

Tagore's Skills in Portraying Socio-religious Ills in His Plays Through Dramatic Art

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Abstract

It is well known that Tagore was primarily a poet. However, he has also written plays that have a level of dramatic talent and inventiveness that very few other writers can match. He had a remarkable theatrical genius, as evidenced by the more than thirty plays he composed with an astounding diversity of themes and style including—tragic, comedic, farcical, symbolic and lyrical. The reason Tagore is considered such a remarkable playwright is that he used a variety of avant-garde techniques and structural devices to try and use his plays as a powerful platform for his thoughts against social evils. This article attempts to show how the dramatic style, when applied skilfully and creatively by a talented writer, can aid in calling attention to the negative impacts of social evils that exist in our society in many forms. The present study is done with special reference to the plays namely 'Mukta-dhara', 'Natir Puja' and 'Chandalika'

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Tagore's remarkable ability to seamlessly integrate his diverse skill set into the overall tone of his plays is a particular notable and noteworthy aspect of his plays, where he demonstrates his mastery of dramatic writing. He distinctively deviates from accepted theories and conventions in all of his plays, which are broadly classified into eight categories. In order to achieve his dramatic goals, this gifted dramatist brings fresh aesthetics, vision, method and sensibility in his plays. As a result, the playwright effectively conveys his social and moral philosophy to the general public through the harmonious integration of language, music, dance, images and symbols found in his plays.

The most striking feature of Tagore's plays is their exquisite fusion of prose, poetry and music, which gives them a sweeter, more expressive and more appealing quality. The majority of his plays are filled with poetic and musical aspects that greatly enhance their beauty. Being a renowned poet and musician, Tagore understood that while prose can be a powerful and moving medium for dramatic discourse when employed alone, without the addition of music or poetry, it can never be as effective or moving as other forms of expression. "The play, as he himself asserts, is not a composition which will bear being read. Its significance is lost if it is not heard sung and seen acted" (Chakraverty XIV).

In his plays, Tagore has incorporated poetry and music in a variety of ways. However, he uses his songs as dramatic device to achieve effects that cannot be achieved through any other medium and it is through his songs that they are most effectively felt and experienced. Tagore's dramaturgy does not include non-dramatic songs. All of his songs serve dramatic purposes, are situational, pertinent and justify their presence. Tagore used his musical compositions with dramatic effect to highlight the intricate and emotional dynamics of the character, elevating the action to a more expressive and suggestive level in his plays. Tagore demonstrates his ability as a great musician and writer by displaying emotional bliss, psychic discovery and mental change of the characters through a variety of tone modulation. Evaluating the song's dramatic significance in Tagore's plays Bishweshwar Chakraverty says, "Few playwrights have explored and exploited the dramatic resources of songs with its haunting music (Chakraverty 21)."

In the plays such as 'Mukta Dhara' and 'Natir Puja' abounds in songs in which the eminent poet-playwright depicted various social ills. Singing serves as a dramatic art form in these plays, much like acting and dancing, to highlight and denounce social evils. These songs employ a novel form of bilingualism. Singing here takes on a new role as a means of communication that urges readers and the audience to respond immediately and directly. A great illustration of it is the theme song from the play "Mukta Dhara".

All hail, Machine, we worship thee,
 We bow to thee, we honour thee,
 Machine, O Lord Machine.
 Thy flames and thunder rend in the sky,
 And all thy rambling wheels reply
 In swift and sonorous majesty;
 We bow to thee, Machine.
 Thy power melts the stubborn ore;
 Shatters the old rock's living care,
 Breaks down the stable things of yore
 All hail, all hail, Machine.(Sykes 16)

It is evident from this song that how creatively Tagore uses his exceptional music skill in his plays by using his songs to both create a climatic effect and aid in the proper development of the play's action. Tagore regularly adds music, either solo, duet or group, in the opening and climatic scenes of his plays in order to intensify the intensity of the action. Not only do these songs enhance the play's texture, but they also guide the reader and audience to the drama's central conflict. The best example is this song, which is performed by some Uttarakut residents in the opening scene of the play "Mukta-dhara". Without realizing that the dam's construction was motivated by an ulterior motive, the innocent citizens in the song applaud the embankment constructed by Bibhuti, the royal engineer. The song contributes to the main thematic import, demonstrating its effective theatrical application.

A vulture thou, whose talons tear
 The bowels of earth, and lay them bare,
 Machine, O Lord Machine.
 Thou art a cloud, beneath whose lee
 Sinister tempests send and flee
 To darken earth and air and sea.
 All hail, Machine, Machine.
 Then grim magician, building still
 The very elements to thy will,
 All hail to thee, Machine.
 Thou hast the captive world in fee,
 And we thy servants worship thee,
 We bow to thee, we honour thee,
 O Lord, O Lord Machin.(Sykes 16)

The above song is the best example of Tagore's dramatic skill in presenting the play's whole theme and plot in a single song. Packed with symbolism and imagery, the song is a potent way for Tagore to communicate his outrage at the evils of petty nationalism, industrialisation and narrow political interests that exploit the vulnerable and undermine social order. Tagore achieved three dramatic goals with this expository song. First, he presents the play's central theme which is the political struggle between two states, of which the enormous dam or machine, is a symbolic image. Secondly, the song seamlessly fits into the theme, which emphasises how contemporary science and its innovations, when misused carelessly and

selflessly, can endanger humanity as a whole. Thirdly, the playwright makes the play's exposition an enthralling experience that piques the audience's curiosity and inspires them to imagine what will happen next.

The last song in the play "Natir Puja" further demonstrates how Tagore uses songs in his plays to reflect his perspective and worldview rather than just using them as adornment. How beautifully Tagore's idea of genuine worship devoid of any rituals is expressed in these lines of Nati's song can be seen here-----

I bring no woodland flower,
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 in gesture shines
My worship, Lord, of thee. (Sykes 138)

It is evident from the song mentioned above that Tagore employed musical and lyrical resources not only for artistic but also for technical purposes. Without the performance of songs on stage, the novel idea that worship can even be done through dancing could never be communicated so poignantly and successfully. Renowned for his compositional skills, he understands that music possesses an expressive power that cannot be expressed by words alone. "Its power, says Tagore, lies in the region of inexpressible (Chakraverty 20)." This is why songs are an essential component of his plays due to their inexpressibility.

Another aspect of Tagore's dramaturgy that lends his plays more beauty, fresh significance and depth is symbolism. Tagore is a master symbolist dramatist, as seen by the way he employs symbols in his plays as a dramatic method to depict socio-religious ills. To express the inexpressible, one of the canons of dramatic art, he employs symbolic technique, just like other dramatic kinds of technique. The significance of symbols' functional role in Tagore's plays can be evaluated by K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar's observation that "Not the logic of careful plotting but the music of ideas and symbols is the soul of his drama (Iyengar 123)."

When it comes to his plays, Tagore is known for using his characters-----especially the downtrodden and oppressed ones who have suffered wrongs-----as a means of suggesting certain moral and spiritual principles. In "Sanyasi" an outcast named Vasanti represents love and humanity; in "Sacrifice", a beggar girl named Aparna embodies the real spirit of religion; and in "Natir Puja", a victim of caste-based discrimination named Srimati represents unwavering courage and determination. In "Chandalika," the following words by Prakriti, who feels honoured and elevated after giving water to Ananada, a man from a socially affluent background, are symbolic in a very meaningful way---"Only once did he cup his hands to take the water

From mine. Such a little water, yet that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea. In it flowed all the seven seas in one, and my caste was drowned, and my birth washed clean (Sykes 148)."

Ananada's cupped hands here have a symbolic meaning. They symbolise the thirst of the whole world for Prakriti who never got the opportunity to give water to a man outside her caste or tribe. She interprets Ananada's bending in front of her with his hands cupped as a sign of new beginning. She feels as though the small amount of water she puts into his hands transforms into an infinite, limitless sea of love and humanity, permanently eradicating the shame associated with her caste and place of origin.

Like symbolism, imagery is crucial component of Tagore's dramatic art that enhances the potency, force and communication of his plays. In order to add further depth to his ideas and experiences, Tagore

frequently employs images— just like he does with symbols—in both his plays, poetry and songs. His imagery encompasses a vast array of visuals that he uses to concretise concepts and realities that are too abstract to be expressed in words.

While there are many different kinds of natural imagery in Tagore's plays, recurring and essential images include flowers, birds, clouds, water and rivers. He has masterfully employed the image of a flower in the majority of his plays. There are numerous metaphorical meanings of flower in his plays and poetry. They symbolise the fulfilment of the human longing for the unknown; the triumph of happiness over suffering and the cycle of life and death. How masterfully he uses a floral image in 'Chandalika' to capture the depth of Prakriti's suppressed desire to be emancipated from the dehumanising effects of her humble origin and long-standing social isolation. The following image presents as a song, captures her intensity----

Blessed am I, says the flower, who belong to the
 Earth/
 For I serve you, my God, in this lowly home
 Make me forget that I am born of dust,
 For my spirit is free from it.
 When you bend your eyes upon me my
 Petals tremble in joy;
 Give me a touch of your feet and make me heavenly
 For the earth must offer its worship through me(Sykes 151).

It must be noted that the innovative methods, which Tagore has adopted in the technique and structure of his plays are also marked in the language and diction of his plays. His distinctive way of denouncing various socio-religious ills in society is clearly demonstrated in the plays in which he has portrayed them. Tagore's inventiveness and resourcefulness as a dramatist are evident in his language, which offers a wonderful blend of verse, poetry and melody, a unique word selection, unique types of imagery and creative symbol usage.

References

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