

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.4., 2017 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

THE STRUGGLE OF CHITRA TO WIN HER LOVE IN THE PLAY 'CHITRA'

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ABSTRACT

The *Chitra* is lyrical play that is Tagore's dramatic interpretation of one of the episodes from the Mahabharata. Chitra is the only child of Chitravanaha, the King of Manipur, who brought up her like a boy and gave the training of the duties of the prince. She is proud of her prowess and 'manliness', till she falls in love with Arjuna, who spurned her. Broken hearted Chitra realizes the 'vain pride of her manlike strength' and prays the god for 'a brief day of perfect beauty' to ensure Arjuna. The gods, Madana and Vasanta, generously grant her a perfect beauty for year. But Chitra realizes that her body has become her own enemy, for Arjuna is attracted and kneeled at her feet by her 'borrowed beauty' but Chitra cannot reveal her true self. Tagore handles this moving story with great sensitivity; and the prose is sheer music. Chitra enthralled Arjuna with the power of perfect beauty that obsesses the mind of Arjuna who accepts her in her original form in the autumn or season of fruition at the end of the play with the condition of the king.

Key Words: Chitra, love, Arjuna. A perfect beauty, struggle, honesty, prayer, man's attire and a vow

Introduction

Chitra is one of the greatest plays of Rabindranath Tagore. It is published in 1913 in English. It is lyrical play with richness in the symbols and poetical language. The speeches burn with passion, and light up the way from truth to illusion and again the arduous climb from illusion to truth. So many figures of speech are used in this play. The language of the play is so poetical that moves to the heart of the readers. We seem that the characters are the representative from the real life world. It is based on one of the episodes of the Mahabharata. In the course of his wanderings, in fulfillment of a vow of penance, Arjuna came to Manipura. There he saw Chitrangada, the beautiful daughter of Chitravahana, the King of Manipur. Smitten with her charms, he asked the king for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Chitravahana asked him who he was, and learning that he was Arjuna the Pandavas, told him that Prabhajana, one of his ancestors in the kingly line of Manipur, had long been childless. In order to obtain an heir, he performed severe penances. Pleased with these austerities, the god Shiva gave him this boon, that he and his successors should each have one child. It so happened that the promised child had invariably been a son. He, Chitravahana, was the first to have only a daughter Chitrangada to perpetuate the race. He had, therefore, always treated her as a son and had made her his heir.

The king said: 'the one son that will be born to Chitra must be the perpetuator of my race. That will be the price that I shall demand for this marriage. You can take her, if you like, on this condition'. Arjuna promised and took Chitrangada to wife, and lived in her father's capital for three years. When a son was born to them, he embraced her with affection, and taking leave of her and her father, set out again on his travels. Rabindranath Tagore handles this moving story with great sensitivity.

Chitra is in man's attire

Chitra is the princess of Manipura. She is brought up as a warrior. Because the boon became powerless during her time which her grandfather got from the god Shiva as the result of his severe austerity. So her father the King of Manipur, Chitravahana brought of her as a boy and gave all sorts of training given to the prince. Chitra received the training with whole heartedly the result of it she became very expert in the archery and the duties of the king. The people were regarded her as the terror to the evil doers and father and mother of the people. One day in search of game she roved alone to the forest on the bank of the Purna river. She entered a dense thicket on the track of a deer by tying her horse to a tree trunk. She found a narrow sinuous path meandering through the dusk of the entangled boughs, the foliage, vibrated with the chirping of crickets, when of a sudden she came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves, across her path. She asked hauntingly, to move aside, but Arjuna heeded not. Then with the sharp end of her bow she pricked him in contempt. Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. An amused smile flickered round the corners of his mouth, perhaps at the sight of her boyish countenance. Then for the first time in her life she felt herself as a woman and knew that a man was before her. She stood petrified like a statue and forgot to do him obeisance but fall in love with him who was the one great idol of her dreams.

Chitra falls in love but rejected

Chitra is projected deeply in love with Arjuna in the play after meeting in forest. Next day, she beautify herself with so many ornaments and wears the beautiful clothes of the woman in order to propose her love after the meeting with Arjuna in man's attire in the forest bushes. Here, Chitra does not take time to propose neither she prepares herself for the announcement of her love to Arjuna. Being brought up as son and warrior she directly proposed him without any pre-preparation. Arjuna rejected her love proposal by saying that he had been taken the vow of celibacy of twelve years so he is not fit as her husband. These words of Arjuna pricked the ears of Chitra who expounded this when she talks with the gods of love and beauty in the following words.

"I know, I know what that pain is and those bounds".

She woos Arjuna but in vain, for he rejected her on the ground of his vow of celibacy. She did not abandon her love, for she is not the kind of woman who "nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile". But she approaches the gods for the removal of her body unattractiveness and for the perfect beauty to magnetize Arjuna.

Her efforts for beauty and love

It has been pointed out in a symbolic manner by Tagore that the flower of her desire refuses to drop before it has been ripened into a fruit. She expounded to Madana, the god of love that she would bring the world conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion's sentence at his hand. Had she but the time needed for this, she could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. She would stand by Arjuna's side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Surely at last the day would have come for him to look at her and wonder and say 'What boy is this? Had one of his slaves in a former life followed him like his good deeds into this?' But it is the labour of life time to make one's true self known and honoured.

She chooses consequently the easy, rosy path of illusion which is of course the first step of reality i.e. the acquired splendours bestowed on her by the gods, Madana [god of love] and Vasanta [god of spring]. In this way she fascinates and wins the heart of Arjuna, like Urvashi, by whose power, as Tagore says, "breaking their meditation the sages lay at thy feet the fruit of their penance". Arjun keels at Chitra's feet and begs for her love: "You alone are the perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all

efforts, the one woman.” Love consummates thus in union of Chitra and Arjuna. From here in the drama we are treated on the path of transition as Chitra through experiences makes an effort to obtain self-knowledge. Her acquired beauty is felt by her to be no more than an obsession and she cries out Arjuna: Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go my hero, do not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion; as the petals fall an overblown flower, the only moment of her sweet union would slip from her, leaving her ashamed of her naked poverty, which she will spend weeping day and night. It is well-nigh impossible for her to keep her disguise and she prefers to accept the hard truth sooner than the false happiness.

The Lord of love, Madan and Vasanta grants her prayer

When Chitra was rejected by Arjuna she is not shown as the crying woman but the woman who thinks how she can achieve her love with efforts. It is shown in the play that Chitra started the severe penance and mortification of her fresh youth in the prayer. Madan is the Lord of love and Vasanta, the king of the seasons pleased by her prayer. Madana introduced himself as “I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and woman”. Chitra said “I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smiles, a widow from her birth. The flower of her desire should never drop into the dust before it as ripened to fruit.” In order to get the blessings, Chitra said “I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid’s archery, the play of eyes”. This line expounds how sad Chitra was due to the rejection of her love by the Arjuna.

She therefore requests to the world –vanquishing love god and youthful Lord of Seasons, took from her young body that primal injustice, unattractiveness plainness and for a single day made her superbly beautiful. The Lord of love, Madan and Vasanta, the king of the seasons were pleased by her penance and mortification through the prayer. They offer her a boon of a perfect beauty. Vasanta said “Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year the charms of spring blossoms shall nestle thy limbs”

She succeeds in her struggle

Chitra is succeeded in achieving the love of Arjuna. That is described by Chitra to the god of love, Madana, in the following words. The southern breeze caressed her to sleep. From the flowering malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over her body. On her hair, her breast, her feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. She slept and suddenly in the depth of her sleep she felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched her slumbering body. She started up and saw the Hermit [Arjuna] standing before her. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to spy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The air was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and still, like a forest tree. It seemed to her that she had on opening her eyes, died to all realities of the life and undergone a dream birth into a shadow land. Shame slipped to her feet like loosened clothes. She heard his call- Beloved, My most beloved! She said “take me, take all I am!” She stretched out her arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One certain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy. With the first gleam of light, the first twitter of birds, she rose up and sat leaning on her left arm. He laid asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. She sighed and stood up and drew together the leafy liana to screen the streaming sun from his face. She looked at her and saw the same old earth. She remembered what she used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid to her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with *shephali* flowers. She found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered her face with her both hands, and tried to weep and cry. But no tears came to her eyes. The god of love describes her dissatisfaction in the following words, “Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink – yet still I hear this cry of anguish”.

Self Honesty of Chitra

Chitra impressed and enthralled Arjuna in love with the borrowed perfect beauty. This perfect beauty is given to her for one year by the god of love and season. She possessed the Arjuna and his love by the grace

of gods in the form of the perfect beauty. Arjuna's mind is obsessed all the time with the thought of Chitra. Let's see the words of Arjuna said "Yes! I am he, the love-hungered guest at your door. But you have dissolved my vows even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity. Ah, I feel how vain is fame, the pride of prowess!" . Chitra responded with oh! Shame upon you! What you have seen in her that makes him false to himself? When Chitra is aware about the borrowed beauty she hates herself and feels as cheater of the Arjuna. She requests god to take back the boon because her own body became her enemy. This is revealed by the followings:

"Ah, god of love, what fearful flame is this with which thou hast enveloped me! I burn, and burn whatever I touch!"

"Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go my hero, go. Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion, go"

"Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love- all the kisses for which my heart is athirst"

"I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!"

One fine day Arjuna was watching her constantly and thoughtfully. When asked by her, he expounds that he was thinking that she, with that same lightness of touch and sweetness were weaving his days of exile into an immortal wreath, to crown him when he returns home. Chitra exclaimed Home! But this love is not for a home! She added, no never talk of that. She asked Arjuna that took to your home what was abiding and strong. Leave the little flower where it was born' leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. He did not take it to his palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten.

Chitra is accepted by Arjuna

There is another aspect of Chitra's personality than what has been described above. It lies in the fact of her being a terror for evil-doers and a father and mother to her people. She is a man in valour, and woman in tenderness. She is obsessed and unfulfilled. The days of spring are over. One day, Arjuna heard the cries of the villagers. They were shouting who would protect them from the robbers who are pouring from northern hills. Hereby he listened so many stories about the Princess Chitra from the villagers about her bravery. He tried to imagine what kind of woman Princess Chitra might be. Chitra [disguised] explained that she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as her, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not her hero's heart. She seems to Arjuna, having been rejected by him once, as the Goddess of Victory. Chitra seems to him like a Goddess hidden within a golden image, not understanding what she is beneath the disguise. The flower of springs have already matures into the mellow fruits of Autumn and the bell for them to part is rung. The day when they would part arrives. The illusion is shattered and Chitra, the playmate of Arjuna's night, appears as the help-mate of the day showing her true- self. Chitra said, "The self that I truly bring is the heart of a woman". Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust. Here love springs up struggling towards immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. She brought from the garden of heaven flower of incomparable beauty with which to worship her hero. If the rights are over, if the flowers have faded, let her throw them out of the temple. She said,

"I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshiped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveler in the great worldpath, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve flower-beauty, the unsullied loneliness of a moment's life? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman". The feminine charm she has acquired after the experiences, makes her "the mother, throned on the fullness of golden Autumn, she who in the harvest -time brings straying hearts to the smiles be set as tears, the beauty deep as the sex of silence, brings them to the temple of the unknown at the holy confluences of Life and Death". Arjuna accepts her in bliss when she casts on him a tranquillizing spell, "Beloved, My Life is full".

Conclusion

We find that Chitra had to go through the painful journey in order to obtain Arjuna as husband. She has been shattered many times in this struggle but she stood firm in her decision and at the end became

successful in her endeavors by her unstoppable efforts. She is woman and a mother, and Arjuna is content; he says, simply, "Beloved, my life is full".

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