

# 'There is Nothing as Old as a Child': Childhood and Language in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Crescent Moon*

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## **Abstract**

Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by the British Romantic poets as well as by the sights, sounds and tradition of his own Bengali culture. Tagore's attitude to childhood is certainly similar to the adulation of the child begun as a cultural movement by the British Romantic poets. Tagore praises both the purity of the child as well as the Platonic essence of childhood in his writing on nursery rhymes. The child's perspective is delightfully captured in his volume *The Crescent Moon* (1913). In a sense, through his exploration of the unconscious components of the mind of the child, Tagore in essence becomes father to himself: his language eludes the Order typically imposed on linguistic expression in the Oedipal stage of development. Tagore's recourse to childhood freedom arguably translated in his poetry to his radical experiment with language, which unfortunately cannot be reproduced entirely in translation.

**[Keywords:** Crescent Moon, Childhood, language]

Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by the British Romantic poets as well as by the sights, sounds and tradition of his own Bengali culture. As Suchismita Sen points out in "Tagore's *Lokashahitya: The Oral Tradition in Bengali Children's Rhymes*": "Tagore's interest in 'naïve and childish' poems stems from his empathy with the English Romantics" (Sen). Tagore's attitude to childhood is certainly similar to the adulation of the child begun as a cultural movement by the British Romantic poets, as captured in such quotes as Wordsworth's famous: "The child is father of the man" from "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold." Tagore praises both the purity of the child as well as the Platonic essence of childhood in his writing on nursery rhymes:

If one thinks about it, one realizes that there is nothing as old as a child. Adults have been deeply influenced by time, place, and culture, but the child has remained the same for the last hundred thousand years. Eternal and unchanging, the child is born every day among us in human form, yet he remains just as fresh, sweet, and innocent as on the first day. The reason that children remain so universally pure and clean is that they are Nature's creations; adults, in contrast, are to a great extent the product of their own doings. Rhymes, like children, are born naturally of the human mind. (Tagore, qtd. in Sen)

The child's perspective is delightfully captured in his volume *The Crescent Moon* (1913). The title itself probably refers to the waxing moon, where the waxing crescent moon is the first stage on the moon's progression to fullness. Thus, it is allusive to childhood itself. The book cover itself makes the image of

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the crescent moon into a little baby swing in which lies a child (see figure 1). Ironically, the creative use of language evident in the work of geniuses like Wordsworth, Joyce and Tagore himself comes from the way in which they are in fact, fathers of themselves in the sense that linguistically they remain in the creative world of the infant mind. This creative world has, in the view of such thinkers as Jacques Lacan been defined as the world of the feminine, before the Law of the Father steps in to fix the mind in language.

Throughout *The Crescent Moon*, Tagore rejects the values of the adult world of getting and spending -- the material world of adults which requires practicality and work. Tagore ends the volume *The Crescent Moon* with a poem called "The Last Bargain." "The Last Bargain" expresses, perhaps, the debt his poetry itself owes to the inspiration of childhood:

The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea waves broke waywardly.

A child sat playing with shells.

He raised his head and seemed to know me, and said, 'I hire you with nothing.'

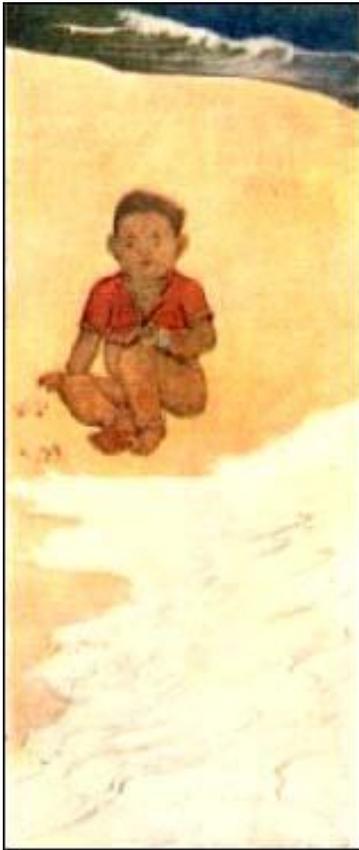
From thenceforward that bargain struck in child's play made me a free man.  
(Tagore, CM, *Google* 82)

This last poem dovetails nicely with the first, "The Home," in which the speaker describes the natural beauty of the sunset as "hiding its last gold like a miser" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 1). In contrast to this, while observing a boy on his way home through a field, the speaker meditates on the prevalence of children and childish joy in life: "I stopped for a moment in my lonely way under the starlight, and saw spread before me the darkened earth surrounding with her arms countless homes furnished with cradles and beds, mothers' hearts and evening lamps, and young lives glad with a gladness that knows nothing of its value for the world" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 1-2).

The first English edition of the collection *The Crescent Moon* described the volume as "Poems of Childhood," and its subtitle is "Child-poems." The poems are more obviously aimed at adults than children, but not all of them speak of the adult's nostalgia for childhood. Although "The Home" would seem to imply that the child's voice of song is untranslatable – "Suddenly a boy's shrill voice rose into the sky. He traversed the dark unseen, leaving the track of his song across the hush of the evening" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 1) the poem reads, as if the words of the song are not heard, but just the sound of the boy's voice, singing – Tagore captures the voice of children.

Tagore renders the limitlessness of children/s imagination in the poem "On the Seashore."

Figure 1: [from a drawing by Nandalall Bose; [www.ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org) e-text of *The Crescent Moon*, London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1913]



On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.  
The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless  
water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds  
the children meet with shouts and dances.  
(Tagore, CM, *Google 3*)

The poem ends with a difference:

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.  
Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships are wrecked in  
the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On  
the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of  
children. (Tagore, CM, *Google 4*)

Throughout the poem, the careless world of  
childlike joy is contrasted to the adult world of work  
and death of which the children are unaware:

The sea surges up with laughter, and pale gleams the  
smile of the sea-beach. Death-dealing waves sing  
meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother  
while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with  
children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.  
(Tagore, CM, *Google 4*)

Possibly dangerous waves are no more threatening  
than the gentle rocking of a child's cradle at the  
hands of a mother.

This last verse above brings up the literature that had early on captured Tagore's interest and possibly led him to the admiration of the state of childhood: folklore, and specifically nursery rhymes. In *Lokashahita* [Folklore], in the essay "Chhelebhulano Chharha" [Nursery Rhymes] (1907) Tagore reports that: "For some time now I have been busy collecting the rhymes that women in Bengal use to amuse children. These rhymes have a special significance for the study of our language and social history, but it is their natural, spontaneous poetic quality that has been of even greater value to me" (Tagore, qtd in Sen). Sen asserts that Tagore began collecting folklore as early as 1883, led by a "Romantic Nationalism (Sen), which is comparable, surely, with early Yeats and his exploration of Irish/Gaelic folklore. The boy's unheard song may be seen as representing the very oral tradition—the stuff of folklore itself—that Tagore wishes to capture, but which is essentially untranslatable, for, when divorced from its context in life as people live it, in touch with the homey traditions of family and regional life, it loses its meaning.

Tagore refers to the snobbism with which high culture views “low” or popular culture, and eschews aesthetic judgment with poetry in general, asserting that the aesthetic judgment of what is “good” or “bad” poetry does not apply:

This is especially true with these children's rhymes, which are intricately connected with my own life and emotion. It is impossible for me to separate the pleasures of my childhood memories from the enjoyment I derive from these rhymes. It is best to admit at the very beginning that my powers of discrimination do not suffice to let me say how much of this pleasure is rooted in my reminiscences and how much in eternal literary ideals.

The line, "The rain falls tip tap, the river gets flooded" (bristi pade tapur tupur, nadi elo ban), was like a magic chant for me, and the feelings aroused by this rhyme remain as intense as ever. Recalling these feelings, I can appreciate the appeal and charm of such rhymes in general, and I understand why these meaningless, spontaneous rhythms flow eternally through human memory, while so many epics, romances, essays, sermons, and other products of meticulous human effort are lost every day. There is a certain permanency in these rhymes. No accounts of their composers exist, and no one asks the date on which they were written. Because of this spontaneous universality they are age-old even if composed today, and remain fresh even if a thousand years old. (Tagore, qtd in Sen)

The poem "My Song" is a tribute to the nursery rhyme format and the continuing memory the child will retain of the parent's song:

This song of mine will wind its music around you, my child, like the fond arms of love.

This song of mine will touch your forehead like a kiss of blessing.

When you are alone it will sit by your side and whisper in your ear, when you are in the crowd it will fence you about with aloofness.

My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams, it will transport your heart to the verge of the unknown.

It will be like the faithful star overhead when dark night is over your road.

My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes, and will carry your sight into the heart of things.

And when my voice is silent in death, my song will speak in your living heart. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 78)

The folk form of the nursery rhyme, the nonsense words "tip tap"— "tapur tupur"—transport Tagore even in his adulthood back to his childhood, becoming the "magic chant," the "pair of wings to your dreams." The adult speaker hopes that her song will resonate with the child--but not just resonate, will become part of his being: "My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes, and will carry your sight

into the heart of things."

Tagore's poem in *The Crescent Moon* "Playthings" praises the imagination and creativity of the child:

Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.

I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.

Perhaps you glance at me and think, 'What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!'

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.

I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.

In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 22)

The "meaningless, spontaneous rhythms" -- the "meaningless ballads" of nursery rhymes -- are the equivalents of the "sticks and mudpies" which the child plays with, or the sandcastles of "On the Seashore." The simple joy of sound that nonsense nursery rhymes convey, formal, high poetry captures more deliberately on occasion, but cannot equal the simple ecstasy that a child feels chanting nonsense rhymes, or, harking back to Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy" for example, the simple "Burr" which the "idiot" boy Johnny utters in "The Idiot Boy" in *Lyrical Ballads*:

Burr, burr -- now Johnny's lips they burr,

As loud as any mill, or near it,

Meek as a lamb the pony moves,

And Johnny makes the noise he loves,

And Betty listens, glad to hear it. (Wordsworth, "The Idiot Boy," l. 107-111, *Lyrical Ballads*, 88)

As we have seen, many of the poems in *The Crescent Moon* deal with the adult's imaginative debt to and admiration of children. However, some of the poems quite convincingly capture the voice of the child. For instance, in "The Astronomer"

I only said, "When in the evening the round full moon gets entangled among the branches of that *Kadam* tree, couldn't somebody catch it?"

But *dâdâ* [*elder brother*] laughed at me and said, "Baby, you are the silliest child I have ever known. The moon is ever so far from us, how could anybody catch it?" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 25)

*Dâdâ* -- the older brother -- is one of the threatening father figures in the volume. Most of the poems deal with the child's relationship with the mother, but when father figures enter into the poems an Oedipal threat seems to be lurking almost

inevitably.

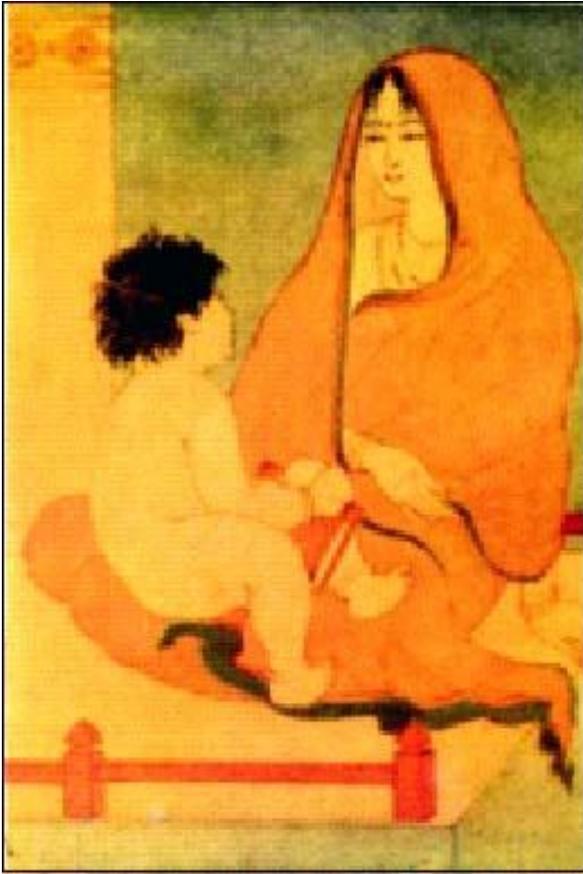


Fig. 2 [from a drawing by Asit Kumar Haldar, [www.ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org) e-text of *The Crescent Moon*, London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1913]

According to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, when the child enters the symbolic realm of language, the Law of the Father must be embraced. Interestingly, the play of language in radical linguistic experiments like Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, in Lacan's view, is rebellion against the Law of the Father. In "The Child Angel" the adult world of cruelty and competition is contrasted to the child's innocence:

They clamour and fight, they doubt and despair, they know no end to their wranglings.

Let your life come amongst them like a flame of light, my child, unflickering and pure, and delight them into silence.

They are cruel in their greed and their envy, their words are like hidden knives

thirsting for blood. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 79)

The language of the adult world is given dangerous phallic attributes, and the child is told:

Let them see your face, my child, and thus know the meaning of all things; let them love you and thus love each other.

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. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 79-80)

The child is asked to serve as a model for the adult, and, interestingly, worship the day in silence. The adult speaker in the poem prefers the silence of the "child-angel" (Tagore, CM, *Google*) to the cutting, phallic language of adulthood. Even in the poem "Playthings," the line "In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 22) contrasts the phallic canoe with the feminine "sea of desire" which the canoe cuts through. It is interesting that in his early memory of the nursery rhyme what is being described is the overflowing

river, in a story of brides, allied once again with the female. Many of the legends and folktales which Tagore cites are associated with the culture of women in Bengali culture.

The connection with the mother is again emphasized in "Baby's Way":

Baby knows all manner of wise words, though few on earth can understand their meaning.

It is not for nothing that he never wants to speak.

The one thing he wants is to learn mother's words from mother's lips. That is why he looks so innocent. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 7)

The very word "infans" means "without speech" in Latin. It is interesting how many of the poems in *Crescent Moon* bring up this baby's lack of language. Just as in the poem "The Home," though, the silence of the baby speaks volumes. In "Baby's World" the speaker says:

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 17)

The adult wishes for the baby's mind, a world that does not accept or understand adult realities. Once again the wonderful line "Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, and Truth sets Fact free from its fetters" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 17) expresses the rebellion against the logical progression of ordinary discourse. This world of self-fashioned expression "Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 17) exists, but it exists in a psychological state that precedes the accession to the -- in psychoanalytic terms -- the Reality Principle, coming before the Oedipal stage where the Reality Principle is eluded. These psychoanalytic theories often draw scorn, but *The Crescent Moon* and its poems serves as a perfect illustration of many of psychoanalysis' key concepts. Particularly striking is the special capability of children to escape the unquestionable realities and authorities of the adult world. In the view of Jacques Lacan, according to the Australian scholar and critic Matthew Sharpe:

to learn a language is to learn a set of rules or laws for the use and combination of words. Accordingly, for him too, "learning is based on believing"...Particularly, Lacan asserts a lasting link between the capacity of subjects to perceive the world as a set of discrete identifiable objects, and their acceptance of the unconditional authority of a body of convention. ("Jacques Lacan")

In Lacan's view, rejecting the Law of the Father would mean that this unconditional authority is not accepted. Ordinarily, this would lead to pathological

conditions like psychosis.

This multivalent signifying of literature may be compared: "to a game whose meaning is always doubled by the signifier:[because] literal meaning and figurative meaning, lexical meaning and contextual meaning is what poetry exploits, says Lacan, in order to wreak violence on language" (Hocq). Symbolically, this wreaking havoc on language is an attack on the authority of the symbolic Father.

Accordingly, the child in *The Crescent Moon* often takes the place of the father, literally. In "The Wicked Post Man," the child speaker sees that his mother is upset at, he conjectures, the fact that the father's letters have stopped coming. The child determines to write *for* his father,

I myself will write all father's letters; you will not find a single mistake.  
I shall write from A right up to K.  
But, mother, why do you smile?  
You don't believe that I can write as nicely as father does!  
But I shall rule my paper carefully, and write all the letters beautifully big.  
When I finish my writing, do you think I shall be so foolish as father and drop it into the horrid postman's bag?  
I shall bring it to you myself without waiting, and letter by letter help you to read my writing.  
I know the postman does not like to give you the really nice letters. (Tagore, CM, *Google* 61)

This passage in Tagore seems to prove Lacan's point made when discussing the "Fort! Da!" game of a child mastering the absence of a love object – his mother – as observed by Freud: "These are the games of occultation which Freud, in a flash of genius, revealed to us so that we might recognize in them that the moment in which desire becomes human is also that in which the child is born into language" (Lacan 103). Here, the child says to the mother he will forbear the disappearance of the object, the letter, into "the horrid postman's bag" (Tagore, CM *Google* 61). The child "rules" his paper at least, but also commandeers his father's letter/letters. The slipperiness of the signifier here – the word "letter" which can refer to both a letter that is written and the letters of the alphabet – demonstrates the linguistic rebellion of the child who has not acceded to the Law of the Father. The child's reluctance to deposit his letter into the postman's bag is perhaps the reluctance to enter into the "system of the concrete discourse of his environment" (Lacan 103) – he acknowledges the "here" – the presence of the object, but not the "there" – the loss of the object

In "The Hero" the child becomes the defender of the mother against an attack by thieves, and the brother, this time, has to admit that the little brother *is* the hero:

Mother, let us imagine we are travelling, and passing through a strange and

dangerous country.

You are riding in a palanquin and I am trotting by you on a red horse.

.....

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?' (Tagore, CM, *Google* 65)

The poem "Authorship" rejects the language of the father, preferring the stories of the mother. We see literally a kind of war of words; a war of languages between the play of the child and the mysterious practicality of the Father:

You say that father writes a lot of books, but what he writes I don't understand.

He was reading to you all the evening, but could you really make out what he meant?

What nice stories, mother, you can tell us! Why can't father write like that, I wonder?

Did he never hear from his own mother stories of giants and fairies and princesses?

Has he forgotten them all? (Tagore, CM, *Google* 58)

Through all of these examples, it seems as if this speaker, and others in *The Crescent Moon* have rejected the language of the Father; in Lacan's terms, the Master Signifiers are being rejected in the poem, as in the poem "Authorship." The mother's language of imagination is what is preferred. The authority represented by the Father in the Oedipal phase is normally acceded to, but Tagore's poems in *The Crescent Moon* by and large reject and undermine the authority of Father or older brother. The child speaker does not accept the Reality Principle usually acceded to by the growing child:

The subject, by speaking, addresses himself to some Other supposed to know her/his truth, and at the end of this process, the signifiers he offers to the Other are quilted, and return to him 'in an inverted form.'

What has occurred at this point, on Lacan's reckoning, is that the previously unquilted signifiers finding voice in the manifestations of his unconscious are integrated into the subject's symbolic universe: the way s/he understands the world, in the terms of his/her community's natural language. They have been subjectivised; which means that now s/he can recognise them as not wholly alien intrusions into his/her identity, but an integral part of this identity. Lacan's stress is thus always, when he talks of psychoanalytic interpretation, that this interpretation does not add new content to the subject's self-understanding, so much as affect the form of this understanding. An interpretation, that is, realigns the way the s/he sees her past, reordering the signifiers in which his/her self-understanding has come to be ordered. A crucial Lacanian category in theorising this process is that of the 'master signifier.' Master signifiers are those signifiers to which a subject's identity are most intimately bound. Standard examples are words like 'Australian,' 'democrat,'

'decency,' 'genuineness.' They are words which will typically be proffered by subjects as naming something like what Kant would have called ends in themselves. They designate values and ideals that the subject will be unwilling and unable to question without pulling the semantic carpet from beneath their own feet. ("Jacques Lacan")

In contrast, Tagore's speakers question everything involving the Law of the Father. The poems of *The Crescent Moon* prove the lasting appeal of Tagore's poetry. Tagore, in capturing the child's mind, uncovers universal themes, the primal directives of the human psyche. While displaying adult nostalgia for the childish state, Tagore plumbs the creative well of the unconscious. His attempts to reach beyond the conscious state to what lies behind are what makes him a genius and gives his writing lasting appeal.

The reader must remember that one cannot deliberately create a dream. The rhymes above may have been written effortlessly under the impulse of carefree fancy, but such a sense of the carefree cannot be consciously captured. We have conditioned ourselves to conscious and directed effort, and thus simple and natural things have become terribly difficult. A mood of anxious stress shadows all our efforts even when totally uncalled for. The moment such feelings make their presence felt all carefree impulses and fancies congeal and lose their freedom to fly. That is why I maintain that those who are able to compose children's rhymes do it naturally, while those who have to make the least bit of effort find the task impossible...(Tagore, qted. in Sen)

Sen points out how important the concept of "play" is in Tagore's ideas. The poem "Authorship" spoken in the child's voice, ironically, I think, uses the word "play" to refer to the father's writing in a detractory sense -- as if the child realizes that the adult world views play as a negative. But the very next line of the poem has the child intruding into the father's room with his own "play." The child's actions violate the father. In turn, the father's writing silences the mother, and the mother attempts to stop the child-writing:

Father always plays at making books.  
 If ever I go to play in father's room, you come and call me, 'what a naughty child!  
 If I make the slightest noise, you say, 'Don't you see that father's at his work?'  
 What's the fun of always writing and writing?  
 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? (Tagore, CM, *Goog/e* 59)

The father "spoils" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 59) "heaps of paper" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 59) with his "black marks" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 59) ; the child makes a pristine boat. Taking a sheet of paper "to make a boat with" (Tagore, CM, *Google* 59) -- what a wonderful way to express the way that a child can transform reality through play! Tagore is very prescient in describing the process of creativity as akin to dreaming, as a way of accessing the unconscious mind, essentially. Tagore explains:

Rhymes, like children, are born naturally of the human mind. This claim is a significant one. Disconnected reflections on the outside world drift regularly across our minds without any conscious effort. They take on different shapes and forms, effortlessly jumping from one subject to another. Just as dust, pollen, smells, noises, leaves, and drops of moisture float aimlessly in the world around us, colors, smells, sounds, fantasies, scattered thoughts, snatches of conversation, and discarded fragments of experience wander randomly through our minds.

When we concentrate our thoughts on a particular topic, however, these excess murmurs cease, these thoughts fly away, these fantasies shatter, and our mind and imagination start flowing in a single stream.

Children's rhymes are a product of a different mental state.

The thoughts, sounds, and images that cross our minds when we are in a state of repose continuously change their shape and configuration, like clouds floating in the sky. If these aimless reflections could somehow be recorded on a piece of canvas, we would find some similarity between these pictures and our rhymes. Rhymes are only reflections of our ever-changing inner mind; they are like the fluid shadows of clouds on the clear waters of a lake. This is the reason I say that rhymes are born spontaneously. (Tagore, qtd. in Sen)

The nursery rhymes that Tagore so admires are associated with the maternal line. Their multivalence and resistance to fixed meaning defy the univocalness of language under the Law of the Father.

The characteristic primitive and natural *rasa* [essence] associated with children's rhymes attracted me to their preservation. This sense of primitiveness may not be appealing to everyone, but certainly no one can doubt that it is our duty to collect these rhymes for posterity. They are our national treasures. These rhymes, long stored in our society's collective memory, echo the loving voices of our mothers and grandmothers and reflect the rhythms of our ancestors' childhood play. Because of the rapid changes in our social structures, however, many things both big and small are being lost. The time has therefore come for us to collect and preserve these timeless treasures of our national past.

These rhymes have been collected from different parts of the country. As a result, one will notice variations in the dialect in which the rhymes are recorded. One will also find more than one form of the same poem, none of which are to be discarded. The reason for this is that there exists no such thing as a correct or authentic version among the variants. The rhymes have changed form so much as they traveled through time and from mouth to mouth that it would be totally

inappropriate to select one particular version as representative. The variations are part of their essence. This quality of constant change is natural to them. They are not dead, unchanging relics from the past, they are alive and are capable of movement. They can make themselves suit the needs of the place. (Tagore, qtd. In Sen)

An authoritative text does not exist with folklore, for folklore—tales as well as ballads—is collected by the folklorist in all of its variant forms. The literature of high culture is not allowed this expansiveness.

Tagore expresses his own inability to do justice to the maternal voices of Bengali nursery rhymes. He, in translating the nursery rhymes which he so much loved, asks

How am I, an aged, somber, and status-conscious man, to capture the soft, loving, and simple voices that are eternally associated with the telling of these rhymes? I fear that readers will have to contribute that tender essence from their own childhood memories. With what magic can I bring back the love, the tunes, the memories of softly lit evenings with which these rhymes are linked? I can only hope that at least some of that charm has been captured in the following lines. (Tagore, qtd. in Sen)

The same is true of his own Child-poems in *Crescent Moon*. He does convincingly render the child's mind in his poems, and not just the nostalgia for childhood. As Indu Dutt, translator of the works in *A Tagore Testament* points out, Tagore's own experimentation with the Bengali language in his poetry was quite radical, but not acknowledged since the English language is so much more predominant in poetry; readers in Bengali as discriminating as she is are hard to come by.

For the understanding of Tagore three main points may be mentioned. First and foremost, there is his influence on the language itself. The measured step in the rhythms of his poetry, the unbounded freedom in the lyrical and musical quality whether of prose, prose-poem or poetry, and his use of words – these are characteristically his own. He has given a new colour, a new structure to Bengali making it deeper and richer in range of emotion and conception. He evolved a language that broke all barriers of fixed forms and conservatism. . . . One feels that if the shape that he has given to Bengali had been achieved in English—a world language—his true stature would then and been better recognized and rightly assessed. (xii-xiii)

If his writings in original Bengali were more appreciated, she conjectures, his originality and creativity—his linguistic experimentation and innovation – would be recognized. Of course, almost 100 years ago he was honored by the Nobel Prize in Literature, and the appearance of this issue of *Rupkatha Journal* in tribute to Tagore is testament to his continued reputation as an important poet.

That the Nobel Committee has also not forgotten him is confirmed by a terrible event with a few mollifying consequences a few years ago. Oddly, in 2004 Tagore's Nobel Prize was stolen from the museum where it was housed. The Nobel Prize committee of Sweden donated replicas, one in bronze for display, and another in gold, to replace the stolen medal in 2005. The replicas remain at Visva Bharati University, the university which Tagore founded in the state of Bengal in 1901. Tagore's legacy will also live on, though the ultimate feat performed by his language may be a product itself of the theft of power from the symbolic Father.

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