

LITERATURE AND ANCIENT SCRIPTURE
A STUDY OF NAYIKA BHEDA IN RABINDRANATH
TAGORE'S DANCE DRAMA

Priyanka Mishra

Research scholar,

Abstract

'Nayika Bheda' is a Sanskrit term used by Bharat Muni in Natyashastra that suggests the traits of leading women characters in given circumstances. It is the most ancient scripture on performing arts created in between seventh century B.C. to fifth century B.C. (Gupt 63-76). Bharat Muni has recommended the theory of 'Ashtanayikas', based on their 'awastha' that refers to their age, their status in the society and their physical/mental condition. These traits help an actor to understand the 'abhinaya' in the proposed plot. Hence the old form of dance drama was invigorated by Rabindranath Tagore in early twentieth century. He shaped a specific kind of dance accompanied with songs and attire of his own, later named as 'Rabindra Nritya'. Similarly he created different kind women characters that lead their life with desires, dreadful deeds and regression. The emotional and mental transformation they experience with their Nayakas in the life journey and finally move ahead on the path of deliverance. The study aims to explore the women characters in his three dance dramas; Chitra, Chandalika and Shyama in the perspective of Ashtnayika traits, set by Bharatmuni in Natyashastra. Study will help to understand the condition of women in contemporary society and the development in socio-cultural environment in India through ages.

Keywords: *Natyashastra, dance drama, Nayika bheda, feminist discourse, spiritual transformation.*

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“Triya charitam purushaysa bhagyam kono naa janati”

In *Manusmriti*, the character of woman is defined as ‘unpredictable’. Many scholars have tried to define it in the different ways. The sum of all the definitions comes as ‘manipulator’. The woman who tries to manipulate the situation or a person with all her womanish traits is a so called ‘*triya charitra*’. The character of woman is always a matter of analysis for the agents of well fare department of society. In many old literatures the woman is degraded and categorized in the list of animals, illiterates, downtrodden and untouchables. In Bharatmuni’s *Natyashastra*, another types of classification of women are there and that is based on their physical shape, age, their social and marital status and their attitude towards their heroes.

“*Natyashastra* is the oldest Indian text on the theory of *Nrutyatanataka* (dance drama)” (*Iha* to *Para* 109). The statement proclaims of ‘*natyashastra*’ being the oldest scripture and ‘*nritya natya*’ the ancient form of the play. It was created in the *Treta-yug* on the request of Gods for creating a scripture that is readable to women, demons and downtrodden, in order to make them learn lessons of Vedas in an entertaining way. Examining the real date of any antique text is usually made by linguistic study. Bharat Gupt has made a valuable attempt in *Dramatic Concept Greek and Indian: A Study of Poetics and Natya Shastra*. He says that the “the text of *NS* was in existence when the *Ramayana* was being composed by Valmiki” (15). His endeavor to establish this thought appear in a article also when he says that “Valmiki has used so many technical terms of music (such as ‘*sruti*’, ‘*sthana*’, ‘*muurcchanaa*’, ‘*jaati*’ ‘*sammuurcchanaa*’ ‘*angahaara*’, ‘*aatidya*’ etc..) corresponding to exactly to their definitions in the *NS* . . .” (*Naat.yasastra: Contents & Date*). So it is safe to

assume that *Natyashastra* was came into existence either before or around the time of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, during 5th to 4th century B.C.. *Natyashastra* was written in thirty six chapters and covers almost all the major and minute aspects of staging art. There were lots of opinion regarding the definition and meaning of the word '*Natya*' and its relation with the word '*Nritya*'. Bharata beautifully defined the term '*Natya*' in *Prathama Adhyaya*, saying, "trailokyasyasya sarvasya natyam bhavanukirtam" (Shastry 26.106). Means, "for the drama is a representation of the state of the three worlds" (Ghose I.100). This definition also clears the significance of '*Bhava-s*' in a '*natya*' and one can find its direct relation to the Tagore's philosophy of '*bhava-nritya*'. His many dance dramas were previously written in the form of poem or play and in order to make them completely 'expressive' or '*bhava poorna*' they gradually converted into dance drama.

According to Bharata's school of *Natya*; *nritya* is very essential part of *natya* and cannot be differentiated from it. Bharatmuni has explained that a dance which is embellished with songs, music, *bhavas*, *rasas* and all the four type of *abhinayas*; can be termed as '*Nritya*'. So it is apparent that in ancient world there was no such discrimination for the distinct category as dance (*nritya*); or drama (*natya*). For every drama was a dance-drama and there were no conversation in dialogue form. But dance can be divided into two categories; one is *Nrutta* (pure dance), with emphasis on body movements and they were essential part of *Nritya* on the stage. *Nritya* (dance with *abhinaya*), is a dance that has a proper theme, has a story to tell and well expressed through all the *rasas* and *bhavas*. These *rasa-s* and *bhava-s* are carried forward by the characters in the *nritya natya* and delivered to the viewers. There are mainly three or four prime characters in the play and some side and minor characters. Main characters usually are a *nayaka*/hero and *nayika*/heroine. They must possess some traits according to the role they are provided with. To make these qualities easily explicable to the actors, Bharatmuni has given a specific classification for the *nayaka* and the *nayika*. The present paper deals with traits of *nayika-s* given in *Ashta-nayika bheda*.

This classification is made on the base of their tendency; physical/mental state; their actions, reactions, emotions and their thoughts. According to their tendency there are twenty two types of *nayikas* he has explained in chapter no. twenty fourth. He says-

“Devtasurgandharva rakhonagapatatrinaam / pishachyakshavyalanam nar-vanar-hastinam// mrigminoshtramakerkharasukeravajinam / mahishajagvadinam tulyasheelah striyah smritah//” (Shastry 203).

In this classification women are compared with different animals on their natural tendency and inclination. Other than this, on the account of birth there are six types of women; *Divya, Manva, Mishra, Nrpatni, Kulastri* and *Ganika*. On the account of their nature there are three types of women; *Uttama, Madhyama* and *Adhama*. On the marital status there are three types of women; ‘*Svakiya*’, who is married to the hero, ‘*Perkiya*’ is married to another man and *samanya* means ‘*anya stri*’. According to the age there are three types of women; *Mugdha, Madhya* and *Pragalbha*. *Mugdha* is a young and an inexperienced *nayika*. *Madhya* is middle aged woman, skilled in art of love and feels shyness and cravings as well. *Pragalbha* is a mature in every sense. According to their level of patience there are three types of *nayikas*; *Dheera, Adheera* and *Dheeradheera*. *Dheera* is a patient and does not express her love or anger directly. *Adheera* is an impatient *nayika* who cannot hide her anger and frustration even in public. *Deeradheera* is a patient *nayika* who does not show her inner feelings whether love or anger. And according to their mental / emotional condition while in love with the hero there are eight types of *nayikas* and it is called ‘*Ashtanayika*’ *bheda*. They are *Vasaksajjika, Virahotkanthita, Svadhinapatika, Kalahantarita, Khandita, Vipralabdha, Proshitapathika* and *Abhisarika*. These names have given to them on the base of their ‘*awastha*’; their psychological and emotional states. ‘*Awastha*’ decides their reaction towards their *nayaka*-s and the circumstances; hence help in moving the story forward. *Vasaksajjika* is the one who decorates herself and eagerly waits for her *Nayaka*. *Virahotkanthita*, who is sad and disturbed and feels the deep love pangs as is away from her *nayaka*. *Svadhinapatika* is proud *nayika* whose lover is smitten by her charm and always wants to be with her. *Kalahantarita* though loves her man and waits for him but

when she learns that he was with another woman; she gets angry, fights with him and later repents. *Khandita* is a *nayika* who is sad and discontent of her lover and does not take care of her beauty. *Vipralabdha* is a frustrated *nayika* because her lover breaks his promise to meet her. *Proshithapathika* is a *nayika* who is far away from her lover or husband due to circumstances and she is missing him and discontent. *Proshithapathika* is not *Virahotkanthita*. *Abhisarika* is a *nayika* who is ready to meet her lover and willing to cross over every obstacle. She is impatient to be united and does not care of society/people and even of dangers. There are some more classifications, developed by the other authors later. Matiram's *Rasraj*; Bhanudautta's *Rasmanjari*; *Rasmanjari* by Nandadas; *Rasikpriya* by Keshavadas; *Sahityalahri* by Soordas are widely read in this aspect. Pandit Koka has classified women in four types on the base of their body type and sexual behavior. These are *Padmini*, *Chitrini*, *Shankhini* and *Hastini*. To add some more spices for the readers of erotica he further classified women on the shape of their vagina and they are; *Mrigi* or *Harini*, *Ashvini* or *Vadava* and *Karini* or the elephant woman.

“May it be the *Natyashastra-s* or the *Kavyashastra-s*; we see the classification to suit the male sex. It goes without saying that all the *sastra-s* were written by males” (Phadke). Bharatmuni has described these traits to provide guidance to an actor to perform on the stage and not to see the whole female community in the light of these somehow impractical qualities. The respect of a woman should be well settled, may it be an actor on the stage or an ordinary female. Some authors of the Middle Age who have worked on the characters of *nayika*; they even have crossed the limits of dignity of a woman. In the *Ritikaal*, Shree Radha the goddess was one of the favorite *nayika-s* in the poems and paintings. Though the love between Radha and Krishna is the example of divine, pure and eternal love between *atma* and *paramatma* and is far from any worldly emotions and pleasures, still they were subjected to the erotic presentation of love in some of the poems and paintings. There is no any logic behind this kind of classification as given by Kokka because neither is it going to help an actor on the stage, nor are they helpful in any kind of physical/mental or social wellness of any individual or a community. Rather they can be the reason of one's cerebral

disarray regarding his sexual preferences. Hence mental blockages regarding sex choice is one of the reasons leading to the brutal sex crimes in a society.

The two basic notions for this paper cropped up through a discussion with guru Valmiki Banerjee who says, “Tagore’s *nayika bheda* is different” and with Dr. Rohitha Eswer, a dancer/choreographer who had an experience of staging of *Shyama*; who says “a *nayika* presents various traits in a single role according to the circumstances”. One can understand this as, if a *nayika* is waiting for her man and missing him deeply, she presents *Virohtkanthita*; when she is preparing herself for meeting; is *Vasaksajjika*, when she is being impatient and rushes to him, she is presenting *Abhisarika* and when he does not come for meeting she is *Vipralabdha*. Researcher is aimed to study the character of Tagore’s *nayika*-s in his three dance dramas; *Chitrangda*, *Chandalika* and *Shyama*, in the light of *Ashtanayika*. The study will demonstrate the difference between Bharata’s *Nayika* of *Treta-yuga* and Tagore’s *Nayika* of modern times. It will also show the difference in the way of thinking of people or society concerning women through the ages.

Chitrangda (1936) is a story taken from Mahabharata. It says about brave princess Chitrangda of Manipuri who is a warrior, lives like a prince, who keeps her people safe as a male fighter and loves them as a mother. Chitra awakens about her femininity when she sees Arjuna. The Princess with a soul of ‘Prince’, goes to him and proposes him but faces rejection due to her man’s attire. She goes to him again in woman’s clothing and gets rejection again on the name of vow of chastity, because of her unattractive looks. The fighter Chitra takes it as a challenge and offers prayers to the love Gods Madana and Vasanta to get enchanting beauty to woo him and succeeds. When Arjuna gets bore of intoxicating atmosphere of their love nest and wants to know the truth behind her mysterious persona then she reveals herself rather bravely with no repentance and says, “I am Chitra, no goddess to worship”, and demands for the equal love and respect.

Other than Bharata’s *Nayika* who is a weak lover and always concerns for getting physical closeness with *nayaka*; Chitra is dutiful woman who is dedicated to her reign. She

is not *Swakiya* as she is not a wife or accepted lover. She is not *Perkiya* as not married to another man. She cannot be *Anya-stri* as she is princess. When she falls in love with Arjuna, she does not hesitate to express her feelings. In Bharata's classification there is no such a bold *Nayika* who proposes a man first. Even the *Ganika* (a mistress or prostitute) gives some visible sign of her wish to be uniting but does not instigate. Thus after rejection she again goes to him in woman's clothing but she cannot be *Vasaksajjika* here, as *vasakasajjika* decorates herself for her husband or lover and Arjuna does not love her. When she goes deep into the woods to meet her man of her dreams with all the hopes and love in her heart; she cannot be compared to *Abhisarika* as *abhisarika* is the *nayika* who is deeply in mutual love with her man and goes to meet him secretly with all her rights. After facing the rejection again, Chitra feels sad and hurt rather angry and insulted too. But she cannot be called *Khandita* since *khandita nayika* is sad of cheatings of his man. Thus warrior Chitra (or stubborn?) takes help of the gods to get the enchanting beauty to break Arjuna's vow of chastity. In other words she conspires against and traps him. Now this action is far from Bharatmuni's range of thoughts. A *nayika* cannot be deceptive. However Chitra gets the desired fulfillment of Arjuna's love after their *Gandharva-vivah* and for a short period of time she experienced the happiness of *Svadhinapatika nayika*; whose husband smitten by her charm and dedicated to her. But this condition comes with hidden truths, fears and betrayal. A woman who has to play with her husband's faith to keep him to her; cannot be called a '*nayika*'. The concept did not change even after centuries that a *nayika* should be 'a woman with good deeds'.

In *Chandalika* (1938), Prakriti is a low cast young woman who is sad of people's bad treatment to her. In this cruel world when she crosses the path of divine sage Ananda, she gets impressed by his compassionate attitude for her and feels love for him. Now blinded by passionate love she wants to win over him through black magic. Chitra and Prakriti, they both were infatuated with their *nayakas* and fall in one sided love. This concept is not described in *Natyashastra*, as a *nayika* whether is *Swakiya*, *perkiya* or *anya*; a *nayaka* is a man, who seems has no problem to love them equally so there is no condition such as one

sided love. It proves that Tagore has worked on more possible situation in love in his dance dramas. His vision is broader than Bharatmuni. Here Prakriti happily prepares herself for physical union while sage Aananda is being drawn to her like a tied animal under the effect of black magic. She neither can be *Vasaksajjika* nor is she *Abhisarika*; as both *nayika*-s have concern of their heroes that Prakriti does not has. No need to say that being compelled to do something forcefully under the black magic, costs heavily on Aananda. His pious glory fades away and magic replaces his divinity with unrestrained lust. This is the woman who is total out of character of Bharat's *nayika*; as Bharata's *nayika* loves her man so dearly that she even can share her man with other woman but cannot even think of hurting him. Though Bhrata's *nayika*-s are aimless feeble creatures whom spent their whole life in either being loved or waiting to be loved by her hero but they cannot act in such a evil way.

Whereas in Shyama (1939), *nayika* is a beautiful court dancer and has many admirers. In Bharat's *Natyashastra* there is category '*ganika*', who is available to the *nayaka* and to the other men as well if she wants. Thus Shyama is a cunning woman and enjoys attention of men but falls in love with Bajrasen. In scene I, when the Bajrasen makes entry, Shyama's friends inform her that there a 'rich', 'wealthy' and 'handsome' businessman, is in the city. So it is not clear that which quality of Bajrasen makes Shyama fall in love with him. But she gets full attention of her hero when in love. She keeps herself well decorated since Bajrasen is infatuated by her beauty. Here is the *nayika*, *vasaksajjika* and when she goes to meet him; is *abhisarika*. But weather changes with the notice that he has to be punished for the accusation of thieving. Here Shyama turns into a worried lover and for saving him from the punishment she traps her innocent and young admirer Utthiyo and manipulates him to face the punishment on the behalf of Bajrasen. Tagore's Prakriti and Shyama are the *nayika*-s who humiliate the humanity.

This forward, audacious and blind by love, *nayika*-s are actually narcissistic or '*aatma-mugdha*' women, who only know how to love themselves. This quality does not come under the *Ashtanayika* traits. These proud heroines face the consequences of their deeds at the end. Chitra accepts her fault of making him a fool out of her falls and foggy

beauty and repents. Prakriti horrifies when she sees Ananada in his changed and degraded outlook. She stops magical process immediate and asks for forgiveness. Arjuna and Ananda forgive them, but the sin of Shyama was not forgivable. Once dear to her hero, she is now bound to live alone. She is *virahini* now; but cannot be called *virahotkanthita*; as there is no chance of their meeting again. Thus all the three *nayika*-s show the guilt, regression, compassion, humble and peace of realization at the end; Bharat's *Ashta-nayika* do not have any category for this 'type'.

In ancient age, the society was not much developed and the range of people's conceptions were very limited. Men were supposed to get education and training and there after run a family. People usually guided by the *Vedic* education which proposes four *Ashramas* system for an ideal life. But as previously discussed, women were victims of biased vision and were not entitled for the education rather they were taught the lessons of home science and were supposed to being a mother and nurturing kids. Though ancient structure of male dominant society provides a necessary protection to the females of the family from the outer evil world but within the family circle women are usually taken for granted. On the one hand *shastra*-s put them below the category of a 'human', the other hand they glorify them by comparing with the 'Goddess'. And here we have this kind of classification for women that shows how keenly their body, their tendency and their natural sexual behavior are being observed by men and have been used for their profit.

Tagore always liked to show his women character strong. Bharata's *nayika*-s are weak and beggar of love and if rejected; they cry and take it as their own faults but Tagore's *nayika*-s know how to get love either by hook or crook. Though analyze woman as a love candidate is a very limited area to explore one's character. A '*nayika*' is much more than a sex toy. She is a mother, a sister and can be an equal companion for a man in their life journey.

The classification also suggests the frank and acceptable attitude towards free sex in the ancient society. If hero spends night with other woman, *nayika* gets angry but

ultimately happily unites with him. That means sex outside marriage was not a taboo. The easy system of *Gandharva vivah* (secret marriage, with no proof at all) was also acceptable. It shows sex was always a priority and the rules regarding relationship were loose. Darwin's theory tells us that the human species are developed from animals and like them we also have four basic needs; food, sleep, shelter and sex. Animal's world is disciplined by nature through one or two mating season in a year. And human society civilized the race through a legalized one marriage system. Though sometimes even the strict regulations are failed to control this wild energy and it finds the secret ways to flow on. To measure a woman on the base of their body and their sexual utility is actually degrading the great female energy which is described in *puranas* as 'shakti'; the source of life and destruction as well.

To understand the 'role' in a *natya*; *Ashtnayika bheda* is welcome. But to understand the character of a 'woman', a new classification is required based on their inner qualities, that is far from their bodily description or gender utility and that put her into the category of a 'human-being'. It can be helpful in maintaining the healthy, crime free and a secured society for women.

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