

**DRIFTING IN STEREOTYPE GENDER ROLES OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST
IN TAGORE'S DANCE DRAMAS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHITRANGDA,
CHANDALIKA AND SHYAMA.**

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Abstract

Gender is a wide term that is not just related to femininity or masculinity but it deals with sex and desires; its socio-political and socio-cultural phenomenon. The different school of thoughts related to gender trouble, in the form of feminism, gay/lesbianism and transgender sexuality emerged as the post effects of colonialism, racism and continental drifts in the nineteenth century. During this period, Indian society was stirring with the wave of feudal feminism as fettered and dependent India was struggling for the basic human rights for women and downtrodden. Nobel-prize winner Tagore acquires a feminist concern for the most of his literature. The current paper deals with the analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's dance dramas Chitrangda, Chandalika and Shyama in the context of feminine desires and its fulfillment in every possible way; henceforth drifting in age-old stereotype gender roles take place. Researcher's aim is to analyze the socio-cultural way of dealing with women that create a cultural mind set in people. The study explores that how these dance dramas raise the issue of emancipation for women's rights and how the bold and assertive portrayal of admirable and desirable woman concludes as the regretful manifestation and spiritual transformation.

Keywords: Gender, Tagore, Dance Drama, stereotype gender roles, feminist discourse, spiritual transformation.

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A gender stereotype consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. Gender roles are defined by behaviors, but gender stereotype are beliefs and attitude about masculinity and femininity (*Gender Stereotype: Masculinity and Femininity* 160). Gender roles enfold a man or a woman in their own identity that have been designed by society for them according to their visible strength, capacity and biological phenomenon. Alice Eagly states defining gender roles, in her *Sex Difference in Social Behavior* that ‘... are shared expectations of behavior given one’s gender. For example, gender roles might include women investing in the domestic role and men investing in the worker role’ (states and burke). This distribution of work set a particular tradition of dealing with men and women which followed by generations. It is society’s archetypal dealing that creates a cultural mind set in people regarding gender and its roles.

Drifts occur when people drive against conventional margins due to their different socio-political and socio-cultural environment, yet personal ambitions, competence, expectations and desires are some of the most influential ingredients. Desires play vital part behind drifting in stereotypes as they push and manipulate people to select for unusual. They can be the root cause of every dilemma if this unusual leads one to the forbidden path. ‘There is a limit to the working power of human being, but no limit to desires’, says Swami Vivekanand during his lecture on *Jnana-Yoga*. He further says about mankind that is ‘... dying, still filled with ungratified desires, we have to be born again and again in the vain search for satisfaction’ (26). They cannot be satisfied by its continuous fulfilling; rather one should seek satisfaction in its surrender. Swami Vivekanand seeks solution in its eradication and says, ‘Kill the desire and get rid of it’ (27). However killing of desires and opt within prescribed choices are the basic lessons of life which has been introducing to people in India since their childhood; to prevent civilization from

barbarism. One may raise question about the efficiency of the idea of containment of desires in order to maintain law and order in society. Newton puts different perspective regarding suppression of energy through his third law of motion that every action has a similar and opposite reaction (*Philosophiae Naturalis*). It suggests that censorship of any kind of force results only in the form of exaggerated one that may or may not be up to the standards. Here a study is made to discover the drifts that occur by uncontrolled desires and its consequences in one's life.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), was a writer of immense creativity. Started with writing poetry at very tender age, he slowly began to gain mastery over every genre of literature. His efforts was rewarded him with the noble prize in 1913. In the later years of his life he was centered upon the creation of astonishingly inventive dance drama by selecting some of his songs from the wide range of *rabindra-sangeet* and fusing them with *abhinaya* thus giving birth to a new form of *natya* that is *nritya natya* or dance drama which Tagore himself defined as 'surrender of body and mind to a rhythmic unity' (*Tagore's Mystique of Dance* 111). Embellished with original expressions and beautiful theatrical presentation, *rabindra-nritya* titles as *rabindra-nritya-natya* when applied in 'dance dramas'. Researcher's aim to take in account the feminist discourse of Tagore's three Dance Dramas; *Chitrangda*, *Chandalika* and *Shyama*, which stimulate the shifting in ethical approach of protagonist.

Tagore was much ahead of his time. The spirit of feminism is well expressed in his works through the sensitive representation of mental atmosphere and the intensive heart desires of his female protagonist, who know how to reach their object of desire; by hook or crook. It is his Chitra who does not dip into the feeling of frustration when Arjuna does not accept her love proposal as she is lacking in feminine beauty; apparently says to her that he was on vow of celibacy. Then so determined Chitra prays to God Madana and God Vasanta for achieving heavenly beauty. She says to gods that she is not '... the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence feeling it with nightly tears and covering it with daily patient smile, a widow from her birth' (1.1.78-81). Her character shows major drift in established role of women that has been suggesting by society, as 'good women do not initiate'. Thus Tagore's women are progressive and feel free to put forward their proposals. The feeling of love is an unusual experience for tom-boyish Princess Chitra, who is single child and the only inheritor of Manipur state. Her parents

put another example of drifting in the typecast parenting of their time as they take their single female child, as a son and now 'Prince' Chitra is far from femininity rather handles the department of defense of the kingdom. 'Prince' Chitra is unable to take the rejection with grace as her 'manly' ego does not allow her to accept this defeat. She takes it as another war opportunity to prove herself. So she determines to have false enchanting beauty for hunting his heart. Now it is another aspect that why does 'the warrior' Chitra choose 'beauty' as her weapon against him whether she is able to make him loose any battle with her tremendous fighting skills. She may not be beautiful according to the social norms but is highly intelligent and knows the weakness of a man's heart. Apparently she says to Madana during her prayers '... unnumbered saints and sages have surrendered the merits of their lifelong penance at the feet of a woman' (1.1.69-72). Down the surface she admits her drawbacks and wants to overcome.

It shows that how the stereotype faiths have grown their roots that even a Princess at the cost of her self-respect, wants the love of a man. Thus social status can't change human feelings, here is Chitra who is a princess and there are Shyama the royal court dancer and Prakriti, the *Chandalika* who is a low caste 'untouchable woman'. Shyama is beautiful courtesan dancer and has many admirers. But she chooses Bajrasen as a love partner, who is a rich merchant and is in search of a suitable bride. Havoc falls on their dreams when state-police grab him for the charge of stealing. For saving the dream of a secured life, she takes an inhuman step. She manipulates Utthiyo; her young admirer who loves her by heart, to sacrifice on the behalf of Bajrasen. When two people do not share any relationship; they share the bond of humanity that express in the form of compassion, benevolence, humanistic love and mutual respect for each other. One may find its shocking when Shyama breaks these common faiths of humanity. Prakriti, as proposed by the title *Chandalika* belongs to a caste 'chandal' assigned for the work of cremations of dead bodies and comes under the category of 'shudras'. Cast and gender being the major forms of discrimination in the Indian society make life even more difficult for individuals who belong to both minority group (*Gender and Cast Intersectionality in the Indian context* 11). Prakriti is a 'chandal' and also a 'woman', so faces discrimination throughout her life and develops into a rebellious girl. She presents imperative shift in prescribed societal 'gender' and 'caste' roles when she refuses to have faith in ancient religion and says 'A religion that insults is a false religion' (1.9.23-24).

Colors enter in Prakriti's life when Buddhist hermit Ananda asks for water to her. When she denies owing to her caste than far from worldly affairs, bhikshu Ananda says '... I am a human being so also you are and all water is clean and holy that cools our heat and satisfies our thirst' (1.5.5-8). He gives her teachings of equality and says, 'Don't humiliate yourself; self humiliation is a sin worse than self-murder' (1.8.3-6). She witnesses a pleasing transformation inside. Gerg says in *Tagore's Chandalika: A Fusion of Myth and Reality*, about her changing inner self that '... develops a sense of new self respect and a new consciousness for her right as a human being and of her worth as a woman'. And realization of selfhood for Prakriti, comes with fragrance of love in her life and she makes her growth as a 'woman' with the statement that 'He come to give me the honor of quenching Man's thirst' (*Rabindranath Tagore: Symbolism in His Plays* 89). Low caste, less experienced young girl Prakriti takes compassion of bhikshu as 'love'.

Thus love is innocent when pure but it is sly when turns selfish and it manipulates when converts into 'power-struggle'. Chitra turns envious when Arjuna rejects her innocent call of love and gives a humorous look towards her manly attire. She could not forget the insult and her 'love' becomes a bet to win over him that makes her enter into the web of lies and illusion. She leaves behind her reign and people helpless; to get the love of a man who already rejected her twice. Shyama could have drawn any other solution for saving Bajrasen. But she drags Uttiyo to death. Prakriti falls upon Ananda, who treats her with respect and equality; she did not receive ever in her life. She manipulates her mother to haul him through the black-magic for her sinful intentions. Strangely, Pathan M.D. sees this act as a 'stand for the revolt against conventions', and says 'she proves that a woman has equal right to choose her life member' (*Feminism Reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's Play: Chitra, Natirpuja and Chandalika*). Though Tagore's heroines take bold steps that reflect their free will and determination. Freedom however does not suggest becoming obsessed about lover and cross every limit that may result as repentance. One may put question, where is love? Tagore's protagonists are *atmamugdha* and present 'narcissus' image, beautiful, proud, egoist and know how to love themselves only. Conversely there are many examples of pure love in Indian history like Saint Meera and Radha which stand for the divine love. Pure love knows how to give but their selfish love knows only how to opt for their personal gain. Utthio happily steps forward when she asks for sacrifice hence he stands for true love. Shyama's love was selfish like Chitra's love. What to say for Prakriti, who does not think

about her mother who dies in the process at last. She puts hermit Ananda's lifelong penance and all his goodness to dust; and converts him into just a living being blinded by lust and craving for sex, like an animal. She presents an extremely selfish character; and rarest of rare major 'drift' in the role of traditional Indian daughter and in image of an ideal lover.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote at a time when the pre-independent India was witnessing mass-upheavals and upbringings. There are many writers who wrote for the improvement of women in the late 19th century. Raja Rao, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Sir Arubindo, Mulkraj Anand and Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya are some of them. But Tagore's heroines are stronger and different. All the three characters belong to different time and space stand on the same ground where emotions and desires are concerned. The attitude they show in dealing with love is that all is fair in love and war. This phrase can create ripples in societal beliefs when it comes to its application. To what extent a woman can go to get her love? It seems Tagore's heroines know no limits. They can manipulate; can spell over and even they can murder! Subsequently ready to face penalty.

The fear of losing Arjuna could not let Chitra take a single breath of peace as she knows Arjuna loves her false image that will fade away soon and her world of sensuous love will also be demolished. So she takes daring step and accepts the 'truth'. Umashanker Joshi appreciates her bold step of revealing the truth and says, 'Chitrangda used deceit to win her love. But she is determined to reveal her true self even at the risk of forsaking her hard won love. Love has the strength to face the truth squarely in its face . . .' (*Chitrangda and Other Dramatic Poems* 80). Shocked or surprised (not clear) by her confession, Arjuna tries to understand her love for him and forgives her.

If talk about Shyama, I feel everything is a game to this exceptionally beautiful and rich dancer that she could not understand the value of a youngster's life who is mad in love with her and is even ready to die to for her happiness and she does not let slip this opportunity. She realizes her sin only when Bajrasen leaves her forever. Shyama bounds to live alone and repent throughout her life.

Prakriti gets her lesson after a big loss. Her only shelter in this unsympathetic world, her mother; dies during the process of spell over and then trying to stop this brutal process in order to save pure Ananda from sin. Prakriti was young, enthusiastic, immature and stupid girl who could

not understand the humanistic and compassionate love of sage Ananda for every living being. Her mother's last words show her the way of enlightenment so she could proceed to the path of *nirvana*. She becomes the disciple of Ananda.

Flood of emotions and decisions taken into intoxicated mental environment, leave behind the garbage to collect. These women who are beautiful, admired and loved by their people, driven by heart turn into eccentric lover and left with nothing in their hand but to repent in their whole life. Thus the story of Chitra, Prakriti and Shyama prove to be a journey of 'sex to salvation' (*Osho Rajneesh*). Lastly they find their peace of mind in feet of God and show their growth as a soul, beyond the limits of fragile bodily desires.

Tagore wants to prove that if power comes in immature hands unwanted consequences will surface. Power has neutral characteristics; if it is in safe hands with compassionate mind it generates positive outcome but when power shifts into the hands of those who unprepared for it, unhealthy results come into existence. Rabindranath Tagore's women characters are superior to ordinary women and are confident and daring. They present an image of unconventional women who have courage to think and act differently still is inappropriate to follow in the society. He presents a vision that is far more valuable than worldly feminist concern. He shows the growth of a 'soul' of merely female into a mature woman through the circumstances he creates; which work as stimulators in the lightened pathway for a soul in the journey of salvation, the 'ultimate aim of a living being'.

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