

A PLAY OF IDEAS, TAGORE'S *THE POST OFFICE*

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ABSTRACT

The post office is the most popular of all the plays of Tagore, composed in Bengali in 1911. The post office is a link connecting Amal with the open streets, the regions that are beyond Amal's gaze, the hill, the river, and the mountain the narrow lane where crickets chirp, where only the stripes wag their tails and poke at the mud with their bills. The play contains elements of a tense human drama, a moving fairy tale and a deeply suggestive spiritual symbol.

Key words: Gaze, chirp, stripes, poke, fairy tale, spiritual

Article Received :16/08/2014

Article Revised:22/08/2014

Article Accepted:24/08/2014

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INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861. His father is Maharshi Debendranath Tagore was a leader of the Brahma samaj in Bengal. He was a great Indian poet and a sage. He made a mark early in life in creative thinking and versification. He started writing poetry at the age of eighteen. In 1900 he established an experimental, self governing school at Shantiniketan and after twenty years he founded Vishwabharati, an International University there. He was a lover of nature, like Wordsworth, Shelley and others and had a mystic fascination for it at the same time he was realistic and matter of fact and practical. His writings are Sandhya Sangit (evening song), the Awakening of the water fall, Prabhato Sangit (Morning songs). He was a poet, storyteller, dramatist, and essayist. He wrote Naivedya. He got the Noble prize for Gitanjali in 1913, ("An Offering of Songs") it was translated into English. His admirers planned to celebrate his seventieth birthday, but it was stopped on account of Gandhiji's arrest on fifth January 1932. Bernard Shaw came to Bombay, but regretted inability to visit Shantiniketan. He paid a visit to many places in India and Ceylon. He died on 7th Aug, 1941.

Tagore was a versatile genius who distinguished himself as a poet, painter, musician, dramatist, short story writer, educationist and philosophical thinker. The growth of his mind took place during the exciting period in the history of India when the old order was yielding place to the new and his native Calcutta became the arena and saw the encounter between two diverse cultures of the East and the West. His Philosophy deals with idealism. He was popularly known as Gurudev. He wrote the song Janaganamana in Bengali language which was taken as a National Anthem by the Indian government and the Bangladesh.

The Post office is the most popular of all the plays written by Rabindranath Tagore. It was written in 1911 in Bengali language. Amal's foster father Madhab Datta takes every precaution to save Amal the sick boy

who has come from nowhere but has ingratiated himself to Madhab very much. Now, Madhab's sole concern is to save the boy. The doctor has advised that on no account should Amal be allowed to go out of doors. Like Tagore, Amal has a deep rooted desire to go out, lie in the lap of Mother Earth, to run and play, and thus feel free. The Madhab's wife was eager to adopt a child and Amal came from somewhere. The arrival of Amal changed Madhab's life completely. Sitting at the window Amal talks to the curd-seller, the watchman, the village headman, and the little flower girl Sudha. Everyone extends his sympathy except the village headman who delights in making life miserable to others. A group of boys visit him, but Amal cannot step out of his room to play with them. His physical condition soon becomes bad to worse. Amal imagines that the king's postman will come to deliver him the king's letter.

The doctor visits him and knows that life is ebbing out of Amal. Madhab and Gaffer are full of sorrow realizing that Amal will pass away very soon. Amal is unaware of his predicament and he is all the time interested in living and death comes to him as a matter of course.

The central theme of post office is love according to S.K.Desai. The most important theme that intersects the central theme of love is that of death. In this allegorical play, its hero Amal, little boy, who is ill and who is confined within the four walls of a room longs for freedom. Sitting at the window, he talks to the curd seller (the dairy man), the watchman, the village headman, the little flower girl Sudha and Gaffer or Thakurda, a wandering mendicant or faqir. The post Office is itself a character in the drama because it serves as the link connecting Amal with the far-off regions, which the beyond the river; the mountain and the narrow lane. The letter which Amal expects to receive and the post office are two significant symbols to the play.

The opening words of Madhab, more or less, strike the keynote of the play. Let us carefully note Madhab's words, "what a state I am in. Before he (Amal) came, nothing mattered, I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and home will be no home to me when he leaves". Probably he has a premonition that in spite of his best efforts to save Amal, the tender boy may "leave" him ultimately. He (Madhab) becomes responsible, caring and dutiful in earning and saving money for the up-keep of the boy. Madhab is a well-to-do householder with no children of his own. Amal is ailing from some kind of illness from which there seems to be no chance of recovery. The Doctor has advised Madhab to keep Amal indoors away from wind and sun.

Amal is described as a "child angel endowed with the characteristic Tagorean qualities". He wins over people through sheer gentleness and affection. He has a strong love of things and beings. He is essentially a lover of life, he is just a boy and is the comperidium of all qualities which Tagore considered healthy. He is imaginative, adventurous, innocent, spontaneous, gentle, sympathetic, observant, curious and full of love. He identifies himself with everything around him. He is romantic enough to be a squirrel just as Keats would peek a pebble with a pigeon.

What Amal is not able to get in real life, he tries to create and get it, by the power of his imagination. Amal requires love and he gets it an ample measure from Madhab and Sudha. Madhab is willing to spend all his earnings on his foster son to keep him alive. Sudha would meet him on her way back home with the flowers and present to him a bunch of flowers without any payment. She keeps up her promise, but then Amal is physically on more in this world. To save Amal's life Madhab keeps him out of the Autumn wind and the sun. Amal is in love with life and the living universe and hence every moment of his life is significant to him. When he is not able to establish contact with his senses, he has recourse to his fertile imagination. He can visualize the parrot's isle and the journey of the kings postman to the village. His love of life and the world is great and he says that he would request the King, "I shall ask him to make me (Amal) one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door".

Under these circumstances, it is most ironic that death hovers over Amal even from the very beginning. He is not destined to live long. Madhab is so full of concern for the life and welfare of Amal that he (Madhab) carries out the prescriptions and instructions the physicians very scrupulously. Amal is not at all aware of the coming events which cast a gloomy shadow over his life. Through out the play we find. Amal longing for freedom. Amal sits at the window, questions the curd seller, converses with the watchman, asks a number of questions to the village headman without knowing his sullen nature, and is kind in his words to Sudha, the flower girl. As for himself, he wishes to go to the far away land which he sees from his window. He wants to

keep himself busy seeing places and talking to everyone. He even dreams that when every one is asleep, he would go out without any one's knowledge and seek some kind of work to do. But sitting at the window "he is hope's most pitiful prisoner". "Tell him (Amal) Sudha has not forgotten him" – these words of Sudha, daughter of the flower seller is the key note to understand Amal, the central character of this two Act play.

This is the reason why W.B.Yeats lays emphasis on deliverance as the theme of the play. Amal finds this deliverance in death. Through the play ends in death, a good deal of the drama emphasizes the significance of the things of the earth. His uncle imposes restrictions on his movements. The physician has advised Madhab to keep Amal inside the room to be away from the prevailing bad weather. Amal all the time wishes not only to be in the open street before him but also go into regions beyond his immediate gaze. He considers the hill as the raised arm of the dumb earth beckoning man to go into far off regions.

To Tagore death is a journey to the other shore; it is giving oneself up at; last into God's hands; it is a love-tryst in the darkness of night; it is seeing God's face and offering him one silent saluation. The dramatist hence shows us that death, after all, is not such an awful thing, that it is not a matter of loss, but it is a matter of joy, triumph and peace. The last scene in the play, therefore, could be taken as an objective correlative of the mystery, naturalness, peace and joy that Tagore wants death to be associated with.

Amal represents the man whose soul had received the call of the open road. At last the closed gate is opened by the king's own physician and that which is death to the world of hoarded wealth and certified breeds, brings freedom. Deliverance is to be sought out not in the other world, but in this world, not after death, but in this very life. Thus the play presents Tagore as a spiritual realist.

Amal's desire to get a letter from the king grows into an obsession in Act II. He has been reconciled to his illness and confinement by the Post office Gaffar says that the letter is on the way and Amal almost sees him coming with a "lantern in his hand". The Headman brings a slip of paper and sneeringly tells Amal that it is a letter from the King. He adds that the King would be calling on Amal shortly and that he would like to have puffed rice from Amal. Gaffer speaks mildly and meaningfully and says that the King's state Physicians would himself come to see Amal. This is followed by the knocking and the state Physician arrives. Even Amal's obsession with the Post office is the result of a concrete situation. The Post office is just there outside his window and he is inquisitive.

Amal : Post Office? Whose?

Watchman : Whose, why, the King's surely!

Amal: Do letters come from the King to the office here.

Watchman : Ofcourse. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

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

Watchman : The king sends tiny notes to little boys.

Amal gets displeased at the headman's replies to his enquiries and so he tells him (the headman) not to take the trouble of sending him the King's letter. Still the headman behaves and talks impudently to Amal. Sudha, daughter of the flower-seller regards Amal some late star of the morning. Amal is a bit jealous of Sudha as she walks about merrily from place to place gathering flowers. Amal is happy in the company of boys like Badal, Sarat and others. Except the headman, everyone else establishes a relationship of affection with Amal. Love is essentially creative and it has the power to transform people into better humanbeings. Amal is in love with life and the living universe and hence every moment of his life is significant to him. His contact with outside world is first with sense and when the senses exhaust their capacity, with his imagination. Thus the twin themes of this play are love and death.

Conclusion :-The Post Office is one of the most significant of Tagore's plays which a child could read and understand; though it might intrigue the grownups. It is a moving piece of work; it is full of feeling and the handling is delicate. The Post Office is beautiful, touching with a texture of simplicity throughout. Within its limits it is almost a perfect piece of art. The play is a genuine symbolical play, yielding more meaning at successive reading. The play is successful because the naturalistic level is sustained throughout – even in the last scene in which there is fantasy. It is because the pity's roots are in reality, in life, that it can be what it is and at the same time radiate meanings and evoke significant emotions. Amal is in love with life and the living universe and hence every moment of his life is significant to him. His contact with outside world is first with

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