

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

REFLECTION OF GANDHIAN IDEALISM IN TAGORE'S MUKTA-DHARA

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an Indian English drama, looking at its history in order to contextualize the texts under examination, and the specific arguments surrounding the study of Tagore's Mukta-dhara which is related with Gandhian's idealism and to show how it is reflected in Tagore's Mukta-dhara. It then looks closely to the characters in the play portraying Gandhian ideals in particular with regards to Tagore and Gandhi, combination of their ideas and their principles as a concept of my discussion. This study attempts to investigate the reflection of Gandhian idealism and his principles in Tagore's Mukta-dhara.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an artistic expression of the best that is taught in the world. It grows upon life, reacts upon life, and is fed by life. In the words of Oscar wilde, "literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds to its purpose".

The play takes its name from a mountain stream named Mukta-dhara (meaning literally "freed current"). A mountain stream is dammed under the orders of Ranajit, king of Uttarakut, by the royal engineer Bibhuti, to withhold the water of the stream from the people of Shiv-tarai who are in need of it for irrigating their fields. Ranajit hopes to keep shiv-tarai in subjection by controlling the source of its well-being.

The dam is a great engineering feat, and the people of Uttarakut are proud of it and of their engineer Bibhuti. But god-fearing people look upon it as an affront to Nature and God and fear that only evil will come out of search inordinate pride and greed.

The crown prince openly disapproves the construction of the dam and expresses his sympathy for the people of Shiv-tarai. He has just been re-called by the king from his viceroyalty of Shiv-tarai after re-opening the road which had been closed for a long time. He feels that as the free waters of the river have been dammed by the king so his own free spirit has been chained by his life in the palace. He wants

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to free himself by freeing the imprisoned waters of the stream. He breaks the dam and he was fatally wounded in this attempt and he was swept away by the rushing waters.

REFLECTION OF GANDHIAN IDEALISM IN TAGORE'S MUKTA-DHARA :

It is a well-known fact that Tagore and Gandhiji maintained true friendship, inspite of their differences of opinion.

Romain Rolland writes:

“The controversy between Tagore and Gandhi, between two great minds, both moved by mutual admiration and esteem, but as fatally separated in their feeling as a philosopher can be from an apostle as St. Paul from Plato is important. For, on the one side we have the spirit of religious faith and charity seeking to found a new humanity. On the other we have intelligence, free born serene and bold, seeking to unite aspirations of all humanity in sympathy and understanding”. (p-76)

C.F Andrews and W.W Parson who were the close associates and life-long friends of Tagore became the bridge of contact between Tagore and Gandhiji. When they both left for south Africa in 1913 to study the passive resistance movement led by Gandhiji they carried with them Tagore's good will and best wishes for the success of Gandhi's mission.

Both Tagore and Gandhiji could know and understand each other in a soul communion even before they had met. This great meeting happened in March 1915. Six days Gandhiji spent in Santhiniketan. This visit laid the foundation of a life-long friendship between him and Tagore, two makers of modern India, and brought into relief the envious contrasts as well as the veiled kinship between the personalities and dynamics of the idealism.

Gandhiji could make friends in his characteristic way not only with Tagore, but also with the inmates of Shanthiniketan and try to inculcate the swadeshi ideals, especially putting an end to the hired-labor system within the ashram. He launched this experiment on 10th March 1915 and as both Tagore and Gandhiji expected, it did not last long. But the memory of the experiment survives in Shanthiniketan. Every year the tenth of March is observed as Gandhi day when all the paid servants are given a holiday and the teachers and students undertake the work done by the servants.

Krishna Kripalini gives a graphic description of these two saints,

“Gandhi and Tagore-the saints who strove to make politics holy and the poets who made holiness seem beautiful
Gandhiji practice was always in advance of his ideology
Tagore had wings to his thoughts and feet to his indent Practice...Gandhiji the stem ascetic was more humane than the humanist a kill joy in the theory he brought comfort to millions of humans hearts Tagore, the pagan-lover saw heaven where Gandhiji failed to see it. These two faces of modern India, one rugged, one chiseled, both equally luminous, represent two aspects of Indian Sadhana a

realization of life's truth". (p-101).

Of this attraction to both, C.F. Andrews makes a clear observation: "Side by side with the friendship with the poet, I have had the supreme happiness of a second personal friendship with character, in his own way, is as great and as creative as that of Tagore himself. It is however, of more ascetic order. Tagore is essentially a modern; Mahatma Gandhi is the St. Francis of our own days" (Kripalani, 55). Tagore naturally voices out the Gandhian principles in his writings.

In many occasions Gandhiji had talked about the problems concerned with the indication of technology and its inevitable corollary, machinery; however, he is not blind to his usefulness too. He has elaborately dealt with the relationships like man and machine, man and production, society and production, society and distribution, machines and values, technology and society and man and nature. He discusses all these categories against his own system of six central concepts namely, Truth, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Swadeshi, Equality and Bread-labour. And man is central to all aspects of the Gandhian system. All the six concepts are not separate compartments, but are complementary to each other.

According to Gandhiji man has to strive hard to attain truth throughout his life and what he has achieved can only be tested in the service of others. One has to move on his search of truth and in this progression non-violence and Satyagraha become two indispensable ingredients. Satyagraha means truth-persuasion (Satya-Truth; agraha-persuasion). It means struggle and conflict practice in the method of non-violence. Swadeshi is not a narrow nationalism, but to Gandhi it meant a very high degree of self-reliance on the part of individual functioning at social, political and other levels. Swadeshi, as fundamental principle aims at self-sufficiency and does not allow exploitation of the weaker section of the society by the stronger ones.

From the Gandhian point of view, Swadeshi means equality which is possible to be attained only through bread-labour. Gandhiji, therefore insists on the necessity of certain minimum physical effort of every individual in the society, thus, his six concepts are inter-related and he applies them to all areas of human activities. They become important components of his views on science, technology and machinery, since machinery reduces man to a selfish brute and renders him inhuman. At the same time, Gandhiji is not against simple machinery that will minimize the strain of individual. Some of his observations are worth quoting:

"we do not need the machine. My fundamental objection to machinery rests on the fact that it is machinery that has enabled these nations to exploit others. In itself it is a wooden thing and can be turned to good purpose or bad. But, it is easily turned to a bad purpose... Industrialism is, I am afraid going to be a curse for mankind". (Kripalani p-64)

He earnestly hopes that India should never take to industrialism as the manner of the west. For, "the economic imperialism of a single tiny kingdom England" has caught hold of "the world in chains" and "if an entire nation of three hundred million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world like locusts". It can be seen that some of these concepts are indirectly expressed in Tagore's Mukta-dhara.

The dam built across the water of Mukta-dhara is the "soulless achievement" of the

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engineer Bibhuti. The machine stands aloft challenging the trident of Lord Bhairava and threatens the economic well-being of Shiv-tarai whose people are held in subjection to the king of Uttarakut. Both the king and the engineer gloat over their successful operation in controlling the poor Shiv-tarayans. Man's diabolical skill is thus symbolized by the machine being the outward expression of the tyranny of man. The citizens of Uttarakut too show similar imperialistic tendencies and are very proud of the mighty engine tower. They are very confident and happy that the defenceless Shiv-tarayans will be forever at their mercy. The life source of their neighbours, water, has been successfully fettered by tremendous feat. Of course, with considerable loss of life of the own brethren.

The king, the engineer and his illiterate citizens of Uttarakut stand as the symbol of arrogance and pride, their own greediness and inhuman qualities are showed in the massive machine which is the veritable treat to the Shiv-tarayans, if the folk of Shiv-tarai are ignorant of the impending danger in the form of a machine Uttarakut people do not see the laws of amity and unity within themselves. The machine thus turns to be a demon of thirst, ready to suck the physical and spiritual energy of the people of both the places alike Bibhuti the creator of this danger who is unmindful of the impending danger and he haughtily says that he has no think of whether some farmer's paltry maize crop would die. He enjoys himself the splendour of the power of the machine and he does not care for the curses as life seems to be an insignificant matter to him. He asks in an arrogant tone, a man fights the power of the God, does he care the curses of men. One can see clearly that Bibhuti unconsciously identifies himself with the machine he has made.

King Ranajit and Bibhuti are indirect representation symbolizing their insights of Gandhian thoughts and ideology. Prince Abhijit and Dhananjaya happen to be the representation of Gandhian idealism. Prince Abhijit is the personification of the Gandhian ideals, the Gandhian concepts namely Truth, Ahimsa and Satyagraha. He recognizes a psychological association with the freed current or Mukta – dhara. He enjoys sleeping, hearing the sound of waterfalls which seems to be a lullaby to him. He says to his foster father about the sound of this water, I hear my mother's voice. Mukta- dhara is not only his mother but also the mother to both Uttarakut and Shiv-tarai and when her feet are bounding the iron fetters, it becomes imperative for him to set her free. He determines to sacrifice his life in his attempt to liberate the imprisoned current by forcing the dam at a weak point.

As K.R Kripalani puts it, in Prince Abhijit, "love of freedom and sympathy for the oppressed discovers their appropriate symbolism." (p-77). In the end he loses his life but he gains an immortal life. To quote Kripalani again: "The last desperate act of self-sacrifice, awful nature of the consummation sought are achieved by the prince, which brings the play to its close, leaves one with a sense of the tragic splendour of man's spirit silencing all contentions for the moments. What happens to the people of Shiv-tarai, we have forgotten to inquire." (p-81). To destroy the monstrous idol, the Mukta-dhara dam, Prince Abhijit has to do a Satyagraha the threefold energy which brought about by the active force of love, faith and sacrifice. Gandhi's words must be remembered in this context.

"Where there is only a choice between cowardice

and violence I advise violence. I cultivate the quiet courage of dying without killing but to him who has not this courage? I advise that of killing and of being killed, rather than that of shamefully, fleeing from danger. For he who runs always

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commits mental violence: he runs away because
he has not the courage to be killed which he kills"
(S.K.Desai p-123)

Even when king Visvajit persuades the prince to go with him to Mohangarh, Abhijit refuses to comply with this cowardly act and declares that "the same work is not for all what has fallen to me is mine alone". His determination source is indomitable will and his willingness to suffer the freedom he seeks is not for him alone and is not for the Mukta-dhara but of his country also so that he can awaken to reality.

Gandhiji writes: "Strength does not come from physical capacity it comes from indomitable will. Non-violence does not mean meek submission to will of the evil-doer but the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration" (Kripalani, 146), Tremendous sacrifice and suffering become essential whether it is for an individual's inward progression or for a nation's progression towards self-sufficiency.

Gandhiji categorically declares, "Suffering is the mark of the human tribe, it is an eternal law. Life comes out of death. The condition of wheat growing is that the seed grain should perish. No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering. It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being that its progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone. The power of the suffering the greater is the progress." (Kripalani p-158).

The sufferings and sacrifices of an individual, says Tagore, "is to awaken the dead to life by soul fire". Prince Abhijit is the monumental example of his creator's belief. Tagore seems to have had a foresight in 1922 as to what will happen in 1947. His hero Abhijit is all ready to plunge in darkness to see the permanent light. The conversation between Visvajit and Abhijit points to the prince's firm decision.

Visvajit: The people of shiv-tarai are devoted to you,
They are eager to lend you a hand, won't you call them?
Abhijit: If they had heard the call that I did, they would not wait
for me. If they follow my call they will lose their way.
Visvajit: But it grows dark, brother.
Abhijit: Where the call has sounded, the light will be given to...
(Tagore Mukta-dhara Act III, 54)

Pained by the happenings at Noakhali in east Bengali and in a mood of self-examination, almost of self-castigation, Gandhiji has made entry in his diary, dated 2, January 1947. It reads: "Have been awake since I am god's grace alone is sustaining me. I can see there is some grave defect in me somewhere which is the cause of all this". All around me is utter darkness. When will god take me out of this darkness into his light? He owns the responsibility for the communal violence and inflicts self-punishment by bare footed in the village - to - village tour. One of the songs of Tagore which Gandhiji liked the most expresses his anguish and pain.

Walk alone

If they answer not to thy call walk alone;
If they afraid and cower mutely facing the wall.
O, thou of evil luck.

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Open thy mind and speak out alone.
If they turn away and desert when crossing the wilderness.
O' thou of evil luck
Trampled of thorns under thy tread.
And along the blood-lined tract travel alone.
If they do not hold up the light when the night is trouble which storm
O' thou of evil luck
With the thunder flame of plain ignite thine own heart
And let it burn alone.

Perhaps the song depicts the underlying sorrow in the innate self of Tagore's hero, Prince Abhijit. Vairagi or the ascetic Dhananjaya says Krishan Kripalani is "the proto type of Mahatma Gandhi, who first appeared in his drama. Prayas-chitta (Atonement), published in 1909. In that play as in the present one, Dhananjaya exhorts the subject the people to resist the ruler's claim non-violently and fearlessly. (p-48)". Dhananjaya of Prayas-chitta anticipates Gandhiji. He rises against the tyranny of the ruler following the method of non-violent civil resistance and non-payment of taxes. Vairagi or Dhananjaya of Mukta-dhara tries to teach the Shiv-tarayans the meaning of non-violence and Satyagraha. The wronged citizens are ready to pounce the cruel Chandapal, the king's brother-in-law, who beats them without any remorse. They only want a green signal from their beloved Vairagi.

But Vairagi is not for such an inhuman treatment, even though Chandapal deserves such a treatment. He asks them: "Can't you show him what not beating is? That needs too much strength; I suppose beating the waves won't stop the storm. But hold your rudder steady and you win. As soon as you can hold up your head and say that it does not hurt, the roots of violence will be cut. Nothing can hurt your real manhood for that is the flame of fire. The animal, that is the flesh, feels the blow and whines". To Gandhiji Satyagraha was a soul force and he wanted to train his people in hard school of Satyagraha. He laid all his hopes on Satyagraha for gaining freedom not for India but for the whole world. He once said that India will find her salvation through non-violence and through non-violence alone India will contribute to the salvation of the world. Gandhi never liked anyone to call him a 'Mahatma'. As Romain Rolland says,

"There is no danger of his being swept off his feet by pride. No amount of adoration can turn his head. On the contrary, it wounds not only in the sense of fitness of things but his spirit of humility. His forehead remains calm and clear, his heart devoid of vanity. He is a man, like all other men. He is not a saint. He will not have the people call him one". (p-80).

Gandhiji himself abhorred the world 'saint' and it should be ruled out of present life. He declares that: "I pray like every good Hindu. I believe we can all be messengers of God. I have no special revelations of God's will. My firm belief is that he reveals himself daily to every human being, but that we shut our ears to the still small voice. I claim to be nothing but humble servant of India and humanity" (Kripalani-44). The illiterate knew him only as Mahatma, but could not understand his ideals, similarly the Shiv-tarayans says; We understand you but your words we don't understand". The answer from Dhananjaya is: "Then you are done for... If you can't make my words your own, you will be drowned".

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Like Gandhiji, he exhorts the people and points to them that cowardice and violence are one and the same, if people do not understand the goals. He says: "You either flee to avoid the blow, or fight to ward it off; it is all one. Whatever you do, you merely follow the flock you do not see the shepherd". He teaches his people that they should exercise their right, to make their king the best king. Dhananjaya's words are almost Gandhiji's,

Kingship is crippled, of it is the king's alone
and not the people is you may shiver with fright
to see that one-legged kingship limps along,
but the eyes of the gods fill with tears for the king's
ownsake, men you must demand your kingship.
(Tagore Mukta-dhara Act II, 36-37)

One should first of all recognize the supreme ruler who rules all and who is ruled by everyone. He says that the badge of our royalty is covered with dust you can't rule your own spirits, yet you run after an outward kingdom. The king takes his seat on a throne, but throne does not make a king, Dhananjaya tries to educate the people but he is considered to be a revolutionary. The Vairagi faces the king boldly and refuses to pay tax. He accepts that he is the one who forbids them from paying taxes. He says boldly "we cannot give you what is not yours. Our excess food is yours; the food our hunger is not". He also advises the king that he who gives all keep all. Greed brings you only stolen goods, and they won't last. That is your mistake what you seize by violence can never be yours. What you set free is yours forever.

Obviously, the king smothered in his own arrogance cannot see the truth behind the Vairagi words. The only thing at his command is to arrest the Vairagi. Dhananjaya rules the innocent people who take him to God. He sadly says: "I only I could run from it all! They spend all their worship on me: inwardly they are bankrupt". Dhananjaya's talks truly and echoes Gandhian principles. Though the character Dhananjaya does not have an important role in the play, his presence obviously must have been a real force during 1922 when the play was published. Infact, the whole play Mukta-dhara is an overt expression of both Gandhian and Tagorean ideals.

CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the Gandhian idealism in Mukta-dhara. It was written at a time when India was in bondage and the congress under Gandhiji's leadership is trying to break the fetters of alien rule. Therefore, there is an undercurrent of political context running right through the play. The people of Uttarakut are compared to Britishers and the shiv-tarayans are compared to Indians.

The Uttarakut people erect the machine by means of which they choke the economic life of shiv-tarai. This is analogous to the high-handed way in which industrial British tried to depress India's economic growth. Dhananjaya who leads the struggle against the Uttarakut is an echo of Mahatma Gandhi, who preached non-violence. We know Satyagraha as the simplest and the most efficient instrument for the overthrow of the alien domination. There is a historic foresight in Dhananjaya's admonition that his followers have to learn the real strength of non-violence and that the people must stand on their own feet without always depending on him

Through Gandhiji's strict discipline of non – violence India was able to gain her political liberty

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after the passing away of Gandhiji's Ahimsa which was thrown to the winds. The people of Shiv-tarai became as corrupted and materialistic people as their former rulers of Uttarakut.

Freedom is the most valued subject both in Tagore's and Gandhiji's thinking. They believe that the right of being one's own master is the greatest of man's rights. They could never think of political freedom and growth in isolation from social freedom and integral development. They also believe that one should rise above his limited self and realize kinship and unity living and maintaining a harmonious relationship alone; one can achieve freedom in the real sense. Freedom is the sense of national independence.

Since freedom is a spiritual phenomenon Tagore attaches a sense of duty to it. Abhijit found a weak spot in the dam and struck there. The machine struck him back and mortally wounded him. The Mukta-dhara took up his wounded body in her arms and carried him away. Through death he gained everlasting life; in freeing the Mukta-dhara he found his own freedom. Lord Bhairava has arisen to slay the evil which was embodied in the machine and freed the souls of men. The drama closes on the mystic note of self-fulfillment through self-sacrifice.

Perfect freedom lies in the perfect harmonious life which we realize in this world not through knowing but in being. Therefore, we reach truth, not through our senses, but through the union of perfect sympathy in the further world of freedom that awaits us.

The reflection of Gandhian thoughts in Mukta-dhara is quite transparent. Both Gandhiji and Tagore have anticipated all the problems of modern India-particularly the concept of slavery. Both of them had a firm belief in truth and non-violence to achieve liberty. And their belief was not in vain! The study of Mukta-dhara in the light of Gandhian idealism is a fruitful and thought provoking concept. This reflection of Gandhian ideals in Tagore's play will be a vital tool for increasing learners interest and motivates them for further study on them.

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