



DEPICTION OF CHITRANGADA AS A MODERN WOMAN IN TAGORE'S "CHITRA"

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ABSTRACT

Tagore was a great advocate of women's liberty. Therefore, his women characters are meted out a very liberal treatment. Chitrangada, the heroine in the one-act-play Chitra is a glaring example of such kind. She stands for a modern woman who defies all the rules of the society and leads a very free and bold life. She proves to be even greater than Arjuna, a hero of the story. She proposes to him for marriage. When he rejects her proposal, unlike a common woman, she does not confine herself shedding tears within four walls. Instead, she undertakes hard penance and thereby pleases the two Gods – Madana and Vasantha and borrows voluptuous beauty and ultimately wins Arjuna's heart. She surpasses Arjuna, the great warrior proving herself quite modern in every aspect.

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore, popularly known as 'Gurudev', is the first Indian to win the most coveted Nobel Prize for literature. He was a poet, short story writer, dramatist, novelist, musician, artist in painting, patriot and moreover a great humanist. He was first a poet and then other else. We find great musical quality not only in his poetry but in his plays also. Perhaps, his plays may lack well-knit plotting, but they are highly lyrical and symbolic too. They win the hearts of readers due to their lyrical and symbolic qualities. Therefore, regarding his plays, K. R. S. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that "Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbols is the 'soul' of this drama" (123). Amar Nath Prasad also puts forward the same view in the words as: "In Tagore's plays, it is not the plot, but the

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music of ideas and symbols, the soul of the drama, that form the core..." (24-33). He was the first Indian dramatist to breathe such kind of exuberance in the play. In this respect, K. Venkata Reddy and R. K. Dhawan hold the view that "Rabindranath Tagore was the first major playwright who invested Indian drama in English with lyrical excellence, symbolic overtones and allegorical significance" (7-26). Although Rabindranath Tagore's plays are hardly meant for performance on the stage, they have drawn attention of the readers at local as well as foreign level. They are read with great literary taste by the readers for various reasons. They have some common qualities like – lyricism, symbolism, use of Indian myths, etc. One of the common qualities they share is that they take cudgel on behalf of women. Tagore's women characters always surpass their male counterparts. Sudha, Chitra and Malini are a few telling examples. Tagore was an advocate of women's freedom. He always seems to have taken cudgel on behalf of women. He was an artist in painting also. He used lines and colours to paint the pictures. Similarly, he painted characters and scenes with the help of words. He uses words like tools. He used lines, colours and words alike to paint the world through different types of art. In the literary works by Tagore, the characters are drawn with the tools of words. He was a musician too. As a result, we find poetic qualities in his writings. He was basically a poet and then a dramatist or novelist. It indicates his sensitive nature. He was well-versed in human psychology. He had perfect knowledge of rhymes, rhythms, sounds and human psychology as well. His characters are both individuals and types too. They retain their identity and represent some individuals in the society. His Chitra, Malini and Sudha will always be remembered by the readers.

Tagore's "*Chitra*" (1893) is a verse-play. It is also called dance-drama. It is based on the Chitra-Arjuna myth in the "*Mahabharata*". Man-woman equality and women's freedom are the major themes of the play. It is set in the forest near Manipur (India known as 'Aryawarta' at that time) during the Vedic period. It is Tagore's attempt to indicate that women during the Vedic period were not only free but they enjoyed all the kinds of liberty. Here, the dramatist takes cudgel on behalf of women. Dr. Gaurishankar Jha's opinion in this matter is worth-mentioning here. She writes: "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..." (53-67). K. R. Srinivas Iyengar also holds the same view. According to him: "*Chitra* is a succinct Tagorean version of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*" (136).

Chitrangada, the heroine of the play is a daughter of Chitravahana, the king of Manipur. Her forefathers had a boon from Mahadeva that there will be at least one male heir in their family to look after their empire of Manipur. But even the words of the God proved to be powerless and Chitravahana begets a daughter instead of a son. Therefore, he brings up Chitra not as a daughter but a son. He gives her boy-like treatment. In fact, Tagore, here, takes liberty to change the original story to some extent to indicate that women in the Vedic India were free



and there was man-woman equality at that time. Therefore, he shows Chitra as a very bold, daring and courageous woman just like a modern woman in the twenty-first century. The following features of Chitra prove her to be so.

Chitra in Male's Attire:

In the very beginning, Chitra is shown in male's attire. Even today in the twenty-first century, women are denied to put on the cloths of men. Only those who consider themselves as modern and free women put on men's cloths. 'Chitra' in the play is a modern woman. It is rightly indicated by showing her in male's attire. The technique of showing her in male's attire is skillfully deployed by the playwright. Thus, Chitra in male's attire is a symbol of modernity. She enjoys liberty of man in putting on the cloths.

Her Horse Riding and Hunting:

Like a brave man, Chitra is also shown as a well-versed in horse-riding. She makes hunting her hobby. In the history of the world, hunting has always been a passion of men. Brave kings and warriors are always shown as hungry for hunting. Chitra is also shown as a passionate hunter in the play. She was pursuing an animal for hunting and right at that time she comes across Arjuna lying on the ground like a hermit. Thus, like every modern woman, Chitra also nourishes the hobby of men.

Chitra as a Ruler:

Even though Chitravahana, Chitra's father, is a real ruler of the state, it is Chitra who protects the subjects from the robbers and looters. When Chitra goes to stay with Arjuna under the pretext that she is going on pilgrimage, villagers express their extreme anxiety for their insecurity due to her absence. They are worried about who will protect them from the robbers pouring from the northern hills. They share their grief in the following words: "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).

Thus, like the great warriors like Razia Sultana and Ahilyadevi Holkar, Chitra is shown as a very able and powerful protector of her subjects. She adopts modern attitude and therefore could carve her image as a modern woman. Here also, Chitra carves her image as a modern woman.

Chitra's Proposal to Arjuna:



Generally, it is a man who proposes to woman for love or marriage. Any traditional woman would not dare to propose to a man for love or marriage. But in the play, “*Chitra*” it is Chitra, a woman, who proposes to Arjuna, a man. Through this act, she proves herself not as a traditional but a modern woman.

Arjuna’s Rejection and Chitra’s Undertaking of Hard Penance:

The Chitra who proposes to Arjuna is rough and sturdy. She is not beautiful. She is not physically attractive. She fails to attract Arjuna. As a result, when Chitra proposes to Arjuna, he rejects her proposal by saying that he has undertaken the avowed celibacy. At that time, like every common woman, Chitra does not shed tears by confining herself within four walls. Instead, she undertakes hard penance and thereby pleases the two Gods – Madana and Vasanta and borrows voluptuous beauty “...not for short span of a day, but for whole one year...” (10). Thus, Chitra proves her bravery in the fact that she undertakes hard penance and gets what she wants instead of shedding tears like a common woman.

Chitra’s Romanticism:

Romanticism is one of the major qualities of a modern woman. Chitra could be claimed as a modern woman for her being romantic. It is she who seems to have taken initiative in the romance with Arjuna. She does not even hesitate to share her experience of romance with Madana and Vasanta. She narrates her indulgence into sexual pleasure with Arjuna as “Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy” (25). She seems to bear bold and candid attitude in the matter of sex. When Arjuna gets fed up with her company, she promotes Arjuna to indulge into sexual experience. She promotes Arjuna in the following words: “Take me in your arms, my love. Let all vain bickerings of discontent die away at the sweet meeting of our lips” (33).

Chitra as a Courageous Woman:

Like every modern woman, Chitra is depicted as a very daring and powerful woman. She is even shown as more powerful than Arjuna. Like Shakespearean plays, Tagore’s heroine Chitrangada in the play, “*Chitra*” is depicted as a more powerful woman than the hero. She possesses all the qualities of a modern woman. She proves her prowess and valour in the words such as: “Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmate of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm” (60).

She finally becomes a voice of the modern woman when she says: “I am Chitra. No goddess, to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with



indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self.” (66)

To conclude, Chitrangada is a true symbol of modern woman. Wearing male’s attire, horse-riding and hunting, ruling powerfully, proposing to her hero and not getting upset even though rejected her proposal, being stubborn on her demand (for Arjuna), romanticism and desiring for working with man are the real qualities of modern woman. She seems to have defied all the traditional roles assigned to her by the orthodox society. Tagore has deliberately depicted such a character of Chitra so as to upheld values of women’s liberty and man-woman equality. His attempt is just to indicate that the women in the Vedic India were quite free.

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