



## ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF TORU DUTT AND MARY OLIVER

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### Abstract

For the entire human race, nature has been an intimate part of their life since the existence of the Earth. They have been eco-friendly. Their relationships with each other like in a family have put a great example to this highly materialistic society where nature is being neglected rapidly, which shows the bitter greed of a capitalist structure of the modern world for wealth and money that has led them for the exploitations of the nature and its limited resources. This capitalist thought of the modern man has brought a huge destruction to the eco-system and the environment of the planet Earth. Cutting of the rain forests, imbalance in ecology due to industrialization, urbanization etc. All these things are inviting, today, damages to the present atmosphere that is not at any cost ethical for the human as well as the non-human world. For taking over all these issues, acclamations definitely go to the intellectuals, like; ecologists, environmentalists, scientists, politicians, non-governmental organizations, and also the common man who have come together with their hand in hand. As for the literary figures, it is extensively known, as in the age of Romanticism where there was a U-turn among the literary personalities towards the mysterious world of the nature and its importance in the life of the people, that they, with their literary works, have done, and are doing a great job to bring their unconscious minds to think over its importance, and its limited reserves which are today at a high risk. With so many other literary icons, Toru Dutt and Mary Oliver have also tried their best through their literary productions to uncover the perils of which the present world is facing, these days. The present paper, "Ecological Consciousness and Its Significance in the Selected Poems of Toru Dutt and Mary Oliver" tries to elicit those concerns that are common to both the poets with a brief outline of Romanticism, Ecology, Ecological Consciousness, Ecosystem, Environment, Nature, and Natural Resources.

**Key Words:** Romanticism, Ecology, Ecological Consciousness, Ecosystem, Environment, Nature.

**Introduction**

With the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), by William Wordsworth in collaboration with S.T. Coleridge, the age of Romanticism emerged as a new school of writing and style in the field of literature that attracted specially the poets into the hidden treasures of the natural world, and its remarkable attractiveness. "Romanticism, a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against emotions, and marked specially in English literature by sensibility and the use of autobiographical materials, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation of external nature, a predilection for melancholy and the use in poetry of older verse forms." (Merriam-webster). This movement in the history of literature provoked the human unconscious and conscious mind to perceive the worth of the non-human world, its splendid loveliness and value for the human race.

The over use of the rain forests, natural reserves and minerals from the non-human world have fetched the imbalance and disturbance in the ecosystem of the Earth. Ecosystem which is defined as "a community of living organisms in conjunction with the nonliving components of their environment, interacting as a system," (Tansley, 1934; Molles, 1999, 482). For a mutual perfection, there is a need to make a proper balance in the environment. However, these days, it seems a little bit outlandish.

"Nature, in the broadest sense, is the natural, physical, or material world or universe. "Nature" can refer to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. The study of nature is a large, if not the only, part of science. Although humans are part of nature, human activity is often understood as a separate category from other natural world." (Frederic & Denis). It is overt from the definition that man cannot be separated from the nature, he is the part of the nature, yet he is looked as a separate entity from the rest of the living organisms. And this separation has invoked him to be a selfish. And this selfishness

has brought the disaster to the whole ecosystem of the world.

Both writers, Toru Dutt and Mary Oliver have greatly raised the issues, even if, indirectly, but in a broader sense through their literary products. All this becomes explicit when their works are subtly scrutinized. In their grand works, Ecology, Ecological Consciousness, Environment, together with the other environment related issues go side by side.

As time passed, and when the world, due to the extreme voracity of the man for the wealth and the material, came into the clutch of the climatic changes which brought obscurity for the survival to them, they became a little bit serious for these burning threats, and drew their attentions to finding the solutions for the problems. To bring out the awareness of the human beings into the ecological consciousness which is "a reflection of the psyche of a variety of man's relationship with nature, which mediate its behavior in the "natural world", and express axiological position of the subject of consciousness in relation to the natural world," (Panov V.I., 381), these two prolific poets' contribution in this field is worthless.

Toru Dutt (1856 – 1877) was a Bengali translator and poet from the Indian subcontinent, who wrote in English and French, in what, was then British India. (Edmund, 197-212). She is an outstanding writer. Besides the other themes in her poetry, she predominantly talks of the nature and its gorgeous beauty.

Mary Oliver (1935 – 2019) was an American poet who won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. (The Associated Press, January 17, 2019). *The New York Times* described her as "far and away, this country's best-selling poet." (Dwight).

Both the poets, if observed deviously, reveal the deep ecological consciousness in their poetry. For a comparative study, in the light of ecological consciousness and its significance, following are their best poems which will be dealt meticulously.

#### Toru Dutt's Poems

1. Our Casuarina Tree
2. A Sea of Foliage (Sonnet)

#### Mary Oliver's Poems

1. A Dream of Trees
2. Wild Geese

#### Our Casuarina Tree

One of the best poems by Dutt talks a lot about the environmental issues. She celebrates the dignity of the tree that she would always see through her windows. This seeing to the Casuarina by the poet forms an unseen relationship between them, as the following line reads:

When first my casement is wide open  
thrown  
At dawn, my eye delighted on it rest;  
Sometimes, and most in winter, - on its crest  
A gray baboon sits statue – like alone  
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs  
His puny offspring leap about and play,  
And far and near kokilas hail the day;  
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;  
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast  
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmased.

This is her high capability to elucidate the natural beauty in simple words. The charming sight of the morning spring with the non-human things is, in fact, an unequal attractiveness of the nature that is now too far from the eyes of the modern man. To observe the nature and its hidden treasure of pleasures by Dutt alone through her window is an irony to the present materialistic and highly technologized society.

But not because of its magnificence  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:  
Beneath it we have played; though years  
may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love  
intense,  
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.

She also recalls those days when she used to play underneath it with her siblings for hours. This

attachment with the tree and the other natural objects unveils the inner intimacy of Toru Dutt for the natural world and its incomparable loveliness. Being in centre of the poem, the Casuarina with the other wonderful living organisms symbolizes the past glory of the primitive man.

#### A Sea of Foliage

It is a fabulous sonnet by her hand which very beautifully describes the beauty of her garden. With wide-range colors of the varied plants and trees, this piece of work discloses Dutt's deep inner love for the natural good looks. According to her, this garden is not like a sea of which color is unvaried, i.e., monotonous.

A sea of foliage girds our ground,  
But not a sea of dull unvaried green,  
Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;  
The light-green graceful tamarinds abound  
Amid the mangoes clumps of green  
profound,  
And palms arise, like pillars gray, between;  
And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,  
Red-red, and startling like a trumpet's  
sound.

It seems, as if, the whole beauty of the nature has come together in a few lines. The sweet music of the garden with the wind and the quiet water of the pool: whom do they not attract to its grand lap? Dutt is truly making here a contrast between the days of the past and the days of the present. As in this greedy world where everything is money, everything is physical comforts; it becomes a little bit ridiculous to talk over the love for nature that is in no way appropriate.

But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges  
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the  
moon  
Looks through their gaps, and the white  
lotus changes  
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon  
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze  
On a primeval Eden, in amaze.

Contrary to this present world, the world of Dutt and her garden are quite different. Where this world has made one's life busiest, the world of Dutt gives convenient to the life. She talks of the primeval Eden which is a satire on the present highly materialistic structure of the society.

#### A Dream of Trees

Among Oliver's many great poems, this one does also have an immense importance vis a vis to the natural beauty. It is, however, a direct attack on the goings-on of the modern world. Its ignorance of the environment, ecology, ecosystem of the Earth, its greed for money and wealth, all these elements which have led it to its disaster, are included in this poem.

There is a thing in me that dreamed of trees,  
A quiet house, some green and modest  
acres,  
A little way from every troubling town,  
A little way from factories, schools, laments,  
With only streams and birds for company.

A soul's eagerness to mingle with the natural world is visible here. It becomes explicit when Oliver's inner soul dreams of trees. She is somehow or the other very indifference towards such types of the developments which are destroying the whole beauty of the society. She wants to separate herself from all these materialistic comforts, and is willing to spend her life quietly. Through this poem, she beyond any doubts attacks the activities of the modern man, his unconscious and unwilling minds towards the nature.

#### Wild Geese

"Wild Geese" is Oliver's best and most frequently readable poem. With a lot of philosophical meanings, it is a finest example dealing with the relationship between the man and the nature. Her consciousness of the nature and helpless lives in it rouses Oliver's inner feelings to love them. She advocates touching the feelings of the heart bits of the non-human organisms that are crawling in front of the man's eyes. Her love and pity emotions for them are clear throughout the poem "Wild Geese:"

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert  
repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your  
body

love what it loves.

Oliver's another aspect in this poem is the beauty of nature, and its fabulous attractiveness which is disappearing from the sights, today. It is all due to the overuse of the natural reserves by the modern man. It is all due to the increasing materialistic notions of the modern man. For all this, Oliver's deep affliction of her heart often pricks her soul that becomes sometimes unbearable to her whole body.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of  
the rain are moving across the  
landscapes, over the prairies and the deep  
trees, the mountains and the  
rivers. Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the  
clean blue air, are heading home again.

From the above excerpts, at least it definitely becomes obvious that the poet is very much interested in the wild and natural life. The picture of the natural beauty, as is in the above passage elucidated by Mary Oliver, in a direct or indirect way shows her greatness of concerns over the untouched world.

#### Conclusion

Toru Dutt and Mary Oliver, both the eminent poets characterized by their simple and lucid language have drawn the real pictures of the psyche of the present world where the relationships between the human and the non-human world are working oppositely. Both the writers comparatively are in the same opinions in treating the nature with a slight difference in forms and patterns of their poems. According to them the inferior behavior of deranging the whole ecosystem of the planet by them is not at any cost ethical for the present as well as the future.

It is, however, not so that these two have only discussed the nature and its relationship with the man, they have also talked of the every aspect of his daily activities. Even the poems discussed here have so many other themes, too, but, from the ecological consciousness and its significance point of view, "The Casuarinas Tree," and "The Sea of Foliage" by Dutt, and "The Wild Geese," and "The Summer Days" by Oliver best fit.

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