

Twentieth Century Fiction
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Lecture - 02
The Postmaster - Part 2

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The Postmaster

Rabindranath Tagore



The postmaster first took up his duties in the village of Ulapur. Though the village was a small one, there was an indigo factory near by, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established.

Our postmaster belonged to Calcutta. He felt like a fish out of water in this remote village. His office and living-room were in a dark thatched shed, not far from a green, slimy pond, surrounded on all sides by a dense growth.

The men employed in the indigo factory had no leisure; moreover, they were hardly desirable companions for decent folk. Nor is a Calcutta boy an adept in the art of associating with others. Among strangers he appears either proud or ill at ease. At any rate, the postmaster had but little company; nor had he much to do.

At times he tried his hand at writing a verse or two. That the movement of the leaves and the clouds of the sky were enough to fill life with joy—such were the sentiments to which he sought to give expression. But God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the *Arabian Nights* had in one night swept away the trees, leaves and all, and replaced them with a macadamised road, hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses.



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at the first text in this course which is Rabindranath Tagore's *The Postmaster*.

So, we have already started with this text. We will just continue from where we left off last time. So, just to give you a very quick recap of what we have done. We started we examined the setting of this particular story which is obviously, colonial Bengal, colonial India and we have this postmaster from Calcutta who is stationed in his job in a place called Ulapur which is presumably a fictional place which represents rural Bengal.

And the entire story, I mean there is some very symbolic things about the story, the sites are very important, for instance the very site of the post office is a colonial signpost as it were. And we have the indigo plantation or the indigo you know the industry around the indigo plantation which is also a colonial site. So, you have these colonial spaces you know the alongside which the postmaster is situated. And we have the human subject negotiating with the colonial spaces around him.

And the entire story is a very human story obviously, about the alienation of a city person in a rural setting and this very empathetic bond that he establishes with this little girl called Ratan.

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At times he tried his hand at writing a verse or two. That the movement of the leaves and the clouds of the sky were enough to fill life with joy—such were the sentiments to which he sought to give expression. But God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the *Arabian Nights* had in one night swept away the trees, leaves and all, and replaced them with a macadamised road, hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses.



The postmaster's salary was small. He had to cook his own meals, which he used to share with Ratan, an orphan girl of the village, who did odd jobs for him. When in the evening the smoke began to curl up from the village cowsheds, and the cicalas chirped in every bush; when the mendicants of the Bañ sect sang their shrill songs in their daily meeting-place, when any poet, who had attempted to watch the movement of the leaves in the dense bamboo thickets, would have felt a ghostly shiver run down his back, the postmaster would light his little lamp, and call out "Ratan." Ratan would sit outside waiting for this call, and, instead of coming in at once, would reply, "Did you call me, sir?" "What are you doing?" the postmaster would ask. "I must be going to light the kitchen fire," would be the answer. And the postmaster would say: "Oh, let the kitchen fire be for awhile; light me my pipe first." At last Ratan would enter, with puffed-out cheeks, vigorously blowing into a flame a live coal to light the tobacco. This would give the postmaster an



So, just to go back a little bit the reference to Arabian nights over here is interesting because we were told that the postmaster tried his hands that in writing in verse, in poetry because he had no companion. So to say. But we also told that if he had a choice, if he had the wish fulfillment option of getting rid of everything he would have asked for genie of Arabian nights to get rid of all the trees and leaves and everything around him and replace those with you know with macadamised road which is pucca road hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses.

So, what you can see immediately in this story is that how the geography in which he grew up in the physical locality, the physical setting which he grew up in informs the imagination to a great extent. So, imagination that would be considered to be an abstract thing is actually informed of material markers. So, the entire aspiration, the almost the fantasy to see macadamised roads, this pucca road, cemented road and tall houses, the imagination the fantasy you know which wants to see that those setting is informed by the growth of this particular person or the culture of this particular person which is very material in quality, the fact that he grew up in such a setting makes him alienated in a setting which is very rural and almost idyllic in quality.

Now, we were told that he starts you know he we about to see how the entire economy of empathy begins to brew between the postmaster and the little girl called Ratan. And the companionship which they establish is were interesting because its it is very parental in quality and the postmaster in a way is a father figure for the girl, but we also see how the girl in turn nurtures him physically when he is ill, she nurtures him back to health, she nurtures him back to normalcy. So, she also becomes the mother figure for the postmaster. So, the parental politics in the story is very interesting and is in a way complex and reversible in quality.

So, we are told that the postmaster's salary was very small. He had to cook his own meals, but he had a little girl called Ratan who would run errands for him, would do his odd jobs for him here and there, and he in a way started teaching him, started making him her literate. So, she started he started teaching her letters of alphabets and then she picked up very quickly. So, in a way that again becomes a mentor figure for the little girl in that complex setting that kind of a rural setting.

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opportunity of conversing. "Well, Ratan," perhaps he would begin, "do you remember anything of your mother?" That was a fertile subject. Ratan partly remembered, and partly didn't. Her father had been fonder of her than her mother; him she recollected more vividly. He used to come home in the evening after his work, and one or two evenings stood out more clearly than others, like pictures in her memory. Ratan would sit on the floor near the postmaster's feet, as memories crowded in upon her. She called to mind a little brother that she had—and how on some bygone cloudy day she had played at fishing with him on the edge of the pond, with a twig for a make-believe fishing-rod. Such little incidents would drive out greater events from her mind. Thus, as they talked, it would often get very late, and the postmaster would feel too lazy to do any cooking at all. Ratan would then hastily light the fire, and toast some unleavened bread, which, with the cold remnants of the morning meal, was enough for their supper.

On some evenings, seated at his desk in the corner of the big empty shed, the postmaster too would call up memories of his own home, of his mother and his sister, of those for whom in his exile his heart was sad,—memories which were always haunting him, but which he could not talk about with the men of the factory, though he found himself naturally recalling them aloud in the presence of the simple little girl. And so it came about that the girl would allude to his people as mother, brother, and sister, as if she had known them all her life. In fact, she had a complete picture of each one of them painted in her little heart.

One noon, during a break in the rains, there was a cool soft breeze blowing; the



And we are told that you know Ratan's parents were you know were dead and she was an orphan essentially, and then you know again that that informs entire parental politics, the parental emotion, the affect around the parental emotions that the postmaster establishes with Ratan.

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always haunting him, but which he could not talk about with the men of the factory, though he found himself naturally recalling them aloud in the presence of the simple little girl. And so it came about that the girl would allude to his people as mother, brother, and sister, as if she had known them all her life. In fact, she had a complete picture of each one of them painted in her little heart. One noon, during a break in the rains, there was a cool soft breeze blowing; the smell of the damp grass and leaves in the hot sun felt like the warm breathing of the tired earth on one's body. A persistent bird went on all the afternoon repeating the burden of its one complaint in Nature's audience chamber. The postmaster had nothing to do. The shimmer of the freshly washed leaves, and the banked-up remnants of the retreating rain-clouds were sights to see; and the postmaster was watching them and thinking to himself: "Oh, if only some kindred soul were near—just one loving human being whom I could hold near my heart!" This was exactly, he went on to think, what that bird was trying to say, and it was the same feeling which the murmuring leaves were striving to express. But no one knows, or would believe, that such an idea might also take possession of an ill-paid village postmaster in the deep, silent mid-day interval of his work. The postmaster sighed, and called out "Ratan." Ratan was then sprawling beneath the guava-tree, busily engaged in eating unripe guavas. At the voice of her master, she ran up breathlessly, saying: "Were you calling me, Dada?" "I was thinking," said the postmaster, "of teaching you to read." And then for the rest of the afternoon he taught her the alphabet. Thus, in a very short time, Ratan had got as far as the double consonants. It seemed as though the showers of the season would never end. Canals, ditches, and hollows were all overflowing with water. Day and night the patter of rain was heard, and the croaking of frogs. The village roads became impassable, and



And then we get to hear about the memory of the postmaster in terms what he remembers about his home, about his alienation that he is experiencing over here, cut off from everything around him. And in a very interesting way this story is very interesting for us today because this is obviously about a time which is you know forget about internet, a pre-electronic communication, pre-telephone where the only mode of communication were letters. So, there were letters written by the postmaster. You know this letter of resignation that he writes, this letter of requesting a transfer that he writes later. But every mode of communication over here is through letters and the post office obviously is a symbolic site for the letters coming and going.

So, the post office becomes a quite literally a material marker for communication, that is the only site of communication only space of communication over here. And ironically the postmaster who is presumably in charge of the post office turns out to be the most alienated person over here. So, that becomes a very symbolic, kind of a significant significance which is the story which is this story sort of dramatizes to a great extent.

So, we are told that on some evenings and this should be on the screen now. On some evenings seated at his desk in a corner of the big empty shed the postmaster too would call up memories of his own home, of his mother and his sister, of those for whom in his exile his heart was sad. Memories which were always haunting him about which he cannot talk about

with the men of the factory though he found himself naturally recalling them aloud in the presence of a simple little girl.

So, interestingly he does not manage to establish this bond with the men in the factory. I mean they do not seem to understand his alienation, they do not seem to understand his emotional and existential you know solitariness, but for some reason he finds himself opening up and you know empathizing and having establishes a dialogue with this little girl called Ratan who is otherwise illiterate and very rural in her background.

And so it came about that the girl would allude to his people as mother, brother and sister, as if she had known them all her life. In fact, she had a complete picture of each one of them painted in her little heart. So, this is a very good example what we call in literature as you know the entire idea of creating a world through stories, a world making through stories because what is happening here essentially is that the little girl called Ratan she is hearing or she is consuming the stories told by the postmaster about his family, about his mother, about his sister and on consuming those stories, on consuming those characters through narratives she manages to make a world around them, in a way that she plans to serve in that world. And she begins to refer to them, allude to them as if they are her relatives her kin folk, right. So, this is very good example of how we consume narratives and the process of consuming narratives, we establish almost an empathetic engagement with them.

So, the engagement of empathy is very interesting over here. She places herself in that position. She places herself in that narrative. So, she plants herself in that narrative as it were and in a sense she becomes one of them, she becomes part of the kin folk, part of the kin structure of the postmaster.

One noon, during the break in the rain, there was a cold soft breeze blowing. The smell of the damp grass and leaves in the hot sun felt like the warm breathing of the tired earth on one's body. So, again if you look at Tagore's descriptions are very evocative in quality and how the natural landscape and the condition of the mind, the mindscape so to say are very interestingly in dialogue with each other. So, we have the image of the tired earth and a cool soft breeze is blowing on the tired earth and the smell of damp grass and the hot sun felt at the one breathing of the tired earth on one's body. So, the earth is obviously, naturalized, humanized over here. The sun is humanized over here as well and the leaves are humanized here. So, every natural element over here is humanized and that it obviously, establishes a

companionship around the postmaster. So, in that sense it is an example of what we call intersubjectivity.

So, it is a very intersubjective kind of an experience where everything is subjectivized. So, the sun is subjectivized, the leaves are subjectivized, the earth is subjectivized and we will be having in the process is a generation of an inter-subjective situation where the postmaster is establishing a dialogue with all the natural elements around him.

A persistent bird went on all the afternoon repeating the burden of its one complaint in Nature's audience chamber. So, again the little girl, little bird over here, a persistent bird, relentless bird goes on crying and you know, and if you take a look at this description over here it feels like as a complaint to nature about the nature's audience chamber. So, the girl, the bird seems to be complaining about something.

So, what we see in the story is also a good example of focalization. So, the entire story is focalized with the postmaster's imagination where the postmaster is a focalized character. So, we see everything around the setting over here through the postmaster's eyes. So, it seems as if the little bird over here is complaining about something to Mother Nature and nature's audience chamber, right. So, the postmaster here is the focal character, the focal point through which through his imagination through his prism, through his cognitive prism we see the rest of the story around unfolding before us.

The postmaster had nothing to do. The shimmer of the freshly washed leaves, and the banked-up remnants of the retreating rain-clouds were sights to see; and the postmaster was watching them and thinking to himself: "Oh, if only some kindred soul were near, just one loving human being whom I could hold near my heart." This is exactly, he went on to think, what that bird was trying to say, it was the same feeling where the which the murmuring leaves were striving to express.

So, again look at the way and this is what I meant when I said this is the example of intersubjectivity, because what happens in intersubjectivity is we establish a subjective bond with everything around yourself. So, it could be a bond between animate and inanimate things. So, you can have a bond between a human being and leaves, for instance in this case it is a bond between a bird, leaves and a human being. And the human being imagines this intersubjective quality and he seems to think that you know everything around him is also referring to things which he is thinking in his mind in terms of wanting a companion, in terms

of you know requesting a companion, in terms wishing for a companion, right. So, the leaves and the birds, the bird over here also seem to be completely dialogic overlapping with the postmaster's fantasy or wish fulfillment you know imagination about having a companion to talk to.

But no one knows, or would believe, that such an idea might also take possession of an ill-paid postmaster, ill-paid village postmaster in the deep, silent mid-day interval of his work. The postmaster sighed, and called 'Ratan.' Ratan was then sprawling beneath the guava-tree, busily engaged in eating unripe guavas. At the voice of the master, she ran up breathlessly, saying: "Were you calling me, dada?" Dada obviously, means brother in Bengali which is the setting over here rural Bengal. "I was thinking." said the postmaster, "of teaching her to read." And then for the rest of the afternoon he taught her the alphabets.

So, we have seen how you know the entire literacy program the literacy you know endeavor in terms of the postmaster teaching, the Ratan the little girl called Ratan over here becomes a very human exercise of companionship, empathy and imagination. And Ratan obviously, learns education, she gets education in that sanitized sense from the postmaster and for the postmaster it becomes an excellent example, excellent opportunity for you know imagination and empathy and to have a companionship with the girl around him because we are told that he cannot connect in terms of way of wavelength and empathy with the people around him, the people otherwise work in the indigo factory.

Thus, in very short time, Ratan had got as far as the double consonants. Double consonants are the complex consonants in Bengali and she we are told she is a very quick learner she is picking up consonants very quickly and she has gone to the double consonants very fast.

It seemed as though the showers of the season would never end. Canals, ditches, hollows were all overflowing with water. Day and night the patter of rain was heard and the croaking of frogs. The village roads became impassable and marketing had to be done in punts.

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marketing had to be done in punts.

One heavily clouded morning, the postmaster's little pupil had been long waiting outside the door for her call, but, not hearing it as usual, she took up her dog-eared book, and slowly entered the room. She found her master stretched out on his bed, and, thinking that he was resting, she was about to retire on tip-toe, when she suddenly heard her name—"Ratan!" She turned at once and asked: "Were you sleeping, Dada?" The postmaster in a plaintive voice said: "I am not well. Feel my head; is it very hot?"

In the loneliness of his exile, and in the gloom of the rains, his ailing body needed a little tender nursing. He longed to remember the touch on the forehead of soft hands with tinkling bracelets, to imagine the presence of loving womanhood, the nearness of mother and sister. And the exile was not disappointed. Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother, called in the village doctor, gave the patient his pills at the proper intervals, sat up all night by his pillow, cooked his gruel for him, and every now and then asked: "Are you feeling a little better, Dada?"

It was some time before the postmaster, with weakened body, was able to leave his sick-bed. "No more of this," said he with decision. "I must get a transfer." He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for a transfer, on the ground of the unhealthiness of the place.

Relieved from her duties as nurse, Ratan again took up her old place outside the door. But she no longer heard the same old call. She would sometimes peep inside furtively to find the postmaster sitting on his chair, or stretched on his bed, and



So, this is obviously, a very you know typical example of rain, typical example of monsoons coming in and everything becomes inaccessible and you know the village becomes almost flooded and you know marketing or shopping had to be done in punts and in intervals. So, everything we just keep hearing the incessant rain you know sound of rain. It is just completely relentless and endless and the village roads become obviously, they are not really pucca roads they are not macadamised roads as we were told at the beginning of the story.

The roads which were you know just built ad hoc and not really cemented. So, when monsoon comes they become completely ruinous, they are completely unusable, impassable and we are told that marketing had to be done in punts. So, you know you can always shop you know periodically we cannot shop every single day because of the rains.

One heavily clouded morning, the postmaster's little pupil had been long waiting outside the door for her call, but, not hearing it as usual, she took up her dog-eared book and slowly entered the room. She found her master stretched out on his bed, and thinking that he was resting, she was about to retire on tip-toe, when she suddenly heard her name: "Ratan" She turned at once and asked: "Were you sleeping, dada?" The postmaster in a plaintive voice said: "I am not well, feel my head, is it very hot?"

So, this is the point in the story where the climax comes where the postmaster is feverish and he falls very ill, and very seriously ill, and we were also told constantly he is completely cut off from his companions. He is completely cut off from his family, from his kin. So, the girl,

the little girl over here, the otherwise illiterate girl over here, uneducated girl over here becomes the sole companion and not just that she nurses him back to health. So, she performs the you know the thing of the mother, the activity of the mother in terms of healing and nurturing the postmaster back to health and normalcy.

So, we are told that the plaintive the postmaster in a very plaintive voice asks Ratan or requests Ratan to feel his temperature of his forehead and then say and confesses that and he is not feeling very well.

In the loneliness of his exile, and the gloom of the rains, his ailing body needed a little tender nursing. He longed to remember the touch of the forehead of soft hands with tinkling bracelets, to imagine the presence of loving womanhood, the nearness of mother and sister. So, we were told that look at the way in which the entire idea of femininity is constructed in the story through affective signifiers, signifiers of affect with the touch of the bracelet, the tinkling of the bracelet with the touch of the finger. So, all these little metonymic markers of womanhood you know are constructed and dramatized in the story at this point and he is longing to get that touch, that that touch of healing and the touch of love, the touch of nursing which he would get from his mother and sister.

But interestingly there is a very conspicuous absence of the father figure in the story. The postmaster never seems to have referred to his father over here. It is always a mother and a sister who were referred to. So, these are all female figure and his imagination, there is no male figure as such that he is thinking about or wishing nearness to. In fact, all the other adult males that he had refers to are referred to in the story considered to be people who are not really sensitive, who are not really you know worthy of communication, not really worthy of having a dialogue with the workers in the indigo factory for instance.

And the exile was not disappointed. Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of the mother. So, again this is the entire performance of motherhood which begins to happen from this point, Ratan becomes the mother of the postmaster, she heals him back to health. Called in a village doctor, give the patient his pills at proper intervals, sat up all night by his pillow, cooked his gruel for him, and every now and then asked: "Are you feeling a little better, Dada?" So, she would just completely devote herself in healing the postmaster or nursing him back to health, and she had the presence of mind to call the village doctor, and she had cooked the gruel for the postmaster in terms of the comforting food, the comfort food

which she would then feed him and every now and then she would have ask him if he is feeling better.

It was sometime before the postmaster, with the weakened body, was able to leave the sick-bed. "No more of this," he said with, he said with decision. "I must get a transfer." He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for transfer, on the ground of the unhealthiness of the place. So, you know this is a point of the story where he is beginning to think of and then moving out of this place and obviously, Ratan does not know it.

So, it was the quality of dramatic irony in this point this point, but we know it the postmaster knows that he wants to go out of the story of this particular setting, but Ratan does not know it yet. So, he writes a letter to the headquarters presumably, the upper office Calcutta being the center all the headquarters were placed in Calcutta at that point of time, an application for transfer on the ground of the unhealthiness of the place. So, you know medical grounds, unhealthiness of the place, these are certain reasons cited by the postmaster in terms of leaving the place, in terms of requesting a transfer.

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It was some time before the postmaster, with weakened body, was able to leave his sick-bed. "No more of this," said he with decision. "I must get a transfer." He at once wrote off to Calcutta an application for a transfer, on the ground of the unhealthiness of the place.

Relieved from her duties as nurse, Ratan again took up her old place outside the door. But she no longer heard the same old call. She would sometimes peep inside furtively to find the postmaster sitting on his chair, or stretched on his bed, and staring absent-mindedly into the air. While Ratan was awaiting her call, the postmaster was awaiting a reply to his application. The girl read her old lessons over and over again,—her great fear was lest, when the call came, she might be found wanting in the double consonants. At last, after a week, the call did come one evening. With an overflowing heart Ratan rushed into the room with her—"Were you calling me, Dada?"

The postmaster said: "I am going away to-morrow, Ratan."

"Where are you going, Dada?"

"I am going home."

"When will you come back?"

"I am not coming back."

Ratan asked no other question. The postmaster, of his own accord, went on to tell her that his application for a transfer had been rejected, so he had resigned his post and was going home.

For a long time neither of them spoke another word. The lamp went on dimly burning, and from a leak in one corner of the thatch water dripped steadily into an earthen vessel on the floor beneath it.

After a while Ratan rose, and went off to the kitchen to prepare the meal; but she was not so quick about it as on other days. Many new things to think of had entered her little brain. When the postmaster had finished his supper, the girl



Relieved from her duties as nurse, Ratan again took up her old place outside the door. But she no longer heard the same old call. She would sometimes peep inside furtively to find the postmaster sitting on his chair, or stretched on his bed, and staring absent-mindedly into the air. While Ratan was awaiting her call, the postmaster was awaiting a reply to his application.

So, again look at the two kinds of wait described over here, Ratan is waiting for the call to come in just so she can start learning again, she can start the companionship with the postmaster again, and but that process is interrupted that that performance that exercise interrupted permanently. The postmaster does not call her anymore. He himself is waiting for another call. He is waiting for a letter from the headquarters, will come back to him and he is hoping the transfer will be granted to him, right. So, we have two different kinds of wait in operation over here. One obviously is more human wait and the other is more official wait, ok, ok. So, Ratan we are told that she is waiting for the call to come in and the postmaster is waiting for the call from the headquarters. So, two different kinds of waiting are in operation over here, ok.

The girl read her own lessons over and over again, her great fear was less, when the call came, she might be found wanting in her double consonants. At last, after a week, the call did come one evening. With an overflow heart overflowing heart Ratan rushed into the room with her, "Were you calling me, Dada?" This is the call and this is obviously there's irony in this particular call in a sense that you know she is waiting to get in and she thinks that the call has come to resume the lesson, resume the learning exercise again. But then we are told very quickly that actually this is a point where the postmaster tells her that she been relieved of duty and he is going away somewhere else. And this is what he says to her: The postmaster said, "I am going away tomorrow, Ratan."

"Where are you going, Dada?"

"I am going home."

"When will you come back?"

"I am not coming back."

So, there is a degree of finality about this particular section and he informs her that he is not coming back. Ratan asked no other questions. So, this is interesting point because there is a degree of break over here, a break of communication and the moment she finds that he is not coming back, he is never coming back, she ceases to ask any more questions. There is no question asked at all.

Ratan asked no other question. The postmaster, of his own accord, went on to tell that her application his application for transfer had been rejected, so he resigned his post and was going home. So, we get we get to know that postmaster has been told already had applied for transfer, but that that application had been rejected and he has instead resigned, he is going home. He is probably going to apply for a new job, we are not told that but there is a degree of finality about it, he has resigned from the job. And we are told that through the postmaster telling this to Ratan, ok. So, this is a degree of conveyance of information over here in a very sophisticated and complex way through which we get to know of this particular bit of information.

For a long time neither of them spoke another word. The lamp went on dimly burning, and from a leak in one corner of the thatch water dripped steadily into the earthen vessel on the floor beneath it. So, you know it is like a slow motion in cinema where you know there is a degree of finality, there is a degree of intensity which is created and you convey the intensity, and you convey the finality, everything slows down, everything is decelerated and all we get to hear is the water dripping steadily into the earthen vessel through a thatch roof. So, again the use of natural signifiers is very interesting because those seem to dialoguing with the human communication over here.

So, interestingly throughout the story you find this one the characteristics of Tagore's fiction that she uses a natural signifiers, the material markers of nature around as well as leaves rustling of leaves or pitter patter of rain, or the dripping water from a thatched roof into a earthenware vessel. All seem to communicate certain human emotions. All seem to communicate or convey certain human conditions which are obviously, captured over here, right. So, the degree of stillness interruption you know all these are captured through this very the sound of the silence so to say, where water dripped steadily into the earthenware vessel through the thatched roof.

After a while Ratan rose, and went off to the kitchen to prepare the meal, but she was not so quick about it as on other days. So, a degree of inertia has crept in. So, she is dragging her feet so to say and she goes to the kitchen to make a meal, but she was not so quick about it no energy and intensity left in her because she has resigned to the fact that he is going away. So, two different kinds of resignation are at work again. There is one official resignation business like resignation and another is more human and existential resignation. And we have seen early how two different kinds of wait were also in operation, one was official wait a business

like wait, bureaucratic wait, other was more existential wait where Ratan was waiting for the call to get in and resume her education. And we have different kinds of resignation at play here as well.

Many new things to think of had entered her little brain. When the postmaster had finished his supper the girl suddenly asked him: “Dada, will you take me to your home?”

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suddenly asked him: "Dada, will you take me to your home?"
The postmaster laughed. "What an idea!" said he; but he did not think it necessary to explain to the girl wherein lay the absurdity.
That whole night, in her waking and in her dreams, the postmaster's laughing reply haunted her—"What an idea!"
On getting up in the morning, the postmaster found his bath ready. He had stuck to his Calcutta habit of bathing in water drawn and kept in pitchers, instead of taking a plunge in the river as was the custom of the village. For some reason or other, the girl could not ask him about the time of his departure, so she had fetched the water from the river long before sunrise, that it should be ready as early as he might want it. After the bath came a call for Ratan. She entered noiselessly, and looked silently into her master's face for orders. The master said: "You need not be anxious about my going away, Ratan; I shall tell my successor to look after you." These words were kindly meant, no doubt; but inscrutable are the ways of a woman's heart!
Ratan had borne many a scolding from her master without complaint, but these kind words she could not bear. She burst out weeping, and said: "No, no, you need not tell anybody anything at all about me; I don't want to stay on here."
The postmaster was dumbfounded. He had never seen Ratan like this before.
The new incumbent duly arrived, and the postmaster, having given over charge, prepared to depart. Just before starting he called Ratan and said: "Here is something for you; I hope it will keep you for some little time." He brought out from his pocket the whole of his month's salary, retaining only a trifle for his



So, she asks him suddenly can he take her to his home in Calcutta, she wants to come with him because you know and this obviously, goes to show that the degree of empathy, degree of companionship that has been established between this girl and this man over here, which is parental in quality, but also very compassionate in quality. The postmaster laughed. “What an idea” said he; but he did not think it was necessary to explain to the girl wherein lay the absurdity.

So, again the whole question of absurdity is important over here, what is the perfectly reasonable question and emotionally deep question for the girl seems to be completely absurd for the postmaster. And therein lies again, we have seen how we are told how this is mapping out of the city imagination, the urban imagination, and the rural imagination. And we are told at the very beginning of the story that the postmaster felt completely like a misfit over here, he did not attune to this at all. So, the question which came from the girl about you know the request to take her with him was a completely legitimate question or perfectly a reasonable

question from her end appears absurd from his end and again we have two different kinds of imagination at play over here.

The whole night, in her waking and in her dreams, the postmaster's laughing reply haunted her: "What an idea." So, this derision that the postmaster had you know conveyed through that laughter what an idea and without giving any excuse without giving any rationale that really taunted her and haunted her in her dreams. And this was a complete rejection of any kind of companionship to that this one little laughter, the laughter of derision the laughter and the idea of you know absurdity through the idea. By saying what an idea the exclamation of absurdity which the postmaster had expressed that was a complete finality in terms of the break between the postmaster and Ratan, so that haunted her and that obviously, was a major attack to her senses, attack on her imagination and a major insult and humiliation of any idea of companionship that she had nurtured with the postmaster.

On getting up in the morning, the postmaster found his bath ready. He had stuck to the Calcutta habit of taking or bathing in water drawn and kept in pitchers, instead of taking a plunge in the river as was the custom of the village. So, again we are told different kinds of bathing, one is more urban where you draw water from pitcher and bathe inside in a bathroom presumably in a closed space, whereas there is a rural way of bathing was go to a pond a dip yourself in the pond, in a more open space. And the postmaster had retained his ritual retained his earlier urban habit of taking a bath inside or using a pitcher, and woke up in the morning I found the pitcher completely ready or well prepared.

For some reason or other, the girl could not ask him about the time of his departure. So, she stopped any communication with him. She did not even ask him about the time of departure. So, we are told that she had got up really early even before the beginning of dawn, and she had drawn the pitcher, she had filled the pitcher with water just to make it ready for him in case he needs it first thing in the morning. So, she had fetched the water from the river long before sunrise and that it should be ready as early as he might want it.

So, you know we can see how she is avoiding communication, how she is evading the postmaster and this being evasive, this avoidance of communication is obviously, a reaction to the insult that she had experienced from the postmaster, the reaction to the humiliation she had experienced from the postmaster in terms of derision and rejection that he had subjected her to.

After the bath came the call for Ratan. Then she entered noiselessly again very interesting noiselessly, no interest, no excitement, nothing, there is a degree of deadness about the movement now. Just dragging her feet there is a degree of inertia which has crept in. She entered noiselessly, and looked silently into the master's face for orders. So, again if you look at that language clearly over here, she is looking at the master's face for orders, right. So, she wants to be instructed, she wants to be ordered over here. And there is no human empathy left at all there is a complete enervation of empathy, a complete depletion of empathy over here and hence what we have is a dried out and dried and cut out orders which is the master servant relationship that is to be retained once she goes back. She falls back into that structure because she realized any kind of human emotion, any kind of human empathy would be rejected outright, they had been rejected outright by postmaster.

The master said: "You need not be anxious about my going away. Ratan; I shall tell my successor to look after you." These words were kindly meant, no doubt, but inscrutable are the ways of the woman's heart. So, again we have this male versus female you know imagination at play over here, which is slightly binaristic in quality, but nevertheless we are told that the woman's heart over here, the girl's heart over here was very different from the man's heart and man was talking about thinking about making things right for the girl. Whereas, the girl had experienced a complete sense of rejection from the postmaster and she retains the rejection no matter what.

So, she refused to communicate, she refused to have any kind of communication with the postmaster from this point beyond what is absolutely necessary, and that is the point in the story where communication takes a different turn. So, you have different kind of communication generated over here, which is not one of empathy, not for a human emotion or any kind of existential fulfillment, but strictly one of servant and master.

So, we will stop at this point today. I will conclude with the story in the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.