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THE '3'ISMS IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S SHORT STORY'THE HUNGRY STONES'

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore's longest short story is "The Hungry Stones". It is a blend of 'Three isms'-Lyricism, Realism and Supernaturalism. A solitary marble palace built by Emperor Mahmud Shah II for his pleasure and luxury about 250 years ago is the background of the story. The atmosphere in the palace is full of "unrequited passions" and "lurid flames of wild blazing pleasure" which raged within that palace centuries ago. Even today, the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes had made its every stone thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up a living flesh. Thus it is called the story of "The Hungry Stones".

KEYWORDS:

Persian beauty, horseback, a loud pearl of merry laughter, artistic and heart-aches.

INTRODUCTION:

Rabindranath Tagore is at once a great poet and a great short story writer and this is a rare combination in the history of literature. This combination has been successful in the case of Rabindranath Tagore, for he has united the lyricism of his poetry with the realism of the short story and has thus inaugurated a new literary tradition. His short stories bear the impression of his poetic genius. We find in them rich emotionalism which is the soul of the lyric. At the same time they give us a realistic picture of the poor and middle-class society in the villages and small towns of Bengal.

Tagore wrote 119 short stories. Each story reveals to us a particular aspect of the human heart. They are on a variety of themes: love, nature, supernatural events, social issues, psychological relationships etc. The interest of the story lies mainly in the manner of narration and the portrayal of the main characters. He has given us different portraits of character within a short compass. There are Zamindars and Jagirdars, the poor and the destitute, men and women happy and sad, persons who are in the world and out of it, actors and actresses and musicians, men of learning, poets, boys and girls, youth and old age. It has been stated that in a poem entitled "The Awakening of the Waterfall", the poet indicated the advent of a new vision after which there was an accession of new patterns in his poetic work. This new power is not easy to recognise in the lyric poems, for in a lyric everything takes on the colour of the poet's personality. As there is less of this colour in narratives, the effect of the new vision is seen more clearly in stories. Tagore saw innumerable types of people and situations in life and all seemed to him worth-seeing. He could sympathise with these innumerable people in innumerable situations and thus comprehend their inner being. For comprehensive of this sort, no life is small and no occurrence trivial. The stones speak to him, Skeltons make friends with him. Tagore was written the majority of short stories during the years between 1891 and 1903. This period was the flood-tide of romanticism in his poetic career. The lyrical exuberance of this period is manifest in

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the short stories too which were composed at the same time.

Nature and human life are often interlinked in many short stories of Tagore. It may be said that humanity has been depicted by Tagore against the background of Nature. This confers on them a lyrical quality. But it does not mean that they lack of realism. The change in seasons, the earth, the sun, the sky, hills and meadows, fruits and flowers, rivers and streams are real things in life. Man's relation to these objects of nature is as real as man's relation to man. There is a close relationship between the mind of man and nature, and the two acts and react upon each other. The prominent place that nature occupies in his short stories has, therefore, helped to combine lyricism and realism. The supernatural element also plays a prominent part in some short stories of Rabindranath Tagore. One such fine example of Rabindranath Tagore's Short story is "The Hungry Stones" Where we can notice the '3'isms – Lyricism, Realism and Supernaturalism.

"The Hungry Stones" is an immortal creation of Tagore. The supernatural atmosphere is created with great skill and there is all the uncanny feelings of a strange fear associated with it but it has never ignored the demands of realism. Regarding lyricism, it conjures up, in passages of acutely visualised description and great poetic beauty, a vanished age with its limitless luxuries, its love and cruelties and unsatisfied passions. A solitary marble palace built by Emperor Mahmed Shah II for his pleasure and luxury about 250 years ago is the background of the story. Even today 'the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes had made its every stone seems to be thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up like a famished ogress any living man who might chance to approach. Thus it is called the story of "The Hungry Stones". A man of varied experience who returns to Calcutta from his Puja train journey narrates the story of what he had heard and seen when spending a few nights in a medieval castle in Hyderabad state-the pleasure resort of the one of the old rulers.

Barich is a lovely place. Here the ruined marble palace stands above a river-stair at the foot of the hills. It exercises a strange fascination to anyone. A collector of cotton duties, a creature of uncommon tastes who has given to look for wonders in his experience, takes up his abode here. Before a week has passed the place begins to exert a weird fascination upon him. One day, a little before sunset, he takes his chair to the lowest step to sit by the water of the river 'Shasta'. He still finds the air laden with an oppressive scent from the spicy shrubs growing on the neighbouring hills. As the sun sinks behind the hill tops, he starts up with the intention of a ride in the cool evening, but he hears a foot fall on the steps behind. He looks back, sees nobody and again takes his seat. But more and more foot falls sound as if "a very of joyous maidens" were running down the steps to bathe in the river Susta. Though not a sound to break the silence, yet he distinctly hears the maidens gay and mirthful laugh as they pass by him in quick playful pursuit of each other. Again, although the river remains still, he feels, the bathers are swimming and ruffling the water and throwing up the spray like a handful of pearls. A sudden gust of wind breaks the oppressive closeness of the evening.

Next morning, the whole affair appears a queer fantasy. He attends his office and he has to write quarterly reports on that day. He unfinishes it. But before it was dark, he is strangely drawn to the vast silence palace, his abode. As he pushes the door of a spacious hall, he is aware of a great tumult. It is like a great assembly that has broken up in utter confusion. He also hears a strange unearthly music.

That night he sleeps in the small side-room and is visited by the apparition of an Arab maid with smooth well-rounded arm. She has a thin veil on her face and a curved dagger at her waist. She leads him on through long corridors, spacious halls, close secret cells, till they come to the foot of the screen. She points with a tell-tale finger to the foot of the screen. There he sees a terrible Negro eunuch dressed in rich brocade with a naked sword on his lap. The fair guide lightly trips over his legs and holds up a fringe of the screen and he catches "a glimpse of exquisite feet in gold-embroidered slippers" of someone sitting inside on a bed. With a terrific scream, he wakes up when he tries to step across the legs of the eunuch. Every night her mysterious call and his wanderings begin afresh. At last she seems to be half-materialised in the day, too. For sometimes in the evenings, he sees a sudden reflection of the Persian beauty in the large mirror before him. But then just as she turns towards him, she melts away.

One evening when the collector decides to go out on horse-back, there is a sudden whirl wind and he also hears a loud peal of merry laughter rising higher and higher. This laughter has two-fold significance. It may be supposed to be the laughter of the apparitions which haunt the marble palace. It may also be explained by the rustling noise created by the guest of wind as it whirls the dead leaves round and round. They again, one evening when his heart is full of contrition and he begs forgiveness from his invisible charmers, suddenly two tear drops fall from his overhead on his brow. These tear drops seem to have mysteriously come from the invisible spirits. But we are told that dark masses of clouds had overcast the top of the Avalli hills that day. Those could very well be two rain drops actually coming down from the sky. The whole night, the collector hears, amidst rain and storms, the anguished cry of a woman. No-one can spend three nights there without losing his life or his senses. But the frenzied cry of Mehar Ali-"Stand

Back! Stand Back!! All is false! All is false!” makes him aware of the dawn and resisting rain and wind, he dashes off to the office. Before the clerk Mehar Ali could relate the story of the Persian beauty and her tragic fate, the train arrives and the story breaks off. The abrupt realistic ending is very apt; for the magic of womanly charm which gives us a delicate thrill would have disappeared with the portrayal of a particular woman.

Thus we find that Tagore's artistic achievement lies in this story. Throughout the story, he maintains the mysterious thrill of the supernatural atmosphere and yet never jars against our sense of realism. The witches in 'Macbeth' are supernatural creatures and have no place in real life. The experiences of the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" do not fit in with everyday life. But Tagore infused the supernatural atmosphere even when they relate to things of everyday life. It is finished piece of art. It has proved a rare success on the screen. It is one of the few best supernatural stories of the world. It induces willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.

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