

Interplay of Attachment and Detachment in Tagore's 'Atithi' ('The Guest')

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ABSTRACT

The timeless truth of the Upanishad enlightens that one should be in a pure place, himself pure (śuci), enduring in pureness (sattva), learning the Real (sat), voicing of the Real, contemplating the Real, surrendering to the Real. The realization of actual Real makes him completely other; he has the reward (phala) of having his shackles cut; becomes annulled of expectancy, unchained from fear in regard to others [as fully] as in regard to himself, void of longing. He attains to undying, incalculable bliss, and goes on with. Liberty from desire (niṣkāmatva) is like the supreme treasure as a person who is trapped by all desires, who has the marks of determination, notion, and self-conceit, is fettered; in being the opposite of that, he is liberated. At stages in his life, enhanced by constantly new-fangled realizations- both mystical and material, Tagore rejoices a sense of liberation. The subject of liberation is noticed repeatedly in all the genres of his literary opus, sometimes evidently, at other times in a coined fashion. His individual conviction which encompasses the belief of liberation, moksha or mukti, portrayed a lot from the Upanishadic teachings. Tagore remains a loyal adherent of exercising individual journeying as a key to finding freedom. This paper is an earnest endeavour to explore the short story 'Atithi' ('The Guest') by Rabindranath Tagore and understand the interplay of attachment and detachment.

It is perhaps a quality or *guṇa* which intentionally through nature or *prakṛti* binds the self with determination, and that liberation results from the demolition of the liability of determination. By the stream of unsteady, wavering, bewildered, full of desire, distracted one goes on into the state of self-conceit and binds himself with himself, as does a bird with an ensnare. In the short story 'Atithi' ('The Guest') of Rabindranath Tagore introduces a teenage boy Tarapada and unfolds through incidents the celebrations of freedom through untied bond. The story centers round the restiveness of Tarapada, who is reluctant to settle down in any place. He has some strange characteristics in him, entirely contrasted from other boys of same age. Escaping from his house, he joins a *yatra* (moving drama) company and travels with the unknown. When he starts getting fatherly affection from the master of the troop, he leaves the company abruptly. "Tarapada was as wary of ties as a young fawn." (Radice, 200) So his restlessness is the outcome of his trepidation of tying down. Another instance reflects the same when Tarapada vanishes from the panchali group all of a sudden. The liking of the master of the group towards him, the growing relationship between them gives a claustrophobic feeling to him, a fear to be fettered by emotional tie and he flees. "Like a pet cage-bird, Tarapada learnt a few songs, and then one morning flew away." (Radice, 200)

The flow of Tarapada's life goes on. The wandering boy joins a group of gymnasts, he learns to play the flute splendidly, but yet again, he flutters off from the group and when he comes to know about the *yatra* troop at Nandigram village, he starts his next expedition to join the group and on the way, on a boat, he meets Matilal Babu, with which next occurrence of his life has been started. The *zaminder* of Kathaliya village, Matilal Babu and his wife Annapurna starts showing immense warmth to this boy. On the other, as soon as the boy reaches Kathaliya village, he successfully starts

creating bonds with people. Probably, he can make acquaintances so effortlessly since he has no factual ties with anyone; he spends almost two years with the family which is contradictory to his character. Perhaps he stays because he tries to fathom the little girl of Motilal Babu, Charushashi; only place, he was unable to create the bond. But when the mother of the girl chooses him as her son-in-law, the husband and wife together send a messenger to Tarapada's village to find out about his ancestry, Matilal Babu sends a formal proposal to Tarapada's mother and elder brother, when they are elated and acknowledge the offer at once, the wedding date has been fixed in the month of *Shrabān*, Matilal Babu makes the arrangement for the boy's mother and elder brother to bring them, the arrangement for the wedding has been ready even a trumpet-and-drum band has been hired from Calcutta to mark this special occasion, Tarapada once again proves the happiness of cutting the bond. The merry mood of the world has been noticed marvelously by the story-teller:

Early monsoon clouds formed in the sky. The village-river had been dried up for weeks; there was water only in holes here and there; small boats lay stuck in these pools of muddy water, and the dry river-bed was rutted with bullock-cart tracks. But now, like Parvati returning to her parents' home, gurgling waters returned to the empty arms of the village -: naked children danced and shouted on the river-bank, jumped into the water with voracious joy as if trying to embrace the river; the villagers gazed at the river like a dear friend; a huge wave of life and delight rolled through the parched village. There were boats big and small with cargoes from far and wide; in the evenings the *ghat* resounded with the songs of foreign boatmen. The villages along the river had spent the whole year confined to their own small worlds: now, with the rains, the vast outside world had come in its earth coloured watery chariot, carrying wondrous gifts to the villages, as if on

a visit to its daughters. Rustic smallness was temporarily subsumed by proud of contact with the world; everything became more active; the bustle of distant cities came to this sleepy region, and the whole sky rang. (Radice, 210-211)

Tarapada escaped from every knot beforehand, this time also he feels elated to breathe unfettered. His moving out from the familial ring cutting the shackle is delineated wonderfully by the writer.

...a famous chariot-festival was due to be held. One moonlit evening Tarapada went to the *ghat* and saw, on the swift flood-tide, boats with merry-go-rounds and yatra-troupes, and cargo-boats rapidly making for the fair. An orchestra from Calcutta was practicing loudly as it passed; the yatra-troupe was singing to violin accompaniment, shouting out the beats; boatmen from lands to the west split the sky with cymbals and thudding drums. Such excitement! Then clouds from the east covered the moon with their huge black sails; an east wind blew sharply; cloud after cloud rolled by; the river gushed and swelled; darkness thickened in the swaying riverside trees; frogs croaked; crickets rasped like wood-saws. To Tarapada the whole world seemed like a chariot festival: wheels turning, flags flying, earth trembling, clouds swirling, wind rushing, river

flowing, boats sailing, songs rising! There were rumbles of thunder, and slashes of lightning in the sky: the smell of torrential rain approached from the dark distance. But Kathaliya village next to the river ignored all this: she shut her doors, turned out her lamps and went to sleep. (Radice, 211)

Tarapada, however, remains a free spirit and cannot be caged. He sets out once again on a voyage to a nameless destination. Tagore reveals the ultimate interplay of attachment and detachment and the correlation of these with life. Tarapada's escapism signifies that he is indeed an 'Atithi' a guest in this world, He, becomes ordinary often and shows the worldly affinity but at core he has a 'stateless state', perhaps he has a different cognitive ability of accepting the consequence of events happening to one in a neutral perspective rather than pouring down with reactions or emotions. Hence he has derived the emotional equilibrium. (Prasad) It is time which merely can liberate mundane from the delusion and establishes the truth that the true identity of a self is actually beyond body. (Rai) Tarapada suddenly becomes a stranger of pleasure and pain; he obtains the absolute unity (*kevalatva*); having crossed beyond the limited, he merges with the unlimited.

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