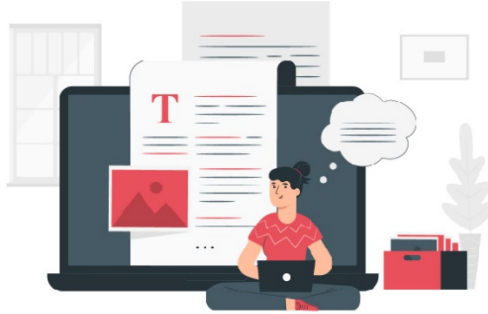


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Rabindranath's Deeper Bond with Earth: Rereading his Select Poems

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore realized the world of Nature in the inmost shrine of his heart and intuitively perceived the stream of multitudes of lives passing through his veins and consciousness. He apprehended the profound feeling of oneness and inter-being with endless life-circles of the wider earth. The poet felt an inseparable bond with Earth, and this eternal bond is the source of joy in his life and his works. His heart throbs through millions of hearts of the tiniest plants and species. Tagore comprehended the primordial language of nature and heard the great cadence of the world. He understood the mathematics of beauty of ecology and her lesson on how-to live-in harmony with her. Thus, he realized intrinsic and inherent value in nature; above all, her law and rhythm, her moods and pulse. For Rabindranath, Earth is a living existence: a source of his aesthetic beauty and poetic inspiration, and a source of his joy and meaning of life. In his poetic aesthetics, there is a unique realization of Earth, which can tune readers in harmony with Earth from a deeper core. The paper explores Tagore's deeper bond with Earth.

Keywords: Self-realization, Aesthetics, Oneness, Earth, Nature, Spirituality.

Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861-7 August 1941), the Nobel laureate, is referred to as the 'Bard of Bengal'. He is known greatly for his poetry, though he wrote novels, dramas, essays, short stories, travelogues, and thousands of songs. Tagore also wrote autobiographies and non-fiction grasped with linguistics, history and spirituality. Above all, he wrote thousands of pages on Environment and Nature. Nature and Earth form an inseparable part of Tagore's oeuvre. His writings on Nature and Earth are marked by the deep interface between the spiritual

and the human. The close contact with Nature gives him unlimited solace and joy for life. For the poet, as he has said, "The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and then left aside. They were necessary to her in the attainment of the ideal perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony." (quoted in M.N. Thakur 31). So, nature holds a special place in Tagore's heart because it connects him to the way of international bonding and also to the infinity. He was influenced greatly by the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, which see nature as sacred.

Deepening interface with the world-nature infuses in the poet's poetic mind the world consciousness. The feeling of interbeing and oneness with the whole universe is the very feature of Tagore's poetic flow. His poetic consciousness is inseparable from Earth consciousness. His Earth-consciousness and aesthetics come from his realization that the whole universe is a whole. This whole consciousness intensifies his uniquely all-inclusive ecological worldview. For Rabindranath, Earth is fraught with wisdom, beauty, and humanity. "We find that life around him flows into him and is transformed into art. His life is a continuous essay in experiencing and turning that experience into things of beauty." (Umashankar Joshi 115).

The world consciousness of Rabindranath Tagore is not an isolated incident in his poetic life. This world consciousness in his poetic expressions is inseparable from his life consciousness. In his early childhood, he used to watch a banyan tree and a pond. Through this narrow passage of window, Nature beacons him, but he had not his means to go out. His sensitive mind could not be prevented from watching and enjoying the banyan tree and the pond. Afterward, Tagore's tour to the Himalayas with his father gave him a wide opportunity to see the vast universe during his childhood, and he had his unique Earth-realization there. This Earth-consciousness again intensifies when Tagore was living in a boat-house on River Padma and its tributaries. In course of time, in his feeling he finds himself unified amidst water-land-sky-river-mountains. His realization widens with the uninterrupted and eternal time stream. The poet feels in himself the life pulse of most primitive species.

Tagore's fascination for Earth-consciousness first finds unique poetic expression in his poem, "Ahalyar Prati" of *Manasi* (a collection of poems). Here the poet wants to know *Ahalya* from his unified whole Earth-realization and consciousness:

Chilo ki pasantale asprasta chetana?

What was un-manifested consciousness under stone?

Later, this fascination finds excellent blooming in his poems, “Samudrer Prati” and “Basubdhara” of *Sonar Tari* (a collection of poems) and this fascination deepens his thought about Earth. This subtle Earth-realization deeply connects the poet’s soul with every particle of the world, and with every idea and object of the world.

Rabindranath thinks that we have a long and deep kinship with Earth and it can be only felt in the deepest core of heart amidst the solitary and silent nature. From this widening and deepening feeling, Tagore greeted the sea as *Adi Janani* or Original Mather. Behind the impassioned love for the sea, the poet felt his original birth-bond and he establishes this truth in the poem. With his philosophical vision, the poet finds his relationship with beautiful Earth not just of present life but also beyond this. With his imaginative introspection, the poet feels himself in the phase when unborn Earth was there as an embryo in the deepest womb of Mother Sea millions of years ago. The poet imagined that when he was diffused amidst the unborn embryo, then the pang of the pregnant mother was imprinted in his heart:

.....*mone hoy, jeno mone pare,*

Jakhon bilin chinu oi birat jathare

Ajat bhubanbhruno majhe, lakhhokoti barsha dhare

Oi taba abishranta katatana ontare ontare

Mudrito hoiya geche; sei purbojanmer smaran,

Garbhasto pithibi pare sei nitya jibanspandan

Taba matriridayer, oti khino avaser mato

Jage jeno samasta shiraya..... (“Samudrer Prati”, *Sonar Tarir Niruddesh Yatra* 137)

.....it seems as if it flashes in mind,

in the state of inter-merging in the great womb

as unborn amidst embryo-universe, for millions of years,

your continuous chant imprinted in hearts; that fore born memory,

that life pulse of that merged earth,

of your mother-heart, it gleams as a slight inkling

in every artery....(Translation Mine)

Envisioning the sea as the original mother and projected world nature as a daughter, the poet feels a deepening bond and widening interbeing with every existence in his poem, *Samudrer Prati*. As there is an inseparable relation between mother and her kid, in the same way, there is the inseparable relationship of world nature with humans in the deepest but unseen layer of realization, which is beyond superficial explanation. The poet feels the mystery of the blossoming sea after millions of years as he is the son of the daughter of the sea. When the earth was there as an embryo in the womb of the sea, the poet was himself there as an embryo of the earth. This world realization of the poet is deeply imaginative and emotional but we cannot deny the foundation of science here.

In “*Samudrer Prati*”, Rabindranath shows the inseparable bond between the world of nature and the world of humanity with his scientific introspection. Here the poet feels oneness with the whole universe-land, water and the sky. The stream of life was ingrained in the creation of the earth. This pulse of life first pulsates the inanimate world of sea and passes through multitudes of lives of flora and fauna. The same stream of life fastens the entire universe with intrinsic oneness. The poet knows that he is very close kin to living ones as he was also once asleep with all.

“*Basundhara*” (Earth), a poem of two hundred and twenty-seven lines, was composed on 11th November 1893 and compiled in the *Sonar Tori*, a collection of poems written when Tagore was living in the boathouse on the bank of the River Padma at Shilaidaha(now in Bangladesh), which immensely influenced Tagore’s ecosophy and his creative minds. The mysterious Padma, green cornfields, endless horizons, diverse sounds, and colours of cyclic seasons enchanted the life of Tagore and deepened his ecosophy. The poem articulates the poet’s intense fascination and longing for Earth and to be fused with her.

Deepening Earth-realization is the base of the poem “*Basundhara*” (Mother Earth). Tagore finds him here diffused amidst water-land-sky and passionately wants to be unified with Earth. The inseparable connection with Earth draws the poet again and again. He has a deep fascination to enjoy every beauty of water, land, and sky, and he wants to diffuse and spread himself among all. From the very beginning of the poem, it is clear that the poet was once totally unified with Earth. He realizes that he has his origin from Earth and he wants to

return to the lap of Earth. In “Samudrer Prati” Rabindranath wrote that he is the child of earth and at the beginning of “Basundhara” he declares:

Earth, take me back,
your lap-child back to your lap
in the shelter of your sari’s voluminous end.
mother made me of Earth, may I
live diffused in your soil; spread
myself in every direction like spring’s joy;
burst this breast-cage, shatter this stone-close
.....
with secret sap in moss, lichen, grass,
branch, bark, leaf; touch
with rippling fingers cornfields bent with the weight
of golden ears; privily fill
new blossoms with colour, aroma, nectar;
fill too, with blue waters of vast seas
and dance to ceaseless waves on quiet beaches;
hurrah language from wave to wave everywhere;
lay myself like a white scarf on mountain-tops,
in lofty regions of solitude, (“Basundhara” 97 Tn. by Dyson)

Here we find unique assimilation between scientific explanation and poetic consciousness. In the evolution of creation there we find single-celled organisms to multicellular organisms, from multicellular to groups of multicellular organisms like human beings. Evolution is always in the process of evolving and acquiring new creative

capabilities. As a species, humans are always in the process of the transition to consciousness for the meaning and purpose of human life on the earth. Tagore shows the evolution of life forms on earth to prove the oneness between the human self and nature. We know that at the primary stage of creation there was only the existence of water, and then land evolved and finally came life. The same consciousness passes and evolves through multiple layers of life to the human being. The poet feels this evolution in his blood and realizes that from the very beginning of creation he was there with the earth being merged. The poet articulated:

I can somehow recall the time when I was one with the earth, when the green grass grew upon me, the light of autumn fell on me, and in the rays of the sun the fragrant heat of youth rose from each pore of my green far-fetched limbs- when I lay still spreading out on far and distant stretches of unknown lands, waters and mountains under the bright sky, the stream of joy and a life-force would, in a very mute, semiconscious as well as in an immense manner, rise in me.(Dev 165-166)

Tagore felt a great and generous touch of silent and tacit Nature on his whole body and mind. Tagore's Earth-realization was so deep that he uttered:

Look at the huge Earth lying over there ever so quietly! I love her so much that I feel like clasping in my arms her whole immensity with her trees and foliage, rivers and meadows, her clamours and silences, her mornings and evenings. I wonder if ever we could get from heaven the earthly treasures which she has given us in such plentitude.... This dusty mother of ours- this our very own Earth- has tenderly carried over to us in her loving arms, these tear-born treasures of poor, mortal children in her golden cornfields and on the banks of bountiful rivers amidst the loving localities enlivened by human emotions. Wretched as we are, we cannot even preserve them. We can not even save them when cruel, unseen, powerful forces snatch them away, one by one, from her very breast. And still the poor old Earth has tried the very best she can for them. I do love this Earth so dearly!(*Introduction to Tagore* 5)

The poet's Earth-realization finds expression in diverse ways; he wants to come out from his narrow self-enclosedness to merge himself amidst every particle of earth. He wants to spread himself among plants, trees, plains, mountains, sky, air, clouds and, etc. He wants to enjoy the nectar of pleasure all together:

I would, if I could, drink again and again

The manifold wines of joy that overflow

All the goblets that this cosmos holds. (“Basundhara” Tn. by Dyson 100)

The poet’s Earth-realization ends only in the interbeing with whole nature. He feels deep solidarity with world humanity. He wishes to realize the surroundings of different races of different nations:

Deep is my desire

in country after country to identify

myself with all men; to be born

as an Arab child in the desert, fearless and free,

raised on camel’s milk; to explore

cold stone mansions, Buddhist monasteries

on Tibet’s plateau; to drink grave-wine

as a Persian in a rose-garden; to ride

horses as an intrepid Tartar; to be polite

and vigorous as a Japanese; to toil

with dedication as in the ancient Chinese land;

to experience existence in all homes. (“Basundhara” 99 Tn. by Dyson)

Rabindranath craves for merging with every existence of Earth. He says that his bond with Earth is from his very existence. The bond is bond beyond life and death, and the poet feels that he has been as one with Earth in body and soul. Even the poet had been with Earth long ago revolving around the sun:

My earth, you are

so many years old; with me mixed in your clay,

unwearied in the limitless firmament,
you have orbited the sun; and for nights and days
spanning millennia within me your grass has grown,
flowers in clusters have opened,
so many trees have shed their leaves, buds, fruits,
odoriferous pollen! ("Basundhara" 100 Tn. by Dyson)

Rabindranath enjoys the beauties and bounties of nature in his heart and soul. He believes that one day he was there in the heart of Earth as one, and for this, he passionately feels for Earth and claps her wholeheartedly. The stream of those beauties and bounties flows through the heart of Earth, the poet wishes to be a part of Earth to merge in the stream:

....Take me back
to the centre of that wholeness, whence continually
life germinates in a hundred thousand ways,
sends out shoots and buds, whence songs burst
in a million melodies, dances emanate
in countless gestures, where the mind flows
in torrents of ideas and emotions, where every hole
belongs to a flute that plays, and where you stand,
black mythic cow of plenty, being milked
from a thousand angles by plants, birds, beasts,
numberless thirsty creatures, the juice of joy
raining in so many ways and all the directions
echoing to that murmuring music.

The poet articulates:

And will not your groves

be even greener, mingled with my gladness

.....O earth,

all your limbs are dyed with the happiness

of so many thousands!

Floods of creatures have again and again

enveloped you with their lives, gone and returned,

mixing their hearts' affection with your humus, ("Basundhara" 101-102 Tn. by Dyson)

In the poem *Basundhara*, the poet wants to share the blissful joy of the whole Earth with all with the unified feeling. In different new forms of life, he wants to enjoy new tastes. He is even passionate to enjoy wandering through the worlds of stars and different planets.

Rabindranath has been there in the lap of Earth for a long, and he wishes to be so in the future also being unified with Earth:

A hundred years hence

will not my spirit quiver in this lovely forest's
layers of leaves? ("Basundhara" 102 Tn. by Dyson)

In the poem Tagore's worldwide different feelings and eternal longing of life find language in poetic expression. The poet wishes to soothe the craving affection imposing motherhood on earth. The poet finally feels more expanded, and he longs to be always with Earth:

Mother, hold me, please,

Within the firmest embrace of your arms.

Make me your own, one who belongs to your breast:

That secret source from where the fountain rises-

Of your vast vitality and varied delights-

Do take me there. ("Basundhara" 103 Tn. by Dyson)

In the poem "Jete Nahi Dibo" (I Won't Let You Go) the poet's Earth-realization has been articulated in a different way. The poem expounds deep fascination for earth and asserts that the bond of the human heart with Earth can never be forgotten. The more humans try to extricate the bond, the more Earth clasps them with multiple kinships and fascination. In the last stanza of the poem, the bond finds unique poetic blooming:

The cosmos is a field where the infinite's flute
plays a pastoral lament, and she sits and listens,
earth, her hair down, and it fills her with longing,
there, in the far cornfields, by Ganga's borders,
a golden cloth-end, sunlight-yellow, drawn
over her breast. Her eyes are still,
fixed on the far blue sky, and she says nothing.
Yes, I've seen her pale face,
no different from the face of my daughter of four,
so quiet, so hurt, and so nearly lost in the door-edge.(Dyson 96)

Tagore's poems on Nature and Earth celebrate the interrelatedness of all beings, and chant that we belong to Earth and all are interconnected in the web of life. His all-inclusive eco-philosophical poetics recognizes the mutual relationships of humans with the natural world and all its members and upholds that everything is an integral part of all that makes the reality—the total cosmos. Barry Commoner's law of ecology aptly states: "Everything is connected to everything else" (Commoner 33). Tagore whole-heartedly realizes this truth. He realizes that everything that exists contains the scintilla of universal consciousness and shares the eternal scintilla with every other creature of the universe.

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