



A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S “NATIR PUJA” AND “CHANDALIKA”

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Abstract:

It is quite true that Tagore's literary genius has found its best expression in poetry and not in drama, but to say that he is not a great dramatist is doing less than justice to the dramatic talents of Tagore. One may not agree with the criticism that a day will come when Tagore's ideas would be old and antiquated, and hence the dramas would lose their importance. Tagore's dramas do not deal with some local problems of transitory importance. They contain critical adjustments on some of the Permanent problems of life and hence their importance would grow and not diminish with the passage of time. Tagore's symbolic plays are undoubtedly dramas of ideas. These ideas have been expressed through character, action, and atmosphere, but the most important of all is perhaps atmosphere.

Keywords: Old and Antiquated, Transitory Importance, Atmosphere.

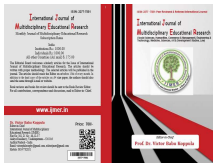
The dramatic art of Rabindranath Tagore is both simple and complex. It is simple in style and expression. It is complex in the variety of its forms and in the depth of its meaning. His works, including his dramas, are saturated with his personality and each one of his plays bear the impression of the experiences of his own inner and outer life. None of his plays is to be viewed merely objectively as a representation of a series of events. It is intended to produce an aesthetic and emotional experience and impression.

During the “*Gitanjali*” period, Tagore had begun to realize the truth that life cannot be fulfilled by worshipping God not in a secluded corner, but through service to humanity. This consciousness of the relationship between man and God dawned upon him with greater intensity during the post- “*Gitanjali*” period. The Upanishadic mantram of *Santam, Shivam, Advaitam - Peace, Goodness, and Unity* is the predominant spirit of his poetry and dramas of the last ten years). The widespread hatred in the world could be conquered by love and peace his realism did not rest content with the material values of life. It brought into its purview the spiritual values of life also. He thought of Buddha and Christ, the world's great apostles of peace, at this time.

In both *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika*, the social injustices which Hinduism tolerated are condemned, and the liberal humanism of Buddhism is commended. Both these plays were written obviously under the influence of Buddhist teachings, and as Srinivasa Iyengar says, both these plays testify to Tagore's attraction to Buddhism as an ethic and Buddha as a spiritual power.

Natir Puja gives us a masterly position of martyrdom in the character of Srimati, who exemplifies in her life and deeds the majesty of human spirit which refuses to be cowed down by the tyranny of authority and power. This is the simplest and most moving of Tagore's plays. It will be interesting to compare “*Murder in the Cathedral*” by T.S. Eliot with *Natir Puja* of Rabindranath Tagore. The martyrdom of Becket takes us as far back as the 12th century A.D. and that of Srimati, brings to us the visions of the distant past nearly 5th B.C. Both had the courage of conviction and faced death bravely and cheerfully.

Natir-Puja has been generally appreciated as a *dance-drama*. But it is more than that. It is real drama of passion and action and succeeds in giving a faithful representation of life at a definite period in the history of India. The steady evolution of plot, the conflict of interests, the clash of personalities, tense situations full of suspense and excitement and, above all,



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the deep psychological interest of the Queen Mother, who is torn between two equally strong impulses- the religious impulse and the impulse of womanhood - all these are the salient characteristics of this drama.

In *Natir Puja*, Upali, the Bikshu, accepts alms at the hands of Srimati, a Nati, who belongs to the degraded class of society. She is roused to a consciousness of the essential dignity of man, whether he is prince or slave. In *Chandalika* also, Ananda accepts a gift of water from a woman of a low and despised class. She is also awakened to a consciousness of her inherent worth as a woman and makes her long for the love of the holy Sage.

The main action of the play "*Natir Puja*" centres in the exalted fervour and devotion of Srimati and its culmination in her martyrdom. Though a member of a low and despised class, she is redeemed by the teachings of the Buddha and her devotion to him. Her faith inspires with a similar emotion all who come into contact with her, and all the princesses except Mallika and Ratnavali are drawn into the vortex of her purifying influence.

As the action proceeds, her religious emotion rises to greater and greater heights of fervour, and as she gives up her life with a prayer for forgiveness for the wrong-doers, the reader is struck with the grandeur of human spirit. Incidentally, he gets a glimpse of Buddhism at its best.

Chandalika is a play with a meaning. It is a symbolic play.

It is not a drama of action or circumstance. Its chief interest lies in an idea which it formulates- "*A religion which gags or blinds is no religion to all.*"

It is not the accidents of birth and other artificial restraints which are imposed upon it which determine the worth of a man. Human dignity makes a rise above this the artificial dignity. Personal lust cannot triumph over spiritual sublimation. It is these ideas which are conveyed through this play.

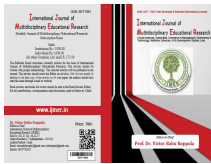
It is a psychological drama of intense spiritual conflict.

The plot, it is evident, is crude, though the tale has been popular down the ages. It is rather surprising how the simple and crude plot has been turned by Tagore, the poet, into a psychological drama of intense spiritual conflict. *Chandalika* is a tragedy of self-consciousness over-reaching its limit. Self-consciousness, up to a point, is necessary to self-development; for, without an awareness of the dignity of one's own role or function, one cannot give one's best to the world. This is what happened to the heroine.

In *Chandalika*, we admire the self-consciousness of Prakriti. She has come out of the cocoon of self-degradation and has realized her value as a human being. But what gives rise to the tragedy is that she oversteps the limits. Any transformation takes its own time. Here it is the psychological conflict and change of mind. Prakriti at first just wants to bring Ananda to her. Later she realises her mistake. Her true path lies in reforming her life, in giving a new direction to her life. In her defeat lies her self-realization. Ananda's departure symbolically signifies the birth of new ideas in Prakriti's mind. Pride and self-humiliation are wiped out from her heart and soul and divine light dawns on her.

"O pure one the dust has soiled your feet but they have not been soiled in vain. The veil of my illusion shall fall upon them and wipe away the dust."

The idea is that a spiritual rebirth or regeneration is not easy. It involves a lot of pain and sacrifice.



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“A new consciousness after years of suppression is overpowering and one learns restraint only after suffering. Hence the tragedy.”

— says K.R. Kripalani

In Summing up,

Tagore's position as a dramatist, it may be said that he has given us in his plays the vision of a higher life without ignoring the claims of the contemporary world. The drama or the theatre is just a device and an excuse for self-expression for a romantic poet, like Tagore, who rebels against the materialistic tradition.

He has a philosophy of his own which he deftly expresses, not loosely or formlessly, through the technique of language of which he is a master.

In the hands of Tagore the plots of *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* are changed into psychological dramas of intense spiritual conflict. Tagore like Mahatma Gandhi was inspired and molded by two spiritual influences: that of the *Upanishads* and the personality of the enlightened one, i.e., Lord Buddha. *Natir Puja* has both these influences pronouncedly present in it.

In *Natir Puja*, Tagore has laid emphasis on two ideas. The one is that true religion is that which ignores man-made prejudices and restores the fundamental valuation by which all human beings must finally be measured and redeemed. The second is that every individual, however low and degraded, has somewhere in his being the essential human dignity which expresses itself sometimes. It is as much present in the slave as in the princess.

Chandalika could be considered as a play for wiping out casteism. Like in *Natir Puja*, Tagore seems to throw light on the irresistible power of the Buddha and his followers. They both *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* emphasise the need for spiritual awakening and the conditions that presuppose it.

In this connection, Prof. **D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu's** remarks are significant:

“The plays of Rabindranath Tagore reveal an organic continuity and a steady advancement in spiritual perception and psychological insight.

As Tagore progressed in these qualities, he also achieved a symbolic form of drama which was organically evolved by the inner causation of his art.”

Tagore has expressed not only ideas of profound significance but also has also created living pictures to illustrate them. It is this combination of the noble values that he sets on human life and their successful manifestation in living symbols that will assume him a place among the greatest dramatists of modern age.



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