Impact of socio-cultural factors on the nature of relationships in society – Study through Tagore’s Broken Nest

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Abstract:
The various written texts contain the reality of life and are mostly surrounded by the influence of cultures prevailing in the society. What kind of person we become Indian writing has become a new form of culture and voice in which India speaks. Indian writing in English is also a case of translated literature, in the sense that it is a transfer between two different cultural systems. The concept of transcreation is closely related to the issue of the 'Indianisation' of English by creative writers in their works. Today, Indian writing in English communicates to the people about the richness and complexity of Indian culture. In the present paper, an attempt would be made to show how the socio-cultural forces play a significant role in determining the nature of relationships in Rabindranath Tagore’s Broken Nest and how these forces generate meaning produced through various practices, beliefs, values, behaviour and attitudes within society.

Key Words: Culture, transcreation, Indian-writing in English, values, socio-cultural factors.

Literature is that vast area which includes both oral and written literature. It was not until about the sixteenth century that an extensive written literature appeared. The tales from Puranas, the Panchatantra folk and fairy tales have made India a vast storehouse of creative writing. The word Puranas means 'that which renews the old'. These were written in Sanskrit language and were meant to expound the truth of the Vedas. The Sanskrit language is divided into two parts: Vedic (1500 BC to 600 BC) and Classical (third to eighth century AD). The great epics, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas are the part of classical period and are undoubtedly the precursors of Sanskrit Kavya. Classical Sanskrit literature includes the Nataka, lyric poetry,
romance, popular tales, didactic fables, scientific literature on grammar, medicine, law, astronomy, mathematics etc. During this period, language was regulated by the rules of one of the greatest Sanskrit grammarians, Panini.

The popular figure in the sphere of epic literature is Kalidasa (AD 380 - AD 415). He wrote two great epics, Kumarasambhava (the birth of Kumar), and Raghuuvamsa (the dynasty of the Raghus). There were several other poets of great merit like Bharavi, Sriharsha, Magha and Bhatti. Jayadeva is the last great name in the Sanskrit language, who wrote Gitagovinda (the song of Govinda) in the twelfth century to describe each phase of love between Radha and Krishna. The didactic fable Panchatantra by Vishnu Sharma composed in third century and the Hitopadesha by Narayan Pandit in twelfth century are considered as the literary masterpieces of the Sanskrit literature. Pali and Prakrit were two spoken languages of Indians after the Vedic period. These were adopted as sacred languages by Buddhist and Jain sections in ancient India. Lord Buddha (500 BC) used Pali to deliver his sermons. Buddhist literature is also abundantly available in Sanskrit, which includes the great epic Buddhacharita (second century AD) by Ashvagosha (AD 80 - AD 150).

Around 1000 AD many other Indian languages came into existence. The most powerful drift of medieval Indian literature between 1000 and 1800 AD was rich tradition of devotional literature. Bhakti literature was the most important development of this period, and the notable writers were: Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Narsi Mehta, Premanada, Jiva Goswami, Daulat-kazi et al. From fifteenth to sixteenth century, Sanskrit literature was at its best and during the period Hindi language also started to develop. The writers started writing in Hindi too. Surdas, Tulsidas and Meera Bai are considered classics in the genre of creative writing in Hindi. Bhakti (devotion) was not only aspect of Hindi literature, also love ballads and heroic poetry were popular. Shah Latif, the famous Sindhi Muslim poet (1689-1752) in his sacred work Risalo elaborated Sufi mystic love as the divine truth.

The historical evolvement of Hindi literature can be divided into four stages which consist of: Adi Kal (the Early Period), Bhakti Kal (the Devotional Period), Riti Kal (the Scholastic Period) and Adhunik Kal (the Modern Period). Adi Kal in Hindi literature began from the middle of the tenth century. Bhakti Kal in Hindi literature was accentuated by advance in poetry forms, predominantly from a blend of older forms of poetry in Sanskrit School and Persian School. These included verse patterns like Doha (two liners), Chaupaya (four lines) etc.
Right after the Bhakti Kal, it was the influence of Riti Kal in Hindi literature which made the literature further rich. The Riti Kal in Hindi literature spans the period beginning from 1600 AD and culminating in 1850 AD. The Adhunik Kal commenced in the middle of nineteenth century. Modern Hindi literature is divided into four phases, comprising: the age of Bharatandu or Renaissance (1868-1893), Dwivedi Yug (1893-1918), Chhayavada Yug (1918-1937) and the contemporary period (1937 onwards). In Hindi, between 1700 and 1800 AD, many poets like Bihari Lal and Keshav Das created secular poetry of Sringara. In the eighteenth century, Urdu as a language came into being. Sauda (1706-1781) was the first among the Urdu poets who gave vigour to Urdu poetry. Other notable poets were Dard (1720-1785) and Mir Taqi Mir (1722-1810).

After the medieval period, Indian literature was struggling to reach the height of its modern age. During nineteenth century, the creative force of many literary figures like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-1891) and Michael Mudhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), played an important role in the development of the foundation of modern literature in India through regional languages. There have been many great writers in regional languages, who created their unique styles of literary expressions. Notable among them are Premchand who introduced realism into Hindi literature, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Nirmal Verma, Mahadevi Verma, Sunil Gangopadhyaya, U. R. Ananthamurthy, Amrita Pritam, Ismat Chughtai, Kaifi Azmi, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Indira Goswami, Budhhadeb Basu, et al.

Many incredible works of Indian literature were unknown to the western society because most of the writers used to write in their mother tongue, which limited their global reach. However, in the nineteenth century, Indian literature started attracting international attention because of Indian writing in English and translation works. The beginning of Indian literature in English is traced to the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), a social reformist from Bengal was the pioneer of Indian writing in English. Indian writing in English is also a kind of translated literature because it is a transfer between two different culture systems. The concept of transcreation is closely related to the issue of the 'Indianisation' of English by creative writers in their works. Transcreation is about recreating concept from one language into another language. In 1785, Charles Wilkin's The Bhagvat Geeta became the first Sanskrit work made accessible to the scholars of Europe by translation.
The word culture has evolved since the definition given by Matthew Arnold. It has become a part of “Cultural Studies”. The term “Cultural Studies” was used by Richard Hoggart in 1964 when he founded the ‘Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ (Wikipedia). Culture deals in the beliefs, customs and values of the society. This includes virtually every aspect of human life. Culture is the pattern which people living in particular social set – up create (Kanwar, Bali, 20). Rabindranath Tagore’s novella Broken Nest (Nastanirh, 1901) portrays the complexities of Bengali society in the late nineteenth century. The impact of western culture on Bengali society has been portrayed by Tagore in the novella through its plot. The author himself narrates the story through a powerful dialogue delivery.

The Broken Nest is the novella of an extremely busy editor, Bhupati, who is unable to spare time for his young wife, Charulata. Due to Bhupati’s negligence, Charulata finds solace in the company of her husband’s young cousin, Amal. Both Charulata and Amal inspire each-other to enjoy their reading and writing sessions which is also “in the context of the Hindu joint family where tradition has always permitted a tender and affectionate familiarity between a married woman and her husband’s younger brother” (Kripalani 186-187).

The glory of the Indian culture lies in the age long tradition of the joint family system where several generations live together. This joint family culture of Indian society has been emphasized upon by Tagore in this novella. In the beginning of the story, when Bhupati notices the loneliness of Charulata, he requests his lawyer brother-in-law Umapati to bring his wife Mandakini to the house: “It was the lack of another woman’s company that was the cause of Charu’s sorrow, that is what the editor understood. He arranged to have his brother-in-law’s wife, Mandakini, brought to the house, and was relieved” (Tagore, Broken Nest 5). Bhupati thinks that by uniting the relatives to one place, he can make his wife happy. But his inability to understand the feelings of his wife, makes Charulata find a bond in her relationship with Amal. Charu fulfills all of his demands happily: “Everyday he makes new demands. Charu, in order to incite all this trouble from the persistent Amal, expresses indifference and so begins a quarrel and then suddenly one day fulfills his wishes and watches his reaction in delight” (7). It is the possessiveness of Charu that she can not bear the sight of Mandakini spending time with Amal. Charu’s indifferent behaviour towards Mandakini exposes the jealous nature of Charu. She does not even hesitate to complaint against Mandakini to her husband:
You don’t keep up with any news at home, you only gather news from outside. Whatever it may be, I am concerned about Dada. When he eats or doesn’t eat Manda doesn’t even care to know, but if the arrangements for Amal are not perfect she scolds the servants and troubles them. (47)

Such behaviour of Charulata and his incapability to help Bhupati in the misfortune when Bhupati is financially betrayed by his brother-in-law, upsets Amal. Amal says, “If I can become a barrister and help Dada, only then am I a man” (65). Amal realises that he is not being any support to the family, this leads him to leave the house. Charu feels saddened by his sudden departure. She says to herself in utter disappointment: “Amal, I haven’t forgotten you even for a day. Not for a day, not for a moment. All that is meaningful in my life you brought to blossom, my life’s essence will be dedicated to your worship” (76). She covers herself with a wall where even “her husband, … had no right to enter” (76).

The culture of arranged marriage is also depicted through the relationship of Bhupati and Charulata. Bhupati remains extremely busy with his editorship of a daily newspaper whereas Charulata has nothing to do in the “wealthy house” (4) and spends “her endeavourless, endless, days and night” (4). Both of them do not have each other’s company. Their relationship does not evolve, even the earlier days of marital bliss is lacking in their alliance. Soon the charm of their marital life is gone:

The time when a husband and wife, in the first glow of the birth of love, appear to each other in incomparable beauty and as forever new, that time, that golden radiance of a marital dawn, passed by, unawares, unknown to both of them. Without tasting newness, both became old, familiar and habituated to each –other. (5)

Bhupati too realises the fact that his relationship with Charulata is weakened due to his busy schedule. So he starts spending more time at home with Charulata to strengthen their relation.

The influence of English language on the then Bengali society changed the mindset of the Bengali people. They developed thinking that the use of mother-tongue is a sign of backwardness. The great influence of English language on the Bengali people in late nineteenth century has also been depicted in the novella. Bhupati and Amal both feel proud to write columns in English for the newspapers. The narrator tells about Bhupati in the very beginning:
Ever since childhood he had liked writing and delivering speeches in English. Even when there was no need, he would write letters to English language newspapers, and even if he had nothing to express he would always say a word or two at formal gatherings. (3)

Trust is the foundation of any strong relationship. Tagore has depicted the value of belief and trust in a relationship through the character of Bhupati. When Amal asks him, “Dada, do you have any reason to doubt me?” (52) regarding the relation of Amal and Mandakini, Bhupati shows his trust in Amal. Even after observing the old behaviour of Charulata, he says to himself, “whatever else happens, Charu will never deceive you” (54). He feels betrayed when he realises the actual reason behind Charulata’s sadness and her manipulation of Amal-Mandakini’s relation: “A vague suspicion began imperceptibly to force its way into him. This suspicion Bhupati did not want to look at directly, he tried to let it remain forgotten, but its pain did not leave him” (86). The betrayal is the breach of trust which produces the feeling of hurt. Earlier Bhupati is betrayed financially by Umapati in his business and this unexpected betrayal by his brother-in-law fills Bhupati with pain but the betrayal of Charulata breaks him into pieces:

How long can I hold her close to my heart, this woman with a dead weight inside her? How many years longer will I have to live like this, day after day? The shelter that is broken and in pieces, can’t I throw away its broken bricks and wood? Do I have to carry their weight on my shoulders wherever I go? (92)

After facing all the complexities of human relations, Bhupati still has faith in marriage-institution and does not leave his wife alone. At the time of leaving to Mysore where Bhupati has been offered the post of an editor of a newspaper, Charulata forces, “Take me with you. Don’t leave me here” (92). Bhupati feels reluctant to take Charu with him as he thinks that “a wife who is everyday absorbed in the thought of someone else, will I not even be given the chance go away and forget her?”(92). But he does not leave Charu in between and makes efforts to mend the broken nest of his relation with Charulata. On second thought, Bhupati asks Charulata to accompany him to Mysore, Charulata’s face turns white (after she has observed his reluctance to take her with him) and in sheer pride she says: “No, let it be” (92).

Indian family structure is the unit that teaches the value of being together. The bonding of brothers is such a relation in a family structure. Bhupati’s relation with his cousin, Amal also
presents the Indian culture of togetherness. Amal feels free to express himself before Bhupati. “The two brothers belonged to this age, they did not refrain from saying anything openly” (24). Amal respects Bhupati from his heart. When Amal gets to know that Charulata has said something objectionable about his relation with Mandakini, he feels ashamed and does not face Bhupati. And he leaves the house for good.

Rabindranath Tagore has portrayed the different aspects of Indian culture through the novella - *Broken Nest*. The culture of family system, marriage rituals, social and human values are the part of literature which are directly influenced by the prevailing society. This can rightly be said that literature is the reflection of life and the impact of the socio-cultural factors on the life of an individual is at the grand scale.

**References**


