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TAGORE'S PORTRAYAL OF HUMANISM AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE
CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract:

This paper explores the humanistic aspects embedded in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore. It explores how his short stories are universal as they speak with the universal audience through the depth of his characters. This paper through the thematic exploration, of the short stories Kabuliwallah, The Home coming and The Postmaster explores how his characters act as a bridge by breaking down all the cultural, economic, and geographical divides through the values portrayed in the characters. His characters resonate with everyone around the world because his characters resonate with universal values like love, Empathy, compassion, universalism, etc. This aspect of humanism is the need for the contemporary world which is economically and geographically polarised and is struggling to come together through some common ground. Literature through Tagore's short stories can act as a bridge to break all the cultural, economic, geographical, and other barriers through their universal values.

Keywords: *Tagore, Humanism, Contemporary World, Indian Literature, Short Stories, etc.*

Introduction:

Tagore's writing refers to his deep conviction and unwavering trust in the inherent divinity and the potential of each individual. He encloses a deep empathy for human suffering, a sense of dedication to social justice, and a belief in the fundamental unity of Humanity. His humanism promotes the interconnectedness of all people cuts across cultural, religious, economic, and geographical barriers, and gives prominence to individual freedom, personal growth, and a deep harmony with nature.

His works are an exemplar of humanism, pointing to values like empathy, compassion, and the shared experiences of all human beings that go beyond the divides of class caste, religion, and culture. In his short stories, he portrays how an act of kindness and understanding can bring people closer even when they are from different backgrounds. Tagore's short stories often find common ground through their values like empathy when they listen to another's pain and or help someone without expecting anything in return etc. he showcases the unity of all beings by accepting the diversity of all cultures, religions, and personal experiences. His humanistic outlook is deeply rooted in spiritualism and the Upanishadic Philosophy of Indian scriptures.

Through his characters he portrays how small or big the act might be, if it is done with compassion, it can bring about a huge impact and bring people together. He intertwines compassion in the daily lives of people. A kind word, a helping hand from an individual or even just trying to understand someone else's feelings can change lives. These moments of humanity



are so real and relatable that readers from different times and cultures can connect with them. His characters generally face societal challenges and personal struggles yet their abilities to be compassionate to others and care for others rise above these difficulties. Tagore portrays through his short stories that everyone has the power and ability to show empathy and make the world better for others around them.

Analysis of the three Short Stories:

Kabuliwallah, *The Home coming* and *The Postmaster* are the masterpieces of Tagore's short stories. They explore and celebrate human relationships, emotions, and the subtle and fine distinctions of Human life. Each of these stories portrays the ability of Tagore to delve deep into the universal themes while grounding himself through the specificity of Indian life. He imbued his stories with deep humanism and the universal emotions, social realities, and the complexities of human relationships. His short stories brilliantly illustrated the essence of humanism that focuses on universal emotions and connections that bind people.

***Kabuliwallah*:**

Tagore's short story *Kabuliwallah* is a touching tale of human relationships, love, and the unexpected connections that transcend social, cultural, and regional boundaries. It focuses on the themes of nostalgia, separation, fatherhood, etc. It also shows the impact of time on relationships. The universal bond between a father and child is the central theme in *Kabuliwallah*. Rehmat's affection for Mini shows his longing for his daughter in Afghanistan. The below lines from the story highlight the universal feeling of fatherhood. "You have a little girl: I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her and buy fruits to your child" (Tagore).

The story subtly highlights the pain of separation and how distance alters relationships over a period of time. Time plays a crucial role in *Kabuliwallah* where the transformation of Mini from an innocent child to a mercurial bride portrays the changes which are inevitable over a period of time. Rehmat fails to understand it until he sees the grown-up child. He realises that Mini has moved on mirrors showcases the transient nature of human relationships. Tagore portrays a friendship that breaks down the barriers of culture, society, and geography. The story subtly critiques the way society perceives: outsiders and how prejudices shape human interactions. Rehmat's imprisonment for the crime committed impulsively adds a layer of complexity to his character.

His return from the jail is not just reunion but a moment of self-realization that Mini is not a child anymore but a grown up and mercurial bride. Now he sees Mini not as an innocent child but as a responsible adult, who is capable of taking care of herself, having discrimination capacity etc. he understands the inevitable changes which took place over a period of time.

The loss of innocence of mini can be understood by below lines from the original story:

"Little one are you going to your father-in-law's house?" but Mini now understood the meaning of the word father-in-law," and she could not reply to him as of old" (Tagore). It showcases Mini's loss of innocence and acceptance of reality.

Rehmat's act of giving dry fruits to Mini every day symbolizes his desire to stay with his own daughter. However, her eventual disinterest in the gifts shows the lost past which signifies the transient nature of human relationships. Despite being an outsider, he could form a beautiful bond with Mini which gets vanished over a period of time due to lack of communication, she could not respond to him as she would respond when she was a child.



The act of Mini's father giving the money to Rehmat even at the cost the cut down some expenses in his own daughter's marriage shows how humanism is far beyond the social, cultural and geographical barriers.

This story remains relevant even today as portrays the universal bond of father and a child. It showcases the bitter sweet and the transient nature of human relationships and also shows how purest act of humanism can transform the lives of people.

The Home Coming:

The Home Coming is deeply rooted in the profound concept of Humanism which reflects Tagore's empathy for human emotions, relationships, and the struggles of individuals in the social framework. The story revolves around Phatik Chakrabarty, a restless and misunderstood village boy who is sent to Kolkata to live with his uncle. It beautifully encapsulates the alienation and the tragic fate faced by a child who is longing for parental love, affection, and acceptance from society. Humanism in a broad sense emphasizes the dignity, freedom, and intrinsic worth of the individual. Tagore humanism was deeply influenced by the Upanishadic ideals of unity and the interconnectedness of everyone around the world. His deep understanding of the psychology of the children is portrayed through his portrayal of Phatik. Phatik like many children is energetic, playful, and mischievous; his actions- pushing a log into the river or resisting his uncle's authority- are not acts of rebellion but expressions of his free-spirited nature. Tagore does not judge Phatik based on his rebellious actions but instead presents him as a symbol of childhood innocence which is crushed by society. He portrays a humanistic approach where a child is not merely an abject of discipline but a person with his thoughts and emotions.

His moment from his village life to the urban city life serves as a metaphor that many people face in urban life even today. He faces a sense of alienation among the people. He has not received acceptance in his uncle's home and is treated as an extra burden by his aunt. The below lines from the story portray that he is treated as a burden in her uncle's family. "In the world of human affairs there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a little boy" (Tagore).

Through this story, Tagore critiques how society often finds it difficult to accommodate those who are not confined to rigid societal structures. Even though his uncle is not cruel, he remains indifferent to his emotional needs and his aunt openly blames him. In contrast, his mother having love for him cannot be expressed properly in the way he understands. This highlights how human relationships should be based on love and compassion and not based on mere duty.

At the end of the story his longing to go home is the wrenching moment of this short story. This line from the story the home coming shows his longing to go home and meet his mother. "Phatik opened his eyes, flushed with fever, looked up to the ceiling, and said vacantly: "Uncle have the holidays come yet?" (Tagore).

He tries to run away from his uncle's home, falls sick, and repeatedly asks if he can go home. The tragic end of this story is the death of Phatik who dies in his longing to meet his mother and go to his hometown.

The Story is a deeply humanistic tale that calls for the necessity of love and understanding in Human relationships. It portrays the harsh situations children face in society due to the strict and rigid societal rules. It highlights the need to choose appropriate ways of teaching children rather than rejecting them. It calls for a proper understanding of children's psychology.



The Postmaster:

Tagore's short story *The Postmaster* is a profound exploration of humanism that showcases the bond between an urban postmaster and a rural girl Ratan. This story highlights the transience of human emotions, relationships, and the moral dilemmas of acceptance and abandonment. Tagore's humanism is evident in his portrayal of the character's silent suffering, the need for empathy, and also the silent endurance of the marginalized. His humanism is made evident in this story through the compassionate relationship between the postmaster and Ratan. The postmaster is an educated young man from Calcutta who is posted at the remote village of Ulapur whereas Ratan is a poor simple village girl who takes care of his needs, eagerly serves him, and forms a deep emotional bond with the postmaster.

Initially, when the postmaster arrives at the village, he is indifferent towards Ratan whereas he develops a soft corner towards her over some time. She finds acceptance in his world. He teaches her to read write and treat her as more than just a servant. This portrays Tagore's belief in empowering through education. He uses it as a tool for human upliftment. The postmaster's kindness towards Ratan offers her a sense of belonging, highlighting the power of humanism as a force to transcend social barriers. The postmaster's treatment of Ratan is humane but it is limited by his self – centeredness. When he falls sick, he realizes the value of Ratan's care but later forgets all that when he is recovered. He abandons her and leaves the village without much thought. His humanity is limited by societal rules, he feels that the idea of taking her would be impractical. Despite showing his fleeting kindness ultimately chooses his convenience. His humanism is bound by societal norms and self-interests.

Tagore beautifully portrays the silent suffering and the emotional endurance she undergoes when he leaves the village. She neither complains nor protests. She waits for him hoping that he would return one day. Her humanism shows a deeper and more profound form of humanism. Her silent suffering elevates her to a tragic but a noble figure, showcasing the humanism rooted in maintaining the dignity of herself.

The ending of postmaster is philosophical where postmaster thinks to himself whether everything is predestined in life however he erases such thoughts by detaching himself from them as he is privileged. Whereas Ratan on the other hand holds on with the irrational hope that he would return. Tagore leaves the readers with the questions in the minds: Is humanism merely a fleeting sentiment or does it require deeper commitment and sacrifice?

This short story about humanism acts as a critique in society that humanism should not be limited or driven by mere self-interest. Through this tale, he urges us to reflect on the nature of compassion, responsibility, and the silent tragedies of human self-centeredness.

In the story the postmaster shares a touching bond with Ratan, their emotional ties were not bound by class yet it was self-centred. He leaves her and goes away without much thought. So through the character of Ratan, Tagore is showcasing the silent suffering and also the loneliness of those left behind in the society. This story questions the casual nature of powerful in leaving behind the powerless and the downtrodden.

Through these three short stories, Tagore portrays how humanism should be a guiding principle in everybody's lives. He stresses the need for empathy in human relationships. He also portrays the universality of parental love and the child's innocence. He expresses that indifference among individuals is a pain to another in a society. Therefore calls for a need to be humanistic towards others. He expounded the humanistic themes with at most sensibility and sensitivity.



He urges readers to embrace humanism in their daily lives which can foster kindness and understanding among themselves and also around the world which is often divided by the cultural and structural divides.

The Relevance of Tagore's Humanism in the Contemporary World:

In the contemporary world which is divided by increased polarisation, cultural conflicts, and economic disparities. This message of universal humanism resonates in society. It holds immense significance. He rejects the narrow feelings of narrow nationalism and he calls for global unanimity which finds resonance in today's challenges. The rise of ethno-nationalism threatens the very basis of global cooperation. Tagore's humanism emphasizes mutual respect, dialogue, and a mixture of diverse cultures, and traditions which offer a path for overcoming these challenges.

Tagore's education system is relevant in today's world where the education systems are commercialized and only prefer the rote and exam-oriented systems. He had a vision of holistic education emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and creativity among the students. His educational system encourages students to learn beyond textbooks and classrooms. His education system emphasizes on the basis moral values and the importance of nature while learning. Stories like *Master Mashai* critique the rigidity of conventional education and advocate for a more empathetic and individualized approach to learning.

Moreover, the contemporary world which is facing many environmental crises like global warming, climate change and many more. His reflections on nature offer critical insights of sustainable environment. His literary and philosophical works resonate with his reverence for nature. Even in his short stories he portrays people have a great connection with nature. He advocates for peace and harmony in this divided world. He criticises the social hierarchies and the social structures that eternize human suffering.

Tagore's short stories also shed light on social inequalities like poverty, caste system, intolerance, alienation, and calls for peace and harmony in the world. Through short stories like *Kabuliwala*, he mentions the discrimination faced by foreigners. He believed in Vishwa manavatwa (the oneness of humanity). Through his short stories, he wanted to erase all the inequalities by silently portraying them in his short stories. Tagore's short stories were relevant in his times and also relevant even in the contemporary world because the problems in society are the same even today but might be in a different way. Through his depictions, he portrays that selfishness or self-centeredness is the reason for all the happenings so he urges the readers to instill compassion, empathy, and selflessness among themselves. He urges the readers to look for commonality among human beings which automatically instills compassion towards others. It leads to a peaceful and harmonious society.

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