

Capturing the Joy of Childhood in Tagore's *The Crescent Moon*

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's literature for children is an exploration of the child that resides in each one of us. The present paper intends to analyze the child character in one of his famous works *The Crescent Moon*, offering a rich insight into a child's psyche. The crescent moon is the journey of progression of a child to attain completeness in the end. It is Tagore's child who plays with the colourful toys, listens to the music in the leaves, travels with the wind and comes to the edge of the earth lifting his hands to the sky and swims with the clouds. The child archetype is seen in multiple layers radiating liveliness, vibrancy and uncorrupted simplicity. The paper's focus is to look at the unblemished world of child. Rocking in the rollicking cradle of innocence *The Crescent Moon* is the sound of joy that captures the voice of children.

Keywords: Child, Crescent Moon, Childhood, Child-Mother, Child Archetype.

Rabindranath Tagore's literature for children is an exploration of the child that resides in each one of us. The love for the children is the recurrent and dominant theme reigning supreme in his poetry and works. His literary influences are the outcome of personal experiences. These influences intensified his love for the children. His childhood reminiscences or the lingering memories of childhood laid the cornerstone of his writings. The child's antics, tantrums, unbridled imagination and child's perspective are charmingly captured in *The Crescent Moon*. The waxing crescent moon is the journey of progression of a child to attain fullness in the end.

Tagore's poetic style proceeds to a different level in all his poems. *The Crescent Moon* is a collection of many prose-poems, All the poems are written in first person; sometimes the mother addressing the child or at other times the other way. These poems are very short in length, but when one reads them, they stay with us throughout. About Tagore's style of writing poetry, J.C. Rallo opines: "...there is the beauty of phrasing, the flowing rhythm, and in its

thought, there is the firm hold upon reality, the truth of feeling and the arresting power of sympathy" (49).

The Crescent Moon has an ethereal appeal as it is replete with certain childhood imagery delicate and exquisite suggestiveness. The world of the child is filled with innocence, pristine purity, sincerity and truthfulness. Tagore's child epitomizes an uncorrupted innocence and unmixed joy. The child communes with the clouds, waves and wants unhindered freedom. He plays with the golden dawn, silver moon, clouds, waves and what not. Tagore's *Song Offerings LX*, too finds a child playing with waves, enjoying every moment. Mohit Chakrabarti avers about Tagore's love for children: "The poet sincerely desires to allow the spontaneity of the child to play as and when he likes under natural settings" (39). In the poem, 'Clouds and Waves', the child talks to the folk who live in the clouds and expresses his inability to join them because his mother waits for him at home. The child being the connoisseur of the game invents a new sport. He says to his mother:

But I know a nicer game than that, mother.

I shall be the cloud and you the moon.

I shall cover you with both my hands, and our house-top will be the blue sky.

(CM: 61-62)

He again shows his helplessness to join the folk in dance who live in the waves. He responds:

I know a better game than that.

I will be the waves and you will be a strange shore.

I shall roll on and on and on, and break upon your lap with laughter.

And no one in the world will know where we are.

(CM: 62)

The child is all this and lots more. *The Crescent Moon* is a beautiful collection of poems which brings out the aspirations of the poet and the child present in it can be seen as the alter-ego of Tagore too. Sabhyasachi Bhattacharya writes in *Rabindranath Tagore-an Interpretation*: "The writings about children, rather than for children, are accessible in English in Tagore's own translation in *The Crescent Moon*" (104). By reading the poems, one gets transported to one's childhood. Through *The Crescent Moon* poet brings out the desires he still has as a child or rather his childhood aspirations. Seems like poet is giving a clue to his childhood days when he was in the class room under the strict observance of stringent teachers and his longing to be with his mother when the school closes down.

Through the vagaries of myriad experiences, Tagore discovers the true essence of life-the great joy. He salvages the untarnished glory of childhood and preserves it, enduring the ups and downs of life. Tagore discovered two major motives of his creative strain- joy and mystery. He established his own philosophy of life. In the book *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Chander Mohan Das opines: "Rabindranath passes through a long corridor of experiences of life. He formed his attitude to life on the basis of these experiences" (216). The uncanny sense of wonder and delight in the seemingly commonplace experiences of boyhood helped him become a great poet. He takes us into the journey into the childhood days. In the poem, 'Playthings', Tagore raises some queries, riddles to be solved. The poem is not only about the childhood games, but it leaves an incredible impression in our deep consciousness probing the queries as to

why we are here on this earthly plane, questions our existence. The poem is reminiscent of poet's lost childhood days. He is a lonely boy and his playmate is his own soul. The poet child is reminded of the golden days when he sees a child playing with a broken twig all the morning sitting in the dust. The poet is grown-up, busy with his accounts and laments over having forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies. He utters:

With whatever you find you create your glad games.
 I spend both my time and my strength over things I can never obtain.
 In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

(CM: 60)

The child is deeply emotional, has deep imaginings of all sorts, he tries to solve science riddles, riddles that the land and sky offer him, etc. and all of them with his crystal-clear logic. His imagination soars higher and higher, higher than Shelley ever imagined the skylark to fly. *The Crescent Moon* captures the free-spirit of the child who is a true romantic and courageous, daring, adventurous and ever-ready to face any challenge that life could offer him.

Tagore praises the purity of the child and the sublime quintessence of childhood. Rocking in the cradle of innocence *The Crescent Moon* is the sound of joy that captures the voice of children. Tagore paints a picture of a child and the many thoughts that cross his mind in the night, in the day in the protective presence of his mother. Someone said that when childhood dies, the corpse that's left is called an adult, so in this book, Tagore paints a picture of that life, that lost world of yesterday. In his book *My Childhood Days*, Tagore writes: "People today are more grown up in every way than they were then. Then we were all children alike, both young and old" (55).

Tagore's child loves freedom and wants to be free like a bird, like a cloud. 'The Last Bargain' clearly portrays the free spirit of childhood. There are four figures where the child wants to engage himself with life. He says: "come and hire me..." (CM: 86) And a King comes on his chariot and tries to empower the child by clasping his hand showing his authority over him. But the power counted for naught and the king leaves. While wandering in the heat of the midday, the child encounters an old man with a bag filled with gold and tries to hire the child. The old man engrosses in counting the gold coins one by one but the child turns away from him. The third image is that of a fair maid in the garden and smiling to child. But soon her smile fades away and melts into tears and she departs alone in the darkness. Finally, the child watches another child playing with shells on the seashore. While in play, the child invites him to play and says: "I hire you for nothing" (CM: 86). From thenceforward, the child cannot resist this bargain in child's play and becomes a free man.

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry exudes a powerful flux of imagination coupled with innate faith vocalizing the free spirit inherent in a child. It is Tagore's child who plays with the colourful toys, listens to the music in the leaves, travels with the wind and comes to the edge of the earth lifting his hands to the sky and swims with the clouds. Tagore infuses his poetic genius with the creative spirit. Travelling on the trajectory of desires, whims, fantasies, the poet portrays a child who rejoices in the delightful flights of imagination.

The mother-child relationship is clearly perceptible in *The Crescent Moon*. The mother misses her child a lot in the poem ‘The End’ but the child assures the mother that he is always present with her. He says that it’s time for him to go. He promises his presence with the mother in the delicate draught of air and the mother would feel his presence in the ripples of water when she bathes. His laughter will flash like lightning through the window. He guarantees to be with the mother, lie upon her bosom while asleep. Like a dream he will slip into the depths of her sleep. The presence of the child is strong that mother will find him in the pupils of her eye, in body and in soul.

Mother’s concern about her child can be seen in the poem-‘The Child- Angel’. The mother wants her child to fight the doubt and despair by overcoming all the wrangling. She teaches him to be pure like a flame of light and prepares him to face the hard realities of life. The poem can be compared with the poem written by Abraham Lincoln ‘A Poetic letter to His Son’s Teacher’. The mother makes her son aware that the world is filled with people who are cruel in their greed and envious of anyone’s progress. But she does not want him to be an escapist, rather she wants her son to face such people and grow: “Come and take your seat in the bosom of the limitless, my child. At sunrise open and raise your heart like a blossoming flower, and at sunset bend your head and in silence complete the worship of the day” (CM: 85).

The mother-child relationship is highlighted in the poem ‘The Beginning’. The interesting conversation between mother and her child touches the chords of the heart. The baby asks his mother: “Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?” (CM: 57) To which mother can’t stop clasping the baby to her breast and replies in half-crying and half-laughing manner: “You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling. (CM: 57). The mother is overwhelmed with mystery when she gazes on child’s face. She sees the presence of the child in the dolls of her childhood games, in worship, in hopes and in her life entire.

It is a journey of child—a progression to attain adulthood. The child archetype of Krishna can be seen in him while he plays or protects his mother. In ‘The Hero’, the child is courageous, bold, is skilled with the sword so when his mother and he are travelling and strange figures come towards them he fights them with his sword: “Many of them fly, and a great number are cut to pieces. I know you are thinking, sitting all by yourself, that your boy must be dead by this time. But I come to you all stained with blood, and say, “Mother, the fight is over now.” You come out and kiss me, pressing me to your heart, and you say to yourself, “I don’t know what I should do if I hadn’t my boy to escort me. “It would be like a story in a book. My brother would say, “Is it possible? I always thought he was so delicate!” Our village people would all say in amazement- “Was it not lucky that the boy was with his mother?” (CM: 79-80).

Tagore also beautifully brings up the different attitudes and the separate ways that the father and the son tread. In the poem ‘Authorship’, the child has some reservations with the mother regarding his father: “You say that father writes a lot of books, but what he writes I don’t understand... When I take up father’s pen or pencil and write upon his book just as he does,—a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i,—why do you get cross with me, then, mother? You never say a word when father writes. When my father wastes such heaps of paper, mother, you don’t seem to mind at all.

But if I take only one sheet to make a boat with, you say, "Child, how troublesome you are!" What do you think of father's spoiling sheets and sheets of paper with black marks all over on both sides? (CM: 76).

But, in the poem 'The Little Big Man', the father-son equation has different slant. The poem commences with the line: "I am small because I am a child. I shall be big when I am as old as my father is." (CM: 74) He tells his teacher, uncle that he is as big as his father is and they understand that he is grown up now and does not need carry his books and can go wherever he likes. He can manage the affairs of home, for he is grown up now. Towards the end of the poem, when father brings him little shoes and small silken frocks, he says to him: "Father, give them to my dada, for I am as big as you are" (CM: 75).

In the poem 'Vocation', the poet child makes a wish to be a hawker. Breaking the routinized daily schedule, he is fed up with school and wants a life of a hawker leading an unhurried life. "I wish I were a hawker, spending my day in the road, crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!" (CM: 73). He wishes to be a gardener, engrossed in his likable vocation as he does whatever he likes to perform with his soiled clothes and wants to dig at the garden without anybody's stopping him from doing so. In the evening when he retires to bed, the child sees a watchman walking up and down through the open window, swinging the lantern and the shadow. He makes a strong wish: "I wish I were a watchman walking the streets all night, chasing the shadows with my lantern" (CM: 72).

Tagore exhibits rare lyrical powers imbued with devotion, mysticism, sublime ecstasy that culminates in the perfect union of beauty and truth. In the process, Tagore unravels the deep realms of child's unconscious mind and tries to probe into the deep recesses. The child archetype is seen in multiple layers radiating liveliness, vibrancy and uncorrupted simplicity. K.R.S. Iyengar avows about Tagore: "Like Wordsworth, like Walter de la Mare, Tagore too found in children a mystic quality. He found in them beauty, innocence, humour, charity, and a kind of ancient wisdom-and these Tagore celebrated in song" (114).

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