



## Confinement to Emancipation : A Critical Study of Rabindranath Tagore's The Post Office

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### ABSTRACT

The human world can't be separated from that of Nature. Now-a-days Eco-criticism has been playing a vital role in shaping the essence of human society. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is considered greater as a lyric poet but he has produced some attractive plays in English. His plays are divided into two classes – the earlier non-symbolic as *Sacrifice* (1917) and *The King and the Queen* (1912) and later symbolic such as *The Post Office* (1916) *The Cycle of Spring* (1917) *Red Oleanders* (1923) *Karna and Kunti or Kacha and Deyani* (1900) *The Sanyasi* (1911) *Malini* (2012) and *Chitra* (1913) are some of his non-symbolic plays. These plays are mysterious. He presents *Amal* as an orphan in the play, *The Post Office*.

### KEY WORDS

Autobiographical Elements, Confinement, Freedom, Adventure, Emancipation.

### INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest Indo-English dramatists in English Literature. He spoke about the material world, the world of memory and the universal self in his drama. His *Gitanjali* offers his meditation on the relationship between god and human beings. His other works are *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener*, *Chitra*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, *Hungry Stones*, *Broken Ties*, *Sanyasi*, *The King and the Queen* (1912), *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja*, *Chandalika*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Karana and Kunti*, *The Fugitive and other Poems* (1919) and *Lover's Gift* (1921). Many of his works are depicted by reflection on death and mysterious can from the far office. *The Post Office* has a symbolic representation of these currents of thought and a dream of peace.

Amal is the central character of *The Post Office*. He has lost his mother he appears unaware of his predicament. He has desire for freedom. He has to sit near the window and watch the panorama of different sorts of persons. He wins his adversaries. Persons like Dairyman and flower girl, Sudha are not inclined to talk with him. Panchanan, a village headman is arrogant. Thus, Tagore's characters from Amal to Herald, all are undisputed significance in the play. In the play, Amal has sympathy towards human kind, Gaffer is the motivation, Madhav appears dear and the headman plays roles of obstacles of the world. The Post Office, Postmen, King, Death of Amal and Watchman are major symbols of the play. A sickly and confined Amal has desire for the outside world. His desire grows as he moves towards the ultimate liberation from worldly suffering and confinement. In this way, he has to spend his day in chatting with villagers and passers.

To the construction of a new post office near his house, Amal's imagination leads him to a dream of visiting the king. His imagination portrays the innocent hope of Amal and his perspective child grappling. In one hand, a young boy Amal is confined to house by the doctor's order but on the other a village headman mocks him. He identifies himself with things around him so intensely that he wants to do so many things. He wants to fly away with the time to that land of which no one knows anything. He also sees that it is the new post office of the king where letters come from the king to his post office. After that he wants to be a postman too. In this way, Amal's desire and fancies spring in his life. Thus, the dramatist has presented a picture of an innocent Amal who proves that the fact of a real childish activity to be everything whatever he sees around him. In this regard, Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger remarks:

The post office is one of the most deeply significant of Tagore's plays, "which a child could read and understand, though it might intrigue the grown-ups" (Rao, 45)

Moreover, Amal keeps himself confined in his room. His curiosity shows a deep need to understand with the external world. His physical confinement fuels a strong desire for freedom. His naivety and innocence of the world and its people. In the end, he represents the human soul yearning for freedom from the earthly body.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The Act-I of the Post Office deals with the theme of love. Here Amal is filled with love. The Dairyman tells him that he has learnt the art of remaining himself happy. The other people also love Amal. In the Act-II, the hour glass present reversed and the direction of the flow that changes. Here Amal's condition becomes worse due to the exposure to the wind near his window. Madhav advised him to keep to his bed. Gaffer disguises himself as a faquir and narrates him about the parrot's Isle as a land of wonders. After knowing the Dairyman's speech Amal thinks about the ephemeral concerns of the materialistic world.

Tagore's play, The post office has elements of tense human drama from confinement to emancipation. Here Amal's sensitive imagination is confined to a blaze. He sees the visions of the king's postman coming to him. He talks to people in sheer joy of life. The following conversation between Amal and the watchman reveals the importance of time:

Amal : Where, to what land?

Watchman : That move knows.

Amal : Then I suppose no one has ever been there. oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that I and of which no one knows anything.

Watchman : All of us have to get there one day, my child.

Amal : Have I too?

Watchman : Yes, you too!

Amal : But doctor won't let me out.

Watchman : One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

Amal : He won't, you didn't know him. He only keeps me in.

Watchman : One greater than he comes and let us free.

(Great works of R. Tagore, 69-70)

From the above conversation the image of time signifies the time of liberation. Here time is mighty and nobody may go beyond the time. Almighty God is free from the clutch of time. Amal and the Watchman have hope for freedom.

The depiction of Sudha, a little flower-gatherer is very interesting in the play. She comes to Amal's house to give him flowers. In the end, The king's Herald comes to make announcements and Tagore has presented the conversation between physician and Amal in the play, *The Post Office* :

State Physician : How do you feel my child?

Amal : I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

Physician : Will you feel enough to leave your bed when the king comes in the middle watches of the night?

Amal : Of course, I am dying to be about forever so long. I'll ask the king to find me the Polar star...

(Great works of R. Tagore, 59)

Here the king's physician appears as the opening of the human mind. Amal gets comfort in his soul as death. As B.C. Chakravorthy has remarked:

Amal represents the man whose soul has received the call of the open road – he seeks freedom the comfortable enclosure of habits sanctioned by prudent and from the walls of rigid opinion...

(Chakravorthy, B.C., 133)

## Characterization

Tagore is the master of characterization because his characters from Amal to Herald are made undisputed in the play. These characters appear spokes of the wheel of *The Post Office*. They are connected to the axle and make the play very interesting. Madhav, the village Watchman, the curd seller, The King's Envoy (Royal physician) the Headman are symbolic characters and they are not deeply complex individuals Tagore has portrayed a tapestry of human experience from confinement to enunciation very artistically. On the whole, characters give philosophical themes of freedom, life, death and the spiritual journey of the soul. They have spiritual union with the divine. They play an account for Amal's tragic story of suffering and pain. He is very eager for deliverance from the earthly existence. All characters have a significant role to play in the inner drama of the soul. Amal becomes fed up and dies but he dies only physically, he achieves eternity. As John Donne has stated in *Death Be not Bond* :

“One short sleep past  
we wake eternally,  
And Death shall be  
no more, Death, Thou shall die.

(Prasad, R.C. & M.Q. 34)

## Symbolism

Symbolism is a reaction against naturalism and realism in English literature. It contains aspects of imagination, spirituality and dreams. In the realm of a movement, it is very close to Romanticism. Thus, symbolism has another meaning beyond its literal meaning. Tagore has mentioned symbols than of characters

and incidents in his the post office. To him, the highest education makes our life in harmony with all existence. Therefore, K.R.S. Iyengers remarks:

Tagore's dramas simplistically  
express a philosophy not on  
the logic of careful plotting,  
but the music of ideas  
and symbols are the soul  
of this drama.

(Iyenger, Srivinasa, 103)

Tagore's account for spiritual transcendence, the human condition the longing for freedom and the post office have symbols. Among these the post office has its mystic gateway as the universe or other world. The following description approaches symbolism about the play:

...The post office is the use of symbols in the play. The post office becomes a symbol of the universe, the king stands for god postmen are the six seasons representing the visible nature. The letter is the message of eternity, the message of god which one is free to interpret according to one's own lights. The post office is the place where messages are received and delivered and where there is ample scope for communication. (wisdomslib.org)

Amal is innocent and simple in the play, The Post Office. He likes the watchman and talks about the post office in which his obsession reveals about his facing situation. What underlines is his situation here :

Amal : post office? whose?

Watchman : Whose? why, the king's surely!

Amal : Do letters come from the king to his office here?

Watchman : Of course. one fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

Amal : A letter for me? But I am only a little boy.

(Tagore's the post office, p. 48-49)

Amal's death is not tragic but it is felt as liberation the emancipation of the spirit from his physical body that is the adventure with the Divine. In this action, his aspiration and the Divine meet, the result is new birth. It is not like physical death. The Divine has come to parch human heart following his law and event. Here we have to remind Tennyson's line of *In memoriam* :

One god, one law, one element, And one far off divine event, to which the whole creation moves.

(Tennyson, CXXXI, XXXVI)

## Aspects of Disillusionment

The following are major aspects of disillusionment in the post office:

- (a) The play deals with the issues of human soul's confinement to emancipation.
- (b) In the play, Madhav reflects a societal structure prioritizing safety over freedom.
- (c) The play has explored how an individual's longing for spiritual freedom can clash with the practical of the outside-world.
- (d) Institutional control fuels Amal's sense of alienation and his disillusionment in many ways.
- (e) Tagore has explored themes of freedom, mortality and the eternal connection between the soul and the universe.
- (f) Autobiographical elements are seen in the play easily but the image of Tagore is seen in Amal's character. Both long for freedom and eager to enjoy their life.

- (g) Amal is unaware of his predicament. He has a limitless hunger for life and death. Here it is a bondage in seclusion.
- (h) The play accounts for the fundamental mismatch between Amal's imaginative world and the restrictions of his reality. Amal tries to identify himself with things around him so intensely that he wants to do so many things in the play.
- (i) The curd-seller, the watchman, and the king's envoy don't give the depth of Amal's inner world. They keep ordinary worldly perspectives of Amal.
- (j) Madhav ever thinks about Amal's imaginative world watching his physical weakness and tragic reality of his confinement. Other characters of the play have to disillusion to comprehend and connect Amal due to their inability.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, Tagore has focused very minutely Amal's confinement to emancipation in his *The Post Office*. His contribution to address universal themes of freedom, innocence and spiritual transcendence to a new spring of life and joy. Amal has to confine in his room but he finds a way to connect with the world by conversing with villagers. His illness confines him physically but not spiritually because his dialogue with the watchman about the open road depicts about the bounders freedom. In the play, death denotes not an end but as a transition to a higher state of being. The play has philosophical and spiritual undertones giving depth of Amal's thoughts in poetic language. These invite readers to reflect on their own aspirations and limitations. Of course, play offers a symbolic representation regarding for reflection on death and a mysterious call from the far off. The symbol of the letter is very suggestive.

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