A Poet's Ashram

Rabindranath Tagore's Experimental Community in Colonial India

Sukalyan Chanda

First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-37153-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-98766-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-33556-6 (ebk)

Chapter 3

'The Message of the Forest': Santiniketan and the Idea of *Tapovana*

CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

DOI: 10.4324/9781003335566-4

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

3 'The Message of the Forest': Santiniketan and the Idea of *Tapovana*

The hermitage shines out, in all our ancient literature, as the place where the chasm between man and the rest of creation has been bridged.

Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest', 1919

In a letter written in 1912, Rabindranath remarked, 'At our school the pupils gain something precious, something that does not belong to the classroom. It is a joyful contact with the universe – a bond of kinship with nature'.[1] These words foreground a theme that figures prominently in his writings on his educational experiments. In the previous chapter, I have argued that the spirituality of Rabindranath's ashram was rooted in his personal reading of the Upanishadic idea of universal unity. Not surprisingly, within the framework of his thinking, that spiritual vision underlined the importance of inclusivity. Through his ashram, he envisioned a community that included not only human beings but also the natural environment.

Rabindranath believed that conventional education alienated its products from their natural setting and from human nature. This chapter begins with an exploration of how he conceptualized an alternative education, an education that aimed to (re)unite the human being with nature and to bring about a transformation of how nature was perceived. Santiniketan, where he founded his school, was about a hundred miles away from Calcutta. For him, the choice of the locale was significant – 'Remembering the experience of my young days, of the school masters and the class rooms, also knowing something of the natural school which Nature herself supplies to all her creatures, I established my institution in a beautiful spot, far away from the town'.[2] A sense of kinship with the natural setting was an important part of the unique way of living he envisioned.

In the pedagogy of the *tapovana,* Rabindranath found an alternative to the education of the urban school.[3] For him, the institution of the *tapovana* represented a paradigmatic site of a perfect union of humanity and nature. For him, it was, in fact, the ultimate locus of that Upanishadic spirituality that saw both humanity and nature as a part of a single spiritual unity. Rabindranath believed that this perception of humanity's relationship with nature was quintessentially Indian and that it was antithetical to the way nature was perceived in the West. Interestingly, in his writings, the city and

DOI: 10.4324/9781003335566-4
This chapter has been made available under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

the *tapovana* are represented as contrasting spaces. The city is perceived as an artificial space that is incompatible with human nature. While nature is seen as home, the city is perceived as a place of exile. This chapter explores these conceptual categories to find an answer to the question of why the poet wished to reinvent the ancient idea of the *tapovana* within an early twentieth-century context. It seeks to comprehend the anti-colonial underpinnings of Rabindranath's concept of the *tapovana* as a utopian alternative to the modern colonial city.

I

Towards an Alternative Education: Nature as a Pedagogic Space

The essay 'Shiksha Samasya' (1906) represents Rabindranath's earliest attempt at a detailed exposition of his conception of the *tapovana* as an educational ideal. In that essay, as in many other writings, arguments for such education are formulated through a critique of conventional schooling. Here, I explore some of those writings to revisit the key themes that figured in his thinking on the role of education vis-à-vis humanity's relationship with nature. A brief survey of these themes will be an important part of my attempt to contextualize his understanding of the *tapovana* as a pedagogic ideal.

In the essay 'My School', he writes that commonly 'knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature'.[4] In this essay, as in other writings, Rabindranath's critique of conventional schooling centres around the complaint that the school tends to be nothing more than 'a special arrangement for giving lessons'.[5] 'The education Factory' remains 'dissociated from the context of the universe'.[6] The child becomes physically alienated from the world of nature in the process of becoming a part of the artificial space that the school embodies. The school 'forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork'.[7] Rabindranath's protest against this process bases itself upon the belief that children are inherently close to nature. It is interesting to note how he ascribes to them a fundamental desire for closeness to the natural world: 'Children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air'.[8] Clearly, his critique of conventional education articulates the perception that it is a process that leads not only to physical estrangement from nature but also to a negation of what is natural in the child. In his writings on education, he repeatedly evokes his own childhood memories of being confined within the walls of the school – 'bare white walls staring like eyeballs of the dead'.[9]

This radical critique of conventional schooling formed the basis of Rabindranath's endeavour to introduce an alternative education. He writes that the purpose of education should be to teach us to be 'in harmony with all existence'.[10] Such education places emphasis on being a part of a natural setting. 'Children should be surrounded with the things of nature', things 'that have their own educational value'.[11] In 'Shiksha Samasya', he proposes

an education that demands a shift from the city to a space where the child can experience direct contact with nature. In order to have an unmediated relationship with nature, the child must learn to minimize its reliance on commodities. In 'My School', Rabindranath tells us that the absence of luxury 'brings us into complete touch with life and the world …' and that 'living richly is living in a world of lesser reality'.[12] Clearly, what he argues for is a return not only to a natural setting but also to a mode of existence that is free from the artificialities endemic in a materialistic culture. He argues that in the life of a human being, childhood should be the phase 'reserved for the life of the primitive man'.[13]

Moreover, I wish to emphasize that, for Rabindranath, such education had spiritual relevance. Here, let me evoke the views he expressed during a conversation that took place at Miralrio, Argentina, in December, 1924. L.K. Elmhirst made a transcription of Rabindranath's response to a question asked by a group of teachers. In responding to the question as to how the idea of God could be taught to children, Rabindranath remarked: 'It is I believe the cultivation of a spirit of sympathy with the world of Nature which is one of the first steps in the growth of our spiritual life'.[14] Since God is love, one has to realize his presence through love.[15] God's love manifests itself through the whole of his creation.[16] Hence, cultivation of love for nature leads one to a realization of spiritual oneness with the world and with God. Rabindranath described what he experienced during his own childhood days:

> It was fortunate for me, I believe, that I was gifted with a sufficiently sensitive mind so that from my earliest days the world all around me had a kind of way of speaking to me; I seemed able to hear its voice as though to me it always had something special to say. I had therefore a feeling that because the world never seemed to be a dead, inert thing, I could always have with it a very personal, even an intimate kind of relationship … We cannot love things that are alien to us. In addition to the love I received from, and came to feel for my family, I experienced an intense love for Nature itself in all its manifestations around me, even though our small tank, or pond, our palm trees and our high roof-top were right in the heart of the city of Calcutta. That this very intensity of feeling could exist at all implies that there was something very akin to Nature in my own personality. Because no one hampered me in my own peculiar cultivation of this love for all the natural beauty, and for the living beings and persons around me, I came to my own knowledge, or consciousness, of God along a path of love which already existed within me.[17]

Rabindranath warned that in a city, realization of this ideal would be difficult: 'You all know how difficult it would be to realize such a suggestion

in a town or city, for cities seem to start out by wanting to smother Nature into deadness'.[18] The main problem, he pointed out, lay in the imperatives of modern civilization:

> Our civilisation has been, for far too long, busy building walls and screens everywhere between the child and nature. Our life is now filled with all kinds and patterns of conventional behavior by which we have achieved a variety of wealth or power, or both, in exchange for the loss of the whole world of natural beauty, ... a world that we owe to the infinite generosity of a father we call God.[19]

Rabindranath's conception of education has perceptible affinities with ideas foregrounded in European Romanticism. Romanticism, the literary and philosophical movement that flourished in the West during the early nineteenth century, put forward a radical critique of some of the consequences of industrialization and urbanization. The industrial revolution had created a new type of city space and had transformed the countryside.[20] In Britain, mass migrations from the villages to new industrial cities like Manchester led to the rise of a new urban working class that lived and worked amid conditions that were dismal. During this historical juncture, a time when Britain was increasingly becoming industrialized and urbanized, when human communities were getting alienated from their natural setting, English Romanticism called for a return to a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. In a poem, William Wordsworth (1770–1850) once described a London scene seen from Westminster Bridge at dawn. 'Earth has not anything to show more fair', he wrote.[21] More typically, the Romantics saw the city as a constraint and as a space that was devoid of joy. One of the themes that the discourse of Romanticism foregrounded was that of a real or imaginative escape from the city into the world of nature. Significantly, this project of returning to nature often focused on the figure of the child. In the meditative poem 'Frost at Midnight', Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) evokes this ideal. The speaker says that though he himself grew up 'in the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim', his child son will grow up in nature.[22] Through nature, God, who is an all-pervading being, will 'mould' his 'spirit'.[23] An analogous ideal of education was conceived by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) during the previous century. In his *Emile* (1762), Rousseau advocated an education that enabled the (male) child to grow up in a natural setting and to preserve his innate nature.[24]

The commonalities between these ideas of education and the pedagogic ideal Rabindranath articulated are easily recognized. Like Rousseau, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Rabindranath perceived nature as a major educative influence in the life of the child. Moreover, as the lines quoted from Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' indicate, the Romantic conception of nature and of God expresses a pantheism that is akin to the idea of *Brahman*

that we find in Rabindranath. Rabindranath became acquainted with the poetry of the Romantics at an early age and, throughout his life, remained an admirer of their work.[25] Yet, the commonalities between Romanticism and Rabindranath's thinking on nature need not be discussed in terms of the question of influence. His writings indicate that his memories of his own childhood, a childhood spent in a prison-like city, played a crucial role in shaping his conception of an alternative space. More significant is the fact that the cultural context of which he was a part was in many ways similar to the context that had shaped the discourse of Romanticism. In other words, the affinities that connect Rabindranath with the Romantics can be attributed to a shared set of historical experiences. Like the Romantics, Rabindranath witnessed significant processes of cultural transition and change. His conception of nature was in many ways a response to the introduction of a new urban modernity by colonial rule.

It is important to remember that Rabindranath developed an acute awareness of the possible consequences of the exploitation of nature by human activities. In scholarly discussions of modern environmentalism, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is often used as a point of departure.[26] In his book on ecocriticism, Greg Garrard remarks that it is generally agreed that modern environmentalism began with Carson's influential book.[27] Carson's text offered an apocalyptic vision of the environmental devastation caused by processes such as the use of pesticides in agriculture. In the West, Rabindranath is yet to receive adequate recognition as an ideologue whose thoughts are relevant to modern environmentalism. What we need is a positive revaluation of the environmental values he tried to inculcate through his writings and through his institution in Santiniketan. Here, let me refer to a speech that he delivered at Sriniketan, his Institute of Rural Reconstruction, in 1938. In that speech, published under the title 'Aranya Devata', he cautions against the possible environmental consequences of the destruction of forests by human greed. Trees make the air pure, bring rains and render the soil fertile.[28] Yet, 'protecting forests against man's all-consuming greed has become a difficult task everywhere'.[29] In various parts of the world, deforestation is leading to desertification.[30] What he insists on is a commitment to a constructive project of protecting the natural environment: 'The time has come when we must repent. We have pledged that with our meagre capacities we will build in our immediate environment an altar for the benevolent god of the forest'.[31]

In Rabindranath's writings, environmental pollution is often shown to be symptomatic of a spiritual crisis: 'Before long, the sky over the whole human world, East and West, will be smudged with factory smoke and the green of living nature will be licked grey by the demon of the utilitarian spirit'.[32] Rabindranath felt that the effort to return to nature required a radical transformation of values. He called for an ideological shift, a shift from the values of the modern city to an alternative set of values embodied in the idea of the *tapovana*.

II

The Colonial City

In 'Shiksha Samasya', as in many other writings by Rabindranath, the city and the *tapovana* are represented as mutually contrasting spaces. My intention is to find out whether his conception of these spaces entailed a politics of location that had an anti-colonial subtext. Indeed, in this context, the insights offered by a postcolonial perspective can be useful. In their Introduction to *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture,* Andrew Treverson and Sara Upstone point out that a preoccupation with space or location is central to postcolonial studies. 'The idea that place plays a significant role in how one defines one's own identity and, equally, how that identity is defined by others is', they note, 'continually foregrounded in postcolonial studies'.[33] Indeed, postcolonial critics are aware that identities can be formed, performed and also challenged through and in terms of spaces that are local or national or global. A foundational text of postcolonial studies, Edward Said's work on *Orientalism* is concerned with how the West sought to imagine and construct a non-Western other through the discursive production of a category of space – the Orient.[34] Significantly, postcolonial thinkers like Said have made it clear that space can be understood not just as a physical, material entity but also as an ideational and cultural phenomenon. This understanding of space as an ideational phenomenon is relevant to my discussion of how Rabindranath sought to imagine the city and the *tapovana*.

As noted earlier, the milieu within which Rabindranath grew up was a specifically urban milieu. He was born into a family that had for a long time been a part of the city of Calcutta. It was in that city that he spent the years of his childhood and youth. During his childhood, he remained for the most part confined within the domestic space of an urban household and experienced physical isolation from the world of nature. In his memoirs, he describes that experience through a number of tropes. One of these is the metaphor of imprisonment:

> We had to get our glimpses of nature from behind barriers. Beyond my reach stretched this limitless thing called the outside, flashes, sounds and scenes of which used to come momentarily and touch me through interstices. It seemed to want to beckon me through the shutters with a variety of gestures. But it was free and I was bound – there was no way of our meeting.[35]

Significantly, it was during a visit to Santiniketan in 1873 that he came into direct contact with nature for the first time. This was his first visit to the place that would become his home decades later.

In the essay 'Shiksha Samasya', he argues that the city is not the natural home of human beings.[36] It is an artificial space that alienates us not only from external nature but also from human nature. Rabindranath argues that

it is incompatible with what he describes as the '*swabhab*' (nature) of human beings.[37] Those who live in the city and get accustomed to it deviate from their *swabhab*. The forest, he asserts, is 'our living home'.[38] In 'The Teacher', an essay written decades later, his account of his own childhood experience of growing up in a city reiterates this conception of nature as home and of the city as a place of exile. There, he writes:

> My mind was constantly haunted by the home-sick fancies of an exile. It seems that the subconscious remembrance of a primeval dwelling-place, where, in our ancestor's minds, were figured and voiced the mysteries of the inarticulate rocks, the rushing water and the dark whispers of the forest, was constantly stirring my blood with its call.[39]

In a lecture published under the title 'My School', he uses an interesting trope to describe his relationship with the city where he grew up – 'Though I had no experience of the outer-world, I had in my heart (a) great longing to go away from … that huge, stony-hearted step-mother, Calcutta'.[40] 'The mind', he writes, 'has its hunger for the ministrations of … mother nature'.[41]

The city that is frequently evoked in Rabindranath's writings is, of course Calcutta – the city where he grew up. In *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, Swati Chattopadhyay emphasizes the need to explore 'the structures of power and knowledge that underlie different representations of the city'.[42] One of the tasks she undertakes in her book is to explore the ways in which Bengali artistic imagination has attempted to engage with the city. She points out that in the nineteenth century, Bengali literary imagination rarely saw the city as a site of creativity.[43] The city was predominantly seen as 'an imposition' and as 'a constraint'.[44] Simultaneously, an effort was made to imagine a blissful countryside as the ideal home.[45] Curiously, as Chattopadhyay points out, 'such idyllic imaginings of the home-as-village life was a peculiarly urban discourse'.[46] Chattopadhyay, therefore, locates a paradox in the relationship between contemporary literary imagination and the city. In her understanding, it lay in 'the refusal to explicitly acknowledge one's creative location in the city'.[47] Though the city was used as a site of literary and artistic production, contemporary Bengali literature often refused to recognize it as such a space.

One may argue that this way of perceiving Calcutta drew upon the awareness that it was a city steeped in the history of colonialism in India. Indeed, it was one of the cities that owed their existence to processes involved in colonialism. In their book on colonial cities, Ross and Telkamp point out that 'colonization demanded many unequivocally urban functions'.[48] One of the processes colonialism entailed was trade, which required, among other things, the presence of ports by which the export and import of raw materials and goods could take place. Moreover, such trade depended on local industries and a range of institutions related to finance and insurance. Further, the performance of colonial power required administrative centres and garrisons.

Ross and Telkamp argue that 'much of what was creative and destructive in the dialectical relationship between colonial rulers and their subjects originated in the towns'.[49] Each of the major colonial cities functioned as an intermediary that connected the colony with the imperial metropolis.[50] Indeed, it was through these cities that the imperial West exercised its domination over the colonies.

The history of Calcutta or Kolkata is inseparable from the history of British colonialism in Bengal and India. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a cluster of villages situated on the banks of the river Hooghly in southern Bengal evolved into the metropolis that came to be known as Calcutta.[51] British presence in this area was one of the main factors that caused the emergence of this city. In the late seventeenth century, the British East India Company began to use these villages as a mercantile base. Following its purchase of *zamindari* or taxation rights over three villages in 1698, a city began to develop within the area of its jurisdiction. The victory of the company over the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 inaugurated a chain of events and processes that led to the rise of the British as an imperial power in India. Consequently, Calcutta rapidly grew in both bulk and prominence. The *diwani* that the Company received from the Mughal emperor in 1765 invested it with the authority to collect taxes and administer civil justice in Bengal. In 1772, the administrative machinery for Bengal shifted from Murshidabad, the capital of the Nawabs, to Calcutta. The following year, an Act of Parliament declared Calcutta to be the seat of the supreme authority over British India. Calcutta remained the capital of British India till it was replaced by New Delhi in 1911.

Sunil Khilnani points out that in India the colonial city was 'a stage where the regalia of British sovereignty was displayed'.[52] Nevertheless, the modernity it promised to offer became, for the Indian elite and middle classes, an object of desire.[53] So, in India, the colonial city embodied a paradox: it was '(a) site of India's subjection' and, at the same time, 'an object of Indian craving'.[54] Not surprisingly, nationalist attitudes towards this paradox were marked by ambivalence.[55] It is important to remember that the colonial city played a crucial role in shaping anti-colonial politics in India. Nationalist politics was dominated by the urban elite whose thinking heavily drew upon values and ideas made accessible to them by the education available in the cities.

In Rabindranath's fictional writings, Calcutta is not always shown to be devoid of humane values and creative possibilities. Typically, his discussion of childhood and education is the context within which he voices his scepticism about urban life. He was particularly critical of the materialism that he associated with modern cities. For Rabindranath, Calcutta was a city grounded in rank commercialism. In his essay 'The Modern Age', Rabindranath defines Calcutta as 'an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face and in her manners'.[56] Through a parody of the biblical myth of Genesis, he describes how the city came into being – 'In the beginning there was the spirit of the

Shop, which uttered through its megaphone, "Let there be the Office!" and there was Calcutta'.[57] Rabindranath believed that the values embodied in a modern city like Calcutta were in conflict with India's traditional values and ways of life. In 'The Teacher', he writes that he has been a part of the milieu that has witnessed the emergence and growth of this dubious form of modernity – a 'citybred spirit of progress', 'driving its triumphal car over the luscious green life of our ancient village community'.[58] In 'The Modern Age', the values represented by Calcutta are contrasted with the values of an older, pre-colonial city, the city of Benares. It is an ancient city where love and reverence for the river Ganges 'has become one with … love of the best in man'.[59] Calcutta, on the other hand, is described as a city that has surrendered its 'body and soul' to 'the spirit of the ledger, bound in dead leather'.[60] In Calcutta, 'the smoke-belching iron dragon' of the factories situated along the sides of the Ganges has 'devoured … the life of its banks'.[61] Most crucially, the modernity of Calcutta is recognized to be a modernity introduced by colonial rule. Calcutta is described as a 'city newly built by a company of western traders' and as 'the metropolis of British India'.[62]

III

Tapovana *as an Alternative Space*

Critical engagement with the problems of modern urbanism was a prominent part of the intellectual atmosphere that prevailed in the West during the nineteenth century. Romanticism's critique of modern urban life has already been discussed. In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, the harsh realities of the new industrial cities that had recently emerged came to be addressed by thinkers and writers like Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865) and Charles Dickens (1812–1870). During the final years of the century, these issues continued to attract critical attention. In *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, a pamphlet published in 1883, the congregational minister Andrew Mearns described the horrible conditions under which the poor lived in London.[63] Other contemporary surveys of the urban realities of the time include Jacob A. Riis's *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1890).[64]

Criticism of urban and industrial civilization shaped and, in fact, entailed significant attempts at imagining alternative spaces and ways of being. Typically, ideas of such spaces shared an emphasis on being close to nature. *Walden* (1854) written by the American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, is an account of how he attempted to practice solitude and a simple way of living in a natural setting.[65] In his book *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), British town-planner Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) put forward his conception of the garden city and discussed the ways in which that concept could be translated into a reality.[66] The concept of the garden city embodied a reaction against the nineteenth-century city in general and against the harsh realities of London, in particular.[67] Mindful of the possible

environmental consequences of urban congestion, Howard emphasized the need to shift from the overcrowded cities to a better environment in rural areas. However, Howard did not altogether reject the city. The garden city, as he conceptualized it, embodied a fusion of the advantages of the country and the city. It was characterized by an abundance of public gardens, open spaces and broad avenues. Interestingly, industry was an important part of it. Industry, Howard hoped, would be the source of livelihood for the majority of the residents. The outer periphery of the garden city consisted of agricultural lands that produced food for the community and also prevented it from spreading to the surrounding countryside. For Howard and those inspired by his ideas, the garden city was not just a utopian ideal but a blueprint for real experiments in an alternative mode of being. In Europe and the United States, his ideas shaped numerous efforts to revolutionize modern urban planning. A garden city was established in Letchworth, England, in 1903. Later, in 1919, another was founded at Welwyn.

The previous section has tried to draw attention to the correlations between colonialism and the modern city. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that the Raj created only cities. As Sunil Khilnani points out, it also invented – for itself – an alternative to those cities. A new countryside was created at the hill stations in the Himalayas and the Nilgiri mountains. In this alternative space, an attempt was made to replicate the English countryside.[68] Like the cities built by the Raj, it remained alienated from indigenous existence.

I seek to emphasize that the global cultural context of which Rabindranath was a part witnessed significant attempts to produce alternatives to modern urban existence. The distinctiveness of Rabindranath's endeavour to imagine such an alternative lay in the way he sought to invest it with values derived from India's spiritual inheritance. It is important to recognize that through the idea of the *tapovana* and through his own ashram Rabindranath sought to imagine a way of being that was rooted in India's spiritual heritage. In order to clarify this point, I must re-invoke an idea that has been discussed in Chapter 2. In the last two sections of that chapter, I examined Rabindranath's distinctive understanding of the Upanishadic idea of *Brahman* as a being that encompasses the entire cosmos. The implications of this idea need to be taken into account. Each and every being is a manifestation of the Universal Soul that is *Brahman*. This implies that all beings are spiritually one with each other. Rabindranath believed that India's spiritual traditions foregrounded the notion that ultimate spiritual fulfilment could be achieved through the realization of this unity.

Significantly, in his writings, he locates the origins of this ideal in the *tapovana*s of ancient India: 'There sounded a voice in the ancient forest-shade of India proclaiming the presence of a soul in the burning flame, in the flowing water, in the breathing life of all creatures, in the undying spirit of Man'.[69] Since the forest hermitage unites the human being with the non-human environment, it is perceived as the space where realization of this spiritual ideal is possible. He emphasizes that the *rishi*s (sages), residing in the

*tapovana*s, realized and articulated this spiritual principle. They felt that 'the same energy, which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world, manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness'.[70] The ultimate spiritual objective of 'the forest-dwelling sages of ancient India' was to realize the 'harmony between man's spirit and the spirit of the world'.[71]

In the essay 'The Message of the Forest', he notes that in the hermitages of the past, 'man was not separate from and had no quarrel with the rest of his surroundings'.[72] To us, representations of the idea of *tapovana* in Rabindranath's writings may tend to be reminiscent of a Western literary mode – the pastoral. The pastoral originated in the third century BC through poems written by the Greek poet Theocritus. The *Idylls* of Theocritus and imitations of his poems by later poets such as Virgil established the main literary conventions of the pastoral. The traditional pastoral is often a poem projecting a nostalgic vision of the life of shepherds and other rural folk amid a natural setting. It is, however, not a genre but a literary mode, one that can be present in poetry, drama, prose fiction and non-fictional prose. It has been pointed out that the emergence of this mode during the Hellenistic period was closely intertwined with widespread urbanization in contemporary Greece.[73] In other words, it was the product of an urban imagination trying to conceptualize an alternative to urban existence. In works using the pastoral mode, the simplicity and peacefulness of the idyllic space are contrasted with the corruption and restlessness endemic to the city. Typically, the pastoral tradition foregrounds two pairs of binary distinctions: a spatial distinction between the country and the city is often accompanied by a temporal distinction between an idyllic past and an imperfect present.[74] Raymond Williams has pointed out that the pastoral tradition has always expressed nostalgia for a lost past. At every point along the history of that tradition, we are offered a vision of a better past.[75]

Like works drawing upon the pastoral mode, Rabindranath's musings on the idea of *tapovana* focus on the theme of an escape from the city to an idealized natural setting. In his writings, as in those works, this spatial distinction is often inseparable from a temporal distinction between the past and the present. To him, the dichotomy between the city and the *tapovana* signified the dichotomy between the spirituality of India's ancient past and the materialism endemic to modernity. Curiously, he discovered a similar paradigm in plays written by the Classical Sanskrit poet Kalidasa.[76] In 'The Message of the Forest', he argues that in those plays, the imagining of the hermitage is closely linked with an indictment of materialism. These plays, in his view, foreground a sense of crisis generated by the decline of traditional spirituality and the rise of a materialistic culture. Rabindranath tells us that 'when Vikramaditya became King, Ujjain a great capital, and Kalidasa its poet, the age of India's forest retreats had passed'.[77] The milieu to which Kalidasa belonged 'had gathered its wealth and missed its well-being'.[78] Trapped in such an era, the poet suffered from 'home-sickness of the soul' and expressed 'his desire for perfection' through nostalgic evocations of the

ideal *tapovana*.[79] In his plays, the court is represented as an epitome of the dominant culture of materialism, and the hermitage is imagined to be an embodiment of traditional spiritual wisdom.

I have argued that, for Rabindranath, the institution of the *tapovana* represented the spirituality embodied in the Upanishads. Significantly, his reading of the Upanishads posited a worldview that was antithetical to one of the dominant discourses of Western modernity. Upanishadic spirituality invests the world with a divinity that is omnipresent. The scientific worldview put forward by, among others, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Rene Descartes (1596–1650) and Isaac Newton (1642–1727), perceives the universe as a mere mechanism that can be dominated by human reason. This view of the world has been complicit with efforts to turn nature into a resource. It is, however, important to remember that the European Enlightenment produced a multiplicity of discourses and that some of these challenged the dominant discursive formations of the time. Though the Upanishadic worldview is in conflict with the dominant discourse of the Enlightenment, it has recognizable affinities with one of the counter-discourses that the Enlightenment produced. Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) put forward the view that everything in nature was a part of the one infinite substance that he recognized as God. Spinoza maintained that both thought and physical reality were derivatives of that being. The views inculcated by Spinoza helped popularize pantheism, a perspective that identifies the universe with divinity or assumes that everything in the universe is a part of one omnipresent God. As noted earlier, the pantheistic perspective was prominently present in the nineteenth-century discourse of Romanticism.

Rabindranath, however, writes that traditionally India has perceived nature in ways that are radically and fundamentally different from the ways in which nature has been perceived and represented in the West. In 'The Message of the Forest', he attempts to account for these differences through a comparative account of the historical processes by which the cultures of India and the West emerged. He locates the origins of India's distinctive cultural and spiritual outlook in the forest – 'The environment, in which we see the past of India, is the forest'.[80] Human beings living in the forest recognized themselves as one with the larger natural setting. Since the forest was, for them, the source of sustenance, 'they could not think of their surroundings as lifeless, separate or inimical'.[81] Rabindranath argues that in the West civilization emerged through continuous confrontation with nature. Western culture therefore perceives nature as the ultimate other.

Rabindranath's exploration, in this essay, of the complex negotiations between nature and culture in the East and the West relies heavily on analyses of particular literary texts. His main argument is that ancient Sanskrit texts, such as plays by Kalidasa, foreground 'the truth of the interpenetration of human life and the cosmic life of the world'.[82] They show human passions to be in harmony with the nonhuman setting. Hence, within these texts, the sublimation of such passions becomes possible. In his reading, it is the forest

hermitage that is represented, in these texts, as the site of a perfect union of humanity and nature. Rabindranath alludes to a range of English literary texts to argue that in the literature of the West, there is a persistent 'gulf between nature and human nature'.[83] Whereas in the Sanskrit literature of ancient India 'Nature stands on her own right', in the literature of the West 'Nature occasionally peeps in' and 'is almost always a trespasser'.[84] Western literature, in his view, focuses exclusively on human realities. He acknowledges that in some plays by Shakespeare, the theme of an escape into the pastoral realm is present. But he argues that even in these plays the pastoral retreat seems 'tolerable' only 'in comparison with … artificial court life'.[85] However, he admits that nineteenth-century Romantic poetry expressed a totally different set of attitudes to nature and proceeds to suggest that the major attitudinal shift, signalled by Romantic poetry, was an outcome of 'the influence of the newly-discovered philosophy of India which stirred the soul of Germany and strongly roused the attention of other Western countries' in that era.[86]

Rabindranath's essay can be read as an early example of an exercise in ecocriticism, a mode of literary and cultural criticism that seeks to evaluate texts, beliefs and ideas in terms of their environmental implications and from an environmentalist point of view. Like environmentalism, a movement with which it has close ties, ecocriticism is a response to an awareness of the environmental problems caused by modern science and industry. The term was used for the first time by the American critic William Rueckert in 1978. It is, however, generally acknowledged that the ecocritical perspective had been anticipated by certain works of literary criticism published before the invention of the term. The texts that are mentioned as early instances of ecocriticism include *The Country and the City* (1973) by Raymond Williams and *The Lay of the Land* (1975) by Annette Kolodny.[87] However, it was during the early 1990s that ecocriticism emerged as a recognizable movement. These years witnessed the rise of environmentalism as a powerful ideology in the Humanities.

It is not necessary to try to find modern ecological or environmentalist concepts in 'The Message of the Forest'. But we need to recognize that it treats canonical Indian and English literary texts as enduring cultural documents embodying historical attitudes to relations between humanity and nature. I suggest that the views articulated by Rabindranath can be best understood through a perspective that combines insights derived from ecocriticism and postcolonialism. A postcolonial ecocritical perspective can enrich our historical understanding of the interrelations between colonialism and nationalism on the one hand and the environment or environmental thinking on the other.

In their Introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley write that colonial and environmental histories need to be recognized as mutually constitutive processes. We need to remember that colonialism had a profound impact on the natural environment of the regions where it operated. Through the

exploitation of natural resources, it caused environmental degradation in the colonies.[88] Simultaneously, it transformed perceptions of nature both at the metropolitan centre and at the colonial periphery. In his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Nigerian author Chinua Achebe offers insights into the process whereby colonialism brought about such an ideological shift. In Achebe's narrative, one consequence of the arrival of colonialism among the Igbo community is the decay of their ancestral faith, a faith that binds them to their natural setting.[89] Conversely, it has been argued by scholars such as Richard H. Grove and others that the history of imperialism has been instrumental in the development of modern Western thinking on environmental conservation. Grove has argued that colonial rule in the tropics helped produce not only a vast body of knowledge about the environment but also an understanding of how the consumption of natural resources through modern economic processes, such as those initiated by colonialism, could lead to environmental degradation and crises.[90]

Most crucially, a postcolonial ecocritical perspective can help us understand how environmental thinking could be utilized by the colonized in their attempt at gaining self-definition. Edward Said has emphasized the primacy of space in colonialism and anti-colonial resistance. Imperialism, he writes, is 'an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control'.[91] In Said's understanding, resistance to imperialism therefore involves an effort to reclaim the space that has been usurped. Imagination, according to Said, plays a crucial role in that effort: 'Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination'.[92] Anti-colonial imagination seeks to discover a nature that can be an alternative to the spaces imagined or manufactured by imperialism. It is possible to argue that through his concept of *tapovana* as a space rooted in India's spiritual inheritance and through his attempt to posit an indigenous alternative to the Western mode of imagining humanity's relationship with nature, Rabindranath participated in similar politics of space.

In recent times, attempts have been made by scholars to evaluate spiritual traditions in terms of how they conceptualize relations between humanity and nature. Some of them have claimed that Eastern spiritualities inculcate values that are environmentally beneficial. Scholarly discussions of this perspective often choose as their point of departure an article published by the American historian Lynn White Jr. in 1967. In that article on the historical roots of current ecological crises, he offered a critique of the environmental implications of the religious worldview embodied in Christianity. His main contention was that the anthropocentrism of Judeo-Christian religious beliefs about the superiority of humanity over nature had contributed to the exploitation of the natural environment by human beings. Lynn White's essay stressed that it was necessary to find an alternative set of values.[93] White's arguments initiated a new debate regarding whether such alternative values could be found in the religious ideas of the East.

Among others, O.P. Dwivedi has argued that Hinduism can be seen as a repository of such values. In the essay 'Satyagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism', Dwivedi explores various religious ideas and also uses a range of ancient Hindu texts as material in order to argue that Hinduism helps us envisage a harmonious relationship between the human and the nonhuman. Significantly, Dwivedi claims that one of the foundational ideas of Hinduism is the idea of *ahimsa* (non-violence). 'Almost all the Hindu scriptures', he tells us, 'place strong emphasis on the notion that God's grace can be received by not killing his creatures or harming his creation'.[94]

The notion that Eastern religions can be seen as an alternative to modes of being or thinking that cause environmental degradation has been challenged by a number of scholars. It has been argued that it relies on essentialist categories such as the East and the West, the pre-colonial and the colonial. In his critique of the arguments offered by Lynn White Jr., Thomas S. Derr rejected such an essentialist perspective by pointing out that examples of human exploitation of nature can be found even in the history of non-Christian cultures.[95] In an essay, Poul Pedersen offers interesting insights into the cultural politics that may be involved in essentialist claims about environmentally beneficial traditions. He argues that such claims are often made by communities eager to invent, for themselves, 'a differentiated cultural space which separates them from that materialist and modernist West that they hold responsible for the environmental crisis and that in many cases was their colonial oppressor'.[96] Through the imagining of 'a glorious ecological past', they seek to 'demonstrate to themselves and to the world that their traditions, far from being obsolete and out of touch with modern reality, express a truth of urgent relevance for the future of the Earth'.[97]

One may argue that Rabindranath's thoughts on Indian and Western perceptions of nature demonstrated a tendency towards essentialism. Nevertheless, it is important for us to recognize that he rejected narrow chauvinism and the politics of hostility. Rabindranath did not entirely reject what he saw as the Western way of dealing with nature. His essay 'The Teacher' discusses the differences between the Indian view of nature and the Western view in terms of the distinction between meditative thought and action. Indian spirituality emphasizes the apprehension of the divine through meditation and the cultivation of love for all forms of life. Western humanity, in contrast, communicates with nature not only through love but also through action. Curiously, he mentions Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as a representative parable of what he describes as 'the heroic love-adventure of the West, the active wooing of the earth'.[98] It is 'a story … in which solitary Man is face to face with solitary Nature, coaxing her, co-operating with her, exploring her secrets, using all his faculties to win her help'.[99] Interestingly, in this essay, we find the presence of a set of common gendered tropes – the identification of nature with femininity and of culture with masculinity. However, his ethical and intellectual commitment to Western scientific rationality can be regarded

as a testimony to his respect for what he regarded as the Western mode of active engagement with nature.

IV

Re-imagining the **Tapovana***: A Poet's Abode*

In a letter written a few months before the genesis of his school, Rabindranath described Santiniketan as a beautiful place. To him, the place seemed to be full of joy and peace. 'Here the task of bearing the burden of life is easy and simple', he remarked.[100] For Rabindranath, being away from urban life was important. In 'My School' he writes: 'I selected a beautiful place, far away from … town life…'[101] In another essay that has the same title, we find a detailed description of the landscape in and around Santiniketan:

> All round our *ashram* is a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon except for sparsely-growing stunted date-palms and prickly shrubs struggling with ant-hills. Below the level of the field there extend numberless mounds and tiny hillocks of red gravel and pebbles of all shapes and colours, intersected by narrow channels of rain water. Not far away towards the south near the village can be seen through the intervals of a row of palm trees the gleaming surface of steel-blue water, collected in a hollow of the ground. A road used by the village people … goes meandering through the lonely fields, with its red dust staring in the sun. Travellers coming up this road can see from a distance on the summit of the undulating ground the spire of a temple and the top of a building, indicating the Shanti-Niketan *ashram*, among its *amlaki* groves and its avenue of stately *sal* trees.[102]

Needless to say, the landscape described in these writings does not really approximate the forest. In fact, Rabindranath's father had bought a tract of barren land. In his memoirs, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya (1861–1932), the first resident of the ashram, mentions that the land purchased by Debendranath Tagore was later transformed into gardens and shady avenues through strenuous labour and substantial expenditure. The soil was made fertile, trees were planted and attempts were made, albeit unsuccessfully, to dig a water tank.[103] The gardens created there served as a surrogate for the forest. About the gardens, Rabindranath wrote: 'There is a shady mango-grove and a few other trees from which we get the green life of the forest'.[104]

In some of his writings, his descriptions of the landscape seem to invest it with a spiritual significance – 'The sky here seems penetrated with the voice of the infinitude, making the peace of its daybreak and stillness of its night profound with meaning'.[105] The landscape at Santiniketan reminded him of the eternity of nature's processes. In that landscape, he sought to discover a vision of eternal time, a vision that helped him link the present with the past. In one of the sermons published as a part of the collection *Santiniketan*, he

describes a moment of visionary experience. He describes an evening when the beauty and peacefulness of the sky above his ashram reminded him of that moment in India's history when the ashrams of the *rishi*s truly existed. The sight evoked, for him, a vision of that age of 'simple life and deep *sadhana*'.[106]

Not surprisingly, the idea of the *tapovana* is often evoked in the Santiniketan memoirs. Pramathanath Bishi (1901–1985) evokes the idea in his description of Dwijendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's eldest brother. Dwijendranath, a brilliant poet, philosopher and mathematician, spent the last two decades of his life in Santiniketan. His dwelling, a cottage surrounded by trees, was regularly visited by inmates of the ashram and visitors from the outside world. In the memoirs, he is portrayed as a saintly person whose otherworldly outlook often amused others.[107] Bishi writes that Dwijendranath's way of living reminded him of the *rishi*s and the *tapovana*s of ancient India. He speaks of Dwijendranath's compassion for his non-human companions – the birds and the squirrels who surrounded him whenever he was in the garden.[108]

Needless to say, Rabindranath had a similar capacity for compassion and empathy. His songs, poems and prose writings articulate his sense of communion with the natural world. Moreover, in memoirs written by others, we find lively and intimate images of his love for trees, birds and animals. In her memoir, which focuses on the 1930s, Rani Chanda (1912–1997) describes how he expressed his affection for trees and how he lovingly nurtured the young saplings in his garden.[109] She tells us that the poet loved to feed Lalu, the stray dog who regularly joined him during breakfast.[110] The poet's affection did not exclude the angry peacock that generally resented the presence of human beings. It, however, seemed to like him and often perched on a wall near his desk.[111] Indeed, in the memoirs, we find interesting anecdotes about the poet's compassion for all living beings. The poet Buddhadeva Bose (1908–1974) writes that Rabindranath was against the idea of killing any of the snakes that were regularly seen in Santiniketan in those days.[112]

Rathindranath Tagore, Rabindranath's eldest son, inherited his father's creative relationship with nature. A trained agronomist and a versatile artist, Rathindranath was deeply interested in experimental gardening. The garden he and his associates planned and created at his residence in Santiniketan was a spectacular outcome of this creative engagement with gardening.[113] It should be mentioned here that a sense of kinship with nature profoundly influenced Santiniketan's conception of architecture. The architectural forms designed by artists such as Rathindranath Tagore and Surendranath Kar (1892–1970) epitomized this principle. These were designed in a way that allowed them to blend into the natural setting.

The natural setting in Santiniketan played a crucial role in the project of reuniting the human child with nature. Describing the locale, Rabindranath remarked: 'We are in the heart of nature…'[114] The pupils 'came from the overcrowded cities, hungering for food at the breast of their Mother Nature, the food of life'.[115] The Santiniketan song, composed by the poet, expresses a sense of closeness and kinship with the natural setting:

> In the peace of her silent shadows we dwell, in the green of her fields.
> Her mornings come and her evenings bringing down the caress of the sky;
> The stillness of her shady paths is thrilled by the whisper of the wood;
> Her amlaki groves tremble with the rapture of rustling leaves.[116]

In his writings, Rabindranath persistently emphasizes the need to cultivate a sense of kinship with nature and responsiveness to its processes: 'When nature herself sends her message we ought to acknowledge its compelling invitation'.[117] He writes that at his institution joyous participation in nature's processes is no less important than the day-to-day pedagogic procedure: 'Clouds gather above the rows of palm trees without any previous notice; we gladly submit to its sudden suggestion and run wildly away from our Sanskrit grammar. To alienate our sympathy from the world of birds and trees is a barbarity which is not allowed in my institution'.[118] 'Such sympathy', he writes, is 'crushed by routine which takes no count of nature's claims and does not keep open the path for this great world to find its place in the soul of man'.[119]

At his ashram, Rabindranath intended to introduce a distinctive pedagogy whose imperatives did not clash with nature. In fact, he felt that in order to be effective, the pedagogic process needed to reconcile itself with nature. He writes that at his ashram, children find themselves in 'their natural environment', an environment 'where their mind has its true delight, where it can taste knowledge, its food, with a joy, a relish, that is necessary for its assimilation'.[120] Here, I quote a passage where he describes how he has been trying to translate this ideal into day-to-day pedagogical processes:

> I have open-air classes because I suffered, when I was young, from … the deadness of the walls and everything which was dull and gloomy and colourless … I sit in the midst of the boys … and they have the right to interrupt me to question me, and now and then to show signs of restlessness … I allow them sometimes to leave their lessons and to look more closely at the things which attract their eyes. Very often they call my attention to some strange birds that have come and perched on the bough ... And then I talk to them about that bird … This constant movement of their mind is necessary for them. It is the method which nature has adopted in her own school for the young.[121]

For Rabindranath, the natural environment of Santiniketan was a potential educator.

> The surrounding Nature was a great teacher to us. She moulded our daily life in the spirit of beauty and delight, harmony and colour, and caused us to meditate upon our inner being. It was Nature that inspired me to write songs, dramas and poems dedicated to her. We had our

> dances and seasonal festivals and the whole place actually rang with the students' happy voices and music. Surely nature helped them and us in forming our outlook and creating an atmosphere. [122]

Typically, this intimate relationship with nature is a prominent theme in the memoirs authored by members of the ashram community. Shivani (1923–2003), a young girl from Almora, was admitted to Patha-Bhavana, the ashram school in 1935. In her memoir, *Amader Shantiniketan*, she describes the open-air classes. It is a beautiful passage that deserves to be quoted:

> Our classes were not closed in within walls that shut out the outer world, nor did they have ceilings to close our minds. As we sat under the canopy of the Ashram's trees, the blue sky spread over us for as far as we could see. Never did any teacher ever admonish a student for following the flight of a bird. If our fingers ached after writing, we were free to put down our pens and stroll away to hear the Santhal tribals who often passed the Ashram's fields as they went about their work, singing or playing a haunting melody on a flute. When we tired of doing geometry or algebra, we were not punished for letting our minds wander or for following the dance of squirrels as they chased each other up a tree. The cooing doves and pigeons came to entertain us and helped us learn the dates of the three battles of Panipat so painlessly that they have remained etched in our minds forever.[123]

Clearly, this educational ideal represented a radical departure from conventional pedagogy and from the idea of discipline that such pedagogy foregrounded. In the essay 'My School', Rabindranath describes an interesting incident:

> I well remember the surprise and annoyance of an experienced headmaster, reputed to be a successful disciplinarian, when he saw one of the boys of my school climbing a tree and choosing a fork of the branches for settling down to his studies. I had to say to him in explanation that 'childhood is the only period of life when a civilized man can exercise his choice between the branches of a tree and his drawing room chair, and should I deprive this boy of that privilege because I, as a grown-up man, am barred from it?'[124]

This account can be read as a description of a clash between two mutually opposed ideas of education. It may be mentioned here that the 'disciplinarian' described here left the ashram because he could not accept what he perceived as an absence of discipline.

At Rabindranath's ashram, cultivation of kinship with nature relied heavily on the arts. He saw the category of the aesthetic as an effective medium through which the human mind could interact with nature. Hence, songs,

dance and seasonal festivals were an important part of the way of life he attempted to imagine. They embodied, as it were, a variety of responses to the multifariousness of nature's beauty. He writes: 'We have … the open beauty of the sky, and the different seasons revolve before our eyes in all the magnificence of their colour. Through this perfect touch with nature we took the opportunity of instituting festivals of the seasons'.[125] The 'Basanta Utsav' (the Spring Festival) was introduced in 1907. In 1908, 'Barsha Mangal', the ceremony that celebrates the onset of monsoon, was held for the first time. Briksha Ropana or the tree planting ceremony was introduced by Rabindranath in July 1928.

In his writings on Santiniketan and also in his songs and poems, nature is seen not as a passive backdrop but as an active presence that interacts and intermingles with the human community. In one of the songs regularly sung on the occasion of Briksha Ropana, the tree-planting ceremony, the collective voice of the human community invites young saplings to accept its love and companionship:

> Tender and young trees,
> welcome guests you are
> to our home-yard.
> Come home to us
> In the loving company of men.[126]

The song projects an image of a collectivity that includes nature as well as human beings. The ideal of unity it evokes is directly relevant to our understanding of the spiritual basis of Rabindranath's conception of his ashram. In one of his sermons, Rabindranath describes his ashram as 'a sacred place founded at the confluence of two flows of music' – 'the music of universal nature' and 'the music of the human soul'.[127] He then proceeds to reiterate his belief that India's spiritual traditions recognize God as the one that unites nature with the soul of man.

In a letter published in 1915, Rabindranath explained how he intended to cultivate 'spiritual culture' at his ashram.[128] In that letter he remarked: 'The first help that our boys get here on this path is from the cultivation of love of Nature, and sympathy with all living creatures'.[129] For the poet educator, such 'love' or 'sympathy' was ultimately an expression of the spiritual ethos that saw the human being and the natural setting as spiritually one with each other. Significantly, this ideal of universal oneness could be interpreted as a doctrine that included an idea of the spiritual unity of all humanity. It is interesting to note that in 'The Message of the Forest', Rabindranath's discussion of this ethos ends with a plea for 'universalism'.[130] 'The message of our ancient forest', Rabindranath writes, is 'the message of all-comprehensive union of souls'.[131] The final part of his essay is an attempt to translate this age-old spiritual ideal into a social and political doctrine that is relevant in our time. He concludes by arguing that 'universalism' is the principle by

which India will be able to regain strength and self-respect. 'India', he writes, 'has gained the world through worship – through communion of soul'.[132] While implicitly critiquing Western imperialism, his discussion of India's spirituality therefore proposes an alternative way of gaining the world. This, he asserts, 'is her heritage from her forest sanctuary'.[133] In the next chapter, my focus is on how he sought to realize this ideal through Visva-Bharati, his international university. In that chapter, I seek to examine how he attempted to imagine his ashram as a community that rejected divisive ideologies.

Notes

1 Rabindranath Tagore to Jagadananda Roy, 26 September 1912, File: Jagadananda Roy, Correspondence Files (Bengali), Rabindra-Bhavana Archives, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Translation mine.
2 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 627.
3 See Rabindranath Tagore, 'Shiksha Samasya,' pp. 576–87. In Chapter 1, it has been noted that the term *tapovana* is commonly translated as forest hermitage. In ancient Sanskrit literature, the *tapovana* is shown to be the locale where ashrams exist.
4 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 391.
5 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 393.
6 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 626.
7 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 390.
8 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 391.
9 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 626.
10 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 390.
11 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 626.
12 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 393.
13 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' p. 393.
14 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' pp. 20–7, 24, File: Tagore Essays and Talks (Ref. no. LKE/ TAG/ 5/ C), Papers of L. K. Elmhirst, The Dartington Trust Archive, Devon Record Office, Exeter, UK.
15 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' p. 23.
16 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' p. 22.
17 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' pp. 20–3.
18 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' p. 24.
19 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Teaching to Children the Idea of God,' p. 24.
20 The Industrial Revolution began in the second half of the eighteenth century.
21 William Wordsworth, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' (1807) in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., Vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 296.
22 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight' (1798) in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 458.
23 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight' (1798) in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 458.
24 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (1762; London: Dent, 1963).
25 See Rabindranath Tagore, 'Adhunik Kabya' (1932), in *RR*, vol. 12 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1989), pp. 463–72.
26 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; London: Penguin, 1999).
27 Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

28 See Rabindranath Tagore, 'Aranya-devata,' in *RR*, vol. 14, pp. 372–3, 373.
29 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Aranya-devata,' in *RR*, vol. 14, p. 373. Translation mine.
30 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Aranya-devata,' in *RR*, vol. 14, p. 373. Translation mine.
31 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Aranya-devata,' in *RR*, vol. 14, p. 373. Translation mine.
32 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To the Child' (1925), in *EWRT*, vol. 4, pp. 524–6, 525.
33 Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone, Introduction to *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1–13, 2.
34 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2001).
35 Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 13. *My Reminiscences* is a translation of *Jibansmriti* (1912), Rabindranath's autobiographical account of his childhood and youth.
36 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Shiksha Samasya,' p. 580.
37 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Shiksha Samasya,' p. 580.
38 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Shiksha Samasya,' p. 582. Translation mine.
39 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 156.
40 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 3, p. 642.
41 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 3, p. 642.
42 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.
43 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.
44 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.
45 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.
46 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.
47 Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.
48 Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp, Introduction to *Colonial Cities*, ed. Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), pp. 1–6, 1.
49 Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp, Introduction to *Colonial Cities*, ed. Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), p. 2.
50 Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp, Introduction to *Colonial Cities*, ed. Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), p. 3.
51 Sunil Khilnani writes that in India the colonial city emerged in two distinct stages. During the seventeenth century, the emergence of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay as ports closely linked India to the economies of northern Europe. The second phase saw the genesis of various cantonment cities in the late nineteenth century. See Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 111.
52 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 118.
53 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 118.
54 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 125.

55 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 125.
56 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Modern Age' (1922), in *EWRT*, vol. 2, pp. 538–43, 538.
57 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Modern Age' (1922), in *EWRT*, vol. 2, p. 538.
58 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 156.
59 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Modern Age,' p. 538.
60 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Modern Age,' p. 538.
61 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Modern Age,' p. 538.
62 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 156. Swati Chattopadhyay, however, has challenged the view that the modernity of Calcutta is derivative of Western modernity. She posits a distinctive modernity particular to nineteenth and early twentieth-century Calcutta. She argues that Calcutta's distinctive modernity took shape through 'accommodation and conflict with Western ideals of individuality, progress, and public and private life'. It was, she tells us, a product not only of the 'modern forms and techniques of governance instituted by colonial authority' but also of 'the nationalist – literary, artistic, spatial – ambitions cultivated by the Bengali community'. See Swati Chattopadhyay, pp. 3, 6.
63 Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*: *An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke, 1883).
64 Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, ed. David Leviatin (1890; Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010). Needless to say, the realities analyzed by these commentators were, more or less, common to most of the large cities in Europe and the United States.
65 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*, ed. Philip Smith (1854; New York: Dover Publications, 1995).
66 Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
67 David Schuyler, Introduction to *From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard*, ed. Kermit C. Parsons and David Schuyler (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 2–3.
68 Sunil Khilnani, p. 117.
69 Rabindranath Tagore, poem no. 99 (1918) in *EWRT*, vol. 4. p. 48.
70 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Relation of the Individual to the Universe,' p. 289.
71 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Relation of the Individual to the Universe,' p. 281.
72 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 394.
73 Greg Garrard, p. 35.
74 Greg Garrard, p. 35.
75 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), pp. 9–12.
76 It is assumed that Kalidasa lived approximately in the 5th century AD.
77 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 387.
78 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 154.
79 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 154.
80 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 386.
81 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 386.
82 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 397.
83 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 397.
84 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 388.
85 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 396.
86 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 397.
87 Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as History and Experience in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

88 Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, 'Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth,' in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3–39, 10.

89 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1986). For an analysis of Achebe's portrayal of this ideological shift, see Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, 'Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth,' in *Postcolonial Ecologies*, pp. 6–7.

90 See Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

91 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 225.

92 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 225.

93 Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,' *Science* 155 (1967): pp. 1203–07.

94 O. P. Dwivedi, '*Satyagraha* for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism,' in *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge, International Response*, ed. J. Ronald Engel and Joan Gibb Engel (London: Belhaven Press, 1990), pp. 201–12, 205.

95 Thomas S. Derr, 'Religion's Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis: An Argument Run Amok,' *World View* 18 (1975): pp. 39–45, 43.

96 Poul Pedersen, 'Nature, Religion and Cultural Identity: The Religious Environmentalist Paradigm,' in *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*, ed. Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 258–76, 272.

97 Poul Pedersen, 'Nature, Religion and Cultural Identity: The Religious Environmentalist Paradigm,' in *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*, ed. Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 258–76, 272.

98 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' p. 159.

99 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Teacher,' pp. 158–9.

100 Rabindranath Tagore to Jagadish Chandra Bose, September 1901, in *Chithipatra*, vol. 6, p. 38. My translation.

101 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' *EWRT*, vol. 3, p. 642.

102 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' *EWRT*, vol. 2, p. 396.

103 Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, 'Santiniketaner Smriti,' in Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Jnanendranath Chattopadhyaya, *Santiniketan Ashram*, pp. 13–14.

104 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To the Child,' p. 524.

105 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 2, p. 398.

106 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sundar' (1911), in *RR*, vol. 8 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1988), pp. 611–14, 611. Translation mine.

107 Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Gurudeb O Santiniketan* (Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh, 1981), pp. 118–33.

108 Pramathanath Bishi, *Rabindranath O Santiniketan*, pp. 99.

109 Rani Chanda, *Gurudeb* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1962), pp. 27, 93.

110 Rani Chanda, *Gurudeb* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1962), pp. 100–01.

111 Rani Chanda, *Gurudeb* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1962), pp. 99–100.

112 Buddhadeva Bose, *Shab Peyechhir Deshe* (1941; Kolkata: Vikalp, 1998), pp. 38–40.

113 See Arunendu Bandyopadhyay, *Santiniketan Sthapatya Paribesh Ebong Rabindranath* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2000).

114 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To School Children at the Victoria Theatre' (1927), in *EWRT*, vol. 4, pp. 564–70, 565. A lecture delivered in 1927.
115 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To the Child,' p. 525.
116 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Santiniketan' (1915), in *EWRT*, vol. 4, p. 60. The Bengali song 'Amader Santiniketan' of which this is a translation was composed in 1911.
117 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 627.
118 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Educational Mission of the Visva-Bharati,' p. 627.
119 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 4, p. 521.
120 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To School Children at the Victoria Theatre,' p. 565.
121 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To School Children at the Victoria Theatre,' p. 565.
122 Rabindranath Tagore, 'To Students at Santiniketan' (1938), in *EWRT*, vol. 4, pp. 601–05, 602.
123 Shivani, *Amader Shantiniketan*, pp. 19–20.
124 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 2, p. 391.
125 Rabindranath Tagore, 'My School,' in *EWRT*, vol. 4, p. 521.
126 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Tender and Young Trees,' in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems and Songs*, trans. Kshitis Roy (Kolkata: Thema, 2012), p. 230. Translation of the Bengali song 'Ay ay ay amader anganey' (1929).
127 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bhakta,' in *RR*, vol. 7, p. 708. My translation.
128 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Tagore and His Boys,' p. 734.
129 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Tagore and His Boys,' p. 734.
130 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 400.
131 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 400.
132 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 398.
133 Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Message of the Forest,' p. 398.