

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

August 2015 Vol. 6, Issue-4



6th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Portrayal of the Supernatural in Tagore's *The Hungry Stone*

Kallol Chowdhury

Abstract:

“The Hungry Stone” is one of the significant stories written by Tagore. It is marked with its uncanniness and striking portrayal of supernaturalism. Its unique storytelling technique and surreal imageries differentiates itself from other conventional ghost stories. In this essay, few aspects of its uniqueness are elaborated. Rabindranath inflicts the elements of Romanticism which are akin to the writings of Poe, Coleridge who has mingled their romanticism with supernatural machineries. It is also noteworthy that the characters in this short story are haunted by the atmosphere and its dominance over human minds. The narrative structure of story-within-a-story is also a very important aspect that lures the reader.

Keywords: Supernaturalism, psychological portrayal, atmospheric predominance, imagery, Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, grotesque, sensual imagery etc.

“*The Hungry Stone*” is a short story written by Rabindranath Tagore which is a translation of the Bengali version “Khudhito Pashan” that was published in his book of short stories “Galpoguchcha”. Rabindranath (1867-1941) and his many-sided achievements are incredible. He is a writer, a great thinker, an artist, a great musician and an orator of extraordinary power. With his god-gifted genius his leviathan bulk of writing and his universal appeal make him global. He got Nobel Prize for his book “Gitanjali” in 1913. His short story “The Hungry Stone” has the grandeur of supernaturalism with the most vibrant shades of romance. The story is about the uncanny experiences of a man who was a cotton-tax collector at Barich. While living in an ancient pleasure-dome of a sultan he witnessed the supernatural. The forgotten age came to haunt him with magnum opacity of the palace and the mourning of the Persian damsel. The unthinkable experience dragged him into insanity and the unearthly incident dangled him into the space of fact and metaphysical attributes. The atmospheric predominance in the story and the plethora of the incomparable poetic imagery discard the crudity and grotesqueness of a conventional ghost story. It is the credit of Rabindranath who lures the tax collector as well as the readers to saunter into the world of surreal uncertainty.

“*The Hungry Stone*” is a short story of Rabindranath Tagore with the subtle and delicate handling of atmospheric predominance that prevails in the story. It is a tale with the bold and bright introspection of spectral mysteries that is very much credible to the readers for its supernatural rapture. Defining supernatural, Coleridge's comment, “willing suspension of disbelief” is very much applicable here for its magnetic storytelling.

The artistic beauty of the story is that it creates a rapture of its own which is at once metaphysical yet factual, at once imaginative yet probable. It satiates their reader about their momentary disbeliefs of the uncanny happenings by dragging them into the whirling opacity of the of the authors abysmal conscience. Psychology explains that the feeling of the supernatural can only be felt by the signal of the sixth sense. But supernaturalism is an indivisible part of romanticism that lures to create such creations which are markedly an

admixture of romance and bizarre, visual and neurotic impulse. The story prevail such a mystical and romantic atmosphere that becomes a subject of extra sensual feeling-an ethereal signal of mind. In fact, the story is the fabrication of the sub-conscious mind of the cotton-tax collector at Barich. His constant wrestling of conscious and his visual exuberance is portrayed by the author with incomparable sensibility, with superior artistic ecstasy and creative vitality. Driven by the gobbling solitude and magnum opacity of the pleasure dome the collector hears the footsteps of an era-forgotten by the decay of ages-in his human and earthen world. Suddenly the lost times animate to haunt his human world. The damned souls, repressed by the burning lechery sob into the man's ears. A palace situated on the banks of a river Sustra, whispers into his ears and lured him to listen to the footfalls of the river. The location, the solitude casts a spell into his mind. The murmur of the Persian damsels taking their bath, lost into the music of Bulbuls and the unearthly intoxicating songs of the muses drowned the speaker with an uncanny yet neurotically enticing sensation. He finds himself hanging in a limbo and juxtaposed into natural, unnatural and supernatural. The tax-collector relates his experience in his tale. Driven by the vision of the Persian beauty and her pathetic cry: "take me away, give me my deliverance; break down the doors of the rooted illusion, this deep sleep, this futile dream. Put me on your horse, take me in your embrace-carry me away through the forest, over the mountains, across the river into your own sunlit room. Give me my deliverance!" Suddenly he loses self-control and finds the surroundings around him is trivial and meaningless. Fascinated by the weirdness of the marble-demon, he was trapped in hypnotism. Karim Khan, The clerk of his office explained to him in a metaphysical term, "There was a time once many flames of unfulfilled desires and demented lust had teemed and flared inside that place. Every block of stone within it is still hungry, still a thirst, from the curse of that anguished and frustrstrated longing. Whenever they find a living human being within their grasp, they seek to devour him like ravishing demons." The cotton-tax collector realized that there is a fatal attraction; magnetism lies in the cursed palace which tends to split personality and soul-debasing insanity. One can be tempted to draw a parallel to Edgar Alan Poe's "*The Fall of the House of Usher*". D.H Lawrence's observation in the context of the storey is also applicable here- "It is just the souls of living men that subtly impregnated stones, houses, mountains, continents, and give them their subtlest form, people only become subject to stones after having lost their integrated souls."

Literature has been produced a great number of works based on the treatment of supernaturalism. Rabindranath seems to be the architect in Bengali literature who used psychoanalytical elements in his short stories. To him, scarcely we find any kind of raw or grotesque elements that tinged the storyline with the sudden arrival of horror and terror. Instead of, his story continues the subtle treatment of psyche. He is not like those Gothic story-writers who implied such crude horror but his characters of the supernatural stories are distorted into his self and hangs into the two extreme ends-the reality and the extra-terrestrial footprints. His, is the story, no Gothic or no ghost story but the psychological portrayal, deriving its art and hue from the mental states of characters where he exploits the flaw of their consciousness.

“*The Hungry Stone*” is marked with its presentation of imagery-so vibrant-to create a better ecstatic sensuality that prevails in the story and supernaturalism looms with uncanny fragrances of romance for the inevitable poetic instinct of the author. We can depict the poetic touch with the affliction of medievalism; prose in style but it has the rapture of poetic potentialities and atmospheric predominance very much akin to “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” for its pictorial sensuousness, vibrant grace and fathomless romanticism. Tagore’s poetic poignancy can be witnessed here in his prosaic style also where nature formulates a dream of fantasy. The minuteness of visual imagery reminds us of Morris’ “*Earthly Paradise*” or A.C. Swinburne’s “*The Garden of Proserpine*”. In this story the nature and its strong presence added an apocalyptic effect with its raw and savage attributes that can be called as strangeness added to beauty. The poetic qualities with the admixture of prosaic style are the most valuable organs of the creation. It seems to the chanting-an echoing of imagination’s revenge. The world of the medieval palace rebels against the evasion of consciousness. The Persian damsel is similar to “*Christabel*” with the satiable desires-

“a damsel bright
Drest in a silken robe white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandal’d were;
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled her hair.”

The lines are very much similar to the description of the Persian damsel. Like Coleridge, Rabindranath also explores the nocturnal world and distrusts it. Tagore also indulged his imagination by the same and came to distinct imagination in consequence.

But we, the readers are unable to connect with the experience of the tax-collector. It is very much visible in the portion where the main narrator and his relative differentiate with each other’s standings. Yet we are still in the darkness in the matter of their co-passenger. The sudden jerk tends us into the hanging limbo of doubt and uncertainty. Our analytical intentions wrestle with our conscience as we sauntered into the land of uncanny happenings. And thus the unfinished finishing of the story haunts us as we never get our answer. The author thus plays with our conscious with the natural merging of supernatural.

May be the story is considered as a supernatural story but still we cannot discard the inevitable aspects of romanticism and romance. Critic Lionel Trilling saw psycho analysis as “one of the culminations” of romantic literature, a literature which is “passionately devoted to a search into the self”. The uncanny attributes present in the story, the life-death border is the crucial site of the story. It has some similarities with those Gothic stories. Freudian psychology in a sense of rationalizes the possibilities though its emphasis on fantasy life and its models of psyche as divided. The uncanny sometimes conspires with supernaturalism to create the supreme sensation both sexual and neurotic that becomes enticing for nerves. We can draw the argument raised by M.H. Abrams, in ‘*Natural Supernaturalism*’ that romantic writer reformulated the traditional relation of God to his creation in terms of-“the prevailing

two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature”. The statement is very much applicable in the context of this short story where strings of nerves play its tune rather than horror or terror.

Works Cited:

- 1) Bowra C.M: *The Romantic Imagination*
- 2) Symons A.: *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*
- 3) Roe Nicholas: *Romanticism*
- 4) Cecil David: *Poets and Story-tellers*