



Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra : A legend in One-Act Play Representing the Philosophy of Power Feminism

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Abstract:

In his one -act play, Chitra, Tagore displays two different facets of feminine through the central character Chitra. Firstly, in the form of a warrior in male attire he presents her powerful side and secondly, as a graceful woman having angelic qualities of peace, grace, and beauty he presents her soft side. Chitra is brought up as a son by her father and was supposed to take over the reins of Manipur after her father. She is swollen with pride of her expertise and masculinity till she falls in love with Arjuna, who spurns her. She has no touch of feminine in her, she is expert in hunting, riding and war. At her male attire she was disorientated by Arjuna her dream hero, and rejected when she was dressed as female but loved when she looks gorgeous. Chitra stands out as a personification of power and assertion. This paper focuses light on the male chauvinism and magnanimity of a female character Chitra and also how she can be seen in the new women of the present day. This paper aims at the study of Citra as personification of some of the traits of power theory of feminism and the power which resides inside of female soul.

Feminism and Tagore's literary works

Feminism is one of the ideology of humanism. Tagore has imbibed Feminism very well in his novels, dramas and short stories through his female protagonists. Tagore's literary works are mirror of his experiences with life, his philosophy of life and an indirect but straight message of social change to the readers. In his works he has tried to imprint the inequalities met by the women in common household of Bengal of his times. But these characters and their problems do not fail to cross the boundaries of Bengal and feature to be the problem of women of the then Indian women. Tagore not only paints the fierce picture of women being suffered, but also, he predominantly presents women with the stronger hue and does not fail in any way to deal with their inner strength. The reader is mesmerised by the strength of these women portrayed by the author and this image of the empowered woman gets imprinted in the readers mind inspiring him every time. One such pseudo masculine figure which Tagore has painted in words is Chitra, the warrior princess of Manipur. Through Chitra, Tagore stresses on the brighter side of the society where well-built and strong headed women overcome feminine longings and desire, emancipate themselves not only from the fetters of the society but also from their own individual shortcomings in the interest of the society at large. Author gives freedom to his protagonists to make her decisions independently. In this article, Chitra , the protagonist of the One act play has been studied in light of the philosophy of power feminism

The empowered female protagonists featured in Tagore's literary works definitely speak largely about how he strived to be a feminist in the truest sense, empowering his heroines to fight for an equal status amongst the throes of 19th century patriarchal society. Though the concept of feminism emerged in the west but Tagore, a learned man, could not resist to flow with the current. But what makes him different is that he speaks in pure Indian context and each female character of the writer is an embodiment of feminism having her own form of feministic impression on the reader. His works can broadly be divided into three stages namely (a) From 1881 to 1897 (b) From 1893 to 1913: (c) From 1914 to 1941: : Firstly in the initial stage he spoke about the social injustices against women and later he portrayed the educated and urban Indian woman who fought for human rights and equality and openly challenging social evils like widow-remarriage, untouchability, the rigid caste-system, and patriarchy at large. Some of characters like Mrinmoyee from *Sampati* Tagore's young, fun-loving heroine, Mrinmoyee, was what people might call an 'eternal tomboy'. Mrinal from *A Wife's Letter* Possibly one of the most powerful portrayals of a woman calling out the evils of patriarchy, Through Mrinal, Tagore described a woman who wasn't afraid to choose herself before her husband and his family, despite oppression from society towards her bold nature and her decision to become a writer and create an independent life for herself. Charulata from *A Broken Nest* who is a woman taking reins of her own desires and ambition.

His female characters come from diverse social settings and are inspirational as they struggle for space and self-sufficiency. Through his works, Tagore is seen breaking the pretence conventions of the society and thus invigorating women from their bondages. He projects women as the most major transformative factor within social aspect and shows a remarkable understanding of female mind and gave ample space to women and their lives and narratives in his novels, short stories and plays. Women from different social class, cast and character are featured in his works with multiple perspectives, dynamic characters and diverse narratives. Tagore observed of the plight of women in the then existing Hindu society. The issues of dowry, early marriage, domestic violence and passivity of women have carved in his wonderful stories. In the midst of these social obstructions, female education is shown as a greater need in the Tagore. In his stories and plays he lays large emphasis on empowering women may be it though education or in other form. For him the skill of the woman is the saviour of *Nashtaneer* or *The Ruined Nest*, is a good example of that. In *The Ruined Nest* we can see the male ego and false sense of pride is hurt when they come in touch with a woman who is not naive and unintelligible. Then again, in the novel *The Sand of Eye*, Tagore portrays how the force of eagerness and desire can weaken any relation from its roots. Tagore also shows how a man disrespects the union and promises with his wife under the corrupt wishes of sexuality where he has no capacity to overcome it.

In most of the stories and novels, Tagore has shown the possibilities women have of which they themselves are generally kept unaware. His works show how women were denied autonomy and it in turn the possibility of their personal growth was also demolished. His novels encompass vast range of issues. The issues of social inequality, religion, human relationships, human mind, society's false standards and contemporary political tensions have often found their way in his writings. Tagore's fiction, Women are illustrated in variety of ways. Tagore purposes the society of his times and develops his writings by relating them with ordinary Bengali Hindu family life. He criticizes the existing social injustices in his representation of the demoralized women who become conscious of their roles in society as well as the resources dormant in their own individuality. Through his long literary career Tagore explored woman as - the most creative transformative factor within social life.

The Concept of Power Feminism

The concept of power is vital to a wide variety of debates in feminist philosophy and the concept of power is functioning in one way or another on approximately all work in feminist theory. The concept of empowerment has been taken up extensively by advocates of "power feminism." A response against a perceived over-emphasis on women's victimization and oppression in feminism of the 1980s, power feminism emerged in the 1990s in the writings of feminists such as Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Naomi Wolf. Although this movement has had more influence in conventional media and culture than in academia -- indeed, in many ways it can be read as an analysis of academic feminism -- it has also initiated scholarly debate. As Mary Caputi argues in her recent book *Feminism and Power: The Need for Critical Theory* (2013), power feminists reject not only the

excessive focus on women's victimization but also the claim, made by earlier empowerment theorists, that women are "sensitive creatures given more to a caring, interconnected web of human relationships than to the rugged individualism espoused by men" (Caputi 2013, 4). In contrast, power feminists endorse a more individualistic, self-assertive, even aggressive commencement of empowerment, one that tends to classify empowerment in terms of individual preference with little concern for the contexts within which choices are made or the options from which women are able to choose.

In 1993, Naomi Wolf presented a divisive polemic on feminism in 'Fire with Fire', a New York Times notable book and national bestseller, Wolf called for a new approach to address shortcomings she supposed in the feminist movement. She cited a chief concern: that feminism was out of touch with the average woman's needs and mindset. She claimed that most women did not recognize with feminism, stating that the feminist movement relied a great deal upon scare strategy in seeking support. As a result she argued that feminism failed to inspire women. As evidence for it she claimed that women more often found role models. She praised modern iconic strong women and ancient archetypes as exemplars of power feminism. She conceived of power feminism as a positive form of feminist thought and engagement. The 'victim feminism' should be replaced with the 'power feminism' according to these feministic writers. 'Power feminism' is 'unapologetically sexual', 'free thinking', 'pleasure-loving' and 'self-assertive' (Wolf, Fire with Fire 149, 180). Power Feminism sees 'women as human beings-sexual, individual, no better or worse than their male counterparts and lays claim to equality simply because women are entitled to it'(xvii). Power feminism means identifying with the other women through shared pleasures and strengths, rather than shared vulnerability and pain. The distinguishing feature of power feminism is use and manipulation of its insider position within popular culture. The power feminism according to Wolf is that female makes herself capable of rearranging the master tools which she says are- the electoral process, press and money to exert her powers more effectively in society dominated by patriarchal system. This feminism turns the movement away from politics back to a apparition of individual self help. The ideology favours individuality rather than collectivism which includes self-interest, self-satisfaction, self-realisation and self-empowerment resulting in mass-empowerment.

Classic articulations of the latter definition of power (as power-to) are offered by Thomas Hobbes — power is a person's "present means...to obtain some future apparent Good" (Hobbes 1985 (1641), 150) — and Hannah Arendt — power is "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (1970, 44).

However, a significant strand of feminist theorizing of power starts with the contention that the conception of power as power-over, domination, or control is implicitly masculinist. In order to avoid such masculinist connotations, many feminists from a variety of theoretical backgrounds have argued for a reconceptualization of power as a capacity or ability, specifically, the capacity to empower or transform oneself and others. Thus, these feminists have tended to understand power not as power-over but as power-to. (Wartenberg (1990) argues that this feminist understanding of power, which he calls transformative power, is actually a type of power-over, albeit one that is distinct from domination because it aims at empowering those over whom it is exercised. However, most of the feminists who embrace this transformative or empowerment-based conception of power explicitly define it as an ability or capacity and present it as an alternative to putatively masculine notions of power-over. Thus, in what follows, I will follow their usage rather than Wartenberg's.)

For example, Jean Baker Miller claims that "women's examination of power...can bring new understanding to the whole concept of power" (Miller 1992, 241). Miller rejects the definition of power as domination; instead, she defines it as "the capacity to produce a change — that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B" (Miller 1992, 241). Miller suggests that power understood as domination is particularly masculine; from women's perspective, power is understood differently: "there is enormous validity in women's not wanting to use power as it is presently conceived and used. Rather, women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others" (Miller 1992, 247–248).

Similarly, Virginia Held argues against the masculinist conception of power as "the power to cause others to submit to one's will, the power that led men to seek hierarchical control and...contractual constraints" (Held 1993, 136). Held views women's unique experiences as mothers and caregivers as the basis for new insights into power; as she puts it, "the capacity to give birth and to nurture and empower could be the basis for new and more humanly promising conceptions than the ones that now prevail of power, empowerment, and growth" (Held 1993, 137). According to Held, "the power of a mothering

person to empower others, to foster transformative growth, is a different sort of power from that of a stronger sword or a dominant will” (Held 1993, 209). On Held’s view, a feminist analysis of society and politics leads to an understanding of power as the capacity to transform and empower oneself and others.

Chitra a Mesmerising Tale of Power, Beauty, Sensuality, Love And Power:

Chitra is a tale of power, bravery, longing, beauty, love, completeness, self realization, sense of duty, generosity of spirit, high-mindedness and again **Power**. It starts with a powerful and brave woman who falls a pray to the human desires and transforms oneself completely in love for Arjuna, but soon has a self realization that she would be really satisfied if Arjuna loves her in her original form. And this results in the attainment of the real mental and physical power which she is able to earn for herself.

Chitra is a lyrical drama, a translation of Chitrangada (1892) based on the love story of legendary prince of Kuru clan, Arjuna, and Chitra a princess of Manipur. The play is divided into nine scenes and the characters are Madana, (God of love), Vasanta (God of Spring and eternal youth), Chitra, Arjuna and villagers.

The play adapts part of the story from the Mahabharata and centres upon the character of Chitra a female warrior who tries to attract the attention of Arjuna. The play begins with Chitra's conversation with Madana, the god of love, and Vasanta, the god of springtime and eternal youth. They ask Chitra who she is and what is bothering her, to which she replies that she is the daughter of the king of Manipur who has been raised like a boy as her father had no male heir. She is a great warrior and hero despite being born as a woman, but has never had the chance to truly live as a woman or gain knowledge of how to use "feminine wiles". Chitra explains that she had met the warrior hero Arjuna after seeing him in the forest while she was hunting for game. Despite knowing that he had pledged several vows including one for twelve years of celibacy, Chitra fell instantly in love with him and develops a desire to fall in love with her dream warrior. The following day she tried to approach him and plead her case, but Arjuna turned her away due to his vows. She wants to be superbly beautiful for a day to ensure Arjuna. Chitra begs with the two gods to give her a day of perfect beauty so she can win over Arjuna and have just one night of love with him. Moved by her pleas, the two gods grant her a year of perfect flowery beauty for a full year. And she turns enchantingly beautiful ready to win her love.

The next scene opens with Arjuna marvelling over the perfect beauty he has seen. Chitra, the beauty of which he mentions, enters and Arjuna immediately strikes up a conversation with her. He requests to know what she is searching for, to which Chitra coyly replies that she is seeking the man of her desires. The two go back and forth until Chitra admits that she is looking for him, which prompts Arjuna to say that he will no longer hold to his vows of chastity. Chitra finds that rather than make her happy, hearing this makes her extremely unhappy since he is not falling for her true self and tells him not to offer his heart to an illusion.

Later the next day, Chitra admits to Madana and Vasanta that she had spurned Arjuna due to him falling for what she saw as a false image of herself. The two gods scold her as they had only given her what she had asked of them. Chitra replies that despite their gift, she sees the perfect beauty as a being separate from herself and that even if she had slept with Arjuna, it would not be the true her that he loved- only her beauty. Vasanta advises Chitra to go to Arjuna and spend the year with him and that at the year's end Arjuna will be able to embrace the true Chitra once the spell of perfect beauty is gone. Chitra does so, but throughout their year together she assumes that Arjuna will not love her once the year is up. After much time has passed, Arjuna begins to grow restless and longs to hunt once again. He also begins to ask Chitra questions about her past, wondering if she has anyone at home that is missing her. Chitra remarks that she has no past and that she's as transient as a drop of dew, which upsets Arjuna. With the year approaching its end, Chitra asks that the two gods make her last night her most beautiful, which they do.

In the eighth scene Arjuna meets the endangered villagers who tell him about the Chitra being the only person to save them from robbers and invaders. However around the same time Arjuna on hearing the tales of the warrior Princess Chitra begins to wonder what she might be like. Never having told him her name, Chitra assures Arjuna that he would never have noticed Chitra if he had passed by her and tries to coax him into bed. Arjuna declines, saying that some villagers have informed him that Manipur is under

attack. Chitra assures him that the city is well protected, but to no avail. The disguised Chitra tells Arjuna all about The warrior woman Chitra and asks him if he would love her even if she shuns all beauty. Arjuna's mind is preoccupied with the thoughts of Chitra and the invaders' attack but seeing her weeping he stays back.

When the disuniting time comes the two lovers have no remorse as life has given them all they want but still something was remaining. Here Chitra wants Arjuna to love her real self and she says, "If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart sprung the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fire, no longer trailing in the dust like a liana shall I then appeal to man's eye? No, no you could not endure it."

Shortly later the time comes when she throws away her ornaments and veil and stands in dignity saying, "I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshiped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with difference". Arjuna now sees in Chitra, in spite of all her blemishes an image of nobility and grandeur and says, "Beloved, my life is full."

The play ends with Chitra finally admitting to Arjuna that she is the princess of which he spoke of and that she begged for beauty in order to win him over. She admits that she is not a perfect beauty, but that if he would accept her then she would remain with him forever. Chitra also admits that she is pregnant with his son. Arjuna meets this news with joy and states that his life is truly full. In true sense now the love is born of deep understanding and shared experience, and this ultimately leads to the vision of their being true to their discarded selves.

Characterization of Chitra and Power Feminism

Tagore's heroines belong to two broad categories, the Type of feminine charm and the type of feminine grace, serene in her self-assurance and radiating a tranquil charm and silent power over the human heart. His women are not abstract entities but creations of flesh and blood, pulsating with convincing liveliness. Overflowing with the current of freedom in thoughts and vision. They are represented facing the everyday problems of life and he explores deep into their heart with his keen psychological insight. His characters are dynamic characters and undergo tremendous changes in their encounter with reality. In this play we have an emotional and the tranquilizing woman Chitra fusion of the feminine charm and the feminine grace and self assurance.

In Chitra we see an evolution from illusion to reality and transition is seen from fire of flowering spring to the mellow fruitfulness of autumn. She is seen advancing from the sensual pleasures to the absolute reality and wisdom. One aspect of her personality is the illusory beauty with which she fascinates and wins the heart of Arjuna, her hero. He is captivated by her disguised beauty and he kneels down at Chitra's feet and begs for her love. But she moves to a point in the drama where the transition takes place. Through her experiences she obtains self-knowledge and gradually she realizes:

"Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's true homage to woman, Alas! That this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit."

In her disguise she has the power of charm and absolute beauty of spring and flowers which can make any man bow before her. Also she is successful in attaining the love from Arjuna she was in search for. But she soon realises the fact that the real pleasure is in winning the love for her original trait of personality which was her strength and power of her arms and a motherly love for her subject. She was a terror for evil doers and a father and mother to her people. In her real self she was a brave girl, a warrior and saviour of the frontiers. She was a man in Valour but woman in tenderness. Arjuna, after hearing from the villagers about their princess thinks about her as the goddess of victory and says to her:

"Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with fierce love. Women's arms though adorned with nought, but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent, reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space." Arjuna respects the bravery and valour of Chitra and gives her equal status. Here racing on the horse side by side symbolises the same idea of equality and respect to the women and making her a partner in the journey of life. Here Tagore adores the beauty in women along with her strength of body, mind and heart.

According to the principle of feminism, women in the society should be treated equally irrespective of caste, colour, creed and gender. Tagore's India was awakening to such social changes. In order to inspire his people to bring positive changes in their lives and putting forth an episode from the epic, Tagore has woven the theme of this one-act-play about the topics which were close to his heart- Nature, Beauty, love, self realization and self assertion. In this play he artistically weaves human emotions around social issues like role of women in modern society, empowering women and leading the society to gender equality. The message of the play would have been incomplete without the empowered Chitra and so we can say that here she symbolises the power feminism in the real sense. To attain full satisfaction of personality a woman need to be powerful and not victimized. This power may be a natural or attained power, inner or outer which may give completeness to the women also the need of power may change with changing situations. It becomes essential for a woman to change to continue to analyze the situation and keep attaining newer powers with the change in time and situation to end up in getting the best in the battle of life.

Concluding Thoughts

The concept of power is central to a wide variety of debates in feminist philosophy. The concept of power is operative in one way or another on almost all work in feminist theory. Here an attempt has been made to emphasize through the study of the character and theme of Chitra of which the concept of power is a central theme that the real power of a woman is her realization of real self and following her dreams. In the play the male and female central characters are equally powerful and dominant on their reins. No one is weaker to the other and from here the real power politics start. A woman well armed with the tools of a man is defeating him here by winning his heart and respect for herself. With her tools of beauty Chitra could only win false love but with equality she could win not only real love but also respect and highest homage for herself. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Susan Moller Okin has rightly opined that power is a resource that is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women; hence, one of the goals of feminism would be to redistribute this resource in more equitable ways.

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