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Research Article

## **Ecosophical Reflections on Human-Animal Affinity in Tagore's "Subha" and Premchand's "Two Bullocks"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand are always considered to be the pioneering figures in the literary and cultural renaissance of modern India on account of their tremendous contribution. Both stories, set in the typical Indian background of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are remarkable studies of the deeper aspects of human and animal nature. Tagore's "Subha" is built on its protagonist, Subhasini, which means 'soft spoken'. Defying her name, she was dumb and additionally, was deaf too, making her existence a curse for her parents and family. The proximity between human beings and animals is beautifully reflected in "Two Bullocks" by Premchand. This story illustrates the loyalty between the owner and his bullocks. When the bullocks were sent away by their master, they revolted silently and did not touch food. After a series of adversities, they helped other animals and a kitten escape from the cattle pound and finally fled to their owner's house, where they were welcomed, tears in their master's eyes. The prime objective of this paper is to explore the ecosophical interdependence between human beings and animals, drawing on these two stories.

**KEYWORDS:** reciprocation of affection, human beings, domestic animals, hostility, loyalty



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## **FULL PAPER**

### **Introduction**

In the domestic context, the term "animals as companions" refers to the practice of keeping domesticated animals, sometimes known as "pets," in a household setting in order to provide companionship, emotional support, and a sense of connection with living beings—basically, considering them as members of the family. A strong emotional connection between the human and the animal is the most important factor. Research has demonstrated that keeping pets can have a variety of positive effects, including reducing stress, improving mental health, promoting physical activity, and teaching children virtues such as empathy and kindness. Under ideal conditions, the relationship is shaped by the needs of both humans and animals. It is fairly usual to give a domestic animal a name that makes them feel more a part of the family. Despite lacking human verbal language, they may grasp much of what we say from our tone, modulation, body language, facial expressions, and other cues.

### **Ecosophy and the Ethics of Human–Animal Affinity**

An important intellectual trend that questions the anthropocentric hierarchy that predominates in Western thought is the rise of Ecosophy as an ecological philosophy. Coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970s, the term Ecosophy combines the Greek Oikos (home or environment) with Sophia (wisdom), literally translating to "ecological wisdom" (Næss 54). Unlike mechanical and utilitarian worldviews, ecosophy promotes an ecocentric perspective of life, in which people are a part of the ecological network rather than above it. It maintains that regardless of human use, all biological forms have inherent value. Through the philosophical lens provided by this theoretical framework, works of literature such as "Subha" by Rabindranath Tagore and "Two Bullocks" by Premchand can be reinterpreted as works that reimagine the moral and emotional bonds between people and animals, transcending domestication and embracing companionship.

#### **1. Arne Naess and the Foundations of Ecosophy**

Ecosophy was initially presented by Arne Naess as a component of his broader philosophical endeavour, Deep Ecology, in opposition to "shallow" environmentalism, which aimed to protect nature only for the benefit of humans. He maintained that the ecological catastrophe was caused by a limited human self confined to ego and species, and that the only way to overcome it was to broaden the self to encompass all living things, a process he called Self-realization (Næss 76). According to Næss, "the flourishing and well-being of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves" (Næss 95). This idea of intrinsic value challenges human exceptionalism

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and promotes biocentric equality, which holds that all living things have the same potential to thrive.

Humans and animals no longer have a utilitarian relationship under this ecosophical paradigm; rather, they coexist and become relatives. Instead of being a passive property, the domesticated animal is now an active member of the shared ecological household. Readers can therefore view "Subha" and "Two Bullocks" through ecosophy as deep ethical discussions about communication, coexistence, and the unsaid emotional resonance that transcends species barriers rather than as sentimental depictions of animal loyalty.

## **2. Ecosophy and the Expansion of Ethical Consciousness**

The moral perspective of ecosophy broadens the sphere of empathy to include nonhuman and inanimate objects as well as humans. Aldo Leopold's land ethic, which broadens "the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals," echoes this expansion (Leopold 204). By establishing ethics on the understanding of ecological interdependence rather than supremacy, Leopold's principle enhances Naess's ecosophy. In *The Three Ecologies* (1989), Félix Guattari extends the ecosophical realm to encompass the natural, social, and mental aspects of ecology. Guattari contends that achieving ecological balance requires changing subjectivity itself, or developing what he calls "ecosophical subjectivity," an awareness that connects social and environmental harmony with interior life (Guattari 28).

Ecosophy reinterprets care and affection as mutual acts within a shared existential space by applying this concept to household animals. Traditional definitions of domestication—control, ownership, and hierarchy—become affective coexistence, in which subjection is replaced by emotional exchange. The emotional geographies of Tagore's and Premchand's writings, in which animal characters represent compassion, loyalty, and moral sensibility that are frequently denied to humans, are very resonant with this theoretical orientation.

## **3. Eastern and Indigenous Resonances of Ecosophy**

Although Naess's ecosophy has its roots in Western philosophy, Eastern and indigenous worldviews resonate deeply with its ethical and spiritual aspects. The ecosophical realization that life is interdependent and sacred is reflected in both the Buddhist notion of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and the Upanishadic concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("the world is one family"). As the embodiment of what Næss referred to as the "deep ecological self," Gandhian ethics of *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) also show compassion for animals (Næss 79).

In her concept of Earth Democracy, renowned Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva reinterprets these ideas, claiming that "all beings have intrinsic worth and a right

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to sustenance" (Shiva 21). Her ecological worldview is consistent with ecosophy's emphasis on cohabitation and rejection of anthropocentric power systems. These ideas take on a literary shape in the Indian cultural environment of Tagore and Premchand, where the home and rural life are paramount. In their stories, animals represent sacred relationality rather than utility, embodying a moral ecosystem grounded in humility and compassion.

#### **4. Posthumanism and the Ecological Self**

Posthumanist philosophy, which challenges the human-centered paradigm that dominated Enlightenment reasoning, also has connections to modern ecosophy. Scholars such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti have espoused posthumanism, which advocates acknowledging "interspecies companionship" and "zoe-centered egalitarianism" (Braidotti 60; Haraway 15). The idea of companion species—beings connected by emotional, material, and historical bonds—is first presented in Haraway's 2008 book *When Species Meet*. According to Haraway (16), "companion species signify co-constitution: we become with each other or not at all."

This concept fits in perfectly with Naess's ecosophy as both advocate relational becoming over human dominance. Therefore, rather than being a simple servant, the domestic animal becomes an ethical and epistemic collaborator. Literarily speaking, the cow in Tagore's "Subha" or the silent bullocks of Premchand serve as forums for interspecies communication, where quiet, empathy, and emotion express a level of comprehension that is beyond words. The journey from anthropocentric ethics to ecological selfhood, where identity is shared, flexible, and co-creative, is mirrored in the change from domestication to companionship.

#### **5. Ecofeminism and the Politics of Care**

Ecofeminist philosophy, which highlights the concurrent oppressions of women and nature under patriarchal dominance, provides crucial support for ecosophy. Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Vandana Shiva are among the thinkers who contend that the same hierarchy and control logic that oppresses women also commodifies nature and animals. The dominance of the other, whether it be ecological, animal, or female, is justified by "the master model of reason," which Plumwood criticizes (Plumwood 43). Thus, ecofeminism turns the philosophical ideal of ecosophy into a sociopolitical ethic of empathy, relational knowing, and caring.

The emotional connection between women and animals in the home environments of "Subha" and "Two Bullocks" exemplifies this ethic. The protagonists' relationships with animals represent a subliminal defiance of anthropocentric and patriarchal power as well as a shared vulnerability. According to ecofeminist theory, caring for or developing a link with animals is not just a sentimental gesture but also a powerful political statement of equality and respect for all species.

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## **6. Ecosophy as Aesthetic and Ethical Paradigm**

Finally moving beyond theory, ecosophy becomes a model of morality and aesthetics. The aim of ecosophy, which is to evoke ecological consciousness through emotional experience, is inherently compatible with literature's function as a vehicle for empathy and imagination. Greg Garrard says that reading through an ecocritical lens makes us "rethink the position of the human in relation to the natural world" (Garrard 5). By restoring ethical imagination and affective reciprocity between humans and nonhumans, ecosophical reading goes one step further.

Animals in Tagore's and Premchand's stories express what Naess would call "the deep ecological self"—a self that finds fulfilment in connection rather than in mastery. These tales demonstrate how friendship, even in quiet, can disclose an ecosophical reality: that humankind's ability to cohabit with and take care of the non-human environment is essential to its moral and mental well-being.

### **Analysis of Subha:**

Tagore's Subha is a moving story pointing out the irony of life. The third daughter of Banikantha, Subhasini, also known as Subha, was deaf. Her parents and family had known since she was a young child that she was a curse because she couldn't speak. Ironically, despite her inability to articulate her emotions verbally, her lips and two enormous, long-lashed eyes conveyed them far more effectively than words could. The emotions of her eyes and lips, however, were beyond the comprehension of the human heart and mind. She sought comfort in her father's animal kingdom, which included goats, cows, and kittens. Subha's bond with these household animals symbolizes the animosity that our society has for a disabled child, while the mute animals respond to her warmth and affection.

Tagore superbly describes Subha and her silence. The language of her eyes and lips was like the clear sky, limitless and generous. She was alone like nature in her inarticulate state. She consequently had no pals in the human world. According to Tagore, she was friendless and silent, like the lonely noon tide. When all the natural objects and people were silent, Subha was delighted with the mute nature. She could speak to the river, the streams, the birds, the trees, and the natural world. She had an overwhelming sense of excitement and believed that her communication with nature was complete and immaculate.

However, Subha was not altogether friendless. Sarbbashi and Panguli, two cows, were in the stall. Although they were familiar with her footsteps, they had never heard their names spoken aloud. Despite her lack of words, she would whisper affectionately, and they could understand her soft voice more clearly than any words could. They understood her better than people did, whether she caressed them, reprimanded them, or lured them. In her visit to the shed, Subha would put her arms

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around Sarbbashi's neck, rub her cheek against her friend's, and Panguli, turning her big, loving eyes, would lick her face. Along with sporadic visits, the girl paid them three daily visits. She would come to these innocent buddies when she heard something that made her feel bad. They seemed to infer her mental distress from her melancholy expression. They would approach her, gently press their horns against her arms, and attempt to console her in a naive, perplexed manner. In addition to these two, there were goats and a kitten; nevertheless, despite their similar devotion, Subha did not share the same level of friendship with them. Night or day, the kitten would always leap into her lap, lie down to sleep, and express gratitude for a sleeping aid as Subha runs her gentle fingers over its back and neck.

As the story progresses, Subha is taken to Kolkata and married to a man in the city. The narration of her departure from two of her friends was heart-wrenching. It was as if she were taken away from a safe place to an alien land, and she could never come back again to talk and listen to these two animals. She silently expressed her restlessness and helplessness as she left. Tagore has described Subha's first meeting with the groom very tenderly. Her silent face and tearful eyes touched the groom's heart, who concluded she had a heart. Her tears, like the pearl in an oyster, increased her value, and she was given in marriage. However, after a week of marriage, everyone knew she was dumb, and her husband went on to marry again. Nobody realised that Subha had no fault, that she had not deceived anybody. She was sent back home, where she took refuge with the two cows, who accepted her with greater warmth and affection.

### **Analysis of Two Bullocks:**

Mansarovar is a collection of stories that includes the narrative "Two Bullocks." It depicts the bond between Heera and Moti, two animals, their struggle for freedom, and their devotion to their master, Jhuri, and to a young girl, Gaya's daughter. It demonstrates the value of friendship, whether it be between humans and animals or between animals. Jhuri treats Heera and Moti, two submissive oxen, as if they were part of his family. Premchand illustrated in this tale that animals also long for love and attachment. Everybody has the right to live freely, regardless of whether they are humans or animals. Heera and Moti, two oxen, are the subject of this tale. Jhuri, a farmer, is their master. He loved and caressed them. Heera was calm and understanding. He approached every task thoughtfully and patiently. Heera's antithesis, Moti, used to do things quickly and mindlessly. As a result, both of them were always in trouble.

Both the bullocks were taken to Gaya's place, Jhuri's brother-in-law, to plough once. Moti and Heera believed that Jhuri had betrayed them to Gaya. As a result, both grew nostalgic. They got really depressed at night when they noticed the dry straw in

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the trough. Their master used to feed them smooth, juicy grass, but there they were just given dry straw. They missed Jhuri, their master. Thus, they decided to escape Gaya's grasp. They broke the rope and got to Jhuri's house when Gaya nodded off. When Jhuri saw them, he was happy, but his wife was sad and angry and chastised them.

Gaya once more took Heera and Moti back to his home. Gaya beat them and didn't feed them straw at night because they neither ate it nor ploughed the land. Chapatis were fed to them by Gaya's younger daughter. She eventually opened the rope one night to rescue Heera and Moti from her father's grasp since she was unable to see their suffering.

Feeling hungry, Heera and Moti travelled to a fresh location and entered the pea field. They both began eating peas fearlessly. Some nearby people captured them in the interim and imprisoned them with other animals in Kanji's home. Without food, they had to endure the suffering with other animals already residing there. Despite breaking down the house's wall at night and releasing all the other animals, Heera and Moti were unable to escape. A butcher now purchased them. They recognized the route to Jhuri's house as they strolled alongside the butcher. They both dashed back to their original residence. Jhuri hugged them, and his wife adored them as well.

### **Conclusion**

These two stories reflect the connection, affection, and interdependence between human beings and animals, especially domestic animals. In this land, the domestic animals are treated as household members. They are fed and caressed like the close members of the family. With the touch of emotion, both the writers, Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand, wove these stories, in which it is clearly realised that not only domestic animals depend on their household members, but also the members are equally reliant on them. Though they are animals, they are not heartless, and nobody could be more loyal than they are. They work for us, protect us, and reciprocate our affection. Despite having a full-fledged family, Subha had no one to turn to in her weak moments. While she was neither understood nor misunderstood by her family members, neighbours, relatives, or even her in-laws, she was cared for only by the two cows. They were her refuge where she could take shelter during the period of hardship, no matter how many times! In *Two Bullocks*, Jhuri is equally attached to his bullocks, whom he treats like his family members. He fed them delicious food, caressed them every night, and took care of them. They similarly obeyed their master without being disobedient. Though a temporary shift from their master's house to his in-laws was taken as betrayal by the bullocks, they, at the peak of their discomfort at the new place, only thought of coming back to their master. During the dead of night when the world was sleeping, they fled to Jhuri's place, breaking captivity. Jhuri was extremely happy to see their loyalty, but had to send them back. However, the second

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time, when the bullocks returned to him after going through a series of happenings and hardships, he could not send them back. He and his wife hugged them, their eyes teary.

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