



Amal's yearning for freedom in Tagore's *The Post Office*

Rohit

Department of English and Foreign Languages, M.D. University Rohtak, Haryana, India

Abstract

This research paper will try to examine the 'Lost Childhood' in the play "The Post Office". The story of the play deals with the life of an orphan boy Amal. Amal is suffering from a fatal disease and remains confined to a room in his uncle's home. The boy is disconnected from the outer world as he is not allowed to go outside. To overcome his loneliness, he interacts with several people through the window of the room in which he is confined. The play reveals his aspiration to explore the outer world. Amal is portrayed as highly imaginative as he gives a compelling picture of Dairyman's village. The play exposes the miserable and lonely childhood of Amal as he is unable to enjoy by playing with other children. He lives an abnormal life and is restricted to a small room. He tries to reduce his pain by talking to the street goers. He feels some comfort when he sees the other children playing in the street and makes interaction with other people.

Keywords: childhood, orphan, abnormal, interaction

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore was a prominent Indian writer in the field of literature. He was first non-European who got Noble prize for his most acclaimed work *Gitanjali*, a collection of poems. This great work was later translated by British writer W.B. Yeats and first performed in 1912. Tagore was not only a poet but a great novelist, dramatist, painter and musician too. He earned the title of 'Gurudev' from Gandhiji. Tagore also contributed in the field of education by founding the Vishva Bharti University at Shantiniketan. There are variety of themes prevailed in the writings of Tagore mostly concerned with human feelings. His plays have a lucid and simple style. Dr.Edward Thompson, the noted scholar of Tagore literature has rightly remarked; "His dramatic work is the vehicle of ideas rather than the expression of action." Tagore raises the social issues through his writings.

The Post Office is a remarkable play of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore himself explains:

When I wrote *Dak Ghar*, my soul was besotted an ocean of feeling. It was a very strong wave. Come, venture outside, before you leave you will have to traverse this world. You have to feel the sorrow, joy, thrill and excitement of the human heart. At the time I was deeply involved in establishing the university (Shantiniketan) but suddenly I don't know how it happened that early one morning between 2 am and 3 am my heart stood on rooftop and sprouted wings. I felt a great premonition of a momentous event, perhaps death. I felt as if I had to jump onto the platform of a train station, as if I were leaving immediately. I was saved. When the call was so strong, how could I resist. The call to go somewhere and the mystery of death is what I expressed in *Dak Ghar*. S.K. Desai, writing on Indian Drama in English, observed that "structurally, *The Post Office* is amazingly simple".

The play narrates the story of a little boy Amal. Amal is an orphan child adopted by his uncle Madhav. The child is suffering from an incurable fatal disease. The Physician asks Madhav that Amal should abstain from the sunlight and air. So Amal is confined to a small room and not allowed to go outside. Amal is totally disconnected from the outer world and unable to enjoy his Childhood. There is only a window in the room through which he gets a view of the street. In order to overcome his loneliness Amal remains stick to the window and tries to communicate with other people. He peers through the window and calls whomsoever he sees for some conversation. First he calls a curd seller and initiates conversation. Amal tells him that he loves his song and wishes to become a curd seller like him. The curd seller asks him to become a scholar but Amal refuses. Amal wants to explore the world wandering through the streets. He wants to participate in active life. The curd seller gives him some curd without taking any money.

Tagore's insights into death seem to be deepest;

"I have had so many experience of loved once who have died what I think I have come to know something about death, something perhaps of its deeper meaning. Every moment that I have spent at the death bed for some dear friend, I have know this, yet it is very difficult to describe how for me that great Ocean of truth to which all life returns, can never suffer diminution by death.... I see how the individual life comes back into the bosom of this ocean at the moment of death, I have felt too how great and fathomless this ocean is, yet how full it is of personality. Yet this ocean seems as nothing, as neither light nor darkness, but as one great extention of the universe, as eternity of peace and life... Science recognizes atoms, all of which can be weighed and measured, but never recognises personality, there is no meaning in creation. Water is water to me, because I am I. And so I have felt that in this great infinite, in this ocean of personality, from which my own little personal self has sprung, lies the completion of the cycle, like those jets of water from a fountain which rise and fall and come home again."

Next, Amal make conversation with the Watchman. The Watchman tells Amal that he should be scared of him because he can arrest the boy and takes him away. Instead of getting scared, Amal feels excited and asks where can he take him? This shows that the little boy longs for freedom. He desires to come out from the four walls of a room. Amal asks him about the new building across the street. Watchman tells him that the new building is the post office of the King. Amal knows that a post man has to travel a lot to deliver letters. He fascinated by the notion of letters and wishes to become a postman.

Amal: Post office? Whose?

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

Amal: Do letters come from the king to the 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!

Watchman: The King sends tiny tones to little boys. (Tagore 33)

Next, Amal makes conversation with Village Headman and it seems from his talk that he is cruel person. He talks very rudely to Amal. Headman makes fun of Amal on hearing that he is waiting for King's letter for him. The imaginary words of Amal about King and Post office make Headman very angry. Headman makes fun of Amal by saying in a mocking way that the King will surely send letter to Amal as he is very close to the King. He meets an innocent little girl, Sudha, who is on her way to pick flowers for her father. Amal excitedly says; "If only they let me, I will go right into the dense forest where you can't find your way. And where the honey sipping hummingbird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will flower out as a Champa". Sudha promises to bring flowers for Amal. Sudha is a little girl who helps her father by picking flowers. Amal thinks that his life is totally different from that of Sudha. He wishes to be like her, wants to go into the forest and pick the flowers.

Lastly, Amal watches a group of children and ask them where they are going? One child replies that they are going to play and invites Amal to join them. Amal tells them about his disease and asks them to play in the street. Amal finds some solace when he observes the children playing in the street. This is very pathetic picture of the play. Amal is not able to enjoy his childhood, so he sees childhood of other children. He asks them to play daily in the street and in return he gives all his toys to them. Amal knows the true meaning of freedom. He desires to enjoy every moment of his life by playing and wandering far away but unable to do so. This shows the helplessness of little child.

Amal. Don't go. Play on the road near this window. I could watch you, then.

A boy. What can we play at here?

Amal. With all these toys of mine that are lying about. Here you are, have them.

I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me. (Tagore 50)

Being a child, Amal wants to play outside and has a deep curiosity to know the world.

It is only the beginning of his life. Amal is highly imaginative. He gives people exact picture of the place they talk about. Amal hopes to travel very long after his recovery.

Conclusion

The play certainly brings out the emotions of pathos. It narrates the suffering of a little boy. Because of restrictions Amal knows the true meaning of freedom. He wants to enjoy every moment of his life. The play has a tragic end. Amal dies and all his wishes remain unfulfilled. Through death, Amal's soul gains eternal freedom. Death is described as eternal sleep.

References

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