
‘Mukta-Dhara’ & Symbolism -A study

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Abstract

"Mukta-Dhara," a Bengali novel by Rabindranath Tagore, published in 1922, revolves around the life of a young woman named Mukta, who escapes from her oppressive marriage and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Through Mukta's story, Tagore explores themes of individual freedom, feminism, critique symbolism, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. The novel is a powerful critique of the social conventions restricting human potential and a celebration of the human spirit's capacity for growth, transformation, and liberation. It's a landmark work of Bengali literature offering a nuanced and deeply human portrayal of the struggles and triumphs of its protagonist. The novel's exploration of the tensions between tradition and modernity and symbolic advocacy resonates with readers today. This study delves into the symbolic landscape of Rabindranath Tagore's novel "Mukta-Dhara" exploring the intricate web.

Keywords: Feminism, Symbolism, transformation, conventions, triumph....

Edward Thomson, who considered "Mukta-Dhara" to be "the greatest of Tagore's symbolic plays" and the best of his prose dramas, says

"It has many strands of significance woven into it so that it is like shot silk suggesting many colors; the play's achievement is that in it, he has attained a synthesis of his different convictions and message. His deep distrust of all government by machinery and of all prostitution of science to serve violence and oppression, his hatred of a slavish system of education, his scorn of race hatred and all politics which seek to make one tribe dependent on another.... all these are so prominent that each may with justice be claimed as the play's message. It is the greatest of his symbolic plays.

(Edward Thomson "Rabindranath Tagore" -Quoted by KRK in his "An Appreciation of Tagore's Three plays. "Madras O.U.P 1950 P.6-7)

The plot:

(Edward Thomson "Rabindranath Tagore" -Quoted by KRK in his "An Appreciation of Tagore's Three plays. "Madras O.U.P 1950 P.6-7)

Mukta-Dhara is a mountain stream that originated in the Uttarakut mountains and flows down to the water in the plains of Shiv Tarai. King Ranjith of Uttarakut has subjugated the people of Shiv Tarai and rules them with an iron hand. Engineer Bibhuti built a dam across Mukta-Dhara after a long and hard endeavor. The machine tower that controls the Dam rises high into the sky, higher than even the temple Tower of Bhairava, the local God. A festival has been proclaimed to celebrate the completion of the Dam. The Dam, however, has deprived the Shiv-Narayan of the much-needed water. Moreover, many lives were sacrificed during the construction of the Dam. The wail of the bereaved parents is heard from time to time.

The crown Prince Abhijeet, who has really a founding, was adopted by the childless king Ranjit and was sent as governor to Shiv-tarai, where he succeeded in winning the affection and loyalty of the people. When a mountain pass was blocked by the king to prevent trade by the Shiv Tarayans, the Prince revolted and opened the pass. The king was, of course, irritated, and he threw the Prince into prison. But the lover of freedom escapes and goes to set free the imprisoned river. He knows of a weak spot in the DSM, but he also knows that to touch the spot would mean sure death. Undaunted by the danger, the Prince sets free the river and achieves personal salvation.

Symbolism in 'Mukta Dhara'

Tagore's symbolic plays are undoubtedly dramas of ideas. These ideas have been expressed through character, action and atmosphere, but the most important of all, is, perhaps atmosphere.

The 'Mukta-Dhara' has four acts, notwithstanding. It is a short play full of swift action, all happening in one place and within the compass of a few hours. We find the scene in the mountainous country of Uttarakut. Processions of men and women crowd it. These men and women belong to Shivataraian and Uttarakut. They consist of devotees and rebels. All of them contribute in their own way to create an atmosphere. The atmosphere throughout is tense and charged with passion. With the passion for freedom on one side and the passion for power on the other, we do not feel here the poet's usual weakness for loose construction, and he shows excellent control of form. He uses allegory, but it does not obstruct.Symbolism in Mukta-

Dhara is not vague or ambiguous or obscure as it is in several other plays by Tagore. In fact the symbolism is crystal clear.

There are many symbols in the play. First, there is the ugly machine, which towers above the temple, threatening to dethrone the Gods. It looks like a demon's head. It seems a sin that it should be allowed to rise higher than the tower of Bhairava's Temple. Such a picture of Bibhuti's machine is a challenge to Bhairava. It represents science that subserves tyranny, oppression, militant nationalism, and exploitation of the people for the glory of the state. The Dam has become an additional instrument of power in King Ranjith's hands. By shutting the sluice gates of the Dam and blocking the flow of water into the plains of Shiv tara, Ranjith can bring the Shiv-Narayan down to their knees and compel them to beg for mercy from him. In other words, the Dam, built with the help of a scientific machine, can serve as an additional means of suppressing and subduing the Shiv-Narayan. Thus, both the machine and the Dam built with its help became symbols of imperialism, tyranny, and the economic exploitation of a subject nation. In other words, the dam and the machine acquire a symbolic significance that is sinister and evil, and it is directly opposite to the symbolic significance of Mukta-Dhara, which is a benevolent force of nature.

As against this monster, there rises and flows down the river Mukta-Dhara, which symbolizes freedom, life, naturalness, and creativity. The third important symbol is Prince Abhijeet, a friend and champion of the oppressed who gradually comes to identify himself with the river Mukta-Dhara. At the end of the play, he sacrifices himself in attempting to liberate the dammed upriver and to alleviate.

The pangs of the deprived farmers on the Plains, Simultaneously he achieves personal salvation.

Prince Abhijeet, the hero of the play, is born on the roadside near the bank of Mukta-Dhara, and his dead body is carried away by the swift current of the river. The dammed spring of Mukta-Dhara and the blockade of the Nandi pass are symbols of life in bondage. It is the mission of Abhijith's life to save man from tyranny and bondage and set him free. He sacrifices his life to fulfill his mission. The gushing waters of Mukta-Dhara carrying away the dead body of Prince Abhijeet seem to have proclaimed the triumph of the spirit of man against the machine, and this is the message of the play.

In the other symbols, Bibhuti symbolises the danger of scientific machinery and technology. King Ranjith symbolises imperialism and the economic

exploitation. Dhananjaya symbolises several virtues such as ahimsa or nonviolence. The groups of citizens of Shiv-tarai and uttarakut symbolises racial hatred and racial discrimination.

Elements of Indian culture, besides the phenomena of nature, are the sources of Tagore's symbols. His symbols reflect the entire culture of the Indian people. The sources of some of the symbols, for example, are dance and music, and motherly affection. The God's power of revenge and destruction is symbolized by the dance of Bhairava. The tune strings of the Veena (harp) symbolize suffering, which will be in vain unless there is its fulfillment of music and song. Love for freedom and sympathy for the oppressed are symbolized by the motherly affection of Mukta-Dhara.

As SK Desai, a renowned critic argues that these symbols- "are so carefully manipulated and attitudes, towards them are so explicitly established that the play moves on allegorical level, most of the time, making precise statements". The symbols tend to become allegories and that the symbols only lend a colouring emphasis to the plays. A symbol should give just a hint and leave the rest to the imagination of the reader. The comparisons implied in Tagore's symbols are elaborate. "They do not merely suggest but try to describe and explain".

However, the truth of this matter is that a poet is not bound by the categorization and the nomenclature of the critics and rhetoricians. A poet's repertory does not correspond to a grammarian's book of rhetoric and prosody. The poet's repertory is a rich treasure house of folk-lore legends, myths, symbols, allegories, similes, metaphors, rhymes, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, etc. The poet borrows anything and everything from his over-filled treasury, which the critic and Grammarians cannot compute or describe. And the poet is guided by his frenzy, driven by the divine urge to choose what suits him best.

To Conclude

Mukta-Dhara is the greatest of Tagore's symbolic plays. Some critics may find fault with symbols. One should not forget that Tagore was first and foremost a poet, and when he turned his attention to the stage, he wrote poetic drama alike in verse or prose. These poetic plays are very different from the verse dramas of T.S Eliot and others. The whole process of writing such a play is poetic. Tagore has a vision and creates a medium through which he can communicate the vision to his audience. He also chooses aids and devices that will help him share his ecstatic experience of the vision with his audience.

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