

## Tagore's "Chitrangada": Women Empowerment In Its Own Way

\*Rajashree Bose

\*Dept. of Bengali, Trivenidevi Bhalotia College, Raniganj, PIN-713347, West Bengal, India;

email: rajashreebose@tdbcollege.ac.in

### Abstract

*Empowerment is not just a word or a question of providing equal status. The concept of 'empowerment' is beyond our usual visualization. We often use this term without even understanding its ponderosity. Empowerment is a process that provides a person the power of liberty and the strength of will to take feasible decisions. The concept of women empowerment is not in a mint condition. Since the beginning of history, women are vying against the sterner sex for 'acceptance', 'dignity' and consummately for 'subsistence'. Women empowerment is a prerequisite for constructing a prosperous circumambient. But, the empowerment must be rendered by every perspective of life and society. The society needs to change its outlook towards women. We all use the statement quite often that "human beings are beautiful creations of God". But, while using this statement majority of the people pass into Oblivion about the veritable sooth that the definition of 'human being' not only comprises of men but also women. The existence of the term 'human' is scrappy without conjugation of women. Thus, women should not demean themselves as the inferior sex. The celestial emblance in the essence of the soul of women make them beyond the emulation of virtue. Women empowerment demands the urge of victory against patriarchy in order to establish concord in society. Tagorian Literature aims at uplifting the soul. Now the question emerges of how to uplift it. From bad to good, from black to white, from darkness to light – the gradual budding of mankind and thereby becoming human and humane as well is the ultimate essence of Tagorian aesthetics. Chitrangada fits in the genre of song play quite aptly.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Power of liberty, Strength, Dignity, Society, Uplifting soul.

### Introduction

Empowerment is not just a word or a question of providing equal status. The concept of 'empowerment' is beyond our usual visualization. We often use this term without even understanding its ponderosity. Empowerment is a process that provides a person the power of liberty and the strength of will to take feasible decisions. The concept of women empowerment is not in a mint condition. Since the beginning of history, women are vying against the sterner sex for 'acceptance', 'dignity' and consummately for 'subsistence'. Women empowerment is a prerequisite for constructing a prosperous circumambient. But, the empowerment must be rendered by every perspective of life and society. The society needs to change its outlook towards women. We all use the statement quite often that "human beings are beautiful creations of God". But, while using this

of women. Thus, women should not demean themselves as the inferior sex. The celestial semblance in the essence of the soul of women make them beyond the emulation of virtue.

Women empowerment demands the urge of victory against patriarchy in order to establish concord in society. Tagorian Literature aims at uplifting the soul. Now the question emerges of how to uplift it. From bad to good, from black to white, from darkness to light – the gradual budding of mankind and thereby becoming human and humane as well is the ultimate essence of Tagorian aesthetics. Chitrangada fits in the genre of song play quite aptly. It was then Bengali year of 1342 and English year of 1936. The mayhem of the First World War tormented the world. India was still torn between the two horns of dilemma of ugly lady. Taking this background on board, Chitrangada can be analyzed in three stages: firstly, transformation from black to beautiful with the message of temporality of physical glory; secondly, reincarnation of beauty along with intellect and personality as an almost avant – garde; finally, blooming of marital bliss without tension, frustration with a wholesome effect. This was the key line of Chitrangada. But, surprisingly enough, the magic of black into white and vice-versa was not mythical at all. While myth is larger than life with all its panoramic view of life, just like the magic carpet in Iliad, Chitrangada is completely different from it. With the blessings of Lord Mahadeva, Pravanjan, King of Manipur dynasty who was the predecessor of King Chitrabahan, bagged a unique blessing of having only boy child in the entire Manipur dynasty. But, as life has its own terms and conditions, Chitrangada came into such dynasty.

Her father, Chitrabahan, brought her up as his desired son with proper education, culture and other qualities. Tagore took over this theme from the Arjuna Banabasa Parbadhaya (the forest episodes of Arjuna) of Adikhanda of The Mahabharata. Chitrangada was penned down in the Bengali year of 1298 on 28th Bhadra, at the end of nineteenth century in a desolated area of Orissa. In the month of Baisakh of Bengali year of 1347, i.e., 1940 of English year, Rabindranath introduced song play as: “Long ago once I travelled in train from Santiniketan to Calcutta, perhaps, the month of Chaitra then. The track was surrounded with long bushes. Flowers of vibrant yellow, purple, white in colours were around. Suddenly a thought peeped in my mind that sometimes after the sun would grow high, the flowers would lose their hues, gradually fruits would come out in the branches, and nature would toast to celebrate her delight everywhere.”

Tagore went on saying like Mr. Pope “Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.” [The Rape of the Lock, Canto – V]. To put it after Tagore “Charms just like the outer cloak, gifted by Cupid, only to yield man in physical gratification. Then comes the power of will, key to a successful relationship – it causes no harm, no monotony, no frustration – it should be eagerly heartfelt and thereby humane, not cultivated.” The cosmic synthesis of permanence and flux in nurturing marital bliss by Tagore in Chitrangada is not only inspired by the myth of perfect household, but is an extension of both physical and spiritual chemistry of man and woman. Art always entices man to pay a look to his root – that root influence man to indulge in history, in epics with a view to reincarnate contemporary society.

Taking this on board, Rabindranath's Chitrangada aims in breaking the shackles of transience and stepping into a fruitful conjugality. Chitrangada not only unveils the earthliness of mythology, but also redevise the myth into its culmination with the alchemic touch of Tagore's genius. The world was vexed with the causes of women emancipation at the fag end of the nineteenth century. Ever being brought up with an enlightened mind, Rabi could not discard the then way of the world. From the very childhood, his household pointed him to the superiority of soul over body. Woman can be judged not only with her woos, but also with her rationality and personality. Hence, to do the honour of women emancipation Tagore glorified the idea of proximity of man-woman and thereby growth of women causes. Being the pivotal forces of Chitrangada, both Chitrangada and Arjuna were distinct from their epical clones. Chitrangada in The Mahabharata was a tongue-tied beauty. For being brought up as a son she lacked the typical womanly vibes of conjugality and fertility. Arjuna, the epic hero smacked the gusto of his valour by ignoring the calls of within. Rabindranath moulded them into living beings with his master strokes in Chitrangada. From every aspect, myth was reshaped by Tagore. While Chitrangada, the epic heroine had been an attractive princess, Tagore's Chitrangada was a dusky one under the garb of a man. Being turned down by Arjuna as an 'inept lad' at their first meeting, the disappointed princess opened the 'book of her secret soul' to Cupid in a soliloquy:

“পরপুরুষের বেশে নিত্য করি রাজকাজ যুবরাজরূপে/ফিরি স্বৈচ্ছামতে:নাহি জানি লজ্জাভয় /অন্তঃপুরবাস:নাহি জানি হাবভাব, /বিলাসচাতুরী, শিথিয়াছি ধনুর্বিদ্যা, শুধু শিথি নাই, দেব, তব পুষ্পধনু/কেমনে বাঁকাতে হয় নয়নের কোণে।”

(In disguise of man, I perform my royal duty daily as a prince don't know fear or shame or embarrassment, I do all my jobs according to my will, I know nothing about extravajant, I know only archary, I have not learnt how to impress man). The very sight of Arjuna made Chitrangada restless to discover the new found land of herself:

“সেই মুহূর্তেই জানিলাম মনে, নারী/আমি:সেই মুহূর্তেই প্রথম দেখিনি/সম্মুখে পুরুষ মোর।”

(The very moment I saw you man, I felt womanhood within me.) Simone de Beauvoir in her The Second Sex (1949) showed that from the very onset of her life, i.e., from her childhood, woman is bound to face man as a superior one whom she cannot be at par with – she prefers to subjugate herself to man, rationally and physically. Keeping at pace with this psychology Chitrangada espoused herself as the typical woman, the beloved of Arjuna rather than an amazon. It was her earnest request to Cupid:

“শুধু একদিবসের তরে /ঘুচাইয়া দাও, নারীর কুরূপ/করো মোরে অপূর্ব সুন্দরী।”

(Wipe out the ugliness of woman just for a day only, make me exquisitely beautiful, o lord.) Undoubtedly, woman's eternal hinge for her beauty and charm is for the superior sex, the man. But as “Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes”, to put it after Keats in Ode to the Nightingale, the presentation of women has also changed. In an essay, 'Naree', taken from Kalantar, Tagore wrote: “When women were occupied in the limited ambit of their household, they were directed by their womanly instinct only. As time has passed, as newer horizons invite women, as women eagerly want to get rid of all age-

old bondages, including rationality and intellectuality for the sake of their self-help and self-esteem has become a must for them.” [Kalantar, ‘Naree’, Rabindranath Tagore, Bengali 1343, Agrahayan]. Men were the only open space for the then ‘captive’ ladies, hence to satisfy them was the prime concern to those ladies. In Tagore’s Chitrangada, with change of time and increase of ideas and demands, Chitrangada had become cultured, at par with the men even in masculine domains, i.e. archery, politics, education and where not. But she too being driven by those womanly senses and sensibilities desired for Arjuna passionately. Here comes Beauvoir’s supervision as she mentioned in her *The Second Sex* – the sexual commodification of women by themselves to men in order to tame them, to satisfy them. Arjuna, stuck by Cupid, too wanted to possess Chitrangada as his own. This was the authentic cause for Chitrangada’s royal transformation from an amazon to a wooing woman. As charm fleets fast with the fluidity of time, a fatigued princess with the transitoriness of her carnal desires felt:

“হায় আমারে করিল/ অতিক্রম আমার এ তুচ্ছ দেহখানা মৃত্যুহীন অন্তরের এই ছদ্মবেশ ক্ষণস্থায়ী।”

(A las someone lagged me behind my trifling decaying body, a disguise of my deathless self-momentary.)

“বহুকাল সাধনায় এক দণ্ড শুধু পাওয়া যায় প্রথম মিলন, সে মিলন কে লইল লুটি, আমারে বঞ্চিত করি।”

(After a long years of meditation a moment comes, bring first union, who robs the union depriving me). Such a conflict of soul of Chitrangada has become a phenomenal trait for the present generation. It has become a pang of generation created from dissatisfaction and unresolved problems. It was the tantamount Chitrangada who longed for Arjuna passionately, now thought Arjuna as “অন্তরে বাহিরে মোর হয়েছে সতিন।” lust. Arjuna did not acknowledge her soul. To put it after Tagore, “if a beautiful lady feels that her beloved is She realized how she had reduced herself to a mere home comfort to Arjuna, just a vehicle to gratify his swayed away by her charm, she often rebukes her charm as his co-wife.” [Introduction, Chitrangada, Rabindra Tagore]

The mythology did not spare the heroine, Chitrangada for such psychological tug of wars. Rabindranath along with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee believed from the core of his heart that a man could become an ideal man by transcending the stratum. For this he should be trained in four ways: physical process, power of intellect, sharp timing and of course power to woo a lady. Arjuna fulfilled every said aspect, he had been a gallant, an intellectual, at the same time a perfect suitor. But his chivalrous blood could not deny the call of duty, he became disturbed to free himself from the earthly chains of love, beauty and obviously passion. With a view to furnish myth, Tagore presented Arjuna independent of all sorts of carnal quicksands and thereby establishing him to a higher dignity. Meanwhile Arjuna came to know of the identity of Chitrangada from one of his men.

An amazed Arjuna turned just clueless at the revelation. Here Tagore’s genius reached at its crescends in transforming Chitrangada from a mere sexual object to a true better-half of Arjuna and thus myth in multidimension was reinforced in Tagore. At the end of the play Chitrangada represented

the changing voice of women making her presence felt at the heart of the male-dominated society saying:

“দেবী নহি, নহি আমি সামান্য রমণী ।  
পূজা করি রাখবে মাথায়, সেও আমি  
নই, অবহেলা করি পুষিয়া রাখিবে পিছে, সেও আমি নহি। যদি পার্শ্বে রাখ  
মোরে সংকটের পথে, দুঃস্থ চিন্তার  
যদি অংশ দাও, যদি অনুমতি কর  
কঠিন ব্রতের তব সহায় হতে  
যদি সুখে দুঃখে মোরে কর সহচরী  
আমার পাইবে তবে পরিচয়।”

(Not a goddess, not a simple woman, no one to worship, no one to neglect, If keep me beside you in time of imminent danger or in prosperity you will be able to know me.) Such initiation of Chitrangada with the coveted assertion of motherhood voiced forth Beauvoir strongly once again: “One is not born woman, one becomes woman.” Tagore created an impeccable confluence of Chitrangada and Beauvoir in his song play where his heroine was allowed to dream of changing views of life and emancipation of woman, keeping aside the epic heroine who was devoid of the power of even to dream.

**CONCLUSION:** Chitrangada is, undoubtedly, one of Tagore’s best creations in mythic affairs. It deals not only with the mythical factors, but also with the contemporary issues of women causes and thereby an open window for those who have been reduced themselves almost to a mere home comfort. As to judge Tagore is a herculean task, much of his multi-faceted genius is undiscovered. His dealing with mythology is among others. With due respect to Michael Madhusudan Dutta as the successful pioneer of starting mythic trends in Bengali Literature, Tagore cannot be relegated to the hinterlands in this respect. An array of multi-dimensional ideas was introduced, deferred, denied by him only to reinforce myth. Chitrangada is, of course, not an exception in this regard. Chitrangada has become a mosaic of a modified myth and promise for a better conjugality in the hands of Tagore. For the changing demands of modern women to coalesce their personal and social life in terms of love and liberty, Chitrangada is Tagore’s tribute to those emancipated women and their enlightened conjugality.

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