



Chitragada As The Epitome of The Present Woman in Tagore's drama "Chitra"

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Abstract

Tagore has bestowed generous and liberal treatment to all his female characters. As he ardently advocates for the freedom of women against the orthodox society. Chitragada, the protagonist of his play " Chitra " is a bright and shining example before us. She has proved herself such modern woman as opposes all the practices and rules laid by the conservative society and leads a very adventurous, independent and free life. Arjuna, the prince as well as the hero of the play is no greater than Chitra, she is attracted towards him and proposes to him (Arjuna) for marriage but is rejected like a common woman. In place of remaining confined herself within house and shedding tears, she boldly takes an oath for rigorous and austere penance and begins to worship the gods Madana and Vasanta (God of love and God of Spring) for sensual beauty to win Arjuna's heart and hand which she later does. She excels the great warrior, Arjuna and reaffirms herself to be a woman of today (modern woman) of self-respect and inner self-evaluated in each and every aspect.

Key words: Chitra, orthodox, conservative, adventurous, penance, inner self-evaluated.

Rabindranath Tagore, the awardee of the most prestigious Nobel Prize in 1913 for literature, is the first Indian man of letters. Primarily he was a poet, playwright, novelist, short story-teller, painter, musician, a great patriot and the greatest humanist in Indian literature. He was a lyricist in heart first we see an excellent musician who used it not only in his poetry but in his plays also. It may be that his plays are in want of a well-knit plot but they possess great symbolic and musical qualities to win and move the hearts of their readers. Krishna R Kripalani describes the play 'Chitra' as one of the most charming, fascinating and the most satisfying examples of Tagore's genius: "One of Rabindranath's most beautiful plays, perhaps the only one that is flawless." "The simple and bald episode" of The Mahabharata, he added, "was transformed by Rabindranath into a drama tense and vibrant with lyrical rapture and full of deep psychological insight." Use of music and symbols is the soul and heart of his plays without which they have no meaning and existence Hence K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks: "Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbols is the soul of his drama" 123 In the same strain A.N. Prasad goes a step ahead: "In Tagore's plays, it is not the plot, but the music of ideas and symbols, the soul of drama, that form the core ..." 23-33 Though Tagore's dramas are rarely for stage performances, they have attracted and captivated the attention of readers locally as well as across the sea

(abroad). They raise the great literary interest of their readers for various reasons like symbolism, lyricism, mysticism , use of Indian myths etc. P. Guha criticised “ Tagore has lyricised all dramatic action.” 112 His plays take some cudgel on behalf of women who always out number their male counterparts. Prakriti, Nandini, Sudha, Malini and Chitra are such kind of examples.

Tagore is not an orthodox or conservative, when he depicts his woman characters .He is radical and consistent. He is progressive, when he potrays bold, courageous and assertive women. Tagore, being an ardent champion of women’s rights and liberty, always takes their side with strong support . He depicts his characters and scenes with colourful lines and words, through different types of arts, he depicts the world with lines, colours and words. He was a great humanist. He had perfect and profound insight into human psychology. He also deeply peeped into the mind of the women. His female characters had myriad and multiple forms. He depicts them in a very sensitive manner. His characters are not only individuals but they are types also. They represent certain individuals in the society and thus maintain their dignity and identity. His female characters Sudha, Chitra etc wil always be immortal in literature. Chitra, the heroine, is the first explicit description of feminism in India by Tagore.

Tagore’s “Chitra“ is a poetic, musical as well as a dance drama . It is a mythical story of Chitrangada and Arjuna episode in the Adi Parva from a great epic, the Mahabharata is the main story of the play. The main themes of the play are – inner spontaneous self -evaluation, self -realisation, and man-woman relation, equality and liberty especially for women in our society. They too have equal rights and liberty during Vedic Period. At that time women were not only allowed to act like men but they could enjoy all kinds of freedom and liberty also. Tagore strongly supported freedom for women and wanted to give them power. His heroines always talk about individuality, liberty, freedom, justice, power, dignity and rights. They do not hasitate to do practices, which are thought to be taboos.

Chitra is an Upanishadic work in the sense that its main theme is the pursuit of knowledge which frees human beings from incognizance and ignorance. Its main stylistic devices is the interaction between human and gods like Madana, the god of love and Vasanta, the god of spring. In chitra we observe that there is the awaking of one self or inner development and high level of consciousness. Chitra’s inner spontaneous evaluation has wider meaning for mankind.

The story of Chitra is set in the forest of Manipur where she comes across Arjuna. Chitra is a beautiful and wonderful creature of Nature. She is the symbol of truth like Aurobindo’s Savitri and Kalidas’ Shakuntala as Dr.Gaurishankar Jhha remarks: “ Chitra is Tagore’s another attempt to justify the role of woman not only as a beautiful agent of Nature but also an interpreter of truth. Tagore’s Chitra is like Kalidas’ Shakuntala, epitome of youth, love and romance.” 537

Chitra (Chitrangada) , the daughter of Chitravahana, the king of Manipur, is the heroine of the play. Lord Shiva (Mahadeva) had granted a boon to her ancesters that they would get at least one male heir in their family. He would be the king of Manipur kingdom. He got a daughter instead of a son as the words of Lord Shiva proved fruitless and in vain, therefore, the king begins to bring up princess Chitra as a son since her birth. She is taught and treated like a boy. Tagore, here, makes some change in the original story that women were free and independent in Vedic period of Indian history and both the sexes had equal rights. He shows her as a very stalwart, dauntless, and courageous woman as we can see this in the women of today.

As the play begins Chitra is brought up as a boy, unaware of feminine delicacy and grace of a woman. She, therefore, is seen in a man's attire, though the women were or are prohibited from wearing man's cloths. Her clothing indicates that she is an up to date woman, who takes pleasure in freedom of wearing a man's clothing. Chitra is an expert and well-versed in horse riding. She loves hunting and makes it her passion like brave man of historical world. While she was chasing an animal for hunting, she comes a-cross prince Arjuna who was lying on the ground in a sanyasi's attire. It shows that like a modern woman Chitra nurtures men's hobbies of horse riding and hunting.

In the play it is Chitra, who has indomitable spirit. She protects the peoples of Manipur kingdom from robbers. Perior to her own-self she discharges her duty towards the kingdom like an able king and safeguards the interests of her people. The villagers express their deep and extreme concern of their own insecurity when Chitra decides to go to stay with Arjuna. They are worried about their protection and life threat from the robbers, come from the northern hills. In her character, there is no submissiveness which the main trait of a woman. "Princess chitra was the terror of all evil doers, while she was in this happy land. We feared natural deaths, but had no other fears. Now she has gone on a pilgrimage, and none knows where to find her." 53

Chitra is regarded as a capable and powerful defender of her peoples like great women warriors and rulers of ancient as well as modern India such as Manu (laxmibai, the queen of Jhansi), Razia Sultana, Ahilyadevi Holkar, Indira Gandhi and so on. To engrave her image as a modern woman, she takes on modern manners and attitude.

Traditionally a man proposes to a woman for marriage but in the play Chitra proposes to prince Arjuna, a hermit but Arjuna rejects her proposal roughly because she is not physically pretty, charming and attractive as a soldier in man's attire. He informs her that he has undertaken a vow of celibacy. But Chitra is a self- assertive woman. Unlike woman she never burries her desires. She does not shed tears and confine herself within the four walls of the palace like a weak and woman of street. To fulfil her ambition and intense desire, she expresses her pain and agony and declares "I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile, a widow from her birth. The flower of my desire shall never drop into the dust before it has ripened to fruit." (156)

Chitra is a simple and unattractive woman in man's attire. She takes an oath of hard penance to gain for only a day's perfect beauty. She performs it with firm determination and pleases the two Gods – Madana and Vasanta. She gets the desirous boon for voluptuous beauty for one year and enjoys a year's union with Arjuna temporarily. "not for a short span of a day, but for whole one year." 10 Now Arjuna, being badly affected by her charms, is infatuated. He, readily desires to marry her. He begs the king her hand. Thus she makes Arjuna surrender before her borrowed beauty. "smitten with her charms, he asked the king for the hand of his daughter in marriage." (qtd in Desai 167)

Chitra is seen as an honest woman. She is infatuated by Arjuna. She enthrals him in her love with her borrowed beauty given to her by the two gods –Madana and Vasanta for one year. He wants her hand for all time on account of obsession with. He says: "Yes I am he, the love hungered guest at your door." By now Chitra is aware of her false beauty. She realises that she is a cheat. She begins to hate herself. Now she decides to be a real Chitra who met Arjuna first in the forest as a male warrior. She requests the gods to take their boon back as she is fed up with the

false and borrowed beauty. She does not care the result. Therefore, She decides to disclose her identity before Arjuna without the fear of losing him. Thus she proves her self –honesty.

As the play “Chitra” is called a song of beauty and love. When Chitra meets Arjuna first time in the forest in male attire as soldier the impulses of a woman arise in her heart. Therefore, it is Chitra who goes forward in romance with Arjuna first. It seems that two opposite sides of life-pleasure and pain, life and death etc are alike for her because she is much affixed with Arjuna. She provokes him for sexual pleasure and experience. She is ready to sacrifice her all for the sake of Arjuna’s love. Even she shares her experience of romance with Arjuna before Madana and Vasanata without any hesitation. “Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in unbearable ecstasy.”²⁵ Her this initiative step shows her as a romantic woman. The romantic attitude of hers is just like the romantic attitude of today’s women.

Tagore always was against the gender discrimination so he advocates for the freedom and liberty for women. In “Chitra” we find ‘woman in action.’ Chitra is not a weak, timid, traditional and typical woman, who loses her courage and begins to shed tears. Her act of performing the tough penance proves it. She has her own significant status. She is self-sufficient and self-reliant. She is a warrior, a ruler, lover of horse riding and hunting, romantic in attitude etc. Love leads to self-knowledge and immortality. She is full of love and motherly care for humanity. She is the moulder of her destiny and of inner-self.

Chitra is the true embodiment of empowered woman as she has proved her equality in performing the penance as her forefathers had done to get heir for their kingdom. She can truly be called the role model for present woman in India.

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