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COMMUNICATING SELF-ASSERTION THROUGH DANCE: A STUDY OF RABINDRANATH  
TAGORE'S *NATIR PUJA* AND *CHANDALIKA*

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ABSTRACT

It is a well known fact that India is a multi-cultured country which is rich in tradition. Though there are various aspects that determine the cultural heritage, the art of dance and music involves as an important part in Indian tradition. So in this way, how Tagore have used the tool of dance to reveal the self-assertion of feminine through his play *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* is the main objective of this paper.

Key words: self-assert, feminine, dance, communication, identity

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I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what it is, too deep to find for words. (Ruth)

Generally dance is not only an entertainment but an art that express various emotions and innate feelings of human. In this way Tagore have used dance as a tool of communication through his few dramas. In fact his distinct personality as a literary writer of various genres has made him familiar all over the universe without any introduction. However he is a poet, essayist, novelist, translator, educator, philosopher, and dramatist. Tagore was highly noted for his drama as he merged poetry, drama, dance, song, music and religion into one another and evolved a new technique, by combining dance in drama that was labeled as "Dance Drama". Dance drama is highly involved more of feelings rather than action by covering various themes like love, religion, casteism, faith, equality etc. Tagore through his drama specially depicted women in mature and bold who through their dance revealed their self-hood. To witness this *Natir Puja* and *Chandalika* is taken for the study in this paper.

The play *Natir Puja* or *Worship of the Dancing girl* is a story that revolves around a low-born Srimathi who is known for her dance. Queen Lokeshwari and Princes Ratnavali who were in higher and stately status, were pride and arrogant. Their royal status did not permit a low caste woman into the temple. So they commanded Srimathi neither to offer things or altar nor to worship and was also restricted to even dance into the temple. Though Srimathi was disappointed, at one stage, she realizes that she has to assert her individuality as human being, in front of God and so did not bother of king's command. But when she entered into the temple, the king took it as an insult and commanded the guards to strike her. In spite of her death,

Srimathi 's great devotion and spirit on Buddha made her ready to sacrifice her body and soul. So with great rebellion and to prove her faith in God and as well as to assert her human being, she danced before the altar in "pure and naked" with ecstasy and vigorous. Finally her sacrifice made the King to feel shame and thus both the king and Queen fell in the feet of dead Srimathi.

Another play *Chandalika or The Untouchable Girl* is a story about Prakriti, a chandal girl. Her unfortunate meet of Ananda, the Buddhist monk, who asked for "some more water!" made Prakriti to a great height as she felt of rekindling her as a human being. His words made her to realize her self –respect and denied to accept that she is Chandala. At one stage she states as, "many chandalas abound in the country in the houses of Brahmins; I cannot be a chandala". Prakriti love for Ananda made her to dance in joy and later she persuaded her mother to work on spell upon Ananda, so that he may return and fill her life with spirit. But on his return to hut, his hallowness disappears, which makes Prakriti upset and thus again dances vigorously and falls off.

Through both the play one can clearly understand how painfully the untouchable or discrimination of caste is visible. However, in both the play, Tagore have used the nuances of dance as a great symbol, to bring out the insight of the characters and interfaced to highlight the caste, class and gender issues in the society. To this context what Levy commented would fit aptly, "the use of dance and movement that allows the body movement to reflect inner emotional status and changes in movement behavior can lead to changes in the psyche, thus promoting health and growth".

In *Natir Puja*, when Srimathi was denied to enter into the temple, she became voiceless. Yet her anger surfaced deep in to the mind and she voiced at the end of the play through her aggressive and fiery dance. Her dance translated that irrespective of caste and class, like King and Queen, she is also a human being. Srimathi when she also removed her jewels and dressed one by one, indirectly asserted that by birth all are equal in front of God.

Whereas in *Chandalika* when Ananda asks for water, Prakriti realizes her real status as a human being and she expressed her happiness through a dance. Even towards the end of the play, when she feels disappointed that she cannot join her life with a high grade man, Prakriti dances vigorously to expose her suppressed status.

To wind up, through both the play, "the self body" is used as a mode of communication to reveal out female expression and liberating force, to let out their unnatural constraints and also striving for recognizing their status in the society and their identity as a equal human being.

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