

REFLECTION OF INDIAN CULTURE AND ETHOS IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PLAYS: A STUDY IN MYTHS

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Introduction:

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution. Drama being an audiovisual medium of expression is supposed to have been the most effective means of representing Man's acts and feeling on the stage. Most of the plays dramatize India's cultural, philosophical, religious, and socio-political values and traditions. Man creates Literature and Literature studies Man.

Myth has always had a very significant position in human psychology and society from its beginning as primitive religious narrative to its recent adaption as an aid in the exploration of the unconscious mind. The word Myth has often suffered from a wrong connotation. In general discourse it stands for something false, fictitious and far removed from reality and history. However, the Psychoanalytical approach to criticism has made it possible to evaluate the concepts of myth all over again. Myth has been a very important phenomenon in world literature. It is a historical fact that drama in its early stages of development dependent upon myths; the myths provided fables a complex of action and character which assumed shape of drama. Indian English drama flourished as much as possible during the last hundred years, has tried to deal with philosophical views, religious convictions, political issues, social problems, psychological matters etc. through myths legends, historical events and day to day happening. Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Girish Karnad, T.P. Kailasam, Badal Sircar, and Uma Parameshwaran are among the Indian English dramatist who have made a frequent use of Indian as well as foreign myths in their writings , particularly in their plays . The Ramayana and The Mahabharata are the chief sources of myths upon which these playwrights draw time and again. Rabindranath Tagore has taken up various myths and presented them very skillfully in his plays. Rabindranath Tagore's *Sannyasi or the Ascetic, the King & the Queen, Sacrifice, Chitra,*

Gandhari's Prayer, Karna and Kunti and the King of the Dark Chamber have mythical themes and characters. If the play is not based on any myth, it surely has reference to one or the other mythical personality. Tagore, a unique figure in the history of Indian English drama, was well versed in the classics of Indian Drama, and was alive to the European Dramatic tradition; the dramatic form which he evolved influenced the Bengali theatre at the outset of this century. The range and multiplicity of his dramatic writings is astounding. He borrowed his themes from the Indian mythology, Buddhist legends, and classical sources. Myths are by nature collective and communal; they bind a tribe or a nation together in common psychological and spiritual activities. Myth is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and of action and of wholeness of living. Moreover, like Melville's famous white whale (itself an archetypal image), myth is ubiquitous in time as well as place. It is a dynamic factor everywhere in human society; it transcends time, uniting the past (traditional modes of belief) with the present (current values) and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations). Mythological Criticism: This approach emphasizes "the recurrent universal patterns underlying most literary works." Combining the insights from anthropology, psychology, history, and comparative religion, mythological criticism "explores the artist's common humanity by tracing how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to different cultures and epochs." One key concept in mythological criticism is the *archetype*, "a symbol, character, situation, or image that evokes a deep universal response," which entered literary criticism from Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. According to Jung, all individuals share a "'collective unconscious,' a set of primal memories common to the human race, existing below each person's conscious mind"—often deriving from primordial phenomena such as the sun, moon, fire, night, and blood, archetypes according to Jung "trigger the collective unconscious." Another critic, Northrop Frye, defined archetypes in a more limited way as "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole." Regardless of the definition of archetype they use, mythological critics tend to view literary works in the broader context of works sharing a similar pattern.

"Myths are the world's dreams. They are archetypal dreams and deal with great human problems. Myths and dreams come from the same place. They come from realizations of some kind that they have to find expression in symbolic form."

Mythological criticism, allows a more universal approach to the study of religion and film. Myth critics, unlike theologians, define religion broadly, refusing to reduce religion to any single tradition or truth claim. Myth critics assert that religion transcends cultural boundaries and the narrow foci of individual traditions. Instead they deal with universal archetypes, symbols, and rituals. This broadens the study of religion and film by opening up the definition of religion. For example, where a theological critic might talk about Christ figures in a film, myth critics are interested in hero figures. Rather than the theological categories listed above, the myth critic is more concerned with psychological and human archetypes, the struggle between good and evil, or the hero's journey. Films like *The Natural* or *Field of Dreams* fit nicely into this type, but perhaps *Star Wars* is the prime example of films that benefit from examination using mythological criticism. As Joseph Campbell suggested in interviews with Bill Moyers, *Star Wars* contains all the mythic elements: Luke Skywalker is a universal hero figure who stands for an entire culture; the Force is a supernatural, spiritual power; the primary struggle is one of good and evil; psychological archetypes come into play as Luke struggles against Darth Vader (death father). Myth criticism helps to alleviate some of the problems inherent in the theological approach, but the mythic perspective has limitations as well. In particular, myth criticism tends to be a historical and psychological and ignores the political. Archetype is an original idea, symbol, pattern and/or design upon which all other similar things are patterned. Collectively, and over time, mankind's collective-conscious has come to collaborate a full library of visual understandings by which to communicate. For example, a hammer owned by ancient man represented industry, hard work and physical labor and much of these vibrational energies remain true today. A symbol of self wielding power, the hammer drives the nail into wood; from such symbolism arises masculine and feminine appreciations and outstretched from this concept rises concepts of sexuality. As all items have a place in historical source, so too does each item continue to resonate with its own, vibratory, signature. A book is a thing of knowledge and wisdom; regardless of the time frame it is derived. So too is a book a book, regardless of who holds it within their hands. Out of such commonalties, mankind's collective knowledge is passed onto generations on the spiritual and cellular levels of knowing and, through this sublime record of visual imagery, mankind shares a common vision and understanding. It is because of these common building blocks of wisdom that dream analysis is made so universally effective. Whether an individual is today, consciously aware of the full scope and broad meaning of a

given word or image, the cellular and indwelt spiritual knowledge of these things are carried through incarnations and stored in the warehouses of the mind. Brought through in dream imagery, archetypes become symbols of language, knowledge, history and communication and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man - perfected, unspecific, universal man - he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore... is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lessons he has learned of life renewed" (19-20).

In *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1959), Joseph Campbell recounts a curious phenomenon of animal behavior. Newly hatched chickens, bits of egg-shells still clinging to their tails, will dart for cover when a hawk flies overhead: yet they remain unaffected by other birds. Furthermore, a wooden model of a hawk, drawn forward along a wire above their coop, will send them scurrying (if the model is pulled backward, however, there is no response). "Whence," Campbell asks, "this abrupt seizure by an image to which there is no counterpart in the chicken's world? Living gulls and ducks, herons and pigeons, leave it cold, but the *work of art strikes some very deep chord!*" (31) Campbell's hinted analogy, though only roughly approximate, will serve nonetheless as an instructive introduction to the mythological approach to literature. For it is with the relationship of literary art to "some very deep chord," in human nature that mythological criticism deals. The myth critic is concerned to seek out those mysterious elements that inform certain literary works and that elicit, with almost uncanny force, dramatic and universal human reactions. The myth critic wishes to discover how certain works of literature, usually those that have become, or promise to become, "classics," image a kind of reality to which readers give perennial response--while other works, seemingly as well constructed, and even some forms of reality, leave them cold. Speaking figuratively, the myth critic studies in depth the "wooden hawks" of great literature: the so-called archetypes or archetypal patterns that the writer has drawn forward along the tensed structural wires of his or her masterpieces and that vibrate in such a way that a sympathetic resonance is set off deep within the reader.

Tagore's experience in theatre began at age sixteen when he played the leading role in his

brother's adaptation of Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. At the age of twenty, he wrote his first drama opera Valmiki Pratibha (The Genius of Valmiki) which describes how the bandit Valmiki reforms his ethos, is blessed by Saraswati and composes the Ramayana. Tagore vigorously explores a wide range of dramatic styles and emotions, including usages of revamped *kirtanas* an adaptation of traditional English and Irish folk melodies as drinking Songs. His most of the plays emphasizing fusion of lyrical flow and emotional rhythm tightly focused on core idea. His works sought to articulate in Tagore's words, The Plays of feelings and not of Action. Among his most famous dramas is Raktakaravi (Red Oleanders) which tells of Kelptocratic king who enriches himself by forcing his subjects to mine. The heroine Nandini eventually rallies the common people to destroy these symbols of subjection. Tagore's another play Chandalika (Untouchable Girl), which was modeled on an ancient Buddhist legend describing how Ananda the Gautum Buddha's disciple asks water from an Adivasi girl. Tagore in his plays examines the human relationship and he continuously explores, examines and analyses the shifting paradigm of human relationship. Myth, folklore, classical tradition and other tools help him in exploration of the unintelligibility of human relationship. He tried to relocate the tradition of the theater in India and world over. Tradition is relocated, redefined and reshaped through his writing. The environment of living theatre and drama in India, particularly, in Bengal, was a great source of encouragement to Tagore, who grew into by reading world – known playwrights. Tagore was familiar with the long and fruitful dramatic tradition of India.

***“He admire Shakespeare, probably he admire Ibsen, probably also Maeterlinck;
and he knew his Kalidasa very well”***

(K.R.S. Iyengar: Indian Writing in English p.p. 122)

As a supreme maker of Indian Renaissance he was free to borrow from all sources and had an imaginative courage to make any borrowed material his own. He was very influenced by the folk theatre of West Bengal and the Sanskrit and Western dramas. Religion is a communal crutch used by people who don't want to take responsibility for their actions. Wallace Stevens said God is a supreme fiction created by men. Tagore linked up the various aspects of the Hindu religion and philosophy and seemed to represent all of them in his own person. Indeed he brought within his fold other religions also. Opposed to all sectarianism. He emphasized that all roads lead to truth. Rabindranath was very modern in his approach to life's problems was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present. He was a powerful orator and graceful writer

.He was a fine figure of man , imposing full of poise and dignity , sure of himself and his and at the same time full of dynamic and fiery energy to push India forward.. Through his writing he laid stress on the necessity for liberty and equality of all .Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well being .Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go. He wanted to combine western progress with India's spiritual background. He inculcated very powerful thoughts like be fearless, be strong, for him man was no miserable sinner but a part of divinity; why should he be afraid of anything? If there is a sin in the world it is weakness, weakness is the sin, and weakness is the death that had been the great lesson of Upanishads which are taken into inspection by Tagore in his playwriting. *Prakritir Pratishodh* later on translated into English by Tagore himself under the title *Sannyasi*, or the *Ascetic*. The theme of the play is the joy of attaining the infinite in finite. Tagore writes in his in his autobiography My Reminiscences -

“The Play should be looked upon as an introduction to the whole of my future literary work; this has been the subject on which all my writings have dwelt – the joy of attaining the infinite in the finite”. My Reminiscences PP. 235.

The central figure of the Play is lonely hermit who is free from and desire, and celebrates his loneliness, I sit chanting the incantation of nothingness, He is untouched and unmoved by the sorrows of human beings. The same story is in Vishnupurana resemblance between Jada Bharata and Hermit. The central idea of the play relates to the achievements of the infinite, we cannot reject the finite. The infinite is supreme. The finite and infinite cannot be separated from each other .

***“The Origin is the end, and the end is origin, it is a circle.
The distinction between the subtle and gross is in your ignorance”.***

Sannyasi: P.12

The village is the setting of the play which represents love, affection, and truth of life, Nature symbolizes truth. The subtle is the outcome of the gross .It reveals that the spiritual can be achieved only through the material. The great can be achieved only through the small. The Sannyasi has rejected the world but he is attracted towards the little girl named Vasanti, who is a part of this world. In the First half of the Play the Sannyasi stands for the hatred of the world and unappeasable thirst of the infinite. In the last part of the Play he realizes that without understanding the ways of the world no one can achieve the infinite. This play highlights the conflict that goes on in the mind of Sannyasi regarding the finite and infinite. The myth of Jada

Bharata in the Vishnupurana is referred and dramatized through Sannyasi. In this Play Tagore purposely refers to mythical Jada Bharata of Vihsnupurana and Lord Shiva .like Jada Bharata Sannyasi renounces all for adopting the living of ascetic. Through this mythical comparison Tagore establishes the fact that the infinite can hardly be achieved through the negation of the finite.

The King and the Queen is a love story of the obsessive king Vikram and the duty conscious Queen Sumitra. While projecting the personality of the king as “The monarch of sensual heaven” Tagore must have in his mind the image of Adam the first Man in Christian mythology , who after the creation of a woman from his own rib , comments :

***“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man”.***

The Bible Genesis – 2, 23

Infatuated by Queens’s beauty, king Vikram neglects all his kingly duties. The condition of the people getting worse day by day. Queen Simitra sympathizes with her people and offers to bear the responsibilities of the kingdom. Sacrifice (1892), shows humanitarian approach of Tagore. He seems to be pleading against animal Sacrifice through certain episodes and characters. Tagore successfully projects a tragic hero in the character of Raghupati, the temple priest, who stands for orthodox religion , ritualism, selfishness, and false pride. The theme of sacrifice is quasi- historical, that is the theme is fictitious but placed against the background of the medieval history in India. Tagore has commendably depicted the myth of goddess Kali as the power of destruction of evil .King Govinda’s liberality, humanity kindheartedness and firmness of decision are the qualities found in the great kings in Indian mythology. Queen Gunavati stands for womanly love and eternal motherhood, Raghupati for eternal orthodox religion Brahmanical egotism and arrogance, Jaising for duty, Aparna for love and truth. The religious myth of Goddess Kali has here been presented with a view to proving the futility of dogmatism and obscurantism as well as to establishing the norms of humanism. The story revolves around a queen, Gunwati, who wants a child at every cost even if she has to sacrifice her husband. Raja Gobind and a village girl, Aparna, are against human sacrifice. A priest tells the queen that she would beget a child if she sacrifices a human being. After being persuaded by the king and Aparna, the priest realizes his mistake and leaves the kingdom. Hence, human sacrifice is banned in the kingdom. Religion Is not the monopoly of the priest, its spark may be kindled in the heart of even ordinary beggar girl, Aprana. The path righteousness is true religion. The rites and rituals is not religion at all It actually consists in love for all. Tagore’s Bengali play Chitragandha 91892) was published as Chitra in English in the year 1913.

Tagore summarizes the story of the Mahabharata on which this lyrical play is based. It is love story between Arjuna and Chitra a daughter the king of Manipur. Tagore transforms this tale into a symbol of human love and, a sense of human life itself. Play also talks how it is difficult to suppress for long the natural passion of love. We should take into consideration some of the inherent limitations of the mythological approach. As with the psychological approach, the reader must take care that enthusiasm for a new-found interpretive key does not tempt him or her to discard other valuable critical instruments or to try to open all literary doors with this single key. Just as Freudian critics sometimes lose sight of great work's aesthetic values in their passion for sexual symbolism, so myth critics tend to forget that literature is more than a vehicle for archetypes and ritual patterns. In other words, they run the risk of being distracted from the aesthetic experience of the work itself. They forget that literature is, above all else, art. As we have indicated before, the discreet critic will apply such extrinsic perspectives as the mythological and psychological only as far as they enhance the experience of the art form, and only as far as the structure and potential meaning of the work consistently support such approaches. Tagore has used various myths to enrich the work of art.

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