

The Feminine Spirit in Tagore's Plays

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Abstract- Rabindranath Tagore is at his best in creating and constructing fictitious characters. He could imagine and describe various natures and features of those imaginary characters and then could give them life like characteristics. When we scrutinize his work considering him as a playwright, it deserves the persistent and long-standing need for thorough study. They will not be understood in cursory reading. Feminist theologians are there in all the religions trying to prove the gender equality. Rather in some religions, it has been made clear that women are more diligent, sincere and obedient than men. Men cannot be equal to them, as there are some duties that have to be performed by women only. Let us see how Tagore has tried to prove their equality, and their superiority with the help of his plays.

Keywords- Feminist theologians, emancipation, psychological insight, social barriers, psychological threads.

INTRODUCTION

Many of his plays are gifted with his own performance, where he has performed the leading role. Plays used to be acted in his own Joresanko home and in the family there were number of artists. There were some female performers in his family, itself. By letting them work in his plays he gave all female actors a reverential position in the society. A critic observes,

*"The stage appearance of Tagore's niece Pratibha in Valmiki Pratibha was a revolutionary step in view of the prevailing attitude of society towards playacting by the woman of a respectable family."*¹

At that period of time women were supposed to be restricted to their household duties. Rabindranath Tagore's efforts of make them work outside their house proved revolutionary. His utmost endeavor was to uplift the status of women in our society and for that he took the help of female characters in his plays. He

was actually striving hard for their emancipation and for that he had inspirations like Raja Rammohan Roy, and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. He did it with such an elegance that we feel some times as if he had surpassed his inspirations.

He had displayed various concerns of women, their ardent efforts to get freedom and their struggle with contemporary partiality of caste system. He tried to convince his spectators how women have been exploited and circumscribed with the need of their parents and the need of their husbands. Tagore has nicely delineated their inmost feelings and emotions in his excellent work with the help of his psychological insight.

It is one of the qualities of Tagore's plays that should be concentrated. His delineation of woman characters as an indispensable part of these plays. As far as his aesthetics in the play are concerned, he has made the original frame of religious beauty and religious truth through the portrait of woman like 'Malini', 'Chitra', 'Shyama' these are the major characters of the same name of the play.

Rabindranath has created multifaceted women characters, in his different plays, especially Chitra and Chandlika open up feminist interpretations. Chitra brings out the contrast between gender identity and women's question. Whereas Chandlika questions the very basis of a system that degrades, demeans and trivialize human being. When we study Tagore's plays closely we find that he amalgamates the sagacity of religion in aesthetics. He explores the truth and presents it with spirituality and religious beliefs with beautification of Indian aesthetics. All the heroines of the play have their own voice, their self-respect and they are self-confident.

Let us see how skillfully he has created his female protagonists and dealt with their respective problems. In 'Chandlika', the protagonist Prakriti who is untouchable by caste, an emotional girl is condemned by birth because of her class. She has become the

subject of emotional and social domination. She has been expelled from her basic rights, the right of living her life with honour, the right of buying anything on street, and even the right of thinking about her own future. All due to her lower caste which was as if written in her destiny and cannot be erased. In this play we see in spite of all her caste restrictions, she dared to love a monk and even dared to tell everything to her mother without hesitation.

In the spirit of intransigent feminist she emerges as a courageous and self-empowered voice. Even a cursory reader can judge by reading '*Chandlika*' that she is not asserting physical desire only but she wants desperately that her social and emotional status should be uplifted. Ananda gave her the sense of honour that she starts loving him. And her one and only aim becomes to gain Ananda and for that she does not bother for any social barriers.

Rabindranath Tagore gave the right turn to the story as though initially Prakriti goes on the erroneous path but afterwards she realizes her own fault. She attains the spiritual goal, she elevate her identity, her existence and achieves the spiritual elevation. As the monk has already renounced the worldly pleasure and his purpose of life is spiritual and not worldly. And she is inspired by him, at the end when she happens to see the pain he is bearing to come to her place, she realizes her blunder and immediately corrects herself by undoing the spell and thus uplifts her spiritual status and elevates him too.

Rabindranath Tagore is revolutionary in his spirit and viewpoint, as though he has allowed his female protagonist to eat forbidden fruit but immediately controls and balances her. As he has to keep in view the moral code of conduct for it would have been too much and morally unacceptable at that period of time, if Prakriti and Ananda would have been united. Rabindranath Tagore has created so appealingly a feminist perspective of his ideology with the help of Prakriti's character. He desired to highlight the mysterious and perplexing character of women. The character of Prakriti is courageous enough to demolish all that stands against her. Precisely it is Prakriti's too much efforts that eventually fails before spiritual manifestation. As Prakriti utters,

*"I have dragged you down to earth,
How else could you raise me to your
heaven?"*²

Prakriti is one of the unconventional characters in Tagore's plays. He has created it with the help of his critical thoughts. As he wanted to criticize the contemporary status of women, and he wanted to make their eminence better. Prakriti has become revolutionary in order to eradicate existing time's custom. The custom which was responsible to imprison her status and her position. As a social reformer he did his best. With the help of his writing he disclosed the pains and sufferings one goes through, if she belongs to discriminated caste.

In short Rabindranath Tagore's female protagonists, including Prakriti, are courageous enough. They are free-spirited and they surpass all the boundaries of the society, in their respective process of modification of their selfhood. Tagore has been severely censured by his contemporary critics for creating such characters. But he never hesitated to write for the right cause. As a social reformer he did what he thought to be correct and what should be done.

In '*Malini*' also the protagonist Malini plays the same challenging role. She is blessed with the vision of love for religion. The play starts with awakening of Malini's supreme self which has achieved luminous seeing through spiritual insight. Thus the new aspect of Tagore's religion is focused. In the beginning Malini seems to be enthusiastic and thrilled for the new religious spirit that has developed in her. This spirit is able to make people anxious, for this is not that traditional religion which is deep down in the roots of society.

Some extremists are obviously opposed to this new creed. They are of the view that the religion of their forefathers is flawless and ideal. Kemankar, a dogmatist is also one of them. He is playing the role of protector of Brahmanism. Whereas Malini is thoroughly influenced by the preaching of Buddha. She delineates the dispute between two religions. She wants that Buddhism should spread in the whole kingdom. Malini seems to have gone through various Buddhist books.

As temple and statues inside and various things related to it are the outer base of religion, but the very core of religion or we should say the fundamental thing in religion are books. It escorts man the real path. Books are traditionally followed by generations. She does not care for her status her, nor does she cares about society, she confidently goes on preaching of Buddhism having the only aim in her mind.

In the play '*Shyama*', Tagore has portrayed the character of Shyama with the same intelligence. She is very courageous woman. She takes the risk in order to save the life of Bojroshen. Though she gets the temporary success, still the way she manipulates the plan she is very firm and determined in whatever she does.

Though the story of '*Chitra*' is inspired from the tale of '*Mahabharata*', but Rabindranath made the necessary changes in order to emphasize the emancipation of women. As we examine it, in Mahabharata Arjuna asks to Chitra's father about his wish of marrying Chitra, whereas in play Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra herself asks for marriage to Arjuna, thus it seems he wanted to show women as bold and realistic. He gave them deserving significance by giving them a vital role in his plays, and by showing their independence and choice. He also inspired and influenced others to do so. In '*Chitra*' Arjuna tells to Chitra,

"You seem to me like a goddess hidden within a golden image." ³

Women according to him should neither be a pretty idol who are esteemed high in society, nor a reliant and helpless creatures, who are blindly doing what is told. At the times of stress in life she is supposed to be an escort for man. She should be like true counterpart of man. This comradeship shows the true place and identity of the woman in a man's life. Manifestly this basic issue was one of his genuine and enduring concern for Tagore.

Thus he has created immortal characters like Chitra, Malini, Shyama, and Prakriti, and many more, so that he can show how a woman is able to elevate to the exceptional height by confronting prejudice boldly. His heroines are portrayed as bright, brainy, determined, courageous and feminist conscious, who can resist the preconceived views of women. Thus he has discovered the struggle concerning oppressive force and sense of independence with the help of his heroines.

A woman is always nurtured as one who will endure all the pains and torments that comes in her way of life. The models and inspiration she has in front of her eyes are based on myths like '*Sita*', the archetype of Indian womanhood. It is well-known thought that during adolescence, a woman is sheltered by her father, during youth she is protected by her husband and in her old age she is in control of her son. She is never

free from bondage and others will take all her decisions. She is supposed to be looked after by someone because she cannot take care of herself. She is supposed to accept her lower status and she is taught to be shy and gentle.

As a humanist Rabindranath Tagore had perceived the degrading condition of women and he thought about the action should be taken to uplift their status. He decided to educate only women is not enough, we have to educate the whole human race for women empowerment. For that he has created four unforgettable women characters Chitra, Shyama, Prakriti, Malini all are characteristically so contradictory yet so comparable in their womanhood. All four characters play their respective roles enthusiastically in their unreal world, so that we can understand in reality the significance of their womanhood.

As we begin to think of them in practicality, we realize that there is a microcosmic viewpoint towards all that is realistic and naturalistic. The human world is an intricate variation of the multi-faceted yet entangled concealed linkages. The dissimilarities or rather the similarities, if any, only go to increase the moral belief of all that is universal and basic. Disapproval in this life and about this life is inevitable. Here this world, and this humanity, formed and reformed, transformed and rehabilitated. Here in this extent we observe class, social group, gender, religious conviction and occupation, where they continue defining, society, community, and economy. They are nothing but the manifold spokes of a shrewd wheel called life.

Chitra is a courageous woman who is in search of true love, is a stimulating search for feminineness. Prakriti is a girl who respects herself a lot but humiliated again and again in the society, tries to disrupt the barriers of caste for the sake of her love. Shyama is a court dancer torn between prejudice and sacrifice in quest of love. Malini is struggling for the sake of her religion in her country. They are women who are facing the common challenges, their challenges are dissimilar but their goal is same. They all want to live their life with self-respect.

Hence all their efforts are for freedom, whatever they do is only to make themselves free from the world and its regulations which are made so inflexibly for them. All are the examples of those who are trying to unshackle women, all over the world. Even in this modern world some women like Chitra are born to

sacrifice her feeling for her parents, some like Prakriti are there who are facing contemptible odds of caste system, and maybe there are some women like Shyama who is born to be disdained and detested by someone whom she has loved so ardently and some are like Malini who changes the unshakable attitude of old religious people.

Many women characters of his plays are focused around the interests, needs, abilities, problems, existence, dignity, freedom and the emancipation of womanhood. He challenged the traditional concept of women. He felt the inevitable significance of women in home, society, in country and even in this world. We observe in his plays the portrayal of legendary, historical, social, representative and idealistic women characters. He became a true feminist, when the world did not understand the importance of women, he taught them.

At that period of time guardianship and household duties are not considered to be important. Rabindranath felt the necessity of changing the perspective of the world regarding the same. Women are the most persistent figure in his plays and mysticism in all his women is noticeable.

Drama has always been the most vivacious and lively medium of literature as it leaves the lasting impact on spectator's emotional and psychological threads. Rabindranath Tagore was the mastermind, he utilized this medium to tackle with various contemporary social issues, and got the tremendous success, in reforming the prejudiced thinking of the society. One of the prevalent contemporary concern was exploitation of women, he picked up the issue and tried his best for the emancipation of women.

As far as religion is concerned there is always equality and freedom we observe in regards of women. Let us see some religious thoughts,

*"The prevailing idea of a woman's place in Islam is that women are deprived of freedom and equality. This is the result of earlier ignorance about Islam or the biased propaganda of anti-Islamic ideology and a prejudiced media. The fact is just the opposite."*⁴

*"The woman is celebrated as the most powerful and the most empowering force in some Hindu Upanishads, Shastras, and Puranas, particularly the Devi Upanishads, Devi Mahatmya, and Devi-Bhagavata Purana."*⁵

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