

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

October 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-V

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Concept of Machine and Human Freedom in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Waterfall and Red Oleanders*

M.Kalaiarasan

RVS College of Arts and Science
Bharathiar University

Rabindranath Tagore has proved successful writer in Bengal. He is well known for his prose and poetry in West through his translated work in English. The first non European, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his beautiful verse 'Gitanjali'. Proving that he was a poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer and painter, Tagore has given a new dimension to the gamut of Indian writing in English translation. The plays *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall) and *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleanders) show his liberal thoughts. These two plays centers on the conflict between machine and human freedom and deal with the other side of love and sacrifice.

Tagore's finest play, 'Muktadhara' takes place in fictional Uttarkut, ruled by an autocratic king, Ranajit. Abhijit, Prince of Uttarkut and the next heir to the throne, is adopted by the king. The waterfall flows from Uttarkut to a neighboring valley 'Shiv Terai'. The people of 'Shiv Terai' lead their lives with the river. The tyrant king wants to bring 'Shiv Terai' under his control and decides to subjugate the people by damming the waterfall thus denying them water. So, the King employs the royal engineer Bibuti go as to build a great dam to prevent the water reaching the plains below.

When the people of 'Shiv Terai' are informed about getting jobs, they welcome the idea of building the dam and celebrate in honour of the machine along with Bibuti. They realise their mistakes when the water is stopped from the mountain. The prince, Abhijit, learns that he was discovered by the side of the waterfall. His love for the waterfall and sympathy for the people lead him to stop the King. He demolishes the machine and makes the waterfall free. In the process the prince is swept away with his mother 'Muktadhara. By giving freedom to the waterfall, Abhijit gives freedom to the people of Shiv-Terai also.

The waterfall is a child of Mother Nature. 'Shiv Terai' people engage and lead their lives only because of the water. Nature showers love on mankind by providing wealth and make them love her. She hurts man when he interrupts her services to humanity. Tagore's love for Nature is seen in this play and establishes the fact that human beings are children of Nature also.

The machine in this play has swallowed the human spirit and Prince Abhijit has destroyed the machine with his powerful weapon, love. The immense power of the machine makes the King use the machine to deny the people of 'Shiv-Terai' but the power of the machine may be used for beneficial purposes. Abhijit says to Prince Sanjay,

"You will not fully understand it. For how are you to know that my life is a stream which must have its free course over the stones of the king's house.

....

Every man has the mystery of his inner life somewhere written in the outer world. The secret of my own life has its symbol in that waterfall of Muktadhara. When I saw its movements shackled I received a shock at the very root of my being; I discovered that

this throne of Uttarakut is an embankment built up across my own life's current. And I have come out into the road to set free its course.”

The conflict between machine and human spirit is clearly presented in this play. The tyrant king and his supporters are on the side of machine to build the dam. Abhijit, along with people, stands for human freedom. Nature on the other side supports human spirit and opposes the cruel users of machine. Love for Muktheadhara and sacrificing his life for his people makes Abhijit a martyr in the hearts of ‘Shiv-Terai’. Tagore portrays the core human values and commitments in his plays, which are recognized as a unique genre in the playwright’s own right. His play, Muktheadhara, is well written against social evils, tyrannical power, that deprives common people.

Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Red Oleanders’ is a great and powerful play. The theme of the play is centers around immoral capitalism, environment exploitation and importance of human relationships. The people of the country of Kuvera are engaged in digging out gold, scratching out from the earth as ordered by the King, the antagonist of the play. The people are made to forgotten the real joy and the sweetness of nature. The King, who hides behind an iron curtain, represents great authority in the town Yaksha. He turns all the people in the town into human machines in the dark searching for the gold. Nandhini, the protagonist, arrives to Yaksha town and frees the people from the tyrant King.

By now people have become slaves mechanically engaged in digging. The theme of immoral capitalism is clearly shown from the beginning of the play. If people arrive late to work, they are punished. Professor in this play says that the King is their ghostly royalty, wielding inhuman power to frighten people. He explains that they work for the dead treasure under the earth. The rulers stop Nandhini from meeting her lover, Ranjan. The cruel nature of the king is revealed through his words. He says to Nandhini “I long savagely to prove to you how cruel I am.” He also kills Ranjan in his secret room.

The play centers on Nature as signified by the very title of the play ‘Red Oleanders’. Nandhini wears red oleanders her hair and white kunda flowers, which insists faith in the power of virtue. The autumn song gives unseen picture of field. The perfumed wind, the sky, shivering corn, sunlight and joy of the people outside the town are clearly shown through the distant song, which refers to the cosmic harmony of nature. This nature song is a song of selfless love.

In Red Oleanders, Nandhini is presented as the embodiment of Nature. Tagore remarks: “the entire play is an elaborate portrait of Nandhini, a woman. She represents the joy of life. The simple beauty and pristine purity of nature”

The theme of the harvest song represents Nandhini’s innocence and opulence of nature. She loves nature, which all the people of the town have forgotten.

The people are unaware of the fact that they are exploiting Nature. They plunder the wealth of earth for their king. The earth keeps all its treasure and it is not right to kidnap its wealth. The king treats people as mere machines for the productions of gold. The workers are numbered as prisoners. The slave people are made banish all life’s sweetness from the place.

Exercising a complete control over his people, the king heartlessly exploits Nature for more gold and outrages Nature in the process.

In Yaksha town, love and relationship among human beings is a forgotten fact. After Nandhini's visit to the town, people are slowly attracted by her beauty. The king hides himself and concentrates on gold but he fears Nandhini. The King's conversation with Nandhini shows that he too has started to love the woman. She creates awareness among the slaves about their oppression and sets them free. Finally the workmen break the prison and start to fight with the authorities. The final song explains the freedom of the people and consequently the King's greed is punished and normal life is restored in Yaksha town.

The conflict between machine and human spirit is clearly presented in the play. The workmen in the town are presented as machines, human beings transformed by the king for his selfishness. The trapped community has no fulfillment in life. The people in that soulless town are unaware of the beauty of Nature, the green meadows, the dazzling sunshine and tenderness and love. Bishu in this play is a spy but finally gives it up for the sake of Nandhini for which he is punished. He stands for sorrow, the sorrow which cleanses the heart. The Governor represents the ruling community. Though he is soft spoken, he is privately ruthless in action. At the end, workmen break the prison and the victory cry is heard everywhere. This establishes the victory of man over the tyranny of machine. The machine is crashed by the human machines, who learn the value of human life and freedom.

Nandhini and the red oleander flower symbolize 'freedom'. The oleander is compared to Nandhini as well as the slave people. Nandhini challenges the beauty and love in a world dominated by mere money and powerless values. With her fearless love, care and belief in freedom, she is capable to make men out of slaves and set back brute authority. In the opening scene, the blossoming of red oleander symbolizes freedom and death and at the end, Nandhini's red oleander bracelet found in dust, is freedom itself.

Like machines, they are driven by the king and his hierarchies consisting of governor, the priest and the professor. The weak community accepts the domination of the strong. Until Nandhini's visit to the place the workmen do not know that there is an alternative to the way they are living. By her action, Nandhini changes the mind of the tyrannical king and makes him join hands with her at the end. She crushed the machines through her love and care.

Hirankumar Sanyal in his article, 'The Plays of Rabindranath Tagore', published in the Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume 1861-1961 comments: "Rabindranath succeeds in Rakta Karabi (Red Oleanders) in representing the actual world, in this case a world of greed and unscrupulousness, in such a way as to give an immensely heightened sense of it."

Tagore highlights the degeneration and decadence of modern civilization in his plays. He defines his faith in mankind through his major characters, who appear real and life-like. Tagore succeeds in spreading his message to mankind through this play, a vital message of inculcating love towards man and nature.

Asit Bandopadhyay says, "Tagore was known to have noted how the power of man can conquer the power of nature, but only for a short time. It ultimately results in destruction. I wanted to bring that out". Tagore spreads awareness about environment in his works because natural environment greatly influenced Tagore's thoughts. He offers his salutation to nature through his characters like Abhijit in Muktheadhara and Nandhini in Raktakarabi. It is a universal problem to save nature from greedy human beings. Tagore emphasizes the need to protect nature as well as our mother earth. He describes the relationship between nature and human spirit in the two plays.

The stories revolve around human sacrifices. Tagore's conception of human love finds a beautiful expression in the plays. The protagonists in both the plays resemble the same sensitiveness and human spirit and sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the community. Nandhini sacrifices her life for the slave workmen and Abhijit sacrifices his life for the poor 'Shiv Terai' people. The protagonists sacrifice their lives not only for the people but also for Nature and freedom which they love. The protagonists are good and fight against evil. After their work is accomplished, their sacrifice earns them martyrdom.

The plot of 'Muktheadhara' revolves round a horrible machine created by the king to stop the natural stream of an enormous river and how a prince whose attachment towards the people made him protects Nature by revolting against the king. The mechanized bureaucracy exploits Nature and Man which concept is highlighted in the play 'Raktakarabi'. The king plays the central character who tyrannically exploits Nature and Man.

Tagore's key to human freedom results in a revolution against the greedy rulers and machines. The protagonists' love and care make the people realise their present life and questions their future. They are tuned against the rulers for their rights. Like the protagonists, people also feel the spirit of human values and freedom. In Muktheadhara, people face troubles in their lives because of the Dam built by the machine. The people revolt against this led by the protagonist. In Raktakarabi, the workmen forget the fruit of life, which is later given by the protagonist. Workmen join hands to fight against the unkind rulers at the end of this play. Tagore uses human beings to destroy inhuman powers in both plays.

Good and evil go together changing attitudes through various phases and reversals transformed into boundless love. Tagore tries to show the sense of evil in his plays. His ultimate aim in introducing evil is to prove the power of good, otherwise God. Good thinks that the created world is imperfect and it is sheltered in the hearts of men. Tagore points out that an imperfection such as pain can serve as a means to good. Nature is red in tooth and claw, but the struggle for existence creates virtues like self-sacrifice and love. Evil dominates us when we fail to understand Nature. Evil is necessary to accomplish the good.

Tagore uses the idea of freedom to criticize narrow nationalistic boundaries, governed by narrow-minded ambition and greed. Tagore's plays Muktheadhara (The Waterfall) and Raktakarabi (Red Oleanders) bring out different aspects of his broader concept of freedom. Both the plays are creation of the self and the ways in which human beings are shaped by Nature. Their works also reveal the critical view of Tagore when he opposes imperialistic power and the modern

technology. Ultimately Tagore celebrates the sense of freedom, which is possible only when hearts and minds come together.

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, plays, fiction, and prose are all infused with the writer's belief that the goal of human life is to attain a union with the divine, a Being who is always nearby in prayer and in nature. A fixation with material goods, social status, or power shrinks the soul and harms both other individuals and society as a whole. His rampant nationalism and narrow adherence to society creeds prove the fact that in this world the righteous often suffer, he believes that only a soul that is unpolluted can know the joy of that spiritual union. His Bengali writings brought Tagore recognition as the father of modern Bengali literature and his English works and his translations made him famous throughout the world. Above all, he is valued as a profound thinker and a profoundly spiritual man.

Works Cited:

Alex Aronson, Rabindranath through Western Eyes, Calcutta, RDDHI, 1978.

Amrit Sen, "Many Paths": Reading Rabindranath Tagore's *The Waterfall (Muktadhara)*, ISSN 0975-1815

Asit Bandyopadhyay, History of Modern Bengali Literature, Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1986.

Ananda Lal, Rabindranath Tagore Three Plays, Kolkata:M.P. Birla Foundation: 1987.

Basudeb Chakraborti, The Unrecognized Work of Tagore as Translator: An Assessment of Red Oleanders, Rupkatha Journal Vol 2 No 4

Kripalani, Krishna. Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography. New York: Grove Press, 1962.

Stunkel, Kenneth R. "Rabindranath Tagore and the Aesthetics of Postmodernism", International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society, 2003.

Tapas Pal, Tagore's Aesthetic Visions: Pioneer of Geo-Environmental Awareness, British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences October 2011, Vol. 2.

The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, ed. Sisir Kumar Das, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, Vol.3, 1995.

<http://red-oleanders.webs.com/abouttheplay.htm>

www.wikipedia.co