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RESEARCH ARTICLE

“AMAR MUKTI AALOO AALOO” (ILLUMINATED I AM...AMIDST THE LIGHTS OF LIBERTY).

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Abstract

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Introduction:-

In his short story, “Atithi”-The Guest, Tagore in his inexplicable poetic manner portrays the character of the protagonist Tarapada, a boy of around fifteen years of age. Tarapada has been constantly intrigued by the beauty and bounty of nature. In fact it can be said that he himself becomes one and unified with nature. He is in constant pursuit of knowledge with undaunted zeal to learn and explore the world and his lust for wander compels him to repeatedly run away from home leaving his family in despair. The group of acrobats that he initially joins fails to quench his thirst for knowing the unknown. So he further moves on. One day he comes across the zamindar of Kanthaliya village. His natural virtuousness, innocence and spontaneity attract the zamindar and his wife. His pleasant voice and charming presence casts a sweet spell on everyone except their envious daughter Charusashi who fails to endure Tarapada out of sheer jealousy. Charu is found to hover between feelings of love and hatred, possessiveness and gentle behaviour. Tarapada settles with the Zamindar family in their village for two years and wins the hearts of the villagers by his charisma, empathy and perspective taking towards others. Charushashi's erratic tantrums enchant Tarapada. Love starts to bloom spreading its shy petals. Zamindar Motibabu fixes Charu's marriage with Tarapada. But, the day before the wedding night the call of clouds ushering in intoxicating fragrance of the first monsoon rain fills the nature. Ever restless Tarapada, breaking all the shackles of security, comfort and attachment disappears again with an opera band. Endowed with the spirit of self actualization and often transcendental, Tarapada somewhere also appears to be a narcissist engrossed in his own self.

The living self has one purpose only:

To come into its own fullest of being,

As a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird

Into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre.

D. H. Lawrence :-

“Atithi” is an astonishing narrative of the eternal journey of a human soul resting at a while and taking a stride to the road at the next probable opportunity –a deep sensitive thought of Rabindranath Tagore characterizing the polarity of life and death.

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In his short story, Atithi (Guest), Tagore spins the thread of the narrative centering on the restlessness of a teenage boy, Tarapada, who never wants to settle down in any place. Tarapada, signifies life. Steeped heavily in Maslow's conceptualization of Self actualization, he possesses a character, very unusual, as compared to his other age mates. Tagore's pen picture of Tarapada reveals marked simplicity and naturalness endowed with lack of artificiality. His unconventionality is not external but essential, internal and spontaneous. His passion for nature, love for human beings, celebration of humanity, perception of beauty makes him akin to life-full of exuberance, lust and joy. Yet, Tara stops nowhere; he does not bind himself in the labyrinth of close relationships. His only aim is to move on. He is like an ever flowing river carrying life along with it, flowing continuously.

This offspring of Nature cannot be tied down by human relationships. "Bandhan-emonki sneho bandhan o tahar shohilo na; tahar jonmo nakshatra tahake grihaheen koriya diyachhe". (Ties, even the ties of love are incapable of holding onto him; his stars have made him an eternal homeless wanderer). He is generally unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown. Relationship with the unknown seems to be the only stable relationship that he is capable of maintaining. Exploring the unexplored seems to be of exceptional promise to him. Tarapada accepts it, is more comfortable with it and is more drawn towards the unknown than the known. Quite characteristic is Einstein's statement (1938), "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all art And Science". Tara, as Tagore calls him, lives more in the real world of nature than the human. He, therefore is far more apt to perceive what is there rather than his own wishes, hopes, fears, anxieties, "The innocent Eye" Herbert Read (1960) has called it.

Tarapada, the fourth son of his parents was still a baby when his father expired. He is loved dearly by his family members as well as the entire neighbourhood.

In his childhood, Tara joins a touring *yatra* (drama)-troupe and leaves his village without a thought. When the master of the company grows an affinity towards him like a son and other members of the troupe show their love for him, he leaves the company one day without prior intimation. "But his stars have made him a wanderer". If he sees strange boats on the river, or sanyasi (Saint) from a distant region under the local *peepul* tree or gypsies sitting by the river, making mats or baskets, his heart would stir with longing to be free, to explore the outside world. And after he has run away two or three times, family and villagers gave up hope of him.

The narrator speaks of Tarapada's restlessness as a young fawn, and his love for music is comparable to a deer. Tarapada is not only intrigued by the harmony of formal music rather he can sense and feel the resonance of harmony when the raindrops fall on the leaves and when the clouds rattle. Moaning of the winds as they blow through the woods, cry of birds breaking tranquility of the surrounding during the lonely afternoons, call of wild foxes and croaking of frogs in the rainy evenings make him throng with emotions. He exhibits a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again freshly and as naively the basic goods of life, with awe, with pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy-that C. Wilson (1972) has called "Newness". These intense feelings come occasionally rather than mostly in most unexpected moments.

His passion for music compels him to join a group of 'panchali' singers next. The master of the group likes him and under his guidance, Tarapada learns to recite panchali. But when the relationship matures, he vanishes from the group once again. Finally, he joins a group of gymnasts. He learns to play the flute very well. He even plays Lucknow 'Thumris' in his flute during gymnastic display. But, again, one day he flies away from the group.

The fifteen year old Brahmin boy then, comes to know that the zaminders at Nandigram have started an amateur *yatra*-group. So he sets for Nandigram to join the group and on the way he meets Matilal Babu, a zaminder of Kathaliya and his family with their household on a boat. Knowing that the boat is heading towards Kathaliya, the boy asks him if he can be dropped at Nandigram on the way. Matilal Babu agrees and invites Tarapada. Both Matilal Babu and his wife Annapurna show great concern for this boy. Specially, Annapurna takes great care to feed the boy and inquires him about his whereabouts. Both the husband and the wife are really impressed by him and start loving him like their son. However, the boy's detachment from her maternal affection evokes a sense of despair in her. But their love for Tarapada hurt their only little daughter Charushashi. The little girl is filled with jealousy and hatred. Being the only child, Charushashi is the sole claimant of her parents love. Being whimsical and headstrong, Charu is always inclined to give opinions about every little thing concerning her like eating, dressing or doing hair-styles. Her parents' affection for Tarapada agonizes her thus making her more and more hostile towards him. Annapurna realizes her daughter's jealousy and stops showing her affection overtly for Tarapada in her presence.

As the boat passes by, Tarapada feels a strong emotional tie binding him closely with the water, land and the horizon as if they are his close relatives. Their existence, full of life, limitless and impregnated with versatility and novelty

intrigues him but they fail to hold back the boy with their strong bond of affection. Tara very easily becomes friends with the boatmen. He at times helps them in their hard work and at others entertains them by chanting verses from the Ramayana.

However, Tara takes no notice of Nandigram when they pass by it. The boat arrives at Kathaliya after ten days where the Babu is given a ceremonial welcome. Tarapada at once surveys the village and is spellbound by its exquisite beauty. He is also able to establish friendly relations with everyone in the village addressing them Dada or 'Khura' or 'Didi' or 'Mashi' (brother or uncle or elder sister or aunt) as appropriate. A deep feeling of identification, sympathy and affection for human beings in general characterizes Tarapada. His relations apparently display more warmth. He can be and is friendly with anyone of suitable character regardless of class, caste or age. In spite of his easy going temperament and his ability to win over the hearts of many people, Tarapada is most individualistic and most altruistic -social and having a deep love for all human beings. At one moment the individuality seems to be strengthened, the ego is in one sense merged with another, yet in another sense remains separate and strong as always. The two tendencies, to transcend individuality and to sharpen and strengthen it, are seen as partners and not as contradictories. He can make friendship so easily because he has no real ties anywhere.

Sonamani is Charu's childhood friend. Charu refrains to tolerate Tarapada's concern for Sonamani. Her initial dislike towards him gradually assumes the hue of love and admiration. Charu wishes to be the sole claimant of Tarapada's attention and admiration. She engages herself into a battle with Sona for no reason and then gets into Tara's room and stamps on his flute and breaks it. But Tarapada still bears it, and does not scold her. He possesses the attribute of accepting himself as well as the shortcomings of others without complaint. He is seen to take the frailties and weaknesses and evils of human nature (Charu's behaviour towards him) in the same unquestioning spirit with which one accepts the characteristics of nature. One does not complain about water because it is wet, or about rocks because they are hard, or about trees because they are green. (Maslow, 1970). He finds it easy to be aloof, reserved, calm and also serene thus making it possible for him to take personal misfortunes without reacting violently as the ordinary person does. He seems to be able to retain dignity even in undignified surroundings and situations.

The hitch between Tarapada and Charushashi continues. Quite contradictory to his nature, Tarapada amazingly stays at this house almost for two years. Possibly he stays with the family because he fails to fathom the little girl. More he fails to unravel the mystery within the girl's psyche, more he feels attracted towards her. Charushashi also starts showing a little bit of liking for Tarapada. To quench Tarapada's thirst for knowledge, Matilal Babu makes arrangement for his tuition in English. Tarapada is seen to be engrossed in his academic endeavor and derives sheer joy from exploring the unknown. In the meantime, Charushashi reaches almost eleven years of age. Matilal Babu has already sought for two or three matches for his daughter. One day Annapurna suggests that Tarapada is a worthy boy and Charushashi actually has an affinity towards him. Matilal Babu is surprised and is reluctant to consider Tarapada as the bride-groom of their only daughter on the ground that they know nothing about his family background. Finally, the husband and wife together send a messenger to Tarapada's village to find out about his ancestry. They come to know that the family is poor though belongs to high-caste. So Matilal Babu sends a formal proposal to Tarapada's mother and elder brother. They are overjoyed at the proposal and accept it at once. The wedding date gets fixed up in the month of Shraban (monsoon). Arrangements are made for Tarapada's mother and elder brother to be brought over from the village. But Tarapada is not made aware of this. Everything is concealed from him. The arrangement for the wedding has been ready- even a trumpet-and-drum band has been hired from Calcutta to mark this special occasion.

Meanwhile, on the Nag family estate, at Kurulkata, a famous chariot-festival is due to be held. One moonlit evening, Tarapada reaches local 'ghat' (riverside) and witnesses the rendezvous of life. The swift flood-tide, boats with merry-go-rounds, yatra-troupes, and cargo-boats rapidly making for the fair. An orchestra from Calcutta practicing loudly as it passes by; the yatra-troupe singing to tunes of violin; boatmen from lands to the west split the sky with cymbals and thudding drums. Tarapada is fascinated to perceive the continuity of life being celebrated to the fullest. Early monsoon clouds fill up the sky. The village river had been dried up for weeks; water being seen in potholes here and there; small boats lay motionless in pools of muddy water, and the dry river-bed was rutted with bullock-cart tracks. But now, like Parvati (lord Shiva's wife) returning to her parents' home, murmuring waters return to the empty arms of the village, naked children dance and shout on the river-bank, jump into the water with voracious joy as if trying to embrace the river; the villagers gaze at the river like long lost companion; a huge wave of life and delight seems to roll through the parched village. The villages along the river had spent the whole year confined to their own small worlds: now, with the rains, the vast outside world has come in its earth coloured chariot, carrying wondrous gifts to the villages, as if on a visit to its daughters. The rustic limitation is suddenly consumed and

replaced by larger world; everything attains activity; the bustle of distant cities overflow this sleepy region, and the whole sky appears to reverberate.

To Tarapada the whole world seems like a chariot festival: wheels churning, flags flying, earth trembling, clouds swirling, wind rustling, river flowing, boats sailing, songs rising! There are clamours of thunder, flashes of lightning appearing in the sky: the fragrance of torrential rain emerging from the dark distance. But Kathaliya village in the river bed is oblivious of the rejoice of life echoing loud; the eternal ceremony of motion. The village shutting her doors turns out her lamps and fades into the spell of slumber.

The next morning when his mother and brother reach the village, Tarapada is nowhere to be seen. He has once again lost himself into the fathomless unexplored unknown world, leaving behind the shackles of certainty and secure bond of relationships.

Tarapada becomes one and unified with nature. He experiences what may be called as “peak experience” or mystic experience where he apparently transcends beyond the mundane shackles of everyday life- a tremendous intensification of emotions centering intense sensuous experience of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy, wonder and awe. He unleashes himself from the bindings of relationships and fades into the realm of oblivion proving that Tara was just an ‘Atithi’, a guest, who was here to stay for just a few days, not forever.

Through Tarapada Tagore has portrayed an ideal child of Nature. He cannot be tied down by human bonds of love. The boy Tarapada therein is quite an attractive a figure who is drowned in a flood that is the fittest close to the life; such a dear and free and joyful child of nature to whom the trammels of common life would have been an intolerable agony. (K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, 1988). He customarily has a mission in life, some task to fulfil, some problem outside him which enlists much of his energy. (Buhler and Massarik, 1968; Frankl, 1969). One can hear the resonance of Tagore’s philosophy, “Jagate anondo yogne amar nimontrono.... Dhonyo holo dhonyo holo, Manobo jibono” (I have had my invitation to this world’s festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.) Jayodhoni shuniye jabo a mor nibedon (I shall chant the melody of victory before I leave).

Tarapada in Atithi easily becomes the object of strong affection for anybody coming in contact with him, but he slips away from the bonds that people try to bind him with. Apparently seeming to be a narcissistic person with self-focus in interpersonal exchanges and problems in sustaining satisfying relationships and difficulty with empathy, the only thing that he consistently does in life is to move on. ‘Charaibeti’ (move on)-one can hear him resonating the eternal essence of life. One cannot choose wisely for a life unless he dares to listen to himself, his own self, at each moment in life. (Maslow, 1971)

Finally, when he becomes aware of the love showing colours his life, a love that may completely engross him and sway him away, a bond that he may not be able to resist, he simply fades into the great impersonal universe never to return. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar (1987). “Mahabishwe, mahakashe, mahakalo maajhe...ami manobo ekaki bhromi bishmoye, bhromi bishmoye.” (Amidst the great universe, the limitless azure and the deep fathomless darkness, I am a lone traveler, awestruck) .

Tarapada is able to live fully in the moment. Continually experiencing a sense of inner freedom he is out and out endowed with creativity, exuberance and invites challenges in life whenever he feels it becoming mundane. According to Carl Rogers (1962), a *fully functioning person* is one who is in touch with his or her deepest and innermost feelings and desires. These individuals understand their own emotions and place a deep trust in their own instincts and urges. Rogers suggested that the fully functioning person is one who has embraced 'existential living.' "Such a person experiences in the present, with immediacy". He is able to live in his feelings and reactions of the moment. Tarapada, the protagonist in Atithi is not bound by the structure of social expectations and norms of formal relationships but these are resources for him insofar as they relate to the experience of the moment. Yet, Tara in Atithi is someone who is open to experience, not defensive, aware and sensitive to one’s self and external world and has a harmonious relationship with others.

Describing a fully functioning person, Rogers (1962) says: “He lives freely, subjectively, in an existential confrontation of this moment in life,”-the words that characterize Tarapada, the ever growing person in pursuit of achieving his potential to the fullest. Hockenbury&Hockenbury (2006) suggest the fully functioning people are also flexible and ever-evolving. Their self-concept is not fixed and they are constantly taking in new information and experiences. Not only is Tarapada open to new experiences, he is also capable of changing in response to what he learns from those experiences.

A reader is enthralled by Tarapada's openness to experience, lack of defensiveness, his ability to interpret experiences accurately, a flexible self-concept and the ability to change through experience. His unconditional self-regard and the tendency to be open to new experiences essentially speak of his innate possibility of emerging into a fully functioning person. He does not feel the need to distort or deny experiences and lives in harmony with other people.

We can hear the rejoice of life, the celebration of humanity in Tagore's creation of Tarapada. Sisirkumar Ghose (1968) writes about this story: "Tarapada in Athithi has heard what Tagore has elsewhere called 'the call of the open reed. 'This world is a chariot moving in the dark. All things are moving, the earth trembles, the winds fly, the river and the boat are on the move'" Thus, "In a cloudy monsoon night, before love and emotional ties can encircle him completely, this Brahmin boy, insecure in close bonds of relationship, thief of all hearts in the village, seeks refuge in the unconstraining, unemotional arms of his Mother Earth – the omnipotent mother, perhaps signifying his eternal return.(Nietzsche 1894).

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