

Nuances of Rhetoric in Rabindranath Tagore's *Where The Mind Is Without Fear* and Rudyard Kipling's *If*

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Abstract

It is a rare event when an author accomplishes the gargantuan task of retracing the pathways that had led to a particular composition. When such an endeavor is taken up by a member of the audience, its outcome is a mere conjecture. Moreover this task attains greater levels of difficulty when the names dealt with happen to be the pioneers of a genre. Rabindranath Tagore and Rudyard Kipling had little to distinguish them in terms of chronological or geographic location. Yet when we experience their works, we realize that they are separated by an ocean of difference which lies in their intent, style and tone. This work makes a daring attempt at unveiling the differences in styles between Tagore and Kipling through their respective masterpieces *Where the Mind is without Fear*¹ and *If*².

Key Words: Rhetoric, Style, Rhyme, Tone, Reflection, Understanding

Structure- Rhyme and Rhythm

If apparently is a composition that follows the dictates of rhyme but not of syllabic meters. Rudyard Kipling keeps varying the length of lines and thus gives very little opportunity to consider the presence of a metric rhythm. But on a careful and detailed observation, and on the careful insertion of catalexes, it is possible to infer a subtle interplay of penta-foot lines (some lines have six feet). But the presence of rhythm ends here. The feet keep varying between iambic and anapestic, giving us a totally inconclusive idea about the tone. It keeps the analyst guessing

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whether the tone is rising or falling. This can be classified as a ‘sprung rhythm’³ - a term coined to define this form of staccato stresses. Kipling, though he belonged to an age where most poets sought liberation from traditional confines of rhyme and rhythm, decided to give a faint touch of rhythmic patterns to his work. This usage by Kipling attempts to justify his theme of materialistic and pragmatic thoughts that are meant to be rooted in social and worldly norms without being overtly ostensible.

Rabindranath Tagore, on the other hand, seeks complete liberation from the patterns of rhyme and metronome beats. This move is coherent with the aim of the composition, i.e. the emancipation from vices, both within and without, at various echelons of life and society. In his own words, “Religion can have no meaning in the enclosure of mere physical or material interest.”⁴ To imply this sense of freedom and material detachment, Tagore has resorted to free verse. Free verse has been a commonly used tool in the hands of metaphysical and confessional poets whose works seek to transcend the orthodox definitions of poetic verse.

In a way, Tagore’s composition and its lack of rhyme and rhythm project its ‘naturalness’ of speech and expression. Any artificial ostentation on his part could have easily marred his purpose of reaching out to the crowds as their comrade in life’s sojourn and not as a commander. Tagore, in his portrayal of hope and altruistic optimism, intends that man should have the allowance of his senses to a limit just beyond the requisite of his immediate surroundings. Beguiled by the apparent potency of these senses, an individual may seek extravagance and ostentation in art; a thing that the poet tries to repel. Thus, the usage of free verse as a mode of communication and expression in where the mind is without fear is far more pronounced than the works of Milton and Shakespeare who pioneered this style.

Pace of the Poems

The pace of the poem is a prominent reflection of the tone and the poet's state of mind. It also affects the way one approaches the poem, i.e. the gravity and emotion that one may associate with a particular piece depends largely upon its pace and smoothness of flow.

If undoubtedly is a fast paced poem. It speaks of 26 different ideas in a span of 3 stanzas. This encapsulation of ideas requires a pragmatic modern approach of the reader. Throughout the poem, we see short lines connected by a variety of conjunctions. The presence of multiple numbers of conjunctions provides a swift flow to the reader as he finds it easier to move from one line to another. This is very typical of modern conversations that we come across in formal circles. Such a usage drops a hint about the westernized mindset of Kipling, which happens to be one of the most distinct features that make his works different from Tagore's. This mindset appreciates the encapsulation of ideas using key words and conveying them in a constrained time span. Also such a pace aims at evoking an immediate response to the ideas mentioned. This is quite appropriate as the poet seeks a young and ambitious audience, ready to embark upon life's journey equipped with more enthusiasm than experience, thereby justifying the gasping urgency that Kipling implies through his usage of key words and a sprung rhythm.

Where the Mind is without Fear and its pace is a reflection of a more composed and carefree way of life that had existed in the Indian subcontinent long before industrialization and professional bureaucracy took over. The lines are longer and there is a more profound use of enjambments. Unlike *If* the run-on lines scarcely use conjunctions. This affects the poem by dragging its pace. Earlier we had seen that Kipling offers a smooth flow from one idea to another. Tagore, on the other hand, wants his audience to stop at the end of each idea, as the gravity of the lines lay in reflection. Also, Tagore envisaged that the comprehension of the thoughts go far beyond a hasty understanding.

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The entire *Geetanjali* and Tagore's philosophy on life takes inspiration from the Vedanta philosophy, which had seen many scholarly propounders through the ages. Such a philosophy, though prevalent in the Indian society, was possibly arcane to the western Anglicized civilization. Tagore sought an audience among such a crowd where he did not distinguish between the Indian and the European. For that very reason, he allowed his lines to occupy a certain time span that may supplement and aid one's understanding of his philosophy. Tagore's choice of pace and his provision for acceleration goes beyond the apparent cause of understanding and comprehension. As mentioned earlier, the pace assigned to a particular piece of prose or poetry determines the response it may expect from the audience.

Unlike Kipling, Tagore's aim is to evoke a delicate inspiration process. Though the poem itself is not didactic, the poet brings forth a path that, according to him may sow the seed to a better future. Considering the fact that this mentioned path is a slow and gradual one, Tagore is justified in using a more delicate pace. It is also notable that his composition does not contain key words. Instead, Tagore uses phrases such as 'narrow domestic walls' and 'dreary desert sand of dead habit'. He also seeks a more mature audience which is capable of philosophical introspection, both in his mind and in the workings of the society as a whole. Tagore also implies the idea of materialistic detachment as a means to escape from disappointment and pain. In the words of Dr. S.K. Pal, "Man in his detachment has realized himself in a deeper and wider relationship with the universe. In his moral life, he has his sense of obligation and his freedom the same time, and this is goodness."⁵ The delicate and slow usage thus strikes a balance between obligation and freedom; something that a rash response may never achieve or realize.

Tone of the Poems

As Kenneth Rexroth puts it, "I have spent my life trying to write the way I speak."⁶

The influence of a poem on the reader depends upon how far or how close it is to our everyday speech and typical style. It is a common misconception that poetry should stand on

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‘extraordinary diction and form of expression.’ On the contrary, like any other form of art, poetry relies solely on the discretion of the poet. The choice of rhetoric is his and so is the choice of the tone. The poet expects the reader to accept his words in a particular level of brevity and that chiefly depends upon the usage of artificial expression. The effectiveness of a particular conversation is directly proportional to the intimacy between the participants. So the poet needs to create a sort of intimacy that may outlive him and carry his message to readers across time. And for this very reason, the poet sets the tone of his poem using interplay of lexicon and language.

The first thing that strikes us when we read *If* is its indelicate use of words. This style is typical to Japanese haiku poetry where the poet displays a penchant for straight-forward statements. Kipling uses this technique to as he seeks to extirpate his reader’s indolence and to bring him face to face with reality. He says, “If you can bear to hear the truth ...twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.” Here most of the readers would expect the use of understatement or euphemism, but that is not so. Had he implied an understatement, the gravity and reverence in a reader’s acceptance would be greatly palliated and the poem would lose its impact.

The tone and diction of the poem has been carried over from our everyday conversation and way of speaking. Kipling takes on a commanding tone from the very first line of the poem. This is quite appropriate as the poem itself is didactic in a worldly sense, thus seeking a young audience. The virtues spoken of in the poem scripts the means for survival in a fast changing society, which tends to have an anathema for the utopian old-world philosophy spoken of by Tagore. There is an anaphoric repetition of the word ‘you’ throughout the poem. This is the point where we learn that the poet wishes to establish a direct intimacy between himself and every individual member of the audience. The reader feels that the ideas are directed exclusively towards him from a wiser body which seeks implicit acceptance.

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On the contrary, Tagore approaches his audience with a more lenient mindset. As a matter of fact, *Where the Mind is without Fear* displays a totally contrasting feature in its tone as it seems to address no particular individual. The poem lacks command in its voice and thus cannot be called didactic. Tagore's tone is similar to that of his contemporary romantic and confessional poets and holds very little resemblance to our daily conversations. It is interesting to note that apparently Tagore seems to be in no mood to establish an intimacy with his audience. This view is apparent from the mode of rhetoric used. But when we look deeper, we realize that here it is content and emotion that establishes the intimacy, and not mere rhetoric.

This style is typical to the Bauls of Bengal, whose soulful renditions have enthralled rural audiences since time immemorial. Set in poverty-stricken but culturally affluent Bengal, Bauls were known for their mendicant's life and their views on spiritual and social liberation. In the words of Gaurav Pradhan, "Throughout the philosophy of Tagore, we find his idea of humanism is more alike the humanism of these Indian saints than the western materialistic humanism."⁷ Though Tagore addresses someone who is apparently not a part of the immediate audience, he manages to appeal to a larger mass in the process.

The poem highlights a more reflective and imaginative echelon of poetry as a whole. *If* talks of emotions inspired by the society and material success, whereas Tagore is inspired by subtler elements like wisdom, hope and spiritual aspirations. Rhetorically, such a tone is implied by the sage of long run-on lines and also of the delicate metaphors. Earlier it was seen that Kipling uses indelicate terms like 'fools' and 'knaves'. Here we see the issue of social and cultural discrimination being addressed as 'narrow domestic walls'. We also see the use of extended metaphors in some parts, viz. 'where tireless striving stretches its arms' though like *If*, we see an anaphoric repetition of the word 'where', the long lines and the innate gravity of the ideas therein subdue this fact.

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Even when the fact is noticed, the anaphora acts towards the creation of utopian scenery in the mind of the audience. This effect is quite contrasting to the previous poem which aims at drawing the youth out of their leisure and inspiring instant action. *Where the Mind is without Fear* thus aims at a more mature and reflective audience. Its ideas transcend social mores and experiences and challenges many preconceived evils that tend to plague the modern society. It is in the form of a prayer and intense request that is dedicated to a power that is infinite, immortal and far greater than the human civilization.

Authenticity and Veracity

When one reads a particular piece of composition, it is human to question to question the veracity of ideas expressed in the piece. It is rare to find the ideal reader who is impersonal in his understanding and acceptance, so it is left to the poet and his ability to convince the audience. Authenticity and the poet's candor is an outcome of rhetoric. We imbibe particular emotions only when we are assured of their authenticity. According to R.G. Collingwood, emotions can be created only by the 'colouring'⁸ of expressions. Different poets seek different modes of rhetoric to color their views.

Rudyard Kipling, in his composition *If*, has to do very little to inspire trust among his readers as the ideas mentioned are not esoteric to the modern society. In spite of that, he makes apt use of rhetoric elements. His layman diction and usage of colloquial terms establishes his candor in our minds. Since the inception if the philosophy Kipling gives us no opportunity to question. As mentioned earlier, the repetition of 'you' implies direct speech. He does not take the help of a persona voice to speak his mind, i.e. he does not take the refuge of any fictional character to express himself. This is remarkable and it plays to the aim of imparting the knowledge of social survival. *If* is a poem that rides on its force to impress, not just to impart.

For Tagore, the task is seemingly difficult as the ideas expressed are far-fetched and their execution spans a larger time frame. Here, authenticity is expressed with the tool of implied

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gravity. Though the language and diction is far from original, the tone and the ideas reveal a source that transcends the echelons of the human civilization. Thus Tagore inspires an unprejudiced acceptance of his ideas based on hope and faith. He also resorts to a higher power, 'God' in this case. He says, "...into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.' The words 'God' and 'Heaven' set the gravity and veracity of the lines. This has been a common practice since the time of literary renaissance. One can find traces of such a practice in Milton's *Paradise Lost* where he resorts to the Olympian muses:

Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.⁹

Another striking feature of the poem is the personal involvement of the poet himself. In the ideas expressed Tagore refers to India as 'my country'. This involvement of the first person changes the tone of the poem and leaves us little opportunity to question his intentions.

Conclusion

The world decrees that every individual maintains a balance, tending to his own needs and to those of the society. Tagore and Kipling, in these works, represent either side of this quintessential balance. Where Kipling intends to suffice the moral needs of the individual, Tagore aims at the ascension of human society as a whole. At this point we are compelled to realize that the two greatest thinkers of the generation, though traversing varied paths, lead us to the same goal. The poems *Where the Mind is without Fear* and *If* create an environment of emotions that work towards reestablishing the balance between the individual and the collective- a balance that our society sadly lacks today.

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