



A study of symbolism in Rabindranath Tagore's 'The Post Office'

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Abstract: It is the Post Office that stands as a symbol, as an agent of communication, where messages are received and delivered. It is an instrument whereby we communicate with each other. It is a catalytic symbol. Its functions are not always fully projected, but are symbolically suggested and indirectly extended. It stands for the tensions revealed in human life, because the expectations of man, whether small or great, sometimes satisfy, and sometimes disappoint him.

Key Words: Symbolism, Catalitic, elusiveness, proximity

Rabindranath Tagore was the first Asian to receive the Noble Prize for English literature in 1913. The writing of Gitanjali, written in a foreign language was preferred to the writings of even the English people, writing in their native language for the Nobel Prize. In addition to all these, Tagore was a singer, a painter, a dancer, an educationist and above all a great freedom fighter.

In literature also he wrote in almost all forms of literature, the poetry, the drama, the short stories etc. It is worthy to note that he did not mention the name of any God in his Gitanjali, thus giving universal appeal to it. As a philosopher, Tagore was more a Visishtadvaitin, than an Advaitin.

It may not be hyperbolic to say that there may not be such a great man as Tagore. Just two points are worth enough to mention here. He was the author of our National Anthem. At least 40 crore Indians stand up to respect the National Anthem, when it is sung or played on music. He was the author of the National Anthem of Bangladesh also. There also a good

number of people respect their National Anthem by standing in attention. What else would the dead soul requires to be joyous, if at all we have belief on soul.

As an educationist, reformer politician, and follower of Brahma Samaj, he assimilated the best in the oriental tradition, fought against the bigotry and inertia of conventional Hinduism. He relinquished his knight hood.

The drama The Post Office is undoubtedly a master piece of symbolism. Symbolism is the practice of presenting a matter by symbols. A symbol is something that stands for something else. At the same time a poet or a dramatist should use symbolism in such a manner that the readers can catch the hidden meaning of it. Thus in Tagore's 'The Post Office' the symbolism is quite simple. Tagore wrote his plays with symbolism and without symbolism. The non symbolic dramas are 'Sacrifice', "The King and the Queen", and the symbolic plays are 'The Post Office', 'The Cycle of Spring', 'Red Glanders' and the king of 'Dark Chamber'.



The centre of action in the drama *The Post Office* is Amal. He is a sick child under the protection of Mdhav, his uncle. But there is a touch of elusiveness about his relationship with Madhav who has only adopted him. Amal himself stands as a symbol for the eternal soul, which is imprisoned in the body; and his very name signifies innocence and original purity. The child in literature has always represented proximity to man's source in the divine being.

At his intense terminal point of consciousness, Amal does not think of Madhav but hears voices from far away and feels that his mother and father are sitting by his pillow and speaking to him. Madhav is anxious to preserve the life of Amal. The Physician tells him firmly that "On no account must the child be let out the doors". He believes that the outside wind, the autumn sun and the damp are harmful to the little patient. Madhav, who is ignorant, trusts the Physician's advice and confines Amal within a small room.

Amal, the boy sits at his window and is fascinated by the stream of life flowing along the street. Everyone who passes by his side is seen like a messenger of the world's affairs and the day's events from which he is cut off. He is not only fascinated by them, but he fascinates them too.

The watchman tells Amal of the King's Post Office being set near his window "One fine Day," he tells Amal, "there may be a letter for you there". Amal's sensitive imagination is aroused and he sees visions of the King's Postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters, climbing down forever so long, for days and nights and of his taking to his footpaths on the

bank where, at the foot of the mountain, the waterfall becomes a stream.

It is the Post Office that stands as a symbol, as an agent of communication, where messages are received and delivered. Its an instrument whereby we communicate with each other. It is a catalytic symbol. Its functions are not always fully projected, but are symbolically suggested and indirectly extended. It stands for the tensions revealed in human life, because the expectations of man, whether small or great, sometimes satisfy, and sometimes disappoint him. The Post Office is a symbol for life: it almost becomes a mystical emblem radiating a message from the world of those invisible and occult hierarchies of experience which transcend time and space.

The curd seller symbolises death. The curd-seller has already left a jar of curds and promised "child wedding" with his niece. "He told", says Amal, that in the morning she would milk, with her own hand, the black cow and feed me with warm milk, with foam in it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the evenings she would carry the lamp round the cow-house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers.

The curd seller promises to come back later and when she disappears, a troop of boys pass in the street. Amal gives them his own toys to play with and is content to observe their play. On the next day, Amal's condition worsens and he is now advised to be confined to his bed with "closed doors and shut windows".

Although apparently Amal is asleep, he tells Gaffer, "I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away".



There is a knock at the door and the King's Herald enters to announce that the King himself would come in the midnight, and is sending in advance his "Great Physician to attend on his young friend. The king's physician is a mystic presence. He represents the healing power of the omnipresent God. Even though he is invisible all the time, his influence is felt by his very absence. On the arrival of the King's physician the doors and windows are opened and Amal feels that "all pain is gone". Amal is in deep sleep. Sudha, the little flower girl, arrives with flowers and "places the flowers in Amal's own hands." And the curtain falls.

Amal's confinement in the small room also symbolises the human soul imprisoned in the mortal body. Amal's soul has received "the call of the open road," where there is light and beauty of the world beyond. But it is denied to his soul, the imprisoning confines of the body. The only way to secure freedom for the soul is through death, as death is said to be the emancipation of spirit. Therefore the doors and windows of the room are opened on the arrival of the King's Physician. The opening of the gate by the King's physician is the opening of the human mind on the nature of experience. Human emotions psychologically condition and modulate the growth of a young mind into the grim reality of the world. There is what is called the child's eternal curiosity, for he wants to learn everything. Amal finds the desired comfort of the soul as "death" brings him "awakening in the world of spiritual freedom".

The drama 'The Post Office' is a perfect fairy tale in the sense that one can submit to its pathos and fancy without any disbelief and without raising disturbing questions regarding the play's deeper intent or its proportions of allegory, myth and symbolism.

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