

**Ecology and Spirituality: A Feministic Approach to the Plays of
Rabindranath Tagore**

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Certificate

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Declaration

I, Sheena Kaimal N., hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Ecology and Spirituality: A Feministic Approach to the Plays of Rabindranath Tagore** has been prepared by me and also declare that this is a bonafide record of research work done by me during the course of Minor Research project allotted to me by The University Grants Commission, New Delhi and no part of this study has been submitted earlier or elsewhere for any similar purpose.

Valayanchirangara
Date

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Sheena Kaimal N.

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Chapter 1

Introduction- Life and Works of Rabindranath Tagore

The versatile genius, visionary and prophet that India has ever witnessed, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) has achieved eminence through his selfless services in art, music, literature, education, journalism and humanitarian activities. As a great litterateur, Tagore is beyond classification and categorization. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his highly acclaimed collection of poems *Gitanjali* (English translation in 1913) which he has written as a tribute to the Omnipresent. Tagore has also put his signature in the worlds of novel, drama, short stories, essays etc. His literary works reveal a world which he has envisioned. His visions have not been merely dreams. Tagore has earnestly striven for making his visions a reality. The great visionary poet and playwright has spread his ideals on humankind through his writings as well as through the educational innovations which he has done through the establishment of Visva Bharathi, the University through which he has imparted values and culture to the students.

Rabindranath Tagore's dedication to the moral and spiritual values, his concern for humanism which is getting deteriorated due to the powerful assaults of materialism, his faith in the eternal power of Nature and the Oneness of all living beings, the need for harmony between Nature and man, his optimistic affirmation and concern for the individual's worth and value, be the individual a woman or a lower caste or any one of the marginalized sections etc., are revealed through his literary works. Most of his literary works have been originally written in Bengali and later translated into English. Some of the works including *Gitanjali* have been translated by Tagore himself. Tagore's works are vast repertoires of humaneness and compassion. His

countless works include genres of all kinds; different types of poetry, short stories, dramas, essays etc.

Rabindranath Tagore's dramatic world includes tragedies, comedies, farces, melodramas, symbolic dramas, poetic dramas, dance dramas, lyrical dramas etc. The sense of righteousness, fair play and justice, revealed through the worlds of Tagore's plays, show the visionary and humanitarian in the playwright. His mastery in the dramatic techniques and stagecraft has made many Indian critics to hail Rabindranath Tagore as the father of modern Indian stagecraft. The Minor Project entitled 'Ecology and Spirituality: A Feministic Approach to the Plays of Rabindranath Tagore' is an attempt at analyzing Tagore's visions upon which his entire ideologies are built.

The project aims to delve deep into some of the selected plays of Rabindranath Tagore, in order to have a glimpse of his visions. Tagore's visions are the foundation stones of his writings. As the literary world of Tagore is highly vast, this project attempts to analyze only three of his plays. These plays are a representative of his entire dramatic output. The plays which have been selected for the study are *Chandalika*, *Natir- Puja* and *Mukta- Dhara*. These plays portray Tagore's belief in the value systems and ideologies and his faith in the harmony and Oneness of all living beings in this Universe, identical to his concept, *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*.

In order to have an understanding of the feministic approach to Tagore's plays, it is necessary to have an understanding of Tagore's deep ecological awareness as well as spiritual vision seen in his plays. Rabindranath Tagore's belief in the Oneness of all living beings is the result of a profound belief in the innate spirit of all beings human and non- human nature. This belief in the innate spirit of every being in the Universe is Tagore's spirituality. The belief in the

pervading presence of an omnipresent spirit or power or energy or life giving essence in all living beings has made Tagore to think about the worth of all individuals. This has led him to make the individuals realize the power and value of the Self inside them. Tagore endorses and worships the Omnipresent Spirit of the marginalized or subaltern elements of Nature. The Spirit is the same spirit pervading in the Universe and Tagore considers this as essentially the feminine life creating, supporting, nurturing essence or energy.

The play *Mukta- Dhara* endorses Tagore's belief in the Oneness of all beings as well as the power of the Nature to help humanity in its survival. The plays *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* depict Tagore's belief in the innate presence of the Divine Energy in all human beings, especially women and those women who belong to the marginalized sections. Tagore's feminism is based on this innate Divine Energy or Essence of the human as well as the non- human beings of the whole Cosmos. There is the need to realize or awaken this inherent Divine Essence of all beings. He sees this Divine Energy as Feminine- the potential power of the womb to create, nurture and support life.

The awakening or realization of the Sacred or Divine Feminine Energy latent in all is necessary for the survival of the whole human race. This life supporting principle is based on selfless love which can bind together the whole living beings in the Universe. Selfless love is the essential principle of the Sacred Feminine. An awakening of this Love is the need of the times. Rabindranath Tagore, the far- sighted dramatist has been aware of the need of the awakening of this Divine Feminine inherent in all beings. This awakening of *Shakti*, the spiritual principle, can be seen in the three selected plays analyzed in this project. In order to free today's world from the frets and fumes, an awakening of the Sacred Feminine is inevitable. This inevitability makes

this study of Rabindranath Tagore's plays with regard to its ecological, spiritual and feministic approach, relevant.

The project is divided into six chapters. This Introductory chapter deals with a small note on the life and works of the great dramatist Rabindranath Tagore. This chapter also tries to bring forth the objectives, relevance and methodology of this study. The second chapter entitled, "Ecology, Spirituality and Feminism- A Reconsideration", tries to have a look at the dominator systems in the patriarchal capitalist world and how the dominator systems try to retain their power by imposing their power both on ecology and then on women. The chapter tries to have a brief analysis on how the selves are colonized and discuss the need to decolonize the selves in bondage. Liberation of the selves is the deliverance of the life supporting Divine Feminine Essence within.

The third chapter entitled "Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays" tries to study in detail the feministic approach of Tagore in the two plays, *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja*. Prakriti, the untouchable girl in *Chandalika* and Srimati, the palace dancing girl in *Natir Puja* awaken the Self within and reach the ultimate stage of Self- Realization. This awakening of the Sacred Feminine in them helps others also to attain deliverance or liberation. The fourth chapter named, "Ecology in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays" attempts to analyze Tagore's highly acclaimed play *Mukta- Dhara* through which Tagore conveys the message of liberating the inherent Divine Spirit of Nature. For Tagore, the Divine Spirit of Nature is the nurturing Feminine Essence which should be set free. The fifth chapter deals with Tagore's spirituality as can be seen from the three plays, *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* and *Mukta- Dhara*. The chapter entitled, "Spirituality in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays" speaks about Tagore's firm belief in the inherent presence of the Divine in all beings irrespective of the sectarian divisions. When taken into account the

feministic approach of Rabindranath Tagore as seen in his plays, the ecological and spiritual elements in his plays have a crucial role. Tagore's deep ecological and spiritual awareness of the Oneness of all beings, human as well as non- human Nature, is based on the Sacred or Divine Feminine Energy, the life source and principle of the whole Cosmos. The last and concluding chapter concludes the project by summing up the arguments and conclusions reached.

Chapter 2

Ecology, Spirituality and Feminism: A Reconsideration

All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of earth. Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

(Seattle 189)

A combination of the discourses on ecology, feminism and spirituality is a discourse on domination and liberation; colonization and decolonization; an endeavour for liberation and survival. While ecological and feminist discourses talk about a politics of domination of all kinds, spiritual discourse dilates on the liberation of all kinds. Barbara Smith in her essay “Racism and Women’s Studies” writes, “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working- class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women.”(49) Ynestra King in the article entitled, “The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology” extends this definition further and says that the challenge of social domination “extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing.”(20) Feminist discourse and ecological discourse thus try to delve deep into all forms of domination and tries to subvert the so called logic of domination, upholding the virtue and value of the Other. Catherine Zabinski quotes Karen J Warren in her essay “Scientific Ecology and Ecological Feminism”,

Value- hierarchical thinking within oppressive contexts maintains the domination of the superior group over the inferior group. Warren’s expansive definition of *ecofeminism*

goes beyond the analysis of male/ female and nature/ culture dualisms to oppose value-hierarchical thinking based on class, race, age, sexual preference, or any trait used to perpetuate a power- over relationship.(315- 316)

Feminism began in the Western world as a movement to fight for the suffragette rights as well as property rights of the white, upper class women. When it reached its second phase of development, feminism began to include the white women as a whole and also fought for the rights of education etc. But during the second wave too it has not been aware of the different types of women all over the world. Only during the Third Phase or the Third Wave, feminism started including women of colour and all the women who have been far away from the mainstream and have been confined in the periphery. Thus Womanism, Post Colonial Feminism, Third World Feminism etc. emerged as a part of the battles for the rights of the marginalized women. When the Eurocentric mainstream feminism has overlooked the issues and concerns of the non- white, underprivileged women of colour, post colonial feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty have raised voices supporting the rights and the need for justice for the Third World women

In the Third World, the women have been subjected to multiple ways of oppression and domination. They have had to face the patriarchal domination of the colonizers and the imperialists as well as that of the men from within. In a way, the Third World women have faced many injustices within their family and outside. Rabindranath Tagore through his writings fights for the cause of women and their upliftment. Tagore strongly protests against the injustices meted out to women. As an educationist, Tagore has contributed much to the upliftment of women. In his Visvabharati University, Tagore has given equal opportunity for the education of girls too.

The marginalized women of the Indian subcontinent, who have been excluded from the mainstream society on account of their caste and class, have had to face even more brutal violence and oppression than that of the upper caste and upper class women of India. The body and sexuality of the Dalit women have been subjugated by the patriarchy as well as the mainstream society which has used these women as mere commodities. The Post Colonial or Third World Feminism has overlooked the issues and concerns of the Dalit women. Even the Post Colonial scenario of India has been no better when it comes to the emancipation of Dalit women. Tagore in his writings portrays the marginalized women who have been denied access to the mainstream Indian society and who have been bound by societal constraints. In his play *Chandalika* Tagore portrays a Dalit woman, Prakriti, who is cast away by the society on account of her untouchability. She later realizes her inner worth. *Natir Puja* portrays a dancer who though marginalized, offers herself unto the Lord and thus pays homage to her inner soul.

The domination over women and nature has grown so deep today that it has become a great threat to the entire world economic system and humanity. “As long as the white males hold all the social and economic power, women and people of color will continue to be discriminated against, and poverty and the military mentality will continue unabated.”(Kelly 112) The seeds of the development of science and technology during the seventeenth century contains in them oppression and domination. The seeds have been sown by masculine institutions and ideologies. As predicted by Petra Kelly “The ultimate result of unchecked, terminal patriarchy will be ecological catastrophe or nuclear holocaust.” (113)

With the emergence of the capitalist system, oppression and dominance have begun to continue. Though Marx and Engels have stood and spoken for the subaltern working classes at the time, no movements have originated to speak for the rights of women and nature. The

capitalist patriarchy has become so powerful that life in the planet has become so difficult to survive. If humanity and the entire species are to survive in this planet, there is the need for an alternative to the powerful imposition of the capitalist mode of domination over women and nature. Vandana Shiva in her 'Preface' to *Ecofeminism* writes,

Violence against women has taken on new and more vicious forms as traditional patriarchal structures have hybridized with the structures of capitalist patriarchy. We need to examine the connections between the violence of unjust, non- sustainable economic systems and the growing frequency and brutality of violence against women. We need to see how the structures of traditional patriarchy merge with the emerging structures of capitalist patriarchy to intensify violence against women. (xiv)

She writes further in the 'Preface', "...the issue of reductionist, mechanistic science and the attitude of mastery over and conquest of nature [is] an expression of capitalist patriarchy. Today the contest between an ecological and feminist world- view and a world- view shaped by capitalist patriarchy is more intense than ever."(xviii)

In the great warfare between the rights of the Mother Earth, Gaia and the market based economy, the great challenge is the risk of losing the perspective of a sustainable development. (Shiva and Mies xix)The complete exhaustion and the harm done to the natural resources have reached a critical juncture that it poses a great threat to the entire living species of this planet to move on. Mother Earth finds it difficult to support the life. The female quintessence of sustainability is being lost. Thus as Ynestra King writes,

Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness....It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing... [Ecofeminists] see the devastation of the earth and her

beings by the corporate warriors; and the great threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warrior, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way. (10)

In order to free the Mother Earth from this deep crisis, sustainable solutions have to be laid down. Fritjof Capra, in his book, *The Web of Life*, speaks about the systemic or interconnected nature of the problems which arose as a result of domination of all kinds. (2) He writes about the need for a deep ecological awareness, which “recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena...” (6) The school of ‘Deep Ecology’ was propounded by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess:

Deep Ecology does not separate humans- or anything else- from the natural environment. It does see the world not as a collection of isolated objects but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep Ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life.(7)

A realization of “the intrinsic value of all things” is thus a rediscovery of the spiritual dimension of life. A sustainable development of life in this planet depends upon this deep ecological realization which is ultimately spiritual. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their ‘Introduction’ to the book *Ecofeminism* writes,

As women in various movements- ecology, peace, feminist and especially health- rediscovered the interdependence and connectedness of everything, they also

rediscovered what was called the spiritual dimension of life- the realization of this interconnectedness was itself sometimes called spirituality. (Mies 16)

Spirituality is ultimately liberating. The liberating power of spirituality, the realization of the spirit of Oneness or Wholeness in all beings, the feeling of a sense of belonging to the whole Cosmos, the innate presence of a life- supporting force or energy, a shift in perception from anthropocentric world- view to eco- centric world- view, is essentially the alternative to all forms of domination. This spiritual principle is essential for the sustainable development and survival of life on Earth.

The life- giving force inherent in all beings is seen by some feminists as the female principle or female energy “inhabiting and permeating all things....Although the spirit was female, it was indeed the connecting principle.”(Mies and Shiva 17) This female principle is the life- supporting principle of every living being as far as spiritual eco feminists are concerned. For spiritual eco feminists like Starhawk,

...spirituality is largely identical to women’s sensuality, their sexual energy, their most precious life force, which links them to each other, to other life forms and the elements. It is the energy that enables women to love and to celebrate life. This sensual or sexual spirituality, rather than the ‘other- worldly’ is centered on and thus abolishes the opposition between spirit and matter, transcendence and immanence. (qtd. Shiva 17)

The sexual energy which Starhawk speaks about is the Feminine Energy or Essence which is the life creating, supporting and nurturing source. This “precious life force” is the thread which unites all beings of the Cosmos and is present in all human as well as non- human nature. This Feminine Essence is essentially Divine and is the supporting principle of the whole Cosmos.

The presence of the life giving force inherent in all beings and which pervades the whole Universe is aptly inscribed in the Sanskrit term, *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*, the Earth as a single family. As a part of the Eurocentric views, the white men thought it their 'duty to civilize' the 'Nature' of the Third World too. Other than inflicting brutal violence upon the women of the non- white people, the white men even now are depriving the Third World of its natural resources. As Vandana Shiva writes in her article entitled, 'Decolonizing the North', "We are now on the threshold of the third phase of colonization, in which the white man's burden is to protect the environment, especially the Third World's environment- and this too, involves taking control of rights and resources", (264) thereby creating poverty and environmental destruction in the Third World.

Nature was venerated and given due respect. The native cultures as well as the Third World nations considered nature as sacred and as the source of all life. They considered the life energy of nature as divine energy which sustains all living beings on the Earth. When man has begun to declare his dominance over Nature, the harmony and rhythm of life began to deteriorate and this degeneration is seen in all aspects of life. Vandana Shiva writes in her essay "Decolonizing the North", about Rabindranath Tagore's attitude to nature seen in his *Tapovan*, "the distinctiveness of Indian culture consists in having defined the principles of nature as the highest form of cultural evolution."(265). Shiva quotes Tagore,

The culture of the forest has fuelled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in right sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilization. (276)

Rabindranath Tagore's far-sightedness can be seen in his play *Mukta- Dhara*, which speaks about the liberation of Nature, a free flowing river from the confines of a dam which is being built across its course. Tagore has been aware of the so called third phase of colonization, which not only the whites will impose upon the non- whites, but the all- powerful human beings will impose upon the whole free Nature. He is a spokesperson for the liberation of Nature as can be seen in the *Mukta- Dhara*. He has been anxious about the survival of posterity. He also has the wisdom to understand that sustainable development is not possible if human beings bring havoc upon nature. Tagore's deep reverence for the presence of the Divine Feminine Energy in Nature, the life creating, supporting and nurturing energy inherent in Nature, is explicitly portrayed through his highly moving play *Mukta- Dhara*.

Tagore, like William Wordsworth, has always believed in the presence of the essential Divine Energy in all beings of the whole Universe. He has the firm belief that the Divine Energy in all human and non- human nature is the same Divine Presence pervading the whole Cosmos. This deeply rooted belief is evident in his plays, *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* which celebrate the presence of the Divine Energy in all living beings irrespective of all human, non- human as well as man- made divisions. Through the depiction of the untouchable girl Prakriti and the palace dancing girl Srimati Tagore asserts his belief in the presence of the Divine Energy in all irrespective of gender, class and caste divisions. This Energy is essentially feminine and is built on the connecting bond of love which binds all beings. Tagore has understood that humanity needs to awaken or realize the inherent Feminine Divine Essence present in each living being.

An analysis of Tagore's plays, *Mukta- Dhara*, *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* reveals Rabindranath Tagore's belief in the Oneness and Wholeness of all beings. All living beings, human and non- human are bound together by the same Divine Energy which is essentially

feminine. The spiritual principle of Nature and the human is one and the same. This spirituality is the all embracing female energy which is essential to balance the life on the earth and biosphere.

Chapter 3

Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays

For the first time in my life after twenty two years,

The spring has come into my room.

Looking at the sky through the window

I feel, in every moment, sheer delight springing in my heart.

I am a woman, I am glorious.

My mood pulsates in the moonbeams of the sleepless moon.

Without me, vain would be the burst of the evening stars,

And vain too would be the blooming of flowers.

(Saha 89)

Rabindranath Tagore's women characters have been created ahead of their times. His women characters have lived in an age, torn with the conflicts of religious and caste divisions, colonialist patriarchy, familial injustices and various other tormenting situations. Tagore's belief in the innate strength of the spirit of women has made him to create powerful women characters that have withstood and transcended the highly patriarchal norms of the times. The entire gamut of Tagore's writings reveals that Tagore has believed in the Divine Feminine Energy which pervades the whole cosmos. The women shatter the chains which bind them and step out with

raised heads and dignity. Most of them reach the utmost stage of Self- Realization and thus go beyond the material and narrow-minded realms of the society which has restricted them.

The plays of Rabindranath Tagore are representative of the portrayal of bold and courageous women who have stepped out of the bonds of society in order to find out their true selves. *Chandalika* portrays a Chandal or untouchable girl, Prakriti, who realizes her self-worth and dignity from the words of a Buddhist Monk, Ananda. The transformation of Prakriti from her low caste status to the realization of her inner strength shows Tagore's firm belief in the Oneness as well as worth of all human beings. Prakriti has been put aside on the periphery on account of her caste as well as womanhood. The Buddhist Monk teaches her to go beyond hierarchical divisions and boundaries and reach the Self- Realized status. Srimati, the palace dancing girl in *Natir Puja* also is a marginalized woman who reaches the state of Self- Realization by waging silent battle against the hierarchical divisions of the society. Srimati also is an epitome of the essence of the Divine Feminine Energy, the Spiritual Feminine which helps in the survival of the whole cosmos.

Tagore's portrayal of extra ordinary women characters can be seen in many plays other than *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja*. In the play *The King and the Queen* (1889), the dynamic Queen Sumitra is an exemplary example of a courageous woman who has stood against injustices and evils of the State and accepts death for her firm belief in Truth. *Chitra* (1894) portrays the fearless and dynamic princess, Chitra, who has been raised as a prince who is bestowed with all the qualities of a dauntless soldier. Her femininity is aroused by prince Arjuna and thus Chitra becomes a representative of a whole womanhood. The play *Red Oleanders* (1925) depicts Tagore's yet another powerful woman character, Nandini, who never believes in social injustices and discriminations. She acts as a saviour of people who suffer from bondages.

Sumitra and Nandini, when stand against the injustices of the State, are the representatives of the protectors of the land and ecology too. All the women characters are manifestations of the utmost state of the Supreme Womanhood, the Divine Feminine Energy.

In the *Mukta- Dhara*, Rabindranath Tagore portrays the cruel exploitation and domination shown towards Nature. The King of Uttarakut builds a dam across a mountain spring there and which irrigates the plains of Shiv- tarai. He wants to stop its flow towards the plains of Shiv- tarai. The imprisonment of Nature, the water fall, becomes a bondage to the people of Shiv- tarai too. The bounty and Divine Spirit of Nature are put to shackles. This is equivalent to the bondage of the Divine Feminine, the creator, protector and nurturer of the Universe. The generosity and bounteous spirit of Nature is imprisoned by the powerful and dominant, as a woman is put in bondage by the patriarchal hierarchical divisions of the society. The prince of Uttarakut has to sacrifice his life for liberating the water current, thus allowing its free flow. This is symbolic of the Spiritual Energy of the Feminine being liberated from the clutches of patriarchal oppressions. As Nature supports humanity, women also can support humanity with her free flowing Divine Energy Source. This energy should be liberated from the bondages of hierarchical authority and bondages. *Mukta- Dhara* is also an epitome of the Divine Ecological Feminine Essence or simply Ecofeminism. The current of water gets liberated from the dominant confines of capitalist patriarchy.

Rabindranath Tagore's belief in the Divine Spirit of Nature is equivalent to Divine Feminine Energy as can be seen in his naming the protagonist of the Chandal girl of the play *Chandalika* as Prakriti. *Prakriti* or Nature is an embodiment of the Divine Essence or Energy. Nature is bounteous, so also women. Like Nature, women also are under the constraints of capitalist patriarchal forces. The freedom to act or to move about or to express is hindered for

both Nature and Women. Tagore is highly anxious about the survival of the whole human race because of the bondage effected on both. In order to make the whole living nature survive, the Oneness and the Wholeness or the innate Spiritual Energy of each and every living being is to be recognized and awakened. His attempt at equating Nature to Women shows his innate desire in making the readers recognize the Oneness of all.

Prakriti reaches a stage of self awareness and Self- Realization through the words of a Buddhist Monk. The play *Chandalika* is based on a Buddhist legend. Ananda, the Buddhist disciple has been on his journey through Sravasti and feeling thirsty. He asks Prakriti for water from the well where she has been washing her calf. Prakriti has been startled as she is an untouchable girl and begins to tremble with fear. She says to Ananda that she is a Chandalini and that the well water is unclean. Ananda replies, “As I am a human being, so also are you, and all water is clean and holy that cools our heart and satisfies our thirst.” (*Three Plays* 148) This arouses in her a sense of self- respect and dignity. She hears such words of human worth for the first time in her life. Ananda teaches her that “Self- humiliation is a sin, worse than self- murder.” (*Three Plays* 148) These words impart her “new birth”. She has never encountered such magical words of wisdom:

Only once did he cup his hands, to take the water from mine. Such a little water, yet that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea. In it flowed all the seven seas in one, and my caste was drowned, and my birth washed clean.... I may truly call it my new birth! He came to give me the honour of quenching Man’s thirst. (*Three Plays* 148- 149)

Water is the life source or the Divine Spirit of survival. Here water is the symbol of the Spiritual Feminine Energy embedded in Nature.

The transformation which is effected in Prakriti occurs first in the material realm. From the status of a marginalized Chandal girl who has been cast away by the society, Prakriti realizes her value as an individual and human being and finds pride and honour in her identity. She realizes that she is not to be kept away from the main stream society on account of her caste. She becomes aware of her worth and tries to come out of the periphery and even tells her mother of the value as a human being. This sense of worth induces in her a fascination for Ananda who teaches her the lessons of justice, equality and dignity of all beings. She says to her mother, “Was there no other water, Mother, in all Sravasti city? Why did he come to this well of all wells?..My heart has been dancing ever since, and night and day I hear those .solemn tones- ‘Give me water, give me water.’...And so I wait and watch.”(*Three Plays* 149) Prakriti begins to wait for Ananda, “the wayfarer” who has taught her the value of existence.

The Buddhist Monk, whose belief in the Oneness of all beings shows his respect for all. His love is not for Prakriti alone. He loves and respects all beings in the world as he loves himself. This spiritual principle has not yet dawned in Prakriti’s mind. Though Prakriti reaches the level of a dignified self, she has not transcended to the supreme level of the reality of Oneness or Wholeness of the Cosmos. She becomes impatient as Ananda is seen no more again. She says to her mother,

I want him. All unlooked for- he came, and taught me this marvellous truth, that even my service will count with the God who guides the world. O words of great wonder! That I may serve, I, a flower sprung from a poison plant! Let him raise that truth, that flower from the dust, and take it to his bosom.(*Three Plays* 150)

Tagore, in between, hints the fake and pseudo promises given by the patriarchal male society to the women in order to seduce them. This is voiced through the words of Prakriti's mother. "Be warned, Prakriti, these men's words are meant only to be heard, not to be practised." (*Three Plays* 150) There is the mention of the hypocritical male society in the conversation between Prakriti and her mother when they speak about the King's son who has wanted to take Prakriti to his palace, as he has been enamoured by her beauty. The King's son has seen her when he has come for deer- hunting nearby the well of Prakriti. She says to her mother, "Yes he had forgotten everything- forgotten that I was a human being. He had gone out hunting beasts; he saw nothing but the beast whom he wanted to bind in chains of gold." (*Three Plays* 151) Tagore through these words rallies against the patriarchal society which sees women as mere flesh, objects to satisfy the sexual hunger of the male society. Prakriti has been seen by the King's son "only as game to be hunted." (*Three Plays* 151)

Prakriti understands that the Buddhist Bhikshu, Ananda, has seen, understood and has made her realize her true womanhood,

I feel that in all these days he is the first who ever really recognized me. That is a marvellous thing. I want him, Mother, I want him beyond all measure. I want to take this life of mine and lay it like a basket of flowers at his feet. It will not defile him....'I am your hand- maid', I shall declare- for otherwise I must lie bound forever at the whole world's feet, a slave! (*Three Plays* 152)

She understands that women and untouchables are not slaves to be despised, but worthy and dignified human beings who have to realize their true potential and dignity. She realizes this from the words of Ananda, but she is yet to transcend the material realm to reach the higher,

spiritual realm which makes one understand the true nature of one's self; a state when one realizes that one's inner self is the Supreme Self itself that pervades the whole Universe. She has not reached that Wholeness of existence. Ananda's message to Prakriti is about the higher state of existence which Prakriti is able to understand and realize only towards the end of the play.

Prakriti longs to give herself to the Buddhist Bhikshu. Reshu Shukla writes,

Ananda goes away, but this meeting leaves its inevitable impressions on the personality of a girl, who, few moments before, was happily accepting her despised position. And now she feels ashamed of being made to suffer for the reason, which is not the fault on her part. This realization of her proud self makes her adamant to possess the monk as lover. (*Three Plays* 182)

Prakriti's wild desire makes her to force her mother to work magic spells on Ananda. Her mother does not want to do so. She says that it will be a play on fire. Prakriti's mother even trembles on the thought of doing so on a spiritually awakened person like Ananda. She knows that Buddhist Bhikshus are no ordinary beings. Fearless, Prakriti insists her mother to do the evil spells on Ananda to come to her. She says that she has become so courageous because of the powerful words of Ananda. She even says, "I care nothing for a code which holds only punishment, and no comfort." (*Three Plays* 155) Prakriti feels that her passionate desire for Ananda is not returned by him. She is enraged and feels it treacherous on his part. She has not realized that Ananda has preached about the Oneness and worth of all beings. On another occasion, when Ananda and other Buddhist disciples go through Sravasti, he does not cast an eye on her. Prakriti feels ashamed and insulted.

The newly awakened woman in Prakriti feels her worth and the new self tries to take revenge against the ego of manhood. She is determined to bring Ananda to her. The sad plight of Prakriti makes her mother to try her magic spells on Ananda. Prakriti says to her mother, “No matter where he goes, you must bring him back. Distance is nothing for your spells. He showed no pity to me, I shall show none to him. Chant your spells, your cruellest spells; wind them about his mind till every coil bites deep. Wherever he goes, he shall never escape me!” (*Three Plays* 157) Prakriti’s mother gives her a magic mirror. She has to dance taking the mirror in her hands. The shadow of Ananda will fall on the mirror and Prakriti can see through it how near Ananda is. The mother reminds Prakriti that when the spell reaches its heights she will not be able to undo it. If she wants to do so then, her mother will have to pay her life for it.

When the second act of the play opens, Prakriti’s mother has been seen chanting her magic spells for two weeks. The spiritual prowess of Ananda has begun to fade. He has come under the spells of the Prakriti’s mother. His radiance, energy and enthusiasm are lost. But Prakriti does not want to break the spells. She yearns for Ananda’s presence. She implores her mother to continue with her spells though the mother has become weaker and breathless. The mother has used all her energy and she is exhausted. Though Prakriti sees the tortured and tormented Self of Ananda who has become lethargic and powerless, Prakriti equates her tormented self with him and is determined to be in his presence. She sees it as a joy of Creation; the union between the two selves.

Eventually, when Ananda reaches Prakriti, she is unable to look at his face. Prakriti flings away the magic mirror and says to her mother,

O Mother, Mother, stop! Undo the spell know- at once- undo it! What have you done?
 What have you done? O wicked, wicked deed!- better have died. What a sight to see!
 Where is the light and radiance, the shining purity, the heavenly glow? How worn, how
 faded, has he come to my door! Bearing his self's defeat as a heavenly burden, he comes
 with drooping head... Away with all this, away with it!...Prakriti, Prakriti if in truth you are
 not Chandalini, offer no insult to the heroic. (*Three Plays* 165)

The last line reveals the spiritual realization, ultimate Self- Realization, the Supreme Knowledge that the inner spirit is one with the Supreme Self that has dawned in Prakriti. She realizes that Ananda has come to her for her deliverance.

In order to reach the ultimate state of Self- Realization, a seeker has to undergo highly tortuous experiences. Prakriti has undergone the torments and with her Ananda too suffers. Prakriti's mother too is no exception. The mother has to pay her life for Prakriti's spiritual awakening. Ananda, indeed undergoes hardships for giving a spiritual rebirth to Prakriti. This reminds one of highly tormenting experiences and hardships that Jesus Christ has had to bear with in order to redeem his devotees and disciples. Ananda represents the Buddha Himself who always wants to redeem his followers. Here, Prakriti's Spiritual Awakening is effected by Ananda. He has to be dragged down to the dust in order to reach Prakriti to give his hands to raise her to a supreme position. Prakriti realizes her true worth, her dignified Supreme Self within her.

The transformation of Prakriti from a Chandal girl to a spiritually awakened woman is portrayed through different states by the dramatist. First, she is made to believe in her dignity as a human being and as a woman by Ananda. She is made to erase her existence as an untouchable

in the margins of the society. She is brought to the main stream society, which she faces dauntlessly and declares her existence. In order to awaken the spiritual essence, Prakriti has to get rid of her ego and other material desires. Here also Ananda comes for her rescue. As a true spiritual seeker, Prakriti has to go through difficult roads to find out her true Self. She is helped in her journey by Ananda, as a true Spiritual Guru does. Ananda also suffers much to help Prakriti attain enlightenment. An untouchable or Chandal woman thus attains the highest stage of Self- Realization. As Bishweshar Chakrawarti says, “Chandalika is a dramatic study of the gamut of complex forces working in a woman, in her passage from social degradation through psychological tumult to spiritual deliverance.”(147) As Krishna Kriplani rightly comments in her biography of Rabindranath Tagore, *Chandalika* is “a tragedy of self- consciousness over reaching itself.”(371)

Tagore’s insight into feminism is based on the innate divinity of all beings. The divine essence inherent in women is to be awakened for the survival of the whole humanity. Tagore views women as the embodiment of divinity. This Divine Feminine Energy or Feminist Spirituality is seen in the character of Prakriti. Reshu Shukla writes,

At the end this new Prakriti appears with a radiant sight of divine gentleness and purity of the heaven. Prakriti’s devastating desires have been converted into the ultimate gain of the most pious feeling. Now, we find her as a feeling embodiment of woman’s eternal quest for honour and love. Now, she has known the love in its transient sense which cannot be fully attained through physical possessions; rather it has a lot to know beyond the interpretations of this physical world that can only be experienced through making a sacrifice of the worldly perceptions. (201)

Natir Puja, like *Chandalika* is Rabindranath Tagore's yet another fine demonstration of the Feminine Divine through the portrayal of Srimati, who, like Prakriti, is cast aside on the margins of the society. In *Natir Puja*, Srimati attains the Supreme State of Spiritual Enlightenment through her martyred devotion. K. R. K. in his 'Appreciation to *Natir Puja*' writes about the play's "sense of the majesty of the human spirit which, when properly awakened, invests the seemingly ignoble with the divinity of that which it contemplates." (*Three Plays* 81) This is what happens in *Chandalika* also.

Like *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* is also based on a Buddhist legend about Raja Bimbisara. The King, when he becomes enlightened with the Truth from the Buddha, builds a big *Stupa* inside the Palace Garden. His son Ajatasatru through unfair means obtains his father's throne. Bimbisara and prince Chitra leave the palace and join the Buddhist Sangha. Ajatasatru is not a disciple of the Buddha and he is against the worship done at the *Stupa* built by his father. He is against the practice of Buddhism in his state. On the *Vasanta Purnima* day (Lord Buddha's birthday), Srimati, the palace dancing girl is selected by the Buddhist Order to offer worship at the shrine of Lord Buddha. Till now, it has been the privilege of the princesses of the palace. The enraged princess Ratnavali, in order to insult Srimati, gets an order from the King that Srimati is to dance in front of the *Stupa* rather than offering worship to the Lord Buddha on the *Vasanta Purnima* day. Srimati, with devotion, surrender and bliss, begins to dance in front of the *Stupa* and in her highly ecstatic and blissful state removes all her gorgeous ornaments and rich costumes and is left only with the garb of a *Bhikshuni*. In her Supreme state of Bliss, she is beheaded by Ajatasatru's guards. The innate Divine Energy in each and every being is manifested through Srimati, as is shown through Prakriti in *Chandalika*.

In the Prologue to the play *Natir Puja*, one can see the same situation through which Prakriti in the *Chandalika* passes. The marginalized palace dancing girl Srimati has nothing to offer to the Buddhist Bhikshu, Upali, when he reaches her for alms. The Bhikshu teaches her self-worth, “Today I have come to *you* for alms.”(*Three Plays* 88) She is doubtful of her dignity to offer alms. When the Lord Buddha has arrived the Palace for the first time Srimati decides not to meet Him, “In His presence, to present oneself is to present an offering, I was unclean; the offering of my heart was not ready for sacrifice.”(*Three Plays* 103) From the Bhikshu, Upali, Srimati understands her worth and dignity of self. She even tells the princess Ratavali later, “My days of mere good manners are over. I’ll give you no false flattery. I tell you plainly, your eyes have looked at Him, but you have never seen Him.”(*Three Plays* 103) As per the advice of the monk she willingly offers herself to the Lord, “...may He Himself take whatever I have.”(*Three Plays* 88) But she is less egotistic than Prakriti as she is aware of the emptiness of material comforts and physical world. This can be seen from her words to Malati, who has come to her seeking the path of the Lord Buddha, “...that fetters should beguile you, seeming ornaments;...that death should bewitch you, seeming beauty.”(*Three Plays* 95)

Srimati becomes aware of the dignity of every human being. “How many women in these days have broken the homes they once built up! How many have put on the saffron robe and taken the road! Is it the way that draws them, or the Wayfarer- who knows?”(*Three Plays* 97) The last sentence shows that Srimati is aware that ‘the Way’ is more important than ‘the Wayfarer’. In *Chandalika* Prakriti is more attached to ‘the Wayfarer’. Only later Prakriti realizes that ‘the Way’ is important. Srimati already yearns for liberation or *Mukti*. “Many and many a time I have lifted my hands and prayed with all my soul to the Great One, that He would not remain unmoved. He has set flowing in every home the flood of women’s tears, may He

grant them peace!”(*Three Plays* 97) Srinivasa Iyengar writes, “Srimati of *Natir Puja* and Prakriti of *Chandalika* are both moving essays on the blessed eternal female...” (15) Reshu Shukla writes in her study on *Natir Puja*,

The complete development process in Srimati’s character, a girl unaware of her own potential, sets an example of great courage and determination of a woman, who thoroughly justifies Tagore’s concept of womanhood. This is the typical Tagorian style that he picks the very common characters from the society, and creates in them such challenging power that can never be defeated. (151)

In the scene where the Queen Lokesvari and the princesses gather near Srimati, one can see Srimati being mocked at by Ratnavali, the princesses because of Srimati’s lower status in the society. “We are waiting for salvation. We’re purifying our sinful minds- we’re well on the way to become Srimati’s disciples.” (*Three Plays* 101) Queen Lokesvari who has been an ardent follower of the Lord Buddha and who now has turned a strong rebel against the Lord because of her husband’s and son’s joining the Buddhist order mocks at Srimati because of her marginalized position. “This dancing girl’s disciples? Yes, that’s just what will happen with this religion. The fallen will come preaching salvation! Srimati has suddenly become a saint now, has she?”(*Three Plays* 101) Lokesvari is egoistic, when she says,

When Lord Buddha came to our garden and everyone in the place came to see him, I sent for her[Srimati] too, out of pity. The wretched girl refused to come. And now it seems, when the Bhikshu Upali comes for alms, he avoids our princesses, and receives alms only at her hands....Beggars will rule henceforth from the thrones of kings! (*Three Plays* 101)

These sarcastic words of Lokesvari reveal the humiliating attitude of the main stream society towards a girl like Srimati who is forever put in the margins. Tagore's mission is to show that all human beings are worthy and dignified. Women of the patriarchal society have not been allowed to even dream about Liberation or *Mukti*. It has been unheard of and is liable to be punished as a sin. Spiritual realm has been an unattainable height for woman. Through the characters of Prakriti and Srimati, Rabindranath Tagore shows that Spiritual Enlightenment is not reserved for the male upper caste of upper class main stream. It is attainable for women too and even the women of the so called marginalized sections.

Lokesvari is a symbol of the materialistic phase; the second phase through which Prakriti has been going through. The Queen has to get rid of her ego in order to get revelation and deliverance. Her firm belief in the Lord Buddha vanishes when her husband, King Bimbisara and son prince Chitra have embraced the Buddhist Order. Like Prakriti, Lokesvari also has to undergo torments or sufferings in order to find out true Self or in order to realize the Oneness of existence. The princesses, including Ratnavali, are also immersed in worldly pleasures and desires. Their Spiritual rebirth also is yet to take place. Tagore's harsh indictment at the mainstream society can be seen in the portrayal of the princesses. Srimati's Spiritual awakening has already commenced. When Srimati sings to the princesses she invokes the Lord,

Have you come to my door, my Lord, To seek my inmost me?

Call your call today within.

For at your call

The hidden flowers come out on the naked branches.

At your call

The new dawn comes with a pitcher of light in her hand,

And the deep darkness answers. (*Three Plays* 104)

Srimati gets the command from Bhikshuni Ulpalaparna, “Today is Vasanta Purnima- the full moon of spring. We celebrate the birth of the Lord Buddha. It will be Srimati’s task to lead the rites of worship at the altar beneath the asoka.”(*Three Plays* 105) She is chosen; a girl who is marginalized by caste and class is chosen for leading the rites of *Vasanta Purnima*. The triple marginalization of Srimati vanishes and there comes forward a girl with over flowing Divine Energy. The Eternal Feminine or the Divine Feminine or the Spiritual Feminine is the blooming of the innate Spiritual Energy of Women. The feminine spirit creates and nurtures the Universe. The realization of this innate Spiritual Creative Energy of a woman is essential for the survival of this universe. Tagore tries to portray this realization of the Spiritual Essence within through the characters for Prakriti and Srimati. Tagore’s immense belief in Feminist Spirituality can be seen in both the plays. His attempt is to raise women from the material to the spiritual realm.

The princesses of the Palace, except Ratnavali and Mallika, are now keen to help Srimati to do the rites at the altar. Lokesvari is deeply frustrated after meeting her son, prince Chitra, who has turned a Buddhist Bhikshu now. She does not want to go to worship at the altar as her husband king Bimbisara, who is a monk now, will also turn up and has sent his word to have Lokesvari’s presence. Ratnavali approaches the Queen and complains about Srimati’s privilege to lead the rites at the altar. “If that dancing- girl is allowed to make the offerings here, this palace will be desecrated. I can live here no longer.” (113) Ratnavali insists that Srimati is to

dance in front of the altar, “Bid her dance, dancing- girl as she is, before the very altar where she was to have worshipped as priestess!”(*Three Plays* 113)

Ratnavali’s cruel plans work out and she forces the King Ajatasatru to forbid worship at the altar. After consecrating the offerings, Srimati and the princesses reach the altar but they are stopped by the guards over there. A fence for forbidding worship is also built there. Srimati is aware of a true spiritual seeker’s hardships. “The temple door does not open to the worshipper all at once. But little by little its bolts are withdrawn. I have no doubts- it is to me that the Master’s call has come. The barriers will go down- this very day.”(*Three Plays* 117-118) Srimati understands that she is in close proximity to the Enlightened State.

The whole city is filled with conflicts. King Ajatasatru’s men take arms against the Buddhist Monks. Mother Utpalaparana is killed by the king’s soldiers. The Lord Buddha’s altar at the garden is smashed into fragments. The king forbids worship there. “...anyone who brings a lamp for evening worship, or chants the hymn will be put to death.”(*Three Plays* 121) But Srimati is fearless. She is ready to surrender only before the Lord. Ratnavali comes with a new order from the king that Srimati has to dance before the altar in the asoka garden. Though Srimati knows that it is intended as an insult upon her she is ready to do so considering it God’s will. She surrenders herself completely to the Lord and takes it as His Will. She is all alone and sings,

You have called me to take the road.

I have lagged behind, and how shall I travel it now?

For night has fallen deep

And the gleam of the path is lost.

Give me an answering call, in the gloom and dark. (*Three Plays* 126)

Srimati comes dressed as a dancer to dance in front of the altar in the asoka garden. “She is rapt out of herself completely.”(*Three Plays* 131) She is in a blissful state, a trance, at the very verge of the Union with the Divine. She sings,

O Thou Life supernal,

O Thou Death Supreme,

Refuge I take in Thee.

Light my dark lamp at Thy fire

Print Thy glory on my brow,

Take away my shame....

Thy feet the touchstone are

To change my dross to gold,

Refuge I take in Thee.

The tarnished cleanse, the dark illumine;

May all evil turn to good.

Rend all veils for ever. (*Three Plays* 131)

She humbly bows down and forgoes her ego:

Defeat admitted, humbled the proud soul.

The platter is broken in pieces

That held the dim lamp lit by the wasted hands.

Kindle then

The light of thine own star,... (*Three Plays* 132)

She submits herself to the “Supremest bliss, most gracious love thou art,/ Holiness pure, and utter peace of heart.”(*Three Plays* 132).

To the surprise of Ratnavali and all others who have gathered there, Srimati begins her dance by singing praises on the Lord Buddha. She sings as she dances,

Forgive, O Lord, forgive me,

Accept my reverence.

O Peerless One, I think of Thee,

And my full heart overflows

In the pulsing life of dance.

To Thee I raise

In wordless praise

My eager body's rhythmmed cry-

This new birth's eloquence.

In music and in gesture shines

My worship, Lord, of Thee. (*Three Plays* 136-137)

Srimati is ecstatic and blissful. She has surrendered her whole self unto the Lord and is in a trance:

Lo, all my being's ecstasy,

That trembles into pain!

On the ocean of peace there dance the waves,

And beauty awakes again.

All I have suffered and striven,

Let it not shamed be.

In music and in gesture shines

My worship, Lord, of Thee. (*Three Plays* 137)

She, in her bliss and ecstasy, forgoes all her material possessions. She throws away "her jewels one by one, upon the stupa ruins." (*Three Plays* 137) Srimati removes her dancing robes and is now seen in *Bhikshuni's* yellow robes.

I bring no woodland flower,

No fruit for worship meet,

No jar of holy water

To offer at Thy feet.

But into my slender body poured

The streams of my heart are free.

In music and in gesture shines

My worship, Lord of Thee. (*Three Plays* 138)

Srimati surrenders wholly before the Lord. Eventually when she chants the holy name of the Lord Buddha, the guard strikes Srimati and she falls dead across the sacred altar of the Lord.

Srimati, paying homage to the Lord, becomes a saint and Divine Feminine in her is awakened. This divinity is the creative essence and energy of a woman. The sacrifice of Srimati awakens the Divine essence of all present there. Queen Lokesvari bows down her head in reverence and touches the *Bhikshuni's* robe worn by Srimati. The guards seek forgiveness and come one by one to take the dust of Srimati's feet. Even Ratnavali suffers from deep remorse and casts away her ego and pride. Ratnavali takes the dust of Srimati's feet and kneeling in reverence, chants the Buddhist praises. King Ajatasatru also realizes his true Self and surrenders at the feet of the Lord.

The Feminist Spiritual Power manifested in Srimati is the power of creation or birth. Srimati who has gone through tortuous roads attains Self- Realization. A woman's realization of the Divine Feminine in her has the seeds of creation in it. Srimati's Divine Feminine Energy is the power which helps in the transformation of Queen Lokesvari, Ratnavali, other Princesses and even the King Ajatasatru. This Spiritual Awakening or the new birth effected on them with the help of Srimati shows Tagore's firm belief in the creative and nurturing energy of the Divine

Feminine. Tagore shows that the Divine Feminine or Spiritual Feminine is an inherent nature of all women, no matter whether a woman is cast away by the society and put in the periphery. The Spiritual Feminine Energy has the power to transform the whole world. This innate energy of a woman can awaken the Spiritual Energy of even the wildest of beings. Srimati, the court dancer of *Natir Puja* is an embodiment of this Divine Feminine Energy. The essence of this Divine Feminine Energy is love towards all beings; the feeling of Oneness and Wholeness with the Universe. “Tagore makes her present her dance as the act of worship thus establishing her victory in death.”(140 Agrawal) As Reshu Shukla writes, “In this play too, like other of his plays Tagore has continued promoting woman as the source of primordial energy and the second name of Shakti.”(178)

The Divine Feminine in Prakriti in *Chandalika* has to go through different stages to awaken it. But Srimati of *Natir Puja* from the beginning of the play itself realizes her innate Divine Energy and makes herself a tool to help others to realize the Spiritual Essence inside. Both Prakriti and Srimati are spokespersons of Rabindranath Tagore who has always attempted to bring the main stream the women of his society. Tagore has understood the plight of the ordinary women folk, the untouchable women, the women who serve as maids or dancers and such other marginalized woman. He has always tried to bring them to the forefront of the society. Through *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja*, Tagore shows that women have the spark of the Divine Energy pervading the whole Cosmos. Tagore does not want to portray mere strong and bold women, but women who are the creators and protectors of this Universe. The Divine Spark in a woman, when ignited has the power to help the whole fellow beings in their existence and survival. Tagore’s mission is to make the women realize their infinite potential of creative spiritual energy. The far- sighted dramatist in Rabindranath Tagore has already realized the need

for awakening the Spiritual Feminine Energy. The essence of this Divine Feminine is Selfless Love, which is beyond ego and pride and other material possessions; a Love which transcends the mere bodily existence and thus embraces everything. Prakriti and Srimati are manifestations of this Divine Feminine, the incarnations of True Love which embraces the whole Cosmos. This Love helps them to realize the Oneness of all beings.

Chapter 4

Ecology in the Plays of Rabindranath Tagore

The realization of the Oneness of all beings is the principle upon which Rabindranath Tagore has undertaken most of his writings. This spiritual experience of the realization of the Oneness is the same deep ecological awareness that Arne Naess has recognized. "Care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves...if your 'self' in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care...." (Capra 12) Deep ecological awareness is always eco-centric in nature and there is the firm belief that the self of each being is the same Universal Self. As Fritjof Capra in his book, *The Web of Life* explains, "Deep Ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life....Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness." (7) A sustainable society or sustainable development can be effected only with a deep ecological awareness. Otherwise, posterity will have nothing left for its survival. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their introduction to the groundbreaking text *Ecofeminism* writes, "The deep ecological relevance of this emphasis on 'spirituality' lies in the rediscovery of the sacredness of life, according to which life on earth can be preserved only if people again begin to perceive all life forms as sacred and respect them as such."(17-18)

Deep ecological awareness fights against all the dominator systems of society like patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism etc. which are always "exploitative and anti-ecological." (Capra 8) In all the social dominator systems, there is the wielding of power over the subaltern or the marginalized. When the primeval power of nature is associated with the Divine Feminine

creative power of the women, there happens a natural relationship with woman and nature.

“Accordingly, ecofeminists see female experiential knowledge as a major source for an ecological vision of reality.”(Capra 9) Andy Smith quotes Karen J Warren in her essay entitled, “Ecofeminism through an Anticolonial Framework”, “Because all feminists do or must oppose the logic of domination which keeps oppressive conceptual frameworks in place, all feminists must also oppose any isms of domination that are maintained and justified by that logic of domination.”(qtd. in Smith 21))

The assault of industrial civilization has forced man to plunder the resources of nature.

Man always wants

to enhance life by dissecting all symbioses which the human individual as such represents. These symbioses are also called ecological systems: the interdependence of humans, animals, plants, but there is also the social ecology of people living together, of men and women, children and parents, older and younger generations. (Mies 142)

These ecological and socio- ecological systems have crumbled into fragments with the onslaught of industrialization and science and technology. Life has found it difficult to move on. Existence and survival have become interrogation marks.

Rabindranath Tagore’s far- sightedness about the consequences of the exploitation of nature has made him write the saga for nature, the play *Mukta- Dhara*. As the name suggests, the play is about the liberation of a free flowing spring which has been obstructing its course by building a dam across it. The spring in its course from the mountainous land of Uttarakut down to the plains of Shiv- tarai is the sole source for irrigation for the people of Shiv- tarai. The people of Shiv- tarai are under the control of the King of Uttarakut. In order to rule the people of

Shiv- tarai with full control, the king of Uttarakut, Ranajit plans to build a dam across the mountain stream, so that he will be the sovereign power of the people of Shiv- tarai. The King employs his skilful royal engineer Bibhuti to achieve this feat. Bibhuti has been working on it for twenty five years using his skill as well as the developments in science and technology. He becomes successful in fulfilling the mighty task. In this great achievement, a considerable loss of life too occurs.

Mukta- Dhara opens in a festive mood. The king as well as the people of Uttarakut are joyous and are celebrating their victory. They are gathered near the Temple of Bhairava to light the lamp of worship. A mighty machine tower which touches the sky has been erected on the mountain peak. King Ranajit has sought the aid of science and technology to construct the engine tower and the dam. The modern capitalist patriarchy helps the dominator class. Imperialism is an offshoot of capitalism. The people of Shiv- tarai have no option other than to be subjected under the control of the king and the people of Uttarakut. Imperialism always develops through exploitation and plunder of natural resources. King Ranajit uses capitalist patriarchal measures to exploit the Shiv- tarayans. He forbids them using the natural resource, the mountain stream, Mukta- dhara which has been used by them to irrigate their plains. Colonialism and imperialism always lay hands on natural resources in order to control and dominate.

In the beginning of the play itself, Tagore voices his anger against the evil done to nature through the words of a pilgrim who comes there from a foreign land. The pilgrim feels it “a fear- some sight” (*Three Plays*¹⁰) when he sees the huge machine soaring up to touch the sky. A citizen of Uttarakut describes to him that the machine is erected to stop the mountain spring coming from Uttarakut. The pilgrim says,

It looks like a demon's head, a grinding skeleton head, lying in wait to devour your city in its sleep. To have it before your eyes night and day will dry up your souls like dead wood....that thing isn't fit to be set up against the sun and stars....The sight of that thing so suddenly today makes me shudder. It seems like blasphemy that it should soar so high above the temple tower. (*Three Plays* 10)

These words of the pilgrims prophesy the destruction and the difficulties that the humankind will face for existence and survival, if human beings continue to exploit and loot nature and natural resources. In the latter part of the play King Ranajit even speaks about the machine as “the menacing fist of a demon....It ought not to have been made so enormously high.” (*Three Plays* 24)

Rabindranath Tagore portrays the inhuman and cruel face of the imperialists in their control over the colonies. When King Ranajit makes Bibhuti to build the dam, many innocent village folk have had to sacrifice their lives. The lives of the marginalized villagers are of no value to the rulers. The subjugation of the subaltern people and the nature are the first steps of a colonizer. In the play, we can see a woman, Amba searching her son in vain. He has been taken away by the king's men to help in the construction of the dam. This is evident from the words of the messenger, who is sent by prince Abhijit, Yuvaraja of Uttarakut to Bibhuti. “After all these years, you have finished the dam on the Mukta- dhara waterfall. Again and again it has burst, many men have been crushed under earth and sand, many others have been swept away in floods...” (*Three Plays* 12) In the course of the play, one can see Old Batuk is seen worried about his two grandsons who have been taken away by force for the construction of the dam and the boys have had to sacrifice their lives to “the demon of Thirst...” (*Three Plays* 27) He considers

the dam as ungodly. These show that the exploitation of nature will definitely result in human sacrifice.

The innocent Shiv- tarayans are ignorant of what has happened. The arrogant royal engineer, Bibhuti, is full of praise for the machine. He does not want to think about the withering crops of the people of Shiv- tarai. He does not care for the bounty of Mother Nature. Bibhuti is concerned only about power and domination. He says, “the purpose of my dam was that human intelligence should win through to its goal....I had no time to think of whether some farmer’s paltry maize crop would die....My thoughts are full of the splendour of the power of Machine.”

(Three Plays 12)

The messenger of the Yuvaraja Abhijit comes to Bibhuti to ask him to demolish the dam as it is against God’s will. This implies the sacredness of Nature; the Oneness of all beings. The self of Nature and Cosmos and the Supreme Self are one and the same. When all are in praise of Bibhuti, the minister of Uttarakut is also worried about the harm done to the Mother Earth. He says “It is none of our business to wrestle with earth and stones.” *(Three Plays 16)* Tagore, in the play, repeatedly voices the doubts and rage at the colonizer’s exploitation of the natural resources of the colonized. His concern for the survival of the humanity is clearly visible through the words of many wise characters in the play. His far- sightedness always makes him to think about sustainable development.

King Ranajit is highly ecstatic as he is able to bring the Shiv- tarayans completely under his control. His uncle King Visvajit of Mohangarh also comes to give advice to King Ranajit as he also does not find it worthy the construction of the dam across free flowing waters. He warns King Ranajit, “I have come to tell you that Bhairava will not accept today’s worship....God pours

out his water freely for all, for every thirsty soul on earth. Why have you blocked the stream?" (*Three Plays* 19-20) It is King Visvajit who has informed Yuvaraja Abhijit that "he is not of royal birth, but was picked up below the falls of Mukta- dhara." (*Three Plays* 17) Abhijit thus feels a deep affection for the waterfalls of Mukta- dhara and he has used to sleep below its falls. "In the sound of this water I hear my mother's voice." (*Three Plays* 18) In these words, there is the respect felt for Mother Nature who is very much the same Divine Feminine Creative Energy. Nature and women have the innate spiritual essence to create, maintain and protect life. Abhijit's words echo his belief in the innate power of feminine creative energy and that of Mother Nature. As Gretchen T. Legler quotes Karen J. Warren in her essay, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism", the task of ecofeminism is "making visible the various ways in which the dominations of women and non- human nature are sanctioned and perpetuated under patriarchy, and engaging in practices and developing analysis aimed at ending these dominations." (234) The play *Mukata- Dhara* too analyzes the ways in which the power over and exploitation of non- human nature are "sanctioned and perpetuated under patriarchy." The play, through various characters aims to make awareness about the consequences of this domination and tries to make an urge in putting an end to the power over nature.

Yuvaraja Abhijit finds himself as a saviour of nature as he finds nature as his mother. Years back, a road over the Nandi Pass had been blocked for Shiva- tarai people in order not to allow them sell wool to foreign markets, but to Uttarakut only. Abhijit now throws open that road and saves the Shiva- tarayans from famine and gives them freedom for trade with the foreign markets. Abhijit opens all roads for all people. He does not want to set boundaries to Nature. He feels the Oneness of all beings, of the human as well as the non- human nature.

Tagore gives a direct hint at the imperialists conquering a race of much lower status. A school master of Uttarakut with his boys comes to meet King Ranajit. The school master, an opportunist, sings paeans for Bibhuti and his efforts in stopping Shiva- tarai's and drinking water. The master has taught the boys that the Shiva- tarayans are bad people because of their inferior religion and race. The boys are made to say that the Shiva- tarayans do not have high-ridged noses and so they do not belong to a great race. The great race will "conquer...they'll conquer everyone else in the world..." (*Three Plays* 23) The people of Uttarakut claim that they are racially and religiously superior. They colonize the Shiva- tarayans because they consider the latter as barbarians the same way the colonized all over the world have been treated by the colonizers. Watching some Shiva- tarayans, the Uttarakut people say, "Don't they look queer? - and dwarfish, as though they had been thumped on the head and stopped growing." (*Three Plays* 42) The Shiva- tarayans are a laughing stock for the people of Uttarakut. Andy Smith, in her essay "Ecofeminism through an Anti Colonial Framework", writes, "With colonization begins the domination of women and the domination of nature." (22) This is what happens in the colonial rule over Shiva- tarai too. King Ranajit controls the Shiva- tarayans through the conquest of the natural resource which is the right of the latter too.

Yuvaraja Abhijit is anxious and worried about the constraints brought upon nature. He considers it his life's destiny to free nature from its bounds. "...my river of life must run free, overleaping the palace walls." (*Three Plays* 28) The imprisonment of nature makes him feel being imprisoned. The dam built across Mukta- dhara makes Abhijit to feel that he is also in confinement. "...God writes for us the secret mystery of each man's spirit. Mukta- dhara is His word to me, bearing the secret of my inner being. When her feet were bound in the iron fetters, I was startled out of a dream." (*Three Plays* 29) Abhijit yearns for the freedom of Nature. He feels

that the machine built there “mutes the music of earth, and guffaws with its iron fangs at the sky....Beautiful is earth....To each smallest thing that has sweetened my life, I offer my reverence today.” (*Three Plays* 30) The Yuvaraja is determined to break free the dam against the water spring and let it flow freely. Nature’s bounty is not to be put in shackles. Its course should not be hindered. Abhijit is ready to sacrifice himself to free Mukta- dhara from the mighty machine which binds it. King Ranajit imprisons Yuvaraja Abhijit when he knows about Abhijit’s moves in demolishing the dam built across Mukta- dhara. Later in the play, when he is free, he speaks to king Visvajit, “I must pay my debt, the debt of my birth. Mukta- dhara was my nurse. I must set her free.” (*Three Plays* 57)

Dhananjaya, a Gandhi- like saintly figure, who is the sole supporter of the Shiva- tarayans makes his policy clear before King Ranajit. His words of wisdom reveal the link between ecology and spirituality. “What you seize by violence can never be yours. What you set free is yours forever. Clutch at it, and it is gone.” (*Three Plays* 47) The need for setting free the Nature is implied in his words. Liberation of Nature is the liberation of the soul. King Ranajit puts Dhananjaya in prison. The minister of King Ranajit feels that the actions of the King will bring disaster. He also sees the machine as “a terrible engine of punishment....To pile yet more terrors upon it will mean a total collapse” (*Three Plays* 48) The wise men in the play throughout speaks about the Oneness of all beings. The spirit residing in all human and non- human beings is One and the same. The Minister’s words also testify this, “The cloud in the sky and the water in the sea are one....” (*Three Plays* 56) Even Old Batuk who has lost his grandsons also is aware of the harm done to Nature. He knows for sure that the harm done to Nature will be retaliated. When restrictions are imposed upon Nature, they are imposed upon God too. Batuk is doubtful, “Has Bibhuti bound him also hand and foot in the Machine?” (*Three Plays* 59).

The determined Yuvaraja, Abhijit, feels sure of his call to free Mukta- dhara, his protector and nurturer. When he gets free from the prison of King Ranajit, he does not reveal himself before others and goes straight away to his nurse and mother, Mukta- dhara. King Ranajit and the people of Uttarakut, as well as those of Shiv- tarai, are unable to locate him and they become anxious. When the Shiv- tarayans come in search for Yuvaraja Abhijit to take him back to be their King, all on a sudden Bibhuti hears the sudden sound of running water. Dhananjaya says, “The dance has begun- the drum is beating.” (*Three Plays 75*) Dhanajaya hints at the dance of the Lord Bhairava, the retaliation of the Lord for putting chains of free Nature. Nature is not to be put in bondage. Every harm done to free Nature is harm done to oneself. The act of damming Mukta- dhara is being paid off. The dam has broken. Water rushes out. The sound of the water rushing out gets louder and louder. Dhananjaya says, “The call has come, for the feast of the breaking of bonds.” (*Three Plays 75*) Nature can never be put in chains forever. Mukta- dhara is let free.

King Ranajit, his Ministers and all others understand that the courageous and defiant act of letting loose the waters of Mukta- dhara by demolishing the dam has been done by Yuvaraja Abhijit. But, “The waters of Mukta- dhara have borne him away.” (*Three Plays 76*) King Ranajit understands that “... in her [Mukta- dhara] freedom he has found his own!...” (*Three Plays 76*) Abhijit has found a weaker built part of the dam and he has struck there. “Then Mukta- dhara, like a mother, took up his wounded body in her arms, and carried him away.” (*Three Plays 76*) The Self inherent in Nature and all beings are one and the same. Abhijit has sacrificed his life in order to free Mother Nature.

Rabindranath Tagore, through the play, *Mukta- Dhara* tries to portray that there is the Divine Spirit inherent in Nature. The Oneness or Wholeness of all living beings is depicted

throughout the play. The Divine Spirit or the Divine Essence inherent in Nature is the same innate Divine Feminine Energy in all beings. It is the Creative Feminine Energy that is being portrayed when Abhijit considers Mukta- dhara as his mother and nurse. Tagore who has lived ahead of his times envisions a posterity who should not struggle for survival on account of the loss of Nature. Beforehand he exhorts to let loose the bondages of nature. Through *Mukta- Dhara* Tagore tries to make humanity aware of the Spiritual Feminine Essence and Energy of Nature.

Chapter 5

Spirituality in Tagore's Plays

Rabindranath Tagore has realized that the highest purpose of one's life is the realization of the Supreme Self. The blissful union of the individual self with the Divine is the ultimate goal of life. The entire opus of Tagore is centred on this spiritual principle of Self- Realization. Though the themes of Tagore's writings vary much, they all revolve around the basic purpose of life- to know the Divine. The plays which this study analyzes, *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* and *Mukta- Dhara*, though convey social and political issues which need immediate attention, centre on the spiritual principle of life, the realization of one's innate Divine Power. Tagore makes the world aware that God never rejects any one in contempt. The hardships and sufferings which the individual soul undergoes are paths to the Supreme Knowledge of one's self. Rabindranath Tagore's visions on spirituality have made Mahatma Gandhi to hail him as Gurudev.

In most of his writings, Rabindranath Tagore makes use of his belief in the Buddhist principles to impart the ultimate truth of life. *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* are based on Buddhist legends which are re- told by the dramatist himself. Both the plays show Tagore's utmost belief in God's unconditional love towards all, showing strong disapproval against the marginalization on account of caste, class and gender. In *Mukta- Dhara*, the saintly God figure, Dhananjaya is a spiritual Guru who shows the path of Truth to his disciples. He symbolizes the incarnation of the Buddhist principle of Non- Violence. Dhananjaya reminds one of Mahatma Gandhi. Tagore's belief in spirituality is his belief in the Divine Creative Energy or Essence of the Feminine. He believes in the Spiritual Feminine which creates and nurtures the whole Cosmos.

Chandalika, though written against the maintaining of society's rough and crude social customs and manners, voices for the equality of all human beings. For Rabindranath Tagore, all beings are equal as there is an innate Divinity present in each and every form of the Universe. This Divine presence is the same Divine Energy pervading the Whole Cosmos. In *Chandalika*, Tagore voices his belief in the Divine Energy through the depiction of Prakriti, the untouchable girl who eventually realizes her true Self. The difficult journey to her awareness of the true Self is highly tormenting. Prakriti, in her first step realizes her worth as a human being. From her despised status, she is taught the value and worth of all human lives by Ananda, the Buddhist disciple. The egoistic self of Prakriti, in her second phase, undergoes the great spiritual transformation which leads her to liberation. Prakriti's deliverance highlights Tagore's belief in the innate presence of the Divine in all beings.

Rabindranath Tagore has always believed that *Mukti* or liberation can be attained through love. "The path to extend our consciousness is through love." (*Religion and Rabindranath Tagore* 13) Ananda teaches Prakriti the lessons of love, service and compassion. When Prakriti hesitates to give water to Ananda because of her fear of the marginalized status, the monk makes her aware that her service will be counted with the God who guides the world. She is reminded of the wonderful words of Ananda. "...That I may serve, I, a flower sprung from a poison plant." (*Three Plays* 150) Ananda is the symbol of love; selfless love towards all beings. Tagore writes that those who seek *Paramartha* (Supreme Knowledge) "do not hate or humiliate men, nor forsake them as 'untouchables'. Their spiritual life is not enclosed in synthetically constructed walls; they fraternize with all men without the slightest hesitation..." (*Religion and Rabindranath Tagore* 216) Ananda is a true seeker of this Supreme Knowledge. In his search for

Knowledge and Truth, he teaches his lessons of selfless love, service and compassion for others. Prakriti too learns these lessons from Ananda.

The lessons which Prakriti learns from Ananda have to be purged free of her egoism in order to attain liberation or *Mukti*. Prakriti has to suffer great hardships and pay heavily to let go off her egoism. Prakriti's lessons on love and compassion fill her with deep love for the monk. Her yearning for possessing Ananda makes her to force her mother to use magic spells to drag the monk to her. When ultimately, Prakriti realizes her mistake and understands the true lesson of selfless love, her mother has to sacrifice her life for Prakriti's mistake. The spiritual transformation of Prakriti begins when she lets go off her egoism and understands her selfish interest. She asks her mother to undo the magic spell. Prakriti understands how pathetic her degradation is and is full of remorse for her act. She says to herself, "Prakriti, Prakriti, if in truth you are no Chandalini, offer no insult to the heroic." (*Three Plays* 165) Her "veil of illusion" disappears and she understands her true Self.

Prakriti has longed for Ananda, the monk, and it is symbolic of her inner desire for the Supreme Truth, the state of *Ananda* or Bliss, the state when the human soul attains union with the Divine Soul, the state of Self- Realization. Prakriti's worldly desires eventually pave way to the desire for the Real. Prasanna Balakrishnan writes,

Mind, body and intellect collectively become the ego and that is the small identity of a person. The ego with all *Vasanas* latent in it is called the *jeevatma*, which is a subtle body. This is the 'i' known in one's name, reputation, personality etc. *Paramatma* is the all pervading 'I'. The process of *i* transforming to *I*, or evolution of man to the Supreme,

jeevatma dissolving in *Paramatma* (by breaking the shell of the ego) is known as Self-Realization. (42)

Prakriti, when she breaks her shell of the ego, dissolves in or merges with the *Paramatma*. “At this stage, a realized soul gets connected with the whole cosmos- the supreme realm of the cosmos.”(From ‘i’ to ‘I’ 46) *Prakriti* gets united with the *Purusha* and reaches the blissful state. The untouchable girl *Prakriti*, also reaches the Blissful Union with the Divine. With *Prakriti*, her mother also attains deliverance.

In *Natir Puja* also, Rabindranath Tagore voices his belief in the innate Divine Presence pervading each and every being. This presence of the Divine Energy in all beings grants *Srimati*, the dancing girl of the palace, an equal footing with the princesses of the palace. Tagore always believes in the equality of all, that no one should be put in the periphery and discriminated against on account of caste or creed or gender or class. In the play, in order to voice his belief in the Divinity of all beings irrespective of sectarian divisions, Tagore again seeks the help of the Buddhist principles. In *Natir Puja*, *Srimati* understands her worth and dignity through the words of the Buddhist *Bhikshu*, *Upali*. She understands that she is a beloved of God and is ready to surrender herself before the Lord. In the Appreciation written along with the play, K.R.K. writes, “Few, having seen this play on the stage, will come away without being deeply impressed by a sense of the majesty of the human spirit which, when properly awakened, invests the seemingly ignoble with the divinity of that which it contemplates.”(*Three Plays* 81)

Upali awakens the divine spirit in *Srimati*. She has had to undergo many hardships in her journey towards Self- Realization, at which moment she dedicates her whole life at the feet of the Lord. K.R.K. writes, “And so the *Nati* by her sincerity and her devotion redeems the so-

called degradation of her calling and vindicates by her death the innate majesty of her self.”(*Three Plays* 84)

Rabindranath Tagore’s interest in the teachings of the Lord Buddha stems from his deep reverence for all humanity. The Buddha has always preached the equality of all beings:

The Buddha had challenged the infallibility of the Vedas and the superiority of the Brahmins to the other castes. Worship of the Divine cannot be the monopoly of this caste or that, nor can its expression be for ever imprisoned in one particular Vedic pattern. True worship is the surrender or dedication of the best we have to the call of Truth. (*Three Plays* 83- 84)

Buddhist principles always reject man- made prejudices and stand for the fraternity of all beings. This spiritual principle is evoked by Tagore in *Natir Puja* also as he does in *Chandalika*.

In *Natir Puja*, Maharaja Bimbisara and his son Prince Chitra understand the true purpose of life and discard all material possessions to join the Buddhist Sangha in search of the Supreme Knowledge. Though Tagore shows their spiritual yearning, it is through Srimati that the playwright achieves his goal of establishing his belief in the Spiritual Feminine Creative Energy. Through Srimati, Tagore depicts the victory of virtue and Divinity. Srimati is the chosen one to offer worship on the Buddha Purnima. The princesses of the palace have been granted the privilege for worshipping the Lord on *Buddha Purnima* earlier. They are enraged at selecting Srimati as the chosen one. The princesses are mere bundles of ego and worldly possessions. Princess Ratnavali is full of contempt for Srimati as she considers it her monopoly to offer worship on the Buddha Purnima. As Srimati is chosen for the worship, the Princess makes evil

plans and this leads eventually to the martyrdom of Srimati. Srimati's sacrificial heroism only leads her to *Mukti* or liberation.

In the highly tumultuous situation, Srimati sings,

Leave me no longer in the darkness,

Give me now to see.

My real self in Thee

Give me to see.

Let my eyes be washed in the stream of tears.

Give me to see... (*Three Plays* 120)

Srimati is aware of the true nature of her Self. She says to Malati, "You mustn't see yourself from the outside. See yourself in Him who is born today eternally, and your fears will be blotted out." (*Three Plays* 120) She understands the true purpose of her life.

Rabindranath Tagore's vision of spirituality is seen in the song sung by Srimati when she yearns for the ultimate realization of her self:

Defeat admitted, humbled the proud soul.

The platter is broken in pieces

That held the dim lamp lit by the wasted hands.

Kindle then

The light of thine own star,

Let the glowing shimmer of twilight have an end.

Come, O friend of the farther shore.

The wind of the road is blowing, the lamps of the home are quenched.

Today have I brought my song

To an empty road,

A darkened landing- stage,

A stage where all is lost. (*Three Plays* 132)

Srimati has discarded all her worldly possessions and her only purpose is to have union with the Divine. She admits her defeat and gets rid of her egoism in order to attain the Supreme Light of the Lord.

Towards the end of the play, Srimati has to obey the order issued to her by King Ajatasatru that she has to dance in front of the *Stupa* that is built in honour of the Lord Buddha. As she has been looking forward to offer worship to the Buddha, this order has been planned by Princess Ratnavali to insult Srimati. Srimati, when she learns that she has to dance in front of the altar where the Buddha's worship is done, she accepts the order as the Lord's will.

The time comes for the dance and Srimati arrives in rich costumes of a dancer and begins her dance with the song,

Forgive, O Lord, forgive me,

Accept my reverence.

O peerless One, I think of Thee,

And my full heart overflows

In the pulsing life of dance.

To Thee I raise

My eager body's rhythm'd cry-

This new birth's eloquence.

In music and in gesture shines

My worship, Lord, of Thee. (*Three Plays* 136-137)

Srimati considers her dance as an offer of worship. As mentioned earlier, she enters a blissful and ecstatic mood, a trance. She throws away all the jewels. Even Queen Lokesvari too is filled with ecstasy when she sees the blissful and rapturous state of Srimati:

I bring no woodland flower,

No fruit for worship meet,

No jar of holy water

To offer at Thy feet.

But into my slender body poured

The streams of my heart are free.

In music and in gestures shines

My worship, Lord, of Thee. (*Three Plays*138)

In the enlightened mood Srimati removes her dancing robes and eventually is seen clad in *Bhikshuni's* robes and she begins to chant Buddhist texts. The guards have had to act in accordance with the King's orders. They have no other way than to strike Srimati. She falls dead on the ground, singing praises to the Lord Buddha.

Srimati's martyred devotion is an example of Rabindranath Tagore's belief in the Divine Energy present in all beings. Srimati reaches her spiritually awakened state after going through a number of tormenting situations. The powerless, marginalized self reaches the Powerful, Supreme state of Knowledge. The *jeevatma* identifies with the *Paramatma*. Srimati attains *Mukti* or deliverance.

In both *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja*, Rabindranath Tagore portrays the deliverance or Self- Realization of two women characters who are forever denied acceptance in the mainstream society. Prakriti and Srimati attain liberation after realizing the dignity and worth of their existence. They realize the true nature of the Self and reach the Union with the Divine. The portrayal of the women characters to depict the spiritual prowess of individuals shows Rabindranath Tagore's firm belief in the Divine Feminine Creative Essence of the Self. Both Prakriti and Srimati realize their inherent Divine Feminine Energy or the *Shakti*. This dynamic Divine Feminine Energy protects and nourishes the whole Cosmos. Tagore voices the need to realize the innate presence of this Divine Feminine Energy.

In *Mukta- Dhara* also, Rabindranath Tagore tries to depict the innate Divine Feminine Energy of the whole Cosmos by delineating the need to liberate Nature from its constraints. As

nurturer and protector, Nature embodies in it the Divine Feminine Energy. *Mukta- Dhara* speaks about the Self- Realization or liberation of a mountain spring which is chained and imprisoned by egotistic human beings in their greed for power, domination and material possessions. The bondage of the mountain spring brings havoc to many people. The powerless and subjugated people are deprived of their sole life supporting source. Many who belong to the dominating class even have had to sacrifice their lives because of the development agenda of the State. When nature loses harmony, its consequences are reflected on the survival of the human beings. The whole Cosmos is systemic and all the living nature is interdependent on each other. There is the pervading presence of a Feminine Spiritual Essence in Nature. The awakening of the Spiritual or Divine Feminine Energy is the need of the times. In *Mukta- Dhara* also, Rabindranath Tagore tries to make his readers aware of the need for awakening this Feminine Spiritual Energy which is essential to bring harmony to the whole Cosmos and also for the survival and existence of all beings of the Universe.

Mukta- Dhara directly conveys the message of the Oneness of all beings, human and non- human. The spirit of man and Nature is one. Bondage of one will bring harm to the other. In the play, Prince Abhijit struggles hard to free Mukta- dhara from its bondage. In order for the liberation of Mukta- dhara, Abhijit has to sacrifice his life in its torrents. The prince's sacrificial heroism brings liberation and survival to the people. When the spirit of Nature gets liberated, man also finds liberation and joy. As K.R.K. writes in the Appreciation of the play, "The social motive of the play, if it had any, seems to dissolve at the end in an undefined sense of mystic self- fulfilment..."(*Three Plays* 4) Prince Abhijit identifies his spirit with that of Mukta- dhara and in his self- sacrifice, he attains union with his foster mother, Mukta- dhara. Abhijit has said to Maharaja Visvajit, "I must pay my debt, the debt of my birth. Mukta- dhara was my nurse. I

must set her free.”(*Three Plays* 57) In the end of the play, when Prince Abhijit breaks open the dam and frees Mukta- dhara, King Ranajit too realizes his fault. He says, “And in her freedom he [Abhijit] has found his own!”(*Three Plays* 76) All human and non- human beings are the manifestations of the same consciousness. Prince Abhijit has understood this Truth and in his attempt to realize this, he finds his deliverance along with that of his foster mother, Mukta- dhara.

Tagore introduces an ascetic figure, Dhananjaya in the play. He is the Spiritual Guru of the people of Shiv- tarai. As Ananda in *Chandalika* and Upali in *Natir Puja*, Dhananjaya is the enlightened person who teaches the colonized and marginalized people of Shiv- tarai, their dignity and worth. He believes in the Oneness of all beings. A true follower of Non- Violence, Dhananjaya reminds one of the Lord Buddha as well as Mahatma Gandhi. He imparts strength and courage to his chosen people, the Shiv- tarayans. He asks his people to hold their heads high and exhorts them to be independent:

Freely thy hand has given us life,

And with life, worth.

Yet our worth is grown worthless now.

By greed and fear and shame it is daily fouled,

And is covered and hidden in dust. (*Three Plays* 40)

Dhananjaya wants his people to awaken their true Self and thus to gain confidence and liberation. He says to Old Batuk, “My son, we grow so accustomed to depend on outward light that when it grows dark we see nothing but darkness.”(*Three Plays* 59)As per the advice of

Dhananjaya, when one realizes the light within,“ The walls will fall and the gates be shattered, the light will burst forth and all be revealed.”(*Three Plays*59) This is the lesson that a true Spiritual Guru always conveys.

Mukta- Dhara, in the depiction of the revered Spirit of Nature, sees in it the Divine Feminine Spirit which is the creative and nurturing power of all beings. Nature too has got the innate Divine Feminine presence in it. Prince Abhijit sees *Mukta- dhara*, the mountain spring, as his foster mother, his nurturer. This nurturing power of Nature is because of the presence of the Divine Feminine Essence in it. The Spiritual Feminine has been put in bondage. The bonded status of Nature will be detrimental to all beings. The Feminine Divine Energy inherent in all beings needs to be awakened for the flourish of the biosphere. Tagore wants the Feminine Divine Spirit of *Mukta- dhara* to be set free, thereby setting free the humanity as a whole.

In all the three plays analyzed, *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* and *Mukta- Dhara*, Rabindranath Tagore’s spirituality is seen in his belief in the Oneness and Wholeness of all beings, human as well as non- human. Tagore believes in the intrinsic presence of the Supreme Consciousness in all beings. The permeating Spirit in the whole Universe is present in all beings and there is the need for all beings to awaken and realize that Spirit within and to have union with the Supreme Spirit. If humanity and non- human beings are to exist and survive, this awakening of the spirit within is necessary. When *Mukta- Dhara* depicts the awakening and liberation of Nature, *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* depict the awakening of the Spirit within the human beings. In *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja*, Tagore voices the innate presence of the Supreme Consciousness in women of the marginalized community. The Divine Presence makes all beings on equal footing.

The Divine Energy inherent in all beings is the creative and nurturing essence of the Feminine. In *Mukta- Dhara*, Nature is portrayed as the treasure of Spiritual Feminine Essence. *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* portray the Feminine Divine Energy present in all irrespective of all sectarian divisions.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore, the master playwright India has ever witnessed, has always attempted to bring forth highly thought-provoking issues before the readers. Three such plays of Tagore, *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* and *Mukta-Dhara* are taken for the purpose of analysis and study in the minor project entitled, "Ecology and Spirituality : A Feministic Approach to the Plays of Rabindranath Tagore." A study of these plays shows the playwright's concern for the exploited classes of the society. Tagore has had a deep empathy towards the suffering humanity as well as the non-human natural world. He has always felt a deep desire to bring to the forefront and mainstream, the fallen people who have been segregated on account of their gender, caste and class divisions. Tagore believes in the inherent and eternal Divine Spirit residing in every being, be it human or not. He firmly believes in the oneness of that individual self with the Supreme Self pervading in the whole Cosmos. The great playwright asserts this belief through most of his writings and this belief rooted in the Oneness of the whole Universe can be witnessed in the three plays taken for analysis.

Chandalika speaks about the journey of an untouchable girl Prakriti, from her downtrodden and despised status to the ultimate status of Self-Realization. Like Prakriti, Srimati, the palace dancing girl of *Natir Puja* also attains the highly revered status of *Mukti* or Liberation. The two women protagonists of both the plays awaken to the reality that their Selves too are dignified and are Divine. When they awaken the divinity within, their individual souls find union with the supreme Divine Soul. They reach a state of pure, selfless Love which can transform the whole Universe. They realize and awaken the latent presence of the all creating,

nurturing and supporting Feminine Essence or Energy in them that serves as the essential principle of life.

Mukta- Dhara, one of the classical plays written by Tagore, also celebrates the Oneness of the whole Universe. The dramatist brings forth the need to liberate and let free the nature from the bondages of human beings. *Mukta- dhara*, a mountain stream has been imprisoned by building a dam across its course by the dominant class of the society in order to wield power and control. Prince Abhijit who considers the mountain stream as his foster mother and nurse sacrifices his life for liberating *Mukta- dhara* and helps the survival of the ordinary folk of the region. The play also asserts Tagore's belief in the Divine presence inherent in each and every being of the Universe. The analysis of *Mukta- Dhara* also reveals Tagore's faith in the Feminine nature of the Divine.

The project is divided into six chapters. Apart from the introductory chapter which deals with a small introduction on Rabindranath Tagore and his literary world and also the objectives, relevance and methodology of the study and this concluding chapter which sums up the arguments of the project, there are four chapters which comprise of the theoretical and analytical chapters. The second chapter "Ecology, Spirituality and Feminism: A Reconsideration" is a brief overview of the theories related to ecology, spirituality and feminism. The chapter brings forth the interdependence of the three aspects and attempts to show that the innate Divine Energy pervading the whole Cosmos is feminine.

The third chapter entitled, "Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays" tries to delve deep into the plays *Chandalika* and *Natir Puja* in order to study the female protagonists of the plays, Prakriti and Srimati, the two subaltern women who attain the highest state of deliverance. The

chapter tries to show that the divine love inherent in both the women brings forth an awakening of the self to all around them and thus they have awakened in them a spiritual or divine energy which is the life supporting feminine energy. The fourth chapter viz. “Ecology in Rabindranath Tagore’s Plays” is an attempt at analyzing *Mukta- Dhara* in order to go deep into the Divine Feminine Energy in Nature which is needed for the survival of the whole Universe. The fifth chapter, “Spirituality in Rabindranath Tagore’s Plays” analyzes *Chandalika*, *Natir Puja* and *Mukta- Dhara* in order to find out Tagore’s spirituality. The plays show Tagore’s firm belief in the Oneness of the whole Cosmos- a belief in the pervading presence of a Divine Energy in the whole Universe and the reflection of which is seen in each and every living being of Nature, be it human or non human. Tagore exhorts the need to awaken the Divine Energy present in every being and thus attains liberation. The realization of this innate Energy or the liberation thus attained can only make possible the survival of living beings.

An analysis of the three plays reveals that Rabindranath Tagore’s approach to ecology and spirituality as can be seen in his plays is feminine in nature. The dramatist asserts his firm belief in the Divine Feminine or Sacred Feminine presence in all human and non- human beings and also the need to realize and awaken this Sacred Feminine. This realization and awakening are the need of the times as the Divine Feminine Essence is the life supporting principle of this Universe.

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