



<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2024.v6n2.03>

Transcendence and Immanence: A Comparative Reading of Nature in Rabindranath Tagore and William Wordsworth

Nabanita Manna

Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, U.P., India

Dr. Niraj Kumar Sonkar

Associate Professor,

Department of English & Other Foreign Languages

Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, U.P., India

Abstract

This paper undertakes a comparative study of the treatment of nature and spirituality in the selected works of William Wordsworth and Rabindranath Tagore, two towering literary figures whose poetic visions transcend cultural boundaries. While Wordsworth, the principal voice of English Romanticism, perceives nature as a moral and spiritual guide, Tagore, the mystic poet-philosopher of Bengal, envisions nature as a living embodiment of the divine. The paper explores how both poets elevate nature to a spiritual dimension, portraying it as a source of inner awakening, harmony, and transcendence. Drawing on key poems, this study examines the thematic affinities and philosophical divergences in their portrayals of the human-nature relationship. By analysing their lyrical meditations on the sacredness of the natural world, the paper illuminates how nature becomes a spiritual catalyst—promoting self-effacement, communion, and moral introspection. The comparative framework not only reveals their shared reverence for the immanence of nature but also situates their works within broader ecological and metaphysical traditions.

Keywords: Nature, Spirituality, Transcendence, Divine Immanence, Romanticism, Mysticism, Human-Nature Relationship

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

Introduction

The English Romantic poet William Wordsworth and the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore occupy pivotal positions in the literary histories of their respective cultures. Although separated by geography, period, and literary tradition—Wordsworth emerging as the central figure of English Romanticism and Tagore as a modern Indian poet steeped in spiritual humanism—both poets exhibit a profound reverence for nature and a deeply rooted spiritual sensibility. Their poetry reflects an intrinsic link between the external world of nature and the internal world of the spirit, which they navigate through distinctive cultural and philosophical frameworks.

Wordsworth's poetry is grounded in the Romantic conviction that nature is not merely a passive backdrop to human life but an active force capable of moral instruction and spiritual transformation. He believed that beyond the world of appearances lies a deeper, transcendental reality that can be apprehended through intuition, imagination, and emotional receptivity. In works such as *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*, Wordsworth invokes natural scenes as sites of personal epiphany, using nature as a symbol and conduit for inner realization. He eschews rationalism in favor of what he termed the "holiness of the heart's affections," preferring subjective experience and spiritual feeling over empirical objectivity. His poetic vocabulary often incorporates allegory, myth, and symbolic central figures to express metaphysical insights.

Tagore, similarly, envisions nature as a spiritual presence permeated by divine immanence. His worldview is deeply influenced by the Indian philosophical traditions of Vedanta and the Upanishads, which assert the unity of all beings and the omnipresence of the divine. Tagore's pantheistic vision perceives God not as a remote, transcendent entity, but as intimately present in every leaf, breeze, and stream. In poems such as those from *Gitanjali* and *The Crescent Moon*, nature is animated by a soulful vitality and serves as both a metaphor and a medium for communion with the divine. For Tagore, service to nature and humanity becomes a path to self-realization and spiritual fulfillment.

Despite their cultural differences, both poets converge on the idea that nature holds redemptive and revelatory power. Wordsworth finds in nature a moral guide that nurtures the soul, whereas Tagore experiences it as a maternal force that offers joy, love, and unity with the cosmos. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth declares, "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her."

This echoes Tagore's sentiment in *Gitanjali*, "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day / runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures."

These lines exemplify the poets' shared belief in the spiritual interconnectedness of all life.

Both Wordsworth and Tagore view the human being as part of a larger, living cosmos. For Wordsworth, nature educates and uplifts, helping the individual align with moral and eternal truths. For Tagore, nature is a manifestation of the divine play (*lila*), inviting the soul into a harmonious and joyous relationship with the universe. Wordsworth's landscapes are often serene and pastoral, suggesting emotional healing and stability, while Tagore's natural imagery pulses with mysticism and emotive lyricism, often suggesting transcendence and divine love.

Furthermore, the sense of self-effacement and cosmic unity is a defining trait in Tagore's poetic approach to nature. He often yearns to dissolve the boundaries of the self and merge with

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

the eternal rhythms of the earth. His spirituality, unlike institutional religiosity, is experiential and intuitive—lived through nature, music, and creative expression. Similarly, Wordsworth's spiritual vision seeks to transcend the ego and harmonize with what he calls “a motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things.”

In conclusion, both Wordsworth and Tagore elevate nature to a spiritual plane, though they do so through different symbolic systems and cultural idioms. Wordsworth's Romanticism and Tagore's spiritual humanism meet at a common horizon where the natural world is not only aesthetically rich but spiritually charged. Their poetry invites readers to recognize nature as a mirror of the soul, a source of divine insight, and a path to inner peace and moral growth. By placing nature at the center of their philosophical and poetic visions, Wordsworth and Tagore offer timeless meditations on humanity's place within the sacred tapestry of life.

Nature and Spirituality as Pathways to Self-Realization

William Wordsworth and Rabindranath Tagore, despite their divergent cultural and historical backgrounds, converge remarkably in their perception of nature as a sacred, instructive force and a medium of spiritual transformation. Both poets envision nature as a powerful teacher capable of imparting moral wisdom, emotional healing, and spiritual elevation. Their poetry consistently affirms the deep interconnection between the human soul and the natural world, presenting nature not merely as scenic beauty but as a living expression of divine presence.

Tagore's philosophy, rooted in Vedantic traditions, and Wordsworth's Romantic idealism both call for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Each poet urges the reader to respect the natural world as an essential element of human existence and spiritual growth. They intertwine their meditations on love, beauty, and divinity through encounters with the natural landscape. For both, the beauty of nature is not only aesthetic but sacramental—a manifestation of divine love. In this spiritual ecology, experiencing the sublime in nature can inspire awe, humility, and a sense of unity with the cosmos.

Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Nature-Centered Spirituality

Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, a monumental autobiographical poem in blank verse, offers a comprehensive philosophical reflection on the development of the poet's imagination and consciousness. The poem is not merely an account of events but a spiritual autobiography, tracing the “growth of a poet's mind” through meditative engagements with nature. As Wordsworth writes in Book I, “Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows / Like harmony in music” (*The Prelude*, I.340–341).

Nature here becomes both setting and subject for the unfolding of the soul's spiritual journey. Throughout its fourteen books, *The Prelude* affirms the transformative influence of natural beauty on the poet's moral and emotional faculties. Wordsworth believed that in the silent and solitary communion with natural forms—mountains, rivers, forests—lies the possibility of recovering a lost innocence and accessing deeper truths.

Importantly, Wordsworth does not equate Nature with God; rather, nature serves as a symbolic and experiential medium through which he encounters the divine. Though he avoids doctrinal references, his reverence for nature takes on spiritual dimensions, reflecting what can be termed a nature-centered spirituality—a belief system that emphasizes the sacredness of the

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

natural world as a source of moral guidance and existential insight. As he notes, “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her” (*Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, ll. 122–123).

Even when the word “God” is absent, the poet’s experiences in nature evoke a profound sense of faith, illustrating how nature becomes a stabilizing force amidst life’s uncertainties.

Tagore’s *Gitanjali* and Spiritual Ecstasy through Nature

Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* (1913), which earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature, is a spiritual offering that merges poetic devotion with meditative encounters with the divine in nature. Translated as “Song Offerings,” *Gitanjali* consists of poems that embody Tagore’s mystical worldview and express his belief in the presence of the divine in every element of creation. The opening poems express gratitude for the divine breath of life and for the cycles of nature that nourish the soul:

“This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life” (*Gitanjali*, No. 1).

For Tagore, nature is not an abstraction; it is a companion (*sakha*), a constant witness to the joys and sorrows of life, and a vehicle for communion with Brahman, the Supreme Being. Even his play *Raktakarabi* (“Red Oleanders”) exemplifies this symbolic function of nature. The image of the red oleander flower pushing through industrial waste becomes a metaphor for natural resilience and spiritual resistance in a world overtaken by greed and mechanical exploitation.

In his shorter poems such as those in *Fireflies*, Tagore expresses the notion that true wisdom glows quietly in solitude, akin to fireflies in the dark. In *Stray Birds*, birds, flowers, and seasonal changes reflect the transient yet eternal rhythms of life and the universe. These elemental images are imbued with philosophical and spiritual symbolism, urging readers to pause, reflect, and reconnect with the divine through nature. In his final compositions, often referred to as his “last songs,” Tagore reiterates the harmony of creation, suggesting that spiritual fulfillment arises from aligning oneself with the cosmic rhythm of nature.

Common Philosophical Ground: Love, Beauty, and Spiritual Unity

At the core of both poets’ works lies a shared philosophical kinship: a Romantic and spiritual sensibility that perceives nature as a divine manifestation. Beauty in the natural world, for both Wordsworth and Tagore, is more than surface charm; it is a spiritual experience, a symbol of love that draws the human soul closer to its source. Their poetry suggests that to truly love nature is to experience a form of sacred union—where self, nature, and the divine are no longer distinct but intertwined.

While Wordsworth’s spirituality remains closely tied to the Christian ethical tradition and to Romantic individualism, Tagore’s mystical leanings draw from Indian traditions, especially Advaita Vedanta, which sees all reality as interconnected. Both, however, arrive at a similar conclusion: that spiritual elevation begins with reverence for the natural world and culminates in a state of inner peace and universal harmony.

Nature as a Spiritual Medium: Tagore and Wordsworth in Dialogue

Tagore’s conception of nature closely aligns with the Western pantheistic traditions—particularly that which found poetic expression in the works of William Wordsworth. Both

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

poets believe in the divine immanence within nature and present it not merely as an external environment but as a sacred presence infused with spiritual significance. For Tagore, nature flourishes as a paradigm of coexistence, a realm where harmony, peace, and spiritual liberation are attainable. He consistently affirmed that peace could only be found through intimate communion with the natural world. This belief led him to establish *Santiniketan* in Bolpur, a rural haven where open skies, meadows, and pastoral stillness became the inspiration for self-exploration and poetic creation.

Tagore's sensitivity to nature was marked by its subtlety and symbolic depth. The vastness of the natural world—its openness, spaciousness, and tranquility—represented for him a metaphor of inner freedom, especially in contrast to the restrictive environment of his childhood. In his dramatic work *Dak Ghar (The Post Office)*, the young protagonist Amal's yearning for the world beyond the walls resonates with Tagore's own early longings for spiritual and physical expansiveness. In his poetic collection *Banabani*, and in over a thousand of his poems and songs, Tagore offers a vivid portrait of nature as a dialogic presence—spring, autumn, winter, flowers, trees, and birds appear as conversant entities in communion with the poet.

Tagore's environmental consciousness also foreshadowed modern ecological thought. He recognized, long before it became a global concern, the destructive consequences of industrialization and environmental degradation. Witnessing an oil spill during a voyage to Japan in 1916 deeply disturbed him and catalyzed his creative engagement with ecological ethics. In *Raktakarabi (Red Oleanders)*, the symbolic resilience of a red oleander flower rising from industrial rubble becomes an eloquent metaphor for nature's resistance against mechanized exploitation. Nandini, the heroine who embodies nature, love, and spiritual truth, stands in contrast to the dehumanized world of greed and tyranny.

When one reflects on the intersection of nature and spirituality in poetry, Wordsworth and Tagore inevitably surface as towering figures. Both perceive the divine within the natural world and advocate for balance between humanity and the cosmos. Nature-centered spiritual traditions, as echoed in their poetry, emphasize the interconnectedness of life and the need to view nature not merely as a resource but as a sacred extension of the self. This interdependence is not only spiritual but ecological; the poets remind us that we depend on nature not just for material sustenance—air, water, shelter—but for our emotional, cultural, and metaphysical well-being.

The human-nature relationship in both their visions is one of interpenetration and unity, not separation. The transcendent, for both poets, is not to be found apart from the natural world but through it. Spiritual elevation is achieved not by denying nature, but by contemplating it as a mirror of higher realities. In this sense, humanity is not the master of nature but its humble participant—capable of channeling grace into the world through mindful interaction. When the inner self is disordered, the external world also loses its harmony; conversely, spiritual alignment within can restore the natural order without.

A comparative reading of *Gitanjali* and *The Prelude* reveals the unique but complementary ways in which Tagore and Wordsworth deploy poetic language to invoke nature's spiritual power. A line from *Gitanjali* transports the reader into an atmosphere of divine surrender, "This

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

is my prayer to thee, my Lord—strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.” (*Gitanjali*, No. 36)

The devotional fervor in Tagore’s work merges with natural imagery to create an aura of mystical transcendence. In contrast, *The Prelude* guides the reader through the moral dilemmas of materialism and alienation, urging a return to the benevolence and sublimity of nature’s order. Wordsworth’s verse becomes a conscience-stirring meditation on the redemptive force of the natural world.

Stylistically, *Gitanjali* is marked by its rhythmic cadence, spiritual simplicity, and musicality. Its tonal repetition and symbolic diction—using natural elements like light, river, sky, and flower—underscore Tagore’s ability to fuse devotional lyricism with ecological reverence. The musicality of the verse echoes the continuity of a spiritual current flowing towards God. Tagore writes, “The morning light has flooded my eyes—this is thy message to my heart.” (*Gitanjali*, No. 11)

Similarly, Wordsworth’s devotion to nature is expressed through measured blank verse, and his language exudes contemplative solemnity. He perceives the presence of a “motion and a spirit” that connects all things, helping the poet transcend temporal suffering and access eternal truths.

In essence, both Wordsworth and Tagore elevate nature to a spiritual realm. Their poems invite the reader to discover in nature not only aesthetic joy but ethical and metaphysical instruction. For Wordsworth, the bond between man and nature offers an enduring moral force; for Tagore, it becomes a gateway to the divine. Tagore’s pantheism reveals a love that extends to all living things, grounded in empathy and non-dualistic harmony. Both poets ultimately articulate a poetics of reverence, interconnectedness, and transcendence—a vision in which the natural world is sacred, not separate, and human spirituality is awakened by turning toward, rather than away from, the earth.

Thus, both William Wordsworth and Rabindranath Tagore exhibit in their poetry the profound ability to reconcile and correlate two realms: the inner world of thought and spiritual reflection, and the external world of action and natural experience. Wordsworth believed that the poet’s task was to probe beneath the surface of material appearances to uncover the deeper reality that governs existence. He sought this transcendental understanding through the faculties of imagination, intuition, and metaphysical contemplation—tools which allowed him to apprehend a unity that binds nature, humanity, and the divine. Tagore, similarly, held a pantheistic view of the universe, grounded in the belief that God is immanently present in every form and force of nature. For him, communion with the divine could be achieved through sincere service to both nature and humanity, thereby transforming everyday acts into spiritual offerings. In their respective traditions, both poets articulate a vision in which poetry becomes a spiritual medium—a means to express reverence for the sacred embedded in the natural world. They converge in their conviction that poetry should strive to reveal absolute or eternal truths—truths not directly accessible through reason or sensory perception but apprehended indirectly through symbol, rhythm, and metaphor. In this way, nature serves as both an object of contemplation and a symbolic conduit to divine realization in their poetic works.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 6 & Issue 2 (April 2024)

Works Cited

1. "Rabindranath Tagore's Legacy in Bangladesh lives on". Rediff.com
2. Cazamian, L. (1927), A history of English literature: Modern times (1660-1914) W.D. Macinnes & Helen Douglas-Irvine. NY: Macmillan.
3. De Quincy, T. (1970). Recollections of the takes and the lake poets (David Wright ed.). New York: Penguin Nooks.
4. Gill, S. (1990). William Wordsworth: A Life N.p.: Oxford University.
5. Hartman, G.H. (1964). Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814. New Haven: Yale University Press.
6. Lindenberger, H. (1964). On Wordsworth's 'Prelude' (p. 316) Princeton, N.J : Princeton University Press.
7. Rani, B. (2007). Nature & Spirituality in William Wordsworth's Poetry. Dissertation University of Periyar.
8. Sneath, E.H. (1967), Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man. Washington: Kennikat Press.
9. Tagore, Rabindranath. (1915), Sadhana : The realization of Life, The Macmillan Company, New York, and Available on: [www. Spiritual. bee.com](http://www.Spiritual.bee.com)