulfil. Tagore includes our moral duty within the principle of unity. From a moral perspective, if we define humanity as Tagore does, then humanity is inclusive of just and ethical behaviour toward all beings and entities in the world. Loving nature and engaging in work based on love for all that exists in the world is the first step toward the unity that Tagore upheld. He also mentioned that the love-for-all tendency helps people break free from the cycle of worldly pleasures and pains. In other words, a person can gain true freedom from selfish thoughts and emotions. Many philosophers have expressed their love for nature as the provider of objects necessary for human needs, but Tagore's perspective is rooted in something different. He revealed his profound love for nature and regarded it as a living personality, believing that every object represents the whole reality and is a manifestation of God's love. In this regard, he strongly connected the love for nature with people's spirituality and freedom. Tagore combined the concepts of unity, love, and perfection as the path toward God. Regarding the achievement of perfection, he stated: "The feelings of perfection in love, which is the feeling of the perfect oneness, opens for us the gate of the world of the Infinite One, who is revealed in the unity of all personalities; who gives truth to the sacrifice of self, to death which leads to a larger life, and to loss which leads to a greater gain... In this we become conscious of the relationship between what is in us and what is beyond us." (Bandyopadhyay, 2019, p. 139) In Tagore's philosophy, nature and the self are deeply interconnected, forming a spiritual bond that reflects the unity of existence. Tagore viewed nature not merely as a physical environment but as a living, divine force that reflects the inner workings of the soul. He believed that the self is not separate from nature; instead, it is intrinsically linked to it, and through this connection, one can achieve spiritual enlightenment. For Tagore, nature serves as a mirror for the human spirit, offering insight and inspiration.

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He often described nature as a manifestation of the divine, with every element representing a part of the whole reality. By immersing oneself in the natural world, an individual can transcend the ego and sense a deeper oneness with the universe. Tagore emphasized that true spirituality arises from this union with nature. The individual self, when aligned with the rhythms of nature, experiences a sense of harmony and freedom from the constraints of the body and material desires. Nature, in this sense, acts as both a teacher and a pathway to understanding the true self—reminding individuals of their unity with all of existence and the divine source from which everything emanates.

Conclusion:

Tagore's relevance today lies in his deep understanding of the relationship between nature and spirituality, a connection that resonates strongly in contemporary times. In an era of environmental degradation and increasing disconnection from the natural world, Tagore's philosophy offers a profound reminder of the need to reconnect with nature for spiritual well-being. Tagore saw nature as a living entity, embodying divine presence and offering spiritual guidance. He believed that true spirituality arises from understanding and experiencing the unity between the self and nature. In a world increasingly driven by materialism and individualism, his emphasis on nature as a source of peace, introspection, and divine connection offers a much-needed antidote to modern discontent. In today's context, where environmental challenges and the pursuit of personal success often overshadow a sense of collective responsibility, Tagore's teachings on love for all beings and oneness with nature encourage mindfulness and ecological consciousness. His philosophy reminds us that by embracing nature and recognizing its spiritual significance, we can find inner peace, foster compassion, and contribute to a more harmonious world. Tagore's focus on the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of living in balance with nature offers a timeless blueprint for spirituality and sustainable living in the modern world.

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