



RABINDRANATH TAGORE AS AN ADEPT AT ORCHESTRATING A FINE HARMONIOUS BLEND OF DIFFERENT STRANDS OF LIFE WITH AN INSIGHT INTO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN HIS STORY WORLD: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper analyses the literary forte of Rabindranath Tagore as a short story writer by making it a point that he is an adept at orchestrating a fine harmonious blend of different strands of life with an insight into the psychology of children and adults in attitude, approach, behaviour and perceptions. It neatly projects how stories were told in the ancient days for the intrinsic value and entertainment and how it started capturing the attention of children and adults alike in course of time in general and Tagore's insight into child psychology, his treatment of women and emotional aspects of humans in particular, bringing home the point that Tagore's stories are nothing but stories of human relationship.

Keywords: *Literary Form, Genre, Child's Psychology, Intrinsic Value and Entertainment, Human Relationship, Deep Insight.*

The genre 'Short Story' is one of the earliest of literary forms. From time immemorial, short stories have captured the heart and soul of men. Over the last one hundred and fifty years, the short story has come to figure conspicuously in the literature of several countries. Even from ancient days, stories were told for the intrinsic value and entertainment. Truly speaking, short stories have captured the attention of children and adults alike. A short story is nothing but 'a world in a capsule'. So 'short story' is the most widely read of all modern genres. There is no shadow of doubt that Tagore's insight into Children's psychology, his treatment of women and emotional aspects of human beings are said to have won fame and name as a short – story writer but also quite a good number of readers for him. Tagore's stories are stories of human relationship.

The short story has firmly established itself as a favourite form in modern literature for in this busy world, one may lose continuity while reading a novel but quite impressed while reading a short story. Its immense popularity is nothing but the result of many cooperating causes, that too, in a condensed form. Modern age is noted for its hectic activities and everything is available in a condensed form and that can be easily attributed to its popularity. Though short in its span, this genre packs a lot of punch in it. People or readers prefer reading short story to reading a novel or watching TV with sustained interest, for short-story reading is the only out for large experience and it beautifully intends to entertain people by describing interesting events and to amuse children and grow-ups alike. It does cater to two of the strongest and deepest human instincts – the desire to amuse and the desire to teach. Stories in *the Old Testament* in the *Buddhist Jatakas*, in the *Panchatantra* and in the *Katha Sarit Sagar*, *The Fables of Aesop* and mythological stories have always been a source of knowledge and delight, both entertaining and teaching the readers.

The short story has now asserted its identity as a distinct art form demanding the greatest care and constructional skill on the part of the writer. The principles of modern short stories were at first formulated by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, both of whom laid stress on the "singleness of effect" and "final impression" as the hallmarks of a good story. Washington Irving was the first great American writer who produced stories like *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. It is a recital of events. Any piece of brief functional prose can be regarded as a short story, provided it retains a plot. While during the nineteenth Century, magazine publication increased rather greatly giving an impetus to this genre. The 19th Century critics often insisted on the need for a firmly developed plot design in any short story. Herbert Gold asserted that a story teller ought to narrate a story and not just write some prose. While emphasizing on its brevity in his definition of the short story, he calls it as;

"The jolly art of making something very bright and moving; it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take from 15 to 20 minutes to read aloud"
(Gupta 292).

Despite the fact that the short story flourished on the Indian soil, it is the West which gave it a perfect literary form. The short story takes the form of literature once it reflects the happenings in real life. Character should be portrayed, the plot to be constructed in a perfect way and the incidents described ought to be interesting. While the great writers like Edgar Poe,



O'Henry and Bret Harte became popular short story writers in America, Chekhov and Maupassant profoundly inspired and influenced short story writers both in America and England. Whether in America or England, Russia or France, the short stories were nothing but the products of the writer's reactions to social circumstances. A short story may not have a particular theme. It may deal with the most ordinary incident or a very serious one, readable in style aiming at a surprise ending and concentrating mainly on character and atmosphere. In the words of Amima Bose "the essential ingredient of a short story, is a particular moment amidst the monotony of routine daily life called out by the author's own experience and sensitivity" (P 52). In Bengali Literature, the modern short story was a unique product of the nineteenth Century which witnessed many upheavals in politics as well as in social customs. Tagore's first story "Bhikarini" was published when he was just sixteen years old. Only with the arrival of Rabindranath Tagore on the literary scene, short story writing received the real but strong impetus for "in the short stories he showed himself a master almost from the beginning. He followed no known model or pattern. There was none in his own country and its literary tradition. He was the first Indian to attempt this form proper" (Kripalani 153).

Born in 1861, Tagore is the greatest literary figure of the modern India. He was a "versatile genius" and his works are acclaimed all throughout the world and are researched even today. He won the Nobel Prize for literature for "Gitanjali" – a collection of short lyrics "expressing the spiritual yearnings of man" in 1913. In 1915, he was knighted by the British Government but he rejected the title in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Some of his best works are 'The Gardener', 'Straybuds', 'Chitra', 'Sonar Tari' etc. his best plays are Bisharjan, Gora etc. and his major prose includes 'The Religion of Man', Nationalism etc.

Truly speaking, Tagore was highly imaginative and deeply sensitive. Kripalani observes:

"like the sun after which he was named (rabi in Bengali, derived from Sanskrit ravi means the Sun), he shed light and warmth on his age, vitalized the mental and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of thought and spanned the arch that divides the East from the West" (P 2).

He is said to have explored every field of literary activity and even created literary forms. Talking about Tagore's literary and writing skill, Viswanath Naravane remarks:

"he pours himself into his work spontaneously and joyously. Unless we know Tagore, the human being we can neither understand nor appreciate Tagore, the thinker the poet the teacher or the artist" (P 10).

Tagore loved spending time sailing in a boat and observing the lives of the common people on the banks of the river Padma. "This proved a rich asset to his genius and provided the real backbone both to his success as a short story writer and to his sound diagnosis of his country's social and economic malaise" (P 137). Being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, he always supported peace, freedom and humanism. His stories reveal, no doubt, the perennial springs of life, getting woven around a variety of themes with a universal appeal. His exposition of a child's mind, his handling of a woman's problem and his grasp of life and its events are out and out superb and even stunning. His views on love, patriotism, social relations among the young and the old find imaginative expression in his stories. Every story Tagore has written shines like a poem attracting the readers' attention even from the first paragraph. He was a keen observer of the life of men and women with its spontaneity and its problems, its joys and sorrows, its happiness and tragedies and its motives – potent or underlying, and he is said to have described it all both in his novels and short stories, variety, it is believed, is the spice of life. Tagore in his own competent manner did capture the nuances of life and placed them before the readers crystallized in an artistic form. Making an appeal for the unity and consolidation of all the people of India, regardless of race, language and religious beliefs, he wrote stories so as to make us understand how all people should live in unity, eradicate racial discrimination and fight against violence and exploitation.

Being deeply interested in children, he was full of sympathy for the children who were forced to lead a constricted life, whose zest for life was stifled by the overprotected adults. Always seeking the great in the small, he found auspicious material in the lives of the common folk for his short stories" (Kripalani 153). Truth and love are the only values that find acceptance in the world of children which is neither different from the world of grown up men and women nor unaware of the false standards of the latter. A child loves and longs for affection and recognition. According to Tagore, children should not be thought of as underdeveloped and unintelligent little models of adults incapable of judging between good and bad, true and false. He clamours for a sympathetic treatment of children from the elders, for children are tender, sensitive, generous, imaginative, sometimes fierce and often sad, deserving kind and good treatment from the elders. Tagore's child characters are mostly meditative creatures with an inward life, wild and wayward in their rebellion against the prison regime of society.



Tagore, the great writer, wrote for children and about children, presenting vividly the problems faced by the children, their loneliness, the cruelty experienced by them and their longing for love and affection. His stories talk about unhappy children orphans living with relatives, misunderstood by them, their childish pranks too severely punished, unattractive adolescent children longing for love, dependent child, whose pride is humbled to dust. His main focus is on these neglected and miserable creatures who crave for love, freedom and happiness in life. What is generally held is that to be a writer for children, one has to come down from adult height and merge with the children. Tagore had, no doubt, a keen insight into a child's psyche. Entering into a world of the child's own making, Tagore sympathises with his unspeakable joys and ununderstandable sorrows and catches the child's fancies in all their vividness and description. He is an adept in picturing children's psychology bringing home the point that the innocent children are pawns in the game of power played by the adults. He is not only a passive observer of children's outward nature but also a deep analyzer of their feelings. He was able to analyse and study the people whom he met every day. When the village postmaster, an educated young man from the city came to see Tagore, he realized that the young man was bored in the quiet place and wondered how he spent his time. His contact with the man resulted in the composition of the short story *The Postmaster*.

In *The Postmaster*, Tagore portrays the love and affection of a small orphan girl for the postmaster. The postmaster, stationed in the village of ulapur, feels like a fish out of water. Ratan, a young orphan worked as his maid. This orphan girl of twelve was his only companion. The postmaster chatted with Ratan about his own home, his mother and sister. The little girl Ratan also told him about her parents and a little brother with his she had played. Their conversation about their past family life draws them nearer and the attempt of the postmaster to educate the child strengthens the friendship. One cloudy morning, she found the postmaster in bed. At once, she called in a doctor, gave him medicines, cooked his gruel and nursed him. The postmaster's illness and the care bestowed by the child who nurses him back to health are lightly sketched. When the postmaster recovered, he applied for a transfer to Calcutta. As his application was rejected, he made up his mind to resign his job. When he broke this news to the child, she was silent, but when he finished his supper, she asked him whether he would take her home with him. The postmaster only laughed and exclaimed, "What an idea!" The whole night, the answer haunted the little girl. Before leaving, he offered her some money which she refused. Then, the postmaster started for Calcutta. When he was in the boat,

"...the rain Swollen river, like a stream of tears welling up from the earth, swelled and sobbed at her bows, then he felt a sort of pain at heart., the grief stricken face of village seemed to represent for him the great unspoken pervading grief of mother earth herself" (*The Postmaster* 168)

The postmaster reciprocated Ratan's feelings, but to him, the most idea of taking the girl home with him was absurd. Musing over the girl, he had thought to go back and bring her along with him, but the boat was already in the middle of the turbulent waters of the river. The village was left far behind. The postmaster goes back to his old world, but what about the orphan girl? The young girl , who did not know any philosophical approach to life was only longing for the love of her companion. The idealistic approach of the girl to love is contrasted with the adults practical approach. The story ends as a philosophical note:

"so the traveller, borne on the breast of the swift flowing river, consoled himself with philosophical reflections on the numberless meetings and partings going on in the world- on death, to great partings from which none returns" (TP 169)

"The Home Coming" reveal the keen insight of the writer who probes into the mind of a fourteen- year old boy. It is the story of a boy of high spirits not yet subjected to the vigours of discipline. it is an excellent story of the adolescent mind of phatik Chakravarthy , the village lad who was the ringleader among the boys of the village . phatik Chakravarthy never got sympathy, understanding or love. Commenting on Phatik's fate, K.R.S. Iyengar writes;

"the one hunger that none can suppress not even the deaf and dumb not even a backward child in the hunger, for understanding and sympathy and love" (P69).

Phatik Chakravarthy, who was involved in some mischief every day decided to shift a heavy log with the help of his friends. Makhan, his brother acted as a barrier for Phatik's plan and amusement. Makhan was firm and did not get up from the log. The log which was rolled along with Makhan had infuriated Makhan. Makhan was his mother's pet. To his mother, Phatik was an eternal nuisance – lazy, disobedient and wild. Makhan kicked Phatik and reported to his mother that Phatik had hit him. This resulted in Phatik's anger. Not able to accept his lie, he beat Makhan severely. Phatik's fate changed and his trouble started from this point when her brother Bishamber offered to take Phatik off his sister's hands and educate him with his own children in Calcutta, she was immensely relieved and immediately agreed to the proposal. His aunt was by no means pleased to see Phatik as she had enough to manage, with her own three boys. As Tagore observes,



“In this world of human affairs, there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of 14. He is neither ornamental nor useful” (The Home Coming 36).

Phatik felt like a fish out of water in the stifling atmosphere of his aunt’s house. His tortured soul was full of anguish as he realized that he was an unwelcome guest. The elderly lady despised him and insulted him on every occasion for “it is easy to excuse the short comings of early childhood, but it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable lapses in a boy of fourteen. The lady himself becomes painfully self –conscious” (The Home Coming 37). Yet is in adolescence that a young lad mostly longs for love and recognition and he becomes devoted to anyone who is kind to him. Thackeray said:

“Nobody feels injustice or shrinks before a slight hurt and has a sense of wrong so acute and so glowing a gratitude for kindness as a generous boy” (P 86).

For Phatik, his own house is the only paradise. Living in a strange house with strange people is little short of torture for him. It was painful to Phatik to be an unwelcome guest in his aunt’s house. Phatik, repelled by his aunt’s cruelty wanted to go back to his village. Phatik’s heart craved for love and longed for affection from his mother. It is true that nothing seems more engaging for the child’s mind than being caressed in his mother’s arms. Every night, he dreamt of his village home – the lovely meadow where he played with his kite, the river bank where he wandered about singing and shouting joyfully and the brook where he dived and swam. And above everything else, “the memory of that tyrant mother of his, who had such a prejudice against him occupied him day and night” (The House Coming 38).

Phatik was the most backward boy in the class and when he lost his text book, the teacher caned him mercilessly. When he informed his aunt about the loss, she shouted at him. The same night, he had an attack of malarial fever and feared that he would be a great nuisance to his aunt. The next morning, the boy had disappeared and Bishamber had to inform the police. At the end of the day, two constables carried him home. He was thoroughly drenched and was shivering. When the aunt exclaimed that he was a heap of trouble and Bishamber ought to send him home. Phatik sobbed out that he was just going home but they dragged him back. A doctor was brought but the boy was delirious. He asked his uncle if the holidays had come and whether he could go home. His excited voice called out to his mother, imploring her not to beat him as he was telling the truth. The next day, his condition became critical. Later on, his mother arrived like a storm and began to lament Phatik’s restless movements stopped as he turned his head and without seeing anybody said, “Mother the holidays have come” (P 40).

A small event created a bitter feeling in Phatik. He was too young to bear too much of scoldings, abuse and face a change of life. Makhan’s lie, the brutality of his mother, the cruelty of his aunt –everything had driven Phatik to a state of agony and sorrow. Phatik’s fun – filled days turned into a nightmare because of Makhan. Phatik craved for affection and love. It is remarkable how Tagore has analysed the sensitivity of the boy’s mind. “The Home coming” leaves an indelible mark on the minds of the readers because Tagore’s understanding of the thoughts and feelings of a fourteen-year-old boy is so amazing that one would imagine that he has done research in child psychology. Lila Ray observes:

“Rabindranath discovered and lost his mother on the threshold of adolescence, between the ages of thirteen and fourteen. All this long repressed and neglected need of love and affection, a need intensified by the first stirrings of an interest in women as women rose to the surface only to be thwarted. The emotional ferment into which he was plunged made him exceedingly restless” (P 32).

Through Phatik, Tagore reveals what can happen to a child when he is nagged by a feeling of restlessness and insecurity. It is no wonder that he has given such a realistic portrayal of a child in the transitional stage. Tagore’s picturization of the agonies of adjustment faced by Phatik in his aunt’s house shows his deep insight into the psyche of children.

“Cabuliwallah” is a beautiful story of character and situation. The story of Mini in the story “The Cabuliwallah” leaves one with a numbness in the heart. The five-year-old girl was a chatter box very much loved by her father who was a writer. Mini was afraid on seeing the Cabuliwallah because she had a belief that inside his bag there were two or three like her. After some time, Mini got rid of her fear and friendship developed between Mini and the fruitseller. Cabuliwallah made frequent visits to Mini’s house. To Mini’s father, it was a strange sight to see this huge man at the feet of the little girl seated on a bench, laughing and talking. Cabuliwallah would ask her when she was going to her father-in-law’s house and Mini unable to understand its meaning would ask him in turn if he was going there. Now the word father-in-law’s house also means jail in colloquial use. So the man would reply that he would thrash his father-in-law and Mini would burst into peals of laughter.

Mini’s mother was apprehensive about the Cabuliwallah fearing that he would kidnap her. Mini’s father tried to allay his wife’s fears in which he did not succeed. Rahman, the Cabuliwallah would bring dry fruits for Mini. One morning, Mini’s



father heard some noise in the street and on looking out, he saw Rahman being led away by two policemen. On enquiry, he understood that when a neighbour who owed Rahman some money for a Shawl, denied ever having bought it, Rahman struck him with a knife in a quarrel. Mini asked Cabuliwallah whether he was going to his in-law's house. He answered that he was just where he was going. He also told her that he would not beat his father-in-law, as his hands were tied. Thus, Rahman was sent to prison for several years and he returned from prison on the day of Mini's marriage. He came and saluted Mini's father. At first, Mini's father was impatient and asked Rahman wished to see the little Mini not realizing that Mini had grown up. Giving Mini's father some fruit which he had brought for Mini, he showed him a dirty piece of paper with the imprint of a small hand that belonged to his own daughter, Parbali. Mini's father sent for her and when she arrived, Rahman was shocked to see her. Ironically, when Rahman asked her if she was going to her father-in-law's house, Mini only blushed. Mini reminded him of his own daughter. Her father generously gifted some money to Rahman which would enable him to go back home and be reunited with his daughter.

Tagore has given here in this short story "The Cabuliwallah", a beautiful pen – portrait of the relationship between the little Mini and Rahman and the sophisticated behavior of Mini's father. In the words of Kripalani, "the friendship between this big truck of a man, unlettered and uncouth from the rugged mountains of Afghanistan and the five – year – old Bengali girl Mini with her ceaseless prattle and irrepressible mirth is one of the most moving torments of human relationship overriding all barriers of race, religion and social prejudice" (P 158).

The most touching story is "Subha". The heroine is a poor helpless dumb girl who is a burden to everyone. Her life is a lonely one. She wants company but her parents do not understand her problem. She is not a normal child; hence, she needs careful handling. The tragedy is that the parents are keen on fulfilling their responsibility. They get her married and push her into an alien world. It is a very poignant situation when her husband seeks a new bride. Subha remains in a world which rejects her and does not give her what she deserves:

The children portrayed in Tagore's Stories are not extraordinary children. They are very ordinary children drawn from common walks of life. Tagore has portrayed well the helplessness of children in the face of a cruel world dominated by the grown-up men and women who fail to appreciate their tender feelings.

To conclude, it may be said that Rabindranath Tagore is an able story teller having a sound knowledge of life and its problems, gifted with the power of understanding the feelings and emotions of children and with a remarkable insight into the psychology of children and adolescents.

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