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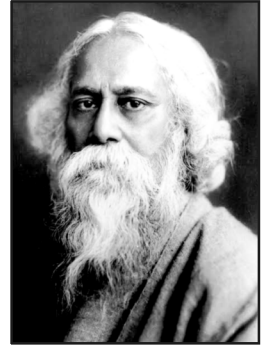
CHAPTER

The Home Coming

Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941)

➔ About the Author

Rabindranath Tagore, the distinguished man of letters, was born in Calcutta (Kolkata) on 7th May, 1861. He got his education at home. He was a great poet, dramatist and novelist. He is a world famous figure. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 for his collection of poems, 'Gitanjali'. His famous works are — 'Gitanjali', 'The Crescent Moon', 'Fruit Gathering' and 'Lover's Gift'. In the novels — 'Gora', 'The wreck' and 'The Home'. Here, we see his idealism and patriotism. 'The Home Coming' and 'The Kabuli Wallah' are his fine short stories which give us the understanding of human life. He was knighted in 1915. But he gave up the knighthood in protest against the Jalliaiwala Bagh Massacre in 1919. He was always addressed as 'Gurudev'. He died in 1941.



➔ About the Lesson

In The Home-Coming by Rabindranath Tagore, we have the theme of conflict, control, responsibility, love and isolation. Taken from his collected stories collection, the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story the reader realises that Tagore may be exploring the theme of conflict. Makhan was listening to Phatik when he tells him to get off the log. Phatik is one, who is blamed for hitting his brother and bringing conflict into the home. Phatik's mother lacks the responsibility that is required to raise Phatik. She likes he should go to Calcutta with his uncle, Bishamber. Phatik's school days in Calcutta were also miserable occasion for him. The unity that Phatik had in the village. He does not have in Calcutta. A difficult role for any fourteen year old boy to play particularly when they are not getting support that they need from adults around them. Phatik missed the village is noticeable by the fact that he attempts to walk home to the village but instead manages to make himself sick.

The end of the story is also interesting as it becomes clear to the reader that Phatik due to his illness is delusional. It is there where the blame for Phatik's premature death lays. Neither woman has shown Phatik, the love the deserved and needed. The author possibly suggesting that Phatik should never have been taken out of the village environment he was used to. He was a lover to nature but he ended his life surrounded by the walls of Calcutta (Kolkata).



Phatik Chakravorti was ringleader among the boys of the village. A new mischief got into his head. There was a heavy log lying on the mud-flat of the river waiting to be shaped into a mast for a boat. He decided that they should all work together to shift the log by main force from its place and roll it away. The owner of the log would be angry and surprised, and they would all enjoy the fun. Everyone seconded the proposal, and it was carried unanimously.

But just as the fun was about to begin, Makhan, phatik's younger brother, sauntered up, and sat down on the log in front of them all without a word. The boys were puzzled for a moment. He was pushed, rather timidly, by one of the boys and told to get up but he remained quite unconcerned. He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on the futility of games. Phatik was furious. "Makhan", he cried, "if you don't get down this minute I'll thrash you!".

Makhan only moved to a more comfortable position.

Now, if Phatik was to keep his regal dignity before the public, it was clear he ought to carry out his threat. But his courage failed him at the crisis. His fertile brain, however, rapidly seized upon a new manoeuvre which would discomfit his brother and afford his followers an added amusement. He gave the word of command to roll the log and Makhan over together. Makhan heard the order, and made it a point of honour to stick on. But he overlooked the fact, like those who attempt earthly fame in other matters, that there was peril in it. ?

The boys began to heave at the log with all their might, calling out, "one, two, three, go", At the word "go" the log went; and with it went Makhan's philosophy, glory and all.

All the other boys shouted themselves hoarse with delight. But Phatik was a little frightened. He knew what was coming. And, sure enough, Makhan rose from Mother Earth blind as Fate and screaming like the Furies. He rushed at Phatik and scratched his face and beat him and kicked him, and then went crying home. The first act of the drama was over.

Phatik wiped his face, and sat down on the edge of a sunken barge on the river bank, and began to chew a piece of grass. A boat came up to the landing, and a middle-aged man, with grey hair and dark moustache, stepped on shore. He saw the boy sitting there doing nothing, and asked him where the Chakravortis lived. Phatik went on chewing the grass, and said: "over there," but it was quite impossible to tell where he pointed. The stranger asked him again. He swung his legs to and fro on the side of the barge, and said; "Go and find out," and continued to chew the grass as before.

But now a servant came down from the house, and told Phatik his mother wanted him. Phatik refused to move. But the servant was the master on this occasion. He took Phatik up roughly, and carried him, kicking and struggling in impotent rage.

When Phatik came into the house, his mother saw him. She called out angrily, "So you have been hitting Makhan again?"

Phatik answered indignantly, "No, I haven't; who told you that?"

His mother shouted, "Don't tell lies! You have."

Phatik said suddenly: "I tell you, I haven't. You ask Makhan!" But Makhan thought it best to stick to his previous statement. He said, "Yes, mother. Phatik did hit me."

Phatik's patience was already exhausted. He could not hear this injustice. He rushed at Makhan and hammered him with blows, "Take that" he cried, "and that, and that, for telling lies."

His mother took Makhan's side in a moment and pulled Phatik away, beating him with her hands. When Phatik pushed her aside, she shouted out, "What, you little villain! Would you hit your own mother?"

It was just at this critical juncture that the grey-haired stranger arrived. He asked what the matter was. Phatik looked sheepish and ashamed.

But when his mother stepped back and looked at the stranger, her anger was changed to surprise. For she recognised her brother, and cried, "Why, Dada! Where have you come from?" As she said these words, she bowed to the ground and touched his feet. Her brother had gone away soon after she had married and he had started business in Bombay. His sister had lost her husband while he was in Bombay. Bishamber had now come back to Calcutta and had at once made enquiries about his sister. He had then hastened to see her as soon as he found out where she was.

The next few days were full of rejoicing. The brother asked after the education of the two boys. He was told by his sister that Phatik was a perpetual nuisance. He was lazy, disobedient and wild. But Makhan was as good as gold, as quiet as a lamb, and very fond of reading. Bishamber kindly offered to take Phatik off his sister's hands and educate him with his own children in Calcutta. The widowed mother readily agreed. When his uncle asked Phatik if he would like to go to Calcutta with him, his joy knew no bounds and he said; "Oh, yes, uncle!" In a way that made it quite clear that he meant it.

It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy and no love was lost between the two brothers. She was in daily fear that he would either drown Makhan some day in the river, or break his head in a fight, or run him into some danger or other. At the same time she was somewhat distressed to see Phatik's extreme eagerness to get away.

Phatik, as soon as all was settled, kept asking his uncle every minute when they were to start. He was on pins and needles all day long with excitement and lay awake most of the night. He bequeathed to Makhan, in perpetuity, his fishing-rod, his big kite and his marbles. Indeed, at this time of departure his generosity towards Makhan was unbounded.

When they reached Calcutta, Phatik made the acquaintance of his aunt for the first time. She was by no means pleased with this unnecessary addition to her family. She found her own three boys quite enough to manage without taking any one else. And to bring a village lad of fourteen into their midst was terribly upsetting. Bishamber should really have thought twice before committing such an indiscretion.

In this world of human affairs there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age

of fourteen. He is neither ornamental, nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a little boy; and he is always getting in the way. If he talks with a childish lisp he is called a baby and if he answers in a grown-up way he is called impertinent. In fact any talk at all from him is resented. Then he is at the unattractive, growing age. He grows out of his clothes with indecent haste; his voice grows hoarse and breaks and quavers; his face grows suddenly angular and unsightly. It is easy to excuse the shortcomings of early childhood but it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable lapses in a boy of fourteen. The lad himself becomes painfully self-conscious. When he talks with elderly people he is either unduly forward, or else so unduly shy that he appears ashamed of his veiy existence.

Yet it is at this veiy age when in his heart of hearts a young lad most craves for recognition and love; and he becomes the devoted slave of any one who shows him consideration. But none dare openly love him for that would be regarded as undue indulgence and therefore bad for the boy. So, what with scolding and chiding, he becomes very much like a stray dog that has lost his master.

For a boy of fourteen his own home is the only Paradise. To live in a strange house with strange people, is little short of torture, while the height of bliss is to receive the kind looks of women and never to be slighted by them.

It was anguish to Phatik to be the unwelcome guest in his aunt's house, despised by this elderly woman, and slighted, on every occasion. If she ever asked him to do anything for her, he would be so overjoyed that he would overdo it; and then she would tell him not to be so stupid, but to get on with his lessons.

The cramped atmosphere of neglect in his aunt's house oppressed Phatik so much that he felt that he could hardly breathe. He wanted to go out into the open country and fill his lungs and breathe freely. But there was no open country to go to. Surrounded on all sides by Calcutta houses and walls, he would dream night after night of his village home and long to be back there. He remembered the glorious meadow where he used to fly his kite all day long; the broad river-bank where he would wander about the livelong day singing and shouting for joy; the narrow brook where he could go and dive and swim'at any time he liked.

He thought of his band of boy companions over whom he was despot: and, above all, the memory of that tyrant mother of his, who had such a prejudice against him, occupied him day and night. A kind of physical love like that of animals; a longing to be in the presence of the one who is loved; an inexpressible wistfulness during absence; a silent cry of the inmost heart for the mother, like the lowing of calf in the twilight; this love, which was almost an animal instinct, agitated the shy, nervous, lean, uncouth and ugly boy. No one could understand it, but it preyed upon his mind continually.

There was no more backward boy in the whole school than Phatik. He gaped and remained silent when the teacher asked him a question and like an overladen ass patiently suffered all the blows that came down on his back. When other boys were out at play he stood wistfully by the window and gazed at the roofs of the distant houses. And if by chance he espied children playing on the open terrace of any roof, his heart would ache with longing.

One day he summoned up all his courage and asked his uncle, "Uncle, when can I go home?"

His uncle answered, "Wait till the holidays come." But the holidays would not come till November, and there was a long time still to wait.

One day Phatik lost his lesson-book. Even with the help of books he had found it very difficult indeed to prepare his lesson. Now it was impossible. Day after day the teacher would cane him unmercifully. His condition became so abjectly miserable that even his cousins were ashamed to own him. They began to jeer and insult him more than the other boys. He went to his aunt at last and told her that he had lost his book.

His aunt pursed her lips in contempt, and said, "You great clumsy, country lout. How can I afford, with all my family to buy you new books five times a month?"

That night, on his way back from school, Phatik had a bad headache with a fit of shivering. He felt he was going to have an attack of malarial fever. His one great fear was that he would be a nuisance to his aunt.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. All searches in the neighbourhood proved futile. The rain had been pouring in torrents all night and those who went out in search of the boy got drenched through to the skin. At last Bishamber asked help from the police.

At the end of the day a police van stopped at the door before the house. It was still raining and the streets were all flooded. Two constables brought out Phatik in their arms and placed him before Bishamber. He was wet through from head to foot, muddy all over, his face and eyes flushed red with fever and his limbs all trembling. Bishamber carried him in his arms and took him into the inner apartments. When his wife saw him, she exclaimed, "What a heap of trouble this boy has given us. Hadn't you better sent him home?"

Phatik heard her words and sobbed out loud, "Uncle, I was just going home; but they dragged me back again,"

The fever rose very high and all that night the boy was delirious. Bishamber brought in a doctor. Phatik opened his eyes flushed with fever and looked up to the ceiling, and said vacantly: "Uncle have the holidays come yet? May I go home?"

Bishamber wiped the tears from his own eyes and took Phatik's lean and burning hands in his own and sat by him through the night. The boy began again to mutter. At last his voice became excited, "Mother," he cried, "don't beat me like that! Mother! I am telling the truth!"

The next day Phatik became conscious for a short time. He turned his eyes about the room, as if expecting someone to come. At last, with an air of disappointment, his head sank back on the pillow. He turned his face to the wall with a deep sigh.

Bishamber knew his thoughts, and, bending down his head, whispered: "Phatik, I have sent for your mother." The day went by. The doctor said in a troubled voice that the boy's condition was very critical.

Phatik began to cry out, "By the mark!—three fathoms. By the mark- four

fathoms. By the mark – “He had heard the sailor on the river-steamer calling out the mark on the plumb-line. Now he was himsel plumbng an unfathomable sea.

Later in the day Phatik’s mother burst into the room like a whirlwind and began to toss from side to side and moan and cry in a loud voice.

Bishamber tried to calm her agitation, but she flung herself on the bed and cried, “Phatik, my darling, my darling”.

Phatik stopped his restless movements for a moment. His hands ceased beating up and down. He said “Eh?”

The mother cried again, “Phatik, my darling, my darling”.

Phatik very slowly turned his head and, without seeing anybody, said, “ Mother, the holidays have come.”

||Glossary||

ring leader	— boss of illegal acts (अनैतिक कार्यों का सरदार)
unanimously	— common (एकमत, सर्वसम्मत)
timidly	— wuss (डरपोक, भीरुतापूर्वक)
furious	— extreme anger (नाराजगी से)
fertile	— healthy (स्वस्थ)
peril	— danger, risk (खतरा, जोखिम)
scratch	— score, rub with fingernails (खरोंचना)
wipe	— to mop (पोंछना)
impotent rage	— powerless anger (अशक्त क्रोध)
critical juncture	— complicated state (संकटपूर्ण समय)
bowed	— bent forward (आगे की ओर झुकना)
immense	— to great extent (अतिविशाल, अतिव्यापक)
eagerness	— keen desire (प्रबल इच्छा)
bequeathed	— to will someone (वसीयत करना)
perpetually	— continuously (लगातार, सतत्)
generosity	— kindness (दयालुता)
lad	— boy (लड़का)
impertinent	— inappropriate (असंगत)
hoarse	— harsh (कर्कश)
quaver	— tremble (थर-थराना)
lapses	— weaknesses, shortcoming (कमियाँ)
angular	— awkward, clumsy (भद्दा)
existence	— presence (अस्तित्व)
crave	— keen desire, urge (प्रबल इच्छा)

paradise	— heaven (स्वर्ग)
despise	— disrespect (अपमान)
brook	— a small stream (सँकरी नदी)
meadow	— open field covered with grass (चरागाह)
wist fullness	— depressed (उदास)
twilight	— duskiness (साँस)
objectly	— dishonourably (अधमतापूर्वक)
jeer	— mockery (चिढ़ाना, चुटकी लेना)
clumsly	— figureless (बेढंगा)
futile	— worthless (व्यर्थ)
drenched	— wet thoroughly (भीगना)
flushed	— redden (लाल होना)
sobbed	— crying noisily (सिसकी भरना)
mutter	— mumble (बुदबुदाना)
whirlwind	— hurricane (बवंडर)
moan	— lament (विलाप)
flung	— to throw (फेंकना)
ceased	— over (समाप्त)

|| Exercise ||

➔ Passages for Explanation :

Explain with reference to the context of the following passages :

- (a) Phatik Chakravorti was..... unanimously.
- (b) But when his mother where she was.
- (c) In this world of human affairs a boy of fourteen.
- (d) It was anguish with his lessons.
- (e) That night, on his way to his aunt.
- (f) Yet it is at has lost his master.

➔ Short Answer Type Questions :

Answer the following questions in not more than 30 words each :

- (i) What type of boy Phatik was? Write few lines in his reference.
- (ii) What mischief Phatik and his friends decided to do?
- (iii) How did Makhan spoil the fun?
- (iv) Who arrived at Phatik's house?
- (v) What were the differences explained by the mother between Phatik and Makhan?

- (vi) Why did Phatik go to Calcutta?
- (vii) What happen with Phatik in Calcutta?
- (viii) Why was Phatik unhappy in Calcutta?
- (ix) What happened to Phatik at School?
- (x) Why did Phatik run away from school?
- (xi) Who come to see Phatik?
- (xii) Why was Phatik delirious throughout the night?
- (xiii) Why did the teacher came Phatik unmercifully?

➡ Vocabulary :

(a) Give the Synonyms of the following :

(i) ringleader, (ii) unanimously, (iii) dignity, (iv) peril, (v) exhasuted, (vi) perpetual, (vii) despise, (viii) companion, (ix) summoned, (x) whispered.

(b) Give the Antonyms of the following :

(i) hasten, (ii) paradise, (iii) cramped, (iv) glorious, (v) miserable, (vi) delirious, (vii) critical, (viii) moan, (ix) patiently, (x) nuisance.

(c) Below are some homophones, use them in your own sentences to make out the difference in their meanings :

(i) bare, bear; (ii) cell, sell; (iii) flour, flower ; (iv) mail, male; (v) son, sun.

(d) Fill in the blanks with suitable words given below :

Flooded, courage, home, patience, condition.

- (i) His failed him at the crisis.
- (ii) Phatik's was already exhausted.
- (iii) For a boy of fourteen, his own is the only paradise.
- (iv) His became so objectly miserable.
- (v) It was still raining and the streets were all

(e) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences, selecting the most suitable words from these given within the brackets :

- (i) A new got into his head. (annoyance, mischief, trick, fun)
- (ii) He is neither nor useful. (glorious, happy, ornamental, important)
- (iii) The day by. (gone, come, went, took)
- (iv) Mother, the have come. (weeks, season, festival, holidays)
- (v) Phatik answered.....“No, I haven't, who told you that?”
(abruptly, politely, indignantly, angrily)
- (vi) For a boy of fourteen his own home is the only
(shelter, refuge, paradise, house)
- (vii) Everyone seconded the and it was carried unanimously.
(advice, suggestion, proposal, observation)