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Enframing the River: Technology, Power, and Resistance in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Waterfall*

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Abstract— *This article reads Rabindranath Tagore's play The Waterfall through Martin Heidegger's philosophy of technology. Tagore and Heidegger share concerns about modern technological rationality and its ecological consequences. Tagore's ethical, spiritual, and anti-colonial views on nature and technology complement Heidegger's ontological investigation of technological enframing. Taken together, they allow the dam in The Waterfall to be read as an instance of technological enframing that reduces both nature and human beings to standing-reserve. The article examines how Ranajit and Bibhuti, driven by a desire for technological control, instrumentalise the river and people for political and economic ends. In contrast, Abhijit and Dhananjay stage a spiritual resistance to calculative thinking and mechanical control through meditative openness and ethical responsibility toward nature. Situating the play within contemporary debates on infrastructure, development, and ecological justice, the article emphasises its continuing relevance. Ultimately, the article suggests that reading Tagore alongside Heidegger enables a rethinking of technological power and infrastructural development beyond purely utilitarian ends.*

Keywords— ***enframing, Martin Heidegger, political ecology, Rabindranath Tagore, technological rationality.***

I. INTRODUCTION

With technology's intrusion into modern life, Rabindranath Tagore's critique of mechanical control over nature and people and Martin Heidegger's warnings against the pitfalls of calculative thinking brought about by modern technology offer a critical lens for assessing the dangers of unexamined technological advancement, often mistaken for progress or development. By employing Heidegger's theoretical framework to analyse Tagore's play *The Waterfall*, this article not only widens our understanding of Tagore's ecological vision but also underscores the play's enduring relevance in a time when technology has come to govern most aspects of life. The article also delves into how Tagore's play shares and even anticipates many of Heidegger's concerns regarding modern technology. Given the potential of science for control and subjugation, *The Waterfall* calls for an attitude shift from material pursuit to spiritual unity, from control to letting-be, and from arrogance to humility.

Heidegger's investigation of technology, though profound and fitting, is for the most part ontological and does not engage directly with questions of political, social, and environmental justice. Tagore's critique, on the other hand, drawn from Indian spiritual traditions and anti-colonial resistance, raises historically grounded social, political, and ethical considerations as it evaluates the role of modern technology in our lives. In this way, Tagore's views strengthen and supplement Heidegger's call for a poetic dwelling in the world. Both Tagore and Heidegger firmly believed in the crucial role that art plays in our lives. Conclusively, this article finds it meaningful to explore the areas where the two thinkers overlap.

Tagore's ideas remain profoundly relevant in navigating contemporary issues surrounding technological progress, development, and environmental ethics. His writings and speeches display ecological depth and foresight. His dream of a liberated humanity, spiritually whole, creative, compassionate, and in harmony with the environment, is a valuable inheritance and a worthy goal. In *Speaking with Nature*, the historian Ramachandra Guha (2024) hails Rabindranath Tagore as "a myriad-minded environmentalist" (p. 1). He claims that Tagore was a precocious environmentalist and that his "thoughts on how nature shaped human life, and how humans reshaped nature in turn, bear recovery in their own right" (p. 2). He observes that most biographies and critical studies on Tagore have overlooked the environmental aspects of his writings (p. 2). Given the depth and relevance of Tagore's ecological ideas, this study seeks to help bridge this gap.

The freeing of the stream in *The Waterfall* has often been read as symbolically depicting the mind's internal emancipation from external impositions (Kripalani, 1950). It has also been read as Tagore's critique of the misuse of technology for imperial or colonial hegemony (Kar, 2018). The studies that deal with the concept of the machine as represented in the play read the dam as a symbol of technical modernity that is unmindful of its adverse impact on nature (Kalaiarasan, 2013; Ta, 2018). Heidegger, too, has been widely applied to discussions on technology and environment. However, Tagore and Heidegger are seldom read together, and relatively little sustained critical attention has been paid to how the dam in *The Waterfall* functions as a technological force that instrumentalises not only those against whom it is used but also its users. The play suggests that technology has the potential to exacerbate global issues such as large-scale war and ecological disruption. Without a poetic spiritual resistance, human beings can easily be its instruments rather than the other way round. Heidegger gives us critical terms to analyse and discuss the nuances of technical thinking. Therefore, reading Tagore alongside Heidegger's philosophy of technology greatly helps us better visualise dam infrastructure as enframing the river and to understand how literature can be employed to propose a shift from a calculative to a meditative mindset. A meditative mindset resists instrumentalisation and seeks to let nature operate on its own terms, preferring humanity's synchronisation with its rhythms.

II. HEIDEGGER'S VIEWS ON TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE

Borgmann (2007) claims, "it can be argued that technology is the most important topic of Heidegger's thought" and "the technological culture is for Heidegger the decisive environment of humans in the late modern era, and their most fundamental welfare depends on their ability to pass through technology into another kind of world" (p. 420). Heidegger's (1977) "The Question Concerning Technology" examines man's relationship with the essence of technology. For him, this essence is not to be found in technology's innumerable mechanical manifestations but instead in the revelation of the truth, or *aletheia,* in the gathering together of the causes of technology. In addition to the revealing which happens by itself, *physis*, Heidegger discusses two distinct modes of revealing by human beings—first, *bringing-forth* or *poesis,* which is how anything is brought into presence on its terms, and second, *challenging-forth*, which is how anything is forcefully brought into presence in a reductive manner, merely as a means to an end. While traditional tools generally work in harmony with nature to bring-forth new aspects of truth, in the case of modern technology, the revealing takes the form of challenging-forth, wherein nature as well as humans are ordered into a *standing-reserve* or *bestand,* i.e., reduced to the status of resources, ready at hand to serve their utility. He calls the latter kind of revealing *enframing* or *Ge-stell.* It blocks the possibility of bringing-forth the truth and instead discloses the world as a calculable and controllable resource.

In his discussion of Heideggerian Ecophilosophy, Greg Garrard (2007) mentions that enframing "discloses beings always in its narrow and reductive terms" (p. 32). This means that they lose their rich multiplicity of possible meanings. The technological mode of thinking poses the danger of human beings getting caught up in the unending desire to control, order, regulate, store, and consume nature. Eventually, Heidegger turns to art's potential to reorient human beings and rescue them from technological rationality. In *Discourse on Thinking,* Heidegger (1966) advances *meditative thinking* that involves *letting-be* of the desire to conquer and control and leads to *releasement* or *Gelassenheit*– a reflective openness to mystery and uncertainty that is inherent in each entity (pp. 54–57).

For Heidegger, "one of the crucial modes of proper letting-be or unhindered disclosure of being is poetry" (Garrard, 2007, p. 31). Poetry can lead man from calculative to meditative thinking. This shift is vital for having an authentic relationship with the self, the world, and other human beings. This article contends that Heidegger's views provide insights into the nature of our technology-induced crises, helping us better understand our position and formulate effective responses. They offer a conceptual framework for assessing the operation of technological power in *The Waterfall*. Additionally, he provides a critical vocabulary for investigating and

discussing the dam as a technological force that actively enframes nature to serve as a tool of political domination and control. In this process, the king and ministers who deploy the technology are also reduced to technical administrators dependent on dam infrastructure for territorial control rather than sovereign rulers governing through ethical leadership guided by justice, morality, welfare, and similar values.

III. TAGORE'S VIEWS ON TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE

Tagore was wary of technology's disruptive potential and believed that a mechanistic society lacking a deep spiritual base would inevitably use it for destructive ends. The perverted parade of machine guns, poison gases, tanks, napalm, and other weapons of mass destruction developed and deployed in World War I contributed towards that mistrust. His writings echo the belief that humankind is not spiritually ready for powers capable of manipulating the earth on a large scale, and that it is in the best interests of society to prioritise spiritual strength, creative fulfilment, and universal love instead. He believed in a shared divinity among all human beings that extends to non-human entities such as other organisms, mountains, seas, and rivers. Thus, despite humanism being "central to all he did and thought in life" (Dhar, 1973, p. 147), Tagore avoids anthropocentrism and the consequential subjugation of nature.

Tagore believed that the excess of mechanical power and its underlying desire for the maximisation of economic profit is what led Western civilisation to embrace imperialism and colonisation. In his essay entitled "East and West", he speaks of the skewed East-West relationship: "The West has not sent out its humanity to meet the man in the East, but only its machine" (Tagore, 1922a, p. 109). In 1922, the same year that he published *The Waterfall*, Tagore discussed the Western man's inclination for mechanical domination of nature in his speech "Robbery of the Soil":

Through machinery of tremendous power this race made such an addition to their natural capacity for gathering and holding, that their career of plunder entirely outstripped nature's power for recuperation. Their profit makers dug big holes in the stored capital of the planet. They created wants which were unnatural and provision for these wants was forcibly extracted from nature (1975, p. 38).

Additionally, in his essay, "The Spirit of Freedom," he states that the West is "continually producing mechanical power in excess of its spiritual control," and "India has produced a system of mechanical control in excess of its vitality" (Tagore, 1922a, p. 140). Thus, the West advances using science and technology, but applies itself to attaining economic superiority and power over the rest of the world and nature. India, on the other hand, has no dearth of spiritual knowledge but is locked into mechanical social customs that repress individual freedom and dissuade people from the path to true inner emancipation. Moreover, under the influence of colonial cultures, seeking economic profit at the cost of other human beings and nature has become the norm. Tagore's use of the word "mechanical" to describe the power that controls, in reference to both the East and the West, reflects his distrust of mechanism. The idea entails a reduction of an organic, interconnected nature into fragmented parts. This oversimplification poses a great risk owing to a false belief that man can tinker with one aspect of nature without affecting the other.

Tagore's vision finds expression in his publications. He presages the conflict that the power of technology can cause in society. He sees entire nations as "machines of power" pitted against each other in an endless strife for dominance. World War I, with its weapons of mass destruction, had ruled out the hope of humanity reserving technology for the public good. Even though Tagore is sceptical of the ability of the material-minded man to handle technology for progressive purposes, he is not against human ingenuity or progress. He steadfastly believes in human creativity and wishes for society to better channel its energy towards spiritually harmonious ends. He feels that righteous action is better than resignation from action, and that humans must selflessly endeavour to improve and elevate their society and surroundings. Arguably, human progress, for Tagore, is essentially personal and not impersonal, the fruits of progress shared by the community and not by the individual, per se.

Tagore's closeness to nature is reflected in the number of natural metaphors and symbols he employs. He writes, "If our country wants fruit and shade, let it abandon brick-and-mortar erections and come down to the soil" (1919, p. 26). He views nature as a spiritual nurturer instead of a resource to be exploited at whim. He sees the modern ideal of mechanical utilitarianism as detrimental to nature and as a deterrent in the human quest for spiritual fulfilment. In "The Modern Age," he reflects, "A relationship of pure utility humiliates man—it ignores the rights and needs of his deeper nature; it feels no compunction in maltreating and killing things of beauty that can never be restored" (Tagore, 1922a, p. 115). In "Robbery of the Soil," he critiques the modern economic system driven by greed and ambition that has led to immoderate inequalities (1975, pp. 32–41). He believes that nature must be respected for what it is. He writes, "Streams, lakes, and oceans are there on this earth. They exist not for the hoarding of water

exclusively each within its own area" (Tagore, 1975, p. 39). The unmindful hoarding of water in an exclusive area for political purposes and the necessity of its emancipation from such bondage serve as the key thematic concerns of *The Waterfall.* Ultimately, Tagore stands for freedom and harmony and is against artificial barriers that separate human beings from the divinity in nature and in themselves.

IV. READING *THE WATERFALL* WITH HEIDEGGER'S CRITICAL LENS

In his writings, Tagore differentiates the mechanistic reductionism of the West from the holistic spiritualist traditions of the East. One of the symbols he uses to represent the former is that of a machine, a metal manifestation of the anthropocentric desire to manipulate nature into submission. Simultaneously, he uses the symbol of a stream to represent the flow of universal love and spiritual joy. In his play, *The Waterfall,* we witness the interplay of these ideas. This section investigates these symbols in the larger context of Tagore's ecological philosophy and his critique of industrial modernity. Using Heidegger's framework, it analyses how the dam in Muktadhara must be read as technological enframing rather than mere symbolism. Tagore's play dramatises the conflict facilitated by the technological power that seeks to instrumentalise nature and people. It reveals Tagore's concerns regarding humanity's technological excesses and misplaced material pursuits. The play makes the case for a more spiritually grounded existence that resists enframing by letting-be.

The Waterfall symbolically features nuanced interrelations among human beings, nature, and technology and lends itself readily to analysis by a Heideggerian conceptual framework. Kalyan Sen Gupta (2005) is a rare voice that observes "striking affinities between Rabindranath's reflections on nature and technology and those of Martin Heidegger," and states, "For Heidegger, as for Tagore, it is not that this technological way of revealing is false. But it is nonetheless 'monstrous'. For it 'drives out every other possibility of revealing'" (p. 65). Heidegger (1977) wants us to ponder over the "monstrousness that reigns" in comparing "The Rhine" as dammed up into the power works, and "The Rhine" as uttered out of the artwork, in Holderlin's hymn by that name" (p. 16). In *The Waterfall* the dam is referred to by the stranger in the opening scene as a "monstrous obstruction in the sky" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 535), by Hubba as "black iron monster" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 558), and by Batu as the altar of "demon thirst" on which humans are sacrificed (Tagore, 1922b, pp. 544, 546). The personification of the dam indicates that it is not a neutral instrument but has political agency. The demonisation indicates that its operation is sinister, at least to the extent that it objectifies the stream and the people.

Despite the cultural and temporal gap, the philosophical resonance between Tagore and Heidegger's perspectives is striking. Both of them explore the same fundamental question: How does modern technology affect our relationship with nature and power? While Tagore expresses his concerns regarding mechanical excesses by dramatically portraying the conflicts surrounding a dam, Heidegger theorises technological thinking that seeks to order nature and people into a standing-reserve, blocking any other meaning than that based on its utility. While Heidegger is concerned about modern technology causing the loss of an authentic relationship between man and nature, Tagore is worried about it facilitating the loss of spiritual harmony between the two. This article acknowledges that Heidegger does not directly offer spiritual or anti-colonial perspectives, which are central to Tagore's thought, grounded in Indian philosophical traditions and the anti-colonial struggle of the Indian Independence Movement. However, this does not detract from the usefulness of Heidegger's conceptual insights and vocabulary for understanding how modern technology reduces human beings and nature to mere resources, a key concern of Tagore's play as well as of our times.

King Ranajit's dam in *The Waterfall,* a constant presence in the backdrop, is the perfect symbol of the enframing of nature, reducing the free stream to an instrument of political control. Ranajit perceives the dam as a convenient means to suppress the rebellion in the subjugated territory of Shiu-tarai. He embodies the imperialist desire to maintain dominion, irrespective of the means and costs. Because technology promises tangible and calculable results, he prefers using Bibhuti's dam over the diplomatic means suggested by his minister for dealing with the people of Shiu-tarai. Despite famines in the territory, he expects them to pay their taxes. Justifying the use of the dam to have strategic control, he asserts that "aliens must be won over by fear" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 539). By doing this, he effectively instrumentalises hunger and thirst, which are no longer merely met by ecological agency, but require social and political agency as well. His kingdom thus becomes a closed, mechanised system with little room for empathy and humanity. His endless need for control can be explained by Heidegger's remarks that "regulating and securing even become the chief characteristics of the challenging revealing" (1977, p. 16).

Bibhuti's stated object behind building the dam "was to make Man triumphant over the sands and water and stones, which conspired against him" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 537). In

positioning nature as the antithesis of man, he justifies man's need to conquer it. For him, the dam represents man's elevation to Godhood due to his ability to bend nature to his will. His steel machine overbears the spires of the temple of Bhairava, symbolising a dominance of the material over the spiritual. He embodies mechanistic and anthropocentric hubris, stating, "It is my mission to prove, by the force of the Machine, that God's throne is ours." (Tagore, 1922b, p. 537). Tagore's choice of beginning the words 'Man' and 'Machine' with capital letters highlights Bibhuti's single-minded focus. He is the epitome of a man driven by technological thought. Heidegger (1977) says of such a man that he "exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth" (p. 27). Indeed, Bibhuti's arrogant pursuit of mechanical mastery makes him inhuman. He becomes an extension of the machine he controls.

Ranajit and Bibhuti's philosophy is, at best, an oversimplification in that they consider nature as a simple object to manipulate and human beings as mere subjects to serve the interests of the nation. Their technological moorings enframe the river as a geopolitical tool. They can only conceive of the river as an instrument, ready to inflict drought or flood on the people of Shiu-tarai at their command. The possibility of the river as an ecological or spiritual entity is lost to them. In subjugating the river, they subjugate not only the people of Shiu-tarai but themselves as well. The resulting lack of empathy in them is underlined by their ability to readily sacrifice the lives of Uttarakut's citizens for dam construction.

Several citizens of Uttarakut consider the machine majestic and express jingoistic pride over its mastery of the river and organise a celebration to honour Bibhuti and the dam. While satirising the mindlessness of such characters by their comical presentation, he gives serious pathos and voice to the common folk who are disturbed by the dam. The stranger in the opening scene felt that its towering presence was sacrilegious, referring to it as a "monster," "dragon's skull with fleshless jaws," thereby setting it up as diabolical and unnatural, antithetical to nature and the God Bhairava (Tagore, 1922b, p. 535). The dam is also referred to as "a ghost," or "a shriek rending the sky" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 558). The king's minister called it an "engine of punishment" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 553). The citizens of Uttarakut note in "The Song of the Machine" that its claws wrench bare "the entrails of the earth" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 538). Tagore artfully deploys such visceral imagery throughout the play to evoke pathos against the damage caused by the limitless exploitation of nature.

Furthermore, it takes Bibhuti twenty-five years and all the labour he could find or force to build the dam. The construction was tainted by the blood of several Uttarakut citizens who lost their lives in building it. It has been stated, "Over and over again it gave way, and men perished smothered with sand and earth; and others got washed away by the flood" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 536). We get glimpses of characters like Amba, who lost her son and Batu, who lost his grandsons to the dam construction. Amba hysterically roamed about looking for her lost son. Batu, on the other hand, was psychologically disturbed in his grief and went about warning others. Through the play's thrust on the deep human anguish caused as a side-effect of dam construction, Tagore underscores the debilitating effects of treating human beings as mere means to an end. It is enframing that "banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 27), which implies that enframing disregards people's autonomy, personality, and emotions.

Heidegger argues, "The essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 4). Thus, Heidegger does not equate technology with its essence. For him, the essence of technology is in the enframing of the world's resources, including humans and nature, in terms of their instrumentality. All resources are valued so long as they can be optimised, stored, or exploited, leaving no room for factoring in the unpredictable and insurmountable aspects of nature and us. This is the true danger posed by technology, which turns everything into a standing-reserve/bestand. In the play, enframing the river leads to the false notion that it is merely a stored resource, nothing more. The river's unpredictability as a natural force is easily ignored, as is the unpredictability of human behaviour. Human emotions, which are incalculable, are conveniently brushed aside. The king and the royal engineer do not consider how the embankment might serve the people, what it makes them feel and what it costs to build. Subjugation of Shiu-tarai seems to be their single-minded objective, and they dam Muktadhara despite the losses and the risks. Putting the potential flood under textual erasure is not an averting of catastrophe but the inability to articulate or countenance it. The play's culmination shows how a one-dimensional understanding of nature leads to disaster.

According to Heidegger, as soon as human beings perceive anything as a standing-reserve, they too become standing-reserves. It may seem that a man is ordering technology and not the other way round, but man fails to "apprehend Enframing as a claim, that he fails to see himself as the one spoken to" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 27). People like Ranajit and Bibhuti become cogs in a huge machine running towards the endless ambition of controlling everything. Instead of ruling through moral

leadership, guided by justice and welfare, they become reliant on the machine for control over rebelling territories. Their sovereignty is reduced to the role of technical administration that constantly tends to the technological infrastructure for its perpetuation. For Heidegger, this way of existence is inauthentic and devoid of truth. The inauthenticity stemming from modern technology is highlighted by Tagore in how the dam is intuitively experienced by most characters in the play as an unnatural and unsettling presence. To most of the audience, as to most of the characters, it comes across as something monstrous, summoned from some alien world of fearful abstractions, and forced to be a tangible reality in the land, magically binding the flowing waters of Muktadhara.

The play could also be read as an indictment of colonisation enabled by technological thinking. When man views nature as a standing-reserve, he feels a desire to prepare it to ensure it is so, i.e., ready at hand to serve his purposes, conquered, categorised, ordered, and stored. Europe's expansionist temperament and unfavourable treatment of colonies are naturally such exercises. Tagore critiques the Western idea of the nation-state and its propensity for imposing homogeneity in thought and action. He condemns the divisions it created in society based on race, religion, language, etc. In the play, King Ranajit represents governance led by jingoism, expansionism, technological and imperial control. People are used to facilitate control over the resources of the occupied colony, and vice versa. Thus, Ranajit wants goods and high taxes from the people of Shiu-tarai, and when they resist, he responds by controlling their water resources. Colonisation means dominating not only the people of Shiu-tarai but also nature, represented by Muktadhara.

Across Tagore's oeuvre, God is seen as omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Foreshadowing how the dam would be destroyed, at the beginning of the play, a messenger tells Bibhuti, "The God, who breaks, does not need the broad road for his passage. The smallest holes, which escape our notice, are enough for him" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 537). The phrase "escaping our notice" is significant for understanding Tagore's critique of reductionist science. Despite its advancements, there are subjects beyond the grasp of scientific knowledge. The tiniest structural weakness is enough to break the largest of dams. This view suggests that, despite its claim to do so, technological thinking alone may be insufficient to grasp any complex problem holistically enough to offer sustainable solutions. Also, blind faith in technology may be counterproductive.

Flowing by Bhairava's temple, Muktadhara represents the spiritual as well as organic flow of life, the cycle of nature. It represents what Heidegger refers to as *physis*, or the revealing that happens by itself. When not enframed, the stream carries in itself the potential for multiplicity of meanings. For Abhijit, as for all other life, it comes across as the embodiment of the spiritual mother, the origin of everything else. Abhijit utters, "I find my mother's tongue in the murmurs of this water" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 539). This depiction is an assertion of familiarity and familiality. It closes the distinction between man and nature, positing everything as interconnected. The crown prince was found beside Muktadhara; he dreams of it, is disturbed by its damming, sacrifices himself to liberate it, and is ultimately assimilated into it. He states, "The secret of my own life has its symbol in that waterfall of Muktadhara. When I saw its movements shackled, I received a shock at the very root of my being" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 545). Such a poetic epiphany is necessary for escaping instrumentality. Beginning with a recognition of his origin, followed by learning and good deeds, leading up to the realisation of the interconnectedness of everything, the consequential shattering of the egoistic bindings, renunciation, and ultimately, re-assimilation with nature/divinity, Abhijit's narrative arc offers a spiritual ideal to be followed.

Abhijit does not seek to control nature or people. Observing a lonely bird against the setting sun, he sees himself in it and remarks, "How beautiful is this world!" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 545). Abhijit's love feeds his desire to clear the obstacles that humans raise between themselves and nature. This motivates him to break the wall built by Uttarakut at Nandi Pass to block Shiu-tarai's trade, and eventually to demolish the dam, thereby opposing the state's regulations that restrain nature and people. Speaking of the dam, which he calls an obstruction, he tells his brother Sanjay, "I cannot tolerate this hideousness. It kills the music of the earth, and laughs its sinister laughter" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 545). In giving heed to a spiritual and poetic call of nature, he showcases that he is worthy of being one with nature, a destiny that he achieves. His sacrifice and the undoing of the dam can be seen as the ultimate effort towards releasement and letting the river be. He overcomes the will to power that was within his grasp as the crown prince of Uttarakut. In refusing power as well as the technology that perpetuates it, he maintains his individuality and integrity.

For K. R. Kripalani (1950, p. 4), Abhijit's philosophical and spiritual identification with Mukta-dhara is the central theme of the play. Eventually, the title 'Mukta-dhara' makes a case for the liberation of the dammed stream, symbolising the unshackling of nature. It situates humanity's spiritual elevation in recognising and respecting the spirituality inherent in the materiality of nature. Fundamentally, humanity and nature are not

distinct. Abhijit represents this idea of oneness with nature to the extent that he identifies the stream as a mother, has visions of the river, finds peace in the flowing water, rids it of Bibhuti's mechanical contraption, and, in the process, gets re-assimilated into the nature he sprang from.

Dhananjay, the ascetic, is the voice of wisdom in the play, a sage who fearlessly promotes non-violent resistance against Uttarakut's unjust actions, such as the building of the wall at Nandi Pass to block Shiu-terai's trade, tax collection at the cost of the hunger of the people, and ultimately the bondage of Muktadhara. He symbolises meditative and spiritual thinking that does not succumb to techno-political pressures. Unafraid of the likely incarceration or execution, he continues to propound spiritual teachings. When restrained by the king, he holds a mirror up to him and sings, "Only that will remain which must. King! You can keep nothing by straining" and "You make a mistake. King, when you think that the world, which you take by force is your world. What you keep free, you gain. But seize it, and it eludes you!" (Tagore, 1922b, p. 553). The idea of straining for something or taking it by force suggests that the thing is reduced to a limited meaning. The idea of keeping free suggests that the thing is allowed to be as it naturally is. Thus, Dhananjaya voices Tagore's view that nature and people must be free and allowed to be, resonating with Heidegger's idea of releasement or letting-be.

Tagore saw nature as a nurturer but never a slave; humankind may take sustenance from it, but any attempt to bind, control, and exploit nature leads to sick self-cannibalising, ultimately destroying society itself. *The Waterfall* perfectly showcases this idea through the corruption and injustice of a ruler who single-mindedly pursues mechanical control over both nature and people. For Tagore, natural entities are not dead matter but imbued with spirituality and agency, resisting domination. As a counter to man's materialism, the play presents Bhairava, a manifestation of Lord Shiva, symbolising both the destructive and creative forces of nature. The stark contrast between the big iron machine and the spire and trident of Bhairava's temple underscores this conflict, foreshadowing the breaking of the dam by the spiritually moved Abhijit, anticipated early on when pilgrims refer to Bhairava as "the breaker of fetters." The destruction of the dam is not a descent into chaos but a restoration of the divine and moral order. Any obstruction to people and nature is unnatural and will sooner or later be overcome. This is highlighted twice in the play, once by the destruction of the wall set up by Uttarakut at Nandi Pass to block Shiu-terai's trade, and next by the breaking of the dam.

Tagore's play reminds us that despite our best efforts to control nature, there will always be gaps in our understanding and interventions. From a Heideggerian perspective, technology gives us the power to mediate in natural processes; however, it does not give us total control over the consequences of such mediations. The hubris in mistaking power to manipulate nature for mastery over nature is delusional. Our misguided interventions lead to the risk of systemic failure with adverse consequences.

V. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The symbolism in *The Waterfall* is as apt today as it was when Tagore wrote the play. Uttarakut, where the play is set and from where Mukta-dhara springs, and Shiu-tarai, the downstream territory, though fictional, seem consistent with any Himalayan region of India, both geographically and culturally. The name Uttarakut closely resembles 'Uttarakhand,' a typical Himalayan state, a centre of Hindu spirituality, and the source of mighty rivers like the Ganga and the Yamuna. Tagore's use of Bhairava, a manifestation of Shiva, as the chief deity of the kingdom also reinforces this idea because the Himalayas are considered his abode. These resemblances ground *The Waterfall* in reality and help Tagore establish socio-cultural verisimilitude, engaging the audience to relate to the play and take action.

Tamanna Khan (2012), commenting on a performance of Tagore's play, writes that it "refers to the current political and economic strife among nations over natural resources." Today, we are witnessing stricter borders, the setting up of walls and fences, and the weaponisation of trade restrictions for economic or political control, all of which feature in the play. Treaties like the Indus Water Treaty distribute rivers as mere resources, negating their borderless nature as ecological entities. Dams on transboundary rivers continue to be built by upstream territories to gain geopolitical leverage over their downstream neighbours. To illustrate, China is currently building the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River, which puts India and Bangladesh in a precarious position concerning water and food security, disaster management, and floodplain management, inciting these countries to build their own dams for risk management. A dam-building spree adversely impacts local society and ecology.

K. R. Kripalani (1950) writes of *The Waterfall*, "Perhaps no other play of Rabindranath expresses his political convictions with such directness and force" (p. 5). The play champions the cause of the nation's rich cultural and spiritual heritage to a society that must have found itself at an ideological crossroads, with the materialist and technological ideals of the West having the greater pull. Despite its contributions, the Western system has led to severe social, political, and environmental crises. It has

resulted in what Tagore distrusts– "government by machinery" and "prostitution of science to serve violence and oppression" (Kripalani, 1950, p. 6). The technological leaps of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have greatly impacted society. Fuelled by these advancements, the rise in industrial activity, constantly propelled by consumerism, has led to the utilisation of huge amounts of fossil fuels, eventually leading to climate change. Advancements in construction, excavation, and resource-extraction technologies and the resulting surge in massive projects have irreversibly impacted physical geography. This leaves in its wake destroyed habitats and dysfunctional ecosystems. Since their advent, modern technologies such as social media, artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc., continue to cause massive social disruptions, lifestyle shifts, and psychological changes. Most often, the technological man ends up being used by, instead of using, technology.

Tagore and Heidegger both teach us to be mindful of technological modernity. Heidegger turns to poetry to save the truth from technological thinking. If poetry is the solution that can point us towards an authentic relationship with nature, Tagore's play *The Waterfall* is a fine example, advocating a spiritual approach towards the material in our quest for genuine progress. Ultimately, they nudge us towards a state where we let nature be, existing authentically, preferring stewardship and conservation of natural diversity over its exploitation and destruction.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tagore's caution against unbridled materialism, as expressed in *The Waterfall,* is prescient. Today, technological advancements alongside the development of big infrastructure are considered synonymous with progress. Large dams, framed as developmental projects, are usually built at great economic, ecological, and social costs. They endanger biodiversity, disrupt natural cycles, and displace people, severing their psychological, cultural and spiritual connection to the land. The competitive pursuit of more and more resources and political advantage is likely to have adverse consequences. Against this backdrop, Tagore's dramatisation of the mechanical subjugation of nature and people in *The Waterfall* comes across as eerily familiar. Martin Heidegger's critical vocabulary helps us probe modern technology as political rather than neutral. A dam effectively enframes a river, causing it to serve as a standing-reserve, reduced to the utilitarian ends envisioned by the builders. In the worst case, as happens in Muktadhara, a dam is reduced to a weapon against downstream territories, rendering them precarious and vulnerable to floods or droughts. Represented in the play by Ranajit and Bibhuti, a calculative utilitarian rationale facilitated by dam technology blocks the possibility of establishing a non-exploitative, harmonious relationship between humans and the river. Heidegger provides us with actionable ideas to rescue ourselves from this kind of situation— letting go of our desire to control nature and people by giving up calculating thinking in favour of meditative thinking. This resonates with Tagore's poetic and spiritual approach, embodied by Dhananjay and Abhijit in the play, who stand for the abandonment of the desire to subjugate and exploit others, whether human or non-human. Infrastructure driven by technological thinking that reduces nature or humanity to mere resources must be rethought. Tagore and Heidegger together provide a framework for understanding contemporary development debates in terms of humanity, ethics, and spiritual enrichment instead of thinking solely of economic productivity or strategic advantage. Heidegger's letting-be, leading to a poetic dwelling, offers a better way of existing in harmony with the natural world and can contribute towards combating current global issues such as the over-extraction of resources, pollution, climate change, economic disparity, social inequities, political tyranny, ecological destruction, etc. Tagore and Heidegger, read together, offer us holistic and spiritually grounded alternatives, nudging us towards authentic living, global cooperation, the mitigation of transboundary conflicts over natural resources, and the exploration of alternative modes of development. Furthermore, the article confirms Guha's (2024) view that "Rabindranath Tagore was an unacknowledged founder of the modern Indian environmental movement," justifying the continued celebration, exploration, promotion, and adaptation of Tagore's plays such as *The Waterfall.*

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