

## A Pilgrimage Towards Truth and Beauty Through Goodness: A Study of Tagore's Selected Short Stories

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### Abstract

Tagore upheld that man is eternally in quest of perfect Truth, perfect Beauty and perfect Goodness. However, this yearning of man can be appeased only when he himself recognises these values that are latent within him and personifies them. The endeavour in this paper is to explore in Tagore's short stories the concept of attaining the true sense of "Truth" and "Beauty" in "Goodness" as philosophised by Tagore. Tagore's stories take the readers on a pilgrimage along with the characters, through the ever-changing truth and beauty, through the dichotomy of truth and untruth, and beauty and the not beautiful, toward the climax of grasping the real Truth and Beauty. This real Truth and Beauty are realised in the glimpses of epiphanic revelations, which manifest wherever there is goodness. It is this pilgrimage that is critically studied in the two short stories: "Fool's Gold" and "The Living and the Dead".

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Short Stories, Truth, Beauty and Goodness, Tagore's philosophy, "Fool's Gold", "The Living and the Dead"

### Introduction

'Gurudev' Rabindranath Tagore, apart from creating heartening and edifying pieces of art, also devotedly worked towards revolutionising Indian education and literature. Tagore believed that man should not limit himself to his past, to his thoughts and his actions because he is much more than all these components. Man comprises within him the personality of the "Absolute". Therefore, "the Truth of the Universe is the Human truth" (qtd. in Popova). Tagore upheld that man is eternally in quest of perfect Truth, perfect Beauty and perfect Goodness. However, this yearning of his can be appeased only when he himself recognises these values that are latent within him and personifies them.

The endeavour in this paper is to explore the concept of attaining the true sense of “Truth” and “Beauty” in “Goodness” as philosophised by Tagore. Every moment, of our life, confronts its own truth and its own beauty. Moment after moment, truth and beauty change. Something that is true at one moment, may not be true another moment; if something appears beautiful to the senses at one moment, the same beauty could seem ugly at another moment. Truth and beauty, also, vary from person to person, according to varying perspectives and varying life situations. So, how do we account for what is true or what is untrue? How do we know what beauty we must ornate our life with? Tagore always gave importance to the daily dealings of life. Day to day biddings, for him, were as significant as being aware of the Absolute. Therefore, momentary truth or changing beauty found an important place in his works, as did the theme of quest for the Eternal.

This paper studies this dichotomy of truth and untruth, and beauty and the not beautiful in his selected short stories. Tagore’s stories take the readers to a pilgrimage, along with the characters, through the ever-changing truth and beauty, toward the climax of grasping the real Truth and Beauty. This real Truth and Beauty are realised in the glimpses of epiphanic revelations, which manifest wherever there is goodness. ‘Goodness’ resolves the dilemmas in conflicts. As soon as a character finds itself in the presence of goodness, it experiences the state of realisation; knows that it is in this truth and beauty, which is determined by goodness, his pilgrimage of life finds its fulfillments. This paper attempts to analyse the selected short stories, highlighting this pilgrimage the characters take, jostling with the dichotomies and finding the resolution in the goodness around them. The short stories selected for this study are “Fool’s Gold” and “The Living and the Dead”.

### **Truth, Beauty and Goodness: Uniting the Diversity**

The three eternal values of “Truth”, “Beauty” and “Goodness” find a very significant place in both Tagore’s ethics and aesthetics. Truth, according to Tagore, is man’s harmonious relationship with the universe and the supreme infinity, and the realisation of this truth is “Beauty.” However, perfection cannot be achieved if truth and beauty are divested from goodness. Goodness is truth, and Goodness is beauty. Man can discover his true self when he impresses upon his goodness. This, in turn, will lead him to the understanding of truth, filling his life with beauty: “The Good is beautiful not because of its utility or because what it does to us... The Good, we say, is at one with the whole of existence and it finds a ready response in the heart of man, and whenever the Good and the True are in accord, Beauty stands revealed” (qtd. in Mohinder 87).

**Truth:** Man is a combination of a finite and infinite being. He has within him the two selves, one that confines to the matters of the world (*Ego*), which does not seek the truth, and the other, that involves the higher consciousness of life (*Atma*): “At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones...but at the other pole of my being I am separate from all” (Tagore, *Sadhana* 69). The dichotomy of human life puts man to great distress. However, it is necessary because it makes the external world look so

amiss that he will be forced to plunge into the deep solitudes of his soul, and yearn for the purpose of his existence.

Man is constantly haunted by the pursuit of his life's purpose, but the knowledge about the impermanence and meaninglessness of life makes him completely abashed. According to Tagore, the consciousness of the meaninglessness of life is necessary because it impels the river to flow towards the ocean, and man towards the cosmos. Though life may seem as meaningless at the bottom, it is not completely void of meaning. Meaning in life is infused by the supreme divine creator and artist. And, they do so not by accentuating its substantiality because that would be equal to submitting to illusion, but by making prominent and submerging in its insubstantiality and evanescence – “*Maya* obscures truth when it is *not* seen as a veil; once it is *seen* as a veil, however, it reveals truth” (Chakrabarti xiv).

Tagore believes that life builds around the concept of evanescence. If illusion or *Maya* can conceal the truth, it can, at the same time, reveal the truth. So, by deliberately participating in “*Maya*”, the meaninglessness of life gets transformed into the infinite, the overwhelming and the immeasurable. Thus, meaning resides in moments, in mutability and the fugitive intermediaries. We must never attempt to possess or cling on to the world, instead we must observe it. The act of observing conveys the fact of existence, and this notion of existence kindles in the observer an awareness of his existence.

**Beauty:** Tagore was the worshipper and the lover of beauty in all its varied forms. Tagore has explored all forms of beauty in his writing, such as beauty of God, beauty of love, beauty of nature, beauty of man and beauty of death. Tagore affirms, “Truth is everywhere, therefore everything is the object of our knowledge. Beauty is omnipresent; therefore, everything is capable of giving us joy” (Tagore, *Sadhana* 76). For Tagore, beauty was a living force, it was omnipresent, thus was not devoid of its counter attributes – Truth and Goodness.

He appreciated beauty not because it is appealing to the senses but because it is the manifestation of truth. He believed, “Beauty is truth's smile when she beholds her own face in a perfect mirror” (qtd. in Poet Seers). Tagore's concept of beauty is directly derived from his philosophy of all-embracing humanism, which is more permanent and universal than individual. Beauty, Tagore says, is subjective and not objective. Actually, there is no beauty in any form; the sense of beauty lies in the human mind. Therefore, it must be comprehended not through the physical senses but through the spiritual mind because beauty is not innate in the form. Thus, the beautiful is not what is pleasing to the eyes but a spiritual experience, which is why it is obligatory to have tranquility, discipline, concentration and restraint in our life, if we are to understand and experience beauty in its purest form.

Tagore holds that the essence of beauty can be realized only when man sees the entire creation of life as a phenomenon of life. As Max Weber says, “We realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. It is commonplace to observe that something may be

true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. Indeed, it may be true precisely in those aspects” (148). Tagore’s approach to the union with infinity is not through denying or destructing the differences, “but rather by conserving those that have worth in a fullness communion with the divine” (Urquhart 5).

For him, beauty lies in the moments of life. Life is constantly in the state of flux and is built on many short moments. However, it is the momentariness and the short-lived joy which adds beauty and meaning to our life. According to Tagore’s friend, Shahid Suhrawardy, “to him Beauty came as she flowed down streams or awoke on the sprays of breeze-tossed corn. She came to him naturally as the cherished one to her lover” (qtd. in Chakrabarti 13). It is necessary to accept the commonness of life because it would not only provide beauty but also provide man the true freedom since it would guard the common humanity that lies within him.

**Goodness:** According to Tagore, beauty without goodness “fills life with ugly and unhealthy desires” (Sharma 27). Man can attain perfection or become a complete man only when truth and the beautiful culminate in goodness. In his view, divinity and humanity do not belong to different realms. His religion is based on the principle of “humanization of God and divinization of man” (Manjula 1). By the humanization of God, he meant ‘not merely’ ‘that God is God of humanity but also’ that ‘it is the God in every human being’ (Manjula 92). For him, the human aspect is the essence of all religion, which means humanity or goodness or the pure self or the undying ‘I’ is the bases of the entire human existence: “We die when we lose our physical life; we perish when we miss our humanity. And humanity is the dharma of human beings” (Tagore, “Essays” 190). Thus, goodness is not an option that man can either accept or reject according to his fancy. ‘Good’ is what a human being ought to be; it is his immanent nature. Tagore believes that God’s presence can be felt in all noble human relations, and it is this experience of the divine’s presence that gives rise to the aesthetic awareness in man.

Good and evil are generally understood as two different entities. However, in nature, everything is in balance; good and evil are not contradictory; the distinction occurs due to man’s faculty of discrimination. Tagore had an optimistic view regarding the problem of evil. In fact, he considered it important to encounter evil. He believes that every human being has to undergo the process of evolution; he has to transform from what he is to what he should be. The presence of evil actually helps to identify what goodness is. And, evil is not the ultimate end, it can always be altered into goodness. Therefore, Tagore says, “Imperfections are necessary factor in the universe. It is as real as the creation of the universe itself. The universe without imperfection is not the last thing. It exists only to be overcome in the perfect” (qtd. in Mandal 211).

Living a life of goodness means to live in harmony with all creation, the Absolute. The quality of goodness connects man to universal humanity, thus reinforcing his attribute of godliness. Tagore says, “Beauty displays God’s majesty in the midst of His creation, Goodness does the same in the conduct of the human being”

(qtd. in Prova 42). Thus, the beauty of his goodness bestows him with godliness. ‘Good’ is thus beautiful and divine. Tagore elaborates on this concept by saying:

The beauty of goodness goes far, beyond what the eye can see or the mind know, it invests everything with a little of God. It is because of its nearness that we often fail to see goodness as a form of beauty. But when we do, our whole being overflows like a river in spate, and then we know that nothing in the world can be more beautiful. (qtd. in Sharma 26)

It is the goodness in man which will help him to apprehend that life is not hollow and catastrophic. It provides him with the knowledge that when he restricts himself to his self, he is not living his truth. That is why he says, “Man’s abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God” (Tagore, *Sadhana* 152). In fact, absolute truth and absolute beauty cannot be manifested if there is no goodness.

### **Analysis of “Fool’s Gold” and “The Living and the Dead”**

In the two stories, first, the predicament of the characters, who are seen continuously jostling with the perplexity of truth or untruth, will be highlighted; then, their persistent conflict between what is beautiful and what is not, will be examined; and finally, that their predicament and conflict seek resolution in ‘goodness’ will be brought out.

### **Truth or Untruth? - Predicament of Tagore’s Characters**

What if we are living in the consistent delusion that the perceived truth is the real Truth? What if truth and untruth are actually contriving to swap their positions, and we are unaware? This is the predicament that most of the characters of Tagore’s stories are caught in. In this section, an attempt is made to understand how Tagore has explored this tussle between truth and untruth, through the critical examination of the stories selected for study.

#### **“Fool’s Gold”**

The story “Fool’s Gold” deals with the major issue that all human beings nurture within themselves greed about being wealthy. Baidyanath Charkrabarti is a poverty-stricken man. His father, Mahesh Chandra, passes the management affairs to his elder brother Shibanath, who later completely inherits all the property, and leaves only some company bonds to Baidyanath. Shibanath gets his son, Adyanath, married to a rich man’s only daughter whereas Mahesh Chandra, taking pity on a poor Brahmin gets his only son married to the eldest of the seven daughters of the Brahmin.

Baidyanath, despite his meagre earning, is happy and contented. But the wife, Mokshada, unlike her husband, is dissatisfied with their standard of living. She does

not find any reason why they cannot have all the comforts that Adyanath's (Baidyanath's co-legatees) family enjoy. She habitually compares their life with them. According to her, "It was against all reasons that Mokshada should be deprived of ornaments, Benares saries, refined conversation and imperious manners that Adyanath's wife Bindhyabasini had! They were the same family after all" (Radice, 98). Baidyanath, on the other hand, is a person who delightedly accepts whatever life has to offer him and "gave no thought to earning a living" (97). He spent his entire day, from dawn to evening, sitting on the veranda, making "fishing-rods, kites and reels."

The two characters have different outlook regarding the truth of their life. For Mokshada, her identity and her happiness is associated with riches, whereas, for Baidyanath, his existence is associated with simplicity, love of his family, and creativity.

Baidyanath, in order to avoid any trouble, remains silent to his wife's complaints and insults. She throws cruel and jarring comments such as "I suppose if the children didn't eat and they died and I too, you'd be able to run the house on your own, nice and cheaply!" Due to the wife's regular rebuke, Baidyanath is compelled to think that he is really a hopeless and useless man, and that, somehow or the other, he should discover a way that would take him to a treasure house. Thus, the truth of Baidyanath is altered by his wife's continuous complaints and questioning: "He compared his joyless home with the atmosphere of festivity and homecoming in so many other houses, and said to himself, 'Why did God make me so useless?'"

The husband and wife, craving to instantly become rich, fall into the trap of a deceitful sanyasi. Believing that the sanyasi has the power to manifest gold, Mokshada starts imagining the world as being full of gold: "As her imagination magically turned beds, furnishing and the walls of the house to gold, she mentally invites Bindhyabasini for a visit." (99) They are physically and mentally so captivated by the power of the sanyasi that they turn deaf ears to the call of the customers of his handiwork, and the desperate cry of their children: "They sat stock-still in front of the sanyasi's cauldron – unblinking, speechless. The restless flames; casting reflections, turned the pupils of their eyes into touch-stones. Their gaze grew red and fiery as a setting sun." And, once two of the Company Bonds are offered to the 'gold-creating fire', the sanyasi, without any hesitation, tells them a sheer lie – 'tomorrow the gold colour will come.' The values of trust and innocence are crushed under the greediness of mankind. The sanyasi, who is supposed to be the upholder of truth and detachment, becomes the cause of other people's misery. Thus, sometimes what appears to be the truth may actually be false. And, "the next day the sanyasi was nowhere to be found. The gold all around them was obliterated: even the rays of the sun fell dark" (100).

Mokshada tries all means to become rich. She consults a fortune-teller and is easily convinced of the prediction that Baidyanatha will soon find a treasure. For this reason, she forces him to go to Benares because she has heard that in Benares there is a house with hidden treasure – "Get moving! Do you think the sky will rain money if you sit gaping like that?" (101). At Benares, he stays at a house whose owner is one

of the clients of Mokshada's uncle. One night, when the whole world is asleep, he hears a clinking noise "... as if the King of the Underworld's treasurer was sitting and counting money". Soon, he starts hearing the noise during both day and night, and his search for the source of the noise becomes more intense. One day, he starts digging the floor of a room which sounded hollow but, to his utter disappointment, all he could get from the excavation is human skulls and bones. Disappointed, "Baidyanath gave a long, heart-rending groan – 'Ma-a-a!' – and the echo seemed to include the groans of many disappointed people from ages past, groans arising from deep underground with gloomy resonance" (105). It is the noise of despair and greed within man that makes him see all kinds of mirage, and this illusion appears to be as real as himself, even though for a moment. Hence, where does the real wealth and truth lie? Is it found in our aspirations or in appreciating what we already have? And, who is to be considered a fool? Is it the person who discards gold or the person who prays for trinkets when he already has 'gold'?

### ***"The Living and the Dead"***

The story "The Living and the Dead" explores the concept of what 'living' truly means, through the dilemma of Kadambini.

Kadambini is a widow of Zamindar Sharadashankar's family. She has no blood relatives alive in her maternal family and, having no husband or a child, there is no body that she can call her own. But there is her brother-in-law's son, whom she adores and to whom she pours out "her frustrated widow's love" (Radice 31). One day, suddenly, due to some strange reason, her small, tender and loving heart stops beating. In order to avoid the notice of the police, the body is quickly carried off by the Brahmin employees of the Zamindar to the cremation ground. When the two employees hear the stir of the bed and a long sigh, they run towards the village. And, when they return with their other two companions, "they found that the corpse had gone: the bed was empty.... They noticed in a patch of mud by the door some recent small, woman's footprint" (32). But in actuality, Kadambini has not died, "her life-function had been suspended that was all" (33). When she regains her consciousness, she feels the darkness and desolation of death all around her: "I am exiled from the land of living – I am my own ghost. They are in the land of the living whereas I belong to Eternity" (34). It is difficult for her to believe that she is not dead because only death could bring her from the inner quarters of the house to the remote cremation ground. But, then, suddenly, she feels the chilly rainy wind, hears the croaking of the monsoon frog, and she recollects all the memories of her short life span. Thus, she is in a grave dilemma as to whether she is alive or dead. If she is dead, then why does she "feel the touch of the world"? And, if she is alive, then where should she go? Now the people of the land will not take her back since she would be a curse on them. Out of misery and frustration, she screams, "If I have no place in this world, or in the next world, then where shall I go? Oh, tell me where should I go" (39)?

Where should she search for her truth – in this world or beyond this world? And, where is the resolution of her predicament? Is it the knowledge of death, or the knowledge of the reason behind living?

### **Beauty or the Otherwise: Characters in Conflict**

Beauty exudes eternal joy. However, as we live through many beautiful moments, that moment which contains eternal joy keeps fading away. Is not beauty defined by the alluring appearance of objects, but we forget that external beauty is only temporary, and there can be a permanent joy that beauty in ugliness lends. Tagore's characters are seen trying to combat the conflict between beauty and the not beautiful they are in constant pursuit of true beauty. Their fixed belief in momentary beauty brings to them vexation and frustration in life. Tagore has wrought his stories with sudden, surprising, and crucial climaxes, which suddenly question the truth and beauty in the situation. Let us see further in the selected stories how the characters are caught in the mire of beauty and the otherwise.

#### ***“Fool’s Gold”***

In the story, “Fool’s Gold,” the husband, Baidyanath finds joy and beauty in handiworks. Though this requires a great deal of patience and creativity, he is sure that this would be more satisfying than earning a living – “He occupied himself by cutting branches off trees and carefully carving them into walking-sticks” (Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* 97). When the whole village is engrossed in some kind of feud, Baidyanath sits on his veranda minding his own business. For him, a penknife and a piece of wood are enough to lead a happy and beautiful life. His wife, on the other hand, is completely opposite to him. For her, everything in her life is “inconvenient and humiliating” (98). According to her, “the beds were not fit for carrying a corpse on; the walls were so decayed that even an orphaned titmouse would not want to live in them.” She believed that beauty and happiness lies in being wealthy. She refutes every kind action of her husband. Baidyanath, in order to please Mokshada, offers her a colour print photo of Druga as a present. She immediately compares it to the English oil painting which is hung in Bindhyabasini’s bedroom, and ruthlessly shuns it away, saying “You can hang it in your sitting room and admire it there. It’s not my style” (100). The two characters, thus, present two concepts of beauty: beauty of simplicity and honesty, and beauty of riches.

During the month of Druga puja, Baidyanath’s two sons ask him for a model boat. Baidyanath, very lovingly, earnestly and intricately makes the model boat: “Even the shell of a boat would have been sufficient, but these had rudders, sails, boatmen in position: they were wonderful” (102) and “There is no boy alive whose heart would not have skipped a beat at the sight of such boats.” Though his sons are extremely delighted, his wife is not: “At the sight, she raged, sobbed and beat her brow; then she snatched the two boats and threw them out of the window”. She feels that when other children are receiving gold necklaces, stain shirts and embroidered caps, her sons are receiving toy boats. The elder son sets aside his distress, and tries to



cheer his father. He says, "I'll look for the boats early tomorrow morning, Father, and bring them back" (103). The wife's insensitivity is in contrast with her children's innocence and maturity. So, is beauty something tangible; something that appeals to the eyes? Or, is it to be realised through the human heart and soul?

### ***"The Living and the Dead"***

Kadambini, in the story "The Living and the Dead", considers her friend Yogamaya as the harbour where she can take refuge. Their bond is so strong that they used to have an affectionate enmity between them, with Kadambini stating that her love for Yogamaya is greater than anything else, while Yogamaya asserts that Kadambini does not reciprocate her love sufficiently. Both of them agree that "if there was an opportunity to meet again, neither would lose sight of each other." (Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* 35) In the initial phase, Yogamaya showers Kadambini with kind gestures and loving words: "How can you be a servant? You are my friend, you're like – and so on." But, as the days pass on, and Kadambini shows no sign of leaving, she starts to feel anxious. She gets annoyed more so with her husband's approval of her stay. She scorns at Kadambini saying, "it doesn't seem advisable for you to stay here anymore. What will people think? How can we go on putting up someone else's widow" (37)? Since Kadambini is forsaken by the person on whom she has pinned her last hope, she becomes inconsolable and cries out, "But other than being dead, what harm have I done to you" (39). But, despite being deserted by one of her close companions, she does get to experience, even for a brief moment, the beauty of life, though she believed that she was living. As soon as her friend behaves otherwise, and negates the beauty in their relationship, Kadambini starts believing that she is dead. Later, her sudden appearance in her in-law's house spreads a wave of fear around, making her believe that she is actually dead. However, no sooner does she meet the little boy and is enveloped by his love, she realises that she is not dead. And, for others, she finally kills herself to prove that she was actually living. So does the relationships or the awareness of living provide beauty to life? If yes, then how do we then account for true beauty in relationships and life.

### **Seeking Resolution in Goodness**

'Goodness' determines truth and beauty. Tagore, through his stories, emphasises on 'goodness' or general humanity, with natural sensitivity, love, and other qualities such as compassion and sacrifice. Thus, in his stories, the characters tumble across a sudden twist, which reveals to them their real truth and beauty. The moment of epiphany is usually a moment of goodness, guiding them toward the Supreme Truth and Beauty. It is interesting to see in the selected stories how goodness silences the conflicts within the characters, and makes them come face to face with Truth and Beauty in their true essence.

### ***"Fool's Gold"***

In the story, “Fool’s Gold,” we find that the characters, due to their perpetual greed for wealth, usually fail to recognise the real treasure that lies in front of them. The phrase ‘Fool’s Gold’ is equivalent to the ‘Golden Deer’ (svarnamgrg) (Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* 97) from the famous episode of the Ramayana, where Maricha takes the form of a golden deer and entices Sita. Mokshada, like Sita, gets deceived by appearances. She thinks that happiness lies in ornaments, refined conversation and an imperious manner. She considers her husband to be a fool because he has no desire for earning money and improving their standard of living. However, in reality, it is she who is foolish because, being blinded by her greed, she fails to recognise the goodness of her husband.

The husband and wife hold contrasting views regarding truth, happiness and beauty. For Mokshada, the truth is that they have been cheated, and that they do not deserve to live the life of a destitute. She compares their life with that of her co-sister’s and, thereby, ceaselessly instructs Baidyanath to hunt for the hidden treasure. In the case of Baidyanath, he accepts his life as it is. So, for him, everything that life puts him through is truth, and he does not have any problem to accept that truth. Baidyanath and Mokshada would not have suffered if she had realised that materialistic possessions can never give eternal happiness, and that joy and beauty come in life only when we value humans and their emotions.

Mokshada, because of the lack of goodness in her, is easily ensnared by greed and jealousy, which makes her incompetent to realise the wealth that God has already bestowed upon her. The problem of their financial scarcity could have been dealt with by selling Baidyanath’s excellent hand crafts. However, his wife feels that his carvings have no worth. Mokshada is so obsessed by her desire to become rich that she does not mind selling away her pure, heavy gold ornaments to get money for Baidyanath to go to Banares: she sacrifices real gold for her unrealistic dream.

Baidyanath finds beauty and joy in being contented. He never thinks that life has provided him with anything less. Unlike his wife, for him, everything is pleasing - a penknife and a piece of wood is enough to give him immense satisfaction. Mokshada, on the other hand, believes that beauty is that which has the ability to entice the eyes, so she discards everything which is not alluring. For instance, she does not find the artistic model boat made by her husband beautiful, she considers it a nuisance. She evaluates beauty based on its appearance. Whenever she does that, the only thing which she gets is disappointment: “Nothing in her house pleased her. The beds were not fit for carrying a corpse on and the furnishing would make a saint weep.” (98) Mokshada fails to understand that Beauty is not a concrete object that can be perceived by our senses. Beauty is one of the human values, which lies within and can never be found outside. Real beauty is defined by our actions, the way we behave with people, and the positive perception that we have concerning life. Like beauty, even truth and happiness cannot be found outside, they always come from within. If one fails to understand this, he becomes a victim of falsehood just like Mokshada and Baidyanath. Due to their foolishness, they fall prey to the lie of the Sanyasi and the prediction of the fortune-teller. Baidyanath experiences the strokes of real truth and beauty only when he is surrounded by the true love of his children, and

receives from them true appreciation of the beauty and skill that lie in him. It is the innocence and goodness of those children that sees the true artist in their father, and real beauty in the model boat.

Thus, the story “Fool’s Gold” reiterates the fact that it is goodness that has to be cherished and not materialistic things. It is only if we have goodness that we can recognise the truth, and thereby attain beauty. Mokshadha could have lived a happy life if she had realised goodness in her and around her, which would make her see that the treasure is never hidden and that it is already with her in the form of her husband.

### **“The Living and the Dead”**

In the story “The Living and the Dead” Kadambini chooses to believe that she is dead: “I no longer belong to the world of living people. I am fearsome, a bringer of evil; I am my own ghost” (Radice, *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* 34). She overlooks the indications which show that she may be living: “her legs were tired as she walked, and her body began to weaken.” She denies her existence possibly because in her life there is no vitality, beauty and goodness: “Daylight and human habitation were what terrified her.” Somehow she feels that death can free her from a miserable lonely life: “As long as she was in the wide open plain, in the burning – ground, in the darkness of the Sraban night, she remained fearless.” However, she soon realizes that death does not provide any freedom. In fact, later, she becomes terrified of herself: “Those who are frightened of ghosts look backwards in terror – they are frightened of what they cannot see. But Kadambini was terrified of her inner self – nothing outside frightened her” (36). She even starts to behave hysterically; in the midday, she shouts out loud and, in the evening, her own shadow in the lamplight frightens her. In the middle of the night, she comes to Yogamaya wailing, “Didi, Didi, I beg you don’t leave me alone!” But the cause for Kadambini’s alienation and her wretched state was not death but her inability to realise the truth that she is alive.

Kadambini’s dilemma is resolved when she is drenched in the little boy’s untarnished love and goodness. Though the boy and Kadambini are not related by blood, they share the bond of pure affection. And, more so, when there is no social claim on a relationship, love gets doubly intensified “because it owes so uncertainly” (31). Even during the time when she thinks that she is dying, her last wish is to see the boy, “Gasping, she had called, Didi, bring the little boy to me – I think I am dying” (33). After regaining her consciousness, the first thought that comes to her mind is “whether her nephew had called out Kakima for the last time.” So, when she sees the boy after a long duration, her heart thirsts to clasp him to her one last time, and to shelter him from all calamities. When the boy sees his Kakima after a long time, he asks her, “Kakima did you die? Have you come back to me? You won’t die again” (40)? This is when Kadambini, for the first time, feels that she has not died. Now, the ancient house, the little boy, his affection and everything are all equally alive to her: “there was no gulf intervening between her and them.” However, for the people of the world, she is dead so everybody is startled on seeing her hugging the child; the zamindar begs her to go away and not to cast her eyes on the child: “please stop attaching yourself to him, please go away we’ll perform your proper funerary rites”

(41). Kadambaini, unable to bear this untruth, hits her brow with the metal bowl and throws herself into the tank. Thus, by dying, she proves that she had not died.

Hence, Kadambini's tragic life fortifies the truth that human life cannot thrive on uncertainty: "They are the people of the world," she felt, "with their loves and feelings and duties and I am an empty shadow." We are either alive or dead; or, if we are too conscious of oneself, then we can neither unite with others, nor realise our own truth. Kadambini, at the end of her life, realizes that it is love and goodness which sustain men during their lifetime and also during their death.

### **Conclusion**

Tagore gives supreme importance to humanity or humanness; according to him, it is the fundamental truth of human existence. He believes that man can achieve the sense of the infinite or the absolute only through feelings. In his essay, "The Religion of Man", he says, "We can never go beyond man in all that we know and feel – I felt that I have found my religion at last, in which the infinite became defined in humanity – reality, is the definition of the infinite which relates truth to the person" (Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* 131). All the characters in his stories are directly or indirectly in search of Truth. For example, in the story, "The Living and the Dead" the protagonist realises that the truth of life can be understood by the power of emotions. Tagore believes that man can realise his truth only by participating in the actions of life, and going through all the turbulence. Thus, he says, "If you shut your doors to all errors, truth will be shut out" (130). All the deeds done by humans can be sanctified and can become a medium to attain the infinite, if they are done with a selfless intention and sacrifice.

He believed that one can experience beauty in life when he unlocks his heart, mind and soul, and is in harmony with creation. Confining ourselves to the self obstructs us from appreciating the beauty of life and takes us farther away from the truth. The protagonist, Baidhyanath, in the story "Fool's Gold" has to suffer due to the insatiable greed of his wife. According to Tagore, in human life, nothing is more valuable than human love; it is the supreme truth of human existence. No matter how prosperous, affluent and illustrious a person becomes, nothing can give more ease to his heart and soul than love; "Love is the only reality and it is not a mere sentiment. It is the ultimate truth that lies at the heart of creation." (Tagore, 1564). Tagore strongly believed that confinement to ourselves leads to fear of death. But, if we turn our vision towards the infinite, we realise that there is actually no meeting and parting, and death is the gateway to the infinity. It is the elixir that frees one from all human sufferings; it confers a new beginning. Since, in every human being, these three aspects – Truth, Beauty and Goodness – unite, the dissonance among them leads to catastrophe, despondency and misery. Thus, man, in order to relish life to its fullest, must foster these eternal values which are embedded in him. And, if an individual completely surrenders himself to these eternal values, he can realise the Absolute.

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