

## PANORAMIC VIEW OF CHARACTERS IN TAGORE'S PLAYS

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Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks. It is a new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as the others. Tagore through his writings bids fair to expand with our and humanity is expanding future. To be Indian in thought, feeling, emotion, and experience, yet also to court the graces and submit to the discipline of English for expression, is a novel experiment in creative mutation. The Indian dramatists have bravely run the race and reached the goal and they deserve due recognition English remained in the saddle all along, Indian Drama in English has achieved a new range and power, literacy in English has been steadily growing. Many people know modern Indian thought through the writings of Tagore. To them, as to myself after a lifetime's indignation, it will be a comfort to realize that at least in making English compulsory, at last to the whole world.

The award of Nobel Prize for literature to him was but the beginning on a global scale to which there cannot be many parallels in literary history. He was the one writer who first gained for modern India a place on the world literary scene. His fecundity and vitality were amazing. Sundry Indians trying to accomplish creative self-expression through the English medium has given us Indo-Anglian literature. Tagore chose dramas even the most ethereal of poets cannot, after all be always a poet or a poet always at the top of his form, prose must come break in. Tagore applied his mind to a current problem - social, political, economic - the heart rule the head; and the heart, in its turn beat in response to abiding institutions not the restrictive formulas of creed, caste or customs. The light of the soul's illumination lead him, not the will-of-the-wisp of agonizing dialects.

A romantic nostalgia and a never-ending quest after the fleeting objects of nature are easily perceptible in the play of Tagore. He sees in nature what he himself has put there. Tagore does not deal with ordinary men and women, his individuals are extraordinary men and women such as can best serve his self-expression. The drama or the theatre is at best just as device and an excuse for self-expression. The below mentioned plays are not dramas of circumstances. The characters in these plays are not persons of flesh and blood but the personifications of the poet's own subjective experiences. They function not in the Global world of master but in the realm of spirit. Inner transformation of man is rarely suggested by Tagore to solve the problems of the modern world. Tagore believes in the spiritual evolution of mind, in his enhancement of sympathy across all the abstracts of creed and colour.

### ***The Post Office***

This is the most popular of all Tagore's plays and has been successfully presented on the stage in India and abroad. The central theme of *The Post Office* is love. It has in it ingredients of a tense human drama, a moving fairy tale, and a deeply suggestive spiritual symbol. Amal is a sick child under the protection of Madhab, who dotes on him. Madhab is not his father, he has adopted him and a touch of elusiveness marks the relationship of Amal and Madhab. In the tense moments of his life, Amal does not think of Madhab, but he hears voices coming to him from a distant place, which make him feel that his mother and father are sitting by his side and speaking to him. Madhab is haunted by a fear that as he is not of his flesh and blood, he will, in spite of his best efforts, not be able to save him.

The very first speech of Madhab strikes the keynote,

*“What a state I am in: Before he came, nothing mattered. I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filed with his dear self, and home will be home to me when he leaves.”*

Like Madhab, almost everyone else, except the Headman, establishes a relationship of affection with Amal. Love is essentially creative and it transforms people into better human beings. Madhab, for instance, realized that involvement is better than 'freedom' and more meaningful, because when one is 'free nothing matters.' Again, with him making money was a meaningless passion before Amal came into his life, but now I make money, and as I know, it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy owing to me. Similarly, for the Dairyman, selling becomes a joy owing to his affection for Amal. Amal is in love with life and the living universe, and hence every moment of his life is significant to him. He establishes contact with the external world first with his senses and, when the senses exhaust their capacity, with his imagination. Remember Amal's imaginative recreation to his village. His love of life and the world is so great that his only request to the king when he came would be,

*“I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that may I wonder far and wide, delivering his messages from door to door”.*

As against the values represented by Amal, we have the Physician, who represents book learning and the Headman, who represents power. The Physician, owing to extreme specialization, has lost his capacity for human sympathy through his knowledge is not without its uses. The Headman, who thinks only in terms of power, has no affection, no sympathy; he is full of anger and malice, both of which are destructive.

### ***The Cycle of Spring***

*The Cycle of Springs* is more allegorical than symbolical. The drama does not contain anything, which plays its part in the human context and conveys a hidden meaning. There are two planes of meaning in it which fit into each other, but which do not intersect. The conception of drama is in simple, but not thin, because it is worked through the extraordinarily varied activities of Nature, which destroys beauty simple that they may be recreated in all their entire glorious splendour. The human drama is not so good as the lyrical interludes, as the Old Man is represented to be non-existent. The presentation of Death is lop-sided, the view which is expressed is that the terrors of Death (the gaping mouth and the head without a body of the dragon are nothing), but illusions, which are, in the words of Tagore, at least true as illusions and

terrors of death are as real or as unreal as the beauty of flowers and the sweetness of the songs of the bird.

The conception of a king thinking of renunciation at the arrival of old age and his being brought back by a poet to a richer realization of life's duties and joys is happy, and the arguments and ideas of the poet expressed in a wealth of images are, indeed, compelling. The portrait of the Minstrel is by far the excellent thing in the drama, as he sees and hears with his whole body. He is different from the other characters; he is blind, as such, he cannot participate in the adventure of the young men and stands apart, but he mystically is capable of seeing into the hearts of things. He becomes a distinctive character not merely through his songs and speeches, but also through his actions and the influence which he exercises over his associates with whom he has little in common. He is calm and confident, as he can see and hear what is a sealed book to them, when these young men are stricken with terror and are doubtful about their mission. The young men like him, do not believe in what he says, but they cannot dismiss him, for his presence is a source of inspiring courage in them. They fear to disturb him, for he conveys mysterious messages and having no insight of their own, they can have sights of the truth by simply looking at them. When it is night for others, morning seems to dawn for the blind man. When all the mystery is gone and the leader returns to narrate his experiences, the Old Man retires unperceived.

### ***Red Oleanders***

Red Oleander is an allegory. We are introduced in this play to a titanic king in an underworld behind a network of controlling material forces and human destinies. He is portrayed by numerous touches, which make his apparition rather impressive. He may not be an individual and his physiognomy is not clearly defined and distinctly outlined, yet he attains to a stature which is distinctively his own by the terror he inspires in others and the influence he wields over them. The characters in the play are all different from one other, but over all of them is cast the blighting power of the king. The king has strength as empty within himself, which makes him tired, sick and he has to join the flag-worship in order to rejuvenate his failing spirits. The portrait of the king is indeed, very grand.

The network represents the intricate barrier by means of which the industrial organization of men's professionalism hides personal relationships. The barrier is erected partly by science, partly by racial prejudices, and partly by power. The barrier is there and it is on account of it that the king cannot enter into the life of his people and his people cannot enter into his. The caves of the yaksha town where nuggets of gold are being made and gathered represent the world of modern industrialism. It is an underworld because it is cut-off (although money is made here plenty) from the open air of love, freedom, and joy, which is symbolized by the tassel of red oleander. Flowers belong to the upper world and red is the colour, standing for love and liberty.

Red Oleanders has a plot consisting of exposing development and denouncement. The central theme relates to the killing of Ranjan and the change that this incident and Nandini's influence bring about in the life of the king who begins to fight against himself with Nandini's help. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore the significance of the action is explained thus: "She (Nandini) is not an abstraction, but is pursued by an abstraction, like one tormented by a ghost. And this is the drama." Although Nandini is portrayed as a real woman, not much is said of the positive side of her life as a human being. She is more a critic of king than a woman is with a personality of her own. Her love for Ranjan is laid an emphasis upon, but he is too shadowy a personality indistinctly drawn, to be taken as a definite symbol or as a living human being. The

hidden significance seems to have clouded the human drama of – love and death, and there is a good deal of confusion even about many other characters as well. Some of the satires such as that of Kenaram Gosam are too broad and the exposition of the play is so long that the other parts are simply gone through hurriedly. In spite, these shortcomings, Red Oleander is a remarkable drama principally because of the portrait of the king, who fittingly symbolizes power, greed, and deartness of modern industrialism.

### ***The King of the Dark Chamber***

What is just an echo in the Red Oleanders; the king emerges as a man later on. The king in The King of the Dark Chamber is a more complex figure. He may be regarded as part of a detailed allegory with pronounced traces of the Vaishnava ideology. The unseen king is God who, like a husband, woes the human soul represented by Queen Sudarshan. Their place of meeting is dark chamber, which may stand for the inner consciousness where man may become one with God. Salvation, according to Tagore, is not to be achieved in the lonely corners of the soul only but that will be won in the wide universe, for God lives at the place where the tiller is tilling the hard soil and the path maker is breaking stones. The Queen is united to her king at the end of the drama; it, in other words, signifies the human soul at last has realized God within itself. When this occurs, the king throws open the door of the dark room and Sudarshana is asked to come with him outside, --into the light. The king is dark, his appearance ugly and as forbidding as God is without a form and the presence of the formless is intolerable to the human eye. Suvarna, the pretender is an embodiment of sensuous beauty isolated from spirituality. He is an imposter and a pretender; this king of Kanchi, who makes use of Suvarna, not a pretender as he stands for the positivistic attitude which does not give any importance to the unseen unless it has been turned into the scene. Two parallel sorts of meaning are brought out in the play; it is not what constitutes the excellence of the play which consists in the fact that symbols in it are not only magnificently conceived, but one plane of meaning goes very easily into and completed in the other.

The poet's meaning which is more mystical than political seems to be that although love for order and harmony is a principle inherent in the very nature of man, yet in his self-interest man thinks that it is against everybody's self-interest and the acceptance and observance of discipline enjoins sacrifice of desire for immediate gain out of consideration for needs of other. The love for discipline, which is inherently both an indwelling instinct and an external necessity, is the most appropriately expressed through the symbol of the unseen king who allows his subjects complete freedom, but at the same time saves them from anarchy and chaos.

Queen Sudarshana is also a remarkable creation. She is all the passionate longings of a woman in love, she is possessed of all the doubts, ecstasies, frailties and vanities of an ordinary human being but her pride vanishes in the end and her soul is purged and she knows, and recognizes her king. There seems to be no difference between her and an ordinary woman of the earth, but her passion is more intense than that of a normal woman and her vanities more foolish and her mistakes enormous and her process of purgation more difficult and strenuous. Sudarshana is a woman in love but she also is a symbol of the human soul yearning to transcend earthly limitations and reach God.

The problem confronting his characters are to be resolved less with the application of the mind and more to do with expansion of once conscience or consciousness. According to him, which a sympathetic approach and regard to the fellow human being sensitivities could go a long way in reduce in not only the inequalities but also help to strengthen and promote harmonious

relationships among the people in the society. In this respect talks about the unity of consciousness that should bind the individual members of humankind and help them to progress collectively and evolve as the superior most species on this earth. Here, he echoes the sentiments expressed by Walt Whitman, the eminent American poet of 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

But, after all, why must we bother about the precise meaning of this or that play? The meaning of a poetic play is so rocky substance. And we know that even a rock is but hard in appearance. Break the rock into atoms: and the atoms into the hundred or more sub atomic particles that are gyrating wildly and where are we? We have to grope towards a meaning, And even if we have only a tenuous something to hold on to, the adventure itself will not have been in vain. So is with Tagore's plays.

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