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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TAGORE AS A SKILFUL ARTIST DEALING WITH THE THEME OF TYRANNY AND FREEDOM ALONG WITH THE CONFLICT BETWEEN TRUTH AND BEAUTY AND BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY: AN APPRAISAL

*Dr. Chelliah, S. M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt.

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English and Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021. Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the theme of tyranny and freedom in the works of Rabindranath Tagore. As an outstanding modern playwright, he has beautifully projects the conflict between the truth and beauty, love and duty throughout his plays in different form. Thus, this paper proves that Tagorean dramas are in quantity and quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore is regarded as an outstanding modern Indian playwright whose phenomenal dramatic career numbering over sixty plays occupies a prime position not only in Bengal but also in modern Indian theatre. Basically, his plays are "the vehicle of ideas, rather than the expression of action" (Thompson 51). Even though he admired Shakespeare, Ibsen and also Maeterlinck and Kalidas, and tried his hand at drama like them, Tagorean dramas in quantity and quality did achieve a high degree of excellence. Amiya Chakraborty observes: "Tagore's play is the play of feeling, not of action" (P 123). Tagore's dramatic accomplishments have been highly eulogized by two eminent critics like Niharranjan Ray and Satyendranath Ghoshal. Niharranjan Ray is of the opinion that "Rabindranath Tagore is matchless in his symbolic plays" (P 56). While Satyendranath Ghoshal believes that "every symbolical or allegorical play of Rabindranath Tagore is a magnificent dramatic work" (P 45). Tagore's study of Sanskrit dramas of Kalidas exercised a profound influence on moulding his dramatic genius. Truly speaking, his dramas are more acceptable in open country yard than in packed theatre.

***Corresponding author:** Dr. Chelliah, S. M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English and Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021. Tamil Nadu, India.

Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Laureate in 1913, universally acknowledged as a poet par excellence for his *Gitanjali* (song offerings), is the most eminent modern Indian writer who gained a prominently permanent play in the map of world literature. As a writer of astonishing scope and versatility, he was endowed with manifold excellences for he was a poet, actor, producer, director, translator, painter, educator and dramatic. Tagorean writings – dramas, novels, essays, short-stories, numerous letters, reminiscences, speeches, poetry of various kinds, songs, travelogues, sermons, criticism and articles on politics, education, and even on psychology and economics – shower down in India and abroad with a rich fund of creative imagination. He was good at translation work. As a translator, Tagore has been a great inspiration to millions and achieved a high degree of excellence. Edward C. Dimock comments:

"Tagore looked upon his English plays not as mere translations but as contribution to western literature as his foreign reincarnation" (P 34)

Essentially, Tagore wrote plays, novels, poems, songs and national anthem and so on in Bengali first. His writings have got translated subsequently into English by diverse hands with himself also contributing to this procedure to a great extent. He himself translated seven plays:

The Cycle of Spring, Sanyasi, Post-office, Malini, Sacrifice, the King and the Queen and Karma and Kunti. His *Gitanjali* (Song-offerings) from Bengali into English. But the gargantuan of his literary works got translated into English mainly by other scholars like Krishna Kripalani, Amiya Chakraborty, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Edward Thompson, Birendranath, Majorie Sykes, Ananda Lal and others. What is to be understood in common is that Tagore to some extent explores the conflict between tyrannical forces and freedom in such works of his as *Mukta Dhara* (1922), *Natirpuja* (1926) and *Chandalika* (1933). In fact, the conflict which is explored is a state in which tyranny is decentred and defeated allowing freedom to achieve victory in the end. *Mukta Dhara* is one such play in which the subject of political tyranny is dealt with. Here in this play, the King of Uttarakut Ranajit desires to control the source of Shiv-tarai's economic well-being and to that end, he had erected a great dam so as to prevent the waters of Mukta Dhara from reaching the plains below. The king is quite confident that the poor and defenseless people of Shiv-tarai must be at his mercy forever. What is focused upon in this play *Mukta Dhara* is that the king Ranaji, Scientist Bibhuti, the mob of Uttarakut belong to the class of tyrannical forces representing tyranny of exploitation, narrow-nationalism, injustice, inhumanity and insensitiveness while Maharaja Visvajit, an ascetic Dhananjaya, the people of Shiv-tarai, the crown prince Abhijit are all for freedom, freedom from the clutch of king's political oppression, freedom from Bibhuti's inhumanity and heartlessness, narrow nationalism, free flow of Mukta Dhara, free trading. At last, all tyrannical forces get changed and transformed themselves for freedom. In a word, it may be said that the right demand of the people of Shiv-tari becomes victorious.

In *Natir Puja*, Ratnavali is a hard nut to crack - representing a powerful tyrannical force. Mallika whispers into the ears of Ratnavali that the King Ajatasatru, fearing a revolt from the common people, has withdrawn his proclamation banning Buddhist worship. This means that now Srimati can go ahead with her worship of the Buddha at the altar in the garden. But Ratnavali does not communicate the latest order of the king to anybody present on this occasion in the royal garden. She does not let know even Lokesvari about the latest news Srimati starts her dance without knowing that the ban on Buddhist worship has been revoked. Unable to tolerate the religious fervour of Srimati who has been now joined by Lokesvari also in chanting Buddhist texts. Ratnavali turns to one of the female guards and asks to execute the King's order to kill anyone who offers Buddhist worship. The guard strikes Srimati dead with a violent blow. Ratnavali's action in ordering the guard to slaughter Srimati is an illegal one and because the king himself has withdrawn his proclamation. Thus, Ratnavali proves herself to be a most unscrupulous and vindictive woman who is chained to old values and the woman who can even break the law to satisfy her personal desire for revenge upon the dancing girl. In this way, Ratnavali proves obstacles to spiritual freedom and manifestly represents the forces of inhumanity, inequity, inequality, casteism and she, at times, appears tyrannical force to suppress others' spiritual freedom. But freedom triumphs over the tyranny of pride, casteism, false spiritual beliefs in Ratnavali and Lokesvari as well. At the end, Ratnavali comes under the influence of the Buddhist faith - the faith that believes in the values of humanity and spiritual freedom. When Mallika asks Ratnavali what she was thinking in silence after the death of Srimati, Ratnavali surrenders and a change is revealed in her statement:

"Now at last I am afraid" (Act-IV, 139). At the last moment, Ratnavali is seen to take the dust of Srimati's feet. She kneels down in reverence and utters the following Buddhist text -

"My refuge is in the Buddha! My refuge is in the Dharma!
My refuge is in the Sangha" (Act-IV-140)

Thus, even Ratnavali, a bitter enemy of Buddhism and determined foe of the dancing girl, is converted to the Buddhist faith - faith in equality, dignity, spiritual freedom of all human beings. In this way, tyranny is decentred and freedom wins over the tyranny of pride, false spiritual beliefs and casteism. Tyranny in different aspects in the three plays is represented from different angles. Religious tyranny in *Natir Puja*, Political exploitation in *Mukta-Dhara* and tyranny of love in *Chandalika* are explicitly shown. However powerful tyrannical forces may be, they are defeated in the long run. All types of tyrannical forces with all its claws and nails are vanquished. After all, there is a breeze of change, Peace prevails. Srimati's awakening as a worshipper, Chandali's awakening as a human being and prince Abhijit's awakening to protect the interest of the poor and defenceless people of Shiv-tarai are the turning points of the conflicts.

Chandalika (the outcaste), not exactly a play on the caste system, shows as a conversion following the outcaste girl's love for Buddha's disciple, Ananda. She persuades her mother, a sorceress, to bring Ananda to her. But overcome by conscience, she begs forgiveness and lets him go" (Ghosh 66). However, at the last moment, Ananda was able to save himself from his moral and spiritual downfall by praying to Lord Buddha to give him the strength to resist the temptation to which he had been to the point of yielding. Tagore has made a very skilful use of this legend to write a play having a spiritual and practical significance even today. Prakriti echoes Tagore's radical ideology that caste system is the humiliation of the Divine spirit, when she condemns her mother.

"Fie, Fie, Mother, I tell you again, Don't delude yourself with this self-Humiliation - it is false and a sin" (Act -I, P-152).

The theme of this play *Chandalika* is a conflict which takes place in the mind of Prakriti; the Chandal girl's awareness of herself as a human being has been aroused by Ananda's assurance to her that she is a human being like all others and she should not hesitate to give him water to quench his thirst. Prakriti is a Chandal girl, who belongs to the lowest untouchable caste; she is untouchable from the point of view of the people of upper castes. But Buddhist monks do not believe in this custom and they regard all human beings as equals. The theme of the play *Sanyasi* is the conflict between truth and beauty, between rejection and acceptance. The protagonist of this play is an ascetic who voluntarily renounces the physical world and all its mundane activities and interests to attain supreme joy and that is why he confines himself in a solitary care in order to be one with God. He denies the law of nature and neglects his obligations towards humanity. He denies all worldly interests when the Sanyasi proudly utters, "the division of days and nights is not for me, not that of months and years" (Act-I, P.463). The Sanyasi tries "to gain a victory over nature by cutting away the bonds of all desires and affections and thus to arrive at a true and profound knowledge of self" (Reminiscences 236). He feels much disturbed by the stir and bustle of actual life.

His constant effort is to identify himself with the cosmic realization of the world and pines for transcendental knowledge. But he feels disturbed by worldly attractions when he comes into contact with a little outcast girl Vanathi. His attachment with the poor girl is against the rules of ascetic morality which requires that an ascetic must give up all worldly attractions. He then leaves the girl to her own fate (death) and goes away fearing that he may yield to human emotions. But he cannot keep away for a long time - "Yet the springs of humanity, not being dried up completely, assert themselves at last" (Iyengar 123).

To awaken the humanitarian sensibility, the dramatist introduces the character of Vasanti. The extremes of asceticism are a kind of tyrannical force. Sanyasi's self-imposed restrictions disappear as he meets Vasanti whom a woman condemns for being untouchable. "The little girl, however, brings back from his communion with the infinite to the world and into the bondage of human affection" (Reminiscences 236). In the play, *The King and the Queen*, the conflict occurs between love and duty. Infatuated with the queen's physical beauty, the king Vikram neglects his duties and responsibilities. He says to his Queen, "No more vain words, Queen. The birds' nests are silent with love. Let lips keep guard upon lips and allow not words to glamour" (Act-I, P.536). His subjects are being oppressed by the hordes of officials who constitute the bureaucracy. Common people and citizens are in deplorable plight and enemies are taking advantages. The queen feels very sad for the oppressed people and requests king Vikram, "I am the mother of my people. I cannot bear their cry. Save them, King" (Act-I, P.538). Sumitra, though loves Vikram, is aware of the difference between personal love and public obligations. Neglecting the duty of a king, he is reduced to the level of a selfish passionate lover. For the sake of love for Sumitra, Vikram is ready to forgo all sorts of prestiges and positions. Vikram's conversation with his queen reveals his real intention as passionate lover, "Rise up, my love, come to my heart. Shut my life from all else for a moment, with your encircling arms, rounding it into a world completely your own" (Act-I, 541).

As S.C. Sengupta puts it, "He does not listen to his wife or to his friend, or to his minister and seems, in his neurosis, to have forgotten the existence of the world outside his palace of pleasure" (P 154).

Sumitra's handling of the entire affair against the sluggishness of Vikram is to suggest the need of practical vision in politics. The tyrannical force of narrow passion of Vikram is found defeated by the sacrifice of Sumitra. To conclude, it may be stated that the treatment of the theme of tyranny and freedom exists in most of his plays in different forms and guises along with the conflict between truth and beauty, between rejection and acceptance, and between love and duty.

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