

---

## Tagore's Gitanjali: A Study of Its Spiritual Aspects in the Age of Environmental Crisis

# 21

**Pooja Kohali**  
**Kavita Bisht**

---

### Abstract

In modern age of science and technology human beings have overexploited natural resources for economic growth and materialistic desires. This irresponsible behavior and excessive greed of humans have resulted in multiple environmental problems such as global warming , loss of biodiversity, pollution , climate change , deforestation and many more . In the context of present environmental crisis, this paper is an attempt to explore ecological consciousness from spiritual viewpoint in Tagore' *Gitanjali*. Rabindranath Tagore was an ardent environmentalist along with being a prominent literary figure in India as well as in the world. He was a naturalist who expresses his love, respect and reverence for Nature through his poems .Tagore believed in the philosophy of pantheism which considers the whole universe

---

Pooja Kohali  
Research Scholar, M.B.P.G. College Haldwani-263139, Uttarakhand, India,  
Email: poojakohli974@gmail.com

Kavita Bisht  
Associate Professor, Department of English, M.B.P.G. College Haldwani-263139,  
Uttarakhand, India, Email: drkavitabisht1@gmail.com

Anu Books, India  
Gender Roles and Green Concepts: Pathways to Environmental Sustainability  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31995/Book.AB302-F24.Chapter1>

as the manifestation of a divine reality. Modern materialistic man is deeply delved in depression, anxiety, and stress. Therefore, he tries to find solace and peace in the lap of Nature. Spirituality and Nature has its own charm in an age of increasing materialism. *Gitanjali* is richly suffused with deep spirituality and love for Nature.

---

**Keywords**

Spirituality, Nature and Man, Environmentalism, Divine, God and Nature.

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most eminent writers of modern India. He was born in an affluent family of Calcutta. He had a remarkable and multifaceted personality. Tagore was a prolific poet, novelist, dramatist, short story writer, musician, painter, a philosopher, and a social reformer. The atmosphere of Tagore family was permeated with creative and cultural aura. They excelled in literature as well as in other arts. Thus, The Tagore family played a prominent role in the progress of Bengali literature. They published *Bharti* magazine which was edited by Rabindranath Tagore and his brother. Apart from Rabindranath Tagore, his siblings had also keen interest in literary activities. His father Debendranath Tagore, was a member of Brahma Samaj and his fascination for the philosophy of Upanishads also influenced Rabindranath. Such enlightened atmosphere of the house exerted tremendous influence on Tagore's overall personality which is manifested in his works.

The present paper is a study of ecological consciousness in Tagore's *Gitanjali* from spiritual point of view. *Gitanjali* is a universally acclaimed and most prominent anthology of Tagore which earned him the most prestigious award, Nobel prize in 1913. It is a collection of 103 poems. It was originally written in Bengali language and Tagore himself translated it into English. Tagore has beautifully amalgamated art with ethics and Nature with God and human in *Gitanjali*.

As a child, Tagore used to live in the chamber of servants and he was restricted to go out of the room. But the melodious sounds of the chirping birds and the fragrant aromas of flowers always created a desire in him to go out of that room and enjoy the beauty of Nature. So, he used to glare on the beauty of Nature from a small window. Nature seemed mysteriously and divinely appealing to him and he used to fantasize a lot about the floating clouds and the beauty of panoramic landscapes. He gives wonderful expression to these childhood imaginations and fancies in his poems. he tells about his love for Nature:

I had a deep sense, almost from infancy, of the beauty of nature, and intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and the clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air (Kumar 68).

Rabindranath Tagore was just a child when he lost his mother. Sarada Devi, his mother, died after a long period of sickness when Tagore was just a young boy of fourteen years old.

He lost the emotional support of a mother from his life. Gradually, he became more devoted and conscious towards the natural environment around him. He writes:

The touch of my mother's fingers would come back to me; and I clearly realized that the tenderness which dwelt in the tips of those lovely fingers was the very same as that which blossoms every day in the purity of these Jessamine buds; and that whether we know it or not, this tenderness is on the earth in boundless measure (Gupta 38).

The above lines are taken from Tagore's biography. These lines demonstrate his emotional and spiritual connections with mother Nature whom he considers like his own mother.

He feels the gentle and loving touch of his mother's fingers in the tender touch of flowers. Rabindranath Tagore was deeply ingrained in the traditions and culture of his country where Nature is considered as a mother. And where different types of plants such as *Tulsi*, *Neem*, *Bargad*, *Peepal* and many more, are worshiped to show reverence for

mother Nature. These plants and trees are considered as the residence of God in Indian philosophy. Tagore too believed that Nature is the reflection of God. He also believes that God resides in the heart of all humans.

*Gitanjali* is mainly an anthology of devotional poems in which a devotee is yearning to meet the divine. He tries to reach the celestial being through the objects of Nature. He uses natural objects as medium of communion with the Almighty. In poem 18, the poet writes:

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind ( Tagore 42).

In the above poem, the poet depicts the spiritual quest of the devotee who is eagerly waiting to meet the supreme being in a dark rainy night. The poet is longing to see the divine face of God. So, he is incessantly looking at the dark and dreary sky. The poet feels a sense of association with the restless winds. His heart is lamenting with the wailing sounds of the winds.

In song no. 46 of *Gitanjali*, the poet says:

I know not from what distant time thou art ever coming nearer to meet me. Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye...

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work, and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence ( Tagore 71).

The poet talks about the arrival of God. He is present everywhere. He is there in the morning as well as in the night. God makes the people feel his divine presence through the sunlight in the morning and the shimmering stars in the night. The poet feels the sweet smell of God's presence in the blow of breeze.

Tagore's attitude towards nature is similar to the views expressed in Upanishads. He firmly believed that Nature manifests the Almighty in each and every object of it. Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, was deeply influenced by the doctrines of

Upanishads. He was a spiritual man who lived a life of austerity. His father's influence can be easily seen on Tagore.

He tells that how they used to recite the mantras of Upanishads in his childhood. He writes:

On one occasion, my father came home to invest the three of us with the sacred thread. With the help of Pandit Vedantavagish he had collected the old Vedic rites for the purpose. For days together we were taught to chant in correct accents the selections from the Upanishads, arranged by my father under the name of 'Brahmo Dharma' (Gupta 28).

Tagore, his brothers and his nephews used to chant the mantras of Upanishads in childhood. So, the teachings of Upanishads left indelible impact on the mind of Tagore and he gives expression to the philosophy of Upanishads in his poems which say that all the natural objects are permeated with an eternal soul. This eternal soul is present everywhere, such as in the wide open sky, in the dark shadows of trees, and in the depth of the ocean. This omnipresent power is the presence of God in the universe. In song No. 46, Tagore seems to express the Upanishadic conception of the Almighty. He writes:

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work,

And I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence  
(Tagore 71).

The above poem shows the spiritual profoundness of the poet. He feels the delightful aroma of God in the air. It is said in Upanishads too that God is present in the air, water, fire and in every particle of the universe. It is prayed in Upanishads that:

I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in the water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees (Shankar Nagar 17).

God expresses his love for creation and creatures by giving them crops, air, trees and many more things. Similar views are expressed in *Gitanjali* by Tagore. In song No. 59, he writes:

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart-

This golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds  
Sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness  
upon my forehead (Tagore 87).

The above lyric is a spiritual poem in which the poet is showing his gratefulness towards the Almighty. God sends his divine love and joy to all humans through the natural phenomena happening in the natural environment. Tagore believed that all the natural objects are the gifts of God. He feels the affectionate touch of God in the sunlight on his face. God makes the poet feel his presence through the soft touch of breeze on his forehead. The sweet voice of the supreme being comes forth in the form of running streams and he showers his infinite love on humans through raindrops.

Tagore has celebrated the graceful sights, sonorous sounds and the different colours of nature in his verses. He finds both peace and pleasure in the lap of mother earth. Tagore always held the strong belief that there should be a harmony between natural environment and human beings around it. In poem 60 of *Gitanjali*, he writes :

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach (Tagore 88).

In the above lyric, the poet has depicted the mother like behavior of the destructive sea waves with the children. The furious sea waves, which can cause death, are singing unintelligible songs to the children and it seems as if a mother is singing lullaby for her child. The perilous sea plays with the innocuous children like a friend. The poet expresses the idea of unity and coexistence between Nature and mankind.

Many poems of *Gitanjali* show the influence of Bhagvad Gita on Tagore's mind. His concept of the immanence of the supreme being

is inspired from the teachings of Bhagvad Gita. Tagore believed that an eternal life is found in all natural objects which is the source of the creation of the entire cosmos. To him, this all pervasive spirit is found in all human beings, in animals, as well as in the trees and plants. This supreme power runs and controls the entire universe. Thus, Tagore believes in the spiritual oneness of all things in natural environment. In song no 48, the poet writes:

The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed in the shade.

Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of the noon.

The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of the banyan tree, and I laid myself down by the water and stretched my tired limbs on the grass (Tagore 73).

The poet has depicted a beautiful harmony between nature and creatures in the above poem. He has described how humans are interfused with the wildlife. These different components of nature together make it complete and consolidated. The sunlight on flowers, the dancing leaves with the wind, the shepherd boy sitting under the shadow of a banyan tree and the poet who is lying down on the green grass, make a perfect picture of harmony in nature. The poet believes in the oneness of all existence and all life on the earth together represents the omnipresent creator.

Tagore has used diverse imageries from nature to convey his emotions related to man, God and mother earth. In *Gitanjali*, he has used many natural imageries such as, flowers, wind, streams, clouds, Moon, rain and many more. Sometimes his “heart wanders wailing with the restless wind” and sometimes he feels “a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind”.

The poet listens the divine voice of the Almighty in the sonorous sound of the running streams. He writes in Song No. 19 of *Gitanjali*:

Thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky. Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nest, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest grooves (Tagore 43).

In the above poem, a devotee is yearning to listen the voice of God. He listens the divine voice of God in the golden rays of the sun which comes forth from the sky. The words of the supreme being come to him through the songs of the birds and the fragrance of flowers. Nature plays a prominent role in the communication between the celestial being and humans. Tagore presents the idea that the finite can reach to the infinite by using nature as medium.

Tagore was an environmentalist. He believed that we are the part of nature. Humans and Nature can not be separated from each other. He was in the favor of giving children education in natural environment. Tagore believed that the preservation of nature and the development of humanity should go together and nature should not be destroyed in the name of urbanization and development. He says:

What is the value of success if it be at the cost of humanity and if it make a desert of God's world?...We need to hear this again and again and never more than now in this modern world of slavery and cannibalism in decent guise: By the help of unrighteousness, men do prosper, men do gain victories over their enemies, men do attain what they desire; but they perish at the root (Bandyopadhyay 180).

Thus, Gitanjali is highly suffused with eco-conscious thoughts of Tagore. He has gracefully merged spirituality with nature and humanity. The incorporation of the spiritual and mystical aspects of nature transports the readers to a divine world. A world where the God comes "in the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path" and where the poet feels "that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe". Tagore was a lover and a devotee of nature and he has worshipped mother nature as God in each poem of Gitanjali. In present time, when humans are suffering from depression and anxiety, they can feel the soothing touch of spirituality in the poems of Gitanjali. It gives the message to all humanity that we can find peace and tranquility in the lap of mother nature. His thoughts and views about nature are deeply rooted in the mysticism of ancient Indian philosophy. A deep study of Gitanjali shows that it mainly talks about establishing a spiritual relations between humans and natural environment. This



anthology of devotional poems can open the eyes of people in an age of increasing environmental problems and it can lead them towards the path of spirituality and love for nature. Literature has the potential to bring change in the attitude of people towards nature and this positive change in their attitude and behavior is very necessary in current scenario so that we can preserve mother earth. Therefore, Gitanjali still has the same importance as it had hundred years back.

### References

1. Tagore, Rabindranath. Gitanjali. Sahitya Sarowar publisher, 17-A, Prabhu Nagar, Near Pratap Nagar Agra-282002(U.P).
2. Tagore, Rabindranath. My Reminiscences. Notion Press, Chennai, 2019.
3. Tagore, Rabindranath. "The Poet's Religion." From Rabindranath Tagore Selected Essays. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004.
4. Tagore, Rabindranath. "The Religion of an Artist." From Rabindranath Tagore Selected Essays. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004.
5. Tagore, Rabindranath. On the edges of time. Kolkata, Visva-Bharati, 2003
6. Asthana, B.P. Rabindranath Tagore: Gitanjali. Sahitya Bhandar publishers, Meerut.
7. Bandyopadhyay, Debarati. Rabindranath Tagore: A life of Intimacy with Nature. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2019.
8. Datta, Krishna and Andrew Robinson (eds),. Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore. Cambridge UP, 2005.
9. Gupta, Uma Das. Rabindranath Tagore: My life in my words. Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd, 2006.
10. Kripalani, Krishna. Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography. London: Oxford UP, 1962.
11. Kumar, Satish. A Survey of Indian English Poetry. 1st Edition, Raza Barqui press Bareilly, 2001.

12. Paul, S.k. The complete poems of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. Sarup and sons publishers, New Delhi, 2006.
13. Paul, S.K, and Prasad, Amar Nath. Indian Poetry in English: Roots and Blossoms. Sarup and Sons Publishers, New Delhi, 2007.
14. Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, et al., eds. Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume 1861- 1941. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961.
15. Sen Gupta, Kalyan. The philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore. Ashgate publishing limited Hampshire England,2005.
16. Shankar Nagar, Anupam Ratan. Mysticism in Tagore's Poetry. Prakash Book Depot Publishers, Bareilly,1995.
17. Sinha, Sasadhar. Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore. London: Asia Publishing House, 1962
18. Awal, Abdul. The works of Rabindranath Tagore: An Ecocritical Reading. International journal of trend in scientific Research and development, Vol.5, Issue 4, May- June 2021.
19. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356264229\\_The\\_Works\\_of\\_Rabindranath\\_Tagore\\_An\\_Ecocritical\\_Reading](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356264229_The_Works_of_Rabindranath_Tagore_An_Ecocritical_Reading)
20. Bakchi , Pankaj. Ecological thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore. Literary Herald: An international refereed /peer- reviewed English e-journal, Vol.7, Issue 5, Feb. 2022, pp.13-22.
21. <https://tlhjournal.com/uploads/products/3.pankaj-bakchi-article.pdf>
22. Gogoi, Dhanjyoti. Note of Eco-Mysticism in selected poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Mamang Dai. The Criterion: An international journal in English. Vol.7, Issue4, Aug.2016, pp.40-50
23. <https://www.the-criterion.com/V7/n4/006.pdf>
24. Gurung, Dilu. Human-Nature Interactions in the Poetry of Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Rabindranath Tagore. The outlook: journal of English studies, Vol.14, 17 July2023, pp. 24-32, DOI:10.3126/ojes.v14i1.56654.

25. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372435931\\_Human-Nature\\_Interactions\\_in\\_the\\_Poetry\\_of\\_Laxmi\\_Prasad\\_Devkota\\_and\\_Rabindranath\\_Tagore](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372435931_Human-Nature_Interactions_in_the_Poetry_of_Laxmi_Prasad_Devkota_and_Rabindranath_Tagore)
26. Hebbar P, Vikas and G, Mallya. A Review of Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' in the light of Eco-Mysticism. *International journal of research and analytical reviews*, Vol.11, Issue1,1 January 2024,pp.690-691.
27. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377387972\\_A\\_Review\\_of\\_Rabindranath\\_Tagore's\\_'Gitanjali'\\_in\\_the\\_Light\\_of\\_Eco-Mysticism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377387972_A_Review_of_Rabindranath_Tagore's_'Gitanjali'_in_the_Light_of_Eco-Mysticism)
28. Kunwar, Shakuntala and Khali, Pooja. An Eco-critical study of Rabindranath Tagore's selected poetry.
29. *Research journal of English language and literature*, Vol.4, Issue 4, Oct.Dec.2016, pp.342-348.
30. <http://rjelal.com/4.4b.2016/342-348%20Dr.SHAKUNTALA%20KUNWAR.pdf>
31. Khali, Pooja. Eco-Spiritualism in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. *The Criterion: An international journal in English*, Vol.5, Issue 4, Aug.2014, pp.217-221.
32. <https://www.the-criterion.com/V5/n4/Pooja.pdf>
33. Matta, Rakib Farooq and K, Morve Roshan. An evaluation of mysticism in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. *Scholedge international journal of multidisciplinary & allied studies*, Vol.04, Issue 11, 2017, pp.103-107, DOI: 10.19085/journal.sijmas 041101.
34. <https://thescholedge.org/index.php/sijmas/article/download/407/464#:~:text=Mysticism%20in%20Gitanjali,and%20worldly%20desires%20or%20ambitions>
35. Sahariya, Bhabani. An Analytical study of R.N.Tagore's philosophy of environment. *Scholars journal of arts, humanities and social sciences*, Jul. 2017, pp.727-732, DOI: 10.36347/sjahss.2017.v05i07.013 [https://saspublishers.com/media/articles/SJAHSS\\_57B727-732.pdf](https://saspublishers.com/media/articles/SJAHSS_57B727-732.pdf)

36. Varghese, Rany. Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali: An Ecocritical Study. *The Creative Launcher*, Vol.5, Issue 3, 30 Aug. 2020, pp. 247-256, DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.5.3.32.
37. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366834372\\_Rabindranath\\_Tagore%27s\\_Gitanjali\\_An\\_Ecocritical\\_Study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366834372_Rabindranath_Tagore%27s_Gitanjali_An_Ecocritical_Study)
38. <https://www.englishliterature.info/2021/08/gitanjali-poem-59-summary-analysis.html> <https://www.englishliterature.info/2021/08/gitanjali-poem-18-summary-analysis.html>