Masculinity Is Not For Men Only, - An Empowered Vision To Remove Gender Biasness, - Based On Tagore's "Chitrangada"

By Sohini Bhattacharyya
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
KSS Jain College of Education

Abstract: Art reflects its age. The role of a writer is to hold a mirror up to society, to show things, which we haven't seen or thought before.

Rabindranath Tagore, was such a writer, carved a distinct niche for himself by engaging his narratives of reality set in imaginary worlds. Throughout his fictional works, one can strongly observe a static reminder of the then contemporary realities and aspirations.

Though we are a part of modern 21st century, still in some respects, still in some respects, till date, our society follow that tradition which is basically meaningless still painful. Gender stereotypes and biasness is one of them.

Tagore, at his time, realized that pre-determined strictness of the society very much. So, he wanted to break this vision through his creation.

Well by turning his pen into a sword, he wrote "Chitrangada" (1936), a dance drama, whereby portraying such a character like Chitrangada, he wanted to change the vision and typically judgmental mind of our society.

Hence, the objective of this paper is to highlight the power dynamics of gender by analyzing Tagore's dance drama "Chitrangada".

Key Words: - Gender, Gender Stereotypes, Gender Role, Masculinity, Femininity, Power Dynamics of Gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Art reflects its age. The role of a writer is to hold a mirror up to society. Show us things, we haven't seen or thought before. Give us some unforgettable, powerful characters, involve with problems of survival. Reveal, what it means to be human.

Rabindranath Tagore, popularly known as 'Gurudev', was such a writer, carves a distinct niche for himself by engaging his narratives of reality set in imaginary worlds. Throughout his fictional works, one can strongly observe a static reminder of the then contemporary realities and aspirations.

It is pointless to begin this discussion by repeating praises of the sheer vastness of Tagore's body of work. An essayist, composer, storyteller and philosopher – all in one – Tagore repeatedly addressed the gender question interestingly, only the feminine one, time and again.

The main feature of this paper to draw the vision of Tagore, regarding Gender equality and empowerment, based on his dance drama 'Chitrangada'. He not only wanted to break the traditional view of a society regarding a woman, but also highlighted his forward outlook by portraying such empowered, self-confident, masculine, heroic character Chitrangada.

Tagore realized that Indian Society is permeated by religion and living myth, endowed with a psychic landscape having its concept of time and space. He wanted to break the gender stereotype mentality of our society.

Vyas tale of Chitrangada stands in sharp contrast to Tagore's characterization. Tagore only seemed to have borrowed the facts that Arjuna married Chitrangada (the princess of Manipur) during the time of his exile while he supposed to practice the vow of celibacy and that Chitrangada had true Kshatriya fostering and ascribe. The rest was his original construct. He formed the character of Chitrangada very consciously. By portraying her unique characteristics, he wanted to break the gender biasness by empowering the neglected / weaker tone.

Gender is multifaceted reality which is culturally constructed and socially determined. In other words, gender portrays culturally and socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women of men.

Gender is a social construct whereas sex is the biological make-up of male and female. Sex is what we are born with and does not change over time, nor differs from place to place.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ON GENDER

The theoretical framework of gender needs to be drawn further by discussing various opinions of the prominent theorists –

Ariyabandhu (2009), stated that gender refers to the biological or sexual differences between men and women, which make substantial distinctions in how they behave, relate and respond to needs of the family, kinship, caste, community, society and the state. These factors are indications of gender differences and gender roles, which were facilitated by the process of socialization, customs, norms, historical traditions and government machinery.

Margaret Mead (1928) revealed how the behaviour of men and women differed from one culture to another and thereby challenged the notion that all gender differences were innate. On the other hand, behaviour argued that the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. Male and female stand opposed within a primordial mitsein, and woman has not broken it. The couple (Man and Woman) is a basic unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. The critical trait of woman is that, she is the 'other' in a totality of which two components are essential to one another.

III. ROLE AND STEREOTYPE NATURE OF GENDER IN SOCIETY

Gender roles in society means how we are expected to act, speak, dressing up, groom and conduct ourselves, based upon our assigned sex.

A stereotype is a widely accepted judgement of bias about a person or group even through its overly simplified and not always accurate. It may create unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. They may be categorized on four basic kinds –

- **Personality Traits**
  For example, women are often expected to be accommodating and emotional while men are usually accepted to be self-confident and aggressive.
- **Domestic Behaviours**
  For example, some people expect that women will take care of the children, cook and clean the home while men take care of finances, work on the car and do the home repairs.
- **Occupations**
  Some people are quick to assume that teachers and nurses are women and that pilots, doctors and engineers are men.
- **Physical Appearance**
  For example, women are expected to be thin and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and muscular. Men and women are also expected to dress and groom in ways that are stereotypical to their gender (like men wearing pants with short hairstyles, women wearing dresses and makeup.)

IV. MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Masculine and feminine, when hearing those two words, one might immediately think of men and women. It said that, masculinity was traditionally associated with men while feminine associated with women only.

Now if we define some common traits, that are considered masculine, it includes – Dominant, Independent, Assertive, Brave, Innovative, while traits considered for feminine characteristics includes – Emotional, Collaborative, Nurturing, Vulnerable, Caring, Humble.

While most men are masculine, there are some that have feminine tendencies and some that have ultra masculine. Similarly, most women are feminine, some have masculine tendencies, and some are ultra feminine.

Levels of masculinity and Femininity like sexual orientation, are set before birth. How masculine or feminine a person will depend on their level of exposure to male hormones in the womb. This prenatal exposure to male hormones sets a baseline level of masculinity or femininity in people.

So, this is the reason by which we can spot varying levels of masculinity and Femininity, even in kids. Some boys are more masculine and aggressive while others tend to become feminine and submissive

Similarly, some girls are more feminine and enjoy playing with dolls while others are more into masculine stuff.

So, these types of prejudice based on masculinity and Femininity in our society are completely baseless.

V. TRAITS OF MASCULINE WOMEN –

- **Physiological Trait**
  Masculine women have a higher baseline level of male hormones like testosterone. This is reflected in their physiology in several ways like – masculine face, male gait, deep voice etc.
- **Psychological Trait**
  Some psychological traits of Masculine Women are – dominance and aggression, masculine interests (such as sports, body building, cars, bikes, fishing, camping etc.), Independence and self-reliance, assertiveness, courage, ambitious, rationality, competitiveness.

Basically, 'Manliness' and 'Womanliness' – both have to be acquired even by men and women himself/herself. These are not in born talent for anyone. Simon de Beauvoir, in her book, 'Le Deuxieme Sex', translated into English as 'The Second Sex' (1949), said that, one doesn't take birth as a woman, but grows up to be a woman –

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, physical or economic destiny defines the figure that human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborate this intermediatory product between male and the eunuch that is called feminine." (1)

Since the immemorial, our society has made rules and opinions on child rearing. The social framework and guidelines coerce a child to grow up society as a female or a male. The concept of narration and bearing children is introduced to the girls since their childhood and hence they grow up towards a fulfilment of their roles. On the other hand, a male child grows up as a male without any such constraints. Rabindranath Tagore, in his legendary work 'Chitrangada', broke this stereotype thinking.

In our grand epic "Mahabharata", Chitrangada, the daughter of the king of Manipur was nothing more than a beloved wife of Kuru Shrestha Arjuna and mother of Bobhrubahana.

But in Tagore's Play (1892), she enjoys way more attention undoubtedly. In Tagorean representation, she enjoys the centrality and that too because of a specific reason.

In the characterization of Chitrangada, Tagore created not clearly demarcated boxes of gender identities, but makes for a confusion, that too made further complex with variations in each of the versions of the play.

The text of the 1936 edition of the dance – drama did not delineate Kurupa from Surupa Chitrangada. Yet within performance, as well as within musical renditions, the two roles are almost always clearly separated. This delineation, therefore, while not present at the textual level at all, seems to rely on external signifiers, which inevitably tend to draw

upon accepted conventions and norms regarding gender. What is different is the idea of fluidity that is associated with Tagore's representation of 'Gender'.

In 'Chitrangada' (both the play and dance drama version), 'gender' did not exist as a pre-determined idea. The king of Manipur had raised and groomed his daughter as a male child, in other words, like a Prince. He taught her warfare, archery, royal rules etc. Chitrangada grew up like a royal prince in the environment of all royal comfort. She was supposed to be a princess only but the gender stereotypes were defied. Lord Shiva had blessed Manipur that it will beget princess only, but a girl was born. Then the king decided to raise his child as a prince and as his successor and thus Chitrangada grew up as a prince. This was the basic framework of Tagore's 'Chitrangada'.

Chitrangada was not the product of a society with stereotypical bindings or male chauvinism. In mentality, activities and personality, Chitrangada grew up as good as a man.

But instincts do not change. Whatever manliness she achieved; she was fundamentally a woman. Feminine qualities and instincts flowed in her blood.

For that reason, during the hunting time, when she saw Arjuna for the first time, she falls in love with him instantly. Here she felt herself like a woman and gathered courage to propose Arjuna for marriage the very next day.

But when she went to Arjuna to submit herself before him, Arjuna rejected her proposal respectively by explaining that he is observing celibacy –

"ক্ষমা করো আমায়–
বরণযোগ্য নহি বিরাঙ্গণে–
ব্রহ্মচারী ব্রতধারী॥" *(2)*

(Forgive me, I cannot accept you, I have the vows of a Brahmachari)

(self-translation)

But Chitrangada clearly understood the harsh reality. She acquired masculine characteristics but always neglected her womanhood. She neither have eye soothing beauty, nor have that charm to attract some handsome man like Arjuna. For the first time, she felt the vein pride of her mainly velour –

" হায় হায়, নারীরে করেছি ব্যর্থ
দীর্ঘকাল জীবনে আমার! *(3)*

(Alas! I have failed the woman in my life for a long time…)

(Self-translation)

By Arjuna's rejection, Chitrangada became aware of the lack of tenderness, beauty, grace and charm in her which are an indispensable part of a woman. The opposite way of grooming her as a male child had closed her doors of her first Kovi. So, she prayed to Madana (the God of Love), for a yearlong to instill in her all the qualities of a woman. By his boon, she turned into a heavenly beautiful lady with full of charm, grace and elegance –

"এ কী দেখি!
এ কে এল মোর দেহে
পূর্ব– ইতিহাসধারা!
আমি কোন্ গত জনমের স্বপ্ন,
বিশ্বের অপরিচিতা আমি
আমি নহি রাজকন্যা চিত্রাঙ্গদা,…" *(4)*

(What do I see! / Who is this who has entered my body! / Previous history of women/ I am a stranger to the world. / I am not Princess Chitrangada.)

(Self-translation)

By the blessings of Madana, the Kurupa Chitrangda turned into Surupa. Feminine beauty entered into her body. This time when she catches Arjun's gaze, he saw an appreciation of beauty in the perfect form of a woman. The vow of celibacy is dissolved instantly. The Pandava declared himself to be a love hungered guest at her door –

"... লহো মোর খ্যাতি,
লহো মোর কীর্তি,
লহো আমার পৌরুষ গর্ব।
লহো আমার সর্ব ।। " (5)

(Take my name / Take my fame/ Take my masculine glory/ Take my everything) (self-translation)

Now although her aspiration is fulfilled, Arjun's instant enchantment with her physical appeal incites a sudden realization and a sharp disgust in Chitrangada. She felt that this love is due to her physical beauty and not because of the individual person in her. So, this love is false.

A fight between ego of the personality and ego of the beauty is ensured. She realized that beauty is just a cover that a person is under, which is false. She felt shame on herself for neglecting her real self just for being the beloved wife of Arjuna –

" লজ্জা, লজ্জা, হায় এ কী লজ্জা –
মিথ্যা রূপ মোর মিথ্যা সজ্জা।" (6)

Shame on me for glorifying myself with the essence of fake beauty. This is a heaven of fake dream. Is this can be considered as gift! Shame)

(Self-translation)

In between when a group of bandits attacked villagers, they were assuring each other by giving the victory sound in the name of Chitrangada. That is for the first time when Arjuna came to know that the life saver of those villagers is none other than a woman – that woman, who is like their mother in showing love and affection, like a king in showing strength to rescue wreakers – she is Chitrangada – the princess of Manipur.

Finally, Arjuna became eager to meet the real Chitrangada, better to say the Kurupa version with less beauty and charm, who glorify herself with the essence of both masculinity and Femininity.

Arjuna wanted to have Chitrangada the way she wanted. Chitrangada asserted her particular position. In society, the position of a woman ought to be just beside the man.

Yes, worshipping a lady as a Goddess or neglecting her as a waste, both are unacceptable. To give respect to a lady, we need to acknowledge her as equal to men and give her the required position in society. That's to Chitrangada said –

" আমি চিত্রাঙ্গদা, আমি রাজেন্দ্রনন্দিনী।
নহি দেবী, নহি সামান্যা নারী।
পূজা করি মোরে রাখিবে ঊর্ধ্বে,
সে নহে নহে,
হেলা করি মোরে রাখিবে পিছে,
সে নহে নহে।
যদি পার্শ্বে রাখ মোরে
সঙ্কটে সম্পদে,
সম্মতি দাও যদি কঠিন ব্রতে
সহায় হতে,
পাবে তবে তুমি চিনিতে মোরে।
আজ শুধু করি নিবেদন–
আমি চিত্রাঙ্গদা রাজেন্দ্রনন্দিনী।। "(7)

(I am Chitrangada, the precious daughter of the king of Manipur. Neither a goddess, nor a woman, commonplace and mundane. Allowing me to be a true partner in your life's journey. I am not the one you hail in the altar, worshipping, nor am I the one you keep behind in negligence. Once you recognize my essence, keeping me beside you. Amid your deep hours of crisis, allowing me to be a true partner in your life's journey – A true accomplice in your mission. Only then you will know my true self.)

(Self-translation)

A complete womanhood can be achieved when man and woman share their happiness and woes together, only when they complement each other. Here we find a deviation from the traditional sociological mindset. It breaks the stereotype of woman as the subordinate.

Tagore's "Chitrangada" is totally different from the conventional portray of masculinity and Femininity in India. The thought and the conflict of thoughts from where Chitrangada has taken birth, symbolized a long dispute. The evaluation of women with masculinity in a male dominated society has got a new turning point of power dynamics of Gender through the character of Chitrangada.

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