



TAGORE'S THREE PLAYS AND HIS VISION OF LIFE – (Chandalika, Mukta – Dhara, Natri puja)

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Abstract:

The play 'Chandalika' by Rabindranath Tagore is not a play on the his vision of life, but shows a conflict in the mind of each of the three characters namely Ananda, the Buddhist monk and Prakriti, an untouchable girl and also Prakriti's mother who was a magician and possesses magical powers. The story of this play is based on a Buddhist legend about Ananda, a famous disciple of Lord Buddha. Ananda, according to the legend, had aroused in a Chandal girl, an untouchable, a sense of her human dignity by asking her for water to quench his thirst; but the girl while pouring the water into his hands, falls in love with Ananda. Tagore had made a very skillful use of this legend to write a play having a profound psychological and spiritual significance. The whole interest of the play centre's round this conflict which takes place in Prakriti's mind, due to her repentance and remorse over what she has done to the holy monk by pulling him down to the dust from the heights of spiritual bliss. In Ananda, we can see the conflict of choice that takes place between his religious duty and his newly-awakened desire for a woman. We can also see a similar conflict in Prakriti's mother when she applies her magical powers on Ananda, in her desire to please her daughter Prakriti and the demand of her conscience not to use unholy methods to please her daughter.

Keywords: vision, Conscience, Morality, Magic, Agonizing, Chandal, Spiritualism.

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore was the greatest poet, dramatist, playwright and short story writer among the Indian writers of English. His fame as a poet in English rests chiefly on his "The Gitanjali", which is a 'transcreation' of the Bengali original. It was with this work that he achieved international fame and recognition and awarded the Noble prize for literature. He is one of the greatest lyric poets of the world and Edward Thomson calls his handling of poetic prose an "Impeccable metrical achievement." His thought and imagery are Indian and his poetry is in the tradition of Indian devotional poetry. His message is spiritual, both Hindu and universal at one and the same time. In his poetry, Indianness acquires a universal significance.

The word 'Chandalika' means a girl of the lowest caste or an untouchable girl. The story of this short but deeply moving play is based on a Buddhist legend about Ananda, a famous disciple of Lord Buddha. Ananda, according to the legend, had aroused in a Chandal girl a sense of her human dignity by asking her for water to quench his thirst, but the girl while pouring the water into his hands, falls in love with the Buddhist monk. Prakriti begins to feel uneasy in her mind soon after Ananda, the Buddhist monk has left her. His brief exhortation to her was not only given her a sense of her own identity as a human being but has given a new meaning to her life.

Tagore's Vision



He was a reformer, philosopher, prophet, novelist, shortstory writer, and critic of life and literature. He even made occasional incursion into nationalist politics, although he was essentially inter-nationalist. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar comments “he was a many person, he was darling versatility, still he was the same man: he was integral whole the rishi, guru dev, next only to Mahathma Gandhi and Sri Aurabindo, Tagore has been supreme inspiration to millions in modern India.” (98-KRS) Tagore’s literary output is large. His major poetics are, Gitanjali, Crescent Moon, Fruit Gathering, Stray Birds, Lovers Gift, The Gardener, Crossing, Fugitive, Kavi Kahani, Santhiya Sangeet, Sona Tari, Kalpana, Swedish, Shishu, Purabi Akash Pradeep, Parandk, Naba-Jadak, John Madine, In Sheshlekha, Manashi, Mana Sundari.

As a play wright he wrote many plays, in which some of them are musical plays; they are, Chitra, King and Dark Chamber, The post Office, Red Oleanders, Balcony, Chandalika, and Natir Puja. Tagore was also a novelist and who has written so many novels like Home and the World, The Wreck, Gora, Chaturang. The pen of Tagore raised letter writing to the status of a literary genre in Bengali. Throughout his life he wrote innumerable letters, almost all of them are rich in thought and expression. Tagore’s last role as a creative artist was that of the painter. It started from the criss-cross scratches in one rough copy of his poems. The inspiration and urge of Tagore as an artist is different from his literary inspiration and urge. This perhaps makes Tagore one of the complete man of art, one world has ever known. Bankim Chandra was then the uncrowned king of Bengali literature and the fame of young Rabindranath was continued to limited circles

Tagore’s Poetry

The Post Office is considered to be his best play. W.B. Yeats in his preface to the play makes the following comments “on the stage the little play shows that it is perfectly constructed, and conveys to the right audience an emotion of gentleness and peace.” (Indian Writing in English 186)

The most notable thing about Tagore’s plays is their variety. Chandalika, a short lyrical play, brings out of the cardinal truth that all caste and class distinctions are false and that all human beings are equal. Mukta Dhara has a political tone and the theme of the play is defiance through passive resistance. In Chitra, Tagore presents the evaluation of human love from the physical to the spiritual. Sacrifice, The Cycle of Spring and Red Oleanders are some of his other notable play.

It is a curious thing how often people refer to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) as if he has a future. This is sometimes about his poetry being timeless – as great poetry should be – although with Tagore the awesomely beautiful and significant lyrical verse is held out by his Bengali admirers, only to be snatched back from anyone who does not know his language. It is more curious that the other Tagore – the one with the myriad mind – who left a vast amount of non-literary writings, much of it the vestiges of his efforts to communicate his ideas to uncomprehending and unreceptive audiences – is written about as if he has a future, a future in which he will deliver on his promises.

Tagore’s Drama

Bengali sociologist and economist, Sasadhar Sinha, writing in the 1960s in his Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore, suggests that Tagore’s ideal of human unity “could only come when the present possibilities of compromise and reform had been completely



exhausted,” and that this would involve “the disappearance of one’s own familiar world” (Sinha, 53). Tagore wrote in 1941, in his last essay “Crisis in Civilization,” of a “new dawn” to come when the cataclysm was over (359).

The end of the Second World War and of British rule in India did not bring that new dawn; another whole lifetime has passed since Tagore’s death and we are still waiting. I suggest in this article that we are waiting for the end of the modern era, which began at the end of the seventeenth century when Newtonian ideas of universal order began to be extended to “positive” and “rational” studies of human nature, history and progress (Cassirer 3-8). There have been critics of the Enlightenment from the beginning – the great historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin, has written on three of them: Vico, Hamann and Herder. Berlin has also written, albeit briefly, on Tagore, not making any direct connection with these thinkers, but with a sense of a connection, perhaps with Herder in particular.

Ravindranath Tagore’s drama poems and his life vision

The Introduction to the book is by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, who writes that he grew up under Tagore’s influence, which he sees as an emotional and spiritual one (Nehru xiii-xvi). Contrasting Tagore with Gandhi, Nehru says: “Tagore was the poet and the singer; Gandhi was the man of action, the true revolutionary,” who “crept into the hearts of those who were disinherited and whose life was one long tale of unhappiness.”

After musing over Tagore’s “outlook on life,” Nehru decides that Tagore, for all his Indianness, was “essentially a person of international mould and thinking,” who helped to break down the barriers of nationalism, which is apt to become a “narrowing creed,” “and yet,” Nehru writes, Tagore “believed firmly in a people growing from their own soil and according to their own genius” (xv). Those words “and yet” (my emphasis) are crucial to understanding Tagore’s “outlook on life” – and why it is that the hopes that were so high in 1961 were disappointed in 1986 and 2011. 1961 is a long time ago, and one is bound to wonder about the high hopes in 1961 for a Tagorean future – and what went wrong.

We can get a good idea of the kind of future for India Tagore wanted from one of the books which came out of the centenary celebrations. *Towards Universal Man* is a collection of eighteen representative essays, “containing a message for humanity,” with a lengthy eulogy on Tagore’s genius by Humayun Kabir, India’s Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs (Kabir 1-35). This was the first book on Tagore that I read, after hearing about him in 1990 from Marjorie Sykes, who had worked as a teacher at Santiniketan in the last years of Tagore’s life.

She told me that Tagore was a deep ecologist, and quoted from his essay “City and Village,” where he relates an intriguing fable about how a race of greedy moon people had ruined their planet. “My imaginary selenites,” Tagore writes, “behave exactly in the way that human beings are today are behaving upon this earth” (314). I found a copy of the book containing that essay, and learned from it that Tagore’s vision of the new India meant reviving the life of its villages (Tagore 302-22).

Some years later I found out more about his rural reconstruction projects when I carried out research on the Elmhirst Papers in the Dartington Hall Trust Archive. I recognised the approach which Tagore and Elmhirst had taken as essentially the same as relocalisation initiatives gradually attracting support worldwide in recent years. Since then I have been

interested in making connections between Tagore enthusiasts and people currently engaged in his kind of world change.

Rabindranath Tagore belonged to this era of national awakening with its deep roots in Bengal. The Noble Laureate proved himself the most successful writer in finding a new path for the world outside. Acclaimed as the “Spiritual Guru” for India, he was essentially a writer with modern vision and a gifted novelist with a message for the rebirth of spirit of individualism. He is one of the internationally recognized writers and has produced a number of pieces in literature in English. He used in his writings history as backdrop and he used the real characters from history in his dramas for example, Bimbisara, Ajatasatru and Devadatta are historical names in Buddha's period.

Selected three characters – (Chandalika, Mukta-dhara, Natri puja)

According to a traditional story that the king Bimbisara was killed by his own son by the intention of capturing the throne and as far another tradition the king himself gave up his kingship for the sake of his son Ajatasatru. This is clearly portrayed by Tagore in his play, Natir Puja in which he mixed up history with fiction and produced a wonderful piece of work. This play depicts how history has become a part in interweaving the work. Historicism may be contrasted with reductionist theories, which suppose that all developments can be explained by fundamental principles (such as in economic determinism), or theories that posit historical changes as result of random chance.

Buddhism is major part in this play. Tagore was inspired by Buddhism and the teachings of Buddha. It is only in Buddhism that there is hope for the world driven by greed and hatred and torn by conflict and cruelty. Buddhism in the play has been depicted with deep sympathy and understanding. The endless procession of Buddhist monks and nuns that bestride the stage in the play sing songs of praise to the Buddha and their formula of Refuge. Refuge teaches of a dharma that saves, and which stands supreme in the Sangha and serves as their formula of prayer.

The play Natir Puja throws light on the history which gave importance to spiritual growth and also witnessed the social condition of down-trodden. This play talks about a dancing-girl Srimati who lives in the palace of Bimbisara and is asked to offer whatever precious things she has, and princesses are jealous of her that she has been blessed by a Buddhist monk Upali. Srimati receives an order from the king Ajatasatru not to offer any worship in the stupa. It is clear that the king Ajatasatru forbids the practice of Buddhism under the influence of Devadatta. She is unmindful of the king's order and on the day of Purnima of Vaisakhi she offers her dance worship to the lord Buddha.

Conclusion

The climax of the play is her impassioned and awe-inspiring dance. One day one by one she removes her jewels and costly garments, casting each in turn on the broken alter as an offering until she stands revealed in the simple yellow robe of a Buddhist nun and face penalty. When she dies, she thinks that Buddha wants her dance from her and out of the jealousy of the princess she is killed.

Tagore by bringing out the theme of Natir Puja from history showcases the condition of the Buddha period. He also was influenced by the teachings of Buddha. He sees Buddhism as a



solution for social discriminations. Srimati, dancing-girl finds shelter in Buddha. Tagore believes that Buddhism teaches the highest value of life because it emphasizes unity and love. This is the reason why Buddhism was established everywhere. And he also gives a picture of how people of lower caste and downtrodden were treated. Thus this project is an attempt to study the social and cultural issues as expressed by Tagore in his Natir Puja in its historical and political context.

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