



RABINDRANATH TAGORE, THE SHORT STORY WRITER AND A SOCIAL REFORMER



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The literary work of Rabindranath Tagore has opened ways for the future which promised to go beyond it. Besides the poetry, which is a vehicle of a poet's self expression, thoughts and feelings, he had chosen the novel and the short story to present his critique on the contemporary society.

Tagore's contribution to Indian Literature has been aptly called a 'Triveni' of three streams: the inspiration of the oriental tradition and its culture, the modern ideas of the Western Renaissance and his own unique and original poetic vision. He made people conscious that they are involved in the process of rebirth as a whole people. He became a symbol of real modernism in Indian by bridging the gulf between the old the new. He affirmed that there is close relationship between the human mind and the nature and the bond of the man with the soil is a concrete one.

Tagore observed the weakness of the Western Civilization that it has in it the spirit of the machine which must move, and to that blind movement human lives are offered as fuel keeping up the stream power. It represents the active aspect of inertia which has been the appearance of freedom, both within its boundaries and outside. Besides this, it was also Tagore who pointed out that the present civilization of India has the constraining power of the mould. It squeezes the living man in the grip of rigid regulations and its repression of

individual freedom makes it only too easy for men to be forced into submission of all kinds and degrees. In both of these traditions, life is offered up to something which is not life, it is sacrifice, which has no God for its worship, and is therefore utterly in vain. "Through his writings, he tried to prove that a new faith, based on man's creative potentialities in art and literature, music philosophy and science, may rise that a new world may be built far greater and higher in accomplishment than which has been going down before our own eyes."

Tagore's short stories portray an India which is in a process of regeneration. His short stories present a wide range of social problems, spiritual conflicts, emotional encounters, imaginative explorations and flights of fancy besides portraits of men and women.

The issue – 'art for art's sake' is perhaps as old as art itself. Tagore believed that a true literary artist must write with an understanding of life. He must have a purpose to express in his writings and the purpose must be healthy and good. According to Tagore, literature expresses not only beauty and Truth, but also goodness.

Tagore has clearly seen the growing social insecurity and demoralization in the life and society of his times. The social structure is marked by the decadent traditional modes of life blindly resisting new forces of life. The caste rules are rigid and inter-caste marriages are not socially accepted. Those who break the caste rules are often excommunicated. Tagore's story *The Renunciation* condemns this social evil.

Harihar, the leader of the Brahmin families of the village, declares that Peari Sankar's family is excommunicated because his son-in-law, who crossed the sea and went to England is living in his house. Though Peari Sankar shifts his family to Calcutta, he cannot escape from the effects of social strictures. When he has made every arrangement for his nephew's marriage, Harihar instigated the bride's party to break off the match as Peari Sankar is excommunicated. Peari Sankar decides to take revenge on Harihar who is responsible for all this. He learns that Hemanth, Harihar's son is in love with Kusum, a Kayastha child-widow. Peari Sankar advises her old-guardian to go on a pilgrimage to Benaras and lodges the girl in the house of a Brahmin, Sripatichatterji. The cunning old man has successfully persuaded Kusum to agree for the marriage through an elaborate process of threats and advice. All the people are made to believe that Kusum is a Brahmin girl and the marriage is celebrated. When he learns that Hemanth's sister's marriage is settled, Peari Sankar reveals the secret. Harihar, for whom caste is more precious than the life itself, orders his son to renounce his wife. But Hemanth has such a deep love for his wife that he does not want to do it. Peari Sankar laughs and tells him the entire story of his revenge. He tells Hemanth that he is free to settle the issue as he

wishes. Hemanth belongs to the new world and so he does not renounce his wife. Instead he gives up the caste itself. Consequently, Harihar, the old man, renounce his son. Hemanth demonstrate that love is more important than the caste and creed and it is above both.

According to the Hindu tradition, marriage is a sacred bond for a happy conjugal life. The marriage function is celebrated with solemn serenity with apt invocations to Gods. The dowry system or the bride-money made marriage some kind of slave trade for women. Comparing the horoscopes is the first act in the dreadful drama of marriage. There are many cases, in which marriages are cancelled and matches are broken on the ground that horoscopes do not agree. Rabindranath's *The Stolen Treasure* denounces this superstition and evil practice.

The narrator of the story is a favourite pupil of Ajit Kumar Bhattacharya, a Sanskrit scholar whose immense faith in the stars can be called 'some sort of bigotry'. His teacher's wife has a great affection for him. One day he expresses his desire to marry their daughter Sunetra. But when the horoscopes are compared, they do not agree. In the meantime, proposals for Sunetra's marriage come from many quarters. But none of the horoscopes is matched. Her mother cannot stand that sort of unreal obstacles and requests the narrator to modify his horoscope to tally with that of Sunetra's. He follows her advice and they are married. After twenty one years of splendid wedded life, he has to face a similar problem when Aruna, his daughter, has fallen in love with a young man called Shailen. Sunetra stubbornly argues that their match will be settled only if the horoscopes agree. To change her mind, the narrator has to remind her of their conjugal happiness and prove that one "does not see how or when stars come together, but it's quite easy to see that they have come together in their hearts." One can hear Rabindranath's voice in the arguments of the narrator. Who says that, every individual has to face many troubles in his life, but they are not brought about by the stars. His master stroke is revealed in the way in which Rabindranath exposes the humbug of astrology in concrete example of the marriage of the parents.

In *Trespass* and *The Trust Property*. Rabindranath exposes two other popular blind beliefs of the society. Like *Sacrifice*, his famous play. *Trespass* portrays the conflict of orthodox religion and the age-old conventions on the one hand and the claims of the humanity on the other. Jaykalidevi, the main character of the story, proved herself as the 'rod of God's justice' by rebuking the villagers who intend to sacrifice the animals. It is a surprise for them that the same women who punished her nephew for his disobedience, gives asylum to an unclean animal in her temple of Radhanath jiu. She can understand that it is not the animal who flouted the laws of life of nature, but the human beings who butcher the innocent animals.

Rabindranath knows that the “supreme Lord of all creatures in the universe was highly pleased at this trivial incident, though the petty lord of the small village, known as Society, was mightily perturbed”.

In the age of Rabindranath, there was a popular superstition in Bengal that one could keep the property of one life to the future generation by placing it under the custody of a ‘Yaksha’. Rabindranath criticizes this superstition in The Trust Property. It is the story of Jangannath, a miser, popularly known as ‘jagnash’. He wants to hide his property so that his own progeny can inherit it. He places all of his wealth in an underground room of a dilapidated temple. He takes a vagabond called Nitaipal to that place and takes the vow that he will make over all that treasure to his grandson or to any other progeny of his who might be rightful heir. Then he locks him in that dungeon and leaves the place. He realizes after the event the Nitai, whom he made into an Yaksha, is his grandson who has to inherit the wealth. He has to spend the rest of his life in agony. On his death-bed, he feels that someone has removed his ‘ladder’ and so mutters, “Nitai, who has removed my ladder?” About the foolish man Rabindranath comments, “Unable to find the ladder to climb out of his terrible dungeon, where there was no light to see and no air to breath, he fell on his bed once more, and disappeared into that region where no one has ever been found out in the world’s eternal game of hide-and seek”.

In The Hidden Treasure, Rabindranath deals with a fundamental aspect of human life, the relationship of man with nature. Mrithyunjaya, the protagonist of the story, wants to decipher the inherited ‘cypher’ and get the treasure. One day he gives hospitality to a sanyasi and the next morning he finds that the cypher as well as the sanyasi disappeared. He goes in search of both. He finds him in a village called Dharaghole. He follows the sanyasi through the puzzling tunnels of the dilapidated temple and when the sanyasi reaches the well, he tries to hurt the sanyasi with a huge stone. But he loses the grip and falls to the sanyasi. The sanyasi, who is none other than his grand-father’s brother, Sankar, understands ‘How monstrous was the image of desire’ and determines to teach the same lesson to his progeny. He leaves him in the dungeon and supplies food and water. Though at first Mrithyalaya intends to take the wealth with him, gradually he recognizes that the soothing moon-light and the sunrays are wealthier than the materials goods.

“We crown thee kind” shows Rabindranath’s genius in adopting the form of story for expressing his ideals. The theme of the story is the independent movement of the India. Nabendu Sekhar, the hero of the story, is the son of Rai Bahadur Purnendu Sekhar and sole ambition of his life is to become a Rai.

Bahadur like father. But his wife Arunalekha, who comes from a patriotic family is not prepared not become a Rai Bahadurini. She seeks the help of her sister Lavanya in changing his attitude. Nabendu has to pass through the ordeal of suffering to become a patriot. With her graceful personality, Lavanya persuades him to donate money for the congress. Nabendu lingers in between his contradicting ideals and Lavanya finds out that he has a sharp inclination towards the Rai Bahadurship. One day, when he is oil-besmearred before bath, he is informed that the Magistrate comes to see him. He is very much worried to know that the Magistrate has left the place after waiting a long time. So he hurrys to see the Magistrate. He cannot see through the trick and find out that it is created by Lavanya. Thus, the trail manipulated by Lavanya to disclose his stupidity proves to be failure. So she takes him to the Congress Meeting which is held at Calcutta and all the congressmen honour him with great enthusiasm. On the same day, Nabendu's sisters-in-law garland him and tell, "To-day we crown thee king. Such honour will not be done to anybody else in Hindoostan"? Thus Rabindranath makes it clear that standing by the side of the poor and patriotic people is a great honour than to become a Rai Bahadur. This story proves that there is no surprise that such a great patriot like Rabindranath resigned Knighthood, immediately after the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre.

Rabindranath has a first hand experience of life and deep insight into the areas of life he depicted. This is the main from which his art draws it strength and power of conviction, its ability to influence the minds and hearts of millions of people and to teach them how to think, feel and act correctly.

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