



ECOSTYLISTICS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE: REIMAGINING THE CITY THROUGH TAGORE'S LITERARY LANGUAGE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Dr. Priyanka Dey

Assistant Professor

Department of Linguistics

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology, West Bengal, India

(Formerly known as West Bengal University of Technology)

Email- drpd.elan2019@gmail.com

Abstract

In the anthropocene, urban centers have emerged as critical arenas where ecological degradation, social inequities, and ideological control intersect. This article investigates how Rabindranath Tagore's literary imagination offers a compelling critique of modern urbanism and governance through the lens of ecostylistics. Focusing on seminal texts such as *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), *The Postmaster* (1891/2008), and the essay *City and Village* (1928/1991), this study explores how stylistic devices—metaphor, imagery, rhythm, silence, and narrative perspective—encode critiques of colonial urbanization, emotional dislocation, and environmental estrangement. Tagore's stylistic minimalism, fragmented narration, and polyphonic voices create text-worlds that resist linear progress, instead privileging ethical ambiguity and emotional complexity. His characters do not merely inhabit urban spaces; they navigate, challenge, and reshape them through quiet acts of emotional and relational agency. In doing so, Tagore dramatizes the affective and ecological costs of exploitative governance while offering narrative strategies for ethical cohabitation and sustainability. Framing the discussion within ecostylistic theory and postcolonial environmental humanities, this paper argues that Tagore's work anticipates and enriches contemporary debates on participatory governance, justice, and urban ecological ethics. Ultimately, it proposes that his literary method models an alternative sustainability paradigm—one grounded not in technocratic control, but in empathy, dialogue, and poetic reimaginings of urban life.

Keywords- ecostylistics, urban governance, sustainability, cognitive poetics, postcolonial ecocriticism



Introduction

The 21st-century city, in the anthropocene, has become a nexus of competing demands: economic development, ecological resilience, and social equity. In the wake of climate change, rapid urbanization, and governance failures, sustainable urban governance is not only a practical imperative but also a conceptual and cultural challenge. In this context, literature has emerged as a vital medium for interrogating the narratives that underpin urban planning and development. As Bulkeley et al. (2013) and UN-Habitat (2020) emphasize, cities today must develop frameworks that are not only efficient but also just and ecologically sound. Yet such frameworks cannot rely solely on policy and planning; they must also be imagined, contested, and narratively constructed. Literature, as Garrard (2004) and Buell (2005) argue, serves not merely as a mirror of society but as a creative and ethical space where alternative futures can be imagined and tested through form and feeling. This imaginative function of literature is particularly salient in ecostylistics—a method that combines ecological discourse analysis with literary stylistics to explore how language performs ideological and affective work (Stibbe, 2015; Goatly, 2007). Ecostylistics investigates how metaphors, narrative voice, tone, rhythm, and silence shape not just aesthetic experience but ecological consciousness. Ecostylistics, an interdisciplinary approach that examines the stylistic features of texts in relation to ecological values, enables a nuanced reading of how language contributes to environmental consciousness. In this context, Rabindranath Tagore becomes a pivotal figure whose literary experimentation—marked by a fusion of lyricism, ethical complexity, and political awareness—offers vital insights into urban sustainability.

Tagore's literary work presents a sustained engagement with the tensions between rural and urban life, and between exploitative governance and ethical community. His characters often traverse shifting ecological and emotional terrains, caught between the alienation of colonial urban life and the intimacy of village-based relationality. These crossings are not simply geographical but also moral and epistemological. As Raymond Williams (1973) notes, the literary contrast between the country and the city encapsulates wider ideological shifts—Tagore's narratives vividly exemplify this dynamic by resisting fixed spatial binaries and instead mapping emotional ecologies of belonging, alienation, and resistance.

Tagore's urban critique also serves as a counterpoint to the technocratic rationalities that increasingly define global urban discourse. Rather than presenting the city as a functional space of production and consumption, his works highlight its affective ruptures, silences, and ethical voids. The urban in Tagore is often fragmented, emotionally desaturated, and narratively unstable—



characteristics that align with contemporary critiques of unsustainable development models. Through ecostylistic analysis, his fiction and essays reveal how governance is not merely enacted through institutions but also through language, representation, and cultural memory. Tagore's ecopoetic vision thus challenges us to read the city not as a monolithic structure but as a site of contested values, stories, and futures.

In this expanded frame, literature emerges not as a secondary cultural product but as a primary site of epistemological inquiry into how we conceptualize and live urban life. Rabindranath Tagore, often remembered for his lyrical evocations of nature and rural life, thus also engages deeply with questions of urban governance, colonial modernity, and ecological ethics. Tagore's work shows that sustainable urban governance requires more than technological adaptation or administrative reform; it calls for a reconfiguration of the narratives that structure our emotional, ethical, and ecological relationships with space. His stylistic innovations—metaphoric inversion, polyphonic narration, temporal dislocation—function as acts of critique and imagination, fostering the reimagining of cities as spaces of collaborative belonging, where governance is shaped by empathy, mutual responsibility, and a conscious commitment to environmental and social harmony.

Focusing on selected works such as *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), *The Postmaster* (1891/2008), and his essays like *City and Village* (1928/1991), the study investigates how Tagore's stylistic choices register anxieties over colonial urbanization, ecological disconnection, and moral disorientation. By analyzing metaphor, imagery, silence, and rhythm, this research reveals how Tagore constructs an ethical and ecological alternative to exploitative urban development. Situating his work within both ecostylistics and postcolonial environmental humanities, the paper proposes that Tagore offers a literary blueprint for sustainable, relational, and inclusive models of urban governance. This article argues that Tagore's urban vision, as articulated through his literary style, offers a powerful critique of alienated modernity and an imaginative reconfiguration of the city as a relational and moral space. Building on this, the paper proposes a conceptual framework for sustainable urban governance grounded in literary ecostylistics—a new theory that integrates ethical narrative, ecological aesthetics, and inclusive policy imagination.

Review of Literature

Williams (1973) identifies the symbolic contrast between the rural and urban as central to English literature, arguing that the city often represents social decay and alienation. Building on this,



Edward Soja (2000) and Michel de Certeau (1984) stress that urban spaces are not merely built environments but are actively produced and experienced through discourse and daily practice. Soja (2000) introduces the concept of the "third space," which moves beyond the binary of physical space (first space) and mental or conceptual space (second space) to explore how space is lived, negotiated, and contested. For Soja (ibid), cities are deeply ideological terrains, where spatial arrangements reflect and reinforce power structures. He challenges the notion of space as passive or objective, proposing instead that spatial forms and relations are integral to how authority, resistance, and subjectivity are performed. M. de Certeau (1984), on the other hand, brings attention to the everyday practices of urban dwellers—their walking paths, spatial improvisations, and uses of public space—as acts of resistance that re-inscribe meaning into the urban fabric. His analysis of walking in the city as a form of spatial storytelling reveals how dominant urban planning often overlooks the lived realities and creative adaptations of its inhabitants.

These insights are crucial for understanding the ideological underpinnings of urban representation in literature. In Tagore's case, his urban narratives resonate with Soja's (2000) and de Certeau's (1984) frameworks by depicting the city as a site of both domination and subtle resistance. Rather than portraying cities as static, Tagore captures their layered textures through stylistic variation and narrative perspective—foregrounding the tensions between imposed order and lived experience. His characters do not merely inhabit urban space; they respond to it, challenge it, and at times, reshape it through emotional, ethical, and relational acts that defy bureaucratic scripts and spatial alienation. For instance, in *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), Nikhil's internal conflict and refusal to conform to both colonial governance and extremist nationalism reveals a resistance to the dominant spatial ideologies of control and conformity. Likewise, Bimala's psychological and spatial journey—from the interior of the zenana to the ambiguities of the political outer world—symbolizes a lived negotiation with prescribed urban roles. In *The Postmaster* (1891/2008), the girl Ratan's silent endurance and emotional labor articulate a subaltern critique of colonial detachment, subtly resisting the emotional sterility imposed by urban administrative systems. Even in the short essay *City and Village* (1928/1991), Tagore's reflections on the sensory and spiritual impoverishment of urban life provide insight into how discursive spatial practices sustain alienation. These characters and their interactions with the urban environment embody the kind of spatial agency and subversive improvisation that de Certeau highlights. They transform the city from a fixed site of power into a space of negotiation, affect, and quiet resistance—rendering Tagore's urban vision deeply aligned with the ideological



interventions proposed by Soja (2000) and de Certeau (1984).

Matthew Gandy (2002) explores the relationship between urban infrastructure and nature, arguing that the material organization of cities is inseparable from the environmental processes they reshape. His work reveals how infrastructural systems such as sewage networks, water supply, and urban planning are not neutral or purely functional; rather, they are deeply political constructs that reflect and reproduce social hierarchies and ecological imbalances. By focusing on the 'metabolic' interaction between urban environments and ecological systems, Gandy (2002) uncovers the ways in which urban modernity often reinforces exploitative and unsustainable paradigms under the guise of development. His analysis of sanitation and green space policies shows how these initiatives, while appearing progressive, often serve elite interests and spatially exclude marginalized populations. Gandy also challenges the aesthetic ideologies that underpin modernist planning by interrogating how cities are visually and materially scripted to project order, cleanliness, and rationality—often at the cost of ecological vitality and cultural diversity. He advocates for understanding cities as 'ecologies of conflict,' where natural and built elements intersect in unstable and contested ways. This reading of urban space opens possibilities for examining literature not only as a reflection of ecological degradation but as a site of resistance and reimagination. In relation to Tagore, Gandy's (2002) critique of sanitized, technocratic urbanism parallels the author's literary portrayal of disenchanted cityscapes—spaces that suffer not only from ecological imbalance but also from emotional disconnection, ethical erosion, and cultural fragmentation. Tagore's texts thus operate in the same critical register, revealing the invisible ideological work of urban infrastructure through poetic language and narrative form.

Similarly, Ursula Heise (2008) advances the concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism," which encourages thinking about ecological issues beyond national or local boundaries. She contends that contemporary environmental crises—such as climate change and biodiversity loss—require global narrative frameworks that transcend parochial or romanticized notions of nature. Heise highlights the role of literature and cultural narratives in cultivating planetary ecological awareness, making her theory especially relevant to discussions of urban sustainability. Her emphasis on narrative scale and interconnectedness supports the idea that literary texts like Tagore's can forge links between intimate ecological affect and global environmental ethics. These positions echo in Garrard's (2004) comprehensive overview of ecocriticism, where he traces the field's development from its roots in nature writing and literary environmentalism to its current engagement with politics, ethics, and theory. Garrard emphasizes that ecocriticism is not just



concerned with representing nature, but with interrogating the cultural and ideological forces that shape environmental thought and action. He advocates for the analysis of how texts negotiate between the natural and built environment, particularly in light of pressing global issues such as climate change, urbanization, and ecological collapse.

Buell (2005), in a similar vein, in framing literature as a resource for environmental imagination, insists on the narrative's role in activating ethical reflection and policy-oriented thinking. He argues that imaginative literature provides an indispensable resource for ecological thinking, offering complex representations of human-nature relationships that resist simplistic binaries and encourage nuanced, ethically grounded reflection. Buell calls for greater critical attention to the ways literature can contribute to envisioning sustainable futures, emphasizing narrative as a vehicle for cultivating environmental responsibility and agency. For both Garrard (2004) and Buell (2005), the urban environment becomes a crucial site of literary inquiry—not only for documenting ecological crises but for reconfiguring the cultural narratives that underlie unsustainable practices. Their work underscores the importance of Tagore's literary engagement with urban life as a form of ecological critique and ethical speculation. Yet, it is precisely here that a critical engagement with Tagore becomes most urgent. While Garrard (2004) pushes ecocriticism to interrogate how environmental discourses are embedded within dominant ideologies, Tagore does not simply reproduce such binaries; rather, his urban writings undermine the very cultural presumptions that shape exploitative governance models. His narratives, unlike many pastoral or romantic environmental texts, are structurally and thematically embedded in the real contradictions of a colonial modernity that weaponized urban expansion as a tool of bureaucratic control and cultural displacement. This complexity makes his work resistant to idealization and open to sustained ecostylistic scrutiny.

Within this tradition, Arran Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics offers a powerful framework for analyzing how language constructs our relationships with the natural world through what he terms "the stories we live by." These stories—manifested in recurring linguistic structures, metaphors, and narrative forms—can either promote ecological harmony or perpetuate destructive ideologies of exploitation, consumption, and control. Stibbe argues that ecostylistics enables critics to examine how texts implicitly support or resist unsustainable worldviews. This approach is especially important when examining literature that engages with power, place, and identity, as it reveals how stylistic choices reflect or challenge ecological values. Complementing this, Andrew Goatly (2007) focuses particularly on metaphor and ideological framing, asserting that metaphor



is not a neutral stylistic device but a crucial cognitive tool that shapes how readers perceive the environment. His analysis uncovers how certain dominant metaphors—such as nature as a machine, a resource, or a battlefield—sustain exploitative attitudes, while others—like nature as kin or community—can cultivate care and responsibility. Goatly's insights are central to understanding the subtle ideological work of Tagore's metaphors, which often resist colonial rationalism by invoking relational and organic imagery. Together, Stibbe (2015) and Goatly (2007) provide the methodological and theoretical scaffolding for ecostylistic inquiry into Tagore's writing, allowing us to see how his style not only critiques unsustainable urban governance but also evokes alternative, ethically grounded ways of imagining the city.

Postcolonial ecocritics such as Huggan and Tiffin (2010), Mukherjee (2010), and DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) show how environmental degradation is often entangled with colonial histories and uneven development. These critics argue that literature from the Global South exposes the environmental costs of modernity and challenges dominant narratives of progress. Tagore's writings prefigure many of these concerns, combining a critique of colonial bureaucracy with a profound ethical engagement with nature. Tagore scholarship by Radice (1991), Hogan (2003), and Chakrabarti (2012) reflects his ecological and ethical commitments. Hogan (2003) underscores Tagore's use of domestic and architectural metaphors to critique colonial power, while Chakrabarti (2012) highlights the emotional and ecological resonances of silence in his narratives. These studies, while insightful, have yet to systematically apply stylistic analysis to explore the intersection of ecological imagination and governance critique.

Urban theorists such as Pierre (2011) and Swyngedouw (2005) argue for more participatory and inclusive models of governance. Pierre (2011) emphasizes that urban governance has shifted from state-centric hierarchies to more flexible and polycentric arrangements involving networks of actors across different sectors. This transformation, while expanding opportunities for civic engagement, also raises concerns about transparency and accountability. Swyngedouw (2005) critically engages with this shift, warning that such models can become technocratic and depoliticized, masking socio-economic inequalities under the guise of neutral expertise. These concerns resonate with Tagore's own apprehensions about bureaucratic alienation and moral disconnection in colonial urban systems. In this regard, Tagore's vision anticipates modern debates on the need to restore ethical and emotional dimensions to governance frameworks. Evans et al. (2016) build on this by conceptualizing cities as experimental spaces—sites of governance innovation where ecological resilience, inclusivity, and cultural adaptability must be negotiated



through collaboration. Tagore's literary imagination aligns with this progressive outlook by portraying the city not as a monolithic structure, but as a living, evolving community where governance must reflect relational ethics, historical consciousness, and ecological sensitivity. Evans et al. (2016) conceptualize cities as experimental spaces where sustainability must be negotiated among competing stakeholders. Tagore's literary vision aligns with these frameworks by portraying urban life not as a fixed system but as a space of ethical encounter and ecological interrelation.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an ecostylistic methodology, integrating insights from Stibbe (2015), Simpson (2004), and Jeffries (2010). Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework emphasizes how language carries underlying values that either support or resist ecological sustainability. Applying Stibbe's method to Tagore's work here an attempt is made to trace how Tagore's stylistic decisions—such as the use of symbolic contrast, modal expressions of uncertainty, and narrative perspective—subvert dominant colonial ideologies of urban control and instead embed relational and ethical models of environmental and civic consciousness. Through this lens, ecostylistics becomes not just a tool for ecological critique but a means of uncovering the linguistic construction of alternative, more just urban futures. Stibbe's approach focuses on identifying the narratives, metaphors, and evaluative structures that shape a society's relationship with the environment. This aligns with the objective of analyzing how Tagore's stylistic choices subtly construct or challenge dominant narratives of governance, development, and environmental ethics.

Simpson (2004), through his work on stylistics and ideology, provides a model for examining how linguistic form and narrative structure can encode complex social positions. His theory emphasizes how modality, transitivity, and evaluative language construct ideological stance, allowing for a critical analysis of how Tagore's characters position themselves within or against systems of power. Jeffries (2010) complements this with her emphasis on "critical stylistics," which explores how even seemingly neutral language can carry ideological implications. Her work is especially useful in examining the fine-grained linguistic features in Tagore's prose—such as presupposition, negation, and foregrounding—that contribute to the subtle construction of ecological and political critique.

By integrating these approaches, the methodology allows for a comprehensive investigation into the interplay between linguistic form, ecological meaning, and political critique



in Tagore's writing. It enables a reading strategy that does not merely identify environmental themes, but reveals how those themes are embedded in the very texture of literary language and style. It emphasizes stylistic features—such as metaphor, modality, deixis, narrative voice, rhythm, and lexis—that shape the ecological meaning of texts. The selected works—*The Home and the World* (1916/2008), *The Postmaster* (1891/2008), and *City and Village* (1928/1991), —are examined for how they stylistically construct and critique forms of urban governance.

Using narrative theory (Toolan, 2001) and cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2002), the analysis situates these texts within colonial Bengal's urban transformation and examines how narrative structure and readerly perception contribute to their ecological meaning. Toolan's (2001) narrative theory emphasizes the relationship between story, discourse, and ideology—highlighting how point of view, temporality, and narrative progression shape ethical positioning. This framework enables a nuanced reading of how Tagore's shifting narrative voices, silences, and focalizations invite readers to align with or resist specific governance models embedded in the text. By foregrounding internal conflict, dialogic tension, and the moral ambiguities of action, Tagore's narratives unsettle fixed ideological positions and model narrative as a space of ethical negotiation.

Stockwell's (2002) cognitive poetics, on the other hand, provides tools for exploring how readers mentally construct literary environments and emotional responses based on textual cues. Through concepts such as deixis, schema theory, and perspective-taking, cognitive poetics reveals how linguistic patterns trigger affective and ethical engagement. Tagore's use of spatial deixis, emotional anchoring, and stylistic foregrounding activates the reader's empathy and ecological awareness, fostering a cognitive mapping of the city not as a sterile administrative space, but as an emotionally charged and morally resonant environment. Together, these approaches offer a multi-dimensional reading of Tagore's ecostylistic strategies, showing how literary form becomes a site for engaging with questions of justice, space, and environmental governance. these texts within colonial Bengal's urban transformation and assesses how Tagore's linguistic choices evoke environmental and emotional displacement. The study also draws on Walker and Salt's (2006) resilience theory, Sen's (1999) capability approach, and Agyeman's (2005) framework of "just sustainability" to relate literary findings to policy discourse.

Discussion

City and Village- Sustainability and Governance Theory

In *City and Village* (1928/1991), Tagore presents a carefully drawn contrast between urban and



rural existence that maps directly onto key frameworks in sustainability and governance theory. Drawing on Walker and Salt's (2006) resilience theory, the essay portrays the village as a system capable of absorbing external disturbances—such as economic exploitation, political neglect, and environmental degradation—while still retaining its core values of community, spiritual vitality, and ecological attunement. The city, by contrast, is depicted as a brittle, overcentralized system built on principles of control, uniformity, and disconnection. Tagore's stylistic use of metaphor and repetition—juxtaposing the sensory and spiritual vitality of the village with the mechanical sterility of the city—constructs a literary ecology that mirrors resilience discourse. The city's apparent strength is exposed as fragility, its progress as degradation.

Sen's (1999) capability approach further illuminates the ethical dimensions of this contrast. Tagore's essay suggests that true well-being arises not from urban accumulation or bureaucratic expansion, but from the freedom to live meaningfully within one's ecological and cultural context. The village, though materially modest, allows for the development of human capabilities through community, emotional fulfillment, and autonomy. Tagore's language—deliberately simple yet richly evocative—echoes Sen's emphasis on dignity, agency, and the capacity to flourish.

Similarly, Agyeman's (2005) notion of "just sustainability," which integrates social equity with environmental health, finds clear expression in Tagore's critique of urban governance. The essay indicts the city for severing ethical responsibility from material growth, privileging efficiency over justice. Tagore's literary style—marked by tonal shifts, rhetorical questions, and appeals to the senses—demands a governance model that acknowledges not only economic metrics but emotional and ecological justice. His vision anticipates a sustainable future where urban governance must be evaluated not solely by infrastructure or GDP, but by its responsiveness to human and environmental needs.

Finally, through the lens of Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistics, *City and Village* (1928/1991) emerges as a text that dismantles dominant "stories we live by"—the myths of industrial progress, urban superiority, and bureaucratic efficiency—and replaces them with alternative narratives rooted in interdependence, humility, and relational ethics. Tagore's metaphoric economy, tonal cadence, and ecological symbolism perform a linguistic intervention that calls for a reimagined urban discourse—one that re-centers the human within nature, and governance within empathy. His critique does not merely describe the problems of colonial urbanism; it offers a discursive and stylistic model for thinking urban futures otherwise. The city emerges as ecologically brittle—its rigidity, bureaucratic alienation, and lack of interdependence rendering it unsustainable. The city



is rendered through metaphors of suffocation and noise, embodying alienated bureaucracy and ecological estrangement. By contrast, the village, though vulnerable, is depicted as adaptive, relational, and emotionally integrated. Goatly's (2007) theory of metaphor as ideological framing helps interpret this stylistic opposition as a critique of dehumanizing urban policy. These stylistic and thematic contrasts dramatize the very concerns of resilience theory, which critiques development models that prioritize control and predictability over adaptability and systemic health. Through this fusion of literary form and political imagination, Tagore's work offers a compelling framework for rethinking sustainable urban governance in the anthropocene.

***The Home and the World*- Narrative Ethics and Ecostylistic Resistance**

In *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), the decay of the aristocratic mansion becomes a complex narrative site where political, ethical, and ecological tensions converge. Here Tagore explores the interplay between political ideology, domestic space, and national identity. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement but also serves as a subtle critique of emerging urban nationalism that mirrors colonial authoritarianism. Ecostylistically, the novel employs shifts in narrative voice, symbolic spatial metaphors, and silences to dramatize the emotional and ecological toll of ideological rigidity. Applying Toolan's (2001) narrative theory, which emphasizes the ethical dimensions of storytelling and the relationship between narrative structure and ideological positioning, the text can be read as a site of narrative ethics in action. The alternating points of view—Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip—are not simply mechanisms for character development, but rather rhetorical strategies that expose and complicate the ideological frames each voice inhabits. Toolan's concept of narrative alignment enables us to see how readers are guided to partially identify with, and ultimately question, the motivations and moral standpoints of each narrator. The instability of perspective resists closure and prevents easy alignment with any singular ideology, underscoring Tagore's suspicion toward grand narratives of political purity or liberation.

Through Bimala's interior monologue and her shifting loyalties, the narrative probes the limits of agency under both colonial patriarchy and nationalist rhetoric, echoing Sen's (1999) capability approach. Tagore does not present Bimala's evolution as a straightforward liberation but rather as an emotionally fraught and ideologically conflicted process. Her entry into the political world—prompted by Sandip's nationalist fervor—initially appears as an expansion of freedom but gradually reveals itself as a form of entrapment within another structure of control, this time



masked by romanticized notions of resistance and patriotism. The capability approach, which centers on an individual's substantive freedoms to pursue a life they have reason to value, is sharply foregrounded in Bimala's increasing alienation. Her emotional turmoil, narrated with introspective depth, highlights the disjuncture between formal participation in public life and the actual ability to make informed, autonomous, and ethically sound choices. Moreover, the narrative structure—its fragmentation, multiplicity of perspectives, and reliance on introspection—underscores that agency is not only constrained by external forces but is also shaped by internal contradictions and epistemic limitations. Bimala's inner voice repeatedly grapples with competing loyalties: to her husband, her nation, her self-respect, and her sense of duty. In doing so, Tagore offers a profound critique of governance systems—both colonial and nationalist—that reduce agency to mere symbolic participation, failing to ensure the conditions under which individuals can flourish in emotional, ethical, and relational terms. This aligns with Sen's (1999) insistence that development must be assessed by the real freedoms people enjoy, not by the ideologies they are made to serve.

Hogan's (2003) reading of the decaying mansion as a metaphor for the collapse of ethical and emotional order under nationalist extremism further enriches this analysis. The mansion, in its slow disintegration, mirrors the unravelling of a once-vital moral order that previously upheld values of compassion, plurality, and ethical dialogue. As the home deteriorates, it becomes more than a physical ruin—it turns into a symbolic commentary on how extremist ideologies corrode the domestic and civic spaces necessary for nurturing relational ethics. Tagore's deliberate choice to center much of the narrative within this declining estate is thus deeply significant: it spatially embodies the collapse of both personal and political harmony. The mansion's fall into disrepair not only reflects the erosion of inclusive governance, but also illustrates how the nationalist movement, when driven by authoritarian impulses, undermines the very social cohesion and emotional intelligence required for sustainable community life. This symbolism reinforces the text's broader ecopolitical critique—namely, that no political project can be sustainable if it destroys the ethical infrastructures of trust, dialogue, and care that undergird communal existence. Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic call to reject "destructive stories" finds clear resonance here: Sandip's charismatic rhetoric is exposed as a toxic discourse that prioritizes power, possession, and male dominance over dialogue and care. The narrative deconstructs this story through a multi-layered stylistic strategy that includes fragmentation, ironic dissonance, and a slow unravelling of belief systems among its protagonists. Fragmentation occurs not just in narrative perspective but



also in temporal structure, breaking the illusion of linear, heroic progression often characteristic of nationalist grand narratives. Tagore uses alternating voices to undermine the coherence of Sandip's rhetoric, revealing how ideology fractures rather than unifies individual subjectivity. Ironic dissonance surfaces as the text exposes the gap between Sandip's seductive oratory and the ethical emptiness of his actions—his glorified nationalism is revealed to be self-serving, performative, and emotionally exploitative. Tagore enhances this critique through subtle linguistic choices: rhetorical flourishes stripped of sincerity, poetic tropes deployed with hollow conviction, and hyperbolic language that collapses under its own weight.

Most significantly, the gradual disillusionment of characters like Bimala and Nikhil functions as an ethical rupture within the narrative. As Bimala confronts the devastating consequences of her misplaced trust, the story enacts a slow stripping away of ideological certainty. This psychological descent is rendered through introspective monologues marked by hesitation, ellipsis, and shifts in tone—all of which signal a loss of narrative control and ideological direction. The result is a narrative that resists closure and mimics the destabilizing effect of ideological betrayal. In doing so, Tagore crafts not merely a political allegory but an ecostylistic intervention: his style becomes a critique of the very linguistic forms that perpetuate domination and exclusion, and a call to imagine alternative forms of storytelling rooted in relational ethics and emotional accountability.

Agyeman's (2005) notion of "just sustainability"—the intersection of social justice and ecological balance—is also subtly invoked through the ethical layering of the text. The narrative does not explicitly articulate a model of ecological governance, but through the interwoven tensions between emotional responsibility, moral ambiguity, and political ideology, it implicitly critiques models of governance that prioritize efficiency or abstract ideals over human and ecological wellbeing. Sandip's vision of liberation, grounded in masculine rhetoric and coercive persuasion, is characterized by its emotional detachment and ecological blindness. It imagines progress as conquest, suppressing empathy and reducing governance to spectacle and control. In contrast, Nikhil's restrained and reflective approach embodies a model of leadership rooted in emotional intelligence and ethical awareness. He foregrounds questions of justice not in instrumental terms—such as national independence or political dominance—but as deeply relational concerns involving responsibility toward others, especially the vulnerable. His language is devoid of heroism, marked instead by empathy, modesty, and critical self-awareness—traits that align with Agyeman's emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and sustainable futures. Bimala's arc



further complicates this moral field. Her inner struggle, shaped by conflicting loyalties and fragmented knowledge, resists easy resolution. Yet, in this refusal of closure, the narrative affirms Agyeman's argument that sustainability—whether urban or personal—cannot be achieved through rigid blueprints, but through iterative, inclusive, and emotionally attuned processes. It is a process of continual negotiation. In its very form—multivocal, ethically unstable, and stylistically nuanced—*The Home and the World* (1916/2008) enacts a politics of ecostylistic resistance: it rejects domination, honours emotional complexity, and opens narrative space for reconsidering what it means to govern, belong, and live responsibly.

The Postmaster- Gap between Urban Governance and Lived Experience

The Postmaster (1891/2008) stages the failure of colonial empathy through minimalism and narrative distance. It presents a microcosmic view of urban-rural relations. The protagonist, a city-born official posted in a remote village, embodies the colonial gaze and its incapacity for genuine ecological and emotional connection. The urban postmaster's inability to connect with the village girl mirrors the disconnect between governance and lived experience. Stylistically, Tagore uses understated diction, pauses, and narrative restraint to evoke the unbridgeable gap between modern administrative logic and rural affective life. The girl's silent grief at the end of the story is not just a moment of personal pain but a metonym for the broader erasures performed by urban rationality. In ecostylistic terms, the story foregrounds the affective cost of governance that lacks emotional intelligence and ecological rootedness. The emotional distance is further accentuated by the use of spatial deixis and temporal disjunctions, which place the postmaster in a transient, almost spectral relation to the village, while Ratan becomes anchored, rooted, and emotionally expressive despite the narrative's reticence. The cognitive tension created by this imbalance invites the reader to fill in the affective gaps left by the narrator. Chakrabarti (2012) reads the girl's silent grief as an ecological and emotional residue of colonial neglect which aligns with Stockwell's model, where affect is evoked not through exposition but through absence, minimalism, and emotional incongruity. Simpson (2004) and Jeffries (2010) help unpack the stylistic mechanisms—modality, repetition, and ellipsis—that construct this emotional landscape. They deepen this reading by showing how modality and repetition encode emotional ambivalence, while ellipsis and vague expressions withhold closure—leaving behind a lingering sense of ethical incompleteness. The sparse narrative—marked by the understatement, ellipsis, and tonal restraint—embodies the postmaster's emotional detachment reflecting the asymmetry of colonial relations. Tagore thus



uses stylistic economy not only as aesthetic choice but as a cognitive-ethical strategy that critiques governance devoid of relational accountability

From the perspective of Stockwell's (2002) cognitive poetics, the story's stylistic features engage the reader's empathy by triggering schema disruption: the urban postmaster, initially portrayed as a figure of authority and order, is expected to exercise compassion and fairness, yet fails in his moral responsibility toward the orphaned village girl, Ratan. This deviation from expected social and ethical scripts unsettles readers' cognitive expectations and provokes a reassessment of colonial authority and interpersonal ethics. Stockwell's concept of "text-worlds" is particularly illuminating in this context: the narrative constructs a world filtered almost exclusively through the postmaster's solipsistic reflections and casual detachment, rendering Ratan's emotional and cognitive presence largely invisible within the diegetic world. However, this omission itself becomes the site of ethical critique. Tagore invites the reader to engage in what Stockwell terms 'mind-modelling'—constructing Ratan's interiority in the absence of explicit narration. Her persistent care for the postmaster, her subtle gestures of hope and eventual heartbreak, such as when she "stood waiting for him at the door" or asked whether she would be taken along, elicit deep emotional resonance precisely because her grief is not given direct voice. This narrative asymmetry amplifies the ethical tension: the reader becomes painfully aware of the emotional cost of colonial apathy. By drawing attention to the silences and emotional lacunae, Tagore's narrative forces readers to inhabit the moral failure of the postmaster as a broader indictment of governance that is emotionally disengaged and structurally unequal.

Tagore's Framework of Sustainable Urban Imagination: Empathy and Ecology in Style

Tagore's work, as analyzed through an ecostylistic lens, offers the foundation for a reimagined theory of sustainability. Tagore's literary practice models a vision of governance rooted in empathy, relationality, and ecological attunement. His stylistic pluralism—the use of metaphorical contrast, rhythmic variation, and narrative layering—aligns with Agyeman's (2005) model of just sustainability. It also prefigures participatory governance frameworks that center affective and ethical dimensions, as articulated by Swyngedouw (2005) and Evans et al. (2016). Swyngedouw critiques the technocratic turn in urban governance, where issues of social justice and emotional experience are often sidelined in favor of managerial efficiency. He argues that true democratic participation must account for conflict, passion, and collective meaning-making. In this sense, Tagore's literary vision resonates powerfully: his characters embody a politics of feeling,



questioning, and refusal that transcends institutional logic. Evans et al. (2016) reinforce this position by emphasizing the co-production of urban futures through inclusive and iterative engagement with diverse communities. Tagore's ecostylistic narrative strategy—marked by polyvocality, affective dissonance, and ethical ambiguity—thus anticipates and dramatizes the core tenets of participatory governance. His works do not present governance as policy, but as a cultural, emotional, and narrative process—where sustainability is negotiated not just through planning but through compassion, dissent, and shared imaginaries.

Rather than reducing sustainability to resource efficiency or institutional design, Tagore's vision foregrounds the cultural, emotional, and linguistic practices that shape how communities experience and negotiate their environments. His urban critique is not merely about infrastructure or development, but about the erosion of intimacy, justice, and imaginative engagement in civic life. This alternative sustainability framework draws on three interlinked dimensions: emotional attunement, ethical interdependence, and discursive resistance. Through characters like Bimala, Nikhil, and Ratan, Tagore dramatizes how sustainable life cannot be engineered through top-down control but must emerge from bottom-up relationships, narrative inclusion, and sensitivity to vulnerability. His stylistic devices—fragmented narration, polyphonic voice, spatial metaphor, and intentional silence—do more than aestheticize conflict; they critique dominant narratives that ignore affective and ecological cost.

Tagore's model thus anticipates a future of urban governance that is less about institutional efficiency and more about cultivating inclusive imaginaries. Sustainability, in this sense, is a poetics of care: a commitment to relational ways of being, narrating, and governing that uphold justice as ecological and emotional reciprocity. His literary method teaches us that imagining sustainable cities begins with telling better stories—stories that make room for empathy, dissent, and the possibility of shared, restorative life.

Ecstylistic Method and Innovative Cultural Policy

Tagore's ecostylistic method also implicitly proposes an innovative cultural policy framework—one that expands the scope of urban governance beyond institutional procedures to embrace emotional literacy, ethical storytelling, and narrative diversity as tools for affective participation. Rather than relying solely on formal policy drafts or technical infrastructure, such a framework emphasizes integrating literature, public narrative, and community voice into sustainability planning. Tagore's literary method illustrates how narrative practices can generate empathy,



cultivate ethical awareness, and inspire civic engagement. His characters model affective responses to injustice, alienation, and ecological disruption—suggesting that governance must attend to these emotional dimensions as vital sites of democratic negotiation. This approach invites us to imagine policies that institutionalize cultural forums, storytelling initiatives, participatory art practices, and dialogic spaces where community narratives can shape urban futures. Policy-making, in this framework, becomes a form of cultural listening—a process grounded not only in data but in shared meaning, memory, and imaginative refiguration. Tagore’s stories, with their stylistic fragmentation, emotional ambiguity, and relational depth, offer prototypes for policies that prioritize inclusion, ethical complexity, and long-term communal resilience.

Thus, Tagore’s vision challenges the technocratic logic that often dominates sustainability discourse. It calls for policy innovation that is not merely regulatory but discursive—one that creates space for vulnerability, dissent, and imagination. By grounding governance in storytelling, Tagore’s ecostylistic vision reframes sustainability as a relational process, shaped by care, critique, and emotional engagement. Sustainability, then, is not just about efficient systems or green design—it is a poetics of care and recognition. In advocating for emotionally intelligent and culturally embedded policy practices, Tagore anticipates a model of urban governance where inclusive imaginaries, rather than abstract blueprints, guide the path to sustainable futures. This suggests the need for policy innovation that is not just regulatory but discursive where sustainability is not imposed from above but negotiated through shared, emotionally resonant art and literature.

Conclusion

Thus, Tagore’s ecostylistic vision offers a profound intervention into debates on urban governance. His work critiques colonial models of urban administration that sever emotional and ecological ties, and instead imagines the city as a space of ethical responsibility and ecological interdependence. By applying ecostylistics to his narratives, we uncover a deeply affective and politically engaged mode of thinking about urban futures. Far from being merely reflective, Tagore’s literary language becomes generative: it articulates alternative forms of governance based on relational ethics, emotional intelligence, and environmental stewardship. In this way, Tagore’s legacy speaks directly to contemporary efforts to rethink urban life in the anthropocene—not through technological mastery alone, but through the imaginative and stylistic reconfiguration of the city itself.



Tagore's narrative focus on individual autonomy and moral decision-making—especially in works like *The Home and the World* (1916/2008)—reminds us of Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach. Sen's framework insists that the measure of a just society lies not in its economic efficiency, but in its ability to enhance individuals' real freedoms and capacities to lead meaningful lives. Tagore's characters often struggle with the constraints of ideology and governance, and his stylistic strategies—dialogic tension, interiority, and perspectival multiplicity—reveal the psychic costs of limited agency. His urban vision thus aligns with Sen's idea that governance must be evaluated in terms of what people are actually able to do and be. In *City and Village* (1928/1991), Tagore critiques the administrative and aesthetic logics of the colonial city, contrasting it with the organic interconnectedness of the rural. The city, in his view, becomes a site of spiritual and ecological dislocation. This is stylistically rendered through fragmented imagery, ironic tone, and the use of contrastive metaphors that juxtapose mechanical urban life with natural harmony. These elements serve as early markers of what can now be theorized as the ecostylistic critique of unsustainable governance. In *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), the decay of the aristocratic mansion becomes a powerful symbol of ethical and environmental collapse. Hogan (2003) interprets this spatial metaphor as emblematic of political extremism's corrosive effects. The narrative's alternating perspectives and moments of silence underscore the limits of ideological certainty, resonating with Stibbe's (2015) call to reject "destructive stories" that prioritize domination and exclusion. Further, Tagore's emphasis on emotional attunement and ecological care parallels Julian Agyeman's (2005) concept of "just sustainability," which integrates environmental integrity with social equity and cultural inclusion. The emotional labour of characters like Ratan in *The Postmaster* (1891/2008), or the ethical ambiguity experienced by Bimala and Nikhil in *The Home and the World* (1916/2008), dramatize how governance—when abstracted from the emotional and ecological needs of individuals—fails its constituents. Through stylistic devices such as ellipsis, silence, and metaphoric layering, Tagore critiques such failures and instead proposes an affective, inclusive model of urban engagement.

Tagore's literary constructions—his use of narrative multiplicity, fragmentation, and tonal ambivalence—function not only as aesthetic techniques but as political gestures. They refuse reductive resolution and instead sustain tension between modernity's promises and its failures. Rather than offer prescriptive visions of the city, Tagore's urban imagination poses unresolved ethical questions that foreground the affective costs of governance divorced from ecological consciousness. In this way, he performs what Buell calls for: a literature that does not merely



reflect environmental realities but compels new modes of perception and civic responsibility. Tagore's urban texts, therefore, are not only ecocritical but ecogenerative—creating the discursive conditions through which alternative urban futures might be both imagined and enacted.

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