

Tagore's Vision of Religion Through His Plays

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ANSTRACT

The present research attempts to examine Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on Religion in his plays *Chitra* and *Chandlika*. It is customary to go through the progression of Tagore's religious and philosophical thoughts within a sequential framework. It will be very helpful in recognizing significant points of his transition. When we analyze Tagore's plays keeping the religious perception in mind, we find that there is a process of gradual development of an intellectual and emotional response to religious passion. The great works of Tagore express the philosophy which was entrenched in 'Islam', 'Christianity', 'Buddhism' and 'Hinduism' and flourished the essence of Indian thought.

Before going through the truth expressed by him about religion in his plays, we should know what the truth is? Truth is the reality which removes the misconception that is deeply rooted in the minds of people from ages and ages. It is always wiser to judge a religion in the light of its refinement than sheer spread or following. If we are making verses that express admiration for God and we are following recommended acts through which we can approach Him, then we are following the God described in scriptures 'the God of orthodox'. Instead we should follow that God like the adherent devotee with our soul. Let us see how Tagore has tried to say this with the help of his play.

KEYWORD: Religion, Marginalized, Emancipated, Literary Heritage.

CHITRA

In quest of plot Tagore breaks open the indigenous literary heritage such as 'Mahabharata', a repository of the national morality. As a principal architect of new India's cultural Renaissance, works into the frame of these legend-based plays. The play '*Chitra*', is wholly based on the great religious epic 'Mahabharata'. In Vedic period 'Kuru' is a strong and powerful kingdom. Arjuna is their prince in the house of Kurus. He is third of the five Pandava Brothers. He is the son of 'king of Gods' Indra but born on earth by Kunti and Pandu. He is also a bosom friend of Lord Krishna. He had four wives Subhadra, Draupadi, Chitrangada and Ulupi. Chitrangada is the daughter of the king of Manipur. Tagore chose the theme of the play '*Chitra*', to explain how Arjuna and Chitra's union takes place.

In Hinduism there are large number of Gods and Goddesses and they are supposed to do their duties. They have their different responsibilities. God Shiva is the personification of the fulfillment of desire. He is the embodiment of success. In the play '*Chitra*' offers her devoted prayer to Shiva in order to get fulfillment of her desire. In every scene religious element is concentrated and focused and aesthetic joy is also given in '*Chitra*'. The meeting place of Arjuna and Chitra is a temple, which is the symbol of religious aesthetic. Chitra says,

*"I harbor a secret in my heart, for the fulfillment
Of which I offer daily prayers to Lord Shiva" ¹*

‘Madana’ and ‘Vasanta’ are two Gods who are playing vital role in the play. ‘Madana’ is the one who was first born in the heart of Creator Himself. He is the God of human love and desire, rather he creates love and desire in human being as well as in Gods. ‘Vasanta’ the king of season is his friend. Chitra narrates her whole story to these two Gods. They carefully listen to her, and comfort her that they will summon Arjuna before her. Madana and Vasanta to fulfil their promise, bestow on her the blessing of perfection of beauty, fascination and magnetism for a year.

Now it so happens that when Arjuna sees her glance, he feels so fascinating as if he is dreaming a perfection of beauty on the lake. Now as if the spell cast on him by Madana and Vasanta could not restrain himself like Prakriti in ‘Chandalika’. Chitra also wants to give herself to Arjuna. Temple and prayers are the manifestation of religious safety and certainty. Chitra has a vision, and she becomes aesthetic with the help of that vision. Arjuna asks her,

*“What stern vow keeps you immured in this solitary temple,
Depriving all mortals of a vision of so much loveliness?”*²

When he comes to know about Chitra’s love for him, with utter surprise, he beseeches Chitra and requests her not to exile her wish. He is now yearning for Chitra more than anything else. Thus they get united. He is so satisfied with this union.

On the contrary Chitra on accomplishing her wish, wants to get rid of the illusion and wants to expose her true self. She thinks it would be nobler to disclose her true self to him. She thinks it is much better to reveal her self instead of concealing and falsifying both of them. But God Vansanta convinces her to have patience till Arjuna would receive her in her true form. When one year is about to come to an end in this disguise, Chitra become very anxious what will happen when truth will be disclosed to him.

Once a group of robbers is seen in the village. Villagers get scared and they discuss about the bravery of Chitra. On hearing the discussion, Arjuna gets very impressed and is inclined to know where the princess Chitra had gone to? He wanted to know more about the courageousness of Chitra and he is very fascinated with her. At last she gets a chance to reveal her real identity. She had been once rejected by him in Shiva’s temple a year before, but she loved only Arjuna and no one else in her life. Bishweshwar Chakraverty points out,

*“The throb of dramatic tension betokens a newer and subtler art. Here is an instance of double inversion. First Arjuna is captivated by the beautified exterior of Chitraganda, and second, he is captivated by her intrinsic worth irrespective of her beauty.”*³

She has achieved the boon with penance and God’s blessing with which she has become beautiful and own his heart. She also informs Arjuna that the baby in her womb would be the second Arjuna if born as a son. But right now she does not have anything to give him but her true self. As Arjuna is already impressed with the bravery of Chitra he feels happier to know the reality and feels his life is complete now. Here we have a beautiful monologue of Arjuna regarding which a critic states,

*“Arjuna’s speech not only gives a clue to the perennality of the problem of appearance and reality but also expresses his readiness to accept the real Chitraganda from the enigma that she has been.”*⁴

Tagore himself is of the view that spiritual freedom is very essential thing, for that the soul enters its own natural home and claims its right of abode in the realm of spirituality. Tagore thus doubtlessly says that religion is related to independence of mind and thought. In the plays also he has accentuated this

freedom of thought and mind. In the plays of Tagore we find number of assertions of spiritual freedom. Tagore asserts that art helps the soul to enter its natural home that is the domain of spirituality.

CHANDLIKA

In the play '*Chandalika*' Tagore has criticized the contemporary existing prejudice, which was prevailing in society with the name of religion and caste. Some people make the religion rigid with in the name of rituals and make it the way they want it. Tagore has shown these dogmas and rituals are deleterious and should be eradicated with the help of his plays. Prakriti is born in a Chandal family, so also brought up with the feeling of inferiority that she belongs to lower-class. She would contaminate other people if she will get close to them or touch them. These families are as much detested that even a street-hawker does not sell goods to them.

A religious man drinking water with the hand of untouchable girl, violates all religious norms. In such background when she considers herself mediocre, Ananda asks her for water, it seems to her that she has seen a radiance, she feels self-elevated. Monk's words prove to be stirring and stimulating to her, who makes the inspiring impression on her mind who has told her that she is a human being like any other. These words brought consciousness and cognizance to her mind and thought. In that very first sight she falls in love with the monk, she says,

*"Once did he cup his hands, to take the water from mine.
Such a little water, yet that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea.
In it flowed all the seven seas in one, and my cast was drowned,
And my birth washed clean"*⁵

It seems as if Buddha's monk surpasses her imposed caste and she ultimately signifies herself as a radical human being. Buddha's monk has bestowed the honour upon her by drinking water with her hand. She is sure that undoubtedly he has come with some holy purpose because instead of going to some sacred stream, he came to her to gratify his thirst. Thus she has become aware of her status as human being who is reverent, honored and equivalent to others.

Thus Tagore gives the message that was actually the message of Buddha through Prakriti. She releases herself from all the intolerable shackles, and chains of the world. Buddha gave the message that no one is defiled and unclean, no one needs to endure the exclusion and no one is supposed to tolerate prejudice of racism. Tagore envisages Buddha's lesson of universal love with the help of this play. In Rug-Vedic times, according to Hindu religion there are four classes of society.⁶

- Brahman [knowledge]
- Kshtriya [power]
- Vaishya [money]
- Shudra [waste]

This fourth class of Shudra were considered to be untouchables. They are supposed to have come from dust of the feet of Creator. This was the source of their discriminative belief. When asked by Ananda for water Prakriti feels self-purified and forgets everything of untouchability. She constructs her own-identity by violating the unfair and unjust restrictions of her religion and caste-system with the sense of liberation Prakriti sings,

*"Blessed am I, says the flower, who belongs to the earth.
For I serve you, my God, in this my lowly home.
Make me forget that I am born of dust,*

For my spirit is free from it.”⁷

Here Tagore is giving a message of equality through Ananda. When he is told that Prakriti belongs to lower caste Ananda speaks as if he is giving Tagore's message to the world.

*“As I am a human being, so also you are,
And all water is clean and holy that cools our heat
And satisfies our thirst.”⁸*

On hearing this Prakriti feels as if she has taken a new birth, here again we feel as if Tagore is speaking with the help of Prakriti. Thus the first words spoken by Ananda are worth creating self-consciousness in her. She feels as if the gates of freedom are open for her. That freedom can be achieved with a pure heart, and a spotless heart. Now she is not in predicament any more rather she is emancipated.

She wants to see him back any how and for that she compels her mother to use sorcery. Because of her hurt ego or her unreciprocated love she declines to listen anything of her mother's warning about the magic. Her mother frequently exhorts Prakriti that undoing the magic could cost her life but she does not listen and does not let her to stop the spell. Her feminine ego gets hurt when asked by mother 'how long should this unpleasant and prolonged experience drag on'. She feels Ananda should not get freed so long she is not free from all the bondages. At last when she takes a look in magical mirror, Ananda is in horrified condition of suffering because of transformation. She realizes it would be a stupid mistake and a regrettable act if she will go for this spell and she asks her mother to undo it. Now she starts exhorting to undo the magic. On her awkward behavior a critic asserts, that by undoing magic she is actually elevating herself.

“The heroine sought to achieve her union with Ananda through the adoption of wrong course does finally receive redemption running through the play is seen first in Ananda's lifting Prakriti from her social degradation then again at the end in her emancipation from fleshly craving.”⁹

Here we see Prakriti is the personification of 'Truth'. She suddenly feels inward contempt for the unjust spell cast on Ananda. As she is witnessing her mother's spell worked on Ananda with such a force that he is pulled along forcefully like an animal. Prakriti starts realizing that something has gone hazardously wrong. She is doing a hideous mistake and she again and again asks her mother to undo the spell as soon as possible. Because she feels God will not forbid her. Her intuition does not allow her to do so. She is a true religious person. A genuine women who obeys God's command, who is truly scared of God's existence and who cannot do anything wrong.

But as a matter of fact, according to the meaning of their name Ananda is the 'Absolute Bliss', that is inner soul and Prakriti is 'Maya', that is an illusion. She can be compared with him in a dream only not in reality, which will soon come to an end as the spell will end. Whereas Ananda can be compared with infinite soul. Thus this play was written in order to highlight the grief and suffering of untouchability, in the name of religion. It was intended to make people understand against the crime of untouchability.

Prakriti and Ananda both are presented as stimulating the idea of redemption first, in the beginning Ananda is lifting Prakriti up from her humiliated and degraded life by giving her self-esteem. In the end, Prakriti lifts him up with her inner conflict and eventually by giving him release from sorcery. Actually Ananda's ethical force saves his honour. This high esteem of Ananda is completely different from that of her initial love she felt for him. Prakriti is thus uplifted to higher and enriched state of spirituality. A different world of experience where a human being begun to realize that worldly desire are subdued with the supremacy of divinity. A critic observes,

“What is presents in the exposition through the baring of the protagonist’s humiliated social status is made to pass through rising action with the Buddhist bhikshu’s acceptance of water from her hands to the climactic stage as the tense moments of Prakriti’s suffering lead her to real emancipation from passion to a pure and superior awareness.”¹⁰

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