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Rabindranath Tagore's Green Philosophy: Beyond Anthropocentrism

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Abstract

This review article examines Rabindranath Tagore's ecological philosophy as a prescient voice that transcends anthropocentric worldviews to envision a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Through a comprehensive analysis of Tagore's literary works, essays, and educational experiments at Santiniketan, this article argues that Tagore developed a distinctive biocentric perspective rooted in Upaniṣadic philosophy yet remarkably aligned with contemporary deep ecology and ecofeminist thought. The article explores how Tagore's critique of colonial modernity and industrial civilisation anticipated current debates on sustainable development, while his concept of universal humanity (Viśva-Mānava) extends ethical consideration beyond the human to encompass all living beings and the earth itself. By examining Tagore's arboreal poetry, his ecological allegories in plays such as Red Oleanders, and his visionary text Pallīprakṛti (Environment in the Villages), this review demonstrates the continuing relevance of Tagore's green philosophy for addressing twenty-first-century ecological crises. The article concludes that Tagore's integration of aesthetic appreciation, spiritual reverence, and practical ecological stewardship offers a compelling alternative to the dominant anthropocentric paradigm that underpins contemporary environmental destruction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The intensifying ecological crisis of the Anthropocene has prompted scholars and environmental thinkers to reconsider alternative philosophical traditions that may provide insights beyond the nature–culture dualism associated with Western industrial civilisation. As climate change accelerates, biodiversity declines at alarming rates, and ecosystems move toward critical tipping points, the shortcomings of strictly anthropocentric models of environmental management have become increasingly evident. In this context of renewed ecological inquiry, Rabindranath Tagore's reflections on nature acquire particular relevance. As Shrivastava [1] observes, Tagore's spiritual engagement with the natural world presents an ecological vision in which nature is experienced as a living and sacred presence rather than merely a resource for human use. Consequently, Tagore (1861–1941) emerges as a remarkably prescient thinker whose philosophical and literary works anticipated many contemporary ecological concerns while articulating a distinctive understanding of the relationship between humanity and the natural world rooted in Indian philosophical traditions.

Tagore's ecological thought has received increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, with researchers exploring various dimensions of his environmental philosophy. Awal traces Tagore's intellectual journey from naturalism to what he terms "Upaniṣadic ecologism,"

demonstrating how the poet's engagement with nature evolved into a sophisticated philosophical position that resonates with modern deep ecology [2]. Similarly, Shrivastava [1] explores Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual engagement with nature and highlights how his reflections present an ecologically sensitive vision that challenges purely anthropocentric notions of progress and development. By emphasising a harmonious relationship between the human spirit and the natural world, Tagore's perspective offers an alternative to the utilitarian assumptions that often shaped colonial and modern models of scientific and economic advancement. Recent ecocritical studies have increasingly placed Tagore's writings within wider discussions of ecological philosophy and sustainable human–nature relationships. In this context, Mishra [3] examines Tagore's songs in *Gitabitan* and *Gitanjali* through the lens of deep ecology, emphasising how they articulate a vision of harmony between humanity and the natural world. Such analyses highlight the relevance of Tagore's literary thought to contemporary debates on environmental ethics and sustainability. Ghosh's analysis of *Red Oleanders* identifies proto-ecofeminist elements in Tagore's dramatic works [4], while Roy et al. explore the educational dimensions of his ecological vision [5].

Despite this growing body of scholarship, the full scope and contemporary relevance of Tagore's green philosophy remain insufficiently appreciated, particularly his systematic critique of anthropocentrism and his articulation of an alternative ecological worldview. This review article addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of Tagore's environmental thought across his diverse literary and philosophical writings, demonstrating how his vision transcends mere appreciation of nature to offer a fundamental reconceptualisation of humanity's place within the more-than-human world.

The intellectual sources of Tagore's ecological philosophy are multiple and intertwined. Deeply immersed in the Upaniṣadic tradition, with its emphasis on the fundamental unity of existence (*brahman*) and the identification of the individual self (*ātman*) with cosmic reality, Tagore found philosophical resources to overcome the subject-object dualism that characterises much Western thinking about nature [6]. Simultaneously, his intimate engagement with the natural world during childhood in Calcutta and later at Santiniketan fostered a visceral, experiential connection to trees, rivers, skies, and seasonal cycles that permeates his poetry and songs. The natural environment of Bengal, its rivers, its lush vegetation, its dramatic monsoon seasons, became not merely a backdrop for human drama but an active presence and interlocutor in his literary imagination.

Equally important was Tagore's critical engagement with modernity and its ecological consequences. Witnessing the environmental degradation accompanying colonial industrialisation, the clearing of forests for tea plantations, the pollution of rivers, and the disruption of traditional agricultural practices, Tagore developed an incisive critique of what he termed "the nation" and its destructive logic [7]. His analysis anticipated many themes later developed by environmental historians and political ecologists, particularly the connection between colonial exploitation of both human and non-human natures. Unlike some romantic critics of modernity, however, Tagore did not advocate a simple return to pre-industrial traditions but sought instead a creative synthesis that would integrate modern scientific knowledge with ecological wisdom derived from Indian philosophical and cultural traditions.

The relevance of Tagore's ecological thought to contemporary environmental discourse lies in its holistic blending of aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, and practical perspectives. Rather than remaining purely theoretical, Tagore's environmental vision was closely connected to his educational initiatives at Santiniketan and his efforts toward rural development in Bengal. As Dasgupta [8] reflects, Tagore consistently emphasised a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, advocating forms of learning that cultivate sensitivity toward the natural environment. His educational philosophy encouraged students to engage directly with nature, fostering an awareness that may be understood today as ecological literacy. Similarly, his ideas on rural reconstruction, articulated in works such as *Pallīprakṛti*, anticipated principles associated with sustainable development and environmentally balanced community life long before such concepts became widely recognised. This review article begins by examining the philosophical foundations of Tagore's ecocentrism, including his engagement with Upaniṣadic philosophy, his critique of anthropocentrism, and his vision of universal humanity extended beyond the human. It then analyses the literary expressions of Tagore's ecological consciousness across his poetry, songs, and dramas, demonstrating how aesthetic engagement with nature functions as a mode of ecological knowing. Tagore's practical ecological vision is subsequently explored through his text, *Pallīprakṛti, and his educational experiments at Santiniketan,* as models of sustainable human-nature relationships. The discussion then turns to the contemporary relevance of Tagore's green philosophy for addressing twenty-first-century ecological challenges, from climate change to biodiversity loss. The conclusion synthesises these threads to articulate the distinctive contribution of Tagore's thought to global environmental discourse.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TAGORE'S ECOCENTRISM

2.1 Upaniṣadic Roots and the Metaphysics of Interconnectedness

At the core of Tagore's ecological philosophy lies a metaphysical vision of fundamental interconnectedness derived from the Upaniṣads, ancient Indian philosophical texts that explore the nature of ultimate reality and the self. The Upaniṣadic equation of *brahman* (the ultimate reality) with *ātman* (the individual self) provides philosophical grounding for overcoming the alienation between humans and nature that characterises modern anthropocentric worldviews [6]. For Tagore, this insight was not merely abstract metaphysics but a living truth to be experienced and embodied.

Tagore's interpretation of Upaniṣadic philosophy emphasises the joy (ānanda) that arises from recognising one's connection to the larger whole of existence. In his philosophical essays, particularly those collected in *Sādhanā*, he articulates a vision of reality as a dynamic, interconnected process rather than a collection of discrete objects [9]. This process philosophy resonates with contemporary ecological thinking that emphasises relationships, flows, and systems over isolated entities. Unlike the mechanistic worldview that underpins much modern science and technology, Tagore's vision conceives nature as a living presence worthy of reverence and capable of communicating with those who cultivate the capacity to listen.

The concept of *prakṛti* in Indian philosophy is particularly significant for understanding Tagore's ecological thought. Unlike the Western concept of "nature" as passive matter to be shaped by human agency, *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya philosophy is dynamic, creative, and intrinsically valuable. Tagore draws on this understanding, infusing it with his own poetic sensibility, presenting nature as a creative force that manifests in endless variety while maintaining fundamental unity [10]. This philosophical orientation precludes the instrumental attitude toward nature that characterises anthropocentric worldviews, replacing it with an attitude of reverence and reciprocity.

2.2 Critique of Anthropocentrism and Colonial Modernity

Tagore's critique of anthropocentrism can be understood within the broader context of his response to colonial modernity and its impact on Indian society and environment. Observing the ecological and cultural disruptions associated with colonial industrial expansion, he questioned the worldview that treated nature primarily as an object of control and exploitation. As Shrivastava [1] notes, Tagore's reflections on nature emphasise a spiritual and experiential relationship with the natural world, challenging the mechanistic outlook often linked with modern scientific and technological development. In this way, Tagore recognised that the anthropocentric assumptions shaping dominant models of progress were not only philosophically limiting but also environmentally harmful. The clearing of forests, the pollution of rivers, and the disruption of traditional ecological relationships were not incidental byproducts of development but expressions of a deeper philosophical orientation that positioned humans as masters and nature as a resource.

In his essays on education and nationalism, Tagore repeatedly critiques the instrumental rationality that reduces nature to raw material for human purposes. He contrasts this Western attitude with traditional Indian approaches that cultivate reverence for rivers, mountains, trees, and animals as manifestations of the divine [11]. This is not, however, a simple nativist rejection of Western thought but a nuanced engagement that recognises both the achievements and limitations of modernity. Tagore appreciated the scientific method and technological innovation but insisted that these must be guided by ethical wisdom and ecological awareness rather than narrow human self-interest.

The concept of "hubris" that Awal identifies in Tagore's critique of Baconian science captures an essential dimension of his anthropocentrism critique [2]. Like the Greek tragic heroes whose overconfidence led to their downfall, modern humanity's assumption of mastery over nature inexorably leads to ecological catastrophe. Tagore advocates instead for "humility" before the earth, recognising human dependence on natural systems that far exceed our understanding and control. This humility is not passive resignation but active engagement informed by reverence and wonder.

2.3 Viśva-Mānava: Universal Humanity Extended Beyond the Human

Tagore's concept of universal humanity (*Viśva-Mānava*) has typically been interpreted in humanistic terms as an affirmation of a shared human identity that transcends national, racial, and cultural divisions. A closer reading of his philosophical writings, however, reveals that this universalism extends beyond the human to encompass the entire cosmos [12]. The realisation of universal humanity involves not merely recognising our connection to other humans but understanding our embeddedness within the larger community of life.

This expanded conception of community has profound ethical implications. If humans belong to a moral community that includes animals, plants, rivers, and mountains, then our ethical obligations extend beyond the interpersonal to encompass the more-than-human world.

Tagore's poetry frequently expresses this expanded ethical sensibility, mourning the destruction of trees, celebrating the arrival of monsoon clouds, and addressing rivers and birds as subjects worthy of respect and attention [2].

The ecological dimension of Tagore's universalism distinguishes his thought from much Western humanism, which tends to posit a sharp boundary between the human and natural realms. By drawing upon Indian philosophical resources that emphasise continuity rather than rupture between humans and the rest of nature, Tagore articulates a vision of human flourishing that requires and includes the flourishing of the wider natural world. This position anticipates contemporary "post-humanist" and "new materialist" philosophies that challenge anthropocentric assumptions while avoiding the reductionism of some deep ecology approaches [13].

III. LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

3.1 Arboreal Poetry and the Voice of Trees

Throughout his poetic career, Tagore returned repeatedly to trees as subjects of contemplation and sources of wisdom. His arboreal poetry, spanning collections from *Chabi* (Pictures) to *Patraput* (Leaf-Bowl), develops a distinctive poetics that grants trees agency, voice, and subjectivity [2]. Unlike the romantic nature poetry of the European tradition, which often uses nature as a mirror for human emotions, Tagore's tree poems attempt to encounter trees on their own terms, recognising their otherness while celebrating connection.

In poems such as "Vṛkṣabandhanā" (Address to a Tree), Tagore addresses trees as companions and teachers, expressing gratitude for their shade, their beauty, and their silent wisdom. The tree becomes a symbol of rootedness and aspiration, drawing sustenance from the earth while reaching toward the sky. This dual orientation mirrors Tagore's vision of human flourishing, which requires both grounding in particular places and cultures and openness to universal values and experiences [14].

The ecological significance of Tagore's arboreal poetry lies in its cultivation of what we might call "biophilic attention"—the capacity to notice, appreciate, and value non-human life. By representing trees as subjects rather than objects, Tagore's poems challenge readers to expand their circle of moral consideration and to recognise the intrinsic value of the more-than-human world. This aesthetic education complements philosophical argument and ethical exhortation in fostering ecological consciousness.

3.2 Seasonal Songs and the Rhythm of Nature

Tagore's *Ṛtusaṅgīt* (Seasonal Songs) represent perhaps the most extensive engagement with natural cycles in modern literature. Composed over decades and integrated into the Bengali annual calendar through their performance at seasonal festivals, these songs celebrate the changing faces of nature while articulating the emotional and spiritual significance of seasonal transitions [2]. The arrival of spring (*vasanta*), the monsoon rains (*varṣā*), and autumn (śarata), with its white clouds and flowing rivers—each season receives a distinctive musical and poetic treatment.

The philosophical significance of the seasonal songs lies in their representation of time as cyclical rather than linear. Unlike the progressive temporality of modernisation narratives, which position nature as a static backdrop to dynamic human history, Tagore's seasonal cycle positions humans within natural rhythms, participating in patterns that infinitely repeat and renew. This cyclical temporality resonates with an ecological understanding of natural systems while challenging the anthropocentric assumption that human history transcends natural processes.

The performance context of the seasonal songs is equally significant. Composed for festivals that brought communities together to celebrate seasonal transitions, these songs functioned as vehicles for collective ecological experience. Participants in Vasanta Utsava (Spring Festival) or Varṣā Maṅgal (Monsoon Celebration) did not merely observe nature from a distance but actively participated in seasonal rhythms through song, dance, and ritual [15]. This participatory relationship contrasts sharply with the detached observation characteristic of modern scientific approaches to nature.

3.3 Ecological Allegory in *Red Oleanders*

Tagore's play *Raktakarabī* (*Red Oleanders*) represents his most sustained dramatic engagement with ecological themes. Written in 1926, the play allegorises the conflict between extractive industrial civilisation and life-affirming ecological values [4]. The kingdom of Yakṣapurī, built upon mining and resource extraction, systematically destroys the natural environment while dehumanising its inhabitants. The red oleanders that give the play its title symbolise both the beauty destroyed by industrial greed and the possibility of resistance and renewal.

Ghosh's analysis of *Red Oleanders* identifies proto-ecofeminist elements in Tagore's dramatisation of the relationship between the exploitation of nature and gender oppression [4]. The female characters in the play, particularly Nandini, embody life-affirming values that challenge the death-oriented logic of the mining kingdom. Their resistance to industrial exploitation parallels their resistance to patriarchal control, suggesting connections between the domination of women and the domination of

nature that ecofeminist theorists would later articulate systematically.

The play's critique moves beyond specific economic structures to question the deeper assumptions that sustain industrial civilisation. The king's palace, constructed above the mines, symbolises a social order that has become detached from the rhythms and foundations of the natural world. Its inhabitants remain removed from the sun, the sky, and the open air, existing instead within an artificial environment shaped by human control. This separation from nature leads not only to environmental degradation but also to a form of spiritual emptiness, as individuals lose their connection with the deeper sources of meaning and harmony found in the living world. As Mishra [3] suggests in his discussion of Tagore's ecological vision, Tagore consistently emphasises the need for a balanced relationship between humanity and nature, a principle closely aligned with the philosophical perspective of deep ecology.

3.4 Nature as Co-Participant in Creative Process

Throughout his literary career, Tagore represents nature not as a passive background but as an active participant in creative processes. His prose poems, particularly those collected in *Lipikā* and *Śeṣ Saptak*, frequently depict natural phenomena, rivers, clouds, trees, and birds as collaborators in meaning-making rather than mere objects of human perception [2]. The creative process itself becomes a dialogue between human consciousness and the more-than-human world.

This dialogical understanding of creativity has ecological implications beyond aesthetics. If nature participates in the creation of meaning and value, then its destruction diminishes not only biological diversity but cultural and spiritual possibilities. Tagore's insistence on nature's creative agency challenges the anthropocentric assumption that value originates solely in human consciousness and that nature possesses only instrumental worth.

The concept of *bhūmā* (fullness or plenitude) that Tagore develops in his philosophical writings captures this understanding of nature's intrinsic value. The natural world manifests a richness and diversity that exceeds human needs and purposes, inviting wonder and celebration rather than mere use. This plenitude, for Tagore, is not accidental but essential, the expression of a creative universe that brings forth endless variety from fundamental unity [12].

IV. PRACTICAL ECOLOGICAL VISION: *PALLĪPRAKṚTI* AND SANTINIKETAN

4.1 *Pallīprakṛti*: An Alternative Development Paradigm

Tagore's *Pallīprakṛti* (Environment in the Villages), a slim but immensely foresighted book, articulates his most systematic vision of sustainable human-nature relationships. Written from his experiences with rural reconstruction in the areas surrounding Santiniketan, the book diagnoses the ecological and social problems afflicting Bengali villages while proposing concrete alternatives [2]. Its analysis anticipates by decades many themes that would later emerge in development studies, ecological economics, and sustainable design.

The central insight of *Pallīprakṛti* concerns the interdependence of ecological health and human well-being. Tagore recognised that the degradation of village environments, deforestation, soil depletion, and water contamination directly undermined the material basis of rural livelihoods while eroding cultural and spiritual connections to place. Conversely, efforts to improve human welfare that ignored ecological foundations would prove unsustainable, addressing symptoms while deepening underlying problems [2].

Tagore's critique of conventional development models in *Pallīprakṛti* focuses on their anthropocentric assumptions. By treating nature as a resource to be exploited for human benefit, these models systematically undermine the ecological systems upon which long-term human welfare depends. Tagore advocates instead for what we would today call an "ecosystem approach" to development, one that recognises human communities as subsystems within larger ecological wholes and designs interventions accordingly.

The positive vision articulated in *Pallīprakṛti* emphasises the creative potential of villages when empowered with modern knowledge while rooted in traditional ecological wisdom. Tagore rejects both romantic primitivism and uncritical modernisation, seeking instead a synthesis that would combine scientific understanding of ecological processes with place-based knowledge accumulated over generations [16]. This synthesis anticipates contemporary movements for agroecology, permaculture, and community-based conservation that seek to integrate modern and traditional knowledge systems.

4.2 Santiniketan as Ecological Laboratory

The institution established by Tagore at Santiniketan served as a practical expression of his ecological vision of education. In contrast to conventional schooling systems that confined learning to enclosed classrooms, Santiniketan encouraged an open, nature-oriented environment where students could engage directly with the natural world. The use of open-air classes, the surrounding greenery, and a curriculum that emphasised observation and interaction with natural processes reflected Tagore's belief that

education should nurture a deeper awareness of humanity's relationship with nature. As Dasgupta [8] notes, Tagore regarded such forms of education as essential for fostering environmental sensitivity and a harmonious connection between human life and the natural environment.

The practice of *vṛkṣaropaṇa* (tree planting) at Santiniketan exemplifies the integration of practical activity with symbolic meaning. Students participated in planting and caring for trees as part of their educational experience, developing through direct engagement an understanding of and appreciation for arboreal life. The trees they planted would outlast them, providing shade and beauty for future generations a concrete lesson in intergenerational responsibility and the temporal scales of ecological process [5].

Santiniketan's seasonal festivals, many of which continue to the present day, extended ecological education beyond the classroom into community celebration. The Halakarṣaṇa (Ploughing Festival) honoured agricultural labour and the earth's fertility; Vṛkṣaropaṇa celebrated tree planting; the various *ṛtusava* (seasonal festivals) marked transitions in the natural cycle. Through participation in these festivals, students and community members developed affective connections to nature that complemented intellectual understanding [15].

4.3 Rural Reconstruction and Ecological Stewardship

Tagore's vision of rural reconstruction, particularly through the Institute for Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan, established in 1922, reflected his broader ecological understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. The initiatives undertaken at Sriniketan sought to improve village life through integrated approaches to agriculture, resource management, and environmental care. As Shrivastava [1] emphasises, Tagore's engagement with nature was grounded in a spiritual and ethical awareness that viewed human well-being as inseparable from the health of the natural environment. In this spirit, the programs at Sriniketan addressed issues such as soil conservation, water management, sustainable farming practices, and afforestation, recognizing them as interconnected aspects of rural development and ecological balance. Cooperative organisations were established to manage common resources, anticipating later work on common property regimes and community-based natural resource management.

The philosophical orientation underlying this work emphasised cooperation rather than competition, stewardship rather than exploitation. Tagore rejected the assumption that human progress requires domination over nature, seeking instead forms of development that would enhance both human welfare and ecological health. This orientation resonates with contemporary movements for "sustainable development" while avoiding the anthropocentric biases that sometimes limit that concept [7].

The Sriniketan experiments demonstrated the practical viability of Tagore's ecological vision. Reforestation efforts restored degraded lands; improved agricultural practices enhanced productivity while maintaining soil health; cooperative management of water resources increased resilience to drought. These achievements, while limited in scale, provided concrete evidence that alternatives to extractive development were practically feasible, not merely utopian dreams [17].

4.4 Critique of "Lifeboat Ethics" and Advocacy for Ecological Justice

In *Pallīprakṛti* and related writings, Tagore explicitly critiques what would later be termed "lifeboat ethics"—the assumption that in a world of limited resources, the wealthy and powerful must protect their advantages against the claims of the poor and marginalised [2]. He recognises that such attitudes, whether applied to international relations or to relations between social classes, systematically disadvantage those with the least access to resources while undermining the ecological foundations of collective well-being.

Tagore's alternative vision emphasises what we might today call ecological justice—the fair distribution of both environmental benefits and burdens across human populations and, implicitly, across species. His recognition that environmental degradation disproportionately affects the rural poor anticipates contemporary environmental justice scholarship, while his extension of moral consideration to non-human nature prefigures debates about interspecies justice [18].

The basis of Tagore's ecological justice vision lies in his philosophical commitment to interconnectedness. If human communities are interdependent with each other and with the more-than-human world, then justice cannot be limited to distribution among humans but must encompass relationships with the entire community of life. This expanded conception of justice challenges both the anthropocentric assumptions of conventional ethical theory and the narrow focus on human welfare that characterises much development discourse [12].

V. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF TAGORE'S GREEN PHILOSOPHY

5.1 Deep Ecology and Upaniṣadic Ecologism

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognised resonances between Tagore's ecological thought and the

deep ecology movement associated with Arne Naess and his followers. Awal's analysis demonstrates how Tagore's journey from naturalism to "Upaniṣadic ecologism" parallels and anticipates deep ecology's critique of shallow environmentalism [2]. Both traditions reject the anthropocentric assumption that nature's value derives solely from human interests, affirming the intrinsic worth of all beings instead.

Naess's concept of "Self-realisation", the expansion of self-identity to encompass the larger whole of nature, finds striking parallels in Tagore's Upaniṣadic philosophy [13]. When Tagore writes of realising one's connection to the universe through joyful participation in its processes, he articulates an experiential dimension of ecological consciousness that deep ecologists have sought to cultivate through different means [6]. This convergence suggests possibilities for dialogue between Indian philosophical traditions and Western environmental thought that might enrich both.

Tagore's thought also anticipates and potentially addresses some criticisms of deep ecology. Where deep ecology has been criticised for insufficient attention to social justice and cultural difference, Tagore's integration of ecological consciousness with commitment to human freedom and cultural pluralism offers resources for an ecocentric politics sensitive to human diversity [19]. His emphasis on aesthetic experience and creative expression as dimensions of ecological relationship also addresses the tendency in some deep ecology writing toward abstract philosophising divorced from lived experience.

5.2 Ecofeminist Resonances

Although Tagore did not use the term "ecofeminism," his work contains elements that resonate strongly with ecofeminist theory and practice. Ghosh's analysis of *Red Oleanders* identifies connections between Tagore's critique of extractive industrialisation and ecofeminist analyses of the links between the domination of nature and gender oppression [4]. The play's representation of female characters as agents of ecological resistance anticipates later ecofeminist celebrations of women's environmental activism.

Tagore's celebration of reproductive and regenerative processes—birth, growth, decay, renewal—parallels ecofeminist affirmations of life-centred values against the death-oriented logic of industrial civilisation [20]. His recognition that the same patriarchal attitudes that subordinate women also license nature's exploitation prefigures ecofeminist analyses of interconnected systems of domination [21]. The philosophical basis of these connections in Tagore's thought, however, differs from much Western ecofeminism in that it draws upon Indian traditions that conceive the feminine principle (prakṛti) as a creative power rather than as passive matter.

The practical dimension of Tagore's work at Sriniketan, which included significant attention to women's economic empowerment and education, also resonates with ecofeminist commitments to linking ecological restoration with gender justice [22]. His recognition that rural women's traditional knowledge of plants, water, and soil represented valuable ecological wisdom anticipated later feminist scholarship on women's environmental knowledge and its marginalisation by development professionals [23].

5.3 Sustainability and Development Ethics

Tagore's critique of anthropocentric development models and his articulation of alternative approaches grounded in ecological principles speak directly to contemporary debates on sustainability and development ethics. The concept of sustainable development, as articulated in the Brundtland Report and subsequent international agreements, has been criticised for anthropocentric bias and for insufficient attention to ecological limits [24]. Tagore's thought offers resources for a more radical reconceptualisation of development that places ecological integrity at its centre.

The principle of intergenerational justice that underpins much sustainability discourse finds expression in Tagore's emphasis on stewardship and his recognition that present actions shape possibilities for future generations. His practice of tree planting at Santiniketan, understood as a gift to the future rather than an investment for present return, embodies an ethic of intergenerational responsibility that transcends the instrumental calculations dominating contemporary policy discourse [5].

Tagore's insistence on the qualitative dimensions of human flourishing—beauty, creativity, spiritual depth, community challenges the reduction of well-being to material consumption that characterises both conventional development models and many sustainability frameworks. By affirming that genuine prosperity includes a rich relationship with the more-than-human world, he offers resources for articulating post-materialist visions of the good life that might support transitions to sustainable societies [25].

5.4 Ecological Aesthetics and Environmental Education

Tagore's integration of aesthetic education with ecological consciousness offers valuable resources for contemporary environmental education. His recognition that loves for nature grows from direct, joyful engagement rather than abstract knowledge anticipates research in environmental psychology on the importance of childhood nature experience for the development of adult environmental

concern [26]. His practice of education through the arts, music, poetry, drama, and dance as a means of cultivating ecological sensibility suggests pedagogical approaches that engage multiple dimensions of human experience.

The concept of "biophilia," the innate human affinity for life and life-like processes that E.O. Wilson and others have developed, finds expression in Tagore's celebration of nature's beauty and his conviction that human flourishing requires a rich relationship with the more-than-human world [26]. Tagore's work suggests that this biophilic tendency can be cultivated through aesthetic education, and that its atrophy in modern urban societies contributes to environmental destruction by rendering nature irrelevant to human meaning and value [2].

Tagore's seasonal festivals, still celebrated at Santiniketan and elsewhere, offer models for community-based environmental education that integrate celebration with learning, joy with responsibility. By marking natural cycles through collective ritual and celebration, these festivals embed ecological consciousness in community life rather than leaving it to formal educational institutions. This integration of culture and ecology offers lessons for contemporary efforts to build sustainable communities [15].

5.5 Decolonising Environmental Thought

Tagore's ecological philosophy also contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonise environmental thought. By articulating an ecocentric vision rooted in Indian philosophical traditions while engaging critically with Western modernity, he demonstrates possibilities for environmental philosophy that neither simply adopts Western frameworks nor retreats into nativist rejection of all things Western [27]. His work exemplifies the creative synthesis that postcolonial theorists have called for—thinking that draws upon multiple traditions to address contemporary challenges.

The recovery of Tagore's ecological thought contributes to the broader project of diversifying environmental humanities by demonstrating that sophisticated environmental philosophy has emerged from many cultural traditions, not only from the Western canon. This recovery challenges the assumption that environmental consciousness is a recent Western invention, revealing the depth and complexity of ecological thinking in non-Western traditions [28] instead.

Tagore's work also offers resources for critiquing the colonial and neo-colonial dimensions of contemporary environmentalism. His recognition that conservation efforts can serve elite interests at the expense of marginal communities anticipates postcolonial critiques of fortress conservation and green grabbing [29]. His emphasis on environmental justice as integral to ecological restoration challenges environmentalism that prioritises wilderness protection over human welfare [30].

VI. CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore's green philosophy represents one of the most comprehensive and prescient ecological visions produced in the modern era. Rooted in Upaniṣadic metaphysics yet responsive to the specific challenges of colonial modernity, his thought articulates a fundamental critique of anthropocentrism while offering positive alternatives for human-nature relationships. Across his diverse writings—poetry, drama, essays, educational experiments Tagore developed a coherent ecological worldview that integrates metaphysical insight, aesthetic sensibility, ethical commitment, and practical wisdom.

The core of Tagore's ecological philosophy lies in his recognition of fundamental interconnectedness as both metaphysical truth and experiential reality. Drawing upon the Upaniṣadic equation of *brahman* and *ātman*, he articulated a vision of reality as a dynamic, relational process rather than a collection of discrete entities. This vision overcomes the nature-culture dualism that underpins anthropocentric worldviews while avoiding reducing difference to uniformity. Interconnectedness, for Tagore, does not mean identity but relationship respectful engagement with beings who are both connected to and distinct from ourselves.

Tagore's critique of anthropocentrism extended beyond philosophical argument to engaged analysis of colonial modernity's ecological consequences. Witnessing the environmental destruction accompanying British industrialisation in India, he recognised that instrumental attitudes toward nature were not merely intellectually mistaken but practically catastrophic. His analysis anticipated contemporary critiques of development while avoiding both romantic primitivism and uncritical modernisation, seeking instead creative syntheses that would integrate modern knowledge with ecological wisdom.

The practical dimension of Tagore's ecological vision, embodied in his educational experiments at Santiniketan and his rural reconstruction work at Sriniketan, demonstrates that alternatives to extractive development are not merely utopian dreams but practical alternatives. His recognition that human welfare depends upon ecological health, that local communities can manage resources sustainably when empowered with appropriate knowledge and institutions, and that aesthetic education cultivates ecological sensibility offers lessons for contemporary sustainability efforts.

For twenty-first-century readers confronting the accelerating ecological crisis, Tagore's green philosophy offers both critique and hope. It critiques the anthropocentric assumptions that continue to shape development policy, economic institutions, and cultural values, revealing their contribution to environmental destruction. But it also offers hope by demonstrating that alternative relationships with nature are possible—relationships characterised by reverence rather than exploitation, reciprocity rather than domination, joy rather than mere utility.

The continuing relevance of Tagore's ecological thought lies in its holistic integration of dimensions too often separated in contemporary environmental discourse. By refusing to separate metaphysical reflection from practical action, aesthetic appreciation from ethical commitment, spiritual depth from political engagement, Tagore offers a model of ecological wisdom adequate to the multidimensional challenges of the Anthropocene. His vision of humanity finding fulfilment not through dominating nature but through participating creatively in its processes challenges us to reimagine our relationship with the more-than-human world and, in so doing, to rediscover possibilities for genuine flourishing.

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