

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

UGC Approved Peer-Reviewed
Multi-disciplinary International Journal
UGC Serial No. - 49202 in 2019 list & 400 in 2022 List
Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST

(Sl. No. 436 in 2024 List under
Arts and Humanities Group I Journal)

Vol. XVIII



Eds.

Subir Dhar, Bryan Reynolds, Sheila T. Cavanagh, Papia Mitra

A

Special Publication of
The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India

ap

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

UGC Approved Bi-annual Peer-Reviewed
Multi-disciplinary International Journal
UGC Serial No. - 49202 in 2019 List
Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST

*(Sl. No. 436 in 2024 List under
Arts and Humanities Group I Journal)*

Vol. XVIII

(Special Issue on Film & Cinema)

Eds.

Subir Kumar Dhar

Bryan Reynolds

Sheila T. Cavanagh

Papia Mitra



AVANTGARDE PRESS

ISSN NO: 2278-2036

THE SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY OF EASTERN INDIA

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

UGC approved Bi-annual Journal No. 49202 in 2019 list, 400 in 2022 list, Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST 2024, Sl. No. 436 under Arts and Humanities Group-I Journal

Published by

Avantgarde Press, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India.

6A, Maharaja Nanda Kumar Road, P.O. Sarat Bose Road, Kolkata 700029.

146, Sarat Bose Road, Subhas Nagar, Dum Dum Cantonment, Kolkata 700065.

Phone: (033) 2466 2688 / 98304 05624 / 9748726895.

E.mail: tapu_biswas@yahoo.com, drtapubiswas@gmail.com

Website Address : www.ssei.org.in

Web Link : <http://www.ssei.org.in/TI/Vol-XVIII.pdf>

© Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, Registered, Govt. approved, non-profit Society, Reg No. S/49021 of 1985 -86.

In collaboration with Tagore Gandhi Institute for Culture Studies and Service Learning

Corresponding Editor : Tapu Biswas

Issue : June 2023, Published in March 2024

[While all attempts have been made to acknowledge the copyright holders of the source materials used by the Editors and the authors, for any inadvertent infringement of copyright laws the authors of the papers published are solely responsible, not the Editors or the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India or Tagore Gandhi Institute or the Avantgarde Press]

The authors of the papers are responsible for the opinion expressed, use of data, graphs, field surveys, statistics not the Editors and publishers.

Cover design, Type & Page Setting : Tapu Biswas

Cover Illustration : Workshop on Chhau Dance and Seminars organised by Shakespeare Society during 1990s.

Printed at:

Mahamaya Press & Binding

23, Madan Mitra Lane, Kolkata-700006,

Phone : 98305 32858, Email : mpkolkata06@gmail.com

Price: 2500.00 (Rupees Two Thousand Five Hundred) only

US \$ 40

UK £ 25

TI Reg. No. B-1554/11 dt 23/3/11 || Book Registered under Act XXV of 1867 as modified upto the 1st March, 1970 under section 9, Govt. of West Bengal.

ISSN NO : 2278-2036 || *Theatre International*, Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST, Peer Reviewed Journal

ISSN No. 2278-2036 (Peer-Reviewed, UGC-CARE listed Journal)

Editorial Board

International

- **Antony Johae (UK), Ph.D** : Former Associate Professor, Kuwait University. Life Member, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India.
- **Aparajita Nanda (USA), Ph.D** : Professor of English, Berkeley, University of California L.A.
- **Bryan Reynolds (USA), Ph.D** : UCI Chancellor's Professor, Department of Drama, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, Univ. of California.
- **Emi Hamana (Japan), Ph.D** : Professor, Doctoral Programme in Literature & Linguistics, University of Tsakuba.
- **Late Günter Grass (Germany)** : Founder Advisor, Nobel Laureate in Literature.
- **Robert Emmet Meagher (USA), Ph.D** : Professor of Humanities, Hampshire College.
- **S. Ramaswamy (USA), Ph.D**: Silliman Fellow, Yale University.
- **Sheila T. Cavanagh (USA), Ph.D** : Chair Professor, Masse-Martin/ NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.
- **Syed Manzurul Islam (Bangladesh), Ph.D** : Professor of English, Dhaka University.

National

- **Awadesh K. Singh, Ph.D**: Director, Translation Centre, IGNOU.
- **Dattatreya Dutt, D. Litt.**: Professor of Drama, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata.

- **Debnarayan Bandyopadhyay, Ph. D** : Former Vice-Chancellor, Bankura University, Bankura, West Bengal.
 - **Goutam Ghosal, D. Litt.** : Professor of English, Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan, West Bengal.
 - **Harish Trivedi, Ph.D** : Former Head of the Department of English, Delhi University.
 - **K.C. Baral, Ph.D**: Professor of India Studies, Dept of Comparative Literature & India Studies, EFL University, Hyderabad.
 - **Madan M. Sarma, Ph.D** : Professor of English, Tezpur University, Assam.
 - **M. Mani Meitei**, Professor, Dept. of English, Manipur University, Manipur.
 - **Pona Mahanta, Ph.D** : Former Professor of English, Dibrugarh University, Assam.
 - **Prakash Joshi, Ph.D** : Professor, Dept. of English, Allahabad University, Uttar Pradesh.
 - **Rajan Joseph Barrett, Ph.D** : Professor, Dept. of English, Faculty of Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara.
 - **R. N. Rai, D. Litt.** : Professor, Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Uttar Pradesh.
 - **Sanjukta Dasgupta, Ph.D** : Professor of English and former Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Calcutta.
-

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL 2017

Serial No. 49202

UGC Journal Details

Name of the Journal : Theatre International
ISSN Number : 23782036
e-ISSN Number :
Source : UNV
Subject : Multi-disciplinary Theatre Studies, English Literature
Publisher : AVANTGARDE PRESS
Country of Publication : India
Broad Subject Category : Arts & Humanities; Multidisciplinary

UGC-CARE LIST SINCE 2019

≡ UGC-CARE List

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	Action
1	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

UGC Approved Arts and Humanities Group I Journals - 2024

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISS N	E-ISS N	UGC-CARE coverage year	Details
1	Aabru (print only)	Gurmukh Singh	2456 - 253 X	NA	from April - 2020 to Present	View
2	Aadhunik Sahitya (print only)	Vishwa Hindi Sahitya Parishad	2277 - 7083	NA	from April - 2021 to Present	View
3	Aalochan Drishti (print only)	Aalochan Drishti Prakashan	2455 - 4219	NA	from April - 2021 to January - 2022	Discontinued from Jan. 2022
4	Aashwast	Bharati Dalit Sahitya Academy Madhyapradesh	2456 - 8856	NA	from July - 2021 to Present	View



436	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278 - 2036	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View
437	Think India Journal	Vichar Nyas Foundation	0971 - 1260	NA	from June - 2019 to January - 2020	Discontinued from Jan. 2020

Contents

From the Editors' Desk		i
1. "'Sound Indeed': Audio as V/Focal Point in Twenty-first Century Theatre"	Sheila T. Cavanagh	1
2. Humour and the Comic Plot: Enacting <i>Twelfth Night</i> on the Indian Stage	Tapu Biswas	15
3. Absent Presence and Beyond: Reading Silence as a Language in Mahesh Dattani's Selected Plays	Swati Roy Chowdhury	23
4. Of Cosmic Horror and The Numen: Reading the Gothic in Gulzar's <i>Lekin</i>	Aparajita Hazra	38
5. Tradition and Modernity in Arambam Samarendra's play <i>Judge Sahebki Imung</i>	Loiya Leima Oinam	50
6. Deciphering the Anxiety of Tagore's Legacy and the Question of Relevance in Q's Tasher Desh	Soumyarup Bhattacharjee	61
7. Existentialism in Tagore's <i>Dakghar</i> , <i>Chandalika</i> and <i>Raktakarabi</i> : A Critical Note	Shreyoshi Dhar	66
8. "From Margin to Centre": A Feminist Reading of Rabindranath Tagore's <i>Natir Puja</i> and <i>Chandalika</i>	Sahin Reja Mondal & Shubham Bhattacharjee	73
9. Rabindranath and Technology: A Re-Reading of <i>Raktakarabi</i>	Madhumita Roy	88

10. Critiquing industrialization and the dehumanizing effects of modern capitalism: On rereading Tagore's "Raktakarabi"	Shantanu Siuli	101
11. The Conclusion and Celluloid: Re-reading "Samapti" through the Eyes of Tagore and Ray	Rituparna Chakraborty	110
12. Athokpam Tomchou's <i>Bus Stop</i> and <i>Mingsel</i> as an Experimental Play	Naorem Ahanjao Meitei	117
13. Preservation and Evolution of Gurudev's "Chandalika" and "Maya Khela" Dance Traditions at Santiniketan	Sharmistha Mukhopadhyay	125
Our Contributors & Editors		142
The TI Manifesto		147

From the Editors' Desk...

We greet our readers, all the old faces and the newer ones, once again to savour what *Theatre International* has to offer. This is the first volume being published after the demise of the doyen of Shakesperian drama, Professor Amitava Roy who also founded this journal many decades ago. This volume is thus the first one being issued without the benefit of his critical input. Nevertheless it carries his imprint in the variety it has to offer. The studies presented here range from studies of technical details of performances, to social themes, to the representation of politics. A large section is devoted to how and why Tagore's dramas are still relevant today.

Dr. Sheila T. Cavanagh picks up a new theme, that of importance of sound in theatrical performance. Modern productions are increasingly relying on creative designing of sounds to attract younger generations of consumers to the theatre. A number of productions ranging from classical ones to Shakespeare to modern dramas have utilized this new stratagem. The audience has responded with alacrity to the types of sound and their positioning on stage and in the theatre environment. Cavanagh argues that though such use of sounds may not be to everyone's taste, soundscape is now an inseparable part of the modern theatre experience and that it will be carried forward by the many successful sound designers who are flourishing at present.

Dr. Tapu Biswas focuses on the role and functionality of elements of humour and comedy in the extremely intricate plot of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* which is regarded as a simple 'festive comedy'. Where theme of love is important. Apart from discussing plot and sub-plot of the play Dr. Biswas takes the more traditional route to sound by focusing on the use of music and songs in Shakespeare's plays with special emphasis on *Twelfth Night*. These plays were not meant to be only works of literature but were also popular as cultural

items. The music used was always related to the characters and themes while keeping the attention of the audience, both elite and plebian, riveted on the stage. Dr. Biswas indicates how Shakespeare's music is in a way closely related with the music and songs to be found in Bengali *jatras*, and how it was prioritized in performances by Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, with Shakesperian music being presented in an Indianised way.

Dr. Swati Roy Chowdhury studies how Mahesh Dattani uses silence as a language in his plays. Silence itself has been used by many playwrights as a dramatic tool to convey messages to their audience. Dattani too uses it effectively. In Indian society silence is supposed to be a virtue for women specially wives. Dattani shows how patriarchy coerces women, into silence but also indicates that does not mean they are happy. Men also employ silence to demonstrate their control over their wives. Roy Chowdhury points out how Dattani gives silence a meaning all of its own in the plays which communicate with the audience as much as the spoken words do.

Dr. Aparajita Hazra focuses on gothic elements in Gulzaar's film *Lekin*. Unlike in Western Gothic, the dead here are not spirits that haunt their oppressors but souls that have been reincarnated. They are reborn to right a wrong according to a cosmic principle beyond human control. Hazra observes how the film intertwines numinous cosmology with lived casteism to remind us that society must be reformed.

Loiya Leima Oinam explores how tradition and modernity clash in Arambam Samarendra's play *Judge Sahebki Imung*. Through the conflict within a family the conflict within broader Meitei society, between Anglicized upper classes who fervently embraced Western values and those who sought to revive older Meitei practices are brought out. Through this conflict the play brings out questions of identity, tradition, modernity and it asks what kind of adherence to tradition can create a 'genuine' identity. Oinam demonstrates how Arambam's play concludes with the teaching that a genuine understanding of tradition is also an aspect of modernity.

Soumyarup Bhattacharjee questions whether the film *Tasher Desh* by Q is faithful to Tagore's original play. Like the protagonists in the

original the protagonists in the film also find themselves in a strange land ruled by fascist powers. Bhattacharjee argues that what Q did was to show that Tagore's writing on social and political issues are timeless and that he is not merely a relic of the past.

Shreyoshi Dhar chooses the plays *Chandalika*, *The Post Office*, and *Raktakarabi* to show how Tagore successfully brings out Existentialist themes in his plays. Existentialism as a philosophy is concerned with choice, freedom and self-determination. That is what these plays focus on as well. As the characters seek their authentic selves free from social constraint, Dhar concludes that these plays of Tagore reject bigotry and encourage support for freedom and virtue and seek enlightenment.

Sahin Reja Mondal and **Dr Shubham Bhattacharjee** similarly choose to focus on Tagore's drama, but they regard him through a feminist lens. *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* are works with female protagonists who stand up for what they believe is right. Both are social outcasts who gain self-realization and refuse to accept patriarchal definition of their status. Mondal and Bhattacharjee argue that through theatrical performance Tagore is able to present successfully an ideology of mingled gender equality, human equality and liberation.

Dr. Madhumita Roy also reads Tagore, this time as one who protested against heartless technological progress as shown in *Raktakarabi*. Tagore was not against science and technology but he also saw that mindless subservience to their rule made men mechanical. The dead city with its machines and a faceless ruler clash with people who retain memories of a simple pastoral lifestyle that had made humans happy. But the king of the machine city itself becomes is challenged even as he witnesses the life and vitality that the heroine exudes. In the final revolt the System is pulled down. Roy comments that Tagore offers an alternative vision of modernity contrary to the Western model of modernity.

Dr. Shantanu Siuli similarly focuses on *Raktakarabi* to demonstrate the dehumanizing effects of Capitalism. Industrialization had destroyed sacredness of nature. Capitalism had produced only greed for wealth. The king is the perfect capitalistic tyrant living only profit. Even when he wants to change, the bureaucratic system stands against him. Only

a revolution by the masses can change this System. Siuli argues that the play is still relevant today in its portrayal of the global exploitation of workers.

Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty compares how Satyajit Ray adapted into celluloid Tagore's short story "Samapti". The story traces the development of a young girl into a woman who refuses to accept the traditional conventions of a gender based society. Her maturity at becoming a loving wife to a husband who loves her does not come at the expense of her independent mind. Chakraborty shows that the film Ray made is faithful to the original theme.

Naorem Ahanjao Meitei writes of experimental theatre in Manipur. He makes Athokpam Tomchou's plays *Bus Stop* and *Mingsel* centrepieces in his article. The first play does not show any character development; it only represents self-centred human nature. The second play uses the technique of the 'play-within-a-play' to literally reflect back the immorality and callousness of the characters in a mirror. Meitei argues that in this modern materialistic society human identities are fragile and untrustworthy.

Sharmistha Mukhopadhyay discusses how Santiniketan has preserved the heritage of Tagore's dance in his plays. She focuses specially on two performance texts, *Mayar Khela* and *Chandalika* to and traces the evolution of Rabindranritya, a special form of dance produced through Tagore's dance dramas. As years passed many changes in technique, costumes and musical instrument took place. However, Mukhopadhyay emphasizes that all performances remain true to Tagore's original vision.

Happy Reading

Subir Dhar & Papia Mitra

“Sound Indeed’: Audio as V/Focal Point in Twenty-first Century Theatre”

Sheila T. Cavanagh

Abstract

Sound design is becoming increasingly central—in forms unfamiliar to many audiences—in modern stage productions, as recent dramatic presentations in England indicate. From reimagined classical drama, such as Jamie Lloyd’s *Romeo & Juliet* and Max Webster’s *Macbeth* to Jeremy Herrin’s *People, Places & Things*, and the re-envisioned classic British television drama of Sarah Frankcom’s and Maxine Peake’s *Robin/Red/Breast*, many directors are emphasizing innovative uses of sound as they endeavor to capture audiences’ imaginations and entice wide-ranging demographics to support live theatre. The heavy emphasis upon sound appeals most strongly to younger audiences, with its repeated borrowings of familiar techniques drawn from popular modern music styles. At the same time, many of the attendant choices supporting such conceptualizations lead to significant changes in the design motifs more commonly used in classic drama.

New directions in sound design are unlikely to correspond to the expectations of traditional theatregoers, but they correlate with many of the aesthetic tastes of the younger cadre being courted by these kinds of innovations. The youthful audience present at *Romeo & Juliet*, for instance, was seated early and thus experienced the entirety of the industrial sound design played well before the show began. Max Webster’s *Macbeth* at London’s Donmar Warehouse, starring David Tennant and Cush Jumbo, also drew attention for the audio techniques that were unfamiliar to many patrons and which annoyed some critics. Whether this technology and heightened emphasis upon sound is welcomed or

described, this mode of theatrical presentation is growing in prominence as the twenty-first century continues.

Keywords: Sound design, binaural sound, demographics, British theatre, headphones

Sound design is becoming increasingly central—in forms unfamiliar to many audiences—in modern stage productions, as recent dramatic presentations in England indicate. From reimagined classical drama, such as Jamie Lloyd’s *Romeo & Juliet* and Max Webster’s *Macbeth* to Jeremy Herrin’s *People, Places & Things*, and the re-envisioned classic British television drama of Sarah Frankcom’s and Maxine Peake’s *Robin/Red/Breast*, many directors are emphasizing innovative uses of sound as they endeavor to capture audiences’ imaginations and entice wide-ranging demographics to support live theatre.¹ Webster, moreover, chose *Macbeth* to present at London’s Donmar Warehouse because he believes it speaks to our current moment in history:

I think *Macbeth* is one of the most radical and original extremes of thinking and feeling in the English language. And so, as we try to understand the extremity of the world right now, the origin or the violence and suffering, and the link between the personal and political, *Macbeth* seemed like it might be able to speak to our present moment.²

Webster decided to use binaural sound in this production because this technology seemed best suited to his concept of the play’s challenges:

I wanted to try and suggest that the witches could be voices in the Macbeths’ heads. . . . So how do you do voices in the head? Well, you could just put it through a speaker or you could have the whole company doing the voices or something...Binaural technology allows you to not just hear a voice very closely and intimately, but to 3D-image-locate that voice so it actually sounds as though it’s whispering in your head, putting the audience into the same position as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.³

Such current decisions are sometimes controversial, as many skeptical responses to Webster's *Macbeth* illustrate. Nick Curtis from *The Evening Standard*, for instance, claims that the sound diminishes the performance:

With the excellent David Tennant and Cush Jumbo as Shakespeare's murderous couple, this show promptly sold out its whole run at the 251-seat Donmar. If you didn't get tickets, take comfort, a potentially great production is coarsened by an overreaching gimmick.⁴

Despite such criticisms, the rise of immersive vehicles for entertainment and growing technological sophistication seems likely to support the ongoing implementation techniques, despite the resistance sometimes encountered.

Jamie Lloyd's production, starring popular *Spider-Man* actor Tom Holland, emphasizes the importance of sound well before the performance begins. As soon as the house opens, patrons enter a darkened space, filled with mechanical sound, occasional flashing lights, and a stage containing large static letters noting the scene as "VERONA." The low lighting inhibits opportunities to read the program in advance of the show, but even the rather intrusive volume of the noise filling the theatre does little to subdue the excited chatter of a predominantly youthful audience of enthusiastic *Spider-Man* fans. The decision to immerse theatregoers immediately into the technological environment of the ensuing drama makes sense, as it readily acclimates patrons to the dark spaces and technologically infused sound that serves as the background as well as key attributes of the entire production. Even before it begins, this show marks itself as a performance designed primarily to attract a much younger crowd than classical drama often draws.

Catriona Fallo explicitly acknowledges in the production programme that this attraction to youth reflects the Jamie Lloyd Company's marketing decision:

[The Jamie Lloyd Company] does not only challenge these 'outdated terms': it rips them up altogether. From dispelling tired notions that to 'respect' a text is to simply give audiences

another version of what they have seen before, the Company has explored multiple ways of making these familiar plays feel new, enabling fresh interpretations for all audiences while also actively seeking out ‘the younger and more diverse audiences.’⁵

In this case, the concurrent decisions about casting and staging appear to be wildly successful, given the sell-out crowds that have been packing this notably expensive theatrical offering. While Fallo remarks upon the many low-cost tickets made available to young audiences, most of the seats on offer are priced at £250 and higher. The sound design and the celebrity star come at a high cost, it seems.

The heavy emphasis upon sound, moreover, appears likely to appeal most strongly to younger audiences, with its repeated borrowings of familiar techniques drawn from popular modern music styles. At the same time, many of the attendant choices supporting such a conceptualization lead to significant changes in the design motifs more commonly used in classic drama. Such presentations often characterize Jamie Lloyd’s stagings, which here alienate some critics. Tim Bano, for example, criticizes the “industrial chic” encompassing the headsets:

This is less “Jamie Lloyd does Shakespeare”, more “Jamie Lloyd does Jamie Lloyd”; a *Romeo & Juliet* muttered through head mics, housed in a shell of industrial chic – or it was chic the first time Lloyd did it, but now it just looks like a fetish for ventilation ducts.⁶

By putting sound at the center of this conceptualization of the play, many theatrical traditions are jettisoned. The actors regularly pronounce their lines into one of the upright microphones frequently lined up across the stage rather than directly to other characters. Thus, Romeo and Juliet, among other figures, do not always address their words to each other.⁷ This distancing is reinforced by the production’s frequent reliance upon filmed sequences presented in juxtaposition with the actors on the stage. The human emotions presented in the text, therefore, often become less central than the technological facets of the production. In addition, the many deaths in this drama, including those of the protagonists, are distanced from their physicality. Mercutio and Tybalt die in darkness,

with no visualized stabbings. Romeo and Juliet die without blade or poison, but through the removal of their highly visible mics and headgear, which presumably signals their permanent disconnection from cutting-edge modernity. Many of the reviews suggest that this technique places emphasis upon *Romeo and Juliet*'s text, but others, like Bano, indicate that the result was disappointing. In any event, whether this technology and heightened emphasis upon sound is welcomed or descried, this mode of theatrical presentation is growing in prominence as the twenty-first century continues.

The current importance of sound is reflected in the impressive careers enjoyed by many of the sound designers associated with these productions. Ben and Max Ringham, for example, who created the sound design for Lloyd's *Romeo & Juliet*, have been involved in significant productions at London's National Theatre, the Donmar Warehouse, The Royal Court and other prominent theatres. Notably, they maintain that part of their success results from the public's increasing knowledge and appreciation of sound design. From their perspective "Directors and audiences are more sound-literate now. It's brilliant."⁸ These comments were published in 2017 and the 2023-2024 shows being discussed here suggest that sound design is even more acknowledged today, presumably due, in part, to advances in sound technology in popular corollary realms, such as video games. The Ringers' work began outside of the theatre, but then, rather remarkably, they were hired for their first stage engagement by National Theatre Director Nicholas Hytner, who brought them on in 2005 to do the sound for *Henry IV*, parts one and two. Max Ringham's account of this experience describes an endeavor closely congruent with what they present in 2024's *Romeo & Juliet*.

The first thing we did on the Henrys was ask exactly what speakers were available to us – including all the reinforcements in the roof and in the corridors outside," Max explains. "That's a lot more common these days, but I don't think anyone had asked them that before. We wanted to make the whole space come alive." It's a practice rooted in the experiential, and it extends across their work.⁹

The sound created for *Romeo & Juliet* clearly reflects their theatrical trajectory from 2017, when their work was described thus:

That variety is showing itself in a season when the Ringhams will move from Jonathan Munby's *King Lear* in Chichester – think Bristol indie-grunge a la Portishead and Massive Attack, with a new national anthem to boot – to the gameshow themes and hacking coughs of James Graham's *Quiz*, about the cheating major on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*. In Manchester, meanwhile, they are creating the soundscape for *Our Town* entirely out of human voices – and a capella score with spoken-word sound effects; pitter-patters for rain, crowing for cockerels.¹⁰

While the new directions in sound design charted by the Ringhams and others are unlikely to correspond to the expectations of traditional theatregoers, they correlate with many of the aesthetic tastes of the younger cadre being courted by these kinds of innovations. The youthful audience present at *Romeo & Juliet*, for instance, were seated early and thus experienced the entirety of the industrial sound offered by the Ringhams. At the end of the show, they flocked to the stage door to greet the departing Tom Holland. There was every indication that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience with no evident concern about the hefty ticket prices.

Max Webster's *Macbeth* at London's Donmar Warehouse, starring David Tennant and Cush Jumbo, also drew attention for its swiftly sold-out tickets and for the audio techniques that were unfamiliar to many patrons. Here, although the audience included a diverse age-range, supported by the Donmar's special price concessions for younger visitors, the many fans of Tennant and Jumbo did not skew the theatrical expectations as clearly as those coming to see *Spider-Man as Romeo*. Accordingly, the requirement that those attending wear headphones in order to experience the binaural sound created for this production raised hackles as much as admiration for this sound design. Binaural sound is presented through the requisite headphones, with each ear receiving different sensory input. This technique helps create the immersive

experience many artistic modes currently employ. Piotr Majdak, Robert Baumgartner, and Claudia Jenny describe how “natural” binaural sound operates in people’s lives:

However, sound is ephemeral, namely, it is happening and short-lived; it is an effect of events, providing information on what happens right now, instead of a long-lasting description of objects’ properties. Thus, the information carried by the sound not only needs to be stored for its processing, but it also requires consideration of various time scales. On a short time scale, a creak might mean someone stepping on the floor. Many similar creaks, however, would rather indicate someone opening a door. The ephemeral property of sound requires the auditory system to address the question: “What is happening?” But even answering this question can only help in understanding a *static* environment. The world is *dynamic* and full of interaction. In order to decide on its actions, the auditory system has to provide a basis for the prediction of “what will happen next?”¹¹

In the Donmar *Macbeth*, binaural sound frequently kept audience members particularly alert to the sounds they heard and the positionality these auditory signals indicated. As Webster notes, the witches only manifest themselves through sound, keeping audience members from knowing definitively if these important figures were real, creations of Macbeth’s, Banquo’s, and Lady Macbeth’s imaginations, or somehow representative of the listeners’ internal thoughts. All of the sound was presented through the headphones, although some audience members refused to wear them or removed them periodically. Award-winning sound designer Gareth Fry’s meticulous work, therefore, was rejected by some of those present for the performance. The show is transferring to London’s Harold Pinter Theatre later in 2024, where the same sound design will be used, according to the theatre’s announcement:

the sound designer on the show is Gareth Fry. Fry has designed an extraordinary sound experience for *Macbeth*, using groundbreaking Binaural sound technology to create a 3D

soundscape, which the audience experiences by wearing headphones. Every whisper on stage is heard by the audience, with sound becoming a central, critical part of the production.¹²

This perspective is shared by many writing about this show's technological emphasis. Sarah Crompton, for example, praises the staging in *Whats On Stage*:

This feels like a *Macbeth* for the digital age, one perfectly tailored for fans of its star David Tennant. It's stylish, evocative – and slightly distancing. But never for a moment can you tear your attention away.

Its main feature is to make you listen to Shakespeare through binaural headphones, rendering both the actor's voices and Gareth Fry's astonishing soundscape in sharp 3D. To begin with, this yields richly imaginative dividends. In pitch darkness, the murmuring voices of the witches emerge against a background of bird screeches and cries. The sense of mystery and of evil is all-encompassing.¹³

Not all critics and audience members agreed, however. Fiona Mountford, for example, speaks at length of her disappointment about the audio component, particularly given the stellar casting included at the Donmar:

Yet this intimacy [created by the Donmar's small space] is oddly wasted by the production's decision to provide the audience with headphones in order to experience the binaural sound design...

Webster's vision of the play is of a psychological drama, in which wars and kingdoms are of decidedly lesser importance than the fevered recesses of the Macbeths' minds.

However I must confess that I swiftly started to take the headphones off for extended periods, so as to restore that all-important connection between voice and corporeal actor.¹⁴

While it may be premature to attach these various responses to the

current status of theatrical sound design to the typical age of those attending these performances, it seems likely that this correlation is part of the mix. My American university students often have little, if any, experience of live theatre before encountering one or two productions during their studies. Most of them, on the other hand, have considerable knowledge of modern films, music, and video games, many of which employ the kinds of audiological experiences now appearing in theatres. Shakespeare is not the only author whose works are being presented through new, technologically enhanced perspectives, but his canon offers a valuable vantage point through which to assess current trends and their variable successes and failures.

Sarah Frankcom's and Maxine Peake's *Robin/Red/Breast*, which was presented at the Aviva Studios in Manchester, also uses binaural sound, although only in the first half of the production. While this play is obviously not written by Shakespeare, Frankcom directed Peake in the title role of *Hamlet* at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre in 2015.¹⁵ The story is not widely known outside the United Kingdom, but the source for *Robin/Red/Breast* would undoubtedly be familiar to many audience members in Manchester. In 1970, an earlier version of the story was performed as a television play, written by John Griffith Bowen. Remarkably, considering the psychological frenzy and uncertainty often occurring during the narrative, numerous original viewers were not able to watch the second half of that rendition of the play until 1971, due to an electricians' strike that stopped the performance abruptly in mid-broadcast throughout much of England.¹⁶ The narrative details of this folk-horror story, combined with the technological upheaval accompanying its twentieth-century debut, make it an appropriate drama to present in 2024 using binaural sound. In this production, audience members are handed headsets as they entered the theatre (at the Donmar, headphones were attached to each seat) and given instructions to test them, put them on when the lights went out, then to put them on again when the lights reappeared. Binaural sound is used solely during the first part of the show, when Peake (playing Nora) is silently alone in her cottage. It soon becomes evident that the sounds coming through the headphones represent her tumultuous inner thoughts, as she contends

with an environment that quickly shifts from pastoral to ominous. In contrast to the reviews of Webster's *Macbeth*, however, which focused heavily upon the use of binaural sound, here, the headphones attract comparatively little attention. Mark Fisher, for instance, in his *Guardian* review of 20 May, 2024, speaks mainly about non-sonic aspects of the play, including Maxine Peake's "mesmerizing" performance. He mentions briefly that "there is a section played on headphones," but that aside fades quickly in light of his vivid descriptions of acting, costume and set design, and other elements of the drama.¹⁷ David Cunningham, moreover, raises potential questions about the sound, but ultimately rules in its favor:

Robin/Red/Breast is marketed as immersive theatre. Upon entry the audience is handed headphones through which, in the opening fifteen minutes or so, they listen to a monologue setting out the central character's inner thoughts along with suitably spooky sound effects while the actor performs wordlessly onstage. The need for this approach is debatable. One could argue the same effect could be achieved by having the speech as a soundtrack played over the theatre sound system or the actor simply speaking the monologue. The headphones do, however, lead to a *coups de théâtre* which really makes you sit up and pay attention so perhaps the device can be justified.¹⁸

The contrast with reviews of the Donmar *Macbeth* is striking. While some reviewers appreciated the binaural sound, many leveled objections similar to those voiced by Fiona Mountford. Binaural sound was not expected and often not appreciated in that production of *Macbeth*. This difference in responses suggests that age may not be the only determining factor in predicting audiences' willingness to encounter such unexpected sonic devices. While *Macbeth* can also be designated as a piece of horror, its status as a "classic" predominates. *Robin/Red/Breast*, in contrast, is most readily identified as a horror story. This differentiation may well shape audience reactions to this modern drama. The horror genre is associated with different conventions than those often linked with Shakespearean performances, so binaural sound may seem more

compatible with this kind of presentation. There was no evident resistance at the use of headphones the night I attended *Robin/Red/Breast* and the reviews tend to be sanguine on this topic. Webster's *Macbeth* clearly triggered a more divisive response to the kind of sound being presented, juxtaposed to the comparatively calm acceptance of the sound profiles created for *Romeo & Juliet* and *Robin/Red/Breast*. This suggests that expectations may be paramount in determining whether unusually loud, mechanized, or binaural sound is accepted or rejected by the audiences who encounter them.

Critical and audience reactions to the 2024 Trafalgar Theatre revival of Jeremy Herrin's *People, Places, & Things* (originally a 2015 National Theatre Production) supports the hypothesis that genre and preconceptions contribute heavily to the quality assessments many assign to innovative sound designs. This play, written by Duncan Macmillan, starred Denise Gough in both iterations of the play, each of which was directed by Herrin. The music here is evocative of that encountered in *Romeo & Juliet*, most frequently during scene changes, but also occasionally during moments of high tension. This play, which follows the treatment journey of an actor confronting drug and alcohol addiction, is also not a classic drama, but it includes multiple allusions to such plays. The main character, for instance, is shown in a scene from Chekhov's *The Seagull* and there are intermittent references to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and other classic texts. Another character also mentions having seen "Sarah" (her name changes throughout the play) as Lavinia in a pub version of Titus *Andronicus* and "Sarah" once quotes from *Romeo and Juliet*. In the 2024 version, Sinéad Cusack, a former Royal Shakespeare Company actor with a lengthy family pedigree in classical drama, plays several roles. This mixture of associations of classical drama within a modern play remains highly relevant in the current context. The actors, scenes, and references with links to classical drama help build both striking contrasts and intersections between the narratives and characters portrayed in both facets of *People, Places & Things*. There are continual suggestions that fact and fiction cannot be separated throughout this play and that there are strong resonances between the issues presented in disparate eras. At the same time, most of what could be considered

jarring musical and lighting intervals occur during segments devoted to modern times. The lights are bright and the sound is loud during these stretches, but references to the classics generally occur during normal conversations (or group therapy sessions).

This pattern seems to situate the soundscape within the “modern” aspect of the play. Notably, therefore, the lights and sounds remain unmentioned in many reviews, including one in 2016 by Fiona Mountford, who criticized the Donmar *Macbeth*, but does not comment on this sound design amidst her glowing praise for Denise Gough.¹⁹ Jonathan Baz, in a review of the 2024 production at Trafalgar Theatre, similarly lauds Gough, but makes no mention of the sound or lighting design, although he favorably acknowledges “Bunny Christie’s ingenious set designs.”²⁰ It seems therefore, that while criticism of the binaural soundscape of Webster’s *Macbeth* typically claims that the technology creates unwelcome distance between the actors and the audience, this supposed distance may not create similar distress in plays more closely associated with the modern world, either through the chronology of the writing or through targeted appeals to specific modern audiences, such as those included in *Romeo & Juliet*. In any event, soundscapes are likely to continue to claim central roles in contemporary theatrical productions. Fortunately for all of us, there are very talented sound designers working in this field, even though their creations may not suit the taste of all who encounter them.

(Endnotes)

1. I regret the impossibility of discussing these emerging theatrical practices with the late Professor Amitava Roy, whose perspective on dramatic presentations was also insightful and welcome.
2. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Edited by Max Webster, with additional material compiled by Alessandra Davison. London: Nick Hern. 2023. vii.
3. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Edited by Max Webster, with additional material compiled by Alessandra Davison. London: Nick Hern. 2023.viii.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/macbeth-donmar-warehouse-review-david-tennant-cush-jumbo-b1127257.html>

5. Catriona Fallow. "Radical Reappraisal: the Style and Ethos of the Jamie Lloyd Company." 2024. Programme for *Romeo and Juliet*. London: Duke of York's Theatre. Np.
6. Tim Bano. *Romeo & Juliet* review: "Tom Holland's star-cross'd sad boy lover falls flat." London: *The Independent*. 25 May, 2024
7. This pair do, however, speak closely in several scenes. I must note that the performance I saw had understudies playing the important roles of Juliet, Mercutio, and the Friar, so I cannot assess how many of the key scenes in the drama were presented by the main actors.
8. Matt Trueman September 19, 2017. <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/sound-designers-ben-and-max-ringham-directors-and-audiences-are-more-sound-literate-now-its-brilliant>.
9. Matt Trueman. September 19, 2017. <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/sound-designers-ben-and-max-ringham-directors-and-audiences-are-more-sound-literate-now-its-brilliant>.
10. Matt Trueman September 19, 2017. <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/sound-designers-ben-and-max-ringham-directors-and-audiences-are-more-sound-literate-now-its-brilliant>.
11. Piotr Majdak, Robert Baumgartner and Claudia Jenny. "Formation of Three-Dimensional Auditory Space." In Jens Blauert and Jonas Braasch, eds. *The Technology of Binaural Understanding*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. 115-150. 116.
12. <https://www.westendtheatre.com/231577/news/macbeth-with-david-tennant-cush-jumbo-confirms-3d-soundscape-and-headphones-for-the-harold-pinter-theatre-in-london/>
13. https://www.whatsonstage.com/news/macbeth-review-david-tennant-and-cush-jumbo-in-a-scottish-play-for-the-digital-age_1558775/.
14. <https://inews.co.uk/culture/arts/macbeth-donmar-warehouse-review-david-tennant-magnificent-style-over-substance-2812821>.
15. Tennant and Jumbo have each also performed the title role in Hamlet, something they discuss in the Webster edition of *Macbeth*. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Edited by Max Webster, with additional material

compiled by Alessandra Davison. London: Nick Hern. 2023.xxxi-xxxii. Tennant performed this role with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2008. Jumbo starred as Hamlet at the Young Vic Theatre in 2021.

16. *Robin/Red/Breast*. Co-created by Sarah Frankcom and Maxine Peake. Manchester: North Warehouse, Aviva Studios. 2024. Performance programme. np.
17. Mark Fisher. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/article/2024/may/20/robinredbreast-review-maxine-peake>. May 20, 2024.
18. David Cunningham. <https://www.thereviewshub.com/robin-red-breast-aviva-studios-manchester/>. May 20, 2024.
19. Fiona Mountford. *People, Places, and Things Review: Denise Gough Gives Unmissable Performance of Humour and Humanity*. *The Standard*. 24 March, 2016. <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/people-places-and-things-theatre-review-denise-gough-gives-unmissable-performance-of-humour-and-humanity-a3210961.html>.
20. Jonathan Baz Reviews. . . *People, Places & Things*. May 16, 2024. <https://www.jonathanbaz.com/2024/05/people-places-things-review.html>.

Humour and the Comic Plot: Enacting *Twelfth Night* on the Indian Stage

Tapu Biswas

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the role and functionality of elements of humour and comedy in the extremely intricate plot of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* which is often regarded as a simple 'festive comedy' where theme of love reigns supreme. Traditional notes the UG and PG students read this to memorise with an aim to just getting through the examinations often fail to do justice to the implications of the complex plot structure and the relevance of jocular undertone in Renaissance theatre and particularly in Shakespeare's plays. The aim of the paper is to explicate the diverse significance of humourous and comic characters entangled within the plot keeping in mind the challenges of enacting the play in Indian theatres.

Keywords: Shakespeare, theatre, love, plot, Renaissance, Indian

I

Introduction

Much of Shakespeare's sources for his plays and plots come from the continent-mainly from Italy, France and Germany. Shakespeare appropriated some names, situations, incidences, not only for home continental plays but also from foreign novels and short stories. But his innovation lies in the ways he recycled the old stories inserting songs and music so that each and every audience can understand and enjoy the play. The main texts which helped Shakespeare to formulate the complexities of his 'main' plot or the 'upstairs' part of *Twelfth Night* involving the aristocratic lovers – Orsino, Viola, Olivia and Sebastian their surrogate wooing cross dressing disguise and deceit ending in marriage are – (1) Barnabe Rich's

Historie of Apoloniuss and Stilla one of a collection of eight tales called *Riche His Farewell to the Militarie Profession* (1581) taken from foreign source.

(2) The Sienese's comedy *GL'Ingannati* (the cheated /deceived 1537) of uncertain authorship but regularly revised by many hands. The plot of this work is very similar to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In its introduction occurs the name Malevolti (= obviously Malvalio), the name Fabio (= Olivia's attendant Febian).

(3) Another Italian piece *GL'Inganni* by Curzio Gonzaga. In this play the sister who disguises herself in male attire and is mistaken for her brother whom she resembles assumes the name Cesara, and Casara (= Caesario which is the name viola takes before Orsinio)

(4) This is not a source of *Twelfth Night* as such but it is worth remembering that the main plot has identical twins, sister Viola and brother Sebastian may have something to do with the fact that Shakespeare too had identical twins, the Judith, (girl) and Hamnet (boy) born to Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway in 1585.

(5) The sub-plot involving the 'downstairs' denizens of counts Olivia great mansion or place with the gulling of Malvolio, the master plan of which is created by Sir Toby's beloved Maria, the wittiest peace of Eve's flesh in all Illayra and effectively executed by the cohorts of Maria, the co-conspirator falian, Feste, and Co. mainly come from Shakespeare's own creative imagination. To simplify with songs and music this structure of *Twelfth Night* we have referred to two plots but the sub-plot and main plots mix and mingle, at various points, coalesce into each other and do not run on separate lines. The same is the case with the sub-plot and the main plot of *King Lear* where the two plots touch upon and run into each other at various points. In *Twelfth Night* Feste the musician shifts with ease from Olivia's household to Orsino's and various characters all cross and re-cross through the two plots.

II

Shakespeare appears to be rather indifferent or ambiguous when it comes to the naming of his plays, especially so in the titles of his comedies. *As you Like It* suggests the play is not what Shakespeare liked but he has written something that the audience and reader might like. It might also

refer to the form of the comedy which the audience might decide upon as they liked it to be. *The Merchant of Venice* has at least two important merchants in it Shylock and Antonio but only one is suggested by the title. *Twelfth Night* is of course a significant title but the significance is undercut in the playful sub-title “What you Will”. It is as if Shakespeare has somehow completed his responsibility of writing the play and it is now up to the audience to take it according to their wishes: “What you Will?”

Twelfth Night is a significant date in the Christian calendar which comes twelve days after Christmas that is on 6th January. It is the last day of the festive season beginning with Christmas. The next day signals the end of the holiday season and the beginning of Lent and return to the work – a - day world of everyday reality. The holidays are over and we must concentrate now on the hard and harsh task of living out our troublesome lives. Critics like C.L. Barber have concentrated only on the festive aspect and called it Shakespeare’s festive comedy (1959). But that is a one-sided view that leaves out the graver and serious dimensions of the play. Shakespeare is always multilayered and his general praxis is to mingle the grave with the gay, the tragic with the comic in most of his writings. Dr Johnson, whatever his falls as a critic, hit the nail on the head when he commented that Shakespeare writes neither comedy nor tragedy but a kind of mingled drama which is a mirror of our sublunary existence.

III

Some of the Bangla translations / adaptations of *Twelfth Night* have called it *Dadash Rajani* (Pasupati Bhattacharya). This phrase has no special connotation but only means twelfth night which has no significance for Indians. An Indian analogue or parallel to Shakespeare’s technical title would be the Durga Puja festivities, now known to the world over through UNESCO’s global certifications. The Puja begins on *Sasti* continue through *Saptami*, *Austami*, *Nabami* and ends with the emersion of the Goddess in the Ganges on *Dasami*. When all the holiday festive sprits comes to an end we bid goodbye to the Goddess and prepare for serious business of life beginning from the day after that is *Ekadasi* on the Indian Calendar. So an Indian adaptation would have to knit together the opposed ideas of *Dasami* and *Akadasi* in the title.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India's first Bangla version of *Twelfth Night* in 2001 offered an excellent way out of the problem of naming the play by referring to it as *Illyrier Raath*. The translators Amitava Roy and Dattatreya Dutt focused on Viola's very important dialogue with the C- Captain who saved her from drowning after the opening "shipwreck"-

Viola : What country, friend, is this?

Captain : This is Illyra, lady.

Viola : And what should I do in Illyra?

My brother, he is in Elysium.

Perchance he is not downed. 1.2 (1-5)

Dattatreya Dutt's later version also aptly called it *Ichchhetithir Galpo* published in 2003 by Shakespeare Society of Eastern India though the Bangla title has not much relation to Shakespeare's title. It also calls the play a Galpo which means a narrative. Otherwise, this is the best modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* that we have in Bangla or in any other Indian language.

IV

It is always instructive to briefly look at some of the bazar notes on the market, most of which are Delhi based publications written by Rajinder Paul, S. P Chaudhuri and Praveen Bhatia to name only three. The information of such publication show that *Twelfth Night* is definitely on the undergraduate and postgraduate syllabus of most colleges and universities and such notes are very much in demand. Most of these notebooks are full of contradictions and mere padding culled from here, there and everywhere without any thought whether they jell together or not. Rajinder Paul rightly points out that this play was without doubt intended to be performed on 6th January, 1602 (or 1601) – a piece of information which he got from Leslie Hotson's *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (1954) which Paul does not of course acknowledge. He thinks the play is totally merry and the songs too are full of gaiety (Wrong on both counts). Possibly he has neither read nor understood the importance of many songs in the play and parrots someone else's one sided opinion.

Feste's songs are special feature of the musical wealth of *Twelfth Night*. But most of them are full of sadness, regret and muted lament. "O

mistress mine, where are you roaming? closes with “Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty: youth’s staff will not endure”. “Come away come away death is an egecic lament on a lover corpse “in sad eypress laid”. Feste brings *Twelfth Night* to a close with another elegiac lament about how life fools and gulls us with our dreams and desires which are never fulfilled. The song centres round the refrain: “For the rain it raineth everyday” (155) and reveals the harshness of reality and our unfulfilled desires. Lear’s fool sings a similar version of this song with its focus on the “wind and the rain and the loss of life’s joys. Shakespeare’s mingling of tragic and comic is there at the end but the feeling generated by Feste’s song in the audience is mainly sadness, or almost tragi-comic.

S. P. Chowdhury begins by asserting that the main title of the play, *Twelfth Night* has no reference to the plot. He then in total contradiction of these assertion goes on to write in great detail about the feast of epiphany and the twelfth night festivities. For him the sub-title is more important than the main title of the play. He also says that the comic characters are free alike from disguises and from pretentions. Chowdhury does not seem to have grasped significance of the sub-title, characterization and plot of *Twelfth Night*. The characters like Sir Andrew, Orsino, and Malvolio are full of pretentions. And disguise is a special feature of *Twelfth Night* on which I shall be writing a separate paper. Chowdhury also thinks that the characters are ludicrous ... ridiculous or contemptible. God help any student who follow this assertion of Chowdhury in their answers.

Praveen Bhatia begins sensitively enough. Focusing on the title and sub-title, on the occasion of the play and on everyone getting what they desire at the end of the play except Sir Andrew and Malvolio. She then contradicts herself by commenting on the word ‘will’ observing that “the wish of every character is fulfilled in the end.” Thus, forgetting about the facts of Sir Andrew or Malvolio she also indulges in some amateur psychologizing and damns both. Sir Andrew is too meek and Malvolio full of self love who do not deserve to marry or have wives. Such character will make their partner’s life measureable. Is there any guarantee that Orsino, Olivia and Maria will not make their partners life measurable in the future? After this foray into the maddening world of the bazar notes of *Twelfth Night* we can now get back on crack to discuss few important dimensions of the play.

Twelfth Night is a play whose major themes are self - deceit (as the title suggests illusions and the breaking out of illusions exploration of various kinds and types of love and of the stretch and abilities that can be found much more in women than in males generally. In the world of twelfth night men talk more while women feel more. Women have to bear the brunt of very difficult situation and attempt to resolve them while generally the man continue to create complications. Viola is probably the most important character of the play who is significantly involved with most of the characters and also the incidents of the play. Her situation is very complicated and tragic. She has to be the messenger for Orsino the man (with whom she falls in love with at first sight) who carries Orsino's love for Olivia the woman he thinks he loves who refuses to see him. She manages to break through to the household of grieving countess Olivia and make a tremendous impact who had decided not to talk to a man for seven years falls in love with viola disguised as Cesario. Olivia moves from the page boy Viola/ Cesario to her twin brother Sebastian. Like most of the characters in Romantic comedies she had caught the "plague of love", but finally ends in happiness.

The play ends happily for all except Malvolio, who comes running into the midst happy romantic couple and revels all to Olivia. Malvolio is the steward of the household of the countess Olivia who thinks highly of this puritanical official. He dislikes any kind of fun and games and is always annoyed with the disorderly drunken behaviour of Sir Toby, Maria and their company belonging to the downstairs part of Olivia's great household. Being a strict disciplinarian as puritan's generally were he dislikes the clowning of Feste and tries to keep Olivia's household always under control. He shouts at the downstairs people that they have no sense of time, place or action and has nearly turned Olivia's mansion into an ale house or a brothel. His exit line cuts across the happy endings of *Twelfth Night* like a knife:

Malvolio : I 'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you. (77)

Malvolio did not get his revenge within the plot and action of *Twelfth Night*, but he finally got the revenge with the puritan reaction against the theatre closing down the theatre and stage from 1642 to 1660. Maria's letter triggers some of Malvolio's basic illusions that he suffers from. He thinks as Olivia's trusted household official his station is above all

others. Subconsciously he must have thought of Olivia has his beloved which Maria's letter feeds upon and brings to the surface. Maria tells Olivia that Malvolio has gone mad and following her advice the puritan is put into a mad house where Feste, disguised as the priest Sir Topas, asks Malvolio insulting questions to humiliate him. Regarding the use of humorous scenes, especially Feste's song which lightens the gravity and tragic intensity of the 'comic' play, Amitava Roy comments:

In the tragedies and in the most mature comedies (like *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*) the Bard introduced songs and music not just for atmospheric but for more dramatic reasons related to the characters and their personality, their situations and to the themes of the plays. The snatches of Ophelia in her madness and the Willow song of Desdemona stress their abnormal states of mind and their abnormal situations, while instrumental music is often associated with scenes of quiet tension and rising suspense as with Lear recovering from his madness and in his re-union scene with Cordelia, or associated with magic as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. (30)

Conclusion

In the West Shakespeare's songs have a tradition of being sung mostly in the Italian way mode and tone with an operative temper. Lead singers of the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India like Shreela Roy, Dattatreya Dutt, Debasis Chattopadhyaya and Produt Ganguly *et al* are familiar with the Italian mode and even if they can use this mode they do not and brings to the audience their own Indian way of seeing Shakespeare. To them the Western way is harsher than their own softer romantic style. Thus in evolutionary terms and historically music and dance have always been inextricably interlinked with drama / theatre. Specially in the East has it been an unbroken and continuous tradition for thousands of years though in the West that tradition has been broken with music and dance being limited to the genre of Musicals and Operas, and theatre without music being labeled simply Drama. But in both hemispheres - East and West Music has been an essential and integral feature of the popular theatre and folk traditions of performance (Roy

27). I do think that their style of singing add much sweetness and a more realistic quality of dialogue to the Shakespeare's song. The children of the members of the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India like Tapsya & Tejaswini Biswas and Miura Roy Basu are all taught the shorter Shakespeare's songs especially from *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* to sing at the musical workshop of the society.

Note:

This paper is the result of long academic discussions with my teacher, Late Prof. Amitava Roy, with whom I spent many Sunday afternoons deliberating on the theatrical devices of *Twelfth Night* and its complexity to produce on the Indian stage. I duly express my gratitude for the departed soul, who once introduced me to the world of Shakespearean plays.

Works Cited:

- Barber, C.L. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedies: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*. Princeton UP, 1959.
- Bhatia, Parveen. editor *Twelfth Night*, by William Shakespeare, UBSPD, 1997.
- Crane, Milton. "Shakespeare's Comedies and the Critics". *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol.15, no.2, Oxford University Press, pp. 67-73.
- Leggatt, Alexander, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Noble, Richard. *Shakespeare's Use of Song*. Oxford UP, 1966.
- Paul Rajinder. editor *Twelfth Night*, by William Shakespeare, Ram Brothers, 2018.
- Roy, Amitava. "The Role and function of Music in the Theatre". *An Introduction to Music and Musicology*, edited by Goutam Nag. Rabindra Bharati University, 2008, pp. 27-39.
- Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*, edited by Keir Alam. Arden Shakespeare. 2008.
- Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present*. Viking, 1991.

Absent Presence and Beyond: Reading Silence as a Language in Mahesh Dattani's Selected Plays

Swati Roy Chowdhury

Abstract

More often than not, silence has been interpreted in negative terms, in terms of absence rather than presence. All popular dictionaries and thesauruses interpret silence as a lack of voice, absence of sound, deficiency of language communication, and so on. Hence an unproblematic understanding of silence influenced by the aforementioned sources overlooks its potential as a meta-language i.e. a language which functions effectively where all verbal means of communication tend to be inadequate. Therefore, a better interpretation of silence would be as an absent presence- an apparent lack that is rich in semiotic significance.

Theatre, however, has a different way of looking at silence. In a dramatic performance, silence has been employed as a means to communicate messages for ages and hence here 'lack of sound' doesn't simply imply a lack of meaning. Instead, it indicates a meta-functional presence that is pregnant with multiple meanings, which again, simultaneously, is informed by and in turn informs the socio-political-cultural ambiance of the setting.

The present paper seeks to negotiate the relationship between the language of silence and the social, cultural, and political concerns in selected plays of Mahesh Dattani to find out whether theatrical silence can at all translate to a more potent form of language. Thus it also tries to find out whether the semiotics of silence can be interpreted to be more potent than those of tangible communicative measures. In this process, the paper examines the situations which generated silence as

a response and endeavors to explain the causal relationship between them.

Keywords: Mahesh Dattani, Theatre, Silence, Non-Verbal Communication

Introduction

...one of the universals of nonverbal behaviors is that they always communicate, and this is no less true of silence. Our silence communicates just as intensely as anything we might verbalize. (DeVito 1989: 153)

In his essay “Silence and Paralanguage as Communication” DeVito explains the communicative function of silence. He debunks the popular misconception that it can be defined only in terms of negatives viz. absence of sound, absence of speech, and consequently absent of meaning leading to absence of communication. His notion of silence as language is supported by others as well who either consider silence as a part of the language or that silence is a language in itself. Ephratt, for example, deliberates that silence is not merely a renunciation of speech, but has a meaning, or, as linguists say, in a somewhat problematic definition, it is a zero-signifier carrying meaning (Ephratt 2011). Since within its context silence carries meaning, one may be tempted to call it a motivated sign. Traditionally popular definitions confer absolute superiority to speech as a conventional mode of communication. But these overlook the fact that almost 96% of the entire universal communication is nonverbal (Mehrabian 1971). While several popular opinions support the claim that silence is non-productive and dysfunctional (Mann 1926), more recent opinions defend the positive functional aspect of silence as language.

The present paper endeavors to find out to what extent silence can be an effective language for theatrical communication. In doing so it begins by challenging the more popular belief that silence is emblematic of absent communication. Rather it searches for examples from theatrical performances where silence has been effectively employed as a more flexible option of communication. It offers fluidity of meaning and performance in spaces where words fall short. This paper argues that

silence, more often than not, corresponds to those empty spaces between the lines of a printed text which allow the reader/viewer a refreshing liberty to read what has not been written and understand what has only subtly been implied. Silence, therefore, serves as the opportunity to rethink words and reassess their semantic significance.

Sometimes, however, silence is not used as implicit communication but as an exact translation of certain verbal codes. It often delivers a more potent form of message than its verbal counterpart. One reason behind this might be its inherent honesty. Silence never lies; it may be misread and misinterpreted and it may be ambiguous and prone to multiple interpretations. But a misread silence never means untruth, rather it refers to an error in decoding. Misunderstanding silence is dependent on the intention or method of decoding of the receiver. Even when silence is used as a means to conceal it does expose the encoder's intention to conceal.

Scholars and experts have delineated several functions of silence as a paralanguage as well as a metalanguage¹. Varied that they already are, more diversity is added to the existing corpus of functions when one considers adding the psycho-socio-cultural communicative conventions of the user to the metrics. While silence implies an absence of sound in general and hence appears to follow a universal pattern, it is not so. The communicative functions of silence are not universal. Rather they are culture-specific and depend heavily on the spatial-temporal reality of the user.

The communicative potential of nonverbal language including silence has been exploited in theatres for a long period. Modern theater practitioners have frequently tried to experiment with the potential of silence as a language of theatre. Harold Pinter, for example, believes "We communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid". (Bloom 1987: 26). His observation refers to his strategy of using silence as a recurrent device of expression in his plays. He finds silence to be an effective medium to communicate what is inexpressible, to convey his unwillingness to express aversion, unreliability, obscurity, ambiguousness, and doubts about his characters. Thus he has established

silence as a potential medium of candid communication, his foundation being the ambiguity inherent in the verbal mode in which"...under what is said, another thing is being said' (Bloom 1987: 25).

Pinter's method of using silence has found wide acceptability as a mode of resistance in the West. But that is not the only creative use of silence in theatre. Rather, it can be used in various ways and for various purposes which rely on certain specific dimensions of communication like the psychology of the communicators, their culture, society, etc. This psycho-socio-cultural resonance of silence becomes easier to understand when one considers it not as a lack of verbal communication but as a distinct mode of communication in itself. Hence the meaning of silence, like that in any particular language, should and must depend on the context of its use in the text which again is not just a large collection of grammatically correct sentences, but "an instance of social meaning" (Halliday 1985: 11). Theatre, being a kind of performative text and with its attempt to capture a particular socio-temporal frame with all its idiosyncrasies use silence with its contextual semiotic significance as "an intersubjective medium of communication, a conventionalized coding system...an output, something that can be recorded and studied, having a certain construction that can be represented in systematic terms" (Halliday 1985: 10). While Halliday uses this observation for verbal language I extend its use to incorporate silence within its purview. This implies that in the present article, silence is not going to be considered as a non-language or inferior language but as having all features of any acknowledged language except for the employment of auditory signifiers.

Considering silence as language has its advantage. It interprets theatrical silence easily by allowing paradigms of verbal communication to be put to use. While questions may be raised about the feasibility of such a strategy, this article argues in favor of it. Nor is such argument baseless, because many aspects are common between verbal language and silence, i.e. both are communicative methods, both are context-specific, both depend on the ethnic, cultural, social, psychological, religious, and political identities of their users, and more interestingly-however contradictory it may sound- both can be used either for hiding

the truth or for exposing it. No wonder, silence has often been used in theatres either as a substitute for language or as language itself.

The culture-specific nuance of silence is important for understanding how it has been used in Indian theatre. In India, silence or “mauna” is primarily associated with meditation and religious rituals. It indicates the high asceticism of the user. While, therefore, this higher form of silence is not within the scope of all users, there are a few other variations of silence that are practiced by common Indians. But then again such uses are flexible and malleable and they indicate no fixity of the situation of the users involved. For example, one may think of considering the gender-specific connotations of silence. For men, silence often implies cowardice and a lack of knowledge. For women, on the other hand, it means obedience and subservience. Thus, while silence is a putatively negative response from men, it is a positive and expected response from women.

Silence in Dattani's Plays

As a contemporary playwright of repute, Dattani creatively uses silence in his plays. It won't be an exaggeration to say that how Dattani molds English to fit into the Indian framework is no different from that of his use of silence in the plays. He uses this ambiguous but widely popular non-verbal mode of communication within the conventions of spatial-temporal framework and context. And thus, silence does not create a void in his plays. Rather it creates possibilities for contemplations and reinterpretations.

In India, silence is often regarded as a virtue, although it often comes at the expense of tolerated injustice and repressed anger. Repression of injustice yields to hatred and silence becomes a language to express that subdued animosity. Such examples can also be found in Dattani's plays where repressed hatred takes the form of silence. An example from his play *Bravely Fought the Queen* may be furnished to explain the point. Dolly makes a deliberate attempt to ignore her mother-in-law when she calls from upstairs. Her effort to cease all verbal communication is her way of venting her anger. The consciousness of being abused for her gender identity, the injustice inflicted on her and her daughter for no

reason of their own, the inaudibility of her voice, and more than that her helplessness in the face of such discrimination and unfairness make her bitter. In her sober state, thus, she prefers silence over vocal protests against the matriarch Baa, who had made her life a living hell. Thus silence becomes emblematic of her repressed revulsion against Baa. An example from the text illustrates the point:

BAA. (off). Dolly!

ALKA. There's one person who is dead sure she isn't going out.

DOLLY. Go see what she wants.

ALKA. She is calling for you.

The bell rings again, a little longer. Alka covers her ears.

I'm coming [...] Two things she fights us all with.
That bell and her loud mouth! [...]

BAA. (off). Oh, Dolly? You have come?

DOLLY. (*on the phone*). Hello Sridhar? (Dattani 2000: 249)

Against Alka's vocal expression of disgust for her extremely annoying mother-in-law is Dolly's deliberately silent response to her call. What makes the observation more interesting is that despite Dolly's opportunistic neglect Baa continues to depend on her. Dolly's silence is strong proof of her hate-oppressed mind and her effort to take revenge on her bedridden mother-in-law for making her life miserable.

Not only Dolly but Ratna in Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* also employs silence to translate her hate for her wealthy and reputed Gujarati father-in-law Amritlal. But unlike Dolly, her hatred is immediately recognized. Ratna is a dancer married to Jairaj, Amritlal's son. Ratna and Jairaj married each other because of their mutual love for dance. Amritlal's disapproval of their dance career led them to leave the house. But pecuniary obligations forced them to return to Amritlal again. A calculative businessman that he was, Amritlal allowed them to re-enter but not

without any condition. He allowed them to live and work in the house but dispossessed them from his property. Helpless and beaten Ratna and Jairaj stood silent before Amritlal. Worldly-wise Amritlal understood that this silence was neither a sign of obedience nor one of agreement. But it implied deep hate:

AMRITLAL. [...] And I don't get much pleasure by reminding you that you had vowed never to come back to this house. No, I won't remind you of that. I am above it. But I definitely mind your silence. It carries too much hate. It was never my intention to get you to hate me. What parent would want that from his children? (Dattani 2000: 425)

In the above examples, silence has been employed to manifest the repression of aversive emotions. But there are other examples too where silence is not so passive.

What is interesting to note in this trajectory of the act of silencing that perpetuates through generations is that it is heavily dependent on the gender identity of the victim. In the Indian context being silent is visualized as a positive quality for women. Any woman going against it deserves to be silenced to ensure that no "bad" example is created. Silencing is thus a form of social conditioning applied to Indian women to maintain the patriarchal status quo. Not only men, but the female compradors also perform to inculcate such belief in women. In her book *Chup: Breaking the Silence About Indian Women* Deepa Narayan-Parker observes:

Speaking up, expressing an opinion, arguing and defending oneself are considered discourteous, disrespectful and dangerous. They lead to conflict and being disliked. Girls learn that men are still kings, and if they want a fairy-tale life of getting along with them, it is best to be quiet [...] girls grow up and become their own self-editing, self-censoring and self-monitoring systems. (Narayan-Parker 2018: 67)

Dattani is not only aware of such conditioning but he also incorporates such gender-specific silence as a major component of his plays. In his

play *Thirty Days in September* the character of Shanta manifests such incorporation. Both she and her daughter have been victims of sexual abuse as children. Daughter Mala falls prey to the pedophilic intentions of her maternal uncle Vinay in her childhood. The result is catastrophic for the young girl. As a woman, her childhood trauma drives her crazy. The prospect of a happy conjugal life is shattered; on looking back she finds her mother silent and unsupportive:

MALA. By staying silent doesn't mean I can forget! This is my hell. This hell is where I belong! It is your creation, Ma! You created it for me. With your silence!! You didn't forget anything, you only remained silent! (Dattani 2005: 54)

Despite Mala's repeated accusations Shanta, prefers to keep silent. This has led many to brand Shanta as one of the flag-bearers of the clan of women who are enemies of women. Yet, the truth is different. It is only almost at the end that one comes to know from Shanta how the notions of domestic peace and reputation coerced a vulnerable woman like her into becoming silent:

SHANTA. I was six, Mala. I was six. And he was thirteen...and it wasn't only summer holidays. For ten years! For ten years!! (*Pointing to the picture of God.*) I looked to Him. I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel pain. I didn't feel pleasure. I lost myself in Him. He helped me. He helped me. By taking away all the feeling. No pain no pleasure, only silence. Silence means Shanti. Shanti. (Dattani 2005: 55)

Shanta does not attempt to justify her silence. Rather this husband-forsaken mother of a daughter confesses her inability to protect both herself and her daughter:

SHANTA. Yes. Yes! I only remained silent. I am to blame. That is why God is punishing me today. I remained silent not because I wanted to, but I didn't know how to speak. I-I cannot speak. I cannot say anything. My tongue was cut off [...] I did not save her. I did not know how to save her. How could I save her when I could not save myself? (Dattani 2005: 54-55)

Like her daughter, Shanta is also a victim of Vinay's pedophilia. But nobody has ever heard her, nobody has tried to understand the pain she suffers. Not even her daughter who accuses her of being insensitive and inert can understand the depth of her agony. Talking about sexual oppression is still taboo in a major section of Indian society. While it is alright for an average Indian male to brag about it as a sign of his masculinity, for a woman it is a sign of shame. Extreme emphasis on the imposed notion of body purity or *pavitrata* as connected with the purity of a woman's soul makes it difficult for an Indian woman to talk about her body. Even when a woman wants to talk about bodily/ sexual torture, it is labeled as an act of profanity. Things get further complicated when such a thing happens inside a family. In such cases, an average Indian woman is expected to keep silent so that she does not harm the reputation of her family as well as defy the patriarchal order of power. Thus Shanta is powerless against the twofold attacks of social conditioning as well as her own wretched and voiceless status in the family. Silence is not her choice, it is her compulsion.

A similar compulsion to keep silent can be seen in *Ek Alag Mausam*. Aparna, the protagonist of the play is detected as HIV positive during her pregnancy. She has acquired it from her husband Suresh. Suresh, on the other hand, has acquired it from his one-night escapades and unprotected sexual interactions with prostitutes. Despite knowing about his disease and the way he can avoid transmitting it to anybody, Suresh has chosen to be silent as well as inert. Thus Suresh's deliberate silence not only makes Aparna a patient of an incurable disease, but a social outcast as well. Her unborn child dies, and she waits to die with the knowledge that no proper doctor or nurse would probably come to treat her when she would suffer. Like Mala in *Thirty Days in September*, Aparna is also a victim of someone else's silence. Yet while Shanta's silence compels Mala to be a rebel and raise her voice, Suresh's silence yields to Aparna's silence as well. Shanta is powerless, Suresh is not. What Shanta cannot afford to do, Suresh can. But Suresh prioritizes the act of maintaining a façade of male superiority over his wife. In India, wives are expected to be "good" even when their husbands are not so. *Manu Smriti*, for example, dictates that no matter what the man does,

a woman has to be obedient to her husband to find herself a place in heaven:

Though he may be bereft of virtue, given to lust, and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god. (Olivelle2005: 146)

This god-like status conferred traditionally on married men has been ingrained in the Indian belief- system. Hence Suresh does not regret infecting his wife with a deadly disease. But he feels that as his wife's god, he has every right to do it. On the other hand, his various excuses to evade public queries are efforts to save his face. He is not as ashamed of being recognized as a pervert as he is about being recognized as not a man smart enough to emerge clean out of those sexual escapades. Aparna, on the other hand, is silenced by the possibility of severe character assassination that might result due to the nature of her disease. HIV being mostly a sexually transmitted virus, an HIV-positive woman is not seen in a favorable light by society. Either she is equated with a prostitute- as having multiple numbers of male partners, or she is seen as a failed wife- one who cannot keep her husband happy. In both cases, the woman is blamed. And instead of offering sympathy to the woman, society doubts her, spreads canards about her, and mocks her wretchedness.

Scrutiny of both *Thirty Days in September* and *Ek Alag Mausam* reveals that Indian society plays almost the same role in making the characters silent. Speaking about sex and sexualities is considered synonymous with vulgarity. And yet inside the closed doors of an Indian household sexual violence is more than common. For the better physical and mental health of the victims, the victims must become audible. But the standard response in most such cases is silence. The ban that society has imposed on expressing individual sufferings is indicative of its atrocious nature and its lack of sympathy for the powerless. Dattani is clever enough to use such silence in his plays not in their standard connotative significance, but rather to critique their standard connotative significance. Thus silence in his plays does not conceal or subdue the social reality, as it is conventionally supposed to do. But it is a more

prominent form of expression that lays bare the hollowness and discriminatory nature of Indian society. Women, however, are not the only powerless creatures featured by Dattani in his plays. A patron of inclusivity in the domain of gender, he also uses silence as a medium to show society's maltreatment of members belonging to non-normative gender categories. In *Seven Steps Around the Fire*, the death of the eunuch Kamla is reported as a result of a quarrel between the communities, while the truth is that she is burnt alive by Salim, the man Friday of the influential minister Mr. Sharma. Kamla was very pretty, and her fault was that she was married to Subbu, the minister's son. The entire hijra community knew about this and so did the police. But the first was silent because nobody would believe them. Hence the case was hushed up and was not even reported in the newspapers:

UMA. The police made no arrests. Subbu's suicide was written off as an accident. The photograph was destroyed. So were the lives of the two young people... (Dattani 2000: 42)

The police remained quiet because in that way they would not upset or disturb the normative social order and in the process, they would be adequately compensated:

SURESH. Sir, that is the truth. I have my resources to verify all this. Of course, they are all sworn to secrecy so...And Mr. Sharma's gratitude will be expressed in ways that will be, I am sure, more than adequate... (Dattani 2000: 41.)

While the silence of the victims is shown to be a sign of their defenselessness against power, authorial silence is emblematic of corruption, discrimination, and lack of sympathy. The muteness of the people in power shows how they can hush up the truth to serve their interests.

Silence is, thus, not only a language used by the victims in Dattani's plays, but it often becomes the choice of the victimizers too. But even when it becomes a victimizer's language it has been used in different ways. In the above examples, one observes how silence is used as a means to conceal a crime. But interestingly Dattani's plays often express

something contradictory as well i.e. guilt, or rather the suppression of it. It is Daksha's silence that torments Baa-the matriarch- the most. She reminds the patriarchs of their atrocious nature, their terrible propensity to be cruel, their sadist enjoyment of physical violence perpetrated on the powerless, and their intolerance towards any sort of objection and protest. Hence she is sent away to a far-away boarding school, not at all for her benefit but for her father and grandmother to escape the pangs of guilt. The latter had not only silenced Daksha but silenced themselves as well when it came to mentioning anything related to her. Despite all these, they could not evade Daksha's screaming silence. However oxymoronic it may sound, it is through her silence that Daksha screams, and thus this verbal silence becomes the playwright's prop to make Daksha's presence felt and her victimization understood.

Baa and her son Jiten choose to remain silent about Daksha out of their guilt. In a conversation between Lalitha and Dolly, such silence is hinted at:

DOLLY. [...] Daksha prefers the downstairs one.

LALITHA. Daksha?

DOLLY. (*looks at her*) I don't suppose Jiten mentioned our daughter to you?

LALITHA. No. But I haven't spoken to him very much.

DOLLY. (*to herself*) How doesn't mention Daksha, but he mentions my tailoring.

[...]

DOLLY. [...] Then there's Baa. My mother-in-law. We had to put her in her upstairs room because of ...Daksha. Baa had a stroke. (Dattani 2000:239)

In contrast to the prolonged silence of Baa and Jiten are small interspersed moments of silence in the dialogues spoken by Bharati, the mother of Chandan and Tara in Dattani's play *Tara*. Long pauses between words and incomplete sentences mark instances of silence in Bharati's dialogues. A closer scrutiny of the dialogues reveals that they all stem

from Bharati's sense of guilt for not allowing Tara the privilege over her brother Chandan to live a better life during the time of separation of the two Siamese twins. Medically speaking Tara had more chance of normal living with the third of the three legs that this conjoined twins had. Despite being a mother to both Bharati decides to give Chandan the advantage of having the extra limb. However, she tries to compensate for the wrong done to Tara by being over-pampering and overprotective. She feeds her more than usual, jumps at the prospect of donating a kidney to her, and feels sad when she is not allowed to do so. Thus she tries to bribe her with all tangible possessions she has, just as Baa wishes to compensate Daksha by gifting her the house, and Vinay plans to barter Shanta's vulnerability with a flat that he hands over to her.

In all the above cases the torturers' guilt surfaces despite their powerful positions. These make them afraid, and they try to buy silence with material possession. But ironically such silences torment them even more, as they become more poignant forms of protest. Unlike Baa and Nitin's carefully chosen strategy to remain silent about Daksha to evade their guilt, Daksha's silence is a form of protest in itself. Showing silence as a form of retaliation is another creative way in which Dattani uses it. Sometimes it is the language of dissent against biases, discrimination, and torture. Daksha embodies absolute muteness. She has been silenced much before she was born. Yet it is her silence that emerges as the most vocal of all protests voiced in the play. Dolly's teary-eyed remonstration is dismissed as hysteric femininity, and Alka's substance abuse and screams are overlooked as a stray woman's symptoms of immorality. But Daksha's silent non-presence is visualized as a threat to the undue hegemonic exercise of patriarchal power; all because of the victimizers' realization that she is a victim of patriarchal oppression without any fault on her part.

Another terrifying form of the act of silencing is observed when at the end of the play *Thirty Days in September* Shanta swallows broken pieces of glass and severely injures her tongue. She claims that she always had a dysfunctional tongue— a tongue that could not protest, could not protect her daughter, but always remained as an inactive organ. When she attempts to make the metaphorically inactive tongue

physically inactive, it comes as a slap to society- the same society which never allowed Shanta to speak and justify.

Conclusion

In Dattani's plays, therefore, one encounters different functions of silence. Ambivalence is inherent in silence. It is exploited by Dattani not only to refer to individual incidents but to expose the role of society behind such silence as well. Silence in Dattani's plays, thus, does not represent any emptiness or lack of meaning. Rather it is illustrative of the plurisignificance of this specific mode of non-verbal communication. Moreover, like his use of language, Dattani's use of silence is also reflective of his space, time, and culture which adds authenticity to the depiction of his plays. In his own words "I am certain that my plays are a true reflection of my time, place and socio-economic background . . . in a country that has a myriad of challenges to face politically socially, artistically and culturally (Dattani 2000: xv)." Indeed Dattani stands for a new generation of Indians. His writing is reflective of the conditions of modern urban India. His contemporaneity is demonstrated not only through his choice of language, a distinctively identifiable 'Indian' English but also through his use of silence as a discrete language to explain the subjects he chooses to write about. From his first play, *Where There's a Will* (1988) to *Thirty Days in September* (2001), Dattani's themes reveal and observe the usual and daily struggles of so many urban people who may be living in intermediate periods of history, caught between the firm undertone of institutional and social values and the pull of modernity and globalization. Some of these struggles have audibility and visibility, others are silent. Dattani's dexterity lies in his ability to translate this silence to give it meaning. In a medium where both sight and sound play great roles in generating meaning, incorporating silence is a difficult task. Mahesh Dattani has succeeded to overcome this hurdle and make productive use of silence in his plays.

Bibliography

Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. India: Penguin Books, 2000.

Dattani, Mahesh. *Collected Plays*. Vol. 2. India: Penguin Books, 2005.

- DeVito, Joseph A. "Silence and Paralanguage as Communication." *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 46, no. 2 (1989): 153–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42579525>
- Ephratt, Michal. "Linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic speech and silence." *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, no. 9 (2011): 2286-2307. Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R. *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. Geelong: Deakin UP, 1985.
- Mann, T. *The Magic Mountain*. New York: A. Knopf, 1995.
- Mehrabian, Albert. *Silent Messages*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1971.
- Narayan-Parker, Deepa. *Chup: Breaking the Silence about India's Women*. India: Juggernaut, 2018.
- Olivelle, P. *Manu's code of law: a critical edition and translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. India: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005.

(Footnotes)

1. Paralanguage is the vocal but nonverbal dimension of speech. Metalanguage is a language used to describe another language, often called the object language.

Of Cosmic Horror and The Numen: Reading The Gothic in Gulzar's *Lekin*

Aparajita Hazra

Abstract

India has always been a land of culture that has been governed by spiritual philosophy and mysticism that is deep and complex. Her literature and later, her cinema too, have often been informed by the same mystical weltanschauung.

This article will zero in on Gulzar's 1990 classic *Lekin* ('But'), a film that reminds one of '*Kshudita Pashan*' ('Hungry Stones'), a 1895 short story by Rabindranath Tagore, and pans on the story of reincarnation of Mehru, reborn as Sameer Niyogi, who eventually crosses paths with the now spectral Reva, the love of his past life, and helps her to crossover to the hereafter from the excruciating limbo he finds her suspended in, in search of *Moksha* or liberation.

This paper will discuss how the Indian philosophy of Reincarnation or *Punarjanm* informs the thematic matrix of the film. The paper will also discuss how in unravelling the motif of *Punarjanm*, the film resembles the principles of the Lovecraftian ideology of Cosmic Horror and the idea of the Numinous, propagated by Rudolf Otto.

The paper will also discuss how, in *Lekin*, the Gothic of spirits and the afterlife becomes a subterfuge that gives on to a discussion on the atrocities perpetrated on lower castes in India by powerful upper caste people down the ages, through the storyline of the torment meted out to Reva's family, especially her beautiful sister Tara, by the evil and lecherous Maharaja Param Singh in the past.

Keywords: India, Philosophy, *Lekin*, Reincarnation, *Punarjanm*, Cosmic Horror, the Numinous.

LEKIN: THE FILM:

Lekin as a film won five National awards — Best Playback Singer, Best Lyrics, Best Music Direction, Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design. Brought out in 1991, written and directed by Gulzar, the film pans on the narratological perspective of Samir, who is sent out to an exotic location in far-off Rajasthan to curate archeological artifacts from a *mahal* or palace of a past Raja or king that has been sealed by the government after the dynasty petered out. Strange experiences waft in as at the outset of the journey, he finds a strange woman gazing wistfully in silence at him. He accosted her yet again once he reaches his destination. Destiny seems to make their paths again and again, until Samir gradually grows more and more intrigued by her presence and even begins to yearn for her eloquent silence and deep, kohl-lined eyes that keep gazing at him, seemingly brimming over with many an untold story from some otherworldly realm of mystery. Gradually, he, and through him, the audience learns that the woman Reva is a forlorn spirit stuck somewhere in limbo between realms. After her death in the vast desert while frantically escaping the clutches of the ruthless Rajah, her wistful spirit waits an eternity for Mehru, who had, in life, promised to take her across the vast and arid expanse of the endless emptiness of the desert. Life plays strange games as the audience is given to understand that Samir is indeed Mehru, born in reincarnation. The past wafts in as the storyline drifts years back to when Reva and her beautiful elder sister Tara were folk singers and fell prey to the evil machinations of the lecherous Raja of the very palace that Samir has come to visit. The two sisters ended up incarcerated along with their masterful musician guru, Meraj Ali. Tara escapes to safety. Reva manages to escape, too, but perishes during a severe sandstorm after trying her best to cross the parched, arid desert alone to reach home. She was told by Meral Ali who had orchestrated her escape that Mehru would be waiting to take her across the desert. Reva roams the earth as a restless spirit, confused in her state of eternal waiting for Mehru to come for her and keep his

promise. The film winds up on a poignant note as Samir (Mehru reincarnated) helps Reva cross the desert to her destination—metonymising the final crossover across the vast deserts of eternity, to the final destination of *Moksha* or liberation.

HORROR:

The first thing that needs to be addressed is what exactly we mean by horror, especially in the Indian context. I mention context here as I consider emotions and feelings to be socioculturally inflected dimensions of subjectivity. What might invoke horror in a person from one spatiotemporal context may not do the same for a person from another context. For example, some parts of Tamil Nadu in India still practise a tradition called *thalaikoothal* that sanctions the killing of elderly or ailing people, supposedly to release them from misery of the drudgery of a diseased and incapacitated life. Yet the same tradition would raise horror in other parts of India, let alone in other parts of the world where euthanasia is not legalized or even thought of as an option.

Again, horror, as Noel Carroll says, can be of two kinds: Art Horror and Natural horror. Natural Horror is the horror generated by what appalls us in real life. Being horrified by war—or the onslaught of the Coronavirus Pandemic, to take a more recent example. But Art Horror is roused in art when we empathise with the characters in a story or a film, who find themselves threatened by the monstrous. Noel Carroll says, ‘Assuming that “I-as-audience-member” am in an analogous emotional state to that which fictional characters beset by monsters are described to be in, then: I am occurrently art-horrified by some monster X.’ (Carroll 27)

Lekin is a film that rouses Art horror, as the audience does empathise with the characters in the film. Yet, singularly enough, the empathy zeroes in more for Reva than anyone else, and Reva is the supernatural entity who haunts in the storyline. As the audience connects with her chirpy, bubbly life as a vivid young girl as shown in flashback, the horror focalises on the atrocities meted out on Reva and her sister by the lecherous Raja Param Singh. The horror in *Lekin* then, does not arise from the ghostly apparition but from what had caused her to become so.

In India, a lot of importance is given to how peacefully a person dies and whether the last rites of an individual were performed perfectly according to the *Sastras* through the last rituals called *Sraddha*. It is believed that unless the *Sraddha* is performed properly, the deceased slips into the form of a Preta, who is then fated to roam the earth relentlessly in search of liberation or Moksha. Thus, in *Lekin*, when the spectral Reva shows up nearabout Samir, the reincarnation of Mehru who was supposed to lead her across the desert to her destination in life, the audience, rather than cringing in horror or revulsion towards her, feels a poignant empathy for her and wish her to find restful liberation or *Moksha* at long last somehow with the help of Samir.

COSMIC HORROR:

The dead in *Lekin* are not the avenging, vicious ghosts that normally haunt gothic literature. The returning, the reincarnation as part of a greater cosmic scheme, of which human beings know little of, rather reminds one of the Cosmic Horror that H. P. Lovecraft talks of. Lovecraft says :

Man's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself. Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood, whilst around those which he did not understand—and the universe teemed with them in the early days—were naturally woven such personifications, marvellous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience. The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part....With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist; (Lovecraft 1)

The same may apply to what may be called the cinema of cosmic fear, or to widen the scope even more, the culture of cosmic fear. Samir in *Lekin* is an educated man, believing in 'modern' enlightened thoughts, with his faith in the dictum of the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum*. Yet, he feels inexorably drawn towards the mystery that surrounds the spectral Reva. Lovecraft while explaining the presence of Cosmic Fear even in the non believer, says that, 'for though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings around all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may now be explained. And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which would make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder.'(Lovecraft 1)

In *Lekin*, reincarnation happens to set a past wrong right, instead of the past returning for revenge. This is similar to the cosmic schema that works behind the feeling of *Unheimlich* in Lovecraft's works. For instance, in his short story, 'The Tomb', Jervas Dudley begins to feel uncanny closeness to a ruined family vault and feels the inexplicable urge to lie down in an unoccupied coffin inside the musty, crumbling mausoleum. As the story unfolds, the readers understand that Jervas Dudley is the reincarnation of the long dead Jervas Hyde who died in a horrible fire so that his body was not found for proper burial. He attempted to set right what had gone wrong in Hyde's lifetime. In *The Call of Cthulu*, the horror, the insanity is evoked by the desperation of understanding that there is a cosmology that exists beyond human understanding and that it lies quietly in wait, biding its time to engulf the world as humans recognise it. In Lovecraft's stories, the horror lies not in physical monsters or gore but in the realization of the insignificance and puniness of human existence in the vastness of the cosmic ontology that couldn't care less about the world of humans. *Lekin* does the same. The dread here doesn't lie with the appearance of the spectral Reva, though there are moments of terror and jumpscare, both diegetic as well as for the audience, when an intrigued Samir follows Reva's spirit

into the old dilapidated *Rajmahal* (the royal palace of the Raja) and tries to figure out what is actually happening and who she is. The only thing is that it is not the eldritch and malevolent cosmic equation that Lovecraft talks about, but a neutral cosmic order that pre-exists humanity and will exist even after that, and is incomprehensible to the human mind.

INDIA AND REBIRTH:

Reincarnation has a very special signification in the Indian socio-religious ontology. In India, religions like Hinduism and Buddhism have elaborate denominations of the karmic cycle of birth, death and rebirth or reincarnation. Hinduism and Buddhism talk of reincarnation as a philosophy of the cycle of life. The same philosophy gets entrenched into the Indian psyche right from childhood through stories, folklore, fairytales and oral literature. Reincarnation thus, is a theme that has the merit of rousing deep interest and intrigue in the Indian psyche. Using that as a motif in *Lekin* is a way of exploring the Indian philosophy of life through cinema.

HINDUISM AND REINCARNATION:

Hinduism is one of the chief among the ancient religions born in India. The *Vedas* and later the *Puranas*, the *Shrimad Bhagawat* and the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were the main repositories that held the main tenets of the philosophy of Hinduism. Among all other components of the elaborate ideology that Hinduism is, there are thoughts about death and rebirth too.

In Hinduism, based on the *Advaita Vedanta*, *Srsti* or Creation is not assigned to any God like in religions like Christianity, but to the mind at cosmic, collective as well as individual levels. The true self is birthless and deathless and moves in the eternal orbit of time. Whatever else is subject to change is *Maya* or illusion and therefore nonself. This nonself manifests itself in three kinds of bodies called *sariratrāyam* (*sarira*=body and *trāyam*=three), that together, constitute the existence of the human being or the *jiva*—the *sthula-sarira* or the gross body, the *Sukshma-sarira* or the subtle body and the *Karana-sarira* or the causal body. The gross body is a temporary thing made up of the five elements ie earth,

water, fire, air and space and operates in its relationship with karma in the form of past and present actions. It is physical and visible to all. The subtle body, driven by the life force called the *prana*, is the mind that operates through *kama* or desire and the will behind *karma*. It is the form of the nonself that is only known to the individual. The causal body, invisible to both the nonself and others, is what the gross and subtle body draw from at birth and merge into at death. The *jiva* keeps being reborn into gross bodies as long as there is *kama* or desire for *karma* or action.

BUDDHISM AND REINCARNATION:

Buddhism has an elaborate understanding of the process of death and reincarnation too. Bob Kindler, in his book, *Footfalls of the Rishis*, explains how one of the teachers of Buddhism, Jamgon Kontrul Rinpoche talks of the three Bardo stages between death and rebirth (Kindler 190). Rinpoche explains how the Bardo at the moment of death lasts for 7 days. At that juncture, as the life ebbs out of the body or the *sthula-sarira*, all the elements that the body is believed to be made of, earth, water, fire, air and ether, dissolve. As the earth element dissolves into water, the body shows external sign of weakness and clouded perception as the mind, failing to understand that it is only the elements that are dissolving away, often begins to panic. Then water begins to dissolve into air even as the body loses temperature and consciousness becomes unstable. This unstable consciousness in Buddhism is often compared to an ignited flame which wavers as it is disturbed by winds of confusion. Then the element of air dissolves into consciousness as the body stops inhaling anymore and consciousness becomes unwavering as an unfaltering flame. And with this comes the second stage Bardo of Buddha(wise) nature between death and rebirth where consciousness becomes a strong and unwavering flame. Then comes the Bardo of Becoming. The ultimate aim is to attain the state of *Tathagatagarbha* or the arrival at the final destination of celestial existence through practising *Dharma* birth after birth (Kindler 2020: 191). If one fails to realize the *Tathagatagarbha* or Buddha state, then rebirth happens in one of the six realms of existence, namely, the six realms of the gods or *devās*, the

demigods or *asuras*, human beings or *manushya*, animals or *tiryagyoni*, ghosts or *preta*, and that of Hell or *naraka*. Buddhism teaches that the soul gets entrapped in *Kalachakra* or the eternal cycles of rebirth or reincarnation because of the 12 *nidanās* or links: *Avidya* or ignorance of the real nature of the world around, *Samskara* or mental impressions or formation, *Vijnana* or relative consciousness, *Namarupa*, ie, 'name' which is made up of what is known as the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formation and consciousness, and 'form' which is created from the ovum and the sperm to create the body, *Shadayatana* or the six sense bases of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind which will help to perceive the inner reality of objects once the next *nidana* of *Sparsa* is reached, *Sparsa* or contact or relations, *Vedana* or sensation or feeling of happiness, suffering and neutral economy that is generated out of the *Sparsa* with objects through *Shadayatana*, *Trishna* or desire that comes out of *Vedana* or feeling and creates *Upadana* or attachment and the need towards the grasping of worldly material objects like beauty, wrong beliefs, the existence of the self as the 'I', and the belief in the nonvirtuous. This leads on to the next *nidana* of *Bhava* or becoming, which again, is of four kinds—that of rebirth, death, intermediate state and the becoming of the lifetime. Next follows *Jati* or rebirth which is a result of how we conduct ourselves in the previous life and whether we have worked towards the *bodhichitta*: and *Jara-maranam* or old age and death, which again looks towards the new life in an eternal cycle. *Avidya* and *Samskara* make up the past life. *Namarupa*, *Shadayatana*, *Sparsa*, *Vedana*, *Trishna* and *Upadana* are results of that past life in the present life. The last three *nidanās* of *Bhava*, *Jati* and *Jara-maranam* are again, future results of the *karma* of this life.

Lekin, the film, where the gothic arises as much from the state that Reva is in, as it does from the horrific circumstances that her death is caused by, takes up these concepts of life and rebirth as the base premise and creates the character of Samir Niyogi who is reborn because the desire to complete the action of taking Reva across the desert to her home had been left unsatiated and unfinished in his life as Mehru. Reva, on the other hand had been divested of her gross body, the *sthula-sarira*, when she perished in the desert. Yet her subtle body, the *Sukshma-sarira*

lingered on, waiting endlessly for Mehru, the desire for the action of returning home driving her eternally. The unfinished circle of desire and action on the part of both, Mehru and Reva is what played out in the film as the ghostly encounters between the reborn Samir and the spectral Reva. If one thinks about the state of Reva from the Buddhist understanding of the cycle of reincarnation, one could very well argue that her state was ensnared somewhere in the second stage of the Bardo states.

REINCARNATION AND THE NUMEN:

The German theologian and philosopher, Rudolf Otto, introduced the concept of what he called the 'Numen' in his book *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). The Numen, according to Otto is the phenomenological experiences of one who comes across something that transcends the ordinary human comprehension. He describes that as the '*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*' (Otto 49), ie. something that is mysterious and tremendous or overpoweringly awe-inspiring at the same time. The Numen thus inspires fear and fascination at the same time. The Numen, thus, is not religion-specific, but is characteristic of any experience that transcends the spectrum of ordinary human experience and understanding.

Lekin as a film, pans on an experience that transcends the bounds of normal humdrum existence and through Samir's encounters with Reva, glimpses into a world of the unknown that is as fascinating as it is frightening. Samir is wary of what he is stepping into, yet he is too intrigued and fascinated by the possibility of interfacing the hereafter, to pull away from it. He thus ends up following and searching for Reva until the film finds him completing the task that he had left unfinished in his previous birth as Mehru.

LEKIN AND SCIENCE:

The camera in the film, while introducing Samir Niyogi to the audience, begins by panning of a book, flapping in the wind from the open window, thereby edging in the hint that Samir is an empirically enriched man of scientific temper, inclined towards intellection. But as strange things keep happening to him, and inexplicable experiences cross his way whenever he encounters Reva, Samir as well as his friend Shafi

Ahmed Siddiqui finds himself absolutely baffled as they struggle to make sense of the incidents from a scientific and logical standpoint. The scientific temper is advanced furthermore midway down the film through the intervention of the psychiatrist when Samir finds himself deep into his existentialist mission to take the spectral Reva across the desert, epitomizing her Moksha or liberation. Samir tries to figure out what is happening by reading books on parapsychology and books on birth-and-rebirth, thereby marking a shift from his initial skepticism, spurred by his innate scientific temper towards a more existentialist philosophy that has more to do with the ideologies propounded by the Indian religions more than anything else. To make matters more intriguing, Samir meets a professor of Parapsychology who shows him articles on Times Weekly and the local Illustrated Weekly where there is a story of Uttara, a professor in a university (again, emphasising on the highly educated, therefore intellectually rational mind) living in Nagpur who woke up one day speaking Bengali that she had never learnt. She was later found to be the reincarnation of Sharda Devi who had died 150 years ago. He also brings up an article from India Today, published in Feb, 1987, which held a story about a Lama in Nepal who had predicted his next birth, birthplace and marks. Was actually reborn in America. The professor, by way of emphasizing the plausibility of the report, mentions (in what could be construed a very colonial mindset) that this is news straight from America, and not some make-believe like any Vikram-Vetal story.

LEKIN AND CASTE:

In *Lekin*, the incidents of the entire storyline were triggered off by the atrocities meted out by the Raja or the Thakurs (upper class landed gentry). If one looks critically at the choice of the theme dealt with in the film, one would understand that the film, underneath the subterfuge storyline of the supernatural encounter, subtly inserts a record of the atrocities that had for long been meted out to the landless Banjaras or gypsies of Rajasthan by the socially superior Thakurs or the landed gentry in real life. Reva and Tara are tormented and almost raped by the lecherous Raja Param Singh, and are incarcerated in the dungeons of the castle. They are treated as objects of lust, bereft of agency, by the evil Thakur, just because they belonged to the poor Banjara clan, the subaltern in the

social hierarchy in Rajasthan. This is then, a subtheme in the film that serves as a subtle reminder of a social evil that dies hard in the country.

Tara, Reva and their teacher Meraj Ali, all belonged to the Banjara community—a sort of gypsy community that made a living out of folk and classical music and dance. The historian Irfan Habib says that the word Banjara could etymologically have come from the word ‘*Vaniḥ*’ (Habib 1990: 378), which means trade in Sanskrit. So he feels that these nomadic tribes were chiefly traders who picked up goods from one place and sold it in another. But, having no land to themselves and being from the lower castes of society, atrocities against the Banjaras has been heard of in numerous incidents in India. B. G. Halbar believes that the word Banjara comes from the Sanskrit word ‘*vana chara*’ meaning those who live in the forest (Halbar 1986: 14), raising speculations of the forest dweller/agricultural settler dichotomy that had been there in India even since the days of the *Ramayana*, where Rama was thought to be the representative of the landed gentry while the *Rakshasas* living in the forest were indigenous tribes¹. *Lekin* features the evil uppercaste Thakur Param Singh doling out all kinds of misdemeanor towards the Banjaras. In reality, the lower castes or Dalits² of Rajasthan have often risen in revolt against this discrimination. For instance, in 2008, the Gurjars of Rajasthan, who are traders/farmers from the lower castes of society, protested in demand of a special status under India’s reservation system for jobs. The police opened fire on 23 May 2008 which sparked off more lynchings and public property damages and deaths.

Atrocities against the lower castes of society is something that makes it to the news often in Rajasthan. Writing in October 2002, Praful Bidwai, a correspondent with Inter Press Service records that ‘Rajasthan has a dismal record of anti-Dalit offenses, with an annual average of 5,024 crimes registered in the last three years. On average, there are 46 killings, 134 rapes and 93 cases of grievous injury every year. One of the worst killings was the massacre of 17 Dalits, at Kumher village, in 1992.’ (Bidwai 2002)

Lekin as a film that explores the supernatural realms of the numinous death and rebirth, thus also rakes up a social revelation through the tragedy that evolves out of the interface between two sets of characters—

characters from the higher caste like Thakur Param Singh and those from the lower echelons of society like Reva or Tara. The film thus provides for the feel-good factor of watching a good movie of supernatural manifestation, and alongside that, drives home a reminder of the need to get over casteism that has been the bane of the Indian social structure for long.

References:

- Bidwai, Praful (2002), 'Subhuman lives: Oppression stalks dalits in India' in *India Together: The News in Proportion*, October 2002.
- Carroll, Noel (1990), *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, New York: Routledge.
- Habib, Irfan (1990), "Merchant Communities in Precolonial India", in Tracy, James D. (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750*, Cambridge University Press.
- Halbar, B. G. (1986), *Lamani Economy and Society in Change: Socio-cultural Aspects of Economic Change Among the Lamani of North Karnataka, India: Mittal Publications*.
- Kindler, Bob (2020), *Footfalls of the Indian Rishis*. USA: Sarada Ramakrishna Vikekananda Associations.
- Lekin: <https://youtu.be/kelFpbplbo8?t=20>
- Lovecraft, H. P. (1945), *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, New York: B. Abramson.
- Otto, Rudolf (1917), *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, USA: Oxford University Press.

(Footnotes)

1. The word *Rākshasa*, coming from the word "*Rakcā*" meaning protect, suggests that the *Rākshasas* were the protectors of the forests.
2. The Dalits (meaning "Suppressed") in India refer to the socio-economically challenged. They are mostly recognized as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) by the Constitution of India.

**Tradition and Modernity in
Arambam Samarendra's play *Judge Sahebki Imung***

Loiya Leima Oinam

Abstract:

The paper explores the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity as presented in Arambam Samarendra's 1968 play *Judge Sahebki Imung* (Family of the Judge). Produced during the Meitei revivalist era of the 1960-70s, the play explores this relationship through the opposing ideologies of characters belonging to retired judge Phulobabu's family. Phulobabu and his anglicised son, the barrister Damodar, are pitted against the youngest son Mohan and Damodar's wife Aruna, who raise their voice against any form of cultural hegemony. The paper delves into the ways the play redefines conventional ideas about tradition and modernity, which posit tradition as regressive and modernity as an extension of western enlightenment. It explores the idea of tradition that is not merely anchored to 'culture' or 'roots', and modernity which is not antithetical to, but rather informed by, the traditional idiom. The play demonstrates that tradition and modernity are not diametrically opposed, but together they give way to a form of vernacular modernity, which is expressed through one's sincere engagement with the history, language, and literature of a particular community. As a play that authentically captures the ethos of its times, it rethinks rigid categories such as tradition and modernity, and questions the premise of constancy attached to them.

Keywords: Arambam Samarendra, tradition, modernity, cultural hegemony.

Introduction

Arambam Samarendra's play *Judge Saheb ki Imung* (*Family of the Judge*) was first performed in 1968 and published in 1973. It was staged at a crucial juncture of the Meitei revivalist era, depicting a family divided by opposing ideologies of the characters. *Family of the Judge* captures the prevalent debates surrounding the cultural and political situation of the 1960-70s. One of the play's highlights is its critical engagement with the dialectics of tradition and modernity. The family patriarch, retired judge Phulobabu, and his London-educated barrister son Damodar are flagbearers of Western enlightenment and rationality. On the other hand, the black sheep Mohan and Damodar's wife Aruna act as the voice of cultural decolonisation. The play redefines conventional ideas about modernity and tradition, as it debunks the notion that modernity is only characterised by western education, anglicisation, and rejection of one's cultural roots and traditional ways. The play achieves this by portraying Mohan and Aruna, the 'misfits' of the family, and their respective choices which are firmly grounded in pride for their cultural and traditional histories. Through their unflinching convictions—be it Mohan's anti-establishment outlook and academic immersion in the philosophical and religious histories of the Meiteis, or Aruna's pragmatism when it comes to social and cultural practices in both educational and societal levels—Samarendra provides a commentary on received ideas that relegate tradition to the domain of the 'uncivilised'. The play presents ideologically charged debates on the question of blind imitation of 'borrowed' cultures and languages, while also placing under critical lens, blinkered jingoism about one's identity and history. For Aruna as well as Mohan, modernity is sieved through a traditional idiom so that their ideas about tradition are not diametrically opposed to modernity, nor are they merely orthodoxy. Instead, theirs is an expression of *vernacular modernity* that stems from their confidence in the history, practices, languages, and literatures of their own community.

Hence, the paper will analyse the play as a reflection of its times, which was one of radical intellectual ferment. Samarendra was a revolutionary figure who contributed to this intellectual ferment as well as Manipur's theatre tradition through his Aryan Theatre. Interestingly,

the anglicised Phulo can be considered as an ironic reference to the iconic figure of Naorem Phullo who spearheaded the Meitei revivalist movement in the 1930s by forming the *Apokpa Marup* (formed by followers of the Sanamahi faith). It can be seen as a comment on the contemporary state of intellectuals who are embarrassed and disdainful of their own culture. The father-son duo tries to reform Mohan and Aruna—both of whom are branded as rebellious, regressive, and identity fanatics—along the tradition of their own family. Hence, the play brings up questions about what really defines tradition, or for that matter, what conformity to tradition means in relation to the constitution of identity.

Contextual Background of the Play

The conflict in this family is therefore emblematic of the larger divide in Manipur during this period, of which the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie was steeped in Western liberal and secular ideas of modernity and progress. The other was the relatively small but increasingly widening group of adherents of the *Meitei Marup*, a revamped version of the *Apokpa Marup*. The Sanamahi movement revived Naorem Phullo's vision of bringing back the Sanamahi faith. The measures also included reviving the Meitei script and replenishing socio-cultural practices that had been sanskritised ever since Vaishnavism became the state religion in the early 18th century under the reign of King Pamheiba (or Garib Niwaz, 1709-1748).

Dramatists of the 1960-70s built their plays on themes of traditional identity and consciously strove for a theatrical idiom that could authentically represent it. Proscenium theatre in Manipur started around 1903-1904 with adaptations and translations, and till the 1930s, theatre was restricted to mythological, historical and social themes. According to Samarendra, the modernity suddenly ushered in by the second world war—technology, development, changing food habits, and the changed economic structure of Manipur altered the people's conventional views on religion, faith, and tradition (Samarendra, 1997:3). His own theatre presents the urban middle class of Manipur. Through their everyday life he explores larger questions about the degenerating cultural values, the angst of the individual and familial relationships. Most of his plays are

in the form of social criticism and have the middle class bourgeoisie in Manipur as the focus. *Family of the Judge* was appreciated by theatre goers and critics alike and took the best play award in the social category in the All Manipur Drama Festival in 1968, winning the awards of all the other seven categories in its maiden production.

The first production of the play occurred at a time when the theatre of roots as well as theatre that internalised the folk for the promotion of tradition in the face of modernity was at its peak. Samarendra's artistic sensibility is poised between synchronising different cultures with one's own, albeit with the condition that the latter's authenticity and autonomy is not compromised. He is a representative voice for issues besetting Meitei identity and culture by positioning it against hegemonic forces and sectarianism (*The Unknown Soldier, Family of the Judge, Nungshithe*). Nongthongbam Premchand captures Samarendra's balanced stance by stating that he was "a nationalist, a patriot, a true revolutionary committed to the cause of positive change. However, he was not a "revivalist" in the sense of the term since he never worked towards preventing influences from outside, or to uncompromisingly retrieve what is lost" (Premchand, 2002; translation mine). Hence, Samarendra sought to encourage the assimilation of outside influences while retaining or infusing the essence of 'Manipuri', at the same time envisaging a model of *constancy* for Meitei tradition (ibid). The idea of *constancy* in tradition here needs to be distinguished from a seamless *continuity* that is implicit in the movements for cultural autonomy. While constancy places the onus of understanding tradition on the participating individual or community, the latter assumes an uninterrupted narrative of a history of one's culture and tradition, which may be hard to preserve. As Eric Hobsbawm notes, tradition per se provides a model of unchanging practices that thrive on continuity with the past, and warrants some form of formalisation, ritualisation and repetition (Hobsbawm, 1992). While this historic continuity is at times invented, being alert to any break in this continuity is helpful in cases where a tradition has seen decline and is on the process of revivalism (7).

Bhagat Oinam points out that early responses of the different classes to modernity in Manipur after colonial rule was varied. One faction

belonging to the old order of royal and Brahmin lineages, and getting elitist education in Bengali and English. Then there was the middle class educated group of intelligentsia which grew up with elitist education in Bengali and English, out of which came a section that was “progressive, but used traditional idioms to register and propagate their political aims”; and lastly, the traditionalist Meitei Marup adherents who took to pre-Vasihnavite values (Oinam, 2005). Moreover, during colonial rule, the middle class was shaped through higher education from universities in Gauhati, Calcutta, Sylhet, Dacca and Allahabad (Kamei, 2012).

Between Tradition and Modernity

Responses to modernity in the face of ‘declining’ traditional values are at the crux of Samarendra’s *Family*. There are concrete cultural practices in *Family* that shows the materiality of cultural reconstruction. On the one hand, there is the retrieval of one’s past history through academic practice and social activism which coincide with the larger Meitei script movement that included pedagogic exercises like making the Meitei primers accessible to the public. The play also depicts actual cultural practices that both Mohan and Aruna engage in, which in turn establish their resistance to imitating other cultures, thereby unwittingly moving beyond the discursive. This is evident when Mohan defends his research titled “Ancient Meitei Culture and Tradition” to Phulo in the opening scene, who in turn dismisses it as a “narrow subject” coming from fanaticism for a “rotten culture” (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 3). What disconcerts Phulo is that Mohan’s faithfulness to his origin and Meitei tradition is not merely guided by a jingoistic impulse to rebel against the anglicised tradition of their family. Rather, the intellectual investment underlying Mohan’s study of ancient Meitei history challenges the epistemological framework he has built around his family through modern education. His discomfiture with Mohan’s academic pursuit and refusal to study law makes him brand Mohan as “a rebel against the tradition of the family” (ibid). One also sees the demarcation of private and public practices that determine the characters’ position vis-à-vis new or acquired cultures. Phulo faithfully observes Meitei tradition in the everyday, but as Mohan sees it, without understanding its proper history or significance in the larger scheme of things:

I give offerings to Lord Sanamahee, give my share of offerings to appease the spirits at *Saroi Khangba*—rice, vegetables and so on. Whenever I think of not giving offerings, fear possesses my mind. At the ceremony of *Epanthaba*—on the sixth day of your birth—you were placed on the husk-basket and the priest asked your mother whether she would take the husk-basket or the child and she replied she would have the child. If you don't believe it, ask your mother. ("Family of the Judge" 428-429)

The clash of ideologies is therefore rooted in the 'propriety' of what needs to be practiced under observation within the family, and what should be carried out in the societal and formal spaces. Here, the tension is more of the compulsion of conformity as set by the standards of Phulo's own generation and Mohan's struggle to inculcate independent thinking—

Mohan: Civilized value and refinement are not blind learning of the manners of the sahebs. The Japanese who are not sahebs are very refined people in Asia. [Phulo stares at Mohan]. What you have learnt is that you began with Bangla and Sanskrit and ended up with English—isn't it?

Phulo: Yes! Go on!

Mohan: Getting by heart a few Sanskrit shlokas, reading Kalidas, Bhavabhuti, Rabindranath, Sarat, Bankim, D.L. Roy, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelley, Bernard Shaw—these are what you know, father. Isn't it?

...Then adopting the manners of the sahebs you rubbed shoulders with... you believe that you have to be immaculately dressed like them, be smartly turned out, keep servants, eat delicious food, accumulate money. Are these not what you have acquired?

...Then there was democracy, equal rights, Gandhi, non-violence, Jawaharlal Nehru, Socialism in India. ("Family of the Judge" 428)

The conflicting ideas of modernity and backwardness are presented through Mohan's attempt to decolonise the mind, whilst Phulo measures Mohan's ideals against European standards. In this sense, Phulo, and later Damodar, seem to have uncritically internalised the civilisational values that colonial officials had set in their assessment of the 'natives'. Mohan, on the other hand, believes in filtering and accommodating the "positive aspects" of Western ideals (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 48). What Phulo cannot grasp is that Mohan's political commitment for the preservation of Meitei culture or social work for the welfare of the marginalised in society is modernity that has been channelised through a traditional idiom. This is visible in Phulo's accusatory question—"are you a communist?"—to Mohan when the latter challenges that Phulo's wealth has been acquired from "the poor peasants who broke their backs in litigations about land" ("Family of the Judge", 429). Mohan however resists reducing his individual convictions into any particular ideology: "I am neither a communist, nor a congressman. I am neutral." (ibid).

Furthermore, Phulo's efforts to weed out any unwanted narrow outlook from their family soon turns aggressive in intent and execution once Damodar joins the family after his stint in England. In an uncanny reminder of the colonial enterprise of civilising the native tribes, the anglicised Damodar lands home, or what he calls is a "world of aboriginals" (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 79). His entry in the play is marked with much fanfare in the family with the playwright immediately setting a conflict of personalities with Damodar who turns up immaculately in a grey suit, the look and the elan completed with a felt hat and suitcase. In contrast, Mohan receives him at the airport in "shabby" clothes, slippers and unkempt hair. With a view to "reorganise the home" with Phulo's approval (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 15), Damodar's arrival is reminiscent of the famous 'arrival scenes' of colonial officials that set a dramatic contrast between the white officer who has left civilisation for the wilderness and the 'natives' who in turn are to receive their benevolent reforms. As Mohan later remarks, "the father is the sort of European culture and the son its leftover" (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 20). Damodar's whole demeanour is reminiscent of Hodson's observation on

the Meiteis' fascination with "Bilati" clothes during the later eighteenth century:

[T]he approach of European civilization has given rise to the fashion of wearing cast-off clothes from England. The combination of two such excellent garments such as the dhoti and the frock coat does not display the merits of either garment, but the "old clothes" corner of the Sena kaithel (Sanakeithel) is always crowded, and in the early days of the British occupation a frock coat fetched in Manipur considerably more than it originally cost, while the competition for collars raised the price to about one rupee each. (Hodson, 18)

Damodar's case also points towards an important moment in the shaping of a particular subjectivity caught in multiple cultural points without the constancy that is integral to Samarendra's understanding of traditional identity. Hence, while he prides on the "special treatment" he received in English societies as compared to his Indian peers, he is often mistaken as Thai or Burmese rather than as Indian "because of (his) face" (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 53). However, Damodar seems reconciled with the racial prejudice he had to face in England, thereby confirming what Aruna identifies it as— that it is a mirage: "what you don't understand is that your self is dissociated from reality. There is a missing link between your self and the ideals that you aspire for." (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 62-63).

Furthermore, Aruna does not understand the need to justify their identity to another culture that Damaodar regards as superior, and instead questions his hesitation in admitting to his Indian identity. Contending that the people who are deprived of their culture and tradition borrow from others, she points out that civilisation is not just the prerogative of the West:

Damodar: I see! What you are arguing for is the recognition of identity. But how does it matter? Let them stay uninformed. We should not make a big deal of their ignorance.

Aruna: The question is not whether they recognise our identity

or not. There should be no need to advertise one's identity. Why should we feel inadequate in spite of having our own culture and tradition? Those who do not have either go for imported ideologies and outlook. You trivialise such a serious matter without giving it proper thought. That is a great mistake.

Damodar: Aruna! Yours is nothing but an obsession with recognition of identity. That is why you brand Western ideals as borrowed... (*Judge Saheb ki Imung*, 65)

Aruna's idea of modernity is rooted in being able to discern "borrowed" thoughts from one's own. Subsequently, Damodar accuses Mohan of encouraging Aruna to nurture a reactionary and non-conformist outlook. Her clash with her husband is based on their opposite views on modernity and progress.

Criticising his skewed understanding of modernity and conservatism, Aruna debunks the association of being modern with following a western lifestyle. Samarendra locates this conflict in the appropriate gender roles that become the crux of the tussle between their thoughts. For instance, Aruna refuses to go to elite clubs with her husband, opting instead to go to play *kang*, an indigenous Meitei game, or to socialise with the local women. Part of her problem with going to elite gatherings is the appraisal of a woman's attire as modern or regressive. Damodar's pride and vanity, which is at stake due to Aruna's defiance of his idea of respectability, leads him to impose a problematic idea of women's freedom solely from the perspective of domestic roles. However, Aruna complicates this gender politics by locating women's emancipation within the home itself, redefining it into a willing acceptance of prescribed gender roles. This aspect of Aruna's character has also been critiqued since her independent self is committed not to a truly emancipatory picture of women in society but one that limits their authority within the home despite the defiance shown to the man's decision (Meetei, 61-62). Aruna's decision nevertheless points towards a subversive exercise as far as conformism is concerned. She chooses the traditional "conservative" Meitei attire with her volition, hence willfully inhabiting traditional gender norms and giving a new meaning to gender roles

defined within patriarchal structures. Moreover, both Aruna and Mohan are members in a leading organisation of the Meitei Marup called Social Uplift and Reconstruction Society, which becomes another bone of contention in the family. In reality, similar organisations and civil society groups tried to initiate political awareness through the adoption of western political thought, albeit filtered through an indigenous sieve.

Conclusion

Samarendra's conclusion in *Family* shows a resignation towards the existing social conditions without arriving at a definitive answer, which reflects the contemporary predicament that he was trying to realistically portray. As misfits of the family, Mohan is compelled to leave his home for a place where he can join likeminded people in the village, while Aruna's marriage to Damodar is at the brink of collapse at the end of the play. However, the anti-establishment protagonist Mohan retreats to the village as an alternative to failure to change the system. Mohan shows conviction in a complete overhauling of the system which is evident in his retreat to a utopic, egalitarian place.

Modernity, in Samarendra's artistic perception, is seen as embodied in or through the traditional. This is evident in characters such as Mohan who reconstitute 'traditional' topics of learning by recasting it in the modern and politicised spaces of educational institutions of that time. Through him, the dramatist problematises the misconception of tradition as regressive and modernity as the privilege of dominant, urban, or Western cultures. *Judge Saheb ki Imung (Family of the Judge)* demonstrates that concepts such as tradition or modernity are constantly reinvented and rethought, and that they are not merely dichotomous. Rather, uncritical, uninformed modernity can lapse into imitative culture, and a true understanding and appreciation of traditional idioms and praxis can also be regarded as a facet of modernity.

References

Hobsbawm, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", *The Invention of Tradition*, 1983. Ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. pp. 1-14.

- Hodson, T.C. *The Meithei's* (1908). Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, Reprinted 1975.
- Kamei, Gangmumei. 'The Rise of Middle Classes in Modern Manipur', *The Rise of Middle Classes in Manipur*. Ed. Gangmumei Kamei. Delhi: Akanksha Publishing House, 2012. pp. 4-37.
- Meetei, R.J. *Kalam amasung Nongmei: Arambam Samarendra gi Drama Neinaba* (Pen and Gun: A Critical Study of Arambam Samarendra's Plays). Imphal: N.R. Publications, 2008.
- Oinam, Bhagat. 'Receiving Communities: The Encounter with Modernity', *Eastern Quarterly*, Volume3, Issue 2. July-September, 2005. <http://northeasterner.in/index.php?view=article&catid=100%3Aeq&id=185%3Areceiving-communities-the-encounter-withmodernity&option=com_content&Itemid=121>. Accessed 20/12/2009.
- Premchand, Nongthongbam. "Samarendra gi Lilashingda Shaktamgi Wapham" (Identity in the plays of Samarendra). Speech delivered on the Arambam Samarendra Second Death Anniversary, June 10, 2002.
- Samarendra, Arambam. *Judge Saheb ki Imung* (Family of the Judge, 1968). Imphal: Meino and Khomdon Publications, 1993.
- "Family of the Judge" (Scene One). Trans. Arambam Samarendra, *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology*. Ed. K.M. George. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994.
- Ed. *Khomjillaba Lila Macha Sing* (A Collection of Manipuri Short Plays). Delhi: Sahitya Akademi Publications, 1997.

Deciphering the Anxiety of Tagore's Legacy and the Question of Relevance in Q's *Tasher Desh*

Soumyarup Bhattacharjee

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the film *Tasher Desh* (2012), directed by Q (Qaushiq Mukherjee), intending to explore how the film addresses the anxiety pertaining to Tagore's political and cultural legacy and the question of his diminishing relevance in contemporary Bengali society. The film serves as an avant-garde cinematic adaptation of Tagore's canonical play "Tasher Desh" and brings to life the spirit of resistance to authoritarianism and unquestioning adherence to mindless traditions, rules, and conventions. By portraying the dichotomy between the institutionalised idealisation of Tagore as a cultural icon and his conspicuous absence in the cultural and political life of the masses, the film, on the one hand, critiques the "absence" of Tagore, and, on the other hand, reminds the viewers that fascist tendencies that demand complete obedience to the dominant and prescribed norms continue to exist in many forms within the contemporary realpolitik. This essay, therefore, situates Q's adaptation in a dialogue with Tagore's original and its historical context, which is to say, the play's dedication to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose for his struggle against the British colonial rule in India, and explores how the film emphasises the timeless relevance of Tagore's anti-authoritarian politics originally laid down in the source text and thus of Tagore himself.

KEYWORDS: Tagore, Authoritarianism, Politics, Culture, Relevance

Tasher Desh (2012), directed by Q (Qaushiq Mukherjee), is a contemporary film adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's play of the same

name and a noteworthy experiment in avant-garde Indian cinema in the twenty-first century. This paper examines the film with a view to exploring how it negotiates with questions of Tagore's legacy and relevance in contemporary Bengali society in a profoundly metafictional manner. The film opens with a young theatre director, played by Joyraj Bhattacharya, searching for a performance of Tagore's "Tasher Desh" but fails to find one. He travels to the centres of cultural excellence in Kolkata, such as the Academy of Fine Arts, but to no avail— symbolically showcasing the absence of Tagore from the contemporary cultural scene. Therefore, the film throws up a peculiar and paradoxical situation where Tagore is marked by his glaring absence even when he has been put on a cultural pedestal, and Tagore-worshipping has become an institutionalised ritualistic practice. As the opening credits roll, the viewers find a moving montage of snippets or fragments depicting the city of Kolkata as the theatre director negotiates its bustling streets. The camera focuses on brightly lit hoardings, and bus stands with Tagore's pictures and quotations strewn across the city. Against the backdrop of the hordes of people busy with the regular humdrum of their lives, the figure of the director stands out starkly as he reads out the script in his hand and enacts the scenes in his head. This sequence in the film presents a stark contrast between the mundane and monotonous lives of the common masses, both oblivious and indifferent to the omnipresence of Tagore and the director, who appears to be the only one passionately trying to enliven the poet and bring him out of the posters, banners, and hoardings.

As the theatre director cannot find the Tagore production despite his best efforts and ends up dismayed, he subconsciously proceeds to stage his own and quite literally dreams up the film during a fatigued slumber at the train station. Therefore, the film is imbued with a consciously self-reflective and metafictional dimension; it embodies a Tagore performance emerging from the void of its absence. In the process, the film explores the nature of artistic creation and the ambivalent relationship between art and reality. There is another layer of discernible meta-artistic awareness functioning throughout the film, where Q, the director, takes on a role very similar to that of the theatre director in the film.

A curious parallel emerges between them as they both appear to be trying to salvage Tagore from the dark abyss of indifference and oblivion in the collective culture psyche. Moreover, the young director in the film, like Q, the director of the film, emphasises Tagore's continued relevance emanating from the multiple, multifaceted, and multifarious interpretative possibilities that his writing opens up.

In Tagore's original, the prince and his friend, the merchant's son, end up on an alien island after surviving a shipwreck at the sea. To their surprise, they discover the island is populated by anthropomorphic cards. The iron fist of a dictator rules the population, and the society is driven by mindless conformity to rules and laws, where there is no place either for dissent or for any creative impulses. The two outsiders bring a breath of fresh air into the claustrophobic confinement of the card people that takes the form of a protest against their lifeless existence amidst structure, order, rigidity, and monotony. The narrative that the protagonist in Q's film dreams follows a similar plotline. The film follows, on the one hand, the theatre director, a young man who, having failed to find a Tagore performance, conjures up his own, and the viewer is transported to a strange land dominated by fascism, where all speech is mechanical and everything that emits from the soul—laughter, music, dance—is banned. On the other hand, the film follows two young men, imaginably the equivalents of the prince and the merchant's son, who are caught in the surreal oneiric world where the events of *Tasher Desh* unfold.

Interestingly, the two young men in the film drift in and out of the oneiric world and the "dream" is punctuated by reality, suggesting that the separation between the authoritarian and fascistic world within the dream and the "reality" that the two men inhabit in actuality is not absolute. Rather, the intrusion of one into the other suggests the real world we currently live in might not be without the kind of tyranny one witnesses within the theatre director's dream. Moreover, this jingoistic authoritarianism one witnesses in the film, an element that Q directly borrows from Tagore's play, is unmistakably based on a narrow sense of hyper-nationalistic pride that upholds the hierarchy between the "insider" and "the outsider." Therefore, the film follows in the footsteps

of Tagore's play and astutely depicts not only the fascistic order but also how that order comes to be—the blind rhetoric of exclusivity and superiority over the outsiders, where the outsider is not only otherised but also branded as a source of corruption. The uniform of the soldiers resembling the officers' uniforms in the Nazi army during the second world war serves as a subtle hint to the parallel Q consciously wants to evoke, with a view to reminding the viewers the extent of evil such rhetoric of superiority coupled with political autocracy can lead to.

Therefore, it might be argued that Q's *Tasher Desh* performs two crucial functions. The film significantly intervenes in the cultural debates and apprehensions surrounding Tagore's legacy. In the opening scenes of the film, there is a distinct and discernible commentary on the curious nature of Tagore's legacy, where he has been reduced to a mere relic of the past that is used, at its best, as the site for projecting the nostalgic yearning for lost cultural glory and, at its worst, a sign where there has been an irreparable separation between the signifier and the signified, stripping both the image and the historical personage of Tagore any "meaning" whatsoever. The diminishment of his meaningful presence leads to a second apprehension regarding the cultural legacy of Tagore, which is regarding the failure to comprehend his continuing political relevance. In this respect, Q's selection of *Tasher Desh*, one of Tagore's most prominent political plays, is significant. *Tasher Desh*, a play known for critiquing cultural and political authoritarianism, emerges as a film against fascism in Q's adaptation. From the directorial perspective, as Q stated in an interview, the film is not "contemporary" but "timeless" (Q 2012). The dimension of timelessness that the director wanted to attribute to his film rendition also attests to his desire to free the narrative in Tagore's original, one that, in Q's opinion, is known to every Bengali, from its confinement in any particular temporal frame or period and the prevalent modes of reception concomitant to that period—be it in the present moment or the long past the play has had (Q 2012).

Therefore, through its advocacy of the dimension of timelessness of the play, the film attempts to make a strong case for Tagore's writing to be attributed with continued relevance, not limited either by temporality or its contemporaneity. To make this point, Q takes recourse to the

play's most poignant themes of conformity and rebellion. Even though the play was initially addressed to Subhash Chandra Bose both as an ode and as an encouragement to his struggle against colonial rule in India, the anti-fascist rhetoric in Q's *Tasher Desh* serves as a reminder that political misrule and autocracy are not specifically a colonial problem—they continue to manifest themselves in different guises at different times. This very possibility of the recurrence and return of political authoritarianism and Tagore's exploration of human perseverance and resistance to such an order in *Tasher Desh*, the film ultimately contends, is the basis upon which the relevance of Tagore, his writing, and his politics rest.

Bibliography

Mukherjee, Qaushiq, director. *Tasher Desh*. NFDC (India) and Anurag Kashyap Films, 2012.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "The Land of Cards (1933)." *The Land of Cards: Stories, Poems, and Plays for Children*, translated by Radha Chakravarty, New Delhi, Puffin, 2010, pp. 76–126.

Existentialism in Tagore's *Dakghar, Chandalika* and *Raktakarabi*: A Critical Study

Shreyoshi Dhar

Abstract: *As a philosophical movement of the modern period, 'Existentialism' mainly lays stress on individual existence, individual freedom, as well as individual choice. Several themes including the significance of life, personal responsibility, authenticity, and the very experience of human living in a seemingly indifferent or absurd universe are explored by the philosophers of this particular movement. It confronts the complexities and ambiguities of human existence. Key existentialist thinkers include Jean-Paul Sartre, who famously declared "existence precedes essence," highlighting the idea that individuals define themselves through their actions and choices rather than conforming to predetermined roles. At its core, existentialism posits that individuals are responsible for creating their own meanings in a universe that may seem indifferent or absurd. This philosophy emphasizes the importance of authenticity and personal responsibility in shaping one's life. Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned Bengali poet, playwright, and philosopher, integrated existentialist themes into several of his plays. His works often explore the complexities of human existence, the search for identity, and the struggle for individual freedom amidst societal expectations. This paper thus demonstrates how in plays like *Chandalika*, *The Post Office*, and *Raktakarabi* (*The Red Oleanders*), Tagore delves into existentialist themes through his characters' quests for meaning and authenticity.*

Keywords: **existence precedes essence, Existentialism, individual freedom, predetermined roles, societal expectations.**

In the 20th century, a philosophical belief has been conceptualized concerning the various themes related to the very existence of human life as well as the human condition of its existence, known by the term 'Existentialism'. The Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard coined the term, explaining the idea of Existentialism to be "a rejection of all purely abstract thinking, of a purely logical or scientific philosophy; in short, a rejection of the absoluteness of reason" (Roubiczek 10). As a philosophical movement, it lays stress on all the facets of human existence, including freedom and choice of every individual. The existentialist philosophers are of the opinion that it is the very human who can add meaning of his or her own life and thus make practical and logical decisions despite being a part of an irrational universe. The very question of human existence remains the primary focus and the realization that there is hardly any purpose or any explanation at the core of existence forms the bottom line of the philosophy of Existentialism. God actually does not exist, neither do any other transcendental force; nothingness can only be encountered by embracing the very existence and only thus one can find meaning in life.

As a literary movement, Existentialism attempts to confront the nihilistic approach of Modernism and thus rise above it. Life as and when measured against the vastness of the universe in terms of space and time seems to be inherently meaningless. There is no actual distinction between the life of a unicellular organism and a human being. All living beings follow the same life cycle – they live, they struggle, and finally they die. However, it cannot be denied that man being a social animal and being part of a culture finds it impossible to sustain in a meaningless world. Nihilism as a philosophy is founded on the belief that rejects all religious and moral principles, considering life to be absolutely meaningless and thus it denies all traditional values of human existence such as knowledge, morality, etc. Here, right at this point, the existentialists claim that man can never survive as nihilists; to exist as part of a community, it has to repose its faith on its individual belief system and only then can human and humanity function.

The first basic premise of Existential philosophy is that life being absurd in actuality makes no sense at all. No matter how much effort

is given, it will inevitably end in death. Even the greatest contribution will be forgotten with time. This feeling of meaninglessness gradually leads to existential despair, anxiety, and angst. In this context, Camus exclaimed that the basic function of philosophy is to challenge this absurdity without escaping or neglecting it; only then one can overcome the crisis and finally succeed in creating meaning when nothing else actually exist. This statement further stresses on the fact that it is not the God or the Gods who control the destiny of an individual; rather man is free in its entirety to create his or her own meaning of life. However, this access to complete freedom is not without consequences. In this world of cause and effect, it is important to remember that with great freedom comes great responsibility and every action of an individual will have a direct impact on the life of not only the person alone but also on the lives of people who are connected to him or her.

The main proponents of this movement include Kierkegaard, Fredrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Albert Camus. Sartre in his seminal text *Existentialism is a Humanism* claims the fundamental principle of the philosophical movement of Existentialism – “existence precedes essence”. By this phrase, he asserts that the very existence of man comes first and then the individual ‘essence’, i.e., his or her nature gets shaped through his or her actions and attitudes. Other notable works of existentialism include *Being and Nothingness* and *Nausea*. In all these works, he advocates for human freedom and the responsibility of individuals in creating his or her own existence. Another 20th Century philosopher and phenomenologist Martin Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* (1962) investigated the essence of real existence, the importance of mortality, and the individual place in the world and among people in the community. According to Heidegger, being-in-the-world is a meaning-giving activity. He introduces the German word ‘Dasein’ referring to the kind of being or existence that is unique to human kind. Dasein indicates “the subject’s way of being” (Heidegger 123); i.e., referring to one who is involved and associated with the institutions, equipments, and practices belonging to a shared world that incorporates a perception of how it is to be in the very world. Albert Camus, another well-known existentialist philosopher and author opines in this context that man being the only

creature who denies to be what he or she actually is, tends to grapple with the individual self-identity, and thus continuously makes an effort to seek and redefine it. By the statement, "You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life" (Web), Camus stresses on the fact that one should yearn to embrace life as it reveals with all its mysterious glory rather than making an elusive quest for defining happiness or seeking the meaning of life.

Being a universal personality, Rabindranath Tagore's intellect and philosophical ideas had the gift of versatility. The Western philosophical theories had a considerable contribution in shaping the philosophical ideas of the Indian poet. He was quite aware of the philosophical developments of the Western countries including the literary movement of Existentialism. The existential view of Tagore claims that man should not be essentially considered to be an object; rather it must be treated as a subject proper. Hence, he or she as an individual object is not to be known rather meant to be studied as a subject.

In Tagore's play *Chandalika*, existentialist themes are intricately woven into the narrative, primarily through the character of Prakriti. *Chandalika* challenges social norms and explores the existential crisis of Prakriti, a lower-caste girl who grapples with her identity and desires. This play questions traditional roles and societal constraints, echoing existentialist concerns about freedom and self-determination. Prakriti's encounter with Ananda, a Buddhist monk, becomes pivotal in her existential journey. She yearns for recognition and validation, seeking to transcend the societal constraints imposed upon her. The existentialist undercurrents in *Chandalika* are evident as Prakriti questions her worth and struggles to assert her individuality against the backdrop of societal prejudice and discrimination.

Tagore's exploration of existentialism in *Chandalika* resonates with themes of authenticity and self-definition. Prakriti's quest for liberation mirrors different existentialist concerns about personal freedom and the search for meaning in a world that often imposes various roles as well as expectations. Ultimately, through Prakriti's journey, Tagore challenges

the audience to contemplate the complexities of human existence and the universal desire for self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment.

The eminent play *The Post Office* by Tagore concerns the story of a diseased kid who unfortunately has the compulsion of remaining confined to his house due to his incurable illness. The play highlights the existential crisis of this little child named Amal through its narrative which explains the events of only the last four days of his life. At the beginning of the play, the readers get to see Amal standing in the courtyard of his adoptive uncle, trying to interact with every passer-by who crosses him. He is very inquisitive of the destination of these people. He makes friends with the curd seller, the poor flower-selling girl Sudha, the watchman, and Thakurda in the disguise of Fakir, who acts as the only source of fantastical tales of faraway lands. This instigates his imaginative power all the more and his urge to travel there. Sudha, before leaving Amal to sell flowers, promises not to forget him and return back with flowers after a while. On the other hand, it has been informed that a post office is about to be constructed nearby and this prompts the eight-year-old little boy to imagine that soon he will be receiving a letter from either the king or being his royal postman and likewise has already fantasized an imaginary world for himself. The watchman informs him that the big building in front is the very post office and the flag that is placed on its roof is that of the King. Meanwhile, the village headman upon witnessing Amal and his dreams mocks the foolish desire of the child and pretends to read a letter from the King where it has been promised that the royal physician will soon visit him. Interestingly, at the end of the play, the physician does arrive announcing the arrival of the King, but unfortunately Amal dies as Sudha keeps her promise by returning with some flowers for him.

As the play progresses, the readers get to witness a glimpse of human life being explored through the lens of a seemingly ordinary setting of a post office which serves as a metaphor for human experience. The play through its emotional and philosophical layers expresses Tagore's timeless insight into the universal human condition. All the characters and components of the play has its individual symbolic significance – the post office acts as the symbol of heaven; the postman

symbolically represent the messenger of God; the King being the God himself; the watchman representing time; and the death of Amal presenting the final liberation of mankind from the limitations of the human world. The existential philosophy comes at play through the fact that the little protagonist is entirely innocent regarding the significance of death. This is well evinced when he tries to seek the meaning of life through various interactions with the passersby as he tries to get hold of them through the window of the room in which he was confined. He seemed to be quite contented in his world of imagination and makes a constant effort to free himself from the boundaries of the real world. In this particular play, one finds the protagonist as a subject rather than an object which further recalls the existential view of treating man as a subject proper. The very existential struggle of Amal to keep up his hope in such a trying situation is found to be evident in the play. The window of the room signifies the state of liberation and emerges to be a source of his dreams, hopes, and aspirations, through which he tries to bring in some light in the dark ambience as part of his struggle for existence. Amal eagerly waits for the messenger of the king and this patience that he displays helps him to keep his hopes and dreams alive. Amal is given an extended meaning by Tagore himself while explaining his character to his friend C.F. Andrews in a 1921 letter from Berlin after seeing a performance of the play –

Amal represents the man whose soul has received the call of the open road—he seeks freedom from the comfortable enclosure of habits sanctioned by the prudent and from walls of rigid opinion built for him by the respectable. . . . But there is the post office in front of his window, and Amal waits for the king's letter to come to him direct from the king, bringing to him the message of emancipation. At last, the closed gate is opened by the king's own physician, and that which is "death" to the world of hoarded wealth and certified creeds brings him awakening in the world of spiritual freedom. (Tagore 172)

In another play *Red Oleanders* (1925), Tagore brings out the existential theme of dealing with human condition. The play narrates the story of a man being imprisoned by his own material possession and administrative power. He delimits his identity within the purview of material power

only but finally he can successfully get over it by confessing his guilt upon being counseled by a strong lady named Nandini who symbolises beauty, freedom, love, and truth at the same time. He confides to her that he has actually fallen to be a victim of power. The play thematically concerns the conflict between the true spirit of a man with a materialistic and mechanical order of the society. In the play, Tagore explicitly presents the real world situation metaphorically through the setting of the town of Yaksha, where due to the presence of the totalitarian society, every character is being deprived of both liberty and joy. It is also clearly evident that actually it is the characters themselves who are responsible for their own confinement in the system. The tale of enslavement of the characters symbolises the universal human condition in this modern world. The malady of modernity is deeply rooted in its close engagement with the worldly privileges according to Tagore that seems to detach man from the ebullience of nature. The philosopher in Tagore continuously harps on the fact that only nature has the power to liberate mankind from both the social and personal confinements which surround the individual; the propinquity of the material system seems to be absolutely inadequate in this regard.

We can see through the plays of Tagore that he seemed to reject the socially constructed views, stigmas, set beliefs, traditions as well as the conventions prevalent in the modern society that are largely responsible for affecting the human existence in a free, serene, and tranquil environment. His literary ventures contain reformatory existential designs in order to support virtue, freedom, and sanity over the evil and coercive forces of the social beliefs.

References:

Roubiczek, Paul. *Existentialism-For And Again*. Cambridge UP, 1966.

Heidegger, M., *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, translated by A. Hofstadter, Indiana University Press, 1982.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25723618.2021.2001727>. Accessed 25 May, 2024.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Letters to a Friend*. Routledge, 1928.

“From Margin to Centre”: A Feminist Reading of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika*

Sahin Reja Mondal & Shubham Bhattacharjee

Abstract

Over time, many scholars claim that Rabindranath Tagore is a writer of mysticism, symbolism, humanism, and spiritualism but he has also produced himself as a writer of society, tradition, culture, and nation in India. His theatrical legacy as a dramatist marks a testament to his intellectual and artistic development in depicting his philosophical observations, intellectual growth, and responses to the shifting social and political circumstances. Rabindranath Tagore’s dramatic contributions incorporate dance, music, and drama to promote an inclusive and holistic approach to the arts. He has enriched the theatrical experience with the integration of these artistic elements and aimed to transcend cultural and creative boundaries to convey deeper truths and emotions. This incorporation reflects his conviction in the interdependence of various art genres and their combined ability to convey nuanced human experiences. He has innovatively dramatized his critical insights and artistic experimentation to display spiritual realism, human dignity and liberation, myths and cultural traditions, social engagement, nationalist thought, and political changes on the stage. The theatrical transformation of his plays from page to stage perpetuates the perfect amalgamation of the theatrical and ideological landscapes to understand the social, cultural, and political milieu at the beginning of 20th-century Bengal. Down the way of the Bengal Renaissance, Rabindranath Tagore as a radical feminist often advocates for women’s resistance to the evils of the patriarchal society and women’s struggle for empowerment and rights to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, discrimination, suppression, and marginalization in his plays like *Chitrangada* (1892), *Chitra* (1894), *The*

Waterfall (1922), and *Red Oleanders* (1932). However, this research paper attempts to integrate the theoretical dimensions of feminism to examine Tagore's representation of social stratification of class and gender in the plays, *Natir Puja* or *The Dancing Girl's Worship* (1927) and *Chandalika* (1933). It simultaneously explores how Rabindranath Tagore has radicalized the theatrical portrayal of women's struggle for empowerment and liberation to shape their journey from the marginalized to the centre in the female characters of Srimati and Prakriti of the successive dramas.

Keywords: Feminism, Intersectionality, Gender, Class, Patriarchy, Resistance, Empowerment, Marginalization, Humanism, Spiritualism.

Introduction:

The origin of Indian drama in English was largely influenced by British drama, which was brought to India in the 18th century by the British, primarily for their gain. Their primary goals were to promote Christianity and guarantee administrative benefits by training a class of English-speaking and writing staff. The rich literature and culture of the British eventually influenced the Indians, leading to cross-cultural interaction and exchange. Due to this influence from the West, a large number of Indian writers began to write plays in English. Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted* (1831) and Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Civilization?* (1871) marked the beginning of the actual voyage for Indian drama in English. During this time, Indian dramas in English were predominantly shaped by Western realism in terms of attire, language, dialogue, thoughts, motifs, and plot construction. The dramas were then written and performed by upper-class people who benefited greatly from the opportunity to acquire a new language and culture. As a result, ordinary audiences felt disconnected and uncomfortable watching plays performed in English. This disconnect created a challenge to the development of Indian English drama. At this crucial juncture, Rabindranath Tagore crafted dramas with the belief that Indian theatre mirrors Indian society and reflects various aspects of Indian life in the assimilation of the Westernized enlightenment of humanism, spiritualism, naturalism, existentialism, imagism, symbolism, utilitarianism, materialism,

and modernism in his dramas. Despite being widely known for his poetry, short stories and novels, he has also made substantial contributions to drama to highlight his inventiveness and profound philosophical understanding. He has made the audience feel about the Indianization of drama by fusing dance, poetry, and music in his dramas. Rabindranath Tagore has beautifully represented Indian myths, traditions, culture and society by adopting the story of Chitrangada and Arjuna from the Mahabharata in his play, *Chitrangada* (1892). To some extent, this theatrical appropriation of his dramas has introduced a paradigmatic shift from Western theatrical practices to Indigenous traditions of Indian theatre. His attempt to revive the mythological legend ensures his national consciousness on the indigenization of theatre.

Moreover, Rabindranath Tagore has offered a profound insight into his philosophy of life, social and political consciousness, and spiritual beliefs in his dramatic writings. He first epitomized his spiritual realization of human freedom by portraying the transformation of the dacoit Ratnakar into the sage Valmiki in *The Genius of Valmiki* or *Valmiki Pratibha* (1881). To represent the transformation of Ratnakar from a dacoit to a sage, he adopted the legendary character, Valmiki, the composer of the Ramayana. Tagore has also displayed a human's spiritual journey and understanding of God through the relationship between the unseen King and his wife Sudarshana in *The King of the Dark Chamber* (1910). Here the unseen King symbolizes God and Sudarshana symbolizes humanity. Sudarshan's journey from being infatuated with Suvarna, a king manqué to her King with total submission allegorically reflects the spiritual growth of people in life. In *The Post Office* (1912), Rabindranath Tagore introduces the longing for spiritual liberation or redemption and the obvious mystical undertones through the character of Amal who dreams of receiving a letter from the king's post office, which he believes will bring him liberation and freedom. Besides, Rabindranath Tagore celebrates his deep outlook on humanism in *Sacrifice* (1890) and *The Immovable* (1912). In *The Immovable*, he criticizes the orthodox Hindu customs, beliefs, superstitions, and society in the character of Panchak. He envisions a society where the well-being of humanity is prioritized above all kinds of difficulties, challenges, and superstitious beliefs for the

betterment of society. Then Rabindranath Tagore vehemently attacks the rigid and cruel practices of traditional religious rituals on making a human sacrifice to please the goddess, Kali in the drama, *Sacrifice*. He has characterized Raghupati, the young priest who opposed this barbaric practice and advocated for compassion and reason over blind faith. After the 1910s, Rabindranath Tagore shifts from the philosophical realms of life, death, and the divine to the social issues of his time. This transition is vividly reflected in works like *The Waterfall* (1922) and *Red Oleanders* (1932). In *The Waterfall* or *Mukta-Dhara*, he has advocated for social justice on human rights, land rights and gender equality. In the small kingdom of Uttarakut, King Ranajit constructs a dam over the river that is vital for the people of Shiv Tarai to irrigate their fields. He intends to exert power over the neighbouring region to control the water so that the people of Shiv Tarai depend on him for food. This cruel strategy fosters immense social injustice to the oppressed people of the village. Tagore's *Red Oleanders* also showcases the real-world struggles, dehumanizing effects of materialism, oppression, and social injustices faced by the common people, marking a significant departure from his more abstract contemplations to a more grounded form of expression. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore as a Bengal Renaissance thinker reflects not only his spiritual thought but also his humanistic ideals and his critique of social oppressive systems in his dramas.

Rabindranath Tagore was a trailblazing supporter of women's autonomy and rights. He popularized and promoted feminism in India through his extensive body of work. He explored topics like individuality, independence, freedom, justice, power, dignity, and rights in his female heroines positively in his dramatic writings. The female characters frequently like Chitrangada, Nandini, Srimati, Prakriti etc. speak out against the firmly ingrained patriarchy. In contrast to the conventional perception of women as the weaker sex, Tagore portrays them as capable, powerful, and independent. During Tagore's contemporary days of the Bengal Renaissance, the courtyard of the ancestral Tagore residence at Jorashanko became the epicentre of new ideas and upheaval. The women of the Tagore household at Jorashanko performed all the roles in performance of the drama, *The Play of Illusion* (1883). This radical

thought through women's theatrical performances on the stage made great historical significance and began a new era in the social milieu. This theatrical appropriation reveals a philosophical mentality committed to promoting women's equality, empowerment, and rights. Then Rabindranath Tagore presented the character of Chitrangada as a modern new woman in the drama, *Chitrangada* (1992). Based on the story of Chitrangada adopted from the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, he portrayed her as a strong, independent female protagonist who challenged societal norms and seeks equality and self-acceptance. The transformation of Chitrangada from a warrior princess to a stunning woman highlights the fluidity of gender identity. Through her character, Tagore humanizes the struggle against societal norms that confine women to predefined roles. Her journey towards self-discovery and independence speaks to the universal theme of women's empowerment and the pursuit of her identity. In *Red Oleanders* (1932), Rabindranath Tagore portrayed the character of Nandini who challenged the suffocating grip of the patriarchal and authoritarian rule of the King. She is a beacon of light and hope for the ordinary people in the dark and oppressive environment of Yaksha town. However, Rabindranath Tagore as a radical feminist often advocates women's struggle for empowerment and women's resistance to the evils of the patriarchal society such as gender stereotypes, discrimination, suppression, and marginalisation in his dramas. This research paper attempts to integrate the theoretical dimensions of feminism to examine Tagore's representation of social stratification of class and gender in the plays, *Natir Puja* or *The Dancing Girl's Worship* (1927) and *Chandalika* (1933). It simultaneously explores how Rabindranath Tagore has radicalised the theatrical performance of women's struggle for empowerment and liberation to shape their journey from the marginalised to the centre in the female characters of Srimati and Prakriti of the successive dramas.

Intersectional Feminism: A Critical Study of Class, Caste and Gender in Indian Context

Intersectional feminism is one of the standpoints of third-wave feminism that has emerged to address social stratifications based on race, gender, class and caste in the USA, Europe and beyond. It

acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences and the need for an intersectional approach to effectively address the particular difficulties encountered by women who belong to various marginalized groups. Intersectional feminism examines how a woman from the margin suffers social prejudice based only on her gender, race, caste, religion, class, or ethnicity, and analyzes her experiences in society. Intersectional feminism aims to build a more inclusive movement that ensures all women's voices are heard and their distinct experiences are considered in the struggle for gender equality to recognise all sociocultural intricacies around the position of women. In the late 20th century America, Kimberle Crenshaw, a third-wave black feminist, coined and introduced the concept of "intersectionality" to explain how different aspects of women's identities, for instance, their gender, race, and social class, can combine to create unique experiences of both privilege and oppression. She thinks that a woman faces discrimination not just because she is a woman, but also because of her race and socioeconomic status. In the essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", Kimberle Crenshaw attempts to focus on how black feminist writers display the various ways gender, class, and race can lead to subordination or depict the unique challenges faced by black women in multiple forms of oppression. Intersectionality in feminism offers a valuable methodology to analyse the various and overlapping axes of oppression that impact black women. This approach challenges the previously assumed homogeneity within both feminist and anti-racist discourses and thereby it provides a more nuanced and humanized perspective on their experiences. Bell Hooks also focuses on the intersection of race and gender that marginalizes black women and shapes patriarchal cultures within oppressed communities in *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981). She argues that the intersection of sexism and racism during slavery resulted in black women enduring the lowest status and most challenging conditions of any group in American society. Hooks also states, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the mainbody" (XVII) in the "Preface" of the book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984). This means that being in the margin is being a part of the larger whole, yet existing on the periphery, away from the dominant group. Besides, Leslie McCall,

an American sociologist, has theorized intersectionality through inter-categorical and intra-categorical approaches in the essay, “The Complexity of Intersectionality”. Her inter-categorical approach upholds the importance of recognizing how inequalities exist and evolve among different social groups across multiple. On the other hand, the intra-categorical approach digs deeper by questioning how all social conflicting boundaries are formed. Thus, intersectional feminism examines the theoretical dimension of belonging to the overall structure not fully integrated into its core but leading to a sense of being marginalized. This approach deepens our understanding of praxis, making it more critical, reflective, and committed to achieving equity across ethnicity, race, and gender.

Like black feminism, feminism in India can also be studied as intersectional feminism. It represents a powerful collective effort to achieve and uphold equal rights and opportunities for women across caste, class and gender. This movement strives for gender equality to advocate for women’s rights in political, economic, educational, personal, cultural and social aspects. Indian feminists, like their counterparts around the world, work tirelessly to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men. The journey towards gender equality in India is fuelled by the determination and resilience of countless women who have stood up against discrimination and injustice. They have together challenged traditional norms and stereotypes to pave the way for a more just and equitable society. In 19th century India, Tarabai Shinde in *Stri Purush Tulana* or *A Comparison Between Women and Men* (1882) criticised gender discrimination in the convergence of caste and class. She raises a question to God:

“Let me ask you something, Gods! You are supposed to be omnipotent and freely accessible to all. You are said to be completely impartial. What does that mean? That you have never been known to be partial. But wasn’t it you who created both men and women? Then why did you grant happiness only to men and brand women with nothing but agony? Your will was done! But poor women have had to suffer for it down the ages.” (Tharu & Lalita 223)

Similarly, Pandita Ramabai, a Hindu social reformer and Sanskrit scholar of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, fought for the rights of women, children, low-caste individuals and destitute. She criticized patriarchy and the system of Hinduism in her autobiographical text, *A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasures* (1907). Here she describes that she grew up into an orthodox Chitpavan Brahman parents, Anant Shastri Dongre and Lakshmibai Dongre and closely observed how her father challenged societal norms to educate his wife and daughters. At that time, he took a radical move at a time when women and Shudras were often denied literacy and access to Hindu sacred texts. He also eloquently defended the right of women and Shudras to learn Sanskrit and Puranic literature against the conventions of the Brahminical society. From the origin of feminism in India, untouchable women or women belonging to the low-caste community lived at the intersections between gender and other types of social stratification based on caste, class, religion, and ethnicity. They have been oppressed, suppressed and marginalized by the Brahminical society or their own community in all aspects of life. The lives of women who are deemed untouchable offer a distinctive viewpoint on how gender and caste oppression overlap. Their stories highlight the significant effects of these social systems and provide an essential perspective for comprehending and combating intersectional prejudice. The oppressive and discriminatory experiences of the untouchable women based on caste, creed, class, sex and gender promoted the establishment of Dalit feminism in the late 20th century in India. For this reason, Anindita Pan says:

Dalit feminist intersectional standpoint begins by viewing caste and gender as mutually intersecting. This intersectional perspective also makes it possible to bring in its intersectional purview other systems, such as class and community. The simultaneity and mutually constitutive intersection of these structures is used to see how knowledge about monolithic categories and concepts as developed by mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics gets transformed. (36)

She means that Dalit Feminism uniquely reshapes the overlapping of caste and gender from mainstream Indian Feminism and traditional Dalit

Politics. So, Dalit feminism emphasizes the interconnectedness of caste, gender, and class oppression to address the unique experiences and struggles of Dalit women in India.

For Rabindranath Tagore, feminism means women's freedom and equality in all aspects of life beyond caste, class, religion, language and culture. His complex and multifaceted depictions of women characters reflect both the socioeconomic circumstances and the progressive political views of his contemporary time. In his writing, women are portrayed in a way that defies convention and demonstrates a variety of emotions, qualities, and complexity. Tagore's women are all new women because he characterizes them in different ways to address his socio-political and religious discourses. Rabindranath Tagore portrays the marginalisation of Binodini as a widow who fights against the patriarchal society in *Chokher Bali* or *A Grain of Sand* (1903). Similarly, he portrays the peripheral subjugation of Kadambini as a widow in *Jibita o Mrita* or *The Living and The Dead* (1892). However, this research paper explores how Tagore's portrayal of Srimati and Chandalika from the low-caste community resists women's suppression, oppression and marginalization in society. It concurrently looks into their peripheral suppression or their social otherization based on caste and class through the lens of the intersectional standpoint.

Voices from the Margin: The Portrayal of Srimati and Chandalika in *The Dancing Girl's Worship* and *Chandalika*

Rabindranath Tagore has reproduced dance as a spiritual expression and resistance medium in *Natir Puja* or *The Dancing Girl's Worship*. He has characterized Srimati as a symbol of spiritual enlightenment and resistance to the predefined or stereotyped society in the kingdom of Bimbisara. He has also portrayed her as a voice from the marginalized community communicating her devotion, resilience, resistance and inner strength through dance. In the drama, we find that King Bimbisara is a follower of Buddhism who built a sacred stupa dedicated to the Lord within the Zanana (the women's quarters) of his palace before giving up his throne to his son, Ajatashatru. This stupawas a symbol of reverence and devotion tenderly cared for by the palace maids. All the maid-

dancers would meticulously clean the shrine to ensure its sanctity and their hands moved with both duty and devotion which intertwined their lives with the spiritual heart of the palace. At the very beginning of the drama, one of the renowned palace maid-dancers, Srimati meets Upali, a Buddhist Monk who comes to her for alms and Srimati says, "To me? But I am so poor! In your alms bowl anything that I could give would seem so mean" (88). She also introduces her as a 'nati' (dancer) of the royal palace. In response, Upali tells her to offer a special puja on the occasion of Buddha Purnima and expresses that her best gift is to become a Bhikshu. Since then, Srimati has taken on the responsibility of maintaining and cleaning the stupa and its surroundings with reverence and dedication. This spiritual has transformed her from a dancer to a devoted Bhikshu and found a new path in Buddhism and embraced it wholeheartedly. However, Srimati's newfound status also stirs jealousy within the palace, especially in Princess Ratnavali. Her sudden rise in spiritual esteem strikes her recognition and respect. In this situation, Ratnavali and other members of the palace underestimate Srimati because of being born in a low-caste community. Nevertheless, her heart and mind focused on her spiritual journey to find peace and fulfilment in her new life of devotion. Their high social standing forbids them to allow Srimati to participate in temple activities. They command that Srimati neither can worship at the altar nor dance in the temple. Srimati then prays to the Lord:

Leave me no longer in the darkness,
Give me now to see.
My real self in Thee
Give me to see.
Let my eyes be washed in the stream of tears.
Give me to see (120)

In this crucial situation, the dignity of the human spirit and the dedication to the lord Buddha within Srimati has prompted her to offer a special puja on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. In the meantime, Ajatashatru, the present king of Bimbisara, has issued a decree to persecute all the Buddhist Bhikshus in his kingdom and prohibited the

offering of the special puja at the palace stupa. Despite the prohibition of the king, she decides to enter the temple, dances before the altar with joy and vigour in an act of profound disobedience and declares her trust in God and her identity as a human being. In a state of bliss and rapture, Srimati removes her dancing robes and dresses in the humble attire of a Bhikshuni. She then experiences profound enlightenment by chanting Buddhist texts with devotion. Srimati says:

I bring no woodland flowers,
No fruit for worship meet,
No jar of holy water
To offer at Thy feet.
But into my slender body poured
The streams of my heart are free.
In music and gestures shines
My worship, Lord, of Thee. (138)

At this time, even Queen Lokesvari is puzzled to observe her devotion to the lord Buddha. Regardless of the fact, the guards strike her to follow the King's orders because she defies the king's decree. Srimati then falls dead on the ground to continuously sing praises to Lord Buddha and finds blissful peace in her devotion forever. Thus, Srimati considers her dance as an offer of worship and becomes a martyr because of her faith in the Buddha. Her unwavering commitment and spirit do not waver in the face of death.

However, Upali's spiritual guidance to Srimati transforms her and makes her realize the power of self-introspection and defiance of the institutional authorities. Despite being a social outcast, Srimati sets out on a quest of introspection and gains the ability to transcend social borders and hierarchical divisions. Her dance becomes a powerful statement that, regardless of caste or class, she introduces herself as a human being as the King and Queen. She then finds her voice through an aggressive and fiery dance to express her inner turmoil and defiance. Belonging to the marginalized society, Srimati shows her resistance to the stratification of class and gender in society. Her devotional path

leads her to the essence of human dignity and mukti (liberation) beyond all social constraints. Besides, the removal of her jewels and clothes one by one symbolically defines the defiance of Srimati as a resistance to the stereotyped social decorum. Her actions challenge the rigid social hierarchy and convey a message of universal equality and human dignity. Through her dance, Srimathi not only asserts her individuality but also reclaims her voice, making a poignant stand for her right to worship and exist as an equal. Srimati's path demonstrates that self-realization is achievable even in the face of institutional oppression, serving as a monument to the tenacity and fortitude of the human spirit. Thus, Srimati comes to a deep realization of who she is and where she fits in the world and should make a quiet but effective struggle against the social stereotypes of gender discrimination and social inequality. Through her devotion to the lord Buddha, she proves that all people are born equal before God.

Like *Natir Puja*, Rabindranath Tagore has described the story of Prakriti through her journey from a life of oppression and disdain to one of self-realization in *Chandalika*. He has sketched the character of Prakriti, a young girl born into the lowest untouchable caste, who grows to understand her worth and capabilities, transcending the limitations imposed on her by society. At the beginning of the drama, Prakriti meets Ananda who asks for water from Chandali returning from a visit. At this time, Prakriti has introduced herself as a Chandali and considered him as a man of her caste. She frankly says, "I am a Chandali, and the well-water is unclean" (138). In response, Ananda, a disciple of the Lord Buddhist, said, "As I am a human being, so also are you, and all water is clean and holy that cools our heat and satisfies our thirst" (Ibid). This dramatic encounter between them sparks a profound transformation in Prakriti. Ananda's words rekindle a sense of self-worth within her and make her realize that she deserves respect and dignity. Prakriti then gives him water and falls in love with the pious monk. Prakriti's love for Ananda fills her with joy, and she dances in celebration of this newfound sense of self. She now sees herself not as a Chandali, but as a human being equal to everyone else in the world. Prakriti says to her mother, "Plenty of slaves are born of royal blood, but I am no slave;

plenty of Chandals are born of Brahmin families, but I am no Chandal.” (141) She also requests her mother not delude herself because thinking about herself as a “born slave” is a kind of self-humiliation. She destabilizes that being born into an untouchable family is not her destiny. She thinks that it is completely a social construction imposed on them. So, after knowing that Ananda has taken vows of celibacy, she desires to have him in her life. Prakriti then desperately persuades her mother to cast a spell to make the monk fall in love with her. Her mother hesitates at first, explaining that it is not right to impose such desires on someone who has chosen a different path in life. She urges Prakriti to reconsider it to emphasize the importance of respecting the monk’s commitment and the natural course of emotions. She finally decides to do the magic to see Prakriti’s obsession and depressed state. Her magic is proved more powerful than Ananda’s will and it forces him to appear at their home at night. Then Prakriti is unable to recognize Ananda because he appears disturbed and tormented and has lost his brightness and calm manner. She then her mother to take Ananda out of the spell and spare her more embarrassment. At the last moment, Ananda, with compassion in his eyes, forgives Prakriti, understanding that her difficult life has driven her to act out of desperation. He recognizes the pain and mistreatment she has endured, which has pushed her to do things. This act of forgiveness makes Prakriti realize that true love is not about possession. She also understands that loving someone means respecting their choices and freedom, even if it means letting them go. Thus, Prakriti’s deliverance and disposition highlight Tagore’s belief in human liberation and the innate presence of the divine in all beings.

However, Tagore’s *Chandalika* is about a very sensitive girl, Prakriti born into a marginalized caste, who becomes aware of her full rights as a woman. Like Upali, Ananda teaches Prakriti about love, service, and compassion. He teaches her to see herself not through the artificial values that society attaches to birth, but through her capacity for love and service. Down the way of her journey in life, Prakriti also realizes her worth as a human being and learns the value and worth of all human lives from Ananda. When Prakriti hesitates to give Ananda water to fear her marginalized status, he reassures her and helps her understand that

her act of service is valuable and will be recognized by the divine presence. At a certain position, Prakriti has lost her divine presence due to her selfhood or the fulfilment of her love but she finally learns selfless love from Annada despite being “a flower sprung from a poison plant” (153). It seems that her difficult journey to self-awareness is divine. Still, the incorporation of divine presence within Prakriti paves the way to break the social discrimination based on caste and gender. Thus, written against the harsh social customs and manners of society, Rabindranath Tagore advocates for the equality of all human beings. For him, all beings are equal because there is an innate divinity present in every form of the universe.

Conclusion

This research paper examines how Rabindranath Tagore has masterly bridged the gap between theatrical appropriation and the ideological performances of the intersectionality of class, caste and gender in both *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika*. He has incorporated dance drama as a powerful mode of communicating Srimati's and Prakriti's innermost feelings about various social issues. Their dances serve as a liberating force to break free from societal constraints, a testament to their struggle for recognition, an assertion of their identity and equality as human beings. They challenge the limitations imposed on them and strive to be acknowledged as equals in society. This research paper simultaneously explores how Rabindranath Tagore has developed the character of Srimati and Chandalika not only as a tool of resistance to gender inequality and the caste system but also as a gateway of human liberation and spiritual connection. Tagore's Srimati and Chandalika also attempt to find out their identities through their self-realisation to redefine their social values in the male-dominated society. However, this research paper has significantly tried to demonstrate contemporary social, cultural and political issues in the intersectionality of gender, class and caste.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H and Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *A Glossary of Literary of Terms* (11th Edition). Cengage Learning, 2011.

- Arya, Sunaina and Rathore, Aakash Singh. *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Routledge, 2019.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color". *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, pp. 1241-1299 <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/critique1313/files/2020/02/1229039.pdf>
- Gilber, Susan and Gubar, Sandra. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2020.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (2nd Edition). Routledge, 2014
- . *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (3rd Edition). Routledge, 2014, p. XVII.
- Iyengar, K R Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling Publications Private Limited, 2019.
- McCall, Leslie. "The Complexity of Intersectionality". *Signs*, vol. 30, no. 3, Spring 2005, pp. 1771-1800.
- Naik, M K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Academy, 2009.
- Pan, Anandita. *Mapping Dalit Feminism: Towards an Intersectional Standpoint*. SAGE Publications, 2020, p.36.
- Ramabai, Pandita. "A Testimony of our Inexhaustible Treasures". *Pandita Ramabai Through Her Own Words: Selected Works*, translated & edited by Meera Kosambi. University Oxford Press, 2000.
- Shinde, Tarabai. "Stri Purush Tulana or A Comparison Between Women and Men". *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, p. 223.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Three plays: Mukta-Dhara, Natir Puja and Chandalika*, translated by Marjorie Sykes. Oxford University Press, 1975.
- . *Three Plays: Red Oleanders, Tapati, Formless Jewel*, translated by Anandalal. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Rabindranath and Technology: A Re-Reading of *Raktakarabi*

Madhumita Roy

Abstract

During the Bengal Renaissance, science became synonymous with power, progress and the idea of modernity. Nineteenth century Bengal witnessed an upsurge of new religion, new education and with it a fresh zeal towards socio-political reform where the diffusion and subsequent appropriation of western science were sought by the English educated Indian intelligentsia. This discourse of science, which gradually occupied the central stage in nineteenth century Bengal was fraught with possibilities as well as complications. This paper aims to explore Rabindranath's critical stance towards Western science, to be specific, technology, which was primarily exploited as a tool of imperialism. Science and technology became consorts of statecraft. Taking Rabindranath's much discussed play, *Red Oleanders* (*Raktakarabi*), as its primary text, the paper will try to delve deep into pluralities that underline Tagore's critical engagement with Western science and technology.

Keywords: Technology, Ambiguous, Imperialism, Oppression

In nineteenth century colonial Bengal science and technology gained enormous significance, and were perceived as synonymous to progress, development, and modernity. For the colonial masters technology served as a tool to justify their superiority over the Indians. Their use of technology in various schemes of development ultimately served the purpose of the colonial rule. For instance, railroads were constructed and maps were designed to get access to various parts of the complicated landscape of India, which would otherwise remain inaccessible. No

doubt, this easy communication across the country enabled the imperial masters to know the land. This process of knowing the unknown land and its people facilitated their strategies of domination, control and rule. Thus, the idea, that is intricately associated with technology is the idea of power. While the British resorted to technology to confirm their power over the colonized masses, the cultural import and indigenization of technology by the Indian intelligentsia also ran parallel to it. In this conflicted domain of technocracy, there were dissenters who opposed the dominance of technology over humanity. The purpose of this paper is to examine the richly ambiguous voice of Rabindranath Tagore, who had an ambivalent approach towards technology. While he was engaged in a debate with Gandhi and his dictates of using the *charkha* [spinning wheel], and himself endorsed technology in his project of rural reconstruction, Tagore offered a critique of technology as the tool of Western imperialism and power. In this paper my focus will be on Rabindranath's play, *Raktakarabi*, which was written in 1923 and published in 1926. Following the terrors of the devastating World War I, that destabilized the entire Western civilization, this play emerges as a significant platform, where Tagore puts a question to the West's idea of progress. Can this mass destruction by employing technological inventions be also regarded as a part of progress? What type of modernity was then the West looking at? For Tagore, a complete rejection of technology was not possible. But the play offers an alternative space, where technology has its limitations and at a certain point it fails to dominate humanity. In the course of my paper I would offer a close textual analysis of *Raktakarabi* to represent Tagore's position vis-à-vis technology.

The diffusion of Western science and technology to colonial India was made possible through education. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution led to the rapid progress of science and technology in Europe. British India proved to be a good platform for a number of experiments. The first step was to impose the Western methodology in science and technology in order to discard the existing scientific tradition of India as irrational, backward and hence, inferior. Gradually Western science and technology were considered as the

gateway to modernity. The initial phase of British scientific works in India began with survey operations. The purpose of these surveys was to map the unknown land, and tap its natural resources for future exploitation. Thus, behind their every endeavour to establish a scientific or a technical institute, there was the sole purpose to strengthen the imperial rule. Zaheer Baber in his essay “Science, Technology, and Colonial Power” relates the story behind the foundation of the Civil Engineering College at Roorkee:

By the mid-nineteenth century, in the influence of utilitarian philosophy, structural changes initiated by colonial administration and imperial perceptions led to the incorporation of state-sponsored public works as an integral aspect of governmental policy. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the initiation of a number of gigantic public works that led to state involvement in the application of science and technology and culminated in the creation of a Public Works Department for the government of India in 1854. (116)

The financial problems led the Company to take interest in the irrigation projects, that would bring revenues. Zaheer Baber maintains, “In addition to such pressing economic imperatives, the execution of a wide range of public works through the application of science and technology was also perceived as being invaluable for legitimizing colonial power” (117). The irrigation projects demanded large supply of locally trained skillful engineers. Here Baber speaks of the Ganga Canal Project that led to the expansion of an engineering school founded at Roorkee in 1845. This institution was expanded and renamed as the Thomason Civil Engineering College in 1847. Colonial India was also benefitted by other public projects under the surveillance of Marquess Dalhousie including the introduction of railways in 1849, the telegraph in 1852, and the reorganization of the postal system in 1850. But what we should note here is that these projects were not only designed to improve the living conditions of the Indian subjects. Rather, they became the instruments of the imperial masters to facilitate their strategies of administration, and as the agents of modernization, they underlined the importance of the British rule in India—a country yet to be modernized and lying at the

mercy of the imperial masters. As Gyan Prakash puts it in *Another Reason*:

Forging India into a productive, interlocking network of irrigation works, railways, telegraphs, mines and manufacturing, the colonial state introduced and oversaw the establishment of modern technics. In an important sense, however, technology was not only the instrument but also the substance of state power. For, as the state's shape and functions came to rest in constituting India as a productive colony—that is, as technologies of the state came to reside in the technological organization of the territory and its people—the rationality of governance acquired another definition. Increasingly, state power meant the growing technological configuration of the territory; it became inseparable from the modern India it engineered into existence. (160)

The process of modernizing India was further sought in the introduction of English education under the Company rule with the appointment of Lord Macaulay as the President of the Committee of Public Instruction. As a consequence, a class of urban elites or *Bhadraloks* emerged. They realized the importance of applied science and technical education as the significant markers of modernity. In this context Rammohan Roy's appeal to Lord Amherst for promotion of scientific studies over Sanskrit can be taken into consideration. Moreover, the process of indigenizing science became pronounced with the establishment of Mahendra Lal Sircar's IACS [Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science] in 1876, an institute to advocate researches in science, which was exclusively meant for the Indians. Thus a group of Indian intelligentsia was also in favour of scientific and technical education which, as they believed, would contribute in the development of India as a modern nation-state in future. To add to this, the World War I and its aftermath propelled an urgent need to industrialize India. The Indian Industrial Commission was appointed for this purpose. In its report after two years of survey, the Commission stressed the role of the state for industrialization, and also envisioned a more extensive application of technology for rapid industrialization. The report was complemented by

a note of the nationalist Madan Mohan Malaviya, who identified a separate industrial capacity of India before the advent of the colonial rule. According to Malaviya, British rule was the cause of deindustrialization of India. He etched out the responsibility of the state to recuperate India's long-lost industrial tradition. Later on, we also find a strong avowal of industrializing India from Meghnad Saha, the scientist and activist, who staunchly believed in organizing science for national development. Thus the predominant discourse concerning science and technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India tried to steer the direction of the country towards an idea of modernity, strongly professed by the West.

Rabindranath's first hand exposure to European civilization took place during his first visit to Europe in 1878 at the age of seventeen. His reactions and responses are documented in the letters he wrote home, that were collected and published as *Europe Probashir Patra* in 1881. The young poet could not suppress his wonder, as he saw the vivid representations of modernity in the cities of Europe. Seeing the enormous buildings in Paris, he says, "What a spectacular city! To be in that wilderness of towering palaces is to be overwhelmed" (*Letters* 33). But he also adds: "Where is the need for such massive ostentatious buildings for puny humans, I wondered" (*Letters* 33). In another letter, he expresses his wonder at the innumerable railway tracks in London: "There is no counting the number of railway tracks England has—London is full of railway tracks, with trains departing at intervals of five minutes" (*Letters* 38-39). In spite of observing various wonders performed by machines, what captivates Rabindranath most is the brutal working of the machinery over the masses of London. While describing the working classes of the city, the poet finds that they do not possess the least signs of humanity in them. His implied critique of the machine-dominated modernity of the West is strongly perceived here. In another letter, where he describes his stay at a countryside called Tunbridge Wells, we find a direct criticism of London and its stifling industrial ambience:

It is a relief to breathe in the air of the country air after a long absence. I have never seen the likes of the air in London. Thousands of chimneys continually spew coal-fire smoke and

soot, and the particles flying around permeate every bit of the London breeze . . . Drawing in coal-dust with every breath one takes, alayer of coal forms inside the head. (*Letters*151)

Thus the letters, which turn out to be a travelogue of the poet, mark his critique of the Western civilization from the very beginning of his perception of the West. This comes out in the form of a warning to humanity in the lectures delivered at his mature years. The most significant deliberations are his *Nationalism* lectures at Japan and U. S. A. in 1916. By that time Tagore was already acquainted with the devastations of the World War I and his lectures are replete with his disenchantment with the Western civilization, where machines rule and justify man's greed for material possession and power. A more scathing condemnation of the Western modernity, that had crept into the then India is found in his essay, "The Modern Age", collected under the title *Creative Unity*, published in 1922 after his third visit to America. Evoking the alarming situation, that had set in Calcutta, the poet places the extremely polluted industrial cityscape in sharp contrast to the Calcutta, that he had experienced in his boyhood days: "I was fortunate enough to be born . . . when Calcutta, with her up-tilted nose and stony stare, had not completely disowned her foster-mother, rural Bengal, and had not surrendered body and soul to her wealthy paramour, the spirit of the ledger, bound in dead leather" (Das 2: 538). Such scattered responses, strewn in his lectures and essays, are crystallized within the dramatic space of *Raktakarabi*.

Rabindranath's response towards science and technology borders on a complex terrain, where the poet refers to science and its impact on man's life as inevitable and cannot be ignored altogether. But the poet was also a witness to the reality where man's absolute subservience to science and rationality problematizes his own existence. Rabindranath's strong dissenting voice against the appropriation of science by British imperial power to justify its act of oppression is also evident in his two symbolic plays, *Raktakarabi* (*Red Oleanders*) and *Muktadhara* (*The Waterfall*). Both the plays depict the intrusion of machine in human life which imposes the dictates of a mechanized regime and cripples the inner spirit of man. In a letter written to C.F. Andrews, Rabindranath

laments this new living condition of man, that is often associated with the idea of modernity and progress:

To me, humanity is rich and large and many-sided. Therefore, I feel deeply hurt when I find that, for some material gain, man's personality is mutilated in the western world and he is reduced to a machine. The same process of repression and curtailment of humanity is often advocated in our country under the name of patriotism. (qtd. in Ghosh 186)

Red Oleanders depicts the bleak, pessimistic world of Yakshapuri (Yaksha Town in Rabindranath's translation) which underlines the magnanimity of state power and its various strategies to exploit science as mere instruments to marginalize human sense and sensibility. The land does not denote any fixed geographical territory but becomes symbolic of an industrial cityscape, which aims to wrest away treasure from the deeper chasms of the earth. In Yaksha Town, a number of diggers are engaged in an endless toil to excavate the land, and extort its rich reserve of gold. In course of the play, it is revealed that if somebody arrives here by chance or by the dictates of fate, he is left without any possibility of return. Most of the diggers remain under the illusion that someday they will be able to retain their freedom. But Yaksha Town has paralysed their minds in such a way that they cannot snap the thread and go away forever. Bishu, a very significant voice of conscience in *Red Oleanders*, harps on this angst-ridden existence from whose bounds there is no release: "Your Governor has closed the way as well as the will to return. If you go there today you will fly back here to-morrow, like a caged bird to its cage, hankering for its drugged food" (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 29). This becomes evident in the procrastination of Phagulal and Chandra to go back to their village. Despite their intense urge to go back and participate in the harvest festival, they realize that the way to their home is closed forever. *Red Oleanders* dramatizes this perplexity in man who has abandoned his natural affinity towards agricultural fields and deliberately chosen the stifling working condition in an industrial set up.

Unlike *Muktadhara (The Waterfall)*, where there is a machine which

becomes the source of all conflicts, in *Red Oleanders*, we do not perceive the tangible presence of a machine. Rather, the rule of the machine is perceptible in the mechanized organization which is constituted by the King, the Governor, along with the Professor and the Gosain (the religious preacher). The appearance of the King is no less fearsome than the iron machine in *The Waterfall* that is installed to arrest the free flow of the waterfall. The King or *Makarraj*, as he is known to all the people of his regime, stands as an embodiment of power, strict vigilance, extreme ruthlessness, and absolute domination. He is described as “a man from the epics, —his forehead like the gateway of a tower, his arms the iron bolts of some inaccessible fortress” (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 49-50). Though he hides himself behind a façade, his unquenchable thirst for power and wealth is evident in Yaksha Town. The nation state chooses to exercise its absolute power over man by curbing individual rights. If someone revolts against the authoritarian control, there is a state appointed Gosain to read out from scriptures and pacify his mind in the name of God. Thus, in Yaksha Town, religion cannot bring any new promise of respite. All major social institutions like education, religion, and science are being reduced to mere instruments of power.

Rabindranath weaves certain possibilities in *Red Oleanders*, that may induce change in the mechanized regime of the King. Within this autocratic system that demands man's complete submission under power, Nandini appears all of a sudden to play the role of a redeemer. In “An Interpretation” of *Red Oleanders* Rabindranath describes Nandini as “the embodiment of that light that is beauty and love. She represents the highest truth in the human world, in the nature of man, a truth for which all down the ages, the great have lived, suffered and even died. She too is willing to suffer torture, a death, a mental crucifixion” (qtd. in Bhattacharya 521). Nandini stands for the ideals of human love, and self-renunciation which are pitted against the ideology of power and domination in Yaksha Town. She finds her soulmate in Bishu, who epitomizes a rare conviction to defy the Governor. Bishu croons to her the lyrics of love, and the vibrant songs of the fields that dispel the monotony of tedious life in Yaksha Town. Nandini introduces the joy of companionship in this land of automatons where people are otherwise

identified by numbers. No one can ignore her presence. Kishore, a digger, escapes the strict vigilance of the Governor and brings her flowers every day. Strikingly enough, Nandini creates ripples in the otherwise placid world of the Professor who contends that she is beyond all knowledge: "The sunlight gleaming through the forest thickets surprises nobody, but the light that breaks through a cracked wall is quite a different thing. In Yaksha Town, you are this light that startles"(Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 4).

Red Oleanders is premised on the debate between two conflicting ideologies embodied in the cityscape of Yaksha Town, where state and science form a nexus to overpower humane attributes, and the agricultural fields only exist in the imagination of Nandini, Bishu, Phagulal, and Chandra. The song of *Nabanna* or the Harvest Festival, "Hark, 'tis Autumn calling . . . Her basket is heaped with corn", brings in a fresh lease of air into this monotonous land of the miners, thereby projecting harvesting as a joyous festival among the village community (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 13). Unlike the industrial cityscape, which aims to stifle its workers, the agricultural fields embody a sense of freedom. Nandini acts as an interlocutor between man and nature and tries to mend the broken ties between the two entities. Her attachment with Raktakarabi/ Red Oleanders, the crimson-coloured flowers, which also symbolizes her love for Ranjan, harps on the idea that in Rabindranath's imagination, Nandini is an epitome of nature's creative principle. Thus, she cannot understand what pleasure does the King of Yaksha Town derive in "handling the dead wealth of the earth?" (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 14). She realizes that the King's deliberate self-incarceration has rendered him passive and helpless. Her frequent interaction with the King reveals several shades of his character. He is terrible, yet he is not hesitant to expose his weakness before Nandini. In his land of strict regulations, Nandini stands as the lord of misrule. The King becomes impatient to know her. For him, Nandini is an enigma. Hence, he believes, "To get fire from a tree you have to burn it. Nandini, there is fire within you too, red fire. One day I shall burn you and extract that also"(Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 62-63). He evokes his several acts of cruelty to intimidate her: "I should like to stand you up on the top of a heap of everything

I've smashed throughout my life . . . Then, like a squeezed bunch of grapes with its juice running out between the gripping fingers, if I could but hold you tight with these two hands of mine" (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 61-62). The King with his desire to decode the enigma, that renders Nandini different from the homogenized toiling mass of Yaksha Town, replicates the imperial strategy to familiarize all that are unknown. Undoubtedly science and technology have acted as loyal compatriot facilitating such colonial gaze on nature as well as human subjects. But, it needs to be considered that Rabindranath's King does not reflect an exact mimetic representation of British sovereignty. Rather, he depicts a conglomeration of multiple personality within a singular character. He threatens Nandini, but soon his anger gives way to a feeling of remorse. In a state of helplessness, he unwittingly reveals his true feelings for her:

On your face, there is the play of life in your eyes and lips;
at the back of you flows your black hair, the silent fall of
death. The other day when my hands sank into it, they felt the
soft calm of dying. I long to sleep with my face hidden inside
those thick black clusters. You don't know how tired I am!
(Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 63-64)

The King, too, becomes a captive in his own citadel who wishes to disown everything and escape. He becomes envious of the freedom that Nandini and Ranjan cherish together. His self-introspection leads him to realise:

In me there is only strength, in Ranjan there is magic . . .
Underground there are blocks of stone, iron, gold, —there
you have the image of strength. On the surface grows the
grass, the flower blossoms, —there you have the play of
magic. I can extract gold from the fearsome depths of secrecy,
but to wrest that magic from the near at hand I fail. (Tagore,
Red Oleanders 17-18)

Within this regimented domain of Yaksha Town, Ranjan introduces an alternative mode of existence which lies beyond the principles of utility. The Governor tries to frighten him with his threats of severe

punishments. They compel him to work with the diggers. But, his supervisor, the Headman has to admit, "I thought that pressure would make him yield. But on the contrary it seemed to lift the pressure from the digger's minds also. He cheered them up, and asked them to have a digger's dance!" (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 68). Thus, Ranjan epitomizes a rare joy, which cannot be easily curbed by the forces of a mechanical organization. They can make him a captive but cannot subsume his spirit.

At the core of *Red Oleanders*, there is a possibility of redemption in Yaksha Town which is to be brought about by Nandini's self-sacrifice. Throughout the play Nandini is separated from Ranjan and with utmost care, she nurtures her faith that one day they will be united. On the auspicious day of Flag-worship, when the people of Yaksha Town are busy paying their tribute to War Goddess [*Maranchandi*], Nandini realizes that she has lost her Ranjan forever. Ranjan's demise appears as an epiphanic moment for the King who realizes that his own instruments of power have turned against him. He is trapped in a secret plot craftily designed by the Governor, Deputy Governor, and the Headman who arrested Ranjan without intimating the King about it. The climactic moment of the play is worked out as the King comes out of his façade, and joins Nandini to demolish his own fortress of power. At the end of the play, we find a transformed King, who resolves to revolt against his own principles. To Nandini, he says: "That fight has already begun. There is my flag. First I break the Flagstaff,—thus! . . . Let your hand unite with mine to kill me, utterly kill me. That will be my emancipation" (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 116). The play ends as the revolt sets in. Rabindranath does not make us intimate with the consequence of such uprising. The question remains as to whether the mechanized regime still continues, or will it be displaced by a new vision of life. However, the stirring in the King brings new promises of change. As the King joins Nandini to demolish his own prison, a sense of freedom is set in Yaksha Town, which gets enmeshed with the refrain: "Hark 'tis Autumn calling", heard from a distance (Tagore, *Red Oleanders* 125).

Partha Chatterjee in *Our Modernity* professes that while the Western idea of modernity is universally accepted as the only form of modernity,

the colonized Indians are its consumers. He says, “We must remember that in the world arena of modernity, we are outcasts, untouchables. . . . No one there believes that we could be producers of modernity” (20). Chatterjee also implies the plurality of the term modernity, and recognizes the existence of a number of forms of modernity. Hence, the notion of modernity professed by the West cannot be the only one form to be pertinent to all situations. In fact he believes that “true modernity consists in determining the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in particular circumstances” (8). Partha Chatterjee’s chief concern here is the colonized India as he attempts to say that India must develop its own modernity according to its situation. But Tagore’s concern was stretched to the West also. He could not discard the West’s emphasis on applied science, that is prominent in their model of modernity. We all know that Tagore himself imported technology to serve his projects of rural reconstruction. But at the same time he also strived to maintain a balance between technology and humanity. This becomes more evident in his farewell address to Japan in 1924, where he appreciates the technical advances made by the country, but also urges that Japan should not blindly imitate the West. If the country has to import and use the power of technology for its development, it must qualify the Western techniques with the spirituality, that resides in its inner recess. Thus Rabindranath never objects to science and technology altogether. But he offers a corrective when he feels that science is ruthlessly exploited to satiate man’s greed for power. To the West’s model of progress by exploiting nature and human as resources, that also defines Western modernity, Rabindranath’s alternative model of modernity, thus, stands as a sharp contrast, where science and humanity co-exist and complement each other.

Works Cited

- Baber, Zaheer. “Science, Technology, and Colonial Power.” *Social History of Science in Colonial India*. Ed. S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Our Modernity*. Rotterdam: SEPHIS, 1997. Print.

Prakash, Gyan. *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Letters from a Sojourner in Europe*. Trans. Manjari Chakravarty. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2008. Print.

—. “The Modern Age.” *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*. Ed. Sisir Kumar Das. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996. Print.

—. *Raktakarabi. Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. 8. Cheap Priced ed. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1986. Print.

—. *Red Oleanders*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2012. Print.

Critiquing industrialization and the dehumanizing effects of modern capitalism: On rereading Tagore's "Raktakarabi"

Shantanu Siuli

Abstract

The play "Raktakarabi" by Rabindranath Tagore is critically examined in this essay in light of industrialization and the dehumanizing consequences of contemporary capitalism. The work of Tagore, which was first published in 1926, provides a thorough examination of the conflicts that exist between conventional ideals and the unrelenting advance of industrialization. This dissertation makes the compelling case that Tagore's story, "Raktakarabi," offers a stinging indictment of industrialization and its negative effects on human relationships, communities, and the environment through a detailed examination of the characters, themes, and symbols. The drama takes place in an industrialized society where profit is made from the exploitation of nature and people are little more than gears in the mechanism of capitalist production. Thus, this essay sustains that "Raktakarabi" remains a contemporary piece of literature given the ongoing struggle between industrial capitalism and people. Tagore's critique of modernity is relevant to present-day concerns of social oppression, degradation of human worth, and nature deterioration. Rereading "Raktakarabi" serves as a helpful reminder of the ongoing significance of opposing the dehumanizing impacts of unbridled industrialization and our unwavering dedication to the principles of respect for nature, community, and compassion.

Keywords : Dehumanizing consequences, Contemporary capitalism, Degradation of the environment, Social Disparities, Reluctance, and India in the Middle Ages

Introduction

With its profound insights into the human condition and the difficulties of societal change, Rabindranath Tagore's literary legacy continues to be a source of inspiration and contemplation. With its beautiful style and thought-provoking subjects, "Raktakarabi" stands out among his extensive body of work as a timeless masterpiece that never fails to enthrall readers. This play, which debuted in 1926, transcends its historical and cultural setting to strike a chord with audiences today, especially in light of its indictment of industrialization and the dehumanizing effects of current capitalism. We go back to Tagore's "Raktakarabi" and examine it through the prisms of industrialization and capitalism, showing how relevant it is to the issues and problems we face today (Bandyopadhyay 33). When we explore the depths of Tagore's story, we find a rich tapestry of themes, characters, and symbolism that come together to create a potent critique of the industrial revolution's unrelenting march forward and its detrimental impact on both the environment and people.

Fundamentally, "Raktakarabi" is a tale of resistance, a loud cry against industrialization's assault against the sacredness of nature and the worth of human life. Taking place in the made-up city of Madhupur, the drama is set against the fast-evolving backdrop of a society that has abandoned traditional values in favor of material gain and economic exploitation (Dutt 110). Tagore asks us to address fundamental questions brought about by modernity and the weakening of our natural connection to the natural world through the character of Nandini, a lively young woman whose unshakable love for nature reflects the purity and vibrancy of life itself.

The brutal pursuit of profit at the price of human welfare, the commodification of labor and the environment, and the estrangement of people from both their communities and themselves are the harsh truths of industrial capitalism that face us as we make our way through the intricate web of Tagore's story (Chakravarty 46). With striking images and moving symbolism, Tagore creates a menacing image of a society on the verge of disintegrating, its moral fabric ripped apart by the unquenchable greed of industrialists and the general lack of interest of the populace (Mitra 202).

However, there is a glimmer of optimism amid the gloom, which is evidence of the human spirit’s resiliency and the enduring power of love and unity. Nandini and her friends are resistance heroes because of their actions of disobedience and selflessness, which upend the mainstream narrative of progress and allow them to regain agency in the face of hardship.

In the pages that follow, we will critically examine “Raktakarabi,” analyzing its themes and motifs in the context of current discussions about capitalism, industrialization, and the state of humanity. By utilizing a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates elements of literary theory, social critique, and environmental ethics, we aim to reveal the hidden meanings inside Tagore’s work and clarify their significance for the contemporary world (Sen 14).

The melancholy work “Raktakarabi” by Rabindranath Tagore elucidates the moral quandaries offered by modern capitalism and industry, as well as the intricacies of human existence. Written in 1926, this play offers a timeless indictment of the dehumanizing effects of industrial progress and the unrelenting quest for profit at the expense of environmental purity and human dignity (Sirkar 200). It transcends its temporal and cultural origins.

We set out to reexamine Tagore’s “Raktakarabi” in this critical introduction, using the modern issues of industrialization and capitalism as a guide. We explore deep into Tagore’s story, analyzing its themes, characters, and symbolism to reveal the layers of meaning that are hidden under the surface.

“Raktakarabi” is essentially a biting critique of industrial capitalism’s exploitative aspects, which include the commodification of labor, the exploitation of natural resources, and the subjugation of people to the whims of profit-driven businesses. The drama takes place in the made-up city of Madhupur, where a once-thriving community is caught in the clutches of moral rot and economic exploitation against the backdrop of a fast-industrializing civilization.

The character of Nandini, a symbol of life and purity amid the

devastation caused by industrialization, is central to Tagore's criticism. Nandini becomes a voice of conscience among the noise of industrial progress, standing out as a beacon of resistance due to her unshakeable devotion to nature and her refusal to give in to the dehumanizing forces of modernity (Bandyopadhyay 35).

Upon traversing the many passageways of Tagore's story, we are met with the harsh truths of capitalism: the disconnection of workers, the deterioration of the surroundings, and the breakdown of interpersonal bonds. By exposing the moral bankruptcy of a society that prioritizes profit over all other considerations, Tagore lays bare the human cost of unbridled industrialization through striking imagery and poignant symbolism (Mitra 202).

Nevertheless, in the middle of the hopelessness, there is a gleam of hope—a call to action that echoes over time. When faced with hardship, Nandini and her allies rise to oppose the current quo and create ties of resistance in the fight for justice and human dignity. Within the ensuing pages, we will commence a critical analysis of “Raktakarabi,” scrutinizing its themes and motifs in the context of current discussions concerning industrialization and capitalism (Dutt 111). Utilizing perspectives from sociology, economics, and environmental studies, we aim to elucidate the lasting significance of Tagore's analysis in a time characterized by the ceaseless advancement of technology and the constant threat of environmental deterioration.

By doing this, we aim to start a debate again that cuts over time and geography and unites the past and present in our common pursuit of a more just and equitable future (Sen 15). As we reread Tagore's “Raktakarabi,” let us take note of its caution and its call to action, for within its ageless wisdom lies the hope of a future in which humanity responds.

Detailed discussion

“Raktakarabi” (“Red Oleanders”) by Rabindranath Tagore is indeed a poignant critique of industrialization and the dehumanizing impacts of modern capitalism. Written in the early 20th century, Tagore's play

dives into the tensions between progress and humanity, exploring the consequences of unchecked industrial expansion on individuals and society. One of the central themes of “Raktakarabi” is the loss of human connection and values in the face of industrialization (Sen 17). The play portrays how the pursuit of profit and power leads to exploitation and alienation, as seen through the character of Nandini, who is forced into servitude by the powerful merchant, Amulya. Her struggle for freedom symbolizes the broader struggle of individuals against the dehumanizing forces of capitalism (Dutt 113). Not only does Tagore criticize economic exploitation, but he also takes into account the ecological and spiritual effects of industrialization. The catastrophic results of industrial growth are portrayed as the devastation of the environment and the decline of traditional lifestyles. A potent emblem of the price of unbridled industrialization is the red oleanders, which stand for the blood of exploited laborers and the devastation of the environment. Looking back at “Raktakarabi” now, we can find similarities with modern problems like environmental degradation, sweatshop labor, and the growing wealth disparity (Sirkar 201). The message that Tagore conveyed through his work is still relevant today because it speaks of the need to balance social justice, environmental conservation, and economic growth. This is a timeless lesson about the need to retain our humanity as we are still grappling with the impacts of modern-day capitalism as depicted in the “Raktakarabi”.

Rabindranath Tagore’s play “Raktakarabi” or “Red Oleanders” is a strident critique of industrialization and the alienating effects of modernity and capitalist economy. This drama was written in 1924 and the main themes of the play are the exploitation, the loss of individuality, and the impact of the mechanical civilization on the creative and human spirit. This poem by Tagore reveals his dream, and that is still valid in the present time because it shows the disadvantages of uncontrolled industrialization and materialism. The setting of “Raktakarabi” is a fictitious mining city known as Yaksha Town and is governed by an oppressive monarch (Bandyopadhyay 39). The town is dominated by industry and machines, symbolizing the impersonal and mechanized powers of industrial capitalism. The employees of Yaksha Town are dehumanized, robbed of

their identity, and treated like inanimate parts of a machine. The harsh surroundings are a reflection of Tagore's concerns about industrialization, which he believed was undermining society's humanistic ideals.

In "Raktakarabi," the monarch stands in for the capitalist tyrant who prioritizes power and profit over human life. He is an inattentive king who lives behind bureaucratic and technological barriers, cut off from the people he subjugates. This figure represents the moral decline and alienation of people who profit from industrial capitalism without realizing the price it exacts on human lives (Dutt 119). A recurrent theme, the king's fixation with gold highlights the materialism and greed at the heart of the capitalist system. The main character, Nandini, represents freedom, nature, and life. The harsh surroundings are sharply contrasted with her presence in Yaksha Town. She is a symbol of the human spirit's unwavering resistance to dehumanization. Tagore highlights the value of love, compassion, and human connection through Nandini as a counterbalance to the impersonal and mechanical forces of industrialization. Her encounters with the miners help them rediscover their humanity and see that they are valuable beings in and of themselves, regardless of their financial worth (Mitra 203).

The capitalist exploitation of labor is also included in Tagore's critique. Yaksha Town's hazardous working conditions are evocative of the real-world sweatshops and mines where people endure cruel treatment in exchange for a small profit margin. The drama sheds attention on how capitalism dehumanizes and exploits workers by putting profit before people. Individuality is lost as a result of modern capitalism, as "Raktakarabi" illustrates. The faceless and nameless laborers represent how industrial society views people as interchangeable components of a massive economic apparatus. One of capitalism's most profoundly dehumanizing impacts is the loss of identity and personal meaning. Tagore regrets that people have been reduced to nothing more than inanimate machines with no autonomy or dignity (Sen 22). Tagore's criticism revolves around the theme of estrangement. The laborers in Yaksha Town are estranged from their work, from one another, and even from themselves. This is similar to the alienation theory put out by Karl Marx, according to which employees grow alienated from both

their human potential and the outcomes of their labor. Tagore depicts this estrangement and its destructive consequences on the human spirit in striking detail. In the modern world, Tagore’s “Raktakarabi” is still remarkably pertinent. In the context of global capitalism, the themes of alienation, loss of identity, and exploitation remain relevant. Contemporary examples of the problems Tagore criticized include the gig economy, income inequality, and sweatshops (Chakravarty 56).

Workers in underdeveloped nations frequently endure conditions akin to those outlined in “Raktakarabi” in the modern global economy. The unrelenting quest for profit results in labor exploitation, whereby employees put up with dangerous working conditions, long hours, and little compensation. Tagore’s play serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting workers’ rights and using moral labor practices (Chakravarty 59). Artificial intelligence and automation have made technology’s dehumanizing impacts more apparent than before. Technology can increase productivity, but it also can drive people further apart from one another and their jobs. In this setting, Tagore’s critique of industrialization and mechanization is especially pertinent because it calls for striking a balance between the development of technology and humanistic values (Chakravarty 62).

Rabindranath Tagore’s “Raktakarabi” is a timeless critique of industrialization and modern capitalism, highlighting the dehumanizing effects of these forces on individuals and society. Through powerful symbolism, rich characters, and a compelling narrative, Tagore underscores the need to preserve human dignity, individuality, and compassion in the face of mechanized and impersonal economic systems. Tagore lamented the loss of individuality, which is evident in today’s consumer-driven society, where people are frequently reduced to their roles as consumers and valued more for their financial power than for their unique human qualities. Tagore’s emphasis on the importance of individual dignity and personal connection is a poignant critique of contemporary consumerism (Sen 30).

Conclusion

A powerful and timeless critique of industrialization and the dehumanizing impacts of contemporary capitalism may be found in Rabindranath Tagore's "Raktakarabi" (Red Oleanders). Yaksha Town serves as a metaphorical backdrop for Tagore's illustrations of the exploitation, alienation, and loss of identity that come with unbridled industrial progress and capitalist greed. The antagonistic king and Nandini, in particular, represent the impersonal forces of materialism and mechanization and the sharp contrast with humanistic virtues (Sen 31). It was the time when economic efficiency and profit objectives predominate, Tagore's story emphasizes how vital it is to preserve human dignity, compassion, and individuality. His writings are still incredibly relevant today, given how the world economy is still battling issues like consumer-driven dehumanization, technological alienation, and labor exploitation.

Rereading Rabindranath Tagore's "Raktakarabi" (Red Oleanders) reveals the drama to be a profound and timeless critique of modern capitalism's dehumanizing consequences and industrialization. Tagore powerfully portrays the oppressive character of a mechanized, capitalist-greed-driven world in which people are reduced to mere tools of production through the metaphorical setting of Yaksha Town and its characters. The gloomy and dreary setting of Yaksha Town along with Tagore's portrayal of the king as an egoistic and immoral capitalist despot underlines the social isolation and loss of individuality that characterizes the modernity of the Industrial Revolution. Owing to these characteristics, Nandini embodies the spirit of humanity and the eternal values of love, compassion, and the sanctity of the individual.

The story of "Raktakarabi" is more socially and politically oriented and touches upon issues that are still actual today, like the exploitation of workers in global supply chains, the loss of identity, and loneliness in a world of consumers and technologically developed products. The ethical foundations of the economic systems that we have need to be discussed and debated in detail, and an equilibrium that acknowledges the dignity of the human person and brings into being genuine human

S. Siuli: Critiquing industrialization and the dehumanizing effects in “Raktakarabi”

relationships needs to be strived for as a fallout of Tagore’s work. A classic anti-industrial and commercial play, “Raktakarabi” is a play that raises the question of human values in society. Through his wise words, Tagore makes one think about the values we hold and strive in the direction of building a society where the well-being of people is the main goal, ensuring that progress does not overshadow our humanity.

References

- Bandyopadhyay, Samik. “Tagore: Redefining Culture.” *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2011, pp. 32–41. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44733615>. Accessed 3 June 2024.
- Dutt, Dattatreya. “The Unrealized Theatre Of Tagore.” *Rabindranath Tagore’s Drama in the Perspective of Indian Theatre*, edited by Mala Renganathan and Arnab Bhattacharya, Anthem Press, 2020, pp. 109–20. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt9k5zq.10>. Accessed 5 June 2024.
- Chakravarty, Chandrava. “Place And Space In Tagore’s Raktakarabi And Muktaadhara.” *Rabindranath Tagore’s Drama in the Perspective of Indian Theatre*, edited by Mala Renganathan and Arnab Bhattacharya, Anthem Press, 2020, pp. 45–66. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt9k5zq.6>. Accessed 2 June 2024.
- “Indian Literature: Translations and Critical Studies.” *Indian Literature*, vol. 31, no. 1 (123), 1988, pp. 157–63. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23336685>. Accessed 2 June 2024.
- Mitra, Sombhu, and Samik Bandyopadhyay. “Building from Tagore.” *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1971, pp. 201–04. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1144639>. Accessed 5 June 2024.
- Sen, Abhijit. “Rabindranath Tagore: Imagining Nation, Imagining Theatre.” *Rabindranath Tagore’s Drama in the Perspective of Indian Theatre*, edited by Mala Renganathan and Arnab Bhattacharya, Anthem Press, 2020, pp. 13–32. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt9k5zq.4>. Accessed 1 June 2024.
- Sirkar, Dhrubajyoti. “Tagore’s Drama Revisited.” *Indian Literature*, vol. 60, no. 4 (294), 2016, pp. 199–202. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44479556>. Accessed 1 June 2024

The Conclusion and Celluloid: Re-reading “Samapti” through the Eyes of Tagore and Ray

Rituparna Chakraborty

Abstract

Amongst other genres, Tagore was equally adept at writing short stories and catering to its nuances. The short story “Samapti” is included in his anthology titled *Galpaguchchha*. The story follows the life of a young man named Apurba who returns to his village after completing his education in Calcutta. His mother wants him to marry a suitable girl, but Apurba falls in love with Mrinmoyee, a free-spirited and unconventional village girl. Despite initial reluctance, Apurba marries Mrinmoyee. The story explores themes of love, freedom, and societal expectations as Mrinmoyee slowly adjusts to her new life, highlighting Tagore’s skill in portraying complex human emotions and relationships.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray, Samapti, short story, adaptation

It was when I was quite young that I began to write short stories. Being a landlord I had to go to villages and thus I came in touch with the village people and their simple modes of life. I enjoyed the surrounding scenery and the beauty of rural Bengal...My whole heart went to the simple village people as I came in close contact with them. They seemed to belong to quite another world so very different from that of Calcutta. My earlier stories have this background and they describe this contact of mine with the village people. They have the freshness of youth. Before I had written these short stories there was not anything of that type in Bengali literature. No doubt Bankimchandra had written some stories but they were of a romantic type; mine were full of the

temperament of the village people. There was the rural atmosphere about them. ... My later stories have not got that freshness, though they have greater psychological value and they deal with problems. [From Galpaguchcha, Granthaparichoy]

Tagore is one of the pioneering figures of modern Bengali short story. Tagore wrote almost 100 short stories. In Tagore's short stories we discover multiple layers of human relationships. Although Tagore disapproves of patriarchal norms and tradition, Tagore was not a staunch advocate of feminism. He believed in the symbiotic relationship between man and woman. In his lecture turned essay "Woman", he observes that the relationship of man of woman is like the relationship of tree and soil. The tree might have its aspirations but all his deeper bond is with the soil. Tagore compares man with nurture (culture) and woman with nature. According to him, this is the reason why masculine creations are not stable."The masculine creations of intellectual civilisation are towers of Babel, they dare to defy their foundations and therefore topple down over and over again. Thus human history is growing up over layers of ruins; it is not a continuous life growth." (Tagore 225)

Tagore's short story "Samapti" is a testament of man-woman intricate relationship. In the very first sentence of the short story, the readers get acquainted with the male protagonist of the short story, Mr. Apurba Krishna Roy. He is returning to his village after earning the B.A. degree.

Tagore gives a vivid description of nature. The small river of the village is now brimming with monsoon water. Tagore draws a comparison between the overflowing river and Apurbo's mind, which according to the narrator is also overflowing with the joy of youth. As soon as Apurbo reaches the bank of the river, he stumbles with his bag and falls down because of the muddy path. And then only, we come across the female protagonist of the story Mrinmoyee, who, sitting on a huge pile of bricks laughs spontaneously at this sudden embarrassment of Apurbo.

We come to know that Mrinmoyee and her family has migrated to that village as the rage of the river made them sacrifice their house. We understand Mrinmoyee belongs to the marginalized section of the society.

The narrator gives a detailed description of Mrinmoyee's appearance and conduct. The society attributes docility as a woman's ornament. If a woman refuses to be docile and submissive, the society tends to claim the woman is not that "feminine." The same thing happens with Mrinmoyee. She did not play with the girls of the village, instead she befriended the boys. There was no sign of fear or shame in her appearance. Interestingly, The narrator mentions that Mrinmoyee's face resembles that of a small boy. The women folk of the village were anxious with the activities of Mrinmoyee. Also, we find that the evil of child-marriage was prevalent in the then society. Mrinmoyee, a girl just stepped into adolescence was expected to get married by that time.

Apurbo, somehow fell in love with Mrinmoyee at the very first sight. The unconventional beauty of Mrinmoyee, her mischiefs attracted him. In a quest of his very self, he can not understand why he feels so desperate to prove his worth to Mrinmoyee, to prove that he is a B.A. and not an ordinary villager.

The girl Apurbo's mother selects as his bride was just a victim of patriarchal society. She seems to be a doll, parroting whatever she is taught, lacking individuality. At the same time the practice of decorating a woman and exhibiting her in front of the supposed groom and his family is depicted. Unfortunately, even after more than a century, this practice is still prevalent in our society.

On the other hand, Mrinmoyee, a girl full of individuality and vibrance is as free as nature. She doesn't reconcile with the taboos associated with marriage. When the elderly women of the village advise her not to talk much, not to eat much, not to laugh audibly, not to make friends with boys after marriage, this very institution named marriage seem to be synonymous with imprisonment to her. Although the society has come a long way, these taboos are still present in our society. A poem named "Ami e sei meyeti" by Kobita Singha testifies this :

“আমি সেই মেয়ে যে ছোটোবেলা থেকে শুনেছে

জোরে জোরে কথা বলতে নেই

ছুটতে নেই—টঁচাতে নেই—হাসতে নেই

এমনকি কাঁদলেও তা লুকিয়ে লুকিয়ে
আমিই সেই মেয়েটি যাকে বলতে নেই—
খিদে পেয়েছে—ঘুম পেয়েছে—ইচ্ছে করছে না—
ক্লান্ত লাগছে—আর পারছি না—আর পারছি না।”

Mrinmoyee enters into the institution of marriage under compulsion. At that point of time, her friend Rakhal was far more important to her than her husband Apurbo. When she struggles a lot in her in-laws home, Apurbo stands by her and becomes her confidante. When Apurbo secretly takes her to her father, Mrinmoyee realizes she can depend on this person. When Apurbo asks her if she loves him, she has no answer. She did not want to accompany Apurbo to Kolkata when the latter moves to Kolkata to study law. She candidly says that she would miss Rakhal and requests Apurbo to bring a gift for Rakhal when he comes back. When Apurbo is gone and Mrinmoyee comes to live in her paternal home, she reaches her moment of epiphany. She becomes a woman the society expects her to be. She realizes her feelings for Apurbo. She is no longer interested in playing with Rakhal. Rakhal is scared of this transformed Mrinmoyee. Apurbo's mother is happy because Mrinmoyee, without her training sheds off her girlish tantrums and becomes the docile submissive daughter-in-law. The monster woman suddenly becomes the angel-of-the house. She restlessly waits for Apurbo's arrival as she is now well aware of the “duties” of a wife. She writes letters in her naïve handwriting. She finally goes to Kolkata with her mother-in-law and meets Apurbo in her sister-in-law's house quite dramatically. A long pending kiss ends the agony of Apurbo's mind. Although the story is titled as “Samapti” (ending), it actually denotes the very inception of the couple's conjugal relationship. Tagore beautifully picturizes multiple human relationships – the relationship between a mother and her son, a father and her daughter, two friends, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and last but not the least a husband and wife.

Samapti (The Conclusion) belongs to Satyajit Ray's trilogy “Tin Konya”. The trilogy consists of “Postmaster”, “Manihara” and “Samapti”. Three women belonging to this trio are Ratan, Nanibala and Mrinmoyee.



There is one factor common among them. All three of them are free spirited. They seem to be the daughters of mother nature. There is striking individuality in each of them.

Aparna Sen makes her debut in the movie “Samapti”. Her outstanding of a girl journeying towards womanhood makes the character perennial. The character of Apurbo played by Soumitra Chattopadhyay is etched in the memory of the audience forever. Satyajit Ray makes some improvisation to keep the background of the movie limited to village. As in *Pather Panchali*, *Gupi Gayen*, *Bagha Bayen* and other movies, Roy’s depiction of rural scenery is hard to miss. An ancient Chariot of Lord Jagannath, the big tree, the post-monsoon village path and a boat sailing across the brimming river – a perfect picture of rural Bengal is wonderfully painted on the canvas of the movie by the master of the craft.

Ray’s neverfailing wit is evident when Apurbo places the framed portrait of his hero Napoleon Bonaparte on the shelf of his bedroom and

then again hides it in a corner of the shelf realizing that winning Mrinmoyee's love would not be that easy.

The mastery of Satyajit again finds expression in the scene when a childhood friend of Mrinmoyee brings her the news that her pet squirrel is dead. She feels depressed for a moment and then again immerses in the reverie of Apurbo. The death of the squirrel somehow marks the death of Mrinmoyee's girlhood and her stepping into womanhood.

References:-

- Cooper, Darius. *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray: Between Tradition and Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Dasgupta, Sanjukta, Sudeshna Chakravarti and Mary Mathew. *Radical Rabindranath*. New Delhi : Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2013.
- Dasgupta, Uma (ed.). *A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore 1913-1940*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Dutta, Ketaki *Indo-Anglian Literature, Past to Present*, Books Way, 2008.
- Ghose, Srikumar (ed.). 1977. *Four Indian Critical Essays: K.C. Bhattacharya, B. N. Seal. Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo*. Calcutta: Jijnasa.
- Hood, John W. *Beyond the World of Apu: The films of Satyajit Ray*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2008.
- Kripalni, Krishna. *Rabindranath Tagore, A Biography*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Kripalni, Krishna. *Binodini. Translation of Chokher Bali* (1903). New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1959.
- Sengupta, S. C. *The Great Sentinel: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & Co, 1948.
- Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. 1985. *Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Publisher Sterling.
- Irving, Edward B. 1989. *Rereading Beowulf*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania.

- Majumdar, Bimanbehari.1968. *Heroines of Tagore: A study in the Transformation of Indian Society 1875-1941*.
- Pearson,W.W. trans.1985. *Gora* (1910). Madras: Macmillan.
- Ray, Satyajit. *Bishoi Chalachitra*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2009 [1982].
- Roy, Arunkumar. *Rabindranath O Chalachitra*. Kolkata: Chitralekha, 1986.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. 8. Calcutta: Visva Bharati & Government of West Bengal Publications, 1961.
- Ghosh, Tapobrata. Introduction. Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories. Trans. Sukanta Chaudhuri. Ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Galpaguccha* [Collected Short Stories]. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2008.

Athokpam Tomchou's *Bus Stop* and *Mingsel* as an Experimental Play

Naorem Ahanjao Meitei

Abstract

Experimental theatre is the umbrella term for the varied theatrical movements in Europe in the late 19th century. It is a form of avant-garde theatre that is trying to produce something new and different from the conventional norms of theatre. Theatre in Manipur can be traced back to 'Lai Haraoba', the play pretaining to Creation myth and since then it had been evolving. Experimental theatre flourished in Manipur in the 1970s and mid 80s as a strong presence, emphasizing the exploration of prevailing social issues, reshaping and incorporating elements such as martial art form-Thang-ta and folk and classical dances. The playwrights started using theatre as a means of protest. Athokpam Tomchou is a renown playwright in Manipuri theatre who had written profusely and he was credited with several crtically acclaimed dramas and Sumang Leelas. The paper attempts to analyse Athokpam Tomchou's *Bus Stop* and *Mingsel* as an experimental play where the playwright had adopted different theatrical techniques to deal with the social problems as well as the moral degradation in the Manipuri society.

Introduction

Experimental play is an escape from the constrictions of conventional plays. It is a new way of expression. The inability of conventional plays to express and translate ideas freely led to the unfolding of the conventional frame. This gave birth to new genres of plays that are in consonance with the respective philosophy. However, how this term came in association with theatre and dramatic literature is also a question. According

to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2014), the word “experiment” is derived from the Latin word, “experimentum”. In the 14th century, the meaning of this term is “test” or “trial”. After this, around 17th century onwards, this word came to be used along with every art form as an “-ism” (Experimentalism). In the late 1960s, experimentalism became as indispensable part in every discipline of art. Experimentalism began to be used in every genre of literature.

French symbolist playwright Alfred Jarry’s (1873-1907) play, *Ubu Roi* (1896) is taken as the first experimental play in the history of experimental theatre and drama. In the Manipuri theatre too, the conventional Bengali Parsi style of play and melodramas reigned until the 1960s. In the late 1960s, a new political movement unfolded in the state. There was a turning point in the women’s movement where ‘Nisha bandh’ and ‘Meira Paibies’ took on a more challenging role. The idea of ‘Manipuriness’, a movement, which aimed to save the tradition and identity developed among the Manipuri people. This brought a new dimension to Manipur’s theatre production, writing, themes and forms. A new form of writing that critically analysed the social problems emerged. The forerunner of this period is G.C. Tongbra (1913-1996). Pukhrambam Samu (1988-1980), Heisnam Kanhailal (1941-2016), Athokpam Tomchou (1944-2021), Nongthombam Shree Biren (1941-2001), Wairokpam Kamini (1947-), Kshetri Sanajaoba (1947-), Yumnam Rajendra (1953-), Khundrakpam Brajachand (1952- 1997), B.K. Wahengba (1947-), Ratan Thiyam (1947-) Niladhaja Khuman (1947-) and Budha Chingtham (1959-) are the major playwrights who practised the new experimental plays. Among the mentioned affluent playwrights, some have their theatre society, their own theatre house and have acted both the roles of director and playwrights delivering this new experimental play across the globe.

The paper attempts to critically analyse Athokpam Tomchou’s plays *Bus Stop* and *Mingsel* as an experimental play. He was born at Imphal-West, Konjeng Leikai on 3rd May, 1944. His parents were Athokpam Tolamu, a farmer and Athokpam (O) Mangolnganbi Devi. Born to a poor family and leading a life of many limitations, Tomchou started writing poems and short stories from his school days. In addition to this,

Tomchou started having keen interest in playwriting in the later part of 1960s. During his study in Imphal college from 1962 to 1965, under the guidance of G. C. Tongbra he was introduced to G.B. Shaw and Chekov. His meeting with Tongbra proved to be a turning point that lead him to writing plays. The result of the meeting was Tomchou's first experimental play titled *Nungsiba Thiba* (In search of Love), a love and marriage theme based satire which was published in 1969. This play had been preformed for more than hundred times. The audience loved it. It got the best script award. This play served as the beginning of Tomchou's journey on experimental plays. He penned many 'Sumang Leela' and 'Phambak Leela' which touched the heart of the audience. His well known plays are Promotion (1947), Jali Mee (1975), Bus Stop (1975), Nungsiba Thiba (1976), Sambal (1979), Mingsel (1985), Meiri (1986). The compilation of Tomchou's Leela (plays performed in open space) can be divided into two phases: the first phase 2017- "Sati Khongnang Tuba", "Yotki Thong", "Investigation Makha Chatthari", "Khunggangi Loubukna Kaphouri" and "Tat Tantra" and second phase 2019 - "Manja Nakada", "Loyalamgi Edhou", "Lilashang", "Rajkumari Houseki Tamnalai" "Vrindavan Yatra", "Pukchel", "Mahatma Gandhigi Cheisu" and "Itihaski Lamaida Anisuba Lanjaogi Heroin".

Bus Stop

Athokpam Tomchou's *Bus Stop* was translated into Marathi language by Borikar who is a theatre director and published in the collection "Indian theatre" as an absurd play. The following discussion attempts to place the play as an absurd play. By emphasising it as an absurd play, the researcher focuses on existentialist philosophy mainly absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence. Tomchou's *Bus Stop* can be said as a landmark in the journey of absurd drama in Manipuri theatre. This play had a great impact upon the journey of Manipuri experimental plays. The inability of individuals to live as a community, the gaps among them, self induced isolation and degradation are the main themes of the play. According to conventions, a well-made play is characterised by a play that reflects the realities of life, psychologically challenging characters, realistic dialogues, well crafted plot that has a beginning, a middle and an end. However, Bus stop, as an absurd play shows the

dismantling of all these conventions. Instance of it is the portrayal of an immoral modern woman whose dress, gait, verse and life style defies all conventions. She ignores and disrespects her husband. She takes marital life casually and only seeks her comfort. Ignoring the customs and traditions of a conventional Manipuri society, she tells her husband:

Woman: The life of a married couple is like taking shelter together in a rainy day. We are either strangers or friends who are living under the same roof. I find my life with you boring. I am going back to my place in the city. I am trying to find a lover for myself. (Manipuri Leela Macha, 2008; 115)

(She left her home. She reaches the bus stop. She is tired of waiting and she dozes off at the bench in the bus stop. A traveller also arrives waiting for the bus. He is also tired and wants to sit. He asks the woman to let him sit.)

Traveller: Wake up, I want to sit.

Woman: You don't have a place to sit. (ibid, 116)

Traveller: What! I don't have a place to sit while you have a place to lie down.

This implies that our society is filled with people who only think for themselves and are obsessed with their individualism. If that is so, then what is the future of the society? This question is frequently raised by the playwright which is one of the aspects of absurd play.

Not only that one Bhadraklok is robbed by a man who also stabs him. But the playwright's wife and the traveller remain shocked and silent as they feared they would be the next target. They argued if they should go to police or not and if they do go, they don't want to be troubled by visits to the court as witnesses. They indulge in game instead of taking Bhadraklok who was profusely bleeding to a hospital and thus saving him.

Traveller: He must be dead.

Woman: I am sure he isn't.

Traveller: Dead

Woman: Not dead

Traveller: I am sure he is dead.

Woman: I am telling you he isn't.

Traveller: I am betting rupees ten that he is dead.

Woman: I am betting rupees twenty that he is not dead.

(Both of them out the money and put it on the injured man's chest.)

Traveller: Okay, the game is getting interesting. We can spend the tedious waiting for bus by this bet. (Both of them look at their respective watch for time. In a few minutes, Bhadraklok starts growling in pain) It's good now. I win. (He takes the money.) (ibid, 126)

The human behaviour that is reflected in Tomchou's award deserving play, *Bus Stop* finds its reflection in today's world where people are no longer interested in coming to solution but are more inclined on taking pictures or videos in mobiles and sharing it in whatsapp and youtubes.

The play vividly depicts human mentality, their inhumane nature, their ignorance and their escape from social responsibility which are indeed elements of an absurd play. In the play, the characters are meeting in a fictionalised place. The characters have neither identity nor names. The characters are the playwrights, the traveller, Bhadraklok and the playwright's wife and hence, they are all senseless characters.

The characterisation is that of a flat character type from the beginning till the end. The characters are made to communicate in a poetic pattern. The dialogues are mostly written to give vague meaning. The playwright employs nonsense language. There is a lack of communication among the characters especially between the playwright and his wife. This is why *Bus Stop* has all the elements of an absurd play. The chaotic nature of human that prevails over reason, estrangement and tragic anguish loom large in the play. The inability to foresee future, the gradual loss

of social contact and isolation are also witnessed in the play. The playwright gives a deeper insights into the psychological condition of man through the lack of communication between the playwright and his wife, the man with the hat and spectacle stabbing Bhadraklok, the distrust among them, enmity and the lack of empathy.

Tomchou builds up his play with subtle complexity. Bhadraklok's inability to die raises many questions. He raises a terrifying yet benevolent question to the society. Thus, he points at the menacing yet funny side of the society. This is the central theme of *Bus Stop* and this makes the play an absurd play. In this way, it can be said as a successful experimental play.

Mingsel (Mirror)

Tomchou experimented with innovative technique in his play, *Mingsel*. He employed 'play within a play' technique in this play and thereby set a trend in experimental play in Manipur. This technique was first used by the Elizabethan English playwright, Thomas Kyd in his play, *The Spanish Tragedy*. The globally famous play of Shakespeare, *Hamlet* has also 'play within the play' technique. Whether one watches or reads the play, *Mingsel*, it never fails to intrigue the audience or the reader. The play is about once affluent man who had exercised abuse of power when he used to hold the reins and how it affects him when he reaches his low point. Biren, who retired after working as an under secretary is trying to regain power by joining a ruling political party and is preparing to contest in election. His wife, Rita, is well known as "Ema ebemma" and has been president, secretary, donor and patron of women's organisations. Their children are all married and are settled with secured jobs in secretariat, police departments and law courts. In short, they belong to a respectable family. One day, in a room that Biren had not visited for almost thirty years, he asks his helper, Bira to clean his father's mirror. He remembers the words of his dying father:

Biren: (His father comes out and says)-

My son, when you reach the evening of your life, there is a mirror and you look intently at it. There you will see your real face. You will find the genuine you without a mask.

He sends his helper, Bira to fetch his wife and the couple look at the mirror anxiously. Their life story is reflected in the mirror in the form of a play. Rita, who is working as a clerk in Biren's office is not returning home at night on the pretext of night duty and this is creating a rift between her and her husband. Biren and Rita indulge in alcohol and sexual pleasure at the office. When her husband tries to intervene, he is killed. Biren and Rita bury the corpse. They silenced Bira by paying him twenty thousands. He takes in Rita as his mistress. The events are displayed one by one in the mirror and this is what we call the 'play within a play'. A play is carried out within a play through a mechanism. It reflects that money can buy anything. Bira pretends as a man of morality while he stands under the shadow of the immorals. When Biren is away for an official tour, Bira takes advantage of Rita by blackmailing her. He forced himself upon her many a time by threatening her that he would expose her crime. It shows that everyone is upto making good use of any opportunity. This also results in the distancing of the family members of Biren. All these run in the mirror.

Through the play, Tomchou is showing a mirror to the disease that has been inflicted on the women staffs who are ready to give up their honour in order to get advantage from their officers. They see neither their husband, children nor the society. The play vividly depicts how power and money ruin the lives of many and how women flesh has become a trade.

Tomchou lays the dirt of our society bare through the clear reflection of a mirror by using the 'play within a play' technique. The play makes the reader and the audience ponder on these issues. It clearly highlights the dictum: "You reap what you sow." The playwright can be said to have been deeply affected by the scandals of middle class morality and traumatised by the different forms of human brutality. This play follows the absurdist and impressionist trend. Thus, Tomchou employs a new technique, the technique of using a mirror that will not hide but will make one face to face with the various misdeeds, corruption and bureaucratic misuse of authority that one has committed in one's life time. This gives a message to the younger generation not to be swayed by the mirage of material success. The plot is based on a single incident

and one a particular time. The main characters are portrayed as the ones that lack synchronisation and have no identity. There is no proper identity of the characters. They keep on changing with the change in time. Human relations are very fragile. This problem of communication is one of the themes of absurd play. This places Tomchou as an experimental playwright.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Tomchou's *Bus Stop* is an absurd play. Both the plays *Bus Stop* and *Mingsel (Mirror)* successfully delineate the evils of the prevailing society, the corrupt morality and the untrustworthy mentality of men.

Reference

- Colin Chambers (Ed). *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, New York: Continuum London, 2002.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Great Britain: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962.
- James Roose, Evans. *Experimental Theatre: from Stanislavski to Peter Brook*. London EC4P4E, 11 New York Lane: Routledge 1984.
- Rajen Toijamba. *Manipuri Dramada Realism*. Imphal: Writers' Forum. 2007.
- Tomchou, Athokpam. *Collection of Plays*. 1st and 2nd Edition. 2017, 2019.
- The Cultural Forum. *Manipuri Leela Macha*, Manipur 2008.
- Gojendra, Lamabam. *Manipuri Theatre amadi Dramagi Khomjinba Wareng*. Imphal: Writers' Forum, 2018.

Preservation and Evolution of Gurudev's "Chandalika" and "Maya Khela" Dance Traditions at Santiniketan

Sharmistha Mukhopadhyay

Abstract

Tagore's plays came to be performed alongside his songs. The first production of Tagore's dance drama happened two decades after 1915. In these two decades, a masked interest could be observed among dancers and dance groups to experiment with this recent dance form.

If we take 1936 to mark the moment of birth of Tagore's dance dramas, then in 1986, when there is a floodtide of dramatic performances of these plays all around to commemorate Tagore's 125th birth centenary year, we might conclude that then, its age is 50 years.

This paper would like to take a close look at this period, namely 1986-2011, which is the period from the 125th to the 150th birth centenary of Tagore. This period also commemorates the 50-75-year period of Rabindranrityanatya. The paper aims to analyze the evolutionary aspect of the developing dance drama form during this period in phases of critically analyzing and comparing Tagorean dance drama performances in Sangit-Bhavan. The paper takes two performance texts, namely Mayar Khela and Chandalika as research samples for close critical inspection. It also aims to take a nuanced informed stance to locate how these dance drama performances have evolved through the years and have been instrumental in both spreading and presenting the cultural heritage of the dance form of Rabindra Nritya.

Keywords: performance text, theatrics, dance drama, evolution, Rabindranrityanatya

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore founded the school in Santiniketan towards the end of the month of December in 1901. Students of this school had come from the Bengali educated middle class families. Tagore had always placed equal significance to the learning and culture of song, dance and art in his school. Tagore had always encouraged dance among students. Thus, even when it had not taken an organizational structure, dance had always been an internal part of play-acting. Tagore is also known to have shown dance gestures to suit song sequences in dramas. It was in fact during the play acting session, that he could imbibe the taste and ambience required to encourage the flourishing of dance in his school. He could inculcate the taste for such aesthetic dance performances among the student and teachers of that period. Today hundreds of years have elapsed since that moment and now that nascent dance form has evolved in the name of '*Rabindranritya*'. Now it is included in the curriculum of the song and dance department of Visva Bharati, known as Sangit Bhavan. This journey from the dance for theatre to the theatrics of dance has happened slowly over time when this dance form the aesthetic creation of art could move away from mere leading movement and expression of joy to being able to embody Tagore's drive for socio-cultural reconstruction and was emboldened enough to be able to tell a story, it was then that it received its full form. However, the gestures and *mudras* of this dance form are neither fixed nor constrained by any strict rules, like the classical dance forms. It is reined by *Rabindrasangeet* (songs of Tagore), and its said goal is to be the vehicle of expressing the mood and content of these songs. *Rabindranritya* has been subject to intermittent change. The same applies to both the plays of Tagore, *Rabindranatya* and the dance dramas of Tagore, namely, *Rabindranrityanaty*. This being susceptible and flexible to change ensures the vitality and longevity of that art form. It was during Tagore's era that the plays of Tagore came to be performed alongside his song. The first production of Tagore's dance drama happened two decades after 1915. And in these two decades a masked interest could be observed among dancers and dance groups to experiment with this recent dance form.

If we take 1936 to mark the moment of birth of Tagore’s dance dramas, then in 1986, when there is a floodtide of dramatic performances of these plays all around to commemorate Tagore’s 125th birth centenary year, we might conclude that then, its age is 50 years.

This paper would like to take a close look at this period, namely 1986-2011, that is the period from 125th to the 150th birth centenary of Tagore. This period also commemorates the 50-75-year period of *Rabindranrityanatya*. The paper aims to analyze the evolutionary aspect of the developing dance drama form during this period in phases of critically analyzing and comparing Tagorean dance drama performances in Sangit-Bhavan. It also aims to take a nuanced informed stance to locate how these dance drama performances have evolved through the years and have been instrumental in both spreading and presenting the cultural heritage of the dance form of *Rabindra Nritya*.

Mayar Khela:

Rabindranath Tagore composed the lyrical drama *Mayar Khela* on the request of Sarala Ray. He naturally dedicated the lyrical drama to her. This lyrical drama *Mayar Khela* was first performed in the premises of the Bethune school with the initiative of the group Sakhisamiti on the occasion of the first day of the women art fair (Mahila Shilpo Mela) on December 29, 1988 (15th Poush, 1295 as per the Bengali Calendar).

The advertisement for the same performance was published on 24th December 1988 in the magazine *The India Mirror* that informs: The fair will close every day at 5 p.m. after which a dramatic piece will be performed entirely by ladies.

We learn from the memoir of Saroj Kumar Devi: “Saradadebi plays Shanta in this play; Abhigya Debi performs in the role of Pramada. Pragyasundori Debi, Pratibha Debi, Indira Debi, Priyamvada Debi and the like have performed in various roles in the play.

In terms of acting, Rabindranath Tagore played the crucial role of an advisor in the staging of this lyrical drama. The other performers taking up various roles are:

1. Shanta – Sati Debi
2. Amar— Shanti Dutta
3. Kumar— Rama, daughter of Sudhindranath (probably)
4. Mayakumari – Reba Ray, Joy Das, Maya Roy, Suman Sen and Gouri Das.

In December of 1938, Tagore began metamorphosing the lyrical drama *Mayar Khela* which was heavily reliant on songs to the dance drama form. However, although he had begun work on the re-composition of *Mayar Khela* as a dance drama, he could not complete the work. Shantideb Ghosh says “Tagore brought about a radical change in the play *Mayar Khela* when it was proposed to be performed as dance drama by students in 1935. He incorporated a number of new songs. However, this had remained an unfinished project— the re-composition of *Mayar Khela* as dance drama was neither finished nor has it ever been performed in its entirety.

It can be known in hearsay that parts of *Mayar Khela* have been performed as part of the *Vasantotsav* celebration on the occasion of Dol Purnima in Santiniketan.

Costume and Make-Up:

It has been known from the statement of Indira Debi that the garb of the ‘Sakha’ was Punjabi and Dhoti made of brightly hued satin. Ray would also don a thin line of moustache. The wands in the hands of Mayakumaris had electric bulbs attached on their heads, in imitation of the fairies of the West.

Rabindranath Tagore had designed the stage for this dramatic performance, being inspired by the stage decoration of the West.

When, on the day of *Vasantotsav*, the lyrical drama *Mayar Khela* was performed again in 2004, major changes were noticeable, markedly in stage decoration and dress design. There has been no literature to support this statement. However, some still photographs of the 2004 performance, collected from the archives attest to the same. The performers of this play are—

Pramada – Susmita Ray

Shanta— Moumita Mitra

Amar— Chiranjib Pal

Ashok— Saikat Mukherjee

Kumar— Manju Elangbam

Pramada Sakhi— Mallika Saha, Papiya (Friend of Pramada)

Khan, Sanchita Ray

Dance Direction— Basanta Mukherjee, Debabrata Mukherjee

Performers in Song and Music:

Prashanta Kumar Ghosh

Malay Shankar Chattopadhyay

Manisha Murali

Buddhideb Das

Sunil Kabiraj

Animesh Chandra

Makeup and Styling:

During this time, Ruma Adhikari was in charge of stage decoration. The task of selecting the costumes of performers was also entrusted to her. Mayarkumaris had worn Kerala cotton white sarees with golden borders in the manner of *ghagras*. They had worn *ornas* on their heads, *ornas* or scarves like the ones used in the Manipuri dance.

The character of Pramada had adorned gold ornaments and flower ornaments. The character of Shanta wore silver jewellery.

The noticeable change in the attire of men can be noted in the use of *dhori punjabi*, the use of multihued *uttoriyos* on their shoulders and tied around their waists, and organdy scarves on their heads.

Light:

To give a dramatic colourful effect on the staging, multi-coloured lights were projected on stage, so that the play of multiple colours on

their white *ghagras* would refract and light up the entire stage in magical, ethereal hues.

The use of spot light is noticed on the character, Shanta. For the character of Pramada, spotlight has been used from askance, from the side of the stage. At times, it is also projected on centre stage to spot the concerned actor. The entire stage is at times thrust into darkness in preparation for the next scenes. We get to know from the interview of Basanta Mukhopadhyay, that this time around, digital light had been used.

Musical Instrument:

The musical instruments used in *Mayar Khela* are – Harmonium, Khol, Mandira, Sitar, Esraj, Key-board, Gong, Tabla and the like.

Stage Decoration:

Ruma Adhikari had been in charge of the stage decoration. She would use a blue smokescreen at the back of the stage. Across that, she would attach a big coconut leaf with bits of yellow cloth. Her decoration of the stage would approximate the appearance of a garden on one side. With the flowers and leaves of the *gulan* plant, she would also decorate the side wings at times, though not always.

She had staged *Mayar Khela* at Dakshini in Kolkata to commemorate the 150th birth centenary of Tagore on 24th August 2011, with the help of students and teachers of Sangit Bhavan, Visva Bharati. In 2004, *Mayar Khela* had been performed during *Vasantotsav* in Santiniketan as a lyrical drama (*gitinatyā*). Professor Debabrata Mukhopadhyay and Basanta Mukhopadhyay had been in charge of dance direction. Debabrata Mukhopadhyay and Basanta Mukhopadhyay had taught the performative sections of Pramada, her Sakhi (female friend), Amar, Kumar and Ashok. Basanta Mukhopadhyay had taught and directed the parts played by Shanta and the Maya Kumaris. In 2011, *Mayar Khela* came to be performed as a full-fledged dance drama, leaving out few sections of the original lyrical drama. However, there had been no fundamental change in the dance form performed. There has been no significant change in terms of use of musical instruments and mechanical musical inputs as well.

The performers in the 2011 performance are:

Pramada- Sharmistha Mukhopadhyay

Shanta- Pallabi Mukhopadhyay

Amar- Chiranjib Ray

Ashok- Ambika Bhandarai

Kumar- Sourav Chatterjee

Maya Kumari- Sujata, Rubini, Tamalika, Raja, Sanchayta etc.

Performers in dance and musical accompaniments include—

Manini Mukhopadhyay

Ritapa Mukhopadhyay

Prasanta Kumar Ghosh

Saptarshi Ray

Malay Shankar Chattopadhyay

Sunetra Majumdar

Reshomita Mandy

Sitaram Das

Animesh Chandra

Buddhadeb Das

Sunil Kabiraj

Pratap Hajra

Costume and Make-up:

In the 2011 performance, we noticed the use of embroidered *Kathiawadi* silk sarees in adorning Pramada. She wore handmade *uttoriyos* of Batik silk, ornaments made of the leaves and buds of the *Tagar* blossom. Her hair buns were adorned with jackfruit leaves, stacked in three layers. She would wear a crown on her head made again with the buds of the *Tagar* flowers. Her earrings were made of *Tagar* buds too.

On her neck, she would wear two gold chains, one slightly smaller than the other and golden bangles on her wrists.

For the character of Shanta, Adhikary chose light blue silk sarees with a Batik border. She would wear flower ornaments on her head, neck and hands. She would wear two silver chains on her neck and silver bangles in her hands.

It has been a conscious choice to use gold and silver ornaments for the two characters, so that on stage they do not look interchangeable, so that their distinction is marked to the spectators.

The uniqueness of such styling of costume, make-up and accessories of Pramada and Shanta also attribute to the uniqueness of their respective individual character.

Professor Sudhiranjan Mukhapadhyay had chosen cotton *punjabis* (*kurtas*) for the male character. These *punjabis* were beautifully decorated by him with fabric work. The male character did not sport any accessories or ornaments to speak of.

The Mayakumaris wore fantastic jewellery on their arms, waists and wrists. These ornaments that were made by Prof Mukhapadhyay caught the attention of the spectators. They were made using cardboard cut-outs adorned with his unique *alpana* motifs.

Changing times have led to much change in the outlook and overall styling of the characters. New items have been added to the make-up regimen, that included— the eye-liner, pancake, panstick, kajal, brushes, shadow-palette, lipstick and so on.

Stage decoration:

Around this time, Prof Sudhiranjan Mukhapadhyay had made use of his unique shell of doing *alpana* to bring in extraordinary change in stage decoration, like never before. From the very initial days, it has been a custom in Santiniketan that the groups engaged in music and song would sit at the back of the stage and the same goes with dance drama as well. There would be two wings in the front for the actors for entry into the stage and for exit, whatsoever. In case of some dance-dramas, there would be decoration on these wings too but not in all plays, where they would be simply be kept bare. For the back screen of the stage,

a dark blue screen would be used. These would be a yellow screen to demarcate the space assigned for the group of singers and musicians. Depending on the context of the play, the space allocated for the group of singers and musicians on stage is decorated as well. It is treated very much as part of the main stage.

Light:

Light is improvised according to the contexts of the scene presented – be it spotlight or yellow light.

This dance drama *Maya Khela*, which was staged on invitation from Dakshini had earned much applause from its audience.

Chandalika:

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore composed the play *Chandalika* in the second week of the month of August in the year 1933. However, he had first named the play *Chandalini*. This play revolves around the dialogues of two *Chandal* women in the Buddha-era. The play also has 13 songs selected by Tagore. The unique band of musical score led to intensified dialogue exchange in the play. Tone and temper of songs could escape from the usual rigour to lend form to variegated evocation of emotion on stage.

In her book *Nritya*, Pratima Debi has observed that the Santiniketan style of dance saw its new evolved look in the dance drama *Chandalika*. This style of dancing does not follow any scripted rulebook. The dance of *Chandalika* is inspired from many a South Indian classical dance form. However, in its deliverance, it does not look like its original South Indian classical version. The dance of *Chandalika* takes motivation in the primal urges of the human nature.

Pratima Debi states, “the music has been so potent, that even though there is no acting via dancing onstage, the music alone has the potency to communicate to its audience the very cadence of dialogues and concessational exchange in *Chandalika*.”

During the beginning of January, 1938, Pratima Debi chose a few scenes of the prose play *Chandalika* with the intention of arranging it

into a dance-drama. Thus we can say, it was in the year 1938 that the dance-drama *Chandalika* as we know it today came to be from its original prose drama form.

It would be relevant to quote the poem '*Jalapatra*' from the book *Parishes* here: '*Prabhu, tumi Pujoniyo Amar Kijaat, Jano Taha Rey Jibannata. Ling.*' *Taboo sobar dwar thele keno elo kon dukkhe ..*

Hey Mohan, Neme ese tumi jare korcho grahan,

Soundaryerarghya tar toma pane kosukbahan.

['*Prabhu*', you are generational. What is do you know that, o lord of life. Caste still making its way through as many doors why did he come? In what grief

O that noble one, the one you have received having so alighted/

May the gift of beauty be appraised toward. You.]

Later, Tagore has incorporated this poem into the prose version of *Chandalika*, albeit changes and finally, he has improvised the poem to suit even the needs of the dance-drama version of the play. Thus the prose play *Chandalika*, written in 1933 can be said to have, taken root in the poem "*Jalapatra*" written in 1932. The later dance drama *Chandalika* composed in 1938 definitely germinated from the prose play written in 1933.

"Jalapatra"- Chandalika- Chandalika

Poem—prose —play—dance- drama

(1932- 1933- 1938)

Metamorphosis' To illustrate the trans formative from the prose to the lyrical version of the drama, let us take an example.

Mother: you amaze me. The day has worn off to be afternoon. In the scorching sun, the earth simmers. It is hard to step in the scorching ground. The water for home has been drawn long back in the morning. The neighbour girl carried Shobi water to their homes. Look how the crow parts its lips to cry in heat, perched on that branch of the Amlaki tree and you are barking in this April sun without any work?

Prakriti: Yes, mother, I am worshipping.

Mother: wonder ! for whom?

Prakriti: for the one who has called me

Transformation:

Mother: Wonder what you think on your own fiddling around

See the day wears off

Mother: you amaze me my girl

What has become of you?

Prakriti: Yes, mother, I sit in the seat of worship

After this *Chandalika* is next staged on January 1939 at Singhasadan in Santiniketan for the recreation of the Maharaja of Tripura. It was performed again on the consecutive days of 9-10 February at the play house ‘Shree’ in Kolkata. The actors were—

Prakriti- Nandini Debi

Mother- Mrinalini Debi

Buddhist Mendicant- Kelu Nayyar

The curd Seller- Anangalal

The Bangle seller- Maki

Sakhi (female)- Subratim Anu, Mamata, Sujata, Urmi

Post this, *Chandalika* came to be performed again in the year 2007 on the occasion of *Vasantotsav*. The direction of dance was shouldered by the then professors of Manipuri and Kathakali department of Sangit-Bhavan, namely – Owaikhom Hemanta Kumbi, Basanta Mukhopadhyay, P. S. Basunni Owaikhom Hemanta Kumar had choreographed the dance of Prakriti in lines with the Manipuri classical dance form. The dance of the mother, curd-seller, bangle-seller, that of female companions (*sakhis*), and valets/attendants (*anuchar*) were respectively directed and choreographed by professors P. S. Basunni and Basanta Mukhyapadhyay.

The actors were:

Prakriti- Rinki Mahata

Mother- Shwelanwita Das

The curd seller- Ambika Bhandari

The bangle seller- Swaraj Chatterjee

Buddhist Mendicant- Owaikhom Hemanta Kumar

Anuchar (Valet)- Sourav Chatterjee

Sakhis (female companions)- Jamalika De, Asmita Bhattacharya, Puja Gupta, Sanchayita Rayak.

Band of Singers and Musicians :

Song: Professor Malay Shankar Chattopadhyay

Prashnta Kumar Ghosh

Manini Mukhopadhyay

Tabla- Sitaram Das

Synthesizer- Animesh Chandra

Esraj- Buddhadeb Das

Mandira- Pratap Hazra

Light:

Light of vibrant hues like red, blue and myriad other colours was used onstage during the '*maya*' dance of the mother. Softer lights were used during scenes where Ananda or Prakriti would be on stage.

Stage Decoration:

During that time, Ruma Debi would decorate the stage using *gulan* flowers, leaves and *Uttoriyos* (handspun scarves) the band of singers and musicians would sit in a row towards the back of the stage as had been the protocol earlier too.

Make up and costume:

The mother would be dressed up in Bichitrapuri sarees. She would don *uttoriyos* around her waist and on her shoulder. She would be made to wear her saree in such a way that her ankles would be visible. She would be made to wear silver jewellery. Her hair would be fashioned in unique style. Her hair would be pulled in a tight bun either on the right or the left side of her head. The very styling of the character ‘Mother’ would be such that it bases no scope for any softness or tenderness.

In case of the character Prakriti, her dress is predominantly a ‘*ghagra*’ till the first scene where she draws water. After she gives water to the Buddhist mendicant and sings ‘*Phul Bole Dhonyo Ami*’ (Flower says grateful I am), she is made to wear sarees. Prakriti wears silver ornaments in her hands, feet and neck. Her bun is tight in the middle of her head. Her hair is decorated with Debdaru Leaves.

The male character wear dhoti banyan and *Uttoriyo* around their waist. The costume of the valet (*anuchar*) was unprecedented. He was made to wear certain ornaments used primarily in case of Sinhalese dance. He wore ornaments in his hands, upper-arms and neck and had a belt tied across his waist.

Due to huge turnover of spectators, for the occasion of *Vasantotsav*, during this time the venue was shifted for the first time from Gour Prangan to ashram math. Around one lakh people turned up to watch the performance.

Comparing the performance during the two time frames:

After conceiving of the performance of 1988 from veiled description, memories and exchange of letters, when we came to watch the performance of the lyrical play *Mayar Khela* in 2004, we could discern the radical change that was observable in every dimension – starting from the light used, to stage decoration, to the kind of costumes performers wore to the sort of performance and musical instruments devised.

Make up and costume:

The costume of the male companions, the *Sakhas* in the 1988 performance was spectacular. They wore satin Panjabi and dhoti. They donned a fine line of moustache. The *mayakumaris* held electric torches in their hands. This was how the performers were adorned then.

There was slight change in the costume of the *Sakhas* during the 2004 performers. They still wore satin Dhoti and Panjabi. However, there was heavier precedence on make up now and a noticeable change was the use of organdy on their heads.

The *Mayakumaris* no longer had torches. However, there was renewed emphasis on their dress now. And still photographs attest to the vital change, apparent in the costumes of and accessories of Pramada and Shanta.

In the 2011 performance, we see Pramada wearing Kathiawadi sarees and shanta, Batik-sarees Mukhopadhyay made unique ornaments for this performance.

From the archives, we have been able to locate many pictures of various scenes of the 1938 performance of *Chandalika*, that depict her in apparel other than the *ghagra*. Dance drama *Chandalika* does not mark much change in terms of costume.

Stage decoration:

Earlier, Tagore would instruct to do stage decoration in imitation of the western style. In 2004, Ruma Adhikari had decorated the stage using gulancha flowers and leaves. The group of singers would still sit behind the stage. In 2011, Sudhiranjan Mukhopadhyay had been entrusted with the stage decoration of the plays. He brought in an innovative new style of stage decoration with the help of his immaculate and beautiful *alpna* designs.

Application of dance forms:

There has been a noted difference in the use of dance forms for the lyrical drama as compared to the performance of 2008. It was in 2011 that the lyrical drama *Mayar khela* came to be composed as a dance drama.

It has been noted that at times, the Buddhist mendicant in *Chandalika* enters the stage from the left and at times from the right.

Musical instruments:

In the earlier time frame mentioned, musical instruments like Esraj, Table, Harmonium, Bamboo, Mandira, Gong and the like were used in dance-dramas. A noted difference in the post 2000 era, is the use of keyboard. Chanda, Edoka also came to be in use during this time.

The drama of dance-dramas and lyrical dramas have covered a long distance from these performances. It is debatable whether the tradition has changed for the better or for worse. However, we might argue that the impact desired from a Tagorean dance drama performance has not been affected in the process. The place it holds in the heart of the admirers of Tagore's work remains unchanged. The primary reason for that is despite experimenting with many forms and techniques, Santiniketan has remained steadfast in its allegiance to institutional rituals and norms.

Sagit Bhavan has strived to maintain its tradition of excellence in terms of *Rabindra charcha* since a century now since Santiniketan is the seat of culture centring. Tagore's work and aesthetics, everyone concerned has remained alert and aware while dabbling in various experiment action and evolution.

It had been an earnest striving so that the culture is never far from its roots. It is important for the main stream to branch out into several projects that would be relevant to the time and age and more entertaining and successful onstage. Such addition and alternations to suit the modern stage might be welcome, however, the primary aim has always been to pressure the tradition.

It is noted that there has been a concerted effect at preserving the originality and uniqueness of Tagore's songs, poems, esraj, Rabindranritya (the dance form of Tagore), Rabindranath (the plays of tagore) at Santiniketan. The original lyrical play *Mayar Khela* is being performed in the format of dance-drama. It retains songs from the original, however, it incorporate a new style of presentation, genre of its performances

onstage this original texts happens written the constraint of making the performance successful written a very limited time frame. However, this unique initiation of Santiniketan to refurbish the original Tagore work marks a noted difference from the earlier era, where increasingly liberal and free thinking is taking precedence over all this is our faith that to there is very Tagorean. However, this thought process is also undergoing change. In a long interval of time, we can discern very little change be it a single song or dance, a certain moment, costume, stage decoration, application of musical instrument and so on. Mostly same traditions are maintained in the performance but for insignificant small change here and there, for these is a tendency to look at the original tradition of Tagorean dance drama as the norm and the ideal one plays in Santiniketan in a certain way, however, with the change in time, place and person, the performance would change as when the same plays would be stayed in Kolkata he would bring in other aspect of presentation to make the performances come alive for the changed setting Tagore himself would do that. However, Visva-bharati seeks to maintain the norm set by Tagore in terms of his dance drama performance. There is very little scope for liberty with other plays have become so Tagore's dance dramas rely extensively on the tradition built by the former practitioners and the idea of culture instilled in the institution of Tagore itself.

Conclusion:

Later, some songs from musical dramas were incorporated into dance dramas. This newfound freedom in editing and the initiative to successfully execute a performance within a specific timeframe in Santiniketan have allowed the new generation to gradually free themselves from the influence of the older generation and think independently. We believe that this thought process is also Rabindrik (aligned with Rabindranath Tagore's ideals) - there is no doubt about that.

However, it changes according to place, time, and context. Rabindranath himself staged a play one way in Santiniketan, and when performed on the stage in Kolkata, he presented the play, its form, and its subject matter, keeping in mind a different flow of thought according to the place, time, and context. In terms of staging Rabindranath's

dance dramas, Visva-Bharati still adheres to that tradition. While other plays involve much more experimentation, Rabindranath's plays, performed with constant dedication to Rabindranath's realization and perception and following the tradition of the predecessors, are achieving considerable success.

Reference:

1. Rudraprasad Chakraborty, Rangamancha o Rabindranath: Samakaleen Pratikriya, Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Private Limited, Kolkata, 1995, p. 41.
2. Tabed., p. 42.
3. Tabed., p. 45.
4. Pratima Devi, Nritya, Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Publishing Department, 1356, p. 33.
5. Gitabitan by Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati, Kolkata, 2015.
6. Gurudev Rabindranath o Adhunik Bharatiya Nritya by Shantidev Ghosh, Ananda Publishers Private Limited, Kolkata, 1943.
7. Jibansmriti by Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati, Kolkata, 2014.
8. Rabindranather Gitinatya o Nrityanatya by Pranoy Kumar Kundu, Bangiya Sahitya Sansad, Kolkata, 1965.

Our Contributors

1. **Sheila T. Cavanagh**, (USA) Ph. D. Chair Professor, Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor, Emory university, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.
2. **Dr. Tapu Biswas**, M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D, D.Litt. is currently Associate Professor, Department of English, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. He is also the Vice-Principal, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva - Bharati. Dr Biswas was formerly the Assistant Registrar of Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He is Honorary General Secretary of the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India and is also the Hony. Secretary of Tagore Gandhi Institute for Culture Studies and Service-Learning (both Govt. Registered Educational and Cultural Societies). As organizational Coordinator, Dr Biswas contributed greatly to the success of the International World Shakespeare Conferences held in Kolkata and across India from 2000 till date. His authored books Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot: Indian Interpretations through Critical and Analytical Studies, Translations and Stage Productions* and *Indian Response to Western "Theatre of the Absurd"* Vols I & II, and *Badal Sircar* (the last published by Sahitya Akademi under its Makers of Indian Literature series) have been widely acclaimed both in India and abroad. He is a Recipient of UGC Research Award Post Doctoral Fellowship 2014-15, recipient of the International Mother Teresa Award in 2021. He is co-editor of the journal *Theatre International* (ISSN NO 2378- 2036) and the corresponding editor of *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences* (ISSN NO 23474777), both of which journals are Peer Reviewed publications indexed in the UGC-CARE list.

3. **Dr. Swati Roy Chowdhury**, Assistant Professor in English
Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College, Kolkata, India
4. **Prof. Dr Aparajita Hazra**, Former Registrar (actg) Dean, Faculty
of Arts and Professor, Department of English, Diamond Harbour
University, India.
6. **Loiya Leima Oinam**, Assistant Professor, Department of
English, Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal, Manipur.
7. **Soumyarup Bhattacharjee** is presently an Assistant Professor
of English at Swami Vivekananda University, West Bengal, India.
He is also pursuing his Ph.D. at the Department of Humanities
and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay. His current research is centred
on transcultural approaches to contemporary Gothic literature
in South and Southeast Asia. His other areas of interest include
adaptation studies, postcolonial Asian writing, and contemporary
horror literature/films.
8. **Shreyoshi Dhar** is currently serving as Assistant Professor,
Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University. She is
pursuing her Ph.D. programme from Rabindra Bharati University.
Previously, she had also completed her B.A. (Hons.), M.A. and
M.Phil. from the same institution. She is also in possession of
a second M.A. Degree in English Language Teaching from
Netaji Subhas Open University, alongside a Post Graduate
Diploma in Translation and Transcultural Studies from School
of Languages and Culture, Rabindra Bharati University. She has
cleared the UGC-NET examination on multiple instances. Prior
to joining this institution as an Assistant Professor, she worked
as a Guest Faculty in Bengal School of Technology and
Management, had engaged classes at Rabindra Bharati University
since December, 2022 as a Junior Research Fellow along with
being a Resource Person at Rani Rashmoni Green University,
Tarakeshwar since April, 2022, where she was in charge of the
day to day functioning of the Department of English. The areas
of her interest include Victorian Literature, Psychoanalysis, and
Feminism.

9. **Sahin Reja Mondal** is a Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore. He is also working as State Aided College Teacher (Category-I) in the Department of English at Domkal Girls' College, Murshidabad. At the academic level, he completed his graduation in English (Hons.) from Dumkal College under University of Kalyani, West Bengal and postgraduation in English from Guru Ghasidas Central University, Chhattisgarh. Besides, he qualified WBSET in 2019, CGSET in 2020 and NTA-UGC-NET in 2022. His research interests include Postmodern Literature, Postcolonial Literature, African Literature, American Literature, Indian Writing in English, Film Studies, Dalit Literature, Cultural Studies and Partition Literature.
10. **Dr. Shubham Bhattacharjee** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore. He has received his Ph.D. from Rabindra Bharati University. During his research period, he engaged classes at Rabindra Bharati University from July 2019, initially as a Junior Research Fellow and subsequently as a Senior Research Fellow. Previously, he had also pursued his B.A. (Hons.), M.A. and M.Phil. from the same institution. He also possesses a second M.A. Degree in English Language Teaching from Netaji Subhas Open University, alongside a Post Graduate Diploma in Translation and Transcultural Studies. Prior to joining Swami Vivekananda University as an Assistant Professor, he worked as an Assistant Professor at Sister Nivedita University. His areas of interest include Romantic Poetry, Victorian Poetry, Modern and Postmodern Literature, 20th Century Literary Theory and Criticism etc.
11. **Dr. Madhumita Roy** did her post-graduation and Ph.D. from the Department of English, Visva-Bharati. Since 2012, she has been researching on Rabindranath's engagement with science. She worked as a Research Assistant in *Kalanukramik Rabindra Rachanabali* Project under Rabindra Bhavana, Visva-Bharati from

2010-12. She also worked as a Project Assistant to the renowned Tagore Scholar Prof. Uma Dasgupta in her book, published by Oxford University Press, which came out in 2018. She worked as a Project Fellow in the UGC Sponsored DRS SAP project in the Dept of English, Visva-Bharati and also acted as a guest faculty in the same department. She also taught in the Department of English, Adamas University for more than four years. Currently, she is working as an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University.

12. **Dr. Shantanu Siuli** is an Assistant Professor of English at the School of Humanities & Social Sciences; Swami Vivekananda University; Barrackpore. He has completed his Masters from University of Calcutta and his PhD from Seacom Skills University. With an experience of over 10 years in the academic sector. His research interests revolve around 16th & 17th Century Literature, Renaissance Studies, Ancient European Classical Literature, Divine-aesthete Theory and Devotional Literature on Interdisciplinary Approaches.
13. **Dr. Rituparna Chakraborty** is Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University. She has done her M.A. in English from West Bengal State University and M.Phil. from Rabindra Bharati University. She was awarded Ph.D. from Raiganj University. Her areas of interest include: Popular Literature, Gender Studies and Postcolonial Studies. She is a Nominated Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), University of Edinburgh and Research Affiliate of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTS).
14. **Dr Naorem Ahanjao Meitei**, Assistant Professor, Manipuri Department, Manipur University, Canchipur.
15. **Sharmistha Mukhopadhyay**, Ph.D. Scholar, Sangeet Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.

The Editors, TI Vol XVIII

Subir Kumar Dhar, Ph.D, is currently Dean School of Humanities & Director School of International Languages, Former Honorary Director, Tagore Gandhi Centre, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata and Former Professor and Head, Department of English at Rabindra Bharati University. Internationally acclaimed Blake and Shakespeare expert. Author of two books and numerous papers.

Bryan Reynolds, (USA) Ph.D UCI, is Chancellor's Professor, Department of Drama Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine, C A 92697-2775.

Sheila T. Cavanagh, (USA) Ph.D, Chair Professor, Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

Papia Mitra Ph.D is Associate Professor, English Department, at Surendranath College for Women, Kolkata, India. She has done her research on Comparative Religion in New Zealand and is a specialist on myths and Sanskrit Literature.

The TI Manifesto

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, EAST-WEST Perspectives on Theatre: the title tells you where we are at. This is an international journal-cum-Drama book. In the constitution of its Editorial Board, in its wide-angle global readership, in its range and scope of subject matter and focus, in its selection of experts and specialist writers this publication caters to the frontierless international community of the Performing Arts and Artists.

This publication hopes to enrich the Indian theatre culture in concrete ways—for the present dramatic culture lacks a creative correlation between theory and praxis. Our connections and involvement in University Performing Arts, Drama and Literature Departments makes **Theatre International** favorably situated to bridge the grey areas between pedagogy and performance. On the other hand, theatre is ultimately performance. Hence papers and articles on the productional aspects will find valuable place in all issues of *TI*.

Moreover, the realization that the theatre cuts across both culture and history is evident in the works of our avant-garde theatre thinkers. The University Drama Departments have every access to and special avenues of communication with theatre movements throughout India and abroad. *TI* is committed to the task of making the necessary intercultural linkages and disseminating the available material to theatre enthusiasts and professionals here. Likewise, *TI* can help make the intelligentsia abroad aware of the Indian, Asian and African theatre scene. Hence *TI* can serve as a medium and forum for international cultural exchange.

Both our masthead and our readership include and span high-IQ decision makers in the performing arts spread across the five continents—University Faculty, members of Akademis and theater ensembles,

performing artists and intellectuals, the cultural avantgarde of Europe, America and Asia. The contents of *TI* will thus range from *Kathakali* to *Kabuki*, from the *Yakshagana* to the *Guerilla theatre*, from the *Peking Opera* to the performative processes of the *African folk traditions*, from Tagore to T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare to Stanislavsky, Kafka to Karnad, reflecting and embodying the creative thrust of the global theatre scene.

TI has published and will publish *Special Issues* in future on Brecht, Tagore, Folk theatre, Political theatre, Theatre and Film, Translation, Adaptation and, of course, on Shakespeare among other subject areas.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, under whose aegis *TI* is being published, has helped spearhead the new resurgence of both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare that emerged from the mid-seventies throughout Bengal and India.

Editorial Note

[While all attempts have been made to acknowledge the copyright holders of the source materials used by the Editors and the authors, for any inadvertent infringement of copyright laws the authors of the papers published are solely responsible, not the Editors or the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India or the Avantgarde Press]

TI VOL. XVIII
Peer reviewed UGC approved Journal No : 49202
in 2019 list & 400 in 2022 List
Currently enlisted in UGC CARE LIST
(Sl. No. 436 in 2024 List under
Arts and Humanities Group I Journal)
A Feast of Theatre and Performance, Research and Reviews,
Re-looks and Re-presentations.

≡ **UGC-CARE List, 2019**

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	Action
1	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

≡ **UGC-CARE List, 2022**

The below list is made from the official UGC CARE website and is downloaded from - https://impactfactorforjournal.com/ugc-care-list-journals/					
159	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
400	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

≡ **UGC-CARE List, 2024**

The below list is made from the official UGC CARE website and is downloaded from - https://impactfactorforjournal.com/ugc-care-list-journals/					
436	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	from January - 2020 to Present View

Website Address : www.ssei.org.in
Web Link : <https://ssei.org.in/TI/Vol-XVIII.pdf>



TAGORE GANDHI INSTITUTE / SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY

Avantgarde Press

146, Sarat Bose Road, Subash Nagar,
Dum Dum Cantonment, Kolkata - 700 065 /
6A, Maharaja Nanda Kumar Road
Kolkata-700 029 • Mob. : 98304 05624

ISSN NO: 2378-2036



23782036