

GLIMPSES OF INDIAN VALUES IN THE STORIES OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE- VISION AND THE RENUNCIATION

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Abstract

In this paper, the researcher studies the Indian values 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 values and culture. The researcher has taken two stories– Vision and The Renunciation for this study. The story ‘Vision’ portrays the relation between Abinash and Kumo and how values help them to sustain many storms in their life. The story ‘The Renunciation’ elucidates the life Hemanta and Kusum who adhere to their values despite of all difficulties.

Introduction

India is a country known for its culture, values and amalgamation of different religions. India’s languages, religions, dances, music, architecture, food and customs differ from place to place within the country but the values are deep-seeded within all the people of the country. Moral values are the standards of good and evil, which govern an individual’s behavior and choices. There are several founding principles of these values in Indian culture which include Tyaga, which is renunciation; Dana, which is liberal giving; Nishtha, which is dedication; Satya, which

is truth; Ahisma, which is non-violence and Upeksha, which is forbearance. Respect is an extremely valued component of the everyday life of the Indians. Children are taught to respect their elders from the very beginning. Family is also an extremely important component of Indian culture. Families are valued highly and are a part of an individual's life until death. 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. It is a universal truth that when we act, we evaluate that act by comparing to a standard. We determine the merit of a thing or an action as compared to a standard. Typical values including honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, honor, responsibility, patriotism, respect and fairness can be easily taught to the students by creating an insight of these values. The stories of Rabindranath Tagore are a great means to make the students realize the importance of the moral values in our life. 'Vision' is the story which shows upheaval in the family life of Abinash and Kumo. It also brings to light the tender relationship of sister and brother. These shades of relationships have fragrance of Indian soil in them and the strong values of Indian people can be illustrated. The story starts with Kumo expecting a baby and due to some mishap; she gives birth to a dead child. Not able to bear the sorrow, she, herself, comes near to death. Though she recovers her strength gradually, her eyesight is affected and become weak. Abinash, who is studying medicine, decides to treat his wife himself without consulting any expert. The brother's concern for his sister is well seen in the words of Kumo's brother to Abinash- "What are you doing?" he said to my husband. "You are ruining Kumo's eyes. You ought to consult a good doctor at once." (Tagore 99)

He was not at all satisfied with Abinash's efforts of curing Kumo and even brought a doctor for her. Here the turn in relationship between a brother and sister is illustrated. Kumo did not like the interference of her brother in what her husband was doing for her. She was of the opinion that as she was married, her joys and sorrows were the concern of her husband and not the problem of her mother's side of family though Kumo loved her brother a lot. This shows the nistha or dedication of the wife towards her husband and his family.

"It also seemed to me very unfair that, when my family had given me in marriage, they should interfere afterwards. After all, my pleasure and pain are my husband's concern and not theirs." (100)

She threw the medicines and the prescription in the well and even gathered courage to speak to her elder brother to not to interfere in her matter. Kumo applied the therapies suggested by Abinash diligently and assured him that she was getting well, though her blindness was increasing day by day. This act shows the tyaga of an Indian wife. The words of Kumo prove this fact- "Each time he came back from the hospital, he would ask me anxiously how I felt; and I would answer" "Oh! much better." Indeed I became an expert in self-delusion." (101) Finally when Kumo lost her eyesight, Abinash felt guilty about his carelessness towards her and not providing her expert medical assistance on time. His husband came to her and repented- "I cannot brazen it out before you any longer," said he; "Kumo, it is I who have ruined your eyes." (104)

This incident was a turning point in their marriage and they became closer. Abinash's love for his wife and feeling of guilt motivated him to her in her in day to day chores which delighted her and she eagerly waited for him. "My repentant husband would not let the servants do my work; he must do it all himself." (107) Tagore here shows the heart of an Indian wife who feels it her duty to serve her husband and feels guilty to be a burden on him. Kumo slowly

trained herself to do all the household work. Not only this, she even suggested Abinash to get married again and bring a 'Sautan' for herself, which is a form of supreme tyaga for a married woman. Though he refused earlier and even took an oath not to marry, he started thinking of remarriage later.

Abinash's aunt brought her cousin's daughter, Hemangini to their house who was a prospective bride for Abinash. Hemangini was a girl full of life, attracting Abinash towards her more and more and Kumo was pained to feel this happening. Abinash ignored his duty as a doctor to meet Hemangini and Kumo came to know about this- "I found out after this that there were constant interruptions in my husband's professional duties. He refused all calls from a distance, and would hurry away from his patients, even when they were close at hand." (117)

Abinash even decided to marry Hemangini and went to the country to do so. Kumo's brother came to her rescue by saving her marriage. Kumo's brother had determined never to marry again but when he saw that his sister's home on verge of collapse due to attraction of Abinash for Hemangini, he decided to marry Hemangini. Tagore here describes the love of an elder brother for his sister, who, though, had taken a vow not to marry, just for the happiness of his sister, forgoes it.

At the end, Abinash realized his mistake. He came to know that his real love was for his wife Kumo and love for Hemangini was just a moment of infatuation. At the hour of midnight, the husband and wife united again, realizing the importance of each other. Abinash said to Kumo- "In that moment of self-revelation I knew that I could have no happiness except with you. You are a Goddess." (127)

A different shade of relationship of husband and wife is seen in the story 'The Renunciation'. It focuses on how love blossomed between a young couple Hemanta and Kusum and twists and turns in their relationship. It is a story of Hemanta who fell in love with an orphan Kayestha girl, Kusum, who used to come to her roof for hanging her clothes and Hemanta would be on his own roof for studies. Peari Sankar Ghosal, who was grieved by the decisions of Hemanta's father (being the head of the community) against his daughter and son-in-law, had mediated in the case of marriage of Hemanta and Kusum. He had introduced Kusum as the daughter of Sripati Chatterji, a Brahmin. Thus the marriage took place.

The story started with the couple sitting in the bedroom on a full moon night in the month of Phalgun. The room was filled with the melodious song of papiya. Hemanta was showing his love to his wife Kusum with his gentle caress. The lines- "There Hemanta now restlessly twisted a lock of his wife's hair round his finger, now beat her churi against her wristlet until it tinkled, now pulled at the chaplet of flowers about her head, and left it hanging at her face." (Tagore: 2002, 180) suggest Hemanta's love for his wife.

But Kusum was lost in her thoughts and her husband's caresses did not have any effect on her. She had guilt in her mind that she had hidden the fact that she belonged to lower class from her husband. Though she loved Hemanta a lot, she did not feel well about starting a relationship with falsehood and not with Satya. When Hemanta called her close and see how beautiful the night was she said- "I know a mantra which could in one moment shatter this spring night and moon into pieces." (181) It is a fact taught in India to a person right from his childhood that a relationship should be built on the foundation of truth and this reality is well described by Tagore in this scene. Hemanta pulled Kusum a little closer and told her to keep her thoughts at bay and enjoy the night with him but Kusum freed herself from the embrace and said- "Do you know, to-night I feel a longing to tell you what I promised to reveal only on my death-bed. To-night I feel that I could endure whatever punishment you might inflict on me." (181-182)

At that moment, Hemanta's father Harihar Mukerji arrived and ordered him to turn out Kusum out of their house. Hemanta looked at Kusum and saw no signs of surprise. Here Tagore shows the vulnerability of an Indian wife with the words-“She merely buried her face within the palms of her hands, and, with all the strength and intensity of her soul, wished that she could then and there melt into nothingness.” (182)

Regardless of his love for Kusum, Hemanta was shocked at the news of her being of lower caste. He enquired from her why she did not tell him about her before and wanted to know everything then. It was very difficult moment for Kusum to reveal the truth or Satya before her beloved but she did it without caring for what would happen to her in future- “Kusum gravely told her story in a firm unshaken voice. She waded barefooted through fire, as it were, with slow unflinching steps, and nobody knew how much she was scorched.” (183) At the end of the narration by Kusum, Hemanta walked away from there and Kusum thought that he would never return back. To her all the moments of happiness and love of Hemanta were unreal. Though even the memory of the caresses of her husband hurt her sharply, she did not find Hemanta's reaction strange. She accepted it as a natural consequence after disclosure of facts.

The next day, Hemanta went to Peari Sankar Ghosal to ask him why he had done like that to him and what harm had he done to him. Peari Sankar told him that he had taken revenge because of wrong decisions of his father, as head of the community, because of which he had to leave the village along with his daughter and son-in-law. He also told him that Hemanta's father interfered in the marriage of his nephew, breaking his marriage. Here Tagore shows the forbearance or Upeksha of Hemanta. Though he was very angry with Peari Sankar he stuck to non violence or Ahimsa. Tagore also mocks at the superstitious beliefs of the Indian society who consider marriage between higher class boy and lower class girl was not possible. Though Hemanta loved Kusum very much, he was proud to be a Brahmin and it was against his dignity to accept a girl of lower caste. His words to Peari Sankar show his pride of belonging to a higher caste-“What will become of this girl whom I shall abandon now? Would you give her food and shelter?” (190)

Peari Sankar denied Hemanta to look after his wife in a calm tone. The tussle in the mind of Hemanta is shown where he has to decide between his wife and his caste. On the fifth day of their marriage, Hemanta was sitting on the side of the bed and Kusum sitting beside her husband on the floor. The calmness of the room was disturbed by the voice of Hemanta's father saying-“You have had enough time, - I can't allow you more. Turn the girl out of the house.” (191) At that moment, the turmoil in the mind led to a decision and he told his father firmly that he won't forsake his wife and did not care of the caste. Here Tagore shows the power of love which is above all caste, creed and religion. Thus Hemanta and Kusum were united although they were renounced by their father.

Conclusion:- The stories of Tagore depict the Indian society with deep-seeded moral values. They see many upheavals in their life but they rarely deviate from their roots. These stories can act as an eye opener for our students and can be used as a means to enlighten them about Indian culture and values

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