

## An Overview of Ecological Consciousness in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays *Sacrifice and Red Oleanders*

By

Dr. Rashmi Priya

Delhi

[rashmi.priya01@rediffmail.com](mailto:rashmi.priya01@rediffmail.com)

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### Abstract:

*Rabindranath Tagore was the first Indian Nobel Laureate for his great poetic work Gitanjali in the year 1913. Rabindranath Tagore was a modern Indian Dramatist who won this honor in the history of Indian Literature. Tagore dealt with different social, cultural and environmental concerns in his dramatic works. Rabindranath Tagore was modernist and social reformer, who supported the beauty and love of nature in his writings. As modernist he explored crucial issues related to environment in the light of eco-critical perspective to create ecological consciousness among the humanity. Eco-criticism is a new approach in literature to depict the importance and need to maintain the sublimity of nature and relationship between human beings and nature as the need of the time. Rabindranath Tagore's plays Sacrifice and Red Oleanders throws light on modern world environmental concerns and values. The paper throws light on Rabindranath Tagore's love for nature in the plays from the eco-critical perspective. Tagore emphasizes on the importance of nature in human culture and man's lack of understanding of nature in today's world. Tagore's plays carry a significant message to modern civilization on the importance of eco-system and its values for the human welfare.*

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**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Eco-critical approach, Ecological consciousness, Sacrifice, Red Oleanders, Ecological values.

### Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore was a social philosopher as well as a preacher in the history of Indian English literature. He was the first distinguished Indian English dramatist and a man of unchallenged literary intelligence and potential who explored different vistas of the modern day society in his writings. He was the most versatile literary personality of the time who depicted various significant aspects of human society in his literature. He was a dramatist, poet, novelist, short story writer, painter, actor, educationist, social reformer etc. Rabindranath Tagore was a modernist and influenced by the western culture and literature of the time. Tagore as an educated believed in progressive and reformist outlook as a writer. He was a master of drama as a literary genius enhanced social, political, educational, cultural and environmental values. Rabindranath Tagore composed different plays some well known plays are *Sacrifice, Sanyasi, The Post Office, King and the Queen, Red Oleanders, The Waterfall, Natir Puja, Malini, Chitrangada, Chandaliika* etc.

Rabindranath Tagore as dramatist deals with the wide range of themes in his plays from the age old myths to modern day concerns. He deals with Indian traditional myths, mythologies, legends and many other contemporary socio-cultural and environmental issues in his plays. He deals with tradition and modernity of Indian society in his drama. Rabindranath Tagore as a dramatist deals with issues of history of India to contemporary modern Indian society with his modern outlook. Tagore as the playwright of pre-independence India wrote a variety of plays such as lyrical drama, dance drama, tragedies, tragi-comedies, symbolic drama etc. Tagore as a playwright used theatre as a means of social transformation in modern India.

The present paper is an attempt to take an overview of ecological consciousness in Rabindranath Tagore's plays *Sacrifice* and *Red Oleanders*. Eco-criticism is a new theory in

<https://www.researchreviewonline.com/issues/volume-7-issue-91-november-2020/RRJ652324>

contemporary literature. It is taken as a study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view. William Rueckert used the term Eco-criticism in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism" in 1978. Eco-criticism is also considered as a broad approach which is known as environmental literary criticism. Eco-criticism focuses on the importance and values of eco-system of the world. The writer in the literary work deals with the degradation of the nature and other significant crisis related to the nature. The present paper is a study to analyze Rabindranath Tagore's plays *Sacrifice* and *Red Oleanders* from eco-critical approach which can be categorized as eco-drama from the green lens in the literature. Tagore expressed his urge for the ecological consciousness among the mankind as the need of the time. Tagore believes in the human and the nature which is strongly reflected in his writings.

### **Sacrifice:**

Rabindranath Tagore's play *Sacrifice* (1890) is dramatically one of the best and it deals with the problem of dehumanizing process of innocent animal killing to express the love towards god and goddess in the name of sacrifice. The animals are also the innocent creation like all other beings in the world and it also affects the co-system in the name culture and religious issues. *Sacrifice* is one of the remarkable plays of Tagore which significantly explores Tagore as a master of drama in the Indian theatre. The play explores the main theme of conflict between the religious and secular power in the society. It deals with rebellion of characters against the pitiless sacrifice of animals in the name of Goddess Kali. Tagore highlights the traditional practices of merciless killing of innocent animals as a part of age old customs.

Rabindranath Tagore has highlighted the problem of live sacrifice of animals according to the Hindu concept of sacrifice which implies loss of compassion, pity and values. Tagore portrays the false practices of the society to express their love to god in the form of their inhuman offerings of animal sacrifice. According to Indian beliefs, Rabindranath Tagore has dramatized the rituals of sacrifice and Indian superstitious beliefs to appease the gods and to seek the benediction of gods in the society.

The drama begins with the emotional Queen Gunavati, who is a childless woman and craving for the child of her own. The Queen Gunavati is religious and believes in the power of the goddess Kali and a devotee of the goddess kali who believes in the miracles and also expect in her life. She has been brought up in the traditional culture of the India where it is believed that to die childless especially without having a son meant a sinner for the woman in the society. Rabindranath Tagore has attacked the age old practices of the society which makes the life of a woman hellish and poignant only for the sake of the child.

The king Govinda has been disappointed by the poor girl Aparna whose pet goat has been offered as a sacrifice to the goddess kali. Aparna is a poor ordinary girl who loves her goat and it is snatched by Raghupati's men for the purpose of sacrifice in the respect and love for goddess Kali. Raghupati is the culprit who exploits people emotionally to offer animal sacrifice in the name of religious practice. Aparna loves animal more than humanity as a greater human being in the society. The king Govinda forbids the practice of killing innocent animals in the temple under the sentence of banishment. Tagore has rejected the inhuman and bloody sacrifice of innocent animals to express our love with selfish motives to the lords. Sibnarayan Ray has remarkably commented on this:

Tagore had also consistently rejected violence in all its forms and even formulated the ideal of non-violent resistance to wrong and injustice. His Brahma upbringing and love of Vaishnav poetry had developed in him a strong distance for Bengal's popular cult of Kali-worship which involved sacrifice of innocent animals.... (82).

The significant royal decision of the king Govinda against killing animals in the offering to the gods hurts the priest of the temple Raghupati which results in the clash between the king and Raghupati. The Queen Gunavati finally realized her mistake for killing animals and her false love. Tagore

rejected the so-called practice of innocent animal killing in front of idols of gods and goddess which harms directly the environmental system.

### **Red Oleanders:**

Rabindranath Tagore's play *Red Oleanders* (1924) is the translation of his Bengali play Raktakarabi. The play is an attack on the capitalist exploitation of earth and human beings in the modern industrial world. Tagore in this drama expressed his views on the values of the natural resources and also criticized the wild attack on earthly resources with the help of modern machines. Tagore has exposed the human selfishness towards earth through the example of mining and inhuman treatment to labors in the mine.

The play is a great work of art which exposes the evils tendency of modern human beings. *Red Oleander* is the story of Yaksha Town who is owned by the master. The Yaksha Town is known as the mining town where labors work like robots. The people in the Yaksha Town have forgotten the greatness, beauty and values of earth as the part of modern civilization. The king is the antagonist and selfish who transforms a town into a fort and human into digging machines. The king exploits the earthly resources. Nandini is the free-spirited woman who opposed the human greed and the dominance of the king. The villagers are working like machines in the mine for gold.

Nandini as the powerful woman opposed the effects of capitalism and moral degradation of human society. She opposed the cruelty of the king who exploits the nature and human beings. The drama also exposes the conflict between a dominant king and free spirited woman. Nandini resolves to free human beings working like machines and the earth from the clutches of the material minded king. The king is attacking the natural resources for his greed for the gold.

Rabindranath Tagore has explored valuable question of environment and nature attacked by the human beings. Nandini tries to break the cruel power of the king and opposed the moral degradation of human society. The mighty king is an evil and material minded person who wants to develop centralized governance and accumulation of wealth. He exploits the earth for his greed. Tagore exposes the capitalist exploitation of the society through gold mining of the Yaksha Town where people are forced to work hard like machines to make profit for the greedy king. Tagore attacked the merciless exploitation of the natural resources and human beings in this drama and expressed his ecological views. Tagore significantly expressed his ecological consciousness through the character of Nandini who emphasizes the relationship between human beings and nature.

### **Conclusion:**

Rabindranath Tagore exposes the event of environmental conflict and ecological injustice in the contemporary world. Tagore has threatened the attack of human beings of modern society on environment in the form of mining with the help of modern machinery and killing of the innocent animals. Rabindranath Tagore was revolutionary and modernist, not attacking the science but the destructive human tendency towards environment with technology. Tagore has strongly criticized the capitalist exploitation of natural resources by the human beings in the name of religion and modernity. The plays *Sacrifice* and *Red Oleanders* expose the ecological values in the contemporary world as it is a significant challenge for the humanity. Tagore deals with idea of ecological awareness taking into consideration the massive strides of technological advancements and unnecessary cultural changes. Rabindranath Tagore successfully dealt with idea of future prospects for human beings along with a very important message to the humanity regarding the preservation of the eco-system in the contemporary society.

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