

**ETHICAL PORTRAYALS IN THE SHORT STORIES OF  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE: MY LORD, THE BABY AND  
THE CABULIWALLAH**

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**Abstract**

In this paper, the researcher studies the Indian ethics which are well reflected in the stories of Rabindranath Tagore. In the era of degrading values, the stories can prove to be good educational source for the students to learn about their Indian ethics and culture. The researcher has taken two stories— My Lord, the Baby and the Cabuliwallah for this study. The story ‘My Lord, the Baby’ portrays the relation between a servant and his master and his lifelong, selfless service to him. The story ‘The Cabuliwallah’ elucidates the bonding between a five-year-old child Mini with a fruit seller Cabuliwallah which is above all the human relationships.

**Introduction**

Ethics is concerned with the norms of human social behavior. It is that study of human behavior which propounds the supreme good of human life and which formulates the judgments of right and wrong and good and evil. Indian ethics is one of the greatest traditions of moral thoughts in world philosophy whose insights have influenced thinkers all over the world. Indian values give prime importance to right to happiness of all human beings. Some of the basic values of the Indian value system are tyaga (renunciation), dana (liberal giving), nishtha (dedication), satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and upeksha (forbearance). Recent years have seen a little degradation of these moral values. People are aping western culture which has led to increase in corruption in the society, opening of old age homes, more and more of nuclear families, less respect in the minds of younger generation. This problem can be solved by training our young minds and providing them value-based education. Rabindranath Tagore based his stories on these basic values of Indian value systems. The stories of Rabindranath Tagore are a great means to make the students realize the importance of the ethical values in our life.

My lord, the baby is a story that showcases the special bond between, the master and his servant. Raicharan was the dedicated servant of Anukul who came to his house at the age of twelve. He looked after the author as a boy and also when he grew up and went to college and became judge. He was “his sole attendant” (Tagore: 2002, 53) until the author married. Then Anukul got married and Raicharan served both Anukul and his wife with utmost earnest. Anukul and his wife were blessed by a son and he got his full attention. He used to take care of him and play with him. He felt exalted when the baby started speaking words and called him “Chan-na”. (54) He always said to his mistress that his son would become a judge. After some time, Anukul was transferred to a district on the banks of the Padma. He brought for his son a go-cart, yellow satin waistcoat, a gold embroidered cap, golden bracelets and anklets from Calcutta. Raicharan used to adorn the baby with the ornaments and take him for a ride in a go-cart. Tagore here brings out the dedication of the servant Raicharan who not only worked sincerely for his master but also for his wife and child.

On an unfortunate day after the rains, Raicharan took the baby for a walk in the routine way. The baby insisted to Raicharan for the flowers on Kadamba trees by saying “Chan-na! Pitty fow”. (55) Raicharan did not wish to get drenched to get the flowers as the ditches were full after the rain. He tried to distract the child’s attention by showing him birds or making noise by to no avail. He bowed to the wishes of the child and went to bring the flowers saying “Very well, baby”, he said, “you sit in the cart, and I’ll go and get you the pretty flowers. Only mind you don’t go near the water”. (56) But when he returned back to the go cart the child had vanished from there. He kept on searching for the child calling “Master, little master” but in vain. When Raicharan reported the matter to his mistress, the mistress became hysterical and kept on demanding her son in exchange of all the wealth. Though many people believed that the child may be drowned in Padma river, the mistress suspected Raicharan of kidnapping the child for the golden ornaments he had worn.

Raicharan was devastated at hearing this allegation and went back to his own village. There his wife gave birth to a son after a year and died. He named him “Phailna”. He started feeling that his lost little master (Anukul’s baby) had been reborn in his house. Here Tagore points out that Raicharan had the guilt of losing his master’s baby. He remembered his mistress’ allegations. He started believing that he had in really stolen his master’s baby and started taking care of his baby as his “little master”.

Raicharan bought his son a go-cart, a yellow stain waistcoat, a gold embroidered cap, golden anklet and bangles just like his little master. He sold his land and started working Calcutta to get Phaina educated. He gave him “the best education, the best clothes, the best food” (61). Though he himself started and went without proper clothing. He would secretly thank his little master. “Ah! My little master, my dear little master, you loved me so much that you came back to my house. You shall never suffer from any neglect of mine”. (61)

After twelve years, Raicharan grew old and could not work accordingly to his employer’s wishes. It was also difficult for him to fulfill his boy’s demands. He went to Anukul’s house and announced that he had stolen their son and he was not drowned in Padma river. When Anukul expressed his wish to see his son, Raicharan brought Phailna to him. Anukul’s wife accepted Phailna to be her son without questioning. Anukul, being a man of law, tried to question him of the proofs that Phailna was their son but seeing his wife happiness he left the topic at bay. Raicharan also expressed his wish to stay with them but Anukul’s “magisterial conscience”(64) did not allow this. Anukul remained adamant on Raicharan’s pleadings. Phailna also believed that he really was son of Anukul, the magistrate. He was angry with Raicharan for hiding the

facts but pleaded his father to give Raicharan a small pension. Raicharan was pained to hear his son talk in this manner and went away from there. Anukul sent some money to Raicharan village but it came back as there was no one there of the name of Raicharan. Tagore here brings to light the golden heart of Raicharan who gave away his beloved child to his master and mistress without thinking twice.

One more story by Tagore that portrays the ethical acts of the characters is *The Cabuliwallah*. It is a story that depicts the bond of friendship and love between a small girl Mini and *The Cabuliwallah*, a dry fruit seller. Mini was a five year old daughter of the author who was fond of chattering about this and that. One day she spotted about man wearing loose clothes, a turban and a bag on his bag. She cried for him *The Cabuliwallah* but as he turned to come there, she was terrified and hid away from him. The author, his father, introduced *The Cabuliwallah* to Mini and he “offered her nuts and raisin”(Tagore:2002, 194) but she was not friendly with him.

But after sometime, the *Cabuliwallah* befriended Mini and they became best of friends. They used to laugh and talk for hours together. *Cabuliwallah* used to give nuts to Mini without taking any money. They cracked jokes to each other which brought merriment to them. Mini would ask, “O *Cabuliwallah*! *Cabuliwallah*! What have you got in your bag?”(195) and *Cabuliwallah* would answer changing his accent “an elephant!”(195) and they would laugh on it. They even joked about when each is going to father in law’s house. Mini was a small girl then and did not know that father in law’s house had two meaning – one house of her husband’s father and second meaning jail. *The Cabuliwallah* liked spending time with Mini because it reminded of her own daughter in Afghanistan. Tagore here mentioned the simple bond of love between the *Cabuliwallah* and Mini without any selfish interest. *The Cabuliwallah* loved Mini like his own daughter. Though he was not very wealthy, he did not mind giving small gifts to Mini.

But a rift came in their relationship when Rahmun, the *cabuliwallah* was arrested for stabbing his neighbor who owed some money for a Rampuri shawl but had falsely denied having brought it. He was sentenced to some years of imprisonment. One day Rahmun is released from jail and he comes back to meet his little one, Mini. “May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment? (201). He imagined her to come out running like the small girl he left her to be. He also brought a gift of nuts for her. But it was the wedding day of Mini and she was busy in the ceremonies taking place in the house. When the author informed *Cabuliwallah* of the same, he became sad. He was about to go when he turned back to the author and asked him to give the small gift to Mini. The author took out some money to offer to *Cabuliwallah* to which he denied saying, “You are very kind, Sir! Keep me in your recollection. Do not offer me money! You have a little girl. I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring fruits to your child, not to make a profit for myself.”(202)

The author was touched by his words and called Mini inspite of all difficulties. Mini comes up before *Cabuliwallah* dressed up in red saree. *Cabuliwallah* is confused to see grown up Mini and Mini also does not recognize her after so many years. When *Cabuliwallah* asked her whether she was going to her father in law’s house, she blushed as she now understood the meaning of the word. After Mini left, the *Cabuliwallah* sat down on the floor with a deep sigh, as he realized that his own daughter would have grown up and he also had to make friends with her again. The author gave the *Cabuliwallah* a sum of money, curtailing the expenses of his daughter’s wedding, so that Rahmun is reunited with his daughter. Here Tagore not only shows the bonding of the *Cabuliwallah* with Mini which brings him back to her after so many years. He also shows the kindness of the author, the father of Mini, who offered a sum of money to the *Cabuliwallah* and had to cut short some of the expenses of his daughter’s wedding.

**Conclusion:-** Rabindranath Tagore’s stories are replete with characters who are ethically strong. These characters portray the Indian culture which gives prime importance to the happiness of human beings. In the present era, when the ethical values are depleting at a fast pace, the stories of Tagore can make our students realize the importance of ethics in our life.

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