

Tagore's "Broken Nest": Fantasy Vs Reality

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Abstract

This story instantly takes us back to 1879 Calcutta to explore the seeds of India's early movement for independence from England and to examine the restrictions placed on educated Indian women. It's like Victorian England but instead it's Victorian India in which a neglected wife, on the point of breaking through to self-awareness, begins to perceive male dominion as a hollow façade of beards, braces and boredom. "The Broken Nest" is one of Tagore's best works. Rabindranath Tagore is a legend in Indian English Literature. He has portrayed his characters in such a way as to teach a moral lesson to society through them. Its chief asset is a subtle and deep analysis of the psychology and interpersonal relationships of its characters. The unadulterated love and longing of an intelligent woman, Charulata, for her younger brother-in-law, while the husband is pursuing his intellectual hobby of running a radical English newspaper in Calcutta, Charulata is left to confide her creative passions with her artistic and poetic brother-in-law, it is difficult to define where this crosses the line from admiration to love.

Keywords- Relationship, Male dominion, Desires, Love-triangle

The story of "Broken Nest" starts in the courtroom where Mini is being sentenced. Bhupati, a newspaper editor, is sitting in the audience noting down the happenings in the courtroom. He belongs to an affluent family, but his dreams of running a successful newspaper keep him busy most of the time, leaving his wife, Charulata, lonely. Charulata, a beautiful young woman, talented and educated, seeks to resume her singing lessons to overcome her loneliness. Enter the younger cousin of Bhupati, Amol, who is studying law but is more interested in music. A jolly character, Amol is soon invited to stay over by Bhupati, so that he could teach music to Charulata, thus bringing a solution to her loneliness issues. The story of "The Broken Nest" is based on Tagore's female protagonist Charulata. Charulata is wife of Bhupati. She is a well educated woman having interest in music, art and literature. She lives in a big house with her husband Bhupati. She has many servants to look after her home having nothing to do. Hence, she feels very lonely at her home. Being rich and

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educated Bhupati does not need to earn for bread. But since he cannot sit idle he starts an English newspaper and becomes an editor. He has a good command on English language. So he always goes to programmes and conferences and makes speeches in English.

Bhupati and Charulata's marriage is loveless because he does not pay attention to her. His political activities over takes his editorial work. He remains engrossed in his work. Being too younger from Bhupati Charu does not know how to indulge her husband. So gradually their marital life loses its essence of love.

The time when a husband and wife, in the first glow of the birth of love, appear to each other in incomparable beauty and as forever new, that time, that golden radiance of a material dawn, passed by, unawares, unknown to both of them.

Without tasting newness, both became old, familiar and habituated to each other.
(*Broken Nest*, 5)

One of Bhupati relatives draws his attention towards Charu. Hence to fulfill her emptiness she calls her brother and his wife to live with them. Her brother starts working with Bhupati in his newspaper agency and his wife, Manda lives with Charulata to entertain her but she does not feel comfortable with Manda. In the mean time Bhupati's cousin Amal, who studies in college comes to their place. Bhupati insists him to stay there and urges him to help Charulata in literature and music. Amal and Charulata spend time together. He helps her in literature and motivates her for writing articles and poetry. To see Charulata happy Bhupati feels relaxed. He remembers all his work as an editor and a politician, but forgets his duty towards his wife. As a youthful woman, she needs a male companion and he himself could be her companion, it does not strike him. Charulata needs her husband's love and affection which he could not give her. Hence when she comes across Amal, she is attracted towards him and falls in love with him.

To gain Amal's help in studies Charu has to fulfill his demands. Sometimes she arranges dinner for Amal and his friends or offers him money for buying books and eating at restaurant. Amal and Charu enjoy each other's company so much that they forget outer world. Being of same age they find a companion in each other. Amal has now fulfilled her emptiness. They make each other complete in every sphere of life.

Charulata and Amol who always shared a sweet bhabhi-devar relationship, begin to bond more over music. The house is filled up with their songs, laughter, poetry and music. Charulata's thoughts are filled with Amol and his music and she doesn't realize that she hasn't been thinking much about her husband. Meanwhile, Bhupati suffers a setback, when he realizes that his brother-in-law, who worked with him, embezzled his money and ran away along with his wife. Bhupati confesses this to Amol and asks him not to reveal about it to Charulata, because she would be hurt with her brother's deeds. Bhupati though shaken decides to renew pursuing his dream as he still has the support of his darling wife, Charulata. This jolts Amol out of the daze he had been in and discovers that he had become closer to Charulata than he ought to be. Realising that Charulata is not able to identify the troubles in

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Bhupati's life and that she has her eyes and ears only for him, Amol decides to remove himself from the equation and agrees to an alliance, which he had refused to earlier. A decision, that leaves Charulata shattered for she is unable to come to terms with it. She pleads Amol not to go, not to leave his music, not to leave... her... alone. But what is unlikely, does not happen and Amol leaves.

Once she gets angry with Amal. Amal starts spending time with Manda and discusses literature with her. This behaviour of Amal disappoints her and she feels jealous of Manda. Here Charulata's jealousy shows her possessiveness for Amal. "Charu had vowed that she would write; she would amaze Amal; she would not rest without proving how different she was from Manda". (*Broken Nest*, 36)

Being a simple man Bhupati is deceived by Charulata's brother, Umapati whom he gives shelter and work. Amal is a true man by his heart, he could not think of making love with Charulata knowingly but love for her conquered his heart. He does not want to deceive his brother, so he accepts marriage proposal offered by Bhupati. He wants to help his brother in adverse circumstances.

After Amal's wedding Charu becomes alone and does not talk with anybody. Seeing the condition of Charu, Bhupati is astonished. He comes to know of her feelings for Amal when suddenly he enters their room and finds her in grief and sobbing for Amal. He was shattered to see her like this. He himself also feels very sad after Amal's departure. In spite of that he tries to console her and takes care of her. He had never been so close to her so he hesitates even to talk to her. His over indulgence in work has brought a communication gap between them.

Everything was ruined. Hesitation and lack of enthusiasm interrupted the flow of his recitation, the correct Bengali translations did not come to him. Charu's empty gaze told him she wasn't paying attention. That lamp lit, small room, that evening time's private leisure did not fulfil itself. (*Broken Nest*, 73)

Charu is bewildered by her unbearable pain. She is still unaware of her love for Amal. She starts questioning herself about Amal. Amal matters more to Charulata than Bhupati. It was not only her thought but reality of her heart. Amal has not only captured her heart but mind also. Tagore dives deep into her mind and describes her real state of mind very well:

Charu would close her wet eyes and say, 'Amal, why did you leave me in anger? I didn't do anything wrong. If you had left in peace and joy I don't think I would be suffering so much.' Charu pronounced all her words as if Amal were right before her and said, 'Amal I haven't forgotten you even for a day. Not for a day, not for a moment. All that is meaningful in my life you brought to blossom, my life's essence will be dedicated to your worship. (*Broken Nest*, 76)

Being an Indian woman, gradually she consoles herself. She decides, after her household chores to spend her time thinking about Amal and his memories. She starts to take care of

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Bhupati. She serves her husband whole heartedly. Still she is in grief but she does not want to reveal it to anyone else. Tagore has described Charulata's state of mind very well. Tagore has drawn a fine line of distinction between her appearance and reality.

In that lightless, motionless darkness, she built a secret temple of sorrow, decorated only with a garland of her tears. There, her husband, the rest of the world, had no right to enter. If that place was secret, it was also profound, also most beloved. At the door of this temple she abandoned all the disguise of the outer world and entered in her unveiled, true nature. When she came out she put the mask back on her face and returned to the arena of the world's talk, activities and laughter. (*Broken Nest*, 89)

Amal is settled in England. Still he does not write a word to her. These thoughts make her restless. She wants to ask many questions from Amal but she is unable to ask. She tries hard to behave normal at her home and outside but she fails. She feels helpless and wanders here and there. She is bewildered and does not take care of her house or her servants' work. People start spreading rumours about her. It is hard for her now to love Bhupati as she is in love with Amal.

Bhupati is also in grief. He has lost his wife. He is deceived. He is feeling as if someone has stolen his jewel or he is bankrupt. Nothing is in his hands. He is feeling guilty for Charu. Now he realizes that he had never loved her. So Charu cannot be held responsible for whatever is going on. His unintended deeds have brought such a situation. "Bhupati said to himself, "Helpless woman, grieving woman. There was no need for this, I did not know what not love was- I carried on well by merely checking proofs, writing articles – I did not need all this to be done for me." (*Broken Nest*, 92)

Now he decides to go away from Charu. He joins a newspaper in Mysore. He decides to leave Charu alone. He is in dilemma. He thinks that if he takes Charu with him how would he live with her now when he knows that she is not in love with him. She loves someone else. How would he hold her close to his heart and face her every second of the day. But he realizes, she is his responsibility. So he asks her to come with him.

All the blood drained away from Charu's face, leaving it as dry and white as paper. She clutched the edge of the bed.

Instantly, Bhupati said, 'Come Charu. Come with me.

Charu said, 'No. let it be. (*Broken Nest*, 92)

The home has been broken, their trust has been shattered; both have fallen from their world of fantasy to the world of reality.

Crestfallen, Charulata loses her interest in music, in the sounds of the birds, in all those little things that she derived pleasure from. Bhupati tries to warm up to her by writing poetry, playing music; but to no avail. Soon, he realizes that her thoughts are filled up with Amol and that he has taken up a special place in her heart. Bhupati is heartbroken. The only support who he thought would always be with him, is now lost in another's thought. He decides to take up a job in Mysore. Charulata pleads to take her with him. Bhupati says he

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would, if she believed that he would be able to fulfill her lonely life. Charulata decides to stay back and so they part ways. Bhupati, Charulata and Amal frame the triangle of love, but we cannot blame anyone of them in particular. Being an Indian traditional woman Charulata cannot cross the threshold of her home though she loves someone else. But she could not save her marriage and the stability of family bond is destroyed. Mary Lago makes an apt remark on this point. She says; “The ‘Broken Nest’ is no one’s fault and every one’s tragedy, a tragedy of misguided attractions and undeveloped talents.”⁸

Anurag Basu’s version of the very popular story ‘The Broken Nest’ (Nashtanirh) in the series ‘Stories by Rabindranath Tagore’, is a treat to watch with outstanding performances by all the actors, especially Amrita Puri who played ‘Charulata’ very earnestly.

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