

Rabindranath Tagore's Chandalika: An Amalgamation of Spiritual Conflict, Liberation and Rebel against Marginality

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 7

Issue: 3

Month: June

Year: 2019

ISSN: 2320-2645

Received: 04.05.2019

Accepted: 22.05.2019

Published: 01.06.2019

Citation:

Mohan Raj, S and
V. Sunitha. "Rabindranath
Tagore's Chandalika: An
Amalgamation of Spiritual
Conflict, Liberation and
Rebel against Marginality."
*Shanlax International
Journal of English*, vol. 7,
no. 3, 2019, pp. 16-20.

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.34293/
english.v7i3.458](https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v7i3.458)



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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, the prominent voice of the Indian Renaissance skilfully presented the conflicts of spirituality, marginality and liberation in the form of a dance drama Chandalika. The play depicts the class consciousness and desire of a marginalised woman to liberate her inner self. She passionately yearns to challenge the social norms and rebel against the discriminations in society. The paper proposes to locate the conflicts, sense of liberation and marginalisation from the psyche of an ostracised woman Prakriti, in Chandalika. The study also focuses on the socio-cultural impulses of the playwright and the plight of a woman to break the social obstacle of marginality. The play tends the readers and the audience to rethink the idea of equality and liberation. The marginalised experience, differences are shown based on caste, gender bias and other conflicts are raised as an aesthetic exploration in the play. It questions the existing belief of caste and marginality. Tagore is imaginative and modernistic in the presentation of the play. The sequences in the play are depicted through dance. Dance in the play is a powerful symbol. Emotions, conflicts, struggles and dialogues are articulated in its true form with the help of the dance. The playwright further amalgamates the internal, spiritual conflicts of liberation against the social hegemony in the play Chandalika.

Keywords: Marginality, spiritual conflict, liberation, untouchable

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is a noble laureate and inspiring voice of Indian Renaissance well known as a poet, dramatist, philosopher, social reformer, thinker and educationist. Stunkel rightly opines that "Tagore was and still is...a major presence in world literature...He remains a literary force." (Stunkel, 237 – 259) The nature of Tagore's writings is that it stands against discrimination. The point is apt while considering the dance play Chandalika. The play gained popularity and has been staged many times in different languages. The play underscores the internal conflicts and racial cruelties. The work is clear in the aesthetics and brings out the needs to question the existing believes of differences based on caste and birth. The play expresses the conflicts and the protest of a woman against marginality. The present study aims to throw light on these aspects of the play. The characters are devised in such a way to point out the contemporary crisis in society based on spiritual and social beliefs. Male character Ananda is a Buddhist monk who follows Buddha's principles. Once, the monk Ananda met a Chandalini (an untouchable girl) on the way. He asked her for some water which is not a usual thing.

With hesitation, she serves him with water. The girl Prakriti is the one who gave him water and fell at love with Ananda. Prakriti's love made her to compel her mother to spell magic against ascetic Ananda. The spell worked and it brought him to her place. But the sufferings of Ananda made her to change her mind. She prays Buddha to protect Ananda from ill-fame and sin. Eventually, Ananda freed from the spell. Both Prakriti and her mother repent for the mistake.

In the drama *Chandalika* Tagore is imaginative and modernistic in the presentation. The internal spiritual conflict and liberation are generated through the character of Ananda. The young monk is about to change his determination (as he was spellbound) from the life of renunciation. The urge and lust created the conflict in his mind. At the end of the play, Prakriti changed her mind and accept the principles of Buddha and turned ascetic. Prakriti is the marginal woman and the protagonist of the play. Hindu mythology labelled her as an untouchable and ostracised woman. Tagore's characterising an untouchable woman as a protagonist is a revolt against discrimination. Tagore opined that the untouchability as an evil and curse lay upon the Indian society. He condemns against caste differences – social cancer – and discrimination in his poetry collection *Gitanjali* and in the novel *Gora*. The idea of liberation and the practice of untouchability are presented in the play as “Mother: Be warned, Prakriti, these men's words are meant only to be heard, not to be practised. The filth into which an evil fate has cast you is a wall of mud that no spade in the world can break through. You are unclean...” (150) The dialogue between Prakriti and her mother is a record of the untouchability and its cruelties from the past. Untouchability is an evil experience which restores the hardships forever. Hindu religious ideas support the differences the playwright marked it as “Prakriti: A religion that insults is a false religion...” (150) The obsession of Prakriti from the point of view of a marginalised woman is not at all a lust. It is a way for her to get liberate from her suppressed status. For her, Ananda is a picture of freedom. The religion he follows allows him to treat people equally. She believes that Ananda will show her the way for self-respect, equality and liberty.

Prakriti from her bottom of heart wants to evade the darkness and self-relegation. She wants to fulfil her soul from the bounds and she marched towards equality. “My mind is saying it over again and again – fulfilled...Everyone also had hidden me the truth for me. I sit and watch for his coming today to give, to give, to give everything I have.” (154) The words of Ananda “give me water” lift her scorching mind to a greater glee. This is for her the first word of equality and respect received so far. She wants to give water and whatever she posses as her best to the man who treated her equally. She rejoices the occasion as “I may truly call it my new birth! ...My heart has been dancing ever since...I hear those solemn tones...” (149) Water here marked as a symbol. Water is a symbol of purification. Great poet Thiruvalluvar stated that “Outward purity the water will bestow; Inward purity from truth alone will flow.” (298) Water is an auspicious thing in rituals. The water taken by Ananda is very little but for Prakriti, it is a collection of seas. She felt that the water washed away her identity, marginality and liberate her soul from unclean things. “Only once did he cup his hands to take water from mine...that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea...all the seven seas in one...my caste was drowned, and my birth washed clean.” (149) Water symbolically quench the thirst of the young untouchable lady who longs for self-respect and acceptance. According to her Ananda has given the liberty to serve people who are in thirst. The call for water gave her liberation from her internal trauma. She now esteemed herself as a real and equal human. The self-evaluation and analysis opened up in her mind. She realised herself as a human, a woman and a living thing with self-respect and dignity. This short incident in the play is actually a revolt against the socially imposed class, caste, and gender differences.

Prakriti's voice questions the entire caste set up. “Plenty slaves are born of royal blood, but I am no slave; plenty of chandals are born of Brahmin families, but I am no chandal.” (152) The poet Rabindranath Tagore rebels against the caste system. The inequality shown based on birth is an injustice and it is a threat to humanity and social harmony. The untouchables are pressed to the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The add-on faiths and beliefs stop

equality and justice to them. The words of Ananda to Prakriti are simple but for her, it is unusual and sparking words. The interest of Prakriti towards Ananda is not just lust but it is a way for her liberty from her conflicts. “You call me daring? Think of the might of his daring! How simple he spoke the words...“Give me water”. Such little words, yet as mighty as flame.” (155) Once in the play, Prakriti clarifies her point to her mother. Prakriti denies the chance to get married to the prince. She refused the chance because for her self-respect and liberation is the greater thing than being a queen with the label of marginality. She doesn’t want to be chained again in the name of marriage. “Yes he had forgotten everything – forgotten that I was a human being... he saw nothing but the beast, whom he wanted to bind in chains of gold. (151) The revolt of Prakriti is to get spiritual, mental, and social liberty. She is ready to dare the social order and proclaims that everyone should marvel at her daring. She never wants to get into the hours of darkness that is a worse thing for her even than the death. Prakriti developed a deep passion for the ascetic Ananda. She undergoes internal conflict. She wants to unite with Ananda, “Will he not mingle his longings with mine, as the Ganges mingles with the black waters of Jumna?”(152)

The playwright creates a heroine who questions the caste practice, who seeks for her identity, who wants to change her destiny through strong desire. Prakriti’s mother reminds her of her birth and her social status. She is born as a slave and it is her destiny to live so. Young Prakriti won’t go with her mother she rebels that “Fie, fie, Mother. I tell you again, don’t delude yourself with this self-humiliation – it is false, and a sin. Plenty of slaves are born of royal blood, but I am no Chandal.” (152) The strong will of Prakriti to possess Ananda and to surrender her whole thing to him is not a mere attraction. It is her strong will to evade her spiritual and identity dilemma. At one point her heart was shattered into pieces i.e. the moment when she received a rejection from Ananda. Poor Ananda is not at all aware of the changes happened in Prakriti’s mind. He remains as usual in his way of living; he chants the religious hymns and moves ahead without noticing Prakriti. She suffered a lot by this action “This is dust, this

dust is your place. O wretched woman, who raised you to bloom for a moment in the light? Fallen in the end into this same dust...He showed no pity to me...” (159) The Buddhist monk Ananda initiated the thought process of Prakriti. Her meeting with Ananda is a desperate validation. She rejoiced her meeting with Ananda and felt it has a new birth to her; the dignity and equality showed by Ananda lift her sense of rebel against the marginality. The words of Ananda are silent preaching to her. She craves in her mind. She wants to possess a monk; she is even ready to break any religious, ethical, and social boundaries. This desire of Prakriti tempts her mother to make use of her sorcery skills. She risked her life and pays her life for her daughter’s desire.

The playwright Tagore presented the conflicts innately. The spiritual conflict of Ananda to stand with the religious vow, conflict of Prakriti to acquire him and the struggle of her mother to work out the spell are brought down naturally and artistically. The three characters and their desires become a cause for the conflict. It is much spiritual, they want to liberate themselves and go on their way. Maya, mother of Prakriti work her spell against Ananda. She is aware that if the spell fails it will take her life away. Ananda spent his time in meditation; he stays in the spiritual bliss. The magic spell of Maya created great havoc in his peaceful mind. The holiness in him left him when his mind was filled with carnal desire. The spell induced the urge and desire. There is a war between the magical pull and the ascetic practice. This conflict turned the glowing face of Ananda dull and weird. The power of the spell outwits the ascetic power of Ananda, he unwillingly moves to the place of Prakriti to quench the lust. In this point, the worldly desires of Prakriti overpower the spiritual desire. The playwright handled the situation cleverly. Prakriti couldn’t tolerate the pains of Ananda she prays Lord Buddha to relieve him from the pains and the spell. Finally, Ananda was free from the sufferings. He got his liberty from the spiritual conflict caused by the spell. Prakriti turned ascetic by accepting Buddha. Her marginality has come to an end. The sequences in the play were depicted in the dance form. The dance in the play is a powerful symbol. The emotions, conflicts, struggles and the dialogues are articulated in its true form with the help of the dance. The play

put forth that the marginality should be thrown out in order to lead a good life. It is dignity and self-respect is the valuable and essential thing for any individual. In this sense, Tagore's play is a revolt. The period in which the play was written is a period when women are not treated as equals in the man-centered society.

Prakriti is a subject of rejection and has been deprived of basic human concern. Ananda is the only person who treated her as a human. This act is a manifestation of human values. Prakriti was marginalised and was rejected from the social structure. But still, she tries to make rebel against the social tyranny. It may be a difficult task to frame the character for the playwright. The character is an innocent marginal woman who is intelligent enough to identify her basic provisions. She is capable to dream about her life and think about her future. Liberty and freedom are the rights of every human to lead life peacefully. Poet Tagore infers freedom as "Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them. Freedom is all I want..." (Gitanjali, 28) The aspiration of Prakriti is to liberate from the exploitation and enslavements. Prakriti wants to unite with Ananda to liberate her true self from the social stigma. Prakriti in the play underwent self-investigation. She understood the self-respect in a new dimension and clear about the worth of a woman. The idea is evolutionary which was from her consciousness. She transforms her idea about inner self and attains self-purification. With the help of Ananda, she overcomes her spiritual conflict and marginality. Maya Prakriti's mother is an untouchable woman who practices witchcraft. The end of Maya is a lesson for those who demarcate the social norms for their happiness. The character is stable than Prakriti. She is aware of the returns of blasphemy and willingly did it for her daughter's happiness and liberation. Her inner turmoil and conflict are both social and spiritual. She accepts the marginality and subordination. She knows that the spiritual power of Ananda is powerful than her magic spell. Yet, she dares to face it. Maybe she either wants to liberate her child from marginality or she attains liberation from her birth as she addresses herself as a born slave.

The playwright employs brilliant dialogues to rebel against the marginality in some places. For

instance, Ananda replies to Prakriti as if the clouds are dark; it never bothers for it or never changes its nature. Humiliation based on race, caste, and colours is not at all good. Ananda further added that Prakriti should not humiliate herself because self-humiliation is a sin; it is a worse thing than the suicide. Some critics opine that the play is half finished while considering the marginality issue. It ends with no answer to the problem of untouchability. Both Prakriti and Ananda never unite which establish a difference between the oppressed and caste people. Tagore used significant techniques to compose the character of Prakriti. She is evolutionary in her outlook and temperament. The playwright presented the idea of the union of Prakriti with Ananda as a prohibited thing. The characterisation in a play has a significant role Peter Barry register it as "The representation of women in literature...the most important forms of 'socialization', since it provided the role models which indicated to women...what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations"(Peter Barry 117). Further, the playwright connects various social, cultural, and moral issues in the play Chandalika. Interlinking multiple things is the great quality of art. Amit Chaudhri supports this argument as "'Interrelation' is the quality of synthesis in a work of art; it is also a feature of a poet's entire oeuvre, especially Tagore's, the dynamic set of relations are vital to the creation, and understanding, of his work; and it refers to the inseparability of the various cultural strands that produce a creative tension in authors such as Tagore" (Chaudhuri 129). The playwright Tagore amalgamates many minute things to bring out the character of Prakriti.

The quote is apt to note and fix in the play Chandalika. "The feminist critique is essentially political and polemical, with theoretical affiliations to Marxist sociology and aesthetic; gynocritics is more self-contained and experimental, with connections to other modes of new feminist research" (Showalter 147). Tagore throws light on the feminist perspective. The play depicts the conflicts, liberation and marginality at its best. Tagore successfully transmitted a moment of protest into an event to create an identity and personality crisis of an individual. The play explores the psyche

of a marginalised woman, sensitive social curse and evil. The play establishes a new relevance for the abolition of marginality. The play visualises love. The love of Prakriti tries to connect the two poles of society. It was then a great and daring attempt. Rabindranath Tagore was a philanthropic visionary who possess great thoughts, humanistic with artistic eloquence. William Rothenstein rightly observes Tagore as a “Strikingly handsome figure, dressed in white dhoti and chuddar, who sat silently listening” (249). Tagore penned the pains and pleasures of life with lively colours. The genius of Tagore is that he mixed the theme of untouchability, conflict and angst to liberate with dance. He had a deeper spiritual spirit, practical enormity which was reflected in his literary outlets. The period in which Tagore made his literary experiments is an important period in Bengal history i.e. the period of Bengal renaissance. Considering the facts Tagore’s dance play Chandalika is a combination of rebel, conflict and liberation.

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