



## **INTERFACE OF CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SHORT STORIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Tagore was an early environmentalist who adored the natural scenes. He established a kinship of human life with nature. Tagore's concept of 'romanticism' points out a significant role of nature in human lives. He records the acknowledgement of a close connection of man with nature. He finds a similar responding function of nature with human sentiments. The present paper points out how nature becomes a part of the plot of the story and if nature's part is removed from the story, the story cannot be complete or it will not have the same effect on readers.*

**Key Words-** *environmentalist, kinship, romanticism, acknowledgement, connection.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rabindranath Tagore's conception of the short stories is the exquisite co-mingling of character with environment. One can't imagine the survival of his characters without their environment. Nature, depicted in his stories, fulfills various functions. It plays an animate role in the progression of the stories. Tagore, after his marriage, was sent by his father to Shelaidaha to manage the estates there. From this, he toured widely in many villages, going about mostly in house boats, surveying the expanse of water that is the Padma River. After years of city life, he was at this time, in the bounties of nature, with plenty of opportunities of admiring natural scenes and surveying the panorama of rural life. Living here, the writer was impressed by the wide expanse of water and by the unknown human beings who had inhabited the villages for generations and centuries. That is why in most of his stories; he establishes an internal link in man and nature. He could feel subtle nuances of the beauty of nature and link it with human life. He uses nature for the creation of a particular mood. In order to convey a mood in a better way, he takes a support of either similar or dissimilar

phenomena of nature. Human feelings get depth and completeness as he reveals them through the interface of nature.

An interesting short story, depicting both human relationship and environment, is "The Postmaster". In it, the postmaster, a city bred man, "felt like a fish out of water in this remote village" when he was transferred to a village. There, he comes in association with Ratan, an orphan small girl. When he is ill, she nurses him with care to recover to him to health. While he revolts to the environment of Ulapur, the only source of his peace is- she. The Postmaster wants to make his transfer. On his application being refused, resigns his post and will go back to Calcutta. When he breaks this news to the child, she wants to accompany him- a request, which the postmaster can not comply with because of social fear. When he leaves her and the boat carrying the postmaster moves on the river, he intensely feels the relationship between the nature and the human being--

*"When he got in and the boat was under way, and the rain-swollen river, like a stream of tears welling up from the earth, swirled and sobbed at her bows, then he felt a sort of pain at heart; the grief-stricken face of a girl seemed to represent for him the great unspoken pervading grief of Mother Earth herself." ( Omnibus III,p-175)*

Within the brief space of the story, Tagore is able to achieve the super harmony of character and environment. Characters like Subha in the story, "Subha" and Kanti's bride in "The Auspicious Vision" are a part of the very rhythm of the natural life. Once the character is exposed to an alien environment, there is breakdown of communication. The Story of "Subha" rendered in omniscient narration, fully brings out the fusion of character and environment. In the environment of her own family, the dumb Subha feels out of place. She makes her move away from her people and lives most of time in her own private world, Nature. The story favours the carefree company of nature for special children like Subha (a dumb girl) who is not made to live in human's society. When she is married and her husband knows about her defect, her husband remarries, neglecting her. The conclusion of the story-remarrying of her husband with someone other does not bring any surprise to the readers. On the contrary, it enhances the feeling that Subha, the dumb companion of the cow, the goats, and the kitten, cannot, after all fit into the artificial world of the city-bred man and she should remain the darling of Nature, a part of Nature's eternal loneliness.

In the story, "The Auspicious Vision", a dumb village girl is confronted by a sophisticated young man, Kantichandra. This story like "Subha" depicts character in relation to environment and the tension or absence of it as consequence upon reversal of situation. Kantichandra goes for hunting and notices a village maiden whose "Beauty and a rare freshness as if she had just come from Vishwakarma's workshop".

Having been captivated by the beauty of the girl, he goes to the house of her father, Nabin Banerji and asks the old Brahmin to give Sudha in marriage to him. By an accident, Kantichandra mistakes the dumb girl for Sudha, her sister and finds himself married to the sister instead. He realizes the deception as the "Auspicious Vision" in the course of the wedding ceremony. However, on knowing that he really has not married the dumb girl for whom he approached Nabin, he feels "a sigh of intense relief, as of escape from calamity". Thus, Kantichandra suddenly removes her from his mind. The blissful vision of beauty vanishes from his mind. But the beauty of the dumb girl is a part of the eternal beauty of Nature. She is but "The companion of all the animals and birds of the locality". Hence she has to remain a part of her environment.

Subha in the short story, "Subha" and the dumb girl in "The Auspicious Vision" bring out the closeness of the human world with the natural world. In both the short stories, Tagore tries to show how the characters are out of tune when they are away from their natural environment.

"Ek Ratri" (The Supreme Night) is a story of a schoolmaster's love for his old playmate, Surabala, now the wife of a rich lawyer. With all ambitions frustrated, he can only think of what might have been until Nature, in her fury, arranges for their short reunion. The torrential rains causing floods seem to be the precursor of a cataclysm and on the one sheltering islet these two human beings stand close to each other, silent, gazing at the enveloping dark pall, listening to the roar of the water currents, But the night approaches its end, the winds lessen their violence, the waters recede and Surabala goes home without saying a word and the schoolmaster does the same, thinking of this one night which would stand out significant in his life of frustration. In the story, nature made the way to their meeting once again as if it knew the male character's inner wish.

In the story, "Mahamaya", when Rajib after many efforts proposed Mahamaya to marry with him, he stood confused and silent for the reply on her part. At this moment of the story, the writer uses nature to create an effect of response. As--

*"The noontide has many undefined plaintive notes of its own; these began to make themselves heard in the midst of that stillness. The broken door of the temple, half detached from its hinge, began at times to open and to close in the wind with a low wailing creak. The pigeon, perched on the temple window, began its deep booming. The wood-pecker kept up its monotonous noise as it sat working on the shimul branch outside. The lizard darted through the heaps of dry leaves with a rustling sound. A sudden gust of warm wind blowing from the fields passed through the trees, making all their foliage whistle. Of a sudden the river waters woke into ripple and lapped on the broken steps of the ghat. Amidst these stray, languid sounds came the rustic notes of a cow-boy's flute from a far-off tree-shade. Rajib stood reclining against the ruinous plinth*



*of the temple like a tired dreamer, gazing at the river; he had not the spirit to look Mahamaya in the face”.*( Omnibus II,P-355)

In the story, “The Home-Coming”, when a small boy is taken away by a maternal uncle to study in Calcutta from his native place and there he dies with home-sickness. He finds unable to live in an alien place. The writer writes—

*“The cramped atmosphere of neglect in his aunt’s house oppressed Phatik so much that he felt that he could hardly breathe. He wanted to go out into the open country and fill his lungs and breathe freely. But there was no open country to go to. Surrounded on all sides by Calcutta houses and walls, he would dream night after night of his village home, and long to be back there. He remembered the glorious meadow where he used to fly his kite all day long; the broad river-banks where he would wander about the livelong day singing and shouting for joy; the narrow brook where he could go and dive and swim at any time he liked”.*( Omnibus I,P-892)

Marking nature's spiritual dimension, Tagore portrays nature as the most sacred place for pilgrimage and leads to an expansion of reader’s consciousness. For Tagore, the beauty of nature fills with joy and makes a relationship of love. It is through this love that one finds the enlargement and meaning of one’s own being as has been reflected in the stories- "Subha" and “Ek Ratri” in which Subha and Sashibhushan find a companionship in nature.

Tagore sets the natural scenes in such a way as to prepare the readers for the tragic event, which would happen soon in the poor peasant family in the story, *Punishment*.. Nature adds to the gloomy atmosphere of the house of murder. A very refined description of nature is given before the calamity. Nature not only formed the background of the terrible happening but also reflected the tense situation in which the murder would take place. The description of nature in the story runs thus:

*“There was not a breath of wind. Weeds and scrub round the house had shot up after the rain: the heavy scent of damp vegetation, from these and from the waterlogged jute-fields, formed a solid wall all around. Frogs croaked from the pond behind the cowshed, and the buzz of crickets filled the leaden sky”.*([www. Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in](http://www.Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in))

In his short stories, nature responds to human action and works as a background of the plot. The scenic beauty is disseminated in abundance in many of his stories. He is realistic in the depiction of nature. He preferred lighter colours. Glaring colours like red, black, yellow were not used in his stories. As the story, “Cloud and Sun” begins with the symbolic description of

nature in concern to the lives of protagonists—Giribala and Sashibhushan. ‘Cloud’ and ‘Sun’ symbolically represent the happiness and sorrows in human lives. As the writer writes—

*“But this morning there was no sign of rain and the pale sunlight and scattered clouds between them were painting the nearly-ripe autumnal cornfields alternately with their long brushes; the broad green landscape was now being touched with light to a glittering whiteness, and again smeared over the next moment with the deep coolness of shadow.*

*While these two actors, sun and cloud, were playing their own parts by themselves with the whole sky for a stage, innumerable plays were being enacted down below in various places on the stage of the world”.*( *Omnibus-II,P-321*)

Tagore’s focus was on finding the harmony and beauty that he saw in nature, and in the relationship of the individual with the universe. As a spiritual man, his inner vision is bathed in the illumination of his consciousness and he realizes the peace, harmony and truth in nature. He seems to support the idea that our existence on earth transcends the laws established by man and the society, and therefore, a life led in a natural environment devoid of all forms of social- evils and restrictions would eventually help man in manifesting his true nature and thereby lead to the creation of a society that does not encourage domination at any level. Nature keeps the things in balance. Anything in excess is not desirable for the betterment of the society. Everything is interrelated and that is why for better environment and culture, everyone must be treated as equal human beings with individual choices.

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