

Tree Consciousness in *Tarun Tapasi*

Keshav Raj Chalise

Abstract

Being conscious means being aware of something. Trees, in a general argument, are not ostensibly aware of the things in the way humans do but modern forest and environmental studies have concluded that trees are most certainly more aware than we think them to be. Consciousness can be a general awareness of being alert and conscious of one's environment, and fully experiencing what happens all around. It can equally be a self-awareness of being able to identify the purpose and effect of others and on others. One may argue that trees do not have a brain to identify what is good and what is bad, and therefore they are not conscious. However modern theories of relational metaphysics and environmental biology have identified the features of consciousness in trees. This is the theory of plant science and plant consciousness. Like relational metaphysics, literature has established the principle that trees have consciousness and therefore they can feel, communicate, and express. Keeping the theory of environmental study as the tool, this research examines the point of how Tarun Tapasi, a tree sage has a complete sense of consciousness. Kavisiromani Paudyal has seen life, sensation, feeling, awareness, and the knowledge of ethics and humanity in the tree, and therefore he has chosen the tree as his means of expression in the form of a young sage in the epic, *Tarun Tapasi*. This study recognizes how the tree has realized the sense of growth, pain, suffering, and sensation in him and how he has felt the loss of ethics and humanity in human beings. Tarun Tapasi, a tree is incredibly aware of the social, moral, and sensational feelings not less than a fully conscious human being is. With these features of the highest level of cognizance, the Tapasi tree is a sage and a conscious being.

Keywords

Cohabitation, ethics, humanity, relational metaphysics, tree-consciousness

Introduction

Tarun Tapasi is a philosophical epic in Nepali literature for which the poet, *Kavishiromani* Lekhanath Paudyal has named *Navyakavya* ("new epic"). Paudyal has played a significant role in Nepali literature in connecting two dominant literary eras, medieval and modern in the matter of form and content of poetry. In this sense, he is a classical poet with new themes and issues like population, humanity, devotion, and national identity. As his title stands for, *Tarun Tapasi* narrates the story from the perspective of a young sage, *Tarun Tapasi* as both character and narrator. The poet has transformed a tree into the form of a young sage who knows about every happening around him. The sage has witnessed the activities of human beings very keenly and has enunciated his own experience of his childhood, young age, and the knowledge of touching his adult life. With the growth of age, the tree has accumulated knowledge of the world and has spoken in the form of a sage. *Tarun Tapasi* is the storehouse of knowledge and experience, and hence, he has consciousness. (Johnstone, 2018) the views and voices of a tree, *Tarun Tapasi* from the viewpoint of consciousness in the tree. It postulates the idea that *Tarun Tapasi* has expressed the ideas in the way the tree has a deep sense of consciousness, and how he displays himself more accountable than human beings. This

tree has undergone a change through natural and human threats while growing in the way living beings do, “All living beings directly or circuitously have been connected as their bodies and population have grown” (Margulis and Sagan 20). This sense of growth and realization is what consciousness is. In the simplest sense, “consciousness is an awareness (knows) of the outside world” (Trewavas and Baluska 1222). With the idea that “plants do many things and, for those plants in natural circumstances, there are plenty of problems to solve” (Trewavas 1), the central character and narrator of the book, *Tarun Tapasi*, has faced many such problems in his life. Focusing on the issues of pain, suffering, memory, and the awareness of humanity and ethics in the tree, the study examines *Tarun Tapasi* as a text with tree consciousness using the theory of plant consciousness as the tool of analysis. Consciousness in *Tarun Tapasi*, “does indicate intention, it does deal with things or events, it relies on memory and the associated process of learning, but is not a simple copy of experience” (Trewavas 256). This research work is meaningful to see how the behavior that once was supposed to be the only property of human culture, is attached and best described in plants like *Tarun Tapasi* and they do have the intelligence to see the problem and the knowledge for problem-solving.

Research Questions

This research aims to address the following research questions:

- Why has Lekhanath Paudyal chosen to express moral and ethical values of human life through the tree?
- What are the concepts of seeing consciousness in plants?
- How Lekhanath Paudyal has empowered the tree *Tarun Tapasi* with consciousness?
- What features of consciousness has the poet attached to *Tarun Tapasi*?

Methodology

The methodology applied in this research is a purely textual analysis. The study depends on two types of textual data. The primary source is *Tarun Tapasi*, the epic composed by *Kavisiromani* Lekhanath Paudyal. The secondary source includes the books and articles on the theory of consciousness. The research, therefore uses the theory of plant consciousness as the tool.

***Tarun Tapasi* (“Tree”): A Metaphor of Life and Wisdom**

Begun from Aristotle’s discussion in his *Poetics*, metaphor is a dominant mode of poetic expression and an “absolute linguistic mastery” (Punter 11) in poetic creation. Aristotle defines metaphor as the figure of the figures powerfully applied in poetry, “one thing that cannot be learned from others, and it is also a sign of genius since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar” (Aristotle 71). This intuition is not the poetry itself, but the ornament in poetry and of poetry. Finding similarity out of dissimilar as the purpose of metaphor generates a general question, “whether the metaphor is merely ornamental to already existing thoughts or words, or creative and constitutive of thoughts and words” (Avis 82). Instead of saying something directly, the ornamented expression enriches the meaning and gives power to creation, however, it is necessary to use metaphors properly. Sometimes, metaphor does have the limitation of contextuality, “the meaning of a metaphor depends almost entirely on the immediate context: a metaphor is justified solely by its use” (Avis 83). The use of the analogy should be matched, for which I. A. Richards names them as ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ of metaphor, “the tenor being the conceptual meaning and the vehicle being the concrete comparison” (Richards 96). Metaphor is the vehicle for delivering insights. Abstract ideas can be best presented through physical perception and vice versa. The

context determines the meaning and the concept of analogy through metaphor can be further extended beyond any particular context in a series of events.

A young sage, *Tarun Tapasi*, speaks as a narrator from the very beginning of the epic. This *Tarun Tapasi*, as metaphor, “the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or species to species, or on grounds of analogy” (Aristotle 63), is none other than a tree. The poet reaches in the lap of a tree for which he supposes as a sage:

त्यसै घुम्दा घुम्दै उस गहन चिन्ताबिच फसी

बिचैमा भेट्टाये विधिवश कुनै दिव्य तपसी। (*Tarun Tapasi* 1. 22)

“The poet was wandering and feeling sad when he found a perky sage” (*Tarun Tapasi* 1.22; trans.)¹ The tree, as a metaphor, gets personified. The poet has wandered the whole day and has just arrived under a young tree. He spends a night in its lap and realizes that it is not simply a tree in physical form. As Johnstone believes, “Each plant has its personality, just like us” (Johnstone 92), the poet finds the personality of *Tarun Tapasi* allegorically comparable with human beings:

अली मोटो अग्लो कद, जमिनमा छन् पद खडा

घुँडा, तिघ्रा, बाहू, उदर, उर छन् पुष्ट तगडा।

कसीलो सल्कालो गठन तनको, दीर्घ मुहुडा

जटा काला, लम्बा, वसन तनमा वल्कल कडा। (*Tarun Tapasi* 1.23)

“Slightly fat and tall structure, standing on the earth with strong knee, arms, and stomach, sound structure with a long face and long dark hair falling to the body” (TT 1.23; trans.)

The tree has brightness and it appears as if it is a holy sage. This personification begins by talking about the physical structure of the tree. It represents a universal perception of the world about the tree. This concept describes what the tree looks like. Its roots are strongly deepened into the earth. Having strong muscles and body structure, the tree has long dark hair. This description of the tree by the tree as a narrator gives an image of a holy sage. It makes sense that the tree is not just a tree but a strong human structure helps to understand the patterns of the tree as the patterns of human life in the extended form in the coming section. This metaphorical description creates a power to please, which is an exciting and perhaps, under some circumstances, “a dangerous power; but it is in some sense an addition to the ‘normal’, by which we might infer ‘literal’, workings of language” (Punter 12). It is not simply used in a single context, but it is an extended metaphor in *Tarun Tapasi*, “the poet’s ability to present a single tree as a *Tapasi* has given a new creative essence in the world epic tradition” (Sama iii). The tree stands for its creative form in the rest part of the epic.

Trees and human beings have similarities in their outer structure and inner structure, “Just like us, plants and trees have a metaphysical counterpart to their physical body, an astral aspect through which their souls can work” (Farrell 54). This tree, having the very nature of a metaphor, cannot be interpreted at its face value, and its just structural and material value. Neither the poet has talked about the material benefits of the tree to human beings in the poem directly. He has created the image of a tree with a creative imagination, and almost every feeling of the tree can be understood

¹ The citations from the primary source are my translations.

implicitly not in the way a tree is speaking, but in the way a wise and intelligent person is speaking. The tree speaks about its past life as a child:

सहारौं, सम्भारौं, अशरण छ यो बालक भनी
मलाई को हेर्ने? उस बखत मायावश बनी।
जती चलथे फिर्था, सब मतलबी नासमझ ती
कठै अन्धा जस्ता; विषयविषले व्याकुल अति। (2.4)

“Who would look after me, take care of me supposing me as a child? Whoever moved to pass this path were selfish and having no understanding, blinded with the desire of life” (TT 2.4; trans.) The tree examines human behavior of treating the small tree, the child tree. The tree (personified ‘he’ hereafter) thinks that human beings are like the blinds guided by the desire, and greed of life. This very evaluation shows the tree’s nature as a mature human being.

As a metaphor, the tree softens himself with multiple types of perceptions based on his experience of his long life, especially creating ethical and ideal evaluations of human behavior. He has a complaint over human treatment of him, however, the tree is indeed the base of human survival. Trees provide oxygen and food, and also trees are the sources of shelter and security for humans. Montgomery explains this fact, “All of our food comes from plants or from animals that ate plants, which then creates all of the tissue that makes up our bones, organs, and flesh. Plants can create their tissue directly from sunlight and water, but we must depend on plants for the formation of ours” (Montgomery 65). Providing shelter to humans, birds, and animals, the tree as *Tapasi* is the symbol of security, the security of food and life:

म मौनी, एकाकी, प्रिय घरवटी, आश्रम खुला
चुलोचम्को लाई खचित नगिचै लाखन शिला।
उता मीठो पानी, सब तरहले वास सजिलो। (5.9)

“I am the only house owner, an open ashram, the cooking stove of the rocks nearby, sweet water closed and an easy shelter” (TT 5.9; trans.).

As trees provide shelter, food, clothes, fuel, wood, and tools, and humans generate a level of their relation with the trees, *Tarun Tapasi* has acquired symbolic functions of “man-tree relations forced and enabled man to cognize nature” (Abramova, Pavlycheva and Tarasova 2). This sage tree functions as an economic, political, and moral force and is capable of replacing the home providing strong defense from external forces giving identity to man and nature directly related to the environment. This tree is not merely a tree in the object. It has presented the image of humans within in the form of the views spoken as a man. It further identifies the mode of the human-tree relationship as an essential mode of the human-nature relationship “to identify and explore the world from viewing and exploring the nearby natural objects, which formed an environment as part of human life and activity” (Klyuchevskiy 1). The life and activities of the tree are associated with physical and beyond-physical.

Tarun Tapasi (“tree”) is a metaphor for a wise and old person, who has lived a long and worthy life. The longevity of the tree provides a metaphor for proposing old people, experience, knowledge, and wisdom:

न मिल्थ्यो त्यो शिक्षा सितिमिति कुनै शास्त्रहरुमा

न वा ज्ञानी ध्यानी धरणितलका सिद्धहरुमा। (7.17)

“That knowledge was rarely found in books, nor found in the earthly pedants and learned cerebral” (TT 7.17; trans.)

The knowledge of the tree, as depicted in *Tarun Tapasi*, has the meaning of the metaphor of wisdom higher positioned ever than the books. On the other hand, the *Tapasi*, as a mature old man is the metaphor for the ancient tree, and in one sense, the history of culture, it is “a component of the cultural code and it possesses a set of cultural meanings, which have developed for centuries” (Abramova, Pavlycheva, and Tarasova 3). This metaphor represents a man-tree relationship, which “reflects the ancient ideas about man-tree kinship” (Abramova, Pavlycheva, and Tarasova 3) conditioned by man-tree similarity in the structure of the body as upright, localized psychological connectivity and family tree concept. In all situations, such as experience, knowledge, and culture, the insight within the tree cannot be neglected. The meaning shows reciprocal transfer: man endowed with the qualities of a tree, and tree endowed with the qualities of the man, both physical and metaphysical; concrete and abstract.

Here, *Tarun Tapasi* as a metaphor has a comprehensive bond beyond a single point of comparison. It begins with the poet’s arrival under a tree and the poet is castrated into a tree in the form of a tree in the triangular relation of the poet, the tree, and a *Tapasi* (“sage”). It goes on regularly until the end of the poem. The voice of the poet appears at the beginning and at the end of every act to show the poet’s participation in the narrative. Starting with the comparative point of physical structure as a standing man the image and knowledge of *Tapasi* gets conveyed through the tree. In this sense, the tree is an extended metaphor of life and sagacity in the epic *Tarun Tapasi*. It further enunciates the possibility of seeing the whole world as a vast series of metaphors in nature and every other creation of God.

Sentience of Equality, Ethics, and Humanity in *Tarun Tapasi*

Lekhanath Paudyal has chosen the tree to express the awareness of equality, ethics, and humanity through the voice of a young sage with the supposition that tree consciousness is the most impartial one without the emotion of one another. Consciousness is the state of being aware of the things that happen around one’s proximity and being receptive. Pellegrino observes that trees have the ability to feel, “Since Darwin, the study of plant signaling has emphasized plants’ capacity to move purposefully and to feel. Plants, then, are to be seen as active sentient beings, capable of complex interactions with their environments” (Pellegrino 16). Being conscious means making sense and interacting. In general, making a sense of something and being perceptive is the state of consciousness. As the history of knowledge has come through human perception, humans are known as the conscious beings of all. However, in recent days, biology has begun to study animal consciousness and botany has introduced a new discipline of plant psychology. This shift from traditional study to modern studies of multiple aspects has given a way to rethink the possibility of consciousness of plants and trees in one sense, “plants have a nervous system: they have memory,

can make decisions, and therefore have consciousness” (Farrell 57). Therefore, examining consciousness in trees in literature through metaphorical interpretation is even relevant to linking literature with modern science.

The sentient state, which labels “a person or other creature as being ‘aware of’ something, and to refer to a property of mental states, such as perceiving, feeling, and thinking, that distinguishes those states from unconscious mental states” (Rosenthal 157) is consciousness. If consciousness is directly linked with the mental state, in the plant, not yet found to have the mind and its mental mechanism, the sensation of self is almost impossible in trees and the trees cannot cross-examine this matter directly, but at the same time, an “awareness (consciousness) confers a significant adaptive advantage that enables organisms to react appropriately to physical, biological and social signals from their environment” (Trewavas and Baluska 1221). This physical, biological, and social signaling, which is found in humans, animals, and birds, can be found in trees and plant organisms. Barlow presents similar arguments:

some of the criteria by which consciousness is inferred to be present in animals are met by plants. For example, plants display features of cognition (sensing and response) and of learning and memory which, in animals, contribute to the conscious state. Plants also possess a rudimentary nervous system similar to that found in basal animals and have, perhaps, a simple brain, as well as slow and fast transmissible electrical activity, all of which are strong correlates of consciousness in animals. (Barlow 1)

The matter of whether plants are conscious depends much on human relationships with the natural world. It is a man who has to find out the consciousness of plants or animals. Humans are conscious of themselves and are also aware of the consciousness of animals and trees, and therefore undergo different animal-based studies to locate the psychology of humans. No consciousness of the trees exists in isolation from human understanding. In this sense, humans can read the consciousness and psychology of the trees. Lekhanath Paudyal has done the same in that he has studied the consciousness of the tree through *Tarun Tapasi*. Tree, as *Tarun Tapasi*, shows its comportment and it has directedness which scientists call teleology “purposefulness—into language speak of a future-directedness that seems present to some degree, in all living beings” (Margulis and Sagan 17). The poet has created two characters in this poem, the poet and *Tarun Tapasi* to maintain the directedness in which the consciousness of the *Tarun Tapasi* has been expressed through the character of the poet. The consciousness of *Tarun Tapasi* has been structured in nineteen chapters with the theme of cognizance of being a child and young, a sense of equality and equity, the feeling of pain, feeling of humanity and ethics.

Realization of Adulthood in *Tarun Tapasi*

Paudyal has seen the growth of the tree in the way it happens in humans, and he has chosen the tree to internalize the sense of psychological and physical growth from the viewpoint of a young sage. He has the realization that a tree has the ability of cognizance. The poet intended to start a penance with the hope of getting the knowledge of life. Spending a night under a tree, he has integrated himself into the tree and has seen the world through the eyes of the tree. His sense of *Tapasi* has come out in the form of the wisdom of the tree. The tree has cognized himself as a grown-up *Tapasi* and he recalls his past life as a child and how people would behave to him:

कलीलो यो मेरो वय छ, बटुवा हो जनि गर

चलाऊ बिस्तारैसित नजरकै साथ पयर । (2.11)

The memory of the past is an indication of consciousness. It is the primary level of being conscious, “Primary consciousness means having any type of experiences or feelings, no matter how faint or fleeting” (Revonsuo 37). It is something like the feeling of being. *Tarun Tapasi* memorizes his child's age and how he used to plead with people to handle him gently. Also, he has felt the change in him:

हजारौं ती धक्का रगडहरु खाँदै हरघडी

अडी काँपी काँपी कठिनसित; पुर्लुङ्ग नलडी।

किशोराऽवस्था त्यो जिनतिन बित्यो व्याकुल बनी

हटे सुस्तै सुस्तै नियतिगतिले ती पशु पनी । (3.12)

Tarun Tapasi, in a sense, recites his autobiography. The change taking place in his life, both in physical and cognizance reflects his consciousness. He is no more a child now. He is not an adolescent either. He has become an adult which shows his sense of maturity and wisdom. He has changed the vision of life to the mode of the consciousness of the world within him, “Vision is the primary route to our conscious experience of the world beyond our bodies” (Goodale and Milner 122). He has undergone thousands of blows and has become a young and mature tree full of senses and experiences. He explains how he has become stronger physically and mentally:

त्यहाँदेखी झन् झन् डबल गतिले कति नअडी

ममा बढ्दै आयो तरुण वय, शोभा हरघडी।

मुटूको कम्जोरी, भय, शिथिलता, संशय उड्यो

जगत्को कल्याणव्रतविषयमा साहस बढ्यो। (5.7)

Growth in life up to some point is certain, and so does it happen in *Tarun Tapasi*. The matter here is not the growth of the tree from a small child to a young and mature, but the matter is the sense of growth and the evaluation of the world, especially human treatment towards it which indicates the state of awareness and the state of being. Also, it shows how the tree feels internally, however not seen as quite reactive.

Awareness of Equality in *Tarun Tapasi*

Lekhanath Paudyal has the classical knowledge of the tree as the divine source. He has the belief that the tree is the natural element that best imparts the value of equality to human beings, especially those who can understand it. So, he has anticipated the idea that tree has a sense of equality.

Awareness of equality is a sign of full consciousness. *Tarun Tapasi* expresses his awareness of equality in natural creations:

ठुला साना प्राणी चतुर विधिका सन्तति सब

सबैको साझा हो प्रकृति गुणको भोग्यविभव।

सबै हाँसून् खेलून् सरल रसिलो जीवन धरी
धरालाई पारी प्रणयरसले देवनगरी। (2.6)

No one has a special claim to nature, and nature supports none with special differences. Nature has universality. *Tarun Tapasi* speaks the truth that nature discriminates against none, and the tree, being an essential part, feels the same. Trees know the art of loving equally. The tree does not react in the way humans do, “even when a person can affect a plant, the result is not always a happy one” (Tompkins and Bird 77), and so has the sense in *Tarun Tapasi* and it is because of the power psychic energy in action. It is not certain if the plants have intellect but “plants could pick up intentions from a human” (Tompkins and Bird 66), and *Tarun Tapasi* realizes:

किरामा, पक्षीमा, नर, पशु, लता, वृक्षतकमा
अहो एकैनासे परम चित्तिको दिव्य चकमा। (2.10)

What exists in nature is the sameness of life forms “A Life Force, or Cosmic Energy, surrounding all living things is sharable among plants, animals, and humans. Through such sharing, a person and a plant become one” (Tompkins and Bird 69-70). This oneness makes it possible to establish a mutual sensitivity between *Tarun Tapasi* and human beings and complaints over human action of discriminating against the surrounding nature:

फुरेको देख्दैछौ तदपि किन गर्छौ धरमर?
विवेकज्योत्स्नाले सकल धरणी शीतल गर। (2.10)

The speaker pleads to think over the action of equality in nature and requests not to be confused to make justice over the earth in making it cool to “celebrate the human role as a positive, life-enhancing agent in Earth’s unfolding story and in so doing, we live in the wonder and mystery of the living Universe” (Montgomery 58). This is the way to bring us forth in interdependence and mutual trust to each other, and then we live in sacred relations.

Tarun Tapasi further examines the equality exposed from the sun:

अहा त्यो वेलाको क्षणिक पनि आलोक रविको
मिठो मर्मस्पर्शी सरस कविता झैं सुकविको।
ठुला साना निर्धा धनिक सबलाई सम थियो
ममा जस्ले गर्दा अतुल समता जागृत भयो। (4.10)

Tarun Tapasi, as a tree has learnt the lesson of equity from the sun. Even the short touch of the sun’s light was pleasing to him like a sweet poem. The sun has taught him the way to behave with everyone equally and equitably with the potential situation of “living that embodies mutually enhancing relations” (Montgomery 57). It is the best way of veneration for all life, and *Tarun Tapasi* would revere everyone equally whoever comes under his shelter.

मल्हामी आऊन् वा मलिन मुख लायेर मुडुला
बिसाऊन् वा जन्तीहरु वरबधूसाथ सुकिला।
समानै दिन्थे ती उभयकन छाया म तिनको । (8.3)

He would deliver the same love and shelter to rich and poor, to good and bad, to kind and miser, to happy and sad people with no discrimination at all. He would always be in between these people:

घडी झुमेझामे मलमलिन ढाक्रे र भरिया

घडी साहू राम्रा सुघर सुर जस्ता शहरिया।

घडी घाँसी ग्वाला, कृषकहरु झुत्रे नगिचमा

थियेँ साक्षी जस्तो सकल बटुवाको म बिचमा। (8.8)

Trees do not have hearts, and therefore they do not know how to discriminate against one another. None is closer to the tree than others. Humans are the ones to label closer and nearer. It does not mean that trees and humans do not have a relation. Certainly, they have, “plants and people have a symbiotic relationship that is undeniable” (Montgomery 64). Humans evaluate the situation with their higher level of consciousness of intellect, emotions, and reasoning, but trees have a primary level of consciousness, “many proponents of plant consciousness have argued that plants need not have human-type or animal-type consciousness. Instead, they propose that plants have something more ‘alien’ that is nonneural yet still fits the criterion for primary consciousness of raw experience—that is, something it is like to be” (Mallatt, Blatt, and Draguhn 460). Primary consciousness, which “does not involve the ability to reflect on the experiences, the self-awareness that one is conscious, self-recognition in a mirror, episodic memory, dreaming, or higher cognitive thought (Mallatt, Blatt and Draguhn 460), is a form of receptive ability and the domain of getting affected from the surrounding events of nature and human beings. *Tarun Tapasi*, with its primary consciousness, receives everything that happens around his situation but does not make a difference between countrymen and city men, farmers and owners in his behavior.

Sensation of Pain and Sorrow

Trees do not have sense organs but do they have sensation? Lekhanath Paudyal has realized that trees have sensation, and therefore, he has chosen *Tarun Tapasi* as the tree with the feeling of sensation. Through this, he has established the concept that nature survives and so does the tree. Likewise, the tree has a life too but the question is if the tree feels? The tree receives everything silently but does not react directly and immediately. Still, it reacts deliberately. This reaction is the result of the expression of the soul force of Mother Nature in Farrell’s views, “And just like us, each plant or tree is an expression of the soul force of Mother Nature and carries her unique medicine to heal on the physical, emotional, and spiritual level” (Farrell 54). Because of its ability to express, *Tarun Tapasi* feels pain in the natural phenomena, and expresses as a silent reaction in a sense:

पिट्यो पाता कस्तै विकट रिपु भै शीतल शठले

तुषारोले मार्यो शिर सब थिची लाति हठले।

चुट्यो, टोक्यो, ठोक्यो अधम हिमले हुर्मत लियो

हुरीले मुण्ट्यायो विकट गलहतीतक दियो। (4.5)

He feels that the dew, the frost, the snow, and the wind all do not care about his weak condition. They all have subjugated and overpowered him every year. This feeling of cold and being bitten by the snow shows his consciousness similar to the effect of cold on human thought and emotions. This very realization indicates that “Plants can understand human emotions too” (Tompkins and Bird 60).

Tarun Tapasi has expressed his experience variously that there is “the power of ‘psychic energy’ in action” (Tompkins and Bird 60). This subjugation has empowered him to stand strong even more:

कडा त्यो ठण्डीले सकल मुटुको ताकत जति
चुसीहाल्यो, थाल्यो विवश दुनियाँ खुम्चिन अति।
बिदा भैगो मान् उपचयकला विश्वभरको
म जस्ता नङ्गाको उस बखत गर्ने खबर को? । (4.8)

Tarun Tapasi has undergone the experience in the way a human being does. This is a fundamental natural process that is similar to human feeling in many ways, “without even being conscious of it, we are intensely linked by this fundamental natural process to the plant kingdom. When we start acknowledging plant consciousness, all we are doing is allowing ourselves to become more aware and conscious of the relationship that we already share with plants” (Johnstone 84). *Tarun Tapasi* provides an intangible aspect of the tree with a special achievement by its nature, conscience and divine spirit and shows the “signs of self-awareness” (Trewavas and Baluska) in his expression of pain and suffering. He has come out of all such pains and has the knowledge of how even nature can make the trees feel painful, however, these phenomena are regular and natural.

Relational Metaphysics: Tree’s Concern about Ethics and Humanity

Relational metaphysics is the theory of examining the relation and interdependency in the world of metaphysics in which ethics plays a significant role. Paudyal has seen the tree as the source of ethics and he has chosen *Tarun Tapasi* with the knowledge of extreme ethical value. Ethics concerns the question of what we have reason to do. It is generally understood as the reason for action and the consequences of action to be positively demanded. Visak examines the ethics of relational welfare, “it is clear that our actions concerning plants only relate to what we have reason to do in so far as these actions affect welfare. If plants are welfare subjects, what we do to them matters directly. If they are not welfare subjects, how we treat them matters indirectly, to the extent that it affects welfare subjects” (Visak 30). For the sense of internal motivation of welfare ethics, trees are always helpful to humans and nonhumans. Likewise, *Tarun Tapasi* has become a shelter for human beings and birds. He has witnessed the way humans have behaved to other natural things and objects. He has beheld the event of a hunter hunting a bird and has found the lack of humanity in human beings from a bird’s perspective.

म मर्ने वेला भो तर मनुज तिम्रो मनुजता
कता भाग्यो, त्यस्को भरसक बुझे है तिमि पता। (6.2)

Tarun Tapasi has integrated himself with the agony of the panic-stricken bird and has raised questions on the level of humanity in human beings. Anyway, he has to die, and it’s time too, but why human beings have declined in their ethics is his query. He has voiced his opinions on human’s fading ethical values and humanity in the way “plants could pick up intentions from a human” (Tompkins and Bird 61). *Tarun Tapasi* has regarded humans as blinds with physical eyes:

खुला नै छन् आँखा तर विकट अन्धोपनसित
मित्यारी लायेका अति कठिन कारुण्यरहित। (9.18)

Plants are always ethical on their stands. Plant ethics is not different from the ethics of humans and animals, “plants are composed of the same organic matter as animals and therefore that they can be compared to animals” (Pouteau 83). *Tarun Tapasi*, therefore realizes the pain of the bird and the cruelty of human beings at the time and supposes that human beings have eyes but they are blind by their behavior to plants, birds, and animals. He has scrutinized human history and that human beings have been changed from worshippers of non-violence to man searching birds in the tree for hunting:

जगत्रक्षालाई जुनिभर अहिंसाव्रत धरी
 उसैद्वारा व्याघ्रप्रभृति पशु सारा वश गरी।
 रहन्थ्यो जो ज्ञानी मनुज गहिरो शान्तिसुखमा
 मट्याङ्गा हान्ने भो शिव शिव उही आज रुखमा। (6.7)

The ethics of a tree is always relational. It happens the same in humans and animals, “plants, animals, humans, and indeed any other living being are always related to other living beings” (Coeckelbergh 99). Therefore, humans have to preserve the ethics of plants and birds to preserve their ethics, but it does not happen. *Tarun Tapasi*, with a tree consciousness of ethics, raises the question of how human beings have undergone a change from a holy sage to a hunter. In fact, “human activities rely on direct or indirect interaction with plants” (Pouteau 82), but humans have ignored this relation of interaction. This human action of destroying plants and birds, as Coeckelbergh states, has certainly a question on the human sense of ethics:

The consequences of our actions on all such living entities out of concern or respect for the whole of which they are parts. This can be extended to plant ethics: one could argue that plants deserve moral standing since they are part of an ecological whole. Whether this means that all plants have a right to live and what, for instance, a no-harm principle would imply for plants are different questions. (Coeckelbergh 99)

Plants possess moral standing because trees are not isolated ‘things’ but they are living beings and they, like other beings, have a sense of perception therefore they are part of a larger ecological and relational whole- a part of the wholeness of the ecosystem. The notion of moral standing is typically understood in ethics and therefore trees can question the loss of human ethical loss. *Tarun Tapasi* has seen the moral decline in human activities and has evaluated their real state:

गरी झुट्टा, बाङ्गा, छल, कपट वा जाल बहना
 पियेका छन् जस्ले मुफत, अरुका उष्ण पसिना।
 यहाँ त्यस्ता दम्भी पुरुष धरणीका धनपति
 कुनै छैनन्, ज्यादै तल छ तिनको गर्हित गति। (15.36)

He, as “plants are open beings never completed and (potentially) endlessly coming into existence” (Pouteau 82-83) is open to look at human activities and their essential selfishness. He has found that people who do not live ethical lives have low levels in the world’s review from the perspective of other living beings however they have the vanity of their wealth. Dominating other beings like plants, birds, and animals is not the real ethics of human beings. What is ethics is to respect every other creature of the world at the level of their own. Great people, in the opinion of *Tarun Tapasi*, are those who depend on their ethics of life based on their toil and work:

धरित्रीमा सत्य, श्रम र पसिनाको भर परी
 तपस्या जो गर्छन् सरल मनले जीवनभरी।
 तिनैको त्यै सत्य, श्रम र पसिनारूप तपको
 चिरस्थायी यै हो परिणति उज्यालो गजबको। (15.35)

The world shines with the holy work and value of the toil, not by dishonesty, oppression, insatiability, and trickery. The work and toil in nature are recognized by the interdependence of the organism. The real notion of interdependence and relational aspects in organisms depends on how a plant or animal contributes to another's life and existence. It is also the moral standing of an individual natural organism "The moral standing of plants cannot be defined apart and receives its relevance from, these larger wholes. Plants as living organisms may surely be viewed as morally relevant, but there is no such thing as "individual" plant life. Living means relating; there is always dependence on other living and non-living entities" (Coeckelbergh 100). With the concept of this relational living *Tarun Tapasi* has a wish to make this world the place of cohabitation, and therefore remarks over human moral debility, "तपस्वीको एकै व्रत छ दुनियाँको उपकृति" (19.12). He has no other wish than the welfare and happiness of the whole nature in the chain of cohabitation. *Tarun Tapasi* further questions to the mother nature on why she has given birth to the cruel human beings:

सिधासादा, निर्धा विहगकन मारने नियतिले
 दियेकी हुन् के त्यो करयुगल माता प्रकृतिले? । (6.20)

It is his question why mother nature has given birth to the ones who have no affection and regard for the feebler ones. Love is the central factor in maintaining harmony among the beings. The relation of love in nature is a relational metaphysics—" an ecological view that emphasizes that plants, animals, humans, and indeed any other living being are always related to other living beings" (Coeckelbergh 98). One who has no sense of affection has no value in the wholeness of nature. One form of nature should have compassion for others when in difficulty or problem. It only makes possible for the natural harmony. *Tarun Tapasi* makes a rhetorical question of why humans move towards violence and leave the property of kindness:

दया त्यस्तो त्यागी मनुज किन हिंसातिर झुक्यौ?
 म मर्ने हूँ, मर्छू तर तिमि नराम्रोसित चुक्यौ। (6.24)

Tarun Tapasi speaks from the perspective of a panic-stricken bird who has to die but he is concerned about the loss of kindness in human beings. No humanity remains if the quality of sympathy is lost from humans. *Tarun Tapasi* is not a passive plant, "plants are not passive but adapt to their environment and signal opportunities and threats to one another" (Coeckelbergh 99), but he has consciousness of possible threat in humans due to the loss of humanity and ethics. He has the realization that all living beings have equity of survival in nature, especially on earth, and the tree also survives with this principle, he is concerned about why some creatures die of hunger to the natural principle of equality:

किरा किर्थादेखी मनुज, पशु, पक्षीतक सब
जती जो जन्मन्छन् सकल तिनको योग्यविभव।
धरित्रीको छाती उपर पहिले नै छ खचित
अहो भोकै मर्छन् तदपि किन त्यो दुर्गतिसित? । (9.10)

Nothing equals the ethics of the earth and trees. The Earth provides space to all beings including trees, and it also teaches the lesson of ethics and consciousness, “The consciousness of the plants is the consciousness of Earth; the plants work to bring balance to all aspects of Earth, including us, her children” (Farrell 54). Likewise, *Tarun Tapasi* sees the earth as the perfect place of equality and shares a sense of consciousness. The connection of earth and tree, therefore is the meaning of relational metaphysics.

In this way, *Tarun Tapasi* has the real realization of relational metaphysics in which human beings are part of natural cohabitation. Life in nature is always interdependent however ontology is one essence of the intrinsic value of an individual nature. He alarms to human beings on their loss of natural ethics, humanity, and compassion.

Tree’s Interest and Grievance to Humans’ Role in Cohabitation

Trees know the truth, and if humans know how to listen to the voice of the trees, humans know the truth too. Hesse admits this fact of truth in the trees, “Trees are holy. If you know how to talk to them, how to listen to them, you will learn the truth” (Hesse 11). If trees know the truth, they certainly expect the same, which is their interest. The matter of interest is an abstract notion, but it can be measured or identified if it is expressed. Trees cannot express their interest, but it does not mean that they don’t have interest. Therefore, the poet has chosen the way of expressing the tree’s interest through *Tarun Tapasi* in the poem.

The role of trees for humans is the most discussed part of nature aesthetics. Similarly, the human role in preserving nature is also a major point of discussion in environmentalism. But the tree’s interest is not much discussed yet though deep ecological inquiry raises the voice of the inherent value of nature and its self-existence. Whether plants have their interests or not is an ambiguous question, but “the fact that trees cannot take an interest in anything does not preclude their having interests” (Sandler 41). Trees cannot show their interests directly and cannot express their interest in the way human beings do. It does not mean that they do not have an interest, “there is a sense in which plants take an interest in their welfare” (Sandler 41). The interest of the tree is of welfare, the well-being of self and others. Like the trees with the interest of welfare, *Tarun Tapasi* examines the history of the condition of trees before the creation of human beings:

विधाताको हाम्रा उपर करुणागौरव छँदै
धरित्रीमा अन्धो मनुजकुलको जन्म नहुँदै।
बितेका हाम्रा ती शुभ दिवस यद्वा शुभ घडी
थिये मानू भाग्योदयजनित बुट्टा फुलजडी। (19.7)

Trees were happy before humans were born on Earth. With no human presence, the life of the trees, plants, and groves was full of blessings. The initial days were happy days for them. This particular expression shows that trees have an interest in happiness, of which humans can be part if they

possess the sensation of relational metaphysics. Trees feel about the life of human beings, but it seems as if humans do not have the same level of thought for the well-being of the trees, “the more time we spend expanding our awareness to meet plant consciousness, the more compassion we feel towards the natural world” (Johnstone 88). *Tarun Tapasi* has further questions for the creator:

पछी उस्ले अन्धो मनुज जहिले सिर्जन गर्यो
 वहाँदेखी हाम्रो सकल कुलमा संशय पर्यो।
 घट्यो आयुर्दाको अवधि, भयको सङ्क्रम भयो
 कठै हाम्रो हत्या उस मनुजबाटै शुरु भयो। (19.8)

Tarun Tapasi has realized that trees are killed by humans. Human activities are the central cause of the death of the tree. Trees have a complex sense of evaluating the situation, and hence, they have consciousness. Montgomery has examined the intelligence in trees; “plants have an enormous computing capacity and for making decisions about complex aspects of their environment like light, water, gravity, vibrations, chemicals, temperature, sound, and predators. They have intricate signaling systems to alert their neighbors when danger is near. They can forage and compete, as well as receive signals from other plants and then remember all of this to set future intentions of intelligent choice.” (Montgomery 68)

He has found that, unlike other natural beings, humans do not think about the well-being of every natural organism at first. They think about themselves first. This self-centered feeling of human beings has made him grieve on humanity and its position. *Tarun Tapasi*, “as plants can share sentience, or autonomy, or agency, or some of the other grounds of intrinsic value, then they have intrinsic value as well” (Pellegrino 15), shares his intrinsic value. He is equally valuable to human beings extrinsically:

यहाँ जो जो बस्छन् घर, महल वा गोठ, झुपडी
 कुटी, पाटी, पौवा, मठ, विविध शाला, कचहडी।
 सबैमा यै हाम्रो कठिन तपको अन्तिम कला
 म देख्दैछु धेरै किसिमसँग त्यो गछ सुकला। 19.19)

Wherever people go, they have to depend on the trees. The shelter is not possible without the use of a tree. Their life is possible only with the difficult penance of the trees. They do have a difficult life with difficulty even surviving due to human activities and even natural catastrophes. *Tarun Tapasi* shows the condition of the trees as:

कसैका देखिन्छन् शिर विकट नङ्गा र मुडुला
 कसैका काटिन्छन् कटकट कठै हात डुँडुला।
 कसैका ताछिन्छन् कमर, बिचरा रक्तमय छन्
 तपस्या त्यो कत्रो? तदपि सब आनन्दमय छन्॥17॥

This is the picture of the cut-down trees. Some trees are bare and bald. Some others have their arms cut down and some others have been wounded on the body. All this is because human beings have

intentionally made this panic to the trees. Despite this panic-stricken situation, trees feel pleasure through the power of their penance. Trees can endure, and therefore, they have consciousness.

Conclusion

The theory of consciousness establishes the fact that experiencing the sense of pain and suffering, recognition of good and bad, and the ability to communicate through reception are the real aspects of identifying consciousness in beings. Whether trees have consciousness is a question in the modern study of biology and environmental studies. Trees have life forms. They have varieties. They grow. Some trees have a moving nature too. They produce oxygen which is the source of human life. They die with the change in time. Therefore, trees have all the indications of life. Trees have consciousness and they can best reflect the feelings of the poet and the feelings of human beings. Modern biology has identified that trees have sense. They experience nature. And therefore, they have consciousness, however, they are not identified with the mind yet. Mind is not the only obligatory measure for consciousness though.

Lekhanath Paudyal has depicted a tree in *Tarun Tapasi*, symbolizing the essence of a Tapasi, the sage. The query arises as to why the poet has chosen the tree as a means to convey his philosophy on life and nature. It seems that the poet recognizes the authentic essence of human existence within the greenery of the forest. Trees play a vital role in our survival, enabling us to breathe and providing sustenance. Each leaf, with its million mobile lips, actively participates in consuming carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Beyond their respiratory function, trees possess a profound understanding of the truths inherent in nature and human life. They exhibit a survival instinct, perceiving the need to seek sustenance and avoid environmental threats. Hence, the poet has selected the tree as a personified character, a conscious sage, and an intelligent being capable of experiencing pain, suffering, moral values, and humanity. Trees possess enduring thoughts—serene, drawn-out, and deep-breathed—reflecting their longer lifespans and greater wisdom compared to humans. Paudyal suggests that when we disregard them, we are less wise than these ancient beings.

In Paudyal's perspective, a relational approach underscores that the value and moral significance of plants arises not from their inherent ontological and moral status but rather from human interactions with them. Paudyal views plants as living allies, emphasizing the importance of connecting with their spirit or vibration for wisdom, guidance, teaching, and healing. Within *Tarun Tapasi*, the poet highlights that the worth of plants is determined by human practices, and things are deemed good or bad based on the value judgments expressed by beings, often identified with humans.

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