

Call for Papers

For May 2019 Special Issue of GNOSIS

On

Rabindranath Tagore

Last Date for full paper submission is April 30, 2019

Editor-in-chief: Dr. Saikat Banerjee, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, St. Theresa International College, Nakhon Nayok, Bangkok, Thailand.

Concept note

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore the first Asian to win the coveted Nobel Prize for Literature mesmerized his readers with his spiritual and fine artistic writings the testimony to which is the translations of his writings in various languages of the world.

This Special Issue of GNOSIS titled *The Immortal Litterateur Rabindranath Tagore* will try to showcase Gurudev's artistic genius in the Six literary genres i.e. Short stories, Novels, Plays, Essays, Poetry and Songs.

The Aspects of Tagore's Writings Which You Can Work on are as Follows:

- Tagore's Short Stories
- Novels of Tagore
- Plays of Tagore
- Tagore's Poetry
- Songs of Tagore
- Essays of Tagore

The regular issues of GNOSIS will be released as per schedule i.e. October, January, April and July.

Submission Guidelines

We accept original theoretical or research articles as electronic submissions via e-mail as attached documents (Microsoft word only). All manuscripts must be in Font Times New Roman, Size: 12, Line spacing: 1.5 spaced and submitted only as MS Word 2007/ 2010. All manuscripts should strictly follow the MLA 8th Edition Style of Citation. The documents must include name and affiliation details in the body of your submission. Submission must be in single attachment. Subject line must be Submission of Poem/ Fiction/ Article etc. Submission e-mail must include the statement claiming that you have read the submission guidelines, you agree to the policy of the journal and that the submission is original and does not contain plagiarized material.

Format of the Research Papers:

Authors are requested to strictly follow the MLA 8th Edition style while preparing the articles.

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1. Full title with subtitle, if any. Times New Roman font, size 14, bold (not all capital letters)
2. Name and affiliation of the author/s.
3. An abstract of the article of about 100-120 words along with 4-5 Keywords.
4. Author/s should note that the main body of the text should be prepared in such a way that no formatting is needed afterwards. Heading, sub headings and illustrations should be well incorporated within the main body of the article. Times New Roman font, size 12 and justified.
5. The word-limit for Research paper is 4000 words inclusive of Abstract and Works Cited.
6. All portions of the articles should be single-line spaced.
7. Author/s should be careful regarding grammatical and typographical errors.
8. All essays submitted must be in English for review.

9. Full Plagiarism report of the Research paper duly checked in plagiarism software like Urkund, Viper, Turn it in, Plag Scan etc.

Note: Do not decorate your submission with lines, borders, special characters etc., which may lead to rejection.

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Saikat Banerjee Jun 22, 2019, 12:41 AM

to me

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Note: Please expect to receive the hard copy of May 2019 Special issue by the end of September 2019.

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Dear Sir

We are happy to inform you that your paper titled "**Gurudev Tagore's *The Post Office: A Study in Universal Human Relationships in the Light of Tagore's Concept of Vishwa Sahitya***" has been accepted for publication in the Special Issue of May 2019 on "Rabindranath Tagore".

Regards
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“Special issue on Rabindranath Tagore”

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Gurudev Tagore’s *The Post Office*: A Study in Universal Human Relationships in the Light of Tagore’s Concept of *Vishwa Sahitya*.

ABSTRACT

The human universe is marked by differences. The differences are natural. However, discriminations based on differences cause imbalance and disturbances in the human relations. These divides in the past, which continue to effect and affect today and may continue in the posterity, have posed multiple threats to the universe. The sublime souls in the history of mankind from time to time have expressed the need for the universality of human expression and existence, rather co-existence. One of the prominent remedies for the universal unification of the human world has always been provided by literature. The present article proposes to study Gurudev Tagore’s famous play *The Post Office* in the light of his concept of *Vishwa Sahitya*.

Key words: World Literature. *Vishwa Sahitya*. Human Relationships. Self and the Other.

The human beings all over the universe wish for a common destination in life known as Happiness, a Paradise. The notion of Paradise or Heaven is built around the much wished for idea of unity and harmony. The disharmony in life results into unhappiness and discord. The never-ending, unquenchable lust for power and greed for wealth give rise to conflict of interest which later on results into the ruthless competition, struggle and war. No civilization, no culture, no society has prospered during the reign of discord, disharmony and hatred. The proliferation of a harmonious living is possible only in the times of mutual understanding and fellow-feeling. This need for oneness of all in spite of differences has been noticed and expressed from time to time by the great souls of the universe notable among them are the poets and creative artists. P B Shelley has aptly called poets the ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world’. The meaning is crystal clear. Poets are not the despotic, power-monger rulers. They are the prophets and propagate what is good for the world. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore is one of such ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world’. The first Indian Noble Laureate for Literature, Gurudev Tagore through his literary offerings and speeches delivered all over the world has sung the hymns of oneness- of the spiritual oneness of mankind. He preached and practiced the universal unity of mankind. In this regard, Vivek Bhattacharya aptly comments, ‘Tagore was, by and large, a citizen of the world’ (09).

World Literature (Weltliteratur) as a concept came into being with the occasional references by the great German writer Goethe. He expressed the need for the transgression of the limits of national literature into universal or world literature. In his journal Propyläen, Goethe

writes, "It is to be hoped that people will soon be convinced that there is no such thing as patriotic art or patriotic science. Both belong, like all good things, to the whole world, and can be fostered only by untrammelled intercourse among all contemporaries, continually bearing in mind what we have inherited from the past" (quoted in Strich 35). He saw this project as a necessity for the common good of the human co-existence. The root cause of hatred lies in the herd instinct. A member who is not from one's herd or community is unwelcomed, threatened and driven away. Much of the hatred comes out of the non-exposure to the other. A fear of the different is actually a fear of the unknown. The remedy for the fear of the unknown is to try to know the other, the dissimilar, and the different. A culture, a civilization gets best expressed through its arts and literature. During the early colonial period the East, especially the Indian subcontinent was introduced to the West as the land of the uncivilized, barbaric people. But the translations of the indigenous literary and other texts into the Western languages and their reception in the West changed the perception of the East for them. Likewise the introduction of the Western classics to the East changed the Eastern perception of the West. This exchange of literature initiated the move for the sympathetic understanding of the common core of the values by which the common people across the globe live. These core governing human values are unconditional love, empathy, caring and sharing, mutual trust, simplicity, concern for the other, love and appreciation for the beautiful forms of the Nature etc. The literary offerings of Gurudev Tagore stand testimony to these values. Rabindranath Tagore in a 1907 lecture titled 'World Literature' told the National Council of Education, Calcutta that "Comparative Literature is the English title you have given (me)... to discuss, but in Bengali, I shall call it *Vishwa Sahitya* 'World literature' ". *The Post Office* is one such work of Tagore that appeals and attracts the universal audience for the delineation of the supreme human values.

Gurudev Tagore is a multidimensional personality. He is a thinker, philosopher, educationist, music composer, painter, activist, freedom fighter, an ascetic, a poet, dramatist, short-story writer, an avid reader and eloquent speaker. The themes of his literary works essentially have mystic, metaphysical, spiritual overtones. His universally acknowledged works like *Gitanjali*, *The Post Office*, *Chitra*, *Chandalika*, *Gora* and other numerous short stories and poems deal with the theme of transition from the material world to the spirituality. The characters and locales of these works are essentially Indian, particularly Bengali. But they transcend the limits of the regional and the temporal and become universal and timeless.

The Post Office is a play in two acts. It is weaved around a short-lived orphan child, Amal. The characters and situations are from any typical contemporary small town from Bengal. The story of the play is quite simple and straightforward. The drama in the play comes from its imagery and symbols. The ordinary references to the ordinary situations in the lives of the ordinary people in equally ordinary linguistic expressions carry great symbolic and philosophical overtones. The singular story of the play is about a dying child Amal. He is adopted child of Madhab and his wife. Madhab initially was against the idea of adoption. But soon after the adoption of Amal, Madhab noticed the change this little boy brought to his life. After some days, the boy gets fever and cold. The village doctor reads from the books of medicines and comes to the conclusion that his book has no remedy for the illness. He advises Madhab to keep Amal shut in the room; away from the world outside least he may catch contagious diseases. Amal is kept inside a room with a road facing open window. A character called Gaffar who lives an ascetic life of a *fakir* keeps company to the ailing boy. Soon after, the passersby on the road keep company to Amal. The play progresses through the interaction of Amal with these passersby namely, a watchman, the Headman, a curd-seller, a group of boys and girls, and a flower-seller girl, Sudha.

As the illness of Amal aggravates, the local physician further restricts his interaction with world outside by asking Madhab to shut off the window.

Meanwhile Amal has crisscrossed with the Headman on account of a letter he (Amal) is expecting from the King. The issue actually springs from a casual conversation between the watchman and Amal. When Amal enquires about a new building constructed that is seen from his window, the watchman informs him that it is a new Post Office. The watchman tells him that the messengers of the King deliver letters to people. Amal asks if he could also receive a letter to which the watchman consoles that one day the King himself would send a letter to him. Elated, Amal mentions this to the haughty Headman who takes it to be his complaint to the authority by Madhab. When Amal is on his bed counting his lasts, Headman comes to him with a blank page and teases him by showing it as a letter by the King. At this juncture, a messenger announces the coming of the Royal physician. The room of Amal is lightened and decorated with flowers. As the Royal physician enters, he commands to open the doors and windows. He then orders Headman to leave the room. But Amal requests the Royal physician to let him be there as he has brought him the letter from the King. The physician asks Amal about his pains. Amal answers that there is no pain now and he listens to the gongs of the village bell and calls coming down from far away hills. Amal slowly lies down on his bed his eyes shut forever. Sudha, the flower girl comes with the flowers to be given to Amal. She asks Gaffar to give them to Amal when he gets up and also to remind him that she has kept her word. The curtain falls amid the sobs of the elders - Madhab, Gaffar and the Headman.

The plot of the play follows a simple yet deeply moving episodic structure. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly observes, '*The Post Office* has a tighter structural unity and its meaning comes to us like a deep dream of peace' (141). There are two acts with no scenes in the play. The scene begins and ends with the periodical entry and exit of the characters while Amal remains present in all the episodes. The play follows the classical three unities- it has a single story of a moderate length, it begins in the morning and ends with the rising stars, and all incidents take place in the same place- the room and the street where the window of the room opens. The real human drama of the play gets unleashed through the conversations between characters mostly in pairs. The life philosophy of Tagore of the essential goodness of the human soul with the characteristics like unconditionally unbounded love, compassion, humility, forgiveness, straightforwardness, detachment, empathy and contentedness gets poetic reflections in the interaction between Amal and the rest of the characters. This philosophical rendition in the play can be studied through the analysis of the conversations between the following characters.

Amal and Madhab: The relationship between Madhab and Amal passes through many transformations. Madhab and his wife are childless. Madhab's wife insists on adopting a child. But Madhab is against the idea of adoption for very materialistic reasons. He reasons that he has to toil hard to make both ends meet. It's justified if his own children enjoy or even squander his hard earned money. But how and why should he allow someone else's child to squander his money? Out of this thought, Madhab postpones the idea of adoption. An unfortunate incident changes his mind. Amal's parents die. His father being a distant relative of Madhab's wife, she urges him to adopt Amal. Madhab brings him home. After few days, Madhab realizes that his initial materialistic view to life and money has changed drastically. Now he does not earn for its sake. And Amal is the agent who has brought this change. This incident establishes Amal as the harbinger of change in the lives of people and this is realized in almost all people with whom he interacts. The illness of Amal shakes Madhab to the roots. He becomes overprotective and

concerned about the life of this dear boy. Through his urges to the local physician and Gaffar we notice the mellowed heart of Madhab. Amal has worked out this transformation in Madhab through the pure innocence and the unconditional love and compassion for others.

Amal and Gaffar: The relation between Amal and Gaffar connotes many ideas that have been very close to the heart of Gurudev Tagore. Human relations are marred by the egoistic feelings. There are many hindrances like authority, age, cast, religion, and economic conditions etc that hamper the cordial relations of the self with the other. The relationship between Amal and Gaffar cuts across all the barriers of age, religion, blood relations, and any other cultural or natural markers of the difference. The only relation that exists between Amal and Gaffar is sheer love of one individual for another. Yet another important message this relation signals is the message of detachment from the mere worldly attachments. Almost every casual line exchanged between Amal and Gaffar is charged with Tagore's mystical view of life. Even Amal's childlike expressions carry deep philosophical overtones. In this regard, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out, 'every word he speaks is simple-perfectly within the range of a child's natural vocabulary-yet also, in the context, charged with profound intimations' (142). Amal consistently refers to the transgression of hills and the calls from beyond the hills. These hills refer to the physical limitations that human beings have to cross to be able to receive the calls and signals from the Infinite. Another important idea that props out of this relation is related to the treatment given to the children. Gurudev Tagore always advocated empathetic concerns for the children. It requires a great deal of compassion and nobility of heart to be one with the children. One has to carry a childlike innocence to earn the love and trust of the children. Then and then only one can become a true, intimate inmate of the children. Gaffar's relation with Amal brings out this basic human principle of life. Gaffar is very much liked by the children. He is always surrounded by them. During the illness of Amal Gaffar keeps his jolly company. He tells Amal various stories and provides much amusement and solace to the ailing boy. This relationship marks a very important idea about the enactment of fruitful human relationships- it needs to be just cordial and compassionate towards each other to have long lasting, peaceful and happy relationship for the happiness in life results from mutual, cordial relations alone albeit the relationship between individuals or societies or the nations.

Amal and the Watchman: The relationship between watchman and Amal serves the purpose of communication between human beings. One always does not need 'cause' to form relations. Moreover these relations may not give us unmixed joy of sharing and caring. Good relationships are not conditioned by the length of time spent together. Literally, Amal and the watchman have 'no cause' to come in relationships. But Amal requires no causes to form relationships. Very amicably he glides into relationships. He praises the work carried out by the watchman. Actually it is a very simple act of ringing the hourly bell. But nobody might have noticed the human worth of this work. None might have praised his work and in the eyes of the world this work carries nothing mention worthy. Amal praises watchman for his casual routine work and wins his heart. The watchman is very much pleased by this act of generosity and befriends with him. The constant reference to the gonging of the bells in their conversation reminds us of the final call for the ailing child. The watchman consoles Amal with hope that one day the King himself would address a letter to him. He knows the impracticality of his promise. But to keep the heart of this dear child he gives him a pure white lie. The reference to the letter carrying message of the King, and the wish of Amal to become one of the messengers of the

King delivering the message of pure love and compassion to the people carries a great deal of the weight of this play.

Amal and the Curd-seller: What intimate relations can one have with a passerby such as a curd-seller? The curd-seller in the play represents the busy world of commerce for which time is money. When Amal calls the curd-seller, he expects business. He asks whether Amal wants to buy some curd to which Amal replies that he has no money. The curd-seller gets annoyed by this prank of this 'mischievous' boy. But Amal with his characteristic innocence compels the curd-seller to have a few words with him. After initial reluctance, very soon the curd-seller finds him drawn in the company of this little angel. Amal mentions the place where the curd-seller has come from. He expresses his wish to become a curd-seller and sell curd with a specific cry the curd-seller gives. The curd-seller is moved to tears when he comes to know about the illness of Amal. He promises him that he will teach him how to cry out while selling curd and also promises to take Amal along with him to sell curd. The climatic point of this relation occurs when the curd-seller offers a bowl of curd to Amal without expecting a single penny. He exclaims that for the first time he has enjoyed his work of selling-curd. The buying and selling does have more than exchange of mere good and its price. The relations in the exchange are priceless.

Amal and a group of boys and girls: This very casual encounter in the play carries one of the central ideas of the play- the need of detachment to seek true joy in life. The human inadequacy in perceiving and maintaining proper balance between need and greed results in many ailments of life such as avarice, greed, dissatisfaction, unhealthy practices of amassing wealth etc. There are two types of pleasure- a pleasure of possession and a pleasure of consumption. It becomes a cause of frustration and dissatisfaction when one has a pleasure of possession but cannot have the pleasure of its consumption. This is like being thirsty among the bounties. Much pain in human life comes out if these gadgets that we possess but are unable to use. Amal asks the boys and girls to come and play in front of him (and not with him for he can't come out in the open due to his illness). He offers them all of his toys. He assures that no one from his family will rebuke them for playing with the toys. He also allows them to take the toys with them with only a condition that they should come and play in front of him. This simple act of Amal signals a great message in life- the pleasure of consumption is greater than a mere pleasure of possession. If one is not able to consume what one possesses, the pleasure has to be derived by allowing the needy to possess the things and revel in their joy.

Amal and Sudha: One of the most aesthetically and poetically rendered scenes in the play is the interaction between Amal and Sudha, a flower girl. Sudha collects and sells flowers. As she passes by the window Amal sits in, he calls her and asks her to keep him company for a while. Sudha complains how she has no time to gossip as she has to sell the flowers quickly and join her mother in other domestic works. But Amal engages her with his mellowed voice and a lively discussion follows. Amal expresses his wish to become a flower seller. He asks her for the flowers but regrets that he has no money to pay back. He asks her to come again as he may have money from his uncle. Sudha promises him that she would come to him with flowers. Amal asks her to keep the promise. At the end of the play when Amal is on his journey to the Infinite, Sudha comes with the flowers. She sees Amal in deep sleep and requests Gaffar to give flowers to Amal when he gets up and also to tell him that Sudha has kept her promise. The play ends

with this expression by Sudha. This is the supreme offering one can give to the world- the message of delicate fragrance, unconditional love and happiness symbolized in the flowers.

Amal and the Headman: The only unsympathetic character in the play towards Amal is the Headman. He is proud of his status, his authority and his power over the people in the village. He symbolizes the ego that hampers the empathetic cordial human relations. When Amal calls him from his window, the Headman rebukes him for his inadvertent behavior. He wonders how this little brat can muster courage to call him- the Headman – one who strikes terror among the villagers with a mere wink at them! Amal asks him if he can order one of the messengers of the King to find his address and deliver a letter sent by the King. The Headman chides him by telling that he himself will bring the letter for this little ‘prince’. Amal senses the tone of sarcasm, contempt and mimicry in the address of the Headman and requests him not to be cross with him. The Headman threatens Amal with dire consequences to him and his father, Madhab, since he feels that Madhab might have complained about him to the authorities. In the concluding scene, Headman appears with a blank paper and offers it to Amal as a letter from the King. In his characteristically sarcastic way he chides the poor little boy. Gaffar, however, reads the blank paper and consoles Amal it being a letter by the King and announces then the coming of the Royal physician to take care of Amal. This announcement is met with the entry of the herald of the Royal physician. At this moment, the Headman gets shaken to the roots. He offers to bring the best rice-puffs to be served to the Royal physician. When the Royal physician enters, he asks the Headman to go out of the room. At this juncture, a turning point comes in the play. The Headman feels that Amal may complain to the Royal physician about his misconduct with him. But Amal does not fall short to his characteristically compassionate, empathetic and cordial nature. He requests the Royal physician to allow the Headman to remain present as he is the one who has brought the King’s letter to him. This is a moment of transformation for the Headman. He is deeply moved by the gestures of Amal and repents for his rude behavior with him. This episode in the play serves the purpose of the play- the antidote for the hatred is not hatred but true love, compassion and forgiveness.

The literary appeal of the play across the globe is seen in its translations and performances in many European languages. During the World War II, many boys were held in the orphanage at Warsaw ghetto run by a Polish doctor Janus Korczak. He arranged for the performance of *The Post Office* in which the children performed with great enthusiasm. And then within three weeks these children were taken to the concentration camp. The play endorses the immense power of the pure soul to retain hope even in the bleakest situations where every hope seems to be hopeless. The play underscores the universality of human relationships as the source of happiness provided that these relationships are founded on the mutual trust, unconditional love, compassion, empathy and forgiveness. In today’s volcanic human universe of discord and distrust, *The Post Office* stands as a light-house of hope and assurance of a possibility of better cordial universe- a happy habitat for the citizens of the world.

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