

CRITICAL REVIEW OF 'CLASS FRIEND' – A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE TO SATYAJIT RAY

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Abstract

On the centennial celebration of Satyajit Ray's birth, a composition from his precious, pioneering and thoughtful essays depicting countless episodes of daily life and creation have been discussed as a tribute. From his huge contribution to children literature, this particular short story 'Class Friend' based on adolescent friendship and interaction and the then socio-cultural depiction with critical analysis have been presented in this paper.

Keywords : Friendship, socio-cultural backdrop, adolescence

Introduction

The renowned Bengali film-maker Satyajit Ray had released the idea of Bengali cinema from the shackles of entertainment to publicity as a form of art. Later, he was the one who was able to add a flavour and essence to the Bengali film media. Satyajit Ray is regarded that after Rabindranath, the person whose name is first pronounced in the literal sense as 'International Bengali' is still the same today. And not just cinema, but at all the fields of culture that can be dawned in mind, such as music, literature and painting, he is assimilated as a surprisingly natural person. On the centennial meditation of Satyajit Ray's birth, a composition from his precious, pioneering and thoughtful essays depicting countless episodes of daily life and creation have been discussed as a tribute.

No word is enough or just about Ray to describe him. Satyajit Ray is associated with his creative and innovative work, and was engaged in a holistic endeavour to see how he perceived the 21st century. He has the most impeccable originality in his literary works with artistic and intellectual philosophy. Noble literary works enable nurturance of the children's personality and social skills and ensures to transmit significant message and themes from one generation to the next. In his contributions to children literature, this short story 'Class Friend' based on adolescent friendship and interaction and the then socio-cultural depiction has been presented in an interlinked reminiscent manner.

Storyline

One of the best stories written by Ray is surely called 'Class Friend'. It seems that Ray has initiated the story with the upper class flavour (of wearing a tie) by Mohit Sarkar the central figure of the composition has a concerning homemaker, Aruna Devi who informs the phone-call of his thirty years back school-friend Joy. Mohit's sense of punctuality and aristocratic attitude of possessing a telephone, a light blue standard car with a driver go to the Central Avenue workplace has been tailored. Quite wealthy and successful middle-aged Mohit had spent his student life in Ballyganj Government School in South Kolkata. Though the Headmaster with strict discipline gave a smudge-look, the memories of those days, seemed always appealing. Among the forty boys, the classmate Joy or Joydev Bose, a close classmate of Mohit, had been studying together since the class six. Mohit did not forget the name and the looks of his bosom friend. He remembered Shankar who was also a close associate with them. Joy was smart looking, good in studies, expert in good high jumps, showed good card magic, recited Cassabianka once won a gold medal. Mohit and Joydev used to sit on the same bench, both of them were good as students, they also played side by side in the football team, one was right-in, and other one was right-out.

But thirty years have passed since the two friends left school. Mohit, the son of a well-known barrister, has climbed the ladder of success, and his father died at a young age. Unsuccessful Joydev rang up to meet Mohit for once. Mohit asked him to come later in the evening for the sake of appointment- courtesy. For due to power and position, Mohit has no shortage of friends in his present life and even a colleague is his close-friend. Joydev Bose who made an appointment on the scheduled evening, came as a shock for Mohit as there was no resemblance between the present look of Joydev. Joy had undergone several turmoils in life that led to much distress, but the teenager look was in Mohit's memory or in a group photo of schoolmates. In Mohit's sharp eyes, the contrast was tremendously unacceptable and painful. Mohit Sarkar noticed the uncared dress, decayed teeth and the shabby and filthy appearance but agreed to accept or consider him anyhow. Unable to recognise Mohit suspects him to be a liar who requests financial help for his son's examination expenses. To avoid the situation tactfully, Mohit refuses and reluctantly evades for another meet for payment. Meanwhile, Banikanta Sen, the partner of Mohit for playing cards at home, enters the room and scorns at Joydev as a seasoned horse-racer on the field. But Joydev insisted on coming Sunday to collect the help. But on the very next Monday morning, a thirteen- to fourteen-year-old boy named Sanjoy appeared with his father's letter stating that a leg-sprain had kept him at bay and it would be a great benefit if he extended help to the little boy. The twists and turns of the story are here. Mohit looked at the unknown boy for more than a minute, as he was crouching his hands whilst sitting on sofa and immediately, it was not difficult to recognize his teenager Joy in Sanjay's face. Instantaneously, his mind was evolved from the clutches of narrow mindedness. He enveloped and contributed him four fifty rupees notes, treated him with tea and snacks, arranged to drop him off even at his home.

Essence of Friendship

Friendship is a relationship that involves a series of interactions between two or more individuals built upon intimacy, respect and trust depending upon situation and cultural factors. This may be of varied span for the purpose of shared activities and emotional support. It is distinguished from cliques and peer groups. The acquaintanceship is retained depending upon the development of affective bond. For healthy human development and adjustment, friendship plays an important role in an individual across his/her life span. Preferred friendship varies considerably with age and circumstances.

Critical Review

From Ray's work the present discussion of the ardent relationship goes on, between remembrance and satire. Ray's thinking is limited to adolescent friendships, limited to school and between two single teenagers. During this early adolescence, the friends are similar in their orientation toward school and towards peer culture. Proximity is a basic element in all the theories of adolescent friendships or attraction which have enabled both Joydev and Mohit to be knitted together, whether in classroom or in the playground. In all competitive situations of scholastic and co-scholastic issues they were mutually satisfying each other. Extracurricular activities are usually settings that are to some extent theorized to help adolescents to maintain existing friendships and develop insightful friendships and it happened also to both. Sometimes, even believed and had a fantasy in their childhood mind that their intimacy or friendship would last forever. Recent research proves that the intimacy of friendships increases dramatically between middle childhood and early adolescence and this is what happened when both were schoolmates since class six.

Moreover Ray has distinctly pointed out that with age and time, associations may change for the fulfilment of purpose, situation but few memories are simply embedded in the core of the mind. With much nitty-gritty Ray has also mentioned about the hustle-bustle of city life with vehicular pollution. Adherence to punctuality and seriousness to work added good qualities vested on Mohit who has moved up the ladder of success. Using ruled chits for scheduling appointments with guests also marks aristocracy, discipline with the prevalence of common availability of paper at home. Listening to BBC news was not only a reliable news item but being briefed and updated was the nature of Mohit. He exhibited his slackness of purchasing snack items himself for his school-friend and the showed dependency on his wife for petty household matters. In order to express, the category of public Mohit associated, Joydev's unkempt appearance, dialogues with Banikanta Sen, spending weekends in farmhouse have been deliberately designed. His straightforward denial and procrastination of payment of a meagre amount displays his utter dislikes and mood swings which may be grounded on trivial issues. Mohit was a minute observer of Banikanta's scornful look at the first glimpse of Joydev and therefore to mask the situation, intentionally avoided to introduce Joydev to him. Herein, there was a mingle of guilt and shame that pricked Mohit's mind-set. But on the other hand, he showed meticulous preservation of a school-picnic photograph to keep alive old cherishing memories. Ray even shows the exuberance of Mohit's unnecessary dedication and goodness to his present elite Banikanta. In addition Banikanta's snobbish, selfish and suspicious personality traits are also portrayed wherein, he interacts with Mohit on the memory of the photo-album.

Throughout the storyline Ray has brought about stark distinctions between Mohit and Joydev through an array of indications - the acquisition of movable and immovable property, sophistication in daily habits, adherence to work schedules, leisure in luxury, kin or associates at home or at workplace and perception of life. But Ray has added a flavour in the composition which is markedly striking. It is the moment when Joydev's son appears with his father's letter and Mohit discovers their adolescence friendship. Ray explicitly stated that proper employability demanded back-up or patronage and it was in vogue in society. But after the school episode, Joy had to struggle hard to sustain. Ray hinted sarcastically through Joy's statement that Mohit was blessed with such success in life.

Friendship is linked to different forms of adjustment and emotional well-being. Herein lies the twist, as Mohit vividly remembers each and every behavioural trait and body language of his childhood friend, which thereby conveys that he was indeed, the son of Joydev. Ray distinguishingly put forward, that Mohit was such a keen observer of his then friend, holds

minutely in memory and recollects immediately and identifies Sanjoy. That very moment, his humane attitude does not debar for a second, and he moves forward to extend utmost help to the lad. It was his inner sense of joy, responsibility and to some extent, the injustice, he felt as he delayed in paying the amount directly to his father. It came to his realisation that he was rather obsessed with the misconceptions of his own nature and as portrayed by Banikanta. In addition, whatever negative intentions he bore in mind or expected had to be erased straightaway, by endowing Sanjoy with maximum benefit than expected. He defied all previous exchanges and crossed all limits in a mission to honour friendship. Ray intended to emphasise that few relations are forever, no matter what come upon on the way.

Mohit Sarkar might have lost something, but got something back in great. It is learnt that his heart was filled with the pleasure of giving and receiving. He took much care of Sanjoy as if to serve old intimacy. He felt an ecstasy and satisfaction through the exchanges with Sanjoy. Then at the concluding section of the composition, Ray showers the character Mohit with the paternal responsibility. The obedience of Sanjoy of returning home, on foot as instructed by his father also deserves commendable mention.

Conclusion

Adolescent stage is a period of storm and stress and so responding to literary works ensure to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive skills from the very school setting. But it is valuable as it also enables reader to develop emotional intelligence and creativity and cogently apprises about the profound knowledge of varied perception of life.

In-depth friendly relations never die but get transferred. In this short story, high quality friendship, personal and social satisfaction was relocated from one generation to other. Initially there were limitations, but the focus on the youngster, paved the passage for honoured maintenance of a friendship and also for resolving issues practically. To uphold a strong self-esteem, recognizing the signs of giving status, acknowledging the relationship, perception of a successful friend but with a humane heart have been highlighted throughout and leaves a lasting note to any reader. It messages the expectations for better friendship skill and stability of teenage partners at later stages of life or even at the controlled ambience.

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