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**COMPARATIVE READING OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND ROBERT  
FROST'S POEMS FROM ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

The growing challenges in the contemporary age from an environmental perspective at the global and regional level attracted my attention to read the poems of two great poets, Rabindranath Tagore, and Robert Frost, to establish the co-relation of nature, man, and poetry. The paper is an attempt to explore the space and scope of surrounding nature and ecology not only in a literary room but also in the existential space of our life as a cosmic man to find a mutual existence of both – nature and man. Though they stand as two different separate entities, they survive in a coexistence manner to enlighten, empower, and strengthen each other. Both poets are from different places and cultures, but both of them represent nature in the best form in their poetic creations. This paper is just an effort to develop an understanding of both poets to read their intent from their cosmic, universal, and spiritual spirit of association of man and nature as reflected in their poems. Even nature has been the sole presence of god envisioned through the philosophical sight in their poems, which too enabled me to feel the strength of their poems. This aspect intends to highlight the emerging threats to both –nature and mankind and warns mankind to understand it, respect it, and protect and preserve it for the betterment of each other rather than to manipulate it to cater to the greed, not the need.

**Keywords:** Poetic Creation, Nature, Ecology, Nurture, Existence, Humankind, Philosophical Sight, Culture, Ecocritical, Environment

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**Introduction:**

The present aspect dives into reading the poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Frost to explore the eco-critical postmodern approach in the context of evolving threats to the survival of man and nature (environment) with its variety of lives relying entirely on it. Postmodernism, a kind of movement, states, "that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding through art and literature but is rather constructed as per the individual mind to understand it from a personal perspective." I find myself keen on investigating and revealing the reality created by both the poets in their poems to establish a relation between nature and humanity to ensure both of their survival in a very harmonious way so that it would appear pleasing, divine, and delightful to the universe. The paper's efforts to analyze and peel off the multiple layers of meanings in the poems of both poets to receive the message in the context of the postmodern age's realistic phenomenon, which is constantly ongoing and changing. Postmodernism rejects any existing reality as the ultimate reality. Therefore, it looks at a radical interpretation of things from a new point of view to explain its utility and scope in yielding pleasure and tracing the emerging issues and challenges in the contemporary age. It challenges the modern notion of reality and its enlightenment and intends to question the assumed reality and its representation in literary space in a modern context to evaluate the existential provoking of the cosmos.

In general, postmodernism involves a broad range of artists, academic critics, philosophers, philanthropists, and social scientists who are trying to discover and rediscover the truth about the objective existential reality of man and nature. Poetry is considered a superior kind of amusement that brings divine enlightenment. The paper emphasizes reading poems in a postmodern (contemporary) context. This attempts to explore a number of issues, such as: How do we read poetry today? What place does reading poetry have in academic curricula today? And so on and so forth. I cannot claim expertise in all these areas, and it would be fruitless to talk of so many things in a single piece of innovative and investigating research paper. Hence, I intend to concentrate on a few specific things while reading both the poets and their poems in today's context. Poetry is a superior amusement, according to T.S. Eliot, who finds it a vast subject that has a magical influence on internal and external life as well. But defining poetry or reading poetry is influenced by our idea of what poetry is. My intention to engage the talk in this way is to find the most fascinating elements in the poetry.

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Eco-criticism in literature emerges from an environmental perspective, and issues highlight the representation of the environment in a very realistic way to resist physical manipulations of nature in various forms. Emerging different kinds of environmental crises and their devastating effects on humanity have led intellectuals and scholars to feel and read about the approaching natural doom and destruction. These sociological philosophers started to raise their voices against the extremely exploitative attitudes of human beings toward nature. They started to demand a notion of a return to the monistic primal ecosphere where nature does not appear as a subject but as a language of its own, capable of communicating with humanity. Its natural signs warn us about natural catastrophes resulting in great calamities. We are a learned community that must act wisely to sustain the value of the present existing ecosystem. Nature stands as an image of a mother and teacher to human beings, which provides everything we need, and it teaches us the secrets of a better life. Each and every activity has certain hidden secrets that the human mind and eyes need to read and observe. It has the power to connect and communicate with us, and it does do it from time to time. It has an unlimited treasure of emotions and feelings. Nature and the environment are part and parcel of all living beings in this world. Eco-criticism explores the literary representation of nature and its relation to mankind. It is a new concept that evolved during the 1990s. Even an American Eco-critic states that "Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."<sup>3</sup> Another Eco-critic, Laurence Buell, believes that "this study must be conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis."<sup>3</sup> There are many other critics who insist on the interdisciplinary nature of inquiry of ecological issues in the context of modern environmental crisis at the global level. It is very clear that the environment has turned into a very serious and sensitive issue for us as a human being.

We must have to show keen interest and concern with our nature and represent it in literary space. Robert Frost and Rabindranath Tagore, two different poets from two different continents, envision nature and its vivid images as a form of source, a power that is capable of influencing human beings to a great extent and has creative and destructive forces too. Nature's both facets are depicted in a very true color – wild and mild. Both of these poets establish a philosophical interpretation and relation between man and nature to ensure everyone's integrity so that both of us can enjoy our existence and survival. Both poets see nature from different perspectives – Western and Indian- but both of them reflect the similarity- protection and preservation of nature to sustain

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ecological values.

Social perspectives may differ, but universal applications are almost similar in the poems of both of these poets. Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman are both world-renowned humanist poets. A kind of divine light is blessed to both of these poets, who submerge the boundaries of nations to meet humanistic goals to enrich and empower mankind. For them, humanity is a universal concern that is not limited to any particular region or any specific boundary. They express their concern for mankind in their poems. The following lines of Tagore's poem reflect his spirit of philosophic nature; „I inhale the great droughts of space. The east and the west are mine, And the north and south are mine.’<sup>4</sup> Tagore is essentially a romantic poet, and like a romantic poet, he looks into the secrets of nature with a child-like wonder. Even the common objects of nature appear very colorful, pleasing, fascinating, and sensuous, which yields his delight. He is very similar to Keats in receiving the sensuous beauty of nature that not only satisfies his sensory organs but also pleases his readers' community. He finds the man caught in the grip of pain and suffering; therefore, he looks to nature to bless humanity with its divinity.

Tagore realizes that nature is the primal store – a house of life from which humanity has evolved through countless ages and births. He feels sad thinking about man's narrowed approach toward nature. It is nature that gives everything that one needs, but in return, what one gives is the extreme manipulation and exploitation of nature, leading to ecological imbalances. In such a situation, how would nature be silent and tolerate the oppressive approach of mankind against its own existence? The result of such a deed turns into the anger and rage of nature in the form of various natural calamities. In his poem addressed to the sea, he listens to the eternal roar of the sea, perceiving it as a furious one. Even in his other poem, he hears the cries of the birds and animals; „I peep into the primeval nursery of life, Where the mother earth thrills, At the first living clutch near her breast’ (116). He just intends to remind mankind to listen to the call of nature; otherwise, nature will go against the deed of man, which he has done in a very suppressive manner. It is better to be friendly rather than feel superior to it and dominate it.

The boundless beauty of nature should be first protected and then enjoyed by mankind. S.B. Mukherji rightly asserts that "It is Tagore's vision steeped in wonder, mystery, and boundless joy that fuses the human body, spirit, and nature into harmony." <sup>7</sup> For the poet Tagore, nature appears as a mother who needs to be respected and regarded. Like Wordsworth, he also feels that

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nature's mother has a deep influence on us. Therefore, moral influences from nature flow into each of us' souls. But in the present context, that flow has disappeared gradually under the influence of commercialism, which ultimately has led to a kind of degradation in the Indian ecological value system. Nature appears to be an exuberant and inexhaustible source for him, but it must be used wisely and judiciously. Edward Thompson, too, feels the same and views that "No poet who ever lived has had more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty than Tagore." 7 All natural images like flowers, rivers, morning and evening, night, stars, the sun, and the moon, the lighting, the clouds, etc., are delicately painted, portrayed, and visualized in such a beautiful manner that they are capable of connecting and communicating with human beings in a very emotional and soothing manner.

In this context, the poet remains unsurpassed and unmatched in vivid depiction of natural beauty. Rabindranath Tagore has always been a great lover of nature. His love for nature represents his love for humanity. Every poet of nature has expressed a certain kind of affinity for nature, but none of them is so deeply concerned with nature. He perceives the beauty in simple objects of nature. In one of his poems, the poet celebrates the beauty of the river Kopali, which doesn't hold the dignified position of either Ganga or Padma. However, it appears to be a slender stream without the dignity of ancient grace to the poet, and he appreciates the slow and zigzag movement of the river Padma, which is in tune with its surrounding environment. The Poet doesn't only describe the external beauty of nature but also associates himself with the internal affinity of nature that he glorifies in his poem.

Nature comes very vibrant and delighting to him in yielding the divine pleasure and blessings of the happy moments which calm the minds of humanity from their unaccountable pain and sufferings; „I sit in the tamarind grove, Where the cries of dumb life congregate, The cattle' slowing, the sparrow's chatter, The shrill scream of a kite overhead, The cricket's chirp and the splash of a fish in water I peep into the primeval nursery of life Where the mother earth thrills At the first living clutch near her breast' (Fugitive.iii-10) If nature is so beautiful; how a man can destroy it? This is the prime question that emerges before us. Nature has been depleted by humanity at the cost of development and growth, but would it be stable and sustained? No... never. It cannot be stable and sustainable till we are not maintaining sustainable growth of nature. Our existence entirely relies on the survival of nature and the environment around us.

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Therefore, we must treat its mother and respect it in the same manner to protect and preserve it. It needs time to turn up wise by not dominating and damaging nature but adapting its values and enriching it by preserving the serene, blissful beauty of natural surroundings. What we observe through the reading of his poems is that he, too, insists on the close tie-up and attachment of mankind with nature. He is not only confined to the romantic fancy of nature but even accepts nature's influence upon the growth of the human mind. He incorporates his faith in the power of nature, which positively influences us. But in today's context, such an attitude is seen in a distinct form that does not associate mankind with nature in a humanistic manner. Man has turned wild from his mild act. In reaction, Tagore, too, paints the terrible mood of nature in the form of thunder and storms. His poem *Barsha Shesh* expresses his concern with the angst mood of nature in which nature tries to communicate its anger to mankind. His manipulative act has been the cause of various destructive consequences that come to us in the form of natural disaster, which is seen and visualized by the poet in his poems; „Thou comest, New Year, Whirling in a frantic dance ‘ Amid the stampede of the wind lashed clouds And infuriate showers, While trampled by the turbulence Are scattered away the faded the frail In an eddying agony of death.

‘ On the breast of the shore, there are fewer sea Destruction swings and sweeps. In a dreadful festival, the indomitable wind is roaming, Ungovernable in strength, beating it's thousand wings. Sky and sea in one are reeling together in vast confusion.’(Collected poems of Tagore p.455).

Tagore is capable of reading the furious mood of nature as he associates very closely with it and looks with compassionate feelings, which enables him to see nature with its pain and cry. He envisions the pictorial description of nature but not in a soothing state. He finds nature extremely irritated, exhausted and disappointed with the manner in which man exploits it for his greed and tempts.

He reads nature in a very different form to feel the humiliation of nature as expressed in his poems, whether it is the image of furious sea waves, the anger of thunder and storm, or the panic cry of the birds. He does not forget to remind us of the doom and destructions that nature can impose on one side, and on the other, he, too, focuses on developing an intimate understanding of nature, which would result in the protective and coexistence of humanity and nature. He suggests we connect ourselves with nature to understand its ideology of survival.

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Like other romantic poets, he too looks at both the facets of nature as destroyer and preserver. His message to mankind is to tune in with nature to promote a mutual co-existence where both mankind and nature enjoy healthy and safe survival.

Robert Frost, a very realistic, philosophic person, resembles his deep understanding of nature and associates himself with it in such a way that it becomes a guide, teacher, and source of delight for him. But he finds a man more egoistic due to his preoccupied notions. His poems create a rich, colorful, and memorable impression in the presence of rich nature. Mountains stand higher than men's heads; valleys reflect the enquiring eyes of men, green bushes, crowded trees, a tuft of flowers, dense dark woods, and snow-covered peaks of hills, all of them appear in Frost's poem, which influences not only the environment but also to the lifestyle of humanity at great extent.

He reveals the fact that nature and humanity stand together and exist within the same sphere. John F. Lynen remarks over his view of nature, "that it is Frost's philosophy that asserts that man cannot find a home in nature, nor he can live outside of it."<sup>5</sup> His poems remind us that man's entire survival is based on nature, and his almost needs are fulfilled by nature. But our needs are turned into greed; we are not judicious in using nature to supply our deeds, which has been creating great problems and threats to ecological survival. Frost appears as a lover and worshipper of nature and its beauty. He very skillfully paints the true color of nature to assert it's both the impressions of preserving and destroying facets.

In the present scenario, we find that man exercises all his power to exploit nature, and in return, at the same time, nature, too, communicates and gives back the same to mankind- doom and devastation to human beings. It appears that nature recovers its ecological imbalances by destroying human activities from its extremely rich and serene natural beauty, which is swiped by none other rather than man himself. Frost is very clear in asserting that man should allow nature to enjoy its serene beauty. He should not create any kind of wrath to it. Nature and men are two separate entities that exist together in association with each other. His poem „To Earthward' represents his views on it in the best possible manner; „When Stiff and sore and scarred.....long for weight and strength to feel the earth as rough to all my length.' (150) In these lines, poet realizes the harshness of nature and feels that this natural surrounding witness a kind of struggle between man and nature striving each other for their survival. Nature doesn't appear hard to him, but it also doesn't seem very soft

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too. The very first line reflects that nature sometimes appears stiff, sore, and scared because of humans's destructive activities. Whatever doom and destruction comes to us in the form of natural calamities is too little if compared with the damage and devastation that man has given to nature in the form of ecological exploitations.

In his poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time," he does 't forget to remind us of nature's apathy in the form of lurking frost beneath the earth. He uses the metaphor of water to depict the positive and negative images of nature. The same water is stolen from the natural water bodies and reprocessed in the form of frost/haze in the presence of night. This water turns into frost, which yields a negative influence on humanity. In general, he presents the true and great picture of nature in which the same objects hold dual potential. If nature is used in a very concrete and judicious way, things appear to yield positive outcomes to us, but if it is going to be used in an imbalanced, exploitative manner, it would pose destructive influences on humanity. „Be glad of water, but don't forget The lurking frost in the earth beneath That will steal forth after the sun is set And show on the water its crystal teeth.' (412) For him, nature appears as a true guide, suggesting to humanity the right path to lead life. It appears as a philosopher who teaches the subtle and secret lessons of life to humanity. The remoteness of nature appears as a sort of peace, not a hindrance to mankind. It offers the serenity of nature, not its roughness. Nature must be received gladly in whatever form it does come to us. It is clearly visible that the poet uses images of nature as metaphors to depict the liveliness of nature.

Another metaphor used by the poet is snow, which reminds him of the immortality of nature. Nature was there, it is, and it will be forever. For him, it appears to be the very essence of all seasons as it breeds every season in nature and turns the cause for changes that happen in nature. Snow cannot be formulated in the absence of winter, and water in brooks and rivers cannot be supplied without snow over the mountains. Therefore, a flood of white snow becomes an essential element for the survival of water, and water becomes the essential object to ensure the survival of each and every sort of life on the earth. But at the same time, it stands for the symbol of life in death. Without that, spring cannot approach and be born. The image of „Death' is represented in the form of melting snow, whereas the image of „Birth' is depicted in the form of turning and running water in brooks, which collectively represent both the facets of nature- preserver and destroyer.



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The image of falling light over the snowy peak is very lively and presented by the poet to depict the energy of water that rejuvenates and accelerates lives in the brook and nature. The following lines from his poem „The Pasture’ tell us his concern with the importance of water in our life; „I’m going to clean the pasture spring; I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away And wait to watch the water clear, I may I shan’t be gone long – You come too.’ In these lines, the poet insists on the protection of water as it has been degraded, destroyed, and contaminated by people's activities. Frost appears to be a true environmentalist whose poems are concerned with the representation of nature and its significance in the life of human beings. He does not miss to remind us to preserve and protect not only the water but every component of nature, which ultimately helps us in various ways to live life. He reminds humanity of his oppressive spirit of nature and tells us that it is now inevitable to acknowledge the fact that nature is extremely manipulated, and it now needs to be preserved and protected for the being of both nature and humanity.

What we observe here is that both of the poets discover and trace the divine beauty of nature in their poems to represent nature in the best form. They reflect the shadow of eternity in the natural images as gliding clouds, blooming flowers, running brooks, etc. God resides in nature in the form of the living spirit as a cosmic force that permeates all the objects of nature and is inanimate. If nature is god and god is our creator, how can man forget his association with his creator? And how can he dare to hurt it even a little bit? What should be done here is to respect nature and its divine beauty and preserve and protect it. This is the only way to imbibe humanity with the power of survival. Otherwise, there would be again a natural upheaval in a very devastating manner that would swipe mankind from the earth entirely.

Therefore, we may sum up the conclusion that Frost's poems like ‚Alice's Adventure in Wonderland’ and ‚Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ and Tagore’ 's poems like Gitanjali, River, and The Great Awakening illustrate the pastoral affection of poets for nature. Seasons, sea storms, trees, clouds, brooks, and flowers are depicted virtually in the background of their poems to visualize the great majesty of nature, whereas the images of trees, bushes, leaves, snow, and other postures of nature exchange their emotions and feelings to human beings. Woods appear as a source of delight and enchantment that satisfies the pleasurable senses of human beings. His nature poetry connects the world of nature and that of human beings.

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Both of the poets' poems are rooted in the landscape beauty of surrounding nature that appreciates the aesthetic richness of nature and ecology. Tagore's poems are mystic and philosophic in establishing a relationship between mankind and nature. He has a spiritual perception of nature, and he tries to locate man in a very mild position in a sweet association with rich ecology. Both poets give full representation of nature in their poems with the message to save and protect it. Frost's poem "Stopping by the Wood" reflects an anthropocentric view that „My little horse must think it queer' ..... „The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, But I have promises to keep And miles to go before I sleep.' So before we sleep, we have to keep our hundreds and thousands of promises to serve humanity, to save it, and to let it go on in a very smooth and pleasant manner.

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- <http://www.the-criterion.com> Vol. II. Issue. 13 April 2011. Bio: Dr. Santosh Kumar J. Mishra is Asst. Prof. in Dept. of English, K.V. Pendharkar College, Dombivli.

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