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Tagore's *The Post Office* through the Kaleidoscope of Bharat's *Rasa Theory*

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Abstract:

When you are open to a deeper Truth, you are open to Love. When you are open to Love, you attract Miracles.

- Nathaniel Solace

Rabindranath Tagore was one such miracle child, who wrote to inspire the world with his personal experiences. He was the first Asian to win the Noble Prize in Literature in 1913 for his extraordinary collection of poems, namely *Gitanjali*. His fond and loving sobriquet was Gurudev, the one that shed light in the path of darkness. Tagore mostly wrote in Bengali, his mother-tongue, but his works are translated too. *The Post Office* originally *Dak Gharis* the story of a young sickly boy and his imagination of the world beyond the four walls of his room. He is a cheerful child, full of life, yet fighting to live his life fully. Tagore narrates the story but keeps the end open for the readers to imagine, which a particular trait of his is. The story is a journey of the eagerness of a child to communicate and participate in the activity of life. Bharat's *Rasa Theory* is similarly a theory of relishing what life offers to the humans, every moment, each activity and everyone connected to us in life. How they make us feel, what makes us laugh and what makes us cry, what surprises us and what scares us, is all a part of Bharat's *Rasa Theory*. The view of *The Post Office* would be pleasurable through the glasses of *Rasa Theory*, as the story of *The Post Office* is the story of a child, who wishes to paint the world in his own colors.

Key Words: *Rasa Theory, The Post Office, Tagore, Bharat.*



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Initiation

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free....

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. – Tagore

The Post Office was written at the time when the glory of Rabindranath Tagore as a poet had reached its zenith. It was a product of the poet's duple experience of happiness and sadness. Happiness of becoming internationally acclaimed by winning the Noble Prize and sadness for the passing away of his wife first and then his beloved son. It invoked in the poet a spark of portraying what is not capable of being spoken – events from life that cannot be explained just experienced and viewed. The Post Office is a play in two acts dealing with the story of Amal, young, sick child and his foster family who has adopted him. It details the journey of Amal through his sickness and an avid yearning for a miracle to happen. To quote in the words of G. Nagerswara Rao,

*Aesthetically the play presents the tragic delight of the profound recognition 'ripeness is all', and the calm of mind that comes when all passion is spent.*¹

The story of the play revolves around Amal, the adopted child of Madhav and his wish to travel beyond the four walls of his room. The only source of joy in the room is a small window that connects Amal with the outside world. Act 1 deals with the happenings outside the house and what Amal sees through the window. It details various people with whom Amal has a conversation and tries to befriend. It also portrays the post office set up by the King and Amal's quest of knowing about the working of the post office. Act 1 ends with the dialogue between Amal and a group of boys who promise to come the next day to play with Amal and his toys. Act 2 deals with the happening inside Amal's room. There come along different people to visit the ailing child who is lying in his sick bed. Amal's desire to grow up and become the King's postman is also reflected in this act. The end of the play is left to the readers to decide upon, but the death of Amal at the end of the play is taken for granted by the critics.



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The magnificent glory of the play is reflected in the words of G. Nagerwara Rao,

The Post Office has been internationally the most popular play of Tagore. It was successfully staged in London by the Irish Players in 1913. W.B Yeats who was present at the performance testified. 'On the stage the little play shows that it is perfectly constructed and conveys to the right audience an emotion of gentleness and peace.' It has also been well received in Paris when Andre Gide's rendering of it La lettreduroi was staged. When Tagore went to Stockholm after receiving the Noble Prize, he witnessed the Swedish version of it. The Post Office was performed at Jorasanko Mansion, during the great national turmoil of 1919, Jalianwala Bagh Massacre and all that, to an audience which included Annie Beasant, Mahatma Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malaviya.²

The play was received greatly throughout the world as it dealt with the emotional aspects of human life. A child who might not have been able to fulfill his dreams and wishes yet lived his small life to the fullest.

The Rasa Theory of Bharat Muni deals with the basic human instincts – emotions. It actually spectacles the reason, the environment and the generation of a particular feeling or *rasa*. Bharat Muni has recognized nine basic emotions of human beings namely, *sringara rasa*, *hasya rasa*, *karuna rasa*, *raudra rasa*, *vir rasa*, *bhayanaka rasa*, *bibhatsya rasa*, *adbhuta rasa* and *santa rasa*. These emotions are instilled in the human heart right from the womb to the tomb. They combine at various occasions in the life of human being, to make him/her feel the essence of life. For instance, the birth of a child feels us with joy and the death of a dear one sorrow and fear at once. The viewing of *The Post Office* through *Rasa Theory* would allow the readers to stay close to the core of the human existence. It would lead to the understanding of the reason behind experiencing joy, sorrow, fear, tranquility and others emotions during the course of the play. It helps the readers explore the emotion of the characters as well as those of theirs. It richly hues the experience of the readers as they not only read the play, but traveling along with the characters through the journey in search of peace.

Rasas in The Post Office

As the human life is a prismatic combination of emotions, so is the play *The Post Office*. It is a mixture of divergent *rasas* combining to form a mystical rainbow radiating the various emotions that occur in the life of Amal. The various *rasas* found in the play are detailed as under:



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1. *Karuna Rasa*

Good night, good night!

Parting is such sorrow,

That I shall say good night

Till it be morrow.

- William Shakespeare

The play begins on a sad note. Madhav has adopted Amal and since the arrival of Amal in his life, Madhav has become more sensitive towards the child. Amal is suffering from an incurable disease and thus the distress is expressed by Madhav in the following words:

Madhav - What a state I am in! Before he 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 my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he ---³

Before the arrival of Amal in his life, Madhav was not so much emotionally attached to children. Amal fulfilled Madhav's desire to be a parent and slowly and gradually he was drawn towards and attached to Amal. The very thought of losing Amal sends shivers through Madhav's spine. Here, the *sancharibhava* of *cinta* and *moha* combine to derive the *karuna rasa*.

Gaffer comes to visit Amal and asks of his health and well-being to Madhav. Madhav is in a remorseful mood and tells Gaffer what the doctor has told him.

Madhav -The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, to get children out of doors!⁴

Madhav describes Amal's medical situation and his worry about Amal's recovery. Madhav is moreover worried about keeping Amal indoors. A child of Amal's age would prefer playing outside with friends and it's a hard task to keep them within the four walls of the room confined for the entire day. Amal is a curious cheerful person. He loves to talk and know about the things happening outside his room. He sits by the window of his room and chatters with the passerbys. His health deteriorated day by day and with the



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beginning of Act 2, Amal is shown to be very weak and is advised to stay in bed. At this moment Madhav reacts in a very fatherly manner:

*Madhav – Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me – Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I suppose I must lose him!*⁵

Madhav has developed a soft corner for Amal and is now not prepared to lose him at any cost. He fears that Amal might not recover from his illness and leave Madhav forever by embracing death. Here the *sancaribhavas* of *visada*, *vitarka* and *marana* together create the atmosphere of sadness leading to the generation of *Karuna rasa*.

2. Hasya Rasa

*...Find out where joy
Resides, and give it a voice
Far beyond singing. For to
Miss joy is to miss all.*



- R. L. Stevenson

Amal is a carefree, cheerful lad, whose desire is to be free to roam around and get acquainted to as many people as possible. He is one such rule breaker and he breaks taboo that knowledge is acquired only through reading books. His words reflect:

Amal – How can the doctor know?

Madhav – What a thing to say! The doctor can't know and he reads such huge books!

Amal – Does his book-learning tell him everything?

*Madhav – Of course, don't you know!*⁶

Amal doubts the doctor's acquisition of knowledge by reading huge books. Amal comically raises a strong question here that can a person who reads huge books be considered a knowledgeable one? Does knowledge come to only those who make references of big names of books?

Madhav gives least consideration to this talk of Amal and advises him to stay in bed and take rest. Madhav is aware of Amal's habit of talking to strangers and thus tries to warn him by saying:



Madhav - Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.

Amal - But I love to talk to strangers!

Madhav - Suppose they kidnap you?

Amal - That would have been splendid! But no one ever takes me away. They all want me to stay in here.⁷

On Madhav's warning Amal reacts and replies in the most funny manner possible. He wishes somebody to kidnap him. He wants to explore the world. But as usual nobody ever wants to take Amal and they all want him to stay indoors all day long. Here, the *sancaribhava* of *autsukya* and *capalta* work together to set the atmosphere in a happy mood. Amal improves the gloomy atmosphere and mood of Madhav and the readers with such a jolly and positive reply.

3. Raudra Rasa

Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.

– Mark Twain

The village headman is one person who disapproves of Amal and his cheerful talkative nature. He freaks out on listening to the very voice of Amal. He is a head strong person and behaves rudely with Amal. The dialogue goes:

Amal - Headman, Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

Headman - Who is yelling after me on the highway? Oh, it's you, is it, you wretched monkey?⁸

Amal wishes to have a talk with the village headman but he is in no mood to talk to Amal. He considers Amal to be a wretched monkey, who stops everyone and wastes their time by chitchatting with them. Here, the *sancaribhava* of *mada*, *garva* and *amarsa* work to generate the *raudra rasa*. Amal still starts conversing with the headman. He considers taking advise of the headman, as Amal considers the headman to be a sensible and responsible person in the village. Amal wants the headman to direct the King's postman to the window, just in case the King writes a letter to Amal. The headman is in fury and considers this to be a bad joke. He reacts by saying:

Headman - Ha! ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! ha! the King indeed,



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aren't you his bosom friend eh! You haven't met him for a long time and the King is pinning to for you I am sure. Wait till tomorrow you'll have your letter.

*Amal – Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you cross?*⁹

The headman makes fun of Amal who awaits a letter from the King. The headman puts forth a pun on the idea by saying that the King is dying to meet Amal, as he is a loving friend of the king. The headman is arrogant due to the powers that he carries as the headman of the village.

4. *Adbhuta Rasa*

*And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head should carry all it knew.*

- Oliver Goldsmith

Amal loves to hear stories and Gaffer in the disguise of a Fakir tells Amal stories of distant magical lands. Amal, in Act 2 is shown to have become very weak and sick yet is he excited about hearing about the new place that the Fakir has visited. His excitement is reflected in the words:

Amal - Tell me Fakir, what's the Parrot's Isle like.

Gaffer - It's a land of wonders; it's a haunt of birds. No men are there; and they neither speak nor walk, they simply sing and fly.....

*Gaffer - Dear me, of course; you don't have a hill without it's waterfalls. Oh, it's like molten diamonds; and my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea. No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment.*¹⁰

Gaffer tells Amal about the magical Parrot's Isle and the wonderful things that Gaffer saw there. He shares his experience with Amal and Amal relishes the happiness by sitting at home. The *sancaribhavas* working here are *smriti* and *supta*. The island is an imaginary one, perfect for a little boy's fantasy. The mere imagination of the wonderful and miraculous island spread a smile on Amal's face.

5. *Shant Rasa*

Chasing after the world



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Brings chaos.

Allowing it all to come to me

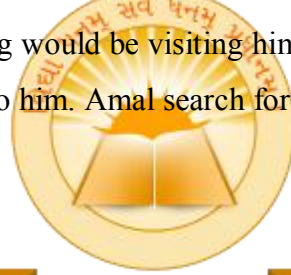
Brings peace.

– Zen Gatha

All that begins must come to an end and so it does here. Amal is visited by the Royal Physician and thus his treatment begins. He allows Amal to have the starlight in his room. The letter brought as fun by the village headman turns true and Amal is satisfied by the thought of his desire to meet the king come true. He sleeps at this moment and his sleep is described by the Physician as:

Physician - No need at all. Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his pillow; he's dropping asleep. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let the starlight stream in. Hush, he sleeps.¹¹

Amal has fallen to a peaceful sleep. The *sancaribhavas* working here are *nirveda* and *dhrti*. Amal is satisfied with the thought that that the King would be visiting him soon. He admires the headman's gratitude of delivering the King's letter personally to him. Amal search for tranquility ends, thus leaving him in a state of peace and serenity.



Conclusion

At the end of the play, Tagore does not reveal whether Amal embraces death or recovers to good health. He has left it to the audience to imagine and decide with the words:

Sudha – When will he be awake?

Physician – Directly the King comes and calls him.

sSudha – Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

Physician – What shall I say?

Sudha – Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him.¹²

The end of the play though seems to be a sad one unknown serenity prevails the atmosphere. It spreads a positive thought of seeking the best and achieving the best. The end of the play, though it is puzzling and critics have accepted the fate of Amal to be death, to quote G. Nageswara Rao, who has quoted a different perspective:



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As Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly questions, 'If Amal merely dies in the end, how do the king's herald, king's physician, and the king himself come in the picture?' The boy is ill; he gets worse; he dies. This sequence could have been rendered movingly without the introduction of the miraculous or melodramatic element. The deus ex machine can be justified only if the natural order is reversed, and the child recovers and lives on as he had wanted to as one of the king's postmen.¹²

Through the kaleidoscope of Bharat's *Rasa Theory*, the readers are able to get a new perspective of the play. The play seems to be more colorful with the understanding of the generating of the *rasas* derived at each moment of the play. The Post Office gains a wonderful meaning through the glasses of the *rasa* theory that life has a multifold meaning and towards the end brings peace, tranquility and serenity to all.

End Notes:

1. Debabrata Mukhopadhyay, Pg. 10
2. Ibid, Pg. 11
3. Ibid, Pg. 23
4. Ibid, Pg. 28
5. Ibid, Pg. 82
6. Ibid, Pg. 30
7. Ibid, Pg. 36-37
8. Ibid, Pg. 52
9. Ibid, Pg. 53-54
10. Ibid, Pg. 71-72
11. Ibid, Pg. 91
12. Ibid, Pg. 15



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