



**“Rabindranath Tagore’s The Post Office
from the view point of Karuna Rasa”**

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Abstract:

An ancient Sanskrit text of [dramatic theory](#) and other performance arts, Natyashastra, shows rasa as the goal of any creative performance art, oratory, painting or literature. Rasa which forms the dominant note of a dramatic piece shows elemental human emotions like love, pity, fear, heroism or mystery. Rasa connotes a concept in Indian arts about the aesthetic flavour of any visual, literary or musical work that evokes an emotion or feeling in the reader or audience but cannot be described. It refers to the emotional flavours or essence crafted into the work by the writer and relished by a 'sensitive spectator', literally one who "has heart", and can connect to the work with emotion, without dryness.

This paper seeks to analyse and show the elements of Karuna Rasa depicted in Rabindranath Tagore's play The Post Office. The play is a mixture of emotions. It shows a sick child Amal who is confined in a small room because of some fatal disease. Tagore has beautifully brought out the pathetic condition of the child who pines for freedom and the world is anxious to keep him in bondage.

Moreover, The Post Office is a pathetic tale of human suffering. The world represented by the village physician shows the eagerness to keep Amal in a cage. At last Amal's illness leads to his death and the tragic end of the play shows Karuna rasa.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Emotions, Rasa, disease, Karuna, pathos

Introduction:

The Post Office, a play written in 1912 by Rabindranath Tagore is a pathetic tale of an orphan child who is suffering from fatal ailment. The play has been internationally the most popular play of Tagore. It was successfully staged in different countries at different times. It concerns Amal, a child confined to his adoptive uncle's home by an incurable disease. On the surface level, the play represents the eagerness of Amal, who is kept confined in a room, to participate in the activity of life around him. But beyond this apparent simplicity lies its profound meaning. In deeper level, it has been read as an allegory of soul seeking what lies beyond. The play has a tragic ending which makes it full of pathos. The events in the play are sorrowful because an innocent child is seen suffering, restricted to play outside, to go out and



to be free from all the bondages throughout the play. Karuna rasa is described by the feelings of sorrow or pathos. The features of karuna rasa are enlisted in Natyashastra,

now (the rasa) known as Karuna arises from the permanent emotion of sorrow. It proceeds from vibhavas such as curse, affliction (klesa or affliction of curse), separation from those who are dear,(their) downfall, loss of wealth, death and imprisonment or from contact with misfortune (vyasana), destruction (upagata), and calamity (vidarva). (Masson and Patwardhan 52)

The beginning of the play evokes the emotions of sympathy and compassion. When upon the advice of the village doctor, Amal is not allowed to go out in open-air as it may be harmful to his health. So he is kept confined in room with utmost care by Madhav. He is a simple and innocent child with highly sensitive and imaginative mind. Though he is kept confined in room, his imaginative mind leads him to rise above the barrier of the four walls of the room. He sits beside the window and makes friends with the passer-by, communicating to each a new zest for life. Thus the Dairyman, Watchman, Headsman, Sudha and the village boys become his friends. He has an extraordinary inquisitive mind. The play begins with Madhav Dutta speaking with the Doctor about a young boy with a fever. The Doctor says the boy cannot go outside or he will get worse. The Doctor quotes scripture and proverbs that support his recommended treatment.

MADHAV. Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?

PHYSICIAN. None at all: for "In the wind and in the sun-"

MADHAV. what will your " in this and in that" do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done, then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine(Tagore103-104)



It was difficult for Madhav to see the little boy suffering so much so his heart aches. After the doctor leaves, Thakurda, a wanderer with whom Madhav is acquainted, comes in. Madhav tells Thakurda that his wife has wanted to adopt a son and now they have finally done so. The boy is an orphan who is distantly related to them, something of a nephew on his wife's side of the family. Madhav confides to Thakurda that he did not want to adopt a son lest the boy foolishly spend all the money Madhav has worked so hard to earn all of his life. Now, however, he loves the boy so much that he does not care. Madhav also makes Thakurda promise not to allow the boy to play outside, and not to excite him too much. Thakurda agrees and promises to come back and only play quietly with the boy indoors. The character of Thakurda is also interesting in a way that he adds some hope and peace to the life of a poor boy. Because Amal doesn't like the confinement, he questions the Doctor's orders, but Madhav says that the Doctor knows best because he is well-read and is an educated man. Amal concedes that he has not read anything and therefore must not know anything. Madhav then tells Amal that he can sit and read his whole life and become a pundit (a learned man who shapes public opinion because of his expertise). Amal scoffs at the suggestion because he does not want to sit still, as he is being forced to do now. Instead, he wants to travel the world and see all there is to see.

AMAL. Wish I were a squirrel! - it would be lovely. Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

MADHAV. Doctor says it's bad for you to be out

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? (Tagore 105-106)

Amal sits at the window when the Curd seller passes by, singing out his wares. Amal beckons to him, but then says he has no money. Amal does not want to buy curd; he wants to hear about the Curd seller's village and to be taught the song that the man uses to sell his curds. He wants to learn how to sell curds when he grows up, walking around and singing. The Curd seller tells the boy that he should become a pundit instead. Amal says "I will never



become a pundit." Amal talks about how he feels exhilarated when he hears the Curd seller's song. The Curd seller is so touched that he puts some curd for him without taking money. He also sympathises with the poor child.

DAIRYMAN. Dear, dear, did you ever? Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.

AMAL. No, I never want to be learned- I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will hawk it from cottage to cottage. OH, how do you cry- "Curds, curds, fine curds"? Teach me the tune, will you? (Tagore 110)

Because of his illness Amal knows the true meaning of life that is to enjoy every moment with enthusiasm. But unfortunately his wishes remain unfulfilled. The incident of Amal talking to the watchman gives the feeling of relief in between the feelings of extreme sorrow. The Watchman passes by and Amal calls him over. The Watchman tells Amal that he should be scared of him because he can arrest the boy and take him away. Rather than being scared by this, the thought excites Amal. The boy asks the Watchman about his gong, which is used to announce the time. From this conversation, the Watchman makes a pun about mortality, though Amal does not appear to understand it. If he does understand the joke, then his answer indicates that he wants to die in order to be "free." Amal asks the Watchman about the building across the street, which the Watchman says is the new post office. The boy is entranced by the idea of becoming a mail carrier for the *Raja* (the local monarch, or ruler), traveling the world and delivering messages

AMAL. Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land of which no one knows anything.

WATCHMAN. All of us have to get there one day, my child.

AMAL. Have I too?

WATCHMAN. Yes, you too! Amal. But doctor won't let me out.

WATCHMAN. One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.
(Tagore 112)

The conversation between Amal and Headman also evoke the feeling of sympathy and karuna. In their conversation it seems that Headman is totally unemotional dispassionate towards the little boy. When the Headman approaches, Amal is talking to himself, imagining what it would be like to receive letters from the Raja. Amal cannot read, so he hopes his "Auntie" will read the letters to him. Better yet, he'll save them and read them once he's older and has learned to read himself. Amal then calls out to the Headman. The boy asks the Headman to tell the mail carriers his name and address in case the Raja sends him a letter. The Headman, who is not very nice, teases Amal about being the Raja's friend. He says to himself that Madhav and his family have gone too far, pretending to be acquainted with royalty just because Madhav has been successful in business. The Headman promises, insincerely, to speak with the Raja and have his letter delivered to Amal. In reality, he plans to speak to the Raja about Madhav's pretensions

HEADMAN. A letter for you! Whoever's going to write to you?

AMAL. If the King does.

HEADMAN. Ha! ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! ha! the King, indeed, aren't you his bosom friend, eh! You haven't met for a long while and the King is pining for you, I am sure. Wait till tomorrow and you'll have your letter. (Tagore 114)

Headman is very brutal towards Amal's feelings but very opposite to him is the girl Sudha who is very innocent. She is on her way to pick flowers for her father, who sells the garlands. Amal wishes he could go with her and says he would pick the best and hardest to reach flowers for her. Sudha says she would love to sit all day like Amal, but she must go before all the best flowers have been picked. Amal makes Sudha promise to return, and he asks her to bring him a flower, promising to pay her once he is grown up and has money of his own. Sudha agrees, swearing not to forget, and saying, "You will be remembered." Their conversation shows how eager Amal is to gather flowers but unfortunately he can't.



SUDHA. I gather flowers in my basket.

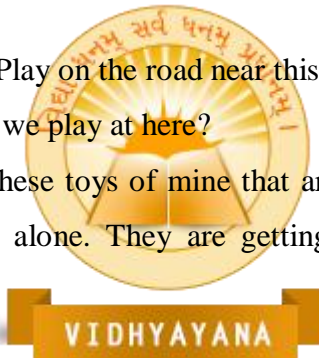
AMAL. Oh, flower-gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets Jingle so merrily as you walk. Wish I could be out too. Then I would pick some flowers for you from the very top most branches right out of sight.
(Tagore 115)

When a group of Village Boys wanders by, Amal asks where they are going and what they are going to play. The boys invite him to come along, but Amal tells them he is not allowed outside because he is ill. Instead, he says he will give the boys all of his toys as long as they promise to come and play outside of his window every morning. He also asks them to send one of the mail carriers to see him. Their conversation shows the extreme emotions of sacrifice. He is the child who is ready to give all his toys just to see other boys play

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.
(Tagore117)



Amal, a symbol of innocence and purity is pinning for freedom all the time. When he gets the freedom it is the freedom from the mortal world. Freedom comes in the disguise of death. All his wishes remain unfulfilled. He feels dark and everything seems gloomy with his death. The play ends with tragic note when he describes his wishes to get the King's letter and dies.

AMAL. Say,Fakir, I' ve been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all of a sudden, suppose-.

(Tagore 124)



Conclusion:

As the story of the play unfolds it seems that it may have positive ending but sudden death of Amal leaves everyone in shock. Sometimes it begins to feel that God is cruel to the little boy or whether there is God or not. The play certainly brings out the emotions of sorrow or pathos and it suggests that there may be pains in life and God may seem to be punishing in one form or the other. The play shows death is inevitable and so it should be accepted as an inevitable phenomenon of existence. The dramatist has been able to bring about such emotions of pathos and Karuna.

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