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DEATH CONSCIOUSNESS IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PLAY "DĀKGHAR"

-A BRIEF STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore's play *Dākghar* is a very beautiful literary creation which is based on a story about a boy Amal and his Death. The characters are rounds around the Amal's physical condition and anxiousness about Amal's Death. Everybody—the characters are loved the boy. They were very affectionate on him. Amal heard about a *Dākghar* on that village and he awaited for a letter which The King will send for him. But on that letter there was Amal's Death news. At last the herald comes and made Amal felt that he was free from the blindness of the world and at last in the midnight Amal was died. Through this Play we can see the Death Conciousness of Rabindranath Tagore.

**Key-Words:** After death, Recurrent motif, Unchangeable destiny, Human aspiration, universal heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore is famous for his poetic talent. But he was a novelist, dramatist, musician, story-writer and philosopher also. His pen flowed creativity in an almost endless sequence. Rabindranath's exuberance in every way of creation was without hindrance. His family background had a great influence on him as a genius. As a thinker his mind was an Eastern product, and he championed the cause of oriental literature.

The writings of Rabindranath spread the branches all wide. He was successful in every way of his writing to give a message to the readers. There is no denying fact that at certain moments the poet has been seized by the supreme glory of the Absolute. Actuated by such feelings, he degrades the finites of the world to the rank of mere elements whole. His only mission was to be lost in the Absolute<sup>2</sup>. Death is reflected in his many writings.

We can see in his play '*Bisarjan*'-- the ultimate destination of Jaysingha was on the lap of Death. In the drama '*Muktadhārā*,' also prince Abhijit was flowed away in the stream of water to save the people of Shibatarai. The drama *Naṭī Pujā* also Naṭī Śrīmatī took the destiny in the lap of death. Like all these drama and in many other literary creations Rabindranath was influenced by the concept of death.

Rabindranath Tagore was one of those philosophers who did not consider death to be the final extinction of soul. It is true, Death draws the veil on many of our earthly possession; and even our bodies which we like the most on this earth, are disintegrated in death. Death, for him is never a negative but a positive incident.

On this discussion of the Death-Consciousness of Rabindranath Tagore, famous writer and editor Sudhir Kakar in his article, 'On Rabindranath Tagore's fascination with the theme of death' (Death and Dying, a collection of essays edited by psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar) writes-

'On 10 September 1937, Rabindranath Tagore fainted suddenly due to an attack of erysipelas, he was in a coma for sixty hours and he began to respond after treatment. On 25 September, he wrote the first poem of a cycle of eighteen poems on life and death, dying and 'afterdeath,' published under the title *Prantik*, the last one written on 25 December 1937. These poems, translated from their original Bengali by Tagore himself, are some of the finest meditations on death and afterdeath in world literature. It is not my contention that Tagore's fascination with the theme of death had its origins in the somatic occurrence of his near-death experience, the sixty-hour sojourn in the borderland between life and death, which haunted the three months in which these poems (and the painting) were composed. All through his adult life, both in his prose writings and in his poetry, death had been a recurrent motif of his meditations. Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross, the author of the popular and widely influential *On Death and Dying*, believed that no one had thought more deeply on death than Rabindranath Tagore and printed his quotations at the head of each chapter of her book.

Tagore's preoccupation with death goes back to a traumatic event of his youth—the suicide of his Muse and the love of his life, his sister-in-law Kadambari, three months after the poet's marriage at the age of twenty-three.

Rabindranath reminds me of the English poet John Keats, whose painful experiences of death of loved ones—father, mother and brother, before his own first haemorrhage that was to kill him at the age of twenty-five, led to an insight that is at the foundation of Keats's work, namely that life accrues value precisely to the extent that one intensely experiences its fragility and transience.

The attempt to find a meaning in death is part of our universal heritage, as old as human consciousness of mortality. Where Tagore gives this search his imprint is in the insistence that death has a meaning because of the existence of life.

If to leave this world be as real as to love it—then there must be a meaning in the meeting and parting of life. If that love were deceived in death, then the canker of this deceit would eat into all things, and the stars would shrivel and grow black.

In his own quest for the meaning of death, Tagore rarely succumbed to the temptation of denying its dread by imagining it, for instance in the following poem, as a longed-for bridegroom, an atypical lapse into thanatophilia that transforms dying into a dramatic and celebratory occasion.

Why do you whisper so faintly in my ears, O Death, my Death?  
When the flowers droop in the evening and cattle come back to their stalls, you stealthily come to my side -----

-----

Come with your conch-shells sounding, come in the sleepless night,  
-----

O Death, my Death'.<sup>1</sup>

So it was the concept and thought of Rabindranath. He knows about this unchangeable destiny of men. Our attempt to do analysis the death consciousness of the play *Dākghar* by Rabindranath Tagore is an appropriate example for doing this analysis.

#### **The Theme of Death in *Dākghar* :**

Bengali play *Dākghar* was written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1912 and it is translated in Sanskrit by Dhyanes Narayan Chakrabarti. Dhyanes Narayan Chakrabarti was a Professor of Rabindrabharati University. He has so many literary contributions to the Sanskrit world. Dhyanes Narayan may be could not do properly

and line by line translation of *Dākghar*. But his efficiency is remarkable in this context. These Sanskrit translations are a wealth for Sanskrit lovers.

*Dākghar* has two Acts. In first Act we can find that a boy Amal who was taken by Madhab Dutta at his home in request of his wife because they had no child. They adopted this boy and started looking after him. Amal was ill. That boy was the nephew of Madhab Dutta's wife. Madhab Dutta says to his grandfather that-

“आमार स्त्रीर ग्रामसम्पर्के भाइपो”<sup>2</sup>

Dhyanesh Narayan Chakrabarti translates it in Sanskrit-“स हि मद्भार्यायाः ग्रामसम्पर्केण भ्रातृष्पुत्रः।”<sup>3</sup>

Madhab Dutta was earning money for that boy and he was very happy to know that he made money to give everything to that boy-Amal.

In the first Act doctor says to Madhab Dutta that he did not understand that the physical condition of this boy is very good. Doctor thinks that his life now have to left on his luck only then if he could alive for the long time. In Bengali Rabindranath writes-“ओर भाग्ये यदि आयु थाके,ता हले दीर्घकाल वाँचतेओ पारे।”<sup>4</sup>

In Sanskrit D.N.Chakrabarti translated it-

“यदि अस्य भागधेये आयुर्वर्तते,तदायं सुचिरं जीवेत्”<sup>5</sup>

These words of the doctor reflected a thought Amal may not be live for long time.

Physician who was not symbolized only as hope but also as a messenger of Amal's death. In first Act he gave a news of the death of Amal. He advised Madhab Dutta to not let Amal go outside of the room. From first to till end of the play we have a fear and anxiety for Amal's Death.

Grandfather –a character who had seemed so carefree and adventurous. The grandfather was very much free and he loved the children. That was the anxiety of Madhab Dutta about his grandfather that he will take out Amal from the house and Amal will be more ill and his recovery will be more difficult. When he heard about Amal from Madhab Dutta, he became very excited for meet with Amal. But grandfather was informed by Madhab Dutta that as doctor says Amal's life is not left for long days, So he have to be stay within the closed doors. Madhab says-“कविराज वलछे तार ऐटुकु शरीरे एकसङ्गे वात पित्त श्लेष्मा येरकम प्रकुपित हये उठेछे,ताते तार आर वडो आशा नेइ ।एखन एकमात्र उपाय ताके कोनोरकमे एइ शरतेर रौद्र आर वडो आशा नेइ।एखन एकमात्र उपाय ताके कोनोरकमे एइ शरतेर रौद्र आर वातास थेके वाँचिये घरे वन्ध करे राखा।छेलेगुलोके घरेर वार कराइ तोमार एइ वुडोवयसेर खेला—ताइ तोमाके भय करि।”<sup>6</sup>

D.N.Chakrabarti translates it in Sanskrit--‘तस्य अमुस्मिन् क्षीण शरीरे वातपित्तश्लेषादीनां समवेतभावेन यादृशः प्रकोपस्तेन तस्य जीवनाशा न दृश्यते इति भिषङ्महोदयेनोच्यते।केनाप्युपायेन शरद आतपाद् वाताच्च तं संरक्ष्य गृहरोधकरणमेव अधुना केवलम् उपायः।किशोराणां गृहाद् वहिरानयनमेव वृद्धस्य ते लीला।अतस्त्वत्तो विभेमि।’<sup>7</sup>

Physician who was not symbolized only as hope but also as a messenger of Amal's death. The physician did not allow Amal to go out of the room while doing so Amal's illness will increase much more. So when Amal asked his uncle how did the doctor knew that if he would go outside then he would be ill. These questions compelled all to think how nice it would be if the boy is free from a room where throughout the day he is closed. Amal express his wish before his uncle to cross over the mount. But when he was interrupted by his uncle, he says—“आमादेर जानलार काछे वसे सेइ-ये दूरे पाहाड देखा याय—आमार भारि इच्छे करे ऐ पाहाडटा पार हये चले याइ”<sup>8</sup>

D.N.Chakrabarti translates it- ‘अस्माकं गवाक्षान्तिकात् विदूरे यः खलु शैलो दृश्यते,तमुल्लङ्घ्य दूरं गन्तुं प्रवलो मे अभिलाषः।’<sup>9</sup>

As Amal was closed within the room then his imagination flies far away and as he could see everything through his power of imagination, he wants to cross over the mount. Amal wants to keep him away from the human crowd. That room was like jail for Amal and he was like a prisoner the

Amal met with a milk man who was going besides the window where Amal sat on. Amal called the milk-man requests Amal to buy a cup of curd. But Amal had no money with him. The dairy man became angry that his time was passing away as he says-

‘केमन छेले तुमि।किनवे ना तो आमार वेला वइये दाओ केन?’<sup>10</sup>

In Sanskrit Dhyanesh Narayan Chakrabarti translates it-‘कीदृशः किशोरस्तम्।यदि न क्रेष्यसि तदा कथं मां विलम्बयसि?’<sup>11</sup>

Here the irony of dairy man’s word is everybody of this world is busy except Amal. Even a milkman who sells curds is also very busy. When Amal have nothing to do throughout the day. He only sit besides the window and sees al the passer by before him. So he would not be release from the house. So he can’t imagine what the value of time is. A milkman can understand it. Amal spends his time within a closed room. But the world will not stop. But how the milkman would know that Amal’s Time is coming when nobody could stop him. Kabiraj’s words will be proved real.

Amal make the dairy man late so he became very irritated. But when he heard that Amal is sick and doctor strictly forbidden him not to come out from the house, then the milk man became sad. Moreover, the explanation about the village, river *Śhyamālī* at the foot of the *Pañchmurā* hills, old big trees, grazing cattle and women wearing sarees pleased milkman. He promised Amal to cry for selling the curds with more happiness and joy what Amal taught him.

Amal is the symbol death. The milkman was the symbol of life. Outside the window there was life but inside the room there was waiting death for Amal. So there was conversation between life and death.

Next to be accosted is the Watchman on his round –Amal met with. He talk with Amal from outside the window. He wants to take Amal to the King. Watch says in Bengali-‘एकेवारे राजार काछे यदि नियो याइ?’<sup>12</sup>

D.N.Chakrabarti translates in Sanskrit-‘यदि राजसमीपमेव नयामि?’<sup>13</sup>

Here the ‘राजा’ is the King and the ultimate destination of everybody, the death. But Amal did not know who is the King and he asked with his simple query—

‘राजार काछे?नियो याओ ना आमाके।किन्तु आमाके ये कविराज वाइरे येते वारण करेछे।आमाके केउ कोथ्याओ धरे नियो येते पारवे ना—आमाके केवल दिनरात्रि एखानेइ वसे थाकते हवे।’<sup>14</sup>

D.N.Chakrabarti translates it in Sanskrit--

‘राजसमीपम्?नय माम्।किन्तु चिकित्सकेनाहं वहिर्गमनाद् वारितः।अतःकोअपि मामन्यत्र वलान्नेतुं न शक्यति।मया अत्रैव केवलं रात्रिन्दिवम् अवस्थातव्यम्।’<sup>15</sup>

The literary meaning of these words is that Amal was very much keen to go near to the King. But the physician told Amal not to step out from the room. For that reason Amal knows that nobody could took Amal away. He has to sit there all the days. Amal asked the Watchman why his bell is ringing from far away? The Watchman replied him that Time waits for none. It goes on forever. Rabindranath writes in Bengali—

‘तोमार घण्टा केन वाजे?’

The Watchman said-

‘घण्टा एइ कथा सवाइके वले,समय वसे नेइ,समय केवलइ चले याच्छे।’<sup>16</sup>

D.N.Chakrabarti translates it-

‘तत् कथं ते घण्टा ध्वनति।

‘घण्टा सर्वानेव निर्दिशति—कालःकमपि नापेक्षते,अविरामं कालो गच्छतीति।’<sup>17</sup>

In another place Rabindranath wrote very short and meaningful conversation between Amal and the Watchman-

अमल।कोथाय चले याच्छे?कोन् देशे?’

प्रहरी।से कथा केउ जाने ना।

अमल।से देश वुझि केउ देखे आसे नि?आमार भारि इच्छे करछे ऐ समयेर सङ्गे चले याइ—ये देशेर कथा केउ जाने ना सेइ अनेक दूरे।

प्रहरी।से देशे सवाइके येते हवे वावा!

अमल।आमाकेओ येते हवे?

प्रहरी।हवे वैकि।

आमार सेइ भालो कविराज कवे आसवेन?आमार ये आर वसे थाकते भालो लागछे ना।<sup>18</sup>

In Sanskrit D.N.Chakrabarti translates it-

अमल:---कालो गच्छति?कुत्र,कं देशमभिगच्छति?

प्रहरी---कोअपि तन्न जानाति।

अमल:---किन्तु तत्स्थानं न केनापि दृष्टम?कालेन सार्धम् अहमपि तमदृष्टपूर्वं दूरदेशं गन्तुम् नितराम् अभिलषामि।

प्रहरी---वत्स,स देशः सर्वैरेव नूनं गन्तव्यः।

अमल:---किं मयापि गन्तव्यः?

प्रहरी---नूनमेव।

अमल:---स मे निपुणश्चिकित्सकः कदा नु आगमिष्यति?उपविश्य विलम्बनं मे नाधुना रोचते।<sup>19</sup>

Here the words of the Watchman 'कालः', 'तत्स्थानं', 'स देशः' all these words meant for a unknown world where nobody gone. But everybody have to go there one day. That world is the place of peace—the lap of Death. Here the word 'Time' indicates the Death.

The watchman indicates about the Death where we have all to go one day. Nobody can deny for going there. Amal also have to go the unknown place. These conversations between Watchman and Amal proved the rude and cruel reality of this earth. That truth nobody could change. The inner meaning of the watchman's word was the king who will send the letter, he will send one day a letter for Amal.

Amal wished for the same king's letter to the head of village. The king will send him a letter and Amal will receive it. There is talk of the king's Post office and of the post man, and of the Headman who was approaching. The child accosts the ill mannered headman—suppose the king should send a letter to Amal, won't he the headman kindly direct the postman to deliver it properly? Significance about the king is the Death- itself.

A little girl Sudha appeared next to the window. She was the daughter of the nector. Sudha sells flower. Amal wanted to know where Sudha was going but Sudha could not wanted to stop anywhere. Her time was passing. She was the only one feminine character with glimpse of beauty and full of life. On the other side Amal was symbolized as a man who is restricted. 'Amal has wished that if he was a squirrel and a crud-seller, and already one of the King's postmen, and now he wished if he could help Sudha to gather flower. Sudha promised Amal to come back later.'

When Sudha was disappeared then troop of boys pass in the street close to Amal's window. Amal requested them to play besides the window as he could not come out from the room Amal gave them his own toys to those boys to play with and was content to observe their play. Amal was then tired and the sound of bell as the call for going to bed. This bell is ironically picturised by Rabindranath that everybody's call will come one day.

'In Act II, the hour- glass reverses its position, and the direction of the flow changes. It was the next day. Exposure near the window has worsened Amal's condition, and he is now advised by Madhab to keep to his bed. Grandfather enters as the Fakir. Amal asked grandfather that whether the king sent a letter for Amal?

The letter has “already started” says Gaffer .” In his reverie Amal sees clearly the progress of the letter.’<sup>20</sup> In Bengali Rabindranath wrote it—

‘आमि येन चोखेर सामने देखते पाइ—मने हय येन आमि अनेकवार देखेछि-से अनेकदिन आगे—कतदिन ता मने पडे ना।वलव?आमि देखते पाच्छि,राजार डाक-हरकरा पाहाडेर उपर थेके एकला केवलइ नेमे आसछे—वाँ हाते तार लण्ठन,काँधे तार चिठिर थलि।कत दिन कत रात धरे से केवलइ नेमे आसछे।- - - - - यतइ से आसछे देखछि,आमार वुकेर भितरे भारि खुशि हये हये उठछे।’<sup>21</sup>

In Sanskrit D.N.Chakrabarti translates it-

‘नाहं तज्जानामि।प्रत्यक्षमिव सर्वं मयि प्रतिभाति।मन्ये बहुशो मया दृष्टं सर्वम्,तत्तु अनेकदिनेभ्यः प्रागेव कदा इति नाहं स्मरामि।कथयामि किम्?अहं पश्यामि—राजो वार्तावाहकः शैलशिखरादेक एव केवलमवतरति,वामहस्ते तस्य प्रदीपः,स्कन्धे तु पत्रपेटिका।कति दिनानि,कति निशाश्च व्याप्य स केवलमवतरत्येव। - - - - - एवम् अन्तिकमायान्तं तं वीक्षमाणस्य मम वक्षसि समुल्लसति आनन्दसन्दोहः।’<sup>22</sup>

These symbolic words of Amal reminds us that if he could see that the Postman who was descent from the hill and he draws a picture in his mind that the Postman to climb down with a lantern in his hand and a bag-full of letters through the paddy field and waterfalls. Quickness of the Postman made Amal very happy that King’s letter will reach to him very soon and its really was a good news for Amal that he will get his letter for which he was waiting—a letter on which his peaceful death will be written by God.

In another place, Amal told to grandfather that if grandfather knows the King who is the owner of *Dākghar*. Then grandfather told Amal that of course he knew the *Dākghar* and he also added that he everyday begged. Then Amal told that when he will be alright then he also go for beg to the king. Grandfather told Amal that there will be no need of Amal’s begging, because he will give whatever he wanted to give very easily. Amal’s thought that one day the letter will come for him because of this reason, he happily could sit besides the window. But he did not know what will be written on this letter. Grandfather said him only Amal’s name will remain on that letter that is enough for him.

Between grandfather and Amal Grandfather could understand what will be Amal’s destiny. So he talk with him very cleverly told story about different things. But he slowly injected within Amal’s heart that king’s letter would surely come. When ‘Madhab comes again troubled because of the loose talk of the King sending a letter to Amal. And Amal himself feels “a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning,” and doesn’t feel like talking.’ He felt that pain has gone. He felt better. Rabindranath writes in Sanskrit-

‘कविराजमशाय,आज खुव भालो वोध हच्छे—मने हच्छे येन सव वेदना चले गेछे।’<sup>23</sup>

In Sanskrit D.N.Chakrabarti translates it in-

‘भिषड्महोदय,अद्य खलु परिपूर्ण कल्यमनुभूयते,मन्ये अपगता सर्वाः वेदनाः।’<sup>24</sup>

When Amal feels well and his pain was gone then he was recovering because his Time has come. The Death was coming in front of him and the King himself came to take him to his World.

‘Although apparently asleep, Amal’s percipience is uncanny. ‘I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away’, he tells grandfather; ‘I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.’ While the Headman indulges in his ill-timed mirth and grandfather tries to smoothen it out, Amal himself feels that he hears the King’s Trumpet, and talks sweetly to the Headman, this striking a responsive chord even in that stony heart. There is a knock on the door, and the King’s herald enters to announce that the King himself will come in the middle watches of the night, and is sending in advance his “greatest physician to attend on his young friend.” The first thing the King’s physician does is to open the doors and windows, and Amal feels that “all pain is gone”. Amal will ask the King to show which exactly the Pole Star is. Amal also intercedes with the King’s physician so that the now unwanted Headman too can remain in the room. But how is the King to be received? With “puffed rice”, says the Physician. The oil lamp is now put out, only starlight streams in Amal is in deep sleep. Grandfather stands up folding his arms, in attitude of reverence, as he senses the approach of

the King. Sudha is the last to come, and she places the flowers in Amal's own hands. She has not forgotten her promise to Amal.<sup>25</sup>

*Dākghar* meant a symbolic place in this play. The Post Office, which is both a visible institution, and a symbolic clearing-house for the transmission of human aspiration in one direction and of the grace of response in the opposite direction. There is a letter, and a reply; likewise, there is the surge of aspiration from below, and the answering response from above.

So Post Office, is a place from where letters are distributed to different places Those letter takes happy news to men. But to Amal the letter for which Amal was waiting for, did not take the news of his happiness. He dreamed for a letter, which will be full of different news and happenings. Sometimes he could not imagine what will be written on this letter. The King's postman will come to give him the letter. But fate takes Amal to the Death. He did not thought about it. The Post Office remains like a dream and the letter did not come. So the name of this Play is meaningful and significant.

#### Notes and References:

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3. *MuktaDhārā-Vartā-Gṛham*, Dhyaneshe Narayan Chakrabarti (trn), Rabindrabharati University, Calcutta(Kolkata), 1988.p.87.
4. Quoted in R. N. Tagore,op.sit,p.849.
5. Quoted in D. N. Chakrabarti ,op.sit,p.86.
6. Quoted in R. N. Tagore, op. sit, p. 850.
7. Quoted in D. N. Chakrabarti ,op.sit,p.87.
8. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,et.op.sit,p.851.
9. Quoted in D. N.Chakrabarti,op.sit,p.89.
10. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,op.sit,p.852.
11. Quoted in D. N. Chakrabarti ,op.sit,p.91.
12. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,op.sit,p.854.
13. Quoted in D.N.Chakrabarti,op.sit,p.93.
14. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,op.sit,p.854.
15. Quoted in D.N.Chakrabarti,op.sit,pp.94-95.
16. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,op.sit,p.854.
17. Quoted in D.N.Chakrabarti,op.sit,p.94.
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21. Quoted in R.N.Chakrabarti,op.sit,pp.860-861.
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23. Quoted in R.N.Tagore,op.sit,p.862.
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