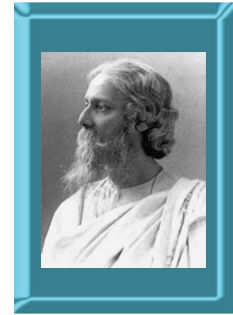


I CAN NOT REMEMBER MY MOTHER

Rabindranath Tagore



Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Indian poet, philosopher, and Nobel laureate, was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He began to write poetry as a child; his first book appeared when he was 17 years old. After a brief stay in England (1878) to study law, he returned to India, where he rapidly became the most important and popular author of the colonial era, writing poetry, short stories, novels, and plays. He composed several hundred popular songs and in 1929 also began painting.



Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali, but translated many of his works into English himself; critics agree they are much more effective in the original. Tagore's writing is highly imagistic, deeply religious and imbued with his love for nature and his homeland. He was awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize in literature for his work *Geetanjali*, and in 1915 he was knighted by the British king George V. Tagore renounced his knighthood in 1919 following the Amritsar massacre of nearly 400 Indian demonstrators by British troops. His Collected Poems and Plays were published in 1966. He is also known for establishing Shantiniketan, a University at Calcutta .

The poem is about the sensitive and intense feelings of a child. He remembers all the things that his mother used to do.

I cannot remember my mother
only sometimes in the midst of my play
a tune seems to hover over my playthings,
the tune of some song that she used to
hum while rocking my cradle.

I cannot remember my mother
but when in the early autumn morning
the smell of shiuli flowers floats in the air,

the scent of the morning service in the temple
comes to me as the scent of my mother.

I cannot remember my mother
only when from my bedroom window I send
my eyes into the blue of the distant sky,
I feel that the stillness of my mother's gaze on my face
has spread all over the sky.

Glossary

hover 'hɒv.əʳ	to stay in one place in the air, usually by moving the wings quickly.
hum hʌm	to make a continuous low sound.
rock(v) rɒk	(cause someone or something to) move backwards and forwards or from side to side.
rock (n) rɒk/ɹɒk	a kind of music.
cradle 'kreɪdl	a small bed for a baby, especially one that swings from side to side.
shiuli ʃiuli/	a common small white flower used in Puja in Bengal, known as chamomile in English.
gaze geɪz	to look at something or someone for a long time.

Understanding the Poem

1. What is the poet doing when he remembers his mother?
2. In what ways does the poet feel the presence of his mother?
3. What does the poet hear when he is at play?
4. What word do we use for the cradle song?
5. Is the poet's mother dead or alive? How do you come to know about it?
6. What sights and smells remind the poet of his mother?
7. What are the feelings that this poem arouses in you?

Learning about the literary devices

1. Imagery: imagery gives sensory impressions and lends clarity to a poem. In this poem the poet creates beautiful images that relate to sight, sound and smell.
Pick out the visual and aural images related to smell which appeal to our senses directly.
2. The poem does not have a rhyme scheme or a fixed length for each line. Did you enjoy the poem? If yes, why?

Discussion

- Do you help your mother while she performs her house hold chores?
- How does your mother inspire you?
- How is your mother different from your father?
- Write an account of any memorable moment that you have shared with your mother.
- When we are small kids our parents take care of us. When we grow older and our parents become old. Do you think we should care for them in the same way as they did when we were small babies? Why do you think we should do so?

Suggested Reading

Leave this Chanting by R. N. Tagore.

Quote to remember

Paradise lies beneath the feet of your mother.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)