

Tagore's *Chirakumar Sabha*: Love, Laugh, Songs and Serious Thoughts

Anjan Chakraborty

If we mark *Chirakumar Sabha*, a play by Rabindranath Tagore, as a romantic comedy we are not wrong because the story moves with young men and women falling in love and ultimately they are caught in wedlock. It is nor wrong to say that it is a bit of social satire exposing those who link up celibacy with serving the nation. It is a play which Tagore structured in early years and modified in the last part of life which shows his undiminished attraction for it which confirms its stability and multidimensionality that withstands the test of the creator himself.

In a sense the flavour of Shakespearean festive comedy exists in this play with Tagore filling up the mundane reality of Kolkata with songs and laughter to convert it into a 'Forest of Arden'. Here we also see woman disguised as man to get into a sphere otherwise inaccessible and another woman gets drawn to her to make things more funny as it happens in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* where Phebe falls in love with disguised Rosalind. All the pairs are matched perfectly at the end which the audience would like. Rabindranath while discussing Shakespearean plays opined that the characters of Shakespeare are all his children and here too we can smell how the pieces or glimpses of Tagore exist in the play. If the members of the *sabha*, Purna, Chandrababu, Srisho and Bipin express the creator's urge for national reforms be it comprehensive assessment of national culture and geography or preparing matches with least costing or revitalizing of domestic appliances which we come across in *Poth o*

Patheo, Bharatbarsha and Jeebansmriti, we also see the ex member Akhsay writing letters to his wife with a lot involvement so reminiscent of Rabindranath himself writing to his *bhai chhuti* (Mrinalini).

Rabindranath may compare and contrast *The Tempest* with *Shakuntala* giving the second one a better treatment, but he has his own regards for the 'Bard of Avon' which is reflected in the play. A very prominent instance is the use of the famous scene of *The Merchant of Venice* where Lorenzo and Jessica romance together(.....*in such a night as this*

But Rabindranath has his points of departure, Shailabala disguises as Abalakantababu not to win over any lover as it happens in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* but creates a subtle feminine aroma which contributes to the process of romantic reformation of Bipin, Srisho and Purna. More active role is taken by Akshay and Rasik. With the initial initiative of Akshay for shifting of the meeting place to the vulnerable spot, it is Rasik with his smart repartees, frequent references to Sanskrit poems and their ready translations draw the young men to their breach of oath or surrender to Cupid's arrow. Above all, it creates a consensus that celibacy has nothing to do with any practice of high idealism like serving the nation. Though no reference to any religion has been made as it is done in *Gora* , there is a clear call to be a monk which was not something absurd in Tagore's contemporary reality and he is the last person to approve such venture. *Chirakumar Sabha* is a literary protest against it.

Just as things end with a total happy note in *Chirakumar Sabha*, we get a completely different scenario in *Bnasari*. It is not a story of celibacy but perhaps much more painful as it highlights forced marriage according to the

diktat of a guru for the sake of nation. Bnasari loved Somshankar but he was forced to marry Sushama as guru Purandar feels that she is the kind of girl who would help him to fulfill his mission. Bnasari was considered to be a misfit. Sushama on the other hand was deeply in love with Purandar but she is just an instrument in the hands of her guru. In other words, Sushama sacrificed her love and life and agreed to marry someone of his guru's choice. If we set the story in a different plane, it fits the life of Nivedita whom Rabindranath watched very keenly and closely. Nivedita expressed her love to Vivekananda but he could not respond. He took her to Amarnath to dedicate her to lord Shiba or Shankar which may fictionally be transferred to Somsankar. Rabindranath believed that Nivedita never gave up her love for Vivekananda though it was never reciprocated and Rabindranath wrote the poem *Maranmilan* as an expression of his last tribute to her beloved. Vivekananda was a handsome young person who loved cricket, music, food, tobacco, nature but only averse to woman and an almost identical issue was pointed out by Purna about the so called members of Chirakumar Sabha members.

Actually Somshankar maintained his love for Bnasari and so did Sushama and Bnasari in their own spheres. The so called sacrifice programme of Purandar therefore hints a meaningless tragedy only in the name of ideology. Nation can be served by one who loves his or her beloved and gets into wedlock. There is no contradiction in between. On the other hand any mal-handling of emotions leads to wastage of love and life only.

Rabindranath used many songs in this play. Interestingly many pensive or sad songs are placed into the context of enjoyment. Rabindranath is not

mocking his own song when Rasik dissects ‘torī amar hotat dube jae’(my boat sinks all on a sudden) with fun. Tagore, a great genius he is shows his elasticity, shows how he can set mournful deity into a merry measure as Shelley said. He also perhaps wants to hint that many tragedies in life can be converted in to comedies if properly intervened. That is what Akshay, Rasik and Shailo do and save three men from meaningless celibacy and three women from marriage without their choice. Bnasari on the otherhand stand opposite to produce tragic waste only and these together frame a complete cycle of thought.

References

1. RabindranathTagore-Chirakumar Sabha
2. Jagadish Bhattacharya- Bibekanander mahaprayane Rabindranather Kabita
3. RabindranathTagore- Bnasari
4. Debanjan SenGupta- Rabindranath o Vivekananda

Anjan Chakraborty is an independent researcher and author on literature & arts. He may be reached at anjan.chakraborty@licindia.com